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Ulu Boyar

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ULU BOYAR

by

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B.A. May 2009, University of Missouri St. Louis

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ABSTRACT

ULU BOYAR

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Set during the Russian Civil War (1918-1922), ULU BOYAR traces the uprising of the Drinsk Cossacks against the tyranny of the Kiev Bolsheviks, who have taken residence in the sacristy of the holy of holies, the Cathedral of Saint Sophia. An homage to Nikolai Gogol's paean of the ancestral Cossacks, the historical satire ULU BOYAR utilizes the steampunk furniture of the Russian Civil War to weave a hilarious and hyperbolic epic of Ukrainian patriotism and resistance for an era of renewed Ukrainian-Russian antagonism.

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EPIGRAPHS

Reply of the Zaporizhian Cossacks to Sultan Mehmed IV
of the Ottoman Empire (1676)

Thou art a Turkish imp, the damned devil's brother...a secretary to Lucifer himself! What the devil kind of knight art thou that cannot slay a hedgehog with your naked arse? The devil shits, and your army eats!

Thou son of a bitch wilt [never] make subjects of Christian sons; we have no fear of your army, by land and by sea we will battle with thee, go fuck thy mother!

Thou art the Babylonian scullion, Macedonian wheelwright, brewer of Jerusalem, goat-fucker of Alexandria, swineherd of Greater and Lesser Egypt, Armenian pig, Podolian villain, catamite of Tartary, hangman of Kamyanets, and fool of all the world and underworld, a fool before God, a grandson of the Serpent, and the crick in our dick! Pig's snout, mare's arse, slaughterhouse cur, unchristened brow, screw thine own mother!

So the Zaporozhians declare, you lowlife! Thou wilt [never] herd [us] Christian pigs! Now we shall conclude, for we don't know the date and don't have a calendar; the moon's in the sky, the year in the book, the day's the same over here as it is over there; for this[,] kiss our arse!

*What sort of person is our Cossack? Many layered:
looting, reckless, daring, professional, revolutionary, bestially cruel.*
—Isaac Babel

The name of dishonored Russia's champion is inscribed in her chronicles in letters of fire.
—Anton Denikin

The brigand in Russia is the true and only revolutionary.
—Bakunin

THE DRINSK COSSACKS

This Bolshevik wishes to fight for his life, said Mykola, Hetman of Drinsk. In the center of the lanternlit basement the unruly specimen squirmed. The rabble of Drinsk Cossacks surrounding him laughed.

The Cossack called Schoolboy came forward. Volodymyr Volodymyrovich Brzezchnikov was from a rich Cossack family that had sent him Warsaw for schooling among Polacks, Jews, Prussians and Lithuanians. It was in Warsaw that Poor Schoolboy's hands went soft; where he learned to babble in Latin, to chatter frenetically in Polish and Russian; to bark in German; to shine his shoes; to cavort waggishly and duel with swords like a Parisian dandy.

Mykola said: Ah, Schoolboy. You will honor this godless dog with a fight.

If it please him, said Schoolboy.

The Bolshevik shaking on the basement floor was small and pale and from the city. None of the Cossacks respected him. He was filthy and all his comrades were dead. Their souls were in hell. They'd come to Drinsk to fetch grain, but they neither asked nor carried money. From the station platform the shuddering Bolshevik on the basement floor had, with a bit more confidence, read aloud a decree referencing starving factory workers, borderless, limitless revolution, endless words with endless implications. After he read, in a voice unbroken and prideful, he and his comrades had advanced with fixed bayonets to the Drinsk granary. They didn't get far; the Drinsk Cossacks rode into them and killed all but this last man.

He shivered, guessed his fate.

Mykola went and fetched two Cossack shashkas and tossed them on the floor. The Bolshevik said something in Russian. One Cossack said: he says he doesn't know how to use this

kind of sword.

Schoolboy said: He's used to French-style.

Is this a problem? Mykola asked.

No, Mykola, said Schoolboy. Schoolboy picked up a sword and menaced the Bolshevik with it. He said: You should pick up your sword.

The Bolshevik picked up the sword. He held it like a thespian, far out in front of him, fearful. He and Schoolboy circled. Schoolboy cried out, fainted. The Bolshevik started, overcompensated. Schoolboy fainted again, the Bolshevik reacted predictably and soon Schoolboy was on him; beating the Bolshevik's sword to the side he closed in and with one zigzag motion had disarmed and slit the man's throat.

Bravo, said Mykola. Put him on the train back to Novyi Stargorod.

After this bit of fun the Drinsk Cossacks all went to the tavern and refilled their tankards. Mykola, however remained behind in the town square, pacing and puffing on his pipe and kicking at the dust, for the usual delights of defiance did not find him that evening.

THE FIRST VISITATION

That night the shade of the great Ulu Boyar came to Mykola Mykhailovich as he slept upon a bed of straw in the stables behind the tavern. The shade of the great Boyar glowed like Christ; through the wall he floated and upon alighting just above the soft earth Mykola was roused from his sleep. Mykola did not fear the ghost for he recognized the epaulets and cords and façade of the Cossack known far and wide for his great courage and menace to the enemies of Slavic peoples.

Mykola nodded to the ghost and the Boyar said: Mykola, I first met the Infidel in Turkestan. They were agitating in the town of Novoyermaksk and they had paid a balloonist to take the local priest up in his basket. The Infidel wanted the priest taken into the clouds so he could see there were no angels up there. When they brought the priest down, he wouldn't speak to anyone. He left Novoyermaksk, joined a monastery, and never broke his vow of silence. The apparition of the Boyar wavered for a moment, then said: I could not defeat the Infidel in Russia, but you must defeat him in Ukraine. Your destiny, Mykola, lies in Kyiv.

In Kyiv, Boyar? said Mykola.

You will lead a vast army of Cossacks to the capitol of Old Rus. You will liberate the city from the Infidel. This is your destiny.

THE HYSTERICAL WOMAN

In the cold hours of morning a woman, wide-eyed and flushed, banged into the tavern. She wept, was incoherent. A Cossack at a nearby table woke up and grabbed the woman with two strong hands. He gave her the gentlest of shakes. Woman! he boomed. What is it you are saying?

The woman took to the rattling; she slowed her words; her stutter left her. She was from nearby Dikanka, just thirty versts up the road from Drinsk. Another short-train of bloody Bolsheviks was due in by midday. The woman wept: We have barely enough grain to last the winter!

Mykola, who had fallen asleep over his morning hardtack stood and went to the woman's side. Dear woman, he said. We will take care of the Bolsheviks in Dikanka just as we have taken care of the Bolsheviks here in beautiful Drinsk! Why, some of our number call Dikanka home! We will not let you down, dear woman!

And with that excellent speech Mykola did a lap about the tavern, slamming his fist here and there, rousing the two dozen or so Cossacks to action; the barwoman went and prepared a meal for the men and the Cossacks crossed the town square to the church to have a morning prayer. Striding across the square one or two Cossacks remarked at the crispness of the sun that morning; that it was good for a battle; that God would ride with them, which was true. They prayed for an hour, went back to the tavern, and by mid-morning were riding with all possible speed for Dikanka.

THE LIBERATION OF DIKANKA

There was a cannon in the center of town older than the oldest man in Dikanka. The cannon had been a proud part of the War of 1812, had been fired at Napoleon's ass as he limped and dragged his weary, rickshawed frogs back to Europe's better half.

Mykola rode into Dikanka with Schoolboy to his left and a seven-foot-tall Cossack named Petrushka to his right. Mykola spied the ancient cannon in the town square and said: That's a fine piece.

The two dozen or so Cossacks came riding in just behind Mykola and his retinue and then an old woman exited the tavern across the square and came up to Mykola and asked if they were there to steal all their grain and starve the town to death.

No Ma'am! boomed Mykola, the greatest Cossack of his age. Quite the opposite!

The old woman fell to her knees and put her hands together and begin to wail in gratitude as old women do. Mykola and the other Cossacks dismounted and headed for the tavern to whet themselves for battle. There were some men in the tavern but they realized who was in charge when Mykola and the others swept in, tossing their cloaks to the floor and hollering at the bartender in a good-natured way for a few bottles of horilka to loosen their minds to the task. As they filled the tavern and began to take drink, the hysterical woman—who'd followed the Cossacks from Drinsk back to Dikanka astride an ass—entered the tavern and renewed her wailing.

Good woman! hollered an ancient, full-bearded Cossack who had killed many Turks at Tarnovo and Plovdiv, we need only to loosen our minds to the task and then you shall have your mercenary guard!

The woman must have heard the old Cossack but continued to move around the tavern. Was it her tavern? Was she concerned about the quantity of drink the Cossacks were taking in?

Good woman! another Cossack said, grabbing her gently by the arm. Never fear! We Cossacks will not drink ourselves into a stupor. History will prove to you, good woman, that horilka, if it's good horilka, never let a Cossack or a Ukrainian down! To those wise words the Drinsk Cossacks in the tavern all raised their snifters and emptied them.

But Cossacks, said the woman, less hysterically, the squad from Novyi Stargorod is due at the station in less than two hours!

At which all the Cossacks in the tavern laughed again—

Good woman! boomed Schoolboy, who knew a thing or two about time, that gives Old Mykola—he paused—one-hundred and forty minutes to strategize!

As bottles were shaken empty and the sun moved so as to shine in on and warm the Cossacks there in the tavern, Mykola put an arm around the woman, led her to the fireplace. He reached into the fire without flinching and withdrew an ashy stump. Now, good woman, he began. This here's the town—and he drew a misshaped square on the tavern wall in ash. This here is the Church, the well, the stables, the tavern, the granary...

And in that way the strategizing had begun.

When the train bearing the red banner chugged into the station the Cossacks were all hidden and ready; just the ancient and beautiful cannon and a few horses and the same old, praying woman who'd thanked God for Mykola were to be seen in the square. No matter; after a few pale, becaped heads popped from a crack in the slider door to make sure the coast was clear, one Bolshevik leapt out and with great élan marched to the well, climbed atop it, and read his decree to those present—the horses, the babushka. *Comrades!*...he began, and as he read the

little old woman waddled over to the beautiful field piece, that Napoleon-biter, and with a little match touched it off. The cannonball caught the locomotive in its tubular black gullet, and there was a massive explosion. The Bolshevik standing on the well fell off, and the remaining twenty standing around the train fell over. They quickly got up; the man at the well seized the old woman, and then the Drinsk Cossacks, hooting and hollering rode out from behind the buildings around the square—the church, the tavern, the postmaster’s—and, sabers drawn, rode into the Bolsheviks before they could fix their bayonets or aim properly. It wasn’t a good fight; the factory workers who swelled the Bolshevik ranks could no better aim their rifles than ride a horse. It was all over in less time than it took three Cossacks to finish a bottle of horilka.

That night of course, as the people of Dikanka were pleased to be spared starvation, there was a great celebration. The town priest blessed the Cossacks, individually then as a group, and then the musicians struck up, the barrels of vodka were tapped, and the young women and men of the town came out and danced until the sun was down and all the stars were out, stars shining and brightening the night, falling, brilliant, double-tailed in blues and greens, and that night it was good reveling and drink that vanquished the mighty band from Drinsk.

THE RAPE OF DRINSK

Never so long lasts a good thing or good news that a bad thing might take the chance to happen; as indeed it happened to the poor little county in Ukraine while the protectors of Drinsk slept in Dikanka slaked and sated, warmed by one another and the beguiling freewomen of the town. As the Cossacks had repulsed the grain requisition from Drinsk only days before, the Agricultural Commissar in Novyi Stargorod, two-hundred versts down the Dnieper from Drinsk, sent a retaliatory detachment to Drinsk. Naturally, as the city was completely undefended, the poor unarmed people of Drinsk were made an example of.

Dawn had barely broken over the glittering waters of the Dnieper when there was a wail from the center of town which not one Cossack mistook for that of the rooster. Stirring from their beds of straw the Cossacks rebuckled their belts and scabbards and emerged into the wan light. A man in rags had made the scream; it was Old Boltov, a farmer from Drinsk.

Boltov, you senile old fool! yelled Mykola from the door of the church where he'd bedded down, do you mean to wake the entire town of Dikanka with your yodeling?

Old Boltov, struck stupid as he was by terror, could only make breathy squawking sounds. He pointed towards the edge of town, southward.

What is it then, old man? said Mykola.

Schoolboy came up to Mykola and said, Drinsk?

And Old Boltov nodded.

The-the-the, he started. He pointed at the train, the train sitting still smoking at the Dikanka rain station with its red banners in tatters.

Truth dawned on the men present. Schoolboy translated their thoughts. The Bolsheviks

returned to Drinsk? he said. In the night?

And Old Boltov nodded.

Mykola took a step back. And why did you escape? How did you get here? And Boltov pointed towards the tavern, where two mares were busy with their feedbags. A cart piled with cheeses sat by them.

You drove your cheese to Dikanka to avoid plunder? Said Mykola, drawing his shashka from the scabbard. Old Boltov took a step back, waving his hands. Tears had sprang to his eyes.

Petrushka, who had lumbered up in the meantime, put a massive hand on Mykola's shoulder.

He probably thinks he's a hero.

Not one good thing passes that a bad one take its place, said Mykola, who was a wise Cossack, wise beyond his years. He had not taken his eyes off of Old Boltov, but he had resheathed his sword.

Before the sun's full disk had emerged from the horizon the Cossacks had gobbled Old Boltov's cheeses and were underway, back down the old south road towards Drinsk to put out this next fire. As they rode, Mykola thought of the Boyar in the night, what the ghost had prophesied, and he dreaded what they would find in Drinsk.

As they neared the town they slowed to a mosey. Drinsk had no gerechtshof, but the smell that grew as they approached reminded the anamnesiac Cossack warriors of terrible carnage—sieges at Syracuse, Bratislava, Sebastopol: burnt flesh, strewn bodies. As they rounded the final bend in the road, however, they saw nothing. They rode into town and the buildings looked untouched; farmhouses, linens on lines, rows of wheat and potatoes and turnips. There was no one in sight. They saw no smoke until they were very close in. They rode faster; those

town Cossacks with families within Drinsk proper moved to a gallop, eager and afraid.

They drew up quickly in the square. The granary was in cinders. No sacks had been removed; the acrid tang in the air was the smell of scorched wheat. Hanging from the shingles of the church on the other side of the square were the old men and women of the town. Nailed by their hands or feet while alive they were now dead; blood streaked the walls of the church like a carnival tent and the Cossacks who recognized their loved ones dismounted and ran to the church. They collapsed and wailed. Schoolboy had a pained expression on his face and Mykola told him to go ahead and weep for the dead.

A few Cossacks rode to the granary to put out the last of the flames and salvage what could be salvaged; Mykola rode over to help them when a flicker of activity beyond the church caught his eye. A girl of about seven rose up from behind a hedge. Mykola hailed her, and she disappeared from sight. Mykola gave chase and found her in an alley. He asked the girl her name and she told him; she told him some of the other children were dead; the rest, like herself, had hidden in the flue of the blacksmith's chimney. Mykola went there, helped the children down and led them all to back to their schoolhouse. He told them to stay put, and fetched an Old Cossack to keep an eye on them.

Mykola returned to the square, took Schoolboy aside. Where is that anarchist you know—the younger brother of the Serb?

Schoolboy gave it a second's thought. The bombmaker? he asked.

Indeed, said Mykola.

Schoolboy said he knew only of a basement where the chap might be, and Mykola beckoned Petrushka to join them. Show me this basement, he said, and they rode there.

An uneven stairwell led to a door. It was made of sturdy ash but Petrushka kicked it in

with little effort. Seated around a table, a collection of glow-worm like anarchists fumbled for pistols at the intrusion. Mykola drew his shashka and cleaved the table in two; the lantern on the table crashed to the floor and winked out. In the darkness Mykola could make out Petrushka lifting with each hand an anarchist, tossing them like fistfuls of rags into the corner. One anarchist scurried for a rear door, but Mykola marched after him, grabbed the scruff of his neck and flung him back into the center of the room.

Bolbol! boomed Schoolboy. Why do you run from a guest?

Bolbol the anarchist squirmed on the floor, retreating in a crawl from the advancing Mykola until he met Petrushka's shins, and stopped.

Bolbol, do you know about the fair city of Drinsk?

Drinsk, Hetman? chattered Bolbol.

Your fellow citizens are dead, anarchist.

Dead? said the boy. He wiped a lock of black hair from his face. He found his workman's cap on the floor nearby and pulled it back over his head.

Yes, Bolbol. Did you not come out of your hole to watch?

Pardon, Hetman? said Bolbol.

In another corner, a crumpled up anarchist started murmuring about the empty city; theirs for the taking, it was.

Mykola rounded on him. If you wish to rule a necropolis that's your business. Mykola pointed his sword at Bolbol's throat and asked him about bombs.

With some further cajoling Bolbol eventually led them into the rear room to the little cache of weapons and bombs and pamphlets—stuff Petrushka flung at Schoolboy—and Bolbol went to a shelf and brought down a crate of black orbs. They're old, said the boy. Maybe in a

few weeks, Hetman, I can make some fresh?

Mykola dismissed the boy with a gesture. He instructed Petrushka to collect the remaining weapons in the basement, and they left.

SEEING RED

Mykola returned with Schoolboy and Petrushka to the center of town. The local Cossacks were still on their knees in little puddles of their own tears. Across the square Mykola spied an old man leaning on a stick. He hollered at him.

Old man!

Mykola Schoolboy went to the old man and asked him if he'd seen the savage perpetrators and whence they'd fled.

The old man, whose face was riddled with scars, pointed to in the direction of the old trade road to Kyiv.

Old man, questioned Mykola, the men did not come by rail?

The old man shook his head. Then he pointed at the Cossacks' horses, milling around in the town square, faces thrust in their feedbags.

Mykola folded his arms. Old man, he said, why did you not perish with your brothers and sisters?

The old man's face twitched. With two fingers he indicated his eyes, indicated having seen what had happened.

Mykola left the old man, returned to the center of the town. They made camp in the square, around the well. Petrushka smashed into the bakery and the Cossacks ate. At night the bereaved Cossacks had wept their last, had replaced their grief with a thirst for vengeance. After consuming every drop of horilka in Drinsk, Mykola stood and made a powerful speech condemning the atrocity committed by the Bolsheviks in Drinsk. At the end of the speech he turned rhetorically to Schoolboy and asked him:

Schoolboy, I know you like riddles; I have one. What is a man without God?

And Schoolboy said: A man without a soul, Mykola.

And what is a man without a soul? asked Mykola.

A machine, Mykola.

Volodymyr Volodymyrovich, Mykola went on, do you weep when a machine is broken?

No, most certainly not, Mykola.

Mykola dramatically drew his shashka from its scabbard just then, and concluded: then we weep no more! And with that Bolbol's bombs were distributed, the bereaved men painted their faces with the blood of their loved ones, and the Cossacks took to the south road.

RETALIATORY DETACHMENT

A person camped along the road might have searched the skies for a thunderhead upon hearing the Cossack approach; the Cossack horses beat the road with such fury it is hard to imagine that the encamped Bolshevik detachment did not feel their approach. But their speed was great and their despair all-consuming. God, one can surmise, road with them, as the Drinsk Cossacks were nothing if not devout.

When the forest opened up, Bohdan Tymoshenko, face painted with the blood of his wife and son, spotted tendrils of extinguished firesmoke to the east. He drew his sword and turned off the road. The Cossack horde followed him. Tymoshenko, a Good Cossack though unformed by war, crested a small rise in the landscape and spotted the collection of dark tents by a copse of trees. Tymoshenko hollered a war cry to extinguish the taste of dried blood and burnt hair that hung in the back of his throat, and cast the first of his three mean bombs into the mess of tents; there was a scream and an explosion. See here, Infidel, cried Tymoshenko to the dark forms springing to life all around him; the retaliatory detachment scrambled for their rifles as the Drinsk Cossacks rode into them. Shashkas flashed in the starlight, explosions cast dazzling shadows against the flora, owls and bats and sleeping sparrows fled the broken night.

It was over not long after it had begun. The bodies of the detachment were everywhere; fire had eaten the tents and scorched the trees, and smoldered on. Two Cossacks lay on the ground: the ancient, full-bearded, Turk-killing Cossack, and a younger Cossack, face painted in blood, who'd enthusiastically slain his enemies before taking a bullet to the shoulder. Petrushka having muscled his way through the encampment dispatching Bolsheviks left and right with his mighty fists, had thrown both the Old Cossack and the younger over his shoulders and carried

them to safety.

There the Old Cossack spoke ancient truths to the Young Cossack before expiring from his wounds. The Young Cossack watched the wisp of soul evaporate from the Old Cossack's mouth, and he cradled the hoary-headed man as he grew cold. Smoke from the battlefield on the other side of the copse blotted out the stars but Mars shone twinkling through the smoke. The Young Cossack, though brave in battle, was not brave enough to join his wife in heaven, and so he allowed Ostap Prykodko, a smart and useful Cossack, to kneel by him and administer unguent to his shoulder and tie up the wound.

Mykola rode around the encampment collecting pistols and rifles from the dead. When Schoolboy, who was good with ranks, identified the commander of the detachment he brought the body to Mykola and Mykola instructed Petrushka to chop off the man's head. Petrushka fetched his axe, the largest axe a man could ever hope to wield, and with one blow made a clean cut. Mykola had another old, smart Cossack pen a letter in blood on the man's linen undershirt. The letter detailed the crime and its repayment in kind. Then Mykola told the smallest of all the Drinsk Cossacks, a wisp of a lad named Gleb Kulyk, to ride to the railroad, ten versts to the west, and place the commander's head and the letter on the tracks.

A COUNCIL OF WAR

No good Cossack shrinks from war, indeed a Cossack isn't truly a Cossack until he's tasted battle, but Mykola, Hetman of the Drinsk Cossacks was shrewd enough to know how and when to plan for war; not merely to spare the innocent, say—though Mykola and his men were nothing if not honorable protectors of the meek—but also to make the most of a good war, for there is nothing sadder than a Cossack grown old and grey having never tasted battle.

Mykola spared no time rounding up his Cossacks and riding southeastward into the untamed Ukrainian steppe. When they could see nothing but horizon they unsaddled their exhausted horses and made camp. They slept very late and in the morning butchered three of the captured Bolshevik horses to eat. That evening Mykola called a Council of War. He explained what was said in the papers, that the Bolsheviks had killed the Czar and were engaged in a civil war fighting other Russians, Finns, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Anarchists, Poles, Siberians, Terrorists, Estonians, American Airmen, Artists, Tatars, Turks, the British, and even a railbound regiment of Czechs.

But Mykola, one Old Cossack inquired, everyone it seems is fighting the Infidel. Does anyone fight with them?

The Latvians, said Mykola.

The Cossacks groaned. Loathsome opportunists, some said. Forsakers of God!

Big Petrushka gestured for silence and Mykola continued. An Atheist Jew named Trotsky runs their army. He hides in an armored train and goes wherever the rails go. They say he is a genius and invulnerable to fire and bullets.

Does he come to Ukraine? one Cossack asked hopefully.

Mykola said: He does not venture outside Russia.

Another Cossack suggested lining the railroad from Petersburg to Kyiv with rubles.

There was much laughter at the suggestion, then another Cossack asked: Volodymyr Volodymyrovich, if the Trotsky does not leave Russia, whom are we fighting?

At which Schoolboy took over. He told the Good Cossacks seated there in council on the rolling steppe there that there were plenty enough Bolsheviks making trouble in Ukraine; from Nizny Verkgorod just across the border to the north, said Schoolboy, to the Soviets in Novyi Stargorod and Kyiv.

For the sake of Christ and Mother Mary, wailed one Cossack, they will burn Saint Sophia's to the ground! They'll enslave the nuns and hang the priests!

Mykola assured the concerned Cossack that the Dnieper itself would catch fire before the Infidels would be allowed to defile that most beautiful of all Churches, the crown Jewel of Kyiv. The Drinsk Cossacks went on talking until the sun dipped low and it was decided, partly to raise and army and partly because they had nothing to drink out there on the steppe, to ride to Zaporizhia.

THE SICH

It was a two-days' ride to Zaporizhia. The Drinsk Cossacks rode many hours a day, taking turns on their horses and the captured Bolshevik nags. The captured horses soon rode well, taking happily to robust Cossack seats, superior to those of the chafed, ignoble Atheist.

The Drinsk Cossacks arrived and rode around the perimeter wall of the city while the loudest Cossack among them hollered for the Zaporizhians to open the gates for a band of travel-weary brothers.

Eventually some Zaporizhian Cossack within unlocked the gate and, Mykola in the lead, the Drinsk Cossacks entered the Sich.

It was midday and many Zaporizhians were exalting themselves in the sun, passed out in the grass with a bottle of horilka or else crowded into the local tavern across from the orthodox church, munching on pickles, bottle of horilka in one hand, lump of brown bread in the other.

Mykola dismounted and kicked a man lying facedown in the grass. The churchbell chimed noon, the man rolled over.

Brother! said Mykola. Greetings! I am Mykola Mykhailovich of the Drinsk Cossacks, and I have come with my brothers to your Sich seeking fraternity and alliance. Where can I find your Hetman?

The man looked around on the grass for his bottle of horilka, found it, found it empty, and squinted up at Mykola. You come all the way from Drinsk?

Yes, brother, said Mykola.

The man stood. Greetings, he said. I am Vysevolod Tovkach, Hetman of Zaporizhia.

ANOTHER COUNCIL OF WAR

Some of Vysevolod Fedorovich's men took charge of the Drinsk Cossacks' horses, then the Hetman led Mykola and his men to the tavern for some horilka.

After they'd drunk all they could and then some more, Mykola told Vysevolod of their adventures. Vysevolod barked with laughter when Mykola recounted the swordfighting Bolshevik; he doubled over laughing when Mykola mentioned the old Dikanka woman and the cannon that bit Napoleon's ass; he wept uncontrollably when Mykola told him what the Bolshevik retaliatory division had done to the good people of Drinsk; and, finally, he got a sympathetic fire in his eyes when Mykola described their revenge.

At the end of Mykola's story Vysevolod wiped his eyes on his sleeve and said: Brother, you have been through much. I can't express in words the grief my soul feels for the good people of Drinsk; for all Cossacks who have lost wife, child, father, and son to the Infidel — !

— And at his words, the other Zaporizhian Cossacks in the tavern join in noisily; a mighty *hear, hear!* rattled the earth and set distant birds aflutter.

I must say, Vysevolod went on, what gives me the most grief in all the world is to look upon my brothers who have never tasted battle, knowing they might leave this world without the honor. Mykola Mykhailovich, the Hetman of Zaporizhia went on, if Infidels have invaded our ancestral lands and killed our loved ones, you need not question the support of the Zaporizhian Cossacks in a war against such devilish brutes!

There was another resounding cheer, and with the conclusion of Vysevolod's masterful speech the horilka was drunk up faster than ever. The Cossack brothers celebrated the imminence of an honorable war, a glorious opportunity for those Cossacks too young to have

slain Hungarians in the Great War, and for those too old to have routed the Turks at Tarnovo and Plovdiv.

INFIDELS

The next day Mykola got up, stretched, left the Hetman's stables. All through the Sich men were lumbering around looking for food and drink. Stone chimneys sent the smoke of breakfast fires into the heavens, and rich smells of roast meat filled the Sich.

In the tavern Mykola happened upon a fight. A Drinsk Cossack—it was Yevgeny Timofeyevich—and a Zaporizhian were locked in combat. Vysevolod Fedorovich was there and Mykola went to him.

What is the meaning of this? said Mykola.

You are awake, brother! Good day to you—please, put a ruble on your man from Drinsk. No better way to start a fine morning.

Mykola obliged the Hetman, but waited impatiently for the fight to end. When it was—and the Zaporizhian had thrown Yevgeny Timofeyevich—Mykola took Vysevlod aside and told him his plans and about the prophecy of the Boyar.

Vysevolod said: You want to liberate Kyiv?

Mykola said: It is ordained, Hetman.

Vysevolod shook his head. The Cossacks of Drinsk are great warriors, as are those of the Sich, but it would take a hundredscore men on horseback to liberate Kyiv from the Infidel. The Atheist has a stranglehold on Kyiv, said Vysevolod; the agitators in the factories and every ship up and down the Dnieper support them!

No Good Cossack can abide it, said Mykola. Send horsemen to the Don, the Buh, the Kuban. If we add their numbers to ours, we can take Kyiv.

But Mykola, said Vysevolod. They have German artillery, and machine guns, and

armored cars—

But at that moment Vysevolod and Mykola, and all the other Cossacks in the tavern stopped their chatter, as a great boom shook the Sich.

They crowded out and climbed the ramparts of the outer wall.

A drab-shirted Bolshevik platoon stood just beyond the walls. Factory boys, to the man, and foolish-looking in their finery. They had a small cannon with them. It was pointed at the gate.

Hetman! cried one of the Infidels. It has been determined that you are harboring certain fugitives of the counterrevolution accused of slaughtering a brigade of Red Army along the South Road two days ago!

The Zaporizhian Cossacks along the battlements all laughed. The Drinsk Cossacks laughed too.

The Bolshevik crier continued. If you do not surrender these criminals forthwith we will have no choice but to place you and every member of the Zaporizhian Sich under arrest!

Once again the jocular lads lining the walls all broke into laughter at the cold threats of the Infidel, who grew angry and made ready their small cannon.

You have to the count of three to surrender the criminal element within your walls or we will be forced to fire upon you! The other Bolshevik grunts in the platoon lifted their rifles and took shaky aim at the Good Cossacks lining the walls.

Mykola, watching beside Vysevolod, asked what he wanted to do.

The crier hollered: One—!

Um, is a good question, said Vysevolod. I like my gate, it is a good gate.

Two—!

And in the nick of time the Drinsk and the Zaporizhian hetmans hatched a plan which began with Vysevolod appeasing the Bolshevik goon poised over the small cannon. Good Captain! Vysevolod hollered from the walls in his most belabored provincial accent. Please do not fire upon my beautiful walls! My father built these walls when I was a child and I have grown very fond of these walls, very fond indeed!

Cossack, yelled the Bolshevik goon in return, if you wish to retain your walls in good working order, open your gates immediately and surrender the criminal element taking refuge within!

Good Atheist, hollered Vysevolod, I will climb down right now to unlock my gates. Please douse your primer and turn aside the bore so the machine is safe from the Devil's toying!

Vysevolod did as he said, and at the same time Mykola went and selected from among the Drinsk and Zaporizhian Cossacks the most powerful men, mighty Petrushka among them, to surrender as the criminal fugitive element from Drinsk.

Mykola addressed them behind a building out of sight of the main gate: Good Cossacks, he said, do you foresee any problems in breaking free of their flimsy Atheist *kibitka*?

The burly Cossacks exchanged glances. None wished to admit weakness.

Because, Good Cossacks, should you reach your destination—or even, say, a good and private lea, they are sure to execute you!

The burly Cossacks looked capable of breaking out of the most carefully-constructed Atheist wheelie-brig, and then Vysevolod, around the corner, loudly and sarcastically announced his pleasure in welcoming the Atheist element into the hallowed Sich.

Mykola heard the grinding creak of the *kibitka* as it was wheeled through the gate and parked just inside the walls. The Bolshevik leader dismissed Vysevolod's niceties and demanded

the criminal element from Drinsk at once.

But good sir! said Vysevolod. Of course, of course!

And, having shackled them one to the other like slaves, Mykola walked the powerful men—twenty of them there were—out towards the gate. The other Bolsheviks pointed their guns towards Mykola and the burly Cossack scapegoats, heads bowed low as though guilt racked their hearts.

The Bolshevik read aloud the charges to the rabble of giant Cossacks and then, before prodding them with their bayonets into the *kibitka*, Vysevolod insisted that the Orthodox priest of the Sich give the Good Cossacks their last rites.

Disgusted, the head Bolshevik gestured for the Priest to get on with it. All the Drinsk and Zaporizhians there bowed their heads too, always game for some extra time to be near and think of and exalt God, and when it was through, they bade farewell to their brothers, and all were all happy to see the Infidels depart their beloved Sich.

Well, Brothers, said Vysevolod when the Bolsheviks were out of sight, our good Sich here on the steppe is polluted beyond recovery! Let us burn our beloved dwelling to the ground in an offering to Christ and Mother Mary, that we might rise from the ashes and emerge victorious against the Infidel in our lands!

And with that glorious and dramatic speech all the Cossacks in the Sich erupted in cheers and they set about collecting all what was good in the Sich into a trio of wagons: the triptychs and the icons, the Priest's good robes and gilded things, his iconostasis and his beautiful 14th century censer; all the horilka left in the tavern and the vodka too; a hundred or so loaves of brown bread, eighteen jars of pickles; all the weapons and all the torches, tools, and knickknacks that might prove useful in a holy war went into that trio of wagons.

With tears in their eyes and resolve in their hearts, the Cossacks set fire to the thatched roofs of the Sich; the flames spread quickly and the men retreated out the gate to watch the blaze from a safe distance.

THE DRAMATIC RESCUE

Through the slotted windows of the *kibitka* Petrushka could see the shadow of trees approaching.

He whispered to his fellow Cossacks there in the hold that now was the time.

Severyn Sahaidachny, a very long-legged Cossack, drew from his boot a dirk, and passed it to the Cossack standing closest to the door, and he very deftly skewered the Bolshevik standing on the rear mudguard. Before the man fell from the *kibitka*, Petrushka, with one powerful swing, smashed the door open.

To the Cossacks' surprise, the Bolsheviks were less ready to brawl than expected. About half the rear guard turned when Petrushka destroyed the armored door; the other half were preoccupied by a pillar of smoke rising to the heavens behind them. The *kibitka* drew to a halt and a few of the Bolsheviks fired into the hold as the Cossacks poured from it. Petrushka took a bullet in the thigh before descending on the perpetrator, snatching away his rifle, and beating him bloody with it. The other Cossacks lay thickly into the rearguard, taking hits but dealing worse. When the avant guard joined the fray and things seemed to swing in the Infidels' favor, over the hill rode the horde from Zaporizhia—and the intermingled Drinsk brothers, of course—five-hundred strong at least, and in a matter of minutes the Bolsheviks were less concerned with foiling the Cossacks' escape and more concerned with fleeing for their lives.

Naturally they did not get far; at the edge of the forest the fastest Cossack riders met them, shashkas drawn, and in a matter of minutes the Cossack were in possession of fifteen horses, an armored droshky, a handsome German-made field howitzer of Franco-Prussian vintage, sixty-four rifles, and two mountable machine guns.

THE TROTSKY OF KYIV

The chairman of the Kyivan Soviet, Msistlav Denisevich Plysukmyov, had set up headquarters in Saint Sophia's Cathedral. They'd kicked the priests to the curb, the old nuns were told to buzz off. The youngest, most comely nuns had been kept on as party secretaries. Naturally.

Plysukmyov had only just received the telegrams about the grain debacle in Drinsk, when he'd received another screaming telegram about Dikanka; he had barely dispatched the retaliatory division to Drinsk before a spooked-looking Latvian rifleman came stumbling into the Sacristy—where Plysukmyov had shoved a massive desk—and informed the chairman that the division had been slaughtered by a band of mounted brigands.

Who?

Brigands, comrade.

Cossacks?

I don't know, comrade chairman.

How many of them?

Er, two-dozen or so?

Plysukmyov put down his fountain pen and lifted his monocle to peer at the Latvian.
How many did they dispatch?

All of them, comrade.

Twenty-four *brigands* dispatched three-hundred and fifteen regular army?

Indeed, Comrade Chairman, and a, er, message of theirs was intercepted.

What message?

At which point the Latvian lifted a hatbox onto the Chairman's desk with a bit more effort than it ought to have taken.

Over the next couple of days the cycle repeated itself; Plysukmyov brought up the Cossack rebellion to the Kyiv Military Revolutionary Committee, and they voted to place the so-called 'mounted brigands' under arrest. Plysukmyov ordered an elite artillery unit to do the job; he was saddened to learn, a week hence, that the 'elite' unit had been killed, and all their accouterments confiscated.

Finally, Plysukmyov decided there was no other course of action but to pen a letter to the Military Commissar in Moscow. The last time he'd interacted with Trotsky, the man had yelled him down for twenty minutes about a trivial little matter relating to defensive positions—or lack thereof, as Plysukmyov charged—on Ukraine's Polish front.

In response Plysukmyov received a telegram from Trotsky ordering him to draft an up-to-date map of the Ukrainian rail; how many total kilometers; destinations; gauge; single or double; defensibility; and so on. In the intermediary, three more grain detachments had been slaughtered in the central Dnieper region, and reports from the rural Soviets alleged the rebel horde had swollen to 1,000.

ALLIES

They'd made camp along the Sula River a few hundred versts east of Kyiv. Mykola sent Gleb Kulyk as envoy to the Buh Cossacks, provisioned with three days' of brown bread, six days of horilka, and the fastest horse in camp. Vysevolod Fedorovich Tovkach, Hetman of the Zaporizhians, sent his lightest, fastest rider to the Kuban and slower but more diplomatically gifted man to the Don.

In the meantime the Cossacks fiddled and futzed with the two mountable machine guns they'd confiscated from the elite Red Army division. A couple of craftsmen from the Zaporizhian Sich worked on hewing wagon wheels from local timber. The Drinsk blacksmith worked on creating a fire hot enough to smelt with, and another pair of handymen tried to mount one machine gun atop the *kibitka*. It was slow-going.

Mykola spent many hours in close conference with Vysevolod, Schoolboy, and Vysevolod's smartest Cossacks, a pair of men who'd received schooling—and some unavoidable softening—in Königsberg and Lemberg, which is to say that they knew how to plan and strategize, and had witnessed firsthand modern warmongering at its finest. Collectively known as the 'war council,' these fine Cossacks were drinking heavily over a map of Ukraine when a Cossack scout came tearing through the woods to inform them the trains along the Kyiv-Kharkiv line were being rerouted.

Mykola looked to the old, smart Zaporizhians for an interpretation.

They looked at each other then one explained: They're freeing up a rail for something big. Military transport, perhaps.

Mykola accosted the scout: Boy, you kept well hidden I trust?

Yes, Mykola! No one can spot Pypynko! said the scout, who's name was Kirill Borisevich Pypynko and was an excellent Cossack scout indeed.

Listen up, boy, said Mykola, I want you station watches along the railway at twenty verst increments, and just on the other side of Romyno. Select your men; do not choose bumblers or drunks for this. And Pypynko, wise beyond his meager years and excited about the prospect of making war against a Godless enemy, dashed off.

A few days later, Gleb Kulyk returned, two days early, provisions to spare. Mykola! he said, leaping from his steed and kneeling into a graceful bow before he steed could trot to a halt, good news from the Cossacks of the Buh!

What news? I see you've returned alone just as you left!

My apologies, Mykola, for riding faster than any other man! The Buh Cossacks, formidable as they are, do not ride so fast as I! They are making their way to our camp in a roundabout manner so as to avoid detection by the infidel. They should be here in a day, Mykola!

How strong?

Very strong Mykola, said Gleb, and he gestured with his hands many multiples of fives.

Mykola shook his head. And how many is that?

Mykola, said Gleb. Forgive me, for I cannot count!

For his efficient and satisfactory service Mykola gave little Gleb Kulyk enough bottles of horilka to kill a Mongol.

The Buh Cossacks arrived exactly when Gleb said, and shortly thereafter, one of the Zaporizhian riders at the head of four hundred Kuban Cossacks. It would have been cause for celebration, if one of little Pypynko's scouts hadn't also charged into camp, red-faced, bearing

news that a heavy, evil-looking train bearing red flags had been spotted in Romyno.

THE STEEL WORM

The Drinsk and Zaporizhian Cossacks apologized to their newly arrived guests, and scrambled to finish off their artillery pieces; they completed one tachanka: the kibitka with a partially-moveable machine gun mounted to it; the second piece had never come to fruition and the second machine gun was assembled and shoved into the hold of the kibitka for transportation purposes.

A group of Cossacks rode out ahead of the others to destroy the railroad tracks at a location the war council had decided upon for ambush. When all was ready, the ambush party, led by Mykola, Vysevolod, and the cunning Hetman of the Buh Cossacks, Maksym Davidovich Chernozubov, headed for that location and made ready for the arrival of this military train. They set their tachanka on one side of the rails, and the loose machine gun on the other, beside the handsome little German howitzer. The Cossacks dispersed themselves along the treeline on either side of the tracks, already vibrating with eminent burden. Coming around a bend that paralleled the meander of the Sula, the train would have no time to break before derailing.

The three-car train roved into view. Mykola had seen nothing like it before—a heavy, windowless machine topped with swivel guns; Vysevolod had indeed seen such things; no one could say if Maksym of the Buh had: the inscrutable man chewed on the end of his pipe and eyed the train wordlessly. Then the train hit the curve, whipped around it, and with a screech slammed on its brakes. It plowed off the rails and ground to a halt. There was a hissing silence; a lone man yelled something obvious in Russian; then the Cossacks' little howitzer went boom and the train engine exploded. The machine guns opened fire, as did the Cossacks with their rifles, but their bullets had no more effect on the hulls of the armored train than a salvo of unforgiving hail.

And then the rebuttal; slots opened up; machine guns were pushed through the slots and began hosing the treeline on both sides. Few Cossacks were hit, but a cloud of splintered flora made it impossible to aim for the little slits, the little chinks in the armor of the steel worm. Once the Howitzer was reloaded, reaimed, and fired, Mykola signaled the Cossacks to retreat.

Reassembling in the trees, Mykola assessed the situation. Their tachanka was lost and thirty-four Cossacks had been hit. Six of those lay dead, including two young Cossacks from Drinsk whose gallant Cossack souls had savored but the barest taste of battle before the heavens opened to collect them.

We can try and wait them out, Mykola said to Vysevolod.

If we wait too long, growled the Buh Hetman Maksym, they'll send a fresh pack of dogs down the line from Romyno—and the Hetman was right, righter than he knew; the Bolsheviks had sent a second armored train after the first, and while the Allied Hetmans discussed options—douse the train in oil, burn them alive!—a distant rumble shook the forest. The Cossacks organized a final defensive line deeper in the wood on the south side of the tracks, did their best to destroy the first armored train with a few aimed shots by the trusty Howitzer, then beat a retreat as the second armored train roved into range and began firing on their position. Unlike the first train, the second stayed out of range of the Cossacks while maintaining perfect range for its long-range weapons.

The Cossacks retreated to their mounts, and rode back to their camp on the Sula; they uprooted as fast as they could and rode southeast, back onto the steppe where Bolshevik trains could not reach them. Mykola felt a lump in his throat for those green Cossacks among the horde; no sooner is a young Cossack nourished by battle than first defeat steals the good feeling from him.

ON THE PLATFORM

On the appointed day Msistlav Denisevich Plysukmyov made his way from Saint Sophia's to the Kyiv station and stood on the edge of Platform 4 with his two assistants—ex-nuns selected by Plysukmyov himself for their revolutionary aptitude and good looks. The trio awaited with eager hearts the whatever-it-was Trotsky had sent from Moscow.

Just you wait, ladies, said Plysukmyov to the two fine bourgeois ladies flanking him and just as giddy with anticipation as he was; for the immediate and distant futures were sure to be equally promising and full of delights for the fine dames—too young, too buxom, too enthusiastic for the cold vows of Orthodoxy.

Girls, said Plysukmyov, making chit-chat, the railway is the future of the nation—of all nations! The chairman pointed at the rails below them, though it was an unnecessary gesture.

But of course, Comrade Chairman, said the girls in unison.

In the future, Plysukmyov went on, a network of steel will link the farthest corners of the globe! And the trains will move at a terrifying speed!

The girls, imagining the speed, suddenly looked terrified.

Now, don't be fearful girls! Don't be fearful of progress! The speed: you'll hardly feel it; progress cannot and will not undercut the efficiencies and comforts of our time—cushions and so on, tea and cakes, the things you like, girls!—and with that impromptu speech Plysukmyov had turned terror to giggles, delightful little fits which almost distracted Plysukmyov—almost—from the plume of black smoke now visible just beyond the city.

He demanded calm and poise from the girls—Hush now, girls! The train approaches!—and in what one might call 'no time' the train had rounded the great bend and it was clear to

Comrade Chairman Plysukmyov and his two dutiful secretaries what it was Old Trotsky had sent from Moscow.

ANOTHER VISITATION

Mykola was wise enough not to allow the sting of a single defeat to fill the silence between the words, to cloud his mind. Beneath a panoply of stars he lay and contemplated the flight from the forest into the steppe; the digging of graves for the days' fallen: those six mounds of turned earth all in a row just south of camp.

Before Mykola was even aware he'd drifted off to sleep, a glow aroused him, and he sat up. The camp was silent and still. At his feet the apparition of the Boyar was smiling as subtly as the Mona Lisa.

Greetings Boyar, said Mykola.

And to you, Hetman. The apparition nodded southwardly. The Don Cossacks are on the move. They will be here by midday tomorrow.

That is good, said Mykola. Are you here to make small talk, ghost?

The Boyar laughed. No Hetman. I want to tell you a story.

Another story? said Mykola.

Yes, Hetman. I will keep it concise. There are few hours left in the night, and you have much to do. Mykola, listen: I was stationed for a time in the Carpathian Mountains under orders from General Ivanov to hold Chyrowa Pass against the advance of the Austrian South Army. Von Hötendorf made a show of using every shell he'd been given by the Kaiser to soften us before advancing on our position. Many of our number were killed, but we held the pass. Von Hötendorf would not accept defeat, and so stationed two mountain divisions in the valley below, biding his time for winter to swipe us from the mountain. Of course we harassed the Austrian divisions; while the snow cover made it fairly difficult to conceal a daylight approach,

by night we were undetectable. My Siberian brothers hewed bows and arrows, and those skilled in the old ways sniped officers in the Austrian camp. No one saw us approach; no one heard a shot; no one saw us slip away into the night.

Mykola—!

Yes, Boyar?

For thousands of years the Cossack ruled the steppe with nothing but a bow, a horse... In the crush of winter they'd ride the frozen rivers, blacken the skies with arrows, destroy armies without a single casualty... Do you hear me, Hetman?

Yes, Boyar, yes!

Then heed me, Hetman...

And with that, the ghost of the Boyar began to recede into the nighttime fog, nodding, nodding, *the old ways, Hetman, the old ways...!*

Upon waking the next day Mykola sent for Schoolboy.

MACHINES AND WOLVES

As soon as Plysukmyov saw the train—one, not two, and in bad repair—he immediately began explaining to his two comely secretaries there on the platform that it was such a burden, anyway, on The People, you see, to allocate even one of Trotsky's armored trains to the Ukraine when there were so many fronts, so many good socialists in Russia on the brink of peril...

The girls didn't care, to be sure, but the Chairmen went on babbling until the armored train slowed; the thin-bearded conductor popped his head out of the engine; and Plysukmyov nodded to him curtly. Girls, he said, please excuse me, for I must have a word in private with my good friend, the conductor, here; and when the secretaries had descended the stairs at the opposite end of the platform the Chairman turned to the conductor, striding up with a salute, and grabbed him by his collar.

What is the meaning of this—do the Good People of the Moscow Soviet mean for me to defend Kyiv with a dented breadbox?

Comrade Chairman—

Last time I checked, comrade, there was more than one railway line into Kyiv; how am I supposed to protect the city with but one train?

The conductor screwed up his face in obvious arithmetic, but Plysukmyov just growled and unhanded the man. Explain yourself, Comrade Conductor.

Comrade Chairman, said the conductor, the War Commissar indeed allocated two of the peoples' finest Putilovs, the heavy-armor Svarog and the lighter Zorya. Unfortunately Bandits west of Romyno ambushed the Zorya and managed to destroy her engine with a field gun. Our troops in the Zorya's transport cars managed to hold the bandits off until the Svarog arrived.

And you drove which?

The Svarog, comrade. Heavy-armor.

Plysukmyov nodded. Do you want a medal?

Pardon me, comrade?

A medal, Comrade Conductor. For your heroism in the belated rescue of the Zorya from the Cossack rebels.

Cossacks, sir?

I'm just kidding, Comrade Conductor. Plysukmyov patted the conductor on the shoulder. Men had begun spilling from the armored train, now at rest at the platform. In total she was eight cars long, not including the Svarog's engine and the heavily-damaged engine of the Zorya coupled at the back. I'm just wondering, Plysukmyov went on, what kind of pagan name I can come up with for a train that combines a 'Zorya' and a 'Svarog'—a mongrel train, a half-breed train.

As the Red Army garrison emptied from the platform, Plysukmyov noticed his secretaries on the steps. Girls! he called to them, telling the conductor that perhaps they had learned some of the Slavic fairy tales in their schooling. They arrived; Plysukmyov introduced the girls—Marina Boltova and Tatyana Heller—as invaluable Secretaries of the Party, and then the conductor introduced himself with a bow, and Plysukmyov asked the girls if they could put their heads together and come up with some pagan Such-and-such to name the train, the poor train which was a cobbling of two more striking machines.

The girls looked at each other and the conductor, eager to talk to the pretty girls, said: their old names were Zorya, for the lighter train, and Svarog for the heavier. The girls, however, themselves only recently and gratefully liberated from the confines of religion, did not feel like

mining their pasts for such obscure nonsense. Instead, Marina, the more attractive of the two girls said: Well, what is the purpose of the trains?

To eliminate the counterrevolutionary element, of course! said Plysukmyov.

Who's that? asked Tatyana. The counterrevolutionary element?

That's classified my darling, interjected the conductor, but Plysukmyov was quick to wave the boy's pretension away—how uncouth!—and tell the girls: Why girls, it is a coalition of Cossacks who've decided to dress a blood feud up as some kind of Holy War!

A Holy War? remarked Marina. How sad!

Indeed! said Plysukmyov. A Holy War put on by a bunch of rabid beasts! But, do not worry, dear girls! With some sober planning and our good Comrade Conductor here—what was your name again, boy?—soon Ukraine will be safe from the horde.

And indeed, it dawned on the Chairman just then that the conductor had been the first Red Army officer to engage with the Cossack and emerge from the encounter alive. Yes—the Chairman went on—perhaps we should name the train, in that case, something as far from religion as possible.

Marina suggested: Cossack Fighter!

Hmm...

The conductor suggested: Truth Weapon!

Well...

Tatyana suggested: Dog Hunter!

But indeed it was the combined effect of all these mediocre suggestions which caused the best, most formidable, and above all most appropriate name to enter Plysukmyov's mind at that very moment.

Good comrades, said the Chairman to the conductor and the girls, I have it—the perfect name! And the Chairman told it to them.

A VIGOROUS COMPETITION

Schoolboy, said Mykola, I want you to gather all Cossacks in camp over the age of forty.

What for, Mykola? said Schoolboy.

Volodymyr, Volodymyrovich, said Mykola, never you mind.

And Schoolboy rushed off. Mykola started a fire at the edge of the camp and awaited the Old Cossacks, who started ambling over shortly after. When there was a good number of Old Cossacks, maybe fifty, Mykola said: Good Cossacks—fathers, brothers—who among you can hew a bow in the old way?

There was some unsure mumbling in response, some nodding, heming, hawing.

Good Cossacks, said Mykola, I present to you a challenge: Fifty rubles to the man who can hew me the best bow in the least amount of time!

One Old Cossack, unafraid to speak his mind as Older Cossacks often are, said: Hetman, do you mean to extract labor from us?

No, Demid Popovich, said Mykola. I mean to bring to bear the full might of the old ways on our Godless Enemies.

With bows, Hetman?

Demid Popovich, my good friend, I simply wish to discover, by way of an invigorating competition, who can hew the best bow in the least amount of time, that he might then teach his secrets to his brothers.

Another Old Cossack questioned the efficacy of bows against the Infidel's iron trains and guns, but Mykola waved aside their conjectures, and reiterated his challenge. Good Cossacks, I will explain myself when it is appropriate to do so—at this moment I merely want a bow, a

decent bow; not a child's toy but a bow worthy of a Cossack horseman! And with that he gestured for the gathering of Old Cossacks—about a hundred of them now, seated in circles around the fire—to disperse. Two days, Brothers, he called after them. Two days, fifty rubles—no, one hundred rubles to the man who hews the best bow!

When the men had all gone, Schoolboy appeared.

Hetman, said Schoolboy, the Don Cossacks have arrived. They're camping on the lea beyond the grove of trees a few versts south of here.

Ah, said Mykola, then they will soon be greeted by a bunch of hoary Cossacks wielding axes, God willing.

Schoolboy, however, thought Mykola should go and greet them first, as, he whispered, the Don Cossacks were on the *fancy* side, and seemed a bit skittish—for Cossacks that is—and would be better off sighting a hero before a rabble of old men.

You make speeches like some Greek, Schoolboy, said Mykola, and he went to saddle his horse.

The Don Cossacks had come about four hundred strong, and did not seem skittish to Mykola. In the space of a morning they'd arrived, put up tents, icons, and had already rinsed their cloaks and things in the stream. Mykola rode between strung lines of drying garments, Schoolboy at his side, and called out to the party: Friends of the Don Host, he said, I am Mykola Mykhailovich Postanov, Hetman of the Drinsk Cossacks—

The who? yelled a cheeky Cossack.

—and I welcome you to our war party. Who among you is Hetman?

There was some stirring and the cheeky Cossack stood, waved with both arms. He was smiling like a fool.

I am Taras Kazkanovich Shcherbychenko, said the cheeky Cossack, Hetman of the Don.

Mykola had a hard time believing the fool, but rode up to him and greeted him in a friendly fashion. Would you join me in private counsel?

Taras Kaskanovich followed Mykola on foot as Mykola led his horse into the small copse of trees within which the old men of camp were hacking away and grunting.

Taras asked Mykola: So, are you building a ship?

Mykola said: What?

Building a ship, going to sail it to Moscow and pop Volody Illich in his good eye?

I don't care for Moscow, said Mykola. I care only for Kyiv; Ukraine!

It's an expensive city, said Taras Kaskanovich, but Mykola refused to inquire whether he was talking about Kyiv or Moscow. Instead he thanked the Hetman for bringing his men. If we can agree on nothing else, perhaps we can agree on a common enemy.

Indeed Mykola Mykhailovich, said Taras Kaskanovich. But please explain to me why these old men are destroying this fine wood?

Mykola explained to the Hetman his competition; he dared not mention his visitations from the Boyar, saying only that he had a vague plan for combating the Infidel.

One hundred rubles! said Taras Kaskanovich. For a bow? Old men, he hollered at the Cossacks hacking the trees, I will pay you sevenfold what Old Mykola has promised you just to *stop* destroying this fine wood!

Some of the Old Cossacks hesitated in their hewing, though it was clear by Taras' tone that he wasn't serious. Taras turned back to Mykola, who was losing patience, and said: Alas, Brother, I in fact don't have even seven hundred rubles to spare on this, a vigorous Cossack competition! Though the Don Cossacks are an old and noble line, our journey to this modern

century of ours has taken an unfortunate turn; suffice it to say, Dear Hetman, that it is quite *impossible* to be rich when a little man in Moscow is doing his best to outlaw money!

Mykola nodded, though he was incapable of empathizing with the Don Hetman. In the back of his mind Mykola began to speculate that the Don Cossacks were exactly the sort of ally one turns against as soon as a war is won—though the Hetman of Drinsk had no time to dwell on this dark, nagging thought before Hetmans Vysevolod Fedorovich, Maksym Davidovich and—of the Kuban host—Arkady Serhiyevich Kozak rode into the wood, parting a clothesline of Don Cossack outerwear as they entered.

Taras Kaskanovich turned and had something to say.

Ah, these smartly draped gentlemen must be your entourage!

Mykola presented the Hetmans; Taras seemed to shelve the nonsense long enough to greet them, then he was watching the old Cossacks with their axes again, smile bumping the corners of his lips.

The Hetmans conferred briefly; they tallied their numbers, explained the situation as quickly as possible to Taras Kaskanovich—whom Mykola feared might bolt at first mention of any sort of defeat—and then Mykola excused himself. He did not answer the Hetmans' questions about the bow-carving; he took Schoolboy back to the main camp across the low hills and there packed a mule and outfitted two captured horses.

Schoolboy knew better than to ask the Hetman where he was going, but Mykola kindly told him anyway: I'm going to Drinsk, Volodymyr Volodymyrovich!

THE LANCE OF TRUTH

My friends, said Msistlav Denisovich Plysukmyov to his two comely secretaries and the blushing conductor, the train shall be called *Kopye Istiny!*

And the Chairman's audience of three burst into applause there on the platform, for it was a beautiful yet fierce name, a name that illustrated to the utmost the aims of socialism and the desires of a crusade against ignorance and baseness.

Bravo, Comrade Chairman, said the conductor.

Thank you, boy, said Plysukmyov. And now, he added, I should like to show my girls, here, the furnished bowels of the glorious *Kopye Istiny*, Conductor, if I might?

The Conductor graciously led the Chairman and his secretaries into the engine of the *Kopye Istiny*, explaining the variation in wall thicknesses from the Svarog to the Zorya, and the diameter of the swivel guns top-mounted on the Svarog's—

The *Kopye Istiny*, Comrade Conductor! snapped the Chairman, for if we don't use its new moniker in practice, you see, it shall never take.

My apologies, Chairman!

—artillery car, as well as the infantry car, reinforced and with retractable slots through which one could shove a machine gun. The Svarog—

—!

—apologies, comrade; *undamaged half* of the *Kopye Istiny* sports a better example of the infantry car, as the other took a good denting in the ambush...

By the time they moved to the third car, which had snubby little rotatable guns mounted along its sides, a man had rushed up to the Comrade Chairman with an urgent, top secret

message, and he had to bid the conductor farewell. Msistlav Denisovich followed the vulpine Chekist to a dark corner of the train station where he breathed his message in the Chairman's ear.

Afterward, the Chekist scurried off and Plysukmyov had to say to his two secretaries:
Well, girls, it seems the brigand has quadrupled his ranks!

THE NECROPOLIS ANARCHATE

Mykola Mikhailovich was no Gleb Kulik, but he made good time riding to Drinsk, making no stops, switching his horses out and taking provisions without stopping.

As he approached the city he turned off the main road and entered the outskirts of the town via a footpath he used to frequent in his boyhood, a boyhood populated by adventures often involving at either their beginning or their end, the footpath. The footpath crossed a creek just beyond the first houses of Drinsk, and thereafter became a dusty alley where old men would piss and old women would toss table leavings for the town strays. Now the alley was silent. Messages in black paint covered the walls of a pair of buildings close to the city center. When the alley made a turn to the left, Mykola saw the church, and from the tallest dome flew a black square of cloth. Mykola said a small prayer for himself and for the town of Drinsk, though it was like a ghost town now, all its Good People dead or flown to the countryside.

When Mykola opened his eyes from prayer he saw a small man with a pistol barring his path. Mykola halted his nags. Whoa, whoa.

Traveler, said the small man, why have you come to Drinsk?

This is the city of my birth, said Mykola. I am Mykola Mikhailovich Postanov, Hetman of this city.

The small man's eyes went wide, and he pointed the pistol at Mykola.

The town of Drinsk is controlled by the Anarchists, now, said the boy. Tyrants are to be shot!

Mykola, who had no fear of small men with pistols, said: Then shoot me, boy! Though I am no tyrant.

Have you come to Drinsk to reclaim your throne?

Mykola laughed out loud at the notion. No, my Anarchist friend, I have come speak with—

But at that moment there was an echo of laughter and around the bend strolled Bolbol, the bomb-maker. He was dressed not in his typical fashion—that of a homeless intellectual—but in a different manner altogether. He wore the Priest's kamilavkion, an overcoat with gold buttons, and billowing red trousers. A ponderous assortment of gold chains hung about the boy's neck.

Mykola Mikhailovich, said Bolbol, brushing the small pistolman aside, your horse is too big! With your head in the clouds how can you see where you're going?

Bolbol Iakovlevich Serov, said Mykola, somewhere a hole is missing its mouse. He dismounted and they slapped each other congenially. If I wasn't positive you had an army of vermin running this town, I'd throw you down the well.

At Mykola's words the small man again menaced Mykola with his weapon.

Calm now, boy, said Bolbol. Take Old Mykola Mikhailovich's horses to the stables. If you would, milk the mares; after that, why don't you milk the colts too?

And Bolbol led Mykola Mikhailovich to the center of town, to a plush throne he'd placed in the dirt by the well. He plopped down on it; please, he said to Mykola Mikhailovich, indicating the rim of the well, have a seat!

Mykola obliged Bolbol, looking around at the buildings on the square; the tavern's windows were smashed out; the smithy's too; a couple of men in black with rifles were sitting on the railing by the churchyard smoking and eating crabapples.

Bolbol told Mykola that the Good Town of Drinsk was now free of all tyrants, ignorance,

disease.

Except for Anarchists, said Mykola, and Bolbol nodded—

Yes, except for Anarchists.

And I, said Bolbol, am Anarch of the Anarchists!

He indicated his hat, and Mykola nodded. Are there any citizens left in Drinsk?

Only anarchists, said Bolbol.

Mykola, though he wished to know a great deal more about the broken city—was there food? Was the well potable? Had the dead been buried in the Christian manner?—instead simply told Bolbol what he'd come for.

Bolbol said: You've come for me?

I will pay you ten rubles a month to produce bombs in my employ. Mykola threw up his hands. Why not? he said; twenty-five rubles, and you bring your anarchist goons with, so long as they follow your orders.

Bolbol said: You ask that I leave this good city, just as soon as I've taken it? He indicated with a magisterial gesture the ghost town around them.

Mykola said: fifty rubles, and Bolbol without pause agreed. He shucked off his coat, tossed the kamilavkion to the ground.

Mykola tossed Bolbol a pouch. Advance pay for the first week. Now gather your brothers, we must ride tomorrow. And Bolbol—Mykola said sternly—if you desert me, I'll kill you and every one of your Anarchist minions.

BOMBMAKER, FLETCHER, PRUSSIAN JEW

Mykola Mykhailovich drew stares as he entered the Cossack camp trailing the rabble of Drinsk anarchists.

I take one look at a man, shouted Taras Kazkanovich as soon as he saw Mykola, and I know immediately the quality of company he keeps!

The Don Cossacks all laughed.

Mykola spoke up:

You know the old saying. Keep your friends close; enslave your enemies!

But Mykola needn't have bothered excusing the anarchists' presence at the Cossack camp; just about as soon Mykola arrived he sent them all, save for Bolbol, to Kyiv, to infiltrate, as Mykola put it, the revolutionary government. Naturally, the anarchists knew a lot more about the Kyiv Soviet than Mykola; it was in their nature to understand these things, and Mykola knew they'd be happy to go to Kyiv, for—as Mykola told the Hetman of the Buh Cossacks, Maksym Davidovich—Rats belong in a city. The anarchists on their mules clinked and clanked with Mykola's rubles.

As for Bolbol, Mykola told him to scurry off to the nearest city and establish contact with his seedy syndicate. Bolbol! Mykola charged him, you must find me a fletcher and a Prussian Jew!

DEMID POPOVICH'S BOW

And with that little Bolbol galloped off, and Mykola called together the Hetmans—Arkady Serheyivich of the Kuban, Vsevolod Fedorovich of the Zaporizhians, Maksym Davidovich of the Buh, and Taras Kazkanovich of the Don—and explained his purpose with the bow.

We will now discover whom among us has not forsaken the old ways! And with that the hetmans called together their Cossacks and the handful or so from each host who'd participated in Mykola's challenge came forward with their bows.

Mykola drew each bow taut, raised it high, imagined an arrow, imagined a trajectory, imagined a skewered foe.

Some bows snapped when Mykola drew them, some pulled well; some were nearly undrawable; of course, a good horseman's bow must draw easily enough, but not too easily; a springy bow which can be strung ten, twenty times in quick succession and not tire a rider's arm. Among the thirty or so Cossacks who had carved bows for Mykola, it was the skeptical Demid Popovich Shylypyn whose bow was the most delightful. Easy to draw and string—Mykola used a dry reed as his arrow—and easily redrawn. Bravo, Demid Popovich, said Mykola. He gave the man a pouch full of rubles and then said: Now brothers, Demid Popovich will share with you his methods; for each bow of a quality equal to his, I will pay the hewer ten rubles!

OLD WAYS

And so the Cossack axemen went back to hewing; in the meantime, using the remaining competition bows, Mykola and the others practiced shooting from horseback. At a standstill, then a trot, then a full gallop the men would ride back and forth across the steppe taking aim at pillars of dirt the little Cossack children had dressed in Red Army rags.

When Bolbol returned with information and a little pullcart full of supplies, Mykola put him to work; when the fletcher showed up—blindfolded, led by a Cossack escort to camp—Mykola sent him to Bolbol, who had carved a little tent for himself in the copse of trees among the Don Cossacks' perpetual linen hangings.

The Prussian Jew, of course, when he arrived at camp, was sent straight to Mykola. Mykola in turn summoned Taras Kazkanovich, the richest Cossack in camp—in Ukraine, it seemed—and they negotiated with the Jew—whose name was Trockenbrot—for all sorts of delightful black-market things; powders, carbines, various guns, mines, all sorts of German-made bric-a-brac to be shipped via unmarked rail car to a station outside Kharkiv.

Indeed, in heeding the advice of the specter of the Boyar, Mykola fully expected the ghost to visit him, to approve of his moves and his strategy as some kind of confirmation that the way Mykola was taking was the right way, that God approved in some way of Mykola's unconventional approaches. The Boyar was no guardian angel, to be sure; suffice to say that the Drinsk Hetman was surprised his nights on the step beneath the stars were dreamless.

BY FIRE, KNOUT, OR NOOSE

And finally, with his plan fully formed, Mykola gathered a war party of five hundred, and set off to the north, to destroy the Bolshevik supply depot at Romyno; to cut the telegraph wires and ruin the railroad tracks and—generally speaking—avenge the deaths suffered outside the city weeks before.

Romyno itself, as an important hub between Kharkiv and Kyiv, supported a small Red Army garrison. Upon entering the city, the Cossacks immediately set it ablaze. Once the flames were tall and the townsfolk had scattered in terror, the Bolsheviks finally appeared; first an armored car and behind that about a hundred men jockeying for cover and boasting an irregular assortment of arms. From down a long wide boulevard, the armored car stopped and its turreted machine gun opened fire, scattering the Cossack horsemen. From behind a building Mykola gave a predetermined signal, and a couple of decoys rode out, drawing fire as a sharpshooter—Old Bohdan Tymoshenko it was, a Cossack wonderfully skilled at revenge—took careful aim around the corner of the building and let fly a devil-tipped arrow. It struck the armored car and upon impact exploded. The machine gun paused in its strafing—and the Cossacks charged, unleashing a hail of arrows before them. When they'd covered the length of the boulevard and met their foe, the skirmish was already over.

Mykola and the men raided the Bolshevik party headquarters in Romyno, then burnt the building to the ground. They hung the Bolshevik Political Commissar in the town square and proceeded eastward out of the city, snipping telegraph wires and ripping up railroad tracks as they went. They proceeded to Chernovsk, eleven versts due east, where they firebombed Bolshevik headquarters and put the local Chairman in a debtor's cage, a medieval relic attached

to the old town church by a heavy, rusted chain. They spent the evening parading around, whipping the poor Bolshevik Chairman in his cage, and when every drop of horilka in Chernovsk was drunk up, they razed the town to the ground—all except for the church, of course, and the bloody caged Chairman—and made camp in the forest nearby.

WAR OF WITS

The next morning, upon waking and remembering their divine mission, the Cossacks rode into the following town—Luchkaniya—but there they drew their horses up short upon spotting an armored train on the tracks by the station.

Though they turned tail just about as quickly as they appeared, the train had been waiting for them, and before they made the treeline outside town the massive six-millimeter gun gave a mighty yowl, and a chunk of the treeline disappeared. When the Cossacks regrouped and rode around to the other side of town, they found a platoon Red Army huddled around a battery of artillery pieces. Peppered with rifle fire, the Cossacks turned tail just as the Bolsheviks' little howitzers began their barking.

The Buh Hetman Maksym rode up to Mykola. What do you propose we do?

Follow the beast, said Mykola.

And they rode back around to the station, and, at full gallop, left the cover of the trees, bows drawn. Riding at an angle to the train, they pelted it with their devil-tipped arrows. Explosions blossomed around the hull of the transport but return fire always came. They went for a second, then a third pass, then the engine gave up a gout of smoke, and the train beat a lugubrious retreat eastward. In a minute the train had gathered momentum, the Cossacks trailing a safe distance behind.

You don't suppose they're leading us to ambush, Hetman? said Bohdan Tymoshenko to Mykola.

Yes, Bohdan Sampsonovich, I do. But they will not get that far. In a broad sweep the Cossacks rode around to the front of the train, well avoiding the artillery cars. The Bolsheviks, as

soon as they spotted the Cossack riders, poked their little machine guns through the slots in the wall and opened fire. A few Cossacks went down; another few Cossacks strung their explosive-tipped arrows. Unlike the artillery cars, the armor protecting the soldiers was thin. The mean little arrowheads punched clear through before detonating, and the ensuing fireball ripped the car completely in half. The engine-half of the train sped forward leaving its mangled hindquarters splayed on the track. The roiling flames warmed Mykola's heart and he looked to the sky. Tell me, ghost: is my vengeance satisfactory?

Mykola held back as his Cossack brothers converged on the dying artillery cars and smashed their way in; the handful of gunners were effortless prey, unsatisfactorily so, and within minutes bloodlust had gripped the Cossacks and they were spurring their foam-mouthed nags onward down the line, riding as hard as they could to capture and destroy the last witnesses to their carnage.

THE HERO

Word of carnage in the east reached Msistlav Denisevich Plysukmyov in his sacristy office at Saint Sophia's. His delightful secretary Tatyana Heller had relayed him the news, almost with tears in her eyes as though it had been her fault a band of Cossacks had burned Romyno to the ground; had destroyed the Kharkiv-Kyiv rail and telegraph lines; had burnt Chernovsk to the ground and then managed to destroy the recently-commandeered Polish Separatist train, the Kościuszko, just beyond the city limits. The engineer, his conductor, and five Polish conscripts managed to get away alive, though they'd been pounded with—

Exploding *arrows*, dear? said Plysukmyov. Did I hear you correctly?

Yes, Comrade Chairman.

They're fighting with bows and arrows?

I don't know, Comrade Chairman. The engineer just wrote in his report "bomb-tipped arrows."

Plysukmyov leaned across his desk, there in the Sacristy, and put his hands over Tatyana Heller's. My dear, he said sweetly, could you go find that Pollack's report and bring it to me? I should very much like to read it myself. I trust you've been quite accurate in your recounting; I'm just so astonished, you see—just so surprised and bemused by such a wild combination of the old and the new. I thought Cossacks were illiterate, you see. Not that literacy has much to do with bombmaking; it's the whole shtick about progress, that's what confounds me. You think you know someone's capacity for this *thing*, or that *thing*, and then—poof!—(which startled the waifish Tatyana; she was an ex-nun, you see, quite unused to men making sounds like that)—men you thought you knew go and prove you wrong.

Tatyana scurried off. Plysukmyov wondered where the equally-delightful Marina was. Somewhere collating something; operating the telegraph desk, perhaps; diddling, diddling, revolutionary diddling. Plysukmyov barely had a moment to wonder, however, when a man—a strapping man, a hero of the Revolution we haven't yet had the pleasure of meeting—tapped softly on the fourth station of the cross.

It is I, said the man. Genadii Petrovich Gybmyblujov.

COSSACKS OF OCCASION

The Cossacks didn't quite catch the train out of Luchkaniya; when it was clear their horses could take no more, they turned south, and, under cover of trees, rested the day. In the evening they began their return trip to the camp on the steppe—the Steppe Sich—as the warrior Bohdan Sampsonovich called it, as the sun set and the stars came out and they rode on.

At midnight they reached camp; expecting to find it sleepy, criers roused the camp upon seeing the shadow of horsemen darken the hillsides; when it was clear the shadow was the returned war party, the horilka flowed freely; women seemed to materialize out of nowhere; banduras were strung up and the Cossacks who had stayed behind badgered the exhausted riders for tales of their exploits. They told of carnage, retribution, the duel with the plated worm, the chink in its armor, the chink's exploitation...

In the morning Mykola sent for the Prussian Jew, Trockenbrot; he charged the Jew with obtaining a dozen sets of clothing that would sufficiently disguise Mykola and a select group as people of the book.

People...my people? said Trockenbrot.

Yes, said Mykola. There are Jews nearby. Barter with them and return here with a dozen sets of clothing. I will pay any price—well not any price; Jew, I will do you fairly. You will line your pockets when you deal with Old Mykola Mikhailovich, of that you can be certain.

But, Hetman, said Trockenbrot, what purpose does a Jewish disguise do you?

You'll discover as much when it becomes a point of negotiations. Now off with you!

And indeed Trockenbrot the Prussian Jew found out exactly four days later, when he returned with a little cartful of shoybs and silk perelines and various hitls made from the finest

Siberian sable.

Mykola greeted the Jew on his return; first he asked Trockenbrot how many dressings he'd procured; before Trockenbrot could answer, the Hetman fired a second question at him: Jew! he boomed, what is the meaning of this finery? I inquire after a set of clothing merely for the purpose of disguising my brothers; we do not intend to sneak into Society!

Trockenbrot responded: Hetman, on such short notice the only dressings to be got were garments of occasion!

Garments of occasion, grumbled Mykola, but I'm not paying you finery prices!

Hetman, do you not understand that such finery could be easily tailored to your, er, Cossack tastes; that good cloth is good cloth and—

Jew, you try my patience! said Mykola, who, so often a man of good humor, often found himself beastly in dealings with money; never try and part a bear and his honey—perhaps that's a lesson to be learned. In the end, as it was the Infidel's rubles anyhow, Mykola paid Trockenbrot for the silks, the fur hats, and he and a chosen dozen stripped off their rugged Cossack garb and, with the assistance of Trockenbrot—who knew the proper hang of the dressings—became as pretty as it is possible for a dozen Cossack warriors to become.

The other Cossacks who looked on laughed at the men of the steppe covered in shimmering clothing; the soft clothing of the urbanite; Templar's dress! one very Old Cossack shouted. Naturally a well-timed quip would have been leveled by the Don Cossack Taras Kazkanovich—had Taras himself not been draped in finery.

Yes, yes, said Mykola to the comments and the laughter, but brothers! Do we not look like Jews?

The Cossacks all nodded and grumbled affirmatives; Trockenbrot, however, winced a

little, for to him the illusion was a failure; to him, the rough horsemen with their dangling braided queues and creased, weatherworn faces looked like a pack of barbarians who'd just finished sacking a temple.

And now, Jew, said Mykola, well enough satisfied, I should like to speak to you regarding a further matter. Mykola began whispering his plan and Trockenbrot looked about as excited about it as he had about the garments.

WAR OF BLOOD

Three days later, the Boyar returned to Mykola.

Mykola, the Don Hetman, and a selection of the finest Cossacks from among the Drinsk, Zaporizhian, Buh, Kuban, and Don hosts were asleep in the forest about a hundred versts from Kyiv. Trockenbrot was among them; indeed, he was leading them to the Great City.

Mykola became aware, in his dreaming, of the Boyar's otherworldly presence as he always did—the faint radiance, off to one side like someone had silently lit a candle. His eyes snapped open. The Boyar hovered there, a thin smile turning his eyes to half moons. You look like a Circassian whore, said the Boyar.

Mykola forgot for a moment his disguise; then he regarded himself, covered in silks, wrapped in furs on the forest floor.

It is a deception, Boyar, said Mykola.

I know it is, said the Boyar; and you look like a Circassian whore. Perhaps instead of entering the Great City via the Hebrews, you should find yourself a Circassian pimp...

Christ and Mother Mary, said Mykola. Does my guardian angel visit only to insult me?

The Boyar shimmered with silent laughter. No, Mykola.

Mykola rolled his eyes. Does he come to tell me stories? Regale me, ghost!

No, Mykola. Hetman, what I have to tell you is of immediate importance!

I cannot believe it, said Mykola.

Hetman! Less than a verst from here, a Bolshevik extramilitary force is leading a group of Kulaks to their grave.

Kulaks? said the Drinsk Hetman to the Boyar, I am unconcerned with political nonsense.

Let the rich eat each other alive!

No Mykola, said the Boyar. They are accused, only; they have committed no crimes save for trying to feed themselves. In this way they are just like your beloved townsfolk of Drinsk.

At the mention of his birthplace, Mykola's eyes brimmed with tears. No crime but to covet the harvest—yes, Boyar. What are their numbers?

The Infidel is twenty strong; the number of accused, threefold that number.

Mykola asked the Boyar why, with such a disparity, the innocents did not lash out and destroy their captors.

Their souls are broken; their children were slaughtered in front of them; their granary burnt to cinders. Does the rage burn righteous in your heart, Mykola?

Yes, Boyar.

There is a scent in the air; God has put it there. It will awaken your brothers when you awaken.

Am I not awake now, Boyar? Are you not reality?

Irrelevant, Hetman. Now: awake!

As one the Cossacks rose from their slumber. As the Prussian Jew Trockenbrot slept soundly, the Cossacks silently gathered their arms and dashed off into the forest. They knew exactly where to go; they knew exactly where to hide, who they'd find.

Just a half-verst due north, under the flat light of a half-moon, they watched the group of black-clad Chekists march a blank peasantry into a meadow. In Russian accents one Chekist read aloud from a legal order he'd unfolded from a chest pocket. Another Chekist passed out shovels. For the next fifteen minutes the Cossacks hidden in the dark wood heard nothing but the rough sound of steel violating the earth.

Then, without a word and all at once, they flew into the meadow, alighted on the Chekists from behind. Heads rolled into the shallow grave; sprays of blood; an arm still clutching its rifle. There was a moment of confusion before shots were fired; indeed, the first bullets hit townsfolk rather than Cossacks, who slipped between the innocent and the infidel.

Steam rose up from the dead and cloaked the night. The last pining shots echoed around the meadow and then silence returned; before the townsfolk had understood what had happened, the Cossacks had retreated back into the forest. Graves half dug, the townsfolk tossed the Chekists in, covered their bodies and their weapons with earth, and melted back into the night muttering of avenging angels and the manifest justice of the dead.

THE KYIV RECONNAISSANCE

In the morning they rode into the Jewish ghetto of Kyiv in full disguise. It mattered not, of course; every Jew who glanced up immediately got the jig, eyes dancing from disguised Cossack to disguised Cossack until finally finding little Trockenbrot, the authentic Jew and obvious leader among them.

Trockenbrot took them to a basement in the Jewish quarter, a private alehouse where they could drink some and have a bite to eat and get out of their silk finery for a moment. It was arranged that afternoon for the Anarchist Lenkov to visit them in the basement, to report on his dealings in the city.

Before Lenkov was due to arrive, Trockenbrot gathered a group of younger politically-minded Jews in the basement, and as the Cossacks ate, the Jews discussed the Jewish sentiments towards the Soviet regime. As the young Jews argued, Mykola's head swam; political nonsense was not his forte; naturally, he could wheel and deal and scheme—these characteristics, when combined with the honor, courage, and fortitude of the typical Cossack, were the provenances of a born leader. The Jews' discussion, to Mykola, was one of equivocation; Mykola could see just how his own regime—that of the Cossack on the throne in Kyiv—would be just as unsatisfactory to the Jew as a regime of Jew-hating Muscovites. He tried not to think about it; when Lenkov the anarchist banged into the basement with his cronies, the looks on the faces of the political Jews made Mykola think they were being raided.

Ah, what a mess Ukraine was! What a seething collection of intrigueists and profiteers and flag-wavers! Would that Mykola could unhinge time, he thought; go back to a simpler time when Old Rus was united in its struggles against the twin yoke of the Pole and the Tatar!

The Anarchists took seats on either side of Lenkov, who sat across from Mykola. Mykola tossed Lenkov a pouch of rubles and ordered him to talk.

The Chairman of the Kyiv Soviet is Msistlav Denisovich Plysukmyov. His headquarters is in Saint Sophia's and he works —

Rrrrraaahhh! Mykola roared, nearly shattering the table with his fists. He stood up. The parasite has laid his eggs in the sacred womb of this Good Nation! It took every Jew and Anarchist in the basement to restrain Mykola. When he had calmed down, he apologized to those present. He sat back down, shaking his head. He asked Lenkov: What is the nature of your intelligence?

I have a man, said Lenkov, can pass for Latvian. He has joined up with the guard billeted in the convent adjoining Saint Sophia's. As I was saying, the Comrade Chairman Plysukmyov works with a retinue of only the comeliest ex-nuns. For the 'brigandage' in the hinterlands, Moscow has allocated the Soviet an armored train which sits under guard at the Kyiv railway station.

We've destroyed the accursed worm, asserted Mykola.

Lenkov made a face, donned a pair of pince-nez such that made him look like one of the Infidel, and brought forth a dossier tied with twine. He removed the twine, opened the dossier. Incorrect, said Lenkov; you have destroyed the *Kościuszko*; the train from Moscow is the *Kopye Istiny*, and it remains intact.

No, no, boy, in Romyno! boomed Mykola. Two trains—one destroyed, and a second come to rescue the first!

I am sorry, Hetman, said Lenkov; the ambush in Romyno involved two smaller armored vessels. Maybe, palliated Lenkov, rifling through his papers, maybe, Hetman, there are two

trains left? But I must digress, these ex-nuns, these secretaresses —

But the meeting with the anarchists was of no more use after that; Lenkov's false Latvian had snatched only the throwaways, the papers not so important as to merit burning; papers on the whole illuminating, but just short of helpful.

That evening the Cossacks in their Jewish attire made a daring trek into the Kyiv city center to gaze upon the Saint Sophia, that monument to God's Glory, and lament its hostage state—red flag flying from its highest dome, banner of the party hung about the archivolt. Small men with rifles stood around it, intellectuals in worker's clothing scurried in and out like it was some bureau of levies and not the house of God.

THE BUDYONNY OF THE UKRAINE

Genadii Petrovich Gybmyblujov was the last cavalry hero of the twentieth century. All the little battles he'd won were tacked onto his good-looking shirt, and if one can believe it, Msistlav Denisovich Plysukmyov swooned just a little when Gybmyblujov swaggered up to his desk and, medals amlink, saluted the Chairman and declared his readiness for action.

The Chairman dug in his desk for the dossier on the Great Hero. He'd had it handy; it was the go-to dossier when the Chairman was feeling low or hopeless about the Cossack hordes to the east. Ah yes, said the Chairman. Now—Comrade Captain, said the Chairman, please tell me about this obscure little engagement—

The Chairman slid the dossier across the desk and Gybmyblujov followed the Chairman's finger.

Ryabka—a fine battle, said Gybmyblujov. If you can imagine it, comrade, we had our cavalry corps divided in two, moving along the rail line from Bozerin to Ryabka. Denikin knew of our movements and dug a small machine gun nest about a verst from Ryabka. We were caught, three men and two horse were killed, but, as our force was divided along the road, I had the rear group ride around, outflank, and neutralize the machine gun. Quite simple, really.

Bravo, bravo, Comrade Captain.

The Captain blushed.

And it says, further, that your force—that is, the force you formed in the area of the Don—was in fact nearly half local Cossacks?

Indeed, Comrade Chairman.

You did not find resistance among your ranks?

What do you mean, Comrade Chairman?

Oh you know, my boy, resistance, *resistance*! Ideological, authoritative, your usual gamut of leg-draggers.

Moscow had put at my disposal incentives, Comrade Chairman, that I might find allies and assemble a force in the Don region against Denikin.

Rubles? asked the Chairman.

No, Comrade, said Gybmyblujov. Deutschmarks.

Ah yes, safe measures for an unsafe time; a stable currency is better than no currency at all.

Yes, Comrade Chairman.

Now, the Chairman went on, *Pravda* has decided to bestow upon you the following honorific, 'The Budyonny of the Ukraine,' for reasons which should be clear. Do you approve of this title?

No, Comrade Chairman.

And why not, my boy?

Comrade Chairman, said Gybmyblujov, the elevation of great men among his comrades, his equals, does not sit right with me nor should it with any revolutionary.

But you must admit, the Chairman went on, the people in war—for they remain people despite the great fluxes of our time—need their heroes; for fireside comforts, you see; for the proper maintenance of morale.

Comrade Chairman, you argue a fair point. I would stand firm however; I would rather, should I be raised above my equals that they might rise to my example, be remembered not as the Budyonny of the Ukraine, but as the Gybmyblujov of all the world!

Bravo, bravo, said the Chairman.

And with that, Genadii Petrovich insisted, politely of course, delicately of course, to be shown the horses, and after that the men from which he was supposed to build his cavalry regiment—the first of the twentieth century so formed to protect Kyiv from the mounted horde.

THE BASTARD OF BAZURASHKA

After another two days in Kyiv the disguised Cossacks finally organized their departure. Out of the Jewish quarter like they'd entered, the motley band of oversized Hebrew merchants made their way to the edge of the city and there met a pair of droshkies to spirit them the away. Barely five minutes out of the city, all twelve men had changed back into their comfortable Cossack garments. Large Morovkin, a Buh Cossack nearly as large as Petrushka, had cut perhaps the most obscene figure—the improbable lumbering merchant softhand—and swore under his breath that he would never again do such a thing; Maksym Davodovich, Hetman of the Buh, said that of course Morovkin would, though he gave him a word of advice: Don't forgot your pipe at home! Old Maksym had caved and purchased a brand new pipe in Kyiv as, after five days of dress-up and espionage, he could hardly stand it any longer.

On their return journey, upon the insistence of the Don Hetman, they stayed in the small village of Bazurashka, a village with old Cossack roots, Taras Kazkanovich maintained. They were hosted in Bazurashka by an old woman who lived with her bastard son just outside of town.

The boy had dodged Red Army conscription; the old woman said since the boy's father was on no town registries, he wasn't, either. Unfortunately, as he was the only male of ripe age left in town, he couldn't leave the basement.

The Cossacks, who could hardly stand being in a basement for more than a few days, were repulsed. What does the young gentleman do all the day and night? Mykola asked; how does he know *what* to do, without a sunrise and a sunset to dictate? The old woman told them how with quill and ink the boy scrawled political screeds on the pages of *Pravda* and *Iskra* and the other weeklies which blew about the dusty avenues of Bazurashka.

The boy, who was sitting in a corner when this was explained, smiled.

Do you want to see the screeds? asked the old woman.

Pray, no, said Mykola.

The old woman went into town at dusk and returned with a bottle of horilka for each Cossack there in the basement. Mykola drank his quickly and passed out; the others stayed up a little longer, talking and passing around Maksym Davidovich's pipe. Taras Kazkanovich, in quiet conversation with the queer intellectual boy, was the last to bed down that night.

RETURN TO THE STEPPE

Mykola was glad to be rid of Bazurashka, when finally they were in the forest east of town, bounding along in their droshkies. The boy—the bastard—had little demon's eyes, and his mother was the kind of babushka who cultivates evil in a boy, whose attention produces resentment and envy of men rather than respect, kindness; there were two ways, of course, for a bastard to turn out: both were unsatisfactory, one was the epitome of evil. Mykola pushed it from his mind, and in the evening when the forest parted unto the rolling steppe, he was glad hail little Pypynko, who road ahead to inform the others of their arrival.

When they reached camp, Trockenbrot greeted his horse with many tearful kisses and informed Mykola that he must be off to see after some business dealings. Mykola told the Prussian Jew to return in four days, no more, no less, and with that he gathered about him the Cossack War Council—the hetmans, Schoolboy, some of the other smart Cossacks, Petrushka for no reason—and asked for the news.

The Kuban and Zaporizhian hetmans, who hadn't been on the drag trip to Kyiv, stared at Mykola. Hetman, said Vysevolod Fedorovich Tovkach, it is you who should come bearing news!

Good Hetman, said Mykola. A simple question, then. I look out over our great camp—our Sich, here on the steppe—and I wonder if my eyes deceive me—have our numbers swelled?

Yes, Mykola Mykhailovich. We are now three thousands strong. The word of our marauding has spread; men have trickled in steadily from the Kuban, the Buh, from Zaporizhia! But Hetman, said Vysevolod Fedorovich, you have been in the Great City! Tell us about your journey!

Mykola told them; there was much lingering on descriptions of the Cossacks in Jew garb,

much laughter too. After that the War Council broke up and Hetman Arkady Serhiyevich Kozak of the Kuban Host took Mykola to see the artillery that had arrived—All courtesy of the Prussian Jew, he told Mykola.

There were three trusty field howitzers, just like the one they'd commandeered, only newer, shinier; six machine guns, which a small group of handy Cossacks were mounting onto droshkies; and a few piles of exploding shells, bandoliers, cannonballs, and automatic pistols.

Bravo, Hetman, bravo, said Mykola.

But it was the last thing Arkady Serhiyevich showed Mykola which was the most important; at the end of the field of arms, there was a carriage covered by one of the Don Cossacks' linen sheets. With a flourish the Kuban Hetman removed the sheet and stacked in the carriage were about as many bottles of horilka as Mykola had ever seen.

But Arkady, said Mykola, while this is the most horilka I've ever seen stacked in one place, it will barely suffice for a hundredscore Cossacks!

Good Hetman, said Arkady; this is the officer's reserve! Ten more wagons of cheap horilka can be found by the Kuban encampment!

Bravo, Arkady Serhiyevich! said Mykola; and with that he summoned the Zaporizhian Hetman Vysevolod, who had a good hollering voice, and they rode around camp telling everyone to drop what it was they were doing and enjoy themselves!

Nothing like a great party before war! said mighty Petrushka, riding behind the two hetmans and banging on a pot with a spoon. Men started to swarm over to the Kuban encampment and a wily old babushka there was doling out the horilka, menacing the thirsty rabble of men with an empty bottle. One at a time, she croaked. One bottle for one man—you can't get drunk without that first bottle, God help you!

As the sun dipped low the torches were lit, canisters of oil were poured into ditches in the ground and set ablaze, some Cossacks fired their rifles into the air in merriment. In a pyrotechnic feat to rival the most stunning fireworks of the Far East, three Cossacks lifted a ridiculous looking harness onto Petrushka, and, fitting one of the tachanka machine guns into the harness, Petrushka fed the contraption from a bandolier, raised the barrel high, and fired an arc of bullets across the sky. The bullets, no doubt somehow bedeviled by the Anarchist Bolbol beforehand, exploded each into a bright color like a string of flowers. Petrushka laughed as he sprayed the sky with the beautiful things, spraying until he ran out of customized bullets, then laughing further amid applause from all who stood there, all who stood in line waiting for the babushka to give them their ration of horilka. Further on a few Cossacks had butchered a couple of oxen and were throwing great racks of flesh across a heap of coals. The smell wafted up, sparks joined those in the heavens, and with the Cossacks on their merry way to drunkenness, Mykola arranged himself on a small promontory on the plain, spread out on fine animal skins with Petrushka on his left and Schoolboy on his right, and below them the trusty hetmans from Zaporizhia, the Buh, and the Kuban, for though a newish friend he might be, the man who bears the horilka is a true friend indeed. Mykola had no idea where the Don Cossack Hetman Taras Kazkanovich had got to, nor was the anarchist Bolbol around. Mykola paid it no mind; what could anyone hope to do with a mouse when a war was afoot?

In front of Mykola the Cossacks brought banduras forward and began to play; little flutes and horns accompanied them and many limber Cossacks—spritely Gleb Kulik and the rider Kirill Borisovich Pypynko—began to jump and throw each other around. As they drank up their horilka—and, as the evening wore on, the babushka doling it out lost count and gave up her rationing—the musicians' folksong hastened, became more frantic, and the limber Cossacks'

jumps and tumbles became more reckless and daring, and it was a delight to behold. After the sun was down and only fire lit the camp revelers, the sweating and exhausted dervishes stepped aside and the musicians slowed their dance to an easy sway. Big Cossacks replaced them upon the beaten earth, stripped off their garments and began a fierce wresting match. First it was surly Yevgeny Timofeyevich, stalking in a circle; he desired a rematch with the big Zaporizhian Cossack, Milan Kaganovich, who had thrown Timofeyevich all those weeks ago when first the Drinsk riders had happened so auspiciously into the Zaporizhian Sich.

Yevgeny Timofeyevich stormed through the Cossacks seated there sipping their horilka, and dealt a fierce shove of challenge to the big Zaporizhian. The man drank up his bottle of horilka, wiped his lip and stripped his garments off until he, too, standing under the moon was wearing only his loincloth. They returned to the clear circle amid challenges and laughter and they circled one another taunting and spitting until finally, as is tradition, Yevgeny Timofeyevich took the first swing, the Zaporizhian caught his blow, and they resumed their grapple. As the two men fought and the circle of Cossacks around them closed in; as bets were placed and horilka sloshed; as the musicians held their instruments above the heads of the mass still trying to pluck their strings, still trying to contextualize the revelry, Bohdan Sampsonovich Tymoshenko edged up to Mykola's spread of skins upon the rise, and took a seat by the Drinsk Hetman.

Brother, said Mykola Mykhailovich and Petrushka.

Brother, said Bohdan Sampsonovich. It was one thing to be brothers in arms; quite another to see a familiar face in a seething army of men. Bohdan Sampsonovich took a piece of paper from his pocket and showed it to Mykola.

Brother, said Mykola, you did not tell me you were an artist.

Hetman, that is because I am also more than just an artist, and need not pretend

otherwise.

Mykola lifted the small piece of paper to his nose, and sniffed, then looked at Bohdan; but this is no ordinary portrait; I fear to ask whom it depicts.

Yes, brother, said Bohdan. The picture is my slain wife's likeness; the medium is her own blood. The paper is rescued from the shirt of my slain son. Bohdan Sampsonovich then pinned the paper to his breast. When I have overlain her image with the spilt blood of our enemies, my grief shall be complete. Her soul will rest; mine will be pacified.

Mykola drew himself up. I see, Bohdan Sampsonovich, why you fight the way you fight; to make war is the talent of all Cossacks; to end war is your gift.

Hear, hear, said Arkady Serhiyevich, Petrushka, Schoolboy, and good old Maksym Davidovich of the Buh. They clinked bottles of horilka; then Mykola said to Bohdan: My brother, I do believe that if you should enter the ring just now, and have to throw both the formidable Yevgeniy Timofeyevich as well as the stout Milan Kaganovich—two worthy fighters—I think that you would make it look easy; would make those two formidable Cossacks look like Bolsheviks with their boots sewn together!

Everyone who could hear threw their heads back for a good Cossack belly laugh, and a few more bottles of the officer's reserve were distributed, and at that moment the fight between Milan Kaganovich and Yevgeny Timofeyevich was almost complete. Many onlookers had tossed uncorked bottles of horilka into the ring—To the victor, the spoils!—many more had formed little piles of rubles and were hollering at their man to win, Christ and Mother Mary Help Him!

It was a glorious throw, the way Yevgeny Timofeyevich got his arm around and under Milan Kaganovich in the last second, just as it appeared he had lost his footing; ah, how wonderful to see the edge a man can siphon from vengeance, from a slight, from a past wrong!

Restored honor is an ally indeed. When Yevgeny Timofeyevich finally had Milan in the dust, a smile crept across the face of Bohdan Sampsonovich, and Mykola Mykhailovich saw it; he had seen many times such a glint in the eye of a Cossack and he knew many Bolsheviks would lose their lives for it; what disturbed Mykola in his heart was the knowledge that this glint would indeed destroy Bohdan Sampsonovich before the war was over.

ON THE MARCH

When Trockenbrot the Jew had returned to the steppe and was firmly planted by Mykola's side, it was time to march. Mykola and the war council had come up with a little map; in a vast encircling maneuver, they would overrun the important Bolshevik towns surrounding Kyiv before turning inward and advancing on the city.

First on their list, sentimentally, was the town of Bazurashka. While the horde of three thousand move slower than Mykola's strike force of five hundred, battle organization was almost unnecessary. The ground trembled beneath tens of thousands of hoofs, and Bazurashka's Red Army garrison fled into the forest. As the horde swept through the countryside, however, like nits in a comb it picked up the Bolsheviks hidden among the trees, picked them up and spat them out.

Onward from Bazurashka, clockwise, was a town about equidistant from both Kyiv and Romyno, Myaritsk—a town famous for its horilka produced by a group of rebel monks who had made the town their home for nigh five hundred years. The Cossacks weighed into Myaritsk like a glacier, crushed the town, absorbed every drop of drink—and so great were their numbers, and so resilient their stomachs, that not one man got drunk or even felt the whimsy, that famous whimsy given a man by good, pure horilka.

At dusk the horde made camp outside Myaritsk. At this point it was quite impossible for the Cossacks to conceal themselves. Their camp went on for nearly a dozen versts in any direction, their merrymaking and loud, guttural laughter carried throughout the forest. It was Mykola's hope that surprise had run its course for the Cossack horde; that the Cossacks would draw strength from inevitability; from the vigor of war; from the Grace of God.

THE DECEPTION AT KAZINOVKA

Naturally, then, as the Cossacks could no longer move in silence, could no longer conceal themselves or strike as though out of nowhere, it was not impossible for the somewhat capable horse captain, Genadii Petrovich, to put together a little trap for the horde.

It started as a simple action; as the trajectory and scope of the Cossack sweep trickled into Gybmyblujov's office in Kyiv, he did a little projection and assembled his cavalry detachment. True, they were a mere three hundred, but a trusted, tested three hundred who'd ridden with Tukhachevsky against many Polish and Ukrainian formations. Captain Gybmyblujov's horses converged on the small town of Kazinovka, which stood just west of the north-south running Dnieper rail line. They were soon joined in the town by the slower-moving 43rd Red Army Artillery Battalion, and the even-slower-moving commuter military transport, the *Kusayet Boga*.

The Cossacks awoke a bit later than expected, but Mykola immediately sent for the bugler, and, with a few trumpet blasts, the Cossack horde assembled themselves quickly; as had become tradition on the march, they forewent any kind of food or drink, save for what horilka they could carry; and, within an hour of the first Cossack rising, the whole force was on the hoof.

By midday they had crossed the tracks of the Dnieper line—checking and rechecking the tracks for vibration; nothing—and with a green light from Gleb Kulik and his avant guard, the entire Cossack force swept through the golden wheat fields towards Kazinovka. Not until they were riding in full force, ready to sweep through the hamlet did one Cossack—an old but farsighted Cossack—yell out some sort of warning. Before anyone could heed him, however, machine gunners hidden in the dark buildings opened fire, and the Cossack force drew clumsily

up.

Mykola, shashka raised above his head, urged them onward, into the city, until, passing the first line of buildings, he saw a phalanx of horsemen armed with rifles; before Mykola could draw his pistol, the phalanx let loose a fusillade, drew their sabers, and charged. Mykola was hit square in the shoulder and did not bother with his pistol; he and his party of Drinsk Cossacks, all at the front of the horde, rode into Gybmyblujov's line full-force, clashed gloriously with them, sword-to-sword, in a satisfying manner of combat hitherto unexperienced by the Cossacks. It was a depredation of modernity—Mykola thought as he parried, counterattacked, rode forth, drew up, yanked his steed in tight three-sixties right and left—that such satisfying tests of men were no longer a regular part of war.

Mykola, though he bled from both shoulders, laughed as he watched Bohdan Sampsonovich, paper icon affixed to his shirt, smite his hapless enemy. The Cossacks drove the enemy's cavalry up against the buildings at the far side of the square, and for an instant it seemed as though this would be the last defense of Kazinovka; rather, with an unseen whistleblast, the fair engagement of men was betrayed; windows on the second story buildings went up, little sniffing snouty machine barrels poked through, and the poor Cossacks in the square were hosed with bullets. Horses hit the dust squeaking and squealing. A few Cossacks who could take shelter drew their bows and fired devil-tipped arrows at the offending levels, and rubble and dust soon filled the square.

At last Mykola reluctantly ordered a retreat, and the Cossacks, some hesitant to let go the enemy's throat, relinquished the square. They were picked apart as they retreated; indeed, as they met the rest of the force in the wood, relaying the message to fall back, only confusion prevented the Cossacks from understanding that, behind them, waiting on the tracks, was a six-car train

with barrels trained on them.

They realized too late, and with Maksym Davidovich and his Buh rearguard taking the brunt of the *Kusayet Boga*'s opening salvo, the Cossack horde made another about face; trying south, they came upon the battery of the Red 43rd; turning northward, they excited Gybmyblujov's second valiant charge of the day. As the Good Cossacks had soured to the Red Cavalry and their dirty tricks, they decided to take their chances with the train.

WAR OF STEEL

It can be said at this point that many of the Cossack horde had dispersed, shaken and confused by the nonsense of the enemy at Kazinovka. Out of cowardice perhaps—who's to say?—but certainly out of frustration and a will to preservation, a great many of the Cossacks had retired the fight on that good day, taking the calculated forethought of the enemy as a sign that perhaps the enemy did want to wear the mantle of victory, if just for a day or so; let him have it—that was the prevailing sentiment—let them have it. Off into the woods, then, to face the steel worm on the tracks went Mykola and his Drinsk diehards, as well as the Buh Hetman and a dozen of his finest merry-makers, as well as—of course—Vysevolod Fedorovich, who wouldn't miss a fight for the Second Coming, and his twelve most irrepressible Zaporizhians.

Naturally the first step in reengaging the train was to strap on Petrushka's monstrosity—his great machine gun harness—and then do their best to lift the massive Cossack onto a horse. They did so, and Mykola, barely able to control his laughter, said: Petrushka, you demon, can you aim your weapon?

Of course, Hetman! said Petrushka.

I am glad, said Mykola; but Petrushka, my boy, can your horse aim *you*?

In response the huge Cossack—who had, naturally, over the years, found himself the most monstrously large horse he could, a twenty-six hand chestnut—led the steed in a teetering loop-de-loop. Petrushka cooed encouragement to his nag, who was clearly capable but unused to the extra load.

Ah, it is good, said Mykola; and never mind perfection, my boy, for we shall meet the Infidel as he has met us, today, with deviousness and an equal helping of Good Cossack

Nonsense.

Following this quick but commendable speech, Mykola arranged his archers—led, naturally, but the firebrand Bohdan Sampsonovich—and his riflemen and Petrushka, who was a mounted division unto himself, and then led his charge, out of the wood towards the train, and at such an angle as to confound the gunners.

Strained as the Bolshevik gunners were, the spray of bullets was rather predictable, and Mykola's first line of horse drew peppering fire while his second line of horse—the archers—pulled up just behind the treeline and launched their broadside of bomb-tipped arrows into the *Kusayet Boga*. It was at that moment that Mykola, shrewd as he was, noticed the damage done by their infernal barrage, and deduced that even this train was not the beast sent from Moscow.

Mykola's and his riders circled around and met with a lumbering Petrushka behind the *Kusayet Boga*. Just as Bohdan and his archers let loose their second flurry, Mykola's men dismounted, sent their steeds galloping off into the woods, then pulled the pins on their Prussian grenades. Mykola gave the signal, and there was a moment of silent anticipation as the grenades spun towards the train; they blossomed, one after the other, and then Petrushka stepped into the billowing smoke and let rip with his massive harness gun. Mykola and his men waited for the Bohdan Sampsonovich's third and final volley of arrows to do their damage, then they advanced through the train, Petrushka first, turning the place to splinters as Mykola eased one bandolier after another into the gun's feedway and Schoolboy collected the empties and tossed them aside.

THE PASSING OF DEMID POPOVICH

Deep in the woods west of Soshnykiv the Cossack horde regrouped. Naturally, as there is no secret trick by which Cossacks find one another—sheer dumb luck is the only trick they possess in this case—they were a great deal fewer than when they'd started the day's march; eighty-score was Schoolboy's count after much riding in circles.

Some Cossacks carried their fallen brothers into the forest, and it saddened Mykola to think of how many Cossacks could not be given a proper Christian burial. In total they had recovered only eighteen dead. Another threescore wounded Cossacks had either straggled into the forest, were helped in, or from their moans discovered and brought in. Overwhelmed, Ostap Prykodko, the Drinsk medic, went from man to man doing what he could for them; a man who'd wandered into camp by himself a little before sunset came to Ostap, tying off a man's severed hand, and without making a sound promptly crumpled to the ground. Ostap Prykodko finished his tourniquet quickly and knelt by the fallen man. He turned the man over and his breath left him.

Demid Popovich! cried Ostap.

It is I, breathed the wounded man.

Tell me, where is your wound, Demid Popovich?

Demid pointed to his right arm; Ostap drew his knife and began cutting away the man's blood-stiffened sleeves. It was a fine wound but nothing gorgeous. Ostap put the back of his hand to Demid's brow.

When did you suffer this bullet, Demid Popovich?

Early on, said the Old Cossack. Fire from the outskirts of Kazinovka.

You have lost much blood, said Ostap.

I know, sighed Demid Popovich. I wanted to die among kinsmen.

Ostap hollered for Severyn Sahaidachny, the fast Cossack, that he might fetch Mykola Mykhailovich.

Severyn took off, long legs carrying him in great bounds across the forest floor.

Can you wait? said Ostap.

I can wait, said Demid Popovich. They lay there in the dead leaves, Ostap cradling the head of Demid Popovich Shylypyn, the rejuvenator of the Old Ways, the savior of the Cossack horde, some might say; the savoir of the old ways.

Severyn Sahaidachny returned with Mykola Mikhailovich just in time to look into old Demid Popovich's eyes before they went blank, and his rugged, ancient body went limp in Ostap's arms, and Mykola proclaimed, as the soul slipped from Old Demid Popovich's lips: This was a Great Cossack, who is now gone from this world; in a warrior's heaven to drink Soma with his lost loved ones and fallen brothers.

NO MORE THAN A DUSTING

The Cossacks in the forest spent sunset and early night digging graves for the fallen. Last rites were given in low voices by torchlight and when the stars were out and the firmament was deepest violet the Cossacks bedded down for the night.

Mykola felt insomnia to be his punishment for the losses of the day. He lay awake watching the stars through the forest canopy. With the explosions and rattling gunfire of the day's engagements repeating in his mind, he felt he might never reach that peaceful place where he might recharge his soul for battle. Hours into the night, in a queer place between sleep and wakefulness, Mykola saw a blazing star cross the sky, divide, and dissipate. The flash of light left a trace of green and blue on Mykola's retinas, and before the light could die away it brightened again. Mykola sat up with a start. The Boyar was shimmering there. He bowed.

Mykola, Champion of Ukraine, said the Boyar.

You are indeed my guardian angel, said Mykola.

I am no angel, said the Boyar. And you, Hetman, require no guarding.

So, then, what tales do you bring me tonight? said Mykola. For I am tired, the night is short and ill-spent, and much is yet to come.

Mykola, said the Boyar, in my war I fought the Infidel with an equal measure of terror. If you revere my legend and the legend of the Great Cossacks who have come before me—Pugachev, Khmelnytsky, Bulavin—you must understand that in every victory lies a massacre.

I do not fear death, said Mykola. Not my own; not of my brothers; not of the enemy.

This is good, said the Boyar. Bravery, courage in death's shadow: these are the marks of an eternal warrior, a warrior who cannot be swayed, killed, undone. But, Mykola Mykhailovich,

Hetman of the Drinsk Cossacks—and, might I presage, of all Ukraine—I should advise you to delegate your retributions; in a war like this there is honor to be had, but a far greater measure of odium and sin.

The infidel will suffer in-kind, said Mykola. I cannot plan my legacy and the Infidel's destruction simultaneously.

Of course not, said the Boyar, but learn from me: I ordered the execution of all prisoners taken in my retreat from Novocherkassk into the Kuban. The winter was unrelenting. We marched day and night, constantly harassed by Infidel artillery. Our limbs were freezing, our numbers diminishing. What could we do?

So, then, what are you saying Boyar? This is not winter, nor is it the Kuban. No one pursues us.

Be righteous, Mykola; during the siege of Yekaterinodar, God placed a howitzer shell right atop my headquarters. It was no lucky shot; I was killed instantly. My Ovtckarka purebred and my Tekkish honor guard suffered no more than a dusting.

THE CROSSING AT PROTSIV

In the morning the Cossacks rose, ate a few bites of brown bread from their saddlebags and formed up. A few more had trickled in through the night, and Schoolboy guessed their number was edging once more towards two thousand. As one they rode quickly northwest out of the forest towards the small town of Protsiv, which they overran most peaceably. In fact the town, grateful to see a liberating force of honorable Ukrainian Cossacks, tossed the men loaves of fresh bread from the bakery and all the extra flasks of horilka in their possession. The women of town came out and danced and sang and beat hand drums and tambourines. The Cossacks formed a handsome column and paraded through Protsiv towards the Dnieper. The girls and the townspeople followed the Cossacks all the way to the banks of the river. The reception of the Protsiv townsfolk lifted Mykola's spirits. He wished the visit from the Boyar could have done the same. Mykola had been led to believe, from his good Orthodox upbringing, that guardian angels were supposed to bring a man hope, not pause.

Schoolboy dismounted and waded into the river. He deployed his expansive learning to gauge the river for a ford. He spent a half hour wading and dipping his queued head under the surface of the sparkling water, letting himself drift, popping up again, before returning to shore and advising that they float the howitzers and machine guns across on some of the townsfolk's rafts—rigs expertly crafted in the old way: layers of dried rushes tied to baseboards—while leading the horses on foot. Schoolboy went first, leading his nag, and in two hours the Cossacks were on the western side of the Dnieper without incident.

Mykola and the other hetmans gathered in counsel and decided on a strategem. Originally planning to overrun the city in the traditional Cossack manner, they decided on a diversion.

These trains, after all, said Maksym Davidovich, Hetman of the Buh, they keep appearing and causing problems. If I have to fight endless armored trains I shall die of boredom!

THE INVASION OF KYIV

That night a small detachment of men rode to the western extremity of Kyiv and destroyed a portion of the railroad track as close to the city as they could without avoiding detection. They used no explosives and worked in total darkness; using only axes, shovels, and hammers, the men built a staircase of uprooted railroad ties, stacking them one upon the other until the tracks led not westward into the forest but upwards towards heaven. As the Infidel does not even believe in the place, said one grinning Cossack to the others, such a destination is no comfort!

They stole away into the night.

In the morning, a diversionary force of a few hundred rode around to the western track. The plan was to feint, entice the *Kopye Istiny* sniffingly from its lair, and then blow up the tracks behind the train, trapping it, rendering it useless. This group took the howitzers with them, was led by the shrewd Buh and Kuban hetmans; Mykola and the Zaporizhian Hetman Vysevolod were to lead the rest of the force into Kyiv from the south shortly after the western force had begun their attack. Counted among their assumed losses—desertions, more like—were the Don Hetman, whom Mykola had not seen since Kazinovka, though, Mykola felt, the chuckling primadonna was no great loss.

They rode at half-tempo, as they did not wish their thundering approach to drown out the sounds of the western riders' howitzers; the delightful, tinny blasts would be the sign for Mykola and Vysevolod's men to launch their attack; until that time, they were to ready themselves: sharpen, straighten and polish their shashkas; do themselves up with war paint, should they be so inclined; preen their steeds; drink up the last of the good horilka they'd got in Protsiv; and

generally not give themselves away before it was time.

At noon Mykola turned to his brothers with a finger to his lips; his hearing was excellent, and on the winds he caught the first few punchy pops of a howitzer. He drew his shashka, roared, and the Cossack horde broke from the forest onto the North Road to Kyiv.

THE FEINT IN THE WEST

Arkady Serhiyevich and Maksym Davidovich dragged their trusty howitzers just within range, and began to shell the Infidel's sandbagged position around the Western Gate, an industrial thing built without aesthetic considerations. After a dozen shots or so their little sandbag fort was rubble, and the little force of Bolshevik rifleman had retreated. Arkady Serhiyevich and Maksym Davidovich gave the signal, and their small force surged forward. A select group of Cossacks immediately went to work rigging the train tracks with explosives.

Then, as though out of nowhere, the railway signal house just to the Cossacks' left exploded. Something big had hit it. They sensed the Great Steel Worm before they saw it, whiffed the smoke from its six-millimeter guns, saw the flash before the boom. Maksym Davidovich hollered to hold steady. There was an eerie silence as the *Kopye Istiny* crept around the bend, every few seconds lobbing a shell over the rooftops at them. When first they spotted its black steel engine, the Cossack howitzers opened fire, but the train seemed impervious, plowing through the clearing bomb smoke at a maddening deliberate pace. The tachankas opened fire and a few Cossack riders let rip their explosive arrows, but they did nothing. The bullets danced about the *Kopye Istiny's* hull, a percussive racket in many pitches; the lovely explosive-tipped arrows made a show pleasing but useless.

Maksym Davidovich, when the Great Worm was within a half-verst and aiming its ten-millimeter gun, drew his sword and waved it about. The howitzers let fly a final salvo, then were dragged back; the tachanka horses were lashed to a gallop; the riders turned tail. They were nearly out of the city when they spotted, guarding the Western Gate, six armored cars. The Cossack riders spilt to the sides and many horses went down as the armored cars opened fire, but

they paid the cars no heed; they scattered into the outskirts of the city, awaiting the worm.

THE FIST FROM THE SKIES

As the distant sounds of artillery fire increased, Mykola and his horde charged through the Southern Gate, scattering townsfolk in their wake. Mykola said to Schoolboy, riding to his right: I hope indeed that the steel train has been lured away by our fellows in the west. If not, Volodymr Volodymyrovich, I fear the Day of Judgment is upon us!

Petrushka, on Mykola's left, armed with his machine gun harness, laughed and voiced his hope that they could have the privilege of both the train and the Red Cavalry. Unfortunately—or, rather fortunately, one might say—it was only the cavalry for Mykola and his horde.

As they reached the expanse of the Pecherskii Gardens, the Dnieper shining to their right, an artillery battery hidden in a copse of trees due north unleashed a broadside. Mykola's horde cut to the west, and, lo and behold, there was Genadii Petrovich Gybmyblujov and his three hundred horsemen there to play.

Mykola swore and bore his teeth, but before they could ride into the Infidel, something peculiar happened. The sun went behind a cloud; the skies, clear but an hour before, were roiling with thunderheads. It was sudden enough of a change that Mykola and his horde hesitated in their charge. An instant later, a light rain began to fall; an instant after that, great sheets of water, then ice pellets, then little balls. While the Cossacks looked on in astonishment, the hail dappling Gybmyblujov's cavalry grew in size until great hunks of ice the size of potatoes were pummeling the riders, causing them to shrink in little circles, to cringe, to crowd beneath the bases of trees, which themselves were being torn to pieces by the storm. Though Mykola and his men were soaked to the bone, no hail of such a size struck them.

Curious now, and less weary of the consequences, Mykola rode northward again; sure

enough, the battery at the far edge of the Pecherskii Gardens was in shambles; men had run for shelter; artillery emplacements had toppled over, guns and gunpowder no doubt rendered useless. Mykola Mykhailovich rode back to his stymied rabble of wet brothers. The Hetman called for Petrushka, who rode up smiling like a child. Petrushka, my friend, said Mykola, can you fire a few salvos in the direction of the enemy for me?

Hetman, are we going to attack?

No Petrushka, not yet; I just would like to deduce something.

Pardon me, Hetman?

Mykola Mikhailovich, said Schoolboy, overhearing their conversation, it is unlikely Petrushka's gun will fire; it is too wet!

A blast of lightning struck the ground perilously close to the treeline to which Gybmyblujov's cavalry had retreated.

I just would like for you to try, dear Petrushka, said Mykola. If you might.

Another bolt of lightning struck the base of a tree, and a handful of Red Cavalrymen went flying.

All right, Hetman, said Petrushka, and he fitted a bandolier into the gun's feed and pulled the trigger.

THE FIST IN THE WEST

In the west Maksym Davidovich and the Cossack worm-killers barely had time enough to notice the brewing storm before it broke; before the rain had soaked them through to the bone and some Cossack remarked that the rain was turning to ice. Sheltered somewhat beneath trees outside the Western Gate, the Cossack Horde was still primarily focused on the *Kopye Istiny* and its sporadic artillery fire. Every minute or so it would let loose with its six or its ten millimeter gun—crack, boom—and a tree hither or thither would splinter into smoking pieces. Its aim was improving, but then another sound cut through the pitter-patter of rain. First it was a tinkling like chimes—ice dancing on the hull of the *Kopye Istiny*—then the little sounds became clanks, then thuds; the hail swelled to a fearsome size, cannonball hail that slammed into the armored train and left welts. A few pieces seemed to strike the snouts of the train's six- and ten-millimeter guns knocking them out of aim. When, after a few minutes, there was no continued fire, it was assumed the gargantuan hail had knocked the gun barrels out of true as well.

A LITTLE PARTY

The Cossack horde rippled with laughter. It gave them great joy to realize their enemy across the green did not share their divine favor, and very soon all the Cossacks were firing their rifles into the sky, and very soon after that bottles of horilka had materialized in most of their hands, and right there in the pinch between an artillery battery and the cream of the Red Cavalry, the Cossack horde threw a little party. One cannot be certain that a Bolshevik didn't try and cut down a happy Cossack, there in range and an easy target—probably one or two did exactly this—but their little rifles didn't work, soaked through as they were, and their artillery, too, pounded by the potato hail keeping the huddling, cowed artillerymen from their guns. The rain persisted, the Cossacks were dripping and drunk and only when a bit of sun poked through the cloud did they realize it would probably be a good idea to use their advantage rather than merely enjoy it. They drank up their horilka, wrung out their beards, and charged.

THE OLD WAYS AND THE NEW

Maksym Davidovich was the first to comprehend the divine nature of the weather and holler joyously about it; naturally, of course, the hail had missed them entirely; the beloved trees at the edge of the forest weren't torn to shreds like the oaks lining the rail yard; only a veil of falling leaves indicated there was any weather at all.

The *Kopye Istiny* had ceased firing, the armored cars lay in wait at the Western Gate; Maksym drew his pistol and, so all the Cossacks knew what he was doing, snapped off three shots. He smiled and hollered at his rabble: You smell like dogs in the rain!

All the Cossacks laughed, for it was true; the smell was palpable: warm men jazzed for war, sweating and steaming from the sudden sunshower. Now more were firing their guns into the air and wondering if the horde south of the city was having such a good time as they. Before getting as drunk as they could with what they had in their pockets, they had rolled their little howitzers into place, and began to pommel the little armored cars. Just within range, the little cars after a half-dozen shots began to rove around in a sputtery panic, then retreat. That was enough; the Cossacks began to ride after their wounded prey. Back into the rail yard, a few Cossacks chased after the armored cars, and the remaining mass of Cossacks converged on the *Kopye Istiny*.

A GOOD SKIRMISH

Mykola Mykhailovich and his great horde rode into the frightened line of Red Cavalry. The Infidels, aiming their rifles, yanking useless triggers, were no match for the flashing shashkas of the Cossacks. Unwilling to match blades with the Cossacks, the cursed enemy resorted to sticking their poor horses with the ends of their bayonets. While this method worked to unseat the riders, it so angered the Cossacks that instead of obliging the resourceful Infidels with a quick death, they set about mutilating them in revenge; there was little that angered a Cossack more than unnecessary cruelty to a beast, and thus was it an extremely bloody encounter between the forces of Genadii Petrovich Gybmyblujov—the celebrated Budyonny of the Ukraine, let us not forget—and those of Mykola Mykhailovich Postanov, Hetman of the Drinsk Cossacks and fearsome leader of the horde. In the blink of an eye, Gybmyblujov and his men had turned tail and were retreating further into the city center; half of the horde broke off and went after the artillery battery lining the north end of the Pecherskii Garden; the other half, including Mykola, picked their way through the dead horses and discarded rifles and gave chase to the retreating cavalymen. Swords sheathed and bows drawn, the Cossacks picked apart Gybmyblujov's men in the old way, the tried-and-true way of destroying an enemy in full flight. Ah, it was a glorious end to a dubious beginning that day.

At last, naturally and just when Mykola Mykhailovich had given up on running down Gybmyblujov, he caught him in a dead-end avenue just a block south of Saint Sophia. Gybmyblujov drew his sabre and Mykola sheathed his bow. As it was Mykola and his honor guard—one might call it—against Gybmyblujov and his, the men there in the dead-end avenue courteously paired off like ballroom dancers. Naturally the Cossacks crossed blades with one

hand on their sidearm, knowing the Bolshevik's penchant for dirty tricks and deception.

Mykola was excited and impressed by Gybmyblujov's swordsmanship; perhaps—thought Mykola—perhaps there *was* more to the imperial academy than dressage, bootlicking, and pederasty. Parry, riposte, parry; feint, disengage—yes indeed, thought Mykola, this was really a good bit of fun. In his periphery Mykola saw Petrushka break his opponent's blade with his own, skewer the man, lift the man off his horse and high above his head, and fling the man through the glass façade of a shop. Petrushka wiped his blade on his horse's mane and took a belt of horilka.

Mykola eventually tired of all the parrying and feinting and disengaging. It seemed, after the first five minutes, to be more of an onanistic diddling than a fight, and with a cleanly-executed *prise-de-fer* he took a nice slice from Gybmyblujov's arm; distracted by the sting, he disengaged and dealt a quick beat to the man's blade from the opposite side, and thrust his shashka through the infidel's heart. It was an honorable and quick death for Gybmyblujov; he could die like a man and not a dog or a coward or an Atheist, though, God knows if the gates opened for Gybmyblujov at the moment of his slip from the world; watching intently and with great curiosity, Mykola saw no sylph slip from the man's mouth as he fell from his mount. Mykola wiped his blade off and sheathed it. The other Cossacks in the dead-end alley—for not one of them lost their bout—saluted Mykola and cleaned their blades. Following Mykola's lead, they drew their firearms, and rode off to liberate the Cathedral of Saint Sophia from the clutches of the infidel.

THE LIBERATION OF KYIV

It so happened that Bohdan Sampsonovich, full of the genius gifts of vengeance had, with his Drinsk brothers Kirill Borisevich Pypynko and Severyn Sahaidachny, commandeered an armored car—commandeered it and menacingly lashed the ex-driver, headless, to the car's hood, and it was around this spiritedly ornamented car that Maksym Davidovich formed his Cossack horde, and together they drove down the Khmel'nyts'koho towards the Saint Sophia, the jugular of the city, and it was a fitting avenue down which to drive, as each and every Cossack knows the legend of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, who did as Mykola Mykhailovich has done, and united the Cossacks in revolt against tyranny.

And then the Khmel'nyts'koho opened to a grand square, that of the Saint Sophia, and the Cossacks had to dismount their horses and bow their heads; for there in front of them were two great and noble reminders: the first, the grave and glorious cathedral with its soaring towers and golden domes; the second, the statue of the Great Cossack himself, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Hetman of Zaporizhia who three hundred years prior liberated the same city, the same Church from Polish-Lithuanian clutches. Yes—a few of the Latvians guarding the entryway to Saint Sophia's Cathedral were firing upon the pious Cossacks, there kneeling in the Sophiis'ka Square, but no one minded much and the Latvians were so full of nerves they landed no shots; it's the risk all Good Cossacks must take, after all, to pay homage where homage is due.

STORMING THE CATHEDRAL

Mykola and his horde rounded Volodymyrskaya into the Sophiis'ka Square and there saw the Horde of the Western Approach, brave Maksym Davidovich and his men all knelt in prayer. Mykola immediately dropped from his steed to give his own thanks for victory and for the ease by which it had come. His men followed suit. The cursed Latvian riflemen guarding the entrance to the Cathedral, now horrified and surrounded, fired in the direction of Mykola's men, and killed one of their horses. This made Mykola very angry, and he hastened his prayers in order to finish the conquest of Kyiv, and oust the Infidel from the halls of Christ and Mother Mary.

He rose, and waved his sword in the air. Brothers, he called across the square.

Maksym Davidovich looked up, around. He waved back, and one by one the rest of the horde stood and a cheer broke out. Cheers of Victory! and Vylyky Mykola! rose up in the crowd and the Latvians riflemen, there cowering by the door of Saint Sophia, said small and secretive prayers and gave each other last rites, for they knew darkness was imminent. They reloaded weapons and prepared for the worst. The hordes converged and while Bohdan wanted to drive the Latvians from the archivolt with his armored car, Mykola Mykhailovich forbade it. She has been ravaged too thoroughly already, Brothers! the Hetman cried; we must do no further harm! And so the Cossacks drew their bows and took aim at the Latvians and what ensued was a fray of Old versus New; the silent grace of a sailing arrow and the perfunctory bleat of a rifle shot. A Cossack went down, two or three Latvians. When it seemed safe enough, the Cossacks charged the porch and slaughtered the remainder.

INFIDEL'S LAST REQUEST

What they'd done to the cathedral was inexcusable, but perhaps not so terrible as the Cossacks made it seem with their hollering and exclaiming. Mostly a bunch of desks where the pews had been; and of course Msistlav Denisevich Plysukmyov's big desk in the Sacristy, and big ugly barrister's shelves and stacks of bureaucratic nonsense softening every corner; right away it relieved Maksym Davidovich to shove papers away from the stations of the cross so that they could be traced around the room. Mykola went in search of the Chairman, whom he thought he would know by his intensity of pomp and sacrilege. As he passed through the Church into the rooms of the convent many bourgeois-looking ladies went hurtling past him; nuns made unholy by the Infidel.

In an upstairs room Mykola found Plysukmyov about to vault to safety with a fat folder of papers under his arm. He knew it was the chairman because of his solitude, the reek of his fear, his devotion to safety at the expense of dignity. Mykola snuck up behind the archbureaucrat and watched him stumble out the window. He landed in the courtyard below, on grass, and seemed to have tweaked some part of his lower leg. He rolled around on the grass. Mykola poked his head out the window and called to the man:

Bolshevik, your acrobatics fail to please me!

Plysukmyov looked around in terror.

Up here, bureaucrat, said Mykola.

Plysukmyov saw Mykola. Mykola pointed a pistol at him. Don't run away, bureaucrat, you look important. Those papers under your arm: are they full of information?

Cossack, said Plysukmyov, it is a waste of time to hold me; as you say, I am but a

bureaucrat; what harm can I do; what aid can I provide my enemies in escape?

Mykola thought it might be wiser to have confronted this important man with Schoolboy by his side. Silence, bureaucrat! Do not move or I will perforate you!

Plysukmyov dropped his papers and attempted to scoop them up again.

And stop moving! said Mykola. At that moment a few Cossacks ran out into the courtyard and seized Plysukmyov.

Mykola called to them: Brothers, this is an important Bolshevik in the regime; confiscate those papers he clutches so lovingly to his breast and lock him up somewhere! Do not let him escape!

Once the cathedral was secure and the Cossacks had set about tending to lunch, and a bit of celebratory drink, Mykola settled down—now with Schoolboy by his side—and went through the archbureaucrat's papers. In them, naturally, he found a great deal of fascinating and incriminating stuff. It was clear from a cursory perusal of even the very first sheet that the man was important, and that his name was Msistlav Denisevich Plysukmyov. Mykola and Schoolboy had a good laugh at the man's name, which was an old and a queer one, and then at the man's title in the Infidel regime—that of Chairman—neither a military nor a political kind of title; indeed the title of a bureaucrat! mumbled Mykola Mykhailovich to Volodymyr Volodymyrovich. He rides a desk while I ride a horse! How unfearsome!

Further along in the Chairman's important papers Mykola found the order to send a retaliatory detachment to Drinsk; this, naturally, was enough to set Mykola's blood to boil, and Schoolboy's too, for it was the root of all rebellion; it was the butterfly's flutter, if you will, that set in motion all the things that had led Mykola to that very room, to that very stack of papers. Without waiting an instant, Mykola burst from the room and went and found the Cossacks who

had taken custody of Msistlav Denisevich Plysukmyov. Mykola drew his sword. Death, he charged, to the slayer of women, children, and old men.

Plysukmyov faltered: What is this?

Mykola showed the Chairman the crumpled order. The Chairman swallowed.

How would you like it, Chairman? No matter the method, it is, sadly, never repayment enough. Mykola made to strike the Chairman's head off.

Wait! said the Chairman.

For the love of Christ and Mother Mary, said Mykola Mykhailovich. What is it?

I heard a rumor many weeks ago, that you and your rebellious element had allowed a captured Bolshevik to duel for the privilege of his life. Might I make the same request?

Every Cossack who could hear the great shrew's insufferable, squeaking request roared and hooted with laughter.

I will allow you, said Mykola, lowering his blade, the privilege of dueling for your *honor*, that you will die with dignity. Insofar as your infidel regime does not seem to care for pride, dignity, or honor, I hardly see the point.

And the prisoner was dragged back to the nave, and given a rusty sword by one of the old, hoary Cossacks there in attendance, and they cleared a long narrow piste on either end of which Mykola and the Infidel Plysukmyov took their positions; and the duel began.

The Chairman was decent in his swordplay—nowhere near as decent as the rider Gybmyblujov—but it was the same brand of swordsmanship which makes a man hate another man: pointless, diddling swordplay like a teenage boy abusing himself; just touching for the sake of touching—what is this, blade fornication?—and before Mykola could allow disgust to rise and poison his own effort, he did something quick and simple and disarmed the Bolshevik.

Now it is time for your execution, said Mykola, and without ceremony he struck off Msistlav Denisevich Plysukmyov's head.

THE HETMANATE OF KYIV

A gaggle of refrocked nuns converged on the mess, produced rags, and spirited the corpse of the archbureaucrat away.

The Good Cossacks there in attendance said a prayer of forgiveness for soiling the Church with an Atheist's blood, then filed out and commenced what one might call the informal portion of Kyiv's liberation.

Mykola, Schoolboy, and Petrushka searched the offices of the converted nunnery, Petrushka working to smash locked compartments open, Schoolboy sifting through the endless stacks of paper and using his polite educational gifts to determine what bits of information might be valuable. Petrushka broke open one heavy armoire and it took no book learning to appreciate what he uncovered there: millions upon millions of deutschmarks. The sound of distant gunfire made the moment of discovery ceremonious and meaningful. Mykola Mykhailovich said to his companions there in the office: This money will rebuild Ukraine.

Mykola Mykhailovich and Petrushka stayed with the hot cash and sent Schoolboy to fetch a kibitka from Lukyanivska prison. With no better plan, Mykola instructed Petrushka to heft the entire armoire out to the kibitka. Their driver, a Cossack Mykola had never seen before, had to ask: What indeed have you got there?

Mykola said they had another god-forsaken bureaucrat in the armoire, God help him if he tries to weasel his way out!

Petrushka shoved the armoire in the hold, locked the hold, and they rode off towards the prison. Midway, of course, Schoolboy set to work on the driver—it can be said with certainty that Schoolboy's posh learning had outstripped that of some anonymous Cossack carriage

driver—inquiring about the condition of Lukyanivska prison in the Socratic mode. Of course, since the Cossacks' great sweep of the city, the prison had been emptied, as is only natural in a liberation. Schoolboy inquired: the locks on the cells, if I am not mistaken, are all busted?

The driver had to say: Well, not all of them; some of the cells were empty!

And those guarding the prison, are they loyal to Ukraine? To the Cossack?

Well, I'd have to say, said the driver, that I cannot say!

Good Driver, said Schoolboy, after quite a number of questions such as these, I daresay our important political prisoner might not be secure in Lukyanivska, the most infamous of all Ukrainian prisons; not even—forgive me—under your own vigilant care.

In that case, Learned Brother, said the driver, to what location should I drive this vehicle?

Good Cossack, said Mykola, leaning towards the driver, take us to the bank.

They arrived, and Mykola and Schoolboy went and checked out the establishment first; the old banker inside had no idea a revolution had been on; he said his hearing was not superb; oftentimes, because of my hearing, he said, I miss out on revolutions and things...

Mykola asked the old banker if he had a key to the vault, at which point the man furrowed his brow and said that of course he did, but that he couldn't divulge where; he certainly couldn't produce it for them.

Mykola straightened up and put his hands on the counter before the old banker. Old man, said Mykola, I am Mykola Mykhailovich of the Drinsk Cossacks; we have swept across Ukraine and taken the Great City of Kyiv; we are in charge now. Now I can tell you that the ruble has been denatured by Atheist magic, but out there in my car, Old Man, I have many millions of deutschmarks. The Empire of Germany may be in shambles, but I guarantee you that their money is in better shape than ours. Fine money, I tell you.

The old banker looked skeptical. Volodymyr Volodymyrovich, said Mykola; fetch Petrushka and the money; Schoolboy left and returned, holding the door open; the armoire, with Petrushka behind it, bobbed into the bank. Petrushka set the armoire on the floor, undid the elegant Victorian hasp, and opened it.

Christ in Heaven, said the old banker.

Mykola Mykhailovich drew his shashka. You put my money in the vault, said Mykola. And you produce a key for me.

On a solemn evening, some four days after that, the Hetmans of the Cossack horde made speeches one after the other, then crowned Mykola Mykhailovich Postanov Hetman of Kyiv.

THE BOYAR IN THE PALACE

Asleep in the Mariyinskii Palace, Dnieper flowing silently beyond his open window, crown of Ukraine on his nightstand, Mykola Mykhailovich dreamed of the old banker and the time when the armies of the Atheist would flood into Ukraine from the East and undo all that he had accomplished. The problem with Russia, Mykola thought, is that it goes on forever.

In the preceding week, bureaucrats had come out of hiding and presented themselves to the Cossacks, who eagerly repositioned them in the government; no self-respecting Cossack wants or respects the work of a bureaucrat; only kingship and brigandry offer the requisite stimulation. A few weeks would be enough to reset the government; the millions of deutschmarks, no doubt given by the Kaiser in order to ruin the eastern kingdom, would now rebuild it. In his fist beneath the sheets, Mykola clutched the keys to the vault. Old man, thought Mykola, are you loyal to me? Are you old enough, and wise enough, to understand the fluxes of time and men?

Outside the window, the Dnieper drifted along; the rushes which grew along its shallows rustled in the breeze. The problem with Russia, Mykola thought, is that it is ruled by the Infidel.

With his eyes open Mykola could trace the map of Ukraine on the ceiling of his chamber. It was an ancient map, perhaps the first ever map of Ukraine, created by some Italian merchant; there were no borders, just names. Ukraine was beset on all sides by her enemies. To the south, the Crimean Tatars, the Turks; to the east, the Golden Horde, Astrakhan; to the north, Poland, Lithuania, and distant, impotent Muscovy. The problem with Russia, Mykola thought, is that it is full of Russians.

The Boyar was there in the chamber with Mykola; he had grown accustomed to sensing

the ghost of the Great Cossack before seeing him.

Hello, Boyar, said Mykola.

Greetings, Hetman. The Boyar folded his phantom limbs. So you have accomplished what I could never accomplish. I have eternity to reflect on my failures.

Mykola said: What is there to reflect on? You were killed in war.

And yet there need not have been a war at all, said the Boyar. Would that I had been a politician, lamented the ghost. Would that I had the augur's gift when sent that first coy telegram from Kerensky, that garrulous coward.

You lost your opportunity to conquer Russia, said Mykola.

I have arrived at the belief, said the Boyar, shackled as I am to hindsight, that if one even senses a 'right moment to strike,' the moment has already passed. The conquered rarely anticipate their own conquest. A good coup d'état is undertaken with either complete and utter surprise—to victor as to vanquished—or complete and utter anticlimax: a revolution drawn over the course of the new regime, rather than at its birth; a bureaucratic revolution.

You bore me, ghost, said Mykola. Why do you ford the bog on these matters? What delight do you find in such trivia?

With Kerensky, said the Boyar, I made the mistake of hesitating; of giving moral consideration to potentialities. You give a man time to think, Mykola, and you give him time to plan. What's worse, to hold a debate via telegram allows either party to invent their own pretext to action. Naturally, the party to realize this first, and to take advantage of the imprecise technology of the telegram—that is the party that will win out. The Boyar shook his head, staring off into the space that was his past, his inalterable legacy.

You have made so many mistakes, said Mykola to the Boyar, I wonder why I should take

advices from you at all. What good are your maxims?

And yet, the Boyar went on, while I lost out to an immoral coward, he in turn lost out to someone yet bolder with even fewer scruples than he. The ultimate tragedy: he is alive and works tirelessly to excuse his failures; I am dead, and cannot. I think my point, Mykola of Ukraine, is this: those you cannot see could be conspiring against you. And you ought to assume they are.

TREASON OF THE HEART

Mykola felt the Boyar's presence by his bedside through the night, but when he opened his eyes shortly before morning, he saw not the Boyar standing by the corner of the bed, but Bolbol the Anarchist.

Mykola sat up and felt for the dagger beneath his pillow.

Hetman, said Bolbol the Anarchist, I have come to warn you that in less than twelve hours these rooms will be sacked and you will be killed.

By whom? said Mykola.

A coalition, said the Anarchist. The Don Cossack Hetman with help from the Anarchists.

Bolbol, said Mykola. Are you not in league with the Anarchists?

Indeed I am, said Bolbol, but I also work for Mykola of the Drinsk Cossacks, for he has kept me well paid. And with that Bolbol withdrew a small pistol and pointed it at Mykola.

I see, said Mykola, indicating the vanity against the wall. Top drawer, he said. Bolbol found there a small pouch, and emptied it into his hands.

Ah, deutschmarks! said Bolbol. He counted the coins.

Mykola dressed quickly and tore down the hall, Bolbol following just behind. Mykola knocked on a door; Schoolboy answered and eyed Bolbol curiously. Mykola, he said, the sun has not yet risen...

Mykola explained the situation quickly to Schoolboy, and they went and awoke Petrushka, a bit further down the hall.

Whom can we count on? said Petrushka, his small mind working fast to overcome confusion.

Only the Drinsk Cossacks, said Mykola. All others are suspect. He charged Schoolboy and Petrushka to awaken Bohdan Sampsonovich, Ostap Prykodko, and Yevgeny Timofeyevich, and any other Drinsk Cossacks they could find in the palace barracks. I'll go with Bolbol to the Hetmans and see where we stand.

Mykola huffed down the stately corridor with Bolbol scurrying along by his side. Bolbol explained: The Don Cossacks are responsible for the ambush at Kazinovka; Taras Kazkanovich wanted you to take Kyiv, Mykola, but with a weakened force. Do you understand?

No, Bolbol, I do not! said Mykola. I do not understand the treason of one Cossack against another!

Do you understand treason, questioned Bolbol, of a Cossack nobleman against a Cossack without titles? You, Mykola, are without titles; it is the opinion of Taras Kazkanovich of the Don that he alone has the right to claim dominion over Ukraine.

They stopped at the entranceway to the Rastrelli wing of the palace. Mykola turned to Bolbol. It is the privilege of any Christian to lead his men against the Infidel. He opened the door and entered another interminable hallway lined with doors; he peered into the first room, saw a big Cossack he didn't know; in the second room he spotted Maksym Davidovich asleep on his side. Mykola went to the Buh Cossack Hetman and spoke quietly.

Maksym started awake, then relaxed again, listening. He nodded, rose and began to dress; Mykola and Bolbol went to the Kuban Hetman, asleep further on, and roused him. In the end Mykola and Bolbol returned to the Michurin wing of the palace with Maksym Davidovich and Arkady Serhiyevich; Schoolboy and Petrushka had brought with them the remaining sixteen Drinsk Cossacks, Kirill Borisevich Pypynko, and Milan Kaganovich, the big Zaporizhian. Mykola saw Milan and questioned him: Brother, where is your Hetman; does he conspire against

me with the Dons?

Milan Kaganovich shrugged and said: It is my guess, Mykola Mykhailovich, that Good Vysevolod Fedorovich of the Zaporizhian Host has wandered off with a bottle and passed out somewhere. Might I suggest we check the palace kitchens before writing off the Good Zaporizhian Hetman?

Indeed, said Mykola, and they with torches lit descended into the bowels of the palace; about halfway between the Rastrelli rooms and the entrance to the palace kitchens they found Vysevolod Fedorovich Tovkach asleep in an alcove clutching in one fist a bottle of horilka, and in the other, a housemaid's bonnet.

Bravo, Vysevolod Fedorovich, said Mykola, kicking the Zaporizhian Hetman in the knee. Even in his sleep the Good Hetman conquers!

The band of about three-dozen saddled up and rode into the city center. They broke into a tavern on Sophiis'ka Square and passed out a few bottles of horilka, a jar of pickles and a loaf of brown bread. How ironic that even in victory I am capable of breaking bread with every one of my companions at once! said Mykola. The men ate and drank and, as dawn broke, the Hetmans rode off to their respective Hosts' billeting places to find out where the loyalty of their people lie. Mykola feared the worst; a claim to the throne of Ukraine was solidly in Taras Kazkanovich's bloodline, and such a link between heaven and earth is fearsome in the eyes of simple Cossacks. A hand landed on Mykola's shoulder as he stared out at the statue of Khmelnytsky in the Square. The hand belonged to Milan Kaganovich. Fear not, Mykola Mykhailovich of Drinsk! If the Don Hetman brings us war, it will be the first fight worth a damn since my grapple with the formidable Yevgeny Tymofeyevich of Drinsk! No Infidel has satisfied the criteria of a worthy opponent; they hide behind buildings and fire through chinks in the wall! At least a Cossack

antagonist earns his death!

Your cheer warms my heart, Milan Kaganovich, said Mykola. I should hope not to draw my sword against a Cossack, but should I be forced to I shall take comfort in your words.

Should we be struck down, said Bohdan Sampsonovich from a seat at the bar, our ghosts will annoy the pretenders until they are fat and gray; until they cannot recreate with a woman or even sleep at night!

There was a rowdy cheer at Bohdan's words, and the bottles of horilka went up for one last toast.

THE ANARCHIST CONSPIRACY

The Kyiv Anarchists, led by the one known as Lenkov, stormed the tavern just as the first rays of the sunlight hit the Saint Sophia Cathedral. They arrested Mykola Mykhailovich and his small group of supporters; the Hetmans, who had ridden off just prior to the Anarchists' arrival, were gone and did not return. Bolbol had known just enough to disappear in the nick of time, and Mykola, taking a gamble, swallowed the key to the bank vault where he'd deposited the Bolshevik deutschmarks.

The Anarchist contingent transported the Cossacks across the quiet square, through the Cathedral, and into the ex-Bolshevik offices in the adjoining nunnery. Mykola and his brothers were chained to columns and Mykola watched as a queer little man, a man he thought he would never see again, rose from the shadows behind a desk and appeared before him. It was the bastard of Bazurashka, pale and thin-haired, a boy not yet a man but with the gait of a crik-backed elderly woman. He bent close to Mykola and told him his name: I am Thorstein, said the boy.

Are you a Swede? said Mykola.

Ukrainian, said the boy. Thorstein is the moniker affixed to my theories; my theories have united the syndicates and I will guide Ukraine into the twentieth century. While the Don Cossacks preen themselves for a glorious afterlife, I shall remake society.

Mykola said nothing, merely regarded the poor, strange boy who reeked of book learning and appeared to have lacked sunlight all his life, and the guidance of a father, guidance that can't be replaced by dead men's words on a page. The boy put his hands together. You shall be branded as opportunists; the Don Cossacks, liberators; when they ride into Kyiv a celebration

will welcome them into the city; the population will engage in the spectacle, which will culminate in a proclamation, from the porch of Saint Sophia Cathedral, of Ukrainian Sovereignty, followed by the execution of you and yours for high treason and conspiracy to overthrow the democratically-elected Kyiv Soviet.

Mykola allowed the words to wash over him like night soil. How can a man come so far only to be yanked and tricked by his brothers? By these shrews from the hinterlands and rats from Kyiv?

Mykola said nothing, and the boy went away; hours passed in which Mykola and his brothers tried to think of something, but time has a way of galloping by when it is needed most, and not even Schoolboy could brainstorm their little cohort out of their chains, past the Anarchist guards outside the door—festooned with bombs and many pistols each—and out from under their condemnation. Mykola managed a prayer for their salvation—a prayer for the pious men there with him who would suffer for their good intentions.

THE RETURN OF BOLBOL IAKOVLEVICH

And as quietly as he'd slipped out, he slipped right back in again; Mykola had barely pulled his hands apart from his little prayer when the door to their chamber creaked open and a head popped through. Bolbol looked around, let himself in and closed the door behind him.

Cossacks, time for your rescue, he said. He knelt by Mykola first and began unlocking the Hetman's restraints.

Mykola looked up at the Anarchist. What about the guards?

The guards outside? said Bolbol. I cut their throats! Bolbol smiled at Mykola and removed his shackles.

Bolbol, said Mykola, you slew your own Anarchist brothers?

Hetman, said Bolbol, Anarchy does not pay half so good as Mykola Mykhailovich of the Drinsk. Speaking of which...

Mykola, hands free, fished in his trousers for a small bag of coins and handed it to Bolbol.

Very good, Hetman, said Bolbol. I thank you. Now, he said, lifting Mykola to his feet, let us make our daring escape!

RASSEMBLEMENT

Through back alleyways out past the courtyard behind the convent Bolbol led Mykola and his men out of the city. Past the *Kopye Istiny*, out of the Western Gate and into the forest, Mykola and his rabble of Drinsk diehards found, there in the trees, about five hundred horsemen. Among them were the hetmans of the Buh, the Kuban, and the Zaporizhian hosts. They rode up and greeted Mykola.

Vysevolod Fedorovich said: These are the zealots. They stand with you while many have deserted.

Bravo, said Mykola. Then let us ride, before we are expected, into the city and take it from that cave salamander and his anarchist coalition!

There was a roar of approval, and, before Mykola could confer with Schoolboy or the other hetmans, before they could decide upon some strategy or another, or some formation to ride, before they could think up some compensation for their lack of artillery or the fact that they had less than half their initial invasion force, they once again struck off in the direction of the Great City of Kyiv; once more unto the breach, or somesuch bravado, and Mykola, anyway, was happy to make such a pure decision with his heart rather than his mind; all the scheming he'd done in the past few days had given him quite a headache; suffice to say, Mykola was happy to use the Anarchist Bolbol to pump efficacy into their brazen decision-making, to inoculate their impulsiveness with cunning. As they rode, Mykola pulled back until he was alongside the Anarchist, bounding along on a saffron-haired mare, and asked him: Well now, Anarchist, you've performed two miracles and the sun has barely risen. If you have a third hidden under your waistcoat, I shall be happy to compensate you for it!

In advance, Hetman—surely then you will have your miracle, said Bolbol. Mykola thought about the key in his stomach, the key to the bank vault. He told Bolbol that he would be glad to pay threefold tomorrow for a miracle today.

They rode into the city, they made for the church en force, hoping to surprise and overrun the dissident forces of the Dons and the Kyiv Anarchate, but even before they got within two versts of the town center, their progress was slowed; the streets were packed with many citizens, some looking like they'd just been called from the fields, pitchforks, hoes, and shovels slung over their shoulders. Everyone was walking in the direction of the Saint Sophia, and soon the crowd was so thick that the Cossacks had to dismount and walk their horses. Mykola called to one yeoman: Good farmer, where are you going?

I am going to the Cathedral, Horseman. The new government will make a speech; then they will execute the insurrectionists. After that, bread and vodka for everyone!

Good farmer, said Mykola, are you satisfied with the new government?

Horseman, I neither know nor care who sits in the Mariyinsky! If there is swift justice, free bread, and vodka, I am satisfied!

Good farmer, said Mykola, please tell me, if you could; who is this new government?

The farmer pursed his lips and raised his eyebrows, shifted his shovel from one shoulder to the other. Is it not the Socialist element? I heard there was a Socialist element in the Good City of Kyiv; I expect it is they. Yes—it must be, and I believe they've caught the brigands who laid waste our lovely Pecherskii gardens not a fortnight ago!

When the Cossacks were quite close, Mykola asked that the Hetmans each assign a few men to corral their horses in the nearby alleys and watch over them while the great body of Cossack warriors proceeded on foot. When they reached the Sophiis'ka Square—or rather, the

very edge of the crowd some ways down Khmel'nyts'koho, Mykola saw, once again, the strange imp child Thorstein—as he called himself—the bastard of Bazurashka, draped in an overcoat that hung on him like folded bat's wings, standing at a podium and saying things to the great mass of Kyivans who stood there listening.

Mykola listened to Thorstein; he spoke of a new regime, Ukraine for the Ukrainians; a return to theocracy but blended with the economic such-and-such of the secular progressivists—the words melted into such a miasma of sound that Mykola called forth Schoolboy. Volodymyr Volodymyrovich, he said, can you please translate for me the words of that child-cur on the stage? I am exhausted from all the phrasemongering! If only one could speak as plainly as a Cossack; if only—lamented Mykola Mykhailovich—all the politicians of Europe could adopt the plainspeak of the noble brigand, as it were. Schoolboy agreed with Mykola Mykhailovich, then set about straining his ear to the cries of the intellectual holding forth from the porch of Saint Sophia.

He says the good people of Kyiv have suffered greatly from the upheavals, said Schoolboy. He says the fighting in the city two weeks ago was part of a plot against the rada, which had moved to elect the Black element into a majority position.

The what? said Mykola.

The Anarchists, said Schoolboy.

Onstage, Thorstein gestured skeletally at the line of seated miscreants, all dressed in black with black waistcoats, armed with pistols and festooned so completely with bombs and bandoliers that they looked like infernal tennenbaums. The Anarchist element stood and modestly bowed, playing along with the yarn. The crowd cheered and waved many little black flags. Then Thorstein spoke again.

He says, Schoolboy went on, that brigands invaded and nearly dissolved the rada; but, luckily—lucky for Kyiv—Don Cossack Hetman Shcherbychenko rode to the aid of the Great City and the leadership of the brigands was taken prisoner—observe!

Marched across the stage at that moment was a line of people Mykola didn't recognize; if they were Cossacks, they'd been made to dress like townsfolk and were impossible to identify otherwise; one thing was certain, however: the parade of anonymous persons across the stage was no brigand leadership.

And they mean to execute them? Mykola asked Schoolboy.

Schoolboy said: The bastard is inviting Taras Kazkanovich to speak about their capture and pronounce the sentence of treason upon the prisoners.

And sure enough, Taras Kazkanovich strode to the podium amid a torrent of applause. He looked the part of the gracious warrior king; somber—as he would presently engage in death-dealing—but glorious: his medals and accolades, his accoutrements of noble status on display for all to see.

What is this coalition? muttered Mykola Mykhailovich to Schoolboy. What is this Anarchist-Noble Cossack-Intellectual triumvirate? If I could make sense of it, Good Volodymyr, perhaps I could walk away from it; and with the thought, Mykola considered for a moment just how things had turned strange in the past day; the wistful regrets of the Boyar in his dream; Bolbol with all his warnings, his double dealings; their lock-up; their unfortunate reunion with so many strange personages: Lenkov and his Kyiv Anarchist renegades, the Bastard Thorstein, the traitor Taras Kazkanovich and his horsemen. For a queer moment there in the crowd, while Taras Kazkanovich goddamned the twenty or so strangers in chains, Mykola lost sight of his revolution, his purpose; he had wanted to save Ukraine, to save Kyiv from the infidel; now the

infidel was gone. Had Ukraine, had Kyiv wanted to be saved? Such complex thoughts once more brought a thumping headache to Old Mykola's brow; so much to think about, to consider; politics was fun for the bureaucrat; to a soldier, it was hell. Mykola shook the confusion from his head, studied for a quick second the vastness of the crowd. Some six-thousand, perhaps seven were standing there in the midday sun, listening; they had little flags, they cheered when called upon to do so. What right, Mykola thought, did he have to conquer a city that was happy with its current iteration of rulership?

Mykola thought perhaps he ought to consult Schoolboy about such confusion; alas, there was no time. As Mykola's internal conflict reduced itself reluctantly to conclusion, the traitor Taras Kazkanovich, there on the porch of Saint Sophia, finished reading his sentence—High Treason!—and a row of bowmen marched into the square to dispatch the condemned men in the traditional way.

FATE OF THE BRIGAND

Inadvertently, as death was about to be served, much of the crowd had surged forward; Mykola and his Cossacks, though they'd begun the spectacle a ways back on Khmel'nyts'koho, were now just on the edges of Sophiis'ky Square and pressing inward with everyone else.

The execution squad strung their bows, raised them and took aim at the first condemned man, now blindfolded and lashed to an oak beam in the center of the Square.

Without meaning to, no doubt because of his inborn sense of justice, the Good Hetman of Drinsk cried out: No!

Not before one archer let fly an arrow; bows were undrawn and, amid a wave of murmur from the crowd, the Don Cossack Taras Kazkanovich growled: Who speaks!? Seize him!

The execution squad mounted the porch to peer over the crowd; they aimed their bows around; this alarmed some members of the crowd, some of whom were ducking out of the way; some of whom were turning in indignation, searching for the source of Mykola's objection; and some of whom were parting to allow a group of Don Cossack riders into the crowd, swords drawn, moving towards Mykola, who turned and searched the faces of his men. He grabbed Severyn Sahaidachny and said: Horses. The long-legged Cossack took off down Khmel'nyts'koho. He grabbed Petrushka and said: Archers.

Then he said, to the Good Cossacks there with him: This is our last stand; do as I do.

THE BATTLE OF SOPHIIS'KY SQUARE

For a little man like Bolbol or to an intellectual like Thorstein, what then transpired on Sophiis'ky Square under the watchful eye of Khmelnytsky probably would have seemed like wretched pandemonium; to a war-born Cossack it was clearly a turning of the tide. Severyn, quick as he was, had barely disappeared from sight before the herd of Cossack horses, unleashed from their alleyway corrals, came galloping towards the Square. This naturally led the many citizens there on the Square to a full-on panic; where some had parted to allow in the Don Cossacks, now there was mindless rushing in all directions. While, amid the chaos, Taras Kazkanovich and Thorstein suddenly identified Mykola—resulting in the archers releasing arrows in his general direction—Mykola and his men had seized the discarded farm implements of the fleeing yeomen—pitchforks, scythes—and very quickly thereafter were engaged in a classic kind of melee. When their horses arrived, they charged the Don Cossacks, and the rush of combat filled every one of Mykola's men with great pleasure. As the anarchists entered the fray, so too did Mykola's archers. Primarily they aimed their devil-tipped arrows at the Anarchists, whose many incendiary hangings made terrific explosions, ripped up great gouts of cobblestone and dirt and left massive craters.

In the heat of the battle Mykola found himself elated; for this was his element, the element of the Cossack, the noble medium in which a Cossack forges solutions, justice, peace. Mykola knew there had been a number among his brethren who had not seen battle, who were incomplete Cossacks; now they had; now they could live their lives anticipating a warrior's heaven. Though no battle is pure victory, every battle possesses in it some modicum of the thing; just as—in one beautiful and poignant motion—Bohdan Sampsonovich Tymoshenko leapt from

his mount to take an arrow that would have pierced Mykola's heart, the shooter of the arrow was dealt swift justice by Mykola's good friend Volodymyr Volodymyrovich by dint of a brilliantly timed, somewhat impossible pistol shot.

Bohdan Sampsonovich Tymoshenko, Great Warrior of Drinsk, fell in the midst of battle—the final battle—and Mykola, realizing who it was, and how he'd sacrificed himself, and why he'd done so—finished his present engagement with a swift sabre stroke, then leapt to the cobbles to cradle the head of his fallen brother.

THE PASSING OF BOHDAN SAMPSONOVICH

Time slowed; the maelstrom of battle surged on; in the eye of that storm Mykola let hot tears fall and absorb into the hem of Bohdan Sampsonovich's Cossack shirt. Blood rippled from where the arrow had pierced the hero from Drinsk; Mykola, holding the entrypoint steady, snapped the back end of the arrow off and tossed it aside.

Brother, will you hold onto life for a little longer? Ostap Prykodko can come and get you.

No, Hetman, said Bohdan Sampsonovich. My heart is pierced and I am dying.

Bohdan Sampsonovich, said Mykola. You have fought bravely and are as worthy of your namesake as any Cossack who has ever ridden the steppe. If I could sacrifice a son so that you could live, I would gladly do so.

But Bohdan Sampsonovich was breathing his last; his eyes turned from Mykola to the sky, focused out and then focused in as Death came and extended his hand for the Great Warrior. Mykola gently let Bohdan onto the cobbles and watched the bit of mist escape from the Cossack's mouth. Mykola did not want to let go so easily; such a valiant warrior and brother does not come but once in a lifetime; the Hetman of Drinsk, there on the cobbles grasped at the mist, at Bohdan's sylph as it drifted up to heaven.

ULU BOYAR

What can be said of the end? That the battle for Kyiv was, in the end, a settling of scores among horsemen? That one rich Cossack would conspire against another in his own interests; that he would ally himself with a Godless antiarch is hateful indeed.

Mykola slew the Don Cossack Hetman, traitor of the heart, scourge of Cossackdom and all of Ukraine. When the ghost of Bohdan Sampsonovich left the battlefield, the ghost of Bohdan Khmelnytsky entered, and settled in the breast of Mykola Mykhailovich. The Drinsk Hetman picked his saber off the ground, remounted his horse, and conducted his rabble of loyal Cossacks to victory. From that point, with the Don Cossacks scattered, the anarchists dead and the frightened bastard of Bazurashka shivering in Saint Sophia's Cathedral, the city was once again Mykola's. He and his men, so very few now, entered the cathedral, removed their war things, and knelt before the likeness of Christ. They said a prayer, asked forgiveness for so much bloodshed so close to the sanctuary, then went back outside.

There was no audience left in the square; even the false condemned innocents had fled. In a ceremony devoid of festivity, the Cossacks crowned Mykola Mykhailovich. They wanted to redeclare his Hetmanship of the city; Mykola said he wanted no such title.

What title do you want, Hetman?

And Mykola told them. Schoolboy, always shrewd beyond measure, went and retrieved from the porch of Saint Sophia's the bloodsoaked overcoat Thorstein had worn barely an hour before.

Mykola made every loyal Cossack there in the square an honorary son of Drinsk, and the Cossacks, in turn crowned Mykola—wearing the red overcoat like some legionnaire's cape—

Boyar of the Drinsk Cossacks.

They raised their weapons—shovels, pickaxes, pitchforks, shashkas, sabers, daggers, and rifles—and said as one: Ulu Boyar!

EPILOGUE

Therafter—naturally—the victorious Cossacks went and found a tavern unravaged, and ravaged it. All afternoon and then all night they drank up horilka and recounted the stories of their glorious campaign, a campaign not even a year old but already brimming with legends.

In a lovely drunken state, Mykola wandered outside to stand with Maksym Davidovich of the Buh, puffing on his pipe. A light snow began to fall; they stood in silence watching the stars. The swirls of Maksym Davidovich's pipesmoke seemed to roil and shift into the likeness of the Boyar, and Mykola thought:

Boyar, what was it like to march on the city, to be on the brink of power, and not to take it?

Boyar, thought Mykola as the smoke shifted and it seemed as though the Boyar was smiling back at Mykola, you are no fortune teller; you are no opportunist; if you refused the reins of power, I would like to think it is because you love your countrymen, and trust them; it is not naiveté that makes us love, but courage.

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(2015) Finalist, Knut House Press, Madness Short Story Prize
 (2013-14) Perry Morgan Fellow, Old Dominion University
 (2012) "Sugar in Wartime" nominated for a Pushcart Prize
 (2012) "Astronaut" nominated for a Pushcart Prize
 (2009) First Place, Wednesday Club Annual Prize in Short Fiction
 (2008-9) J. Frederic Fausz Achievement Award
 (2008-9) Eugene J. Meehan Scholarship
 (2005-6) University of Missouri Alumni Fellowship
 (2005) National Finalist, Elder & Leemauer Annual Essay Contest
 (2005) CFSSDA National Invitational St. Louis 1st Place, perfect score (Standing Record)

Selected Publications

(2015) "Clown of the Times" in *Faultline* 25
 (2015) "Dervish" in *Ninth Letter*
 (2014) "Ant Fighting" in *The Valley Review* 8:4
 (2014) "The Speechwriter" in *Whiskey Island* 64
 (2014) "The Pulcinella Suite" in *The Sonora Review* 66
 (2013) "A Treatise on the King of Bulgaria" in *Whole/Beast/Rag* 5
 (2013) "Rose and Kit" in *Sein und Werden* (U.K.) 2013
 (2013) "The Circumstance of Luke Davenport" in *Euphony* 13:1
 (2013) "Sugar in Wartime" in *Moon City Review*
 (2012) "Dream Women" in *The Madison Review* 34:1
 (2012) "Relics" in *The Portland Review* 56.1
 (2012) "Astronaut" in *Yemassee* 19.2