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by Maxim Gorky



***Liberated from  
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to educate the masses  
by  
Socialist Stories***

THE CROWD reminded one of the dark swell of the ocean, scarcely roused by the first gust of a storm. It rolled on sluggishly; the grey faces of the people looking like murky foam on the crest of a wave.

Eyes sparkled with excitement, but the people looked wonderingly at each other, as if they could not believe their own determination. Words circled over the crowd like tiny grey birds.

They spoke in low voices, gravely, as if trying to justify themselves to each other.

"It's impossible to bear it any longer, that's why we've come...."

"People wouldn't have come out without a reason...."

"Won't 'He' understand?..."

They talked most of all about "Him," telling each other that "He" was good and kind-hearted, and would understand everything.... But there was no colour in the words with which they depicted him. One felt that they had not thought of "Him" seriously, or pictured him as a real live person for quite a long time, if ever at all; that they did not know what "He" was, and did not even understand what "He" was for, or what "He" could do. But today "He" was needed. All were eager to understand him, and not knowing the one who actually existed, they involuntarily pictured him as something great. Great were their hopes, and they needed something great to sustain them.

Now and again a bold voice was heard among the crowd saying:

"Comrades! Don't let yourselves be deceived...."

But it was self-deception that they wanted, and the voice was drowned by frightened and angry cries.

"We want to come out openly...."

"You keep quiet, brother...."

"Besides, isn't Father Gapon with us?"

"He knows..."

The crowd flowed sluggishly down the canal-like street, breaking up into eddies, murmuring, arguing and discussing, swerving against the house walls and again filling the middle of the street, a dark, fluid mass. A vague ferment of doubt seemed to pervade it, an obvious, intense expectation of something that would light up the path to the goal with belief in success, so that this belief could bind, merge all the fragments in one, strong and harmonious body. They tried to conceal their lack of belief, but could not do so, and a vague feeling of anxiety, and a particularly acute sensitiveness to sound, was observed among them. They shuffled along cautiously, pricking up their ears, staring ahead, persistently searching for something with their eyes. The voices of those who believed in the strength within them and not in a strength outside of them, imbued the crowd with a sense of fear and irritation far too acute for one who was convinced that he had a right to contend in open dispute against the power he wished to see.

As it poured from street into street, however, the crowd rapidly grew, and this outward growth gradually created a feeling of inner growth, awakened the consciousness that the slave-people had a right to call upon the government to pay attention to its needs.

"Say what you like, but we, too, are human..."

"He' will understand that we are only asking..."

"He must understand! ... We are not rebels..."

"Then, again, there's Father Gapon..."

"Comrades! One doesn't ask for freedom..."

"Oh, Lord!..."

"You wait, brother!"

"Chase him away, the devil!"

"Father Gapon knows best..."

A tall man in a black overcoat with a yellow patch on the shoulder got up on the curb and, removing his cap from his bald head, began to talk loudly and solemnly, with flashing eyes and trembling voice. He talked about "Him," about the tsar.

At first there was an artificial exaltation in his words and tone of voice; they lacked the emotion, which, by infecting others, can almost perform miracles. It seemed as though the man was straining himself in an effort to awaken and conjure up an image that had

long been impersonal, lifeless, and obliterated by time. All his life "He" had been remote from men; but now men needed "Him," men were reposing all their hopes in "Him."

And they gradually revived the corpse. The crowd listened attentively—the speaker was expressing what it wished, it felt this; and although the power which they had fantastically conjured up in their minds obviously did not merge with "His" image, all knew that such a power existed, that it must exist. The speaker identified this power with the being with whom all were familiar from calendar portraits and linked it with the image which they knew from legends; and in the legends this image was human. The words the speaker uttered, loud and intelligible, clearly depicted a being that was powerful, benevolent, and just, and who displayed paternal interest in the needs of the people.

Belief came and enveloped the people, excited them, and drowned the low whisperings of doubt.... The people hastened to yield to the mood they had long been waiting for. They pressed close together, a huge, compact mass of unanimous bodies, and the density, the closeness of shoulders and hips, warmed the heart with comforting confidence, of hope of success.

"We don't want any red flags!" shouted the bald man. Waving his cap, he stepped out in front of the crowd, his bald pate glistening dully, swaying before the eyes of the people and attracting their attention.

"We are going to our father!"

"He'll not do us any wrong!"

"Red is the colour of our blood, comrades!" a determined voice rang out over the heads of the crowd.

"No power can liberate the people except the power of the people themselves!"

"Stop that!"

"Agitators! We want none of that!"

"Father Gapon is carrying a cross, but he comes along with a flag!"

"You're too young to take command yet!"

Those who were the least confident walked in the heart of the crowd, and from there shouted out angrily and apprehensively:

"Chase him away, that one with the flag!"

They now walked at a more rapid pace, without hesitation, and with each step they took, they infected each other with this unity of mood, with the intoxication of self-deception. The "He" which they had just created persistently roused in their minds the shades of the ancient, benevolent heroes, echoes of the legends they had heard in childhood; and absorbing the vital strength of the human desire to believe, "He" grew and grew in their imagination....

Somebody shouted:

"'He' loves us...."

And there can be no doubt that this mass of people sincerely believed in the love of the being whom they had just created.

When the crowd poured from the street onto the embankment a long, crooked line of soldiers barred its way to the bridge, but the people were not daunted by this thin grey barrier. There was nothing menacing in the figures of the soldiers that were distinctly drawn against the light blue background of the broad river. They were skipping to warm their frozen feet, flapping their arms, and pushing each other about. On the other side of the river the people saw a large, gloomy house. That was where "He," the tsar, the master of this house, lived. Great and strong, kind and loving, he could not, of course, have ordered his soldiers to prevent the people from going to the one they loved, and to whom they wished to speak about their needs.

Still, a shadow of perplexity appeared on many faces, and the people in front reduced their pace. Some looked back, others left the crowd and stepped onto the sidewalk, but all tried to show that they were aware of the presence of the soldiers and that it did not surprise them. Some calmly gazed at the golden angel that glistened high in the sky above the gloomy fortress, others smiled. A voice said commiseratingly:

"It's cold for the soldiers...."

"Rather...."

"But still they've got to stand there!"

"The soldiers are here to keep order."

"Quiet now, fellows!... Keep calm!"

"Three cheers for the soldiers!" somebody shouted.

An officer, wearing a yellow hood thrown back on his shoulders, drew his sword from its scabbard and, brandishing the curved

steel blade, shouted something to the crowd. The soldiers sprang to attention and stood motionless, shoulder to shoulder.

"What are they doing?" a rather plump woman asked.

Nobody answered her. Suddenly everybody found it difficult to walk.

"Stand back!" they heard the officer shout.

Some of the people looked behind and saw a dense mass of bodies into which a dark human river was continuing to flow in an endless stream. Yielding to the pressure of this river the crowd moved on and filled the open space in front of the bridge. Several people stepped forward, and, waving white handkerchiefs, went out to meet the officer, shouting:

"We are going to our tsar!"

"In a perfectly orderly manner!"

"Go back! If you don't, I shall order my men to shoot!"

When the officer's voice reached the crowd it was echoed by a buzz of amazement. Some of the people had said that they would not be allowed to go to "Him," but this threat to shoot at the people who were going to "Him" in a perfectly orderly manner, believing in his power and benevolence, distorted the image they had created. "He" was a power above all powers and had no reason to fear anybody, had no reason to repulse his people with bayonets and bullets. . . .

A tall, gaunt man, with a starved face and black eyes suddenly shouted out:

"Shoot? You won't dare!"

And turning to the crowd he continued loudly and angrily:

"Well? Didn't I tell you they wouldn't let us through?"

"Who? The soldiers?"

"Not the soldiers, but them, over there. . . ."

And he waved his arm into the distance.

"Those higher up. . . . Ah! I told you so, didn't I?"

"We don't know yet. . . ."

"When they hear what we've come for, they'll let us through!"

The noise increased. Angry exclamations and sarcastic remarks were heard. Common sense had been shattered against this silly barrier and was now silent. The gestures of the people became more nervous and agitated. A raw, cold wind blew from the river. The rigid bayonets glistened.

Bandyng remarks and yielding to the pressure from behind, the people pushed forward. Those who had been waving handkerchiefs turned aside and disappeared in the crowd; but those in front, men, women and children, were all waving white handkerchiefs now.

"Shoot? What are you talking about? Why should they?" said an elderly man with a beard streaked with grey. "It's simply that they won't let us cross by the bridge and want us to go straight over the ice."

Suddenly a dry, uneven rattle broke out, and it seemed as though the crowd had been lashed by scores of invisible whips. For a moment all voices seemed to have been frozen, but the mass of people continued slowly to push forward.

"Blank shot," said somebody in a colourless voice, whether enquiring or stating a fact was not clear.

But here and there groans were heard, and several bodies lay at the feet of people in the crowd. A woman, wailing loudly and holding her hand to her breast, rapidly stepped out of the crowd towards the bayonets which were thrust out to meet her. Several people hurried after her, and then some more, sweeping round her and running ahead of her.

Again came the rattle of rifle fire, louder, but more ragged than before. The people standing near the fence heard the boards crunch, as if they were being fiercely gnawed by invisible teeth. One bullet scraped along the wooden fence and knocked small chips from it, scattering them into the faces of the people. People fell to the ground in twos and threes; some sank to the ground clutching their abdomens, others hastened away limping, still others crawled across the snow, and everywhere bright scarlet patches appeared on the snow, spreading, giving off vapour, and attracting everybody's eyes. . . . The crowd swept back, halted for a moment as if petrified, and then a savage nerve-racking howl rose from hundreds of throats. It rose and floated in the air like a continuous, intensely vibrating and discordant combination of cries of acute pain, horror, protest, mournful perplexity and cries for help.

Groups of people, bending low, ran forward to pick up the killed and wounded. The wounded too were shouting and shaking their fists. The faces of all had suddenly changed, and there was

a glint of something akin to madness in their eyes. There were no signs of panic, of that state of universal horror which suddenly overcomes people, sweeps bodies into a heap like dry leaves and blindly drags and drives everybody in an unknown direction in a wild whirlwind of desire to hide. But there was every sign of horror, horror that burned like the touch of frozen iron; it froze the heart, held the body as in a vice, and compelled one to stare with wide-open eyes at the blood that was spreading over the snow, at the blood-stained faces, hands and clothing, and at the corpses which were lying so calmly amidst the pandemonium of the living. There was every sign of burning indignation, of mournful, impotent rage, of much perplexity; there were numerous strangely motionless eyes, brows drawn in an angry frown, tightly clenched fists, convulsive gestures, and anger expressed in strong language. But it seemed as though it was cold, soul-crushing, bewilderment that filled people's breasts most. Only a few short moments before they had marched along, clearly seeing their object before them; before their eyes had hovered that majestic, legendary image which they had admired, had loved, and which had sustained their hearts with great hope. Two volleys, blood, corpses, groans and—they all found themselves standing before a grey vacuum, impotent, and with hearts torn to shreds.

They kept moving about in one spot as if riveted to it with fetters, which they were unable to break. Some silently and mournfully carried away the wounded and picked up the dead, while others watched them doing this as if in a dream, stunned, in a strange state of apathy. Many shouted words of complaint and reproach at the soldiers, swore at them, shook their fists at them, took their caps off and bowed for some reason, and threatened them with the terrible wrath of someone or other....

The soldiers stood motionless, with ordered arms. Their faces were rigid too; the skin on their cheeks seemed taut and their cheekbones stood out prominently. It looked as though all the soldiers had white eyes, and that their lips were frozen together....

Somebody in the crowd cried out hysterically:

"It's a mistake! They made a mistake, brothers! They are taking us for somebody else! Don't believe it! Go, brothers—go and explain it to them!"



A boy who had climbed up a lamppost shouted out:

"Gapon is a traitor!"

"Do you see the reception they are giving us, comrades?..."

"No! It's a mistake! Things like this can't happen! Try and understand!"

"Make way for the wounded!"

Two working men and a woman were leading the tall, gaunt man. He was all covered with snow, and blood was dripping from the sleeve of his overcoat. His face was livid, his nose was sharper, and his dark lips moved feebly as he whispered:

"I told you they wouldn't let us through!... They are keeping him away from us. What do they care about the people!"

"Cavalry!"

"Run!"

The wall of soldiers shook and then opened like the two leaves of a wooden gate; and through the opening, on prancing, snorting horses, filed a troop of cavalymen. The sharp command of an officer rang out, and above the heads of the horsemen sabres flashed like silver ribbons, cleaving the air and sweeping in one direction. The crowd stood swaying, excited, waiting, not believing.

Silence reigned. Suddenly a frenzied shout was heard:

"M-a-r-ch!"

It seemed as though a whirlwind struck the faces of the people and as if the ground heaved under their feet. Then commenced a mad stampede. People ran, pushing and knocking each other down, dropping the wounded they were carrying, and jumping over dead bodies. The heavy clatter of horses' hoofs reached them. The horsemen yelled, their horses leaped over the wounded, the fallen and the dead, sabres flashed, cries of horror and pain went up and now and again the swish of steel and its impact with bone was heard. The cries of the injured merged in a prolonged, hollow groan....

"A-a-a-h!"

The horsemen swung their sabres and brought them down on the heads of the people, their bodies lurching over their horses' sides with every blow. Their faces were flushed and looked sightless. The horses neighed, bared their teeth ferociously and wildly tossed their heads....

The people were driven back into the street from which they had come, and no sooner had the clatter of horses' hoofs died away in the distance than they began to look at each other, gasping for breath, their eyes bulging with astonishment. A guilty smile appeared on many faces. Somebody laughed and said:

"Oh, didn't I run!"

"It was enough to make anybody run!" answered another.

Suddenly cries of amazement, fright and anger rose on all sides. . . .

"What's the meaning of this, brothers, eh?"

"It's murder, that's what it is, fellow Christians!"

"What for?"

"There's a government for you!"

"Hack us to pieces, eh? Trample upon us with horses. . . ."

And so they stood there in bewilderment, expressing their indignation to each other. They did not know what to do. Nobody went away. They pressed against each other, trying to find a way out of this motley confusion of feeling, they looked at each other with anxious curiosity and yet, more surprised than frightened, waited for something, pricked up their ears, looked around expectantly. But all were crushed and stunned by amazement; this was the feeling that was uppermost in their hearts and prevented their mood from merging into something more natural in this unexpected, frightful, idiotically uncalled for moment, impregnated with the blood of the innocent. . . .

A young voice called out energetically:

"Hey! Come and pick up the wounded!"

Everybody awoke from their torpor and proceeded quickly towards the river. From the opposite direction came injured people covered with blood and snow, some crawling over the snow and others staggering on their feet. These were picked up and carried. Izvozchiks were stopped, their passengers were ordered to get out and the wounded were put in their place and driven away. Everybody became careworn, gloomy and silent. They looked at the wounded with appraising eyes, silently measured things, compared them, and pondered deeply to find an answer to the frightful question which confronted them like a vague, formless black shadow. It obliterated the image of the hero, the tsar, the fount of charity

and goodness which they had so recently conjured up. But only a few dared audibly confess that this image was now destroyed. It was hard to confess this, for it meant abandoning one's only hope. . . .

The bald man in the overcoat with the yellow patch passed by. His dully shining skull was now stained with blood. His head and shoulders drooped and his knees seemed to be giving way. He was supported by a broad-shouldered, hatless lad with curly hair, and by a woman in a torn fur coat whose face was dull and lifeless.

"Wait a minute, Mikhailo. How can this be?" mumbled the wounded man. "Shoot the people? That's not allowed! . . . It ought not to be, Mikhailo."

"But that's what's happened!" shouted the lad.

"They shot . . . and they hacked . . ." observed the woman despondently.

"Then they must have had orders to do so, Mikhailo. . . ."

"Of course!" the boy answered angrily. "Did you think they'd come out and talk to you? Bring you out a glass of wine?"

"Wait a minute, Mikhailo. . . ."

The wounded man halted, leaned his back against the wall and shouted:

"Fellow Christians! . . . Why are they killing us? Under what law? . . . By whose orders?"

People walked past, hanging their heads.

Further down, at the street corner, next to a fence, several score of people had gathered, and in the middle of the crowd somebody was saying in an alarmed and angry voice, gasping for breath as he spoke:

"Gapon went to see the Minister last night. He must have known what would happen today. That shows he has betrayed us. Led us to death!"

"What good would that do him?"

"How do I know?"

The excitement spread. Everybody was faced with questions that were still unclear, but everybody felt that these questions were important, profound, stern, and imperatively demanded an answer. In the fire of this excitement, belief in assistance from outside, the hope of a miraculous saviour from want, perished.

A rather stout, poorly-clad woman, with a kind, motherly face and large sad eyes, walked down the middle of the street. She was weeping and supporting her blood-stained left hand with her right.

"How shall I be able to work now?" she wailed. "How shall I feed my children? To whom can I go to complain?... Fellow Christians, who is to protect the people if the tsar, too, is against us?"

Her questions, loud and clear, awakened the people, roused and stirred them. People ran up to the woman from all sides, halted in front of her and listened to what she said, gloomily, but attentively.

"So it means that there is no law for the people?"

Sighs broke from the lips of some of the people around her. Others swore under their breath.

A shrill angry voice shouted out from somewhere in the crowd: "I got assistance.... They broke my son's leg!"

"My Peter was killed!" another voice shouted.

Numerous cries of a similar kind went up. They lashed the ear and more and more often called forth a vengeful echo, whipped up the feeling of rage, and stimulated the consciousness that something had to be done to protect oneself against the murderers. Something like a decision appeared on the people's pale faces.

"Comrades! Let's go into town.... After all, perhaps we'll get some explanation of this.... Let's go, a few at a time!"

"They'll slaughter us...."

"Let's talk to the soldiers. Perhaps they'll understand that there's no law which permits the killing of people!"

"Perhaps there is such a law. How do you know?"

The mob slowly but steadily underwent a change; it became transformed into the people. The young people went away in small groups, but all went in one direction, back to the river. Meanwhile, more and more wounded and killed were being carried away. The smell of warm blood pervaded the air, and groans and exclamations rent the air.

"Yakov Zimin was shot right through the forehead...."

"Thanks to the Little Father, the tsar!"

"Y-es! He gave us a nice reception!"

Several strong oaths were uttered. Only a quarter of an hour before the crowd would have torn to pieces anybody who had uttered only one like them.

A little girl ran down the street loudly asking everybody:

"Have you seen my mummy?"

The people looked at her silently and made way for her.

Later, the woman with the shattered hand was heard crying out:

"I'm here, I'm here!"

The street became deserted. The young people dispersed more and more quickly, while the older ones moved off in twos and threes, gloomily and unhurriedly, casting furtive glances at the young people who were hurrying away. They spoke little. Only now and again somebody, unable to restrain his bitter feelings, exclaimed in a low voice:

"So they have cast off the people..."

"Damned murderers!"

They expressed pity for those who were killed; and they had an inkling that a certain strong, slavish prejudice was killed too, but they prudently said nothing about it, they no longer pronounced "His" name, which now jarred on their ears, so as not to stir up the sorrow and anger that smouldered in their hearts...

But perhaps they said nothing about it because they feared that another prejudice would come to take the place of the dead one...

... A close, unbroken cordon of soldiers was drawn round the tsar's house. Cavalry were posted in the palace square, right under the windows, to which rose the smells of hay, horse dung and horse sweat, and the sounds of rattling sabres, clinking spurs, commands and stamping feet.

A dense mass of people, tens of thousands, with cold anger gnawing at their breasts, bore down upon the soldiers from all sides. They spoke calmly, but with a new emphasis, new words and with new hope, which they themselves scarcely understood. A company of soldiers, one flank resting against the wall of the building and the other against the iron railings of the park, barred the way to the palace square. Close up against them, face to face, stood the crowd, immeasurably large, mute and black.

"Move along, please!" said the sergeant-major in an undertone, as he passed down the line, pushing the people away from the soldiers with his arms and shoulders and trying not to look into their faces.

"Why don't you let us through?" he was asked.

"Where to?"

"To the tsar!"

The sergeant-major halted for a moment and in a tone that sounded like boredom he exclaimed:

"But I'm telling you he's not here!"

"What, the tsar's not here?"

"No, I'm telling you he's not. So go away!"

"Do you mean he's gone for good?" enquired a sarcastic voice. The sergeant-major halted again, raised his hand warningly and said:

"Take care, now! You know what you'll get for saying things like that!"

And then he went on to explain in a different tone:

"He's not in town."

To this came responses from the crowd:

"He's not anywhere!"

"He's dead!"

"You've shot him, you devils!"

"Did you think you could kill the people?"

"You can't kill the people! . . . There's too many of us. . . ."

"You have killed the tsar—do you understand?"

"Move along, I tell you, and stop that talk!"

"What are you? A soldier? What's a soldier?"

At another part of the line a little old man with a pointed beard was saying animatedly to the soldiers:

"You are human. So are we! Just now you are in uniform, but tomorrow you will be in civvies. You'll want a job, because you have to eat. You'll have no job, and you'll have nothing to eat. And so, boys, you'll have to do what we here are doing now. . . . And they'll have to shoot at you, is that it? To kill you, because you are hungry, eh?"

The soldiers felt cold. They hopped from foot to foot, stamped their feet and rubbed their ears, passing their rifles from one hand

to the other. Hearing this talk they sighed heavily, looked this way and that, and smacked their frozen lips. Their faces, livid with cold, all bore the uniform impress of despondency, perplexity and stupidity. They blinked their eyelids and lowered their eyes. Only a few of them screwed up an eye as if taking aim at something, and clenched their teeth, evidently finding it difficult to restrain their anger at this mass of people who were compelling them to freeze like this. The entire grey line breathed weariness and boredom.

The people stood opposite the soldiers, breast to breast and, pushed from behind, sometimes collided with them.

"Steady there!" one of the soldiers said in a low voice whenever this happened.

Other people grasped the soldiers' hands and spoke to them ardently. The soldiers listened, blinking their eyes; their faces became distorted by indefinite grimaces, which made them look pitiful, or shy.

"Don't touch the gun!" one of them said to a young lad in a fur cap. The boy was tapping the soldier's chest and saying:

"You're a soldier, not a butcher.... You were called up to protect Russia against her enemies, but they are making you shoot at the people.... But try and understand! The people—that's Russia!"

"We are not shooting!" answered the soldier.

"Look!" said the boy, pointing to the crowd. "This is Russia, the Russian people! They want to see their tsar...."

Somebody interrupted with a shout:

"They don't!"

"Is there anything bad in the people wanting to talk to the tsar about their affairs? Tell me, is there?"

"I don't know!" answered the soldier, spitting.

The man next to him added:

"We have orders not to talk...."

He sighed despondently and lowered his eyes.

One little soldier suddenly brightened up and asked the man in front of him eagerly:

"Hey, you! Aren't you from Ryazan?"

"No, I'm from Pskov.... Why do you ask?"

"Oh, just like that.... I'm from Ryazan...."

He smiled a broad smile and hunched his shoulders from the cold.

The crowd swayed in front of the straight grey wall and beat against it like the waves of a river beating against its rocky banks, receding and rolling forward again. It is doubtful whether many of the people knew why they were here, what they wanted, and what they were waiting for. They had no conscious aim or definite intention. They were conscious only of a bitter sense of wrong, of indignation, and many, of a desire for revenge; this is what bound them all, kept them here in the street. But there was no one upon whom to vent these feelings, no one upon whom to wreak vengeance. . . . The soldiers did not rouse anger, they did not irritate the people—they were simply stupid and unhappy, they were freezing; many were unable to keep from shivering, and their teeth were chattering.

“We’ve been here since 4 o’clock this morning!” they said. “It’s simply awful!”

“It’s enough to make you want to lie down and die. . . .”

“Suppose you went away, eh? We could go back to our warm barracks then. . . .”

“What’s the time?”

It was nearly 2 o’clock.

“What are you all excited about? What are you waiting for?” the sergeant-major asked.

The question, his grave face, and the serious and confident tone in which he asked the question, cooled the ardour of the people. There seemed to be a special meaning in everything he said, more profound than the simple words he uttered.

“There’s nothing to wait for! You are only keeping the men out in the cold. . . .”

“Will you shoot at us?” a young man in a hood asked the sergeant-major.

The sergeant-major remained silent for a moment and then answered coolly:

“If we are ordered to—we will!”

This caused an outburst of reproaches, oaths, and jeers.

“What for? What for?” asked a tall, red-headed man, louder than the rest.



"Because you are disobeying the orders of the authorities!" explained the sergeant-major, rubbing his ear.

The men listened to the talk going on among the crowd and blinked their eyes despondently. One of them softly exclaimed:

"Wouldn't it be nice to have something hot now?"

"Would you like some of my blood?" somebody asked him in a tone that was both angry and sad.

"I'm not a wild beast," answered the soldier, gloomily and resentfully.

Many eyes stared at the broad flat faces of the long line of soldiers with cold, silent curiosity, contempt and disgust. But the majority tried to warm them with the fire of their own excitement, to stir something in their hearts, which had been tightly compressed by barrack life, and in their heads, which had been stuffed with the rubbish of barrack room training. Most of the people wanted to do something, to put their thoughts and sentiments into practice somehow, and they kept obstinately beating against this grey cold wall of men who wished only one thing—to warm their bodies.

The talk became more ardent, the words more and more striking.

"Soldiers!" said a thick-set man with a long broad beard and blue eyes. "Who are you? Aren't you sons of the Russian people? The people are poor, downtrodden, without protection, without work and without bread, and so they have come here today to ask the tsar to help them. But the tsar orders you to shoot, to kill them! Soldiers! The people—your fathers and brothers—are asking for assistance not only for themselves, but also for you! You are being put against the people. They are compelling you to kill your own fathers and brothers! Think of what you are doing! Don't you understand that you are going against yourselves?"

That voice, calm and even, the fine face and grey-streaked beard, the whole appearance of the man and his simple and truthful words evidently moved the soldiers. They lowered their eyes at his glance, they listened to him attentively, some shaking their heads and sighing, others frowning and looking round. One of them advised in an undertone:

"Go away—the officer will hear you!"

The officer, tall, fair, with a big moustache, was slowly pacing down the line. Pulling at the glove on his right hand he kept hissing through his clenched teeth:

"Disss-misss!... Get out of here! What? You want to talk? I'll give you talk!"

He had a fat red face and round eyes, bright, but with no sparkle in them. He walked down the line unhurriedly, stepping firmly on the ground. But on his approach time flew more quickly, as if every second was in a hurry to pass in case it should be filled with something offensive and disgusting. It seemed as though an invisible ruler was trailing behind the officer, straightening the line of men. They stood up, drew in their abdomens, pushed out their chests and glanced down at their toes. Some of them drew the attention of the people to the officer with their eyes and made angry faces. On reaching the end of the line the officer commanded:

"Shun!"

The soldiers drew smartly to attention and stood as if petrified.

"I order you to disperse!" the officer then said, unhurriedly drawing his sword from its scabbard.

It was absolutely impossible for the crowd to disperse, for the whole of the small square was crammed with people, and more and more people were pressing into its rear from the street.

Looks of hatred were cast at the officer; jeers and oaths were hurled at him, but he stood unmoved. He ran his dull eyes down the line of soldiers and his brows twitched slightly. A clamour went up from the crowd. It was irritated by the officer's calmness, which was too inhuman to be appropriate for the present moment.

"That one would give the order!"

"He'd shoot without orders..."

"Yes. Drew his sword, and all..."

"Hey, Mister! Are you ready to kill?"

This bantering tone gradually grew into one of recklessness; the cries became louder and the jeers more biting.

The sergeant-major looked at the officer, shuddered, went pale and also quickly drew his sword.

Suddenly the sinister strains of a bugle were heard. The people turned their eyes in the direction of the bugler—his cheeks were

strangely puffed out and his eyes bulged; the bugle trembled in his hands and he played much too long. The nasal, brassy sounds were drowned by an outburst of whistling, shrieking, howling, curses, reproaches, despairing groans of impotence and shouts of reckless desperation called forth by the consciousness that death could follow in an instant, and that it would be impossible to escape it. There was nowhere to go to escape from it. Several dark figures dropped to the ground and pressed close to it, others hid their faces with their hands. The man with the large beard stepped out in front, tore his overcoat open at his chest and peered with his blue eyes into the faces of the soldiers. He spoke to them, but what he said was unheard, for his voice was drowned in the chaotic tumult.

The soldiers whipped their rifles to the "ready," then raised them to "present," and stood as if petrified, in a uniform, alert posture, with their bayonets pointing at the crowd.

The line of bayonets suspended in the air was uneven—some were held too high and others too low; only a few were pointed straight at the breasts of the people, but all looked soft, and they quivered, seeming to melt and bend.

A loud voice rang out in horror and disgust:

"What are you doing? Murderers!"

The line of bayonets shook convulsively. A frightened volley rang out. The people recoiled, hurled back by the sound, by striking bullets and by the falling bodies of the killed and wounded. Some, without uttering a word, began to jump over the railings of the park.

Another volley rang out . . . and then another:

A boy, who was struck by a bullet as he was climbing the railings, suddenly bent over and remained suspended with his feet upwards. A tall graceful woman with fluffy hair gasped and sank slowly to the ground near the boy.

"May you be accursed!" somebody shouted.

The place became less congested and quieter. The people in the rear ran back into the street and took refuge in the courtyards. The crowd slowly retreated as if pushed back by invisible hands. A space of about twenty feet was left between the crowd and the soldiers, and this space was strewn with bodies. Some got up and ran

quickly towards the crowd. Others got up with great difficulty, revealing patches of blood on the ground, and staggered off, leaving a trail of blood behind them. Many lay motionless, face upwards, face downwards, and on their sides, but all stretched in a queer state of tension, as if death had caught them, and they were trying to tear themselves out of its clutches. . . .

The smell of blood pervaded the air, reminding one of the warm, saline breath of the sea in the evening, after a sultry day; it was a pernicious smell; it intoxicated one and roused an unhealthy desire to inhale it long and deeply. It distorted the imagination in a disgusting way, as butchers, soldiers and others professionally engaged in killing know.

The crowd wailed as it retreated. Curses, oaths and cries of pain mingled with a confused medley of whistling, howling and groans. The soldiers stood with their feet firmly planted on the ground, as rigid as the dead. Their faces were ash-grey, their lips were closely pressed together, as if they, too, wanted to shout and whistle, but restrained themselves because it was against orders. They stared in front of them with wide-open eyes; they no longer blinked. There was nothing human in that stare; it seemed as though those dull, vacant spots on the grey, drawn faces were sightless. Perhaps they did not want to see, because they were secretly afraid that if they saw the warm blood which they had spilled, they would want to spill more. Their rifles trembled in their hands, the bayonets twisting as if they were boring into the air. But this trembling could not dispel the dull indifference of the men whose hearts had been hardened by the violence which had been done to their will, and whose minds had been thickly plastered with disgusting, putrid falsehood. The bearded, blue-eyed man rose from the ground and again addressed the soldiers in a sobbing voice, his whole body twitching as he spoke:

“You have not killed me. . . . That’s because I told you the sacred truth. . . .”

The people again slowly and gloomily pressed forward to pick up the dead and wounded. Several men stood beside the one who was addressing the soldiers and, interrupting him, also began to plead. to shout and to rebuke, not angrily, but in tones of sadness and sympathy. The voices still rang with naive confidence that truth

would prevail, with a desire to prove the absurdity and madness of cruelty and to make the soldiers understand how awful was the mistake they had made. They wanted, and tried hard, to make them understand how shameful and disgusting was the part they were involuntarily playing. . . .

The officer drew his revolver from its holster, carefully examined it, and strode up to the group that was talking to the men. They made way for him, unhurriedly, as one steps aside when a stone is slowly rolling down the mountainside. The blue-eyed bearded man, however, did not budge, but met the officer with ardent words of reproach, and with wide gestures pointed to the blood all round.

"How are you going to justify this?" he asked him. "There is no justification for it."

The officer stood in front of the man, knitted his brows in a preoccupied manner and raised his arm. The shots were not heard, but wisps of smoke encircled the arm of the murderer, once, twice and thrice. After the third time, the bearded man's knees gave way, his head fell back, and waving his right arm he fell to the ground. People rushed at the murderer from all sides. He retreated, brandishing his sword and pointing his revolver at everybody. . . . A boy fell down at his feet, and he plunged his sword into his stomach. He shouted in a grating voice and jumped about like a prancing horse. Somebody threw a cap in his face. He was pelted with clots of blood-stained snow. The sergeant-major and several men ran towards him with out-thrust bayonets, and the attackers ran away. The victor waved his sword at the retreating people threateningly, and then he suddenly lowered it and plunged it once again into the body of the boy, who was crawling at his feet, bleeding profusely.

And again the brassy strains of the bugle rang out. On hearing them the people rapidly deserted the square, but the sounds continued to undulate in the air, as if putting the finishing touches to the vacant eyes of the soldiers, the bravery of the officer, his red-tipped sword and his dishevelled moustache. . . .

The vivid, scarlet hue of the blood irritated the eye and yet fascinated one, rousing a drunken and vicious desire to see more of it, to see it everywhere. The soldiers looked alert, they stretched

their necks this way and that as if searching with their eyes for more living targets for their bullets. . . .

The officer stood at one end of the line, waved his sword and shouted something in a choking voice, angrily, savagely.

From all sides came answering cries:

"Butcher!"

"Scoundrel!"

The officer stroked his moustache.

Another volley was fired, and then another. . . .

The streets were packed with people as tightly as a sack with grain. There were fewer working men here; most of the people were small shopkeepers, salesmen and clerks. Some of them had already seen the blood and the corpses, and others had been beaten up by the police. They were brought out of their houses into the street by alarm; and they spread alarm everywhere, magnifying the outward horrors of the day. Men, women and children looked around anxiously, and listened intently and expectantly. They told each other about the killing, moaned and groaned, swore, questioned the slightly wounded working men, and now and again lowered their voices to a whisper and talked mysteriously to each other. Nobody knew what was to be done, and nobody went home. They felt and guessed that something important was going to happen after this killing, something more profound and tragic for them than the hundreds of killed and wounded, who were strangers to them.

Up to this day they had lived almost without thinking, with vague ideas, heaven knows when or how acquired, about the government, the law, the authorities, and their rights, and these ideas, being amorphous, did not prevent their brains from becoming enmeshed with a thick, close web, from being covered with a thick, slimy crust. These people were accustomed to think that there was a certain power whose function it was to protect them and was capable of protecting them, namely—the law. This habit gave them a sense of security and safeguarded them from all troublesome thoughts. Life was tolerable under these conditions, and although these vague ideas were often disturbed by life's pin-pricks, scratches, jostles and sometimes even heavy blows, they remained

strong and tenacious. The scratches and fissures soon healed, and the ideas retained their lifeless integrity.

But today, their brains were suddenly exposed, and they shuddered; their breasts were filled with alarm that chilled them like a cold blast. Everything that had been established and habitual was upset, was shattered and had vanished. All of them were conscious, more or less clearly, of a sad and frightful loneliness and defenselessness in face of a cruel and cynical power which recognized no rights and no law. This power held all lives in its hands and could with impunity sow death among masses of people, could destroy the living just as its will dictated, and in any numbers it pleased. Nobody could restrain it. It refused to talk to anybody. It was all-powerful and coolly proved that its authority was limitless by senselessly strewing the streets of the city with corpses and flooding them with blood. Its bloody, thirsty, insane caprice was clearly visible, and it sowed universal alarm, a gnawing, soul-destroying dread. But it also persistently roused the mind, compelling it to devise new plans for protecting the individual, new methods for the protection of life.

A short, thick-set man was walking along with lowered head, swinging his blood-stained hands. The front of his coat was also profusely stained with blood.

"Are you wounded?" he was asked.

"No."

"What about the blood?"

"It's not my blood," the man answered and passed on. Suddenly he halted, looked round and said in a loud voice that sounded queer:

"It's not my blood. It's the blood of those who believed . . ." and he went on his way, lowering his head again, without finishing what he had to say.

A troop of horsemen rode among the crowd, swinging their knouts. The people rushed away from them in all directions, colliding with each other, and pressing against the walls. The soldiers were drunk. They smiled idiotically, swayed in their saddles, and now and again, as if reluctantly, struck at people's heads and shoulders with their knouts. One man was bowled over by a blow and fell to the ground, but he sprang to his feet again and asked the soldier:

"What was that for? Ekh! You brute!"

The soldier unslung his carbine and without reining in his horse fired at the man. The man dropped to the ground again. The soldier laughed.

"Look what they are doing!" shouted a respectably dressed, horrified gentleman, turning his distorted face in all directions. "Do you see what they're doing?"

The murmur of excited voices continued without interruption, and amidst the torments of fear, the anguish of despair, something was born that slowly and imperceptibly united resurrected, awkward minds, minds which were unaccustomed to work.

But men of peace appeared.

"Why did he abuse the soldier?" demanded one.

"The soldier struck him, didn't he?"

"He should have got out of the way!"

In an archway two women and a student were attending to a working man who had been shot through the arm. The wounded man winced, looked around angrily, and said to those around him:

"We had no secret intentions whatever. It's only skunks and dicks who say we had. We went openly. The Ministers knew why we were going. They had a copy of our petition. If we were not allowed to go, why didn't they say so, the skunks! They had plenty of time to tell us. We didn't arrange this today. . . . They knew—the police and the Ministers—that we were going. The murderers. . . ."

"What did you ask for in your petition?" enquired a short, grey-haired, lean old man, thoughtfully and gravely.

"We asked that the tsar should assemble representatives elected by the people and govern the country with them, and not with the government officials. Those scoundrels have ruined Russia, they have robbed everybody."

"Yes, that's true. . . . We must have control!" observed the little old man.

The working man's arm was bandaged and they carefully rolled down the sleeve of his coat.

"Thank you," he said. "I told my comrades that it was no use going, that nothing would come of it. Now they will see that I was right."

He gingerly inserted his hand into his buttoned overcoat and unhurriedly went off.



"Do you hear how they talk? You know what that means, brother. . . ."

"Y-e-s! Still, they shouldn't have done this slaughter. . . ."

"They shot him today. It may be my turn tomorrow. . . ."

"You're right there. . . ."

At another spot two men were arguing heatedly. One said:

"He might not have known!"

"Then why. . . ."

But there were few now who wanted to revive the corpse, so few that they were hardly noticeable. They only roused anger by their attempts to raise again the ghost which had now been laid. They were attacked as if they were enemies, and they ran away in fright.

A battery of artillery rode into the street. The soldiers sat on their horses and limbers, thoughtfully gazing ahead, over the heads of the people. The crowd pushed back to make way for the guns. Sullen silence reigned; only the rattle of the harness and the clatter of ammunition boxes was heard. The gun barrels, swaying like elephant's trunks, pointed their muzzles to the ground as if smelling it. The cavalcade reminded one of a funeral.

Shots rang out in the distance. The people stood petrified, listening intently. Somebody said:

"Again!"

Suddenly a ripple of excitement swept down the street.

"Where, where?"

"On the Island. . . . On Vassilyevsky Island. . . ."

"Do you hear?"

"You don't say?"

"On my word of honour! They've captured a gunsmith's shop. . . ."

"Aha!"

"They cut down the telegraph poles and built a barricade. . . ."

"Is that so?"

"Is there a lot of them?"

"Plenty!"

"Oh! If only they avenged the innocent blood that has been spilt!"

"Let's go there!"

"Let's go, Ivan Ivanovich, eh?"

"Y-e-ss. . . . But . . . you know. . . ."

The figure of a man appeared above the crowd, and in the twilight an appeal rang out:

"Who wants to fight for freedom? For the people, for man's right to life and labour? He who wants to die in battle for the future—let him go and help!"

Some gathered round the man, and a close-packed knot of bodies was formed in the middle of the street. Other people hurried away.

"You see how angry the people are!"

"Quite legitimately! Quite!"

"But it's madness. . . ."

The crowd melted in the twilight. People dispersed to their homes, carrying with them an unfamiliar sense of alarm, a frightening sense of loneliness, a half-awakened consciousness of the tragedy of their lives, the oppressed, senseless lives of slaves . . . and a readiness to adjust themselves to everything that would be advantageous and convenient. . . .

The atmosphere became more tense than ever. Darkness broke the contacts between people—the feeble contacts of external interests. And those who lacked fire in their hearts hastened to their accustomed nooks.

Night was falling fast, but the street lamps were not lit. . . .

"Dragoons!" shouted a hoarse voice.

Out of a side street a squad of cavalry suddenly appeared. The horses stamped their hoofs for a few seconds and then charged down upon the people. The soldiers yelled in a queer way; they roared, and there was something inhuman, dark, blind, an unintelligible something akin to despair in that roar. Both men and horses looked smaller and blacker in the darkness. Sabres glinted dully, there were fewer outcries, but the sounds of numerous blows were heard.

"Hit them with whatever comes to your hands, comrades! Blood for blood!"

"Run!"

"Don't dare, soldier! I'm not a peasant!"

"Hit them with cobble-stones! Comrades!"

Upsetting the tiny dark figures, the horses pranced, neighed and snorted. The clash of steel was heard. A command rang out:

"Squad! . . ."

A bugle rang out, hurriedly and nervously. People ran, pushing each other and falling. The street became deserted, but dark hummocks remained on the ground, and from somewhere, down a side street, came the rapid clatter of heavy hoofs. . . .

"Are you wounded, comrade?"

"My ear's cut off, I think. . . ."

"What can you do with bare hands?"

The sound of rifle fire echoed in the deserted street.

"They haven't grown tired of it yet—the devils!"

Silence. Hurried footsteps. How strange that there were so few sounds and no movement in the street. A subdued, liquid murmur floated from all directions, as if the sea had invaded the city.

Somewhere near, a low moan trembled in the darkness. . . . Somebody was running and breathing heavily.

An anxious voice enquired:

"Are you wounded, Yakov?"

"It's nothing!" answered a hoarse voice.

From the side street, down which the dragoons had galloped, a crowd reappeared and flowed blackly across the whole width of the street. Somebody, walking in front, but inseparably from the crowd, was saying:

"Today we took a pledge sealed with our blood—henceforth we must be citizens."

Another voice interrupted him and said nervously with a sob:

"Yes—our fathers have shown us what they really are!"

And somebody else said threateningly:

"We shall never forget this day!"

They walked quickly, in a close-packed crowd, many talking at once, and their voices merged chaotically with the dark, angry, murmur. Now and again somebody raised his voice to a shout, drowning all the other voices.

"Christ, how many were killed today!"

"And what for?"

"No! We can never forget this day!"

Somebody on the side, in a strained hoarse voice, made the sinister prophecy:

"You'll forget, slaves! What's other people's blood to you?"

"Shut up, Yakov!"

It became darker and quieter. Passers-by turned their heads in the direction of the voices and growled.

A light from a window threw a faint yellow patch upon the street. In the patch two black figures were seen. One was sitting on the ground, leaning against a lamppost: the other was bending over him, evidently wanting to help him to rise. And again one of them said, softly and sadly:

"Slaves. . . ."