Simon Arshakovich Ter-Petrosyan ("Kamo")

The Peter and Paul Fortress is one of the largest history museums in Leningrad. In tsarist times it was a prison for particularly dangerous political offenders.
In the autumn of 1919, a young soldier, still in his army greatcoat, came to revolutionary Petrograd; this was Fedin (born 1892), the future author of *Towns and Years*, *Early Joys*, *No Ordinary Summer* and other novels widely known in many countries.

He was mobilised for the Red Army immediately on arrival and worked on its newspapers up to the end of the Civil War. The abundance of impressions he gained fed a longstanding urge to write. And Fedin wrote a lot. He made the acquaintance of Gorky and the latter became the first judge of Fedin's stories. In the following extracts from *Gorky Among Us* Fedin tells us of his meetings with Gorky during the early years of the revolution.

"His role in shaping the newborn Soviet literature of the twenties," wrote Fedin, "was a tremendous one and his interest in the fate of a writer often determined the entire further development of a talented person and brightened the path of many a young writer."

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In the autumn of 1919, when I was demobilised and reached Petrograd, the city was an armed camp. It was, in fact, called the "Petrograd Fortified Area" and the headquarters of the area was in the heart of the city, in the Peter and Paul Fortress. Yudenich's Whiteguards had reached its outskirts. His officers could see the Moscow Toll-gate through field-glasses from the Pulkovo Heights. They intended either taking the city by storm or besieging it.

Then the Petrograd workers and the Red Army made an effort that many people regarded as impossible—they checked the enemy's advance, and hurled him back. Yudenich's army was routed and disgraced.

Every street, every house, every stone of Petrograd bore traces of that heroic effort for a long time.

The population of the city was only a third of what it had been in peacetime. The people were suffering from hunger, from typhus and from the cold; they were tormented by thousands of petty privations and illnesses whose very existence they had never even suspected in peacetime....

But that hungry, icy fort was kept alive by undying faith in its new, fantastic morrow....

Like everyone else around me, I had to struggle for physical survival. Never once, however, did I forget literature. I was completely alone in that huge city, in yesterday's capital, which never suspected that yet another young man had appeared...
on its wide avenues who also dreamed of the writing profession and hoped to make some conquests and, perhaps, gain fame.

I had an insatiable urge to understand everything and was certain that nothing could satisfy that urge better than literature. The strongest feeling that I brought to the revolution after what I had experienced as a prisoner of war, was the feeling of Russia as my homeland. That feeling was not driven away by the revolution; it merged with it.

Many people thought as I did and—I am sure of this—many expected a weighty word from literature.

In that heroic, hungry, epidemic-ridden and silent Petrograd there was one man who seemed to stand aloof from the rest, but who in reality was the focal point of a movement that was just beginning to grow. The man was Gorky. And the movement was the beginning of the Soviet work of the intelligentsia.

Gorky played the call to muster on his magic flute, and gradually people began to take courage and to peep out of their holes and caves. There was something medieval in the way the dead guilds reappeared in the light of day; writers came out and warmed up their frozen ink, scientists appeared and took their places at their laboratory benches. Gorky had many ways of bringing influence to bear. The chief of them was his personality. No sensible person, of course, doubted the purity of Gorky's motives; purity of motives, however, was no rarity among the intelligentsia. Gorky had one advantage over all the intellectuals—his life had been woven into the history of the revolution and belonged to it. He was the biography of his times. It was, therefore, natural that in the revolution he should be on the right side of the barricades and that his appeals should contain no suggestion of fortuitousness or calculation. And his earlier fame, his influence in art and, therefore, his power over the intellect were so great that he had no need to multiply them.

The sarcastically inclined may say that Gorky's magic flute was the bread ration. But everybody could see that there was no hidden strategy in this—it was just another thing that Gorky did for culture. He was part of that culture and he could not have had any other idea than the one he had—to compel that culture to live.

Gorky was writing beside a broad window looking out on to Kronverksky Street. I could see his silhouette bent over a big desk where everything was in such apple-pie order that it looked empty. His glasses glinted in the sun as he looked over the top of them, noticed me and took them off. He walked easily towards me, one shoulder lowered and jutting angularly, took me by the elbow and propelled me towards another small desk.

"Here, if you please!"

He slapped a pile of books with his hand, then began opening them at the title page, one by one, and, with his head tilted slightly backwards, tapped the names of the authors with his finger-nail.

"Very clever, very..." he kept repeating. "But ironical, it's all tongue-in-cheek, and often without reason. This one is a light-weight, but he is knowledgeable, gives a lot of facts.... No sense at all in his arguments.... Don't be tempted.... This one is so witty and brilliant it would be more suited to a Frenchman. He is consistent, however; despite his German origin he has no system at all, and is a cynic...."

"That is all I've so far managed to dig out on the 1848 revolution. There was an excellent book,
but it got lost. I can’t find it anywhere. There are all kinds of scamps who steal books from my shelves, you know. I ought to lock them up, I suppose.”  

The bookshelves were arranged like those of a public library, end-on to the wall; there were only narrow gangways between them, but in this big room the sunshine found its way even into those narrow spaces.  

Gorky tore himself away from the books with a faint smile.  

“Don’t restrict yourself in any way,” he rumbled in his low bass. “Make use of the biggest stage. You can have the circus if you want it. Or a city square with hundreds and thousands of actors. Would you like to use the church steps, for instance?... That could make a glorious spectacle....”  

Back he went to his desk in a cloud of tobacco smoke. He ran his fingers over the few things on it, as though making sure they were all there—blue pencil, ashtray, glasses, sheets of lined paper.  

“I have more and more contact with our scientists,” he told me. “Extraordinary people! They sit in their studies, their hands in home-made gloves, their feet wrapped in blankets, and write. Just as if the sergeant of the guard might arrive at any moment to check up whether they were at their posts.... They wander over pathless mountains in the Urals and gather fantastic collections of precious stones for the Academy of Sciences. They don’t see a scrap of bread for months on end. One wonders what they live on—must live by hunting, like savages! This isn’t California at the time of the gold rush, you know. Money doesn’t interest them, they’re not filling their own coffers. They’re people we should be proud of....  

“We have to save Russian science.... We need food, even at the highest price—food!  

“This never happened to me in the past, you know—pains in the heart and swollen legs. Not enough phosphorus. No sugar....”  

He stopped suddenly (talking about himself again!).  

“The nervous strain of our work makes phosphorus essential,” he informed me didactically.  

“My last visitor before you was Professor Fersman,” he said in a more lively voice. “He had just spoken to Lenin over the direct line to Moscow about the work of the commission set up to improve scientists’ conditions. Lenin was very sympathetic and was ready to help. Fersman assured me that Lenin is all for the intelligentsia....”  

Again I see him when he is talking about Lenin. With just a touch of miming, a jerking of the shoulders he reproduces a Gorky-Lenin conversation with affectionate humour.  

“This is not the first year I’ve been arguing that short-sighted people will regret their neglect of the intelligentsia. We’ll have to go begging to those same academicians and professors. It has become obvious that we cannot do anything without the intelligentsia.... And then what? That, of course, made the educated gentlemen gloat. And that is no good, either. No good at all....”  

I wanted to tie up the books he had selected for me.  

“Give them to me, give them to me,” he demanded, “I have a lot of experience as a packer.”  

“So have I.”  

“Let’s see who’s best!”  

With experienced hands he straightened out a sheet of blue sugar-wrapping, straightened up the pile of books and put them on the paper, grasped the paper firmly in his hands and folded it over, twisted a piece of string round his index finger and, hugging the parcel close to him, passed the string
tightly round it in two directions. He then made a
loop over his left hand with the string, with a jerk
snapped it skilfully and fastened the end at the
place where the strings crossed. He brought the
parcel to me, clicked his heels and smiled.
"If you please, sir!... Who's better?"
"I could do it just as well. . . ."
"We'll see about that another time. . . ."
Like a fresh initiate I carried his parting words
away with me. I kept a firm hold on the packet of
books in which my future was perhaps hidden—
precepts for work, the secrets of art, the truth of
life—who could know?

In the summer I saw Lenin and Gorky together.
It was in July at the opening of the Second Con-
gress of the Communist International. The fact that
Lenin had come for the Congress and had spoken
in a city that had shortly before with great sacri-
fices defended its walls against the enemy, and that
representatives of workers' parties from almost all
parts of the world had gathered here—all this gave
the occasion a triumphal air. There were, however,
in this triumph certain harsh and relentless notes—
the struggle, the life-and-death struggle, was still
going on and the Congress was conducted with
clenched teeth, with a determination to fight to the
end.

Lenin's arrival in the hall was striking.
The dull yellow light from the chandeliers,
made even duller by the strong light of day that
came in through the skylight, seemed to increase the
excitement in the packed hall. The air in the palace
had become oppressive long before the Congress
opened. And suddenly the tension created by this
strange combination of electric light and sunlight,
and by the stuffiness, and the long waiting broke
out in applause that began in bursts in the musi-
cians' gallery, then merged into one and began to
spread slowly downwards until it embraced the
whole palace and seemed actually to rock it; Lenin,
his head bent forward, as though he were cutting
his way through an opposing air stream, strode
through the entire hall at the head of a crowd of
delegates. He made his way quickly to the place
allotted to the presidium and disappeared from
view while the ovation grew in volume. Then he
suddenly appeared again and ran lightly up the
gangway of the amphitheatre. He was seen and
people began to move towards the place where he
had stopped; the ring tightened round him, and
the thunder of applause again rocked the hall.
Lenin was engaged in friendly conversation with
Mikha Tskhakaya, and kept bending closer to his
ear until, finally, he gave what seemed to be an
angry wave of the hand at the lack of order, almost
had to force his way through the ring of people and
hurried down the gangway.

He had to endure a third ovation when he took
the floor to make his report. He stood for a long
time on the rostrum looking through some papers.
Then he raised his arm high and waved his hand
to quieten an audience that refused to be silenced.
Alone amidst that rumbling noise he suddenly
pulled his watch out of his waistcoat pocket, as if
defending himself, showed it to the crowd and
tapped angrily on the glass—but nothing helped.
Then he again began nervously turning over his
papers, as though he were quite unable to reconcile
himself to the unfortunate breach of good order.

Lenin's very first words brought him into living
contact with his audience. He did not speak very
loudly, but in a high-pitched voice with a slightly
guttural "r"; he spoke of matter-of-fact, prosaic
things, but he spoke with unusual inspiration, the
inspiration of the true orator. He read out lists of
figures, holding his notes close to his eyes to do so; everything in his words was clear and practical, with no ornaments or embellishments, but his speech, taken together with his simple, persuasive gestures and with the mobility and lightness of his whole body, seemed to burn with an inward fire.

Lenin's speech revealed a big world, the world of struggle for mankind waged by the first Soviet state on earth. He seemed to take history by the hand and lead her easily into the hall, while she obediently unfolded before our eyes the deeds of recently defeated Poland and routed Wrangel, and the deeds of their defender, Britain, who had suddenly become imbued with love of peace and had proposed to mediate between the Soviets and the counter-revolution. Lenin recorded only a moment in history, but his practical words resembled the calculations of a scientist, and in them there was the dream of a new world that throbbed like the beating of a heart; the Congress delegates not only followed the dynamics of Lenin's thoughts but seemed to reach out and place their hands on Lenin's heart.

The press-box where I was sitting was next to the rostrum. I did not take my eyes off Lenin and I got the impression that, had I been an artist, I could have drawn his portrait from memory.

I saw him again at the end of the session when he was going towards the exit in the midst of a crowd of delegates. There was a terrible crush, and in that stuffy atmosphere and the milling crowd hundreds of people were trying to push their way forward to see him closer at hand, and all the time he was moving through the corridors, in the circular hall and in the lobby, he was hemmed in by the crowd.

Suddenly I saw Gorky's head, high above Lenin and high above the crowd. The whole crowd came to a halt at the doors, and then began slowly trickling out through the exit. That was how Lenin and Gorky left the palace, pressed together by the crowd, hand in hand, but outside, on the porch, the crowd again halted and they were surrounded by jostling photographers with their cameras clicking, and their heads hidden under black cloths or kerchiefs. Gorky stood bareheaded beside a column behind Lenin and his head, lit up by the sun, was visible from afar and his name was being mentioned all round me. I saw something new in Gorky's face, something I could not remember having seen at our previous meetings. He was, no doubt, profoundly moved and was struggling to overcome his agitation; this made his glance harsh and the usually mobile folds in his cheeks had become rigid. He seemed to me to have a masterful look about him, his whole appearance, as it were, expressing the profound determination that had just emanated from Lenin's speech and inspired the whole Congress.

Jostled by the crowd and watching them over the heads and shoulders of others, I did my best to catch every movement made by those two men standing together—Lenin and Gorky. It struck me that the best I had ever thought of Gorky was embodied in him at that moment, in his closeness to Lenin, his closeness to the higher comprehension of everything that had been going on in the world.

I went to him thinking, as usual, of nothing but the coming meeting and did not notice that there was somebody else in the room, probably hidden between the bookshelves. During our talk he took me by the hand and turned me lightly round.

"Meet Vsevolod Ivanov. Also a writer. From Siberia. Hm-m."

A man in a shabby semi-military jacket, his legs
bound in puttees, was standing with his back to the stove. This outfit, all too common in those days, had long since acquired the torn and faded look that comes from lengthy campaigning. His face and hands were of an ashen hue; he was gaunt, almost haggard, you could see he had done plenty of journeying on foot and on the whole he looked like a runaway.

“It’s terrible what he’s been telling me,” said Gorky with a sigh.

That was true, he was telling a story of horrors. He had just arrived, probably on foot, from the East and visions of the Kolchak regime were still in his narrow eyes behind the tiny lenses of a pince-nez that did not suit his broad face. He had been in the holocaust of the Civil War for two years and had come out of it unscathed, if that was at all possible. He spoke about the horrors very tersely, in short, disconnected phrases. He kept his hands behind his back, his face seemingly indifferent to what he was saying, his voice calm.

“They rip the guts out of a Red Army soldier. Nail them to a post. Then drive him round and round the post with their rifle butts until his guts are all wound on the post.”

“What sort of post?” asked Gorky, stern and practical.

“Any sort. A telegraph pole, for instance.”

“Pretty awful,” said Gorky, rubbing his hands as though he were cold. “Pretty awful. What about the partisans?”

“The partisans are all right. They are easy to get along with.”

Gorky gave Ivanov a suspicious look, but curiosity and sympathetic admiration gained the upper hand; there was something epic in the fugitive’s improbable stories, he could hardly be lying, he had seen too much—and if he embellished his stories a bit, well, it was so well done it would have been a pity not to have heard his horrible embellishments.

After that the fugitive found a place to live in the Vyborg District, in the altar room of a former hospital chapel; the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, looked down piously at his desk from their home on the ceiling. A strange sort of life was going on on that desk, nothing like the mysteries at the throne of the Lord; sheets of calendared paper with tables, maps and pictures on one side and covered with pencilled scribble on the other, were being piled up, torn and cut. Vsevolod Ivanov was writing horror stories on illustrations torn from an encyclopaedia and was writing them with the frantic speed of a man haunted by memories of the horrors he had witnessed. Gorky telephoned him occasionally. He ran from the altar room to a neighbouring apartment and listened to Gorky’s solicitous questions.

“Are you getting any bread?... Are you writing?... Excellent, carry on.”

That was the beginning of Gorky’s solicitude for the daily bread of absolutely unknown young writers, and Vsevolod Ivanov was the first of them to queue up with a sack over his back to obtain bread at the House of the Scientists.

I am confident that Ivanov was one of the boldest writers of the post-October period. He managed to achieve chemical fusion of scarcely compatible things—the brutal truth and winged fantasy. His prose writings about the Civil War were one of the fountain-heads of Soviet literature. His fellow writers had to admit that he was the first after the war to introduce new revolutionary material into the writer’s craft with great artistic strength; this was something the entire rising generation of Russian literature was trying to achieve.
Vsevolod Ivanov was probably one of the most fortunate discoveries Gorky ever made among writers.

... Early 1921 was the most difficult time for Gorky. His illness was developing rapidly, and it would be hard to name another ailment that can compare with consumption in its great ability to disturb the equilibrium of the spirit.

I saw him in January at the House of the Arts, on the occasion of an evening devoted to world literature. Sitting at a little table, he opened the proceedings with a speech of a few phrases. In the silence of the hushed hall his laboured breathing could be clearly heard. He had made an effort to overcome fatigue and had mustered the last of his strength—that was obvious and was the cause of great concern to those present. He finished speaking and, swaying a little, walked out with long, slow strides, as if his usual light tread had deserted him for ever.

Never before had I climbed the narrow staircase on Kronverksky Street in such a state of mind; it was not because it was cold and gloomy as it usually is in October, and not because I was ill—it was neither, it was because I knew I was going there for the last time, that I was going to say “good-bye”. Gorky was going away for a cure, as we said in those days, at first to Nauheim and then, probably, to Finland. What could be better? I knew only too well that he was approaching the point beyond which there might be no cure and I could well imagine how he would look when I entered and he rose to greet me. But that one word “good-bye” cast a gloom over everything, and an involuntary selfishness would not be reconciled with the inevitable; Gorky needed it, it would do him good, but would it be good for me, for us, for the whole world of hopes that he had founded with such good will and at such great speed? Of course, he had to go away for treatment. Dying was not so very clever—Blok’s terrible end was still fresh in the memory and everyone was still amazed at the rapidity of it. But what should I do about my feelings of pity, the bitter consciousness that I would be talking to him for the last time?...

Much later Gorky quoted in his reminiscences of Lenin a letter that finally made him decide on a trip abroad.

Spitting blood the way you are and not wanting to go!! Really, it’s a shameless and quite irrational attitude. In Europe, in a good sanatorium, you’ll not only take a cure but get three times as much work done. Really! Here you can neither be treated nor work. It’s just turmoil, all turmoil. Do go and get well. Please, don’t be stubborn. 

Yours,

Lenin

I was again astonished that Gorky mostly displayed concern for others, for those whom he was leaving. But he also spoke about himself, clumsily, confusedly, smiling shyly and raising first one, then the other shoulder.

The folds on his face had increased in number and they were more pendulous. His eyes burnt more brightly and the blue of them was more transparent; the fever did not put more life into his glance but only gave greater prominence to the fatigue that had forced its way into his every feature.

“I almost died in Moscow, I can tell you. Nothing like it ever happened to me before. I’ve been in danger before but never felt it. But this time I felt it, you understand, I felt that I might possibly die.”
He laughed vivaciously, in childish amazement, and repeated it several times with wide-open eyes: "I felt I might die.... Very possible, you understand, very.... They discovered I had some sort of dilatation of the heart.... And the worst of it is I have to believe it...."

Becoming suddenly serious, as though he had caught himself talking of something that had no importance, he began to question me. "What’s happening to you, sir?"

I had just come out of a clinic and would soon have to go to hospital for an operation and, when I told him so, he began to ask me anxiously who would operate, who would take care of me after the operation.

"It’s a simple operation," he said, not believing his own words or that I would be deceived by them. "But what will you do after it? You’ll need food, that is, of course ... an inconvenience. Where to get the food from, eh?"

He had a fit of coughing that lasted a long time, and all the while he shook an outstretched forefinger to indicate that he had an idea and that I should have patience—when he had finished coughing he would tell me.

"Just wait a bit," he managed to say, barely recovering his breath. "My books are coming out, I’ll get the fees and I’ll send the money. To all the Serapionites."

"Take care of yourself," he said suddenly and with a tenderness that came from the heart. "Tell your people to look after you, too. Yes, that’s right—look after one another.... I have the warmest feelings for that group. It must be saved, it must be preserved at any cost...."

He strode across the room to me smiling his one-sided smile that had formerly upset me very much, and tapped me on the shoulder, clumsily, trying to keep his emotions under control.

"You’ve got terribly thin," he muttered softly. "And so Grekov is going to cut you up, eh? A good surgeon, a master.... Of course, it might be better if Fyodorov did it...."

He looked at me in anxiety, and then argued confidently against himself. "It’s care after the operation that matters, and that we’ll arrange. That we’ll certainly arrange...."

Once again, for the last time, I got the momentary feeling that I could go right into his eyes; then the feeling was gone, it was behind me, as everything else was behind me.

I stood for a while downstairs, by the gate, and before I left I had to get over a feeling that was disturbing me, disturbing me because I could not understand it. I had to muster a lot of strength, sheer physical strength, and when, at last, I succeeded, I said to myself with a sudden sense of emancipation—but I’m a lucky man. What a lucky man I am!..."
Maxim Gorky wrote of the Russian revolutionaries that they were a phenomenon of which he knew no equal in spiritual beauty and love of the world.

An artist of the revolution, Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) was throughout his life closely connected with the proletarian movement. He was personally acquainted with many outstanding revolutionaries of his time and wrote about some of them. His reminiscences of Lenin, whose friend he was, rank first among Soviet writings about the leader of the revolution. Gorky’s novel *Mother* was based on certain facts from the life of the Russian revolutionary Pyotr Zalomov and his mother, both of whom Gorky knew well and maintained friendly relations with till the end of his life.

The story that follows is about Simon Ter-Petrosyan, known in the annals of the revolution as “Kamo”.

MAXIM GORKY
KAMO

In November-December 1905, in my flat in the building on the corner of Mokhovaya Street and Vozdvizhenka, where the All-Russia Central Executive Committee had its quarters until recently, I had an armed company of twelve Georgians living with me. Organised by Leonid Krasin under "the Committee", a group of Bolshevik comrades, which was trying to direct the revolutionary work of the Moscow workers, the company maintained communications between districts and guarded my flat during conferences. On several occasions it had to go into action against the "Black Hundreds" and on one of these, when a Black-Hundred mob about a thousand strong advanced on the Technical College, where stood the coffin of Bauman, who had been murdered by the scoundrel Mikhalchuk,* this well-armed company of young Georgians succeeded in dispersing the crowd.

They would come home at night, tired out by the work and dangers of the day, and, lying on the floor, tell each other of their experiences. They were all young men between eighteen and twenty-two, and they were under the command of Comrade Arabidze,** who was getting on for thirty, an energetic, very exacting and heroic revolutionary. If I am not mistaken, it was he who in 1908 shot and killed General Azancheyev-Azanchevsky, who was commanding a punitive detachment in Georgia.

It was Arabidze who first mentioned the name Kamo to me and told me a few stories about this exceptionally bold exponent of revolutionary techniques.

These stories were so astonishing and fabulous that even in those heroic days it was hard to believe that a man could combine almost superhuman courage with constant success in his work, and exceptional resourcefulness with child-like innocence of heart. It struck me then that if I were to put down on paper all that I had heard, no one would believe that such a person really existed and my picture of Kamo would be regarded as a novelist’s make-believe. So, nearly everything that Arabidze told me I attributed to the revolutionary romanticism of the narrator.

But, as not infrequently happens, the reality proved more complex and more startling than any "make-believe".

Not long afterwards these stories about Kamo were confirmed by N. N. Flerov, a man I had known way back in 1892 in Tiflis, when he had been a proof-reader on the newspaper Kavkaz. In those days he had been a “populist”, just back from exile in Siberia. He was a very tired man, but he had dipped into Marx and was extremely eloquent in trying to persuade me and my comrade Afanasiev that “history is working in our favour”.

Like many of the tired ones, he liked evolution better than revolution.

But in 1905 he turned up in Moscow a changed man.

“There’s a social revolution beginning in this country, old chap. Do you realise that? Yes, and it’s really going to happen because it has started from the bottom, from the soil," he said, coughing drily, in the careful voice of a man whose lungs are being eaten up by tuberculosis. It was good to see that he had lost the near-sightedness of a narrow

* Mikhalchuk was a janitor of a house in Nemetskaya Street (now named after Bauman). At his trial for the murder of Bauman he was acquitted. In 1906 he was charged with theft and convicted.

** The Georgian actor Vaso Arabidze.
rationalist and I was delighted to hear such warmth in his voice.

"And what amazing revolutionaries are coming out of the working-class environment! Just listen to this!"

He started telling us about some amazing person and, when I had listened for a while, I asked, "Is his name Kamo?"

"So, you know him, eh? Only from hearsay...."

He rubbed his high forehead and the sparse grey curls on his balding skull, thought for a moment, and then said something that reminded me of the rationalist he had been thirteen years ago.

"When people talk a lot about a person, it means he's an unusual person and, perhaps, that 'one swallow' that 'doesn't make a summer'."

But having paid tribute to the past with this reservation, he confirmed what Arabidze had told me and told the following story on his own account.

At the station in Baku, where Flerov was to meet an acquaintance, he was violently pushed by a worker.

"Please, curse me!" the man whispered to him.

Flerov realised there was a good reason for this request and, while he complied, the worker stood holding his cap apologetically and muttering to him under his breath.

"I know you. You're Flerov. I'm being followed. Someone else will be along soon with a bandage round his cheek, and wearing a checked overcoat. Tell him the safe house isn't safe any more—there's an ambush there. Take him home with you. Got it?"

The worker then pulled on his cap and himself shouted rudely, "Enough of your yelling! What's the matter? Did I break one of your ribs, or what?"

Flerov gave a laugh.

"Neatly acted, wasn't it? For a long time afterwards I wondered why he didn't rouse my suspicions, why I submitted so easily. I suppose I was impressed by his air of authority. A provocateur or a government spy would have asked me politely, wouldn't have had the gumption to give me an order. I met him two or three times after that and once he spent the night with me and we had a long chat. Theoretically he is not very well equipped. He knows this and is very much ashamed of the fact, but he just hasn't the time for reading and educating himself. And he doesn't really need to. You see, he's a revolutionary to the core, in all his emotions, he'll never be shaken. Revolutionary work is as much a physical necessity to him as air and bread."

About two years later, on the Island of Capri I was given another glimpse of Kamo by Leonid Krasin. We were recalling various old comrades and suddenly he gave a little laugh.

"Remember how surprised you were when I winked in the street at that dashing Caucasian officer? 'Who's that?' you said in surprise. I told you it was Prince Dadushkeli, an acquaintance of mine from Tiflis. Remember? I was sure you didn't believe I could know such a dandy and suspected me of pulling your leg. Actually, it was Kamo. He played the part beautifully! Now he has been arrested in Berlin and this time it's probably all up with him. He has gone mad. Between you and me, he's not all that mad. But I don't suppose that will save him. The Russian Embassy wants him extradited. If the gendarmes know even half of what he's been up to, they'll hang Kamo."

I related all I knew about Kamo and asked Krasin how much of it was true.

"It may all be true," he said after a moment's thought. "I, too, have heard all these tales of his
amazing resourcefulness and daring. Of course, the workers, in their desire to have a hero of their own, may be slightly embroidering the tale of Kamo’s exploits, creating a revolutionary legend with an eye to stimulating class-consciousness. But he is an exceptionally original chap. Sometimes one feels he has been spoiled by success and plays the fool a bit. But this is not just youthful recklessness, not showing off and not romanticism, it originates from something else. He plays the fool very seriously, but at the same time he seems to do it in a dream, without any regard for reality. Take the following incident. In Berlin, not long before his arrest he was walking down the street with a comrade, a Russian girl, and she pointed to a kitten sitting in the window of a burgher’s house and said, ‘Isn’t he lovely!’ Kamo gave one jump, snatched the kitten off the window-sill and presented it to his companion—‘Here you are! Please, take it!’

‘The girl had to convince the Germans that the kitten had jumped out of the window itself. That’s not the only story of its kind, and my explanation is that Kamo has no sense of property whatsoever. That ‘please, take it!’ is often on his lips when it’s a matter of his own shirt or boots or any of his personal belongings.

‘Perhaps it’s just kindness? No. But he’s an excellent comrade. He makes no distinction between mine and thine. It’s always ‘our group’, ‘our party’, ‘our cause’.

‘And there was another incident, also in Berlin. In a very crowded street, a shopkeeper threw a boy out of his doorway. Kamo went rushing into the shop and his frightened companion could scarcely hold him back. ‘Let me go, please,’ he shouted struggling, ‘he needs a sock on the jaw!’ Perhaps he was rehearsing his part as a madman, but I doubt it. At that time we couldn’t let him go out unaccompanied. He was certain to get into some sort of trouble.

‘He did tell me once that during an act of expropriation, when he was to throw a bomb, he thought he was being shadowed by two detectives. There was only about a minute left. So he walked up to the detectives and said, ‘Get out, I’m going to shoot!’”

‘And did they?’ I asked.

‘Of course, they did.’

‘But why did you tell them that?’

‘Why not? I thought I had better, so I did.’

‘But what was the real reason? Were you sorry for them?’

‘That made him angry and he flushed.

‘Not a bit sorry! Perhaps they were just poor people. What had it to do with them? Why should they hang about there? I wasn’t the only one throwing bombs. They might have got injured or killed.’

‘There was another incident that enlarges and perhaps explains his conduct in this case. In Didub he once thought he was being tailed by a spy, so he grabbed the man, held him against a wall and started talking to him in the following manner: ‘You’re a poor man, aren’t you? Then why do you work against the poor? Are the rich your comrades? Why are you a scoundrel? Do you want me to kill you?’

‘The man said he didn’t want to be killed. He turned out to be a worker from the Batumi group. He had come to fetch revolutionary literature but had lost the address of the comrade he used to stay with and was trying to find the place from memory. So, you see what an original chap Kamo is?”

The finest of Kamo’s exploits was the brilliant pretence that deceived the omniscient Berlin psychiatrists. But Kamo’s skilful malingering did not
help him much. The government of Wilhelm II handed him over to the tsarist gendarmes. He was put in chains, taken to Tiflis and confined to the mental department of the Mikhailovsky Hospital. If I am not mistaken, he simulated madness for three years. His escape from the hospital was also a fantastic exploit.

I met Kamo in person in 1920, in Moscow, in Fortunatova's flat, which used to be mine, on the corner of Vozdvizhenka and Mokhovaya Street.

A strong well-knit man with a typical Caucasian face and a good, very attentive and stern look in his soft dark eyes, he was wearing Red Army uniform.

There was a certain restraint and caution in his movements that suggested he was somewhat embarrassed by his unaccustomed surroundings. I realised at once that he was tired of being questioned about his revolutionary work and was now completely absorbed in something else. He was studying to enter the Military Academy.

"Science is difficult to understand," he said disappointedly, patting and stroking a textbook, as though he were fondling an angry dog. "There aren't enough pictures. Books ought to have more pictures, so that you can tell what dispositions are right away. Do you know what they are?"

I didn't and Kamo gave me an embarrassed smile.

"You see—"

The smile was helpless, almost child-like. I knew that kind of helplessness well because I had experienced it myself in my youth, when confronted with the verbal wisdom of books. And I could well understand how difficult it must be to overcome the resistance of books for a fearless man of action whose service to the revolution consisted mainly in creating new facts.

This gave me a great liking for Kamo from the start and the more we got to know each other the more he impressed me with the depth and accuracy of his revolutionary feeling.

It was quite impossible to equate everything I knew about Kamo's legendary daring, superhuman will and amazing self-control with the man who sat before me at a desk piled with textbooks.

It seemed incredible that after such enormous and sustained effort he should have remained such a gentle unaffected person so young in heart, so fresh and strong.

He had still not outlived his youth and was romantically in love with a very fine, although not startlingly beautiful woman, who was, I believe, older than himself.

He spoke of his love with the lyrical passion of which only chaste and vigorous young men are capable.

"She's wonderful! She's a doctor and she knows everything, everything about science. When she comes home from work she says to me 'What's this you can't understand? But it's so simple!' And she's right, it is! Very simple! What a person she is!"

And when describing his love with words that sometimes sounded ridiculous, he would lapse into unexpected pauses, ruffle his thick curly hair and look at me with a silent question on his lips.

"Well, and what then?" I would encourage him.

"You see, it's like this—" he would say vaguely, and then I should have to pump him for a long time to hear the most naïve of all questions:

"Perhaps I ought not to get married?"

"Why not?"

"Well, you know, there's the revolution, I've got a lot of study and work to do. We're surrounded by enemies, we've got to fight!"

And by his knitted brows and the stern light in
his eyes I could see he was really tortured by the
question. Would not marriage be a betrayal of the
revolution? It was strange, a little comic and sin-
gularly moving that the youthful vigour and fresh-
ness of his virility should be at odds with his
tremendous revolutionary energy.

He spoke with the same passionate enthusiasm
about the need to go abroad and work there as he
did about his love.

"I've asked Lenin to let me go. 'I'll be a useful
man there,' I tell him. 'No,' he says, 'you've got to
study!' So, there you are. He knows! Ah, what a
man! Laughs like a kid. Have you ever heard
him laugh?"

His face brightened in a smile, then clouded
again as he complained of the difficulties of study-
ing military science.

When I asked him about the past, he unwillingly
confirmed all the amazing tales about him, but
frowned and added little that was new to me.

"I did a lot of silly things as well," he said one
day. "I once got a policeman drunk with wine and
tarred his head and beard for him. We knew each
other and he asked me, 'What were you carrying
in that basket yesterday?' 'Eggs,' I said. 'And what
papers underneath?' 'No papers!' 'You're lying,' he
says, 'I saw the papers!' 'Well, why didn't you
search me then?' 'I was coming back from the
baths,' he says. The silly fool! I was angry with
him for forcing me to tell lies, so I took him to an
inn. He got drunk as a lord and I gave him a good
tarring. I was young in those days, liked playing
the fool." And he screwed up his face, as if he had
tasted something sour.

I tried to talk him into writing his memoirs,
arguing that they would be useful to young people
who were unfamiliar with revolutionary techniques.

He shook his curly head and for a long time would
not agree.

"I can't do it. I don't know how. What sort of
writer would I make—an uncultured fellow like
me."

But he agreed when he saw that his reminis-
cences would also be of service to the revolution, and
as always, no doubt, having once taken a decision,
he set about carrying it out.

He wrote not very correctly and rather colour-
lessly, and obviously tried to say more about his
comrades and less about himself. When I pointed
this out to him, he grew angry.

"Do you expect me to worship myself? I'm not
a priest."

"Do priests worship themselves?"

"Well, who else then? Young ladies worship
themselves, don't they?"

But after this he began to write more vividly and
with less restraint about himself.

He was handsome in his own way, though one
did not realise it at once.

Before me sat a strong, lithe figure in the uni-
form of the Red Army, but I could see him as a
worker, as a deliverer of eggs, a cab-driver, a dan-
dy, Prince Dadeshkeliani, a madman in chains, a
madman who had induced learned men of science
to believe in his madness.

I don't remember what made me mention Tria-
dze, a man with only three fingers on his left hand,
who had stayed with me on Capri.

"Yes, I know him—he's a Menshevik!" Kamo
said and, with a shrug and a frown of contempt,
went on: "I can't understand the Mensheviks. What
makes them like that? They live in the Caucasus,
in a land like ours—mountains shooting up to the
sky, rivers rushing into the sea, princes all over the
place, with all their riches, while the people are
poor. Why are the Mensheviks such a weak lot? Why don’t they want a revolution?”

He talked at great length and with increasing warmth, but there was one idea for which he just could not find the right words. His outburst ended with a heavy sigh.

“The working people have a lot of enemies. And the most dangerous is the kind that can tell un-truths in our own language.”

Naturally, what I most wanted to understand was how this man, who was so “innocent-minded”, had found the strength and skill to convince experienced psychiatrists that he was mad.

But apparently he did not like being questioned about this. He would shrug and answer evasively.

“Well, what can I say? I had to do it! I was saving my skin and I thought it would help the revolution.”

And only when I said that in his memoirs he would have to write about this critical period in his life, and it would have to be well considered and perhaps I might be useful to him, did he become very thoughtful, even closing his eyes and clenching the fingers of both hands together till they were like a single fist.

He began to speak slowly: “What can I say? They kept feeling me, tapping my knees, tickling me, all the rest of it. But they couldn’t feel my soul with their fingers, could they? They made me look in the glass and what a face I saw there! Not my own. Someone very thin, with long matted hair and wild eyes—ugly devil! Horrible!

“I bared my teeth. Maybe I really am mad, I thought to myself. That was a terrible moment! But I thought of the right thing to do and spat at the mirror. They both gave each other the wink, like a couple of crooks, you know. Yes, they liked that, I thought—a man forgetting his own face!”

He was silent for a moment, then went on softly.

“What I really thought about a lot was, will I hold out or will I really go mad? That was bad, I couldn’t trust myself, you see? It was like dangling over the edge of a precipice. I couldn’t see what I was holding on to.”

And after another pause he smiled broadly.

“Of course, they know their job, their science. But they don’t know the Caucasians. Maybe any Caucasian would seem a madman to them, eh? And this one was a Bolshevik as well. Yes, I thought of that too. Who wouldn’t? Well, let’s keep it up, I thought, and see who gets the other mad first. I didn’t manage it. They stayed as they were, and so did I. In Tiflis they didn’t test me so much. I reckon they thought the Germans couldn’t have been mistaken.”

Of all he told me that was his longest story.

And it seemed to be the most unpleasant for him.

A few minutes later he returned to the subject unexpectedly. He gave me a nudge with his shoulder—we were sitting beside each other—and said in a quiet voice, but harshly:

“There’s a Russian word—yarost.* Do you know it? I never understood what it meant, this yarost. But when I was before those doctors I reckon I was in a yarost, so it seems to me now. Yarost—that’s a fine word. Is it true there used to be a Russian god called Yarilo?”

And when he heard that there was such a god, and that this god was the personification of the creative forces, Kamo laughed.

For me Kamo was one of those revolutionaries for whom the future is more real than the present.

* The nearest English equivalent is “fury”.—Tr.
This does not mean that they are dreamers. Not at all. It means that the power of their emotional class revolutionary spirit is so harmoniously and soundly organised that it feeds their reason, provides soil for it to grow in and ranges ahead of it.

Outside their revolutionary work the whole reality in which their class lives seems to them like a bad dream, a nightmare, and the true reality in which they live is the socialist future.

Translated by Robert Daglish

MITYA PAVLOV

Mitja Pavlov, from Sormovo, where I come from myself, died of typhus somewhere in Yelet.

In 1905, during the Moscow uprising, he brought us from St. Petersburg a big box of fulminate of mercury capsules and thirty-five feet of fuse, wound round his chest. Either his sweating had made the fuse swell, or it had been too tightly wrapped round his ribs, but as soon as he entered my room Mitja collapsed on the floor, his face turned blue and his eyes bulged, as if he were dying of asphyxia.

"You must be crazy, Mitya! You might have fainted on the way here. D’you realise what would have happened to you then?"

Gasping for breath, he replied guiltily, "We’d have lost the fuse, and the capsules as well."

M. Tikhvinsky, who was massaging his chest, also scolded him grumpily, but Mitja was screwing up his eyes and asking questions.

"How many bombs will it make? Will they smash us? Is Presnya still holding out?"

Then, from where he was lying on the sofa he sent a look at Tikhvinsky, who was examining the capsules.

"Is he the one who makes the bombs?" he asked in a whisper. "Is he a professor? A worker? You don’t say—"

And all of a sudden he inquired anxiously:

"He won’t blow you up, will he?"

And not one word about himself, about the danger he had only just escaped by a hair’s breadth.

Translated by Robert Daglish