

Chapter 1



The Ascent

And the years go by. . . .

Not in swift staccato, as they joke in camp—"winter-summer, winter-summer"—but a long-drawn-out autumn, an endless winter, an unwilling spring, and only a summer that is short. In the Archipelago . . . summer is short.

Even one mere year, whew, how long it lasts! Even in one year how much time is left for you to think! For 330 days you stomp out to line-up in a drizzling, slushy rain, and in a piercing blizzard, and in a biting and still subzero cold. For 330 days you work away at hateful, alien work with your mind unoccupied. For 330 evenings you squinch up, wet, chilled, in the end-of-work line-up, waiting for the convoy to assemble from the distant watchtowers. And then there is the march out. And the march back. And bending down over 730 bowls of gruel, over 730 portions of grits. Yes, and waking up and going to sleep on your multiple bunk. And neither radio nor books to distract you. There are none, and thank God.

And that is only one year. And there are ten. There are twenty-five. . . .

And then, too, when you are lying in the hospital with dystrophy—that, too, is a good time—to think.

Think! Draw some conclusions from misfortune.

And all that endless time, after all, the prisoners' brains and souls are not inactive?! In the mass and from a distance they seem like swarming lice, but they are the crown of creation, right? After all, once upon a time a weak little spark of God was

breathed into them too—is it not true? So what has become of it now?

For centuries it was considered that a criminal was given a *sentence* for precisely this purpose, to think about his crime for the whole period of his sentence, be conscience-stricken, repent, and gradually reform.

But the Gulag Archipelago knows no pangs of conscience! Out of one hundred natives—five are thieves, and their transgressions are no reproach in their own eyes, but a mark of valor. They dream of carrying out such feats in the future even more brazenly and cleverly. They have nothing to repent. Another five . . . *stole* on a big scale, but not from people; in our times, the only place where one can steal on a big scale is from the state, which itself squanders the people's money without pity or sense—so what was there for such types to repent of? Maybe that they had not stolen more and divvied up—and thus remained free? And, so far as another 85 percent of the natives were concerned—they had never committed any crimes whatever. What were they supposed to repent of? That they had thought what they thought? (Nonetheless, they managed to pound and muddle some of them to such an extent that they did repent—of being so depraved. . . . Let us remember the desperation of Nina Peregud because she was unworthy of Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya.) Or that a man had surrendered and become a POW in a hopeless situation? Or that he had taken employment under the Germans instead of dying of starvation? (Nonetheless, they managed so to confuse what was permitted and what was forbidden that there were some such who were tormented greatly: I would have done better to die than to have earned that bread.) Or that while working for nothing in the collective-farm fields, he had taken a mite to feed his children? Or that he had taken something from a factory for the same reason?

No, not only do you not repent, but your clean conscience, like a clear mountain lake, shines in your eyes. (And your eyes, purified by suffering, infallibly perceive the least haze in other eyes; for example, they infallibly pick out stool pigeons. And the Cheka-GB is not aware of this capacity of ours to see with the eyes of truth—it is our “secret weapon” against that institution. And State Security slips up here with us.)

It was in this nearly unanimous consciousness of our innocence that the main distinction arose between us and the hard-labor prisoners of Dostoyevsky, the hard-labor prisoners of P. Yakubovich. There they were conscious of being doomed renegades, whereas we were confidently aware that they could haul in any free person at all in just the same way they had hauled us in; that barbed wire was only a nominal dividing line between us. In earlier times there had been among the majority . . . the unconditional consciousness of personal guilt, and among us . . . the consciousness of disaster on a mammoth scale.

Just not to perish from the disaster! It had to be survived.

Wasn't this the root cause of the astounding rarity of camp suicides? Yes, rarity, although every ex-prisoner could in all probability recall a case of suicide. But he could recall even more escapes. There were certainly more escapes than suicides! (Admirers of socialist realism can praise me: I am pursuing an optimistic line.) And there were far more self-inflicted injuries, too, than there were suicides! But this, too, is an act indicating love of life—a straightforward calculation of sacrificing a portion to save the whole. I even imagine that, statistically speaking, there were fewer suicides per thousand of the population in camp than in freedom. I have no way of verifying this, of course.

But Skripnikova recalls how a man thirty years old hanged himself in 1931 in the women's toilet in Medvezhyegorsk—and hanged himself on the very day he was to be released! So maybe it was out of a feeling of disgust for the *freedom* of that time? (Two years earlier his wife had abandoned him, but he had not hanged himself then.) Well, the designer Voronov hanged himself in the club of the main camp center of Burepolom. The Communist Party official Aramovich, a second-term, hanged himself in 1947 in the garret of the machinery-repair factory in Knyazh-Pogost. In Kraslag during the war years Lithuanians who had been reduced to a state of total despair—mainly because nothing in their former lives had prepared them for our cruelties—marched on infantrymen so as to get themselves shot down. In 1949, in the interrogation cell in Vladimir-Volynsk, a young fellow stunned by his interrogation tried to hang himself, but Boronyuk pulled him down in time. At the Kaluga Gates a former Latvian officer who was hospitalized in the camp infirm-

ary began to creep stealthily up some stairs—they led to the incomplete, empty upper stories. The “zechka” nurse saw him and went in pursuit. She caught up with him on the open balcony of the sixth floor. She caught him by the bathrobe, but the suicide slipped off the robe and stepped off into nothingness dressed in his underwear—and flashed past like a white streak of lightning in plain sight of busy Bolshaya Kaluzhskaya Street on a sunny summer day. When Emmi, a German Communist, learned about her husband’s death, she left the barracks in sub-zero weather undressed so as to catch cold. The Englishman Kelly, in the Vladimir Special Purpose Prison, very skillfully cut his veins with the door wide open and the jailer right there on the threshold.¹

I repeat: there are many others who can recount similar cases—but nonetheless, out of tens of millions who have served time, their total number will be small. Even among these examples, it is clear that a much greater proportion of suicides is accounted for by foreigners, Westerners; for them the transition to the Archipelago . . . was a more shattering blow than for us, so they put an end to it. And suicides were frequent among the loyalists too (but not among the hard-heads). And one can understand why—after all, their heads must have got thoroughly mixed up and filled with incessant buzzing. How could they stand it? (Zosia Zaleska, a Polish noblewoman who had devoted her entire life to the “cause of Communism” by serving in the Soviet intelligence service, tried to commit suicide three times during her interrogation: she tried to hang herself—they pulled her down; she cut her veins—but they stopped her; she jumped onto the window sill on the seventh floor—but the drowsy interrogator managed to grab hold of her by her dress. They saved her life three times—so they could shoot her.)

And, anyway, what is the correct interpretation of suicide? Ans Bernshtein, for example, insists that suicides are not at all cowards, that great will power is required for suicide. He himself wove a rope out of bandages and throttled himself by lifting his feet off the floor. But green circles appeared before his eyes and there was a ringing in his ears—and each time he involun-

1. He did it with a piece of enamel from the washbasin. Kelly hid it in his shoe and his shoe stood by his bed. Kelly dropped his blanket over the shoe to cover it, got out the piece of enamel, and cut his wrist vein beneath the blanket.

tarily put his feet back on the ground. During his last try the homemade rope broke—and he felt glad that he was still alive.

I am not going to dispute that perhaps even in the most extreme despair you still need will power to commit suicide. For a long time I would not have taken it upon myself to pass judgment on this at all. All my life long I was absolutely convinced that I would never consider suicide in any circumstances whatever. But not so long ago I dragged my way through gloomy months when it seemed to me that my whole life’s cause had perished, especially if I remained alive. And I remember very clearly indeed the revulsion against life that came over me and the sensation that to die . . . was easier than to live. In my opinion, in a state like that it requires more strength of will to stay alive than to die. But, in all probability, with other people, in a different extremity, this turns out differently. And that is why from time immemorial the two opinions have existed.

It is a very spectacular idea to imagine all the innocently outraged millions beginning to commit suicide en masse, causing double vexation to the government—both by demonstrating their innocence and by depriving the government of free manpower. And maybe the government would have had to soften up and begin to take pity on its subjects?—well, hardly! Stalin wouldn’t have been stopped by that. He would have merely picked up another twenty million people from freedom.

But it did not happen! People died by the hundreds of thousands and millions, driven, it would seem, to the extremity of extremities—but for some reason there were no suicides! Condemned to a misshapen existence, to waste away from starvation, to exhaustion from labor—they did not put an end to themselves!

And thinking the whole thing over, I found that proof to be the stronger. A suicide is always a bankrupt, always a human being in a blind alley, a human being who has gambled his life and lost and is without the will to continue the struggle. If these millions of helpless and pitiful vermin still did not put an end to themselves—this meant some kind of invincible feeling was alive inside them. Some very powerful idea.

This was their feeling of universal innocence. It was the sense of an ordeal of the entire people—like the Tatar yoke.

But what if one has nothing to repent of—what then, what then does the prisoner think about all the time? “Poverty and prison . . . give wisdom.” They do. But—where is it to be directed?

Here is how it was with many others, not just with me. Our initial, first prison sky consisted of black swirling storm clouds and black pillars of volcanic eruptions—this was the heaven of Pompeii, the heaven of the Day of Judgment, because it was not just anyone who had been arrested, but I—the center of this world.

Our last prison sky was infinitely high, infinitely clear, even paler than sky-blue.

We all (except religious believers) began from one point: we tried to tear our hair from our head, but our hair had been clipped close! . . . How could we? How could we not have seen those who informed against us?! How could we not have seen our enemies? (And how we hated them! How could we avenge ourselves on them?) And what recklessness! What blindness! How many errors! How can they be corrected? They must be corrected all the more swiftly! We must write. . . . We must speak out. . . . We must communicate. . . .

But—there is nothing that we can do. And nothing is going to save us! At the appropriate time we will sign Form 206. At the appropriate time the tribunal will read us our sentence in our presence, or we will learn it in absentia from the OSO.

Then there begins the period of transit prisons. Interspersed with our thoughts about our future camp, we now love to recall our past: How well we used to live! (Even if we lived badly.) But how many unused opportunities there were! How many flowers we left uncrumpled! . . . When will we now make up for it? If I only manage to survive—oh, how differently, how wisely, I am going to live! The day of our future *release*? It shines like a rising sun!

And the conclusion is: Survive to reach it! Survive! At any price!

This is simply a turn of phrase, a sort of habit of speech: “at any price.”

But then the words swell up with their full meaning, and an

And whoever takes that vow, whoever does not blink before its crimson burst—allows his own misfortune to overshadow both the entire common misfortune and the whole world.

This is the great fork of camp life. From this point the roads go to the right and to the left. One of them will rise and the other will descend. If you go to the right—you lose your life, and if you go to the left—you lose your conscience.

One’s own order to oneself, “*Survive!*,” is the natural splash of a living person. Who does not wish to survive? Who does not have the right to survive? Straining all the strength of our body! An order to all our cells: Survive! A powerful charge is introduced into the chest cavity, and the heart is surrounded by an electrical cloud so as not to stop beating. They lead thirty emaciated but wiry zeks three miles across the Arctic ice to a bathhouse. The bath is not worth even a warm word. Six men at a time wash themselves in five shifts, and the door opens straight into the subzero temperature, and four shifts are obliged to stand there before or after bathing—because they cannot be left without convoy. And not only does none of them get pneumonia. They don’t even catch cold. (And for ten years one old man had his bath just like that, serving out his term from age fifty to sixty. But then he was released, he was at home. Warm and cared for, he burned up in one month’s time. That order—“Survive!”—was not there. . . .)

But simply “to survive” does not yet mean “at any price.” “At any price” means: at the price of someone else.

Let us admit the truth: At that great fork in the camp road, at that great divider of souls, it was not the majority of the prisoners that turned to the right. Alas, not the majority. But fortunately neither was it just a few. There are many of them—human beings—who made this choice. But they did not shout about themselves. You had to look closely to see them. Dozens of times this same choice had arisen before them too, but they always knew, and knew their own stand.

Take Arnold Susi, who was sent to camp at the age of about fifty. He had never been a believer, but he had always been fundamentally decent, he had never led any other kind of life—and he was not about to begin any other. He was a “Westerner.” And what that meant was that he was doubly unprepared, and kept putting his foot into it all the time, and getting into serious difficulties. He worked at general work. And he was impatient!

in a penalty camp—and he still managed to survive; he survived as exactly the same kind of person he had been when he came to camp. I knew him at the very beginning, and I knew him . . . afterward, and I can testify personally. True, there were three seriously mitigating circumstances which accompanied him throughout his camp life: He was classified as an invalid. For several years he received parcels. And thanks to his musical abilities, he got some additional nourishment out of amateur theatricals. But these three circumstances only explain why he survived. If they had not existed, he would have died. But he would not have changed. (And perhaps those who died did die because they did not change?)

And Tarashkevich, a perfectly ordinary, straightforward person, recalls: "There were many prisoners prepared to grovel for a bread ration or a puff of makhorka smoke. I was dying, but I kept my soul pure: I always called a spade a spade."

It has been known for many centuries that prison causes the profound rebirth of a human being. The examples are innumerable—such as that of Silvio Pellico: Through serving eight years he was transformed from a furious Carbonaro to a meek Roman Catholic.² In our country they always mention Dostoyevsky in this respect. And what about Pisarev? What remained of his revolutionary rebelliousness after imprisonment in the Peter and Paul Fortress? One can certainly debate whether this is good for revolution, but these transformations always proceed in the direction of deepening the soul. Ibsen wrote: "From lack of oxygen even the conscience will wither."³

By no means! It is not by any means so simple! In fact, it is the opposite! Take General Gorbatov: He had fought from his very youth, advanced through the ranks of the army, and had no time at all in which to think about things. But he was imprisoned, and how good it was—various events awakened within his recollection, such as his having suspected an innocent man of espionage; or his having ordered by mistake the execution of a quite innocent Pole.⁴ (Well, when else would he have remembered this? After rehabilitation he did not remember such things very much?) Enough has been written about prisoners' changes

of heart to raise it to the level of penological theory. For example, in the prerevolutionary *Prison Herald* Luchenetsky wrote: "Darkness renders a person more sensitive to light; involuntary inactivity in imprisonment arouses in him a thirst for life, movement, work; the quiet compels profound pondering over his own 'I,' over surrounding conditions, over his own past and present, and forces him to think about his future."

Our teachers, who had never served time themselves, felt for prisoners only the natural sympathy of the outsider; Dostoyevsky, however, who served time himself, was a proponent of punishment! And this is something worth thinking about.

The proverb says: "Freedom spoils, and lack of freedom teaches."

But Pellico and Luchenetsky wrote about *prison*. But Dostoyevsky demanded punishment—in prison. But *what kind of* lack of freedom is it that educates?

Camp?

That is something to think about.

Of course, in comparison with prison our camps are poisonous and harmful.

Of course, they were not concerned with our souls when they pumped up the Archipelago. But nonetheless: is it really hopeless to stand fast in camp?

And more than that: was it really impossible for one's soul to rise in camp?

Here is E.K., who was born around 1940, one of those boys who, under Khrushchev, gathered to read poems on Mayakovsky Square, but were hauled off instead in Black Marias. From camp, from a Potma camp, he writes to his girl: "Here all the trivia and fuss have decreased. . . . I have experienced a turning point. . . . Here you harken to that voice deep inside you, which amid the surfeit and vanity used to be stifled by the roar from outside."

At the Samarka Camp in 1946 a group of intellectuals had reached the very brink of death: They were worn down by hunger, cold, and work beyond their powers. And they were even deprived of sleep. They had nowhere to lie down. Dugout barracks had not yet been built. Did they go and steal? Or squeal? Or whimper about their ruined lives? No! Foreseeing the approach of death in days rather than weeks, here is how they spent their last sleepless leisure, sitting up against the wall:

2. S. Pellico, *Moi Temnitsy (My Prisons)*, St. Petersburg, 1836.

3. Henrik Ibsen, *An Enemy of the People*.

4. *Novy Mir*, 1964, No. 4.

Timofeyev-Ressovsky gathered them into a "seminar," and they hastened to share with one another what one of them knew and the others did not—they delivered their last lectures to each other. Father Savely—spoke of "unshameful death," a priest academician—about patristics, one of the Uniate fathers—about something in the area of dogmatics and canonical writings, an electrical engineer—on the principles of the energetics of the future, and a Leningrad economist—on how the effort to create principles of Soviet economics had failed for lack of new ideas. Timofeyev-Ressovsky himself talked about the principles of microphysics. From one session to the next, participants were missing—they were already in the morgue.

That is the sort of person who can be interested in all this while already growing numb with approaching death—now that is an intellectual!

Pardon me, you . . . love life? You, you! You who exclaim and sing over and over and dance it too: "I love you, life! Oh, I love you, life!" Do you? Well, go on, love it! Camp life—love that too! It, too, is life!

There where there is no struggle with fate,
There you will resurrect your soul. . . .

You haven't understood a thing. When you get there, you'll collapse.

Along our chosen road are twists and turns and twists and turns. Uphill? Or up into the heavens? Let's go, let's stumble and stagger.

The day of liberation! What can it give us after so many years? We will change unrecognizably and so will our near and dear ones—and places which once were dear to us will seem stranger than strange.

And the thought of freedom after a time even becomes a forced thought. Farfetched. Strange.

The day of "liberation"! As if there were any liberty in this country! Or as if it were possible to liberate anyone who has not first become liberated in his own soul.

The stones roll down from under our feet. Downward, into the past! They are the ashes of the past!

And we ascend!

It is a good thing *to think* in prison, but it is not bad in camp either. Because, and this is the main thing, there are no *meetings*. For ten years you are free from all kinds of meetings! Is that not mountain air? While they openly claim your labor and your body, to the point of exhaustion and even death, the camp keepers do not encroach at all on your thoughts. They do not try to screw down your brains and to fasten them in place.⁵ And this results in a sensation of freedom of much greater magnitude than the freedom of one's feet to run along on the level.

No one tries to persuade you *to apply* for Party membership. No one comes around to squeeze membership dues out of you in *voluntary* societies. There is no trade union—the same kind of protector of your interests as an official lawyer before a tribunal. And there are no "production meetings." You cannot be elected to any position. You cannot be appointed some kind of delegate. And the really important thing is . . . that they cannot compel you to be a propagandist. Nor—to listen to propaganda. Nor—when someone jerks the string, to shout: "We demand! . . . We will not permit! . . ." Nor—will they ever drag you off to the electoral precinct to vote freely and secretly for a single candidate. No one requires any "socialist undertakings" of you. Nor—self-criticism of your mistakes. Nor—articles in the wall newspaper. Nor—an interview with a provincial correspondent.

A free head—now is that not an advantage of life in the Archipelago?

And there is one more freedom: No one can deprive you of your family and property—you have already been deprived of them. What does not exist—not even God can take away. And this is a basic freedom.

It is good to think in imprisonment. And the most insignificant cause gives you a push in the direction of extended and important thoughts. Once in a long, long while, once in three years maybe, they brought a movie to camp. The film turned out to be—the cheapest kind of "sports" comedy—*The*

5. Except for the unfortunate period of the White Sea-Baltic Canal and the Moscow-Volga Canal.

*First Glove.** It was a bore. But from the screen they kept drumming into the audience the moral of the film:

The result is what counts, and the result is not in your favor.

On the screen they kept laughing. In the hall the audience kept laughing too. But blinking as you came out into the sunlit camp yard, you kept thinking about this phrase. And during the evening you kept thinking about it on your bunk. And Monday morning out in line-up. And you could keep thinking about it as long as you wanted. And where else could you have concentrated on it like that? And slow clarity descended into your brain.

This was no joke. This was an infectious thought. It has long since been inculcated in our Fatherland—and they keep on inculcating it over and over. The concept that only the material result counts has become so much a part of us that when, for example, some Tukhachevsky, Yagoda, or Zinoviev was proclaimed . . . a traitor who had sidled up to the enemy, people only exclaimed in a chorus of astonishment: "*What more could he want?*"

Now that is a high moral plane for you! Now that is a real unit of measure for you! "What more could he want?" Since he had a belly full of chow, and twenty suits, and two country homes, and an automobile, and an airplane, and fame—what more could he want?!! Millions of our compatriots find it unthinkable to imagine that a human being (and I am not speaking here of this particular trio) might have been motivated by something other than material gain!

To such an extent has everyone been indoctrinated with and absorbed the slogan: "The result is what counts."

Whence did this come to us?

In the first place—from the glory of our banners and the so-called "honor of our Motherland." We choked, cut down, and cut up all our neighbors in our expansion—and in our Fatherland it became well established that: The result is what counts.

And then from our Demidovs, Kabans and Tsybukins. They clambered up, without looking behind them to see whose ears they were smashing with their jackboots. And ever more firmly it became established among a once pious and openhearted people: The result is what counts.

And then—from all kinds of socialists, and most of all from the most modern, infallible, and intolerant Teaching, which consists of this one thing only: The result is what counts! It is important to forge a fighting Party! And to seize power! And to hold on to power! And to remove all enemies! And to conquer in pig iron and steel! And to launch rockets!

And though for this industry and for these rockets it was necessary to sacrifice the way of life, and the integrity of the family, and the spiritual health of the people, and the very soul of our fields and forests and rivers—to hell with them! The result is what counts!!!

But that is a lie! Here we have been breaking our backs for years at All-Union hard labor. Here in slow annual spirals we have been climbing up to an understanding of life—and from this height it can all be seen so clearly: It is not the result that counts! It is not the result—but *the spirit!* Not *what*—but *how*. Not what has been attained—but at what price.

And so it is with us the prisoners—if it is the result which counts, then it is also true that one must survive at any price. And what that means is: One must become a stool pigeon, betray one's comrades. And thereby get oneself set up comfortably. And perhaps even get time off sentence. In the light of the Infallible Teaching there is, evidently, nothing reprehensible in this. After all, if one does that, then the result will be in our favor, and the result is what counts.

No one is going to argue. It is pleasant to win. But not at the price of losing one's human countenance.

If it is the result which counts—you must strain every nerve and sinew to avoid *general work*. You must bend down, be servile, act meanly—yet hang on to your position as a trusty. And by this means . . . survive.

If it is the essence that counts, then the time has come to reconcile yourself to *general work*. To tatters. To torn skin on the hands. To a piece of bread which is smaller and worse. And perhaps . . . to death. But while you're alive, you drag your way along proudly with an aching back. And that is when—when you have ceased to be afraid of threats and are not chasing after rewards—you become the most dangerous character in the owl-like view of the bosses. Because . . . what hold do they have on you?

You even begin to like carrying hand barrows with rubbish (yes, but not with stone!) and discussing with your work mate how the movies influence literature. You begin to like sitting down on the empty cement mixing trough and lighting up a smoke next to your bricklaying. And you are actually and simply proud if, when the foreman passes you, he squints at your courses, checks their alignment with the rest of the wall, and says: "Did you lay that? Good line."

You need that wall like you need a hole in the head, nor do you believe it is going to bring closer the happy future of the people, but, pitiful tattered slave that you are, you smile at this creation of your own hands.

The Anarchist's daughter, Galya Venediktova, worked as a nurse in the Medical Section, but when she saw that what went on there was *not healing* but only the business of getting fixed up in a good spot—out of stubbornness she left and went off to general work, taking up a spade and a sledge hammer. And she says that this saved her spiritually.

For a good person even a crust is healthy food, and to an evil person even meat brings no benefit.

(Now that is no doubt how it really is—but what if there is not even a crust? . . .)

■

And as soon as you have renounced that aim of "surviving at any price," and gone where the calm and simple people go—then imprisonment begins to transform your former character in an astonishing way. To transform it in a direction most unexpected to you.

And it would seem that in this situation feelings of malice, the disturbance of being oppressed, aimless hate, irritability, and nervousness ought to multiply.⁶ But you yourself do not notice how, with the impalpable flow of time, slavery nurtures in you the shoots of contradictory feelings.

6. The revolutionaries of the past left many traces of this. Serafimovich, in one of his stories, describes the society of the exiles in this way. The Bolshevik Olminsky writes: "Bitterness and spite—these feelings are so familiar to the prisoner, so close to his soul." He used to pour out his anger on those who came to visit him. He writes that he lost all taste for work too. But then the Russian revolutionaries (in the overwhelming mass) did not get and did not

Once upon a time you were sharply intolerant. You were constantly in a rush. And you were constantly short of time. And now you have time with interest. You are surfeited with it, with its months and its years, behind you and ahead of you—and a beneficial calming fluid pours through your blood vessels—patience.

You are ascending. . . .

Formerly you never forgave anyone. You judged people without mercy. And you praised people with equal lack of moderation. And now an understanding mildness has become the basis of your uncategorical judgments. You have come to realize your own weakness—and you can therefore understand the weakness of others. And be astonished at another's strength. And wish to possess it yourself.

The stones rustle beneath our feet. We are ascending. . . .

With the years, armor-plated restraint covers your heart and all your skin. You do not hasten to question and you do not hasten to answer. Your tongue has lost its flexible capacity for easy oscillation. Your eyes do not flash with gladness over good tidings nor do they darken with grief.

For you still have to verify whether that's how it is going to be. And you also have to work out—what is gladness and what is grief.

And now the rule of your life is this: Do not rejoice when you have found, do not weep when you have lost.

Your soul, which formerly was dry, now ripens from suffering. And even if you haven't come to love your neighbors in the Christian sense, you are at least learning to love those close to you.

Those close to you in spirit who surround you in slavery. And how many of us come to realize: It is particularly in slavery that for the first time we have learned to recognize genuine friendship!

And also those close to you in blood, who surrounded you in your former life, who loved you—while you played the tyrant over them . . .

Here is a rewarding and inexhaustible direction for your thoughts: Reconsider all your previous life. Remember everything you did that was bad and shameful and take thought—can't you possibly correct it now?

Yes, you have been imprisoned for nothing. You have nothing to repent of before the state and its laws.

But . . . before your own conscience? But . . . in relation to other individuals?

. . . Following an operation, I am lying in the surgical ward of a camp hospital. I cannot move. I am hot and feverish, but nonetheless my thoughts do not dissolve into delirium—and I am grateful to Dr. Boris Nikolayevich Kornfeld, who is sitting beside my cot and talking to me all evening. The light has been turned out—so it will not hurt my eyes. He and I—and there is no one else in the ward.

Fervently he tells me the long story of his conversion from Judaism to Christianity. This conversion was accomplished by an educated, cultivated person, one of his cellmates, some good-natured old fellow like Platon Karatayev. I am astonished at the conviction of the new convert, at the ardor of his words.

We know each other very slightly, and he was not the one responsible for my treatment, but there was simply no one here with whom he could share his feelings. He was a gentle and well-mannered person. I could see nothing bad in him nor did I know anything bad about him. However, I was on guard because Kornfeld had now been living for two months in the hospital barracks without going outside, because he had shut himself up in here, at his place of work, and avoided moving around camp at all.

This meant . . . he was afraid of having his throat cut. In our camp it had recently become fashionable—to cut the throats of stool pigeons. This has an effect. But who could guarantee that only stoolies were getting their throats cut? One prisoner had had his throat cut in a clear case of settling a sordid grudge. And therefore . . . the self-imprisonment of Kornfeld in the hospital did not yet prove at all that he was a stool pigeon.

It is already late. All the hospital is asleep. Kornfeld is ending up his story thus:

“And on the whole, do you know, I have become convinced that there is no punishment that comes to us in this life on earth which is undeserved. Superficially it can have nothing to do with what we are guilty of in actual fact, but if you go over your life with a fine-tooth comb and ponder it deeply, you will always be able to hunt down that transgression of yours for which you have now received this blow.”

I cannot see his face. Through the window come only the scattered reflections of the lights of the perimeter outside. And the door from the corridor gleams in a yellow electrical glow. But there is such mystical knowledge in his voice that I shudder.

These were the last words of Boris Kornfeld. Noiselessly he went out into the nighttime corridor and into one of the nearby wards and there lay down to sleep. Everyone slept. And there was no one with whom he could speak even one word. And I went off to sleep myself.

And I was wakened in the morning by running about and tramping in the corridor; the orderlies were carrying Kornfeld's body to the operating room. He had been dealt eight blows on the skull with a plasterer's mallet while he still slept. (In our camp it was the custom to kill immediately after rising time, when the barracks were all unlocked and open and when no one yet had got up, when no one was stirring.) And he died on the operating table, without regaining consciousness.

And so it happened that Kornfeld's prophetic words were his last words on earth. And, directed to me, they lay upon me as an inheritance. You cannot brush off that kind of inheritance by shrugging your shoulders.

But by that time I myself had matured to similar thoughts.

I would have been inclined to endow his words with the significance of a universal law of life. However, one can get all tangled up that way. One would have to admit that on that basis those who had been punished even more cruelly than with prison—those shot, burned at the stake—were some sort of supervildoers. (And yet . . . the innocent are those who get punished most zealously of all.) And what would one then have to say about our so evident torturers: Why does not fate punish *them*? Why do they prosper?

(And the only solution to this would be that the meaning of earthly existence lies not, as we have grown used to thinking, in prospering, but . . . in the development of the soul. From *that* point of view our torturers have been punished most horribly of all: they are turning into swine, they are departing downward from humanity. From that point of view punishment is inflicted on those whose development . . . *holds out hope*.)

But there was something in Kornfeld's last words that touched a sensitive chord, and that I accept quite completely *for myself*. And many will accept the same for themselves.

In the seventh year of my imprisonment I had gone over and re-examined my life quite enough and had come to understand why everything had happened to me: both prison and, as an additional piece of ballast, my malignant tumor. And I would not have murmured even if all that punishment had been considered inadequate.

Punishment? But . . . whose?

Well, just think about that—*whose?*

I lay there a long time in that recovery room from which Kornfeld had gone forth to his death, and all alone during sleepless nights I pondered with astonishment my own life and the turns it had taken. In accordance with my established camp custom I set down my thoughts in rhymed verses—so as to remember them. And the most accurate thing is to cite them here—just as they came from the pillow of a hospital patient, when the hard-labor camp was still shuddering outside the windows in the wake of a revolt.

When was it that I completely
Scattered the good seeds, one and all?
For after all I spent my boyhood
In the bright singing of Thy temples.

Bookish subtleties sparkled brightly,
Piercing my arrogant brain,
The secrets of the world were . . . in my grasp,
Life's destiny . . . as pliable as wax.

Blood seethed—and every swirl
Gleamed iridescently before me,
Without a rumble the building of my faith
Quietly crumbled within my heart.

But passing here between being and nothingness,
Stumbling and clutching at the edge,
I look behind me with a grateful tremor
Upon the life that I have lived.

Not with good judgment nor with desire
Are its twists and turns illumined.
But with the even glow of the Higher Meaning
Which became apparent to me only later on.

And now with measuring cup returned to me,
Scooping up the living water,
God of the Universe! I believe again!
Though I renounced You, You were with me!

Looking back, I saw that for my whole conscious life I had not understood either myself or my strivings. What had seemed for so long to be beneficial now turned out in actuality to be fatal, and I had been striving to go in the opposite direction to that which was truly necessary to me. But just as the waves of the sea knock the inexperienced swimmer off his feet and keep tossing him back onto the shore, so also was I painfully tossed back on dry land by the blows of misfortune. And it was only because of this that I was able to travel the path which I had always really wanted to travel.

It was granted me to carry away from my prison years on my bent back, which nearly broke beneath its load, this essential experience: *how* a human being becomes evil and *how* good. In the intoxication of youthful successes I had felt myself to be infallible, and I was therefore cruel. In the surfeit of power I was a murderer, and an oppressor. In my most evil moments I was convinced that I was doing good, and I was well supplied with systematic arguments. And it was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of good. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. And even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained. And even in the best of all hearts, there remains . . . an unuprooted small corner of evil.

Since then I have come to understand the truth of all the religions of the world: They struggle with the *evil inside a human being* (inside every human being). It is impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to constrict it within each person.

And since that time I have come to understand the falsehood of all the revolutions in history: They destroy only *those carriers* of evil contemporary with them (and also fail, out of

haste, to discriminate the carriers of good as well). And they then take to themselves as their heritage the actual evil itself, magnified still more.

The Nuremberg Trials have to be regarded as one of the special achievements of the twentieth century: they killed the very idea of evil, though they killed very few of the people who had been infected with it. (Of course, Stalin deserves no credit here. He would have preferred to explain less and shoot more.) And if by the twenty-first century humanity has not yet blown itself up and has not suffocated itself—perhaps it is this direction that will triumph?

Yes, and if it does not triumph—then all humanity's history will have turned out to be an empty exercise in marking time, without the tiniest mite of meaning! Whither and to what end will we otherwise be moving? To beat the enemy over the head with a club—even cavemen knew that.

"Know thyself!" There is nothing that so aids and assists the awakening of omniscience within us as insistent thoughts about one's own transgressions, errors, mistakes. After the difficult cycles of such ponderings over many years, whenever I mentioned the heartlessness of our highest-ranking bureaucrats, the cruelty of our executioners, I remember myself in my captain's shoulder boards and the forward march of my battery through East Prussia, enshrouded in fire, and I say: "So were we any better?"

When people express vexation, in my presence, over the West's tendency to crumble, its political shortsightedness, its divisiveness, its confusion—I recall too: "Were we, before passing through the Archipelago, more steadfast? Firmer in our thoughts?"

And that is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me: "*Bless you, prison!*"

Lev Tolstoi was right when he *dreamed* of being put in prison. At a certain moment that giant began to dry up. He actually needed prison as a drought needs a shower of rain!

All the writers who wrote about prison but who did not themselves serve time there considered it their duty to express sympathy for prisoners and to curse prison. I . . . have served enough

time there. I nourished my soul there, and I say without hesitation:

"*Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!*"

(And from beyond the grave come replies: It is very well for you to say that—when you came out of it alive!)

Chapter 2

Or Corruption?

But I have been brought up short: You are *not talking about the subject* at all! You have got off the track again—onto prison! And what you are supposed to be talking about is *camp*.

But I was also, I thought, talking about camp. Well, all right, I'll shut up. I shall give some space to contrary opinions. Many camp inmates will object to what I have said and will say that they did not observe any "ascent" of the soul, that this is nonsense, and that corruption took place at every step.

More insistent and more significant than others (because he had already written about all this) was Shalamov's objection:

In the camp situation human beings never remain human beings—the camps were created to this end.

All human emotions—love, friendship, envy, love of one's fellows, mercy, thirst for fame, honesty—fell away from us along with the meat of our muscles. . . . We had no pride, no vanity, and even jealousy and passion seemed to be Martian concepts. . . . The only thing left was anger—the most enduring of human emotions.

We came to understand that truth and falsehood were kin sisters.

Friendship is born neither of need nor of misfortune. If friendship does arise between human beings—it means that conditions are not that difficult. If misfortune and need have joined hands—it means they were not *in extremis*. Grief is insufficiently sharp and deep if it can be shared with friends.

Ascent, growth in profundity, the development of human beings, is possible in *prison*. But

. . . camp—is wholly and consistently a negative school of life. There is nothing either necessary or useful that anyone derives from it. The prisoner learns flattery, falsehood, and petty and large-scale meanness. . . . When he returns home, he sees not only that he has not grown during his time in camp, but that his interests have become meager and crude.¹

Y. Ginzburg also agrees with this distinction: "Prison ennobled people, while camp corrupted them."

And how can one object to that?

In prison, both in solitary confinement and outside solitary too, a human being confronts his grief face to face. This grief is a mountain, but he has to find space inside himself for it, to familiarize himself with it, to digest it, and it him. This is the highest form of moral effort, which has always ennobled every human being.² A duel with years and with walls constitutes moral work and a path upward (if you can climb it). If you share those years with a comrade, it is never in a situation in which you are called on to die in order to save his life, nor is it necessary for him to die in order for you to survive. You have the possibility of entering not into conflict but into mutual support and enrichment.

But in camp, it would appear, you do not have that path. Bread is not issued in equal pieces, but thrown onto a pile—go grab! Knock down your neighbors, and tear it out of their hands! The quantity of bread issued is such that one or two people have to die for each who survives. The bread is hung high up on a pine tree—go fell it. The bread is deposited in a coal mine—go down and mine it. Can you think about your own

1. Shalamov also considers it an indication of the human being's oppression and corruption in camp that he "lives there for long years subject to someone else's will, to someone else's mind." But this is something I have chosen to set aside in a footnote—because, in the first place, one can say just the same thing about many free people (not counting the scope for activity in minor details which prisoners have as well), and because, in the second place, the fatalistic character obligatorily instilled into the native of the Archipelago by his ignorance of his fate and his inability to influence it tends rather to ennoble him, to free him from fruitless bustle.

2. How interesting people become in prison! I have known people who became tiresome bores after their release, yet in prison you simply couldn't tear yourself away from conversations with them.

grief, about the past and the future, about humanity and God? Your mind is absorbed in vain calculations which for the present moment cut you off from the heavens—and tomorrow are worth nothing. You *hate* labor—it is your principal enemy. You hate your companions—rivals in life and death.³ You are reduced to a frazzle by intense *envy* and alarm lest somewhere behind your back others are right now dividing up that bread which could be yours, that somewhere on the other side of the wall a tiny potato is being ladled out of the pot which could have ended up in your own bowl.

Camp life was organized in such a way that envy pecked at your soul from all sides, even the best-defended soul. Envy also extended to *terms* and to *release* itself. In 1945 we, the 58's, had to see the nonpolitical offenders off at the gates (as a result of Stalin's amnesty). What were our feelings toward them? Gladness for them because they were going home? No, it was envy because it was unjust to free them and to hold us. And V. Vlasov, who got a twenty-year term, served out his first ten years calmly, for who was not serving out ten years? But in 1947–1948 they began to release many others—and he envied them, got nervous, and was eating his heart out: How was it that he had received a sentence of twenty? How galling it was to have to serve that second tenner! (And I did not ask him, but I suppose that when these others began to return to camp as *repeaters*, he then must have calmed down.) And in 1955–1956 the 58's were being released on a mass scale, and the nonpolitical offenders were left in the camps. What did they feel at that point? A sense of justice because the long-suffering article, after forty years of incessant persecutions, had at long last been pardoned? No, in fact, there was universal *envy* (I received many letters of this sort in 1963): they had freed "the enemies who were far worse than us habitual criminals." And why then are we still here? For what?

And in addition you are constantly gripped by *fear*: of slipping off even that pitifully low level to which you are clinging, of losing your work which is still not the hardest, of coming a cropper on a prisoner transport, of ending up in a Strict Regimen Camp. And on top of that, you got beaten if you were weaker

than all the rest, or else you yourself beat up those weaker than you. And wasn't this corruption? *Soul mange* is what A. Rubailo, an old camp veteran, called this swift decay under external pressure.

Amid these vicious feelings and tense petty calculations, when and on what foundation could you ascend?

Chekhov, even before our Corrective Labor Camps, observed and identified this soul corruption on Sakhalin. He wrote correctly that the vices of prisoners arose from their lack of freedom, enslavement, terror, and constant hunger. And their vices were dishonesty, slyness, cowardice, faintheartedness, stool-pigeoning, thievery. Experience had demonstrated to the hard-labor convict that in the struggle for existence deceit was the most reliable means.

And wasn't all this multiplied tenfold among us? So isn't it the right time not to object, and not to rise to the defense of some sort of alleged camp "ascent," but to describe hundreds, thousands of cases of genuine soul corruption? To cite examples of how no one could resist the camp philosophy of Yashka, the Dzhzhkazgan work assigner: "The more you spit on people, the more they'll esteem you." To tell how newly arrived front-line soldiers (in Kraslag in 1942) had no sooner scented the thieves' atmosphere than they themselves undertook *to play the thief—to plunder* the Lithuanians and to fatten up off their foodstuffs and possessions: You greenhorns can go die! Or how certain Vlasov men began *to pass for thieves* out of the conviction that that was the only way to survive in camp. Or about that assistant professor of literature who became a thief Ringleader. Or to be astounded—via the example of Chulpenyov—at how infectious that camp ideology was. Chulpenyov stood it for seven years on general work at timbering and became a famous lumberjack, but landed in a hospital with a broken leg, and was subsequently offered a position as a work assigner. He had no need for this job. He could certainly have dragged out as a lumberjack the two and a half years he had still to serve since the management made a great fuss over him—but how could he turn down the temptation? After all, it is a rule of camp philosophy: "If they give, take it!" And Chulpenyov became a work assigner for just six months, which were the most restless, troubled, and dismal of his whole term. (And it is now a long time since his term was

3. P. Yakubovich declared: "Nearly every hard-labor convict dislikes every other one." Yet where he was there was no competition for survival.

served out, and he will tell you with an openhearted smile about the tall pines—but there is a stone on his heart because of those who died as a result of his *slave-driving*: a Latvian six and a half feet tall, a captain who had sailed the seven seas—yes, and was he the only one?)

Conscious instigation of one prisoner against another can lead to just such awful “soul mange”! In Unzhlag in 1950, Moiseyevaite, who, even though she was touched in the head, was still being marched to and from work under convoy, paid no attention to the convoy and went off to look for “her mother.” She was seized, tied to a post at the gatehouse, and it was announced that “because of her escape attempt” the whole camp would be deprived of the next Sunday (a standard trick)! And therefore as the brigades returned from work they spat at the trussed-up woman, and some even struck her: “Because of you, bitch, we don’t have a rest day.” Moiseyevaite only smiled benignly.

And how much corruption was introduced by that democratic and progressive system of “trustworthy watchmen”—which in our zek terminology became converted to *self-guarding*—introduced back in 1918? After all, this was one of the main streams of camp corruption: the enlistment of prisoners in the trustworthy guards! You—had fallen. You—were punished. You—had been uprooted from life—but you want to avoid the very bottom of the pile? You want to hover over someone else, rifle in hand? Over your brother? Here! Take it! And if he runs—shoot him! We will even call you *comrade*. And we will give you a Red Army man’s ration.

And . . . he grows proud. And . . . he tightens his grip on his gun stock. And . . . he shoots. And . . . he is even more severe than the free guards. (How is one to understand this: Was it really a purblind faith in social initiative? Or was it just an icy, contemptuous calculation based on the lowest human feelings?)

After all, it was not just a matter of “self-guarding” either. There were also “self-supervision,” and “self-oppression”—right up to the situation in the thirties when all of them, all the way up to the camp chief, were zeks. Including the transport chief. The production chief. (And how could it have been otherwise anyway—when there were only thirty-seven Chekists to 100,000 zeks on the White Sea–Baltic Canal?) Yes, and even *security chiefs* were zeks too. One could not have carried “self-supervi-

sion” any further than that: The zeks were conducting interrogations of themselves. They were recruiting stool pigeons to denounce themselves.

Yes, yes. But I am not going to examine those countless cases of corruption here. They are well known to everyone. They have already been described, and they will be described again. It is quite enough to admit they took place. This is the general trend, this is as it should be.

Why repeat about each and every house that in subzero weather it loses its warmth? It is much more surprising to note that there are houses which retain their warmth even in subzero weather.

Shalamov says: Everyone imprisoned in camp was spiritually impoverished. But whenever I recall or encounter a former zek, I find a real personality.

Elsewhere Shalamov himself writes that he wouldn’t betray other zeks! He wouldn’t become a brigadier and compel others to work.

Why is that, Varlam Tikhonovich? Why is it that out of a clear sky it appears that you would refuse to become either a stoolie or a brigadier—if it is the case that no one in camp can avoid or sidestep that slippery slope of corruption? Given the fact that truth and falsehood . . . are kin sisters? Does it mean that you did nonetheless grasp at some branch sticking out? Does it mean that you found a footing on some stone—and did not slide down any further? And maybe, despite everything, anger is not really the most long-lived feeling there is? Do you not refute your own concept with your character and verses?⁴

And how is it that genuine religious believers survived in camp (as we mentioned more than once)? In the course of this book we have already mentioned their self-confident procession through the Archipelago—a sort of silent religious procession with invisible candles. How some among them were mowed down by machine guns and those next in line continued their march. A steadfastness unheard of in the twentieth century! And it was

4. Alas, he decided not to refute it. . . . As if out of stubbornness, he continued this argument. . . . On February 23, 1972, in the *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, he published a renunciation (for some reason now that all the threats have passed): “The problematics of the *Kolyma Stories* have long since been crossed out by life.” This renunciation was printed in a black mourning frame, and thus all of us understood that Shalamov had died. (Footnote of 1972.)

not in the least for show, and there weren't any declamations. Take some Aunt Dusya Chmil, a round-faced, calm, and quite illiterate old woman. The convoy guards called out to her: "Chmil! What is your article?"

And she gently, good-naturedly replied: "Why are you asking, my boy? It's all written down there. I can't remember them all." (She had a bouquet of sections under Article 58.)

"Your term!"

Auntie Dusya sighed. She wasn't giving such contradictory answers in order to annoy the convoy. In her own simplehearted way she pondered this question: Her term? Did they really think it was given to human beings to know their terms?

"What term! . . . Till God forgives my sins—till then I'll be serving time."

"You are a silly, you! A silly!" The convoy guards laughed. "Fifteen years you've got, and you'll serve them all, and maybe some more besides."

But after two and a half years of her term had passed, even though she had sent no petitions—all of a sudden a piece of paper came: release!

How could one not envy those people? Were circumstances more favorable for them? By no means! It is a well-known fact that the "nuns" were kept only with prostitutes and thieves at penalty camps. And yet who was there among the religious believers whose soul was corrupted? They died—most certainly, but . . . they were not corrupted.

And how can one explain that certain unstable people found faith right there in camp, that they were strengthened by it, and that they survived uncorrupted?

And many more, scattered about and unnoticed, came to their allotted turning point and made no mistake in their choice. Those who managed to see that things were not only bad for them, but even worse, even harder, for their neighbors.

And all those who, under the threat of a penalty zone and a new term of imprisonment, refused to become stoolies?

How, in general, can one explain Grigory Ivanovich Grigoryev, a soil scientist? A scientist who volunteered for the People's Volunteer Corps in 1941—and the rest of the story is a familiar one. Taken prisoner near Vyazma, he spent his whole captivity in a German camp. And the subsequent story is also

familiar. When he returned, he was arrested by us and given a tanner. I came to know him in winter, engaged in general work in Ekibastuz. His forthrightness gleamed from his big quiet eyes, some sort of unwavering forthrightness. This man was never able to bow in spirit. And he didn't bow in camp either, even though he worked only two of his ten years in his own field of specialization, and didn't receive food parcels from home for nearly the whole term. He was subjected on all sides to the camp philosophy, to the camp corruption of soul, but he was incapable of adopting it. In the Kemerovo camps (Antibess) the security chief kept trying to recruit him as a stoolie. Grigoryev replied to him quite honestly and candidly: "I find it quite *repulsive* to talk to you. You will find many willing without me." "You bastard, you'll crawl on all fours." "I would be better off hanging myself on the first branch." And so he was sent off to a penalty situation. He stood it for half a year. And he made *mistakes* which were even more unforgivable: When he was sent on an agricultural work party, he refused (as a soil scientist) to accept the post of brigadier offered him. He hoed and scythed with enthusiasm. And even more stupidly: in Ekibastuz at the stone quarry he refused to be a work checker—only because he would have had to pad the work sheets for the sloggers, for which, later on, when they caught up with it, the eternally drunk free foreman would have to pay the penalty. (But would he?) And so he went to break rocks! His honesty was so monstrously unnatural that when he went out to process potatoes with the vegetable storeroom brigade, he did not steal any, though everyone else did. When he was in a good post, in the privileged repair-shop brigade at the pumping-station equipment, he left simply because he refused to wash the socks of the free bachelor construction supervisor, Treivish. (His fellow brigade members tried to persuade him: Come on now, isn't it all the same, the kind of work you do? But no, it turned out it was not at all the same to him!) How many times did he select the worst and hardest lot, just so as not to have to offend against conscience—and he didn't, not in the least, and I am a witness. And even more: because of the astounding influence on his body of his bright and spotless human spirit (though no one today believes in any such influence, no one understands it) the organism of Grigory Ivanovich, who was no longer young (close to fifty), grew stronger in camp; his earlier rheumatism of the

joints disappeared completely, and he became particularly healthy after the typhus from which he recovered: in winter he went out in cotton sacks, making holes in them for his head and his arms—and he did not catch cold!

So wouldn't it be more correct to say that no camp can corrupt those who have a stable nucleus, who do not accept that pitiful ideology which holds that "human beings are created for happiness," an ideology which is done in by the first blow of the work assigner's cudgel?

Those people became corrupted in camp who before camp had not been enriched by any morality at all or by any spiritual upbringing. (This is not at all a theoretical matter—since during our glorious half-century millions of them grew up.)

Those people became corrupted in camp who had already been corrupted out in freedom or who were ready for it. Because people are corrupted in freedom too, sometimes even more effectively than in camp.

The convoy officer who ordered that Moiseyevaite be tied to a post in order to be mocked—had he not been corrupted more profoundly than the camp inmates who spat on her?

And for that matter did every one of the brigade members spit on her? Perhaps only two from each brigade did. In fact, that is probably what happened.

Tatyana Falike writes: "Observation of people convinced me that no man could become a scoundrel in camp if he had not been one before."

If a person went swiftly bad in camp, what it might mean was that he had not just gone bad, but that that inner foulness which had not previously been needed had disclosed itself.

M. A. Voichenko has his opinion: "In camp, existence did not determine consciousness, but just the opposite: consciousness and steadfast faith in the human essence decided whether you became an animal or remained a human being."

A drastic, sweeping declaration! . . . But he was not the only one who thought so. The artist Ivashev-Musatov passionately argued exactly the same thing.

Yes, camp corruption was a mass phenomenon. But not only because the camps were awful, but because in addition we Soviet people stepped upon the soil of the Archipelago spiritually disarmed—long since prepared to be corrupted, already tinged

by it out in freedom, and we strained our ears to hear from the old camp veterans "how to live in camp."

But we ought to have known how to live (and how to die) without any camp.

And perhaps, Varlam Tikhonovich Shalamov, as a general rule friendship between people does arise in need and misfortune, even in extreme misfortune too—but not between such withered and nasty people as we were, given our decades of upbringing?

If corruption was so inevitable, then why did Olga Lvovna Sliozberg not abandon her freezing friend on the forest trail, but stay behind for nearly certain death together with her—and save her? Wasn't that an extreme of misfortune?

And if corruption was so inevitable, then where did Vasily Mefodyevich Yakovenko spring from? He served out two terms, had only just been released, was living as a free employee in Vorkuta, and was just beginning to crawl around without an escort and acquire his first tiny nest. It was 1949. In Vorkuta they began to rearrest former zeks and give them new sentences. An arrest psychosis! There was panic among the free employees! How could they hold on to their freedom? How could they be less noticeable? But Y. D. Grodzensky, a friend of Yakovenko from the same Vorkuta camp, was arrested. During the interrogation he was losing strength and was close to death. There was no one to bring him food parcels. And Yakovenko fearlessly brought him food parcels! If you want to, you dogs, rake me in too!

Why was *this man* not corrupted!

And do not *all* those who survived remember one or another person who reached out a hand to him in camp and saved him at a difficult moment?

Yes, the camps were calculated and intended to corrupt. But this didn't mean that they succeeded in crushing *everyone*.

Just as in nature the process of oxidation never occurs without an accompanying reduction (one substance oxidizes while at the same time another reduces), so in camp, too (and everywhere in life), there is no corruption without ascent. They exist alongside one another.

In the next part I hope still to show how in other camps, in the Special Camps, a different *environment* was created after a

certain time: the process of corruption was greatly hampered and the process of ascent became attractive even to the camp careerists.

■

Well, and what about *correction*? How did things go with correction, after all? ("Correction" is a social and state concept and does not coincide with ascent.) All the systems of justice in the world, not just our own, dream that criminals will not merely serve out their term but will also become corrected in the process, in other words behave so as not to return to the defendant's bench in court, particularly for the same offense.⁵

Dostoyevsky exclaims: "Whom did hard labor ever correct?"

The ideal of correction existed in Russian legislation after the great reform. (The whole of Chekhov's *Sakhalin* grew out of that ideal.) But was it ever successfully implemented?

P. Yakubovich thought about this a great deal and wrote: The terrorist regimen of hard labor "corrects" only those who have not become depraved—but they would not commit a second crime even without it. Yet this regimen only depraves a corrupt person, compelling him to be sly and hypocritical, and to do his utmost not to leave any clues behind.

What can one say about our Corrective Labor Camps? Students of penology (Gefängniskunde) always believed that a prisoner must not be driven to total despair, that he must always be left hope and a way out. The reader has already seen that our Corrective Labor Camps drove prisoners only and precisely to total despair.

Chekhov spoke truly: "Soul-searching—that is what's truly needed for correction." But it was soul-searching that the managers of our camps feared most of all. The common barracks, brigades, work collectives, were all specially designed to disperse and dismember that dangerous soul-searching.

What sort of correction could there be in our camps! All they could do was damage: instill the thieves' morality, instill the

5. Nonetheless, they never strove to "correct" the 58's—in other words to avoid imprisoning them a second time. We have already cited the frank statements of the penologists on this subject. They wanted to exterminate the 58's through labor. And the fact that we survived was due to . . . our own initiative.

cruel camp ways as the general law of life. ("Criminogenic places" in the penologists' language—in other words, crime schools.)

I. G. Pisarev, when he was completing his lengthy prison sentence, wrote, in 1963: "It becomes particularly hard, because you leave here an incurable nervous wreck, with your health irreparably ruined by lack of proper food and by incessant incitement. Here people are corrupted once and for all. Maybe butter wouldn't have melted in a man's mouth before—but now you'd never manage to put salt on his tail. If you say 'pig' to a person for seven years, he will end up by grunting. . . . It is only the first year that punishes the prisoner; all the rest simply embitter him. He adapts to the conditions, and that is all. The law, with its long sentences and its cruelty, punishes the criminal's family more than it does him."

Here is another letter. "It is painful and frightening to leave life without having seen anything and without having done anything, and no one even cares about you except, in all likelihood, your mother, who never ceases to wait for you her whole life long."

And here is what Aleksandr Kuzmich K., who devoted much thought to the matter, wrote in 1963:

They commuted my sentence of execution to twenty years of hard labor, but, to be quite honest, I don't consider that to have been any favor to me. . . . I experienced those "mistakes," as it is now the style to call them, on my own skin and bones—and they were in no way any easier or better than those of Auschwitz or Majdanek. How is one supposed to distinguish dirt from truth? A murderer from an instructor? The law from lawlessness? An executioner from a patriot—when he moves upward, and from being a lieutenant becomes a lieutenant colonel, and the cockade he wears on his hat is very much like the one worn before 1917? . . . And how am I, emerging after eighteen years of imprisonment, supposed to decipher all the obfuscations? . . . I envy you educated people who have flexible minds and who do not have to spend a long time breaking your heads in order to figure out how you should proceed or how you should adapt, *which in fact I do not want to do.*

Well spoken indeed! "I do not want." With feelings like that on his release, can one say that he was corrupted? But was he *then corrected* in the state's sense? Of course not. For the state

he has simply been ruined. See what he has come to understand: This was no different from Auschwitz, and the cockades are no different either.

The "correction" which the state would like (?) is by and large never attained in the camps. The "graduates" of the camp learn only to be two-faced, how to *pretend* to be corrected, and they learn cynicism—toward the appeals of the state, the laws of the state, and its promises.

And what if there is nothing for a person *to be corrected of*? If he is not a criminal at all in the first place? If he has been imprisoned because he prayed to God, or expressed an independent opinion, or became a prisoner of war, or because of his father, or simply to fulfill the prisoner-arrest quota—what then could the camps give him?

The Sakhalin prison inspector said to Chekhov: "If, in the final analysis, out of a hundred hard-labor prisoners fifteen to twenty emerge as decent men, the responsibility for this result lies not so much with the corrective measures we employ as with our Russian courts, which send so many good reliable elements to hard labor."

Well, that judgment can stand for the Archipelago too, provided we increase the proportion of the innocently sentenced to, say, 80 percent, without at the same time forgetting that in our camps the percentage of spoilage was also considerably higher.

If we are speaking not about the meat grinder for unwanted millions, not about the cesspool into which they were hurled without pity for the people—but about a serious correctional system—the most complex of questions arises: How is it possible to give monotonously uniform punishments on the basis of a single, unified criminal code? After all, externally *equal* punishments for *different* individuals, some more moral and others more corrupted, some more sensitive and some more crude, some educated and some uneducated, are completely *unequal* punishments. (See Dostoyevsky in many different places in his *The House of the Dead*.)

English thought has understood this, and they say there (I don't know how much they practice it) that the punishment must fit not only the crime but also the character of each criminal.

For example, the general loss of external freedom for a person

with a rich inner world is less hard to bear than for a person who is immature, who lives more in terms of the flesh. This second person "requires more in terms of external impressions, and his instincts pull him more strongly in the direction of freedom." (Yakubovich.) The first finds it easier to be in solitary confinement, especially with books. (Ah, how some of us thirsted for that kind of imprisonment, instead of camp! When the body is confined, what broad horizons are opened to the mind and the soul! Nikolai Morozov did not seem in any way remarkable *either* before his arrest *or*, which is the more surprising, after it. But prison meditation provided him with the chance to conceive of the planetary structure of the atom—with its differentially charged nucleus and electrons—ten years before Rutherford! But *we* were never offered pencils, paper, and books, and even had every last one of them taken away from us.) The second kind of prisoner, on the other hand, might not be able to stand solitary confinement for even a year, and would simply wither away and die off. He would need someone, companions! And yet for the former kind of prisoner unpleasant company could be worse than no one. But camp (where they gave very little food) would be much easier for the latter to bear than for the former. As would a barracks where four hundred people were housed, all of them shouting, playing the fool, playing cards and dominoes, howling and snoring, and where, on top of all that, the radio, which was aimed at idiots, was constantly screeching away. (The camps in which I served time were *punished* by having no radio! What a salvation that was!)

Thus the system of Corrective Labor Camps in particular, with their obligatory and exhausting physical labor and their obligatory participation in the humiliating, buzzing ant heap, was a more effective means of destroying the intelligentsia than was prison. It was precisely the intelligentsia that this system killed off quickly and completely.

Chapter 3

Our Muzzled Freedom

But even when all the main things about the Gulag Archipelago are written, read, and understood, will there be anyone even then who grasps what our *freedom* was like? What sort of a country it was that for whole decades dragged that Archipelago about inside itself?

It was my fate to carry inside me a tumor the size of a large man's fist. This tumor swelled and distorted my stomach, hindered my eating and sleeping, and I was always conscious of it (though it did not constitute even one-half of one percent of my body, whereas within the country as a whole the Archipelago constituted 8 percent). But the horrifying thing was not that this tumor pressed upon and displaced adjacent organs. What was most terrifying about it was that it exuded poisons and infected the whole body.

And in this same way our whole country was infected by the poisons of the Archipelago. And whether it will ever be able to get rid of them someday, only God knows.

Can we, *dare* we, describe the full loathsomeness of the state in which we lived (not so remote from that of today)? And if we do not show that loathsomeness in its entirety, then we at once have a lie. For this reason I consider that *literature did not exist* in our country in the thirties, forties, and fifties. Because without the *full* truth it is not literature. And today they show this loathsomeness according to the fashion of the moment—by inference, an inserted phrase, an afterthought, or hint—and the result is again a lie.

This is not the task of our book, but let us try to enumerate

briefly those traits of *free* life which were determined by the closeness of the Archipelago or which were in the same style.

1. *Constant Fear*. As the reader has already seen, the roster of the waves of recruitment into the Archipelago is not exhausted with 1935, or 1937, or 1949. The recruitment went on *all the time*. Just as there is no minute when people are not dying or being born, so there was no minute when people were not being arrested. Sometimes this came close to a person, sometimes it was further off; sometimes a person deceived himself into thinking that nothing threatened him, and sometimes he himself became an executioner, and thus the threat to him diminished. But any adult inhabitant of this country, from a collective farmer up to a member of the Politburo, always knew that it would take only one careless word or gesture and he would fly off irrevocably into the abyss.

Just as in the Archipelago beneath every trusty lay the chasm (and death) of general work, so beneath every inhabitant lay the chasm (and death) of the Archipelago. In appearance the country was much bigger than its Archipelago, but all of it and all its inhabitants hung phantomlike above the latter's gaping maw.

Fear was not always the fear of arrest. There were intermediate threats: purges, inspections, the completion of security questionnaires—routine or extraordinary ones—dismissal from work, deprivation of residence permit, expulsion or exile.¹ The security questionnaires were so detailed and so inquisitive that more than half the inhabitants of the country had a bad conscience and were constantly and permanently tormented by the approach of the period when they had to be filled out. Once people had invented a false life story for these questionnaires, they had to try not to get tangled up in it. But danger might strike suddenly: The son of the Kady Vlasov, Igor, regularly entered in his questionnaire the statement that his father was dead. And that way he got into a military school. Then one fine day he was summoned and he had three days to present a certificate of his father's death. And he had to do it!

1. In addition, there were such little-known forms as expulsion from the Party, dismissal from work, and dispatch to a camp as a free worker. That is how Stepan Grigoryevich Onchul was exiled in 1938. It was natural that such persons were listed as being very unreliable. During the war Onchul was conscripted into a work battalion, where he died.

The aggregate fear led to a correct consciousness of one's own insignificance and of the lack of any kind of *rights*. In November, 1938, Natasha Anichkova learned that the person she loved (her common-law husband) had been arrested in Orel. She went there. The enormous square in front of the prison was filled with carts. On them sat women in bast sandals, wearing their traditional peasant dress, with parcels which the authorities refused to accept. Anichkova pushed her way up to a window in a dreadful prison wall. "Who are you?" they asked her sternly. They heard her out. "Well, now, listen here, Comrade Muscovite, I am going to give you one piece of *advice*: get out of here today, because at night *they are going to come for you too*." The foreigner finds all this quite incomprehensible: Why had the Chekist given her unsolicited advice instead of a businesslike answer to her question? What right did he have to demand of a free citizen that she leave immediately? And who was going *to come* and why? But what Soviet citizen will lie and say that this is incomprehensible to him or that it sounds like an improbable case? After advice like that you would be afraid to stay in a strange city!

Nadezhda Mandelstam* speaks truly when she remarks that our life is so permeated with prison that simple meaningful words like "they took," or "they put inside," or "he is inside," or "they let out," are understood by everyone in our country in only one sense, even without a context.

Peace of mind is something our citizens have never known.

2. *Servitude*. If it had been easy to change your place of residence, to leave a place that had become dangerous for you and thus shake off fear and refresh yourself, people would have behaved more boldly, and they might have taken some risks. But for long decades we were shackled by that same system under which no worker could quit work of his own accord. And the passport regulations also fastened everyone to particular places. And the housing, which could not be sold, nor exchanged, nor rented. And because of this it was an insane piece of daring *to protest* in the place where you lived or worked.

3. *Secrecy and Mistrust*. These feelings replaced our former openhearted cordiality and hospitality (which had still not been

destroyed in the twenties). These feelings were the natural defense of any family and every person, particularly because no one could ever quit work or leave, and every little detail was kept in sight and within earshot for years. The secretiveness of the Soviet person is by no means superfluous, but is absolutely necessary, even though to a foreigner it may at times seem superhuman. The former Tsarist officer K.U. survived and was never arrested only because when he got married he did not tell his *wife* about his past. His brother, N.U., was arrested—and the wife of the arrested man, taking advantage of the fact that they lived in different cities at the time of his arrest, hid his arrest from her own *father and mother*—so they would not blurt it out. She preferred telling them and everyone else that her husband had abandoned her, and then playing that role a long time! Now these were the secrets of one family which I was told thirty years later. And what urban family did not have such secrets?

In 1949 the father of a girl who was a fellow student of V.I.'s was arrested. In these cases everyone would shun such a student, and that was considered natural. But V.I. did not shun her, and openly expressed sympathy with the girl, and tried to find ways to help her out. Frightened by such unusual conduct, the girl rejected V.I.'s help and participation, and lied to him, saying she did not believe in the innocence of her arrested father, and that he had evidently concealed his crime from his family all his life. (And it was only during the times of Khrushchev that their tongues were loosened: the girl told him she had decided he was either a police informer or else a member of an anti-Soviet organization out to rope in the dissatisfied.)

This universal mutual mistrust had the effect of deepening the mass-grave pit of slavery. The moment someone began to speak up frankly, everyone stepped back and shunned him: "A provocation!" And therefore anyone who burst out with a sincere protest was predestined to loneliness and alienation.

4. *Universal Ignorance*. Hiding things from each other, and not trusting each other, we ourselves helped implement that *absolute secrecy*, absolute misinformation, among us which was *the cause of causes* of everything that took place—including both the millions of arrests and the mass approval of them also. Informing one another of nothing, neither shouting nor groaning,