



# EVERYTHING FLOWS

VASILY GROSSMAN

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## About the Book

Ivan Grigoryevich has been in the Gulag for thirty years. Released after Stalin's death, he finds that the years of terror have imposed a collective moral slavery. He must struggle to find a place for himself in an unfamiliar world. Grossman tells the stories of those people entwined with Ivan's fate: his cousin Nikolay, a scientist who never let his conscience interfere with his career, Pinegin, the informer who had Ivan sent to the camps and Anna Sergeyevna, Ivan's lover, who tells of her involvement as an activist in the Terror famine of 1932-3.

## About the Author

Vasily Grossman was born in 1905. In 1941 he became a correspondent for the Red Army newspaper, *Red Star*, reporting on the defence of Stalingrad, the fall of Berlin and the consequences of the Holocaust, work collected in *A Writer at War* and *The Road*. In 1960 Grossman completed his masterpiece *Life and Fate* and submitted it to an official literary journal. The KGB confiscated the novel and Grossman was told that there was no chance of it being published for another 200 years. Eventually, however, with the help of Andrey Sakharov, a copy of the manuscript was microfilmed and smuggled out to the west by a leading dissident writer, Vladimir Voinovich. Grossman began *Everything Flows* in 1955 and was still working on it during his last days in hospital in September 1964.

ALSO BY VASILY GROSSMAN,  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT AND ELIZABETH CHANDLER

*Life and Fate*  
*The Road: Short Fiction and Articles*

ALSO BY VASILY GROSSMAN,  
EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY  
ANTONY BEEVOR AND LUBA VINOGRADOVA

*A Writer at War:*  
*Vasily Grossman with the Red Army 1941-1945*

# Everything Flows

Translated from the Russian by Robert and  
Elizabeth Chandler, with Anna Aslanyan

Vasily Grossman

VINTAGE BOOKS  
London



*The last photograph taken of Vasily Grossman, on a bench near his Moscow apartment, spring 1964(© Fyodor Guber)*

## Introduction

Vasily Grossman has become recognised not only as one of the great war novelists of all time but also as one of the first and most important of witnesses to the Shoah. 'The Hell of Treblinka' (published in *Znamya* in November 1944), one of the first articles in any language about a Nazi death camp, was used as evidence in the Nuremberg trials. And there may be no more powerful lament for East European Jewry than the chapter of *Life and Fate* that has become known as 'The Last Letter' – the letter that Anna Semyonovna, a fictional portrait of Grossman's mother, writes in the final days of her life and manages to have smuggled out of the Jewish ghetto of a town under Nazi occupation.

Few novelists have incorporated more history into their novels than Grossman. *Everything Flows* is a quarter of the length of *Life and Fate*, but its historical scope is in some respects broader. The central story – about the struggle of a fifty-year-old man, Ivan Grigoryevich, to find a place for himself in post-Stalinist Russia after losing thirty years of his life to the Gulag – is interrupted by chapters about Moscow prisons in 1937, about the sufferings of women in the camps, about Stalin's destruction of Soviet science in the late 1940s, about the anti-Jewish campaign of the early 1950s, about Lenin and Stalin and the roots of 'Russian slavery'. Many of Grossman's thoughts – especially the suggestion that Stalin was heir both to the Russian revolutionary tradition and to that of the Russian secret police, and that his paranoia arose in part from the conflict between these two forces within his psyche – still seem startlingly bold. The novel even has room for a small playlet,

a mock trial that follows Ivan's chance meeting with the informer responsible, long ago, for his being sent to the camps: the reader is asked to pronounce judgement on four informers, four different 'Judases'. The arguments Grossman puts into the mouths of both prosecution and defence are unexpected and lively; as members of the jury, we are constantly taken off guard, repeatedly forced to change our minds. The trial eventually falls apart, dissolved by the reflection that the living have, without exception, compromised themselves and that only the dead - who, of course, cannot speak - have the right to pass judgement.

Some of these digressions are introduced as Ivan's thoughts or writings. The most powerful chapter of all, an account of the 1932-3 Terror Famine that brought about the deaths of three to five million peasants in the Ukraine, is narrated by Ivan's landlady, Anna Sergeyevna, just after she has become his lover. Anna Sergeyevna was herself involved, as a minor Party official, in the implementation of the measures that caused this famine. Anna is an attractive figure and we cannot help but identify not only with the middle-aged Anna telling the story but also with the young Anna of the time of the famine; once again, Grossman denies the reader the luxury of unalloyed indignation. This chapter about the least-known act of genocide of the last century is subtle, complex and unbearably lucid. Only Dante, in his account of Ugolino and his sons starving to death in a locked tower, has written of death from hunger with equal power.

Almost every step of Grossman's career - even after his death - has been marked by long delays and tedious, protracted battles. Editors, publishers and politicians seem to have responded to the painful and intractable nature of Grossman's subject matter with an equal intractability of their own. *For a Just Cause*, the fine but more orthodox war novel to which *Life and Fate* is a sequel, was originally titled

*Stalingrad*. This title was abandoned after Mikhail Sholokhov, by then the grand old man of Soviet letters, asked contemptuously, 'Whom have you entrusted to write about Stalingrad?'; Sholokhov's implication, clearly understood by everyone, was that a mere Jew had no right to be writing about one of the most glorious chapters of Russian history - let alone to be writing about it with such truthfulness. From 1949 to 1952, Grossman and his editors struggled to meet the demands of the authorities. No fewer than twelve sets of author's proofs remain, and the editors of the literary journal *Novy mir* made three abortive attempts to print the novel before publishing a heavily cut version in 1952. A less cut version was published in 1954, and a full version in 1956. As for *Life and Fate* itself, the manuscript was confiscated by the KGB and Grossman was told by Mikhail Suslov, a prominent member of the Communist Party Central Committee, that there was no question of it being published for the next two hundred years. Even after the satirist Vladimir Voinovich had smuggled a microfilmed text to the West, it took him almost five years to find a publisher for the first Russian-language edition - mainly, it seems, because of anti-Semitism among Russian émigrés. Grossman's friends and admirers were bewildered and shocked. In 1961, after what he always referred to as the 'arrest' of *Life and Fate*, Grossman said it was as if he had been 'strangled in a dark corner'. Dismayed at being unable to find a publisher twenty years later, Voinovich said it was as if Grossman were being strangled a second time.

Even after the first publication of translations of *Life and Fate* in the mid-1980s, Grossman's reputation grew only slowly. Grossman would have had little time for postmodernism, and it is perhaps not surprising that postmodernism had little time for him. It may have been easier during the decade following the collapse of the Berlin Wall to imagine that we can be free of the weight of history,

to believe that we need only adopt different metaphors, different visions – and reality will be transformed. Today, however, as the ecological crisis deepens and the West is drawn into one seemingly insoluble conflict after another, it is harder to doubt the stubbornness of reality – and Grossman’s realism seems more valuable than ever. Grossman is, on occasion, both witty and joyful, but he is seldom ludic; he is not given to flights of fancy and he is linguistically inventive only when plainer, more ordinary words are inadequate. If, however, one accepts Coleridge’s definition of Imagination as ‘the power to disimprison the soul of fact’, then Grossman was endowed with an imagination of supreme power and – above all – steadiness.

It is hard to believe that a single man could possess the strength to write with such clarity about so many of the most terrible pages of twentieth-century history – the siege of Stalingrad, the Shoah, the Terror Famine. The source of such strength must remain a mystery, but Grossman himself certainly linked it to the memory of his dead mother, Yekaterina Savelyevna. He felt guilty that he had not done more to save her in 1941, that he had failed to persuade her to join him in Moscow and so escape the invading German armies. This admission of guilt, however, seems not to have weakened him but to have lent him clarity and determination. This is clear from the guardedly optimistic conclusion to the story of Viktor Shtrum (in many ways a self-portrait of Grossman) in *Life and Fate*. After betraying men he knows to be innocent, Shtrum expresses the hope that his dead mother will help him to act better another time; his last words in the novel are ‘Well then, we’ll see [. . .] Maybe I do have enough strength. Your strength, Mother . . .’

Grossman believed that his mother was, in some way, alive and present in the pages of *Life and Fate*. In a letter to her on the twentieth anniversary of her death, he wrote: ‘I

am you, dear Mama, and as long as I live, then you are alive also. When I die you will continue to live in this book, which I have dedicated to you and whose fate is closely tied to your fate.'<sup>fn1</sup> Grossman's mother is no less present in *Everything Flows*. Anna Sergeyevna first comes to Ivan's bed on hearing him call out for his mother in a nightmare. And her account of the famine is similar in tone to Anna Semyonovna's last letter from the ghetto; these two chapters are among Grossman's supreme achievements, and both are laments - for millions who died, for whole worlds that were destroyed. Both chapters are historically truthful; both chapters are written with the sensitivity of a supreme poet.

*Everything Flows* is an unfinished work; Grossman began it in 1955 and was still revising it during his last days in hospital in September 1964. It is unbalanced in its structure, and the burden of history it carries is so overwhelming that most novels would sink under its weight. Nevertheless, *Everything Flows* is a work of art; important though it is as a historical document, it is far more than a historical document. Even if the essays on Lenin and Stalin cause us to lose sight of Ivan Grigoryevich for most of the last quarter of the novel, and even if Ivan eventually becomes barely distinguishable from Grossman himself, Ivan's fate still moves us. And the novel's structure, however schematic, carries meaning; central to this structure is the idea that the telling of stories, of histories - the telling of my story and your story, of her story and his story - can be a gift. In the first chapters Ivan and his cousin, Nikolay, approach their long-awaited reunion with great hopes. Ivan hopes to be released from the burden of all that he has seen and suffered in the camps; Nikolay - a successful scientist - hopes to be released from the burden of the guilt he feels on account of all the compromises he has made in order to stay 'free'. Nikolay, however, feels threatened by Ivan's

presence – and the breath of the camps he brings with him – and no real conversation, no true exchange of stories, takes place. Ivan leaves abruptly, lonelier and more burdened than ever.

In the second half of the novel, Ivan finds understanding and love; and the failed conversation between the two cousins is balanced by a true conversation between Ivan and his lover. Anna Sergeyevna's account of the Terror Famine – an act of genocide in which she was complicit – is a gift of love. She tells her story lucidly, with absolute trust, and with absolute truthfulness. She is not trying to escape her pain by inflicting it on Ivan, nor is Grossman trying to escape his own pain by inflicting it on the reader. Grossman is simply doing what he can to remember the lives and deaths of millions who have been too little remembered.

Ivan accepts this immense gift, and he does his best to reply in kind. Anna is taken away from him – by illness and, eventually, by death – but this does not bring an end to their conversation. Just as Grossman continued writing letters to his mother, so Ivan talks to Anna in his imagination and writes down for her – in a school exercise book that had once belonged to her nephew – his uncompromising thoughts about Lenin, Stalin and the Russian 'slave soul'. Ivan fully understands the importance of this unbroken conversation; in the penultimate chapter he says to Anna, some time after she has died, 'Do you know? At the very worst times I used to imagine being embraced by a woman. I used to imagine this embrace as something so wonderful that it would make me forget everything I had been through. It would be as if none of it had ever happened. But it turns out that it's you I have to talk to, that it's you I have to tell about the very worst time of all. You yourself, after all, talked all through that first night. Happiness, it turns out, will be to share with you the burden I can't share with anyone else – the burden I can share only with you.'

This exchange of gifts is not, of course, enough to save Anna's life, nor is it enough to restore the thirty years that Ivan has lost to the Gulag. It is, however, enough to validate Grossman's claim that freedom does not die, that it is the essence of our humanity. For all the pain gathered within it, *Everything Flows* is a gift, Grossman's last gift to the world. And one of the most precious understandings it embodies is that, if we can speak truthfully and trustingly, our histories can cease to be burdens. Any story, truly told and truly listened to, can become a gift.

Robert Chandler

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[fn1](#) Fyodor Guber, 'Pis'ma materi, pis'ma k materi' (*Nedelya*, no. 41, 10-16 October 1988).

# 1

THE KHABAROVSK EXPRESS was due to arrive in Moscow by 9 a.m. A young man in pyjamas scratched his shaggy head and looked out of the window into the half-light of the autumn morning. He yawned, turned to the people standing in the corridor with their soap boxes and towels and said, 'Well, citizens, who's last in line?'

Last in the queue, he was told, was a plump woman who had gone away for a moment. She was behind a man with a twisted tube of toothpaste and a piece of soap plastered with bits of newspaper. He himself would be behind this woman.

'Why's there only one washroom open?' said the young man. 'We'll soon be arriving in the capital - and the conductors' only concern is the circulation of goods; they're just thinking about their private deals and the packages they've been asked to deliver. What do they care about their duties to the passengers?'

A few minutes later, a stout woman in a dressing gown appeared, and the young man said to her, 'Citizen, I'm next after you. But I've had enough of hanging about in the corridor - I'm going to go and sit down.'

Back in his compartment the young man opened an orange suitcase and began to admire his belongings.

One of his three fellow travellers was snoring; the back of his head was broad and bulbous. A second - pink-complexioned, young-looking, but bald - was going through the papers in his briefcase. The third, a thin old man, was sitting and looking out of the window, resting his head on his brown fists.

Addressing the pink-faced man, the young man with the suitcase said, 'Have you finished with my book? I need to pack it now.'

What he really wanted was for his travelling companion to admire his suitcase. In it were some viscose shirts, *A Brief Philosophical Dictionary*, a pair of swimming trunks and sunglasses with white frames. In one corner, covered by some local newspaper or other, lay some grey village-baked shortbreads.

The pink-faced man answered, 'Here you are - *Eugénie Grandet*. I realised I'd read it last year, when I was on holiday.'

'It's a powerful piece of writing, there's no denying it,' said the young man. And he packed the book away in his suitcase.

During the journey they had played cards. And while eating and drinking, they had discussed films, records, furniture, socialist agriculture, the merits of various Houses of Recreation in Sochi, and which football team had the better attack - Spartak or Dynamo.

The bald man with the pink face was an inspector for the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions;<sup>1</sup> he worked in a provincial capital. The shaggy-haired young man was returning from a holiday he had spent in some village. He worked in Moscow as an economist for Gosplan, the State Planning Committee.

The man now snoring on the lower bunk was a Siberian construction superintendent. The two younger men disliked him because of his lack of culture; he swore, and he belched after eating. Learning that one of his fellow travellers worked in Gosplan, in the Economic Science Department, he had said, 'Political economy - now what exactly *is* all that? Tells you why collective farmers go to the city to buy bread from the workers, does it?'

Once he had got very drunk in the bar of a junction station where he had gone, as he put it, 'on a brief mission'. After

this he had kept his fellow travellers awake for a long time, sounding off about one thing after another. 'You can't keep to the law in our line of work or you'll never get anything done at all. To fulfil the plan, you have to work the way life tells you to work. Yes, you have to meet life's demands: "You scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours." Once - under the Tsar - this was called private enterprise. The way I put it is "Let a man live - he *wants* to live!" Yes, I could teach you a thing or two about real economics! Once I had my steelworkers registered as nursery-school staff for a whole quarter - until our new budget came through. Yes, the law tries to stop life, but life makes its demands regardless. Fulfil the plan - and you get a pay rise and a bonus. But who knows? You might end up doing ten years in the camps instead. The law fights against life, and life fights against the law.'

The two younger men said nothing. But when the construction superintendent fell silent - or rather, when he began to snore loudly - they said what they thought of him.

'One needs to keep an eye on people like him. Behind that comradely mask . . .'

'A wheeler-dealer. A man without principles. Bad as a Yid.'

This man was a nobody, an uncouth nobody from the back of beyond. It was infuriating to sense that he held cultured people like them in contempt. 'I've got prisoners working on my construction site,' he had said once. 'Their name for people like you is "tossers". But when the time comes to decide who built Communism, no doubt it'll turn out to be you lot who did all the ploughing.'<sup>2</sup> And with that he had gone off to the next-door compartment to play cards.

As for the last passenger, it seemed that he seldom travelled in a carriage with reserved seats. Most of the time he just sat there, his palms on his knees, as if wanting to hide the darns on his trousers. The sleeves of his black sateen shirt ended somewhere between his elbows and his wrists, and the white buttons on the collar and the chest

made it look like the shirt of a child. There is something absurd and touching about the combination of white, childish buttons and the grey temples and exhausted eyes of an old man.

When the construction superintendent said to him, in the voice of a man used to giving orders, 'Move out of the way, Grandad - I need the table for my tea!' the old man jumped to his feet like an obedient soldier and went out into the corridor.

Inside his plywood suitcase with its peeling paint lay a loaf of crumbling bread and some threadbare underwear. He smoked *makhorka*<sup>3</sup> and, after rolling a cigarette, he would go to the space at the end of the carriage, so as not to upset the others with his horrible smoke.

Sometimes his fellow travellers would offer him a piece of sausage; once the construction superintendent presented him with a hard-boiled egg and a glass of vodka.

Even people half his age addressed him familiarly as *ty*, rather than politely as *vy*. And the superintendent kept saying that when they got to Moscow, 'Grandad' would pretend to be a bachelor and marry a young girl.

On one occasion the conversation turned to the subject of collective farms. The young economist began criticising 'village layabouts'. 'I've seen it now with my own eyes. In the morning they just hang about outside the farm office and scratch their arses. The collective-farm chairman and the brigade leaders have to sweat blood to get them out into the fields. And all they do is complain. They make out that under Stalin they didn't get paid at all and that they hardly get paid even now.'

The trade-union inspector, thoughtfully shuffling a pack of cards, agreed with him. 'And why should our dear friends be paid if they don't keep up with their grain deliveries? They need to be taught a lesson - like this!' And he shook his white fist in the air - the strong fist of a peasant, though it had clearly not seen manual labour for many years.

The construction superintendent stroked his stout chest with its rows of greasy ribbons – he had evidently been awarded many orders and medals.

‘There was bread enough for us in the army, on the front line. We were fed by the Russian people. And no one had to teach them how to do it.’

‘You’re right there,’ said the economist. ‘What matters is that we’re Russians. Yes, Russians – that’s quite something.’

The inspector smiled and winked at his companion. It was as if he were pronouncing those well-known words: ‘The Russian is the elder brother, the first among equals.’<sup>4</sup>

‘That’s what makes one mad,’ pronounced the young economist. ‘These peasants we’re talking about are Russians – not some national minority or other! One of them started haranguing me: “Five years we lived on linden leaves . . . Since 1947 we’ve been working without any pay . . .” They just don’t want to work – and that’s all there is to it. They don’t want to understand that everything now depends on the people.’

He looked round at the grey-haired old peasant listening to the conversation in silence and said, ‘Don’t be angry, Grandad. The State has begun to address your needs – now it’s up to you. You must all fulfil your duty as labourers.’

‘Their duty!’ said the construction superintendent. ‘They seem to want to eat every day – what do they know about duty and consciousness?’

This discussion – like most discussions, whether inside or outside a railway carriage – was never concluded. An air-force major with gleaming gold teeth looked into the compartment and said reproachfully to the three younger men, ‘Well, comrades? How about getting down to some work?’

And off they had gone to their neighbours – to finish a game of cards.

But now the long journey was nearly over. The passengers were packing away their slippers and depositing remnants

of food on the tables: pieces of stale bread, chicken bones that had been gnawed till they were blue, pallid sausage ends wrapped in layers of skin.

The sullen conductors had already collected all the crumpled sheets and pillowcases.

The little world of the railway carriage was about to disperse. Jokes, faces and laughter would all be forgotten – as would chance confidences and painful confessions.

Ever closer drew the vast city, the capital of the great State. Finished were the thoughts and anxieties of the journey. Forgotten were the tête-à-têtes at the end of the carriage with the woman from the compartment next door, while just outside the clouded windows the great Russian plain rolled past before you – and the water in the storage tanks sloshed heavily about behind your back.

The close-knit world of the railway carriage – a world that had come into being for only a few days and that was governed, on its straight or curved path through time and space, by the same laws as every other man-made world – was now melting away.

So great is the power of a great capital that it makes every heart miss a beat – even the carefree hearts of those who are travelling there to stay with friends, to roam around shops, to visit a zoo or a planetarium. Entering the force field generated by a world city, entering its taut, invisible network of living energy, everyone feels a moment of confusion and apprehension.

After nearly missing his place in the queue, the economist had been to the washroom. Still combing his hair, he had returned to his seat. Now he was scrutinising his fellow passengers.

The construction superintendent was sorting out his expenses sheets. A great deal of alcohol had been drunk during the last few days, and his fingers were trembling.

The trade-union inspector had already put on his jacket. Entering the force field of agitated human emotions, he had

grown timid and silent; his supervisor, a grey-haired, bilious old witch, was sure to have a few things to say to him.

The train rushed past brick factories and little village houses built from logs, past tin-grey fields of cabbages, past station platforms where the night rain seemed to have created grey puddles of asphalt.

On the platforms stood sullen men and women from the Moscow suburbs, wearing plastic macs over their coats. Sagging beneath the grey rain clouds were high-voltage power lines. In the station sidings stood grey wagons, ominously labelled 'Slaughterhouse Station. Circuit Line'.

And the train thundered on with ever increasing speed, with a kind of malign joy. It was a speed that flattened space and time, that cleaved through them.

Resting his head on his hands, the old man was sitting at the table and looking out of the window. Many years ago, a young man with a tousled, uncombed head of hair had sat in the same way by the window of a third-class carriage. The people then travelling with him had disappeared. He had long forgotten their faces and words. Inside his grey head, however, things had come back to life that had seemed as if they could no longer be in existence at all.

The train had already entered the Moscow green belt. Its grey, tattered smoke clutched at the branches of fir trees and, forced down by the rushing currents of air, streamed over the fences of dachas. How well he knew the silhouettes of these austere northern firs; how strange it was to see them beside light blue fences, beside flower beds planted with dahlias, the peaked roofs of dachas and the coloured windowpanes of their verandas.

And this man, who during three long decades had not once remembered that the world contains lilac bushes - and pansies, sandy garden paths, little carts with containers of fizzy water - this man gave a deep sigh, convinced now that life had gone on in his absence, that life had continued.

## 2

AFTER READING THE telegram, Nikolay Andreyevich regretted giving the postman a tip - he had evidently come to the wrong address. And then Nikolay Andreyevich remembered - and gasped. The telegram must be from his cousin Ivan.

'Masha! Masha!' he called.

His wife, Maria Pavlovna, took the telegram from him. 'Give me my glasses,' she said. 'You know I'm quite blind without them.' After she had read the telegram, she said, 'Well, there's not much chance of him getting a permit to live in Moscow.'

'Oh, for goodness' sake . . . Don't talk about residence permits at a time like this!' Nikolay Andreyevich wiped his hand across his brow and added, 'Just think - Vanya's<sup>5</sup> coming and all he'll find here is graves, nothing but graves.'

'This is going to be very awkward indeed with the Sokolovs,' Maria Pavlovna said pensively. 'I know we can give him his present some other way, but it's still all very unfortunate. It's an important occasion. He's going to be fifty.'

'Don't worry. I'll tell them the whole story.'

'And then the news that Ivan is back, and that he came here straight from the railway station, will spread from the birthday dinner to the whole of Moscow.'

Nikolay Andreyevich waved the telegram in her face. 'Don't you understand? Have you no idea at all how much Vanya means to me in my soul?'

He was angry with his wife. All the same petty thoughts, every one of them, had passed through his own mind before she had said so much as a word. This had happened many

times before. What he saw in his wife were his own weaknesses, though he did not understand this; he was unable to grasp that it was his own failings, rather than his wife's, that made him so very indignant. But then, because of his love for himself, he was also quick to calm down; forgiving his wife, he forgave himself.

He too could not stop thinking about Sokolov's birthday party; his stupid thoughts just wouldn't leave him alone. The news of his cousin's arrival was shocking not only in itself but because it made the whole of his own life, in all its truth and untruth, appear before him; he felt ashamed that missing a celebration at the Sokolovs' - and the Sokolovs' welcoming decanter of vodka - was occasioning him so much regret.

He was ashamed of the shallowness of his thoughts; it had occurred to him, too, that he would have to get Ivan a residence permit - and that this would be hard work. He too had thought about how all Moscow would get to hear of Ivan's return, and that, one way or another, this was sure to affect his own chances of being elected to the Academy of Sciences . . .

And now his wife was tormenting him, continuing to say out loud everything that was on his mind, insisting on bringing into the light of day thoughts of his that were not really thoughts at all, thoughts that were really only something chance and imaginary.

'You're very strange,' he said to his wife. 'You make me wish I'd received this telegram when you were out.'

This was a hurtful thing to say, but she knew that Nikolay Andreyevich would immediately put his arms round her and say, 'Masha, Masha, we're going to celebrate this together. Who else is there for me to celebrate it with?'

And that is just what happened. But there was still an unpleasant, long-suffering look on her face. It meant, 'Your sweet talk doesn't give me the least joy, but I know how to be patient.'

But then their eyes met, and the love between them put right everything that was wrong.

For twenty-eight years they had lived together without ever being separated; it is hard to understand or explain the relationship of people who have lived together for almost a third of a century.

She was grey-haired now; she would walk across to the window and watch as he, her grey-haired husband, got into his car. And there had been a time when they used to eat in a canteen on Bronnaya Street.

‘Kolya,’ she said quietly, ‘just think – Ivan never once saw our son. He was arrested before Valya was born. And now that he’s back, Valya is already eight years in the grave.’

This thought astonished her.

### 3

AS HE WAITED for his cousin to arrive, Nikolay Andreyevich thought about his own life. He was preparing to tell his story, to make a confession to Ivan. He imagined showing Ivan his apartment. In the dining room they had a fine Turkmen rug. 'Look!' he would say to Ivan. 'Damned fine rug, isn't it?' Masha had good taste, and Ivan knew very well who her father had been. And in Petersburg in the old days people had understood how to live well.

How would he find a way to talk to Ivan? Whole decades had gone by. Life had gone by. No, life had not gone by - and that was what they must talk about . . . Life was only just beginning!

What a meeting it would be! Ivan was arriving in Moscow at an astonishing time. There had been so many changes since the death of Stalin. And they affected everyone. Both workers and peasants. There was bread in the shops now. And Ivan was back from the camp now. As were many others. And Nikolay Andreyevich had also reached an important turning point in his life.

Ever since his student years Nikolay Andreyevich had felt dogged by bad luck. This was all the harder to bear because he was certain he deserved better. He was well educated; he worked hard; he was considered a witty raconteur; women were always falling in love with him.

He was proud to be thought honourable, a man of principle. At the same time, he was entirely free of pious hypocrisy. He enjoyed listening to a good story over a meal, and he had an excellent understanding of all the

complexities of dry wines – even though he often preferred to get straight down to the vodka.

When people praised Nikolay Andreyevich, Maria Pavlovna looked at her husband with sparkling, angry eyes and said, ‘Try living under one roof with him! Then you’d get to know the real Kolya: Kolya the despot, Kolya the psychopath, Kolya the greatest egotist the world has ever seen!’

Each knew every one of the other’s failings and weaknesses, and sometimes this knowledge was more than they could bear. Sometimes it seemed it might be easier to live apart. But they were quite unable to live apart; if they had, they would have suffered terribly.

Maria Pavlovna had fallen in love with Nikolay Andreyevich when she was still a schoolgirl. And everything that thirty years ago had seemed astonishing and splendid – his voice, his big forehead, his big teeth, his smile – all of these things, with the passing of time, had become still dearer to her.

And he loved her too, but his love had changed. What had once been central in their relationship had faded into the background, and what had once seemed of lesser importance had become central.

Tall and dark-eyed, Maria Pavlovna had been a beauty. Her gestures and movements were still remarkably graceful and her eyes had not lost their youthful charm. But what had been a flaw in her looks when she was young – the way her large lower teeth stuck out when she smiled – had become more noticeable with the years.

His continued bad luck remained a source of deep pain to Nikolay Andreyevich. At student seminars it had been the talks hastily flung together by that drunkard Pyzhov or by the red-haired Radionov that had generated excitement – not his own meticulously prepared papers.

Nikolay Andreyevich had become a senior researcher at a famous scientific institute; he had published dozens of works; he had successfully completed his doctorate. But his

wife - and his wife alone - knew what torments and humiliations he continued to experience.

At the cutting edge of his area of biology there were only a very few researchers. One was an academician, two were Nikolay Andreyevich's juniors, and one had not even completed his candidate's dissertation.<sup>6</sup> All four respected Nikolay Andreyevich's decency and valued him as someone to discuss their ideas with. They were friendly and well disposed towards him - but they simply, and quite sincerely, did not think of him as a scientist.

Nikolay Andreyevich was constantly aware of the aura of tension and excited admiration surrounding these men - especially the lame Mandelstam.

A London scientific journal had once described Mandelstam as 'a scientist who is brilliantly continuing the work of the founders of contemporary biology'. Had this been written about himself, Nikolay Andreyevich could have died of joy.

Mandelstam often behaved badly. Sometimes he was sullen and depressed; sometimes he spoke in a haughty and patronising tone. When he got drunk at a party, he would mimic other scientists, referring to them as mediocrities or even as frauds and rogues. Nikolay Andreyevich found this extremely irritating. Mandelstam, after all, was criticising friends, people whose hospitality he enjoyed: when Mandelstam was eating and drinking in someone else's home, he probably called Nikolay Andreyevich a mediocrity and a rogue.

Nikolay Andreyevich was equally irritated by Mandelstam's wife - a stout woman who had once been beautiful and who now, it seemed, loved only two things: card games played for money, and the scientific glory of her lame husband.

And at the same time he felt drawn towards Mandelstam. 'Life is never easy,' he would say, 'for people as special as he is.'

But when Mandelstam gave him a condescending lecture, he would feel very upset indeed. He would come back home cursing and swearing, raging at that upstart Mandelstam.

Maria Pavlovna regarded her husband as brilliant. The more Nikolay Andreyevich told her about the indifference and condescension shown by various luminaries towards him and his work, the more fervent her faith in him grew. This faith and admiration were as necessary to him as vodka to an alcoholic. They both believed that some people are lucky and some unlucky, but that in other respects everyone is much the same. Mandelstam, for example, was blessed by especial luck – he was a kind of Lucky Benjamin of the biological sciences. As for Radionov, he had as many adoring fans as if he were a famous operatic tenor – not that he looked much like one, with his snub nose and his prominent high cheekbones. Even Isaac Khavkin seemed to be blessed with good fortune – in spite of the fact that he had never completed his candidate's degree and that, being suspected of the heresy of vitalism,<sup>7</sup> he had never, even at the most relaxed of times, been offered work at any research institute. Instead, although he was already grey-haired, he worked at a local bacteriological laboratory and went about in torn trousers. But there was no getting away from it – academicians went along to discuss their work with him, and the research he conducted in his pitiful little laboratory generated considerable interest and controversy.

When the campaign against the followers of Weissman, Virchow and Mendel began, Nikolay Andreyevich was troubled by the harshness of the punishments meted out to many of his colleagues. Both he and his wife were upset when Radionov refused to confess his errors. He was, of course, dismissed; Nikolay Andreyevich cursed his quixotic obstinacy and at the same time arranged for him to earn some money by translating English scientific texts in his own home.

Pyzhov was accused of 'servility towards the West' and sent off to work in an experimental laboratory near Orenburg. Nikolay Andreyevich wrote to him and sent him books; Maria Pavlovna organised a New Year parcel for his family.

Newspapers began printing articles consisting largely of denunciations: of careerists and petty crooks who had obtained degrees - even higher degrees - through fraud; of doctors guilty of criminal cruelty towards sick children and women in childbirth; of engineers who had built dachas for themselves and their relatives when they were supposed to be building schools and hospitals. Nearly everyone denounced in these articles was a Jew, and their names and patronymics were cited with unusual punctiliousness: Srul Nakhmanovich . . . Khaim Abramovich . . . Israel Mendelevich . . . A hostile review of a book by a Jewish writer with a Russian pseudonym would include, between brackets, the writer's original Jewish surname. Throughout the whole of the USSR it seemed that only Jews thieved and took bribes, only Jews were criminally indifferent towards the sufferings of the sick, and only Jews published vicious or badly written books.

Nikolay Andreyevich was aware that it was not only street sweepers and drunks on suburban trains who enjoyed these articles. He himself was appalled by them - and yet he felt annoyed with his Jewish friends who seemed to look on these scribblings as portents of the end of the world and who were always lamenting that talented young Jews were not being accepted as graduate students, that they were being barred from university physics departments, that they were no longer being offered jobs in ministries or in heavy - or even light - industry, and that Jews graduating from institutes of higher education were all being sent to work in the most far-flung parts of the Soviet Union. And whenever staff reductions were being made anywhere, it was always the Jews who had to go.