

The Unknown Black Book

The Holocaust in the German-Occupied Soviet Territories

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Chapter I, section 27. In the shtetl of Pyatigory, Kiev Region

The recollections of Raisa Zelenkova ¹

The weather was sunny. As I did every day, I was at work sorting books in alphabetical order in the library. Suddenly I heard the frightened voice of a young reader, Vanya Klebansky. "Haven't you heard? They're bombing Kiev! Everyone has to show up at the meeting!" His words came out in a trembling, frightened voice. It seemed incredible to me somehow. Still, I closed the library. Ten minutes later I was in Zagrebyonka Street where the meeting was taking place. Afterward, the young people went to a club. It was our last time going out; it was already forbidden to walk the streets in the evening. A week later, the evacuation of other towns in the region began. Day and night, hundreds, thousands of people were on the move, but everyone was reassuring us that the Front was still very far away.

I decided to ask the director of the collective farm to see to our evacuation. The director helped all of us. I, like the other families, received a pair of bulls. Another ten people came with them. We began to prepare for our departure. I had four meters of cloth; I sold them all and began getting ready to take to the road. Everyone wanted to bring something essential. For us, the adults, it was small children. And that meant that there would be nothing to feed the bulls with for a trip of such a distance.

My father refused to go on the journey altogether. "I'm sixty-seven," he said. "I've been working since I was eleven. What have I got to be afraid of? You," my father said, turning to me, "you're in the Komsomol. You save your life. I've got nothing to be afraid of." But I decided to stay with my father. My brother, Zalya, had become well-off; he had a pair of bulls as well. But a fight broke out between my brother and the neighbors. They decided to forget about the train as well.

Times turned very hard. Every day we were expecting something serious to happen. And while people were being evacuated in cars and horse-drawn carriages, they all kept on reassuring us that the Front was still far away. The wait for our "guest," however, was not long. On July 16, 1941, two light German tanks appeared. They quickly drove through the center of the shtetl to shouts of "*Befreit die Ukraine!*" (Free Ukraine!)

Everything came to a stop, as though there were not a living soul in the shtetl. A few minutes later, both of the light tanks came back. And then on July 19, the German advance began. The Germans were met by the wives and children of the members of the 1918 gang. For example: Matryona Tasevich, the wife of a bandit; Maria Kravchenko, the wife of an enemy of the people; Gordy Ishchenko, who was shouting at the top of her lungs: "I've been waiting for you for twenty-three years, brothers!" There were other German toadies like this as well.

The Gestapo appeared a few days after that. They introduced a new internal order in the village. They posted a decree to surrender all weapons. Zakotynsky, the manager of the mill, who had not surrendered some weapons, went into hiding. The commandant issued an order: any Jews seen on the street would be arrested.

¹ There is a notation on the typewritten manuscript of *The Black Book*: "Material rejected by Efros. Not to be used."

They arrested: Avram Strizhevsky, Bunya Klotzman, and Zakotynsky's wife. They were shot as hostages on July 31, except for Zakotynsky's wife, who escaped.

After this, the village elder, Mazurak, announced that all Jews would have to immediately put on armbands bearing six-pointed stars, on a visible place on the right sleeve. With tears in our eyes, we took up our handiwork—sewing on the stars. I decided that I would rather die than wear the despised armband. Since my husband was Russian, I appealed to the village elder. The mayor gave me a certificate releasing me from wearing the star. I was happy to have this document. Later, the entire Jewish community was pressed into forced labor on the collective farm to bring in the harvest. The monthly wage was six kilograms. They worked in fear, not knowing a day of rest. On the right arm, a ribbon could be seen from a kilometer away that it was Jews who were working. While the work was going on, the Tetyev District police would come and rob us. I was working in the fields at the time. I worked up the nerve to quit work and go directly to the town. I went up to the car, and a tall blonde man—the bastard—was standing there: the commandant. I showed him my document. He slapped me on the shoulder and said: “Get something for yourself.” I said: “*Danke schön*” [thank you]. At the door, he ordered me to make a cross over the notation “*Befreit von Betraubung*” [released from requisition]. I thanked him and continued to look at this tragedy: They were carrying absolutely everything out of the apartments.

The vehicle moved off. I went to work. After a hard day's work, I went home to bare walls. There was nothing to put on and nothing to cover myself with. And instead of letting us rest, they made us peel potatoes and wash the floors of the officers' quarters. On August 28, coming home from work, we received an order from the village council: All men fourteen and older were to appear for a meeting at the school at 9:00 am. I tried to convince my father to go into hiding because there seemed to be some kind of deception going on. We did not sleep the whole night. We talked of only one thing—whether it was necessary to leave for somewhere. Papa did not agree with me. Early the next morning, there was a heavy fog outside. Papa got up, prayed to God, and said: “All right, Raya, give me some clean underwear. If we're to be sentenced to death, then I want to be clean for the next world.”

I also started getting myself and my child ready for a trip. “Where are you going? At least tell me where you'll be!” I felt my heart tighten out of pity for my father, and I answered: “I have two options. And, by the way, if anyone takes me in, I will stay there until tonight. Maybe by then we'll know what's going on.”

I took a step forward and was just about to leave when Papa opened a cupboard and said: “Come back. Here in this black sock are seven hundred rubles that I earned with these old hands. If you come back alive with the child, take them for yourself.” I burst into tears and left the apartment. I walked and then began to feel so sad. Why had I not kissed my father? But going back now was out of the question. Dawn was breaking. I went away. It was on that foggy morning that I saw my old gray haired father for the last time. On that day, seventeen souls were killed, including my beloved father. It was difficult to think that this hardworking shoemaker had gone off to such an awful death.

Hard months raced by. We carried on working. The depths of autumn were approaching. The sun was warming these unfortunate, ragged, naked people less and less. We began preparing for winter. Several families were living in each apartment. At the time, there were two girls in my apartment who had escaped the Germans in Cherkassy. Sonya Ostrovskaya was registered as Nadya Ivanchenko, and Tanya as Ilenko. They were working alongside Ukrainians and gave no sign that they were Jews. After work, we would get together and speak as usual in Yiddish. But the enemy does not sleep.

One evening we were at my brother Zala's place. Nadya and Tanya were there. A village policeman named Fanas learned our secret. That night he knocked at our door. Before I could open the door, he had already ripped it off its hinges and kept on shouting: “You're hiding yourself under the cross and now you're hiding kikes!” He

set about smashing dishes and furniture. It was a cold, wintry night. We took off, without clothes or shoes, and ran to my brother's place.

The next morning I made a statement to the chief of police. Fanas was sent to the gendarmerie for his hooligan antics. There they gave him a good twenty-five lashes, and he had to pay a fine of another hundred rubles for tiring out Gokhman, the chief. But this was not enough for Fanas and he carried on with his work. We decided, all three of us, to get out of town. The talk around us was very bad. We were all expecting something serious to happen. To leave with a child, however, was impossible. I decided to have my daughter baptized since my husband was Russian, and to leave the child with her godmother. My plan was adopted by the girls. Tanya, Nadya, and I were doing housework. All at once, a good friend named Ivan Pavlovich Grechany came to see me.

"Raechka, you have to go into hiding these days because they're going to kill everyone. That's what they are saying." We quit our jobs, gathered some junk together and traded it for provisions, and then began making the preparations for the baptism at top speed. I took some grain and went to the Hitlerite mill. In the evening, the three of us began to think about who the godfather and godmother would be. "To my way of thinking," I said, "the godfather ought to be the mayor of the village since he has a German seal, and the godmother should be the doctor's wife since she has no children. So then, dear friends, you can congratulate me. I have a baptized daughter. She wears a big cross that the village priest gave her himself. Now the only thing we have to do is get ourselves some good papers."

We were waiting for a long time until our guest arrived, the godfather. Tanya poured the vodka, Nadya prepared the appetizers. I embraced the godfather and discreetly took out the seal. And then the godfather passed out and snored so that the whole apartment could hear it. We locked the door and got to work. Tanya was writing the certificates while I stamped them. We wrote out six certificates plus copies, providing place and year of birth, and nationality. Obviously, we put Ukrainian as the nationality. The godfather woke up when everything had been finished.

On April 25, 1942, the police surrounded the village. They herded all the Jews into the village council building. The girls were at work and managed to escape. I also hid with my child. I went to see the godmother to leave the child, and decided for myself to go out into the world.

In the evening, I found out that the childless and the young were taken to a concentration camp in the shtetl of Buka. I did not have time to rest at home before V. Sheputa, the chief of police, dropped by to see me. "Why did you take off?" he shouted. "You have to report at the police station without fail at eight this evening."

That night, I was arrested along with my child. In the morning, the chief of police came and began to interrogate me about where I had sent Nadya and Tanya, and what road they had taken. I indicated another road, one that they would not have taken. The chief called round to everyone in the police, so that any such people on foot would be arrested. He kept after me for a long time: "You're lucky," he said, "that you've got a kid. Otherwise I'd send you to Buka."

So there I was, free again, continuing to work on the collective farm. My life was very uneasy. I had a vague premonition of some great sadness, but I could not bring myself to abandon my child and go into hiding. I kept on consoling myself with the thought that I would still be able to go wandering through the world. The talk was very bad; they were saying that Jews were being wiped out everywhere. But no one made their mind up to leave because things would have been even worse in a strange village.

On November 14, 1942, the politsai arrived. They spent the night in the school. Alarm spread throughout the shtetl. I thought very seriously about things. In the evening, I went to see my brother; all the neighbors had already gathered there, everyone was frightened. We all went to our homes. But really, who could sleep on

a night like that? I pressed myself closer and closer to my child and thought: “Is this really the end of our lives? Do they really need sixty policemen to shoot us? It seems to me that twelve dogs would do.” Tired, I fell into a deep sleep.

“Mama!” I heard the voice of my child say, “Someone’s knocking!” And it was true. Someone was quietly knocking. I opened the door. Before me stood Vanya Pravuk, a policeman. “All right, Raya, get your little girl and come with me.” “What, it’s all over, then? (That was what I guessed straight away.) “There’s no one, it’s just a summons.” “Vanyechka, be a pal, go tell them that I wasn’t home and that I took off for the wide world.” “No!” he said. “They sent me, and I have to bring you!” I managed to say:

*On a Sunday, very early
The bells are all ringing
And they’re already taking
Me and my daughter out to death!*

“What makes you think that?” the policeman asked. I wasn’t thinking anything, I was just anticipating. Before we reached the police station, I opened up my satchel and tore up the document. I went into the station. The whole gendarmerie was sitting there, and they opened the cell where all the Jews were. My best friend, Manya Aletka, was as overjoyed to see me as I was to see her. We would perish together! “Yes,” Manya replied. “Only together.” I took out my poems and began to read aloud. Suddenly the cell door opened—they were calling us by surname and sending us somewhere.

“Zelenkova” I heard called. I took my daughter and walked out. Policemen were leading me somewhere. They took us to the big Grebenyuk house. I came upon several families there. It was a quiet, freezing, but sunny day. It happened to be a market day. I was sitting by a little window and watching: They are taking everything out of my apartment and dragging stuff to the market. Jews were added to our number.

Around four in the afternoon, the door opened and they brought in Jung, the interpreter, who had been working for Shefer. Jung stood out from all of us. His boots shone like mirrors. He was wearing a splendid overcoat and had a watch on his left wrist. He did not say anything, but paced around the cell looking down frequently and smoking aromatic cigarettes. Slowly walking around the room, he grabbed his black forelock and softly whispered: “That’s it!” We understood him. A wail rose in the room, as in the synagogue on Yom Kippur. The police opened the door and called Jung out into the corridor. They made him suffer there for some time. We could hear Jung’s conversation in the cell: “I won’t give you my overcoat! I’ll give it away where it’s needed!” With these words he came into the cell.

“Yes,” Jung said to us there, “tomorrow they’re taking us out to be shot! Come on, girls, let’s go to be shot together! We ought to die a heroic death! No waiting!” We agreed. It was a moonlit night. The moon shone down on all these poor suffering people. All around was quiet, and they were afraid to disturb it. Everyone kept silent as though under a spell. This beautiful weather was not for us. For us there were only a few last minutes of enjoyment. And there, there was the damp grave. The night seemed very long, there was no way to sleep, the only sound to be heard was the wailing of a child asking for water. She cried the entire night. The parasites did not pay her cries any attention. “Officer,” the mother would cry, “please give us a bit of snow, the heat’s unbearable.” Her words sounded in vain. The bandits had no sympathy for the heart of a poor mother.

Now dawn was breaking. Gokhman gave the policemen the order: Form two ranks. They opened the cell, we found ourselves surrounded. Manya Aletka was holding me and my daughter by the hand. Manya kept on pushing my little daughter so that at least she could be saved. But no sooner had my daughter managed to make a leap than one of the bastards brought her back. I heard my little girl’s voice: “Mama! Wait for me! Where’s my mama?” Again, the three of us walked on. And in front of us, my brother with his family and Manya’s mother with her four brothers.

They brought us to the park, to the machine-tractor station, a long barn, where the order was given: “Strip down to your underwear!” Jung winked at us, Manya gave me a nudge as if to say “Time to go.” “There’s still time, Manya. Every minute counts.” “No!” Manya shouted, “If a little flower like Jung leaves us, we ought to go together! How can you look at your brother’s blood, after all?” I wouldn’t agree to it. Jung took out his papers and photo, took off his overcoat, produced a comb and combed his fringe. He gave the order: “One, two, three” and put one leg forward, yelling: “Shoot, I’m ready!” Gokhman fired five shots and that was the end of Jung. Manya cried: “Raya! My mother’s gone!” Her brothers joined hands, went up to Manya, kissed her, and, after saying “Goodbye” left.

Next to me stood my six-year-old daughter asking me to take her hand. I took her hand, but just as soon let it go; I had no strength left. Our turn came. I stood in front of [. . .]² I had five hundred rubles in my pocket. I threw them at the police and yelled: “Drink our blood!” Then I took off my dress and stood there in just a black shirt. My little daughter was standing a few meters from me shouting: “Mr. Gokhman, I’m not a Jew, I don’t know how to talk in Jew language!”

“Let’s go, now, daughter, let’s die together!” I began to kick off my shoes. Just then, a thought flashed through my mind: I ought to beg! I can’t believe that I’m to die. I’m still young, after all, and there’s so much in front of me. I began to plead: “*Ich will leben. Ich bin jung. Mein Vater ist Ukrainer und ich bin keine Jüdin.*” [I want to live, I’m young, my father is Ukrainian, and I’m not a Jew].

“Who’ve you got here?” asked Gokhman. I pointed to my poor little girl, who was crying without stop. He ordered that we be taken to the police. I took the child and everything went black before my eyes. I asked for a bit of snow. Then Gokhman shouted: “*Zurück!*” [Back!] I was very frightened. “Take your coat!” he ordered. I thanked him and was led away to the police. On the way, I could only think of one thing: Who could I bring as a witness? Who would step forward for such a lie! After all, everybody knows that I did not speak the truth. That’s all right, I said to myself to calm my heart. I will live another twenty minutes until they get me to the police station, and there, until the interrogation begins, I will live at least a bit longer in this world. I will breathe the fresh winter air a bit longer, I will at least hear the voice of this little one who has pressed herself to her mother’s breast and is sleeping soundly, sobbing all the while.

Do you hear the shots? That’s it for Manya. There were two little girls sitting in the police station. Both blondes. They were looking at me with their little blue eyes as though they were looking for their own dead mothers. They had also been spared because their fathers were Russians. That is where she would be sitting helpless, then; no one has any use for my daughter, was the thought that came to mind. Then the door opened and they brought in Manya. “Manya, you mean you’re still alive? Is it really you? You were there altogether naked!”

“Hold on, Raya, it’s not over yet. If it weren’t for our local scoundrels, we might have wriggled out of it, but there’s no way like this. We’re still breathing fresh air, though, while our brothers and sisters are being finished off!” “On your feet!” a policeman shouted. “The gendarmes are coming!”

Gokhman appeared. His coat was spattered with blood and bits of flesh. The policemen’s boots were red with blood, as though they were red leather. Taratsansky, the Oberleutnant; Pobyl, a gendarme; and Kuravsky, the district chief of police, were sitting behind a table.

I behaved calmly, carried myself freely, and smiled from time to time at my small daughter, who had awakened from all the noise. My plan had long since been sketched out in my mind. The Oberleutnant called me over to the table, on which there was a typewriter, and said to me: “If you’re three-quarters Jewish and one quarter

² There is a gap in the text.

Ukrainian, then you're *kaput* here and now. If it's the other way round, you'll live." The interrogation began: "How can you prove to us that your father's Ukrainian?"

"I am Raisa Zelenkova, born 1912. My mother was a kike. Her husband was also a kike, but he went to America in 1907. There was a cobbler's shop in our apartment where Ukrainians worked. At the time when Mama's husband was in America, she was living with a Ukrainian worker from the shop. When Mama's husband, Leyba Kleter, found out that Mama had betrayed him and had a child—that is, me—by a Ukrainian, he did not even want to come home. My mother told me about this when I was already a grownup. Leyba Kleter brought me up very badly. My mother tried to marry me off to a Ukrainian, and I was doing my best to get married myself. In 1934, I married a Ukrainian, but my husband, Vasily Ivanovich Zelenkov, died from a severe illness and left me with a daughter." The Oberleutnant said: "You have witnesses to this?" "There will be witnesses," I said.

They summon Manya Aletka. She started trying to twist her way out of it. The Germans took a break and went outside to have a smoke. Someone had betrayed Manya. Gokhman ordered her outside into the courtyard. A cart was waiting there. He seated her in it, laid aside a shovel, and came for me. "Right," he said to the child, "You—*zurück* [back], and you—*komm* [come]!" Lida began to scream. I managed to beg another half hour from them to summon witnesses. Gokhman agreed to it.

When they brought Manya up to a freshly dug grave, which was indeed still fresh—it was scarcely covered over—blood was seeping up to the surface, and the soil was rising in places from those who had been buried alive. They made a shallow pit for Manya on the top of this grave. Lying in this pit, Manya appealed to Gokhman to let her live another five minutes. Gokhman took out his watch and said: "Eh, you've already lived long enough!" Then Manya began to ask for another ten minutes, but when Gokhman heard that, he went into a rage and reached for his pocket.

Manya cried out: "Long live comrade Stalin!" Gokhman fired an explosive round and Manya's skull flew into bits. Like a beast, Gokhman came back to me and asked whether or not I had a witness. "I'll have one soon," I said. My God, I thought, why didn't they just kill me straight away? Why should I have to bear so much sorrow? But who will go to their death just for me? If it hadn't been for our own scoundrels, I could have thought of something.

"Fine," said Gokhman. "We'll go to lunch and you call a witness!" I was still thinking—maybe I'll live yet! The Germans went off to lunch. I stayed behind with Lida. Galya Mikhaylova, a clerk for the local village council, a Komsomol member and a teacher, came over to me. "Galya!" I appealed to her. "You've got to do something so that at least I will be saved!" Galya agreed.

We needed to act fast, and discreetly as well. I had Ivan Pavlovich Grechany summoned; I needed to talk to him properly so that our stories would coincide. They hitched up the horses. A young policeman set off for Grechany. "We've got to save one person. You know her. You work in their apartment, in the workshop." "Raechka!" Ivan Pavlovich cried. "I'm ready. I'll go whether it means life or death!" The horses rushed along briskly. Galya was coming toward me, and she asked Grechany into her office. She explained everything to him. When Grechany appeared in the doors of my room, I was kneeling over my sleeping daughter and crying bitterly.

Grechany winked at me, but a tear was rolling down his wrinkled face. He went out. I quickly assumed a happy look on my face. The gendarmerie came in. "Well, got a witness?" he asked. "I'll have one soon! Ivan Petrovich will get here in about twenty minutes." I was not looking at him. Grechany repeated my story and added something that was very valuable to me: "I worked in America in the same factory with Leyba Kliner, and when I asked him to come home with me, he said to me: "How am I supposed to go home when my wife's expecting a *baystryuk* [bastard] from some Ukrainian." Everyone there burst out laughing. I did the same. The

Oberleutnant who was taking down these words looked serious, not understanding the word. Galya tried to explain it to him. Grechany left the room. They summoned Z. I. Sitinok, a clerk to the village council. He said: "I didn't know her father at all."

They called in F. K. Slobodyanik, who worked for the council as well. He repeated the same words. Then they asked me what school I had attended, a Ukrainian one or a Jewish one? I called a witness, Odarka Bachinskaya, who confirmed that we had gone to a Ukrainian school together. They called in the chief of police. The commandant also confirmed that he did not know my father at all. The only thing that he knew for sure was that I had been married to a Ukrainian.

It was only then that I felt that I would live. "Well," Gokhman said, "Let's go to your place." Pobyl and Gokhman went with me. There was nothing in my apartment. The gendarmes and the police had taken everything. Gokhman ordered me to come to the police station at 2:30. I began weighing what to do. Should I try to escape or should I go? I began to consult with my neighbors, and then I decided to go. I arrived there. Gokhman told me that I was an hour late: "We wanted to give you your things back. You'll have to go to the gendarmerie." I went to the gendarmerie. "Well come on, follow me, only be quick about it, march like a German!" the policeman shouted.

That's it, I thought, I'm done for. My legs would not move at all. He led me into a storeroom where all the Jewish things were. If I had not been so frightened, I could have picked out my belongings, but I asked him to give me back only my bed. I took it home.

It was very difficult to adjust to this new life: I had no one close to me, while enemies were abusing me all around. Just one conversation of theirs was enough to make it impossible for me to live with peace of mind: "They left her so she could live an extra week." More than once I had occasion to curse my life. It would have been better for me to go through that terrible moment of being led out to be shot than to suffer now, to endure cold, hunger, and fear. It had been ten days since the death of all the Jews. I decided to take a woman with a child into my apartment, so that I wouldn't be so afraid; her name was Maria Poganenko.

At twelve o'clock on November 28, Fanas Korobkov and B. Sheputa, the chief of police, came to see me. They checked our papers and arrested us both along with our children. Fanas led me along, shouting: "You're not going to beg in German anymore. Today I'm going to kill you myself. I found a kike woman at your place at twelve o'clock." We went to the council building and they put us in a cell. Sheputa was summoned to the gendarmerie. Fanas came into the cell and asked us how we were feeling, congratulating himself all the while on how he would get to shoot me himself that day.

Sheputa turned up in the evening, opened the cell and told me to go home. I decided not to sleep at home that night. I went to sleep at a friend's place. I got up in the morning, and, passing by the commandant's headquarters where my friend worked, knocked at the door.

"Raya, go wherever you want, they've been looking for you all night! They even went to places where you set foot a year ago. They searched my cellar and my attic, and they were saying: 'When we find her, we'll shoot her on the spot,'" Grisha Shulyak told me. Where to go, what to do! I went to the collective farm. I saw the director, Kondrat Ivanovich Dyachenko, standing there. I told him everything. He took me to his office and rang up Sheputa. I stood there trembling. All the workers were hurrying to their jobs.

"Yes, yes, it's me, Kondrat Ivanovich. Listen Sheputa, they tell me that they're looking for Raya again. No, I don't know where she is. I'm just wondering who wants her. The gendarmerie? For when? The twelfth? All right, Sheputa, all the best." And Kondrat Ivanovich put the phone down. "See here, Raya, don't be in a hurry

to go to other villages. Save yourself here.” I shook his hand and went to the lady of the same house where I had spent the previous night. She received me and told me to lie down on the stove.³ I stayed with this woman for two weeks. It was impossible to stay with her for a longer time because she was very poor. I decided to write to a friend who worked in the commandant’s office.

I was very glad indeed when Nina brought me some supplies. In the evening, Nina asked me to come back to her place, since Herman was away. I went. “Do you want to see Lyusya Beznalenko?” Nina said. “She’s here at my place; they’re taking her to Germany tonight, so she came to stay with me.” Seeing Lyusya, I was overjoyed. “So this is where the farmhands get together!” I said. Nina went out somewhere at that point. “Get out of here, quick!” a coachman opened the door and said. “The police are coming!” We did not have time to run out of the apartment before shots rang out.

And when we wound up back in the apartment, the lady of the house could not find out anything from us. I fell onto the bed where my poor little girl lay and covered her with bitter tears. Lyusya stood there as motionless as death. We realized it was all Nina’s doing. There were no police. The fear, hunger, and filth were impossible to bear. I would go to the gendarmerie the next day and say: “Do whatever you want.” “I’m leaving my daughter with you. If I don’t come back, give her to the farmers!” I said to the lady of the house. We lay there together for a long time, shivering.

In the morning at dawn, Lyusya accompanied me to the district gendarmerie. I came into the outer yard and stood there thinking, should I go or not? How awful! No, I’ll go, I can’t suffer like this anymore! I knocked on the door. “Whom do you want?” a little girl asked me. “Pobyl.” “Wait here.” Ten minutes later, Pobyl called me into his office. “Mr. Pobyl, I was visiting someone in a village near here. I came home in the evening and they told me that the gendarmerie wanted to see me. So, here I am.” “We don’t need you now. We had your lodger brought in and we found out that she’s not a kike.” I said: “*Auf Wiedersehen* [Goodbye]” and left the commandant’s headquarters.

Walking quickly and boldly, I went home. Who was I to fear now, after all? I have fooled the gendarmerie itself, I thought to myself. It was with joy that I met my daughter, who was still hiding over the stove. I went home and my lodger would not let me into the building. It was late autumn outside. It was cold and raining. I was standing there with my daughter and trembling all over. My neighbor called me over to her place. Before I had time to warm up, my “friend” Fanas Korobkov turned up. “What are you doing sitting here? All right, then, come with me. I’ll show you where your apartment is.” And with these words, he loaded his rifle. I heard the cry of my neighbor: “Fanas, my friend, don’t shoot her here!” He took me into my apartment and said: “You’ll spend the night here for now. Tomorrow, we’ll see about everything.” He was still trying to frighten me. I found nothing at all in my apartment. What the gendarmerie had given back to me, Nina had already taken away.

Winter came on. There was nothing to burn to keep warm. There was nowhere to take shelter. There was nothing to eat. By day I went to other people’s apartments to get warm. I would go to one apartment and Lida to another. There were good people who would give us something to eat; there were some who would not even let us into their apartments. In the evening I would go to find my daughter and we would go back to our cold apartment where the walls were sprinkled with diamond-like clusters of ice. We suffered a great deal that cold winter.

In those unfortunate days, I had occasion to meet up with my neighbors: Khannah Shvarts; the young woman Khaye Kagan; and the daughter of Shura at the home of my rescuer, Ivan Pavlovich Grechany. It was not a

³ In Ukrainian and Russian peasant houses, the stove was a large structure whose top, as the warmest spot in the house, served as a bed.

meeting, but a farewell, for at that moment I could have fallen into the hands of the fascist bandits. So, I saw the Jews for the last time.

Spring came. The snow melted. The sun rose higher in the sky so we felt more cheerful. On Sunday, April 5, at three in the afternoon, the policeman, Ivan Yaremich, came to see me and congratulated me on still being alive. I thanked him. He sat a while and then went away. An hour later he came back in a drunken state and arrested me, telling me that I could expect a new interrogation: “The gendarmes will be summoning you.” “Vanya, my dear man, go and tell them that you didn’t find me in, and I’ll just go wherever the wind carries me. Oh my God! Do I really have to say goodbye to the world? Can this really be the last day I’ll see the sun? Only God and man know how I survived this cold and hungry winter, and now another interrogation.

Mr. Yaremich! Aren’t you a father to your children? How can you stand the screams of this suffering little girl?” He loaded a round in his gun and shouted: “Two steps forward!” He took me to the police, locked me in a cell and rang the gendarmerie himself. Five minutes later, he opened the cell: “All right, get your daughter, come outside with me. Just know that if you run, I’ll shoot!” I passed out and did not hear anything more. When I came around, I saw my poor little girl next to me, crying loudly: “Mama, Mama!”

The chief of police arrived and began asking about who had made the arrest. I pointed to Yaremich. Yaremich took my place in the cell. “So, just for a bit of varnish you wanted to snuff out my life?” I said to Yaremich.⁴ I went home. The next day, Yaremich was summoned to the gendarmerie, where he was kicked off the police force and given twenty-five lashes for having arrested me on his own initiative. I could not regain my composure for a long time after this arrest.

On April 15, I went to work at the state farm, pulling weeds. The foreman was standing there with some unknown person who was smoking and looking at me. Somewhere far off was the sound of singing, and the work was humming along. I was trying to pull up as many weeds as possible, and kept on looking at this young man, who was not taking his eyes off me. There was the bell; work was over. The young stranger came up to me and said: “If you want, go slowly, I’ll catch up with you.” “Fine,” I said, “I’ll wait for you.” I started to think: Could the foreman really have told him who I am? He might turn out to be some fascist who will turn me in. But I decided to wait for him anyway. He caught up with me in short order. He held out

his hand and said: “My name’s Petya Boguslav.” “Nice to meet you! My name’s Raya,” I answered him. He did not say anything serious along the way. He only asked where I was from and if he could come round in the evening. “Have you got a family?” I asked. “Yes,” Petya said, “I have a wife who lives here.” What sort of candor is this? I wondered. After all, men are usually bachelors when they meet young women. I thought very seriously about this. He did not say anything else. Our paths separated. He had to [. . .](64) “So I can come round in the evening, then?” “Please do!” I was already wanting to go. He continued to hold my hand and say: “You and I, Raya, have one path in life. We’ll talk about it when we meet.”

I walked along thinking that I cannot understand him at all. He dropped by in the evening, but not for long as he was hurrying to get somewhere. He told me that he was working on a farm and that he had things to do. “We’ll get together tomorrow!” We met the next day. He came to see me after work. I started to tell him how I had saved my own life, but I was still on my guard with him.

“Yes,” he said, “You’ve been through a lot. I’ve already heard a bit about you. But don’t hold yourself back around me, speak openly. As I already told you, we have one common path in life.” With these words, he kissed me. “Raya! I need a secretary!” Everything became clear to me. “Fine,” I said, “Since I don’t write very nicely, I’ll introduce you to my girlfriend. She used to be a Pioneer leader at the school. Her name is Fanya Kursanivska.” “Fine, we’ll get together at your place after work.”

⁴ Russians were known to drink bottles of commercial varnish for their alcohol content.

This friend, Pyotr Volkov, was actually the commander of a partisan detachment. They wrote their first proclamations at my place under the title “An Appeal.” They were posted on the farm and along the Tetiev Road. In the morning we went off to work. Everyone realized that there was some news, and when we got near the farm, we saw that Pyotr Boguslav was standing there and reading a leaflet aloud. They continued to work at my place; they were making flyers for three villages: Pyatigory, Ralayki, Nenadykha. And when Volkov’s wife, Boguslava, began keeping an eye on him, we decided to transfer the work to the woods beyond the Azarovets state farm. The work continued there.

On August 1, a round-up of all the remaining Jews began throughout the region. They took every last one, even those who had been baptized. It was the start of a difficult time for me, but I continued to comfort myself with the thought that I would still be able to hide. I was arrested on August 1 by Yaremich and sent to the Pyatigory police station. They put me in a dark room. I groped about in the darkness and came upon a box. I sat there, took my child in my arms, and bitterly, bitterly wept: “On this dark night, I’m saying goodbye to you, my little daughter. I won’t see you anymore.”⁵

They’ll kill me. I will no longer be among the living. I’m hearing your voice for the last time. You’re calling me. They’re coming. Do you hear them, dear, they’re coming! Goodbye, goodbye, I’m no longer here! Oh, it’s scary how we want to go on living.” The footsteps stopped. Exhausted, I bent over my child and fell sound asleep. “Oh, Mama, is that you?” “Dearest! It’s so good that you’re with me! I had a dream. I’m behind bars again, waiting to be executed.” “So why do you look so happy, Mama?” “Today, dear, is a great day of celebration, don’t you know that? Give me your hand, I’ll give you a kiss. Don’t cry, don’t cry, I’m coming! I won’t forget you, no, I won’t!”

“Wake up! The kid’s crying and you’re sleeping.” I opened my eyes. There was a soldier in front of me. “Oh, what a lovely dream, to see your own mother.” “And where’s your mother?” asked the soldier. I told him about the conversation. “Soldier! Look over there. That cat walks the streets freely, no one despises it, and I’m sitting here waiting for the cart to take me to Gokhman. Oh, if only I could be a cat.” “Right, then.” The policeman Chernenko opened the cell. “Get yourself ready. The cart’s here!”

The trip to the gendarmerie went very quickly. And just as quickly, I found myself in a cell. “Officer!” I said to Chernenko. “Tell the interpreter that I’m here and that I want to do the interrogation.” “You’ll spend the night here, and then they’ll know!” the scum answered.

The day was very long and the night even longer. All the prisoners were saying that there was a car waiting to take me to Belaya Tserkov. There had been cases where Jews were sent there to be shot. The next morning a policeman opened the cell, and behind him came the interpreter, Rita Litke.

“What are you doing here, Raya? What’s the matter with you?” “Once again,” I said. “Do the interrogation! I’ll call a witness, perhaps I’ll save myself?!” “What interrogation? Tell me, how did you get here?” “The gendarmerie called: What’s that? Me? I’ll go to Gokhman right now!”

Twenty minutes or so later, she came back alone: “Take your child and go home!” Could it really be true? I went home. And there I was again, calm, cleared by the gendarmes.

On August 20, Fanas Korobkov came to my apartment along with two Germans; they had been sent by Volkov’s wife in connection with the search for him, Pyotr, who was now in hiding. Volkov’s wife had sent the police and the Germans round to my place saying that I was a Jew who was connected to him. “Well, all right,

⁵ There is a gap in the text.

if we need to, we'll come back." Difficult times had come again. I decided not to leave the village. On August 25, I went to see Nina at the commandant's headquarters so as to find out any sort of news about myself. The commandant suddenly came in. "Okay, *komm mit mir* [come with me]," he said, and pointed to a spot on the floor to tell me to wait for him.

Twenty minutes later I was at home. My little daughter just happened to be there. "Come on, darling, get ready. We've got to get out of here. They mean to shoot us. We'll run wherever the wind blows us!" I quickly opened my hiding place, shoved all my poems and flyers into it, and set off for Byednovka.

The sun was sitting on the horizon. The weather was very gloomy. Darkness was gathering and it was drizzling. In that weather, I set out on the road without knowing what to expect in the next village. The road was unfamiliar. I began to get very anxious. Thanks to the barking of a dog I knew that the village was not far off. It was already quite dark by the time I came to the village. I spent the night with a woman I knew. "Tell me," I said to her, "do you know where Vasily Kravets the blacksmith works?" "He works here, on collective farm number 2. I'll show you first thing tomorrow."

In the morning, when dawn was just breaking, I set off to see Vasya. Vasya was a good friend of mine. When Vasya and I got together, we exchanged opinions. Vasya had told me more than once that there was danger hanging over me and that I needed to get out of our village. That was why I decided to see him. When my child and I turned up on Vasya's doorstep, he realized what was going on. "Today, after lunch, you and I will take off. We'll go as one family. I'll deal with anyone we meet along the way." We took a long detour and came to the village of Klyuchki as it was getting dark. We could not go any farther.

We asked a woman if we could come in. "Sure, come on in," she said. "We're not allowed to have guests in the evening." I was thinking that it was forbidden by the police and that I was in for it again. But the woman went on: "They work during the day. At night they walk along the streets with their accordions and then drive off on some mission, and in the morning they rest." Vasya, sitting beside me, gave me a nudge. It became clear to me that this was a partisan village. I felt as though I had been born into the world all over again, that I was only beginning to live. What luck one has to have to land in a partisan village. In the morning we moved on to the next town. Vasya knew where to take poor Raya.

My life changed. If you have ever happened to jump out of a scalding bath, then I jumped out of danger. Here, on the small Balka state farm where Vasya and I stopped, lived partisan families and prisoners, while the rest were exclusively Jews. How do you like a community like that?⁶

Vasya introduced me to his friend Semyonov. The latter looked me over and it was obvious that he was figuring everything out: "Everything's okay here. A man can live well here on our little farm." "Sure," Vasya said, "but I still need your recommendation for getting set up." "Right. It just so happens that we need a blacksmith." "And where are the rest of our lads?" Vasya asked. "Out there, in the woods. They're working hard, these guys. They come to our place almost every day. And they should be here today." Vasya glanced at me. I was bright red as I sat there. "Yes. We'll have to go and see your director." Vasya and Semyonov went off, and I felt right at home. I could rest here.

Vasya put all of us on the books. I, as the wife of Kravets the blacksmith, became the shopkeeper's assistant. My daughter went to nursery school. In the evening, the young people coming from work would gather in the street to have a good time. Our daughter also sang and danced. Vasya and I looked with great pleasure at our daughter. "Oh, what a lovely little girl. She doesn't take after you at all: a dark dad and mother." "It's because the neighbor was a redhead." Everyone laughed and was satisfied with my answer. "They're coming, they're

⁶ It is not clear what she means by "prisoners." Perhaps they were escaped Soviet prisoners of war.

coming,” a little boy cried, and everyone ran to the dormitory. And it was true. You could hear the clatter of wheels, the sound of the accordion, and then a song rang out: “A man walks along like the master.”

I stood there without moving, listening to the words of the song as they drew closer. The cart stopped. I continued to stand there. A small, swarthy, armed partisan in a long leather coat passed by me. He didn't say anything. When he came back out of the dormitory, I said quietly: “Ah, our own brave soldiers.” He stopped: “Why don't you come by the apartment? And why are you crying? Did I hurt your feelings somehow?” Leaning against a fence, I burst into sobs: “Call Volkov out here, boys,” the short one shouted: “Ah, Volkov is here!” I cried even harder. “What's wrong with her? Take her to the apartment. There's nothing to see here.”

And when Volkov took me to the apartment, he held me in his arms for a long time and kissed me. “Raya. Is it really you? Are you really alive?” “Yes, Petya, friends meet up again.” Volkov introduced me to his men, whom I did not know yet. His comrade Fedya gave me a black shirt as a gift. I thanked him and felt a bit better. “You'll be okay now, Raya. We'll be coming here quite often. We'll take care of you and stay in contact with you.”

An accordion began to play. The men began moving off from the farm on their missions. After three days at the forge, Vasya said to me: “Well, Raya, it's time for me to go do my own work now. I've saved you. The men will be dropping by, and you and the child will be looked after. Everything's going well at the Front. Our people have already crossed the Dniepr, and things are getting better.”

Vasya arranged for the written permission he needed to go somewhere, to get some stuff, and then left. It was hard for me to say goodbye to as good a friend as Vasya. This was how my new life began. Gursky, the director of the state farm, did not behave badly toward the workers. Comrade Gursky hid about forty-four Jews from the German fascist bandits, along with many prisoners and partisan families.

When we were threatened with any danger, he always let us know about it beforehand. And when hard times came for the enemy, Gursky said to us: “My dear friends, if you and I have managed to save ourselves from the hands of the German fascists, that doesn't mean that we can't suffer in the last minutes of the German retreat. We need to spread out to the villages.” Gursky provided help to everyone. He paid particular attention to those who had suffered, seeing to it that they had food and fuel for heating, and I was one of those. I traveled to Khmelevka, where the partisans usually came by during the day.

On November 25, the partisan Danko Dudnik invited me to the funeral of another partisan in Belobonivka. I left my daughter with my landlady. I went with him alone. And before the arrival of our troops, I was in the detachment. In Khmelyovka, I had the good fortune to see the first Red Army patrol, which was stopped beside a church. “Hello!” I said in a trembling voice, and shook hands with each of them. “Tell me, is it true that there are Reds in Dengofovka? Has my region really been liberated?”

“If you want to see for yourself,” said the Kirghiz in command of the patrol, “come with us.” Even though I had not seen my daughter for a long time, I decided to go with them. My heart filled with happiness when I saw the red flag fluttering over the sugar factory. They brought me to army headquarters, and there I told the story of what I had been through and asked to volunteer for the army. The commander of the headquarters shook my hand and said: “You need to get back to your daughter and to her upbringing, as the Motherland expects of you. You should work and live with your daughter.” So I went back with the scouting party to Khmelyovka. Because of foul weather, I stayed there until February 9. And on February 9, I went home on a Stalin tractor.