

## Chapter One.

September 5<sup>th</sup>. *Moleben*<sup>1</sup>.

Today, on September 5<sup>th</sup> at 12:00 PM, we were told to come to a *moleben*. Of course, I arrived early, around quarter past 11. My comrades had already gathered. Here I saw Viktor Vatner with whom I had recently made peace after our small quarrel. There was Vova Ts., a short, small boy with light-colored shiny eyes who we dubbed 'Vovochka'<sup>2</sup>; there were many other comrades. The back door of our school led into a small garden where we could play in the fall and spring. In our class, I must incidentally mention, whoever of the students we liked most was always the center of conversations, discussions and games. Before that, he would have to distinguish himself somehow, like courage, wits, etc. Vatner was one of such people. He was a good student; I wouldn't say he was excellent but he was relatively OK. Last year, Vatner organized a so called "Third Grade Society." A member of the Society had to pay the dues of 30 kopeks per month. [Page 2] The collected money was used to purchase school supplies like geography maps or notebooks that would be sold to the Society's members whenever someone forgot them, as well as pencils, pens, quills, etc. With the help of the class, Vatner gathered the Board of the Society consisting of 5 people. Initially, the board comprised the best students—Liber, Vova Ts., a girl (a representative from the girls) Asya Kadysh, a representative from the Tatars (we had seven of them) Ibragimov, Boris Lesk, and Vatner (the total number stood at six but Ibragimov was soon excluded for not attending the Board meetings.) Lesk is an interesting character, worthy of a verbal analysis. It is rare that a good trait would sparkle in him, immediately extinguishing like a lightning bolt amidst a dirty, black cloud. He is too proud, even for such a trivial thing as politeness. He greets everyone with a slight nod of the head. If he notices that someone in the class is remarkably strong, he tries to ally with him and demeans himself in spite of all his pride. He is also ungrateful for services received. Liber is our number one student; Lesk is already hovering around him and has managed to get to sit with him. The

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<sup>1</sup> *Moleben* is a thanksgiving service.

<sup>2</sup> Diminutive

two of them sat at the last desk and apparently were friends. [Page 3] For some reason, Lesk became a good student. We couldn't gather why. But soon the truth emerged: Lesk copied all assignments from Liber. The teachers were pleased with Lesk. However, by the end of the year Lesk began picking on Liber and soon fell out with him. Lesk is ambitious; he tries to distinguish himself in strength, intelligence, and agility the best he can. He fails, and he becomes angry and gets into endless disagreements. He mocks others although not in a witty way; he enjoys touching others on a sore spot, and if someone gets a bad grade, he rejoices, although when he himself gets a bad grade, he cries a lot, and his father punishes him. He doesn't make friends with good students but rather with street urchins. The first year when he and I became acquainted, I liked him immensely but soon I became disenchanted, and I think that I will snap and, just like Vatner, Liber, and Vovochka, fall out with him. So, there was the moleben. We had to be on our feet for an entire hour. The priest said a word about the new year, which I liked a lot although the others chuckled while putting a hand over the mouth. After the priest, the principal made his speech, and then the moleben was held. The bass singer occasionally hit totally wrong notes, which made others [illegible] out loud. [Page 4] The tenor sang soothingly and distinctly. After the moleben, we received the schedule and went [illegible]. As we played, Lesk tried to join us but unsuccessfully; so he remained an outcast in the full sense of the word. Deep down, I felt sorry for him although he was often mean to me by mangling my verses. At this time, he said something to one of the students pointing at Vatner. 'That's what his pride reduced him to,' I thought, repeating Pavel P.'s words. He is even angrier at everybody right now, and makes everyone look at him with even more contempt.

You have humiliated yourself in everyone's eyes

You, Lesk, an envious stuck-up.

Who have you brought closer to yourself?

Ultimately, street urchins.

By contrast, Vatner is a joyful and kind boy, courageous and witty. During breaks, he rarely stays at his desk; he runs around and plays all the time. He boldly points out anything unfair right in [the teacher's] face, which makes some of them dislike him. He rarely lies to a teacher;

he tells the truth in a situation when I would be silent. [Page 5] Vatner says jokes during class; his jokes are not mean but witty.

September 7<sup>th</sup>. I arrived at school at 8:30 AM. Vatner and everyone else were already there. Today (Tuesday the eighth) we behaved badly during the physics class. I am not talking about myself because I had nothing to do with it. Vatner, Pinsky, and others told the teacher that the bell had rung when it hadn't. The teacher stepped outside the classroom and saw that everybody else was still in class, so he was angry. I feel sorry for him with all my heart but what's the use? It's worse for us. I was busy writing a poem titled *Brothers* but now since school started I have slowed down. I am writing a play *Yashka*. The plot is simple: Yashka is a smart boy. Although he lives with his intellectual parents, he is not a good student, plays pranks, is rough, and tells lies about servants and other students. In the last scene, he confesses everything and repents. There is a lesson episode, comic characters, etc. I wanted to write *Rome*, a narrative poem but it didn't come out right because I always write in iambs (a very convenient verse) but this time I wanted to use an octave and a different meter. I failed. I have been writing the *Brothers* poem for a long time; sometimes it came out right, other times it didn't but now I am close to completing it, and obviously I will decide that it is no good. [Page 6] It is an interesting storyline from the life of Slavs. The verse is iambic. There are some interesting historic types such as Sviatoslav, prince Vyat, and the sons of the prince. I also depict Kiev here in an ancient style, naturally.

After lunch I was at Vatner's; he invited Liber. The three of us started arguing about what a theorem is. Vatner and I were of the opinion that a theorem is a truth that requires proof. Liber claimed that a theorem is an expression that requires proof. We argued passionately for a long time, and only after I arrived home did I learn that Liber was right. Tomorrow I will say so during class or before the class since we already decided to ask the teacher. Liberman says that he will try to enroll me as a board member of the "Fourth Grade Society." Last year I was in it but since my disagreement with Vatner I left.

As soon as I arrived at school today, I was already shouting to Liber as I walked, "A theorem is a sentence, the truth of which becomes evident only after a certain proof." Vatner

and his other proponents crowded around me and almost squished a pear that I had brought to eat for breakfast, because of my words.

[Pages 7-8] The new algebra teacher explains very quickly so I had hard time understanding him. The physics teacher is old. I am very interested what will be for the theory of Russian literature because I think I will do well in this subject. *Rome* is picking up. The topic will obviously be suitable for our school newspaper (only Society members will receive it.) Liber kept his word—I have been elected to the board. He is trying to make me his assistant; he himself is the editor. I am asking to be appointed as editor of poems and short stories, so poetry in general. I am not sure if I will be.

On Saturday I did not go to school because someone got sick with scarlet fever in a classroom that we have to pass through.

Today is already Monday. The weather is rainy. Gray masses of leaden rain clouds move across the sky and sternly, as if reluctantly, spray the earth with rain. Occasionally, among the rain clouds, a little blue piece of translucent sky appears for a moment, and you can't help but want to go there, so high, to inhale that fresh air with your chest and to go on and on looking at the shining sun; at the rivers flowing in pearly ribbons across the face of the earth like tears; and at the mountains, these huge mountains that are gazing haughtily around them and meeting a curious human destroyer with their rocky chest; at the thick blue pine woods; at the fields, meadows, and farmland; at everything that constitutes all the beauty and grace of the living nature. But in an instant, this piece, just like the happy days of life, wraps itself up; menacing storm clouds swim over it, and in the place where there once was this azure islet among the raging sea, now the thunder is clapping and lightning is flashing with the speed of [illegible]. I've spent an uninteresting day today. In the evening, Liber and Vatner dropped by; we chatted some, argued some, and peacefully called it a night as usual.

They have not called on me yet, but I think they will soon. My poem *The Grave* written in Yimianpozhen will be published in the first issue of our class newspaper. The poem is beautiful. [Page 9] One can't say that it is very mellifluous but I am not a poet yet although I am trying to deserve this title. The new Russian language arts teacher, at first appearance....you can't really say anything about him. He often repeats the same word, which makes students

laugh. He told us what books we need to read. I have already read three fourths of them before. I also wanted to put a short story *To Shave* in the first issue but Liber brought a short story too. His descriptions are very similar to mine, and I protested explicitly, however his short story will be published because it will take more space than mine. Liber said that I should have lived in the last century. Of course, I thanked him for his advice. Furthermore, he said that it would have been even better if I were a son of a landowner so that I could spend my time among fields and nature in general. I think that if my poem *Brothers* is successful, then I'm thinking about publishing it using the Society's money, and sell copies at the Society's board's price (the price set by the board). [Page 10] All the profits from selling the books would go to the Society's treasury. There can't be much profit. It can amount to a maximum of one ruble or maybe more depending on which prices the ~~sec...~~ board will set. *Brothers* is a very long poem, the same as *Demon* by Lermontov. ~~The time of the action...~~The action takes place during the reign of Sviatoslav. I will describe the plot line in these notes after I finish the poem.

Today, our language arts teacher returned the material to us that we had given him for our newspaper. Liber's notes about the Society were corrected, and so was his short story. He corrected my three poems noting that in *The Grave* I say that a willow is rustling over the grave, and then I mention birch trees. This comment is fair; I had noticed it myself but I just couldn't redo the poem. In *The Blind Man* he noted that I repeat the word "ah" the same way as in another poem, *The Prisoner*, and he called them "the ahs" (*Ah* would be an interesting title for a poem.) [Page 11] In addition to the poem, I submitted a puzzle and a charade for the first issue. I will sign them "1-4" because these are the first and the fourth letters of the alphabet, "A.G." (Pushkin's signature was "1-14".) Somehow our escapades have died down: no one is fighting, nothing interesting is happening, so Vatner suggested (jokingly, of course) to stage a fake fight. The plan did not work.

I haven't sat down to write in my diary for about a week. Now I have to fill in what I missed. About the newspaper: Vatner and I are working on the newspaper at our classmate M.'s house who is letting us use his typewriter free of charge. In the short 'biography' of our Society that was written by Liberman (I used a short name for him before, Liber), while typing, Vatner and I noticed a lot of errors concerning the goal and the past deeds of the Society (not

grammar errors.) We didn't correct them because there was no time. Vatner and I consider the short story by Liberman not very good in terms of language and meaning. I am thinking about writing a critique of his short story and putting it in this diary. I also need to make a note about the current weather. [Page 12] I can't say that this fall is rainy because during the entire week, although the sky is always covered with heavy clouds, there have not been strong rainfall yet. Three or two times it drizzled a little bit and stopped. I believe the fall is especially wholesome. There is constant light southwest wind that is moving gray clouds. Very often, I wanted to try and express in words the whimsical shapes of rainclouds and clouds. I often observe them and marvel at their whimsicality. Recently I was sitting at my desk at school and looking out the window at them, and I saw two chains of high clouds that were stretching away in beautiful and fascinating dotted lines. Many rain clouds look somewhat like mountains. The same tall peaks lit by sun rays, same gorges covered by a dark cloak of shadow. These air mountains look almost cut at the bottom. At the bottom, they are dark and flat. Light and snow-white like foam, lonely summer clouds are beautiful during any time of the day. In the morning, they appear in the clear and fresh air, looking sharp but pleasant. They breathe freshness and coolness. [Page 13] The sky is still dark blue after a short summer night, and only around the rising sun it is becoming lighter and lighter. In the sky, there is only one single little cloud, as if made out of lace, like a little white island in the midst of the blue sea. It is even difficult to look at it, that's how pure white it is. Smoothly and quietly, the little cloud glides across the sky in the direction the cool morning wind is blowing, and little by little it disappears in the transparent blue distance. A cloud like this is beautiful when the sun is in the middle of the sky. Then it looks like it is frozen in place. It becomes more round and soft and doesn't stand out as sharply in the midday atmosphere. It looks like it is melting in it. It looks to our eyes like it is about to dissipate in the sky and vanish. But a cloud like this is most beautiful during sunset. Indeed, there are no colors on earth that could be used to express<sup>(2)</sup> and paint<sup>(1)3</sup> all the glory of the evening nature. The sun gradually sets at the edge of the sky, coloring the bottom and the sunset-facing side of the cloud with golden lazuli. The little cloud is wallowing in the parting light of the setting sun rays. [Page 14] It clothes itself in a magenta mantle, and there is nothing

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<sup>3</sup> Handwritten notations "2" and "1" indicate a change in the word order.

more beautiful on earth than this mantle; it doesn't shimmer or sparkle; it only grows dim as it burns out gloomily and slowly as if saying goodbye to its beauty and to the little cloud it shrouds, and gradually becomes purple. Now the sun has set. We can't see it. But it is still casting the last imploring rays as if asking the little cloud to protect it and begging the night to wait just a little bit longer, and then it burns out, fades away, and, casting its light over a portion the sky and the little cloud for the very last time, it disappears. And the little cloud looks like it is wondering, how come it has just turned gray, dark, and bleak. But now the black shroud of night covers it, and it falls asleep... This is the most beautiful type of clouds. We can also note the beauty of cirrus clouds so appropriately called 'rams.' Indeed, they create an impression that the entire sky is covered by a dense and huge heard of sheep. But I think these clouds are best compared with waves. Just like waves, they run with the wind, catching up with each other and foaming. The entire sky looks like a disturbed surface that keeps moving, endlessly moving. I will describe yet another type—the most interesting among the remaining types. [Page 15] It is when clouds are in a shape of an animal, a person, or a plant. For example, in Darasun, I saw a huge cloud of gray color that looked like a lion on its hind paws. The mane, the tail, and other distinctive features were clearly outlined. I had never seen such a sight before then, and I was utterly amazed. Recently, I saw a rain cloud resembling a crocodile with an open mouth, another one resembling a whimsical ship, a bird, etc.

#### *The Eve of Ivan Kupala*<sup>4</sup>

This story that I remember so well happened in the village of Zintsy. The village is located several versts<sup>5</sup> away from Poltava and is literally immersed in greenery. Picturesquely nestled along the edges of the village, there are low-roofed clay hamlets, colorful vegetable gardens, fields, and a small, quiet rivulet, a tributary of the Vorskla. It was a hot summer that especially makes itself felt in dusty cities, however, in Zintsy, among shadowy and dense groves and gardens, it has not yet come into its own. [Pages 16 & 17] It was a hot day. The sun was climbing in the middle of the blue sky. One snow-white cloud was rolling like a swan in the direction of the wind, looking down radiantly on the shadowy Zintsy. It was the day before the night of Ivan Kupala. We were five kids. My village friends—Yashka, Pet'ka, and two other

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<sup>4</sup> *Ivan Kupala* is St. John.

<sup>5</sup> A *verst* is an obsolete Russian unit of length equal to 1.0668 kilometers.

younger ones—and I had decided long time ago that on that night we would visit a ~~so-called~~ ‘fern grove’ we knew. The bright red sun was gliding down slowly towards the darkening edge of the sky, when we were all set to start our trip to the fern grove. We had prepared matches, a cauldron, and some potatoes as the necessary ‘provisions.’ We also got some bread; everything had been prepared according to the rules of a ‘long-distance trip.’ The sun eventually went down, and the pale horn of the moon was casting its mournful rays onto the earth as we sat cozily peeling our ‘provisions’ (the potatoes) and throwing them into the cauldron filled with water. During the meal, Yashka, who, by the way, we considered to be all-knowing and truthful, told us that at the same time last year he and a friend of his saw ferns blooming, and three hundred devils and as many witches, and many other unholy creatures who usually mess with humankind. When he finished his story, Yashka looked at the moon and said affirmatively that two hours had already gone by and that it was time to get ready. We scattered apart and made a circle around the fern grove. Thirty minutes went by while we waited impatiently. Somewhere close by, in the dense grass, a grasshopper was chirping. Beside that sound, nothing else could be heard around. I cannot express what I felt. It seemed to me that any moment now a devil with a fork would jump out from nowhere and start jumping, laughing, and flying over me; that I would see a witch on a broom soar and disappear high above. Such thoughts horrified me. I could not tolerate this silence any longer and, without realizing what I was doing, I screamed frantically. Somehow, this calmed me down, and I fell silent. All of a sudden, as if answering my scream, I clearly heard above my head someone’s hellish, heart-rending laughter. [Page 18] “Ha ha ha ha,” I thought I heard, “Ha ha ha ha,” and right after that someone started clapping their hands loudly. “Clap, clap,” I heard the clapping, and then again a “ha ha ha ha” cut through the night’s silence. I was beside myself with horror although the laughter was heard no more. In pitch black darkness, I thought that I saw a devil making that laughing sound. I got down and could hardly breathe.... Through the dense foliage of linden trees, the first glimpse of the rising sun shone upon us. I could barely get out of my trance. My friends helped me to my feet, and, in silence, we started making our way home. Suddenly, we heard something resembling a discreet stomping. We looked back. A round face with huge eyes was staring mindlessly at us, waving its long, thin arms attached to its ears. In terrible confusion we rushed back, scattering

in all directions, and hid in the bushes. The sun rose higher, and it became significantly lighter. When we stood up, we saw a large eagle owl above our heads that was looking down without seeing us. We went further and saw a young spruce that grew entangled with another tree and looked like a round face. [Pages 19 & 20] We were now out of the woods. On a pea patch in front of us there was a scarecrow. We recognized it at once, but when I was walking past it, I almost fell to the ground with fear and was ready to believe that the scarecrow would grab me any moment and strangle me. I got home safely.... A remarkable night! It will never be forgotten by me.

October 30, 1925.

A. Galatzky

About the short story *The Living Ghost* by M Liberman.

While reading this short story, one could notice some mistakes that could not be blamed on M.L. since this short story ~~has been written by him~~ is either his first or his second. The first mistake, although insignificant, is the following. The land owner says, "You are telling fibs! Would you like me to give an account of what happened to me?" "Do tell us," everyone begged the land owner. The landowner replied, "All right, all right, I will tell you," as if he was unwilling to tell them before. Next, the text says, "I fell asleep like a log and was awoken by a strange rustling." I think that a person who falls asleep like a log would not be able to wake up because of some rustling. Next, the land owner hears someone's steps for a good ten minutes. However, I do not think that his deceased wife would take ten minutes to walk from one room to another. "The black clouds, like mountains, were hanging above as if they were going to fall," is a poorly written sentence. Then it says, "I looked at the uniform and saw a few hairs on it. Ending his story,... etc." It appears that the ghost's hair did not make any impression on him. He just glanced at it and continued his story as if nothing had happened...

1-4 (this is me)

## *The Death of Oleg*

(translated from Slavic from *Nestor's Chronicle*)

And autumn came, and Oleg remembered his horse which he had some time back put to pasture forever. He had asked magi and sorcerers before, "What will cause my death?" And one sorcerer told him, "Prince, your beloved horse, the one you ride, he will cause your death." These words sank into Oleg's mind (he believed them), and he said, "I will never again sit upon that horse, and I will never look upon him again." [Page 21] And he ordered that the horse be put to pasture and never brought to him again, and he spent several years without seeing the horse when he waged a war against the Greeks. Four years passed after he returned to Kiev, and then in the fifth year Oleg remembered his horse which the magi had predicted would cause his death. And he summoned his senior stable master and asked, "Where is that horse of mine which I ordered you to put out to pasture and to watch?" The stable master replied, "He died." Oleg laughed and reproached the sorcerer, saying, "The magi did not speak the truth. Everything was a lie. The horse died, and I live on." He ordered that a horse be saddled for him. "At least I will see that horse's bones." And he rode to that place where the bare bones and fleshless skull lay. He dismounted from his horse and laughed, "Will it be this skull that will cause my death?" And he stepped upon the skull, and a snake slithered from the skull and bit him on the leg, and Oleg fell sick and died. Everyone wept great tears for him, and they carried him onto the mountain called Shchekovitsa (Skovitsa) and buried him there. Until this day, there is a grave there, and it is known as the grave of Oleg. [Page 22] And the total number of years that Oleg was ruling was 33. And this is a miracle that all prophecies come true.

A. Galatzky

October 3rd. We don't have school today—it's a holiday. The zoology teacher told us to come; he would show us blood vessels under a microscope. We came. It was very interesting. He swaddled up a frog and showed its leg. Now I will say a few things about my stories that I wrote here. *The Eve of Ivan Kupala* wasn't composed by me. That story (an episode, to be exact) happened to one young man (he is now old) and his friends. I think the story deserves to be written although it is not mine. My critique of a story will not be accepted because they will not publish any critiques at all. With regards to *The Death of Oleg* I will say that if they decide that it

is poorly written, in my defense, I should say that I never studied the Slavic language but I translated the text word for word because I understood it. I'm thinking about having both stories and a poem published. By the way, today I wrote a poem titled *Dmitry Donskoy's Speech before the Battle against Mamai*. I will see what our class critics have to say about this composition by a poet "of our times." [Page 23] Today I added two stanzas to *Brothers*. Some poem, I must say; actually, some poet. I have been writing this poem for about a year now, and I still cannot finish it. Thirty times I started over trying to write it as a play or novella but I eventually decided that it would be best written in verses. Several times I finished it but every time I didn't like it and would started over. I will repeat again—the subject is very interesting.

Today we had our first technical drawing lesson. We were assigned to draft three drawings. I think that I will be one of the best students in technical drawing. Today I got a five<sup>6</sup> in art. I painted *Going Home* depicting the son of Andrey Kurbsky together with Dmitry Impostor I crossing Lithuanian border, and Kurbsky greeting his homeland with his soul. By the way, today Issue No. 1 came out of the school newspaper that is published by the seventh and sixth grades. I didn't have anything published in the first issue. I will do it in the second one.

[Page 24] Liberman, Vatner, and I decided to hold a small debate between the three of us about the character of Andrey Kurbsky. We decided to invite another fellow student, Vova Ts., to participate in the debate. Liberman and I will be Kurbsky's defenders. Vatner and Ts. will be his accusers. The debate is set for Saturday, which is today, at 4 PM. I wonder what the outcome of this debate will be. I will describe the outcome and the process here.

So, the debate took place. Liberman and I completely destroyed the accusations of V.Ts. and Vatner. Of course, one cannot deny that more fervent accusers would have been able to produce more accusations that would be hard to respond to. The debate is not over yet. It is more difficult to argue against Vatner, after Ts. ([*illegible*]) has already conceded and acknowledged his defeat. I think that we will eventually win.

I haven't been keeping my diary for several days again because at some point my teacher took it to check the short story that I wrote here, and then it was taken by the editorial board so that they could copy the short story. Well, now I am writing.

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<sup>6</sup> "5" is a top grade, an "A" (4 = B, 3 = C, 2 and below = failed)

[Page 25] The day before yesterday, students from our class decided to play a joke on our physics teacher, Vasily Semyonovich P. I must note that this teacher is not strict at all towards students, and that is exactly what the perpetrators decided to take advantage of. They overturned the classroom board, hung some maps on the board, put a chair on top of the desk, and placed some bread with breakfast sausage on the chair. Even before the lesson began, the perpetrators were escorted into the principal's office. Those were [illegible], a repeater who is still only getting twos, Vatner (I did expect pranks from him), and totally innocent Liber. Vatner was sent home with his books, and a summons was sent to his father who didn't hesitate to respond and hurried to school. Liber and the other guy were allowed to stay in class. Earlier I said that I let others use my diary to publish a short story that I had written in it. We were working on the newspaper at Vatner's. When I was leaving to go home, I forgot my diary, and today I learned that it had been read. I got really angry, all the more so because Vatner started to criticize it. [Page 26] I told Vatner that unless he stopped teasing me I would not give him my diary. Vatner gave me his word, which he broke after about five minutes by some kind of a taunt. I took the diary and said that I would not let him copy the short story. In the end, taking Vatner's word again not to criticize me, I gave him my diary. Right now I am reading a novel *Tsar Fyodor Ioannovich* by Aleksey K. Tolstoy. I like it a lot.

Yesterday the first light snow fell. (October 20.) Fluffy and whirling in the strong wind, it tickled the face pleasantly and instantly melted as soon as it landed on it. It became significantly colder. On October 18, I started writing a historical tragedy of the era preceding the Time of Troubles, that is, the rule of Fyodor Ioannovich—*Tsarevich Dmitry*. It tells about the death of Tsarevich Dmitry and the circumstances thereof. The action takes place in Uglich. I have already written five acts.

Liberman decided to keep a diary as well. The main thing has been accomplished—he bought a notebook, yet not a single line has been written in it. Liberman asked that I characterize him in my diary. Sure. He's terribly ambitious. If you write down three family names including his own, he would be angry if his family name came last or even second.

[Page 27] Last year he was the best student. Now, in order to uphold his reputation, he asks Vatner to draft some of his technical drawings for him. When a teacher asks something,

and everybody or some people in the class know the answer, he would never raise his hand to show that he knows it too. Quite the opposite, when nobody knows, he offers his answer, and after that he looks around to check what kind of impression his answer produced. I will not say anything else about him in order not to “tease the geese.”<sup>7</sup>

I’m doing really well in Russian and getting only fives. Today I was called on during physics class. The teacher told me to sit down and said that I don’t know how to speak or give a coherent answer. *Dmitry* is going well so far.

What an amazing fall. It doesn’t rain at all. Liberman and I have become friends. My short story was not published because it was too long for the newspaper. For the second issue, I submitted only *The Death of Oleg* and *The Dnieper*. I will not allow publishing my short story in the third issue because Vatner has made fun of it. [Page 28] If they do publish it despite my wish, I will go as far as to quit the board and the Society. Right now I have finished the ~~sixth~~ fifth act. I must note that I have made a serious move towards prose. I have abandoned *Brothers*. I am not writing any new poems. Today I was called on in the German and Russian classes. In the German class, the teacher told me to recite the *Loreley* poem and asked me a few questions. I will probably get a five. In the Russian class, the teacher also asked me several questions about an excerpt from *Dead Souls*<sup>8</sup>, a meeting between Chichikov and Plushkin. He asked to write an outline for that part. Apparently, I didn’t get any grade for it since I already have three grades in Russian. All fives. I was given a two for my attention because I had failed to write down my homework assignment for Saturday in the assignment notebook. Most probably, I got that grade because they had to give a two to someone. The debate is not over yet. Today, on October 27, 1925, I have finished writing a historical tragedy *Dmitry*. When I wrote above that [illegible], I sat down and wrote it to the end. I must check on it.

Has anyone not seen a quiet, moonlit night when everything is calm, and the full moon, like a swan in the shoreless blue sea, swims and sends out its pale ~~sounds~~ rays filled with sorrow?

[Page 29] Has anyone not seen in that time a shady garden, a quietly ~~whispering~~ sloshing pond or a creek? But who actually felt it all? Who could, with their eyes closed, see the same picture, only even more vivid and mottled? Who could, in that silence, the absolute silence of the night,

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<sup>7</sup> A Russian idiomatic expression similar to “poke the bear.”

<sup>8</sup> *Dead Souls* is one of the most famous novels by Nikolai Gogol.

hear the voices of nature? One doesn't need to have a poetic soul for that; one doesn't need to have their thoughts constantly directed at nature. No, for that, one needs to have a simple soul or a child; one needs to have a soul that could distinguish sounds in the silence so that while contemplating the beauty and opulence of nature, other thoughts would not penetrate even the most remote parts of the soul. A poet can paint a vivid, clear, and beautiful picture of nature's beauty, but he cannot penetrate into its best kept secrets, while a simple bandura<sup>9</sup> player, whose only listeners in the green steppes are the wind and the sun, embodies nature through simple, grassroots language—a simple song. [Page 30] And he sings about nature's beauty to nature itself and hears his own song with pleasure; and he doesn't know whether he sings it himself or hears it from someone else; and he is afraid to miss a single word, a single word of this life-breathing folk song of vivid colors.

It hasn't snowed any more. Lately, the days have been indicative of an upcoming cold and frosty winter. I am reading historical dramas by A. K. Tolstoy. I have read *Fyodor Ioannovich, The Death of Ivan the Terrible*, and the very beginning of *Tsar Boris*. To fix some parts of *Dmitry* that I'm convinced are not true to the facts, I need to get more information about the circumstances of Tsarevich Dmitry's death. Although his death remains an unsolved mystery, I can learn a lot that I still don't know from the books by A. Tolstoy and others. Now let me say a word about my very own *Brothers*. I can say that they have become my distant relatives that I don't even greet when I come across them. I have put them to sleep; they are sleeping and will wake up only at my will. Today I have prepared a lullaby for *Tsarevich Dmitry* that is sung by Tsarevich Dmitry's nurse in the very beginning of the first act. [Page 31] I borrowed the tune from a Ukrainian song. The song starts... Actually, let me write it here:

Sleep, my *tsarevich*, sleep, my darling  
Sleep, the unforgettable one, sleep, the light-eyed one.  
Gray rainclouds are roaming the sky,  
The wind is raging, singing its song.  
Hail, my *tsarevich*, my pure baby,  
A guardian angel is keeping watch over your sleep.

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<sup>9</sup> A bandura is a Ukrainian plucked string folk instrument.

Like a birch tree in a green field,  
A hatchling in the nest, a young fish  
You are cheerful and always blooming  
You are growing up for the good of the Russian tsardom.  
The black winds are moaning like people,  
Whose hearts are gripped by grief.  
Hail, the black winds, don't sing any songs,  
Your songs make me feel gloomy and sad.

I don't think this song needed a long meter. Let me go to Vatner's now. This song has put me in a dreary mood indeed.

Barely a few hours later it started snowing—on the same day that I wrote that there had been no snow. The snow melted quickly, as soon as it touched the ground. Two girls behaved very nobly in class today. One of them was the best student last year. Today, the second one, Sh., was called on in algebra class. She didn't know something, and K., who was sitting in the first row, gave her a tip. The teacher heard that and was about to give her a two. [Page 32] However, many students pleaded for her, and even Sh. herself stood up for her. Then the teacher asked Sh., "So, shall I give you a two?" Sh. answered yes. The teacher gave her a two. After some time, K. started asking the teacher to erase Sh.'s two. I don't think he did. Now I would like to discuss or rather to ponder over the word 'instinct.' What is instinct, and how can it be explained? Let's say that instinct is a feeling that commands a person when they act unconsciously. I think it would be fairly correct. But we can give a more precise definition: instincts are a force of a mechanical movement, namely, a mechanical movement that is based on instinct alone. When you prick your finger without noticing it, you automatically put your hand to your mouth or against the other hand. It's not the brain that works here, but instinct. But, interestingly, instinct often prevails in animals and birds as a so called hereditary feature. A bird that has been raised and kept at home, once set free, will begin nesting and laying eggs. [Page 33] If it builds a nest because of an innate instinct, then once it has built it, it would have left it as is, but instead it lays eggs in the nest, therefore it knows why it has built the nest. Quite the opposite happens when some birds, even in the dark of the night, fly unerringly

south. It can't be explained, and it is quite fair to say that they make some turns on their way, take some detours, and fly all the way instinctively. Even more interesting is how strong the instinct is in sleepwalkers. With their eyes closed, they walk on edges of roofs, fences, even on wires, and they never lose their footing. All movements of a sleepwalker are mechanical and instinctive.

There is an interesting custom, if you can say that, in Harbin (I don't know, maybe in all of China) when every Saturday nearly every store puts away some spare coins to give to beggars. And every beggar can walk up to a store and receive spare coins from a boy standing in the doorway of the store. I think one could not find a better solution so that beggars wouldn't come every day; however, despite this, when you walk around Harbin you can still see large numbers of beggars. [Page 34] Right now I am reading Mordovtsev's *Mace and Bunchuk*. The arts teacher told me yesterday that I am good at his subject. He advised me to hire a private teacher. Right now we are reading *Mtsyri*<sup>10</sup>, a poem by Lermontov. I can't help but wonder how could Lermontov convey Mtsyri's feelings in such detail and so beautifully. Such beauty and vivacity of the verse! The entire poem is heartfelt and filled with inspiration. I think that Mtsyri is the poet himself. Lermontov ends up in the Caucasus but his heart is longing for the homeland. He misses it, encounters obstacles in life, and just like Mtsyri he wants to live; he doesn't ask for happiness or joy but only for adventure, obstacles, and only things that can make his life interesting. "Alas, it seeks no happiness....rebellious, it seeks out a storm as if in storms it could find peace," these were his words that he tried so hard to live by<sup>11</sup>. *Mtsyri* is a poem that is rich both in action and in beautiful descriptions of nature.

[Page 35] November 16. I have been flat out lazy. I have stopped writing in my diary, and overall I've been in the wrong box, so to speak. I got a two in physics. I'm afraid that the teacher will give me a two for this grading period. The other subjects are OK. The snow is melting. I have been very diligent writing *Brothers*. Tomorrow we will be doing a paraphrase on the topic of Alexander Pushkin's poem *The Song of the Wise Oleg*. So far I only have fives.

Fog has descended over the city.

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<sup>10</sup> The published English translation is *The Novice*.

<sup>11</sup> This is a quote from Lermontov's poem *The Sail*.

November 21. Heavy snow fell in the morning. Well, obviously, it was snowing all night but, of course, I only noticed it in the morning. Nearly all cab drivers today switched to sleighs. Now I must note, and maybe it will be interesting in the future: I went to a concert of a 10-year old violin player Tolya<sup>12</sup> Poppa. When I saw his photograph on posters, I immediately thought that his face is not particularly beautiful. I couldn't imagine that such a little boy could perform something interesting, and at first I actually refused to go hear him. But (if only this "but" didn't exist! people would live so much better), but I was entirely wrong. [Page 36] The stage was a room. On the right hand side, there was a piano. My mistake, it was a grand piano. I was also sitting on the right side, so when the young virtuoso came out, I could only see his legs at first. He was dressed in all white. He had a kind face, and I liked it tremendously. From afar, it seemed to me that he had black eyes (I am not sure what color they are from up close); his hair was black and combed. When he came out, he was met by a roar of applause. He was supposed to play rather difficult concerts. The concert started with the piano. While the piano was playing, Tolya Poppa stood there with his head tilted to the side, and although I did not notice any apprehension on his face, nevertheless his look kind of said "please don't criticize me too hard, I am still a..." He played quickly and beautifully, sometimes even with a shade of feeling. I believe that he will become famous unless his performances spoil him. They gave him something on a tray and flowers. The young violin player was accompanied by Itkis, an excellent pianist. Currently, I am reading (oops: I was at the concert on November 19, 1925) so, currently I am reading *Grand Lady* by Mordovtsev. [Page 37] So far it's interesting. Right now I am writing *The Songs of Grief*, which are songs that share the same theme. I have written six of them. Here is one (the shortest):

Farewell, dear fields of grain,  
Farewell, groves and forests,  
And farewell to you, too,  
The golden skies of my native Ukraine!  
Having been thrown by a powerful hand  
Into foreign dales and fields,  
With sincere longing, I'm dying

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<sup>12</sup> Short for Anatoly.

To get back to my homeland, to you alone.

(Written on November 18)

Today is November 22. Vatner, Liberman, and I, and one other guy, with our principle's permission, decided to organize a performance. We are preparing two plays, *Petka's Proverbs*<sup>13</sup> or *The Tutor*, and a short story by Chekhov *A Horsey Name*, under our own adaptation. I was given the part of Ivan Evseyevich<sup>14</sup>. After the plays there will be a divertissement in which I will be performing. I will be playing the piano, *Venetianisches Gondellied* by Mendelssohn, and maybe I will recite some of my own poetry. [Page 38] I will not play any part in *Petka's Proverbs*. I have started writing a short story *Ivas'*. In this short story, a boy sacrifices his own life to save others.

November 24. I will start writing my autobiography. I was born in the town of Poltava, the Poltava governorate, on November 15, as per Gregorian calendar, 1912. A few weeks after I was born, I was taken to Kremenchug. I have no recollection of Kremenchug. When mobilization was announced, my father moved to America, and the rest of us moved to my aunt's in Konstantinograd. I still remember Konstantinograd well. We stayed there for about a year, and then my mother and I moved to Poltava at 9 Kotlyarevskaya Street, former house of Bozhkov. I vividly remember the gate, the large courtyard in the middle of which there was a huge oak tree, the balcony, the tree near the balcony, which I used to climb sometimes to get inside the house. A Zelman family ran a hotel in our yard, and I was friends with their boy Lyova<sup>15</sup>. Across from us lived another friend of mine, Petya<sup>16</sup> Krasnov. I used to play Indians with him and one other boy. [Page 39] Petka was a locksmith's son; they lived poorly, so when we elected him our chief he would sit on his "throne" and say, "Is there anything *edibul*?" That is, something *edible*, so we would run home and bring him either bread or prunes or whatever we could. But once Yashka (I don't remember his last name) came to us and started laughing at us. He read a lot. Whenever he went on a walk, he would always take a book with him and read all the time. He was elected our chief. But this is not important, so let's proceed. I will write about how I was able to visit the 'Swedish grave' located eight versts away from the city at a

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<sup>13</sup> Petka is a colloquial name for Peter.

<sup>14</sup> One of the characters in *A Horsey Name*.

<sup>15</sup> Diminutive of the name Lev.

<sup>16</sup> Diminutive of the name Peter.

battle site between the Swedes and the Russians. I was attending a non-classical secondary school, in the second shift, which means that the school started at 2 ~~a.m.~~p.m. On one of the holidays there was a separate field trip for both younger and older grades. Senior grades were told to arrive at 7 a.m., and we were told to arrive at 8 a.m. I got confused, and instead of 8 I arrived at 7 a.m. The older kids were already gathered there. When I was told about my mistake, I wanted to go with older kids but their teacher said that it would be very difficult for such a young kid like me to walk eight versts. [Page 40] They were about to leave. Then I broke down and started crying... Some kids started pleading for me including one boy who lived in the same building. The female teacher asked me, “Won’t you get tired?” I answered happily that I would not get tired, and I went with them. How could I describe the beauty of Ukrainian fields? Here and there, you would see stacks of grain or a telega.<sup>17</sup> A peasant with a rake is standing on top of a large stack collecting hay. Everything is so bright and vivid, and looks like a painting. It was a hot day. We walked for about three versts. The sun has just risen from its bed of sleep. Birds were chirping cheerfully in the occasional trees left by peasants in the fields so that they could rest in their shade. We were singing Ukrainian songs:

Aw, my sun	} I don't remember exactly which song it was. This little verse has been written by me.
My bright sun	
Aw, my crimson skies	
Beautiful crimson skies...	

Finally we stopped to rest. The boy who had insisted for them to take me along gave me some carrots to eat. After the break, we continued walking... Picturesque views of golden fields were punctuated with small shady groves. [Page 41] Eventually we caught sight of a low church building and a fence. We entered it. To the left, there was a museum. Next to it there was a church, and then a tall mound over deceased enemies and Russians. Unfortunately, the museum was closed but through its windows we could see human torsos. They were dressed in military uniforms, and I was told that those were Swedes. Through the window, we could see a craftily made fox holding a rooster in its teeth, snow on the floor (obviously, it was cotton wool,) and blood seeping from the rooster’s wound (we couldn’t see what it was exactly.) At

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<sup>17</sup> A type of wagon.

the entrance to the church there was a large canvas painting, already old and tattered: Peter is kneeling in front of a priest with the army behind him, ready for battle. The painting made a deep impression on me, and I still keep it in my memory. We played on the mound for another hour and then took a different way home. 'The Swedish grave,' that was the name of that mound. ....I also studied in the gymnasium named after N. V. Gogol because that's where our school moved. [Page 42] That gymnasium was located on Spasskaya Street..... It is night time... I should go to bed. I will try to finish my biography tomorrow.

So let me continue. A little while later, when I was around seven, I started catching different diseases: measles, smallpox, diphtheria, whooping cough, and scarlet fever. One illness followed another. Finally, when I got better, my mother and I decided to move to Harbin. I still remember that when I learned that we were going to China, I was so delighted that I was nearly losing my mind. There was a simple explanation to this: I had a small card with a drawing of two small Chinese lads behind a fence with cigarettes in their mouths, and there were rows of fields behind them. Those fields were exactly where I was so eager to go. I imagined that we would not live somewhere in a dusty city but rather in a log cabin amongst fields and nature. At that time I was reading a lot about travels, about Indians, and the idea of visiting a foreign country was making me happy then. [Page 43] More so that in Poltava we only had one Chinese, a magician Xi Wu Li, and (unfortunately!) he did not have a queue. But once I saw a card showing a street of Harbin. And I got disappointed. My longing for nature was also noticed by a teacher from our school. (~~Once she asked me~~) Once I asked her, "Where does a bee get honey?" She explained something to me, which I did not remember, but I asked her in turn, "If I put a bee inside a small box, will it give me honey?" She had a dark purple birthmark on her arm, and I often thought, "What would happen if you cut it open? Wouldn't it be ink flowing from it?" Finally, we were ready to go. I will hold a map and describe my journey that took around two months, with interminable transfers, vending trays, and other obstacles on our way, on the road of the new regime in heated railroad cars... But now a teacher is about to come, so I will finish tomorrow.

So we left Poltava around 1921, exactly four years ago. [Page 44] From Poltava, we went to Kharkov where my aunt lived. There, I remember when we arrived at the station (we were

leaving already), I wanted to have a ride on a streetcar. So I got on it, and when it took off one gentleman noticed that and wagged his finger at me. I got frightened, jumped onto the rails and hurt myself a little bit. It could have been worse. From Kharkov we went to Kursk, from there to Oryol<sup>18</sup> and through Chern to Tula and then Moscow. I remember very little about Moscow. We only spent one day there, so I can't even describe what I saw there. From Moscow, we went through Rostov to Vologda. In Vologda, we got caught in a rain shower. We arrived at 6 a.m. The day was starting to break. We had to transfer to a different train. From Vologda we went to Vyatka through Galich. We still have a wooden box from Vyatka, which they sell all over the place there, with some burnt patterns on it. From Vyatka, we went through Glazov to Perm and from Perm to Yekaterinburg. On the way to Yekaterinburg, we went through some rocky mountains. So that's how we crossed Russia. Tomorrow I will write about our journey in Siberia.

[Page 45] December 7th. I have to stop my autobiography because for the last five days I have been lying in bed nearly all the time, and I am not allowed to go out. Recently I have read in a newspaper that travelers show interest in the heads of killed people that African people shrink by some mysterious method. I'd like to note that I read about such shrinking of heads in a magazine, and it even offered a hypothesis about how it was done. This hypothesis is probably what the reality is because the story tells about a traveler who saw the method of head shrinking with his own eyes. I don't know whether it is true! I have read *Leatherstocking Tales* by James Fenimore Cooper. Here is a real person, I'm telling myself. I was basically crying when I was reading that book. A simple elderly hunter, honest and loving the woods and nature with his whole soul. He did not accept civilization or laws. He lived simply and poorly. He loved his friends and hated those who destroyed nature. After living in the wild for seventy years, the hunter met the hand of civilization with such disdain.

[Page 46] December 9. The Poltava scenario is back: my head needs to be treated for dandruff, my teeth need some work, my finger has a boil because of dirt, I have a sore throat, and I will also have to have my tonsils removed. I must say that I am either never sick, or, if I do get sick, then I'm sick with everything at the same time. I have just rubbed some medicine into my skull. It hurts like hell.

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<sup>18</sup> Also spelled as Orel or Oriol.

December 16. The editors' re-election was held, and Liberman and I were unseated. Vatner and two other guys were elected. Well, they decided to publish short stories by Rudenkov and others. Liberman and I refused to give our material, and the newspaper was never published. Ha! And it would have never been published. Luckily, Vovochka ceded his position of editor to Liberman so I will give them my ballade poem *Underwater Feast* and an anecdote about life in Paris. I will think about it and maybe even publish a short story. I have become interested in collecting stamps. I am hard at work gathering them. There is nothing interesting. I have read *The Runaway King* by Mordovtsev. It's OK, but that's about it.

December 18. I have picked up a book *False Dmitry* by Mordovtsev. I have not started reading it yet but I think that my reading it will lead to corrections in some chapters of my *Tsarevich Dmitry*. [Page 47] Several days ago, we were assigned to write a summary of *Poltava*, a poem by Alexander Pushkin, my curly haired namesake. I gave an eloquent description of it, and although the teacher told us to write it on two pages, it took me six. Maybe soon I will write it here as well. And, by the way, here is my paraphrase of *The Death of Oleg* that I did in class not so long ago. "With a mighty army Oleg marched against the Khazars. "Feeble minded," said Oleg, "a small bird hides from a predatory hawk. A wolf hides when it hears a snow leopard or a bear roar, yet these ones have the audacity to wage war on my land." So Oleg marched out of Kiev. He was not afraid of anyone for he knew that he was not destined to die in battle. With his mighty force he crushed his enemies to dust. With a swing of his hand he dethroned them and made them captives. Like a lamb runs and hides in a barn when it hears a wolf, Oleg's neighbors trembled with fear, for his force was mighty. [Page 48] Wise was Oleg, for he knew his future and looked into years down the road with calm. And now, marching against the Khazars, he knew that the enemy forces will not be a match for his own. Oleg was quickly approaching the unreasonable Khazar kingdom. They could see the woods now. The spring sun was playing gently in the crowns of rustling trees beckoning to a tired voyager. So Oleg approached (here the teacher added "drawn by the shade, Oleg approached") the woods and settled down to rest in the shade. A sorcerer came out of the woods, an enlightened magus. His white beard hung to his knees and was as milky as a pale moon or first fluffy snow. In his prophetic hands he was holding a staff, and his stern eyes watched them gloomily from under

the white eyelashes. And Oleg said, “Tell me, magus, how will my death come to me (here, the spelling of the word “come” was corrected from ‘*приидет*’ to ‘*прийдет*’)?” The sorcerer replied, “Like the bright sun looks upon the earth, and trees, and rivers, so you Oleg look down on your people. Like a rock that stands by the blue sea, you too are impregnable. [Page 49] But, Prince, the horse that you ride and that you love dearly will cause your death.” The sorcerer retreated. Oleg stood there, dark and gloomy. But he believed the prophecy and ordered a new horse to be brought to him. Four years passed. Oleg defeated the Khazars, and the Greeks, and many other nomadic khanates, and back to Kiev he went. As Oleg and his army feasted, the warriors remembered the bygone days. Oleg remembered his horse for it was his best friend in many frays and battles. “Where is my horse?” he asked. “It sleeps a wakeless sleep for he missed you,” was the answer he heard. So Oleg wanted to see at least the bones of his friend. He rode to the steep hill and saw the bleached bones of his horse. With a grin on his face, Oleg stepped on the bleached skull and uttered, “Will my death come from this skull?” A snake slithered out from the skull and bit Oleg. Oleg died. His friends, and Igor, and Olga, and all the Russian land wept bitterly for him. And he was nicknamed Wise for he had known his own future and the future of others.

[Page 50] The reasons that caused Pushkin to write the poem were, first of all, its plausibility and interesting subject, and, secondly, his love for Russian *bylinas*<sup>19</sup> and folk tales.

The second issue of our class newspaper will come out after Christmas. I will publish *Underwater Feast*, a beautiful ballade poem written in the summer of 1925 at the Yimianpozhen resort, *The Last Word of a Criminal*, and something else. Supposedly, there will be a contest for charades, poems, and short stories. I will participate!

I have been elected to the editorial board. I have started taking lessons from our school art teacher. I have artistic abilities. We were given a non-mandatory assignment over Christmas to draw something from ~~Greek~~ ancient history. From ancient history, I drew “Babylonian Scribe,” “Alexander of Macedonia,” “Disc Thrower,” “Julius Caesar,” and “Legionnaire.”

January 1, 1926. The New Year has arrived. To my Russian language teacher—Sergey Evgrafovich Everestov—I sent a tiny congratulatory rhyme:

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<sup>19</sup> Russian oral epic poems.

Our teacher, my congratulations  
Go to you in this pre-holiday poem  
I wish you all the best,  
All the best in everything.

[Page 51] The same things, naturally,  
Are wished upon you by our entire class.  
I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart  
Wishing you new happiness in this new hour!

The rhyme is not bad—that's my opinion. Over the holidays, we received an assignment in Russian to write a paraphrase to such novellas as *The Gypsies*, *Dubrovsky*, *Taras Bulba*, *Khor and Kalinych*, and *A Landlord's Morning*. I have already finished the first three. I would like to write something interesting, something that would entertain, but I can't. A mighty good poet I am! What should I write!?... I should probably sit down and start...

For some time now I have been interested in one question. What is inspiration? An augmented sensation of delight, admiration of a distinguished creator of art, a feeling when one wants to pour out these emotions and praise the creator—is this what we call inspiration? Mostly, yes! I have experienced this feeling myself; it excites a person in a strange way. At such a time, unconsciously, you want to do something, to work, to create something that would inspire others. Sometimes I feel speechlessly inspired when I see a scenic sunset, mountains covered in green foliage, or nature in general. [Page 52] Then I feel that my language is insufficient to express the beauty of nature or my feelings, and I remain in a fascinating numb observation of its grandeur.

~~When you read *The Bronze Horseman*, just to think that this mighty mausoleum of a powerful reformer, Peter the Great, is destroyed, debased, and replaced with the rebel leader of the revolutionary party, Lenin. I am filled with such aversion towards the Bolsheviks. Where are the famous monuments to historically renowned persons, poets, and leaders now? Where are the museums, palaces, the memorable places of the Russian history? Where are the famous people untouched by the newness? Where are you, the great monument that served as the first inspiration to a foreigner, the monument to Peter, the first Russian emperor who joined~~

~~The North with the West, the founder of Saint Petersburg whose name should be forever venerated on the pages of the Russian history, whose memory should not become effaced through [illegible] of the centuries and remain unobliterated and eternal in Russia?~~

[Written over the crossed-out text: *ETERNAL MISTAKE*, A. Galatzky, 1928; {the star of David drawing}]

[Page 53] I have finished reading *Yuri Miloslavsky*<sup>20</sup>. An entertaining book, and I really liked its plotline. However, I think that if Zagoskin did not return in several places to the modern age, the entire impression created by the story would be much more striking. I have picked up *Quo Vadis*<sup>21</sup> to read.

Liberman and I have gathered six pages worth of material for the newspaper, which is two pages more than usual. Today, January 20, after classes, the newspaper was posted on the wall. I have published a short story *The Last Word of a Defendant*, a ballade poem *Underwater Night Feast* as well as a rebus, charades, puzzles, and notes. Our principal, A. V. Bartashev, tasked our Russian language teacher, S. Everestov, to be a censor of our newspaper. Both the principal and our teacher praised our newspaper and urged the students of our class to keep working and publish their short stories and notes in it.

I am reading Shakespeare. I have read *King Lear*. I have started writing a poem/legend titled *Daria*.

[Page 54] January 30. This week is the most torturous of all. I got two twos and three threes. I am literally beside myself. But I will be able to show that I can work. I know why I am getting bad grades. This is because I have been devoting myself entirely to drawing and forgot about the other subjects. My fervor will soon be over. The storm will pass, and the river that has overflowed its banks far and wide will once again flow in its riverbed. I am writing but it is so quiet around. The watch on my wrist is ticking softly.... My desk is strewn with stuff.... Here are geometry and English that I have just been doing. It's silent outside. Someone coughed and walked by.... I will stop writing.... I will go over some of my homework, or I will read something out of my books.... It is quiet....

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<sup>20</sup> A novel by Mikhail Zagoskin.

<sup>21</sup> A novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz.

I am on cold terms with Liberman. I want to vex him somehow because he was behind quite a lot of things that make me want to leave the editorial board. Right now I am re-writing and correcting *Tsarevich Dmitry*. I am reading *The Three Musketeers* by Dumas. [Page 55] Sergey Evgrafovich gave me a task to draw an illustration to Pushkin's poem *Demons*. I started and then ruined it. I will start fresh.

I went to see the opera *Sadko*. My arts teacher A. I. Sungurov took me to a room where they painted the scenery. M. Liberman wrote a summary paper "On the Figurative Properties of Language." I made a lot of corrections for him, and tomorrow we will be reading the summary papers together.

Most probably, on Sunday we will be attending an art exhibit that had been organized before but to which I couldn't go because I was sick. It was snowing yesterday but today it is spring already. Harbin! I am writing *Dmitry*. It's wonderful! For the newspaper, I submitted a poem *The Greek Melody* written in Yimianpozhen.

I went to the art exhibit. There was an expensive painting *The Forest* by my teacher. In a different section, we saw a map of Manchuria made of some kind of metal or bone. On one of the walls, there was an executioner's sword hanging with traces of blood on it. Small antique trinkets drew my attention. [Page 56] There were some Mongol Tatar yurts, objects from the everyday life of the Chinese, coins, medallions, etc. There were huge charcoal logs on display. It was interesting but I have no desire to describe everything.

Liberman says that he is crazy. I believe him. He made peace with Lesk and defends him in every way. We went to a party yesterday. Lesk likes R.Ts. However she likes Vatner. Lesk is terribly angry. Yesterday, when we were playing *neighbors*, he approached me with R.Ts. I apologized to her and refused without giving a reason. Yesterday, as she was leaving she asked to tell Vitya<sup>22</sup> to beware of Lesk. The party was fun. Liberman felt awkward around girls and was afraid to link his arm with theirs. We laughed at him quite a bit. Lesk threatened to beat Vitya up. Vitya is nice when he acts nice. Liberman is not a fool when he doesn't act like a fool. I cannot describe it more accurately than this. Sergey Evgrafovich sang during the divertissement. [Page 57] He sang from his heart, in a soft and pleasant voice. He ran with us

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<sup>22</sup> *Vitya* is short for Viktor (Viktor Vatner.)

and played. We all love it very much. He gave me a hat that he had won. I have just finished writing my poem *Lebreng*.

I am becoming superstitious. My best works— *Dmitry, Brothers*, and the newly written poem *Bayan*<sup>23</sup> *Songs*—have all disappeared. I don't know what to think. Who would want them?

What is ambition? This is a question that would be interesting to ponder about. Ambition is one of the great moral deficiencies of a person. However, despite all the harm that it brings, it can also be useful. Ambition makes people achieve perfection in some area. This is a positive aspect. There will be a lot more negative ones. It is true that ambition pushes a person to commit crimes, to experience danger, and then makes them a victim of their conscience.

[Page 58] An example of this could be Boris Godunov who sacrificed several people's lives in order to ascend to the tsar's throne. Afterwards, his conscience begins to torment him, and he dies, which is rendered beautifully by Pushkin. Another example would be Nero, an ambitious emperor. He composed poems that were not bad but he considered and forced others consider them better than poems by Homer and other poets. In order to picture the fire of Troy, he burned Rome, and many people died in the flames. He had his attendants executed over a single careless word. Before his death, his conscience could not win over the hardened emperor who had to pay for his ambition, and he died in the pains of despair. A person must be somewhat ambitious if only to distinguish themselves.

[Page 59] We had a matinee on March 12. Sergey Evgrafovich came with his daughter and wife. His daughter looks very much like him. She has the same kind face and a childish expression. I liked her a lot. She is only about six or seven. In the middle of the matinee the police arrived, and the show was stopped. I submitted my new and pretty beautiful ballade poem *Cliff* for our newspaper.

I made peace with Lesk. Lesk is much more honorable than Liberman. Liberman is a hypocrite. In a few days, our teacher who has been teaching us for five years will be leaving. We decided to give her a gift. Two money collecting groups formed in our class, one headed by Lesk, and the other one by Vatner. I gave my money to the latter, while Liberman gave his

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<sup>23</sup> Bayan is a type of accordion.

money to Lesk. Yesterday I talked to them and advised them to combine the money to purchase a gift. But they would not agree just because they didn't want Vatner to buy and present the gift. They said, including Liberman, that they didn't want to go with Vatner. [Page 60] I asked Liberman about the reason why he refused to buy the gift together, to which he gave me an unclear and hesitant answer. Yesterday night, however, he told Vatner that he would go with him, etc. Let's see what happens next.

My name appeared in the press. The Life News newspaper that came out on that day in support of our school printed two of my poems, *Steppe* and *Over the Homeland*. I received congratulations from Mamaev and S. Everestov. Today I went to R.Ts.'s on an invitation. It was fun. Inspired by the party, I wrote a poem. Vitya is not on speaking terms Liberman. The latter is trying to suck up to me. He's not very successful! R.Ts.'s elder sister of is a very likeable young lady. She was a lot of fun.

I went on a visit to Kabalkin's plant, Atsetko<sup>24</sup>. In the first room, I saw how the incoming beans are crushed. In the next one, a Chinese guy put the crushed beans in sailcloth, and then they were placed under a press. Huge iron tanks are gradually lowered to squeeze the oil out. [Page 61] The pressed beans come out as oil cakes that contain 6% oil and are used to fertilize fields. Then the oil is filtered and placed into huge tanks that hold 40,000 poods<sup>25</sup> of oil each. We were shown into the engine room that makes all the wheels and presses at the plant move. There is a high-end movable lab at the plant that is used to analyze the oil. After the visit to the plant, I was at Vatner's, and on my way back home I learned that R.Ts. has the same goal as me of traveling to Italy. She would like to be an artist. She has talent! [Written in pencil: *Her talent is questionable. 1927.*]

Here is the poem that I wrote for D. Moskvina as a remembrance:

Dima, you see the spring is starting to bloom,  
The sun is shining more brightly,  
Blue waters are shimmering in the sunshine,  
A swallow is chirping sweetly.  
Do you remember the fall? Trees withered,

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<sup>24</sup> Atsetko produced soybean oil.

<sup>25</sup> A unit of mass equal to approximately 16.38 kilograms.

Our pond and garden stopped whispering,  
Gloomy rain clouds ran across the sky,  
It was gloomy and sad to look around.  
Our life is a golden spring,  
You can cherish it,  
However, you will also face a white-haired autumn in your life,  
You need to learn how to welcome it.

[Page 62] I transitioned to longer lines in the second line of the second quatrain. In the third quatrain, I switched from a dactyl to an amphibrach.<sup>26</sup> Such a pity, but adding the word “however” has a meaning.

I have been carried away by Afanasyev’s fairytales. I’ve read about three hundred of them. S. Evgrafovich wants to put together a show. There will be three plays. One play is German, under the guidance of our teacher of German, the second one is *Gorger*, and the third one is *The Writer*, in which I will play the main part, that of the writer. During the Russian class today we had to write an essay, a characterization of our best friend. I characterized Vatner, pretty successfully. If I get a five, I will copy it into my diary. Recently I went to the circus to see wrestling. The most interesting wrestling is between Hadji Murad and Death Mask. Hadji Murad is a very strong Tatar, and all Tatars in town are proud of him. Death Mask is a wrestler who wears a black mask with a skull and bones on it. Both of them wrestled fervently and charged at each other like animals. [Page 63] During the fight, Murad tripped Mask, which is not allowed in French wrestling, and explained it by the fact that he was used to Tatar-style wrestling. Once he grabbed Mask successfully but the latter wiggled himself out, so he gestured helplessly and said, “He gotaway” (I wrote it this way because that’s how he pronounced it.) A famous mathematician, Arrago, has come to Harbin on a tour. I don’t know if I will go see him (P.S.) Recently, S. Evgrafovich wanted to patch things up between Vitya and Lesk but both of them got hot under the collar (as S. Ev. put it) and did not make peace.

I went to the Sungari. The river has been free from ice for about two weeks now. I sat down on the bank, took out a piece of paper, and started to write:

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<sup>26</sup> The translation does not use the same metric foot as the original.

“The weather is quiet. I am sitting on a rock on the shore and looking at the river. Light clouds quietly drift across the blue sky like frightened lambs. In the fresh morning wind, the river ripples a little and reflects the shoreline stakes in wavy lines. [Page 64] A boat has passed by with young men singing a jaunty song. This song echoes boisterously in the fresh distance and strangely moves my soul making me remember my native Ukraine, its fields and the slow flowing of the Vorskla. The long bridge melts in the blue distance. The edge of the sky gradually pales and blends with the ground far away.”

This is a lyrical description. Although the description is what prevails here, I felt so much in my soul without being able to express my feelings. Here is a description of a garden written at the resort in Yimianpozhen:

#### The Garden

It is pleasant to sit on a fresh and cheerful morning in a nice shade listening to the cheerful chirping of joyful birds hiding behind the green wall of tall and dense trees in the cloudless, bright summer sunshine amidst the continuous hum of various bugs and bees. [Page 65] The fragrant aroma of verdant fields fills the garden. There is a light breeze. A gusty rustling of leaves reminds of light ripples of a playful sea. At times, everything becomes still.... Everything freezes. And you as well, in a surge of endless delight, are trying to hold your breath, blending into the environment, so that you don't disrupt the silence that reigns in the garden. You think that in this silence you can hear many different sonorous and harmonious sounds. You can't see who makes those sounds but you can hear them clearly. Sometimes, a light breeze awakes the garden from this slumber and fills it with noise again. And again the cheerful chirping of birds like the murmur of a mountain stream flows sweetly through the garden making it lively and happy.

I must mention the entertainment that we engage in once a week. On Saturdays or Sundays, we gather at someone's place and play. [Page 66] The boys in this group include Vitya, Moskvina, Tsitrin, and me. From the girls (I don't want to write their last names), we have R. Ts., S. Ts., and N. M. Vitya and I are number one “status-wise.” I'm not allowed to be friends with him because somehow someone learned that he and I had gone on a boat ride and told my

father. As a result, I'm not allowed to visit him, and he is not allowed to visit me. But friendship cannot be broken so easily, and on my part I will be trying to continue it.

My father spoke to Mr. Vatner, and we were allowed to be friends. We had an evening show. I was given the main part of the writer, and I must say that I played it flawlessly and perfectly. I was applauded for quite a long time. We were given a task of writing an autobiography. I wrote it. As part of it, I also provided a self-characterization. I will write it here. I am reading Charskaya. I have finished *Notes of a Boarding School Girl* and *The Forest Girl*.

[Page 67] I'm now reading *Princess Dzhavakha*. Good night!

May 18, 1926. We have been dismissed although the teacher said that we had already been "dismissed" long time ago. I have sat down to write *Brothers*, the 13th stanza of the second song. This is the most difficult stanza. I can't quite come up with anything that would rhyme with the word "impassable." Here is this stanza:

Will he die forgotten by the fate,  
The beautiful, loyal son of the fields?  
Will he not meet at dawnbreak  
His welcoming valleys?  
Will the earth conceal the young ashes  
Away from the native fields?  
Under the pale rays of the night,  
Amid the impassable swamps,  
The sad wind will sing to him,  
Ruffling the silk grass on his grave,  
And bring a greeting from the invincible waves  
To him in silence.  
Ah, Volos, you will die alone,  
Away from the steppes, away from the valleys.

[Page 68] I had to sweat to finish it. I am currently reading, well, actually, I have just finished reading *A House of Gentlefolk*.<sup>27</sup> Not bad!...

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<sup>27</sup> A novel by Ivan Turgenev.

It has been decided! We are going to spend the summer in Darasun. I can't complain because Darasun is a wonderful little place with natural springs surrounded by the woods. It will be there that I will push my literary creativity. The place is famous: In Darasun, it is rare for a person not to write poetry. I'm not sure about others but that's what I think anyways. I am thinking to continue with my diary in Darasun. Maybe it will become enriched with some experiences and serve as a wonderful and pleasant pastime in the future. The girls have been preparing some kind of a surprise for us for quite a while. Finally, the wait is over: it is a card with their photographs. It is signed, "To the Triumvirate and its allies." [Page 69] The Triumvirate are: Vatner as Cesar, Moskvina as Pompey, and Tsitrin as Crassus. I am their ally as Alexander the Great. Vatner, however, kept the card for himself. I protested. By the way, I got a five for the best friend characterization. And I got a five for my autobiography. We took the Russian language exams. There was a dictation and three topics to choose from:

- I. What makes the characters in the *Taras Bulba* novella attractive?
- II. The characters of Savelyich and Biryuk.
- III. What makes city life convenient?

I chose the first topic and wrote quite a lot about it. I wonder what grade I got. (Just like I expected, I got a five.)<sup>1)</sup>

1) Written later

On top of writing poems, I am also writing music. I'm composing light melodies. I like some of them, and I throw away others. Recently I began composing a nightingale's song and composed some pretty decent melodies although they sound very little like the singing of a nightingale.

[Page 70] I visited a Russian cemetery recently. Huge crosses and granite monuments catch the eye of a visitor from afar. I walked between small graves, reading tombstone inscriptions. And I found human psychology strange. Does it make a difference how you bury a dead person? An opulent stone-clad tomb or a cheap wooden coffin—the body will decay anyway, and nothing will revive the dead person.

June 1. Yay! We are going to Darasun tomorrow! I will be describing our journey in this notebook since I still have some space left, and then I will transition to another one that I have

already signed as “My Summer Diary, or the Continuation of a School Boy’s Notes.” The road will be picturesque. I have already been to Darasun once and remember it.

[Page 71] Yesterday, I bought two notebooks for myself (one for the diary and the other one for essays,) some paints, and I also brought with me a little bit of Alexandrian paper for drawing. I’m also dragging along with me about a hundred notebooks with poems. They are saying that notebooks will be examined for anti-Bolshevik content. What an inconvenience! I will have to check them again.

I am very interested in wrestling. I went to the circus only three times but that doesn’t stop me from following the matches. The best wrestlers are the wrestler behind the Death Mask and Bauman. Recently the former took his mask off, and it turned out to be Mikhail Evseev, coach of Klementijs Buļs. Although he suffered two defeats from Bauman, I like him more. Evidently, Bauman will take the first place.

[Page 72] I’m on my way. The train is humming steadily. A poem comes to mind:

Among proud mountains and quiet valleys  
My rapturous gaze wanders.  
Here a path winds, and a giant oak  
Watches over it day and night.  
Flowers already fill the fragrant spring,  
A stream trusts its dreams to its banks,  
A meadow spreads like a green carpet.  
There’s a herd, there’s a pit, a mountain  
There’s a linden tree suddenly flashing behind a mound.  
Everything breathes, “It’s spring already! It’s time!”  
A mountain after mountain flashes before my eyes.  
The valleys between them are covered with green carpets.  
And clouds of bushes look fresher and fresher,  
And a yellow field flower,  
And the spring outfit of mountain pines  
And the curls of their light branches.

Clay huts flew by and hid again.  
We are on our way to meet the mountains once more.  
Like blue sea waves  
Bathed in the light of the day  
They sink deep and charge upwards  
In a huge wave, and they greet me harshly.  
As if, in a faraway silence,  
I am interfering with meeting the youthful spring.  
Here's a tree, clearly broken by a thunderstorm,  
Lies withered and drooping.  
And it surely feels silently sad  
In the bright springtime.  
It will not celebrate the holiday of spring  
For its branches have withered, broken by a thunderstorm.  
Why did I end up in this [*illegible*] land?  
Here, the sorrow and joy are one.  
I see that the realm of nature is not paradise  
I see that everything is the same everywhere.

June 3rd.

[Page 73] Our trip went well until we reached Manchuria. But there was a lack of tickets there, and we stayed. I met one boy that I knew who introduced me to his friends, and I spent a wonderful day. We had to decide whether to continue our journey in fourth class, in a hard and slow *maximushka*,<sup>28</sup> or to wait for a passenger train. We took the former.

August 15. Allo!<sup>29</sup> My old diary. Your replenisher is on your case again. I have already come back from Darasun. I thought about staging a play there but, unfortunately, there were very few actors, only myself and some girls. I had to recruit some local villagers who missed rehearsals, so my attempt failed. Such a pity! It would have been a nice *divertissement*. Two girls danced, and I was their accompanist; there would also be poem declamation, music, etc.

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<sup>28</sup> A diminutive for Maxim. Probably, an informal name for this type of train.

<sup>29</sup> Written in Latin alphabet.

During my time in Darasun, I wrote little, which is really strange. [Page 74] In Harbin, in that dirty and dusty little town, I described nature as if I were in its midst; however, in Darasun, I could not produce even a couple of poems. But I did jot down about five plays. I wanted to take drawing lessons (after I came back) with Gust but instead I was admitted in music school (conservatory,) and most probably I won't have time. On top of that, I am taking English lessons. The day after tomorrow, on August 23, there is a Music exam. At home, I actually draw almost every day, and I love this art.

August 26. I am down with strep throat. For the last four days, I've been lying in bed with a sore throat and headache. Every year, during the last several days or, more exactly, weeks of the summer, I get sick with something. Three years ago, I had an ear problem. Then two years ago, I had a boil. This year I have strep throat. My illness interfered with my music school exam on the 23rd, so I will be taking the exam on Monday, August 30. [Page 75] I am reading Chekhov now. I haven't been writing much; actually, I haven't been writing at all. I saw Vitya; he was in the yard. I called him through the window. But he hasn't come to my place since the day of the boat incident. I will not go to him until he comes to me.

September 6. I re-read *1812* again. On the cover of the book, I read the following:

"This book is very interesting. I advise you to read it," and another one "That's exactly right! This book is very interesting."

But the most remarkable inscription is below:

"What a pity that not all women are alike. Some of us are too brave but others are the exact opposite. While reading this book, you can't help but strive to accomplish a great deed, but which one? I am sure that, beside a great deed of love, I am unable to do anything heroic like Durova did. Our honor and praise go to you." With that, the confession on the cover ends.

[Page 76] We can only regret that this mysterious love heroine did not sign her name. Her confession would have surely made her a celebrity, at least in Harbin.

September 8. I am working hard on *Gudits' Treasure*. It's an interesting subject. The action takes place in Ukraine and then moves to China. I have already written a few pretty large chapters.

September 18. In the very beginning of my diary, there is some insincerity, at least that's what I think. Indeed, it is not hard to notice that at first my characterizations are somewhat biased and untrue. "Vatner is a joyful and kind boy." "A kind boy," these words suggest that he is some ten-year old shy boy, when in fact he's 15 already. "His jokes are not mean but witty." [Page 77] This sounds more like it but, again, not to me. His jokes are sometimes witty but almost always mean. He can put another person in an uncomfortable position in front of everyone. My excuse is that I wrote it in the moment when I made peace with him. In fact, he is a good friend, and his faults are not noticeable, although when they do manifest themselves, you will notice. I also 'over-egged the pudding' describing Lesk although I did not intend to eat him. But, I repeat, I was in the moment. I didn't over-egg the pudding too much though, as he is virtually that kind of person. Now he is friends with Rogovin and Eskin who are most probably better than him, which will be a good influence on him. Now I would like to write in my diary a sort of disproof of what I wrote in it before, namely that the monument to Peter the Great had been destroyed. I've learned that not only it had not been destroyed but they've been taking care of it and want to put a fence around it. [Page 78] In general, I have changed, and my best opinion about politics is what I am practicing now—neutrality. Well, now a word about the Society of what is now the fifth grade. I can't remember but I think I did not report the latest "events" in our class politics. Vatner, the organizer of the Society and most of its collegia, has found himself outside the board, and, in general, the attitude towards him has been despicable. Pinsky and I also left the collegia. Only Tsitrin remained. Kadysh, who had never been elected to the board before and who had spoken about Liberman's hypocrisy, immediately changed her opinion as soon as she was elected (for lack of other candidates) to the board. One time, Kadysh and Vatner were at Tsitrin's. The conversation turned to 'politics.' "The board couldn't care less about you now," she declared. [Page 79] Vova Tsitrin kicked her out of the room, and both he and Vitya fell out with her. Shortly after that, there was a meeting of the entire class called by Sergey Evgrafovich. Vatner did not vote. Tsitrin said little. Moskvina said some kind of gibberish and was put back into his place. I was mostly the one defending our rights. I was answering all the questions but the debate did not lead to anything. Finally, Sergey Ev. asked, "Who is for the board re-election?" (We insisted on that.) All of us, except Vatner, raised our

hands. However, “all of us” doesn’t mean the entire class, and most votes went to the opposite side. Then S. Ev. declared, “In this case, I’m closing the Society down.” We all asked him not to do it but that’s how the meeting ended. I also need to remark on the slyness of our opponents.

[Page 80] When they learned about the general meeting of the class, they announced that those without the means can join the Society free of charge. Naturally, those free-of-charge members would be voting for their benefactors. “Of course, this is a noble goal,” I said during the meeting, “but why have you thought of it right before the meeting, at the end of the school year?” Then it was our turn to be in the hot spot. “Tell us why have you called the meeting only when you were asked to leave the board?” Again I answered, “Because when we were members of the board, we believed that we acted correctly, and if anybody demanded a reelection, it would have taken place.” Well, in any case, this year the Society is beginning to function, and an attempt has already been made to drag Pinsky into it. Let’s see what happens.

[Page 81] I made acquaintance with Tolya Poppa that I had already written about in this diary. Soon, he will graduate from the conservatory (previously known as music school) and leave. He will be using our piano to practice for his mandatory grand piano class.

I have given up writing poems; not sure whether it is temporary or forever. I am not writing anything beside *Gudits' Treasure* and the diary. Undoubtedly, it will be my loss, maybe even a big one, with regards to my poems, but I already took this risk, and I will not go back. Good bye!<sup>30</sup>

My friendship with Vatner fell apart. Now that I can freely express my thoughts without being bound to him by friendship, I am going to write what Vatner is all about. The analysis of his personality in these young years, almost childhood years, will look strange and maybe somewhat funny. But it will be a mistake. It is not funny at all. I have become interested in this topic quite seriously, and the personality of my ex-friend that has been hiding under the outer shell of a child will be revealed in a completely different way like no one has ever seen it from the outside. [Page 82] Vatner is an egomaniac. To be friends with him means to go to his place every day. He would only drop by yours once a year, and this is what you call friendship? He

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<sup>30</sup> Written in English.

likes to make fun of his friends, and this is why Liberman (another character that I will cover later) who was friends with him for almost an entire year barely talks to him...

An acquaintance of ours, a young man of about twenty, died today (October 22.) He had taken a walk with a girl who was sick with scarlet fever, actually she was at an early stage, and he caught the disease. There were complications with his heart. He received a blood transfusion from his father, but developed sepsis and died in full consciousness. When he was dying, he asked that his favorite record be played to him. When it ended, he whispered, "This is the end of me as well." [Page 83] With these words he died. This is hard to bear! A week ago he was over at our place, cheerful and young, and now... I cannot picture his cold corpse, the eyes closed forever, and the motionless face. Indeed, a person doesn't know why and when death would come for him. Today he is cheerful and filled with life, but tomorrow he is a dead body, a frozen mind. There is no comparison between dying delirious and dying in full consciousness. To live knowing that in a minute you will stop breathing, your mind will stop working, and you will pass away. Isn't this torture, isn't this suffering? I must confess that his last wish made a bigger impression on me than the death itself. When I heard about his death, I felt bitter and sad, but after I'd learned that small detail, I cried... Can you only imagine what his poor parents are going through?

[Page 84] After my music lesson with a tutor, I put a book under my belt and went to the library. On my way, I met some friends and went for a walk with them. I don't know how it happened, but the book dropped from under my belt, and I lost it. On my way home, I met a crazy guy who was singing "Evening Bells," "Confess to Her for Me," and was reading poems in German. I have become an inventor: I invented a device to test lung function. It consists of a flat plate that is pressed against the chest, a rod that attaches to the plate, and a rotating drum. When a person breathes, the rod moves along the drum indicating the degree of lung expansion and uneven breathing. I was browsing through my diary now, and I saw a page with the words "Just to think that the monument to Peter has been destroyed." My political views have changed. As I am writing these words, my first obligation is to correct the untruth that I wrote earlier. [Page 85] Not only the monument to Peter was not destroyed but it is actually taken care of. However, my previous words were not a product of my imagination. An old

woman told me about the destruction of the monument, and I believed her without checking the fact. To tell the truth, my attitude towards politics is not quite like that of an adult. For example, I disliked the Bolsheviks just because they renamed Petrograd into Leningrad and also changed the names of some other cities. The word 'Bolsheviks' exudes some kind of modernity that I cannot stomach at all. Naturally, having those views, I couldn't arrive at any serious conclusion and that is why I believed in what my instincts told me.

The first snow fell yesterday (October 28.) It fell in big flakes but melted quickly. Today the snow is not melting. Obviously, it is cold.

[Page 86] Harbin is a city of hooligans. You couldn't take a single step without being asked, "Are you white or are you red?" Try to put a hat on incorrectly, and in a moment's time you will get a slap on the head. The streets are swarming with the "Musketees," the "Black Ring," the "Crusaders," and other gangs with no names. The Musketees and others know one thing: that they are fascists, but their main thing is beating people up. When you walk down the street, you look not at people's faces but at their trousers. If you see bell-bottoms, run. Bell-bottoms are a style of trousers that are narrow at first, and then they become wider and wider and reach 25 cm in diameter, so they look like a circle of 75 cm. Yesterday, I witnessed fascists beat two Otmol<sup>31</sup> members because the latter wore their cap peaks up, in the Otmol style. On the other hand, it is interesting to live in a city that is full of danger but it is not interesting at all to get bruises and other physical 'decorations.'

[Page 87] I am not doing well in mathematics. My father yells at me. But is it my fault? I work until I am exhausted. I wake up at 6 o'clock and go to bed at 11, and of those 17 hours I only go for a walk for thirty minutes or one hour. In fact, I don't have that many twos. I got two twos in two months, in German and in Algebra. Lesk was called to the board in the German class today. Our German teacher remembered that Lesk had misbehaved yesterday and managed to make him lose his train of thought. He noticed a mistake and started picking on him until Lesk started crying and said, "If you want to give me a two, please do, and I'll just return to my seat."

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<sup>31</sup> Otmol is an abbreviation of 'otryady molodezhi,' or 'youth detachments.'

I'd like to disconnect for a minute from this world and plunge into contemplation. Where is the end of airless space? Even if it stretches for billions and billions of versts, it does end somewhere. Or does it stretch endlessly, far, far away? To imagine this distance...is impossible. How did the Sun get created? You can't make something out of nothing. [Page 88]

So where have all these celestial bodies, speeding through space or staying motionless, come from? How did the first living creature appear on Earth? Who gave it the ability to live and think, and who made it adjust to the environment? Was it nature? But what kind of answer is this? Nature IS those creatures, those celestial bodies, and everything that exists. There is nothing surprising that the ~~former~~ ancient man asked such a question and had to provide some kind of supernatural explanation. He invented gods, and his undeveloped mind was never again bothered by that question. Now, theories established over the years explain everything in a simple way, therefore there can be nothing supernatural. To this day, the majority of people still explain the origin of life by existence of God. But what is the difference between God and pagan gods? Idolatry is icon worship. Primitive man did not say about an idol, "This is a god," in the full sense of this word. He only tried to imagine a creature that rules over a part of nature. [Page 89]

Believing in a single god is also only an answer to the question of life's origin. But man, who has become smarter by that time, doesn't make his God so supernatural anymore. Man gives him his own thoughts and likeness. But even then man cannot resist the temptation and not depict someone he believes in and whose interference serves as an explanation of everything. The only thing that could push man to believe in gods or God is his own helplessness in trying to explain the natural phenomena that happened before his eyes. Now a new picture is unfolding in front of the mind of man, and there is no need to attribute everything to supernatural forces. However, there is still a lot that needs to be explained this way. A few examples from modern life: a moving pen of an Egyptian princess, a diamond from Buddha's forehead that brings misfortune to all those who hold it, spiritism, Hindu Brahmins' spells, etc. [Page 90]

All these are facts, not fiction.... So how would you explain this? Is it supernatural indeed?

I have just seen the motion picture The Phantom of the Opera. It is an amazingly interesting picture. Lon Chaney plays the title role. Here is the synopsis: "Erik, a self-taught

violin player, is accused of a crime and exiled to an island from which he escapes and goes to live in a dungeon of the Opera House in Paris. The singer Christine hears his voice. He teaches her to sing. He sends a letter to the Opera prima donna warning her that if she signs the role of Marguerite the following night, there will be dire consequences for her. The prima donna pretends that she is sick and is replaced by Christine. The mysterious voice tells her that today she will be able to see him. A mirror door in her room slides open, and the mysterious teacher appears. His eyes are dead, his face is dead. But he is wearing a mask. He leads her to his quarters and tells her that she has nothing to fear if she doesn't touch his mask. She takes it off him and sees a human monster in front of her. [Page 91] His face looks like a death mask. It is impossible not to shudder. Not without difficulty, Christina's fiancé and a detective free her. A raging mob throws the monster, or the Phantom of the Opera, into the river Seine. But before the end, when the mob chases him and the human phantom sees that there is nowhere to run because the Seine is on his way, he raises his fist as if he is holding something that can destroy everything. The mob of thousands stops. The Phantom opens his fist....it is empty. He is drowned." You can't describe it, you have to see it. The biggest effect was produced by the appearance of the monster without his mask and the very last scene before his death.

Sergey Evgrafovich wants to stage a play. It has already been chosen, *The School Teacher* by some French writer. I am playing Plumichon, a student. This is a very small part but in another play, *The Conspiracy*, I got a bigger part, that of Pierre. Our homeroom teacher also wants to stage of play. [Page 92] It is *The Magic Mirror*, a fairytale. I am playing the part of an elderly servant.

November 26. This third<sup>32</sup> of our school year will end very soon. I have zero time. I sat down to study for oriental studies. I don't like it but I have to—what if I'm called on? As if things weren't bad enough!

I am in a very strange position right now. I have not entirely separated myself from Vatner nor have I become definite friends with Lesk either. I can't help but play a double game. I wonder how it will end?!

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<sup>32</sup> A school year was divided into three grading periods ("thirds")

We've received an assignment to write an essay on the topic "The Ideals of the People as Revealed in Epic Poems." I've jotted down seven long pages. We have to submit it tomorrow. The essay was assigned to us a month ago. Vatner did not come to school today because he had not written anything. He will be writing it today. I don't think that he would make it by tomorrow. The third is over. They will probably be handing the report cards tomorrow. I will have one two in German. It's OK! As it happens with all my works, *Gudits' Treasure* is taking a nap, which means that I haven't touched it for an entire month. I will catch up!

[Page 93] Since they were handing our report cards today, there were only three lessons. I have the following grades: Religion – 3, Russian (oral and written) – 5, German – 2, English – 5, Business Arithmetic – 5, Algebra and Geometry – 3 in each, Physiology – 4, Physics – 3, Chemistry – 5, Geography – 4, History – 4, Art – 4, and Technical Drawing – 4. A three in Jewish History (Religion) is fair because I don't have the book since I have no desire to study it. A two in German is a total accident. Last year, I only got fives in that language. I need to fix it. The only grade that vexes me is a three in Art. I drew well—at least better than many others who got fours and fives—but I don't know in which way I displeased the teacher. It is very possible that I got a three because I drew using strokes while our teacher is an adept of the old, slow and dead shading technique. Anyway, the devil only knows! He ended up giving me a four as my final grade for this third because I got a five for the previous drawing.

[Page 94] I am reading *Notre Dame de Paris*<sup>33</sup>. I can't help but notice Lermontov's imitation of Victor Hugo. I've just read something like this in Hugo's book, "I was despised, and I became wicked, I was hated and I hated back," etc. In Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time* there is a similar quote. I thought that it was a coincidence. But now I've read Quasimodo's exclamation when he sees the dead Esmeralda, "Oh! Everything I loved!" If I'm not mistaken, there is a similar address to a corpse in Lermontov's *Orsha* and *Lora*. It is twice as suspicious!

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<sup>33</sup> Also known in English as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*.

A person goes through moments when they remember something from their past and become disappointed in themselves over this or that incident. I go through the same thing. Sometimes I remember something wrong that I said or did, and it drives me crazy. Heavy is the head that wears the crown but a person's personality is even heavier.

A. GALATZKY

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It is not time that makes one old but life.

A fool is the one who was born that way but even a bigger fool is the one who takes another fool for a role model.

Laugh at others but cry at yourself.

Simplicity is the best quality in a person.

Make-up only covers up the face.

A sophism is created by clever people; although the idea behind it is stupid, do not try to prove it since it is hard to argue with clever people.

It is easy to fall off a mountain but it is hard to climb it.

Be a fool with a fool but be clever with clever people.

It is necessary to get used to hard things so that things that are less hard seem easy.

The wise are mightier than the strong.

There is nothing unnatural in the world but there are many mysteries.

Even the smartest of the fools is no more than a fool.

An artist sees, a musician feels, a poet both sees and feels.

When you have climbed high, hold on, because if you lose your grip, you will fall to your death.