

1927

DIARY OF A. GALATZKY

1928

6th Grade Student

October 4. We've been back to school for a month now! Not much new. Well, maybe, just that I fell out with Liberman for nothing back in the spring, and with Vovochka Ts. because of a shiner that came to adorn his right eye. What a character! Every time new kids are initiated, which means that a new kid is placed on a desk and slapped (this procedure is mandatory and is a sort of custom,) or something like that, Vovochka is the first one to do it. Once, when we wanted to "bend the sled¹" on a new guy M.P., Vovochka was the first one as usual. Then I said, "Let's make an exception and have Ts. do the entire procedure alone." The latter became hesitant and embarrassed, and proved himself a 'tough guy' overall. The same was with my 'telega' colleague, that is, the person who sits at the same desk with me. Without thinking, I grabbed Vovochka by the scruff of his neck, and when he resisted, I colored him with one of the colors of the rainbow (purple.) It's true, school affairs haven't been interesting so far, except maybe the fact that the famous classroom library consisting of fifty books resembles a decreasing arithmetic progression, [Page 2] and the breaking of one of the glass panels of the bookcase makes book disappearance invaluablely more comfortable and convenient, so the arithmetic progression is threatening to turn into a geometric one although there are almost no books left in the bookcase, and the number cannot drop below zero. A few words about the summer. I lived at a dacha² in Laoshaogou, or Sungari. Pinsky, Shriro, and some other acquaintances also stayed there. At that time, I used to wear a Turkish hat that had an indirect effect on subsequent events. So, I am walking down the alley. Walking towards me is a girl who goes to our school. I don't know her so I'm not saying hello, nothing, but all of a sudden she goes, "Shura³, why are you wearing this hat?" I sort of froze as if an electric current ran through my body, and then the anode and the cathode got disconnected. In a kind of dryish voice (I don't

¹ A literal translation of "загнуть салазки," which is a form of hazing when a person is forced on their back and their legs are bent towards their head.

² A summer residence usually in the countryside.

³ Short and informal for 'Alexander'

drink much water) I replied, “What if I just like it?” “Hmm... And would you like to meet Larissa?” Really?!! That was fast! In any case, “Sure.” And so I had the honor to behold the ugly snout of Larissa that resembled a domestic animal (I’m not pointing fingers at the exact animal.) So big was my pleasure that my stomach went on strike, [Page 3] and I could not eat for a week (can you picture that beauty?) to the great chagrin of the *kursaal*⁴ cafeteria person, the respected Mr. B. I met the rest of the group. Nadya, a nice simple girl, and probably the best of them. However, I just got them acquainted with all my friends and kept myself out of it. For days on end I was bored... I wandered aimlessly in a faraway field, played with little kids, wrote poetry, and ate Chinese melons (in my opinion, these are an indispensable element of a lyrical mood.) Little by little, I got acquainted with both local and visiting boys and girls, and little by little, I stopped being bored. There was a very nice girl G., around 12 years old, living across from us, with whom I and other boys and girls played croquet all day long. Then I got into lawn tennis and played quite a bit. After dinner in the evenings, I would take some of my younger friends and go for a walk with them explaining “the essence of this world” to them, and every comment they would make that proved that they had taken me quite too literally, would horrify me. Little by little, I became friends with Kalya, Ksenya, Olya, Anyuta, etc. In the evenings, we would go for a walk and joke about someone’s affections, and then, content, we would call it a day [*an inked out word*]. [Page 4] Eventually, little by little, people started to leave. I became friends (just think about that) with G., and one time, taking advantage of the absence of her mother, we spent three evenings in a row chatting. What did we talk about? One can talk about anything, really. About school, about teachers, about friends, about sleepwalkers, about ghosts, etc. I think those three evenings were the most interesting ones during the entire summer. We literally talked about everything, touched upon every topic, inquired about every subject! But those three evenings ended as well, and we expected that one of us would leave any day. I was supposed to leave on September 1, and G.—on August 22. She convinced her mom to stay while my mom made a decision to leave earlier, and we left on August 27. I remember the last few days. Both of us took a walk in the park—I walked at one end of the park, and she walked at the other, and we would not dare speak to each other...

⁴ A public hall or building for the use of visitors at health resorts or spas.

Finally, we decided to go to the *kursaal* and play chess. Before I left, I had gotten her address and learned about her house furniture, the number of chairs, and about a dozen geese that stayed in a special coop in the yard. The summer flew by so quickly. [Page 5] I barely noticed it! Just as I got used to it, the fall came, and with it, school, boredom and laziness! Several times I rode my bike to see G. She would come out, and after talking a little bit we would separate. I would ride down the hill like crazy, and she would... How would I know what she did? Actually, I've only seen her here twice, whereas I've been near her house about ten times. More precisely, I've talked to her only twice, but I've seen her frequently as she played ball, or read, or spoke with a friend. I never make my presence felt; if they see me, wonderful, if not, I just rush back. And that's that! There is probably another interesting thing, but I don't want to write about it because I am being somewhat cautious. Let me only write the first letters of my statement, E.N.K.S⁵. Well, bye!

I've become friends with a boy, S.M. We go on bike rides together, and sometimes I just happen to turn into the street with the familiar garden, the boulevard, and the little house. We go to the boulevard, actually, to the small garden, sit down on a bench, talk, then get back on our bikes, and off we go! The day before yesterday we went on a ride later than usual. The lights were already on. As I was riding past the little house, I saw G. who was doing her homework. [Page 6] I paused for a little bit. She glanced up and must have recognized me despite the physics law about light and darkness. But I pushed my bike and like an arrow darted downhill towards the train station. We flew past the viaduct like crazy... It started drizzling. The sky was covered in black rain clouds. As soon as we separated and I was already approaching my home, a serpentine lightning bolt shot through the celestial darkness, and a terrible rumbling shook the air. I slipped in the dirt and almost fell. I barely made it home when a terrible hurricane began. The eastern monsoon roared like a beast in a cage; lightning bolts shorted the current in the electric lamp; thunder shook the entire house; and the glass windows buzzed... Had I not made it home, a minute later I would have taken a free cold bath mixed with radioactive dirt from the streets. Yesterday I went to see the opera "Carmen." It was truly delightful! I never thought that an overture could be played so quickly. I somewhat

⁵ Transliteration of the Russian letters "E. H. K. C."

disliked the fact that the director took the liberty of adding the boys choir who marched in the first act together with the soldiers. [Page 7] They sang “Changing of the Guard”, but they were so off key and off rhythm that the poor conductor had to tap his baton loudly to cue the kids to the right beat. The music during the intermission before the fourth act is beautiful. The English horn sings so melodiously! The overture theme sounds solemnly when the toreador wins. Altogether, the opera made a positive impression on me just like the first time, although at that time I was not very savvy in music.

There was a parade on Monday. All schools arrived at the designated location in a ceremonial march. When the Chinese flag was being raised, the Chinese schools sang some kind of anthem, and they sang so ‘beautifully’ that I must say that *arbiter elegantiarum* Petronius would have found Nero a pure genius compared to our singers. The very first streetcar in Harbin was launched, in which the local authorities took a ride with pomp and circumstance. Currently I am writing, or, more precisely, I am continuing to write since 1926, *Wolves Are Howling*. I came across this manuscript of mine by chance, and I really liked the topic. It is extremely important to artfully convey the moment when the old Cossack who has decided to betray his comrades for gold, hears howling of wolves, his forest brothers, and begins to remember his Cossack life with Stenka Razin and other atamans, and suddenly perceives the meanness of his act. [Page 8] *Wolves Are Howling*, these three words make me shiver when I picture a dense forest on a mountain slope, the black night, darkness.... Men-at-arms are slowly making their way through the gloomy woods, and suddenly wolves start moaning. What should the soul of an old Cossack feel who has spent his entire life in battles, in the woods, in his forest detachment? A person who understands the intensity and the power of these words, *wolves are howling*, will understand my soul and my thoughts. They will understand me like no one else... Only for that person, or maybe only for those people, am I writing this short story, this song in prose!

Autumn Song

You are standing lost in thought near a linden tree that has fallen asleep
And autumn is sending dreams to you woefully
Autumn whirlwinds howl so madly

Tattering the naked bushes.

The yellow patches of leaves are swirling around the garden

And they whisper and cry, "The day of happiness is over,

We no longer provide coolness in the night.

The whirlwind of autumn has blown us away."

[Page 9] It whistles, and weeps, and howls, and moans

The soul freezes, sorrowful and sad,

As if it is burying the bright days with its song

And chases the gray clouds far away.

The summer is a vivid memory. And the golden skies

During the beautiful, solemn hour of sunset,

The ravines and groves during night time

Used to excite and move us so much.

A light wind would blow and stir the foliage

And with it, the dreams would awake for a fleeting moment.

This whirlwind whistles and weeps so mournfully

Why have you become melancholic, my friend?

Although the wind fills my heart with sorrow,

I hear in silence, I hear and I wait

The winter will fly by! The sun will sparkle again

And I will find again everything I was looking for.

You are standing lost in thought near a linden tree that has fallen asleep

And autumn is sending dreams to you woefully

Autumn whirlwinds howl so madly

Ah, listen in silence, and your wait will be over!

(I wrote it straight into my diary, without making a draft first)

19 X/15 27 (inspired by the painting "Autumn")

I wrote music for this poem. The Rupun⁶ newspaper started publishing the Young Reader sheets on Saturdays. The editor invites everyone to participate. That's nice! In the first issue, on October 22, there were a lot of interesting things to read. For example, there was a small article titled "Young Creativity." A sulking, misunderstood poet, V.B., writes a letter to the editor complaining that other newspapers did not publish his poems but replied curtly, "Weak. Won't do. [illegible]" [Page 10] Well, of course it is weak. Here is the portion of his poem published in that article:

A palette and pieces of paint
Nearby, two brushes and a canvas
I am going to use my mind and my hands
To insert nature into the canvas.
I've been painting for an hour, this painting is my life.
The view nurtures my soul
And, loved by my work,
I am painting it with love.

Such heaviness, the style, the expressions! My dear V.B., I would advise you not to be offended by the newspaper that is wise enough to understand your talent, but to sit down for about five years (not literally) just like I did, avoid such topics as your "Painting" and write something limiting yourself to a lighter form, like trochee and iambs. In about two or three years, you will stop changing your meter every other line, the paints on your palette will not lie in pieces, you will take a few more brushes, and it will not be your work that will love you, but you will love your work, if you want to. When I read the poem by V.B., I can't help but think about my first poems. I remember that I rewrote the entire *The Humpbacked Horse* by Yershov, and woe was it to those who denied that it was the fruit of my labor. I remember my tutor who became interested in my poems and gave me a push closer to the true path. [Page 11] I was about seven or eight years old, and it would be ridiculous to try and hammer the theory of poetic meter into me. So my tutor explained to me quite skillfully that in a quatrain, the number of vowels in the first and third lines, as well as the second and fourth lines must be equal. I

⁶ Literally translates as "horn loudspeaker."

remember sitting for hours counting vowels, and I finally got it right. My versification technique is virtually impeccable. I do have a few irregularities in word placement, but I hope that it will smooth out in due time. In the same issue of the Young Reader, a Best Poet contest was announced. They have provided the rhymes that make up two quatrains, and you need to add words to compose a poem. The words are: candles, day, evening, shade/shadow, sound no more/cease, silence, sadness, and moon. Here is my draft:

Up high, the stars have lit up like *candles*,
A late autumn *day* has faded away,
The black shroud of the *evening* is creeping in,
And the *shadows* are stretching out longer.
The evening prayers in the village have already *ceased*,
And *silence* has fallen upon the valleys.
Only a nightingale in the woods is singing his songs of *sadness*
And the *moon* is shining faintly.

I sort of struggled with the line with the word “ceased.” It is hard to get the verse right, and I still don’t like the phrase “the evening prayers....have already ceased.” [Page 12] Oh well. By the way, if everybody writes like V.B., then glory and praise to the silver-bowed Phoebus/Apollo. My pen name is ready—Shura Poltavsky, although I’m not sure, maybe it should be Poltavets? (An issue of great importance!) [an ink drawing]

Yay! Schwarzbord⁷ has been acquitted! No words can express my joy. An innocent killer of the killer of the innocent, this is what Jews can say, and now the entire world with them. This trial was not Schwarzbord’s trial but rather a trial of the pogrom saga of savage criminals, and Schwarzbord’s acquittal is a stark accusation of the worldwide anti-Semitism. Despite the ridiculous facts made up by Petliurites⁸, the court’s bias, and many obstacles put up by *chernosotentsy*⁹, Schwarzbord has been acquitted. My heart is singing a joyful song of victory! Yes, it is a victory. It is a victory over the vile pogrom-mongers and a cleaning of the dirty stains

⁷ A more common spelling is Schwarzbard.

⁸ Followers of Symon Petliura.

⁹ Also known as the black-hundredists (members of the Black Hundred, a reactionary, monarchist, and ultra-nationalist movement in Russia in the early 20th century.)

that were falsely attributed to Jews, in front of the whole world. Schwarzbord is a national hero whose trial has exposed to the world that people died in the teeth of savage beasts, actually worse than beasts—some kind of creatures who were completely insane, deranged monsters.

[Page 13] This trial has shown a lot to the world, and Petliurites and all those bandits are hardly pleased with the opinion that the whole world has formed.

19 XI/6 27

Read these lines,

This is my truthful poem.

“There are many dumb girls in this world

Rol* is number one among them.”

Pigs are protesting these days

Oh, what a disgrace for them!

Rumor has it that Kh* Rol*

Is a hundred times dirtier than them

They are looking for freaks

To go to the famous Hollywood.

From among the Harbin folks,

Kh* will surely be asked to go.

Do not soil this album,

Do not disturb its beauty.

They say that even apes

Very often like cleanliness.

Etc.

This is what a poet can write into the album of a certain dumb Kh. Rol* whom the poet can't stomach at all. First, you need to secure the poet's favorable opinion of yourself, and then give them your album to sign. [Page 14] "The poet," huh... Doesn't it sound pretentious? Today is Sunday. In the morning, my friends and I went for a walk down the Chinese street. There were Vatner (I am giving him the silent treatment,) Tsitrin, and Pinsky. Looks like the latter, "a jolly young lad," doesn't feel well. He walked with Vatner, and I walked with Lesk. Oh well, to hell with them all. Yesterday, the Young Reader printed my poem *The Night*.

The spruces are making a quiet noise,
Talking amongst themselves
As if ripples ran across the foliage... etc.

Around 70 letters were received for the Best Poet contest. The editor will shortlist the best ones, and readers will vote to select the top three poems. So many poets here! There are 70 contenders. If my poem gets printed in the newspaper (as one of the best,) it will be good. The stage is being set for a battle. But I am hopeful because I know for sure that one of the shortlisted best poems in yesterday's issue *Verses about Winter* that was printed after mine, doesn't meet the requirements of the language arts theory as well as mine does. The meter is correct but such rhymes as "winter/river"¹⁰ do no credit to Boba K. [Page 15] In my poem, I, however, even tried to use sounds to render the night atmosphere and the whispering of trees. For example, *rustling, only whispers can be heard, sway, pass across*, etc. The repeated sibilant sounds create a certain flavor in the description of night. A Self-Education Circle has opened in our school. The elected board members are: B. Lesk, M. Lesk, Pinsky, M. Liberman, I. Zimin, and F. Markman. There is a campaign waging against Liberman based on the Charter item that says that if board members are not pleased with the work of one of them, then that board member can be voted out. This club will comprise different sections: Theater, Literature, Technical, Natural Science, and others. On the 15th of this month, the first issue of the magazine will come out under the editorship of B. Lesk. After that, an editorial board will be elected. If Liberman gets elected, then, by my grace, the magazine will be a failure, but there is little hope for him, very little. Two days ago, my arts teacher, Pavel Petrovich Gust, left the city. I dropped

¹⁰ The original words are "зима" (*zima*, or winter) and "река" (*reka*, or river.)

by to say goodbye. He is a nice and charming person. We gave him a big album as a keepsake. [Page 16] Actually, now I mostly do music—not playing but composing although I know perfectly well that I won't be a composer. I remember, however, that someone wrote that “even if he found himself on a deserted island, he would not stop his literary pursuits and would still write his notes even though no one would probably ever read them.” Where would he find paper and ink on a deserted island, one might ask (the idea of him writing in blood should be rejected since that trick is mostly a myth.) Anyways, none of this does any harm, and I write sheet music and fill sheet music notebooks just like our chef makes my favorite raw potato pancakes. Good bye!¹¹ I am a person of regimen, and I go to bed no later than half past ten.

(A sketch)

The sun is shining gently. The snow is melting. It feels like spring rather than November. It is a holiday, the 10-year anniversary of the October revolution. [Page 17] Crowds of people are strolling up and down the street. Two drunk old guys are standing near a store and hugging each other like brothers. “There is strength in unity. To the alliance between Germany and France!” The one who is impersonating Germany is a person in his late thirties, with a likable face, looking like he used to be refined and speaking good German. The second one is a clumsy old guy in his late forties, with his hair overgrown and a face of a drunk. He is France. A policeman approaches and leads them away from the main street into a side street, where he leaves them. We follow them. “Alfredo! Oh, Alfredo! *Deutschland und Frankreich zusammenn*,”¹² Germany is welcoming the alliance as its leader. The sluggish France mumbles something under his breath. “*Junge herren*¹³, here is my friend Alfredo, the king Georges Alfredo.” “Hmm, yes, Alfredo!” the drunkard babbles unclearly... “Hold on, Alfredo!” Germany protests. We also ask Alfredo to wait. Germany begins to recite something in Latin, sing and dance a bit, while Alfredo shows us mercy and holds out his hat begging for alms. “For nuts and beans,” he says. [Page 18] Then, as if to prove his power, he lowers his head and starts headbutting his ally. “Oh, Alfredo, Georges Alfredo!” the indignant German switches from Latin. Alfredo begins dancing, and

¹¹ Written in English.

¹² Germany and France together (German words are written in Cyrillic letters.)

¹³ Young gentlemen (German words are written in Cyrillic letters.)

Germany continues the recitation. A Chinese policeman approaches and tries to pacify him. "Oh, lieber king, was tuen wir," Germany addresses him. The policeman doesn't care about the German's philosophy. "This son of the Celestial Empire doesn't wish it," the drunkard apologizes, and we leave.

On the 15th of this month the first issue of our school magazine is supposed to come out. I have submitted my poem *After a Thunderstorm, A Magic Poem*, and *Wolves Are Howling*. Dang, what a shame! Sergey Evgrafovich came up to me today and said, "I have a suspicion that you have plagiarized *Wolves Are Howling*." Naturally, he didn't say where I have copied it from because I never copied it. What hurts me is not that someone in their infinite wisdom decided that I have plagiarized, but that I gave that short story to some idiots who understand nothing and who know as much about poetry as a pig knows about Sunday. [Page 19] No one realized that my goal was not to describe a historical moment or some atamans or gangs. No one realized that this is poetry, not prose, and that I used those characters just so that I could convey my feelings in more understandable terms. Oh well, I will either succeed in making sure that Sergey Evgrafovich does not make any edits to the magazine, or I will stop submitting my material, and the magazine will fail. If they elect an editorial board, then I will propose point-blank to decide this issue by voting. If they don't, then I will give them an ultimatum: do it my way, or I will not provide any material. O. Zimin wrote a funny sketch, a script for *Ruslan and Lyudmila*. In it, four knights ride out on motorcycles to look for Lyudmila, and Ruslan goes to a chiromancer [illegible] Finn, etc. The sketch offended the literary tastes of Sergey Evgrafovich, and he declared that "he didn't like it." We will definitely publish it! Personally, I felt offended and withdrew my story. They will not get anything from me for the second issue. Less than squat! *A Magic Poem* published in the first issue is quite unconventional. [Page 20] I wrote all of it in History classes, so it is imbued with the spirit of history: "I am sitting in my History class and thinking to myself, wouldn't it be wonderful if the ground split open and swallowed me, sparing me from the boring history? I yawned and got a one. Chasing shadows, little by little I fell asleep, and I had a dream about Poseidon fighting Vulcan. There's a lot of noise and thundering. All of a sudden, the ground splits open, and I fall down. I land by the river Styx and

manage to catch Charon's motor boat. The motor roars, and having spent a little gasoline Charon transports me to the other bank. I jump out of the boat and give a copper [*illegible*] to Charon as a tip. His Hellenic blood boils, and he hits me on the ear. I hit him back, when the dog Cerberus appears and starts pulling my ears. I wake up, and I see the History teacher holding me by the ear while my classmate rubs his injury." So that's the plot of *A Magic Poem*. I'm just afraid I'm going to get a two in History for the words "Our History teacher has puffed up with rage like a crawfish." Well, good night, it is almost the time, 10:30 p.m.

[Page 21] On Saturday, November 12th, the fourth issue of the Young Reader came out. Eighty-eight poems had been sent to the editor to participate in the contest. Of those, twenty three best poems were selected, of which ten were published in that issue, and the other 13 will be published in the next one. I rushed home from school, grabbed the sheet, and scanned it for Shura Poltavsky. The name was not there. I must confess I felt chill grip my heart! Then I read that not all the poems were published in this issue and relaxed. After that, however, I read the list of all the 88 pen names, and mine was not there. My first idea was to write a letter and attach my poem to it, which would be very disadvantageous, but then I decided that it would be better to go see the editor in person. I grabbed a friend and went there, but the editor was not in. I went there again in about 15 minutes (I had time to grab a different friend), and I caught the editor in the office. I told him what the matter was, and he "eased my mind" saying that there will be a second contest. But I decided to press on. He asked me whether I remembered my poem and told me to write it down on paper. I wrote it down, and the editor clearly liked it. He said that he would publish it. So, the twenty-three contestants, I have the honor to introduce myself: I am number twenty-four. [Page 22] "We will fight on, and damn it all!"¹⁴ By the way (I just remembered, after the quote) the Literature section had its first gathering. We were told (the usual blah, blah, blah) about the Circle's usefulness, a need for it, etc. A student monitor was elected. I got 19 votes, and some girl (a terribly "clever one") got 24. It was all the doing of M. Liberman and Co. Well then! Lesk was given a task to prepare a presentation on Don Quixote and Hamlet. Then Sergey Evgrafovich asked for forty minutes of our attention, and made an hour and a half long presentation on Turgenev. If I were asked

¹⁴ A quote from a poem by Ivan Turgenev.

what I learned from that presentation, I would say that making mistakes is part of human nature—the presentation went on for nearly two hours. Well, enough about that. I'll just write a few words about the poems that were submitted for the contest. Here is a beginner poet; the poem is not bad, a little too light for a gloomy evening:

We are lighting *candles*,
The sad *day* has passed.
And the quiet blue *evening*
Is bringing *shadows* with it.
All sounds have *ceased*,
Silence is around us.
The *moon* stirs in the soul
Now joy, now *sadness*.

[Page 23] A poem by some Avochka is a little worse but it is lively and light. A wonderful poem by Lyubochka, I liked it:

The sunset was fading. Like *candles*,
The trembling stars lit up, and the *day* was over.
Having brought coolness, the pensive *evening*
Cast its purple *shadow* upon the earth.
The voices *ceased* everywhere a long while ago,
Silence fell as if in an empty temple.
And filled with a light and incomprehensible *sorrow*,
I am watching the *moon* hide in the clouds.

It is a bit mixed-up: a light sorrow means a clear one, so the words “light and incomprehensible sorrow” are totally incongruous, especially when they are placed side by side. But overall it's nice! A certain Mamochka wrote a few poor lines and made a mistake: “the *day* is over” cannot be placed before “hello, the *shadow* of the night” because there is no meter. Kelly also wrote a poor poem. Pechalin wrote a “good” one:

The wet October lit *candles* in the azure,
The cold *day* lowered its eyelashes,

The yellow *evening* pressed its eyebrows painfully,
And pine trees stretched their angry *shadows*.
The birch violins have *ceased*,
Silence is ringing in the heart like copper
And in the skies, the tired autumn *moon*
Is bathing in *sorrow*.

“Ab ove.”¹⁵ Does Pechalin even know what “azure” means? I don’t think so, but he still writes about it. How painfully did the evening press its eyebrows? Dear Monsieur Pechalin, could you please press your eyebrows as hard as you can and see if it hurts you? [Page 24] Have you ever seen a yellow evening, or did it turn yellow because of the beauty of your poem? Please advise the pine trees against becoming angry; it is bad for them: offer some valerian root to them. Do you really think that a violin must always squeak, or is it your style of playing? And if so, birch trees do squeak. The silence is ringing! How wonderful! You see, copper is not a noble metal and will turn yellow inside a heart. Please advise the moon not to go swimming in the autumn: it will catch a cold, and if it is in sorrow, it will be even worse. The only excellent expression is “the tired moon.” Well, how could it not be tired, it’s been moving for millions of years. Lyric wrote a sentimental poem, a little too sentimental because it makes you teary. A deadly insult was inflicted on our newly launched street cars by Julius. Dear Julius, did you get your personal street car, because ours will “sound no more” only by nightfall? Lulu wrote a wonderful poem, simple and clear. Kira Stokalskaya wrote a poem that is tearful, sentimental, etc., etc.

The days of my life are extinguishing like *candles*,
I wish I could bring back every *day* that I have lived.
With sorrow, I am facing the upcoming *evening*.
Isn’t it the *shadow* of death moving behind me?

¹⁵ The original notation.

All the harps of my wishes have long *ceased* playing.
Everything has gone quiet... I have fallen asleep... *Silence* is everywhere.
My face distorted by a grin of *sadness*.
Is lit by a big laughing *moon*.

[Page 25] How old are you? You must be around a hundred. It is too early for your days to start extinguishing like candles and facing the evening with sorrow. Are you sure you haven't taken any castor oil? Take some black draft¹⁶, it will act quickly, and you won't have to face the upcoming evening with sorrow. Your holy face is "distorted by a grin of sadness." You must be sleeping and clearly seeing this in your dream. Or maybe you placed a photographic apparatus above you, and in the morning you saw the face distorted by a grin of sadness. Do you really think that I will start crying? Oh no, I will do what your moon did (luckily, the only clever character in your poem), which is... Haven't you noticed that the moon that usually feels sad and cries, even the moon could not hold back its emotions? So what do you want a mere mortal like me to do? But there is a great merit in your poem: you are absolutely correct when you say that the moon is big. It is definitely big. Maybe it's bigger than your head? I don't know really...

[Page 26] Two people meet at a ball. Both are bored and feel awkward. One says to the other, "Are you squeamish about sharing plates?" "No, not really, why?" "Let's exchange our plates! I'm not in mine, and you look like you are not in yours, either. Maybe I am holding your plate, and you are holding mine!"¹⁷ Yesterday (November 19th), I attended an evening event at my school. Shkurkin made a presentation titled "The Myths of China." His presentation was wonderful: he didn't read it; he actually spoke, even talked to the audience. Indeed, I was under impression that he was conversing with us. My impression was that it was good, maybe even useful. After the presentation, there were games and dancing. I made acquaintance with B.G. (a girl, of course) in a quite unusual manner. I was not acquainted with her, so I introduced my friend under a condition that he, in turn, would introduce me. R.Ts. is sort of eyeing me up. I

¹⁶ *Aqua laxativa viennensis*, used as a purgative.

¹⁷ This joke does not translate well into English. The Russian expression "быть не в своей тарелке" literally translates as "to be not in your own plate," which means "to feel uneasy," "to be out of one's element," or "to be in the wrong box."

pay zero attention to her! Vatner and Co., beware!!! It is obvious that a break-up is brewing. That's all the better. Both sides will be left with nothing, but we will not lose anything.

I'm telling you seriously
You are sweet and gracious
Although it's freezing cold outside
Your eyes are burning me, but not unkindly.

This is an impromptu poem to my new acquaintance, B.G. [Page 27] Lesk, B.G., another girl B., and I danced the Hungarian dance together. I can't really dance, Lesk dances a little, but both girls dance superbly. We asked them to teach us, and did some "dancing." I can only imagine the goggle-eyed R.Ts.! It's all for the good, darn it (our good, naturally.) My poem was published as part of the contest in the Saturday issue. "What does the coming day hold for me?"¹⁸ Isn't it five tickets to the theater? (the prize for the King)" I got elected to the editorial board.

On Saturday 26th, the contest was still going on. The readers were informed that No. 10 and No. 11 were competing for the title of "King." Mine is No. 20. This means I'm out. I said earlier that if the winning poem is worse than mine, I will be content, but if it's the other way around, then I will feel annoyed by the idea that someone writes better than me, although there are some 23-year-old dumbheads among "young poets." In general, I am not worried. No.10 is the poem with the "face distorted by a grin of sadness," and the second poem is completely mind-boggling. I have a strong suspicion that someone spared no expense, bought a lot of newspapers, and sent all those votes to the editor. [Page 28] The editor also knows on which side his bread is buttered. He knows that if the contest is extended by a week, the newspaper can make some money on the "Young Poet." Damn you all, modern poets. Have you ever even thought of what it means to be a poet in our times? Never! Our life is all about prose, and nothing but prose. I dare you find an "honest person," who would ask "To be or not to be" before committing a murder. If I were to paint an allegory of poetry for you, I would paint Don Quixote of La Mancha and said, "That is poetry." Bedbugs on the face of the earth, do you know what life is all about? I got a two. I went to bed at night and kept thinking. Through the window,

¹⁸ A quote from *Eugene Onegin*.

I can see the full moon, silvery stars, and gloomy sky. But please don't smile, whoever you might be, for this is not poetry against which I have just rebelled. Oh no! The Moon is six times smaller than the Earth. It is six thousand versts¹⁹ in diameter, so its radius is three. But let's leave it in peace. My brain imagines airless, infinite space. It is dark and silent. Tiny grains of planets meticulously follow their orbits. What is there shining in the distance like a light dot? Oh, that's the Sun! Here is a comet flying, with its fiery head and golden body. [Page 29] Where is it going? Far, far away. Our brain is incapable of imagining the distance that comet will cover, or what it will see on its way. Will it be new myriads of planets or something completely new to us but eternal as far as nature is concerned? Maybe THERE, the comet will pass by some enormous world inhabited by creatures that for millions of years have known the highest sciences and learned to travel in time and space. THERE, at an enormous distance from us, there is life, too, there are grains of life energy and electricity. Picture the space of the Universe: here, among the infinite darkness, a dot is moving. It is Earth. On that dot, there are atoms, even smaller ones. These are us, humans. What do we know? What has our culture achieved? Nothing! Just imagine that total lack of knowledge is a straight line and knowledge is an angle. The bigger the angle, the bigger the knowledge. So if you draw a straight line from us to some other unknown planet billions of times further from us than the Sun, then that line will form an angle that, at that unknown planet, will be one atom wide!!! Even smaller! We know nothing.

[Page 30] Lesk made a presentation on Don Quixote and Hamlet today. The presentation caused a big debate. We talked about the idealist, the abnormal, the superfluous man, etc. We talked a lot about Hamlet, and to wrap it up I would like to smash all of their interpretations by saying that Shakespeare is both the stupidest and the smartest person in the world. Is it life-like when people die one after another? Indeed, everybody dying is not life-like. Seriously, there has never been such a non-realistic artist as Shakespeare (of course, he was an artist in a figurative sense.) In my *Classroom Sonnets* (I wrote them exclusively during classes,) I wrote:

¹⁹ A *verst* is an obsolete Russian unit of length equal to 1.0668 kilometers.

Regan passed away,
King Lear passed away,
Goneril passed away,
The entire world passed away.
Those are Shakespearean tricks.
And if it were so indeed,
Most probably, neither Volta nor Lussac
Would be born.
Przhevalsky would not be born,
And neither would Ohm or Faraday.
You, Shakespeare, of all people,
Are no smarter than a donkey.

Please don't get offended, Sir William! [Page 31] A donkey is not that stupid, and it knows that its back is whipped not by the Holy Spirit but by humankind that, despite your protests, is growing in arithmetic progression; I cannot forget to mention the progression because I have been honored by a big fat two painted by artist Fyodor Kuzmich (hope he only gets to eat foxtail millet with Chinese dough in the afterlife.)

November 29. Bella G. has been walking around with Stefa Ts. Most probably, they have become friends. This must be stopped otherwise Bella G. will become as bad as Stefa Ts. I can't stand the latter. She is darkish, repulsive, and nasty. Also, she likes to express her feelings on paper. She sent us her short story, *The Voice of the Motherland*, in which she beats about the bush so badly that it is annoying to read. Her exaggerated sentimentality shows right away. This is what I wrote on her manuscript:

We regret to be sending your writing back,
Your words are as new as the world...
The Voice of the Motherland is a wonderful title,
But the content is as wonderful as you are.

In a nutshell, wonderful!

The snowy garden under the moon
 Weeps gently over me.
 The snow lies in a pelerine,
 The flickering light shines in it.
I will close my eyes with a thought,
 Will you come to the window?
The snowy garden under the moon
 Will sing a song about me...
 “Take a streetcar in the evening
 To the railroad station, then walk
 Up the Boulevard Street just a little,
And here I am in the garden, at the end of my route.”
 Casually, I will lean towards the window,
And with a fainting heart I will peek inside...
 There, hunched over the desk,
You are writing something with your quill.
 I wish you would stand up
 And come to the window.
The snowy garden under the moon
 Will sing a song about me...

19 November 29 27

This is all about my old acquaintance (not an old person, obviously,) my summer sweetheart, G[*inked out*]. Often times, my friend and I (I used to go on bike rides with him) want to go for a walk, so we catch a streetcar, pay five kopeks and take a ride to the railroad station; and then we go “up...just a little,” and there we are. The garden where in the fall we used to take a break from riding our bikes is all covered in snow now and looks so picturesque under the evening moon that it is pure delight. The naked trees with fluffy patches of snow in their forking branches are begging to be painted on canvas. Unfortunately, my friend doesn’t know much

about art, so my declaration that it would be impossible to go without the ultramarine color doesn't make any impression on him.

[Page 33] November 30. Please do tell me why is it that when I wrote my poems last year, and I wrote whatever I wanted about things that I had not seen and did not feel, I gave them freely for everyone to read and got praised? Why is it that now when I am writing about my sincere feelings, about something that is really happening inside me, I cannot and do not show my poems to anyone? I know beforehand that my friends will ridicule me although I would probably be ridiculous only because I say out loud something that is in everyone's heart. What's bad about me liking a certain G[inked out]? I think it is better than walking up and down Chinese street hitting on unknown girls. Why do I understand this, and they don't want to understand? I think only Syoma Malkin, my "travel" companion, would be able to understand how ugly the thoughts of my other school friends are. S.M. is very nice and quiet, but stubborn. Until now, he lived in Yimianpozhen, and for this reason he is better than almost anyone in our class. I became friends with him because I've learned from my six-year experience that such a friend is the best. [Page 34] Tomorrow this third will be over. It's turned out rather bad for me. I studied little, and I have two twos in this third, in Accounting and in Technical Drawing. That's too bad but I will definitely work on it in the second third. I don't like it myself!

December 2. Lesk received a letter that said, "Evening 1. I like you. Guess who I am." A typical drawing followed, a heart pierced by an arrow. I'm almost 100% sure that it was written by B.G. This further emphasizes her innocence and strengthens my desire to influence her so that she stops being friends with Stefa Ts. For now, she is sweet and naïve, and compared to Stefa, they are like water and stone, fire and.... etc. Yesterday, I asked Ts. for a fountain pen. I took it and put it on the desk. The student who was sitting in front of me took it and gave it to Vovochka Ts. with whom I am not on speaking terms. "Ts. has your pen," I told Ts. "Then ask him to give it back to me. Tell him that it is my pen." "I am not on speaking terms with Vovochka." "You are at odds with everyone. Who do you actually talk to?" I got angry and couldn't help but say, "Right now I'm talking to a fool." Ts. turned away and left. A big performance is being prepared for Christmas in the Commercial Assembly building. [Page 35] They will do *The Minor*²⁰ (the

²⁰ A play by Denis I. Fonvizin (1745 — 1792)

lesson and the exam scenes) and the third act of *Woe from Wit*²¹. I am playing Famusov. For the divertissement, I will prepare a poem (my own.) Yesterday it was frosty and cloudy in the morning. The classroom was dark. By about 12 p.m. it became lighter. During that time I wrote a poem. I like it:

After a cold winter cloud,
The sun has shone again.
And a comforting ray of light
Has made its way into our dark and gloomy classroom.
The blue sky is clear.
Only a small cloud, becoming shapeless,
Is drifting across it. How wonderful!
Towering against the clear sky,
A mosque is shimmering with
Its golden hued minaret.
The snow on the roofs is glistening
Like ripples of water in the warm summer.
The heart urges to go into the distant vastness,
Into this azure height,
And from the sky, meeting my gaze,
A raging ray of light is charging through the window.

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And in ten minutes, a new poem (I am churning them out like hotcakes):

After this third, I will go to Laoshaogou
(This third rushed by so quickly)
And I wish not to lay my eyes again
Upon a different resort.
I remember an old time story
That has actually nothing to do with my poem,

²¹ A satirical play by Alexander Griboyedov (1795 — 1829)

About an old man (who lived in the desert)
[a missing line]
He did not fall for wealth
But traded the noisy city for wilderness
Going back to the desert
And lived there until the end of his life.
I am not anywhere close to the end of my life,
But, gosh, I would really want
To go back there again. I will get to see
My old friends (poetic license²²)
Not you, Lora the cow,
And your gang of friends.
I will keep for my own (poetic license²³) gaze
My dear G[inked out]....

[Page 36] It will be good indeed to go to Laoshaogou again. I hope G[inked out] can go. That would be so much fun: we would gather a gang, we would play... Well, it's time to wrap up. The time is near: it is half past ten.

The girl who had asked me in the summer why I was wearing a Turkish hat and who I honestly cannot stomach, brought me three poems for publication in the magazine. I am truly in a difficult situation here. Such poems cannot be published: the meter is quite erratic, but at the same time, she is definitely making an attempt to portray life in a way that I really love and that I can distinguish immediately from the "exaggerated sentimentality" which made me reject *The Voice of the Motherland*. If I don't publish the poems, she will take offense. She will write really well after a year of consistent editing. If only she would give me her poems then. Here is one of them titled *The Beggar*. [Page 37]

Down a noisy street, exhausted and pale,
A boy in patches (?!!!) is walking.
He has suffered such hardship, poor thing,

²² The Russian word "friends" is written in an unconventional way for the sake of the rhyme.

²³ The Russian word "my own" is written in an unconventional way for the sake of the rhyme.

Without food for three straight days...

etc.

A boy in patches, without food for three days.... She rhymes the words *died* and *soul*²⁴. She switches from dactyl to iamb, from a tetrameter to a trimeter and a hexameter, then to an amphibrach, etc. It could be published as a try, but not as a relatively perfect poem. The same is the case with another poetess, Little Gypsy (that's her pseudonym.) In terms of the form, the latter is a little better than the former. By the way (*caramba!*), the chosen king is...actually, the chosen queen is Kira Stokalskaya, the one with the "face distorted by a grin of sadness." She did something cunning and not quite honest: she signed her poem for the contest with her real last name as if she was saying to her acquaintances, girl friends, and admirers (I am not excluding this possibility), please help me to win, for the love of God! Overall, I took it rather indifferently, and my memories about the contest are nothing but ironic... I have fallen head over heels for astronomy. I've buried myself in *Worlds in the Making*²⁵ by Svante Arrhenius to the tip of my nose, and I'm writing a paper titled *The Spread of Life in Space*. [Page 38] I've reached the point where I had a dream that Earth has collided with a comet, and today during my presentation at the Literature section, when someone mentioned that a certain article was written in 1910, I couldn't help but exclaim, "The year of the Halley comet!" Dang, it's twenty to eleven already! December 7. "Everything in the world repeats itself," a writer said. God said, "You shall wander in the wilderness for forty years until the old people die and the young generation comes to replace the old." Ten more years! Old rabbis with payot, sick and frail, just skin and bones, will yield their place to new workers, to young Jews—us. It is with deep satisfaction that I have been observing that there are fewer and fewer of these old people who have grown accustomed to their situation, who are used to caving in, and have no feeling of national or personal dignity. I see young people get stronger year after year, grow both intellectually and physically, and I have a feeling that soon we too will become a nation with our own state, and we will be able to say proudly, "I am a Jewish subject"²⁶." These Jewish quarters and closed ghettos have chained

²⁴ The Russian words for "died" and "soul" are *umerla* and *dusha*, respectively. Phonetically, these two words do not rhyme perfectly.

²⁵ The original title is *Das Werden Der Welten*.

²⁶ Although the author uses the word 'subject,' he probably means 'citizen' or 'national.'

our intellectual life for centuries. [Page 39] Jewish children were raised in *cheders* where an old rabbi would only teach them Talmud and Torah. Now we are growing freely, we study like everyone else, and despite our century-long isolation, we are not falling behind. Go to any public school and ask about the number one student in any class. There is a 99% chance that you will hear a Jewish last name in response. You have chained Jewish brains and frozen our minds in isolated ghettos, hoping to wipe our people off the face of the earth. The results can already be seen, and when time goes by... Some time ago, about ten years back, I could not say out loud, "I am a Jew." A Jew was not a human; a Jew was worse than an animal... Not a single one of the oppressing countries ever thought that it denied us an opportunity to assimilate by persecuting us. But now it is too late... Our freedom will serve freedom. Over many centuries, we have absorbed the essence of our nation. Now, neither persecution nor freedom shall wipe it off the face of the earth. Ten more years!²⁷ Just remember who Mendelssohn, Antokolsky, Goethe, Heifetz and many others were, and then think that if a nation oppressed for many centuries could produce such people, what it would be like if it was free and developed like other countries. But it is not too late...

[Page 40] Pavel Iokhvidov, another guy, and I came over to Mikhilev's. We started making random phone calls. "Lyubochka?"²⁸ We decided to get together at such and such. Do come, darling!" "Is this the Hotel Europe? Criminal investigation agent speaking. Who is staying in room 19? What? What's my business? I'm asking you, who is staying in room 19?" "Is this the Hotel Palace? Can I get room number 11 on the phone? I'm asking you to get room number 11! What do you mean 'no one is staying in it'?! My apologies, in this case." "Is this the Hotel Beijing? Room number 19 to the phone, please! What do you mean, no one is there? What about Ladyshev? Is he staying there? No? Bye then!" But the last call was the most interesting one: "Is this Mr. Ternov?" "Mr. Ternov is sleeping. Would you like to leave him a message?" "Oh my God! (in a frightened manner) please call Mr. Ternov to the phone! Please, tell him... Do ask him to come to the phone at once!" Apparently, Mr. Ternov himself comes running to the phone: "What's the matter? What's happened? Please speak!" "Just a minute, somebody wants

²⁷ This same sentence can be translated as "Just ten years ago!"

²⁸ Endearing name for Lyubov, a female name.

to speak to you." A minute-long pause follows. "Oh, you are still waiting? I must inform you that the person who wanted to talk to you has changed their mind!"

The naked planes are white.

Only the crescent is casting its rays

On tree stumps, snow banks, and hills,

Flooding them with silver.

[Page 41]

It is so fresh at night time,

One breathes easily in the steppe.

I am rushing along a high road

Like a cloud in the sky.

The horses are neighing... my sleigh is squeaking faintly,

The crescent is shining above me.

A famous poem by an old nanny

Comes to mind at times:

"Storm has set the heavens scowling,

Whirling gusty blizzards wild..."²⁹

The young heart isn't lamenting,

The sleigh is rushing forward light-heartedly.

No, it is not the sleigh but the years that are rushing by,

The years of youthful joy.

The clear waters of childhood

Are rushing along a wicked long road.

So many times a hunched old man,

The frost, has come to me

In a ballroom with a Christmas tree, lit up

Under the stars and the moon.

Yesterday (December 10th) there was a party. I sent a letter via the "flying post service" to one young poetess containing a rather unpleasant message: "Whether you are a poetess, or a

²⁹ A quote from Alexander Pushkin's poem *Winter Evening* translated by Walter Arndt.

blockhead, I'm afraid to judge, but I wouldn't dare to start looking for another idiot like you." I wonder how she took it?! Lesk wrote a letter to B.G., "Evening 1. I liked you," etc. But she took her number off, without which, naturally, the letter would not reach her. Lesk got offended and (how very stupid of him!) wrote rather contemptuous interjections, "Ha! Ha! Ha!" over her previous letter (I think I mentioned it before.) I handed her the letter, and some time after she comes and asks, "What is this all about?" and gives the letter back to me. [Page 42] Either she pretended, or the letter to Lesk had not been written by her. In the latter case, it is indeed an awkward situation. I am writing quite an interesting little play *Yashka* about school life!

December 12. Apparently, the probability that it was B.G. who wrote that letter was not 100% but 99%. She came up to me and asked, "What was that letter all about? You ruined my whole evening." "It must've been a mistake," I answered, "we assumed that the letter was written by you." "Well, before you *assume*, you should try to find out." "We were 100% sure that it was you who wrote the letter." "What about now? Not a single percent?" "That's right." "The thing is, that letter has stirred up quite a bit of rumors." I should apologize tomorrow. Today I got punched in the eye, so there was no way I could do it (if you disregard the fact that I actually forgot to apologize.)

December 13. When I got elected to the editorial board together with Khanin and Iokhvidov, Lesk, who is at odds with the latter, ironically offered his congratulations to me on the fact that I will be working with Iokhvidov. But now I see that he is the most useful member of our club. Who, for example, would have thought or dared to start collecting New Year wishes from teachers to students? Now we gather them at our long recess every day, and we have collected them from almost all the teachers. [Page 43] Today B.G. asked me where I will be celebrating the New Year. Actually, she said that she had been tasked to ask me that. I replied that I didn't know, but probably among my friends just like last year. I wonder what it might mean. I apologized that I had acted in such a disrespectful way with that letter... My dear diary! It seems that I'm speaking frankly, without holding back, with you alone. Maybe, many years from now, I will be pleased to see these lines that remind me about my past that will be gone forever. Today for the very first time I dreamt of G[inked out]. In my dream, she and I were either playing tag or catching ball. I'm glad, so very glad that I think of her as a child. I

remember that back in the summer, because I like to paint, I liked her arching eyebrows and long fair braids. And I still keep them in my memory. G[*inked out*] is a nice, very nice girl. I remember how she used to play with little kids, and I think it is the number one sign of childlike purity. Simplicity is the only quality I like! And that's the only thing I love in people... no, not in people, but in us, in boys and girls... It can hardly be found in callous, coarsened people who live in our cities! Oh, Jean Jacques Rousseau was so right!!!

[Page 44] December [*illegible*]. I re-read *Rusalka*. It made a deep and depressing impression on me like no other book before. Indeed, what a powerful tragedy... The Prince feels that he will not be happy, that he will not be able to start his life over again... I am feeling everything that the Prince was feeling... Unwillingly to these sad shores...³⁰ I guess my brain is structured differently somehow... I cannot remain indifferent seeing such a great range of emotions in the soul of the Prince... I don't think that anyone who reads these lines will understand me... I'm trying to say, in vain, that this is fiction, Pushkin's creation, etc. I still remain under a heavy impression... Alas, it is better I set my quill aside. If only I could find a person with the same cranium as mine, then it would be quite a different story... But you... It is so painful to imagine the woods, the abandoned mill, the Dnieper... Eight years ago, here he loved and enjoyed life... Now everything is overgrown with weeds and abandoned... If only (will it come true?) I could be in Poltava now... Our old yard! Is that mighty oak tree still standing in the middle of the yard? Is that elm tree still growing near the balcony which I used to climb to get into the house? I am built in such an irrational way. Should a person like me really live in our times? Let me go to the piano: maybe it could reflect my feelings.

[Page 45]

We don't fear the embrace of death

Love makes the grave warm...

This is how I ended the sixth scene of *Rusalka* that I am done with.

December 19. This morning I went to school for a rehearsal (it's a holiday.) El* is hoping to perform a miracle with his symphonic declamation—I guess that's what you call it? I wonder what it is... On Tuesday, there will be a first rehearsal of *Woe from Wit* on the stage of the Commercial Assembly. Our New Year celebration plans have gone awry. Last year, only boys

³⁰ A quote from Pushkin's *Rusalka*.

from our group got together to celebrate: Eskin, Lesk, Iokhvidov, Rogovin, etc. The other group—Vatner, Pinsky, etc.—also celebrated the New Year together, I think. We had invited the girls, but they did not come. This year, we’ve decided to invite Pinsky and Tsitrin to celebrate with us, but only so that the girls would come as well... Hopefully, those assholes do not get offended! Red-Haired Fritz, as everybody calls Pinsky, has been dodging a direct answer, obviously hoping to celebrate with Vatner. Yesterday, however, he said, “So, shall we talk on Tuesday?” Oh, you cunning redhead, if you are trying to be smart again with your golden noggin, you will not escape a re-coloring.

[Page 46] December [*illegible*]. I was right: the red soul tricked us and will be celebrating with Vatner. We lost nothing: the girls will not be celebrating the New Year either with us or with them, anyway... I am taking every opportunity to practice my poem writing—whatever comes into my hand gets covered with poems. Today R.Ts. let me use her textbook, and as a token of gratitude, I wrote this: “Your visage, as rosy as rubber, is like the moon splashed with sour cream. Like vareniki, like haluski from Poltava. There is only one moon, but there are many of you, darlings!” or

“In a blurred image of the moon, I see your eyes,
Your mug (!!!?!), oh and ah!, is like a pancake in the skies!”

It is true: her face is round like the moon or a pancake... I can’t keep writing. My stomach is churning; my guts are turning inside out. Should I take some valerian root? *I took some black draft, and now my guts are moaning! Wow! There is a stampede inside! Ouch! I hope my stomach kicks the bucket!!!*³¹

December 23. Yesterday, P. Pinsky, Frizer, A. Khanin, Pines, Eskin, and I were invited for a cup of tea to celebrate Hanukkah. Izgur made a rousing speech. Others spoke as well. Finally, they turned to us, Jewish youth, to say a word. I grabbed a pencil quickly and drafted a few words getting ready to make a speech, but Pinsky took the paper from me and said that he would be speaking instead. And so he did. [Page 47] He got complimented, but my friends chuckled about the fact that he actually spoke my words. Under a vivid impression of Izgur's speech, I wrote the following poem:

³¹ The italicized lines are rhymed to produce a comic effect.

When the giant wakes up again,
The nearby mountains will tremble...

Etc.

Last night, I had an idea to write a long piece of work in prose: Two young men live and work in the city*. One of them is emotional, ardent, and has a gift for words; he is a would-be writer. The other one is quiet and hard-working. They are friends. Both are Zionists who organized a Jewish club, etc. During Hanukkah celebration, in an attempt to distinguish his friend, the first young man gives him his speech, and he does the speaking. Eventually, both graduate from school. The first one has a splendid future ahead. Together with one of his friends, Esk., he leaves for America where he earns recognition through his gifted works. He exerts himself in all areas of science, and his name becomes known all over America. The other one goes to Vancouver (Canada,) and after staying there for three months, he receives a letter from a famous Zionist, A.S.I., and goes to Palestine. There he becomes a simple farmer, toiling the land and making a living as a peasant, etc. When he is twenty, he falls in love with a Jewish girl who lives nearby and marries her.

[Page 48] January 1. So we ended up celebrating the New Year's without the girls. It's OK, it was still fun. The second group—Vatner, Pinsky, Tsitrin, and Shriro—wanted to celebrate separately. We were too noble to offer them to celebrate the New Year as a class, but they didn't want to. They decided to gather at Shriro's, but Tsitrin did not get permission, and M. did not want to leave her mother home alone. When they all agreed to gather at M.'s, Shriro was no longer invited. That was very rude of them. Then we acted smarter than them: we invited Shriro, and now he is on our side; he's ours, so to speak. We gathered at Eskin's, had dinner, drank some wine, and started making witty remarks. Iokhvidov stood up, made a small speech, at the end of which he proposed that all who had quarreled make peace, and stretched his hand out to Lesk. It was a beautiful gesture. I was sitting, and I must admit, I wouldn't dare to stretch my hand out to Liberman when I saw that he offered me his hand first. We made peace. Lesk made peace with five people; Iokha (Iokhvidov) with one; Liberman with one; Shriro with two people, etc. After that we started drinking tea, and either because it was too hot, or because his stomach was too full, Gildburd threw up. [Page 49] As a future doctor, I was truly

toughening myself—forcing myself to look at that disgusting spectacle. We went outside at 1:30a.m. and walked to Zimin’s house where the fifth-graders were celebrating their New Year. They did not let us in, so we went to seventh-graders. On the way we changed our mind and went to [illegible.] There we went to bed and snoozed for about half an hour. Then we went on our way... We walked and walked. We threw a snowball into the fifth graders’ window, and around 3:30 in the morning we went to our own homes. And that was our New Year’s celebration. Beside the peacemaking, there was nothing pleasant to remember. I am becoming convinced that Iokhvidov is a good friend. When we were having dinner at Eskin’s, we decided to demote Pinsky from being the student monitor. We had shown him respect by electing him student monitor, but in return he didn’t even want to celebrate the New Year with his class. And not only that!

[Page 50] January 6. So many interesting things have been happening, but I have no desire to write. Pinsky has completely alienated from us, and so has Tsitrin. Our guys are still friendly with each other. Bor’ka³² Lesk and I, the two of us, organized a meeting where we decided to show Pinsky and Tsitrin their place, attract R.Ts.’s attention, in other words, to win her over, although there’s nothing to win over: a painter (R.Ts. paints) cannot direct her attention to either the redhead Fritz or to the fatty and oily Tsitrin. But her own situation is not to be envied: she is clearly bored with her old gang—Vatner & Co. To leave them and join us would be rude... Well, it’s all bad. Tsitrin does everything he can to show that R.Ts. is with them. He shouts when he invites her to the cinema. He shouts when he promises to pick her up, etc. But as funny as it is, we should do something about it. Yesterday was the Jewish youth night. Olmert made a great presentation about Peretz followed by a divertissement. Vatner, Pinsky, Tsitrin, and R. Tsir. sat separately. Tsitrin, Markman, and Vatner left early: Mommy said no! R.Ts. stayed. The dancing started. She danced waltz and foxtrot (!?!). I felt like Chatsky³³ but, unfortunately, without a carriage, because I would have to walk home. [Page 51] I was casting contemptuous glances at the people dancing, and, for the most part, I was entirely sincere. R.Ts. noticed that. I wonder if she understood. It was impossible to look at Pinsky without laughing. When R.Ts. was dancing, he would humbly stand by the wall. When a dance ended, a

³² *Bor’ka* is short and informal for ‘Boris.’

³³ The protagonist of *Woe from Wit*.

smile would spread across his face, and he would approach and start talking to her, turning from red to crimson, which has been his characteristic from the day he was born. She paid as much attention to him as Apollo would pay to our Chinese cook, and our cook to Apollo.... Ukrainian songs make an astonishing impression on me. Tears come swelling to my eyes when I hear, "*Oi ne khody, Hrytsyu, ta y na vechornytsi.*"³⁴ I transcribed the song to sheet music the way my father played it—he still remembers those songs from Ukraine. Are there any other folk songs that are as melodious as those? You can't help but picture a village, white peasant houses with wicker fences, a blue forest nearby, the mirror-like Vorskla, and green fields punctuated by bushy groves. Poetry, songs, paintings, everything that's beautiful in this world...

[Page 52] January 9. I have just come back from the matinee. Something happened between Vatner and R.Ts. They don't speak to each other. Vatner sat down to talk with another girl, then he danced, so he is probably in counter relations with R.Ts. If this happened because of us³⁵, then I have made a mistake not to pay attention to Ts. in my turn. I danced (actually, very badly) with one girl several times, right before Ts.'s eyes, and she asked, surprised, "Galatzky, do you dance?" Yes, yes, I dance, didn't you see? I know those tricks. There are signs that appear to be pointing in our favor. It's becoming interesting! Tomorrow there is a rehearsal at 11 a.m., and we are not going to make any more mistakes! Pechorin³⁶ never made mistakes in such affairs but he had a lot of experience. And experience comes from...!! By the way, it's been over three months that we have created a Jewish club. There have been many presentations made already. We get together in private houses or ask for a venue. The day before yesterday there was a meeting. When it ended, R.Ts. (she is a member) said to a female student from seventh grade, "You are going my way! Walk me home, could you?" [Page 53] So Pinsky roared, "I will walk you home!" She paid zero attention to him. On the way home, I didn't waste time and demonstrated to Pinsky my ability to entertain a young lady, and to the young lady, R.Ts., my interest in her. I kept asking her when she goes to the cinema, what show time she prefers, etc., etc. Pinsky didn't say a word. He didn't get to walk her home: we reached our street and

³⁴ Hryts, do not go to the evening dances.

³⁵ The author appears to be referring to himself in plural sometimes, especially when he writes about matters of the heart.

³⁶ The protagonist of Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*.

turned to go home. Then Pinsky said, "You know, I never thought that Ts. is such an idiot!" I agreed sympathetically, but I thought to myself, "~~Of course~~ Oh no, when she is refusing such a gallant red haired suitor like Pinsky, she is far from being an idiot!" After the next meeting, I'll try to walk her home to show Fritz!

January 11. I barely finished writing these lines when Lesk dropped in. We began a discussion. Lesk told me that Iokhvidov (a competent person) confirms the correctness of my tactics. I expressed my new view of the current situation. It was an arbitrary view, but when we got to the bottom of it, we finally understood that, unexpectedly, it turned out to be as certain as Earth's gravity. We were baffled by one thing: apparently, R.Ts. had quarreled or was in a strained relationship with Vatner. [Page 54] At the last party, Mad* kept him company all the time, while R.Ts. didn't even approach him. But it is clearly noticeable that R.Ts. is constrained by something. She had agreed to celebrate the New Year with us, but found herself in an awkward position: Mad*, her friend, did not want to go. As it happened, everything was quite simple. I accidentally remembered that at a party in 1926, when I was still friends with Vatner, Mad* mentioned that she liked him. Shoot, so that's what this is all about! That's why she got so attached to that group. I want to know more about Markman. He is the only one within his group who behaves in an independent way. But he cannot be counted as one of our group either. He's closer to them than to us. But if he breaks up with them, then he will definitely join his own classmates (he's in the seventh grade.) He is obviously attracted to R.Ts. but he doesn't show it. As for R.Ts., it is impossible to tell with her, dang it! At some point, she liked Vatner but now it is obvious that she does not. I don't think that she likes Markman. I don't think that she likes anyone. [Page 55] Either she is a wonderful actress, or, indeed, she likes *neither a donkey, nor a stud, nor a pickle in a jar* (this is my own improvised rhyme.) But it's OK. We'll figure her out as we've figured out Pinsky, Tsitrin, Vatner, and now Mad*. With regards to my own feelings, I will say only that over her—and over a lot of other similar things—I would prefer my summer G[inked out] who I have not seen for about a month now. Nonetheless, I will say it flat out: I would not particularly like it if she fancied Vatner or somebody else. In summary, it is a typical feeling of a selfish person, augmented by the fact that a defeat on this front causes us to lose a lot, whereas a win brings us the victory in the entire game. It is worth trying!

In the diary I kept in 1925-1926, under the entry marked 'October 22, 1926,' I wrote about the death of a certain young man and his very touching dying wish. A week ago, his father, Mr. Leibovitch, died. After the death of his son, he was sad for the whole year. He could not get used to the loss of his son. A blood transfusion ruined his health, and he died. A month before his actual death, everybody was waiting for him to die any minute, but he survived although he lost his mind. [Page 56] It looks like he died fully conscious. He was survived by his wife and mother, and a son. His son is a grown-up man, as smart as a tree stump. I remember that one time he and I played for an entire hour, wrestling, when all of a sudden he cried out with indignation, "You can't treat me like a little boy," etc. That was both funny and sad! Good ideas come at night, and they come unexpectedly... At least, in my case. I have invented a wonderful pump, very simple and convenient, to pump the air out of a bell jar during all sorts of experiments. For better convenience, you can pump out the air using electricity instead of doing it manually. This way, all the air can be pumped out of a bell jar as large as our room in about six to seven minutes (if this is possible at all.) On top of that, I have come up with an initial concept for my future theory on the nature of electricity. I will try to regard it as invisible rays passing through spaces between atoms or molecules. I will have to elaborate this idea somewhat. Let us assume that they are formed as a result of a chemical process and radiate into the air, where they get neutralized and destroyed by each other. [Page 57] Actually, this is how I explain Fechner's electroscope. Let us assume that this little hypothesis is correct, and turn to conductors and non-conductors. Let us use iron and air as an example. It is possible that iron, maybe like all other metals, has relatively larger spaces between molecules, meaning atoms, and rays easily pass between them as in bodies with good transparency. However, air, or rather its molecules, are very compressed and are considered bodies that do not transmit electric rays well. We can make an analogy here: we claim that there are no bodies that are completely nontransparent because, according to the hypothesis about atoms and molecules, rays can freely travel in the spaces between them. We can say the same about electricity. According to the theory, there are no bodies that are completely non-conductive of electricity, but we are still unable to produce a current strong enough to destroy the tremendous resistance of non-conductors. Therefore, I believe that non-conductors are bodies with

molecules and atoms pressed closely together. I noticed that all conductors are elements, and non-conductors are compounds. [Page 58] Let us take wood (dry wood,) for example. It consists of H, C, etc. In order to combine and form a body, those elements underwent a number of chemical and physical processes, the former of which occurred in prehistoric times. If enormous pressure and cooling of air creates water—not our water (H₂O) but liquid air—then, who knows, maybe at a pressure that is thousands of times higher, under some unknown physiological conditions, and may be colossal temperature, a body formed that we generically call ‘organic,’ and in this specific case it was wood. Of all physical processes I am mostly interested in pressure. If there was pressure (which is supported by a number of facts, like the deluge that occurred when the atmosphere became saturated with vapors and was condensed by some strong pressure,) then the wood molecules, or rather atoms of which it consists, would be brought closer together, compressed, and the distances between them would be significantly reduced. [Page 59] Even if separate atoms transmit electricity because distances between them are large enough, when they are joined together by strong pressure, they lose this ability, more so that a chemical process transforms them into a different body. Now let us go further. In their turn, gases are non-conductors of electricity (that’s what we call them.) I will try to prove, in the light of my theory, that their atoms are also compressed. It would be interesting to conduct the following experiment. Take the famous Magdeburg hemispheres and conduct an experiment by elimination: pump the air out of a giant vessel (they could use the electrical pump I invented) but leave the air inside the hemispheres and mate them. If the hemispheres remain mated, then my theory will have a bigger chance of success. If not, then evidently the experiment was conducted incorrectly from the technical point of view. Suffice it to say that I am trying to make an analogy with our atmosphere and outer space. If my Magdeburg hemispheres fall apart, then why doesn’t the air on our planet escape to space? [Page 60] Is it because of gravity? Well, it’s time to go to bed. Tomorrow I will try to look into induction and electrification of air by ultraviolet rays, as well as condensation of water vapor by ions.

January 12. I didn’t sleep all night. I woke up early feeling completely drained. Well, let us continue... Actually, dang, I’m feeling nauseous... I probably ate something... Obviously, it will

not be possible to conduct the experiment that I wrote about, but I will try to analyze it from every possible angle. Logically speaking, the hemispheres should break apart and create an evacuated space inside the bell jar. But this may also not happen, since the carbonic acid can be close to water without dissolving much, but if you pass it through water, it will dissolve in the water completely. If the hemispheres remain mated, that would be excellent. That would mean that our air shell is tightly compressed, and electric rays do not pass through it. If the hemispheres break apart, it wouldn't be bad either. It would be obvious that the air is affected by Earth's gravity. But then the closest layers are compressed and do not transmit electricity, whereas the upper layers must be transmitting it, maybe with high resistance. [Page 61] To put it simply: according to my theory, the airless space is the best conductor of electric current. Indeed, take a cylinder with a wire on both ends, then pump the air out of the cylinder, and a spark would jump even if the ends of the wire are far apart. If you let the air in, then you would need to put those wires close together, and even then you'd still have a high resistance. The phenomena of the spark jumping instead of the current flowing, as would be the case in a different conductor, confirms that airless space is the best conductor. The electric rays (that definitely have high affinity towards each other) are drawn to each other with such force (since there is no resistance) that the energy transforms into visible energy, which is the electric spark. Let us recall an experiment on radiation pressure performed by Americans Nichols and Hull. Their experiment was successful only because they conducted it in thin air. Evidently, in thin air, rays do not lose their brightness or force, and they exert sufficiently strong pressure. So if electric current is a kind of radiation (which I don't think anybody doubts,) then its force in the evacuated space should be immense. [Page 62] So we can formulate it like this: the force of the current depends on the molecular density of the conductor, where under 'molecular density' we understand not the density of each molecule, but how close the molecules are located towards each other, or their compression. Obviously, an iron molecule is a lot denser than a hydrogen molecule, for example. However, in hydrogen the particles are very close to each other, while in iron there is significant space between them that lets electric rays through. We should conduct the following experiment: place a battery in airless space, and it will deteriorate after a certain time. Actually, there is no need for it: I have already mentioned such

an experiment (the cylinder and the wires) that is known to science and can be easily explained by the theory that I have proposed. Finally, there is a clearer understanding in my mind:

Electricity is invisible rays that have tremendous radiation pressure.

Next, let us imagine a battery cell (a dry one, for convenience.) [Page 63] According to my hypothesis, the current always flows but it is so small that such a battery can become unusable after a large number of years (100 years.) Therefore, if before that time the element does not get exposed to other factors (like the oxidation of zinc,) then it shall still deteriorate even though it was never used... What is induction? During class, we learned that it is contactless excitation of electricity. And because such experiments were conducted at a close distance, it was deemed that induction is indeed an excitation and not a partial transfer of energy from one body to another. On my part, I can say that, according to my own theory that is looking more truthful to me by the hour, and according to observations of scientists who didn't even notice what conclusions they had drawn, induction is not an excitation but rather a transformation, a movement, a flow of electricity from one body to another. We say that electricity is inducted onto Earth by the Sun. It was noticed, however, that magnetic storms began only 42 hours after the Sun received large amounts of energy from gigantic meteors falling on it, that are charged (according to the theory of Arrhenius) with negative electricity. [Page 64] Maybe electricity passes through airless space at the speed of light, but through the layers of gases around the Sun and Earth, those layers that we call non-conductors, those colossal charges pass through a lot slower. Let us make some calculations. Light travels 300,000 km in a second. The distance of 150 million km (from Earth to the Sun,) will be traversed by light in 8 minutes and 16 seconds. For electricity, the speed of which should in theory be equal to the speed of light, it takes 42 hours to travel the same distance. It means that it takes 41 hours and some minutes for it to go through the layers of gases around the Sun and then around Earth. If such a huge amount of energy meets such a strong resistance, then our poor battery...

January 19, 1928. My diary is running out of pages. I bought an album for my poems yesterday. I've read *Pushkin's Youth* by Avenarius. It made a big impression on me. There was a performance on the 17th. I played my part wonderfully. Congratulations rained down on me,

etc. Some people liked Fedya Markman (who played Chatsky,) some didn't. I will write about this performance in more detail in my new notebook. And for now...

“Goodbye, my dear notebook,
A monument to the days of my studies!
Many years later, when I open your pages,
Maybe I will shed a lot of sweet tears over them.”

19 I/19 27 A. GALATZKY