

Ivan Ievhrafovych Is No Longer His Own Man

Borys Antonenko-Davydovych

Once again Ivan Ievhrafovych took the notice from the table with trembling hands and, holding his breath, read: "... present yourself on 20 November 1937 at 10:00 a.m. to Investigator Parfutin, Room 13."

Today was Saturday November 18th, so the 20th would be a Monday, which people regard as a difficult day; the room number—13—didn't bode well either.

His twelve-year-old son Pavlo had given him the notice late in the evening, just after Ivan Ievhrafovych returned from a teachers' meeting, which, as usual, had dragged on long after classes.

"Dad, a soldier came and asked me to give you this piece of paper," the boy had said casually.

If only it had been an ordinary soldier! But it had been a courier, an operative, or whatever they're called in the NKVD! Obviously, the boy doesn't yet comprehend how mysterious and terrible these words are—"present yourself at 10:00 a.m." But Ivan Ievhrafovych will know torment for two nights and a day, until he learns why and for what reason and purpose some investigator named Parfutin was summoning him. He's likely a Jew, like many other investigators in the NKVD, and for some reason is masquerading under a Russian surname, thought Ivan Ievhrafovych. He began racking his brains to remember everything that had happened in the past year, in order to figure out the reason for this summons. Last year, right after the October festivities, his wife had suddenly fallen ill with croupous pneumonia and died. All the neighbors as well as the teachers and pupils at school know this, for they expressed their sincere condolences to Ivan Ievhrafovych, who had become a widower at forty-eight, while poor Pavlo—or Pavlyk, as his late mother used to call him—had become an orphan. If this were a case of belated interest in his wife's sudden death, then someone from the militia would have come—not someone from the NKVD.

No, this must be something else, and definitely something political, because the NKVD is interested in political matters, not domestic dramas. But politics could hardly concern Ivan Ievhrafovych. Until now he has been a completely inconspicuous mathematics teacher in an ordinary public school in Kyiv. What does mathematics have to do with politics? Not a thing! Everyone needs Newton's binomial theorem or, say, logarithms—

Reds, Whites, monarchists, and Communists. Since the beginning of time not a single state system has been able to do without the multiplication table. Political errors can be made in all the other sciences; even in natural science one can inadequately explain the theory of evolution, the dialectic of nature, or other highfaluting stuff that Engels wrote about. And what about history or literature, which offer so many perilous opportunities to deviate from the general party line and fall into bourgeois heresy. For instance, you could fail to expose the bourgeois character of the great French Revolution, forget about the fundamental class nature of all wars, censure Trotsky and his permanent revolution only superficially, instead of condemning him and categorically disassociating yourself from him. How is it that hairdressers were not afraid of calling a woman's elaborate hairdo a "permanent"? It would be easy to accuse them of Trotskyism too! And what about literature? Are there any fewer of those dangerous underwater reefs here? Suppose you haven't read the speech by Popov, secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, which states: "We will never pardon Shevchenko for his nationalistic outlook in such poems as 'Rozryta mohyla,' 'Iakby zh to ty, Bohdane pianyi,' and others." So you're still prattling on about the "great son of the Ukrainian people and his social and national significance"—it's curtains for you. You will definitely be accused of being a Ukrainian nationalist, which is exactly what happened to Porfyr Hryhorovych Ponomarenko, the Ukrainian literature instructor, who was taken away a month ago. Unfortunately, few teachers realize that newspapers should now be read not so much to learn what is going on in the world as to find out what is currently forbidden and why. This applies not only to Ukrainian literature but to literature in general. It's said that four senior girls in a Russian school in Kyiv were jailed because they recited Sergei Yesenin's poem "Moskva kabatskaia" at a school soirée. Misfortune probably befell their lecturer, too, who had not noticed in time that Yesenin's works were being quietly removed not only from school libraries but from public ones, and who had not taken the trouble to explain to his students the petty-bourgeois character of this newly proscribed lyricist.

Mathematics—now that's something else. No matter how often the government changes, or how often the current government changes its policies, two times two will still be four, not five or three. Still, for some reason they are summoning Ivan Ievhrafovych to the NKVD. But it's a good thing that they sent for me, thought Ivan Ievhrafovych, instead of coming during the night and taking me away, like they did two weeks ago when they took away Vasyl Petrovych Semeniuk, the history teacher in their school. Semeniuk, a bit younger than Ivan Ievhrafovych, had left a wife and two children to their fate. His wife visited Ivan Ievhrafovych a while ago to give him this sad news. Perhaps he was being summoned to the NKVD in that connection? It's quite possible. Now, belatedly, Ivan Ievhrafovych regretted that he had been so careless in his solicitude: deeply moved, he

had expressed his profound sympathy to Semeniuk's anguished wife and had even given her ten *karbovantsi* to help tide her over the first few days. How could he have forgotten that any relations, even normal human contact with families of "enemies of the people," let alone offering them material comfort and aid, are now considered political crimes! But it's hardly likely that Semeniuk's wife told anyone about this, Ivan Ievhrafovych reassured himself; no one knows about his gesture. Except, perhaps, his son, who was in the next room doing his homework. He might have been listening to their conversation and later told someone in school. But no, his son was not so stupid as to jabber about such things in or out of school. It probably had something to do with the young literature teacher Porfyr Hryhorovych Ponomarenko. If they ask about him, Ivan Ievhrafovych will say, "You know, he's young—a greenhorn. He made a muddle of things through ignorance, because he didn't get enough preparation at the pedagogical institute. He only just graduated from there." Such a reply should satisfy the investigator, and wouldn't burden Ivan Ievhrafovych's conscience where his young colleague is concerned.

But what if their attention is focused on Ivan Ievhrafovych Kapustian himself? But Ivan Ievhrafovych hadn't seen the name Kapustian mentioned among the political activists of various sorts hostile to Soviet rule. Unless his patronymic "IevHRAFovych"¹ had caught the eye of someone at the NKVD who thinks that social origins dating back to the former privileged classes of counts, princes, etc., are hidden behind it. It's very likely that today's young investigators don't know, or have not yet had it explained to them, that in the past footmen, salesmen, watchmen, and people of various petty social classes were named Ievhraf—not people from the powerful ruling classes, not even from the intelligentsia. Well, Ivan Ievhrafovych will explain that his father, Ievhraf Pylypovych Kapustian, was once a watchman in a boys' high school in Kyiv: there are even documents to confirm that. It's nothing! Ivan Ievhrafovych thought, calming down.

Suddenly he remembered that the historian Semeniuk would occasionally drop by and converse on topics that were far from innocent. What exactly had they talked about, or, more precisely, what had Semeniuk talked about while Ivan Ievhrafovych listened, agreeing and smiling from time to time? It's hard to remember everything exactly, but it can be said unmistakably that, judging by his turns of phrase, Semeniuk's attitude was very skeptical, if not hostile, toward everything that was taking place not just at school, but in the entire country. To listen without contradicting is already a political crime, for it shows that Ivan Ievhrafovych is in agreement with these ideas. To hear everything that is being said and not report it to the proper authorities is yet another crime!

Ivan Ievhrafovych was gripped by fear, as though he were already at

¹ Hraf (= Graf) means Count or Earl.—*Trans.*

the investigation and was struggling to justify his politically indifferent conduct. He tried to recall at least individual phrases that Semeniuk had blurted out in his presence: "Today we are all like those tightrope walkers who balance themselves on a slippery rope beneath the dome of the circus tent without a safety net below..." "Truly, even the medieval Inquisition did not burn as many heretics as the numbers of people being put through their executionarium." Ivan Ievhrafovych had even laughed at hearing the word "executionarium," which was so similar to the generally known word "planetarium" and was free of the terrible gist of its philological cousin. But fun and games aside, thought Ivan Ievhrafovych, now suffering: it'll be no joke when they take me to the executionarium because of somebody else's witticism!

Just then Ivan Ievhrafovych remembered the most terrible thing that Semeniuk had ever told him: "What have we pedagogues been driven to that we should now be educating informers! You've probably heard about the 'achievement' of Pavlyk Morozov, that boy somewhere in the Urals who denounced his father and his friends as *kulaks*. Somebody killed Pavlyk in retaliation for the denunciation, but he was canonized and his name inscribed in the pantheon of Red saints. Just let some lecturer in the humanities try not telling his pupils about this contemporary hero! Even a geography teacher lecturing on the Ural region has no right to skip over Pavlyk Morozov's heroic act! Medieval justice, which upheld the rule: 'the first lash is for the informer' was morally superior to the current "pedagogy" that must exalt informers. After this, just see what'll happen when a teacher gives some dunce a failing grade, and his father takes a belt to sonny-boy for the F. The son will write a denunciation against the father and the teacher, charging that they are "enemies of the people." Then he'll not only have his revenge, but become a hero, like Pavlyk Morozov! The horror!"

At the time, Ivan Ievhrafovych had totally agreed with Semeniuk that the story of the denunciation by the boy from the Urals undermined parental authority and was generally anti-pedagogical. But now he feared that he had not only listened to, but even endorsed Semeniuk's incredibly harsh words. Maybe Semeniuk had been unable to withstand the investigator's pressure, and had admitted everything; otherwise, how had the NKVD found out what Ivan Ievhrafovych thought? The two of them had been alone in the room at the time. Pavlo—or Pavlyk, as his late mother used to call him—was doing his homework in the next room. Ivan Ievhrafovych was unpleasantly struck by the similarity of their names: his son Pavlyk and Pavlyk Morozov, and he felt a chill in his heart.

Could his son have told his friends in school about the conversation between the history teacher and his father? If so, then it's clear that Ivan Ievhrafovych is being summoned as a witness. Come to think of it, who are his son's friends in class, and whom does he hang out with after school, when he's running around outside? After his wife's death Ivan Ievhrafovych

had utterly neglected his parental duties. He barely had enough time to shop for necessities and prepare food for himself and his son, because his day was taken up with lessons in school and in the evening, at home, he had to correct his pupils' assignments. Pavlo, left to his own devices, could have made friends with God-knows-whom and gotten up to who-knows-what—even denouncing his own father!

The next day, Sunday, at morning tea, Ivan Ievhrafovych, concealing his anxiety, asked his son casually: "What sort of marks do you have in history?"

"History?" His son was surprised. "I've never gotten anything lower than a B and Kozeroh hasn't called on me yet."

"Who's this Kozeroh?"

"The new history lecturer—Kozelets. In school we call him Kozeroh¹."

Any other time Ivan Ievhrafovych might have asked his son what he, Ivan Ievhrafovych, was called by his pupils in school, but this was not the right time.

"Dad, why did they arrest Vasyl Petrovych? He always told us interesting things that you can't read about in the textbooks. We all liked him a lot."

Is he deliberately deflecting suspicion, pulling the wool over my eyes, pretending that he's not involved in this sordid deed? This thought flashed through Ivan Ievhrafovych's mind. Shrugging his shoulders, he replied quietly—just in case:

"Maybe he did something bad outside of school. They don't arrest innocent people here."

The father's reply seemed to satisfy the son, and the boy went off somewhere. For a long time Ivan Ievhrafovych sat beside his cold cup of tea reflecting: had his son pretended to be nonchalant when he gave him the summons from the NKVD investigator, and not said anything deliberately? Had youthful curiosity caused him to read the note brought by "some soldier," when no soldiers had ever come to their house before? Was it possible that childish vanity had prompted the boy to try to acquire the glory of a Ukrainian Pavlyk Morozov, so he might read about himself in a newspaper: "The Young Pioneer Pavlyk Kapustian has helped the security organs expose a vile enemy of the people who was hiding under the guise of a Soviet teacher." Had he thought of the kind of trouble he might cause by denouncing his father, who might transform from witness into accused during the very first interrogation? And what might happen to him then, without a father or mother? Kateryna Mykhailivna was fortunate to have died last year and not lived to see the terrible calamity that had befallen her husband and the disgrace caused by their son!

¹ Capricorn, i.e., goat horn. *Trans.*

At that moment Ivan Ievhrafovych felt that it would be better to die than to testify tomorrow against the intelligent and witty Semeniuk, who was beyond all help because his sad destiny had already been decided. After all, it was unheard of for someone taken away during the night ever to return home after an investigation or trial.

But life must go on, even if only for the sake of that very son who in his childish ignorance had become involved in this mess.

Lost in thought, Ivan Ievhrafovych paced the room, imagining the interrogator's potential questions and devising answers to them, so that he might somehow wriggle out of this disaster.

It was only towards evening, when his son came home hungry, that Ivan Ievhrafovych realized he had not eaten anything since the morning's unfinished cup of tea, and that dinnertime had come and gone long ago. He quickly heated up leftovers from yesterday's dinner for his son and began cooking food for the next three days, because tomorrow anything might happen.

Seemingly oblivious, Pavlo polished off the borshch and cutlet and then started his homework. This allayed Ivan Ievhrafovych's suspicions somewhat, but still he hardly slept at all that night—perhaps the last in his own home. Ivan Ievhrafovych kept tossing and turning, trying to fall asleep so he could appear at his summons with a clear head, but his consciousness surrendered only for a short while. The suspicions of his son had nearly vanished, but in their place appeared all kinds of thoughts—some very contradictory—searing his brain and lacerating his soul. It even occurred to him that the summons had deliberately been sent long in advance, in order to torment him and paralyze his thinking.

He arose at 6:00 a.m., when it was still dark outside. Maybe he should take some dry food and a change of underwear, just in case? But he rejected that idea instantly: the investigator will think that I feel guilty and that I realize I will be put in jail. No crackers, underwear, soap, or toothbrush! But cigarettes—as many as possible, because when you start getting nervous, you'll smoke a lot.

Ivan Ievhrafovych woke his son a little earlier than usual and gave him a good breakfast. He himself drank only a cup of tea, and that for appearance's sake; he really didn't feel like eating at all. After a moment's hesitation, and keeping his emotions in check, he said to his son in a feigned, business-like tone:

"I may be sent on an assignment to... um... evaluate the teaching of mathematics in the outlying schools, so here are fifteen *karbovantsi* for while I'm away. Spend the money sensibly, so it lasts until I return."

Pavlo took the money hesitantly, and stared at his father in amazement. But Ivan Ievhrafovych rushed his son off to school without even saying goodbye, no matter how much he may have wanted to embrace his only child, perhaps for the last time.

He put on his coat, donned an old cap, and before leaving, perhaps for the last time, sat down as custom dictates. With sorrowful eyes he gazed around the room and sighed deeply. Although his appointment was still an hour and a half away, he left the house in a hurry.

Everything was completely different from what Ivan Ievhrafovych had imagined. At the security desk, a man in military uniform, who seemed indifferent to everything in the world, silently took the notice that Ivan Ievhrafovych carefully handed him through the small window: he wrote out a pass, and at Ivan Ievhrafovych's request reluctantly explained how to get to Room 13.

With a sinking feeling Ivan Ievhrafovych passed through the immense doors of a large, gray building. He politely showed his pass to a guard who was as immobile as a statue, and apprehensively, as though walking on an ice floe, made his way down a long corridor.

A deathly silence prevailed here. Contrary to Ivan Ievhrafovych's expectations, there were no cries or groans of interrogated prisoners; only the sound of someone approaching who was noisily snapping his fingers for some reason. Around the bend in the corridor two figures appeared. But when the figure in back, who was armed with a pistol, spotted Ivan Ievhrafovych, he sternly ordered the other person to turn and bury his face in the wall. They're taking someone to or from an interrogation, maybe Porfyr Hryhorovych or Vasyl Petrovych, and the guard is snapping his fingers from a distance so that they won't see me or I them, thought Ivan Ievhrafovych dolefully. And so as not to give any cause for complaint, he turned his head sharply in the opposite direction.

Ivan Ievhrafovych stopped in front of Room 13, took a deep breath, and knocked lightly. There was no answer. Ivan Ievhrafovych knocked harder and heard someone from within say "Enter!"

Investigator Parfutin was not a Jew at all, Ivan Ievhrafovych noted, but an aging man with dark circles under his eyes and a band of gray hair.

"Kapustian? Ivan Ievhrafovych?" he asked, placing the pass on the table.

"Now it begins," thought Ivan Ievhrafovych nearly in despair, as if he were about to jump into an abyss. But the investigator looked at Ivan Ievhrafovych's frightened face with a friendly expression and asked him to sit down.

"We know, Ivan Ievhrafovych, that you are an honest, upright Soviet person, and that is why I summoned you on a certain delicate matter," the investigator said in a calm, simple, and business-like manner. But Ivan Ievhrafovych became guarded. "This is hocus-pocus, as they say—an underhanded maneuver. He'll lull me into complacency and then crush me with an accusation," Ivan Ievhrafovych told himself silently. "Watch out, and don't give in to the charming words, because any minute now he's going to come out with 'And how could you, a Soviet person, stoop to—'"

But the investigator said something else:

"No doubt you know that numerous arrests are taking place in our country."

Ivan Ievhrafovych became even more guarded and kept silent. The investigator went on:

"It's very possible that among this mass of arrested people are quite a few innocent persons. But we can't release them, because that would discredit the organs, for then ordinary citizens on every street corner would whisper, 'They're taking people away for nothing, snatching innocent people!' Why, in fact, do we sometimes arrest innocent people? Have you ever thought about that?"

Ivan Ievhrafovych, completely baffled, didn't know what to reply.

"Because," continued the investigator, "we are forced to use second-rate information. Who gives us information? People who have committed great sins against Soviet rule in the past—all kinds of White Guardists, Petliurites, and so on, who are quaking in their boots and are ready to commit any vile deed to save their own skins. Second, there are paid agents who are interested in earning more money. I rarely see objective, respectable people among them. But what else are we to do? Whom can we rely on, when honest people will do anything to avoid helping us? Let's say that we make you a proposal to cooperate with us. You'll wave your hands about—I don't want to! I won't! Leave me alone! Because you, like many others, are still living according to old notions, as though cooperation with the organs were something disgraceful, unethical, humiliating, but in the meantime..."

"Are you proposing that I become an informer?" Ivan Ievhrafovych, now recovered from his earlier fright, asked quietly.

"Ivan Ievhrafovych! Shame on you! Informer! Maybe next you'll say stool pigeon, tattletale, or spy? Dear, dear, dear! And here you are, a cultured person, a pedagogue entrusted with educating the next generation!"

Ivan Ievhrafovych sensed that he was making mistakes and fidgeted in the chair, but at the same time he was calming down. Obviously they were not planning to arrest him; in fact, it seemed they were courting him.

"Ivan Ievhrafovych, think seriously about how good it would be if honest people like yourself didn't shun us but helped us instead. Here's an example: we have received damaging information about your colleagues at the school—" the investigator glanced at a piece of paper in a drawer, "Ponomarenko and Semeniuk. This information tells us only bad things about them, but how can we verify whether that corresponds to reality or is meaningless slander? Now if a person like you cooperated with us, before arresting these people we could turn to you for truthful, objective information and reach the proper conclusions based on it. Think how many mistakes we would avoid, and how many innocent people you would be saving!"

Ivan Ievhrafovych began thinking: there was actually nothing shame-

ful in the investigator's proposal. Was it a disgrace to give somebody objective information, even if it was to the NKVD? If he had agreed to such a proposal earlier, maybe it would have been possible to save Porfyr Hryhorovych and Vasyl Petrovych from arrest, and their families would not be in the critical situation they found themselves in now.

The investigator smiled gently.

"Perhaps you're thinking that we're asking you to stand on a street corner with a raised collar and a cap over your eyes and follow some suspicious type, or to provoke teachers in your school with various anecdotes so they'll make counter-revolutionary statements. Ugh!—how disgusting! It's deplorable even to imagine such a thing!" The investigator's face became serious, almost solemn. "No, we favor honest work. Specifically, it would look like this: say, for example, that we're interested in some individual about whom we still don't have any exact and verified information. We ask you to provide us with an objective report on this person. Do you hear, Ivan Ievhrafovych? Objective! If you know this person's good points, then you write about that; we don't need fabricated insinuations. But if you know that this person has hostile intentions, then you write about that frankly, as every Soviet citizen should, even those who have no ties to us, because hiding such things is, as you know, punishable by law... So now what's keeping you from accepting our proposal? Honesty? No. Respectability? Again, no. Your conscience? No again."

Ivan Ievhrafovych's every doubt had completely evaporated, and in a measured tone of voice he said:

"I can accept this."

"So, we have an agreement?" The investigator was pleased.

"I agree," Ivan Ievhrafovych replied firmly.

"You should have said so at the start!"

The investigator stood up and stretched out his hand across the table to an astonished Ivan Ievhrafovych.

"Now you're one of us!"

Ivan Ievhrafovych blinked nervously, and the investigator took a blank form from a drawer and pushed it towards him.

"Now all that's left is a small formality... You probably realize that this is still a secret matter. No one should know about it. You will not come here any more: we'll keep in touch through a secret address, which I'll give you right now. You'll be summoned there for meetings, and that's the address to which you will write if the need arises, and also where you'll deposit material. Never sign your own surname, only a nickname, which you must choose right now. Only you and I will know that nickname."

Ivan Ievhrafovych looked distressed. The elaborate, unnecessary secrecy with which the investigator was shrouding an ordinary matter like writing the objective truth did not appeal to him at all. The word "material" had put him on guard, and he really didn't like the term "nickname"—as

though the matter concerned a dog rather than a person.

"What's the problem?" asked the investigator, seeing a change in Ivan Ievhrafovych's face.

"It's just this 'nickname'—"

"It's the same thing as a 'pseudonym.' Do you know that party documents of the pre-Revolutionary period also included 'party nickname?' The term has been established in official usage, and we won't be changing it," the investigator explained disapprovingly, and then asked impatiently, "So what's your nick— ... your pseudonym going to be?"

Ivan Ievhrafovych spread his hands in confusion:

"If it's really necessary, then let it be Kapustiansky instead of Kapustian."

"Oh, no, that won't do!" The investigator disagreed categorically. "There should be no cabbage¹ in the nickname. Think of something else."

Ivan Ievhrafovych thought for a moment and then, looking questioningly at the investigator, said:

"Well, how about Horokhovsky²?"

"That'll do, more or less. And now take the pen and write: 'I, Kapustian, Ivan Ievhrafovych, born 1889, pledge to keep my contacts with the organs of the NKVD strictly secret and to carry out all the tasks assigned to me. My nickname in contacts with the organs of the NKVD is I. Horokhovsky.'"

Whatever else Ivan Ievhrafovych had written on that thrice-cursed form, he could not remember, because he wrote as if in a trance, his hand forming someone else's words as though he were bewitched. The only things that stuck in his memory, like two tightly hammered nails, were the words "I pledge" and "my nickname, I. Horokhovsky."

Afterward Ivan Ievhrafovych dimly remembered how the investigator handed him the signed pass, shook his hand, and said: "Good luck!" But Ivan Ievhrafovych could not tell if this was a sincere wish or a veiled irony of some sort.

As he left the NKVD building and stepped out into the fresh air, Ivan Ievhrafovych felt joy at being alive. Had the weather really cleared up, or was the day not as overcast as it had seemed to Ivan Ievhrafovych when he had walked over here in the morning? It was sunny outside and in his soul. Despite everything, things had turned out well for Ivan Ievhrafovych! He

¹ Kapustian and Kapustiansky derive from the word *kapusta*, which means "cabbage." *Trans.*

² Horokhovsky derives from the word *horokh*, which means "peas." "Mixing peas and cabbage" is a Ukrainian idiom with a meaning similar to "mixing apples and oranges." *Trans.*

had kept his cards close to his chest, as they say. On top of that, he would now have the chance to save other people. That'll be the day when Ivan Ievhrafovych helps to jail people in dark cellars! No way! And it was no big deal that the investigator had cloaked Ivan Ievhrafovych's summons to the NKVD in secrecy. They are so used to secrecy there that they can't take a single step without it. Of course, no one should be told about the conversation with the investigator; back at school Ivan Ievhrafovych will explain that he missed his lessons due to illness, that's all. The main thing was that all his fears had dissipated: he was free, and for the time being nothing threatened him.

Ivan Ievhrafovych was in such a good mood that when his son came home rather late from school, he didn't ask where and how the boy had spent three whole *karbovantsi* of the money he had been given.

When, having gone to bed, Ivan Ievhrafovych remembered "I pledge" and "my nickname, I. Horokhovsky," he immediately reassured himself. Well, they'll summon him once or twice, and they'll see that he's of so little use to them, like getting milk from a bull, that they'll leave him alone. At worst, Ivan Ievhrafovych will deflect their grasping hands from another innocent person.

For two weeks Ivan Ievhrafovych received no summons and he began to think that they had forgotten all about him. Then an ordinary envelope containing a small piece of paper came in the mail: "Present yourself at 4:00 p.m. on 4 December 1937 at the address known to you." The signature was illegible, but the laconic and imperative tone of the contents, which seemed more like an order than an invitation, hardly sounded like Parfutin, who had impressed Ivan Ievhrafovych as a polite and frank individual.

That day Ivan Ievhrafovych's classes ended at 3:00 p.m., and he arrived a bit early at the "known address," a one-story residential building indistinguishable from many similar buildings in Kyiv. When he rang, the door was opened by an old woman, also unremarkable, who asked:

"Are you Horokhovsky?"

Hearing his nickname instead of his surname embarrassed Ivan Ievhrafovych for a moment, but he soon recovered and nodded his head:

"Yes. Yes, Horokhovsky." For some reason he even repeated: "Horokhovsky..."

The woman led him into a small room similar to a dentist's waiting room and invited him to sit down on the soft couch.

"The person who is supposed to meet you," she said briefly, "will come soon. Wait a bit." Then she left.

Ivan Ievhrafovych gazed with interest around the foyer of the secret apartment, looking for covert signs, but it was an ordinary place, with a rubber plant in a flat tub and oleographs on the wall. One of them, Leonardo

da Vinci's "Last Supper,"¹ caught Ivan Ievhrafovych's attention. "Maybe this is a sign that marks branch locations of the institution where everything is secret?" thought Ivan Ievhrafovych, when a tall man dressed in civilian clothing suddenly entered the room. His hair was cut short, and he nodded in greeting. Without shaking hands, he sat down at the table opposite Ivan Ievhrafovych.

He asked: "Do you know Polishchuk, secretary of your district board of education?"

"Yes, I do," replied Ivan Ievhrafovych.

"Write a report on him and bring it in three days. What time do classes end on December 7 in your school?"

"At five."

"I will be waiting for you at six sharp."

The tall man rose and left, nodding goodbye.

Ivan Ievhrafovych was somewhat startled by the tall man's cold, officious behavior, but immediately explained it to himself: he's probably an ordinary employee, something like a courier. Only someone like that could behave in such a manner.

That evening Ivan Ievhrafovych sat down to write his report.

"Mykola Hnatovych Polishchuk is a very patriotic person...."

Ivan Ievhrafovych smiled to himself: if he had written anything like that ten years ago, oh, how they would have pounced on him: "What White Guardist terminology—patriotism!" Wasn't it common knowledge that the world proletariat does not and cannot harbor any kind of patriotism, only internationalism?! But "times and morals change," and today the word "patriotism" has absorbed all the virtues that every Soviet citizen should possess.

After describing this trait of Polishchuk's, which would guarantee his safety, Ivan Ievhrafovych filled in the rest with generalizations: "knows his job well," "hard-working," "conscientious," "friendly," and so on.

When he had finished writing, Ivan Ievhrafovych was very pleased that he had completed his task successfully and, most importantly, that he had saved the likable Polishchuk from possible arrest. Ivan Ievhrafovych was trusted over there, he and they were now teammates, as Parfutin had said.

At exactly the appointed time on December 7 Ivan Ievhrafovych handed his report to the tall man. He read it silently and asked:

"And do you know Prokopovych, head of the district board of education?"

"More or less."

"Write a report on him, too. Bring it here in five days, at six."

¹ In Ukrainian, "Last Supper" is *taiemna vecheria*, which means, literally, "Secret supper". *Trans.*

Ivan Ievhrafovych was somewhat taken aback that he was being given five days for Prokopovych instead of three, but he rationalized to himself: it's probably because I didn't just say "I know him," but "more or less." That's why they're giving me more time, so that I can get to know Prokopovych better, in their opinion. Go ahead, comrades, give me more time, but the results will be the same, thought Ivan Ievhrafovych, smiling to himself.

That very evening he sat down to write the report on Prokopovych.

"Everyone is aware of Comrade Prokopovych's patriotism, which manifests itself in his every deed and general leadership in the field of education. Comrade Prokopovych is a former pedagogue and has a good knowledge of schooling and its requirements...."

Although Ivan Ievhrafovych had official contact with Prokopovych and knew him only vaguely, as did every teacher in their district, why not deflect danger from his superiors, too? So Ivan Ievhrafovych wrote a few pro forma generalizations: "polite to his subordinates," "attentive to everyone who consults him," and so on.

On December 12, Ivan Ievhrafovych delivered the report on Prokopovych at the designated time. The same tall man, with whom Ivan Ievhrafovych now felt familiar, read the new report in a disinterested manner, and said:

"And now write a report on Pryimenko, who works in your school. Will three days be enough for you?"

Ivan Ievhrafovych had known Donat Karpovych Pryimenko, the natural science teacher, for several years so even a single day would have been enough to write a report about him. But why were they pressuring Ivan Ievhrafovych to keep writing reports! It was beginning to seem as though he now had to work not just as an educator, but also simultaneously at an unpaid, uninteresting job that had been thrust upon him as a civic duty. Ivan Ievhrafovych did not like this, but you could hardly say that to the tall fellow, who no doubt did not carry out important functions, but worked as a drudge for the NKVD.

That same evening, without delay, Ivan Ievhrafovych wrote his report about Donat Karpovych Pryimenko, a sociable person with a cheerful nature who loved to laugh and make others laugh. He did not spare laudatory epithets: "a person of wide erudition," "a teacher enamored of his subject," "strong community involvement." He did not forget, of course, to write at the very beginning of his report: "a patriot who strives with all his might to instill patriotism in his pupils."

Ivan Ievhrafovych was very pleased with his new composition, certain that he had also deflected a threat from Donat Karpovych, granting him the opportunity to continue his carefree cheerfulness in today's otherwise cheerless circumstances.

The next day, Ivan Ievhrafovych, Donat Karpovych, and Palianychka, the new lecturer of Ukrainian literature, who had replaced Porfyr

Hryhorovych Ponomarenko and whom Ivan Ievhrafovyh did not yet know very well, had a free period and the three of them spent it together in the teachers' lounge. They had nothing to do and passed the time talking about various school matters.

"It's easy for you teachers of the exact sciences—you can teach the same thing over and over year after year, without adapting to changing circumstances. But what are we miserable humanities teachers supposed to do? For example, how are we to present Pushkin to pupils today? Do we continue to mention that he was a gentleman of the imperial bedchamber at the court of Nicholas I, a nobleman, and the author of the poem "No, I am not a flatterer when I praise the tsar," or do we keep silent about that? In what context do we present the introduction to "Ruslan and Liudmila"? Do you remember?

An oak tree greening by the ocean;
A golden chain about it wound:
Whereon a learned cat, in motion
Both day and night, will walk around;
On walking right, he sings a ditty;
On walking left, he tells a lay.

A magic place: there wends his way
The woodsprite, there a mermaid sitting
In branches, there on trails past knowing
Are tracks of beasts you never met.¹

What is this, if not a fairy tale for pre-schoolers? But master-wordsmiths have updated it so that it can capture the interest not only of schoolchildren but adults. Have you heard it?

At the curving seashore they cut down an oak tree,
Brought a gold chain to the *torgsin*²,
They took away the mermaid's passport,
And exiled the woodsprite to the Solovetsky Islands.

That place is now watched over
A star now burns over it,
And about the successes of the Five Year Plan
Stalin himself is spinning tales.

¹ *Ruslan and Liudmila*, trans. Walter Arndt (Ann Arbor: Ardis Inc., 1974). *Trans.*

² *Torgsin*, or *torhivlia z inozemtsiamy* [trade with foreigners]—stores where food and delicacies could be purchased for gold and dollars. *Author's note.*

Donat Karpovych's face dissolved in a good-natured smile. He drew his chair closer to Palianychka and asked:

"How does it end?"

"The master himself is telling tales," replied Palianychka, smiling mysteriously.

"What a stroke of genius! So he replaces the 'learned cat?' Those rascals sure are witty!" Jerking backwards in his seat, Donat Karpovych burst out laughing.

Ivan Ievhrafovych also grinned, but was quick to extinguish the smile on his face: this was dangerous to do in public, although he enjoyed clever political jokes as much as the next man. Only the French Revolution had given rise to as many as our Soviet reality, Ivan Ievhrafovych had often thought. But he avoided listening to them, especially in the company of others, because look out!—you may accidentally wind up as a witness, and then you'll have no end of problems!

Of course, in his report on Donat Karpovych, Ivan Ievhrafovych did not mention a word about this dicey comic poem, nor about the way the joker Donat Karpovych had reacted to it. Whatever for? It wasn't he who had written the poem, and is it a crime to laugh at someone else's joke? After all, Ivan Ievhrafovych had promised to furnish objective reports, not write denunciations about everything he saw and heard.

On December 15 Ivan Ievhrafovych submitted the report at the designated time, and after reading it like he had the others, the tall one went away without saying anything about the next meeting. This surprised Ivan Ievhrafovych somewhat, but he immediately rationalized to himself: maybe they're not interested in our school any more; it could also be that his "bosses" (that is how Ivan Ievhrafovych had secretly begun calling the security organs) had finally become convinced of his uselessness for their work. What's the good of his meatless information when they prefer it fried and salty!

But Ivan Ievhrafovych was mistaken.

The next day he received a terse message signed by Investigator Parfutin, sent not by post, but delivered by a state messenger: "Appear on December 17 at 10:00 a.m. at the address known to you."

Such a swift reaction to the last report alarmed Ivan Ievhrafovych, and the following morning, he pressed the electric buzzer of the familiar building with heavy foreboding.

Ivan Ievhrafovych's presentiment had not deceived him: this time, instead of the tall man, Investigator Parfutin came to meet him.

Without even greeting Ivan Ievhrafovych, Parfutin came up to him and in a voice dripping with sarcasm and indignation, said:

"So, my dear man, you've decided to waste our time on trifles!?"

"How so?" quietly asked Ivan Ievhrafovych, thunderstruck by this change in behavior toward him, and blanched.

"Instead of a comprehensive, serious report on the individual we're interested in, you write empty and meaningless clichés: 'hard-working,' 'attentive,' 'polite'... Who needs your useless trivia? Do you think we're so dense that we can't see your efforts to leave out the main point? Why, you're simply hiding from us the political core of the individual whom you know well. No, this will not do! Obviously, we will have to change our opinion of you..."

"I wrote what I knew," Ivan Ievhrafovych mumbled awkwardly, feeling his heart growing cold and his hands trembling.

"And you have the nerve to assure us that you were writing everything you know?" said Parfutin, his voice rising.

"I did write everything," said Ivan Ievhrafovych very quietly.

"May I ask, then, why you didn't mention a word about the new version of 'Ruslan and Liudmila,' eh?"

Ivan Ievhrafovych was overcome with horror: who had informed on them? No one else but that new teacher Palianychka, because Donat Karpovych, who had been so impressed with the new version of "Ruslan and Liudmila," could not have informed on himself. So Ivan Ievhrafovych, is not the only one in his school connected to the NKVD. Palianychka is too, and maybe someone else, who is writing reports about him...

"Pryimenko did not compose the re-worked "Ruslan and Liudmila," that's why I didn't mention this." This was all that Ivan Ievhrafovych managed to say—not so much in Donat Karpovych's defense as his own.

"But aren't Pryimenko's guffaws while listening to this counter-revolutionary version proof enough of his political physiognomy? No, indeed, you are more like a fellow-thinker of these people than an objective informant. I'm afraid that the organs will have to draw the appropriate organizational conclusions..."

Ivan Ievhrafovych broke into a sweat at Parfutin's last words. The term "organizational conclusions," widely used in official parlance, entailed nasty goings-on, beginning with dismissal from work and ending with the far-off camps, or even—look out—the "executionarium." It was no longer a question of saving others now, it was crucial somehow to save himself from the danger that was suddenly looming over him. And Ivan Ievhrafovych, cowering like a schoolboy caught in some serious mischief, pronounced in a guilty voice:

"Please forgive my incompetence... It's my lack of experience and misinterpretation of the assignment. I will try to correct my error."

"That's the spirit!" Parfutin said severely. "Write a report on Bukhaltsev and bring it here in one week. I myself will come for it, at this same hour."

Without shaking hands, merely nodding his head, Parfutin went out, leaving Ivan Ievhrafovych in a very dejected state.

Ivan Ievhrafovych had known Oleh Kostiantynovych Bukhaltsev, the

German teacher at their school, for several years, but he could not say anything specific about him. Middle-aged, reserved, and guarded, Bukhaltsev was not close to any of his colleagues, never visited anyone, and did not invite anyone to his home. Ivan Ievhrafovych didn't even know if he was married. Always silent, Bukhaltsev would bring his class journal to the teachers' room after classes were over and disappear from the school. He usually kept silent at teachers' meetings and his voice was heard only when he had to make a report on the pupils' German marks. He spoke Russian, which was not to Ivan Ievhrafovych's liking—in his opinion, teachers should speak the language of instruction of their school; but you couldn't fault Bukhaltsev for this in a report. He was very demanding of his pupils, and they were afraid of this "kraut," as they had dubbed Bukhaltsev in school. As a result, the success rate in German language was rather high. But this should not be written in a report, lest it become a "totally unnecessary trivial detail." What, then, should he write?

Ivan Ievhrafovych was caught in the predicament of a pupil in the senior class who is asked on a final exam to write a composition on a topic for which he is completely unprepared. But write one must, absolutely, because Parfutin's tone implied not a request but an order—and a harsh one at that.

For four days Ivan Ievhrafovych could not bring himself to sit down and write a report on Bukhaltsev, afraid as he was of failing to satisfy Parfutin's demands and of becoming a shameless liar who aims fabricated slander against someone. He began to scrutinize Bukhaltsev closely in the teachers' lounge, whenever he made a brief appearance there. Once he even tried talking to him, but that led nowhere: in reply to Ivan Ievhrafovych's remark that it had gotten colder outside in the last while, Bukhaltsev answered curtly that cold weather was what winter was all about and then left the school. Further delay was impossible and finally, on the sixth day, after tearing up several sheets, Ivan Ievhrafovych managed to write the damned report.

"Oleh Kostiantynovych Bukhaltsev is a very reserved and taciturn person, which involuntarily raises certain doubts about him: he is uncommunicative, does not express himself—this means that he is hiding something inside, but exactly what is not known. One can only guess that this secretiveness hides a frame of mind that is not germane to a Soviet person. He never speaks up at general teachers' meetings, where acts of exposed enemies of the people are discussed, and even though Bukhaltsev also raises his hand 'in favor' when a vote is taken on the severest degree of punishment for nasty criminals, he is the last to do so, and does it with obvious displeasure.

"He never stays behind at school: after his lessons he disappears who knows where. I cannot follow him because I am busy with my classes.

"He makes himself out to be a Russian, but is this really the case? I

have doubts about his surname, name, and patronymic: maybe he is not Oleh Kostiantynovych Bukhaltsev at all, but Oskar Konradovych Bukholts? This should be checked thoroughly, but it is beyond my capacity."

Ivan Ievhrafovych could not drag anything more out of himself, and on the appointed day he brought his work, extracted after great ordeals, to Parfutin.

Parfutin read the report calmly and said:

"Now this is more or less what's required, but why didn't you write down his address?"

"But I don't even know it myself."

"Find out and tell us. Now report on your gym teacher. In general, you should demonstrate initiative, look for targets for your observations; we're not putting any time constraints on you. It wouldn't be bad if you expanded your observations outside the school: after all, you don't sit there the whole day, and we're interested in everything and everyone."

Parfutin was obviously satisfied with the last report: in saying goodbye he even shook hands with Ivan Ievhrafovych briefly.

Ivan Ievhrafovych breathed a sign of relief: perhaps the terrible danger had shifted away from him, but in the future he ought to conduct himself so as not to cause trouble again.

Writing reports became much easier for him. Ivan Ievhrafovych was not troubled by the fact that occasionally he lacked concrete facts, for now he gave free rein to all sorts of surmises and suppositions. After all, his main task was to flash a signal, as the official speechmakers say, and the NKVD organs could dig up the facts without his involvement.

The only thing that surprised Ivan Ievhrafovych was why no organizational conclusion had been instituted against Pryimenko and, in particular, Palianychka. Just in case, Ivan Ievhrafovych began to avoid them both.

Without any difficulties, he easily wrote a negative report on the dashing gym teacher with presumably low morals, to whom he had long had an aversion. Without awaiting instructions from above, he began writing reports on other school colleagues, but he left out the Ukrainian literature teacher Palianychka: if he had not been punished for the reworked version of "Ruslan and Liudmila," then it was better not to meddle with someone like that, because he may be writing reports himself.

Parfutin allowed Ivan Ievhrafovych to submit the "material" to the landlady at the secret address without waiting for a special summons, and he began frequenting the one-story building, which—it seemed to him—brought a look of admiration to the landlady's face.

The only task that remained was to find targets for observation outside school. After his wife's death, Ivan Ievhrafovych visited no one and, in fact, did not know anyone. But even in this respect fortune unexpectedly smiled on him.

Returning from school one Saturday evening, Ivan Ievhrafovych encountered his neighbor Prokip Stepanovych Khmelko at the front door of their building. The latter greeted him politely; as always on Saturdays, he was hurrying to church for evening Mass. Well advanced in years, Khmelko suffered from epilepsy and was a mute. A thought immediately flashed through Ivan Ievhrafovych's mind: why couldn't Khmelko become his required target? What was there to stop Ivan Ievhrafovych from reporting about him, too?

Nowadays Ivan Ievhrafovych has hardly any free time. All his thoughts are occupied with reports and the search for new targets of observation. He rarely cooks meals at home, and prefers bringing home ready-made suppers from the cafeteria for himself and his son. He can no longer look after his son; he has stopped preparing his lesson plans as he used to; he barely has time to read the newspaper lest he fall out of step with the requirements of the times. But now he sleeps peacefully at night: he sleeps in his own bed, not one that belongs to the state—and that's the main thing!

Translated by Marta D. Olynyk

Original publication: Borys Antonenko-Davydovych, "Ivan Ievhrafovych bil'she ne nalezhyt' sobi," in his *Sybirs'ki novely* [Siberian Short Stories], Baltimore: Smoloskyp, 1990, pp. 57–76.

