

I/946

## Play for a Wish

S. ADAM

I WOULD probably never have learned the story which I am about to tell if it had not been for my trousers. They were, very fine trousers, of good English stuff, and worth a fortune in the Siberian camps. I wore them day and night (under another pair, dirty and patched ones), which was the only way to save them from being stolen; but you cannot conceal anything in a barrack where you sleep with a hundred people, and where you are stripped by the guards and searched at least every other week. So people knew about them and I had many offers. But I called those trousers my reserve fund and refused to sell them. Maybe it was foolish of me, maybe it wasn't; you will see at the end of the story. But let's begin at the beginning.

It happened in my first camp in Komi, and the trouble started when they took Lame Iossip off the cook job. Victuals were being sold out of the zone. The story went that Tataroff, the camp commandant, and the doctor (actually he was a veterinarian) were also involved. Of course, things might have gone on like that forever and a day but for the unexpected inspection from Kniazpogost that started the inquest and took Lame Iossip off the job. Iossip was told by the commandant to keep his mouth shut and he would get his job back once the inspection was over—at least that's what Lame Iossip kept on telling everyone. He took all the blame and got three years, which did not impress him much because he already had twenty, anyway.

One might have expected that this would end the whole affair. But no. The point was that the inspection had been over for three weeks and Lame Iossip didn't get back his job, but was being sent with the brigades to work on lumber. It was clear that he had been double-crossed by the camp commandant. Lame Iossip swore he would get Tataroff for that.

Of course, Tataroff was not stupid and the first thing he did was to put Lame Iossip on the transport list to send him away. But this made things even worse, because, when the news about it spread, Iossip's girl took up with another guy, Red Pietia, who had replaced Iossip in the kitchen. I must say that even Iossip's best friends did not blame her for that. Vania, a professional thief, who slept on the same bunk with me, put it this way: "What a girl needs is good food and, besides, what girl cares for a guy who's on the transport list? She'll never see him again—our Mother Russia is big enough and camps are many." Lame Iossip, however, felt different about girls and got quite mad.

The presentiment of trouble grew in the barracks. Searches became unusually frequent and scrupulous. I soon understood that the guards

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were doggedly looking for playing cards. I knew cards were strictly forbidden in the camp. But why the commandant should be so tenaciously after them, just because of Lame Iossip's threats, was more than I could understand myself, and neither Vania nor anybody else was willing to enlighten me. It was evident, however, that both prisoners and guards were getting tired of the continuous nervous strain, and that everyone wished Lame Iossip were taken away.

At last, on one September morning, when the brigades were gathered at the camp gate to be taken to work on lumber, the word was passed that the transport would leave that very night. I looked around for Lame Iossip—it must have been sad news for him—but I could not see him in the crowd. The brigades—about thirty men each—already started moving out of the gate, one at a time. Outside the gate they stopped and waited in ranks until all men, stepping up to the toolstand in pairs or threes, had collected their axes and saws. A platoon of guards stood at the other end of the toolstand, covering the prisoners with their guns. After the whole brigade had been provided with tools, it was taken over by four guards, the obligatory warning formula against any attempt to escape was perfunctorily recited by one of the soldiers, and the brigade moved away along the muddy road.

My brigade happened to be the last that morning. The one ahead of it had just passed through the gate and started collecting the tools, when I felt a pull at my sleeve. It was Vania.

"Good morning, Ian Ianovitch, I've got to talk to you. How about working together today?"

"Why, of course," I answered. Prisoners usually worked in pairs of threes, the work done being credited equally to each of the group. I was rather a poor worker and no one wanted to join me, usually. Vania was a strong fellow, and, what was more, an expert in all kinds of cheating; working with him, you were sure to "earn" your best kettle without overstraining yourself.

"That's fine," Vania answered somewhat absent-mindedly and without looking at me. I noticed that all his attention was concentrated on the toolstand on the other side of the gate. There was intent anticipation in his eyes. I looked in the same direction; everything was just as usual.

Tataroff, the commandant, was standing in front of the platoon, a few paces from the toolstand, as was his routine every morning when seeing the brigades off. Prisoners were stepping out of their ranks, as usual, collecting their tools and falling back in the line. In one of the two who just stepped up, I recognized Lame Iossip. He was slowly and carefully selecting his axe, passing his finger over the edge. His face was darker and grimmer than usual. I noticed that the commandant let his hand drop on the butt of his revolver with exaggerated casualness; he was watching closely Lame Iossip's moves, and a mocking smile bent his lips.

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Lame Iossip finally took his axe, seemed to hesitate for a very short moment, and then slowly started turning back, when the officer spoke.

"They tell me you weren't lucky at cards last night." The tone was provokingly ironic. "That's too bad, my boy, just too bad . . . because you are leaving with the transport tonight. I'm sure I'll miss you . . . He, he, he!"

Lame Iossip turned swiftly to the officer and bent forward, glaring at him. The officer's grip on the gun tightened, his squinting eyes narrowed, and his laugh rose in pitch just a little. Everybody held his breath and the commandant's laugh, now evidently nervous, was the only sound heard.

All this lasted just a moment, although it seemed much longer to me. Then Lame Iossip turned on his heel and fell back in the ranks. The officer took his hand off the gun and, still chuckling mockingly, began to roll a cigarette. Everybody relaxed; the climax was over.

With a feeling of relief, I turned to Vania and I could hardly believe my eyes; Vania, more intent than ever, was still staring in the same direction. On a sudden impulse, I looked at the toolstand again.

The last couple of men just fell out of the brigade to collect their tools. One of them was a short, pale Jew with a small, dark moustache. The other was a tall, muscular fellow, his face marked by smallpox and his saddle-formed nose reminding me of the picture—I once saw in my boyhood and vividly remembered—of a man born of syphilitic parents. His motions were slow, but quite natural. He took his axe and made a half-turn as though he were to step back in the ranks.

All of a sudden he sprang at the smoking officer. I saw the circular flash of the shining blade rising, then falling on the commandant's head. There was a gush of blood and brain and the dull sound of the falling body . . . and then the tall prisoner stood still, macabre in his sudden motionless poise over the victim's corpse. His face betrayed no emotion. He spoke, and in the deathly silence his voice sounded unusually clear.

"He has slept with my girl. Now we are even."

The spell of horror broke. The soldiers jumped at the man and one of them knocked him down with the butt of his rifle. The man fell with a shriek of pain. Two or three soldiers started beating and kicking him. The rest aimed their guns at the brigade. The sergeant, his voice shaking with rage, shouted: "Drop the axes, everybody, and hands up, or we shoot! Back in the zone, one by one."

There was a clicking sound of dropped tools, all hands went up. In this moment I happened to see Lame Iossip again. He stood in the first row of his brigade, his hands up, his ugly face contorted with a sinister delight.

In a few minutes the gate was shut. The uproar of conversation rose at once. Everybody was commenting on the murder and on the impend-



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ing inquest. And everybody was enjoying the prospect of a day off. It was not likely that the two brigades left in the zone would be sent out that day.

Vania and I walked slowly toward the barrack.

"Vania." I stopped and looked at his face sharply. "You did know what was going to happen, didn't you?"

"Oh, you think I did," Vania drawled. "Why?"

"I observed you at the gate. You were expecting it. And I'm almost sure that Lame Iossip is at the bottom of this murder. I saw him at the very moment when he and Tataroff were facing each other. There was something in his face which I couldn't make out then. Now I know what it was: Lame Iossip knew that his foe would be dead in a few minutes. I also saw his face again shortly after it happened. It showed no trace of surprise. No, it was the face of a man whose scheme had worked. What kind of scheme was it? Why did the other fellow kill Tataroff? I hardly think it was because of a girl. Tell me, Vania. You know I won't talk."

Vania smiled with a shade of appreciation, but he didn't answer for a while. We resumed our walk, and he stopped near some logs which were lying in the middle of the yard. Here he seated himself and I did the same. Vania looked around. Nobody paid any attention to us and there was no danger of being overheard; no eavesdropper could come close without being noticed. Vania looked at me and grinned again.

"Ho, ho, Ian Ianovitch, I didn't think you'd be that clever with as little as you know about camps. Well, only four guys in the camp are in on it, and I'm one of them. Maybe I shouldn't tell you, but I've got to ask you for a favor." Vania coughed embarrassedly. "Besides, I know you won't squeal."

"Of course I won't."

"Harasho,\* it's a deal, then. And here's the story.

"It all started moving last night, though Lame Iossip had his scheme ready long before. But to make it work, he needed cards and it isn't easy to make cards in a camp; and even if you did, people aren't likely to gamble with your cards; they are afraid you might have marked them in some way. No wonder Lame Iossip was worried.

"Then, three days ago, there came a new transport and the news was passed that one of the newcomers had a nice little pack of cards. So Lame Iossip made a deal with me and I made friends with the new fellow, and before he knew anything, I found out where he kept the cards and had them in my pocket.

"Well, last night we slipped into the little cabin next to the laundry, where my girl Viera lives alone, to have a game; Lame Iossip, Tall Fiedka—who killed Tataroff—myself and. . . Well, never mind the fourth fel-

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\* Okay.

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low's name. My Viera kept watch in front of the cabin's door. You have to feel safe at a game, you know, and besides you have no use for a girl when you gamble.

"We played 'Twenty-one,' as usual. I don't know if you play it or not. You don't? Well, you draw cards one by one, as many as you want, and so do the other players, and whoever has twenty-one in his hand or next to it—but no more—takes all the stakes.

"We first played all four and I had good luck and won fifty rubles and a blue shirt from Fiedka. But soon my luck changed and I lost all the cash I had. Then I put all my things on stake—and you know I used to have a nice bundle—but again I had no luck, and I lost everything to. . . . Well, never mind the name, cursed be his mother. Of course I got angry and. . . . Harasho, forget it, I'll tell you later anyway, Ian Ianovitch." Vania swallowed, embarrassed. "Let's have the story first.

"So I stopped and just sat by. And before long, the fourth fellow, cursed be his name, lost everything and stopped, too. That left only Lame Iossip and Tall Fiedka with all the money and all mine and the damned fellow's things almost equally divided between those two.

"Lame Iossip didn't even look at the pool and said, 'Let's go for all the money and all the things we both have, except what's on us.' Tall Fiedka took a deep breath and then said, 'I'm going,' and they drew. And Lame Iossip won.

"Tall Fiedka didn't say a word, but his face got all wet with sweat as if he had just come out of the rain. He started rolling a cigarette, but his hands shook so that he spilt the tobacco on the table. Then he licked the paper, and he had to do it again and again, his tongue was so dry.

"But as for Lame Iossip, he didn't even stir, just stared at the kerosene lamp which stood on the table and waited. So we all understood that he wanted to give Fiedka the chance to 'play for a wish,' as I expected he would do, because that's what he had been waiting for all the time. We also knew Fiedka guessed what kind of wish it would be, and that's why his hands still shook when he lit his cigarette over the kerosene lamp. And I wondered if he would risk the play for Lame Iossip's wish, or if he would quit.

"Fiedka sat still for a while and then looked sharply at Lame Iossip's face and said, 'Harasho, I'll play for your wish, if you name the stake.'

"And Iossip kept staring at the kerosene lamp and answered, 'The stake is the whole pool, cash and things, and my wish, you know already, is Tataroff's life.'

"Tall Fiedka swallowed hard and said, 'I'm going.'

"It was Lame Iossip's turn to shuffle and he did it long and slowly. Then Fiedka cut and they started drawing. After two cards Fiedka said, 'Enough for me,' and his face cheered up. You could easily tell he must

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have had a good hand. Then Lame Iossip also said, 'Enough,' after two cards. And they looked at each other for a while.

"But Fiedka couldn't wait any longer; he showed his cards and said, 'You won't beat that,' and laughed loudly. And, damn him, he had an ace and a ten, just twenty-one!

"Now I looked at Lame Iossip, but he was as calm as ever and slowly showed his cards. And, cursed be his mother, he'd got two aces, the only cards which could beat Fiedka's twenty-one.

"You should have seen Fiedka's face, Ian Ianovitch; it was grey. As for Iossip, he smiled for the first time—it wasn't a nice smile, though—and started rolling a cigarette.

"Well, nobody talked for a while and Tall Fiedka, once it was all over, calmed down and was thinking hard. Then he said slowly, 'I think I can do it tomorrow morning, if you fellows give me a hand.'

"'It's against the rules,' I said quickly, because I didn't like to be mixed up in a murder. 'You've got to keep all of us clear of this business.'

"But here Fiedka said I got him all wrong, because what he wanted us to do was simply this: through my girl Viera, I should pass Tataroff the news that Lame Iossip had gambled but had had no luck.

"Fiedka said it was important that Tataroff get this information in time because it would make him feel safe. He is a clever fellow, Tataroff, Fiedka said, and knows all about gambling for life. Until Lame Iossip took his axe and stepped back in the ranks, Tataroff would watch him closely and have his gun ready just in case Lame Iossip should try to kill him himself. But once Iossip had stepped back, Tataroff would think all danger was over and would relax because, Fiedka said, he'd be sure nobody else would do the killing for Lame Iossip, as Iossip had no luck in cards. So when he, Tall Fiedka, would be taking his axe, and he'd be at the very end, he said, Tataroff would pay no more attention to him than he would to last winter's snow. And that's all, he said, he needed to do the job cleanly.

"Now I saw Tall Fiedka was a clever fellow and had thought of everything, but I still didn't know what he was going to give as a motive. Because a motive he had to have, and a good one, or they would suspect cards and then he would get a death sentence with no hope for a pardon. So I asked him.

"But Fiedka just laughed and said, 'If I had no motive ready, I would not play for Iossip's wish, but would just quit. But I have. See, I was in a camp near Vorkuta and on a fine job: I was khleborez.\* It was last year. Now, of course, I had the finest girl in camp, because who can afford a finer girl than a khleborez? You can get anything for bread in camps. Mashenka was her name, and cursed be my mother if I ever had a hotter girl.'

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\*Bread distributor.



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"Then," Fiedka said, "they change the camp commandant and Tataroff is the new one. And before long my Mashenka is ordered to come to his quarters every day to do the housework. Of course I don't like it very much because I know what this housework really means, but I don't say a word to her and let things go their way. First, I know that if I start any trouble about Tataroff, he can simply put me on the next transport or, at least, take me off my job, and I am not so stupid as to lose a fine job because of a girl and for no reason at all, to be frank, because Mashenka is as sweet to me as ever and I've no complaints. Besides, I begin to think that to love Mashenka is too much for just one fellow. So I only take care that Tataroff thinks I know nothing about Mashenka and him, and I wonder if he knows about Mashenka and me.

"Well, he didn't find out until some three months later. And even then," Fiedka said, "he just began to look at me a bit sharper, but never did or said a thing. Maybe he didn't care, and maybe he had also found out, by that time, that to love Mashenka is too much for just one fellow, even if he is a camp commandant.

"Well, soon afterward," Fiedka said, "I was taken to Kniazpogost to witness a case against a political, and so I had to part with my Mashenka. Mashenka cried and wept when they were taking me out through the gate. Tataroff stood near by and saw it, of course, but he didn't seem to be angry at all, and was quite nice to me and gave me some bread, and, if you ask me," Fiedka said, "he rather seemed kind of sorry. . . ."

"The next time I saw him was three days ago when I was brought here with the transport. So you see," Fiedka ended, "I've got everything I need for a motive."

"I tell you, Ian Ianovitch," Vania continued his story, "I listened carefully all the time but, cursed be my mother, I couldn't make any sense out of it. And this I said to Fiedka, but he laughed and told me he didn't think I was that stupid.

"Don't you see," he said, "that I'll have a hundred witnesses that I had a girl and that Tataroff slept with her? They can check on every detail and will find it's true. Don't you see that all I've got to say now is that I cared for the girl and that I didn't find out about her and Tataroff until after I had left them? With all those crazy guys who kill the guards for sleeping with their girls, what court won't believe me with all the evidence I've got? So I've got a clear-cut case and all they can give me is twenty years, which I don't care about, since I've already got twenty-five altogether."

"When I heard this, Ian Ianovitch, I thought again that Fiedka was a very, very clever fellow, and I still think the same. Because, as you saw yourself, Fiedka's scheme worked beautifully, and no one will ever suspect it was a card killing.

"Well, that's about all you wanted to know," Vania ended.

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I remained silent. Strange story, strange people. . . . All of a sudden I wanted to be left alone. I wanted to get some sleep and forget about where I was.

"Thanks for the story, Vania. I never expected it would be as queer as that. I'll go to the barrack now."

But Vania still had something on his mind because he cleared his throat and said, "Just a moment, Ian Ianovitch, just a moment. I've got to tell you something. . . . You see, I didn't tell you everything, yet."

"Go on, then. What's on your mind?"

"Well, Ian Ianovitch, what I've got to tell you . . . Well, it's this. After I'd lost all my money and things, I, too, took my last chance and played for the damned fellow's wish. . . . Never mind his accursed name; I can't tell you who he is because it's against the rules, you know. . . ."

"Well, then?"

"Well, I lost, cursed be my luck."

"Oh, I see now. It's too bad; I'm sorry for you. But I can hardly help you; I have no money if that's what you want to ask me for."

"Money be damned! You never play for money in wish gambling. Ian Ianovitch, don't you be angry with me. . . . It was pants."

"What do you mean? What pants?"

"I lost your pants, the fine ones, to this accursed fellow. Now you can see why I can't tell you his name; the rules say I've got to keep him out of it. And, Ian Ianovitch, I've got to have the pants for him before tonight."

And Vania sighed with relief, once he was through with his confession.

"But, it's ridiculous!" I burst out. "It's quite crazy! How could you? It's . . . it's. . . ." I lost my speech for a while.

"Well," I finally resumed, "the worse for you because I tell you, Vania, I won't sell these trousers and that's my last word."

But now Vania's face became serious. "You don't know what you're talking about," he said firmly. "I'm very sorry for you, the more because I can't even buy your pants—I told you I lost all my money. But your pants I've got to get, because my honor is at stake. I gave my word and I can't take it back; the rules are clear about it. So don't you go making it harder for me and for yourself. It's no use.

"I'll tell you frankly, Ian Ianovitch, I could arrange that these pants be stolen from you and you'd be no wiser. But I like you and I thought you'd be reasonable, and I still think you'll be, after all. So I'll be honest with you. You give me the pants, Ian Ianovitch, and you won't regret it. I can't promise I'll get them back for you because the fellow, cursed be his name, is leaving tonight with the transport, and I can't steal them from him the same day; it wouldn't be honest. If he'd stay here a week or so, that'd be different; I'd get them back for you all right.



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"But I want to be fair with you, Ian Ianovitch. I'll work with you every day from tomorrow. And when I work on lumber I always have a pile big enough for the third kettle,\* because no brigadier is that stupid as to check whether *my* pile isn't empty inside—which it always is, of course. He knows he'd be mighty sorry soon, himself. So you'll have no work, practically, except helping me a little, and you'll have the best kettle every day. Don't shake your head; just listen.

"I'll see to it that you get extra food whenever I steal something from the store—I hear they've got some good sausage for the guards, right now. So you be reasonable, Ian Ianovitch, because I speak to you like a brother. And to prove that, I'll even tell you that if you ever care for a girl . . . Oh, don't shake your head again, I know you don't right now, but when you have lard and sausage and plenty of bread, you'll feel different, you'll see. So if you ever care for a girl, just say the word and I'll talk to my Viera and she'll be nice to you because she'd do anything for me; she loves me, stupid.

"You see yourself, Ian Ianovitch, no other fellow would be that honest with you. So give me the pants, because I'll get them anyway. This I tell you frankly, whether you like it or not. Nobody will ever say that Vania doesn't pay his card debts."

I listened to this long and ardent speech with varying feelings. There was no use to argue with Vania. I had to say Yes or No. I am not a coward and I did not mind risking a straight refusal and its consequences. But, to my own surprise, my reaction was changing almost beyond my control. My sense of humor was affected by the absurdity of the situation and of Vania's ideas of honesty; and finally I burst out laughing, and laughed so heartily that tears came into my eyes.

"All right, Vania." I could hardly speak for laughter. "I'll give you my trousers, and never mind the sausage and the girl. By God, I haven't had such fun for years! . . . As for working together, you are certainly welcome."

Vania's face brightened. "I knew you'd agree, and I tell you again you won't regret it. I'll leave you now and come for the pants in an hour or so. You are a good fellow, Ian Ianovitch; too bad you are a political."

And he went on his way, whistling a gay tune, badly off key. But after a few steps he turned to me again.

"And if you ever change your mind about the girl, you just say the word."

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\* Best ration in camps, given to prisoners who do 130 per cent of work required of them.

Budapeszt, niedziela 11 lipca 1943

Nr. 2 ARCHIWUM WARSZAWIE

3. Maja 1942 roku w -Kujbyszewie

.....Barżo się potem skarżył nasz duszpasterz wileński ka.dr. Kucharski, że nigdy dotąd nie było tak gorąco w liturgicznych szatach w czasie nabożeństwa jak akurat tego 3 Maja. Niezmordowany był jedynie nasz "organista" prof. Adam Skąpski z krakowskiej Akademii Górniczej, który przez cały czas nabożeństwa czerował spod klawiszy jakąś osobliwą muzyczną "missa solemnis". Brała za serce swoją słodkością i swojakością. Przysięgłaby jednak, że było to jakieś "mixtum compositum" z mazurków i nokturnów Chopina, poloneza Ogińskiego, rapsodii Liszta, fragmentów Palestriniego i fug Bacha.

Pewnie nie ja tylko, ale wielu innych modliliśmy się wtedy poprzez te melodie muzyki. Ziączył Polaków w modlitwie serce i dusz szkocki chorał, przywieszony na rosyjską ziemię z elektryzującym refrenem "Do wolnej Polski nam powróć daj!!" Moc tych prostych słów ziała się w okolicę z pieśnią "Boże coś Polako" - hartowała wolę, napawała wiarą w zwycięstwo i powrót rozproszonych dzieci Matki-Ojczyzny.

Tę osobliwą determinację odczuwali widocznie cudzoziemscy goście. Długo nikt nie ruszył się z miejsca, trwali jakby przykułi fluidem wiary i siły wygnaneńców, cierpiętników, ludzi bez ziemi. Pozostali też bez wyjątku na skromnej uroczystości dla uczczenia rocznicy 3 Majowej Konstytucji. Nie nazwano tego zebrania akademią, lecz poprostu upamiętnieniem dziejowej chwili.

Obok ołtarza ustawiono mały stół z narzuconym sztandarem. Z głębi popłynęły dźwięki pieśni majowej. Znowu Skąpski wkładał całą swą duszę w znane melodie mazurków i polonezów, których słownym zakończeniem była recytacja jankielowskiego Koncerta z "Iana Tadeusza" - w ostatnich wierszach na kanwie "Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła". Recytacja była udaną w równej mierze dzięki umiejętności mówienia Mickiewiczowską ego wiersza, jak i urodziwości recytatorki włościennej p. Joanny Witwickiej. Nie było na tej akademii uroczystego przemówienia. Było kilkanaście zdań, w których zawarte były na tle rocznicy przeżycia i pragnienie ludzi bezdomnych.

Oczy Polaków iu nas było w tej kaplicy-pracowni-stołówce były zamglone. Tylko słońce snopem jaskrawego światła iluminowało biel i dzerwień narodowych barw na stoliku przy ołtarzu. Ludzie przeżywali wspomnienia niedawnego nieszczęścia i zła, dawniejszej radości i innych dni majowego święta w odległym kraju...

Brzętem wtedy nie tylko wewnątrz, ale było niepodobieństwem opanowaódrzenie rąk. Iasrze kolegów, których nie przerażały nocne strasznych przesłuchiwań, wielotygodnoinwe pobyty w "celsach śmierci", agonie w "łagrach" konwulsje przedśmiertne konających z głodu, od tyfusu i malarii były teraz białe, blade, śniadzi i ostre.

Pod klawiszów płynęły dziwnie łagodnie dźwięki "Jeszcze Polska nie zginęła". Zrazu nieśmiało. Budziły z wewnętrznego omdlenia i przywracały do rzeczywistości. Potem spotężniały, nabrały siły i porwały się. Utaione przeżycia, pragnienia, tęsknoty, wolę walki i zwycięstwa, nadały narodowej pieśni taką moc i barwę, że pianino zgasło w huczącej fali głosów. Śpiewali wszyscy: Polacy i cudzoziemcy, ostatni nie znali słów, ale porwał a ich melodia, rytm i duch pieśni tułaczy.



# Adam Skapski

From Russian Slave Labor to Nebraska Comes a Great Teacher, Writer, Musician, Philosopher And Scientist

ADAM SKAPSKI probably would still be in a Russian slave labor camp today if it hadn't been for the bruise of a guard. It happened one cold wet day in September, 1941. The thin, pale, middle-aged man lay on his bunk protesting bravely against working that day. The unmoved guard simply kicked the little of the camp.

The guard's brutality was to have eventually a quality of mercy. Outside the camp a trainload of Poles en route to the slave labor camp located in Komi, a province in far northern Siberia. Heavy rains a day before had washed out the tracks and the prisoners were turned out to repair

the prisoners marched by the train. The little man called out frantically and loudly "Skapski... Adam Skapski... I am the Polish ambassador I am at Komi Camp No. 113." Perhaps he praved, someone on the train would remember the name and the place.

It was important. Adam Skapski was first arrested by the Russians in East Poland in 1939. For rejecting their proposal for scientific collaboration he was sentenced to eight years of slave labor in Siberia. In July, 1941, the Polish-Soviet Agreement provided that the Russians would release all Polish prisoners from labor camps. To secure release of some prominent Poles, a list of a hundred odd men was submitted to the Kremlin.

Poland's reinstated ambassador, Adam Skapski's name was on this list. The Russians released him in August, 1941. In the presence of Polish university officials he was released from the camp for the railroad station but that night before the train even came, he was taken more of the Russian character. Apparently the Russians considered Dr. Skapski a dangerous anti communist, for that night he was arrested, documents taken, and sent farther north to Camp No. 113 where there was not a single Pole. At No. 113 he was listed simply as "bezdokumentny"—the man without papers. Such men cannot be released, for no one knows the extent of their guilt.

The train moved on. Months passed. Then one day in February, 1942 the prison camp commander at No. 113 noticed Skapski he was being given his freedom. Some one on that train had remembered his name and delivered his message!



"At Camp No. 113 I was simply listed as 'bezdokumentny'. Do you know what that means?"

Adam Skapski felt the horrors of Komi with a deep hatred for all things Communist, but with a high resolve to return to his science. The road back to the laboratory led him to the University of Nebraska where this remarkable man, his health restored, has thrown himself with fervor into research. But he is also a great teacher, writer, musician and philosopher.

Dr. Skapski's love of the campus comes naturally. Before the war he was graduated with the M.D. degree from Jagiellonian University of Cracow, Poland and served brilliantly on the faculty as a physical chemist from 1924 to 1933, and as founder and first director of the Institute for Physics and Physical Chemistry of Metals from 1934 until his capture by the Russians. In 1935, his research led to a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to Sweden's famed Metallographic Institute.

The return to research following his release from Komi awaited the end of the war. Meanwhile he served as a cabinet member (Education) in the Polish Government in London. Then, in 1945, the opportunity came to join the staff of the University of Chicago's Institute for the study of Metals. He came to America, to stay. In 1948, he accepted an offer from the University

"Chopin? His music is my favorite. Of course it's Polish. But then it is very human too."

of Nebraska to join the faculty of its Physics department.

Dr. Skapski brought to Nebraska a great reputation for study in metals. For one thing, he was the first to show the unexpected role played by small but steadily increasing amounts of copper in the sulfur content of today's steel. Nobody suspected the relation between copper and sulfur in steel, in fact, whatever evidence was at hand pointed to the opposite. Dr. Skapski read a paper at a scientific meeting last winter which succeeded in showing that copper (which comes from the scrap iron widely used in modern steel-making) attracts sulfur, and prevents its being desulfurized. Sulfur causes brittleness and other undesirable qualities in steel. Prompted by Dr. Skapski's earlier work, the U. S. Steel Corporation checked his theory on about two million tons of open hearth steel and found his theory right.

Dr. Skapski's current research involves a point of great interest, and some controversy among U. S. metallurgists. Briefly, Dr. Skapski is claiming that many good and bad qualities of steel and in fact all metals are located in the boundaries of the tiny grains of which it is composed. He says grain boundaries, or surfaces, play the same



"Perhaps there is too much emphasis on how (training) and not enough on why (education)."

role as mortar between bricks, and are not simply squeezed together as was commonly supposed. The surfaces or boundaries, Dr. Skapski further claims, contain material different from the composition of the grains themselves and actively bind the grains together. Dr. Skapski is now laying the foundation in this fundamental problem of surface tensions and cohesive forces by investigating the structure of metal in liquid alloys. Out of his study may come a manufacturing know-how which will yield better metal products.

Dr. Skapski's intense interest in physics and chemistry has stamped his university lectures as the work of a great teacher. His students are enthusiastic. One series of lectures he gave last spring on thermodynamics aroused such widespread enthusiasm that next year several interested faculty members are planning to attend.

But Dr. Skapski's interests are not limited to physics. He is the author of many short stories published here and in Europe. He now has a book manuscript being considered by a large publishing house in New York City.

He loves music, especially the works of Chopin because the composer is Polish and because "his music is very human." Dr. Skapski is an amateur pianist, too, and has



"The scientist, having conceived a theory or idea, must check on it and support it by measurement and facts... but his imagination must work until the facts and theory are in harmony."

composed several pieces.

Science, teaching, writing and music is not a strange mixture, for the Philosopher Skapski says: "Creation is very similar in science and art. In both cases one must have a vision, a pre-conceived idea. The only difference is this: The scientist, having conceived a theory must support it by measurements and facts and if these don't fit then the theory must be extended or modified. But the scientist's imagination

must continue to work until it has brought all the facts into the harmony of one theory.

"The artist is, maybe, in a happier position. It's up to him alone to cover the bones of his artistic idea with the flesh of form. The harmony of form is art, as the harmony of content is science. But this does not mean that the scientist needs less fantasy, nor lacks in his approach to a problem the flexibility and development so characteristic for art."