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THE YOUNG GUARD

ANovel

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE Moscow A. FADEYEV

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Forward, forward, comrades, to meet the rising sun! We'll fight our way to Liberty with bayonet and gun. Let crimson banners be unfurled That working men should rule the world. To battle, valiant young guard From factory and farm!

Youth Song



Dart ONE



Chapter 1

"Oh, Look, Valya, how beautiful! Fascinating! Like a sculpture. It's not marble or alabaster, it's alive and yet how cold! And so fine and delicate: no human hand could ever have made anything like it. See how it rests on the water, so pure and austere and aloof. And look at the reflection: I don't know which is lovelier. And the colours! Look, look, not white, I mean it is white, but so many shades: yellow, pink, sky blue, and in the centre, where it is moist, like mother of pearl, it's simply enchanting. There just aren't any names for colours like that!"

The voice came from the willow bushes, where a girl bent over the creek. She had wavy black hair gathered in plaits emphasizing the whiteness of her blouse, and her lovely, dark eyes were so alight with sudden radiance that she herself was not unlike the water-lily reflected in the

shadowed water.

"A fine time for going into raptures! You really are funny, Ulya!" came the answer as Valya, too, thrust her head through the branches. Despite the slightly prominent cheekbones and snub nose, the face, youthfully fresh and goodnatured, was attractive.

Without a glance at the lily, her eyes worriedly searched the bank for the group of girls from whom they had strayed.

"Hello-o-o!" she cried.

"He-ere! He-e-ere!" came answering shouts from near by. "Come over here! Ulya's found a water-lily," shouted Valya with a teasing, affectionate glance at her friend.

Just then, like the echo of distant thunder, came the rumble of gun-fire from the north-west, near Voroshilovgrad.

"Again!"

"Again," Ulya said tonelessly. The radiant light, which

had sparkled a moment before, faded from her eyes.

"Will they break through this time?" Valya said. "My God! Remember how we worried last year? Yet everything turned out all right. But last year they never came so close. Listen, it's like thunder!"

They listened in silence.

"When I hear that," Ulya said in a low voice filled with emotion, "and see the clear sky and the trees in leaf, and feel the grass warm with the sun and smell the sweet smell of it, it hurts me, as if all this were lost for ever and ever. You think you've been hardened by the war, that you've learnt to crush everything that might soften you, and suddenly such a rush of love and pity breaks through! Of course, you know that you're the only person I can talk to about this sort of thing."

Their faces were so close, among the leaves, that their breath mingled, and they looked straight into each other's eyes: Valya's light, wide-set, kindly, filled with humble adoration; Ulya's large and dark, with long lashes, milky whites, and deep, mysterious pupils in which that intense

radiance was glowing again.

The distant booming of the guns set the leaves rustling even here, down by the river, bringing a shadow to the girls' faces.

"Wasn't it lovely out in the steppe last night, Valya?

Wasn't it?" Ulya asked softly.

"Oh, it was! That sunset. Remember?"

"Yes. Nobody likes our steppe; they say it's dreary and bleak: hills, endless hills—desolate they call it—but I love it. When Mother was still well, she used to take me with her to the melon patch. I was quite small then. While she worked I'd lie there on my back, looking up, up, as high as I could, trying to see to the very top of the sky.... Yesterday it hurt me when we watched the sunset and then all those sweating horses and the guns and the carts and the wounded.... The soldiers were so tired and dusty. And all of a sudden I realized that it wasn't a regrouping at all but a terrible, yes, a terrible retreat. That's why they won't look us straight in the face. Have you noticed?"

Valya nodded.

"I looked at the steppe where we've sung so many songs together, and at the setting sun, and I could hardly keep my tears back. You haven't often seen me cry, have you?... And when it grew dark, there they were, marching and marching in the twilight, and all the time that rumbling, the flashes on the horizon, the red glare—that must have been Rovenki—and the deep, crimson sunset.... I'm not afraid of anything on earth, you know that. I'm not afraid of hardship or fighting or suffering, but if only I knew what to do! Something terrible is hanging over us," Ulya said and a dismal look came into her eyes.

"And what a lovely time we had," Valya said with tears

shining in her eyes.

"What a lovely time everyone in the world could have, if only they'd try, if only they'd understand!" Ulya said. "But what shall we do? What shall we do?" she ended, with a sudden change of mood, in a childish, lilting voice, her eyes sparkling mischievously, as she heard the other girls drawing near. Swittly, kicking off her shoes and gathering up the hem of her dark skirt in one thin, sunburnt hand, she darted into the water.

"Look, a water-lily!" A slim, supple girl with reckless, tomboy eyes came crashing through the bushes. "I saw it first. It's mine!" she shouted and, snatching up her skirt in both hands, leapt into the water with a flash of bare, tanned legs, showering herself and Ulya with amber spray. "Ow! It's deep!" she laughed, as she caught one foot in the tangle of water-weeds, and drew back.

The other six girls came rushing to the bank, chattering noisily. Like Ulya, Valya and slender Sasha, who had just dashed into the water, they all wore short skirts and simple blouses. The burning Donets winds and the scorching sun had tanned each girl differently: arms, legs, faces, necks down to the shoulder-blades were here golden brown, there darkly bronzed, while those of another were fiery red, as though she had been through a furnace.

Like girls everywhere, when there are more than two together, they all talked at once at the top of their voices—without listening to each other—in high, shrill tones, as if each were imparting news of the utmost importance,

which the rest had to know forthwith.

"... He parachuted right down, honest! Such a handsome, fair chap, with wavy hair. And eyes like little buttons!"

"I could never, never be a nurse; I'm horribly atraid of

blood."

"Surely they won't leave us behind. How can you say such a thing? It'll never happen."

"Oh, what a beautiful lily...."

"But Maya, my little gypsy, suppose they do leave us behind?"

"Look at Sasha! Just look!"

"But to fall in love at first sight! I don't believe in that."

"Ulya, you idiot! Where are you off to?" "You'll be drowned, you silly things!"

They spoke in the rather rough Donbas dialect, a mixture of Central Russian vernacular, Ukrainian idiom, Don Cossack dialect, and the colloquial speech of the Azov ports: Mariupol, Taganrog and Rostov-on-Don. But whatever language the world over girls speak, it sounds sweet on their lips.

"Ulya darling, do you really have to have it?" Valya called, with a worried look in her gentle, wide-set eyes as her friend's brown calves and then her white knees disap-

peared under the water.

Cautiously feeling her way with one foot through the weeds and hitching her skirts higher until the edge of her black panties showed, Ulya took another step. Her graceful, slender body bent forward, she seized the lily with her free hand. One of her thick, dark plaits slipped over her shoulder, the loose, curly end falling into the water. A last effort and her fingers pulled out the lily together with its long stem.

"Good for you, Ulya!" Sasha cried, fixing Ulya with her round, hazel, boyish eyes. "You deserve the title of Hero of the Union. Not of the whole Soviet Union, but, let's say, our little union of restless girls of Pervomaisky. Let's have it!" Standing up to her calves in the water Sasha caught her skirt between her knees, reached out for the lily and dexterously fastened it in Ulya's black, wavy hair. "Oh, that does suit you! I'm simply green with envy...." Suddenly she stopped, raised her head and listened. "Just a moment.... Do you hear that, girls? Those beasts!"

Sasha and Ulya scrambled to the bank.

All the girls stood listening to the intermittent hum, now high and waspishly thin, now a low rumbling drone. With upturned faces they strained to see the aircraft through the white heat-haze.

"There are at least three of them!" "Where? Where? I can't see a thing."

"Neither can I, but I can tell by the sound."

Now the vibrating hum of the engines merged into a menacing roar; now it was broken into separate piercing or low rumbling sounds. The planes zoomed somewhere overhead. Though they could not be seen, it seemed that the dark shadows of their wings flitted over the girls' faces.

"They must be heading for Kamensk, to bomb the cross-

Or Millerovo."

"Millerovo? Rubbish! We've got out of Millerovo; didn't you hear the communiqué last night?"

"All the same there's fighting farther south."

"What shall we do, girls?"

They began to listen again to the distant thunder of ar-

tillery fire which seemed to have come closer.

Grim and cruel as war is, grievous as are the losses and sufferings of humanity, happy, healthy youth in its simplehearted, good-natured egoism, its loves and its dreams of the future, will not and cannot recognize the threat of danger and suffering to itself in the common danger and suffering so long as its own joyful rhythm remains undisturbed.

Ulya Gromova, Valya Filatova, Sasha Bondareva and the rest of the girls had that spring finished their secondary

schooling in the mining village of Pervomaisky.

Leaving school is always an important event in the life of a young person, but to leave school in time of war is very

special indeed.

In the previous summer, after the outbreak of war, the pupils in the upper forms-people still called them boys and girls-had worked on the state and collective farms round Krasnodon, in the mines, or in the locomotive works at Voroshilovgrad. Some had even travelled as far as Stalingrad to work in the tractor plant, now producing tanks.

In the autumn the Germans had broken through into the Donbas and occupied Taganrog and Rostov. In the whole of the Ukraine, only Voroshilovgrad Region had remained untaken. The Ukrainian Government authorities, retreating from Kiev with the army, transferred to Voroshilovgrad, while the Voroshilovgrad and Stalino (formerly Yuzovka) regional administration moved to Krasnodon.

Late into the autumn, until the Southern Front was stabilized, an unending stream of people from the occupied areas of the Donbas passed through Krasnodon, churning up the rust-red mud of the streets which seemed to get mudpier every day as the people brought it in on their boots

from the steppe.

The school children were got ready by the school to evacuate to Saratov Region, but stayed on when the Germans were brought to a halt far beyond Voroshilovgrad. Rostovon-Don was retaken and, in the winter, after the defeat of the Germans on the approaches to Moscow, the Red Army offensive began and everyone hoped that now things would

take a turn for the better.

The school children had grown accustomed to having strange people living in their cosy homes—the stone houses of Krasnodon, the farm-houses of Pervomaisky, even the little clay-daubed cottages of the "Shanghai" neighbour-hood—which had felt so empty in the first weeks of the war when fathers and brothers had left for the tront. Now they held an everchanging stream of lodgers: men and women working in the evacuated administrative organizations, soldiers and officers passing through on their way to the front, or quartered as part of the garrison.

The youngsters soon learnt to distinguish between the different branches of the services, ranks and types of arms, the makes of motor cycles, lorries and other forms of motor transport, their own as well as those captured from the enemy. They were able to identify any type of tank at first glance, not only when they stood massively at rest in the shade of the poplars by the roadside, the heathaze rising from their steaming armour, but also when they thundered over the dusty Voroshilovgrad Highway or rolled heavily westwards through the autumn mud or win-

ter slush.

They learnt to distinguish, by sound as well as sight, every type of Soviet and German aircraft, recognizing them when