

VSEVOLOD KOCHETOV

*The  
Zhurbins*

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*Vsevolod Kochetov*

THE ZHURBINS

*A Novel*





B. Koenig—



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VSEVOLOD KOCHETOV

*The*  
**ZHURBINS**

A NOVEL



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## ABOUT MYSELF

Neither my father, a peasant from the Saratov region who served twenty-five years of his life as a soldier in the tsarist army, nor my mother, the daughter of a village carpenter, when I, their last child, the last of eight, was born, could ever have suspected that a time might come when that child would write books. As I have said, I was their eighth child, so it was quite natural that no one should be particularly delighted over my arrival or show any great concern for my upbringing. At any rate I had plenty of freedom.

I was born in 1912, in Novgorod, where my family had settled down after my father's discharge from the army. Novgorod is an ancient Russian city, famous for its monuments of the past, which the people have cherished for hundreds of years. In the centre stands the Kremlin fortress with its battlemented walls and tall turrets, and on the outskirts an earthen rampart runs right round the city. In almost every street there are churches dating back to the XV, XIV or XIII centuries, and where there is not a church there is a palace that once belonged to one of the princes of Novgorod, or some other interesting sight.

During the Great Patriotic War Novgorod was overrun by the hitlerites, who destroyed many of its ancient monuments. Now, by a special resolution of the Soviet Government, these are being restored and carefully preserved.

Novgorod is situated in picturesque surroundings. It is cut in two by the river Volkhov which rises nearby in Lake Ilmen, a wonderful place for fish. All round the city stretch immense forests.

This combination of historic past and natural beauty filled my childhood with a mass of vivid impressions that determined the course of my future interests. I came to love the history of my people, and nature. When I was a schoolboy I used to collect old coins, make trips into the country for herbs, and go bird-catching and fishing.



When I was thirteen an event took place that had a considerable influence on my future life. I went to Leningrad to live with my brother, a student at the Institute of Transport Engineering. After leaving secondary school I worked at a shipyard and in Leningrad docks, then entered an agricultural college.

This was in the thirties, a time of great change throughout the countryside, when individual farms were being organized into collective farms. The Soviet State was helping them with machines, mineral fertilizers and credit, but the new collective farms badly needed specialists, or for that matter, anybody with some education and a sound knowledge of agriculture. I was itching to take part in this huge refashioning of the Soviet village and without even waiting to complete my studies at the college, I left for the country.

I worked for nearly five years as an agronomist. At one time I even had to act as director of a State farm. At twenty that was not an easy job. But the work was very interesting and gave me a lot of experience. For several years after that I was a research worker at an agricultural experimental station near Leningrad.

In 1938 I became editor of the agriculture section on a local newspaper. This was a turning point in my life. Writing had always attracted me. Even as a boy I used to write poems and stories in secret, never showing them to anybody. Work on a newspaper, where everyone around me was writing something, released my natural desire and I too started writing in earnest. I wrote articles and essays about agriculture, about the workers of local factories, about scientific workers at museums, and the astronomers of the Pulkovo Observatory.

A year later, as a reporter on the *Leningradskaya Pravda*, I was travelling everywhere through the Leningrad region. My wanderings took me to the new slate quarries that were being opened up, to new plants for processing flax; I visited steelmen and engineering workers. Often I had to walk dozens of kilometres from one village to another; I went to many collective farms and machine and tractor stations, I interviewed fruit-growers, fishermen and frontier guards.

When the Great Patriotic War began I encountered many of the people I had written about, with guns on their shoulders, marching the front-line roads as soldiers and officers of the Soviet Army. As a war correspondent of a Leningrad front-line paper I was at their side during the nine hundred days of the siege of Leningrad.

The whole world knows about those nine hundred days. But one cannot speak of the heroes of Leningrad in a few lines. I only want to say that it was then that I saw the Soviet man in his full gigantic stature. A man who was fighting for the right, defending the honour, freedom and independence of his country. And now when I took up my pen it was no longer to write articles or features, but to write a story. In 1946 my first story *On the Neva Plains* was published. In that story I wrote of the People's Guard, of the peaceful inhabitants of Leningrad who took up arms as the hitlerites approached their city. In the following year I published my second story *The Suburb*, in which I attempted to portray the complex life of a district lying between the trenches and the city.

Later I wrote several more stories, and then a novel. The heroes of these works are fishermen, collective farmers, soldiers and officers of the Soviet Army. Memories of childhood, impressions of my travels before and during the war, and also of my work in the country, found expression in those works. But for that experience, I should never have been able to write anything. There would have been nothing to write about.

I remember, in particular, an early experience in my life. Working in a shipyard, I met representatives of that great class that smelts steel, builds ships, locomotives and houses, the men who create with their own hands all the material necessities of life. I saw the real creators of life on earth—the workers. And I understood why it was on the working class that the great founders of the Soviet State, Lenin and Stalin, always relied in their revolutionary work. I was inspired and gladdened by the lofty moral qualities of working-class people, their courage, honesty, comradeship, their staunchness and devotion. As the years went by I kept on meeting representatives of that class—in their peaceful labour and in the trenches of Leningrad, and at the postwar construction sites, and all the time I was storing up in my memory examples of their character and conduct.

That was how the main outlines of my novel *The Zhurbins* took shape and gradually grew into a whole book—the fruit of its author's profound respect for the working class, the most progressive, active and creative class on earth.

V. KOCHETOV

*Leningrad*



## THE ZHURBINS





## CHAPTER ONE

\* 1 \*

**ON** THE evening of the First of May, when the festive boom of Moscow's gun salute had scarcely died in the loud-speakers, District Inspector of Militia Yegorov heard the sound of shots.

Yegorov threw down the cigarette he had just lighted, crushed it with his heel, and with an habitual tug at his holster made his way down the side-street in the direction of the shots. Gramophones and guitars could be heard through wide-open windows, the wind of dancing billowed the lace curtains, and the regular beat of heels on the

spick-and-span holiday floors shook the walls of the little wooden houses.

*Let us dance with all our zest  
Put your floor boards to the test.*

Another time the Inspector would probably have turned off at the little yard covered with flower beds to see Natalya Vasilievna, would have wiped his boots respectfully on the brightly coloured mat on the porch, and pulled the old-fashioned bell handle.

But the firing went on. . . . Yegorov's walk changed to a heavy run, and soon, with one hand on his holster, he came out on Anchor Street.

Beyond the palings round No. 19, in the deep evening shadows of old poplars and lilac, a large crowd had gathered. There seemed nothing suspicious in that; the Zhurbins probably had friends and neighbours to see them, and as the weather was warm they were all out in the open air.

The Inspector was about to pass on when two sharp flashes glowed in the yard above the heads of the assembled crowd, and again there was a resounding double-barrelled explosion.

Yegorov threw open the gate.

"Citizens, citizens!" he cried, pushing his way through the crowd. "What's going on here?"

"Another Zhurbin just off the stocks, Comrade Inspector!" was the unenlightening answer from one of the men.

"What stocks? Where's he come from?" Yegorov's nostrils twitched at the acrid smell of powder. In the company he could make out the figure of Ilya Zhurbin, the master of the house, with a double-barrelled gun in his hands.

"Hullo, Kuzmich!" sang out Ilya Matveyevich. "We're not breaking the law. It's a 21-salvo salute of the nation. A working man has just been born. What do you think of that!"

He came up, stood the gun on the ground, leaned on it with his left hand, and with his right tugged at an eyebrow.

"The youngsters have brought me a grandson, Kuzmich. So there, brother!..."

Ilya Matveyevich's eyes sparkled, reflecting the light of the street lamps; even in the dusk one could see his contented smile. He used phrases like "So there, brother," and "What do you think of that!" because joy prevented him from finding anything more expressive.

It had not been expected that the great event would happen on the holiday, but it would have been a great event and a great joy to Ilya Matveyevich at any time. A few hours previously he had been marching through the town in the contingent from his shipyard, with the bands blaring different tunes all around him; and practically every step of the way he had been thinking of Dunyasha who had been taken to the maternity hospital the evening before. The strains of her favourite song had brought her sharply to his mind; the lorry-loads of children waving little flags had made him think of how the young mother was faring; and one after another of his workmates had come up to ask for news of the great family event.

Ilya Matveyevich could think of little but family affairs until he reached the square, which was the hub on which the marchers converged from all seven districts of the town. How many times in thirty years had he trod this huge cobbled rectangle in front of Regional Party Headquarters and the Regional Soviet. To him the square was a mirror which reflected the life of the town twice a year, and not only of the town! At one time the marchers came with picks and shovels on their shoulders, to set out for



voluntary work straightaway after the meeting; at one time teams of horses used to pull models of the town's first cupola furnaces across the square; after the furnaces came weaving looms; a few years later an AMO lorry brought along a model of a new-type motor ship. That was a joyful year: the big yard had done with repair work, and a new period of construction had set in.

It was a good many years since Ilya Matveyevich had met those first cupola furnaces and weaving looms on the square—the plants had long ago been equipped with open-hearth and electro-smelting furnaces, and the textile machines had become such mighty contrivances that even a model reduced to a third of their size could not have been accommodated on a five-ton lorry.

On this May Day—and it was this that made him give second place in his mind to family affairs—he noticed something new, which had not been there in the autumn demonstration. In the papers, it is true, they had been writing about the excavators, and the cranes, and the cable, and other equipment that the town was making for the new construction works on the Volga and the Dnieper. But words are one thing, and it is a different matter to see things in reality. Even if they are represented only by models, an experienced eye can judge the scale and power of the new machines and structures.

A thought came to Ilya Matveyevich that he could not part with for a long time. He thought of the ore which is put in the furnace for smelting. Slowly, gradually, it begins to glow, the heat does not seize all the fragments at once but creeps from one to the next until they begin to boil and bubble as one mass.

This thought took Ilya Matveyevich further.... The human ore that had been growing hotter and hotter year by year since 1917, now it had started to boil and bubble; a metal was smelting there the like of which the world had never seen.