

A. S. MAKARENKO

*THE ROAD TO LIFE*  
(AN EPIC OF EDUCATION)

IN THREE PARTS

SECOND EDITION

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE  
Moscow 1955

**А. С. МАКАРЕНКО**

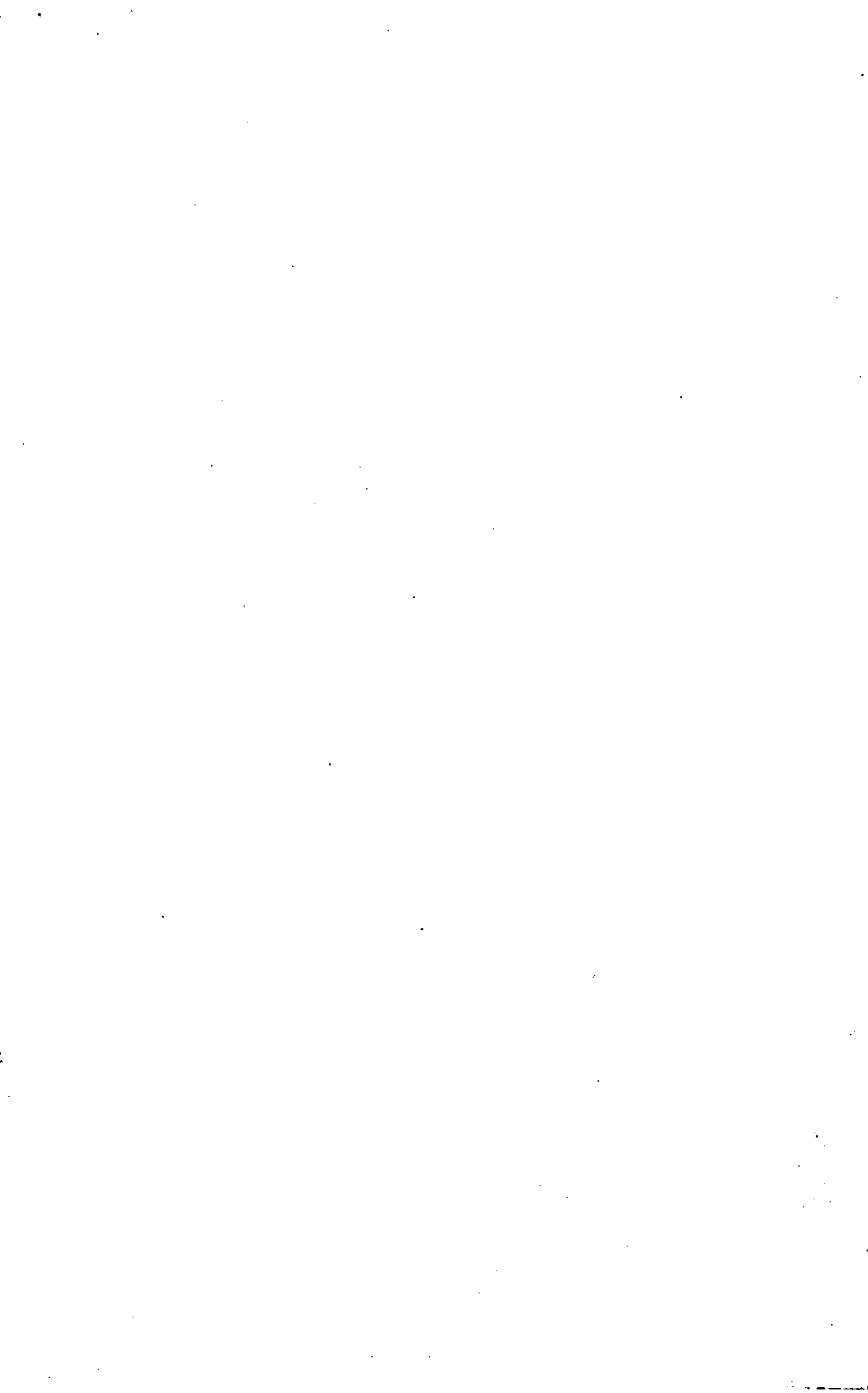
**ПУТЕВКА В ЖИЗНЬ**  
**(ПЕДАГОГИЧЕСКАЯ ПОЭМА)**

**ПОВЕСТЬ  
В ТРЕХ ЧАСТЯХ**

**ИЗДАНИЕ ВТОРОЕ**

**ЧАСТЬ ТРЕТЬЯ**

**ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО  
ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ  
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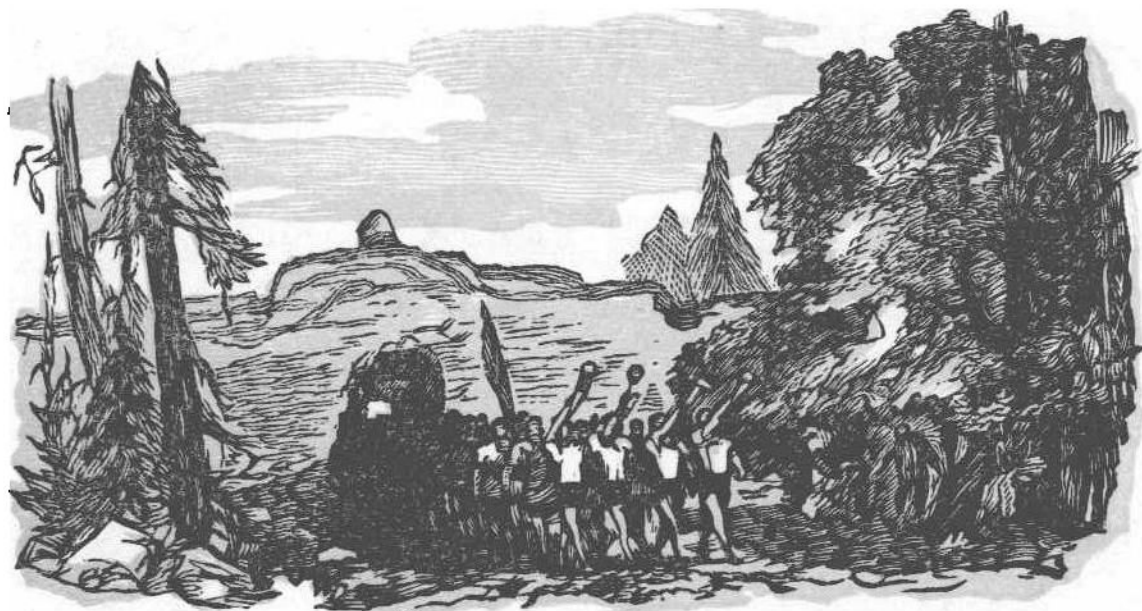
**TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN  
BY IVY AND TATIANA LITVINOV**

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*NAILS*

*I* was to start taking over the Kuryazh colony in two days, but first there was something I had to do at the Commanders' Council, something I had to say to them, to enable the colonists to organize, without my help, the hard task of getting all our property ready for transport to Kuryazh.

Within the colony, fears, hopes, "nerves," sparkling eyes, horses, carts, a veritable tidal wave of trifles, of objects listed as essential, and nevertheless forgotten, of ropes mislaid, had all



become so inextricably tangled, that I did not believe in the ability of the boys to disentangle them.

Only one night had passed since we had received the agreement for the transfer to Kuryazh, and a campaigning spirit already prevailed in the colony, affecting everybody's mood, desires, and tempo. If the colonists were not afraid of Kuryazh it may have been because they had not seen it in all its glory. I, on the other hand, could not get away from the inner vision of Kuryazh as a terrible, fantastic corpse, capable of seizing me by the throat even though its death had long been officially certified.

It was resolved at the Commanders' Council to send only nine colonists and one teacher with me to Kuryazh. I asked for more. I pointed out to them that, with such small forces, all we should be able to do would be to upset the prestige of the Gorky Colony, that the whole staff of Kuryazh had been discharged, and that there was a great deal of feeling against us there.

Kudlaty, smiling quizzically, answered me: "It really doesn't make the faintest difference if you take ten with you, or if you take twenty. You won't be able to do anything, anyhow. When everybody comes it'll be different—we'll take them by storm. Don't forget, there are three hundred of them. We must make our arrangements

here thoroughly. Think what it will be to load three hundred and twenty hogs! Besides, you've noticed, haven't you, they send us new kids almost every day—perhaps they've gone mad in Kharkov, or, perhaps they do it on purpose to annoy us."

I myself was depressed by the new arrivals. They, as it were, diluted our collective, making it harder for us to preserve the Gorky Colony in its full strength, its purity, and its flexibility. And we should have to master a crowd three-hundred strong with our small detachments.

In my preparations for the struggle with Kuryazh I kept before me the idea of a single lightning stroke—the Kuryazhites must be taken by storm. The slightest delay, any hopes of evolution, of "gradual infiltration," would jeopardize the outcome of our operations. I was well aware that the traditions of Kuryazh anarchy were just as likely to be "gradually infiltrated" as our own forms, traditions and tone. The sages of Kharkov, with their insistence on "gradual infiltration," confidently advanced the time-honoured notion that the good boys would have a beneficial influence on the bad boys. But I knew very well that the best of boys can easily become wild beasts in a collective based on a flabby organizational structure. I did not cross swords with the sages, calculating with mathematical precision

that the decisive blow would have been struck long before any gradual process had time to begin. But the new arrivals were in my way. The wise Kudlaty realized that they would have to be prepared for the transfer to Kuryazh with the same solicitude as everything else under our care.

And so it was not without many an anxious retrospective glance that I left for Kuryazh at the head of the "Advance Mixed Detachment." Kalina Ivanovich, although he had promised to look after our affairs to the very last moment, was so dejected and so overwhelmed by the thought of the coming parting that he could only stump about among the colonists, recalling with the utmost difficulty the various details of work, and forgetting them again immediately in the rush of an old man's bitter grief. The colonists received the orders of Kalina Ivanovich with respectful affection, replying to them with a cheerful "very good" and emphatic salute, but they quickly shook off the embarrassing feeling of pity for the old man, and did their work in their own way.

At the head of the colony I left Koval, who feared nothing so much as being cheated by the Lunacharsky Commune, which was to take over from us the estate, the sown fields, and the mill. Representatives of the commune had begun to

show themselves in various sectors of the Gorky Colony, and the red beard of Nesterenko, their chairman, was constantly turning distrustfully in the direction of Koval. Olga Voronova disliked the diplomatic contests between these two, and would try to get rid of Nesterenko.

“Go home, Nesterenko! What are you afraid of? There aren’t any crooks here. Go home, do, now!”

Nesterenko, smiling cunningly, with his eyes alone, nodded towards the angrily flushing Koval.

“D’you know what that man is, Olga? He’s a kulak! He’s a kulak by nature.”

Koval, now thoroughly worked up, continued stubbornly.

“And what did you think? Did you think we were going to give up everything to you, free, after the boys have put such a lot of work into it? Why should we? Just because you’re taking over our estate? Look at your fat bellies, and you pretend to be poor! You’ll have to pay!”

“But do think! How am I going to pay you?”

“Why should I have to think about that? What did *you* think about when I asked you if we were to sow the fields? You gave yourself high-and-mighty airs then—sow them! And now, kindly pay! For the wheat, and for the rye, and for the beets.”

His head on one side, Nesterenko unfastened his tobacco pouch, felt delicately for something in the bottom of it, and smiled guiltily:

"It's quite true, you're right there . . . the seed-grain . . . of course. But why should you ask payment for the work? The boys might have been working for society, as they say."

Koval leaped fiercely from his chair, and, turning round on his way out, his feelings worked to fever pitch, exclaimed:

"Why should they, you damned drones! Are you sick, or what? Call yourselves a commune, and want to profit by child labour. . . ! If you don't pay I shall give everything to the Goncharov people."

Olga Voronova chivied Nesterenko away, and a quarter of an hour later she was whispering with Koval in the garden, reconciling within her bosom, as only a woman can, her conflicting sympathies for the colony and the commune. The colony was like a mother for Olga, but in the commune she ruled supreme, impressing the men with the broad scope of the agronomical experience she had gained with Sherre, and coaxing the women with her dynamic, and often virulent advocacy of woman's emancipation. For crises and occasions of all sorts she had in reserve a battering-ram composed of a score of lads and lasses who followed her as if she were Joan of Arc.

She won all hearts by her innate culture, her energy, and her boundless optimism. Surveying her with pride, Koval would emit a terse: "That's our handiwork!"

Olya gloried in the generous gift left by the Gorky Colony to the Lunacharsky Commune, in the form of the well-regulated estate with its six-field system, but for us this gift spelt catastrophe. Nowhere is the importance of past endeavour felt so keenly as in agriculture. We knew—none better!—what it had cost to weed, to organize crop rotation, to set in order, to see to every detail of equipment, to look after and keep intact each element of the slow, endless, almost imperceptible process. Our true wealth was hidden away somewhere deep down, among the interwoven roots of plants, in roomy, scientifically-erected stalls, in the very heart of such simple objects as wheels, the shafts of carts, gear and sails for the windmill. And now, when so much had to be abandoned, and so much to be torn from its native soil and thrust into the cramped quarters of stuffy freight cars, it was not hard to understand why Sherre looked blue, and why all his movements were like those of a victim of disaster.

His melancholy mood did not, however, prevent Eduard Nikolayevich from getting his treasures ready for the journey with his usual methodical calm, and I had little difficulty in shaking

off the thought of his drooping figure as I left for Kharkov with the advance detachment. For all around me the colonists, like so many elves, danced in a joy and excitement precluding anxious thoughts.

The happiest hours of my life were passing away. I sometimes regret now that at the time I did not dwell on them more longingly and attentively, that I did not force myself to gaze firmly and steadily at this life, that I did not commit to memory forever the lights, the lines, and the colours of every moment, every movement, every word.

Even then I realized that a hundred and twenty colonists did not merely represent a hundred and twenty waifs who had found a home and work for themselves. No, they represented hundreds of moral endeavours, hundreds of harmoniously co-ordinated units of energy, torrents of beneficent rain, which even that self-willed, opinionated wench, nature, awaited with joyous impatience.

In those days you would hardly ever come across a colonist walking at an ordinary pace. They all got into the habit of running from place to place, flitting like swallows, with a business-like twittering, clear, joyous discipline, and grace of movement. There was actually a moment when I indulged in heretical musings, as to happy

people not needing any authority over them, for its place could be taken by that joyful, novel human instinct which shows every one what he has to do, how to do it, and the reason for doing it.

Such moments did occur. But I would rapidly be dashed from these anarchistic heights by all sorts of sights and sounds. Alyoshka Volkov, to give a single instance, would bend his blotchy countenance wrathfully upon a miscreant, and rate him soundly:

“What are you doing, you blockhead! Look what nails you’re using for that box! I suppose you think three-inch nails can be picked up in the road!”

The eager, flushing boy thus reproved would lower the hammer helplessly, rubbing his bare heel with it in his embarrassment.

“And what size is needed?”

“You can use old nails for that, you know, ones that have been used before. But wait a minute! Where did you get these—the three-inch ones?”

And then the fat would be in the fire. Volkov would stand over the youngster, wrathfully picking to pieces a character which had shown itself so glaringly inadequate in regard to new three-inch nails.

Yes, tragedy still stalks the world!



Very few people know what a used nail is. It has to be wrenched by all sorts of cunning means out of old boards, broken defunct objects, from which it emerges crooked, gouty, rusty, its head awry, its point blunted, often bent in two or three, often distorted into spirals and knots which the ablest locksmith in the world could not have fashioned. It has to be straightened with a hammer on a fragment of nail, the wielder of the hammer squatting on his heels, and hammering his fingers almost as often as the nail. And when, finally, the old nail is hammered again into something, it is apt to bend, to snap, and to go anywhere but in the right place. No doubt it was all this which inspired the Gorky youngsters with such a loathing for old nails, tempting them into all sorts of suspicious dealings with new ones, dealings which formed the steppingstones to official investigations on the part of the Commanders' Council and cast a cloud over the great and joyous adventure of our move to Kuryazh.

And it wasn't only nails! Unpainted tables, pretentious benches, innumerable stools of all sorts, old wheels, cobblers' lasts, worn files, tattered books—all the odds and ends which accumulate as a result of settled residence and thriftiness—obscured the glory of our heroic campaign. . . . But we could not bring ourselves to throw them away.