

DOVER · THRIFT · EDITION

MAXIM GORKY
CHELKASH
AND OTHER STORIES

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DOVER · THRIFT · EDITIONS

**Chelkash
and Other Stories**

MAXIM GORKY



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DOVER THRIFT EDITIONS

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Note

RUSSIAN WRITER Maxim Gorky (1868–1936), the nom de plume of Aleksey Maksimovich Peshkov, was born in Nizhni-Novgorod (later renamed Gorky in his honor). Recognized as one of the foremost leaders in the Socialist Realism movement, a doctrine encouraging a Socialist view of society in works of art, music, and literature, Gorky was also actively involved in the 1917 Russian Revolution. Gorky identified with the Russian poor, and the protagonists of his stories were typically criminals, ordinary merchants, or laborers. A champion for the downtrodden, Gorky is deemed to be among the greats of Russian literature.

After his father died when he was just five years old, Gorky went to live with his maternal grandfather, who treated him harshly. The budding proletarian author began to earn his own way at the age of nine, assuming a wide variety of odd jobs that drew his attention to working class struggles. His early short stories such as “Makar Chudra” (1892) and “Chelkash” (1895) were first published in Soviet journals. *Sketches and Stories* (1898), his first collection, met with unparalleled success. In “Twenty-six Men and a Girl”—often regarded as his best short story—Gorky describes the lives of bakery workers in an evocative and powerful style that quickly gained popular approval. Securing him an international reputation, these authentic portrayals of social outcasts as also seen in his drama, *The Lower Depths* (1902), and his novel, *Mother* (1907), exerted considerable influence in post-revolutionary Russian society.

Gorky’s political activism caused him continual troubles with the tsarist government. A supporter of the Bolsheviks, he was exiled in 1902 for organizing an underground press. The following year, Gorky was elected to the Academy of Sciences, but this honor was rescinded by the government. In 1905, when Gorky was arrested for revolutionary

activities, his followers issued formal protests to the tsar on his behalf. He traveled to the United States in 1906 to raise money for the revolution. Gorky returned to Russia after being granted amnesty in 1913.

Among Gorky's greatest achievements were his memoirs. In 1913, he wrote *My Childhood*, the first work in a trilogy of autobiographies that included *In the World* (1915), and *My Universities* (1922). During the 1920s, he published his reminiscences of fellow Russian writers Chekhov, Tolstoy, and Andreyev. Other works by Gorky include several novels, short stories, nonfiction, and plays such as *The Petty Bourgeois* (1901). Ill for many years with recurring tuberculosis, Gorky died in Moscow in 1936.

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CHELKASH

THE BLUE southern sky, darkened by dust, bore a leaden hue; the hot sun, looking down onto the greenish sea as if through a fine grey veil, was barely reflected in the water, which was chopped by the strokes of boats' oars, ships' propellers, the sharp keels of Turkish feluccas and of other vessels that ploughed backwards and forwards in the congested port. The granite-fettered waves, borne down by the immense weights that glided over their crests, beat against the ships' sides and against the shore, growling and foaming, befouled with all sorts of junk.

The clang of anchor chains, the clash of the buffers of the railway cars that were bringing up freight, the metallic wail of iron sheets slipping onto the cobble-stones, the muted sounds of wood striking wood, of rambling carts, of ships' sirens rising to a shrill, piercing shriek and dropping to a muffled roar, and the loud voices of the dock labourers, the seamen and the military Customs guards—all mingled in the deafening music of the working day, and quivering and undulating, hovered low in the sky over the port. And from the land, rising to meet them, came wave after wave of other sounds, now muffled and rumbling, causing everything around to vibrate, and now shrill and shrieking, rending the dusty, sultry air.

The granite, the iron, the timber, the cobble-stones in the port, the ships and the men, all breathed the mighty sounds of this fervent hymn to Mercury. But the human voices, scarcely audible in this tumult, were feeble and comical; and the very men who had originally produced these mighty sounds were comical and pitiful to look at. Their grimy, ragged, nimble bodies, bent under the weight of the merchandise they carried on their backs, flitted to and fro amidst clouds of dust and a welter of heat and sound. They looked insignificant compared with the steel giants, the mountains of merchandise, the rattling railway cars and everything else around them which they themselves had created. The things they themselves had created had enslaved them and robbed them of their personality.

The giant steamers, lying with steam up, shrieked and hissed and heaved deep sighs; and every sound they emitted seemed to breathe scorn and contempt for the grey, dusty, human figures that were creeping along their decks, filling the deep holds with the products of their slavish labour. The long files of dock labourers carrying on their backs hundreds of tons of grain to fill the iron bellies of the ships in order that they themselves might earn a few pounds of this grain to fill their own stomachs, looked so droll that they brought tears to one's eyes. The contrast between these tattered, perspiring men, benumbed with weariness, turmoil and heat, and the mighty machines glistening in the sun, the machines which these very men had made, and which, after all is said and done, were set in motion not by steam, but by the blood and sinew of those who had created them—this contrast constituted an entire poem of cruel irony.

The overwhelming noise, the dust which irritated one's nostrils and blinded one's eyes, the baking and exhausting heat, and everything else around, created an atmosphere of tense impatience that was ready to burst out in a terrific upheaval, an explosion that would clear the air and make it possible to breathe freely and easily—after which silence would reign over the earth, and this dusty, deafening, irritating and infuriating tumult would pass away, and the town, the sea and the sky would be tranquil, serene and magnificent. . . .

A bell struck twelve in slow regular strokes. When the last brassy vibrations died away, the savage music of labour sounded softer and a moment later sank to a muffled, discontented murmur. Human voices and the splash of the sea became more audible. It was dinner time.

I

When the dock labourers stopped work and scattered over the port in noisy chattering groups to buy the victuals that the market women were selling, and had squatted down on the cobble-stones in shady corners to eat their dinner, Grishka Chelkash turned up, an old timer, well-known to the people in the port, a confirmed drunkard, and a skilful, daring thief. He was barefooted; his legs were encased in a pair of threadbare corduroy trousers; he wore no hat, and his dirty cotton blouse with a torn collar, which exposed the brown skin drawn tightly over his lean collar bones. His matted, black, grey-streaked hair and his sharp crinkled, rapacious face showed that he had only just got up from sleep. A straw was entangled in his brown moustache, another was sticking to the bristle on his left cheek, and he had a freshly plucked

linden twig stuck behind one ear. Tall, gaunt, slightly round-shouldered, he strode slowly over the cobble-stones, wrinkling his hawk-like nose and casting his keen, grey, flashing eyes around, looking for somebody among the dock labourers. Now and again his long, thick, brown moustache twitched like the whiskers of a cat, and his hands, held behind his back, rubbed against each other, while his long, crooked, grasping fingers nervously intertwined. Even here, among the hundreds of rough hoboes like himself, he at once became conspicuous by his resemblance to the hawk of the steppe, by his rapacious leanness, and by his deliberate gait, outwardly calm and even, but internally agitated and alert, like the flight of the bird of prey that he reminded one of.

When he drew level with a group of bare-footed dockers who were sitting in the shade of a pile of coal-laden baskets, a thickset lad, whose stupid face was disfigured by scarlet blotches and his neck badly scratched—evidently the results of a recent scrap—got up to meet him. Walking by the side of Chelkash, he said in an undertone:

"The sailors are missing two bales of cloth. . . . They're searching for them."

"Well?" asked Chelkash, looking the lad up and down.

"What do you mean, well? I say they are searching for them. That's all."

"What? Have they been asking for me to go and help in the search?"

Chelkash smiled and looked in the direction of the warehouse of the Volunteer Fleet.*

"Go to hell!"

The lad turned to go back, but Chelkash stopped him with the exclamation:

"Hey! You do look a sight! Who messed up your shop front like this?" And then he enquired: "Have you seen Mishka about here anywhere?"

"Haven't seen him for a long time!" retorted the other, leaving Chelkash to rejoin his mates.

Chelkash proceeded on his way, greeted by everybody as an old acquaintance; but today he was obviously out of sorts, and instead of replying with his customary banter, he snarled in answer to the questions put to him.

Suddenly a Customs guard appeared from behind a pile of merchandise, a dark-green, dusty, and truculently erect figure. He stood in front of Chelkash, defiantly barring his way, clutched the hilt of his dirk with his left hand and put out his right to take Chelkash by the collar.

*A merchant shipping company.—*Trans.*

"Halt! Where are you going?" he demanded.

Chelkash stepped back a pace, raised his eyes to the guard's good-natured but shrewd face and smiled drily.

The Customs guard tried to pull a stern face; he puffed out his round, red cheeks, twitched his brows and rolled his eyes ferociously, but he succeeded only in looking comical.

"How many times have I told you not to go prowling around these docks. I said I'd smash your ribs in if I caught you! But here you are again!" he shouted.

"How do you do, Semyonich! We haven't met for a long time!" Chelkash answered serenely, proffering his hand.

"It wouldn't break my heart if I didn't see you for a century! Clear out of here!"

Nevertheless, Semyonich shook the proffered hand.

"Tell me," continued Chelkash, retaining Semyonich's hand in his tenacious fingers and familiarly shaking his hand. "Have you seen Mishka anywhere around here?"

"Who's Mishka? I don't know any Mishka! You'd better clear out, brother, or else the warehouse guard will see you, and he'll. . . ."

"That red-haired chap I worked with on the *Kostroma* last time," persisted Chelkash.

"The one you go thieving together, you mean, don't you? They took that Mishka of yours to the hospital. He met with an accident and broke his leg. Now go along, brother, while I'm asking you quietly, otherwise I'll give you one in the neck!"

"There! And you say you don't know Mishka! You do know him after all! What are you so wild about, Semyonich?"

"Now then, now then! Don't try to get round me! Clear out of here, I tell you!"

The guard was getting angry, and looking round from one side to another, he tried to tear his hand out of Chelkash's close grip. But Chelkash calmly gazed at the guard from under his thick eyebrows and keeping a tight hold on his hand went on to say:

"Don't hustle me! I'll have my say and then go away. Well now, tell me, how're you getting on? How's the wife, and the children? Are they well?" With flashing eyes, and teeth bared in an ironic smile, he added: "I've been wanting to pay you a visit for a long time, but I've been too busy . . . drinking. . . ."

"Now, now! None of that! None of your jokes, you skinny devil! I'll give it to you hot if you don't look out! . . . What! Do you intend to go robbing in the streets and houses now?"

"Whatever for? There's plenty of stuff lying about here. Plenty I tell

you, Semyonich! I hear you've swiped another two bales of cloth! Take care, Semyonich! See you don't get caught!"

Semyonich trembled with indignation, foamed at the mouth, and tried to say something. Chelkash released his hand and calmly made for the dark gates in long, regular strides. The guard kept close on his heels, swearing like a trooper.

Chelkash brightened up and whistled a merry tune through his teeth. With his hands in his trouser pockets he strode along unhurriedly, throwing biting quips and jests to right and left and getting paid in his own coin.

"Hey, Grishka! Look how the bosses are taking care of you!" shouted a dock labourer from a crowd of men who were sprawling on the ground, resting after dinner.

"I've no boots on, so Semyonich is seeing that I don't step onto something sharp and hurt my foot," answered Chelkash.

They reached the gates. Two soldiers ran their hands down Chelkash's clothes and then gently pushed him into the street.

Chelkash crossed the road and sat down on the curbstone opposite a tavern. A file of loaded carts came rattling out of the dock gates. Another, of empty carts, came from the opposite direction, their drivers bumping on the seats. The docks belched forth a howling thunder and clouds of biting dust. . . .

Chelkash felt in his element amidst this frenzied bustle. Solid gains, requiring little labour but much skill, smiled in prospect for him. He was confident of his skill, and wrinkling his eyes he pictured to himself the spree he would have next morning when his pockets were filled with bank notes. . . . He thought of his chum, Mishka; he would have been very useful to him that night if he had not broken his leg. He swore to himself as doubt crossed his mind as to whether he would be able to manage alone, without Mishka. He wondered what the weather would be like at night, and looked at the sky. He lowered his eyes and glanced down the street.

A half a dozen paces away, on the cobbles, leaning back against the curb, sat a young lad in a coarse blue homespun blouse and trousers of the same material, bast shoes on his feet, and a dilapidated brown cap on his head. Beside him lay a small knapsack and a scythe without a haft, wrapped in straw and carefully tied with string. The lad was broad-shouldered, thickset, fair-haired, and had a sunburnt weather-beaten face and large blue eyes, which looked at Chelkash trustfully and good-naturedly.

Chelkash bared his teeth, poked his tongue out, and pulling a horrible face, stared at the lad with wide-open eyes.

The lad blinked in perplexity at first, but soon he burst out laughing and shouted between his chuckles: "Aren't you funny!" And then, scarcely rising from the ground, he shifted awkwardly over to Chelkash, dragging his knapsack through the dust and rattling the heel of his scythe over the cobble-stones.

"Been on the booze, eh, brother?" he asked Chelkash, tugging at the latter's trousers.

"Yes, baby, something like that!" confessed Chelkash with a smile. He at once took a fancy to this sturdy, good-natured lad with the bright childish eyes. "You've been out haymaking, eh?" he enquired.

"Yes! . . . But it was plenty of work and little pay. I made nothing by it. And the people! Hundreds of them! Those people from the famine districts came pouring in and knocked the price down. The job was hardly worth taking. In the Kuban they paid only sixty kopecks. Something awful! . . . And they say that before they used to pay three, four and five rubles!"

"Before! . . . Before they used to pay three rubles just to look at a Russian! I used to do this job myself about ten years ago. I would go to a stanitsa* and say—I'm a Russian! And they'd look me up and down, feel my arms, shake their heads in wonder and say: 'Here, take three rubles!' And then they'd give you food and drink, and invite you to stay as long as you like!"

The lad listened to what Chelkash was saying with mouth wide open and amazement and admiration written on his round, tanned face; but soon he realized that the hobo was pulling his leg, and, smacking his lips, he burst into a hearty laugh. Chelkash kept a straight face, hiding his smile under his moustache.

"I'm a boob! You talk as if it was all true, and I listen to it and believe it. . . . But, still, so help me God, things were better there before!"

"Well, and what am I saying? Ain't I saying that before things were. . . ."

"Stop kidding!" interrupted the boy with a wave of his hand. "What are you, a shoemaker? Or a tailor? You, I mean."

"Me?" asked Chelkash in his turn, and after thinking for a moment, he said: "I'm a fisherman."

"A fish-er-man! Is that so! So you catch fish?"

"Fish! Why fish? The fishermen here don't only catch fish. Mostly it's drowned bodies, lost anchors, sunken ships—things like that. They have special hooks for this work. . . ."

"Yah! It's all lies! . . . They must be the fishermen they sing about in the song:

*Cossack village. — *Trans.*

*On arid shores
We spread our nets,
And barns and sheds we trawl. . . .*

"Have you ever met fishermen like that?" asked Chelkash with a smile, looking hard at the boy.

"Met them? No, where could I have met them? But I've heard about them. . . ."

"What do you think of them?"

"That kind of fisherman, you mean? Well . . . they're not a bad lot. They're free. They have freedom. . . ."

"What's freedom to you? . . . Do you like freedom?"

"What do you think? Be your own master. Go where you like, do what you like. . . . I should say so! You can keep yourself straight and have no milestone round your neck. Have a good time, and nothing to worry about, except keep God in mind. What could be better?"

Chelkash spat contemptuously and turned his head away.

"With me it's like this," continued the boy. "My father's dead. We've only a patch of a farm. My mother's old. The land's all dried up. What can I do? I've got to live. But how? I don't know. I think to myself—I'll go and be a son-in-law in a good house. But what's the use? It would be all right if the father-in-law gave his daughter a share of his property, and we could set up for ourselves. But do you think he'd do that? Not a bit. The devil wants to keep it all for himself and expects me to slave for him . . . for years! You see what I mean? But if I could earn a hundred or a hundred and fifty rubles, I'd be independent, and I'd say to the father-in-law—you can keep your property! If you give Marfa a share, all well and good. But if you don't . . . thank God she's not the only girl in the village! I'd be quite free. On my own. . . . Y-e-s!" The boy heaved a deep sigh and went on to say: "But what can I do now? Nothing. I'll have to go and slave for a father-in-law. I thought I'd go to the Kuban and earn a couple of hundred rubles, and then everything would be all right. I'd be able to live like a gentleman. But I didn't make anything. So I'll have to go as a labourer after all. . . . I'll never have my own farm now! Ah, well!"

It was quite evident that the lad was extremely reluctant to go as a son-in-law, for as he finished speaking his face became beclouded with grief and he squirmed as he lay on the ground.

Chelkash asked him:

"Where are you bound for now?"

"Home, of course! Where else?"

"How do I know? You might be bound for Turkey. . . ."

"T-u-rkey!" drawled the boy in astonishment. "What Christians go to Turkey? That's a nice thing to say!"

"You're a fool!" said Chelkash, heaving a sigh and turning his head away again. This sturdy peasant lad stirred something in him. . . .

He became conscious of a vague, but steadily growing feeling of vexation gnawing at the pit of his stomach which prevented him from concentrating his mind on the task he had before him that night.

Offended by the snub which had just been administered to him, the boy muttered something under his breath and now and again cast a sidelong glance at the hobo. He pouted his lips, puffed out his cheeks, and far too rapidly blinked his eyes in the most comical fashion. He was obviously disappointed at the conversation with this bewhiskered tramp having been brought to such an abrupt close.

But the tramp paid no more attention to him. He sat on the curbstone engrossed in thought, whistling softly to himself, and beating time with his dirty, bare heel.

The lad wanted to pay him out for the snub.

"Hey, fisherman! Do you often go on the booze?" he began, but the "fisherman" suddenly turned his face towards him and asked:

"Listen, baby! Do you want to do a job of work with me tonight? Tell me quick!"

"What kind of job?" the lad asked suspiciously.

"What do you mean, what kind? Any kind I give you. . . . We'll go fishing. You'll row the boat."

"Oh, all right. Not so bad. I don't mind taking a job. But . . . I won't get into trouble with you, will I? You're a dark one. . . . There's no understanding you."

Chelkash again became conscious of a feeling like heartburn rising in his chest. In a low voice of cold anger he said:

"Then don't chatter about what you don't understand. . . . If you're not careful I'll give you a crack over the head that'll make you understand."

His eyes flashed. He jumped up from the curbstone, twirled his moustache with the fingers of his left hand and clenched his right hand into a hard brawny fist.

The boy was frightened. He glanced round rapidly, blinked timidly, and also sprang to his feet. The two stood looking each other up and down in silence.

"Well!" asked Chelkash sternly. He was burning and trembling with rage at the insult he had received from this callow youth whom he had despised when talking to him, but whom he now hated because he had such a healthy, tanned face, bright blue eyes and short sturdy arms, and because he lived in a village somewhere, had a home there, and some

rich farmer was asking him to be his son-in-law; because of his whole past and present, but most of all because this lad, who was only a baby compared with himself, dared to love freedom, the value of which he did not appreciate, and which he did not need. It is always unpleasant to see a man whom you regard as being inferior to and lower than yourself love or hate the same things that you love and hate and thereby resemble you.

The lad glared at Chelkash and felt that the latter was his master.

"Oh . . . I don't mind," he said, "I'm looking for a job, ain't I? It's all the same to me who I work for, you or somebody else. All I wanted to say was . . . you don't look like a working man, you're . . . er . . . so ragged. Of course, I know it might happen to anybody. Lord, haven't I seen enough drunkards! Lots of them! And some even worse than you."

"All right, all right! So you agree?" Chelkash interrupted in a milder tone.

"Me? Why, of course! With pleasure! But how much will you pay me?"

"I pay according to results. It depends on the results. . . . On the catch. D'you understand? You might get a fiver. Will that be all right?"

Now that it was a question of money the peasant wanted to be definite, and he wanted his employer to be definite too. Again distrust and suspicion awoke in his mind.

"No, that doesn't suit me, brother!"

Chelkash also began to play the part.

"Don't argue. Wait! Let's go to the pub!" he said.

They walked down the street side by side. Chelkash twirled his moustache with the important air of an employer. The lad's face expressed complete readiness to obey, and at the same time complete distrust and apprehension.

"What's your name?" Chelkash asked him.

"Gavrila," the boy answered.

When they entered the dingy smoke-begrimed tavern, Chelkash walked up to the bar and in the familiar tone of a frequenter ordered a bottle of vodka, some shchi, roast meat, and tea. When all this was served, he curtly said to the barman: "On tick!" The barman silently nodded his head. This scene impressed Gavrila and roused in him a profound respect for this man, his master, who was so well known and enjoyed such credit in spite of his disreputable appearance.

"Well, we'll have a bite now and then talk business. But wait here a moment, I have somewhere to go," said Chelkash.

He went out. Gavrila looked around him. The tavern was in a basement; it was damp and dismal, and a suffocating smell of vodka fumes, stale tobacco smoke, tar, and of some other pungent substance per-

vaded the place. At a table, opposite Gavrila, sat a red-bearded drunken man in seaman's dress, covered from head to foot with coal dust and tar. Hiccoughing every now and again, he sang a song in twisted and broken words that sometimes sounded like a hiss and sometimes were deeply guttural. He was evidently not a Russian.

Behind him sat two Moldavian women, ragged, black-haired and sunburnt, and they too were drunkenly singing a song.

Out of the gloom other figures emerged, all strangely dishevelled, and half drunk, noisy and restless. . . .

Gavrila began to feel afraid and longed for the return of his master. All the noises of the tavern merged in one monotonous tone, and it seemed as though some enormous beast was growling, as though, possessing hundreds of different voices, it was angrily and blindly struggling to get out of this stone pit, but was unable to find the exit. Gavrila felt as though his body was absorbing something intoxicating and heavy, which made him dizzy and dimmed his eyes, which were roaming round the tavern with curiosity mixed with fear. . . .

Chelkash came back and they began to eat and drink, talking as they proceeded with their meal. After the third glass of vodka, Gavrila was drunk. He felt merry and wanted to say something to please his master, who was such a fine fellow and had given him this splendid treat. But the words which welled up in his throat in waves could not, for some reason, slip off his tongue, which had suddenly become so strangely heavy.

Chelkash looked at him and said with an ironic smile:

"Half seas over already! Ekh, you milksop! What will you be like after the fifth glass? . . . Will you be able to work?"

"Don't . . . be . . . afraid . . . brother," stammered Gavrila. "You'll . . . be . . . satisfied. I love you! Let me kiss you, eh?"

"Now then, none of that! Here, have another drink!"

Gavrila took another drink, and another, until everything around him began to float in even, undulating waves. This made him feel unwell and he wanted to vomit. His face looked foolishly solemn. When he tried to talk he smacked his lips in a comical way and mooed like a cow. Chelkash gazed at him absently, as if recalling something, thoughtfully twirling his moustache and smiling sadly.

The tavern rang with a drunken roar. The red-haired seaman was sleeping with his head resting on his elbows.

"All right, let's go," said Chelkash, getting up from the table.

Gavrila tried to get up too, but could not. He swore, and laughed idiotically as drunken men do.

"What a wash-out!" muttered Chelkash, resuming his seat at the table opposite Gavrila.

Gavrila kept on chuckling and gazing stupidly at his master. The latter stared back at him, keenly and thoughtfully. He saw before him a man whose life had fallen into his wolfish clutches. He felt that this life was in his power to turn in any direction he pleased. He could crumple it like a playing card, or could help place it in a firm peasant groove. He felt that he was the other one's master, but through his mind ran the thought that this lad would never have to drain the cup of bitterness that fate had compelled him, Chelkash, to do. . . . He both envied and pitied this young life, he despised it, and was even conscious of a feeling of regret as he pictured the possibility of it falling into other hands like his own. . . . But in the end all these feelings merged into one that was both paternal and practical. He was sorry for the lad, but he needed him. He took Gavrila under the armpits, lifted him up and gently prodding him from behind with his knee, he pushed him out into the tavern yard, laid him in the shade of a wood-pile, sat down beside him and lit his pipe. Gavrila wriggled about for a while, moaned, and fell asleep.

II

"Are you ready?" Chelkash in an undertone asked Gavrila, who was fumbling with the oars.

"In a minute! This rowlock's loose. Can I give it just one bang with the oar?"

"No! Don't make a sound! Force it down with your hand and it will slip into its place."

Both were noiselessly handling a boat that was moored to the stern of one of a whole flotilla of small sailing barges laden with oak staves, and of large Turkish feluccas laden with palm and sandal wood and thick cyprus logs.

The night was dark. Heavy banks of ragged clouds floated across the sky. The sea was calm. The water, black and thick, like oil, gave off a humid, saline smell and lazily lapped against the ship's sides and the beach, gently rocking Chelkash's boat. Far from the shore loomed the dark hulls of ships, their masts pointing to the sky, tipped with different coloured lights. The sea, reflecting these lights, was dotted with innumerable coloured patches, which shimmered on its soft, black, velvety surface. The sea was sound asleep, like a labourer after a hard day's work.

"We're off!" said Gavrila, dropping his oars into the water.

"Aye, aye!" said Chelkash, pulling hard with his steering oar to bring the boat into the strip of water between the barges. The boat sped