ALEXANDER
SOLZHENITSYN

Winner of the Nobel Prize 1970

ONE DAY
IN THE LIFE OF
IVAN
DENISOVICH
Alexander Isayevich Solzhenitsyn was born in 1918 in Kislovodsk, a spa in the Caucasus. He was educated at Rostov University where he studied mathematics and physics while simultaneously taking a correspondence course in literature. After the outbreak of war in 1941 Solzhenitsyn joined the army, serving at the front as a gunner and artillery officer. He was twice decorated and in early 1945 promoted to the rank of captain. That same year he was arrested in an East Prussian village, charged with making derogatory remarks about Stalin, and sentenced to eight years hard labour in prison camps. He served the first part of his sentence in the Arctic, then was transferred to a special prison in Moscow because of his training as a physicist. This latter experience provided the basis for The First Circle (1968). The final term of his imprisonment was spent in a ‘special’ camp for political prisoners in north Kazakhstan, the setting for One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich.

When Stalin died in 1953 Solzhenitsyn was released, but forced to spend the next three years in exile in southern Kazakhstan during which time he contracted near-fatal cancer. He then moved to Ryazan where he taught mathematics at a local school while writing prose in secret.

In 1962, Solzhenitsyn made his remarkable literary debut with the publication of One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich, authorised personally by Kruschev. It was an immediate bestseller, winning Solzhenitsyn enormous acclaim at home and abroad. Two further stories were officially published in the Soviet Union but from 1964 onwards, Solzhenitsyn’s struggle to get his work printed met with systematic opposition from the authorities. In 1969, he was finally expelled from the Soviet Writers’ Union. World recognition for his outstanding literary talent was confirmed when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1970, but as his reputation both as a writer and political dissident grew in the West, so his position within the Soviet Union became increasingly intolerable and in 1974 Solzhenitsyn, with his family, was sent into permanent exile.

Solzhenitsyn now lives and works in the United States.
Also by Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Novels
The First Circle
Cancer Ward
August 1914
Lenin in Zurich

Plays
The Love-Girl and the Innocent
Candle in the Wind

Stories
Stories and Prose Poems

Non-Fiction
One Word of Truth (The Nobel Speech on Literature)
Gulag Archipelago (Volumes I and II)
Warning to the Western World

Autobiography
A Calf Banged its Head against an Oak

Letters
Letter to Soviet Leaders
A Lenten Letter to Pimen, Patriarch of all Russia

Poetry
Prussian Nights
Alexander Solzhenitsyn

One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich

Translated by Gillon Aitken
At 5.00 a.m., as usual, reveille was sounded — a hammer banged against a rail just by the staff hut. The intermittent ringing came faintly through the window-panes, two fingers thick with frost, and died away rapidly: it was cold, and the warder did not want to go on banging for long.

The noise stopped, and outside the window it was pitch-dark when Shukhov got up to go to the latrines; it was as dark as night. Then the yellow light from three lamps — two on the perimeter, one inside the camp — fell on the window.

For some reason nobody had come to open up the hut; and there was no sound of the orderlies lifting the latrine barrel onto poles in order to carry it away.

Shukhov never overslept reveille, but always got up at once, which gave him, until parade, about ninety minutes to himself, unsupervised, and anyone who knew camp life could always earn himself something — by sewing a cover for someone’s mittens out of a piece of old lining; by fetching some well-off gang-leader’s dry felt boots — right up to his bunk so that the fellow would not have to stumble barefoot about the pile looking for his own — or by going around to the store-rooms where someone might want to make use of him, sweeping or carrying this or that; by going to the mess-hall to pick up the bowls from the tables and take them in piles to the dish-washer — there was always a chance of getting something to eat, although
there were too many others with the same idea, and, what’s worse, if you found something left in a bowl, you couldn’t resist starting to lick it out. And Shukhov had never forgotten the words of his first gang-leader, Kuzyomin – an old lag who had already been inside for twelve years in 1943 – as he told some new arrivals from the front while they sat by a bonfire in a barren forest clearing:

‘Here, lads, it’s the law of the jungle. But even here people can live. The first to go under is the fellow who licks out bowls, who puts his trust in the infirmary, or who squeals on his mates.’

He wasn’t so right about the squealers, they could get by all right – but at the expense of other people’s blood.

Shukhov always got up at reveille, but today he didn’t. He had been feeling rotten since the previous evening, feverish and with pains all over his body. He had not been able to keep warm through the night. In his sleep he had felt at one moment that he was becoming really ill, at another that he was improving. He had dreaded the morning.

But the morning came as it always did.

Anyway, how could he have got warm – the ice thick on the window, and a white cobweb of frost all along the hut where the walls joined the ceiling?

Shukhov did not get up. He lay on his top bunk, his head covered by a blanket and coat, his feet tucked into the sleeves – folded back at the ends – of his jacket. He could not see, but he understood by the noises around, what was going on in the hut and in the corner occupied by his gang. There: the heavy tread along the corridor of the orderlies carrying one of the twenty-one gallon latrine barrels. This was considered light work, a job for a sick
man, but to carry the thing without spilling it! Then some men from Gang 75 slammed onto the floor a pile of felt boots got from the drying-room. Then some men from his own gang did the same (today it was the turn of his gang to dry their felt boots). The gang-leader and his second-in-command put on their boots quietly, although their bunks creaked as they did so. The second-in-command would now go out to the bread-store, the leader to the Production Planning Department (PPD) at the staff hut.

But Shukhov remembered that this would not simply be a routine trip to the PPD for orders. Today was a fateful day: they wanted to transfer their gang — 104 — from the construction of workshops to a new project, the ‘Socialist Community Centre’. The Centre was nothing but a barren field covered with snow-drifts, and before anything could be done there, they would have to dig holes, erect posts and put up barbed wire between the posts — to prevent themselves from escaping. And only then could they begin to build.

You could be sure that for a month there would be nowhere to get warm, not even a hovel. And it would be impossible to have a fire — where to get the fuel? The only hope would be to keep warm through work.

The gang-leader was worried, would have to try to arrange matters — to push some other gang, less alert, into the job. Of course, he wouldn’t get anywhere if he went empty-handed. It would mean a pound of lard to the senior official, perhaps two.

There’s no harm in trying, why not go up to the infirmary and aim for a few days off work? Anyway, his whole body ached.
Then – which warder's on duty today?

He remembered – 'One-and-a-half' Ivan, a tall, gaunt, black-eyed sergeant. The first time you saw him, you thought what a terror, but when you got to know him, he was the most lenient of all the warders – wouldn't slap you in the cells, wouldn't drag you up before the chief disciplinary officer. So it was all right to stay in his bunk for a while – until Hut 9 had to go to the mess-hall.

The bunk began to rock and shake. Two of his neighbours started to get up at the same time – parallel to him, the Baptist Alyoshka, and below, the ex-naval captain Buinovsky.

Having carried out both the latrine barrels, two elderly orderlies began to quarrel as to who should go for the hot water. They nagged away at each other like a couple of old women. The electric welder in Gang 20 roared at them:

'Hey, you two babblers' – and he flung a boot at them – 'I'll shut you up!'

The boot thudded against a post. The orderlies shut up.

The second-in-command of the gang next to them growled softly:

'Vasily Fyodorovich! They've cheated us at the supply-store, the swine: we should have four 900-gram loaves, and we've only got three. Who's going to go short?'

He spoke quietly but, of course, everybody in the gang heard him and held his breath: who would get less bread than he should this evening?

Shukhov continued to lie on the hard-packed sawdust of his mattress. If only it could be one thing or another – either a real fever or an end to the pain. It was neither the one nor the other.

While the Baptist was whispering his prayers,
Buiiovsky returned from the latrines and announced to nobody in particular, but with a kind of glee:

‘Well, men, buck up then! It’s thirty below for sure.’

Shukhov decided to go to the infirmary.

And then some powerful hand stripped his jacket and blanket off him. Shukhov snatched his coat from his face and began to sit up. Below him, his head level with the top of the bunk, stood the spare figure of ‘the Tartar’.

So he had come on duty out of turn and stolen up on them.

‘S–854,’ the Tartar read from the white strip sewn to the back of Shukhov’s black coat, ‘three days in the cells with work!’

As soon as his oddly strangled voice was heard, everyone not already up throughout the half-dark hut, where not all the lights were on and where two hundred men slept in fifty bug-ridden bunks, immediately came to life and began rapidly to get dressed.

‘But why, Comrade Warder?’ asked Shukhov in a voice expressive of greater self-pity than he felt.

‘With work’ – it could have been twice as bad. They gave you hot food, and you didn’t have time to start thinking. The cells without work – that was the full treatment.

‘For not getting up at reveille. Come with me to the Commandant’s office,’ the Tartar explained indifferently – because he, and Shukhov, and everybody else understood perfectly well what the punishment was for.

There was no expression on the Tartar’s hairless, crumpled face. He turned, looking for another victim, but everybody, in the darker parts of the hut and under the lights, on the lower bunks and on the higher, was pushing his legs into the black, padded trousers with
numbers on the left knee, or, already dressed, was wrapping himself up and hastening outside – to keep out of the Tartar’s way until he left.

If Shukhov had been punished for some other offence, he would not have been so pained. What upset him was that he was always one of the first to get up. But he knew it was impossible to plead with the Tartar. And, while continuing to remonstrate for form’s sake, Shukhov at the same time pulled on his padded trousers (which also had a worn, bedraggled scrap of cloth sewn above the left knee, with the number S–854 painted on it in black and already faded), put on his jacket (which had two numbers on it – one on the front and one on the back), and went out after the Tartar.

The whole of Gang 104 saw Shukhov go, but nobody said a word: what would have been the use, and what could you say? The gang-leader might have been able to do something, but he wasn’t there. And Shukhov did not say anything to anybody, not wishing to anger the Tartar. Knowing what was up, the gang would keep his breakfast for him.

So the two of them went out.

The foggy, bitter cold made you catch your breath. Two large searchlights swept across the parade-ground from the far corner watch-towers. The lights on the perimeter, and those inside the camp, were all on. There were so many of them that they outshone the stars.

Their felt boots crunching on the snow, prisoners were running quickly by, each about his business – to the latrines, to a store-room, to the post-room, to the kitchen to hand in meals to be individually cooked. All had their heads pressed into their shoulders, their coats buttoned
up, and all felt the cold not so much on account of the frost as of the realisation that they would have to spend the entire day in it. But the Tartar in his old greatcoat with the dirty blue tabs walked on steadily, as though quite impervious.

They walked past the high wooden fence around the stone-built prison block inside the camp; past the barbed wire which guarded the camp bakery from the inmates; past the corner of the staff hut where the frost-covered rail (used to sound reveille) was fixed to a post by thick wire; past another post where – in a sheltered place to prevent it falling too low – hung the thermometer, coated with frost. Shukhov cast a hopeful sideways glance at the milk-white tube: if it showed −41, they ought not to be sent out to work. But today it wasn’t even near −40.

They went into the staff hut – straight to the warders’ room. There it became clear – as Shukhov had already begun to suspect on the way – that he wasn’t going to be punished after all, but that the floor of the warders’ room simply needed cleaning. The Tartar explained to Shukhov that he was going to let him off, and ordered him to scrub the floor.

Scrubbing the floor of the warders’ room was the job of a special prisoner not sent outside the camp to work – the staff hut orderly. He had long since made things good for himself in the staff hut; he had access to the offices of the Major, the chief disciplinary officer and the security officer. While serving them, he from time to time heard things which even the warders did not know, and for some time he had reckoned that to scrub floors for ordinary warders was somewhat beneath him. He had been summoned once or twice by the warders for this purpose, but
they had grown to understand how the land lay, and had begun to call upon other prisoners to do the job.

The stove in the warders' room was burning fiercely. Two warders, undressed down to their grimy tunics, were playing draughts, and a third, still with his belted sheepskin coat and felt boots on, was asleep on a narrow bench. A bucket and rag stood in the corner.

Shukhov was delighted and thanked the Tartar for letting him off:

'Thank you, Comrade Warder! Now I'll never lie in late again.'

The rule here was simple: finish and go. Now that Shukhov had been given some work, his aches and pains had stopped. He took the bucket and, without his mittens, which in his hurry he had forgotten to take from under his pillow, went to the well.

The gang-leaders who had gone to the PPD had collected together near the thermometer post, and one of the younger ones, formerly a Hero of the Soviet Union, climbed up it and wiped the thermometer.

The others shouted their advice from below:

'Don't breathe on it, or it'll go up.'

'Go up? Fucking likely! I won't affect it.'

Tyurin, Shukhov's gang's leader, was not there. Shukhov put down the bucket and pushed his hands into his sleeves. He looked on with curiosity.

The man on the pole said hoarsely:

'—27½. Shit!'  

And, taking another look to verify this, he jumped down,

'But it's never right — it always lies,' someone said. 'Why hang up a true one?'
The gang-leaders dispersed. Shukhov ran to the well. The frost bit at his ears under his ear-flaps, which were lowered but not tied.

The top of the well was so thickly covered with ice that the bucket would scarcely go through the hole. And the rope was frozen stiff.

His hands numb, he returned to the warders' room with the steaming bucket and thrust his hands into the well water. It warmed him.

The Tartar wasn't there, but four warders were, standing together. They had stopped playing draughts and sleeping, and were arguing about how much millet they'd get in January (food supplies were bad in the nearby settlement, and the warders, although ration cards had long since gone out, could buy certain products at a discount which the locals couldn't get).

'Shut the door, you swine! There's a draught!' shouted one of the warders.

Nothing to gain by getting your felt boots wet in the morning. There was nothing else to change into even if you could run back to barracks. During eight years' detention, Shukhov had experienced many different styles of footwear: he had lived through the winter without felt boots at all, had not even had leather boots — only bast shoes or 'Chetezes' (made from rubber tyres). Nowadays the boot situation was looking rosier: in October Shukhov had received — by dint of accompanying the second-in-command of his gang to the store — a pair of sturdy, hard-wearing boots, with room inside for a couple of warm footcloths. For a week he went around as proud as Punch, clicking his new heels together. And then in December felt boots arrived — and it was good to be alive. Then some
devil in the book-keeping office whispered in the Commandant's ear that felt boots should be issued only to those who gave up their other boots. It was not right that a prisoner should have two pairs of boots at the same time. So Shukhov had to make a choice – whether to get through the whole winter in the boots he'd got in October, or to give them up and wear felt boots even when it began to thaw. The care he had lavished on those new boots received in October – softening the leather with grease! Nothing had been harder to lose in all those eight years than those boots. They had been tossed into a single, communal heap, and he'd never be able to find them again in the spring.

Now Shukhov had an idea. He nimbly got out of his felt boots, stood them in a corner, shoved his footcloths into them (his spoon tinkled on the floor: quickly as he had prepared himself for punishment, he hadn't forgotten his spoon) and, barefoot, began to slosh the water right under the warders' felt boots.

'Hey, take it easy, you swine!' one of the warders shouted, lifting his feet onto a chair.

'Rice? Rice is on a different quota, you can't compare rice . . .!'

'How much water are you using, idiot? That's not the way to wash a floor, is it?'

'Comrade Warder, I can't clean it otherwise. The dirt's ingrained . . .'

'Didn't you ever see your woman scrubbing the floor, pig?'

Shukhov straightened up, holding the dripping rag in his hand. He smiled innocently, revealing the gaps in his teeth, thinned out by scurvy at Ust-Izhma in 1943, when
he thought he’d been on his last legs. So much so that his bowels had been running blood, and his worn-out stomach could not hold anything down. Now only a lisp remained from those times.

‘They took me away from my woman, Comrade Warder, in ’41. I can’t even remember what she was like.’

‘That’s the way the bastards scrub . . . They don’t know how to do anything and don’t want to. They’re not worth the bread we give them. We should feed them on shit.’

‘Anyway, what the fuck’s the point in washing the place every day? It only gets damp. Now, look here, 854. Just wipe it over lightly to moisten it a bit, and then get out fast.’

‘Rice! You can’t compare rice with millet!’

Shukhov was smart about getting along . . .

Work – it was like a stick: it had two ends. If you were working for proper people, then give them quality; for a fool, then just pretend to.

Otherwise, everybody would have given up the ghost long ago, that’s for sure.

Shukhov wiped the floor-boards, leaving no dry patches, threw the rag behind the stove without bothering to squeeze it out, put on his felt boots by the door, splashed the rest of the water out of the bucket onto the path used by the authorities, and, following the quickest route, hurried past the bath-house and the dark, cold club to the mess-hall.

He still had to get to the infirmary – he was aching all over again. And he still had to avoid being caught by the warder outside the mess-hall: the Commandant had given strict orders that prisoners unaccompanied should be picked up and chucked into the cells.
Today there was no crowd, no queue in front of the mess-hall – a rare occasion. He was able to go straight in.

Inside it was as steamy as in the bath-house – what with the frosty air coming through the doors and the steam from the gruel. Members of the gangs were sitting at tables or crowding in the areas between them, waiting for places. Yelling to each other across the crush, two or three workers from each gang were carrying bowls of gruel and porridge on wooden trays and trying to find places for them on the tables. And even so, they don’t hear you, the dolts, and upset your tray – and splash, splash! If you have a free hand – then give it to them in the neck! That’s the way! Don’t stand there in the way, looking for something to lick up.

There, at one table, before dipping in his spoon, a young man was crossing himself. That meant a Western Ukrainian and a new arrival.

As for the Russians, they had even forgotten which hand to cross themselves with.

It was cold sitting in the mess-hall, and most men ate with their caps on, but not hurrying, picking out rotten little bits of fish from under the black cabbage leaves and spitting the bones out on the table. When there was a pile of bones on the table, and before a new gang came to sit down, someone would sweep the bones off, and there, on the floor, they’d be ground underfoot.

To spit the bones directly onto the floor was somehow considered to be bad manners.

In the middle of the mess-hall ran two rows of supporting posts, and near one of these sat Fetyukov, a member of Shukhov’s gang, who had kept his breakfast for him. Fetyukov was one of the lowest members of the gang,
counting for even less than Shukhov. Externally, all the members of the gang were equal in status — the same black coats and numbers — but beneath there were sharp distinctions. You wouldn't get Buinovskiy to look after your bowl for you, and Shukhov would not take on any old job either.

Fetyukov caught sight of Shukhov and sighed as he gave up his place.

'Vet's all cold. I was going to eat if for you. I thought you were in the cells.'

He didn't bother to wait, knowing that there would be nothing left from Shukhov's bowl - that both the bowls he had collected would be scraped clean.

Shukhov pulled his spoon out of his boot. The spoon was dear to him, and had been with him all over the North. He had cast it himself in sand from aluminium wire. There was an inscription on it: 'Ust-Izhma, 1944'.

Then he took off his cap from his clean-shaven head — however cold it was, he couldn't bring himself to eat with his cap on — and, stirring the now cold gruel, took a quick look to see what was in the bowl. A medium haul. It had not been poured from the top of the cauldron, nor from the bottom either. Fetyukov wouldn't be above pinching a potato while he was guarding the bowl.

The only decent thing about the gruel was that it was usually hot, but Shukhov's had grown completely cold. Nevertheless, he began to eat it as slowly and deliberately as always. No need to hurry - even if the roof caught fire. Not counting sleep, a prisoner lived for himself only for ten minutes in the morning at breakfast, five at the lunch break and five at supper.

The gruel did not change from day to day - it depended on the type of vegetable stored for use in winter. Last year
it was salted carrots — which meant nothing but carrots in the gruel from September to June. This year, black cabbage. The most satisfying time of the year for the prisoner was June, out of season for vegetables, when they substituted groats. The worst time was July: shredded nettles in the cauldron.

Bones were almost all that remained of the fish, the meat having been boiled off the bones and reduced to nothing except for odd bits on the head and tail. Not leaving a single scale or the tiniest piece of meat on the brittle skeleton, Shukhov still crunched his teeth, sucked the bones dry, and then spat them out onto the table. He ate everything — the gills, the tail, the eyes when they had not fallen out of their sockets; but when they had been boiled out and floated separately in the bowl — great fish-eyes! — then he did not eat them. He was laughed at for that.

Today Shukhov economised: because he hadn’t been back to the hut, he had not received his bread ration, and now he ate without bread. The bread he would be able to eat later; it could even be more satisfying.

After the gruel there was magara porridge. It had frozen into a single, solid lump, and Shukhov had to break it into little pieces. It was not only that the porridge was cold — even when hot, it was tasteless and quite unfilling: it was just grass, only yellow and looked like millet. They had had the idea of giving them it instead of groats. It was said to come from China. 300 grams of it boiled a day — that was the ration. It certainly wasn’t porridge, but it passed for porridge.

Licking his spoon and returning it to the same place in his felt boot, Shukhov put on his cap and set off for the infirmary.
The sky was still quite black, and it was impossible to see the stars for the lights of the camp. The broad beams of two searchlights continually swept the parade-ground. When this camp, a ‘special’ camp, had been established, the warders had had a lot of flares of a type used at the front, and if the electricity failed, they let off flares all over the parade-ground, white, yellow, red, just as if it were the front. Later they stopped using them. Perhaps they thought it was too expensive?

It was just as dark as it was at reveille, but to the experienced eye it was obvious from various small signs that they would soon be called out on parade.

Khromoi’s assistant (Khromoi was the mess-orderly who was able to feed and keep an assistant out of his own pocket) went off to summon Hut 6 — occupied by those who were sick and did not leave the camp — to breakfast. An old artist with a little beard shuffled towards the Culture and Education Section (cEs) to fetch paint and a brush with which to paint the numbers on prison uniforms. Once again the Tartar strode rapidly across the parade-ground in the direction of the staff hut. Generally speaking, there were not so many people about — which meant that everybody had gone to cover and was warming himself up during these last sweet minutes.

Shukhov was shrewd enough to hide from the Tartar behind a corner of a hut — if he got caught again, he really would be for it. You could never let up for a moment. It was essential not to get yourself spotted alone by one of the warders — stick to the crowd. He might be on the lookout for someone to do a job, or on whom to vent his temper. They had posted up a new order in the hut that you had to take off your cap to a warder five paces
before passing him and put it on again two paces after. Some of the warders wandered around like blind men, not caring a damn, but for others the new order was a real bonus. A lot of prisoners had been slapped in the cells on account of their caps. Oh no, safer to stay round the corner.

The Tartar passed by, and Shukhov finally made up his mind definitely to go to the infirmary — when it occurred to him that surely it was this morning that the tall Latvian from Hut 7 had told him to come before parade to buy a couple of jars of home-grown tobacco. It had gone clean out of his head he’d been in such a bustle. The tall Latvian had received a parcel the previous evening, and perhaps there would be no tobacco left by tomorrow, and then he would have to wait a whole month before the Latvian got a new parcel. The Latvian’s tobacco was good, strong-flavoured and fragrant and brownish in colour.

Shukhov felt put out and stopped in his tracks — oughtn’t he to go to Hut 7? But he was now so close to the infirmary that he jogged up the steps. The snow crunched under his feet.

Inside the hospital, the corridor was, as usual, so clean that he was afraid to step on the floor. The walls were painted with a white enamel paint, and all the furniture was white as well.

But the office doors were all shut. The doctors could not yet have got out of bed. In the orderly room, a medical assistant — a young man called Kolya Vdovushkin — sat behind a clean little table, wearing a gleaming white coat; he was writing something.

There was nobody else around.

Shukhov took off his cap as if in front of one of the authorities and, in accepted camp fashion, letting his eyes
slide where they had no business, he could not help noticing that Nikolai was writing in beautifully straight lines, each line set in from the edge of the paper and beginning, one below the other, with a capital letter. Shukhov understood immediately that this was not work, but something private and none of his business.

‘Look here, Nikolai Semyonich, I’m feeling ... sort of ... sick,’ Shukhov said somewhat shamefacedly, as if trying to claim something he had no right to.

Vdovushkin looked up from his work, calm and wide-eyed. There were no numbers visible on his white cap and his white coat.

‘Why are you so late? Why didn’t you come yesterday evening? Don’t you know that we can’t see people in the morning? The sick-list has already gone to the PPD.’

All this Shukhov knew. And he knew that it was no easier to get on the sick-list in the evening.

‘But, Kolya ... in the evening, when it should have ... it didn’t ache.’

‘But what is it? What is it that aches?’

‘Well, when you think about it, nothing does. I just feel bad all over.’

Shukhov was not one of those who hung about the infirmary, and Vdovushkin knew that. But he was permitted to put only two men on the sick-list in the morning — and he had already done that, and the names of these two with a line drawn under them were already written down on a single sheet lying beneath the greenish glass top of the table.

‘You should have thought of that earlier. What do you think you are up to — coming here just before parade? Come on, then.’
Vdovushkin took a thermometer from a jar from which a number of thermometers projected through a gauze covering, wiped it and gave it to Shukhov.

Shukhov sat down on a bench near the wall, right on the edge of it, only not so that it would overturn with him. He did not choose this uncomfortable position on purpose, but as an involuntary expression that the infirmary was unfamiliar to him and that his purpose was somehow unimportant.

Vdovushkin went on writing.

The infirmary was in the most remote corner of the camp, and no sounds could be heard from outside. No clocks ticked here – the prisoners were not permitted to carry watches; the authorities told the time for them. Even the mice did not scratch – they’d all been caught by the hospital cat, put there for that purpose.

It was delightful for Shukhov to sit in such a clean room, in such quietness, under a bright light, with nothing to do for a full five minutes. He gazed at all the walls – but found nothing there. He looked at his jacket – the number on his chest had become indistinct and would have to be renewed if he were to keep out of trouble. With his free hand he felt the beard on his face – quite a stubble had grown since his last bath more than ten days previously. But he didn’t mind that. He would be having another bath in about three days’ time, and he could shave then. No point in waiting in the barber’s queue. He didn’t have to beautify himself for anybody.

Then, looking at Vdovushkin’s gleaming white cap, Shukhov remembered the hospital on the banks of the river Lovat, how he had arrived there with an injured
jaw and — fool that he was! — of his own free will returned to the front. And he could have had five days in bed.

And now he dreamed of going sick for two or three weeks, not fatally or anything requiring an operation, but just so that he could be sent to the hospital and be able to lie there for three weeks without moving; and even if the hospital food was pretty meagre, it wouldn't matter.

But Shukhov remembered that now you couldn't even lie back in the camp hospital. A new doctor had shown up from some transit prison or other, Stepan Grigorich, a busy, loud-voiced man who gave neither himself nor his patients any peace: he had had the idea of sending all those patients who could actually walk to work around the hospital — making fences, laying paths, carrying soil to the flower-beds; and in winter there was snow to clear. He was always saying that work was the most effective cure for illness.

But many a horse has died of overwork. He should have understood that. If he'd spent a bit of time laying blocks, he would keep his mouth shut, for sure.

Vdovushkin continued to write. He was, indeed, doing something 'on the side', but it didn't matter to Shukhov. He was writing out a new, long poem he'd completed the previous day, and today he had promised to show it to Stepan Grigorich, the very same doctor who championed work as a therapy for illness.

As can only happen in prison camps, Stepan Grigorich had advised Vdovushkin to describe himself as a medical assistant, and Vdovushkin had begun to learn to give intravenous injections to ignorant prisoners, on whose simple minds it would never dawn that 'medical assistant' might not be an accurate description. In fact, Kolya was a
student of literature who had been arrested in his second year. Stepan Grigorich was keen that he should write in prison the verses he had not been in a position to write as a free man.

The signal for parade was scarcely audible through the double windows, made opaque by the thick, white frost. Shukhov sighed and stood up. He felt as feverish as before, but it was clear that he would not be able to get off work. Vdovushkin reached for the thermometer and looked at it.

‘Look, it’s neither one thing nor the other – it’s under ninety-nine. If it were a hundred, there would be no problem. But I can’t hold you as sick. You can stay at your own risk if you want. If the doctor considers you’re ill, he’ll let you off; but if not, it’ll be the cells for you. You’d do better to go to work.’

Shukhov made no reply, didn’t even nod, but pulled his cap over his eyes and went out.

‘There’s no point in expecting someone who’s warm to understand someone who’s cold.

The cold was oppressive. A biting, foggy chill enveloped Shukhov and made him cough raspingly. The temperature was −27, and Shukhov’s was ninety-nine. It was one against the other.

Shukhov ran back to the hut at a jog-trot. The parade-ground was quite deserted, and the camp looked empty. It was that brief moment before parade when it was possible to imagine, against all the odds, that there would not even be a parade. The escort guards were sitting in their warm quarters, their sleepy heads propped against their rifles – it was not all clover for them either, hanging about on the watch-towers in such cold. The guards at the main gate threw coal into the stove. The warders in the
warders' room were finishing their last cigarettes before going out to search the huts. And the prisoners, got up in all their rags held together with pieces of string, their faces wrapped in rags from chin to eyes as protection against the cold, were lying on top of the blankets on their bunks with their felt boots on, their eyes closed, just waiting in trepidation for the gang-leader to cry out: 'All out!'

Gang 104, along with the rest of Hut 9, were dozing — except for the second-in-command Pavlo, whose lips moved as he totted something up with a small pencil; and on the top bunk, the Baptist Alyoshka, Shukhov's neighbour, was reading his notebook, in which he had copied half the Gospels.

Shukhov ran into the hut noiselessly, and went up to the second-in-command's bunk.

Pavlo looked up.

'So you're not in the cells, Ivan Denisovich? Still alive?' (The Western Ukrainians would never change; even in the camp they addressed people by their patronyms.)

Taking Shukhov's bread ration from the table, he handed it to him. On top of the bread lay a little heap of sugar.

Shukhov was in a great hurry, but nevertheless he responded respectfully (a second-in-command was really a kind of official, and one depended upon him even more than the Commandant). Despite his haste, he sucked up the sugar from the bread with his lips, licking it as he levered himself up with one leg to make his bed, all the while inspecting his ration of bread, weighing it in his hand to see if it constituted the full 550 grams that was his due. Shukhov had received thousands of similar rations in
prisons and camps, and although he had never been in a position to weigh one of them on a pair of scales, and although he had always hesitated to defend his rights, did not know, timid as he was, how to, it had long been evident to him and every other prisoner that there was no such thing as honesty in the apportioning of the bread ration. There was no ration that was not short — the point was, how short? So you inspected it every day, to ease your mind. Perhaps you hadn’t been too badly treated today? Perhaps you had received almost your full quota?

‘About twenty grams under’, Shukhov determined, and broke the bread in two. One half he shoved under his jacket, into a little white pocket he had specially sewn (prisoners’ jackets were made at the factory without pockets). The other half, which he had saved by not getting his ration until after breakfast, he considered eating there and then, but food eaten in a hurry is no food at all; it’s no good and gives no satisfaction. He began to put half the bread into his locker, but thought about it again; he remembered that two orderlies had been beaten up for pinching. The hut was big, like a public courtyard.

So, his hands still grasping the bread, Ivan Denisovich withdrew his feet from his felt boots, deftly leaving his foot-cloths and spoon inside, climbed barefoot up to his bunk, widened a little hole in his mattress and there, amidst the sawdust, hid his piece of bread. He took off his cap, pulled out a needle and thread from it (hidden deeply, because they did not forget to examine your cap when they searched you; once a warder had pricked himself on a needle and had almost knocked Shukhov’s head off in his rage). Stitch, stitch, stitch, and the little hole was sewn up and the bread concealed. Meanwhile, the sugar in his
mouth had melted. Every nerve in Shukhov's body was strained to breaking-point — at any moment the warder at the door would begin yelling. Shukhov's fingers moved rapidly, but his mind, racing ahead, was reckoning the next move. Alyoshka the Baptist was reading the Gospels not just to himself but almost out loud (perhaps for Shukhov's benefit; those Baptists loved to evangelise):

- 'But let no one of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or interfering in the affairs of other men. But if you suffer as a Christian, then do not be ashamed, but glorify God on that behalf.'

Alyoshka was crafty: he had been so skilful at concealing his little book in a hole in the wall that it had survived every search.

With the same rapid movements, Shukhov hung up his coat on the cross-beam and pulled out from under the mattress his mittens, a pair of thin foot-cloths, a piece of string and a rag with tapes at each end. He evened out the sawdust in the mattress (it was heavy and thickly packed), tucked in the blanket all round, arranged the pillow, and then clambered down barefoot and began to wrap his feet, first with the good foot-cloths, which were new, then with the bad, torn ones.

Then the gang-leader hawked, got up and bawled:

'No more sleep, 104. Outside!'

Immediately everyone in the gang, whether he had been dozing or not, got up, yawned and made for the door. The gang-leader had nineteen years' experience, and he wouldn't call you out for a parade a moment before it was necessary. When he said 'Outside!' he meant it, and there was no time to lose.

And while the men, with heavy tread, without a word,
went out one after another into the corridor, then through
the doorway onto the steps, and the leader of Gang 20,
just like Tyurin, shouted: 'Outside!', Shukhov hurriedly
drew on his felt boots over the two layers of foot-cloths,
put his coat over his jacket and tied it tightly with rope
(leather belts had been disallowed in 'special' camps).
Shukhov succeeded in finishing everything he had to do
and caught up with the last of his gang-members at the
doorway, as their numbered backs moved through it onto
the steps. Bulky, dressed in everything they had in the way
of clothing, the men progressed diagonally, in single file,
towards the parade-ground, nobody in a hurry to get there
first. They moved heavily, their boots crunching in the
snow — that was the only noise.
It was still dark, although the sky in the east was
beginning to brighten and to take on a greenish tint. A
light, sharp breeze was blowing from the east.
This was the bitterest moment of the day — going out on
parade in the morning, in the dark, in the cold, with an
empty belly, to face the hours ahead. You lose your
tongue, you don't want to speak to anyone.
A junior warder was rushing about the parade-ground.
'Well, Tyurin, how long have we got to wait for you?
Shirking again?'

Shukhov might have been frightened of this young
warder, but not Tyurin. He wasn't going to waste his
breath on him in this cold, just trudged on in silence. And
the gang followed him through the snow: tramp, tramp,
crunch, crunch.

Tyurin must have slipped the officials that pound of
lard, because it was evident from the position of the other
gangs that Gang 104 was going to its usual place in the
column. They'd be sending one of the poorer, less crafty gangs to the Socialist Community Centre. It'd be hell there today: —27 and a wind, and no shelter and no fire!

The gang-leader needed a lot of lard to be able to slip it to the PPD officials as well as satisfy his own belly. Tyurin himself never received any parcels, yet he was never short of lard. Any member of the gang receiving some handed it over to Tyurin immediately.

That was the way to survive.

The senior warder recorded something on a little board.

'Tyurin, you've got one man sick today and twenty-three fit for work, is that right?'

'Twenty-three,' the gang-leader said with a nod.

Who was missing? Pantaleyev was not present. Was he sick then?

And immediately there was whispering among the gang: Pantaleyev, the son of a bitch, was staying behind again. He wasn't sick at all — the security people were keeping him back. He'd be splitting on somebody again.

They could summon him during the day without any trouble, keep him for three hours, and no one would know or hear.

They'd fixed it through the infirmary . . .

The parade-ground was black with prisoners' coats as the gangs shuffled across it to be searched. Shukhov remembered that he had wanted to renew the number on his jacket, and elbowed his way to one side of the parade-ground. There, two or three prisoners were waiting in turn in front of the artist. Shukhov joined them. Those numbers meant nothing but trouble — if you did something wrong, a warder could spot you by your number at a
distance and would write your number down. And if you
didn't have your number renewed, then into the cells you
went for not looking after it properly.

There were three artists in the camp. They painted
pictures free for the authorities and took it in turns to be
present at parade. Today it was an old man with a grey
beard. When he painted the number on your cap, it was
like being anointed on your brow by a priest.

He painted and painted, occasionally blowing into his
glove. It was a thin, knitted glove, and his hand grew so
stiff with cold that he could scarcely manage to form the
numbers.

The artist renewed the ‘S–854’ on Shukhov’s jacket,
and Shukhov, the rope for belting his coat in his hand and
his coat loose – the searchers were near-by – caught up
with his gang. And at once he noticed that another member
of his gang, Tsesar, was smoking, not a pipe but a
cigarette – which meant that he might have been able to
cadge a smoke. Shukhov did not ask him direct, but stood
quite close to him and, half turning, looked past him.

He looked past him with an air of indifference, but he
saw how after each drag (Tsesar was thinking and only
rarely dragged on the cigarette) the circle of red ash
moved down the cigarette, shortening it as it crept to-
wards the holder.

Just then that jackal Fetyukov came up and stood
directly opposite Tsesar, watching his mouth with burning
eyes.

Shukhov did not have a scrap of tobacco left, and today
saw no prospect of getting any before the evening. He
was tense with expectation, and all his desire was concen-
trated on that dog-end, for which he felt he would be
ready to give his freedom — yet he wouldn’t lower himself like Fetyukov, he wouldn’t stare at someone’s mouth.

Tsesar was a mixture of many nationalities: you couldn’t tell whether he was a Greek, a Jew or a Gypsy. He was still a young man. He used to make films. But he had not completed his first when he was arrested. He had a thick, black, bushy moustache. It hadn’t been shaved off in the camp because that is how he appeared in the official photograph they had of him.

‘Tsesar Markovich,’ Fetyukov slobbered, unable to restrain himself. ‘Give us a drag, come on!’

His face was twitching with greed.

Tsesar raised his eyelids a little — they were half-lowered over his black eyes — and looked at Fetyukov. He had begun to smoke a pipe more often than before because then people wouldn’t keep cadging from him. It wasn’t the tobacco he grudged, but his thoughts being interrupted. He smoked in order to set his mind going and to stimulate ideas. But he only had to light a cigarette instantly to see in a number of eyes: ‘Leave me the dog-end.’

Tsesar turned to Shukhov and said:

‘Take it, Ivan Denisovich.’

And with his thumb he pushed the burning end out of the short amber holder.

Shukhov gave a start (although he had been expecting Tsesar to do as he had done), with one hand hurriedly — and gratefully — took the end, and put his other hand underneath in case it fell. He was not offended that Tsesar felt squeamish about giving him the cigarette to finish in the holder (some people had clean mouths, some foul), and his hardened fingers did not suffer as he held it right up to the burning butt. The main thing was that he had beaten
that jackal Fetyukov to it, and here he was now, puffing away until his lips began to burn. Mmmm... The smoke pervaded his hungry body and seemed to penetrate into his feet and head.

Just as that blissful feeling spread, Ivan Denisovich heard the shout:

‘They’re taking off our undershirts!’

That was the life of a prisoner. Shukhov had grown accustomed to it: only watch out that they didn’t go for your throat.

Why undershirts? Undershirts had been issued by the Commandant himself. No, something wasn’t right...

There were two gangs ahead of them waiting to be searched, and everyone in Gang 104 looked about: the chief disciplinary officer, Lieutenant Volkovoi, had come from the staff hut and shouted something to the warders. And the warders, who had been doing their searching in quite a slapdash way until Volkovoi came on the scene, now set to with a vengeance and hurled themselves into the job like wild animals.

‘Open your undershirts!’ a senior warder yelled.

It was said that the Commandant himself – let alone the prisoners and the warders – was frightened of Volkovoi. God had named the rogue well.* Wolf he was, and he looked it. Dark and tall and scowling, and rapid in his movements. He’d emerge from behind a hut with: ‘What’s going on here?’ One couldn’t keep out of his way. At first he had carried a whip of braided leather, as thick as his arm. They said he beat people with it in the cells. Or he’d creep up behind someone, when the prisoners were collected together by the hut for the evening

* Volk means wolf in Russian.
count, and lash his neck with the whip. ‘Why aren’t you standing in line, you swine?’ The group would retreat from him like a receding wave. The man struck by the whip would clasp his neck, wipe away the blood and keep his mouth shut — in case he got shoved in the cells as well.

Now, for some reason, he had stopped carrying the whip.

In the freezing weather, the search routine was not so rigorous in the morning — although it remained so in the evening. The prisoners untied their coats and held the skirts open. They went up by fives, and were received by five warders. The warders felt inside the prisoners’ jackets and slapped the only pocket they were allowed — the one on the right knee — and being loth to take off their gloves, if they came across anything unusual, instead of seizing it at once, they would ask in a leisurely way: ‘What do we have here?’

What did they expect to find on a prisoner in the morning? Knives? But knives were not taken out of the camp, only brought in. In the morning it was necessary to make sure that a prisoner was not carrying a large amount of food out with him, with the purpose of escaping with it. There was a time when they were so frightened of the 200-gram chunks of bread the prisoners would take to eat with their dinner that an order was issued for each gang to make a wooden box in which all the bread, collected from each member, would be carried. It was impossible to guess how they hoped to benefit by such an arrangement — most likely it was simply to torment, to make excessive work. You had to take a bite out of your bit of bread, and make your mark on it as it were, and
then put it in the box; but pieces of bread are exactly alike, and they were all from the same loaf — and all along the way to work you thought about your bit and worried about whether it would get taken by somebody else, and sometimes there were quarrels among friends to the point of fighting. Then one day three men escaped from the construction site in a truck, taking a box of bread with them. Whereupon the authorities thought better of it, and all the boxes were chopped up in the guard-room. From then on, each man carried his own bit of bread.

In the morning they also had to check that no one was wearing civilian clothes under the camp uniform. But then everybody had had all his civilian things removed long ago, and had been told that he would not get them back until the end of his sentence. In this camp nobody had yet completed his sentence.

And they also kept an eye out for letters which might have been mailed through someone outside the camp. But if they were going to search for every letter, they'd be there until dinner-time.

But Volkovoi shouted that they were to search for something — and so the warders quickly took off their gloves, ordered the men to open up their jackets (where each had preserved some of the warmth from his hut) and unbutton their undershirts, and ran up and down, feeling to see whether they were wearing anything against the regulations. Each prisoner was allowed two shirts — a shirt and an undershirt — and anything else was to be removed. That was Volkovoi's order, which was passed among the prisoners from rank to rank. The gangs which had already been searched were lucky, and some had already gone through
the gates; but the rest had to strip themselves. And any-
one with more than the regulation amount of clothes on
had to give them up there and then, in the cold!

That's how it began, but trouble soon came of it: the
flow of men through the gates eased up, and the escort
guards began to shout: 'Come on, come on!' So Gang
104 didn't suffer as much as they might have done from
Volkovoi; the warders were told to write down the names
of any people with extra clothing on, and they were to
report to the store-room that evening with a written ex-
planation as to how and why they had concealed extra
clothes.

Shukhov was dressed according to regulations — feel me
all over then, there's only my soul in my chest. But they
wrote down that Tsesar had got on a flannel shirt, and
Buinovsky some kind of waistcoat or jerkin. Buinovsky,
who had not been in the camp three months and who was
accustomed to life on board minelayers, objected:

'You've no right to make people undress in the cold!
You don't know Article Nine of the Criminal Code!'

But they did have the right and they knew the article.
It's you, brother, who don't know yet.

'You're not true Soviets!' the captain went on. 'You're
not Communists.'

Volkovoi had tolerated talk of the Criminal Code, but
now, like black lightning, he flashed back:

'Ten days inside!'

And more quietly to the senior warder:

'You can arrange it this evening.'

They didn't like putting people in the cells in the morn-
ing, because it meant the loss of a day's work. Let him
break his back all day and be put inside in the evening.
The prison block was to the left of the parade-ground—a stone building with two wings. They had finished building the second wing in the autumn—the authorities had run out of room in the first. The prison had eighteen cells, set apart from the others, for solitary confinement. The rest of the camp was made of wood, only the prison block of stone.

The cold had got under the prisoners' undershirts, and now it wouldn't go away. It had been pointless wrapping themselves up. Shukhov's back was aching already. Oh, to be lying down in a hospital bed right now—and to sleep. There was nothing he wanted more. Under a really heavy blanket.

The prisoners were standing in front of the gates buttoning and tying themselves up, and the escort guards were shouting from outside the gates:
'Come on, come on!'
And a warder was jostling them in the back:
'Come on, come on!'

The first gates. The perimeter. The second gates. Railings along both sides by the guard-room.
'Halt!' one of the guards yelled. 'Just like a flock of sheep! Line up in fives!'

It was beginning to grow light. Beyond the guard-room, the escort guards' fire was burning itself out. They always lit a fire before parade—to warm themselves and in order to be able to see to count.

One of the guards counted in a loud, shrill voice:
'One, two, three!'

The men had separated into groups of five, and each group marched forward on its own so that whichever way you looked, you saw five heads, five backs, ten legs.
A second guard stood silently by the railings, just to make sure that the count was right.

And a lieutenant from the camp stood and watched.

Each man was more precious than gold to a guard. If you found yourself with one head too few, then your own head was likely to make up the difference.

And again the gang formed up all together.

And now an escort guard began to count them off:

‘One, two, three!’

Again the men separated by fives and marched forward.

And the assistant to the Chief Escort Guard counted them in on the other side.

As did another lieutenant – from the escort.

No mistakes could be made. If you signed for one head too many, then you’d likewise have to make it up with your own head.

There were escort guards everywhere. They formed a semi-circle round the column going to the power-station, shouldered their tommy guns and pointed them right in your face. And there were dog-handlers with grey dogs. One dog bared its teeth as though it were laughing at the prisoners. The escort guards all wore short sheepskin coats, except for six wearing long coats. The long coats could be changed among the guards; they were worn by those deputed to man the watchtowers.

Once more, bringing the gangs together, the escort guards counted by fives the column heading for the power-station.

‘It’s always coldest at dawn,’ Buinovsky explained. ‘Because that is the last stage of the cooling process which takes place at night.’
The captain liked to explain things. He could work out for you the exact phase of the moon — whether it was old or new — for any day of any year.

The captain was deteriorating before your very eyes. His cheeks were sunken — but he kept cheerful.

The cold here outside the camp, with a strong wind blowing, bit even Shukhov’s face, used as it was to almost anything. Realising that he would have the wind in his face all the way to the power-station, he decided to don his piece of rag. Like many others, he had a piece of rag with two long tapes for use when the wind was against him. The prisoners agreed that a rag could help. Shukhov covered his face up to his eyes, passed the tapes below his ears and tied them behind his neck. Then he covered the back of his neck with the flap of his cap and raised his coat collar. Then he pulled the front flap of his cap down over his forehead. Thus in front only his eyes were naked to the wind. He tightened his coat firmly at the waist with the rope. Now everything was fine except for his mittens, which were thin; his hands had already begun to freeze. He rubbed them and clapped them together, knowing that soon he would have to put them behind his back and leave them there for the rest of the way.

The Chief Escort Guard read the daily ‘sermon’ of which every prisoner was heartily sick:

‘Attention, prisoners! Column order on the march will be strictly observed. No straggling or racing, no changing from one group of five to another, no talking. You will look to the front at all times and keep your hands behind your back. A step to the right or left is considered an attempt to escape, and the escort guard will open fire without warning. Leading ranks, quick march!’
The two escort guards at the head of the column must have started out along the road. The column in front began to sway, shoulders began to swing, and guards, twenty paces to the right and left of the column and ten paces apart, moved forward, tommy guns at the ready.

There hadn’t been any snow for a week, and the road was well-trodden and smooth. They circled the camp, and the wind caught them sideways on. Hands clenched behind their backs, heads lowered, the column moved forward as if to a funeral. All you could see was the feet of two or three people ahead of you and the piece of trodden ground where your own feet went. From time to time one of the escort guards would shout: ‘U–48! Hands behind your back!’ ‘B–502! Keep up!’ Then the shouts became rarer: the wind whipped at them, and it was difficult to see. The escort guards were not allowed to tie cloths round their faces. It wasn’t much fun for them either.

When it was warmer, everyone in the column talked no matter how much they were shouted at. But today everyone was hunched forward, each man hiding behind the back of the one in front, thinking his own thoughts.

Even the thoughts of a prisoner are not free, always returning to the same thing, the individual turning it over in his mind again and again: would they find that piece of bread in his mattress? Will the infirmary put me on the sick-list this evening? Will they put the captain in the cells or not? And how did Tsesar get hold of that warm flannel shirt? He must have bribed someone in the store-room for private possessions, how else?

Because he had breakfasted without bread and his food had been cold, Shukhov felt quite empty today. And in
order to stop his belly from grumbling and begging for food, he stopped thinking about the camp and thought instead about the letter he would soon be writing home.

The column passed by the woodworking-factory which had been built by the prisoners, went past a block of living-quarters also built by the prisoners but housing free workers, past the new club (again, built from start to finish by the prisoners – but it was the free workers who watched the films there), and moved out on to the steppe, straight into the wind and into the reddening dawn. Bare white snow lay in every direction, and there wasn’t a single tree to be seen.

A new year had begun, ’51, and Shukhov had the right to send two letters during that year. He had sent his last letter in July and had received an answer in October. At Ust-Izhma, the system had been different – there you could write every month. But what can you write in a letter? Shukhov had written no more frequently there than he did now.

Shukhov had left home on June 23rd, 1941. The previous Sunday, people had come back from Mass at Polomnya and reported that the war had started. They had learned about it in the post-office at Polomnya; in Temgenovo there had been no wireless sets before the war. Now, they wrote, ‘piped’ radio blared out of every hut.

Writing now was like throwing stones into a bottomless pool, they sank without trace – and that was the last you heard. There was no point in writing to say which gang you were working in, and what sort of gang-leader Andrei Prokofyevich Tyurin was. Right now he had more to say to Kilgas the Latvian than to his family.
And from the two letters a year they wrote, you couldn’t tell much about their lives. A new chairman of the kolkhoz – as if that didn’t happen every year! The kolkhoz had been merged – but such mergers had taken place before, followed by un-mergers. Or else somebody had failed to carry out his work quota and had had his private plot reduced to 1,500 square metres, and someone else had lost his altogether.

What Shukhov could never understand was that, according to his wife, there hadn’t been a single addition to the kolkhoz since the war; all the young men and women did their best to work in the factories in the town or in the peat-works. Half the men had not returned from the war at all, and those who had did not want to have anything to do with the kolkhoz: they lived at home but worked outside the kolkhoz. The only men in the kolkhoz were the gang-leader Zakhar Vasilyich and the carpenter Tikhon, who was eighty-four and had recently married and already had children. It was the women who had been there since ’30 who held the place together.

This was something Shukhov couldn’t understand at all: living on the kolkhoz but working elsewhere. He had seen life on individual and collective farms, but men not working in their own village – that he couldn’t grasp. Did they do seasonal work? And what about the haymaking?

They had stopped seasonal work a long time before, his wife answered. They didn’t go out carpentering, for which the district was famous; they didn’t make baskets any more, because nobody wanted them nowadays. But there was a new craft, a cheerful one, it seemed – painting carpets. Someone had brought back some stencils from the war, and from that time it became more and
more popular, and now there were a great many skilled workers at it. They did not have any regular employment, they worked nowhere in particular, and helped the kolkhoz for only one month in the year, haymaking and harvesting; to cover the other eleven, they got a chit from the kolkhoz saying that so-and-so was released from kolkhoz work to pursue his own affairs and was exempt from taxes. They travelled all over the country and even flew in aeroplanes to save time, piling up thousands of roubles and painting carpets everywhere: fifty roubles a carpet, made out of some old sheet — and it didn’t take more than an hour to do one. And his wife very much hoped that when Ivan returned, he also would become one of these painters. They’d be able to raise themselves out of the poverty she was suffering, send the children to technical school and build a new place to live in instead of the rotten old hut they had now. All the painters were building themselves new houses, and near the railway-station the cost of a house had risen from 5,000 to 25,000 roubles.

He asked his wife how he was going to become a painter — he who had never been able to draw in his life. And what was so marvellous about these carpets, anyway? His wife replied that any old fool could paint the carpets: all you had to do was put the stencil in position and paint through the little holes with a brush. And there were three types of carpet: ‘Troika’ — an officer of the Hussars driving a beautiful carriage drawn by three horses; ‘The Red Deer’; and the third had a Persian design. There were no other designs, but people all over the country were only too glad to get their hands on these, because a real carpet doesn’t cost fifty roubles, but thousands.
Shukhov would have loved to see those carpets....

During his time in camps and prisons, Ivan Denisovich had lost the habit of concerning himself about the next day, or the next year, or about feeding his family. The authorities did all his thinking for him, and somehow it was easier like that. He still had another two summers and winters to serve. But those carpets irritated him...

It was clearly an easy way to make money, you see. And he would want to keep pace with the other villagers.... Yet in his heart Ivan Denisovich did not really want to become a carpet-painter. You had to have a lot of confidence and cheek for that, know how to grease the right palm. Shukhov had been walking this earth for forty years, had only half his teeth and was getting bald, but he had never either given or taken a bribe, and hadn't learnt to do so in the camp either.

Easy money — it weighs nothing and doesn't give you the feeling that you have worked for it. The old adage was right: what you don't pay for, you don't get value for. Shukhov's hands could still be put to good use, and surely he would find work when he was free as a stove-maker or a joiner or a metal-worker?

Only if they didn't give him back his civil rights and didn't allow him to go home — then he might have to busy himself with carpets.

Meanwhile the column had come to a halt before the guard-room of the enormous power-station site. A moment before, at the corner of the site, two escort guards in sheepskin coats had detached themselves from the column and made off across country to distant watch-towers. Until guards were occupying all the watch-towers, nobody was allowed inside the site. The Chief Escort Guard,
with a tommy gun over his shoulder, went to the guard-
room. Smoke billowed out of the guard-room chimney:
a civilian guard sat there all night to stop planks and
cement being stolen.

Far over on the other side of the site, the sun, big and
red and hazy, was rising, its beams cutting sideways
across the gates, the whole site area and the distant fence.
Alyoshka, standing beside Shukhov, looked at the sun
and rejoiced, a smile on his lips. His cheeks were sunken,
he lived entirely on his ration, never earned anything
over and above that – why was he so pleased? Sundays
he spent whispering with the other Baptists. The camp
did not get them down – it was like water off a duck’s
back.

On the way, Shukhov’s face-cloth had got soaked from
his breath, and in places had frozen and formed an icy
crust. He pulled it down from his face to his neck and
stood with his back to the wind. He didn’t feel cold all
over, but his hands were numb in his thin mittens, and
the toes of his left foot were frozen: his left boot was in
bad shape and would have to be sewn up again.

From the small of his back right up to his shoulders,
his back ached and throbbed – how could he work?

He looked round, and his eyes fell on the face of the
gang-leader, who had been among the last group of five.
He had powerful shoulders and a broad face. His face
was grim. He didn’t put up with any nonsense from his
gang, but he cared about getting them good rations. He
was serving his second term, had spent much of his life
in camps, and knew the ropes backwards.

In a camp, the gang-leader means everything: a good
one will give you a second life, a bad one will put you in
your coffin. Shukhov had known Andrei Prokofyevich in the days of Ust-Izhma, but hadn’t been in his gang there. And when prisoners in under Article 58 had been moved from general camps, such as the one at Ust-Izhma, to penal camps, Tyurin had picked him out. Shukhov had had no dealings with the Commandant, the PPD, the work superintendents or the engineers – the gang-leader, with strength and resolution, did all that. In return, he had only to raise an eyebrow or beckon with his finger – and you ran and did what he wanted. You could cheat anyone in the camp, but you didn’t cheat Tyurin. You depended on him for your life.

Shukhov wanted to ask the gang-leader whether or not they were going to work in the same place as yesterday, but he was afraid to interrupt his serious train of thought. He had only just got them out of going to the Socialist Community Centre, and now he must be pondering the ‘percentage’ the gang would receive, on which their food would depend for the following five days.

The gang-leader’s face was heavily pock-marked. He stood facing the wind but without moving a muscle; the skin on his face was like the bark of an oak-tree.

In the column the prisoners were rubbing their hands and stamping their feet. What a wicked wind! Apparently all six watch-towers were now manned, but they were still not letting them into the site. They badgered the life out of you with their vigilance.

Now! The Chief Escort Guard came out of the guardroom with a checker. They stood on either side of the gates and then opened them.

‘Line up in fives! One, two . . .’

The prisoners marched as though on parade, nearly
in step. Once they were inside the site, they knew what to do.

Just beyond the guard-room was the office, and near the office stood a work-superintendent, indicating to the gang-leaders that they should go to him. Der was there, a foreman but a prisoner himself, a regular bastard who treated his fellow-prisoners worse than dogs.

Eight o’clock, five minutes past (the hooter had just given a blast). The authorities were afraid that the prisoners would waste time, would find warm corners to linger in — but the prisoners had a long day ahead of them and there was plenty of time. As soon as a prisoner enters the site, he bends down to pick up scraps of firewood here and there and hides them away for the stove.

Tyurin ordered Pavlo, his second-in-command, to go with him to the office. Tsesar accompanied them. Tsesar was rich, got two parcels a month and bribed everybody it was necessary to — he had a soft job in the office, working as assistant to the norm-checker.

The rest of Gang 104 immediately pushed off.

The sun rose, red and hazy, over the empty site. Some panels for prefabs, covered with snow, could be seen; elsewhere, the beginnings of a brick wall on which work had been abandoned at the foundations; there, the smashed arm of an excavator; a scoop; some scrap metal. Everywhere there were ditches and trenches and holes. The automobile repair-shops were completed except for the roofs; and, on a rise, stood the power-station, where work had begun on the second storey.

There was nobody to be seen except for the six guards in the watch-towers and people bustling around the office.
This moment belonged to the prisoners. The Chief Work-Superintendent, it was said, had often threatened to issue work orders to the gangs the evening before — but it wasn’t to be, because by the time the morning came round they’d changed their minds anyway.

This, then, was a time for the prisoners. While the authorities were arranging things, you sought out the warmest place you could find and sat back and took it easy — you’d soon be breaking your back, for sure. It was best if you could get near a stove — you could take off your foot-cloths and warm them up a bit. Then your feet would be warm all day. But even without a stove it was still good.

Gang 104 went to the big room in the automobile repair-shops, where they’d paned the windows last autumn and where Gang 38 were making concrete blocks. Some of the blocks lay around in moulds, others, reinforced by mesh, were standing on end. The ceiling was high and the floor was of earth, and it was only warm here because it had been heated with coal — not for the men, but so that the blocks would set better. There was even a thermometer, and on Sundays, if for some reason the camp was not working, a free worker would still keep the stove going.

Gang 38, of course, wouldn’t let any strangers near the stove, they sat round it themselves, drying their foot-cloths. Well, we’ll have to sit in the corner, it’s not too bad.

Shukhov found a place for his padded trousers — where had they not sat? — on the edge of a wooden mould, and leaned back against the wall. When he leaned back, his coat and jacket tightened, and on the left side of his chest, near his heart, he felt something hard pressing against
him. It was the corner of the hunk of bread in his inside pocket, half of his ration that morning, which he had taken with him for his dinner. He always took the same amount with him to work and never touched it until dinnertime. He usually ate the other half at breakfast, but today he hadn’t. Shukhov realised that he had not really economised. He had a great yearning to eat the bread now, in this warm spot. It was five hours until dinner, and that was a long time.

The pain he had felt in his back had now moved to his legs, and they began to feel quite weak. If only he could get them near the stove!

Shukhov placed his mittens on his knees, undid his coat, untied his frozen face-cloth from his neck, folded it several times and put it in his pocket. Then he reached for the hunk of bread in a little white cloth and, holding the cloth against his chest inside his coat so as not to allow a crumb to fall, he began, very slowly, to nibble and chew. He had carried the bread under two layers of clothes and had warmed it with his own body, so it was not in the least frozen.

In camps Shukhov had often remembered how they used to eat in the village: potatoes by the saucepanful, masses of porridge, and big chunks of meat in the old days. And milk enough to make you burst. He had learned in camps that that was not the way to eat. It was best to eat with all your thoughts concentrated on your food, just as he was nibbling the bread, rolling each morsel with his tongue and sucking it into his cheeks — and then it tasted good, this moist black bread. What had he had for eight or nine years? Nothing. And the work he had done on it, well...
So Shukhov occupied himself with his 200 grams of bread, and near him, on the same side of the room, sat the remainder of Gang 104.

Two Estonians, who were like blood brothers, sat on a low concrete block, taking it in turns to smoke half a cigarette from a single holder. They were both fair, tall and thin, and both had long noses and big eyes. They kept so close to each other that it was as if they were duty-bound to breathe the same air. The gang-leader never separated them. They shared all their food and slept next to each other in top bunks. And when they stood in the column, or waited on parade, or prepared to go to bed at night, they talked continually to each other in low, unhurried voices. In fact, they were not brothers at all, but had become friends here, in Gang 104. One of them, they explained, had been a fisherman from the coast, the other had when the Soviets established themselves in Estonia been taken by his parents as a small child to Sweden. But he had grown up with an independent spirit and had returned to Estonia to finish college.

They say it doesn’t matter to which nation you belong, every nation has its share of bad people. But of all the Estonians Shukhov had met, he had never come across a bad one.

They all sat around – some on the blocks, some on the moulds, some on the ground itself. You didn’t feel like talking in the morning, and each man was sunk in his own thoughts, silent. That jackal Fetyukov had been collecting dog-ends all over the place (he would take them out of the spittoon, he wasn’t fussy), and now he was breaking them up on his knees and pouring the unsmoked tobacco into a roll of paper. Fetyukov had three children
at home, but when he had been taken, they had all disassoci-
ated themselves from him, and his wife had remarried:
so he got no help from anywhere.

Buinovsky kept glancing over at Fetyukov. Finally, he
bawled:

‘Hey, what are you doing, collecting all kinds of
infection? You’ll get syphilitic lips! Chuck the stuff
away!’

The captain was used to giving orders, and spoke to
everybody in a commanding tone.

But Fetyukov had no reason to depend upon Buinov-
sky – the captain got no parcels either. Smirking to show
his mouth half empty of teeth, he said:

‘You wait until you’ve been here eight years, captain,
and you’ll be picking up dog-ends yourself. Prouder men
than you have come to it in camp . . . ’

Fetyukov was judging by his own standards. Perhaps
the captain would hold out . . .

‘What’s that?’ asked Senka Klevshin, who was half-
deaf. He thought that the conversation referred to Buinov-
sky’s being caught on parade that morning. ‘You shouldn’t
have snapped like that.’ He shook his head sorrowfully.
‘It would all have blown over.’

Senka Klevshin was a quiet, unfortunate fellow. One
of his eardrums had burst in ’41. Then he’d been taken
prisoner, escaped, had been recaptured and chucked into
Buchenwald. In Buchenwald he had managed to stay
alive by a miracle, and now he was serving his sentence
quietly. If you kicked up a stink, he used to say, you were
done for.

It was true, better to grumble and get on with it. Fight
them, and they’d smash you.
Alyoshka lowered his face into his hands without saying a word. He was praying.

Shukhov ate his bread almost to the end, keeping back, however, a little crust — a semicircular bit from the top of the loaf. You could not clean out the porridge from your bowl as effectively with a spoon as you could with a piece of bread. This small crust he wrapped up again in the white cloth in preparation for his dinner, shoved the cloth into the inside pocket of his jacket, buttoned himself up against the cold and began to get ready — they could send him to work now, although he’d rather they waited a bit longer.

Gang 38 got up and dispersed — some to the cement-mixer, some to fetch water, some to the reinforcement meshes.

But neither Tyurin nor his second-in-command, Pavlo, had come back to the gang. And although Gang 104 had been sitting down for scarcely twenty minutes, and the working day, shortened in winter, went on until six o’clock, they still felt that they had had splendid luck, as if evening was not so far off.

‘Well, it’s been a long time since we had a snow-storm,’ sighed Kilgas, the red-faced, plump Latvian. ‘The whole winter — and not a snow-storm yet! What sort of winter’s this!’

‘Yes ... snow-storms ... snow storms ...’ sighed the members of the gang.

When there was a snow-storm in that locality, then nobody went out to work: they were frightened to let the prisoners leave their huts. If you didn’t fix a rope between your hut and the mess-hall, you could get lost. Supposing a prisoner froze to death in the snow? The dogs could
eat him for all they cared. But if a prisoner tried to escape? There had been occasions. However fine the snow in a storm, it always got packed down in the drifts. Prisoners had managed to get away over these drifts when they were higher than the wire — not far, it is true.

When you thought about it, a snow-storm was no use to anyone. The prisoners had to stay in under lock and key; the coal never arrived on time, and the warmth was blown out of the hut; no flour was delivered to the camp, so there was no bread; things went haywire in the cookhouse. And however long the snow-storm lasted — three days or a week — the days were reckoned as lost days, which had to be recovered by work on an equal number of consecutive Sundays.

All the same, the prisoners loved snow-storms and prayed for them. Whenever the wind got up a bit, everyone would turn his face to the sky: 'Come on, come on, let's have some real snow!'

But because the wind came across the ground, a real storm did not often brew up.

Someone tried to creep up to Gang 38's stove, but he was sent packing.

Then Tyurin came into the room. He looked gloomy. The members of the gang realised that they were going to have to get down to work, and quickly.

'Right, said Tyurin, looking round. 'Everybody in Gang 104 here?'

And not bothering to confirm it or to count, because none of his gang could have gone anywhere, he quickly began to give them their orders. He sent the two Estonians and Klevshin and Gopchik to pick up the big box for mixing mortar from nearby and to take it to the power-
station. Evidently the gang had been assigned to work on the unfinished part of the power-station that they had abandoned in late autumn. Another two men were sent to the tool-shop, where Pavlo was picking up some tools. Four were ordered to clear the snow from around the power-station, the entrance to the machine-room, in the machine-room itself, and from the ladders. A further two were detailed to get the stove in the machine-room going and to get some coal and some boards to chop up. Another was to take some cement there on a sledge. Two were told to carry water, two sand, and another to sweep the snow off the sand and break it up with a crowbar.

After all this, there remained only Shukhov and Kilgas to be given jobs – the two best workers in the gang. Calling them over to him, the gang-leader said:

‘Now boys!’ – he was no older than either of them, but had got into this habit of addressing them – ‘After dinner, you’ll be laying breeze blocks on the second-storey walls, where Gang 6 left off in the autumn. But for the moment we must heat up the machine-room. There are three big windows, and the first thing to do is find some way of boarding them up. I’ll give you people to help, but you’ll have to think what to board them up with. We’ll be using the machine-room for mixing mortar in – and for warming ourselves. If we don’t succeed in keeping warm, we’ll freeze like dogs, eh?’

Perhaps he would have gone on, but up ran Gopchik, a lad of sixteen, as pink as a sucking-pig, complaining that another gang wouldn’t give him the box for mixing mortar in and were fighting about it. So Tyurin went off to sort it out.

However tough it was to get started on the working
day in cold like this, the important thing was to make a
beginning, just that.

Shukhov and Kilgas looked at each other. They had
worked together more than once, and respected each other
as carpenter and mason. It was not easy to find anything
in the bare snow with which to board up the windows.
But Kilgas said:

'Ivan! Over there, where the prefab are, I know a
little place where there's a fine roll of roofing-felt. I hid
it there myself. Let's go.'

Although Kilgas was a Latvian, he spoke Russian like
a native – there'd been a village of Old Believers near
where he lived, and he had learned the language as a
child. He had only been in camps for a couple of years,
but already he understood everything: if you don’t bite,
you don’t eat. Kilgas' name was Johann, but Shukhov
called him Vanya.

They decided to go for the roofing-felt. But first Shuk-
hov ran over to fetch his trowel from the part of the
automobile repair-shops which was still under construc-
tion. A trowel means a lot to a mason if it fits his hand and
is 'light. However, wherever you worked, there was a
rule: every night you had to hand back any tool you had
been given that morning. It was a sheer toss-up what
sort of tool you got the following day. Shukhov had once
managed to pull the wool over the eyes of the man in the
tool-shop and got hold of the best trowel. Now he had to
hide it in a different place every evening, and recover
it every morning he learned he was going to be laying
blocks. Of course, if Gang 104 had been sent to the Social-
ist Community Centre today, he would have been without
a trowel again. But now he pushed aside a small stone,
shoved his fingers into the crack — and, there we are, he’d got it!

Shukhov and Kilgas left the automobile repair-shops and went over to the prefabs. Their breath formed thick clouds of steam. The sun was up now, but was casting no rays, as if in a fog, and around the sun itself stood, it seemed, pillars of light.

‘Like pillars, eh?’ Shukhov said to Kilgas with a nod.

‘Pillars are nothing to worry about,’ rejoined Kilgas, laughing, ‘so long as they don’t stretch barbed wire from one to the next, that’s what we’ve got to watch for.’

Kilgas couldn’t speak without making a joke. He was liked by all the gang on account of it. And the other Latvians in the camp regarded him highly. Of course, it was true he fed himself properly, receiving two parcels a month, and he looked well on it, as if he weren’t in the camp at all. In his position, you could make jokes.

Their site was big — it took a while to get right across it. On the way they came across the lads from Gang 82, who’d been put on to digging holes again. The holes didn’t have to be very big; half a metre by half a metre and as deep again, but the ground was like stone even in summer, and now it was completely frozen, and you might as well have gnawed at it. They used picks on it — but the picks just skidded off, showering sparks but not an atom of earth. The lads stood there, each man to his hole, looking around — but there was nowhere to warm up and they were forbidden to leave, so they would take up their picks again. It was the only way to get warm.

Shukhov recognised someone he knew among them, a fellow from Vyatka, and suggested:

‘Listen, you lot, why don’t you start a little fire over
each of these holes, and then the ground would thaw out?'

'Vere not allowed to,' the man from Vyatka sighed. 'They won't give us any wood.'

'You must find some.'

Kilgas merely spat.

'Now I ask you, Ivan, if the authorities had any sense at all, would they send people out in this cold to peck away at the ground with picks?'

He swore a few times under his breath and was silent. You didn't talk much when it was as cold as this. They went on and came to the place where the prefab panels were buried under the snow.

Shukhov liked working with Kilgas: the only bad thing about him was that he did not smoke and did not get any tobacco in his parcels.

Kilgas had been dead right: the two of them picked up one panel, then another — and found the roll of roofing-felt.

They pulled it out. Now — how would they carry it? It didn't matter being noticed from a watch-tower: the guards' only worry was whether the prisoners escaped — inside the site they could chop up all the panels they wanted as far as the guards were concerned. And if a warder came across you, that didn't matter either: he'd be looking around himself for anything useful to him. And the prisoners and the gang-leaders didn't give a damn for the prefabs. The only people who'd mind were a work-superintendent, a foreman who was also a prisoner, and that spindleshanks Shkuropatenko. Shkuropatenko was a nobody, simply a prisoner who'd been given the job of guarding the prefabs against theft. It was
Shkuropatenko who was most likely to catch them on the open ground.

‘Look, Vanya, we mustn’t carry it flat,’ Shukhov said. ‘Let’s up-end it and put our arms round it, and carry it slowly, shielding it with our bodies. At a distance, they won’t know what it is.’

Shukhov’s idea was a good one. The roll wasn’t easy to carry, so they didn’t pick it up but squeezed it between themselves like a third man, and set off. From the side all you could see was two men walking close together.

‘Later, though, when the superintendent sees this felt on the windows, he’ll guess everything,’ Shukhov said.

‘What’s that to do with us?’ Kilgas answered. ‘We can say it was already there when we got to the power-station, and what should we do – pull it down?’

That was true.

Shukhov’s fingers were numb with cold in his worn mittens: he’d completely lost all sensation in them. His left boot was holding out: that was the main thing – your felt boots. His hands would warm up when he began to work.

They crossed the untrodden snow and came to a sledge track from the tool-shop to the power-station. The cement had obviously been taken along already.

The power-station stood on a rise at the edge of the site. Nobody had been there for a long time, and all the approaches to it were covered with virgin snow. The sledge track, the new path and the deep footprints of the men in Gang 104 stood out in contrast. The men were already clearing away the snow from around the power-station with wooden shovels, making a way for the lorries.
It would have been all right if the hoist in the power-station had been working, but the motor had burned out and had not been repaired. Which evidently meant, once again, that they would have to carry everything—mortar and breeze blocks—up to the second storey themselves.

The power-station had been standing there for two months, like a grey skeleton in the snow, abandoned. Now Gang 104 had arrived. And what kept their spirits going? Empty bellies pulled in by rope belts; terrible cold; no warm shelter; not a spark of fire. But Gang 104 had arrived—and life began again.

At the very entrance to the machine-room the box for mixing mortar had come apart. It was a decrepit thing and Shukhov had suspected that it wouldn’t make the journey in one piece. The gang-leader swore as a matter of form, but he could see that nobody was to blame. Just then Kilgas and Shukhov appeared on the scene with the roll of roofing-felt between them. The gang-leader was delighted and immediately devised a new arrangement for work: Shukhov was to fix the stove-pipe, so that the stove would warm up faster; Kilgas was to repair the box for mixing mortar, the two Estonians helping; Senka Klevshin was given an axe with which to cut long laths to nail the felt to—double thickness. Where to find the laths, though? The superintendent certainly wouldn’t give them any wood to make themselves a warm shelter. The gang-leader looked around, and so did everybody else. There was one way out: to remove the boards used as hand-rails for the ladders leading to the second storey. You’d have to watch out as you climbed the ladders, or you’d be for it—but what else could be done?

Why should a prisoner work so hard for ten years in a
camp, anyway? Why not let things slide, and drag your feet from morning until night, which belonged to you?

But it didn’t operate like that. That’s why they’d thought up the system of gangs. It was not like being in a gang on the outside where Ivan Ivanich and Pyotr Petrovich would get paid separately. In the camp it was so arranged that it was the members of the gangs who urged each other on, not the authorities. It was like this: either you all earned a little extra, or you all went under. You’re not working properly, you swine, I’m having to go hungry because of you. So sweat, you bastard!

And if a situation like the present one cropped up, then there was all the more reason not to take things easy. Like it or not, you had to get a move on. If they hadn’t made somewhere to warm up in after a couple of hours, then they’d have given up the ghost anyway.

Pavlo had brought the tools now, so you had only to take your choice. And some pipes for the stove. True, the tools wouldn’t have gladdened the eyes of a tinsmith, but there was a hammer and a small axe. They’d manage.

Shukhov clapped his mittened hands together, joined up the pipes and fastened the joints. He clapped his hands together again and went on fixing the pipes. (He had hidden his trowel nearby. Although he was with his own gang, he wouldn’t put it past one of them to snitch it — even Kilgas.)

And then every thought but one flew out of his head, and his memories and worries evaporated. His only thought was how to arrange the pipes so that they wouldn’t smoke. Gopchik was sent to get a bit of wire — hang up the pipe by the window, that was the answer.

In the corner there was another stove, a squat one with
a brick chimney. It had an iron plate on top, which grew red-hot and was used to thaw out and dry the sand. The stove had already been lit, and the captain and Fetyukov were carrying sand there in hand-barrows. You don’t need brains to carry a hand-barrow. That’s why the gang-leader gave this kind of work to people who had formerly been in a position of authority. Fetyukov had been a big shot in some sort of office, and had travelled around in a car.

In the early days Fetyukov had treated the captain like muck and had yelled at him. But the captain had landed him one in the teeth, and now they got on all right.

The lads bringing in the sand had sidled up to the stove, but the gang-leader warned them off.

‘Watch out, or I’ll tan one of you! Get the place fixed up first!’

Beat a dog once and you have only to show him the whip. The cold was ferocious, but not as ferocious as the gang-leader. The men went back to work again.

And Shukhov heard the gang-leader say softly to Pavlo:

‘You stay here and keep them at it. I’ll go now and settle the percentage.’

More depended on the percentage than on the work itself. A clever gang-leader was one who gave his mind to the percentage. That is how they ate. If something had not been done, make it look as though it had; if the percentage had been assessed low, then push it up. To do this a gang-leader had to have brains in his head — and be cosy with the norm-checkers, who would have to be fixed.

But, come to think of it, who were these percentages for? For the camp. The camp made thousands out of the construction people and were able to hand out bonuses
to the officers – like Volkovoi, for using his whip. And you? You got an extra 200 grams of bread in the evening. 200 grams was the difference between life and death.

Two buckets of water were brought in, but they had frozen on the way. Pavlo reckoned that it was pointless to carry the water like that. Quicker to melt down the snow. They put the buckets on the stove.

Gopchik brought some new electric wire.

‘Ivan Denisovich!’ he said. ‘This wire’s good for making spoons. Will you teach me how to cast a spoon?’

Ivan Denisovich liked Gopchik, the rascal (his own son had died young, and he had two grown-up daughters). Gopchik had been arrested for taking bread into the forest for Bandera’s* followers. They had given him an adult’s sentence. He was like an affectionate little calf, and he fawned on everybody. But he was artful, too: he ate the contents of his parcels on his own, sometimes during the night.

But you can’t feed everybody, that’s for sure.

They broke off some wire for the spoons and hid it in a corner. Shukhov fashioned a step-ladder out of a couple of planks, and sent Gopchik up it to hang the stove-pipe. Gopchik, as agile as a squirrel, clambered along the beams, banged in a nail, threw the wire over and fixed it to support the pipe. Shukhov, however, was not idle, and he used one knee to make another bend in the top of the pipe. It was not so windy today, but it might be tomorrow – and that would stop the pipe smoking. One must understand, the stove was for them – for them.

Senka Klevshin had made the long laths now. Gopchik

* Stepan Bandera (1909–1959), leader of the extremist Ukrainian National League, opposed to the Soviet authorities.
was put to nailing these up as well. He climbed up, the little devil, and shouted down to the men below.

The sun had risen higher now, dispersing the haze, and the pillars Shukhov had remarked on had gone — there was a reddish glow inside the room. Now they had got the stove going with stolen wood. Much more cheerful!

‘Only cows get warmed by the sun in January,’ Shukhov said.

Kilgas finished nailing together the box for mixing mortar, gave it one last tap, and shouted:

‘Listen, Pavlo, I won’t take less than 100 roubles from the gang-leader for this job!’

Pavlo laughed:

‘You’ll get 100 grams.’

‘The public prosecutor will make up the difference!’

Gopchik shouted from above:

‘Hold it, hold it!’ Shukhov cried. (They were cutting the roofing-felt wrong.)

He showed them how to do it.

The men were sidling up to the iron stove, but Pavlo drove them off. He gave some helpers to Kilgas and ordered them to make hods for the mortar to be carried to the second storey. He put another pair of men onto carrying sand. He sent others to clear snow from the scaffolding and the place where the blocks would be laid — and another inside to throw the hot sand from the stove into the box for mixing mortar.

Outside a motor could be heard turning over — they were beginning to deliver the blocks; the lorry had arrived. Pavlo ran out and waved his hands to show them where to unload.
They put up one strip of roofing-felt, then a second. But what protection do you get from roofing-felt? It was paper, just paper. All the same, it made a solid wall of a kind. And it was darker inside — so the stove looked brighter.

Alyoshka brought in some coal. Some shouted: ‘Tip it on!’, others: ‘No, don’t, we’ll get warmer with wood!’ He just stood there, not knowing whom to obey.

Fetyukov found a place near the stove and put his felt boots right up to the fire, the idiot. The captain lifted him up by the scruff of the neck and jostled him over to the barrows:

‘Go and get sand, you bastard!’

The captain looked upon work in the camp as service in the navy: if you were told to do something, you did it. He had grown very emaciated in the last month, but he was holding up.

Before too long, all three windows were covered with roofing-felt. Light only came through the doors now. And with it the cold, too. Pavlo ordered the upper half of the doorway to be boarded up, leaving the lower half free — enough space to let the men, heads bent, get through. Meanwhile three lorries had driven up and dumped their load of blocks. The problem now was to get them up to the second storey without the use of a hoist.

‘Bricklayers! Let’s go up and look round!’ Pavlo called.

Laying blocks was a job worthy of respect. Shukhov and Kilgas went up with Pavlo. The ladder was in any case narrow, but now that Senka had torn away the handrails, you had to stick close to the wall if you didn’t want to fall off. And worse still, the snow had frozen to the
steps and rounded them so that you couldn't get a grip for your feet. How were they going to get the mortar up?

They looked around to see where on the walls to lay blocks — the men were shovelling away the snow already. Here was the place. They'd have to take an axe to the ice on the old blocks and then sweep them clean.

They considered how to get the blocks up. They looked down. They decided it would be a mistake to use the ladder, better to have four men on the ground to throw the blocks to that scaffolding there, then another two to throw them to the second storey, and two more to carry them on from there — that would be quicker than the ladder.

The wind wasn't strong up there, but you could feel it. It would penetrate all right when they began to lay. If they got behind the wall that had been started on, they'd be protected to some extent though — not much, but it would be slightly warmer.

Shukhov looked up at the sky and gasped: it was quite clear, and the sun showed it was almost dinner-time. Miraculous how time went by when you were working! Shukhov had noticed it many times: the days rolled by in the camp before you could say 'knife'! But your sentence — that didn't seem to pass quickly, the end never seemed to be in sight.

They went down and found that everyone had settled round the stove, except for the captain and Fetyukov, who were still carrying sand. Pavlo exploded and immediately drove eight of the men out to get blocks, ordered two to start pouring cement into the box and stirring in the sand, another to fetch water, another to fetch coal.
'Come on, lads, we must finish these hods,' Kilgas said to the men who had been working with him.

'Shall I help them?' Shukhov asked Pavlo.

'Yes,' Pavlo said and nodded.

They brought up a can in which to melt snow for the mortar. Somebody observed that it was already noon.

'That's right,' said Shukhov. 'The sun is directly overhead.'

'If it's overhead,' retorted the captain, 'that means it's not noon, but one o'clock.'

'How so?' questioned Shukhov. 'Any old man knows that the sun's at its highest when it's time for dinner.'

'Any old man — maybe!' snapped the captain. 'But since then a decree has been issued that the sun is at its highest at one o'clock.'

'Who issued the decree?'

'The Soviet Government!'

The captain went out with a barrow. Shukhov wasn't going to argue with him in any case. Surely the sun wasn't subject to their decrees as well?

There was more banging and hammering, and they knocked together four hods.

'O.K., sit down and warm yourselves,' Pavlo said to the two bricklayers. 'And you, Senka, you'll be laying blocks with them after dinner, too. Sit down!'

This time they sat by the stove quite lawfully. They couldn't start laying before dinner in any case, and if they started carrying the mortar up, it would freeze.

The coal was beginning to grow red-hot, and was now throwing out a regular heat. But it only reached you near the stove; the rest of the room was as cold as ever.
They took off their mittens, and all four of them held
their hands near the stove.
It was important never to do one thing — put your feet
near the flames if you were wearing boots. If they were
leather, then the leather cracked, and if they were felt
boots, they got damp and began to steam, and you
didn’t feel any warmer, and if you put them too close to
the fire, they burned. Then you had to walk around until
spring with a hole in them, you wouldn’t get any others.
‘What’s Shukhov got to worry about?’ Kilgas joked.
‘He’s got one foot at home already.’
‘Yes, the bare one,’ said someone. They laughed.
(Shukhov had taken off his left boot — the one needing
to be repaired — and was warming his foot-cloths.)
‘Shukhov’s sentence is almost over.’
They’d given Kilgas twenty-five years. Earlier, things
had been better: ten years without exception for every-
body. But since ’49 it had gone up: twenty-five years,
irrespective. One could live through ten years — but who
could get out alive after twenty-five?
Shukhov enjoyed the fact that everybody pointed him
out as the one whose sentence was almost over. But he
did not really believe it. Remember the prisoners whose
sentences should have finished during the war — all that
lot had been retained until ’46 ‘pending special instruc-
tions’. And those with three-year sentences had found
themselves with another five to serve. The law can be
bent any way you want. You served your ten years, and
perhaps they’d give you another ten. Or they’d exile
you.
But there were times when you thought about it and
your spirits soared: your sentence was coming to an end,
the string was running out... God, to go out on your own two legs, free...?

But it wasn’t done for an old camp hand to talk out loud about it. Shukhov said to Kilgas:

‘Don’t you worry about those twenty-five years. Who knows whether you’ll be here for the full twenty-five? I have done eight years, that I do know.’

So you went on living like this with your nose to the ground, and there was no time to be thinking how you got in and how you’d get out.

According to his papers, Shukhov had been sentenced for high treason. He had given evidence against himself to the effect that he had surrendered to the enemy, intending to betray his country, and had returned from captivity in order to carry out instructions given by the Germans. Just what these instructions were neither Shukhov nor the interrogator was able to say. So they left it like that – ‘instructions’.

It was a simple calculation for Shukhov: if he didn’t sign, he’d be shot; if he did, he would live for a while. He signed.

This is what happened: in February ’42, their whole army had been encircled on the North-west front. They didn’t send in any provisions by air; there weren’t any aeroplanes. Things reached such a pass that they were cutting the hooves off dead horses, which they would then soften by soaking in water and eat. They had no ammunition. So the Germans hunted them down a few at a time and took them prisoner. Shukhov was in one such group and was held in captivity for a couple of days in the forest. Then five of them managed to escape. They crept through the forest and marshes and, by a miracle, reached their
own lines. A machine-gunner killed two of them on the spot, and a third died of his wounds — so two of them got through. If they’d had any sense, they would have said that they’d been just wandering around in the forest, and everything would have been all right. But they told the truth: they had escaped from the Germans. Escaped, you fuckers! If all five of them had got back, their statements would have coincided and maybe they would have been believed, but only two: not a hope. The bastards had fixed the whole escape story!

Deaf as he was, Senka Klevshin heard that they were talking about escaping from the Germans, and said loudly: ‘I escaped three times, and they got me three times.’

Senka, who had suffered much, was mostly silent: he couldn’t hear what people said and did not involve himself in their conversations. They didn’t know much about him, only that he’d been in Buchenwald and in the underground organisation there, smuggling in arms for an uprising. The Germans had hung him up with his hands tied behind his back and beaten him with rods.

‘You’ve been in for eight years, Ivan – but what kind of camps?’ Kilgas asked. ‘You were in criminal camps, where you could sleep with women. You didn’t have to wear numbers. But what about eight years in a penal camp. Nobody gets through that alive!’

‘Women . . . logs, not women!’

Shukhov stared into the stove, remembering his seven years in the North. The way he’d hauled logs for three years – for making crates and sleepers. The fire had danced just like this in the forest camp – not during the day of course, but when they worked at night. The Commandant’s rule was that if a gang failed to do its daily quota,
then it stayed in the forest until it was done, night or no night.

They would get back to the camp at about midnight and would have to go out into the forest again the following morning.

‘No, no, brothers . . . it’s a more peaceful life here, believe me,’ he lisped through his missing teeth. ‘Here it’s regular: finish the job or not, you go back to camp at the end of the day. And there’s a guarantee here of a hundred grams more bread than up there. Here one can live. It may be a ‘special’ camp, but so what? Does it bother you to wear numbers? Numbers don’t weigh anything.’

‘More peaceful!’ Fetyukov hissed. (It was nearly time for the dinner-break, and everyone had moved up around the stove.) ‘When you can get your throat cut in your bed! More peaceful!’

‘Only squealers get their throats cut!’ Pavlo raised a menacing finger at Fetyukov.

It was true, something new had happened in the camp. Two well-known squealers had been found dead in their bunks before reveille. And not long after the same thing had happened to an innocent prisoner – they must have mistaken the bunk. And one of the squealers had run off to the Chief Prison Officer, and they’d given him refuge in the stone-walled prison block.

It was astonishing, that sort of thing did not occur in criminal camps. Nor here until recently...

Suddenly the hooter went. It never achieved full force at first; it began rather hoarsely, as if clearing its throat.

Midday! Down tools! The dinner-break!

Hell, they’d missed their chance! They should have
gone to the mess-hall long ago to get in the queue. There were eleven gangs on the site, and no more than two could fit into the mess-hall at one time.

The gang-leader hadn’t come back. Pavlo looked round rapidly and then decided:

‘Shukhov and Gopchik, come with me! Kilgas, when Gopchik gets back to you, send the rest of the gang over immediately!’

Their places at the stove were taken at once; the way the men surrounded it, it almost might have been a woman they were embracing.

‘That’s better!’ they shouted. ‘Let’s have a smoke.’

And they looked at each other to see who would light up. Nobody did – either they had no tobacco or they were holding it back because they didn’t want anybody to see that they had.

Shukhov went out with Pavlo and Gopchik bounded after them.

‘It’s warmer,’ Shukhov observed when they were outside. ‘No more than —18. It’ll be good for laying the blocks.’

They glanced at the blocks – many of them had already been thrown up to the scaffolding and a number had been taken on to the second storey.

Shukhov screwed up his eyes against the sun to confirm its position as decreed by the captain.

Outside, where there was nothing to interrupt the wind, it was strong and sharp. Don’t forget, it was saying, remember that this is January.

The cook-house on the site was a small shack made of boards around a stove – to cover the cracks, they’d fixed some rusty metal sheets. Inside, the shack was separated
into a kitchen and a place to eat. Neither area had a proper floor. The earth had been trampled down by the men's feet and was full of holes and ridges. As for the kitchen—a square stove with a cauldron on top.

The kitchen was run by two men, a cook and a sanitary inspector. When he left the camp in the morning, the cook received some groats from the main camp-kitchen—fifty grams per head or a kilogram per gang, less than sixteen kilograms for all the men working on the site. The cook wasn't going to cart that himself over three kilometres, so he had an assistant carry it for him: better to give the assistant an extra portion at the expense of the prisoners than break his own back. There was water to be carried, too, and wood with which to light the stove—again, jobs the cook didn't relish, so more assistants and more extra portions at the prisoners' expense. It's easy to be generous with what does not belong to you. It was an established rule that you had to eat without leaving the mess-hall; so the bowls had to be brought from the camp (you couldn't leave them on the site overnight since they would get stolen by the free workers) — about fifty bowls at the most were so conveyed, and they were quickly washed for use by the next man. (Of course, the man who carried the bowls also got an extra portion.) To prevent the bowls being taken out of the mess-hall, they posted a man on the door. But however watchful he was, people took them out all the same—either by talking their way through or nipping by when he wasn't looking. So yet another person had to go round the site, the whole of it, collecting dirty bowls and taking them back to the kitchen. An extra portion for him, too, naturally.

The only thing the cook did was put the groats and the
salt into the cauldron, sharing the fat between himself and the cauldron (good fat never got as far as the prisoners, it was only the bad stuff which went into the cauldron; so the prisoners much preferred it if the stores issued bad fat). The cook also stirred the porridge when it was about ready. The sanitary inspector didn’t do as much: he sat and watched. But when the porridge was ready, then he ate his fill — as did the cook. Then the gang-leader of the day arrived — they took it in turns, the gang-leaders — to sample whether it was good enough for the men to eat. He got a double portion.

The hooter sounded. The gang-leaders at once formed a queue, the cook handed them bowls through a little hatch, and in the bottom of each bowl lay some of the porridge — whether your fair share or not you didn’t ask or try to assess: if you opened your mouth at all, you’d get it in the neck.

The wind whistled over the bare steppe — in summer a hot, dry wind, in winter a freezing one. Nothing would ever grow on that steppe, still less behind four rows of barbed wire. As far as they were concerned, the only place where bread came from was the bread-store, and oats from the oats-store. And whether you broke your back working, or lay down on your belly you’d harvest no food from that ground — you got no more than was issued to you by the Commandant. And you didn’t even get that — what with the cooks and their assistants and helpers. You got short measure all the way — on the site, in the camp, even back in the store-rooms. And you never saw any of those fiddlers taking up a pick. No, you did the work and took what you were given, and didn’t linger round the hatch.
You feathered your own nest as best you could.

Pavlo, Shukhov and Gopchik entered the mess-hall — there the prisoners stood so close to one another that you couldn’t see the tables and benches for their backs. Some were eating sitting down, but mostly they were standing. Gang 82, who’d spent the morning digging those holes without any kind of protection had been the first to get seats after the hooter had gone. And now that they’d finished eating, they weren’t leaving — where else could they find any warmth? The others were swearing at them, but it was as much use as swearing at a blank wall — it was so much more pleasant here than in the cold.

Pavlo and Shukhov elbowed their way through. They had come at a good time: one gang had been served, another was waiting its turn, and the seconds-in-command of the gangs were standing by the hatch. They were next.

‘Bowls! Bowls!’ the cook shouted through the hatch, and they were pushed through to him from the other side. Shukhov collected up some more bowls and pushed them through — not to earn himself an extra portion, but to get his ration sooner.

Behind the partition some helpers were already washing the bowls — to get something extra for themselves.

The gang second-in-command in front of Pavlo was beginning to get the food for his gang — and Pavlo shouted across the heads:

‘Gopchik!’

‘Here!’ came a squeaky little bleat from the door.

‘Call the gang!’

Gopchik ran off.

The main thing was that the porridge today was good — oatmeal, the best sort. They didn’t get it often. As a
rule, it was magara twice a day, or meal. Oatmeal was good, and filling.

How many times had Shukhov fed horses in his youth! He never thought he'd be craving with his whole soul for a handful of oats!

'Bowls! Bowls!' they cried through the hatch.

Gang 104's turn was approaching. The gang second-in-command ahead got his double ration and moved away from the hatch.

This was also at the expense of the other prisoners - but nobody questioned it. Every gang-leader received an extra portion, and either ate it himself or gave it to his second-in-command. Tyurin gave his to Pavlo.

Now Shukhov had to squeeze himself in behind a table, chase away a couple of men who had finished but not left, politely ask another to leave, and clear a space on the table for twelve bowls pushed up together, on top of which he would put another six and then another two. Then he would take the bowls from Pavlo, repeating out loud the number he took and keeping his eyes skinned in case anybody else grabbed a bowl from the table or jostled him into upsetting one. On either side of him people were either getting up from the bench, sitting down or eating. It was essential to keep a sharp eye open - were they eating from their own bowls, or had they got hold of Gang 104's?

'Two! Four! Six!' the cook counted behind the hatch. He gave out the bowls two at a time. It was easier for him that way, he didn't lose track.

'Two, four, six,' Pavlo repeatedly softly, through the hatch and immediately passed the bowls in pairs to Shukhov, who placed them on the table. Shukhov did not
repeat the count out loud, but his eye was keener than anybody’s.

‘Eight, ten.’

Why hadn’t Gopchik brought in the gang?

‘Twelve, fourteen . . .’ went the count.

Then they ran out of bowls in the kitchen. Beyond Pavlo’s head and shoulders, Shukhov saw the hands of the cook putting two down onto the hatch; the hands held on to the bowls, as if the cook were pondering something. Perhaps he had turned to curse the dishwashers. Then another pile was pushed through the hatch. The cook released his hands from the two bowls and pushed the other pile back.

Shukhov left the pile of bowls he had assembled on the table, jumped over the bench, seized both the bowls, and, not so much for the cook as for Pavlo, repeated in a not very loud voice:

‘Fourteen.’

‘Stop! Where are you taking those?’ the cook shouted.

‘They’re ours, they’re ours!’ Pavlo assured him.

‘They may be yours, but don’t make me lose count!’

‘Fourteen’, Pavlo said, shrugging his shoulders. He himself would not have whipped the extra bowls; as a second-in-command, he had to maintain his authority. He had simply repeated what Shukhov said, and he could always blame it on him.

‘I’d already said fourteen!’ the cook raged.

‘Of course you did, but you didn’t pass them out, you kept your hands on them!’ Shukhov shouted. ‘Go and count them if you don’t believe me! They are all there on the table!’

While Shukhov was shouting at the cook, he noticed
that the two Estonians, close to each other as always, were pushing their way up to him. He shoved the bowls into their hands as they passed. Then he hurriedly turned back to the table to establish that all the bowls were in place and that nobody sitting nearby had pinched any — although they could easily have done so.

The cook’s red face showed itself halfway through the hatch.

‘Where are those bowls?’ he asked threateningly.

‘Here we are!’ cried Shukhov. ‘Get along there, you fucker, he can’t see!’ He pushed somebody aside. ‘Here we are – two bowls!’ He picked up two bowls from the top of the pile on the table. ‘And there are three rows of four left, correct? Count them!’

‘But hasn’t your gang arrived?’ The cook looked suspiciously round the small area of the mess-hall visible to him through the hatch – itself small and narrow so as to prevent people looking in from the mess-hall to see how much was left in the cauldron.

‘No, they’re not here yet,’ Pavlo said, shaking his head.

‘Then why the hell are you taking bowls if your gang isn’t here yet?’ he shouted furiously.

‘Here they are, they’re coming!’ Shukhov cried.

Everybody could hear the yelling of the captain in the doorway – as if he were on his bridge.

‘Why are you all crowding round? If you’ve eaten, get out. Make way for other people!’

The cook grumbled something else, straightened himself up, and his hands showed again in the hatch.

‘Sixteen, eighteen . . .’

Then he poured out the last bowl, a double portion:
"Twenty-three. That's it! Next!"

The members of the gang began to push their way over to the table, and Pavlo handed them their bowls – some over the heads of prisoners seated at a second table.

In summer five men could sit at one bench, but now they were so bulkily dressed that scarcely four could squeeze in, and it wasn't easy for them to wield their spoons.

Reckoning that, of the two bowls he had contrived to swipe, one of them would be his, Shukhov lost no time in getting down to eat. He raised his right knee to his stomach, pulled the spoon marked ‘Ust-Izhma, 1944’ from his boot, took off his cap, tucked it under his left arm and stirred his porridge round the edge of the bowl.

This was the moment when one gave one's entire attention to the act of eating – taking the porridge from the meagre helping at the bottom of the bowl, putting it carefully into one's mouth, and rolling it around with one's tongue. But Shukhov had to hurry, so that Pavlo could see that he had already finished and offer him a second bowl. And there was Fetyukov, who had come in together with the Estonians who had seen the business with the two extra bowls, and who was now eating, standing directly opposite Pavlo, looking at the four extra portions which had accrued to the gang. He was trying to convey to Pavlo that he should get, if not a whole extra portion, at least half of one.

The swarthy young Pavlo, however, went on eating quite calmly, nothing on his face to indicate that he had noticed that anyone was standing in front of him or that he remembered the extra portions.

Shukhov finished his bowl of porridge. Because he had
let his belly hope for another portion, it did not feel satisfied with the one, as it usually did with oatmeal. He reached into his inside pocket, took the unfrozen, semi-circular crust from the clear cloth, and carefully began to wipe all that remained of the oatmeal porridge at the bottom of the bowl and around the edges. When there was enough on the crust, he licked it clean and went through the same process again. Finally the bowl was as clean as if it had been washed, if not as shiny. He handed the bowl over his shoulder to one of the people collecting bowls, and continued to sit there without putting his cap back on.

Although Shukhov had swiped the extra bowls, it was not his business to dispose of them but the second-in-command’s.

Pavlo delayed things a little longer, while he finished his own bowl, but he didn’t lick it clean, merely passed his tongue over his spoon, put it away and crossed himself. Then he lightly touched – there was no room to push them – two of the four bowls, which meant that he was giving them to Shukhov.

‘Ivan Denisovich, take one for yourself and give the other to Tsesar.’

Shukhov had remembered that one of the bowls would have to be taken to Tsesar in the office (Tsesar would never have lowered himself to go to the mess-hall, either here or in the camp, to get it) – he had remembered all right, but when Pavlo had touched the two bowls at the same time, Shukhov’s heart had contracted: had Pavlo given him both the extra bowls? Now his heart returned to normal.

He inclined himself over his lawful prize and began to
eat very deliberately, not feeling it when members of the
new gang which had arrived jostled him in the back. The
only thing that bothered him was that Fetyukov might get
the other bowl. Fetyukov was a master at cadging, but he
never had the courage to pinch anything himself.

Captain Buinovskys sat near them at the table. He had
finished his porridge some time ago and, not knowing
that the gang had any extra portions, he did not look
around to see how many bowls Pavlo had still to dispose
of. He was simply taking it easy, warming up, not having
the strength to stand up and go out into the cold again or
walk to the shelter which they had made at the power-
station – which was really no shelter at all. There he was
occupying a place in the mess-hall he had no right to, and
was a hindrance to the members of the gangs which were
arriving – just like those whom, five minutes before, he
had been driving out with his authoritarian voice. He had
not been long in the camp and was unused to hard labour.
Such moments as these (though he did not know it) were
especially important to him, converting him from a
powerful, brisk naval officer into a slow-moving, watchful
prisoner; and it was this slow-moving quality which
would give him the capacity to survive the twenty-five
years’ imprisonment he had been sentenced to.

People were already shouting at him and pushing him
in the back to get him to give up his place.
Pavlo said:
‘Hey, captain! Captain!’
Buinovsky started, as if roused from sleep, and looked
round.
Pavlo handed him the porridge, not asking him whether
he wanted it or not.
Buinovksy's eyebrows shot up, and his eyes regarded the porridge as if it were some unprecedented miracle.

'Take it, take it,' Pavlo urged him and, picking up the last bowl for the gang-leader, he went out.

A guilty smile passed over the captain's chapped lips — the lips of a man who had sailed round Europe and through the Artic Ocean. And he bent forward, happily, over the meagrely filled bowl of thin oatmeal porridge, cooked without fat — mere oats and water.

Fetyukov looked maliciously at Shukhov and at the captain, and left.

And Shukhov felt that it had been right for the captain to get the extra bowl. As time went by, the captain would learn to cope, but for the moment he did not know how.

Shukhov still had one faint hope — that Tsesar would give him his bowl of porridge. But why should he, when he hadn't received a parcel for two weeks now?

Having scraped the bottom and edge of the bowl and licked the crust clean as before, Shukhov finally ate the crust itself. Then he picked up Tsesar's by now cold porridge and went out.

'For someone in the office!' he said to the cook's assistant at the door, who tried to stop him going through with the bowl.

The office was a wooden hut near the guard-room. Even now, as in the morning, smoke was pouring out of the chimney. An orderly kept the stove going and acted as a messenger as well, picking up a bit on the side from time to time. The office never went short of wood.

The outer door creaked as Shukhov opened it — and then the other door, caulked with oakum — and, bringing with him a cloud of frosty steam, he went in, rapidly
closing the door behind him (so that they wouldn't shout at him: 'Hey, you, you bastard, shut the door!')

The heat in the office reminded him of the bath-house. The sun, shining through the melting frost on the windows, played on the wall opposite, not angrily as it did on top of the power-station, but cheerfully. And the smoke from Tsesar’s pipe drifted across the broad sunbeam like incense in church. And the stove glowed red-hot, it had been so well fed – the brutes! The pipes were red-hot, too.

In such warmth, you had only to sit down for a moment and you’d be fast asleep.

There were two rooms in the office. The second, the Chief Work-Superintendent’s, had its door half-open, and from it thundered the voice of its occupant:

'We've been spending too much on labour, and we've been spending too much on building materials. The prisoners have been chopping up expensive boards, not to speak of prefab panels, and burning them in their shelters, and you notice nothing. Only the other day they were unloading cement near the stores in a strong wind and then carrying it in barrows for up to ten yards, with the result that the whole area around the stores was ankle-deep in cement and the prisoners covered with the stuff. Sheer waste!'

The Chief Work-Superintendent must have been having a conference with the foremen.

The orderly was sitting dreamily on a stool in the corner by the entrance. Beyond was Shkuropanenko, B–219, looking like a bent pole, staring wall-eyed through the window, even now watching in case anybody tried to get away with his prefabs. The old fool had been taken for a ride over the roofing-felt.
Two bookkeepers—also prisoners—were toasting bread at the stove. They'd fixed up a wire grill to prevent it burning.

Tsesar was smoking his pipe, sprawled in his chair by a table. He had his back to Shukhov and couldn't see him.

Opposite him at the table sat X–123, a scrawny old man who had served twenty years. He was eating porridge.

'No, old chap,' Tsesar was saying in a gentle, tolerant tone, 'objectively speaking, one must admit that Eisenstein was a genius. “Ivan the Terrible” — isn't that a work of genius? The dance of the masked oprichniki! The scene in the cathedral!'

'Affected!' said X–123 angrily, holding his spoon in front of his mouth. 'So much art is not art at all. Pepper and poppy-seed instead of good, honest bread! And then the political thesis is vile — the justification of a one-man tyranny. A mockery of the memory of three generations of the Russian intelligentsia!' (He ate his porridge as if his mouth had lost the power to taste, it seemed wasted on him).

'But what other treatment would have been permitted...?'

'Ugh! Permitted! Then don't speak of him as a genius! Call him a toady, say that he carried out orders like a dog! A genius does not adapt his treatment to the taste of tyrants!'

'Hm, hm.' Shukhov cleared his throat, hesitant to interrupt this cultured conversation. But he couldn't just go on standing there.

Tsesar turned, held out his hand for the bowl, not looking at Shukhov—as if the porridge had appeared from thin air—and then carried on:
‘But listen, art — art isn’t a question of what, but of how.

X-123 beat the table repeatedly with the edge of his hand.

‘No, no, no! To hell with your “how” if it doesn’t arouse any decent feelings in me!’

Shukhov stood there for as long as was fitting for a man who had just delivered some porridge. He waited, hoping that Tsesar might give him a smoke. But Tsesar had completely forgotten that he was standing there, behind him.

So, turning, Shukhov left quietly.

It wasn’t too cold outside. The block-laying should go quite well.

As he walked along the path, Shukhov saw a piece of metal lying in the snow — a piece off a hacksaw blade. He could envisage no specific use for it ... but you never knew what you might need in the future, so he picked it up and put it into his knee-pocket. He’d hide it at the power-station. A thrifty man is better off than a rich one.

Reaching the power-station, first he recovered his hidden trowel and pushed it behind his rope belt, then he ducked into the machine-room.

In there, after the sun, it seemed quite dark and not as warm as it had been outside. Damper somehow.

The men were gathered about the round stove which Shukhov had fixed up, and the stove where, steaming, the sand was being dried. Those with no place by either of the stoves sat on the edge of the box for mixing mortar. The gang-leader sat right by the stove, finishing his porridge, which Pavlo had heated for him on it.

The lads were whispering among themselves. They were very cheerful. They told Ivan Denisovich in quiet
voices that the gang-leader had managed to get a good percentage. He had come back in a good mood.

What sort of work he’d said they’d been doing and where was the gang-leader’s affair. What, in fact, had they done today until dinner? Nothing. Fixing up the stove and making a shelter didn’t count as work: that was for themselves, it was nothing to do with the job. But something would have to be written in the work-report. Perhaps Tsesar would help the gang-leader to fiddle things — the gang-leader was respectful towards Tsesar, and that must mean something.

‘A good percentage’ — that meant that they would now get decent bread rations for five days. Well, maybe not five, but four: the authorities would do the dirty on one day out of five for sure, would put the whole camp on a guaranteed minimum — to apply equally to the good and the bad workers. So that nobody should feel offended, equal rations for all! And the camp would be saving at the expense of the prisoners’ bellies. Well, a prisoner’s belly can put up with anything: get through today somehow and eat tomorrow. It was with that dream that they lay down to sleep in the camp on the day of a guaranteed minimum.

Thinking about it, it was five days’ work for four days’ food.

The gang was quiet. Those who could were smoking unobtrusively. They huddled together in the dark and looked at the fire. Like one big family. It was like a family, the team. They listened to the gang-leader as he recounted a story to two or three of them by the stove. He never wasted words, and if he allowed himself to talk, then it meant that he was in good spirits. He also had never
learned to eat with his cap-on, Andrei Prokofyevich; and without it, he looked old. His head was closely shaven—like all the prisoners'—but in the light of the stove you could see how many grey hairs he had.

...I was frightened enough in front of the battalion commander, but here I was before the regimental commander! "Private Tyurin at your service..." He looked at me under his thick eyebrows: "And your name and patronymic?" I tell him. "Year of birth?" I tell him. It was 1930 then, and I was twenty-two, a kid. "Well, Tyurin, who are you serving?" "I serve the workers." At which he blew up, and banged both his hands on the table. "You serve the workers, but who are you, you bastard?" Inside I was raging, but I kept control. "Machine-gunner, first-class. Distinction in military and political..." "First-class—what do you mean, you swine? Your father's a kulak. Look, these papers are from Kamen! Your father's a kulak, and you've been hiding. They've been looking for you for two years." I went pale and kept silent. I hadn't written home for a year in order that they wouldn't catch up with me. I didn't know whether they were still alive—and they knew nothing about me. "What about your conscience!" he shouted, all four shoulder straps shaking with his anger. "Deceiving the Workers' and the Peasants' Government?" I thought he was going to beat me, but he didn't. He signed an order to have me booted out of the gates within six hours, and it was November. They stripped me of my winter uniform and gave me a summer one—third-hand, it must have been—and a short greatcoat. I didn't know that I could have kept my winter uniform, and told them to go to hell. And they sent me off with a stinking reference: "Discharged from
the ranks... as the son of a kulak.” Fat chance of picking up a job with that! It was a four days’ train journey to get home – and they didn’t give me a free pass, or anything to eat even for a single day. I got dinner there for the last time, and then they chucked me out of the garrison.

‘By the way, in ’38, at the Kotlas transit centre, I met my old platoon commander – they’d given him ten years. I learned from him that both the regimental commander and the commissar had been shot in ’37. Whether they were proletarian or kulak, whether they had a conscience or not... I crossed myself and said: “So, Creator, You are up there in heaven after all. You have plenty of patience, but when You strike, You really strike hard.”’

After the two bowls of porridge, Shukhov longed desperately to smoke. Banking on being able to buy from the Latvian in Hut 7 those two jars of home-grown tobacco and then settle things, Shukhov said quietly to the Estonian fisherman:

‘Listen, Eino, lend me enough for one cigarette until tomorrow. You know I won’t let you down.’

Eino looked Shukhov straight in the eye, and then, not hurrying, turned towards his ‘brother’. They shared everything, and wouldn’t dispose of a shred of tobacco without consultation. They muttered something together, and Eino reached for his pouch sewn with pink cord. Out of the pouch he took a pinch of factory-made tobacco, placed it in Shukhov’s hand, measured it and then added a little more. Enough for a single smoke, no more.

Shukhov had some newspaper. He tore a piece off, rolled a cigarette, picked up a coal which had rolled between the gang-leader’s legs, and lit it – and dragged and dragged! A heady feeling pervaded the whole of his body,
as if the cigarette were reaching his legs as well as his head.

As soon as he began to smoke, he spotted a pair of green eyes sparkling at him across the hut: Fetyukov's. He might have softened and given the jackal a pull, but he had seen him score one success at his cadging game already today. Better to leave something for Senka Klevshin. He wasn’t able to hear the gang-leader telling his story, and had just sat there, poor wretch, in front of the stove with his head on one side.

The gang-leader’s pock-marked face was lit by the flames from the stove. He continued his story without self-pity, as if he were talking about somebody else:

'The odds and ends I had, such as they were, I sold to a dealer for a quarter of their value, and I bought a couple of loaves of bread under the counter – there was rationing then. I thought I’d hop a goods train, but they’d just brought in some tough penalties for that. And you couldn’t buy tickets then, remember, even with money, let alone without it – you had to have an authorised travel voucher. You couldn’t even get on the platform: there were militiamen at the barrier, and guards wandering up and down both sides of the tracks. The watery sun was setting, and the puddles were beginning to freeze over. Where could I spend the night? I climbed up a smooth brick wall, jumped down with my loaves of bread and got into the platform lavatory. I stayed there a while, but nobody was after me. Then I came out as if I were a passenger – a soldier in transit. And there stood the Vladivostok–Moscow train. There was a rush for boiling water, and people were hitting each other on the head with their kettles. At the edge of the crowd was a girl wearing a
blue blouse and carrying a big tea-kettle — but she was too frightened to make her way to the hot-water point. Frightened to get her little feet scalded or trodden on. “Here,” I said, “take these loaves, and I’ll get some hot water for you.” While I was filling the kettle, the train began to move. She was holding on to my loaves and crying: she didn’t know what to do with them; she would gladly have thrown the kettle away. “Run!” I cried. “Run! I’ll follow you.” And off she went, with me behind her. I caught up with her and hoisted her onto the train with one arm, running alongside it myself. I — I got one foot on. The conductor didn’t try to bang my fingers or push me in the chest: there were other soldiers in the carriage, and he must have taken me for one of them.’

Shukhov nudged Senka in the ribs to get him to take his dog-end, poor devil. He gave it to him in its wooden holder — let him drag at it, it was all right by him. Senka, the dolt, responded like an actor — put his hand over his heart and bowed his head. But he was deaf, after all . . .

The gang-leader went on with his story:

‘There were six of them in the special compartment – all girls, Leningrad students returning from a practical course. They had some splendid things to eat on their little table, their coats were hung up on hangers, and their cases had covers on them. They were going through life easy — it was the green light for them, all right. We talked and joked and drank tea together. They asked me which carriage I had come from. I sighed and told them the truth. “Girls, the carriage I come from, unlike this, has death as its destination . . .”’

It was silent in the machine-room — just the stove roaring.
‘After some aah-ing and ooh-ing, they conferred together – with the result that they hid me under their coats on the top berth. Hiding me like that, they got me as far as Novosibirsk ... Incidentally, I was able to repay one of the girls later in the Pechora camp: in ’35 she got taken in following the death of Kirov, and she had just about reached the end of her tether doing hard labour when I got her fixed up in the tailoring shop.’

‘Should we begin mixing the mortar?’ Pavlo asked the gang-leader in a whisper.

The gang-leader didn’t hear.

‘I reached home one night through the back garden, and I left the same night. I took my little brother with me, and we went off to a warmer spot, Frunze. I had nothing to feed him on – or myself. In a street in Frunze they were boiling some asphalt in a cauldron, and there were a bunch of riff-raff sitting around. I went up to them: “Listen, gentlemen of the streets! Take my little brother and train him up, teach him how to live!” They took him. I’m sorry I didn’t go with those crooks and join them ...’

‘And you never saw your brother again?’ asked the captain.

Tyurin yawned.

‘No, never saw him again.’ He yawned once more.

‘Well, lads, don’t fret! We’ll make ourselves at home in the power-station. The ones who are mixing the mortar had better get going, don’t wait for the hooter.’

That’s how a gang runs. The authorities couldn’t get a prisoner to work even in working-hours, but a gang-leader could tell them to work in the break, and they would. Because he fed them; he wasn’t getting them to work simply for fun.
If they only began to mix the mortar when the hooter went, then what would the bricklayers do?
Shukhov sighed and got up.
‘I’ll go and hack off the ice.’
He took with him a small axe and a brush and an implement for laying, a batten, some twine and a plumb.
Kilgas’ ruddy face looked at Shukhov and grimaced as if to say, why should he jump up before his gang-leader. Of course, Kilgas didn’t have to think about ways of feeding the gang. It didn’t concern him, the old bald-head, if he got a couple of hundred grams of bread less – he could manage on his parcels.
Nevertheless, he got up. He understood: you couldn’t hold back the gang on your own account.
‘Hang on, Ivan, and I’ll come with you!’ he said.
That’s it, fat-face, that’s it. If you’d been working for yourself, you’d have been on your feet a damn sight quicker.
(Shukhov was also in a hurry because he wanted to get hold of the plumb before Kilgas; it was the only one they’d got from the tool-shop.)
‘Will three be enough to lay blocks?’ Pavlo asked the gang-leader. ‘Should we put somebody else on the job? Or won’t there be enough mortar?’
The gang-leader frowned and thought a while.
‘I’ll be the fourth man myself, Pavlo. And you stay here with the mortar. It’s a big box, we’ll put six men on the job. And take the mortar out of one end when it’s ready and mix up the new stuff at the other end. No messing about!’
Pavlo jumped up. He was a young man, his blood was fresh, camp life had not reduced him too far yet, his face
was still plump from eating Ukrainian dumplings at home.

‘If you lay the blocks,’ he said, ‘then I’ll mix the mortar for you myself – and we’ll see who’s faster. Where’s the longest shovel around here?’

That’s how a gang runs. Pavlo used to shoot his way out of trouble in the forest and had made night-raids on villages – why should he knock himself out with work in the camp? But to work for the gang-leader – that was another thing.

Shukhov went up with Kilgas, and they heard Senka creaking up the ladder behind them. Deaf as he was, he had guessed what was going on.

The previous lot had only made a start on laying the blocks on the walls of the second storey: three rows all round, a little higher here and there. This was the stage when laying was fastest – from the knee to the chest, without the use of steps.

The steps which had been there earlier and the planks had all been taken by other prisoners. Some had been carried off to other buildings, some had been burnt – just so that no other gang would have them. Tomorrow they would have to nail some planks together or they’d be unable to get on with the job.

One could see a long way from the top of the power-station: the whole site snow-covered and deserted (the prisoners were hidden away, trying to get warm before the hooter went), the black watch-towers, the sharpened poles for the barbed wire. One couldn’t see the wire itself looking at it against the sun – only away from it. The sun shone very brightly, it hurt one’s eyes.

Not far off was the power engine, blackening the sky
with its smoke and breathing heavily. It always made that
great wheezing noise before sounding the hooter. There it
went. They hadn’t got down to work so early, after all.
'Hey, Stakhanovite! Hurry up with that plumb!' Kilgas shouted.
'See how much ice there is on your wall! You going to
chip it off before evening?' Shukhov retorted sarcastic-
ally. 'Your trowel won’t be much use to you until you do!'
They planned to start on the walls which they had
allocated to each other before dinner, but now the gang-
leader shouted up from below:
'Hey, lads! We’ll work in pairs so that the mortar
doesn’t freeze in the hods. Shukhov, you take Klevshin on
your wall, and I’ll work with Kilgas. But for the moment
Gopchik can take my place and clean up Kilgas’ wall.'
Shukhov and Kilgas exchanged looks. It was true. It
would be quicker.
They seized their axes.
From then on Shukhov ceased to see the distant view
where the sun shone on the snow or his fellow-prisoners
wandering over the site from the places where they’d been
keeping warm — some to dig holes which they hadn’t
finished in the morning, some to reinforce mesh, some to
put up beams in the workshops. Now he saw only his
wall — from the corner on his left where the blocks rose in
steps, higher than his waist, to the right-hand corner
where his wall joined up with Kilgas’. He showed Senka
where to take off the ice, and himself hacked away at it
eagerly with the back and blade of his axe so that chips of
ice flew all around him and even into his face. He worked
well and swiftly, but without thinking about it. His mind
and eyes were concentrated on the wall below the ice, the
outside wall of the power-station, two blocks thick. He didn’t know the bricklayer who had worked on that part of the wall before him, but he was either an idiot or an incompetent. Shukhov felt at one with the wall as if it were his own. There — there was a gap which it would be impossible to level out in one row; he’d have to do it in three, adding the mortar a little more thickly each time. And here the outer wall was swelling out — it would take two rows to straighten that. He divided up the wall in his mind into the place where he’d lay blocks from the left-hand corner, the stretch Senka was working on; on the right, as far as where Kilgas was. There, at the corner on the right, he reckoned that Kilgas wouldn’t hold back, would lay a few blocks for Senka to make things easier for him. And before they had finished tinkering in the corner, Shukhov on his side would have more than half the wall up so that his pair did not fall behind. He made a note how many blocks he would have to lay and where. And as soon as they began to get the blocks up, he shouted at Alyoshka:

‘Bring ’em to me! Put ’em down here — and here!’

Senka finished hacking off the ice, and Shukhov fetched a wire brush, gripped it in both hands, and started scrubbing to and fro along the wall, cleaning the top row of blocks, especially the joints, until they were a light greyish colour like dirty snow.

The gang-leader climbed up and, while Shukhov was still busy with the wire-brush, set up his batten at the corner. Shukhov and Kilgas had set theirs up on the edges of the wall some time before.

‘Hey!’ Pavlo shouted from below. ‘Anybody still alive up there? We’re coming up with the mortar!’
Shukhov began to sweat. He hadn’t stretched his twine over the blocks yet! He got moving fast, and decided to stretch the twine not over one row, nor even over two rows, but over three at once, leaving some room to spare. And in order to make things easier for Senka, he took over a bit of the outer wall from him and left him a bit of the inside wall.

Stretching the twine along the top, he explained to Senka by words and signs where he was to lay. He understood, deaf as he was. Biting his lips, he squinted in the direction of the gang-leader’s wall as if to say: ‘We’ll give it to ’em! We’ll keep up!’ He laughed.

They were bringing the mortar up the ladder. Four pairs of men would be on the job. The gang-leader decided that the mortar should not be emptied from the hods beside the layers – it would only freeze before they had time to lay it. The carriers were to put the hods down straight away, and the two layers on each part of the wall would take out the mortar and lay it immediately. Meanwhile, the carriers, in order that they shouldn’t freeze up there doing nothing, would carry the blocks over to the layers. As soon as the hods were empty, the first pair would go down without a break and another pair would come up. Then, at the bottom, any mortar which had frozen in the empty hods would be thawed out by the stove – and the men would thaw themselves out, too.

They brought up the hods two at a time – one for Kilgas’ wall and one for Shukhov’s. The mortar steamed in the cold, although it wasn’t really warm at all. You had to get a move on, slapping it on the wall with a trowel – or else it would harden up. If it did, you had to hit it with a
hammer, you wouldn’t get it off with a trowel. And if you laid your block a little off centre, then it’d freeze instantly and set out of place — and you’d have to knock it away with the back of your axe and chip off the mortar.

But Shukhov made no mistakes. The blocks were not always the same. If one had a corner chipped or a broken edge or something else wrong with it, he would spot it immediately and see which way up to lay the block and the precise place on the wall to put it.

Shukhov scooped up some steaming mortar with his trowel, threw it into place, remembering where the joint was in the row below (it should be in the middle of the block he was laying on top). He threw on exactly enough mortar for one block, picked a block out of the pile (carefully, so as not to tear his mittens — easy to do that with blocks), levelled the mortar once more with his trowel — then on with the block! He evened it out immediately, tapping it with the side of the trowel if it wasn’t lying quite true — so that the outside wall would run plumb straight and the blocks lie level both lengthways and across. And the mortar would quickly freeze.

Now, if any of the mortar squeezed out from under the block, you had to scrape it off with the edge of your trowel as quickly as possible and chuck it over the wall (in summer it could be used to go under the next block, but now that was unthinkable). Then you took another look at the joint below — sometimes the block would not be whole, would have crumbled, and you would have to slap in some more mortar to fill up the gap; and you couldn’t always simply lay the block down flat, sometimes you would have to slide it from side to side, and it was then you’d get the extra mortar coming out from between the block and its
neighbour. One eye on the plumb. One eye on the laying surface. Down with the block. Next!

The work went well. Once he'd laid a couple of rows and ironed out the flaws, it'd be smooth going. But right now he had to be as sharp as hell!

He slaved away on the outside row to meet Senka. Senka had parted company with the gang-leader at the corner and was now working towards Shukhov.

Shukhov winked at the carriers — come on, come on, look lively! He was working at such a pace he didn't have time to wipe his nose.

When he and Senka came together, they began to scoop mortar out of the same hod — and they soon exhausted it.

'Mortar!' Shukhov shouted over the wall.

'Coming!' Pavlo shouted back.

They brought up another hod, which was soon emptied — the unfrozen mortar, that is, for a lot had frozen to the sides of the hod. Scrape it out yourselves! There was no point in letting the frozen mortar accumulate in the box, since the carriers had to be carrying it up and down all the time. Go on, get rid of it! Next!

By now Shukhov and the other layers had ceased to feel the cold. As a result of the speed and absorption with which they worked, the first wave of warmth had overtaken them and they felt wet under their coats and jackets and shirts and undershirts. Yet they didn't slacken for a moment, they became increasingly wrapped up in their task. After an hour they experienced the second wave of warmth — when the sweat dries on you. And their feet didn't feel cold, that was the main thing, nothing else mattered. The light, piercing wind did not distract them. Only Klevshin stamped his feet: he took size 46, poor
fellow, and his felt boots weren’t of the same size, and were too tight anyway.

From time to time, the gang-leader would shout: ‘Mortar!’ and Shukhov would repeat the shout. If a fellow is working really hard, he becomes a kind of gang-leader over those working with him. It was up to Shukhov to keep up with the other pair, and he would have chased his own brother up the ladder with hods of mortar.

After dinner, Buinovskiy had carried mortar with Fetyukov. But the ladder was steep and slippery, and he hadn’t done very well to begin with. Shukhov urged him on gently:

‘A little quicker, captain! More blocks over here, captain!’

But while the captain became more efficient with each load, Fetyukov became more idle: the bastard would tilt the hods as he came up, allowing some of the mortar to spill so that they would be lighter to carry.

Once Shukhov poked him in the back:

‘Come on, you bloody swine! I’ll bet you worked your men hard enough when you were a director in that office of yours!’

‘Gang-leader!’ the captain shouted. ‘Give me a man to work with! I can’t carry anything with this piece of shit!’

The gang-leader transferred Fetyukov to hauling blocks from the ground to the scaffolding – in a position where it would be possible to count how many blocks he handled – and put Alyoshka to work with the captain. Alyoshka was a quiet one, and would do whatever he was told, whoever gave the order.

‘All hands on deck, then!’ the captain shouted at him. ‘See how they’re laying the blocks!’
Alyoshka smiled meekly:
‘If we must work faster, then let’s work faster. Anything you say.’

And down the ladder they went.

A meek fellow like that was a treasure in any gang.

The gang-leader shouted to somebody below. It seemed that another load of blocks had arrived. Not a block had turned up here for half a year, and now they were pouring in. This was the time to work – while they were bringing the blocks. It was the first day. It wouldn’t be easy to cope later if they got held up.

The gang-leader was swearing at somebody else below. Something about the hoist. Shukhov wanted to know what was going on, but he had no time: he was levelling his wall. A couple of the carriers came up and told him that a fitter had arrived to repair the motor of the hoist, and with him the superintendent of electrical works, himself not a prisoner. The fitter rummaged around inside the motor, while the superintendent looked on.

That was how it went: one man worked, the other just watched.

If they were able to repair the hoist now, they could use it to lift both the blocks and the mortar.

Shukhov was already laying his third row of blocks (Kilgas had started his third as well) when up the ladder came another patrolling official – building foreman Der, a Muscovite. It was said he had worked in a ministry there.

Shukhov was standing close to Kilgas and he drew his attention to Der.

‘Ugh!’ Kilgas brushed the sight aside. ‘As a rule, I steer clear of those bastards, but if he slips on the ladder, then give me a call.’
Der would stand behind the layers and watch them work. Shukhov simply couldn’t stand these prowlers. Trying to become an engineer, the pig’s snout! Once he had tried to show Shukhov how to lay blocks — that had been a joke! Build a house with your own two hands first, and then you can think of becoming an engineer — that was how Shukhov felt.

At Temgenovo there were no stone houses, all the huts were made of wood. The school-house was wooden, too — six-foot logs carried in from the forest. But in the camp they needed bricklayers — so, Shukhov had become one. A man who could use his hands in two trades would have no trouble acquiring another ten!

No, Der hadn’t slipped on the ladder, although he had stumbled once. He almost ran up.

‘Tyurin!’ he shouted, his eyes popping out of his head. ‘Tyurin!’

Pavlo ran up the ladder behind him with the shovel he’d been using.

Der was wearing an ordinary camp coat, although it was new and clean. His cap was smart and made of leather, but it had a number on it like everybody else’s: B–731 in this case.

‘Well?’ The gang-leader approached him with his trowel in his hand, his cap tilted over one eye.

Something was up. Shukhov didn’t want to miss anything, but the mortar was freezing in the hod. He went on laying, keeping his ears open.

‘Well, what’s this?’ Der shouted, spitting saliva. ‘This isn’t just a spell in the cells! This is a criminal matter, Tyurin! You’ll get a third sentence for this!’

Only then did Shukhov twig what it was all about. He
glanced at Kilgas, who had also realised. The roofing-felt! Der had seen it on the windows.

Shukhov was not afraid on his own account. His gang-leader would never betray him. But he did fear for Tyurin. To the gang he was like a father, to the authorities he was merely a pawn. For an offence like this they were quick to give a gang-leader a second term up here in the North.

Christ, you should have seen the gang-leader’s face! He threw down his trowel and took a step towards Der! Der looked round — and Pavlo brandished his shovel. The shovel! He hadn’t brought it up with him for nothing . . .

Senka, deaf though he was, understood: he moved forward, his hands on his hips. And he was a big fellow.

Der blinked nervously and cast his eyes round for an escape route.

The gang-leader leaned towards Der and said quite quietly, although clearly enough to be heard up there: ‘Your time for handing out sentences has passed, you rat! If you say a word, you bloodsucker, this’ll be your last day. Get it!’

The gang-leader was shaking all over, unable to control himself.

And sharp-faced Pavlo gave Der a straight look in the eye — as keen as a razor.

‘Steady now, lads, take it easy!’ Der turned pale and moved further away from the ladder.

The gang-leader said not another word, straightened his cap, picked up his trowel and went back to his wall.

And Pavlo, with his shovel, walked slowly down the ladder.
Very, very slowly...

Der was frightened to remain up there and frightened to go down. He went and stood by Kilgas.

Kilgas went on laying — carefully, as they weigh medicine in a chemist’s shop; like a doctor with all the time in the world. He had his back to Der as if he didn’t know he was there.

Der crept up to the gang-leader. Where was all his pride now?

‘What shall I say to the superintendent, Tyurin?’

The gang-leader went on laying, and said without turning his head:

‘Tell him that’s how it was when we got here. We arrived — and that’s how it was.’

Der stood around a little longer. He realised that they were not going to kill him now. He walked around a bit, quietly, and put his hands in his pockets.

‘Hey, S-854,’ he grumbled. ‘Why are you laying that mortar on so thin?’

He had to take it out on somebody. He couldn’t find fault with Shukhov’s joints or straightness — so it was the mortar that was too thin.

‘Allow me to point out,’ Shukhov lisped, smirking, ‘that if I laid the mortar on any thicker now, this whole power-station would leak like hell in the spring.’

‘You’re a bricklayer, so listen to what a foreman has to tell you,’ Der frowned, and blew out his cheeks, which was a habit of his.

Well, maybe it was a little thin here and there, and he could have used a bit more — but only if he had been laying in ordinary conditions and not in winter. All the same, people should have some understanding. Output
was important. But what was the point of explaining it to an ignoramus like Der, anyway!

And Der went slowly down the ladder.

‘You get that hoist put right for me!’ the gang-leader shouted after him from the wall. ‘What do you think we are—donkeys? Hauling blocks up to the second storey by hand!’

‘You’ll get paid for carrying them up,’ Der replied from the ladder, but mildly.

‘Yes, but paid for carrying them in wheelbarrows. Could you push a wheelbarrow up that ladder? We should get paid for carrying them up by hand.’

‘You don’t think I’d mind, do you? But the bookkeepers would never pass it.’

‘Bookkeepers! I’ve got a whole gang working to keep four layers at it. How much do you think we’re going to earn?’ the gang-leader shouted back without interrupting his laying.

‘Mortar!’ he yelled down.

‘Mortar!’ Shukhov echoed him. They’d finished levelling the third row and could get going on the fourth. He should stretch the twine along the row again, but he reckoned he’d manage without it this time.

Der went off across the site, looking somewhat shrunken. He’d warm up in the office. He couldn’t have been feeling too good. He should think twice before mixing it with a wolf like Tyurin. He should try to keep on good terms with gang-leaders like him, and then he’d have nothing to worry about. He wasn’t asked to do any really serious work, he got the highest category of rations, he lived in a separate cabin. What else did he want? Giving himself airs like that, and trying to be clever.
A pair of carriers came up from below to say that the superintendent of electrical works had gone, so had the fitter — and it was impossible to mend the hoist.

So on with the donkey work.

In all the many jobs Shukhov had done in camp life, the machinery had either broken down itself or had been smashed by the prisoners. They had once broken a log-conveyor by shoving a pole under the chain and pressing down on it. In order to get a breather. They’d been piling up log after log without a break.

‘More blocks! More blocks!’ shouted the gang-leader, flying into a temper. ‘And go fuck your mothers, all of you!’

‘Pavlo’s asking how you’re off for mortar,’ they shouted up from below.

‘Mix some more!’

‘We’ve got half a box mixed!’

‘Well, mix another!’

They were really moving now! They were going along the fifth row. They’d had to bend themselves double on the first row, but now the wall was up to their chests. It wasn’t so hard to get on, with no windows or doors, just two blank walls joined to each other and a lot of blocks. They should have stretched the twine in the higher position, but it was too late.

‘Gang 82 have gone to hand in their tools,’ Gopchik announced.

The gang-leader’s eyes flashed at him.

‘Get on with your work, you little pipsqueak! Keep those blocks moving!’

Shukhov looked about. Yes, the sun was setting. It was all red and seemed to be sinking into a greyish haze. And
they were really getting a move on — couldn’t have gone faster. They’d begun on the fifth row now, and they should have time to finish it and level it off.

The carriers looked like winded horses. The captain had turned quite grey. He was, after all, round about forty.

It was getting colder. Even though his hands were working all the time, Shukhov’s fingers were beginning to feel numb through his ragged mittens. And the cold was getting into his left boot. He stamped his foot up and down.

By now he didn’t have to bend down to reach the wall, but he had to break his back each time he reached for a block or a scoop of mortar.

‘Hey, you lads!’ Shukhov badgered them. ‘Get me some blocks onto the wall here! Put ’em up on the wall!’

The captain would have been glad to help, but he lacked the strength. He wasn’t used to this sort of work. But Alyoshka said:

‘All right, Ivan Denisovich. Show me where to put ’em.’

Alyoshka never refused, he did everything asked of him. If everybody in the world were like him, Shukhov would be as well. If a man asks for something, why refuse him? Those Baptists were right.

All over the site, as far as the power-station, the sound of the rail being banged could be clearly heard. Knocking-off time! They still had some mortar left. Ah, when you tried hard . . .

‘Give me some mortar! Give me some mortar!’ the gang-leader shouted.

And a new box of mortar had only just been mixed! Now they’d have to go on laying, there was nothing else for it: if they didn’t empty the box, tomorrow they’d have
to smash the whole box to pieces, the mortar would have set so hard they’d never be able to hack it out with picks.

‘Come on, brothers, don’t let me down!’ Shukhov shouted.

Kilgas hated it. He didn’t like rush jobs. But he pressed on. What else could he do?

Pavlo ran up the ladder with a hod and a trowel in one hand, to help with the laying. There were five trowels at work now.

Now they’d have to watch out that the blocks met in the right place! Shukhov always picked out beforehand the size of block he was going to want. He pushed a hammer into Alyoshka’s hand and said:

‘Go on, knock this one to size for me!’

You can’t work well if you’re in too much of a hurry. Now that everybody else was speeding away, Shukhov slowed down a bit and observed the wall carefully. He pushed Senka over to the left-hand side, and himself went to the main corner on the right. If the wall didn’t join up properly or if the corner went wrong, it would be half a day’s work putting it right tomorrow.

‘Stop!’ He pushed Pavlo away from a block and righted it himself. And from there, in the corner, he saw that Senka’s bit was beginning to sag. He rushed over to Senka and straightened it out with a couple of blocks.

The captain, like an old carthorse, hauled up more mortar.

‘Two more hods!’ he shouted.

The captain was tottering on his legs, but he kept going. Shukhov was reminded of a horse he had once had. He had cared for it well, but it had worked itself to death. Then they’d skinned the hide off it.
The upper rim of the sun was going down below the horizon now. They didn't need Gopchik to tell them that all the gangs had not only handed in their tools, but were moving in a wave towards the guard-room. (Nobody went there immediately after the signal sounded - they'd have been fools to stand around freezing. They all sat back in their shelters. Then came the moment, agreed among the gang-leaders, for all the gangs to pour out together. If there hadn't been an agreement, the prisoners were so stubborn they would have sat around in their shelters until midnight, waiting for another gang to make the first move.)

Tyurin came to his senses and realised that he had left things very late. The man in the tool-shop would be cursing him like mad, for sure.

'Hey!' he shouted. 'Don't worry about that shit! Carriers! Let down the ladder and scrape out the box into that hole there, and cover it up with snow so that nobody will see! And you, Pavlo, take a couple of men, collect the tools and go and hand them in! I'll send the remaining three trowels with Gopchik, and we'll finish these last two hods.'

Everyone got going. They took Shukhov's hammer and unfastened his twine. The carriers and the block-shifters hastened down the ladder to the machine-room where they'd been making the mortar - there was nothing more for them to do up there. Three layers remained on top - Kilgas, Klevshin and Shukhov. The gang-leader wanted to see how much they had achieved. He was content.

'Not bad for half a day's work, eh? And without a fucking hoist at that.'

Shukhov noticed that Kilgas still had a little mortar left. He was reluctant to waste it, but was worried that the
gang-leader would get blasted by the man in the tool-shop for handing back the trowels so late.

‘Listen, lads,’ he said, ‘give your trowels to Gopchik. Mine is not accounted for, so I don’t have to give it back, and I’ll finish up the job with it.’

The gang-leader laughed:

‘How can we ever let you go free? The camp would be in a sorry state without you!’

Shukhov laughed as well, and went on laying.

Kilgas took the trowels. Senka started handing blocks to Shukhov, and they poured Kilgas’ mortar into Shukhov’s hod.

Gopchik ran across the site to the tool-shop, trying to catch up with Pavlo. And the rest of Gang 104 started out across the site without the gang-leader. A gang-leader is a force to be reckoned with, but the guards were a force stronger by far. They noted down those who were late and that meant the cells.

There was a terrific crowd around the guard-room. Everybody had gathered there. It looked as if the escort guards had come out and had started to count.

(The prisoners were counted twice on the way out: once when the gates were still shut, in order that the guards should be able to open them and again when the gates were open and the prisoners were passing through. And if the guards thought that they had made a mistake, then they took a third count outside the gates.)

‘To hell with the mortar!’ the gang-leader said, waving his arm. ‘Chuck it over the wall!’

‘You’d better go, gang-leader! You’ll be needed over there!’ (Shukhov usually called the gang-leader Andrei Prokofyevich, but now, after his work, he felt on a kind of
par with him. Not that he thought consciously: ‘Well, I’m your equal!’ but he simply knew that it was so.) As the gang-leader descended the ladder with resolute tread, Shukhov called after him: ‘Why do the swine give us such a short working day? You’ve only just got going on your work, and they knock you off!’

Shukhov was left with deaf Senka now. You didn’t talk much with him, but you didn’t need to: he was smarter than them all, he understood without words.


The boss had said not to worry about the mortar — chuck it over the wall and push off. But Shukhov wasn’t made that way, and eight years of camp life hadn’t altered him: he still worried about every little detail of work — and he hated waste.


‘We’ve finished, fuck it!’ Senka shouted. ‘Let’s be off!’

He seized a hod and went down the ladder.

But Shukhov — and the guards could have put the dogs on him now, it would have made no difference — ran back to have a look round. Not bad. He ran over and looked along the wall — to the left, to the right. His eye was true. Good and straight! His hands were still good. He ran down the ladder.

Senka was already out of the machine-room and running down the rise on which the power-station was situated.

‘Come on, come on!’ he shouted over his shoulder.

‘Run on, I’m coming!’ Shukhov waved back at him.

And he went into the machine-room. He couldn’t simply throw down his trowel like that. Perhaps,
tomorrow, Shukhov would not be sent to this place, but
the gang would be ordered to the Socialist Community
Centre, perhaps he wouldn’t come back here for six
months or so — and would that be that with the trowel?
No, he’d do his best to hang on to it.

Both the stoves in the room had been extinguished. It
was dark. Frightening. Not frightening because of the
dark, but because everybody had left, because he might
be the only one not to be counted at the guard-room, and
then the escort guards would beat him.

He looked all around, spotted a large stone in a corner,
rolled it back, slipped his trowel in and covered it again.
That was that!

Now to catch up with Senka. But Senka had only gone
a hundred yards or so and was waiting for him. Klevshin
would never leave you in the lurch. If you had to answer
for anything, you’d answer together.

They ran off side by side — the short and the tall.
Senka was half a head taller than Shukhov, and it was a
big enough head at that.

There are some people with nothing better to do than
chase each other round a stadium of their own free will.
Let them try it, the devils, after a full day’s work, with
their backs still not straightened out, their mittens wet, in
worn out felt boots — and in the freezing cold.

They were panting like rabid dogs, all that could be
heard was the sound of their heavy breathing.

Well, the gang-leader was in the guard-room and he’d
make excuses for them.

Now they were running straight towards the crowd,
and it was frightening.

Hundreds of voices yelling at them at once: ‘Fuckers!
Bastards! Cunts! Fuckers!’ Five hundred men raging at you – it certainly was frightening.

But the main problem was what the escort guards would do.

No, they weren’t going to do anything. The gangleader was there, in the last row. That meant that he had explained, had taken the blame on himself.

But the lads swore and yelled obscenities – and made such a row that even Senka heard it; he took a deep breath and roared back with all his might! All his life he had been a quiet sort of person, but now he positively bellowed! He shook his fists and seemed ready to fight all comers. The men quietened down, and some of them laughed.

‘Hey, Gang 104! We thought you had a deaf one among you?’ somebody cried out. ‘We were just making sure.’

Everybody laughed. Even the guards.

‘Line up in fives!’

They didn’t open the gates. They weren’t sure enough of themselves. They pushed the crowd back from the gates. (Everybody surged up to the gates – as if, the idiots, they’d get out any quicker like that.)

‘Line up in fives! One! Two! Three!’

And as each five was called, they moved forward a few yards.

While Shukhov was getting his breath back, he looked up – the moon had already risen and was scowling ruddily in the sky. Perhaps it was beginning to wane. Yesterday it had been much higher at this time.

Shukhov felt pleased that everything had gone off so smoothly; he poked the captain in the side and said:
‘Listen, captain, where according to that science of yours does the old moon go when it’s through?’
‘Where does it go? What ignorance! It simply isn’t visible any more!’

Shukhov shook his head and laughed:
‘Well, if it’s not visible, how do you know it’s there?’
‘So, according to you,’ said the captain, astonished, ‘we get a new moon every month?’
‘What’s so strange about that? People are born every day, why shouldn’t there be a new moon every four weeks?’

‘Pfui!’ The captain spat. ‘I’ve never met such a dumb sailor as you. So where do you think the old moon goes?’
‘That’s what I’m asking you — where?’ Shukhov grinned.
‘Well, where does it go, tell me?’
Shukhov sighed and said, hardly lisping:
‘At home they used to say that God broke up the old moon for stars.’

‘What savages!’ The captain laughed. ‘I’ve never heard such a thing! Do you believe in God, Shukhov?’
‘Why not?’ Shukhov replied, surprised. ‘When you hear-Him thunder, you can’t help believing in Him.’
‘And why do you think God does that, then?’
‘Does what?’
‘Break the moon up into stars?’
‘Well, don’t you understand?’ Shukhov shrugged his shoulders. ‘The stars fall down from time to time, and it’s necessary to fill the gaps.’

‘Turn round, you swine . . . ’ an escort guard shouted.
‘Get into line!’

The counting had got as far as them. The twelfth row
of five of the fifth hundred moved forward, leaving only Buinovskiy and Shukhov behind.

The escort guards were worried and began a discussion over the counting boards. Somebody missing? It had happened before! If only they would learn to count!

They had counted off 462, but they reckoned that it should have been 463.

They pushed everybody back from the gates (they had pressed forward again) — and:

‘Line up in fives! One! Two!’

The worst thing about these recounts was that they came out of the prisoners’ time, not time which otherwise would have been spent working. They still had to go back across the steppe to the camp and then line up to be searched. Everybody from all the sites would race to get back to the camp as quickly as possible so as to be searched early, and consequently to get quicker into camp. The first column to arrive back in camp had everything their own way: the mess-hall was at their disposal, they were the first to get their parcels, first to the ‘individual’ kitchen, first to the store-room, first to the CES to collect letters or to the censor to hand them in, first to the infirmary, the barber’s, the bath-house — first everywhere.

The escort guards weren’t sorry to see the back of them either — and hand them over to the camp. It wasn’t much fun being a soldier: a lot to do, and not much time to do it in.

And now the count had gone wrong.

As the last rows of five began to move forward, it looked to Shukhov as if there would be three men left at the end. But no, there were two again.

The counters went to the Chief Escort Guard with
their boards. There was a discussion. The Chief Escort Guard shouted:
‘Gang-leader 104!’
Tyurin stepped forward half a pace.
‘Here.’
‘Did you leave anybody at the power-station? Think.’
‘No.’
‘Think hard, or I’ll knock your head off!’
‘No, I’m sure.’
But he glanced at Pavlo – could anybody have dropped off to sleep in the machine-room?
‘Line up in gangs!’ the Chief Escort Guard shouted.
They had formed into fives according to where they had been standing at the time, in random order. Now they began to move about and to re-form. Someone shouted:
‘Gang 76 – over here!’ Somebody else ‘Gang 13, this way!’ Another ‘Gang 32 here!’
Gang 104 had been behind everybody else, and they grouped together where they were. Shukhov noticed that nobody in the gang had anything in his hands. They had been so busy working, the fools, that they had not collected any firewood. Then he saw that two of them – only two – were carrying small bundles.
They played this game every day: before knocking-off time the prisoners would collect chips, sticks and broken laths, and tie them together with bits of rag or old string to take back to camp. The first raid on these bundles took place at the guard-room – by a superintendent or one of the foremen. If one of these was standing there, he would order the bundles to be thrown down (millions of roubles went up in smoke in consequence of the authorities’ inefficiency, yet they thought they could make up for the
loss with chips of wood). But the prisoners' calculation was that if every man from every gang brought back with him even a stick or two, then the barracks would be somewhat warmer. The orderlies were given five kilograms of coal-dust per stove, and you couldn't get much warmth out of that. So the men would break up the pieces of wood, or saw them short, and stuff them under their coats. In this way they eluded the superintendent.

The escort guards on the site never ordered the men to drop their bundles until they'd got them back to camp. They also needed firewood, but it was impossible for them to carry it. For one thing, they were wearing uniform, and for another their hands were occupied – with tommy-guns with which to shoot at the prisoners. But when they got back to camp, the order went out: ‘Row Such-and-Such to Row Such-and-Such, drop your bundles here!’ But they robbed mercifully: they had to leave something for the camp warders, and for the prisoners themselves, who would not otherwise bring any wood back.

So every prisoner brought something back with him every day. You never knew when you'd get it through or when it might be taken from you.

While Shukhov was looking around to see if there were any odd bits of wood to pick up, the gang-leader finished counting the gang and reported to the Chief Escort Guard:

‘Gang 104 all present!’

Tsesar had left his fellow office-workers to join the gang. His pipe glowing red as he puffed away at it, and, his black moustache tinged with frost, he asked:

‘Well, captain, and how are things?’

A man who's warm cannot understand one who's
freezing, or he wouldn’t ask silly questions like that. ‘How are things?’ indeed.

‘Well,’ the captain said, shrugging his shoulders. ‘I’ve worked so hard I can hardly straighten my back.’

And you might give me something to smoke was the implication.

Tsesar did give him something to smoke. The captain was the only man in the gang he kept close to, and he gave him confidences he would not have entrusted to anyone else.

‘One man missing in Gang 32! Gang 32!’ everybody began to shout.

The second-in-command of Gang 32 dashed off with a young fellow to search the repair-shops. In the crowd people kept asking: ‘Who is it? What’s happening?’ The news reached Shukhov that it was the short, dark Moldavian. But which short, dark Moldavian? Not the Moldavian who, it was said, had been a Rumanian spy, a real spy?

Spies – there were up to five of them in every gang, but they were not necessarily the real thing. Their records showed them as spies, but they had probably been simply prisoners-of-war. Shukhov was that kind of spy.

But the Moldavian – he had been the real thing.

The Chief Escort Guard looked down at his list, and his face blackened. If a real spy had indeed got away, then the Chief Escort Guard would be for it.

In the crowd, everybody, including Shukhov, went mad. Who did he think he was, the vulture, the swine, the bastard, the fucker? The sky was already dark, and what light there was came from the moon. The stars were out, and the night frost was gathering strength – and now this
Moldavian bastard was missing! Hadn’t the shit worked long enough that day? Weren’t the regulation hours—eleven hours from dawn to dusk—sufficient for him? Well, maybe the public prosecutor would add to them!

It was incredible to Shukhov that anyone could work so hard as not to notice the signal to knock off.

Shukhov had completely forgotten that he himself had been working like that only recently, that he had been irritated when everybody else collected around the guardroom excessively early. Now he was frozen stiff and furious like the rest of them; in this mood if the Moldavian kept them hanging around for another half hour, and if the escort guards gave him to the crowd, they’d tear him to pieces, like wolves with a lamb!

The cold was really biting into them now! Nobody stood still—they either stamped up and down where they stood, or walked two or three paces backwards and forwards.

People were discussing whether the Moldavian could have escaped. Well, if he had got away during the day, that was one thing, but if he had hidden and was waiting for the escort guards to leave their watch-towers, he’d have a long time to wait. If there were no traces under the wire to indicate his point of escape, they’d scour the site for three days and leave the escort guards in the watch-towers for three days until they found him. Or a week, if necessary. That was how it was laid down, as all the old prisoners knew. In general, if somebody got away, the guards’ lives were made hell, and they were kept at it without sleep or food. Sometimes they got so mad that the escaper wouldn’t be brought back alive.
Tsesar was arguing with the captain:
‘For example, do you remember the shot when the pince-nez were hanging from the ship’s rigging?’
‘Mm . . .’ the captain grunted, smoking.
‘Or the perambulator going down the steps – bumping, bumping . . .’
‘Yes . . . but life on board is rendered somewhat artificially.’
‘Yes, you see, but we have been spoiled by modern camera techniques . . .’
‘And the maggots in the meat crawled around just like rainworms. Surely they weren’t as large as that?’
‘But in cinema you can’t show things like that much smaller!’
‘Well, I think if they brought that meat to the camp instead of the fish we get, and shoved it straight into the cauldron without even cleaning or washing it, then I reckon we’d be . . .’
‘Aaaa . . .!’ the prisoners yelled. ‘Oooo . . .!’
They saw three figures darting out of the repair-shops—which meant that one of them was the Moldavian.
The crowd at the gates booed.
And as the three hurried nearer, they yelled:
‘Rat! Shit! No-good bastard! Cunt! Swine! Vulture!’
And Shukhov joined in:
‘Rat!’
It was no joke to rob five hundred men of more than half an hour.
His head down, the Moldavian was running like a little mouse.
‘Halt!’ an escort guard shouted, and began to write.
‘K–460, where have you been?’
The guard walked over and turned the butt of his rifle towards him.

Everybody in the crowd was shouting:
‘Bastard! Puke! Swine!’

Others, seeing that the guard was on the point of swinging the butt, fell silent.

The Moldavian said nothing, hung his head and backed away from the guard. The second-in-command of Gang 32 stepped forward:

‘The bastard climbed up the scaffolding to do some plastering. But he hid from me, found a warm spot up there and went to sleep.’

And he hit him with his fist in the neck and in the face! Yet, with these blows, he had pushed the Moldavian further from the guard.

The Moldavian staggered back, and then a Hungarian from Gang 32 leaped out and kicked him in the back, again and again!

This was rougher than spying. Any fool can be a spy. A spy has a clean, contented life. But try spending ten years in a punishment camp!

The guard lowered his rifle.

The Chief Escort Guard yelled:
‘Get back from the gates! Line up in fives!’

So the dogs were going to have another count! What was the point, when the situation had now been cleared up? The prisoners began to groan. All the anger they felt for the Moldavian was now directed towards the guards. They began to boo and wouldn’t move away from the gates. ‘What’s this?’ the Chief Escort Guard bawled. ‘So you want to sit in the snow? That’s all right by me, I’ll keep you there until morning!’
And he would, too. He’d had them on the snow many times before. They’d even had to lie down – ‘On your faces! Release safety-catches!’ The prisoners knew all about it. They began slowly to move away from the gates. ‘Back! Back!’ an escort guard shouted.

‘Why the hell are you pushing up against the gates, anyway, you idiots?’ people at the back shouted at those in front. And they moved back under the pressure.

‘Line up in fives! One! Two! Three!’

The moon was fully up by now. It was shining brightly, and its reddish tinge had gone. It was a quarter way up the sky. Their evening had gone! That damned Moldavian! The damned guards! This damned life!

When the men in front had been counted, they turned and stood on tiptoe to see if there were two or three people left in the last five. They felt their lives now depended on it.

It looked to Shukhov as if there were going to be four people left in the last five. He was sick with fear. If there was one extra person, then they’d have another recount! But it turned out that Fetyukov, that jackal, had been bumming a smoke off the captain, had forgotten what he was supposed to be doing, and had been late to return to his five – which was why he was now at the back, looking like an extra man.

The Chief Escort Guard’s assistant angrily gave Fetyukov a sock on the neck.

Excellent!

So in the last five there were three men. Thank God the count had come out all right!

‘Back from the gates!’ one of the escort guards shouted again.
And this time the prisoners did not grumble, for they could see the guards coming out of the guard-room to cordon off an area on the other side of the gates.

Which meant that they would be letting them through.

None of the foremen was about, and no superintendent, so the prisoners were able to carry their firewood.

The gates were thrown open. There, on the other side, by some wooden railings, stood the Chief Escort Guard with a checker.

‘One! Two! Three!’

If they achieved the same count, then the guards would come down from the watch-towers.

But what a long trudge it was back across the site from those towers! It was only when the last prisoner had been led off the site and the numbers had been found to tally that they telephoned the watch-towers to say it was all right to come down. A Chief Escort Guard with any intelligence would get the column on the move immediately, because he knew that the prisoners had nowhere to run to and that the guards from the watch-towers could catch up the column easily enough. But there were some stupid enough to be frightened that there wouldn’t be enough armed men to cope with the prisoners in an emergency, and these waited until the guards had made the journey across the site from their watch-towers.

They had one such dolt of a Chief Escort Guard on today. He waited.

The prisoners had been out in the cold all day and were already half dead with it. And now, after knocking off, to have to hang around for another whole hour! It was not so much the cold that got them down as the loss of their
evening. They wouldn’t be able to do any of the things they wanted to do in camp.

‘And how do you come to know so much about life in the British Navy?’ Shukhov heard someone in the adjacent five asking the captain.

‘Well, you see, I spent nearly a whole month aboard an English cruiser. Had my own cabin. I was attached to a convoy as a liaison officer. And then, if you please, after the war some English admiral – the devil must have got into him – sent me a souvenir gift inscribed: “As a token of gratitude”. I was staggered and cursed like crazy! So here I am – in the same boat as the rest of you... It’s no pleasure being shut up alongside Bandera’s lot.’

It was strange. Strange to see the barren steppe, the deserted site, the snow shining in the moonlight. The guards had already taken up their positions – ten yards apart, guns at the ready. A black herd of prisoners, and among them, wearing the same sort of coat as everybody else, S–311 – a man to whom life without gold epaulettes had been inconceivable, who’d hobnobbed with an English admiral and was now carrying hods with Fetyukov.

How easy it is for the circumstances of a man’s life to change...

The escort guards were ready now. But no ‘sermon’ this time, just:

‘Quick march! Hurry up, then!’

To hell with your ‘Hurry up, then!’ Now! They were sure to be the last column to arrive at camp, so there was no point in hurrying. Every one of the prisoners understood this, there was no need to talk about it: you’ve held us back – now we’ll hold you back, and doubtless you’re thinking about getting warm, too...
'Move faster!' the Chief Escort Guard shouted. 'Faster, up in front!'

To hell with your 'Move faster!' The prisoners walked on at a regular pace, heads lowered, as if on the way to a funeral. We’ve nothing to lose now: however fast we go, we’ll still be the last back in camp. He hasn’t treated us with any sort of consideration – so now he can yell his head off!

The Chief Escort Guard went on shouting: 'Move faster!' but he realised that the prisoners wouldn’t increase their pace. And there was no excuse to shoot at them: they were proceeding in fives, in column, peacefully. The Chief Escort Guard had no power to force the prisoners to go faster. (In the mornings it was this alone that saved them, and they proceeded to work as slowly as they could. A man in a hurry wouldn’t last out his time in the camp – he’d sweat himself into his grave.)

So on they went, regularly and deliberately, the snow crunching under their boots. Some talked quietly, others didn’t talk at all. Shukhov tried to remember if there was anything he hadn’t done in camp that morning which he should have done. The infirmary! Curious that he should have entirely forgotten about the infirmary while he was working.

The infirmary would be about open by now. If he missed his supper, he could still get there in time. But now he hardly felt any pain. And they probably wouldn’t even bother to take his temperature. It would be a waste of time to go. He’d got through without the help of the doctors. Those doctors could land you in your grave in no time.

He gave up the idea of the infirmary and began to
think how he could add to his supper. His hopes were concentrated on the fact that Tsesar might get a parcel—it was time he did.

Suddenly, the progress of the column changed character. It began to sway, broke from its regular pace, lurched forward, there was a buzz of excitement all along it—and now the fives at the back, where Shukhov was, were no longer treading on the heels of those in front but were running to keep up. A few yards at walking pace, and then they had to run again.

As the back of the column passed over a rise, Shukhov could see, over to the right of them, far across the steppe, another dark column moving diagonally across their own course. They must have spotted Shukhov’s column, for they also seemed to be stepping out.

The other column could only be from the machine factory, and there were about three hundred men in it. It meant that they had had tough luck too, and had been kept back. Shukhov wondered why. It sometimes happened that they were held back to finish repairs on some machine or other. But it wasn’t bad for them, they worked inside in the warm all day.

Well, who would win? Shukhov’s column began to run, quite openly, and even the escort guards broke into a fast trot. The Chief Escort Guard yelled:

‘No straggling! Keep up there at the back! Keep up!’

What the hell are you shouting for? Can’t you see we’re keeping up?

And everybody forgot what he had been talking or thinking about. One idea dominated: to get back to camp before the other column.

‘We must beat ’em! We must beat ’em!’
Everything was now confused. The sweet had become sour, the sour sweet. The guards were no longer the enemies of the prisoners, but the friends. The enemy was the other column.

All at once they felt more cheerful, and their anger passed.

‘Get on! Get on!’ the men at the back shouted at those in front.

The column had reached one of the streets leading to the camp, and the column from the machine factory had passed out of sight behind a housing block. It was a blind race.

They were going down the middle of the street now, and the way was easier. And for the escort guards there was nothing to stumble over at the sides of the column. They were bound to beat the others!

There was another reason why they had to beat the column from the machine factory: the men from there got an especially thorough searching at the camp guardroom. Since people had started to cut each other’s throats, the authorities reckoned that knives were being made in the machine factory and smuggled into the camp. So the machine factory boys got a real going over at the entrance to the camp. In late autumn, when the ground was already beginning to freeze up, the searchers had shouted at them:

‘Off with your boots, those from the machine factory! Hold your boots in your hands!’

And they’d got searched in their bare feet.

And even now, notwithstanding the frost, they would shout at random:

‘You there, take off your right boot! And you – your left boot!’
And the prisoner would take off his boot and have to hop around on one leg and turn his boot upside down and shake out the foot-cloth to show that there was no knife hidden in it.

Shukhov had heard — he didn’t know if it was true or not — that in the summer some lads from the machine factory had brought back to the camp a couple of volley-ball posts, both of which had been stuffed with knives! Now, from time to time, a knife did show up in the camp.

So they were half running when they passed the new club-house, another housing block and the woodworking factory, and reached the turning which led straight to the camp guard-room.

‘Hooo ... ooo!’ shouted the column in a single voice.

This was the place where the roads merged — and the column from the machine factory was 150 yards behind, on the right!

Now it was plain sailing. Everybody in the column was delighted. As happy as a hare which finds it can still frighten the life out of a frog.

And there was the camp — just as they had left it in the morning: night now, like night then. Lights were shining over the continuous fence, they were especially bright around the guard-room, and the searching area was as light as if the sun were out.

But they still hadn’t got to the guard-room ...

‘Halt!’ the assistant to the Chief Escort Guard shouted. And handing his tommy-gun to one of the guards, he ran up close to the column (the guards weren’t allowed to go near the prisoners with their guns): ‘All those standing on the right with firewood in their hands — throw it down to their right!’
Those on the outside had been carrying firewood with
out any attempt to conceal it. One bundle flew through
the air, another, a third. Some tried to hang on to their
bundles by passing them to the inside of the column, but
their neighbours went for them:
‘Chuck it down or they’ll take it off everybody else!
Go on, chuck it down!’

Who is the prisoner’s worst enemy? The prisoner. If
only the prisoners didn’t fight with each other, then . . .
‘Quick march!’ shouted the assistant to the Chief
Escort Guard.

And they proceeded towards the guard-room.

Five roads converged on the guard-room. An hour
earlier, all the other columns had gathered here. Had the
camp been a town, the point where these five roads con-
verged – by the guard-room and searching-area – would
have formed the main square. In that case, demonstra-
tions would be held where now the columns poured in
in every direction from sites all over the camp.

The warders were warming themselves inside the guard-
room. They came out and stood opposite the prisoners.

‘Open your coats and jackets!’

And the prisoners raised their arms, ready to be felt
and searched, and slapped down the sides. The same
routine as in the morning.

But it wasn’t so bad undoing coats and jackets now, for
they were nearly home. Yes, they all spoke that word.
There was no time in a prisoner’s day to recall any other
home.

While the men at the head of the column were being
searched, Shukhov went up to Tsesar and said:
‘Tsesar Markovich! As soon as I’m through, I’ll run
straight over to the parcels office and keep a place in the queue for you.'

Tsesar turned to Shukhov, the ends of his black moustache still tinged with frost:

'Why should you do that, Ivan Denisovich? Maybe there won't be a parcel.'

'Well, if there isn't, what harm will it do me? I'll wait there ten minutes, and if you don't show up I'll go back to the hut.'

(Shukhov was reckoning that if, indeed, Tsesar did not come, somebody else might, to whom he could sell his place in the queue.)

It was clear that Tsesar was longing for a parcel.

'Well, all right, Ivan Denisovich, you run over and get a place. But don't wait longer than ten minutes.'

It was approaching Shukhov's turn to be searched. Today he had nothing to hide, he would step up fearlessly. He undid his coat unhurriedly, and loosened the rope belt around his jacket.

Although he couldn't remember having anything on himself today which he shouldn't have, eight years of camp life had given him the habit of caution. He shoved his hand into the knee-pocket of his trousers just to confirm to himself that it was empty, as he knew it was.

And there was the piece of hacksaw blade which, because he had a thrifty nature, he had picked up on the site today, and which he had not had the least intention of bringing into the camp.

No intention at all, but now he'd got this far with it, surely it would be a pity to throw it away! He could fashion from it a small knife for mending boots or making clothes!
If he had meant to bring it in, he would have thought hard where to hide it. But now there were only two rows between him and the searchers, and already the first of these rows of five was separating and moving forward to be searched.

He had to make a decision quicker than the wind: should he take cover behind the row in front of him and, unnoticed, throw the thing into the snow (they’d find it later, but they’d never know where it had come from), or should he try to get it through?

If they caught him with that bit of blade and decided to classify it as a knife, he could get ten days in the cells. But a little knife for mending boots, which meant earning, which meant bread!

It would be a pity to throw it away.

Shukhov slipped it into one of his mittens.

Then the next row of five was ordered to go forward to be searched.

Now only three of them were left standing under the bright lights: Senka, Shukhov and the young man from Gang 32 who’d helped look for the Moldavian.

Because there were three of them and the guards facing them numbered five, Shukov was able to weigh up the two guards on the right and choose which of the two to approach. He decided against the young, red-faced one, and in favour of an older man with a grey moustache. The old one was, of course, experienced and would easily be able to find the piece of blade if he wanted to, but because he was old he must have become so fed up with the job that it would be distasteful to him.

Meanwhile, Shukhov had taken off both mittens, the one with the piece of blade and the empty one, and was
holding them in one hand (the empty one a little further forward) along with his rope belt. He opened his jacket wide and pushed back the skirts of his coat and jacket (never before had he been so obliging when about to be searched, but this time he wanted to show that he was ‘clean’ – come on, then, search me!) – and on the command he moved towards the old man with the grey moustache.

The old man slapped Shukhov’s sides and back and the outside of his knee-pocket – nothing. He squeezed the skirts of Shukhov’s jacket and coat – again, nothing. Just as he was on the point of letting him through, to be on the safe side he put his hand round the mitten which Shukhov was holding out – the empty one.

The warder squeezed the mitten, and Shukhov felt as if his heart were being squeezed with it. One such squeeze on the other mitten, and he’d be in the cells on 300 grams of bread a day and hot food once every three days. He imagined at that moment how enfeebled and hungry he would become and how difficult it would be to get back to his present condition of being neither starved nor properly fed.

And the vital prayer surged up within him: ‘Oh, Lord, save me! Don’t let me be put in the cells!’

All these thoughts passed through him while the warder squeezed the first mitten and reached out his hand to squeeze the one behind it (he would have squeezed them one in each hand if Shukhov had held them in separate hands and not both in the same hand). But at that moment the voice of the warder in charge, anxious to be free as quickly as possible, was heard shouting to the guards:

‘Come on, bring up the men from the machine factory!’
And, instead of taking Shukhov’s other mitten, the old warder with the grey moustache waved him through. Shukhov was off the hook.

He ran to catch up the others. They had already formed up in fives between two long wooden rails of the sort to which horses are hitched in market-places, and which made a kind of paddock for the column. He ran lightly, scarcely feeling the ground, but he didn’t say a prayer of thanksgiving because he didn’t have time, and in any case it didn’t seem appropriate.

The escort guards who had brought the column in now moved to one side, freeing the way for the escort guards attached to the column from the machine factory, and waited for their chief. They had picked up all the firewood thrown down by the column before being searched, and the firewood which had been taken by the warders searching had been collected in a pile by the guard-room.

The moon was rising higher all the time and the cold growing more intense in the bright, snowy night.

The Chief Escort Guard walked to the guard-room to get a receipt there for the 463 men he had delivered. He spoke to Pryakha, Volkovoi’s assistant, and then shouted: ‘K-460!’

The Moldavian, who had been hiding himself in the middle of the column, sighed and went up to the rail on the right. He was still hanging his head low and his shoulders were hunched up.

‘Come here,’ Pryakha said, indicating the other side of the column.

The Moldavian walked round. He was ordered to put his hands behind his back and stand there.
It meant that they were going to get him for attempting to escape. He'd go to the cells, all right.

Just in front of the gates, to the right and left of the paddock, stood two guards. The gates, which were three times the height of a man, were slowly opened, and the command was given: 'Line up in fives!' (There was no point in ordering the prisoners to stand back from the gates here, since all the gates into the camp opened inwards, and the prisoners would get nowhere should they attempt to break through the gates from the inside.) 'One! Two! Three!'

It was at this evening count, when they returned through the camp gates, that the prisoners felt most weather-beaten, cold and hungry, and their bowl of thin, hotted-up cabbage soup was, for them, like rain in a drought. They swallowed it in one gulp. That bowl of soup was more precious to them than freedom, more precious than their previous life and the life which the future held for them.

They passed through the camp gates, those prisoners, like soldiers returning from a campaign — keyed up, seasoned, confident. 'Watch out, we're coming,' they seemed to say.

For an orderly who'd spent the day in the staff hut, that surge of returning prisoners must have been a frightening sight.

After the evening count, the prisoners became free men for the first time since being called on parade in the morning. They passed through the big camp gates, through some smaller gates further on, through a couple more barriers to the parade-ground — where the column dispersed and they could go where they wanted.
Except, that is, for the gang-leaders, who were summoned by a warder:

‘Gang-leaders! Report to the PPD!’

Shukhov ran past the prison block, between the huts, to the parcels office, and Tsesar moved in a leisurely and regular way in the opposite direction, where a number of people were swarming around a post with a plywood board nailed to it on which was written in pencil the names of those who had received parcels that day.

They rarely used paper in the camp – usually plywood. It was stronger, certainly, and somehow more trustworthy than paper. It was used by the guards and counters for counting the prisoners. They could wipe it clean for the next day and use it again – a great economy.

There was a queue around the walls of the vestibule which formed the entrance to the parcels office. Shukhov joined it. There were fifteen or so men in front of him, which meant that he would have to wait at least an hour – or until lights out. But if anybody from his, the power-station column – or from the machine factory column – had gone to see if his name was on the board, he would have got a much worse place than Shukhov’s in the queue. He would probably have to return to get his parcel another time – tomorrow morning.

The men stood in the queue with little bags and sacks. There, on the other side of the door (Shukhov had never once received a parcel in this camp, but he knew from hearsay), they would prise open the box in which the parcel came with a small axe, and the warder would take everything out with his hands and inspect it carefully. He would cut anything, break anything, handle anything, mix anything. If there was anything liquid, in glass jars
or tins, they’d open it up and pour it out for you – either straight into your hands or into a cloth bag if you were carrying one. They didn’t give you the jars or cans, they were scared to. If there was anything made of pastry, or something sweet, or any sausage or fish, the warder would take a bite out of it. (And if you started to object, he’d immediately say that the stuff was forbidden or wasn’t regulation, and wouldn’t give it to you anyway. Anyone receiving a parcel had to give, give, give all along the line – starting with the warder who opened it.) When they’d finished searching through your parcel, they didn’t give you the box in which the stuff came, you just had to shove it all into your bag or even into the skirts of your coat. And off you went, and it was the next fellow’s turn. They harried you so much that you sometimes left something behind on the counter. There was no point going back for it: it would have gone.

When he’d been at Ust-Izhma, Shukhov had received a couple of parcels. But he’d written to his wife that it was just a waste and not to send them – better not deprive the children.

Although it had been easier for Shukhov, when he was free, to feed his whole family than it was here to feed only himself, he knew what these gift-parcels cost, and he knew that he couldn’t go on taking the food out of the mouths of his family for ten years. Better to do without.

But although that was what he had decided, every time someone in the gang or a neighbour in the hut received a parcel (and that was nearly every day), his heart ached that it wasn’t for him. And though he had expressly told his wife never to send a parcel, even at Easter, and
he never went to the post with the list of recipients on it except on behalf of some rich member of his gang — yet sometimes he longed for somebody to run up to him and say:

‘Shukhov! Why don’t you get going? There’s a parcel for you.’

But nobody ever ran up to him . . .

There were fewer and fewer occasions to recall the village of Temgenovo and the hut where he and his family lived. Here life pursued him from reveille to lights out, and there was no free time for reminiscing.

Now, standing among men dwelling on the near prospect of sinking their teeth into a lump of lard, being able to spread their bread with butter and to sweeten their mugs of tea with sugar. Shukhov had only one wish: to be in time, with his gang, to get to the mess-hall, and to be able to eat his gruel before it got cold. Cold, it was only half as satisfying as when hot.

He reckoned that if Tsesar’s name had not appeared on the list, he would long ago have gone to the hut to clean up. But if his name was listed, he’d be collecting bags and plastic mugs to hold the contents of his parcel. That’s why Shukhov had promised to wait for ten minutes.

There, in the queue, Shukhov learned some news: there wasn’t going to be any Sunday again this week — they were going to be deprived of another Sunday. He’d been expecting it, they all had: if there were five Sundays in a month, they got three free and had to work on the other two. He’d been expecting it, but when he heard the news, his spirits sank, it was like being hit in the face: how could you not resent the loss of a day? But what they
were saying in the queue was right: even if it was a free Sunday, they’d find something for you to do in the camp, invent something – fixing up the bath-house, putting up a new wall to prevent you getting somewhere, cleaning out the yard. Or there’d be mattresses to be changed and shaken, bed-bugs to be exterminated. Or they’d devise a parade for checking photographs against people’s faces. Or there’d be an inventory: you’d have to move all your things out into the yard and spend half the day sitting about.

The one thing they couldn’t stand was a prisoner having a sleep after breakfast.

The queue was moving, although slowly. Three people – a camp barber, a bookkeeper and someone from the CES – broke the queue and pushed up front, elbowing their way through without so much as a word to anyone. These weren’t regular prisoners but established camp trusties, bastards of the first water with soft numbers in the camp. They were regarded by the workers as lower than shit (a feeling that was reciprocated). But it would have been useless to argue with them: they kept close together and were well in with the warders.

Now there were only ten people ahead of Shukhov and seven more had joined the queue behind him when Tsesar appeared in the door and, stooping, came through, wearing a new fur cap which had been sent from home. (That cap, now. Tsesar must have greased somebody’s palm to be allowed to go around in a clean, new, town cap. Others had had their frayed army caps taken from them as soon as they entered the camp and been issued with regulation pig-fur ones).

Tsesar smiled at Shukhov and immediately began
talking to an odd-looking fellow in glasses, who was standing in the queue reading a newspaper:

‘Aha, Pyotr Mikhailich!’

And they blossomed out like a couple of poppies.

‘Look!’ The odd-looking fellow said: ‘I’ve just got a fresh *Evening News* from Moscow! It came by newspaper post.’

‘Well, well!’ And Shukhov poked his nose into the newspaper. How on earth could they decipher that small print in the meagre light cast by the lamp on the ceiling?

‘Here’s an extremely interesting review of a Zavadsky first night . . .’

These Muscovites can smell one another from a long way off, like dogs. When they meet, they sniff at each other. And they jabber away very, very fast, each trying to say more words than the other. And when they jabber away like that, you rarely seem to hear any proper Russian words – they might just as well be Latvians or Rumanians.

However, Tsesar had all his little bags in his hand, everything ready.

‘So I . . . Tsesar Markovich . . .’ Shukhov lisped. ‘I’ll be going now, all right?’

‘Of course, of course.’ Tsesar raised his black moustache from the paper, ‘But tell me, who am I after, and who’s after me?’

Shukhov told him where his place was in the queue, and not waiting for Tsesar himself to remember the subject of supper, asked:

‘And shall I bring you your supper?’

(That meant from the mess-hall to the hut in a can. This was emphatically forbidden, and there were many
orders concerning the practice. If you got caught, they emptied the can onto the ground and shoved you in the cells. Nevertheless, people went on carrying food in this way and would continue to do so, because if someone had a job to complete, he would never have time to get to the mess-hall with the rest of the gang.)

When Shukhov asked: 'And shall I bring you your supper?' he thought to himself: 'You're not going to be so mean, are you, as not to let me have your supper? You know there's no porridge for supper, only thin gruel!'

'No, no,' smiled Tsesar. 'Eat it yourself. Ivan Denisovich!'

That was all that Shukhov had been waiting for! Like a bird on the wing, he rushed out through the vestibule and across the parade-ground.

There were prisoners scurrying about all over the place! At one time the Commandant had issued an order that no prisoner was to walk about the camp alone. Wherever possible, the gang had to move together – except to places like the infirmary or the latrines, when the whole gang couldn't obviously go at the same time; in that event, groups of four or five men were to be made up, one of them to be in charge to march them where they wanted to go, wait, and then march them back in a single body.

The Commandant had been very firm about this order, and nobody had dared to oppose him. The warders seized prisoners walking on their own, recorded their numbers, and shoved them in the cells. But the order collapsed, quietly and gradually, as many high-sounding orders had a habit of doing. Say someone was summoned by the security people – did he have to go in a group of other people? Or if you had to get something from the
stores — ‘Why should I go along with you?’ Or if someone had the idea of going to the CEs to read the newspapers, who would he get to go with him? One man wants to get his felt boots repaired, another to go to the drying-room, a third simply to go from one hut to another (although that was forbidden above everything else!) — well, how can you prevent them?

With his order, the Commandant had wanted to take away from the prisoners the last vestiges of freedom they possessed, but it didn’t work out like that, the pot-bellied old fool.

On his way back, Shukhov ran into a warder, took his cap off to him to be on the safe side, and made it to the hut. Inside there was pandemonium: somebody’s bread ration had been stolen during the day, and the fellow was shouting at the orderlies and the orderlies were shouting back. The corner which Gang 104 occupied was empty.

Shukhov always reckoned they’d been lucky, when they returned to the camp in the evening, if the mattresses hadn’t been messed up and the hut searched during the day.

He dashed over to his bunk, slipping his coat off his shoulders as he went. He threw the coat up onto his bunk, together with his mittens, the bit of blade still inside one, and felt his mattress — the bread was still there! A good thing that he’d sewn it in.

Then he ran outside again — to the mess-hall.

He got there without coming across a single warder — only a couple of prisoners quarrelling over their bread ration.

Outside the moon was shining more and more brightly. The lamps everywhere looked pale, and the huts cast
black shadows. The entrance to the mess-hall was through
a wide porch with four steps, and the porch was in the
shadows too. Above it a small lamp swayed and creaked
in the cold. All the lamps shone with a kind of rainbow
effect, whether caused by the cold or simply dirt he didn’t
know.

There was another order the Commandant was par-
ticularly keen on: members of a gang should proceed
into the mess-hall in twos. An extension of the order was
that, having reached the mess-hall, the gang was not to
proceed through the porch, but form up in fives outside
and wait there until allowed in by the orderly.

Khromoi* hung on fiercely to his job as mess-hall
orderly. With his limp he was able to pass himself off
as an invalid, although he was perfectly fit, the vulture.
He’d got himself a staff made out of birch and, standing
at the top of the porch, would let anybody have it who
tried to creep by him without his permission. Well, not
anybody. Khromoi had eyes like a lynx and could spot
you in the dark from behind – and he’d only hit out when
he knew that a person wouldn’t hit back. He’d only go
for those who felt beaten already. He’d caught Shukhov
a blow once.

He was called an orderly, but when you thought about
it, he was a prince – friendly with the cooks and all!

Today the gangs must have all poured into the mess-
hall at the same time, or it had taken longer than usual
to get things organised inside, because the porch was
thick with people, and there stood Khromoi and his
assistant and the head of the mess-hall himself. They were
trying to keep order without warders, the tough guys.

* Khromoi means lame in Russian.
The head of the mess-hall was a fat swine with a head like a pumpkin and shoulders a yard wide. He was so over-endowed with strength that when he walked he used to spring up and down as if his legs and arms were, indeed, made of springs. He wore a white cap made of soft fur without a number on it, of a quality not seen in ordinary, outside life. He also wore a lambskin waistcoat with a number on the front the size of a postage stamp — a concession to Volkovoi — and no number on the back at all. He bowed to nobody, and all the prisoners were scared of him. He held a thousand lives in his hands. Once they’d tried to beat him up, but all the cooks had rushed to his defence — and an ugly bunch of mugs they were.

Shukhov would be in trouble if Gang 104 had already gone in. Khromoi knew everybody in the camp by sight, and in front of the head of the mess-hall he would never let anyone through who wasn’t with his gang — in fact, would make a point of tearing a strip off him.

Sometimes prisoners managed to climb over the porch railings behind Khromoi’s back. Shukhov had done this, too. But today you couldn’t try this on with the head of the mess-hall present — he’d give you such a crack that you’d only just be able to drag yourself to the infirmary.

He’d have to make it over to the porch as quickly as possible and see if, among all those black coats which looked identical in the dark, Gang 104 was there.

Just as he got there, the gangs began shoving and shoving (what else was there for them to do — it was nearly lights out!) as if storming a fortress. They got up the first step, the second, the third, the fourth — they spilled into the porch!
‘Stop, you bastards!’ Khromoi yelled and raised his stick at the men in front. ‘Get back! Or I’ll smash your faces in!’

‘What can we do?’ the men in front shouted back. ‘We’re being pushed from behind!’

And, indeed, it was true, the pushing did come from behind, but the men in front weren’t putting up any resistance, anxious as they were to break into the mess-hall.

Finally, Khromoi put his staff across his chest as a kind of barrier and charged at the men in front with all his might! Khromoi’s assistant got hold of the stick as well and pushed, and even the head of the mess-hall seemed ready to soil his hands.

They pushed with all their strength – and they had plenty of it with all that meat they filled themselves with! The men in front were pushed back onto those behind, who fell against those behind them, and they went down like sheaves.

‘Fuck you, Khromoi!’ shouted somebody from the crowd, but he was well hidden. The rest fell down without a word and picked themselves up without a word, as quickly as they could before they got trampled.

The steps cleared. The head of the mess-hall went back inside, but Khromoi stood on the top step and shouted:

‘Line up in fives, you blockheads, how many times have you been told? I’ll let you through when we’re ready for you!’

Shukhov thought he saw what could have been Senka Klevshin’s head right by the porch. He felt quite overjoyed and started trying to push his way through with
his elbows. But the backs in front of him drew together, and he knew he didn’t have the strength to make it.

‘Gang 27!’ Khromoi shouted. ‘Forward!’

Gang 27 leapt forward up the steps towards the doors in a rush. Everybody else surged up the steps again after them, the men at the back pushing hard. Shukhov also pushed for all he was worth. The porch shook, and the lamp above the porch squeaked.

‘So you’re doing it again, you bastards!’ Khromoi was furious. He brought his stick down across one man’s shoulders and another’s back, shoving them back against the others.

From below Shukhov could see Pavlo moving up the steps towards Khromoi. He was in charge of the gang. Tyurin didn’t care to get mixed up in this sort of crush.

‘Line up in fives, Gang 104!’ Pavlo shouted from the top. ‘Let them through, friends!’

Friends, indeed! The hell they’d let them through!

‘Hey, let me through, you! That’s my gang!’ Shukhov shoved against the man in front of him.

The man would have been glad to let him through, but he was jammed in on every side.

The crowd rocked from side to side—ready to do anything to get their gruel, their lawful gruel.

Then Shukhov tried a new tack. He seized hold of the rails on his left, grabbed one of the posts in the porch and pulled himself off the ground. His feet hit somebody on the knee, he got bashed in the ribs himself and drew a few oaths—but he got through. He stood with one foot on the edge of the top step and waited. Some of the men from his gang saw him and stretched out their hands to him.

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The head of the mess-hall came out and looked around:

‘Come on, Khromoi, let’s have another two gangs.’

‘Gang 104!’ Khromoi shouted. ‘And where do you think you’re going, you bastard?’

And he caught the intruder a blow on the neck with his staff.

‘Gang 104!’ Pavlo shouted, letting his men through.

‘Phew!’ Shukhov entered the mess-hall, exhausted. But without waiting for Pavlo’s instructions he began looking around for empty trays.

The mess-hall was as usual – clouds of steam coming through the door, the men packed tightly – like sunflower seeds – at the tables or wandering around and jostling each other between the tables, looking for empty trays. But Shukhov had got used to all this over the years. He had a sharp eye; he saw that S-208 was carrying a tray with only five bowls on it – which meant that it was the last load for his gang, because otherwise the tray would have been full.

He went up to the man and said in his ear from behind:

‘After you with the tray, brother!’

‘There’s another fellow at the hatch waiting for it, I promised him . . .’

‘Let him wait, he should have been quicker!’

And they reached an agreement.

The man carried the tray over to his table and unloaded it, and Shukhov immediately seized it. The man to whom it had been promised came running over and grabbed the other end. But he was smaller than Shukhov, so Shukhov pushed him away with the tray so that he hurtled against one of the pillars in the mess-hall and his
hands let go. Shukhov put the tray under his arm and dashed over to the hatch.

Pavlo was standing in the queue by the hatch, concerned that he had no trays. He was delighted to see Shukhov.

‘Ivan Denisovich!’ And Pavlo pushed the second-in-command of Gang 27, who was standing in front of him, out of the way. ‘Let me through! What are you standing there for? I’ve got some trays!’

Gopchik, the little rascal, was carrying a tray over as well.

‘They were too slow,’ he laughed, ‘and I just grabbed it!’

Gopchik was going to do all right in the camp. Give him another three years to grow up in, and he’d be at least a bread-cutter, it was inevitable.

Pavlo ordered that the second tray should be taken by Yermolayev, a big Siberian who’d got ten years for being captured by the Germans, and Gopchik was sent to keep an eye out for a table which would shortly become free. Shukhov put down his tray in the hatch and waited.

‘Gang 104!’ Pavlo shouted through the hatch.

There were five hatches: three serving hatches for ordinary food, one for those who got special food (there were ten men who suffered from ulcers; and the bookkeepers too had managed to get themselves in on special food), and one for the return of the bowls (where the bowllickers congregated and squabbled with each other). The hatches weren’t very high – scarcely waist-height. You couldn’t see the cooks themselves through the hatches, only their hands and the ladles.

The cook’s hands were white and carefully tended, but
they were big and hairy. More like a boxer's hands than a cook's. He took up a pencil and checked a list on the wall:

‘Gang 104! Twenty-four bowls!’

Pantaleyev dragged himself into the mess-hall. Nothing wrong with him, the swine.

The cook picked up an enormous ladle and stirred the mess in the cauldron—three times. The cauldron had just been refilled, nearly to the top, and billows of steam were rising from it. Then, swapping the big ladle for a smaller one, he began to serve, never letting his ladle dip deep.

‘One, two, three, four . . .’

Shukhov noticed that some of the bowls had been filled before the bits in the gruel had had time to settle back on the bottom of the cauldron, whereas others had no substance in them at all—just wash. He put ten bowls on his tray and carried it off. Gopchik waved at him from the second row of pillars.

‘Here, Ivan Denisovich, here!’

You had to be careful not to let your hands shake carrying the bowls. Shukhov walked as smoothly as he could, so as not to jolt the tray at all, meanwhile working just as hard with his throat:


It was difficult enough in a crush like that to carry one bowl without spilling it, let alone ten. Nevertheless, he put the tray down gently on the free end of the table which Gopchik had found, and not a drop had he spilled. He so arranged it that the two bowls with the most solids in were at the end of the tray opposite to where he was going to sit himself.
Yermolayev brought another ten bowls over, and Gopchik ran across to help Pavlo bring the last four bowls over by hand.

Kilgas brought the bread on a tray. Today they were being fed according to the work they had done — some got 200 grams, some 300, some 400. Shukhov got 400, which he took from the crust — and from the middle he took the 200 which Tsesar had earned.

Now the other members of the gang began to stream up from all parts of the mess-hall to get their supper and to eat it where they could. Shukhov handed out the bowls, remembering to whom he had given one, and keeping an eye on his corner of the tray. He put his spoon into one of the ‘thick’ bowls — which meant that it had been taken. Fetyukov was one of the first to collect his bowl, and then went off, reckoning that there was nothing to be cadged from his own gang and that it would be better to prowl round the mess-hall on the scrounge. Perhaps somebody would not finish his bowl (when that happened, sometimes a whole group would swoop on it like vultures, all at the same time).

Shukhov counted up the bowls with Pavlo, and everything seemed to be in order. He handed over one of the ‘thick’ bowls for Tyurin, and Pavlo poured the contents into a little mess-tin with a lid — he could carry that under his coat, pressed to his chest.

The trays were given up. Pavlo sat down to his double portion, and so did Shukhov. They didn’t talk to each other, these minutes were sacred.

Shukhov took off his cap and rested it on his knee. He put his spoon into one bowl and tasted, and then did the same with the other. Not bad, and there was some fish.
In general, the gruel in the evening was much more watery than in the morning: in the morning the prisoners had to eat in order to work, in the evening all they had to do was go to sleep.

He began to eat. First of all, he drank the watery stuff at the top. As it went down, the warmth flooded through his whole body — his insides seemed to be quivering in expectation of more. Goo-ood! It was for this brief moment that a prisoner lived!

Now Shukhov had no complaints — about the length of his sentence, about the long day they had had, about the Sunday they would not be having. Now he thought: 'We'll survive! We'll get through it all! God grant that it'll end!'

He drank the hot wash from both bowls, then poured the remaining contents of the second bowl into the first, scraping it clean with his spoon. It was easier that way. He didn’t have to think about the second bowl, keep guard over it with his eyes or a hand.

His eyes were free to look around now, and he glanced at the bowls near him. The man on his left — his bowl was just water. They were swines what they did, and they were prisoners at that!

Shukov began to eat the cabbage in what was left of his gruel. He came across a small piece of potato in one of the two bowls, Tsesar’s, an average sort of piece, frostbitten of course and somewhat hard and sweetish. There was very little fish — just the occasional bit of bare backbone. But you had to suck away at every bit of backbone or fin — to get the juice out, for the juice was nutritious. All this took time, but Shukhov was in no hurry. Today had been a good day: he’d got an extra portion at dinner.
and an extra portion now as well. In view of that, he could forget about anything else he might have done.

Although he really ought to pay a visit to the Latvian for some tobacco. There might not be any left by tomorrow.

Shukhov ate his supper without bread – two portions and bread as well would have been too much! He kept his bread for tomorrow. Your belly is a cruel master – however well you’ve treated it one day, it’ll be singing for more the next.

He finished up his gruel without making any effort to see who was sitting around him. It hadn’t been necessary: he’d had a good whack himself and hadn’t been on the lookout for anything extra. All the same, he noticed that when the man directly opposite him vacated his place a tall, old man – U-81 – sat himself down. He was, he knew, from Gang 64, and he had heard in the parcels’ queue that it was Gang 64 who had been sent that day to work at the Socialist Community Centre instead of Gang 104. They’d been out there all day, without any kind of shelter, putting up barbed wire – to fence themselves in with.

Shukhov had been told that this old man had spent countless years in camps and prisons, he had never benefited from a single amnesty, and whenever one ten-year sentence ran out, they immediately slapped another one on him. Shukhov examined him closely. Among all those bent backs in the camp, his stood out as straight as a board; it looked as if he had put something on the bench beneath him to increase his height. For a long time there had been nothing to shave off his head – he had lost all his hair as a result of the good life, no doubt! The old man’s eyes didn’t dart around to see what was going on
in the mess-hall, but were fixed above Shukhov’s head on some invisible spot of his own. He ate the thin gruel with a worn wooden spoon at his own pace, not bending his head towards the spoon, but carrying the spoon all the way to his mouth. He had no teeth at all in his upper gums, and none in the lower half of his mouth either, and he used his hardened gums as teeth to chew his bread. His face was quite drained of life, but did not look weak or unhealthy – rather, dark as if hewn out of stone. From his hands, which were big and cracked and blackened, you could see that not much soft work had come his way in all those years. But it was clear that the one thing he wasn’t going to do was give in: he wasn’t going to put his bread, like everybody else, straight down on the filthy table – but on a piece of cloth which had obviously been washed many times.

However, Shukhov had no time to go on looking at the man. Having finished eating, he licked his spoon and shoved it into the top of his felt boot, pulled his cap over his eyes, stood up, took his own and Tsesar’s bread ration, and went out. The way out of the mess-hall was through another porch, where stood a couple of orderlies whose only job was to unhook the door, let people through, then put the hook on the door again.

Shukhov came out with a full belly, feeling pleased with himself, and decided that, although lights-out was pretty imminent, he would run over to see the Latvian. Without stopping off at Hut 9, his own, to leave his bread there, he strode off in the direction of Hut 7.

The moon was up high now and looked as if cut out of the sky, clean and white. The sky was completely clear, and the stars were at their brightest. But Shukhov had
even less time for gazing at the sky. One thing he did notice — the frost hadn't let up. Someone had heard one of the outside workers say that it would be —30 in the night and —40 by morning.

He could hear the noise of a tractor in the distance working in the settlement outside the camp, and from the direction of the highway the screaming of an excavator. And from every pair of felt boots on the move throughout the camp — crunch, crunch.

There was no wind.

He would have to buy the tobacco for the price he'd paid before — one rouble per mug; although, outside, a mugful would cost three roubles — more for better quality tobacco. In the hard-labour camp, though, all prices were improvised, were not comparable to anywhere else, because you weren't supposed to have money and it was very difficult to get hold of. In a camp like this, you weren't paid a single copeck for the work you did (at Ust-Izhma Shukhov used to get thirty roubles a month). If you received any money through the post from relations, you didn't actually get it, it was marked up to a personal account. And every month with the money in your personal account you could buy stuff at the camp-store — soap, mouldy biscuits, 'Prima' cigarettes. Whether you liked what you got or not, you had to spend the amount you had applied to the Commandant to spend. If you didn't buy anything with the money, they'd take it out of your personal account anyway.

Shukhov got money only by doing odd jobs — making slippers out of rags given to him by the buyer (two roubles) or patching a jacket (by negotiation).

Hut 7, unlike Hut 9, was not made up of two big halves.
There was a long corridor, with ten doors opening off it, and behind each door a room which housed a complete gang, packed into seven tiered bunks. There was a latrine to each room, and a cabin for the man in charge of the hut. The artists had a cabin to themselves as well.

Shukhov went to the room where the Latvian was. He was lying on a lower bunk, his feet up on a ledge; chattering away to a neighbour in Latvian.

Shukhov sat down beside him and greeted him. The Latvian returned his greeting without taking his feet down. It was a small room, and everyone was keeping his ears open — who is this fellow? Why has he come? They both realised that, which was why Shukhov sat there talking about nothing special. Well, and how's life? Not bad. Cold today. Yes.

Shukhov waited for everybody to begin talking again (they were arguing about the Korean War; whether, now the Chinese had joined in, there would be a world war or not), then leaned towards the Latvian and said:

'Any home-grown?'

'Yes.'

'Show it me.'

The Latvian lowered his feet from the ledge, dropped them to the floor, and sat up. He was a real skinflint, that Latvian; when he filled a mug with tobacco, he was always terrified he might be giving you one smoke too many.

He showed Shukhov his pouch and unfastened it.

Shukhov took a few strands of tobacco and put them on his palm. It looked the same as last time, brownish and strong-flavoured. He held it to his nose and sniffed. Yes, that was it. But to the Latvian he said:
‘It doesn’t seem the same.’

‘Of course it’s the same!’ the Latvian answered angrily. ‘I never have any other, it’s always the same.’

‘All right,’ agreed Shukhov. ‘Pack the mug for me, I’ll have a smoke, and maybe I’ll have another mugful.’

He had used the word ‘pack’, because the Latvian always tried to fill the mug up loosely.

The Latvian reached under his pillow for another pouch, fuller than the first, and took a little mug out of a locker. Although the mug was made of plastic, Shukhov knew just how much it would hold; it was as good as glass for his purposes.

The Latvian began to fill the mug.

‘Press it down, press it down!’ Shukhov said, and poked his finger in.

‘I know, I know,’ the Latvian retorted irritably, pulling the mug away and pressing the tobacco down himself, although gently. And he continued to fill it.

Meanwhile Shukhov opened his jacket and found the place inside the padding where he had hidden, so that nobody else could find it, his two-rouble note. With both hands he forced it through the padding, and got it along to a little hole in a different spot which he’d torn and then sewn up with a couple of stitches. He tore open the hole with his nails, folded the note lengthways (it had already been folded that way before), and pulled it through the hole. Two roubles. An old note which didn’t crackle.

There was shouting in the room:

‘Do you think that old sod with a moustache* is going to have any mercy on you? He wouldn’t lift a finger for his own brother, let alone you, you creep!’

* Stalin.
There was one good thing about a punishment camp — you were free to let off steam. At Ust-Izhma, if you’d even whispered that you couldn’t buy matches outside, they’d have shoved you in the cells and added another ten years to your sentence. But here you could shout your head off if you wanted — the squealers wouldn’t tell on you, and the security people couldn’t care less.

If only there were more time in which to talk...

‘Hey, you’re putting it in loose,’ Shukhov complained.

‘All right, all right!’ the Latvian said, and added a few strands on top.

Shukhov took his pouch from his inside pocket and poured the tobacco in from the mug.

‘O.K.,’ he decided, not wishing to smoke that first sweet cigarette in a hurry. ‘Give me a second mugful.’

He haggled a bit more, emptied the second mug into his pouch, handed over the two roubles, nodded and left.

Outside again, he hurried to get back to his hut. He didn’t want to miss Tsesar when he got back with his parcel.

But Tsesar was already there, sitting on his lower bunk and gloating over his parcel. He had laid out everything he had received on his bunk and on the locker, but as the light did not fall directly there — Shukhov’s bunk above was in the way — it was all rather dark.

Shukhov bent down, stepped between the captain’s bunk and Tsesar’s, and stretched out his hand with the bread ration.

‘Your bread, Tsesar Markovich.’

He didn’t say: ‘Well, did you get your parcel?’ That would have been the equivalent of saying: ‘Well, I kept a place in the queue for you, and now I have a right to a
share. Shukhov wasn’t a cadger even after eight years in punishment camps — and the more time went by, the more resolute he became in his determination not to be one.

However, he couldn’t help revealing himself with his eyes. His eyes, the hawk-eyes of an experienced prisoner, ran rapidly over the contents of the parcel laid out on the bunk and locker, and although the paper had not been unwrapped and the little bags were as yet untied, by that one swift look and from the evidence of his nose he knew for certain that Tsesar had received sausage, condensed milk, a fat smoked fish, lard, two kinds of biscuits, two kilograms of lump sugar, and also some butter, cigarettes and pipe tobacco. And there was more besides.

Shukhov took all this in in the time it took him to say: ‘Your bread, Tsesar Markovich.’

But Tsesar, who was in a state of high excitement and seemed almost drunk (people getting parcels always got into this sort of condition), waved it away.

‘Take it, Ivan Denisovich!’

Tsesar’s bowl of gruel and now 200 grams of bread — that was a full supper and, of course, there was Shukhov’s share of Tsesar’s parcel to come.

Shukhov immediately dismissed from his mind the idea that he might get something good from what Tsesar had laid out all around him. There was nothing worse than exciting your belly to no purpose.

Well, he had 400 grams now, and Tsesar’s 200, and at least 200 in his mattress. That was doing all right. He’d eat 200 now, tomorrow morning he’d get another 550, and he could take 400 to work — living it up, eh! And he’d leave that bit in the mattress. A good thing he’d sewn it in.
Someone from Gang 75 had had his ration pinched from the locker — and a fat lot he could do about it now.

Some people used to think that a parcel immediately and permanently solved all the problems of the fellow who received it. There it was, a big, tightly-packed bag just waiting to be opened. But when you thought about it, it didn’t take long to get through. More often than not, before he got his parcel, a prisoner would be only too glad to earn himself an extra bowl of porridge somehow and smoke other people’s dog-ends. There were the warder and the gang-leader to think of — and how could you avoid giving something to the orderly in the parcels’ office? The next time he might decide to ‘lose’ your parcel for a while, and your name wouldn’t appear on the list for a week. There was the man in the store-room, to whom you handed your stuff for safe-keeping against thieves and searchers — Tsesar would be going along there tomorrow before parade with his little bag — and by order of the Commandant, he had to get his whack, and a good one if you didn’t want him nibbling his way through your property. He sat there all day, the rat, with other people’s food — how could you check up on him? And then there were those who had been of service to you, like Shukhov. And if the orderly in the bathhouse was going to give you a decent set of underwear, there was a little something you had to give him. And the barber — not much perhaps, but three or four cigarettes if he was going to wipe the razor on a bit of paper and not on your bare knee. And the people at the CES for keeping your letters separate and not losing them. And if you wanted to lie on your back for a day or so, there was the doctor to pay off. And your neighbour, with whom you shared a locker — in Tsesar’s case the captain —
you couldn’t not give him something. He saw everything you got, and you’d be a hard man not to let him have a bit.

There were some people who always thought the radish in the fellow’s hand was bigger and better. Let them be envious; Shukhov understood life, he didn’t want to stretch his belly at anybody else’s expense.

Meanwhile he took off his boots, climbed up to his bunk, drew the bit of hacksaw blade from his mitten, inspected it and decided that tomorrow he would look around for a good stone on which to grind it down to make a knife for mending shoes. It would take him about four days, if he worked away morning and night, and then he’d have a perfect little knife with a sharp, curved blade.

But now he had to hide it, if only until morning. He’d push it into the gap under the cross-beam of his bunk. So while the captain was still not in his bunk below – he didn’t want any rubbish to fall onto the captain’s face – Shukhov turned back the corner of his heavy mattress, which was stuffed with sawdust and not wood-shavings, and began to conceal the bit of blade.

His neighbours on the top were able to see him: Alyoshka the Baptist and, across the way, the two Estonians. But Shukhov had nothing to fear from them.

Fetyukov came into the hut, sobbing. He was hunched, and there was blood all over his lips. He must have been beaten up again for cadging from other people’s bowls. Without looking at anyone and without attempting to conceal his tears, he walked by the entire gang, climbed up to his bunk and buried his face in his mattress.

It was a shame really, when you thought about it. He would not survive his sentence. He just didn’t know how to cope.
Then the captain came in, looking cheerful, and carrying a pot of special tea. Two wooden tea-urns stood in the hut, but as for the tea that came out of them... It was more or less hot and the right colour, but it was like dishwater and smelled of rotten, rain-soaked wood. This tea was for the lowest of the low. The captain, though, must have got some real tea from Tsesar, chucked it into a pot and run off to get some hot water. He looked thoroughly pleased with himself and settled comfortably beside the locker below.

'Nearly scalded my fingers under the tap!' he boasted.

Also below, Tsesar was spreading out some sheets of paper, and putting various goodies on it. Shukhov turned his mattress back; he did not want to be disturbed by the sight of all that food. But again they couldn't manage without him. Tsesar stood up and, with his eyes level with Shukhov's, winked.

'Ivan Denisovich! Lend me your "ten days", will you?'

That meant Shukhov's small pen-knife - possession of which, if he were caught, would mean ten days in the cells. He kept it, too, under the cross-beam of his bunk. It measured no more than half his little finger, but the little rascal could cut through lard five fingers' thick. Shukhov had made the knife himself, had ground it and sharpened it all on his own.

He pushed his hand under the cross-beam, took out the knife and handed it to Tsesar, who nodded and disappeared from view.

You could earn good money with a knife like that, but it meant the cells all right if they found it on you. Only a man totally devoid of conscience would have said: 'Here,
lend me your knife, we're going to cut up some sausage without feeling a sense of obligation.

So once more Tsesar was in Shukhov's debt.

The problem of the bread and the knives out of the way, Shukhov proceeded to pull out his tobacco-pouch. Then he took from it as much tobacco as he had earlier borrowed, and stretched across to the Estonian. Thanks.

The Estonian spread his lips, as if in a smile, and mumbled something to his neighbour, the other Estonian, and they rolled the offered tobacco into a cigarette - to test its quality.

It was no worse than theirs, so why not go ahead and try it? Shukhov would have liked to try the stuff himself, but some sort of clock inside his head told him that there wasn't much time before the evening check. Now was about the time that the warders would come barging around the hut. He would have to go out into the corridor to have a smoke, but he felt quite warm up on his bunk. In fact, the hut was not at all warm, frost still coated the ceiling. At the moment it was fairly tolerable, but they'd certainly freeze up during the night.

So Shukhov stayed on his bunk and began to break up the 200-gram piece of bread, listening against his will to the captain and Tsesar conversing below, while they drank their tea.

'Help yourself, captain, help yourself; don't hold back! Take some smoked fish, a bit of sausage.'

'Thank you, I will.'

'And spread some of that butter on your bread! It's real Moscow bread!'

'It's hard to believe that real bread is made any more.
You know, this spread reminds me of the time when I happened to be in Archangel . . .

There was so much noise from the two hundred voices in Shukhov’s half of the hut that he wasn’t sure if he had heard the rail being banged or not. Nobody else seemed to have. He also noticed that Snub-nose, one of the warders, a tiny young man with a red face had come into the hut. He was holding a bit of paper in his hand, and it was evident from this and from the way he behaved that he hadn’t come simply to catch illicit smokers or kick everybody out for the evening check, but was looking for somebody.

He confirmed something on the piece of paper and asked:

‘Where’s Gang 104?’
‘Here,’ they answered him. And the Estonians hid their cigarette and waved away the smoke.
‘Where’s the gang-leader?’
‘What do you want?’ said Tyurin from his bunk, scarcely bothering to lower his legs to the floor.
‘What about those reports by two of your men concerning extra clothing?’
‘They’re writing them,’ Tyurin answered confidently.
‘They should’ve been in by now.’
‘The men haven’t had much education, it’s not easy for them.’ (This referred to Tsesar and the captain. The gang-leader was sharp, never lost for a word.) ‘And there’re no pens, no ink.’
‘They should have them.’
‘They’ve been taken away.’
‘Now, watch out, gang-leader; if you go on talking like that, I’ll slap you in the cells!’ Snub-nose threatened
Tyurin, but not too angrily. ‘See that those reports get to the staff hut tomorrow morning before parade! And give orders that all unofficial garments be surrendered at the store-room for personal property. Understood?’

‘Understood.’

(‘The captain’s got off!’ thought Shukhov. The captain himself hadn’t heard a thing, so intent was he on his sausage and talking to Tsesar.)

But...

‘Now,’ said the warder. ‘S-311 – is he one of yours?’

‘I’ll have to look at my list,’ the gang-leader stalled. ‘You can’t expect me to remember all those damned numbers, can you?’ (He was dragging things out, hoping that the evening check would intervene and keep the captain out of the cells until the following morning.)

But the warder said: ‘Buinovsky – are you here?’

‘What? Yes, I’m here!’ the captain called out from under cover of Shukhov’s bunk.

It’s always the quickest louse that’s first to get caught in the comb.

‘You? Yes, that’s right, S-311. Come on, then.’

‘Where to?’

‘You know well enough.’

The captain just sighed and gave a grunt. It must have been easier for him to take a squadron of destroyers out in a stormy sea on a dark night than to break off his cosy conversation for an icy cell.

‘How many days?’ he asked in a low voice.

‘Ten. Come on, then, get a move on!’

At that moment the orderlies came in, shouting:

‘Evening check! Evening check! All out!’
This meant that the warder whom they’d sent to make the check was already in the hut.

The captain looked round — should he take his coat? But they’d only take it away, and leave him with his jacket. In that case, better go as he was. The captain had hoped that Volkovoi would forget (although Volkovoi never forgot a thing), and he wasn’t properly prepared — hadn’t hidden any tobacco for himself in his jacket. And to carry it in his hands would be pointless — they’d find it immediately they searched him.

Nevertheless, while he was putting on his cap, Tsesar slipped him a couple of cigarettes.

‘Well, good-bye, brothers,’ the captain said and nodded in a confused way to Gang 104. He followed the warder out.

A few voices shouted to him: ‘Keep cheerful’, ‘Don’t let them get you down’. What could you say? Gang 104 knew the cells, they’d built them themselves: stone walls, cement floor, no windows, a stove lit only to melt the ice on the walls, causing pools of water on the floor. You slept on bare boards, and if your teeth didn’t fall out from chattering, 300 grams of bread to eat a day and gruel only every third day.

Ten days! Ten days in the cells in this camp — if you survived them — meant that your health was ruined for the rest of your life. T.B., and in and out of hospital until that was that.

Fifteen days — and you were a dead man!

While you’re living in your hut, you thank God and try to keep out of trouble.

‘Come on, out before I count three!’ the man in charge of the hut shouted. ‘Whoever’s not out by the time I count three has his number taken and reported.’
The fellow in charge of the hut was a real swine. There he was, locked in with the rest of them for the night, yet he behaved like an official and was afraid of nobody. The opposite, in fact; everybody was afraid of him. He might hand you over to the warders or smash you in the face. He was classified as an invalid because he’d lost a finger in a fight, but you could tell from his face that he was a thug. In fact, that’s exactly what he was, with a criminal record, but among other things ‘they’ hung Article 58/14 on him, and that’s how he ended up in the camp.

He really might take your number and report you – and that meant two days in the cells with work. So they didn’t make it to the door slowly, but rushed towards it all at once, the men on the top bunks leaping off like bears and hurtling towards the narrow door.

Shukhov, holding the cigarette he’d just rolled in his hand – he hadn’t been able to overcome his craving for one – jumped nimbly down, shoved his feet into his felt boots and started to move off. But he felt sorry for Tsesar. It wasn’t that he wanted to get anything else out of him, he just felt genuinely sorry for him. Tsesar thought so much of himself and yet he didn’t really understand life: having received a parcel, he shouldn’t have gloated over it, but taken it straight to the store-room as quickly as possible before the evening check. He could have eaten the stuff any time, but what was he going to do with it now? He could have taken it all out with him in a bag to the evening check – but he’d have been the laughing-stock of five hundred men. He could leave it where it was – but there was a good chance that it would be whipped by the first man back to the hut. (At Ust-Izhma, it was even more cruel: there, the criminals would get back
from work before the others and clean out all the lockers.)

Shukhov saw that Tsesar did not know what to do. He was fussing around all over the place; but it was too late. He was shoving the sausage and lard down his front - at least he could take them out to the check and save them.

Shukhov took pity on him and gave some advice:

'Sit here, Tsesar Markovich, until the very last. Hide yourself in the shadows and sit there until everybody's gone. And when the warder and the orderlies go round the bunks, looking into all the corners, then come out and say you're not feeling well. I'll go out first and I'll be first back. That's what to do.'

And Shukhov ran off.

At first he shoved his way roughly through the crowd (protecting his rolled cigarette in his fist, however). In the corridor into which both halves of the hut led and by the doorway, nobody was in a hurry to go forward; the crafty ones stuck close to the walls in two rows to the right and left, leaving passage room down the middle of the corridor for only one man. They didn't want to go out into the cold, and only a fool would if he could stay inside. They'd been out in the cold all day, why go out and freeze for an extra ten minutes now? That was a mug's game. You may want 'to give up the ghost today, but I want to see tomorrow!

At any other time Shukhov would have stuck to the walls like everybody else. But now he strode through the crowd and even jeered at them:

'What are you frightened of, you goats? Never seen a Siberian frost? Come out and warm up under the wolves' sun! Give us a light, uncle!'

He lit his cigarette in the doorway and went out on to
the steps. ‘The wolves’ sun’ – that’s what they sometimes jokingly called the moon where Shukhov came from.

The moon was high in the sky now. A little bit more and it would be as high as it would go. The sky was pale and greenish. There weren’t many stars, but they shone brightly. The white snow gleamed, and the walls of the hut looked white, too. The lights of the camp glowed weakly.

By another hut there was a black crowd of men – they were coming out to line up. The same thing was happening by another hut. But it was not so much conversation you heard from the other huts as the sound of the snow crunching under the prisoners’ boots.

Five men descended the steps from the hut, and then another three. Shukhov was among the three and formed part of the second row of five. It wasn’t so bad standing there, having had a good fill of bread and with a cigarette between your lips. It was good tobacco, the Latvian hadn’t deceived him – strong and fragrant.

Gradually other prisoners came down the steps, and there were now two or three rows of five behind Shukhov. At this stage, whoever came out was angry at the swine still hugging the walls in the corridor, refusing to budge until the last. They had to freeze for them.

None of the prisoners ever saw a watch or a clock. Much use they’d be, anyway! A prisoner only has to know how soon reveille is, how much time until parade, dinner, lights-out.

The evening check was at nine – or that is when it was supposed to be. It never finished at nine, they were always having a second count, even a third. You never got away before ten. And reveille was meant to be at five in the
morning. No wonder the Moldavian had dropped off before knocking-off time. If a prisoner found somewhere warm, he would go to sleep there immediately. They lost so much sleep during the week that on Sunday, if they weren’t hustled out to work, all the huts were full of men sleeping.

Now the prisoners poured down the steps – the hut chief and the warder kicking them in the arse. Take that, you brutes!

‘You swine,’ the men in the first rows of five shouted at them, ‘you thought you were being clever, did you? Trying to get cream out of shit, eh? If you’d come out before, the check would be over by now.’

The whole hut was out now. Four hundred men – eighty rows of five. They formed a sort of tail, the rows at the front in strict order, those at the back a shambles, however.

‘Line up in fives there, at the back!’ the hut chief yelled from the steps.

But the bastards wouldn’t budge!

Tsesar came out of the doorway, hunched and pretending to look sick, behind him a couple of orderlies from one half of the hut, a couple more from the other half and a prisoner who limped. They formed a new first row of five, so that Shukhov was now in the third row. Tsesar was sent right to the back.

The warder came out on to the steps.

‘Line up in fives!’ he shouted to the prisoners at the back in a loud voice.

‘Line up in fives!’ the hut chief yelled in an even louder voice.

But still the bastards wouldn’t budge.
The hut chief rushed down the steps and over to the back, swearing at them and hitting out. But he was careful whom he hit — only those he knew wouldn’t retaliate.

The men at the back got into line, and the hut chief went back to the steps. Together with the warder he began to shout:

‘One! Two! Three!’

As each row of five was called, the men shot into the barracks as fast as they could go. That was the last of the authorities for the day.

Unless, that is, they had a recount. Any herdsman could count better than these parasites, these thick-heads. He may not be able to read or write, but at least when he’s driving his herd he knows whether there’s a calf missing or not. These people had been trained, but much good it had done them.

The previous winter there had been no drying-room at all in the camp, they’d had to leave their boots in the hut all night, and sometimes the prisoners were chased out for as many as four recounts. On those occasions, they wouldn’t even bother to get dressed, but went out wrapped in blankets. This year they’d built drying-rooms, but not enough, so each gang could only dry their felt boots two days out of three. Consequently, recounts now took place in the hut — and the men would be driven from one half to the other.

Shukhov wasn’t the first to rush back into the hut, but he kept a sharp eye out. He ran to Tsesar’s bunk and sat down. He tore off his boots, and climbed up the bunk near the stove. From there he put his boots on the stove — first come, first served was the rule — and then returned to Tsesar’s bunk. He sat there, his legs crossed under him,
one eye open to see that nobody pinched Tsesar’s stuff from under the head of his bunk, the other to see that his boots weren’t shoved aside on the stove.

‘Hey!’ he shouted. ‘You, you with the red hair! Do you want a boot in your face? Put your boots up, but don’t move anybody else’s!’

The prisoners were flooding back into the hut. Someone in Gang 20 shouted:

‘Let’s have your boots.’

As soon as they left the hut with their boots, it was locked after them. And when they came running back, they shouted: ‘Comrade warder! Let us in!’

Now the warders were collecting in the staff hut to do their bookkeeping on those boards of theirs, to see if anyone had got away, that everyone was present.

But Shukhov did not care about such things today. Here was Tsesar, diving between the bunks towards his own.

‘Thank you, Ivan Denisovich!’

Shukhov nodded and climbed rapidly up to his own bunk, like a squirrel. He could now finish that 200 grams of bread, have another smoke, go to sleep.

Only, after a good day would Shukhov feel so cheerful – today he didn’t even feel particularly like sleeping.

Making his bed was a simple matter: take the black blanket off the mattress, lie down on the mattress (Shukhov hadn’t slept in sheets since ... ’41 it would be, when he left home; it astonished him that women went to all that trouble with sheets – just extra washing), head back on the pillow filled with wood-shavings, feet in the sleeves of his jacket, coat on top of the blanket. And thank You, God, that’s another day gone!
And thank You that I'm not sleeping in the cells, but here, which is not too bad.

Shukhov lay down with his head to the window. Alyoshka, who slept in the next bunk – the bunks were separated by slatted boards – had his head turned the other way so as to be able to catch the light. He was reading the Gospels again.

The light was not so far from them; it was possible to read, even to sew.

Alyoshka heard Shukhov's thanksgiving and turned towards him.

'You see, your soul is beseeching you to pray to God, Ivan Denisovich. Why don't you yield to it?'

Shukhov glanced at Alyoshka, whose eyes were glowing like two candles. He sighed.

'Well, Alyoshka, it seems to me that prayers are like those appeals we put in. Either they don't get there or they come back marked "Rejected".'

In front of the staff hut there were four sealed wooden boxes, emptied once a month by the authorities. Many appeals dropped into these boxes. The petitioners would wait and count the days: after a couple of months, or a month, the reply would come . . .

Rather, either it didn't come, or there it would be: 'Rejected'.

'That's because you don't pray enough, Ivan Denisovich, or you pray badly, not with your whole heart, that's why your prayers don't get answered. You must pray without cease! If you have faith, and tell a mountain to move – it will!'

Shukhov smiled and rolled himself another cigarette. He got a light from one of the Estonians.
‘Come off it, Alyoshka. I’ve never seen mountains moving. Well, to tell the truth, I’ve never seen a mountain at all. When you and your fellow Baptists in the Caucasus prayed, did you ever get a mountain to move?’

Poor bastards: they prayed to God, and whom did they ever harm? But they got twenty-five years all the same. That’s what the sentence was these days: twenty-five years, neither more nor less.

‘But that wasn’t what we were praying for, Ivan Denisovich!’ Alyoshka persisted, and, with the Gospels in his hands, he moved closer to Shukhov, right up to his face. ‘Of all earthly and transitory things our Lord commanded that we should pray only for our daily bread. ‘Give us this day our daily bread’!’

‘Our bread ration, you mean?’ asked Shukhov.

But Alyoshka went on, exhorting more with his eyes than with his words, and laying his hand on Shukhov’s.

‘Ivan Denisovich, you mustn’t pray to receive a parcel or for an extra portion of gruel. Things which men put high value on are an abomination in the sight of the Lord. You must pray for the things of the spirit, that the Lord will drive out all wickedness from our hearts. . . .’

‘Just you listen. At our church in Polomnya there was a priest . . .’

‘Please don’t tell me about your priest!’ Alyoshka begged, and his brow wrinkled in pain.

‘No, but just you listen.’ Shukhov raised himself up on one elbow. ‘In Polomnya, in our parish, there’s no richer man than the priest. Say you were asked to put on a roof, your price for ordinary people would be thirty-five roubles a day — for the priest, it’s a hundred. And he’d pay up without a murmur. That man’s paying alimony to
three women in three different towns, and living with a fourth. And the bishop’s completely in his power, you should see the way he holds his greasy hand out to the bishop. And he gets rid of all the other priests, no matter how many they send him, he doesn’t want to share with anyone . . .

‘Why are you talking to me about priests? The Orthodox Church has strayed from the Gospels. They don’t get sent to prison like us because they have no true faith.’

Smoking, Shukhov looked on calmly at Alyoshka’s agitation.

‘Alyoshka,’ he said. He took his hand away from Alyoshka’s, and the smoke from his cigarette blew in the Baptist’s face. ‘Understand, I’m not against God. I’m quite happy to believe in Him. But what I won’t believe in is heaven and hell. Why do you take us for fools and try to fill us up with all that rubbish about heaven and hell? That’s what gets me.’

And Shukhov lay back again, flicking his cigarette ash carefully between the bunk and the window so that the captain’s things wouldn’t get burned. He began to think his own thoughts and stopped listening to what Alyoshka was going on about.

‘Anyway,’ he concluded, ‘however much you pray, it’s not going to take anything off your sentence. You’ve got to sit that out, every day from reveille to lights-out.’

‘But you shouldn’t pray about that!’ Alyoshka was appalled. ‘Why do you want freedom? If you were free, the remnants of your faith would be choked with thorns! You should rejoice that you are in prison! Here you have time to think about your soul! Paul the Apostle said: “What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I
am ready not to be bound only, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus”.*

Shukhov looked up at the ceiling without saying anything. He no longer knew whether he wanted freedom or not. At the beginning he desired it more than anything in the world, and every evening had counted how many days he’d done and how many were left. But then he’d grown bored. And then it became clear to him that prisoners such as he would never be allowed home, but would be forced into exile. He no longer knew where he would be better off – here or at home. It was impossible to tell.

Freedom meant only one thing to him – home.
And they’d never let him go home . . .

Alyoshka was not lying; it was evident from his voice and from his eyes that he was happy to be in prison.

‘You see, Alyoshka,’ Shukhov explained, ‘it’s all right for you: Christ ordered you to be here, and you are here for Christ. But why am I here? Because in ’41 they weren’t properly prepared for war? Is that it? But am I to blame for that?’

‘It doesn’t look as though there’ll be a recount,’ Kilgas shouted from his bunk.

‘Yes, yes!’ Shukhov answered. ‘We ought to count that as a mercy – that they’re not having a recount.’ He yawned. ‘Time for sleep.’

At that moment, in the hut which had grown peaceful and quiet, the rattle of the bolt on the outside door was heard. A couple of men who’d been taking their felt boots to the drying-room ran in from the corridor and shouted:

‘Recount!’

The warder followed behind him:

'Over to the other half of the hut!'

Some people were already asleep. They began to grumble and move about, shoving their feet into their boots (nobody ever took off his padded trousers — without them you'd freeze under the blanket).

'Fuck them!' Shukhov exclaimed, but he wasn't too angry, because he hadn't got off to sleep yet.

Tsesar put his hand up and gave him a couple of biscuits, two lumps of sugar and a slice of sausage.

'Thank you, Tsesar Markovich,' Shukhov said, leaning over. 'Now you pass that little bag up to me, and I'll put it under my pillow for safety.' (Things couldn't be pinched from the top bunks as easily, and nobody would think of looking through Shukhov's.)

Tsesar passed up his little white bag, neatly tied up. Shukhov slipped it under his mattress and waited a while until most of the others had been driven out, so that he would have as little time as possible standing in his bare feet in the corridor. But the warder snarled at him:

'Come on, you there in the corner! Outside!'

Shukhov jumped gingerly to the floor in his bare feet (his felt boots and foot-cloths were in a good position on the stove, it would be a shame to disturb them!). The number of pairs of slippers he had sewn — but always for other people, never for himself. However, he was used to recounts, and this one probably wouldn't last long.

And they'd take those slippers off you as well, if they found them on you during the day.

The gangs who had taken their boots to the drying-room — it wasn't all that bad for them either. Some of them had slippers or foot-cloths, or they went out in bare feet.

'Come on, come on!' the warder yelled.
‘Do you want a bit of persuading, you bastards!’ The hut chief was there as well.

They were all turned out into the other half of the hut, the last of them having to stand in the corridor. Shukhov stood there, against the wall near the latrine. The floor was slightly wet under his feet, and there was an icy draught coming through the doorway.

When they were all out, the warder and the hut chief had another look round to see that nobody was hiding or asleep in a dark corner. If they didn’t get the right number, there’d be trouble, and they’d have to have a recount – then perhaps more trouble, and another recount. They did their rounds and returned to the doorway.

‘One! Two! Three! Four!’ It was going fast now, as they were counting off one at a time. Shukhov squeezed himself in eighteenth. Then he ran back to his bunk, put his leg up on the ledge – a heave and he was up!

Good. Feet back into the sleeves of his jacket. Blanket on top. Coat on top of that. Sleep. Now the other half of the hut would have to come through to their side, but his lot wouldn’t mind about that.

Tsesar returned. Shukhov handed him down the little bag.

Alyoshka came back. He was a misfit in a way, he was as pleasant as could be to everyone, but he never gained anything by it.

‘Here, Alyoshka!’ And Shukhov gave him one of his biscuits.

Alyoshka smiled.

‘Thank you! But what about yourself – you don’t have anything?’

‘Eat.’
Shukhov didn’t have much, but he could earn. And now he’d have a bit of that sausage! Into your mouth! Get your teeth into it! Teeth! Oh, the taste of meat! And the juice from the meat, the real thing! Right down to the stomach!

There – gone!

He’d eat the rest of the stuff, he decided, before parade. He hid his head in the thin, unwashed blanket, and didn’t hear the noise of the prisoners from the other half of the hut around the bunks. They were still waiting to be counted.

Shukhov went off to sleep, and he was completely content. Fate had been kind to him in many ways that day: he hadn’t been put in the cells, the gang hadn’t been sent to the Socialist Community Centre, he’d fiddled himself an extra bowl of porridge for dinner, the gang-leader had fixed a good percentage, he’d been happy building that wall, he’d slipped through the search with that bit of blade, he’d earned himself something from Tsesar in the evening, he’d bought his tobacco. And he hadn’t fallen ill – he had overcome his sickness of the morning.

‘The day had gone by without a single cloud – almost a happy day.

There were three thousand six hundred and fifty-three days in his sentence, from reveille to lights-out.

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