

I

FROM THE DARKNESS

In this remote village of ours we are in the grip of terrible ignorance and superstition. Here I am, wanting to go outside to relieve myself, but at this moment hordes of bats are flying about, like leaves blown by an October wind, their wings knocking against the window panes, and I am afraid that one of them will get into my hair and I will never be able to get it out. So I am sitting here, comrades, instead of going out, repressing my need, and writing this report for you.

Well, as far as the purchase of grain is concerned, this has been falling ever since the devil appeared at the mill and took off his cap in an elegant greeting. His cap was in three colours: red, white and blue, and on it was embroidered *Tour de la Paix*. The peasants have been avoiding the mill, and the manager and his wife were driven by worry to drink until one day he splashed her with vodka and set her on fire. Then he left for the People's University, where he is going to read Marxism so that, as he says, he has something to put against those irrational elements.

And the manager's wife died in the flames and we have one more ghost.

I have to tell you that at night something howls here; howls so terribly that your heart almost stops beating. Some say that it is the spirit of poor Karas, who never had a bean, cursing the rich kulaks; others say that it is wealthy Krywon,

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complaining after death about the compulsory deliveries. A proper class war.

My cabin stands on the edge of the forest, alone. The night is black, the forest is black and my thoughts are like ravens. One day my neighbour, Jusienga, was sitting on a tree stump by the forest, reading *Horizons of Technology*, when something got at him from the back so that for three days he never stopped staring vacantly.

We need your advice, comrades, because we are alone here, miles from anywhere, surrounded only by distance and graves.

A forester has told me that at full moon in the clearings heads without bodies roll about, chase each other, knock at each other's cold foreheads as if they wanted something, but come dawn they all disappear and there are only trees left to murmur, not too loudly because they are afraid. Oh my God, nothing will make me go outside, not even the greatest need.

And it is the same with everything. You talk about Europe, comrades, but here. . . . No sooner do we pour our milk into jugs than hunchback dwarfs appear from somewhere and spit into it.

One night old Mrs. Glus woke up swimming in sweat. She looked at her eiderdown and what did she see? The small credit, that had been given to us before the elections (so that we could build a bridge here) and died suddenly without Extreme Unction, that credit was sitting on her eiderdown, all green and choking with laughter. The old woman started to scream but nobody came to see what was the matter. Can one be sure who is screaming and from what ideological position?

And at the spot where we were to have the bridge an artist got drowned. He was only two years old, but already a genius. Had he grown up he would have understood and described everything. But now all he can do is to fly about and fluoresce.

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Of course, all those happenings have changed our psychology. People believe in sorcery and superstition. Only yesterday they found a skeleton behind Mocza's barn. The priest says that it is a political skeleton. They believe in ghosts and things, and even in witches. True, we have one woman who takes milk away from the cows and gives them fever, but we want to get her to join the Party and in this way deprive the enemies of progress of at least one argument.

How those bats flap their wings. Christ! how they fly and squeak "pee pee" and again "pee pee". There is nothing like those big houses where everything must be inside and there is no need to go into the bushes.

But there are even worse things than that. As I am writing this the door has opened and a pig's snout has appeared. It is looking at me very queerly, it is staring at me . . .

Have I not told you that things are different here?