

By the light of an oil lamp, she reads and the girls sew. The daughters, Shura and Sonya, have been to the university. Sonya came from Lvov, where she was the director of a library.

I live with my mother. My husband is in Saratov, in military training. I did not manage to get away. Everyone was expecting him to come for me. Winter began fiercely this year. No one had a stove. There was no firewood either. I am already working in a cafeteria. Today it's borscht from frozen beets without bread, then came *kozein*, a glue-like, repulsive, white substance [made from bones]; it tasted like rubber. I do not know to this day what it was for. They say that it was used in building airplanes. I spend the whole day in the kitchen freezing. There is shouting; there isn't enough *kozein*. People are dropping in the doorways. I am still alive. I can eat a few helpings of *kozein* and still bring a bit home, but at home things grow worse every day. The stove in the kitchen is still smoldering; they are chopping up the furniture for fuel. The stove is surrounded by people.

Lyuba and Vera make matchboxes. One hundred boxes for a glass of bran. The oil lamp is still smoldering. The Mordukhaev girls sit on the floor by the stove. They don't say anything. There's no end to the evening. The other day, a worker named Nadya, after gathering her things, went to the flea market. She came back five days later all beaten up. The Germans had taken everything, leaving only a sackful of peas. Nadya went on and on with her story of how she had eaten bread with borscht in the village. And so all the youngsters decide to go with her. It's freezing outside, there's nothing to wear. Riva wears sandals and old galoshes. They've left. It's quiet. I've got the best place, right by the stove.

New orders were posted in the streets: all Jews had twenty-four hours to leave the city. Terrible processions formed. I come running home at four o'clock. There is panic and weeping in the apartment. The building superintendent says that the Mordukhaevs have to clean the apartment right away since they're Jews. The girls have only just got back from the village. They've brought nothing, everything was taken away from them, while Shurik wants a cookie. What to do? I dash with Margarita to 100 Sumsky, to the commandant's offices, and say that I've known the Mordukhaevs for many years, and that they're Armenians (I know a little German, since it was not long ago that I graduated from the institute). It worked. They let them stay until they can get a guarantee. They stay, but they've no more strength. No one wants to take them on, since they're Jews, and everyone shouts *Jude* after them. They have nothing to live on. In their large room with the windows facing north, it is colder than it is outside.

The first to get sick in our room is Shura and Sonya's mother. Sonya would go to a village to the south to get her milk. Her mother dies slowly. And now in our apartment is the first coffin, made from a chest of drawers.

In the kitchen in the evenings, everyone looks nervously at their legs, squeezing them. Are they swollen? Sonya's and Nyura's are very swollen, and the Mordukhaev girls are just wasting away. They look like they are made of wax. They don't comb

their hair, they don't wash, they make something out of potato peelings and snow and eat it on the spot, raw. People live by selling things, but they've got nothing left to sell. Lice are crawling around the apartment, they're everywhere. Sofa and Nyura have gotten sick. Shurik as well. He doesn't cry anymore and doesn't even want the soup that I bring from the cafeteria. There's a second body in the apartment; Nyura has died and then a week later Riva is gone, too. Margarita goes begging, she's staggering from weakness. Her eyes are wild. I can't think about those eyes without being horrified. She falls, gets up, and falls again. She needs to give Shurik and Sofa something to eat. She is older, she's twelve. Sofa and Shurik are crying from the next room, demanding something to eat from her. The room stinks and is dirty, it's dreadful to enter. I'm still working at the cafeteria. It's cold as the devil, the soup freezes in the plates. I hold on. One has to live.

Another one of us has died. Sonya died in the hospital. Her feet became infected and she died of blood poisoning. They buried her in a common grave. There's no one left to recall the past, our life before the Germans. There's no one to dream about. Margarita has gotten sick, too.

Yesterday, Shurik asked for a cookie. "Mama gave me one," he said, then smiled, and, toward evening, died. Margarita got up and with great difficulty said that Shurik should be taken to his relatives to be buried. She moves along, ragged, in a terrible state. The cold keeps on getting more bitter. Shurik's not here, she's gone to Lyubotin. Nadya went off to the village as well and hasn't come back. It's obvious that she's died. Sofa and Margarita are getting sicker. I brought them soup, but they do not want to eat. They ask for tea. It is terrible to look at them. Kozha is all bones and huge, dark eyes. In the morning, I poked my head into their room. They're dead. Both are dead. Sofa on the bed, Margarita on the floor. How to bury them? I went to the *bürgermeister* repeatedly. He says: "We don't bury Jews." They've been lying there for ten days now. It's a good thing that it's cold, but the bodies smell all the same. They lie there for another twelve days. Finally, they come to pick them up. They need to tidy up the room. The Petrovna woman comes. She wants to lift up the feather bed. I hear an awful, heart-rending cry. Shurik lies under the bed where Margarita slept. Had he died then, or did she deliberately put him there in order to bring an end to his sufferings? Who can say? He lay there for a month and a half. When will this end? When?

The notes end here.

GARE, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 953, ll. 38–42. A typewritten manuscript.

9. The destruction of the Jews of Kharkov

THE RECOLLECTIONS OF NINA MOGILEVSKAYA, WIFE OF A WELDER
RECORDED BY S. GOLOVANIVSKY

It is difficult, painful to remember Kharkov. December 14, 1941.

My husband Yalovsky, a welder, and I were going to the market; we needed to trade some of our belongings for food.

There was a crowd on the street. In an oppressive silence, people were reading flyers in which the Germans announced that "All Jews, regardless of sex, age, confession, or state of health are required to resettle in the Losevo District behind the Kharkov Tractor Factory by December 16. All those discovered outside of that area will be shot on the spot."

The next day I, along with my husband, went to the Tractor Factory. A huge crowd of sixteen thousand Jews was winding its way through the streets. The young, the old, teenagers, small children were all walking. The healthy were carrying the sick.

An older woman was walking alongside us carrying her palsied, aged mother. In front of us was a family—a husband and wife and two small children. The man had one leg in a cast and was walking on crutches. It was slippery, he fell several times. They shot him at the Electro-Chemical Plant.

It was very cold. Those who were freezing lagged behind, and if they caught the eye of the Germans they were killed.

The robberies began in the city center. They robbed people at every bridge and at every spot where the column slowed its pace. Hardly anyone reached the tractor factory with what they had been permitted—were forced—to bring with them.

The barracks were waiting for us beyond the tractor factory. The windows were knocked out, the stoves smashed. In a room of about twenty or twenty-five square meters, some fifty or sixty people piled in. They locked the barracks. The doors opened when the Germans, on the pretext of searching for weapons, came to steal. They took everything: valuables, clothes, food.

People were dying from hunger and the cold. The first to go were the elderly and the children. But all this is known from other witnesses. I will tell about myself and my sorrow.

On December 25, 1941, when it was already obvious that nothing but death awaited us, I said to my husband (he is a Russian) that he should not die because of me, that he should go home. My husband refused, so I promised him that I would escape.

There was a girl named Marusya in my barracks. Her husband, also a Russian, was at the Front. I convinced her to escape as well.

There was no water in the barracks. The Germans needed water, too. They sent the women for water to a pump located some three kilometers away from the barracks.

On December 27, going out for water, we didn't return to the barracks. Convinced that they wouldn't come after us, we made for the village of Kaplunovka, where the parents of my new friend's husband lived. A hundred ten kilometers in the cold and drizzle, poorly dressed (the Germans had taken away all our warm clothing) we walked, not stopping anywhere.

They offered us help in the villages, but we were afraid to stay the night. So we went on, day and night, we walked and walked.

The parents of Marusya's husband, the Serdyukovs, welcomed us and gave us food. Serdyukov told us that if we had money, he could buy documents for us from the commandant's office and in that case we could live without fear.

But we did not have any money. The next day, when we came to Kaplunovka, I remembered that my husband's uncle lived seven kilometers from that village. I decided to ask him for help and I invited Marusya to come with me. But she was worn out by our wanderings and decided to go stay with her in-laws.

I went away. I did not get any money and on the same day went back to Kaplunovka. Approaching the village, I saw a crowd. I took a few more steps and saw Marusya, hanging from a crossbar. There was a sign hanging on her that said "This kike woman is a Bolshevik"

It later turned out that she had been betrayed by her father-in-law, Serdyukov. I went back to my husband's relatives. He was summoned to the commandant's office where they beat him and demanded that he tell them where I had gone, but he kept silent. I had to stay for days on end in the cellar, coming to the hut only at night.

I was pregnant. The time was coming for me to give birth. To have the child here was unthinkable. The cry of a child could be heard by any neighbor who happened to come by. I did not want to be the undoing of people who were protecting me so bravely. One night, I left for Kharkov.

The road to Kharkov was hard, but in Kharkov itself life was even more difficult. A policeman was standing on almost every street corner, checking papers. I would hide in the entranceways of buildings and in three days made my way through the city to Mt. Kholodnaya, where my husband's parents lived.

They told me that my husband had gone off to join a partisan unit. These old people, knowing that it might cost them their lives, nevertheless took me in. A few hours later, I gave birth to a boy.

The neighbors agreed that I should come back and though there were no scoundrels among them who would turn in my child and me it was still too dangerous to stay. Two weeks later, with my child and a birth certificate in the name of Valentin Yalovsky on which I dribbled a few drops of ink in the necessary places, I left Kharkov to look for work and a roof over my head.

I had a child with me: everywhere, people let me stay the night. Sometimes they let me bathe the child, but in the morning, I had to go, and there was no end in sight to my wanderings.

I was already close to despair when they told me about a sugar beet farm called Ekonomia in Parkhomovka that was taking on workers. But I had to get in touch with the "boss," and the "boss" came by the motor pool every day. I waited for the "boss" for a whole day, but he never turned up. And the next day, all confused, I went down to the railroad tracks to throw myself and my child under the engine. Suddenly, someone jerked me by the shoulder: "Stop, where do you think you're going?" he asked me. (He was dressed in city clothes.) "I'm hungry. My child is dying. I can't find any work." The questions followed: where was I from, where was my husband, and so on. I was quite used to all this and I answered as usual.

"You're a city girl and we do hard work here."

"I can handle any sort of work."

The "boss" put me in a cart and we went off. The "boss lady" met us.

"Look at this Katerina with a knapsack on her shoulders and a kid in her arms that I've brought back," he said to her.

The "boss lady" muttered, "You've always got some wild idea in your head."

The "boss" looked at me and said in an embarrassed voice, "Seems she wanted to throw herself under some vehicle. When she was suffering, her face was beautiful."

Thanks to his fantasy, I got a roof over my head, even though my papers were not entirely in order. The work was very hard, and for me, a city girl, even harder. My child was always with me. He lay on some rags not far from me, but I could not tear myself away from my work long enough to feed him.

My son died by my side. I kept on working, stupidly, like a machine, which filled the people around me with hostility and irritation against me.

My husband arrived toward the end of the summer. He asked for work and they took him on. A few days later, someone dug up a few potatoes from the garden of one of the Germans. Someone said that I had done it for my husband. We were called in to see the commandant. They beat me unconscious. The scars remain on my body to this day. Then they took us out to be shot.

Don't be surprised: they killed the old and the young for a spool of thread or a cigarette stolen from the Germans.

We were walking and I thought to myself: it is obviously my fate to die at the hands of a German executioner. And why had I been fighting so hard for my life? It was good that my son had died; he was better off.

Suddenly we saw that a woman had come up to the commandant. She was young and beautiful and had been living with him for several days. She was saying something to him and we managed to hear: "Well, of course, that's not them. I know them very well. These are very honest people."

I don't remember what happened after that. All I know is that they let us go. I went down on my knees before this woman and she stroked my hair and whispered: "Don't worry, I'm one of you." I think she was a partisan. How my husband and I would like to see our rescuer, whose name we don't even know!

My husband soon went back to his unit, while I stayed in *Ekonomia* until the arrival of our troops. I am twenty-two now, but I've seen so much sadness in my life that it would be enough for several human lives.

Mind you, I'm not the only one!

GARE, f. 8114, op. 1, d. 961, ll. 24-29. A typewritten manuscript.

Odessa and Transnistria

10. Why did it happen to us?

THE RECOLLECTIONS OF DR. LIDIA MAXIMOVNA SLIPCHENKO (KOZMAN)²⁷
[1944]

Deeply respected Comrade,

I am sending you an article written by my cousin, Lidia Maximovna Kozman, Slipchenko by marriage.

L. M. is a young woman of thirty, a Jew, who was on the threshold of death when she was with the Germans, but who was saved and is now living with her family in Novosibirsk. She sent me her article with the request that I look it over. In forwarding the article to you, I am guided by the following considerations: the dramatic odyssey of my cousin and the literary capabilities that one could employ to create a document bearing witness against the Germans.

In the autumn of 1941, L. M. found herself alone in the Odessa ghetto. Having become convinced that death was inescapable, she, along with several other comrades in the ghetto, took poison, from which she did not die, but rather fell seriously ill. In the hospital to which she was sent, she managed to obtain a passport with a Russian name and to escape. Over the next two and a half years until the arrival of the Red Army, she worked in some cattle yards.

L. M. was a doctor, the mother of an eight-year-old son, and the wife of a Ukrainian. She grew up in an assimilated family, was not a Party member, and could not be suspected of any kind of chauvinism or prejudice.

Her notes and recollections, corrected and edited in a suitable manner, could be useful both within and outside our country.

I ask you to advise me of your opinion on this matter. My telephone at work is K0-21-90, ext. 42.

Luiza Petrovna Skupnik

Why did it happen to us?

Hundreds and thousands of individuals who were not guilty of any crime, including weak old people, women and children, perished with this question on their lips. All of them dreamed of posing this question out loud, of receiving an answer, so as to learn what they were guilty of, if anything, and to disprove the absurd accusations which rained down on their heads like a hail of bullets. But they received no answer, and so with that question on their lips they departed for a world in which there were neither accusers nor accused, nor nations having a right to life nor those without such a right.

A modest number managed to break out of the gruesome ring of death and to live to speak of their pain and sorrow out loud. I am such an individual, and I consider it my duty to ask, at last, in the name of those who went to their graves and who will never again have the opportunity to speak: WHY DID IT HAPPEN TO US?

27. A portion of these recollections appear in *The Black Book*, p. 57.