The Case of Comrade Tulayev Study Guide

The Case of Comrade Tulayev by Victor Serge

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

The Case of Comrade Tulayev, by Victor Serge, is a fiction novel that highlights the real-life corruption behind the Soviet Union. Author Victor Serge (born Victor Kibalchich) was the son of Russian political exiles and an exile himself. He spent much of his life writing fiction that exposed totalitarianism and corruption in the U.S.S.R.

This novel is circular in structure. It begins and ends with the stories of two men living in Moscow in the late 1930s. Romachkin is a sickly old man who toils away as an assistant clerk in the wages department of the Moscow Clothing Trust. He is devastated by the injustices he sees around him. He buys a Colt revolver on the black market to exact justice, but he does not have the nerve to use it. He ends up giving the revolver to his neighbor, Kostia.

Kostia is a tall, young man who works in the office of a subway construction yard and is a leader of the Young Communists. He is also disillusioned with the state of his country, but he has the innocent hope of youth and believes that he can create change for the better. He carries the Colt revolver around with him for days. Then, one night he happens to be on a dark street alone with a high government official, Comrade Tulayev, whom he believes is corrupt. In a rash act, Kostia shoots Tulayev and runs away. This is the impetus for the entire rest of the novel.

Subsequent chapters unfold the stories of each of the principle individuals accused of the crime of Tulayev's murder. The government decides that the Tulayev case must be a political plot, and they set out to find (or create) the perpetrators. Thousands of dossiers are collected in the initial investigation, but examiners pinpoint very specific individuals they decide to prosecute.

The main suspects include the following: Erchov (the former High Commissar for Security and Commissar of the People for Internal Affairs); Rublev (an academic); Makeyev (born a peasant, who has risen through the ranks as a soldier and eventually becomes the Regional Secretary of Kurgansk); Kondratiev (a career revolutionary who is an old friend of the Chief); and finally Ryzhik (an old Trotskyist who is brought back from deportation to face charges).

Erchov, Rublev, and Makeyev are eventually executed for the plot to kill Tulayev even though none of them had anything to do with Tulayev's death. It was not a plot; it was a rash act by an individual. Ryzhik dies in prison from a hunger strike before he can be executed. Kondratiev is the only one who escapes execution, partly because of his friendship with the Chief (Stalin).

In the last chapter of the book, Kostia is tormented by guilt and sends an unsigned confession to the Central Committee. Comrade Flieshman, an examiner in the case, burns the letter and files the thousands of pages of trumped up charges on the Tulayev plot. The Tulayev case is closed.

Chapter 1: Comets Are Born at Night

Chapter 1: Comets Are Born at Night Summary

Chapter one introduces Kostia and Romachkin, who are neighbors in Moscow, living in small, mirror image rooms next door to one another. Romachkin is a sickly, old, little man who works as an assistant clerk in the wages department of the Moscow Clothing Trust. Kostia is a tall, young man, almost childlike in his exuberance. He works in the office of a subway construction yard.

Both Kostia and Romachkin are disenchanted with the direction their country is heading. They are tired of poverty and iniquity. Romachkin buys a Colt revolver on the black market one day with the idea that he will seek his own justice, but he is too frightened to take action. He eventually gives the gun away to Kostia.

One beautiful, wintry night in February, Kostia is walking along a deserted street, and he sees Comrade Tulayev get out of a big, black car. Without thinking, Kostia takes the Colt revolver from under his coat and murders Tulayev in the street. As he runs away, he realizes that he is not in the least bit remorseful. Instead, he is filled with joy, because he took action to retaliate for the overwhelming injustice.

He returns to his room and visits Romachkin next door. Romachkin immediately notices a difference in his demeanor and asks him what has happened. Kostia replies that he is in love—and it's terrible.

Chapter 1: Comets Are Born at Night Analysis

Chapter one sets the stage of poverty in the Soviet Union. Kostia has been saving up for weeks to buy a pair of shoes at a secondhand store. In a brief insane moment, he instead makes a frivolous purchase of a small ebony-framed portrait of a woman. It's intoxicating for Kostia to look into the eyes of the woman in the portrait, and the odd purchase makes him happy.

When Kostia returns to his one-room apartment, the author reveals more of the poverty in which citizens live in Moscow. There is nothing but a cot and a table with magazines piled on it. The one window has three broken panes that have been replaced by cardboard. Kostia actually feels lucky to have found the portrait to brighten up his room and props it up on the table against the wall.

Kostia hears his neighbor, Romachkin, cough next door, and he thinks about the old man. Kostia and Romachkin are bachelors who actually share a room with a partition down the middle in a communal apartment building. A beautiful marble fireplace is split in half by the thin partition that separates their rooms. Kostia feels sorry for Romachkin, because he believes Romachkin has the dark half of life. The old man seldom goes out.

He works, tends his geraniums, reads books, and ponders the portraits he has of great men on his wall.

Kostia goes next door to visit with Romachkin, and the author describes Romachkin further by detailing what he does with his hands. Romachkin never puts his elbows on the table. When he speaks, his hands are usually spread flat on his knees, and when he walks, his hands are behind his back. When Romachkin speaks, sometimes his crosses his arms over his chest and occasionally raises his shoulders slightly. All of this reveals to Kostia that Romachkin is a humble and patient beast of burden in society.

The author uses simile to describe Romachkin being like a melancholy bee in his job. He goes around humming quietly and delivering his depressing statistics and reports to his superiors. Eventually, Romachkin realizes that the newspapers are lying. He works with statistics, and he knows that the numbers do not support what they say about how well the country is progressing. Romachkin feels horribly guilty that his reports are used to squeeze the poor out of decent salaries.

Romachkin starts to feel as though he's losing his mind and even goes to the library to look up various psychological diseases to find out if he possesses the same symptoms. He visits a doctor at a neuropsychiatric clinic and emerges believing that the doctor should be the patient. He does take the doctor's advice to increase his sex life and visits a prostitute.

The prostitute takes Romachkin back to her pitiful hovel, and they do their business quietly on the floor so as not wake her baby, who is sleeping on the bed. Romachkin is disgusted by the miserable conditions in which the prostitute lives, and the experience gives him an idea. The author uses metaphor to compare Romachkin's new idea to a tiny flame that rises out of volcanic soil. It's very small, but it will soon crack the earth and burst forth with flowing lava. This is a bit of foreshadowing. Romachkin's subsequent actions will change the lives of many others.

The author reveals more of the poverty in the Soviet Union when the prostitute tells Romachkin that she has just returned from her village. She describes the cholera and extreme poverty in excruciating detail. The best animals were taken for the collective, and there is no fodder to feed the beasts that remain. Therefore, there is no way to tend the fields, and all living things are dying in the small town, except the cockroaches.

Romachkin continues to read headlines in the paper about the country's economic success, while at the same time hearing story after story of people who are dying of hunger and facing injustices of all kinds. He starts to spend time wandering around the Great Market before and after work. It is a place where thousands of people come together in a stagnant crowd to buy and sell. The author uses simile to describe the market as being like an ancient bog, a swarming mass of human beings exchanging junk, spreading disease, and stealing from one another.

Romachkin eventually buys a Colt revolver on the black market. This is a bold move, because it is forbidden to own a weapon of this sort. After the purchase, Romachkin feels it hidden against his chest under his coat. His goal is justice.

Romachkin wanders the streets, and the author describes Moscow as a crumbling city. Workers are tearing down beautiful, old buildings to make room for newer, more modern skyscrapers. The author uses simile again to describe the destruction of the Cathedral of St. Saviour. A dark crack one hundred feet long splits it from top to bottom, like a dead lightning bolt. Then, it tumbles into ruin in front of fearful onlookers and the engineers who are destroying it. The author uses personification to describe the building crumbling on itself with a snapping of bones and a desolate look of suffering.

After Romachkin returns home, Kostia visits him, and Romachkin does not hide the Colt revolver in time. Kostia enjoys looking over the weapon and laughs inwardly at what a little man like Romachkin could possibly want with a gun like that.

Romachkin carries the Colt revolver every time he goes out to wander the streets. One day while he is in the public gardens that border the Kremlin, Romachkin sees the Chief (Stalin). The Chief passes within a few feet of Romachkin. Romachkin reaches for his Colt revolver, but his fear overpowers him, and he stumbles. Two men (probably the Chief's secret-police escort) help him to his feet. Romachkin collapses onto a nearby bench, overcome by his own cowardice.

When Romachkin returns to his room, he leaves the Colt revolver lying on the table. The author describes the blue-black revolver gleaming at Romachkin like an insult. When Kostia comes over to visit, Romachkin gives him the gun to get it out of his sight.

The author describes Romachkin and Kostia's relationship further. They talk almost every night. The author uses simile to describe that Romachkin returns to the same ideas and topics of conversation over and over like a plow ox making one furrow and beginning again to plow a row right beside it. Kostia mocks Romachkin but is nevertheless attracted by his ideas.

Next, the author describes Kostia's workplace. He works in the office of a subway construction yard. He uses musical terms such as rhythmic and staccato to describe the raucous environment of Kostia's workplace. Machines, trucks, and workers make a continual commotion.

Kostia has to go to the morgue to identify a worker who drowned. He is furious at the world when he has to check her cause of death as suicide. He believes there should be a box for "collective crimes". She had recently been depicted in a cartoon in the Wall Gazette as a person with a venereal disease, and in her suicide note, she stated briefly that she could not live with the dishonor.

The author personifies the seasons by saying that the rains of autumn carried away the insignificant episode of Maria's suicide. Kostia continues to talk to Romachkin every night. Kostia is still enraged and believes that dying in iniquity is useless. He should

fight while he's alive. Romachkin has aged a lot recently and has started reading strange religious books.

One February night, the author describes a magical city scene. It is ten o'clock at night. The snow has recently stopped, and frost covers everything with crystals. It is as if one is walking on powdered stars, and the entire city sparkles. Kostia emerges frustrated from a Young Communist meeting and doesn't notice the beauty of his surroundings at first.

Kostia is walking down a narrow street when Comrade Tulayev of the Central Committee emerges from a large, black car. Kostia recognizes him, and in a rash moment, he draws his revolver and shoots Tulayev on the deserted street. The author uses simile to describe the loudness of the gunfire. It is like a sudden clap of thunder in a dead silence. Simile is used again when the author describes Kostia running from the scene. Fragments of ideas chased one another through Kostia's mind like snow squalls. He has no idea why he shot Tulayev. He acted without thinking. One final example of simile is used when Kostia is described as feeling inexplicable joy, cold, inhuman, luminous joy—like a starry winter sky. He is not remorseful. Kostia is elated.

Chapter 2: The Sword Is Blind

Chapter 2: The Sword Is Blind Summary

Chapter two follows the story of Erchov. Erchov is the High Commissar for Security and Commissar of the People for Internal Affairs. He has risen quickly through the ranks, and now that he is in this important position, he is completely terrified. All of his predecessors have either vanished or been arrested or executed.

Erchov realizes very quickly that he has been given an impossible job. Thousands of dossiers filled with evidence on crimes pile up on his desk, many of which demand capital punishment. When the case of Comrade Tulayev comes to his attention, Erchov is pressured—by the Chief himself—to uncover a terrorist plot behind the murder. Erchov feels increasingly panicked and sick to his stomach because there is no real evidence of a plot and he believes an individual acted alone to murder Tulayev. That is not the conclusion the Party desires.

Erchov's wife, Valia, is also introduced in this chapter. She is an innocent woman with animal-like qualities who devotes her time to caring for her body and making herself available to her husband. She become frightened when she notices Erchov's growing unease.

One day, Popov, from the Central Control Commission, visits Erchov in his office and suggests that he take a two-month vacation with his wife. This is more of an order than a suggestion, and Erchov and his wife leave the very next day. They spend several weeks trying to relax, and then Erchov is sent a telegram summoning him back to Moscow immediately.

Erchov and Valia board a private train car to return to Moscow. Partway back to the city, the train stops at a deserted railway station. Erchov is escorted into the station, where two soldiers inform him that he has been arrested and relieved of his official duties. They ask Erchov to change into military clothes bearing no insignias, and when he comes out of the station, the private train car has carried Valia away and a different car waits to take him to his destination.

Chapter 2: The Sword Is Blind Analysis

Chapter two begins with the immediate consequences of the murder of Comrade Tulayev. The first secret investigation yields sixty-seven arrests in three days. The author uses this incredibly high number to point out the ineffectiveness of the authorities. The reader knows that one man committed the act alone, yet the secret police arrest sixty-seven people they believe to be suspicious.

The author gives a lengthy description of the horrible torture the interrogators put Tulayev's chauffeur through in hopes to elicit a confession. The man collapses several

times and nearly goes insane before the Chief himself calls off the interrogation, as it is obvious the man knows nothing.

High Commissar Erchov oversees the various interrogations and looks over the piles of dossiers that point to individuals and plots to assassinate Comrade Tulayev. He feels sick, because he knows that they provide him with no useful information to find Tulayev's killer and yet he has to somehow successfully close the case.

Deputy High Commissar Gordeyev greets Erchov when he returns from having a document photographed and typewritten. The author uses the metaphor of a pig to describe Gordeyev. He has the servile insolence of a domestic animal that is too well fed by its masters. Erchov mocks Gordeyev for following ridiculous leads, but his tone is lost on Gordeyev.

Days later, Erchov is summoned to appear at the General Secretariat. He finds himself face to face with the Chief. The Chief wants to know what he has dug up on the plot to kill Tulayev, but Erchov explains that he believes it was the act of an isolated individual. The Chief's response is sarcastic. The individual would have to be incredibly well-organized and efficient to pull something like that off, would he not.

The Chief requests a list of people who are to be sanctioned for not protecting Tulayev, and he is not happy with the list of twenty-five people Erchov gives him. The punishments (such as ten years in prison for the chauffeur) are not nearly harsh enough. Erchov increases all of the sentences in response, and tries to pass the blame on to Gordeyev, who is also in the room.

Gordeyev takes this moment to tell the Chief that he has come up with a new list of all persons whose antecedents might make them suspect of terrorism. The list contains seventeen hundred names, some of which hold important offices in the Party and three of which are in Security. The author uses the metaphor of a net closing in around Erchov when he starts to wonder if he is on Gordeyev's list.

When Erchov returns to his huge office, he is left alone with the dossiers. He thinks about what has happened to his predecessors. Most of them have ended up imprisoned or executed. Erchov has reached the pinnacle of his career, and he is terrified. The author uses the metaphor of a nest of hissing vipers to describe the three thousand dossiers suggesting capital punishment that sit on Erchov's desk.

Erchov feels increasingly out of control. He questions Gordeyev about why he executed the chauffeur, and Gordeyev claims a report was put on his desk. Did he not read it? Gordeyev admits that new evidence after the execution of the chauffeur puts the poor man in a different light. Taking his life may have been a mistake. Next, Erchov finds out that his old friend Kiril Rublev is also under suspicion. Then, one of his recent appointees goes insane.

Most of the department heads are now avoiding Erchov, except for his old friend, the head of the foreign department, Ricciotti. Ricciotti leads Erchov to his office where they

talk over many things, and before Erchov leaves, Ricciotti warns him to be careful. He has heard rumors that they are after him next.

After Erchov and Ricciotti part ways and Erchov returns to his office, Gordeyev comes in to inform him that two out of the three men who make up his personal escort have been replaced. Things are now happening without Erchov even being consulted. He leaves his office, and as his car travels through the streets, Erchov looks at the people through his window. The author takes this opportunity to describe average citizens in Moscow—clerks, technicians in school caps, an old Jew, graceless women, hard-faced workmen. Erchov doesn't recognize any of them, but he knows there is a file for each of them somewhere that doesn't come close to telling their whole story.

As the driver takes Erchov out of town toward his villa in the cold, dark woods, the author uses simile to describe the spruce trees covered with snow like shaggy fur. Erchov's villa (Villa No. 1 of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) is a dense house with Norwegian gables. It is Erchov's haven for his private life with his wife, Valia. He tries to remove everything that reminds him of work from this place.

The author describes Valia in animal terms. She is innocent and self-assured and has feline eyes and prominent nostrils that seem to always be scenting something. She has a swimmer's body and golden eyes and curls. The author uses Erchov's description of Valia to complete her picture. Erchov thinks she always looks like she has just come out of the cold water and into the sun. Valia calls herself Erchov's little golden fish.

Valia asks Erchov about his day, and the author uses simile to describe that her untroubled eyes—as beautiful as a field of flowers—look up at Erchov. She tells her husband to take a shower, and when Erchov looks at himself in the bathroom mirror, he no longer sees the virile man he once was. He looks at his drawn and anxious face and puffy eyelids, and the author uses simile when Erchov tells himself that he looks like a man who has just been arrested.

Erchov tries to relax with his wife, but he is paranoid that a chambermaid is listening at the door, and this frightens Valia. He just begins to relax when a call from Gordeyev interrupts them. Gordeyev informs Erchov that there is new evidence pointing to the indirect complicity of his old friend Rublev. Rublev is a high ranking official, and Gordeyev does not want to take personal responsibility for arresting him. It is up to Erchov to make the call. Erchov is annoyed at the trap that is being set for him to arrest an old member of the C.C. He tells Gordeyev to wait until he hears from him.

In the next scene, Popov pays Erchov a visit. This man is an old fox who hides his authority under a guileless manner, worn clothes, and a sickly appearance. This is the first time Erchov has ever seen Popov, but his reputation of moral authority precedes him. Popov informs Erchov in a sly conversation filled with ambiguity that it would be in his best interest to take a two-month vacation immediately. Gordeyev will take over for him while he's gone.

On vacation with his wife, Erchov experiences some peace, but he cannot stop the building fear in the back of his mind that he knows too much and the Party will eliminate him. He will disappear just like his predecessors. The author uses simile to vividly describe the fear as being as tenacious as decay in a tooth.

One evening on vacation, Erchov receives a telegram summoning him back to Moscow immediately. He and his wife leave the next day by private railway car. The train stops at a deserted railway station, and Erchov is led into the building where two soldiers inform him that he has been arrested and relieved of his high office. He is forced to change out of his official clothes into a military tunic with no insignia. When he emerges from the station as an unidentifiable soldier, the train carrying Valia has vanished, and a different train car is there to carry him to his fate.

Chapter 3: Men at Bay

Chapter 3: Men at Bay Summary

Chapter three begins with a beautiful snowstorm blanketing Moscow. Rublev enjoys the view from his window at the Academy of Sciences. Later, he walks home to his apartment on the eighth floor of an eleven story building. Children playing in the street call him Ivan the Terrible, because he resembles portraits of the Bloody Czar, but he only laughs. He greets Dora, his wife of sixteen years, at the door, and they spend the evening listening to the radio—as they do most evenings.

Dora is mortified to continually hear their friends on the radio admitting to crimes they never committed. Rublev explains to her that they were probably tortured and believe that admitting to the complete lie is the only way they can save their lives. Rublev knows that he will soon be in the same situation, and Dora knows it, too, but neither speaks the words out loud.

Rublev looks up his old comrades and finds that only two of them are still living—Philippov and Wladek. They arrange to meet secretly in the woods and talk over the atrocities that are happening in their beloved country. The men share their fears and their theories and end their meeting with a huge, childish snowball fight to blow off some of the tension that has building within each of them. The men take separate routes home to avoid suspicion.

One night, as the Rublevs are finishing dinner, Xenia Popova pays them a visit. Xenia is the daughter of Popov, and Rublev can hardly believe that such a beautiful girl is related to such a horrible man. Xenia tells the Rublevs that she will soon be traveling to Paris. Her father has gotten her a commission to study a new technique for printing on cloth, and she can hardly wait to experience the famous city. Xenia also relates some inside news about recent arrests of people Rublev knows, and she asks Rublev before she leaves if he is an Oppositionist. He replies simply that he is not. After Xenia leaves, Rublev asks his wife, Dora, if she believes he is an Oppositionist, and she does not answer him.

Late one evening, Rublev decides to go up to the roof of the apartment building to get a bit of fresh air. He is mesmerized by the beautiful lights of the city and regrets that he did not bring Dora up to see them. When he returns to the apartment, Dora is sitting across from a well-dressed man that they do not know. He claims that he is from the Moscow Committee and they have summoned Rublev on urgent business. Dora protests that it is eleven o'clock at night, and the man promises her that Rublev will be back within twenty minutes.

Rublev and Dora say a hasty goodbye and kiss each other with lips that are cold with fear. Rublev is then taken to the office of the Committee and told that he has been charged with a crime. They take away his Party card and usher him to a large, black car

to take him away for questioning. Rublev orders the driver of the car to slow down and rolls down the window as they drive through the streets to have one more glimpse of Moscow.

Chapter 3: Men at Bay Analysis

The author begins chapter three with a captivating and movement-filled personification of snow falling in Moscow. It was born in the Arctic and swept across sleeping forests. Packs of wolves fled here and there before the storm that eventually lands on Moscow, falling slowly and heavily, torn to shreds and worn out by its long journey. The storm blots out the blue sky.

Rublev is introduced, watching the snow from his window at the Academy of Sciences as he consults four historical books at once. His Assistant Librarian, Andronnikova, is about sixty years old and an ex-princess. She prays for his safety every night, although he doesn't know it.

Rublev enjoys breathing the cold Moscow air, so he walks home from work. The author gives a detailed description of Rublev and finishes it off by describing a scene where children in the neighborhood run ahead of him and call to each other to watch out, Ivan the Terrible is coming! Rublev resembles portraits of the Bloody Czar. One of the children on a single skate accidentally crashes into Rublev and says, "Excuse me Citizen Professor Ivan the Terrible," which sends Rublev into fits of laughter.

Rublev lives on the eighth floor of an eleven-story apartment building in Moscow with his wife, Dora. The heat doesn't work in the apartment, which makes the big room of their apartment seem desolate. The author describes green plants in the room that seem to be made of metal, and then he uses simile to describe a typewriter with a dusty keyboard that looks like a fantastic set of false teeth.

Rublev and Dora speak in hushed tones. The author steps in and describes that if they made a list of all of the high ranking people who had disappeared from that apartment building in the last few months, Rublev and his wife would be astonished. He uses the image of the list living inside of Rublev and Dora obscurely rather than actually being written down. It is what has aged Rublev.

Rublev and Dora have listened for years to the radio in that apartment, astonished by the senseless words that pour out of the loudspeaker. The author uses simile when Dora describes the horrible revolution as a snowstorm, an avalanche that will bury them all. They hear their friends—people with spotless reputations—admitting to horrible crimes. Dora does not understand why they lie. Rublev explains to her that they have been tortured, and they believe there is a chance they will live if they say what the prosecutor wants them to say. Rublev can't judge them because he is sure that he will be in their place someday soon. Dora knows it, too.

Rublev checks of a list of his earlier comrades and finds out that only two of his friends are still alive. He makes plans to meet with them in the woods to have a serious

discussion about what is going on in their country. Philippov and Rublev arrive on skis, and Wladek walks from his villa in felt boots and a sheepskin coat. The author uses simile to say that Wladek appears looking like a fantastic and extremely shortsighted woodcutter. The three men have known each other for a very long time. Their friendships remained intact, despite various disagreements over the years.

The three men start talking as they walk through the woods. Each one has a feeling he will be arrested soon, and they talk about how they will react when the police come to take them away. Philippov and Rublev are trading theories when Wladek stops and faces them both. The author sets a scene of the three men standing in a triangle, up to their knees in snow. Wladek's lip quivers and his glasses begin to steam up. He admits to them that he is deathly afraid. He lives alone in the woods without a wife because he is afraid. He can't sleep at night because he is afraid. He thinks of their comrades who have already been shot, and he is ashamed of it all and gets horrible migraines that no medicine will cure.

Philippov admits that he is afraid, too, but there is nothing he can do about it. He uses simile to say that one lives with fear as one lives with a hernia. Rublev takes his gloves off and starts packing snow between his hands. He starts a snowball fight, and the three men laugh like children as they pelt each other with snowballs.

As the three men part ways, Rublev says that he must believe that there is progress underneath the barbarism that is going on in their country. He believes that they will not die in vain. Wladek adds that progress may occur, but it will be long after their bones have completely disintegrated and nothing of them remains. The author again uses simile to describe how darkness seems to grow out of the ground like an imperceptible mist, and a thin, blue, crescent moon rises in the sky like an ideal breast, as Rublev skis through the woods toward the nearest train station.

One night, the Rublevs are finishing dinner when Xenia Popova (Popov's daughter) comes to visit them. Rublev can hardly believe that this beautiful young woman is Popov's flesh and blood. She tells them excitedly that her father is sending her on a mission abroad to Paris for six months, for the Central Textile Bureau. Her job will be to study a new technique for printing cloth. She also passes on information to them that her father has been diligently working on the Tulayev case and believes it to be a plot. She tells them that she heard Erchov was arrested. Xenia asks Rublev if he thinks their troops will hold out in Spain. Rublev says that he believes they will be defeated, and it is partly their own doing. Before Xenia leaves, she asks Rublev if he is an Oppositionist. He replies simply, "No".

After Xenia leaves, Rublev asks his wife, Dora, if she—who has known him for sixteen years—believes he's an Oppositionist. Dora doesn't answer. Rublev paces around the room, and the author uses simile to describe him as looking like a great emaciated bird of prey shut up in a cage that is quite large but still too small.

One night, Rublev puts on his cap and short overcoat and tells Dora that he is going up on the roof for a bit of fresh air. The lights of Moscow are beautiful from the roof, and

Rublev regrets that he didn't bring Dora up to see them. When he returns to the apartment, he finds Dora sitting opposite a well-dressed young man. The author describes her fear by saying that she looks pale. Her lips are colorless, her cheeks are yellowish, as if she will disintegrate in front of him. The well-dressed man has a yellow envelope from the Moscow Committee. It is a summons to discuss urgent business.

Dora protests that it is eleven o'clock at night, and the man promises that Rublev will be back in twenty minutes by car. The author shows their fear again, when Rublev and Dora kiss goodbye and their lips are cold.

When Rublev arrives at the Committee offices, they are nearly deserted. A man in the secretary's office looks at Rublev's dossier and informs him that he has been charged with a crime. The author describes Rublev's reaction: fury bristles his eyebrows, clenches his jaws, and squares his shoulders. Rublev has been waiting too long for this news.

As Rublev walks away, he feels strangely light. The author uses simile to say that he is borne by thoughts like flights of birds. Rublev is escorted to a black car and as they drive through the streets, he orders the driver to slow down so that he can take one last look at the city.

Chapter 4: To Build Is to Perish

Chapter 4: To Build Is to Perish Summary

Chapter four tells the story of Makeyev. He is born a peasant and becomes a soldier and works his way up the ladder of success within the Party. He eventually lands as the Regional Secretary of Kurgansk. Makeyev believes strongly in himself and in Socialism, and the two are intertwined in his mind. One of his strategies for moving to the top is to conveniently forget about troubles of the past.

Makeyev is a builder. He is known as an honorable, tough man who builds the success of the country literally through roads, schools, factors, and so on. He lives on his instinct more than thought and does not like to dwell on anything negative. When Makeyev's old friend Kasparov visits him, Kasparov gives bad news about what he believes will be the economic ruin of the country. Makeyev knows what he says is true, but he refuses to allow himself to believe it. He remains true to the Party line.

Only once does Makeyev disobey orders (which come directly from Tulayev) because he believes they are out of touch with reality and will cause further suffering of the people. Makeyev loses this battle with Tulayev and eventually recants his statement and goes through with the orders.

Makeyev is not an ideal husband. He is rough with his wife, Alia, and cheats on her. When she confronts him with her knowledge of his mistress, Makeyev savagely beats her but then cleans her wounds before going back to work.

There is a continual lack of supplies in Makeyev's district, but he still follows the Party line and carries out all orders no matter how ridiculous they are. Many of Makeyev's old friends disappear or are arrested, but he continues on. Makeyev resolves himself to the fact that he must have a heart of stone and build on the corpses of others.

Finally, Makeyev is summoned to Moscow for a conference. At first he is treated very well, and all of his requests are granted (by a committee that he doesn't know will soon be completely purged and reorganized). When he attends the opera one evening, the captain of building security invites him backstage to take a look at the new scenery-moving equipment that was purchased from New York. While backstage, Makeyev is seized by a number of men in long, dark coats. He is informed that he has been arrested, and while the opera continues on stage, they smuggle him out a back door and into a black car to points unknown.

Chapter 4: To Build Is to Perish Analysis

Chapter four covers the story of Makeyev. The author's description of Makeyev in the very first sentence of the chapter says a lot: Makeyev is exceptionally gifted in the art of forgetting in order to become greater. He is born into a lowly peasant family in

Akimovka, but he conveniently forgets that bit of history in order to become upwardly mobile. It is useful, however, for him to be proud of how far he has climbed up the ladder.

Makeyev doesn't have a particularly happy childhood. He is unpopular with the girls because of his pockmarked face and bowlegs (from a case of Rickets when he was younger). He is a very good fighter, though, and invents a blow between the neck and the ear that makes his enemy temporarily dizzy. In 1917, he becomes a soldier.

A strange sort of strength awakens in Makeyev when he finds out that the peasants are taking the land. He remembers the manor house in his hometown of Akimovka, and although he never sees the owners, he develops a hatred for them. He gets an idea to seize the land and burn down the manor house. The author uses the metaphor of "burn the nest and you drive away the birds" to describe Makeyev's plan. He leaves the trenches and returns home, finding many other men like himself on the train along the way. The manor house is burned, and just as the Cossacks rush to the scene, a decree goes out stating that the people have seized the lands. The Cossacks are unsure of what to do, because it seems as though the act is now law, so they do nothing. Makeyev is soon elected president of the Executive Committee of peasants.

Makeyev is an imposing figure as president of the Executive Committee. He has deeply set eyes, arching brows, and his head is shaved. The author uses simile to describe him as having a will as tough as knotted roots in a rock crevice.

The Whites invaded the district, and soon Makeyev is on the run again. In 1919, he joins the Party during a meeting outside around a campfire. Makeyev receives cheers of approval when he states that he is the son of landless peasants, and he is adopted as a member. He is a soldier again, Deputy Commissar of the Fourth Battalion. The author describes the ugliness of war by giving a brief snapshot of Makeyev struggling to conquer his fear and fury as he holds his rifle over his head and wades through a treacherous lagoon and is the first to climb onto a sand dune on the other side and ambush a group of men.

The author goes on to use the senses of smell, touch, and sight in describing the victory celebration after the battle. Makeyev is completely exhausted and wants nothing but to sleep, but he is singled out by Comrade Blücher, who kisses him on the mouth for his bravery. Blücher has a stubbly chin that smells of raw union, dried sweat, and horse. The author then uses simile to describe the way the two men look at each other as two exhausted horses reconnoiter each other. They realize that they know one another from Party conferences, and their eyes are wet with tears.

In 1922, Makeyev returns to Akimovka, and later he is sent from Akimovka to eastern Siberia to preside over a regional Executive. Next, he is elected alternate member of the C.C. Makeyev honestly and patiently climbs the ladder of success within the Party, and as he does so, he leaves his peasant heritage behind. Makeyev begins to feel superior to everyone around him (except for men in the C.C. who have greater power). The author uses simile to describe how Makeyev integrates into the dictatorship of the

proletariat like a good steel screw set in its proper place in an admirable, complex machine.

When Makeyev becomes Secretary of the regional Committee, he governs the city and district of Kurgansk for a number of years. He almost renames the district after himself (Makeyevgorod or Makeyevgrad) but thinks better of it at the last moment. He refuses fame for the moment and instead lifts up the Chief in a speech and suggests naming a new school after him. He is patient and believes fame will come. Makeyev believes in himself as much as he believes in the triumph of Socialism. He no longer distinguishes between himself and his country.

Makeyev has four telephones on his desk as Regional Secretary of the Kurgansk Regional Committee. He used to fear telephones and lost his self-assurance when he had to use the magical instrument. But now, he sees the telephones as a symbol of his power. One of the phones is a direct connection to Moscow.

Member of the local committees fear Makeyev's phone calls. He usually waits until he has a few colleagues in the room, and then he phones a member of a committee and reprimands them with a booming voice and blood rushing to his head in anger. The author uses simile to describe how he looks when he hangs up the phone. He stares into space like an angry bird of prey. He flies into these rages randomly to boost his prestige.

Only one of the C.C.C. secretaries occasionally overrides Makeyev's decisions, and that is Tulayev. The author compares Tulayev and Makeyev, stating that the two men are actually very similar, although Tulayev is bigger, better educated, more adaptable, and more blasé about exercising power. This comparison foreshadows coming events in the book where Makeyev will become one of the accused in the supposed plot against Tulayev. The author goes on to explain one incident in which Tulayev publicly embarrasses Makeyev at a meeting. However, after the meeting, Tulayev tells Makeyev not to take it personally, offers him a drink, and invites Makeyev to come back at him as hard as he can whenever he likes. The author states those were the good old days of rough-and-ready brotherhood.

Makeyev utilizes his power to build—irrigation canals, brickworks, schools, railway yards, farms, and so on. He believes that he is part of building a new and prosperous world.

One day, Makeyev's old friend Kasparov, from their days in the Army, pays him a visit. Kasparov is a member of the Party, but he has been exiled to the Far East because of a paper he sent to the Political Bureau giving evidence that the economic plan of the Party is doomed to fail. Kasparov tries to get Makeyev to agree with him, but Makeyev will not stray from the Party line, even though deep inside he knows that what Kasparov says is true. Kasparov's warning depresses Makeyev and foreshadows the collapse of the U.S.S.R.

Makeyev changes the subject and invites Kasparov to his home to meet his wife, Alia Sayidovna. Kasparov accepts.

When the author describes Alia, he once again uses animal references. She has doe eyes and a sleek animal grace, a woman who is clean and well-fed. She serves Kasparov a sumptuous meal when he comes to their home. Kasparov is very cordial at the dinner and does not talk any further about his misgivings of the direction in which the Party is heading. However, when the two men say goodbye, they have a sense that they will not meet again as friends.

Makeyev believes that Kasparov's visit was an ill omen. As soon as he leaves, the trouble begins. Reserves are insufficient, and there is a reduction in cropping and a rise in market prices. An envoy tells Makeyev that draconian measures must take place with an iron hand. This signals the beginning of the black years. The people are starving, and fields lay fallow. The C.C. responds by recommending that the people raise rabbits for food. Makeyev continues to support the Party line. Most of the rabbits die because there is nothing to feed them.

There is a perpetual lack of supplies for survival, but Makeyev continues to fight to carry out the C.C.'s orders and fulfill their plan for industrialization—in spite of the evidence he sees within his district that it will not work. He remains loyal to the Party.

Makeyev is hated by his people, and he cannot go anywhere without escort. Then, a final blow occurs when he receives secret orders from Moscow to begin a new purge of the kolkhozes before the autumn sowing to cut down resistance. Makeyev demands to know who signed the orders and finds out it was Tulayev. His hatred for Tulayev grows. The author uses simile to describe that Makeyev looks like a bulldog when he returns home, he is in such a bad mood.

For the first time in his life, Makeyev refuses to carry out an order and writes the C.C. to inform them of their error. Alia tries to console Makeyev after the sleepless night he spends composing his letter. He responds by nearly raping her in their house—bruising her legs and ripping her kaftan before he takes her on the divan. Makeyev feels like a conquering hero again briefly after this act and uses simile to tell Alia that she is as downy as a peach.

Makeyev loses his battle with Tulayev and renounces his error, agreeing to a new purge of the kolkhozes. He is allowed to stay in his position because he admits to his error and ultimately follows through with the order.

Makeyev's good friend Blücher, now a military hero, disappears after a military campaign goes bad. The author uses the metaphor of a scythe at harvest to describe Makeyev's growing fear. Makeyev is not overtly threatened, but he feels the wind of the inevitable scythe that mowed down Blücher.

Makeyev resolves that he has to have a heart of stone and continue to build on the corpses of others. When Makeyev hears that Tulayev is killed, he shouts for joy that his adversary is gone. Alia is playing solitaire and overhears Makeyev saying that Tulayev

deserved what he got. This foreshadows her testimony against her husband later in the novel.

Alia is upset with Makeyev because she has received an anonymous letter constructed of over four hundred letters clipped out of papers detailing Makeyev's affair with a blond ticket girl. Alia confronts Makeyev by responding to his glee over Tulayev's death. She asks him with trembling lips who will kill the blond ticket girl. Makeyev cannot think about what she accuses him and barks at her to get out of the room so he can think.

Makeyev works all night on a speech in response to Tulayev's death. He falls in bed in the early morning hours beside Alia, who is still furious and hurt over his affair. She goes to a drawer and retrieves a knife to kill her husband, but as she tries to gather her courage, Makeyev wakes up. The author describes Makeyev's overwhelming rage through his actions. Makeyev takes a belt and beats Alia until she is barely breathing. Then, he expertly cleans her wounds and tells her to go to sleep. The author uses simile to describe his pupils narrow like a cat's eyes when he kisses her heavily before he leaves to go back to work.

Life gets back to normal for Makeyev. His wife remains silent, and he sends his mistress to work in the mailroom at a construction yard, just to be safe, and visits her often under the pretext of official business. However, the author foreshadows Makeyev's impending doom by describing an anonymous person who continues to work silently clipping characters out of newspapers to compose letters filled with evidence.

Makeyev is invited to Moscow to attend a conference of regional secretaries from the Southwest. The author personifies the landscape Makeyev sees from his window on the train. Endless fields of snow flee past his window; the wooded horizon is melancholy under a leaden sky; light fills the white spaces with expectancy; the clouds hurry across the sky.

Makeyev is picked up at the train station by a chauffeur in a large, black C.C. car and treated as the important man he believes himself to be. He obtains everything he asks for at the Central Plan Commission. He has no idea that the promises they give him are empty. There will soon be a complete purging and reorganization of the Plan offices.

On his second day in Town, Makeyev tries to find some of his old friends, but none of them can be reached. When pressed for more information, a man on the phone tells Makeyev that one of his old friends has been arrested. Makeyev's fear is portrayed when he gasps for breath and a spasm passes over his face.

Makeyev decides to spend the evening at the opera. The scene is surreal. Makeyev goes to the large government box, which is empty except for one elderly couple. It is Popov and his wife, who avoids looking at Makeyev. Makeyev is usually mesmerized by the music. The author uses simile to describe that music intoxicates Makeyev like a drug. But on this night, he finds it hard to concentrate on the opera.

At intermission, the Popovs discretely leave the box, and Makeyev feels strangely isolated. He goes to the lobby where he is relieved to be recognized by Captain

Pakhomov, who commands the building police. Captain Pakhomov invites Makeyev backstage after the third act to take a look at their new scene-shifting machines that were recently bought in New York. Makeyev asks about a dancer who has caught his attention in the opera, and Captain Pakhomov promises to introduce her to Makeyev in her dressing room.

Makeyev is regaining some of his confidence, and he thinks to himself good riddance to Popov and his wife, who were not very friendly in the box. Makeyev uses simile to describe the wife as looking like a plucked turkey.

After the third act, Captain Pakhomov leads Makeyev backstage through a series of winding corridors. A metal door closes behind Makeyev, and he is suddenly in a dark, cold room facing several men in black overcoats. One of them tells him he's under arrest. The men grab hold of Makeyev, take his revolver, and begin ushering him out of the building. The author uses simile to describe them scuffling through the darkness like a single creature clumsily moving a profusion of legs.

The author uses opposites to make an impression in the last scene. On stage at the opera, the orchestra plays sweetly and a pure woman's voice is heard while the scene depicts a beautiful dawn over a meadow and a silvery lake. This is juxtaposed against Makeyev being launched from the building into complete darkness by his captors—into the cold night with no music and then a black car.

Chapter 5: Journey into Defeat

Chapter 5: Journey into Defeat Summary

Chapter five opens with the introduction of Ivan Kondratiev. He works in the Political Bureau and is a man of many disguises. He uses several of them to make an undetected trip to Spain to see how the Revolution there is progressing.

In Barcelona, Kondratiev spends several days going over reports and interviewing individuals. He comes to the conclusion that there is much corruption and inadequacy and the war may end in defeat.

The story then jumps to Stefan Stern. He crosses into Spain with no money or passport and ends up living with a woman named Annie in Gracia where he writes many theses and articles with her help and talks with comrades about the progress of the Revolution.

One morning Stefan is kidnapped and taken to a boat where he is questioned. The reader finds out later in the scene that his questioners are Kondratiev and a Bulgarian named Yuvanov. After a very short period of questioning, Kondratiev takes Yuvanov aside and chastises him for kidnapping Stefan, who is obviously a romanticist and no one of any real importance or danger. He tells Yuvanov to take Stefan back to shore immediately and release him.

Kondratiev doesn't wait to see if Yuvanov follows through with his orders. He has to return to Moscow immediately to tell the Chief in person the truth about what is going on in Spain.

When Kondratiev returns to Moscow, the Chief agrees to see him immediately. The two men are old friends, and the Chief asks Kondratiev to tell him the truth. He is sick of so many people lying to him. Kondratiev does tell the Chief the truth, even though it is a painful one, and he also takes a moment to put in a good word for Stefan Stern (just in case Yuvanov didn't release him).

Even though the Chief and Kondratiev are old friends, there is still a bit of unease between them. Kondratiev is afraid of saying the wrong thing, because it could cause him to be the next person who is arrested. When they part, the Chief suggests that Kondratiev take a vacation. Kondratiev pities the Chief because he cannot do the same, but the Chief will not be pitied. He is much more important a person than Kondratiev. With power comes responsibility.

Chapter 5: Journey into Defeat Analysis

Ivan Kondratiev of the Political Bureau takes several side trips and changes identities a number of times before he lands in Barcelona, Spain at the beginning of Chapter 5. He

is an emissary of a strong and victorious revolution in the U.S.S.R., but he has a feeling that he is entering a very sickly revolution in Spain.

The author personifies Spain in his description. The city sumptuously opens before him in the late-afternoon sun. The plaster of the pink or red houses is scaling off, and the glassless windows yawn. When Kondratiev arrives at a once-luxurious mansion in Sarria, the fountain on the patio seems to be softly laughing to itself.

Kondratiev sees similarities between the U.S.S.R. and Spain in the faces of the women. Their faces are drawn, and they are always patiently waiting in line for something—potatoes, sour bread, rice, sugar.

The author explains the situation in Spain through Kondratiev's impressions of the people with whom he is working. The Spaniards surprise him. They are likeable, childish, and full of ideas and complaints at the same time. They make no effort to conceal their suspicions. At one moment they admit complete defeat, and at the next they are talking about victory and possibly starting a European war. Kondratiev doesn't believe they have any idea what they're doing. He's sure that none of them have actually read Marx. There is a general lack of order and preciseness in Spain that is very unlike the U.S.S.R.

Kondratiev spends several days in two white, sparsely furnished rooms going over various reports. He takes time out to walk up and down the patio at night smoking cigarettes. On one of these walks, he takes notice of the stars. Kondratiev had always wanted to study the stars, but the only period when he had time to study them was when he was in prison, and then he was banned from books and the outside. He has the realization that he will never learn the names of the stars. He will continue to live divided from the stars—and from himself.

Kondratiev receives a number of visitors, and the first is a Socialist lieutenant colonel who was a lawyer before the Civil War. The man angers Kondratiev when he tells him quite bluntly that they are losing the war, because they do not have the material to fight, and they should begin to negotiate a surrender now before more damage is done. Kondratriev rebukes the man by saying that his language is unwarranted, but the man repeats that this war may be a farce, and it is costing his people dearly. He is telling the truth.

Kondratiev's next visitor is a Syndicalist who pleads with Kondratiev to help them win the Revolution. He asks if the Chief knows what his toadies have done in Spain. He says that they can still be saved if the Chief is sincere in wanting them to win. Kondratiev can only reply with empty phrases of desiring good for the Spanish people.

The third visitor is a noncommissioned officer in the International Brigade. He is a seasoned militant in the German C.P. Kondratiev knows this man from several days of fighting in Hamburg in 1923. They are happy to see one another, and the officer assures Kondratiev that the morale of the International Brigades is very good. However, he would like to Kondratiev to look into the death of a friend of theirs, Hans Beimler, who

was shot on the front line, but from behind by his own people. He was killed because of a vague rumor, and the officer would like Kondratiev to find out the truth and punish those responsible. Kondratiev agrees to look into it.

Kondratiev does not know what to do with the information he has collected. He is afraid to think of the deep evil it reveals. As he leaves for a conference of political commissars, Yuvanov (a Bulgarian comrade) tells him that he has good news. They have finally arrested Stefan Stern. Kondratiev asks who arrested him and if he acted under orders or his own initiative. Yuvanov answers strongly that he has a right not to answer the question.

The story then turns to Stefan Stern. He crosses the Pyrenees without a passport or money. He does have in his knapsack a manuscript called "Theses on the Motive Forces of Spanish Revolution." He has a brief affair with one of the first girls he meets. The author uses all of the senses to describe the girl. She is golden-armed with an intoxicating white smile, and she has fiery tawny eyes. Her young flesh smells like the earth and beasts, and she holds freshly washed clothes in her arms, so that the coolness of the well also hangs around her. Her name is Nievo, which means snow.

In Barcelona Stefan meets Annie, who is a career revolutionary. They move in together. Annie and Stefan live in a one-story pink house at Gracia that is surrounded by an abandoned commercial garden. The author paints a magical picture of choice flowers growing with surprising wildness and mixing with the weeds around the house. Then the author uses simile to compare Annie to the flowers, saying that her neck is as straight as a rising stem.

Stefan and Annie work out a comfortable, nearly silent life. Annie cooks, washes the linens, and corrects Stefan's proofs and types his letters, articles, and theses. Stefan continues to write. Comrades come to their house every day bringing news of the Revolution. The author takes this moment to highlight the toll that revolution takes on citizens. One of the comrades tells a story about a bomb going off and a streetcar going up in flames. When the sirens sound again, women standing in line at a shop door do not take cover for fear of losing their place in line. Death is only a possibility, but hunger is a certainty.

Sometimes Stefan and Annie talk with comrades from the clandestine Committee until late in the night. Stefan makes an interesting point during one of these talks. He says that the people have to look out for the profiteers who show up behind the revolution. The author uses simile to describe these profiteers, right-thinking cowards, and careerists as being like a swarm of rats that rise behind the people. Stefan says that Marx and Bakunin lived in a time where problems were simple. They didn't have to worry about enemies behind them.

One of their comrades says that the people are sick of it all. He admits that they will swallow defeat if only it will stop. They no longer know what the Republic is fighting for. The comrade (Jaime) then mentions that he saw an ugly German on his way to their

house. He asks if they have noticed anything and if the house is still safe. Annie and Stefan have noticed nothing. This foreshadows Stefan's kidnapping.

Jaime's warning to be careful leaves Annie and Stefan filled with anxiety. Stefan has survived the collapse of several worlds, and he is fearful that he knows too much. If he and many of his comrades disappear, so does their collective knowledge, and humanity will have to start over without the wisdom people who bore witness to history.

Stefan and Annie decide to sleep on the hill near their house, rolled up in blankets and hidden in shrubbery, just in case someone comes to their house to take him away. They stay awake late and feel strangely intimate as they huddle together under the clear night sky. When they see that no one has invaded their home by dawn, they start to feel less fearful and believe that Jaime was just seeing things. The author personifies danger by saying that it is as if blind danger brushed against them in the night and now has withdrawn in the morning light.

They return to their house and find everything left unchanged. Annie takes the milk jug and the author uses simile to describe her running up the path to the farm, springing like a goat.

When Annie returns twenty minutes later, she is surprised to see the wooden door in the garden wall is half open. She expects to find Stefan shaving. The mirror hangs from the window latch, and his shaving brush that is still white with suds is on the windowsill. A magazine is even open on the table, but Stefan is gone.

The author uses simile to describe Annie's panic. The violent beating of her heart is like troops on the march. She calls out for Stefan and runs around looking everywhere for him as her fear rises. At the entrance of their home Annie spots a half-smoked cigar, and her fear becomes very real. Cigarettes have not been available in the city for months, and no one who has been to their home recently is a smoker. A cigar signifies a wealthy foreigner. Annie suspects immediately that the Russians have taken Stefan. She starts running toward the city for help. The author utilizes the sense of touch by describing how the stony road burns her feet as she runs. It feels like petrified lava, it is so hot.

The scene then switches to Stefan. He is regaining consciousness and afraid to open his eyes. When he does, he sees a man with a shaved head and prominent cheekbones standing over him. There is an officer's insignia on his collar. The author uses simile to describe how terror—like icy water—flows to ends of Stefan's limbs. All he can think is that he's done for.

The reader then finds out what happened when Annie was gone on her errand. Stefan remembers that he was still uneasy. He tried to read and to compose at the typewriter, but he soon gave up and started to shave. That is when he heard an unfamiliar step and a whistle outside. He ran to the cover of the garden with his pistol. Then he saw a comrade who sometimes came to Jaime's place. He didn't know the man well, and he

didn't like him. The comrade claimed to have some urgent letters for him. When Stefan reached for them, the man hit him on the head and kidnapped him.

As Stefan fully regains consciousness, he finds that he is being held on a boat. He is told that he has been arrested by the Military Investigation Bureau, and they would like him to answer some questions. There are three men in the room. One of them, presumably the ship's doctor, leaves. The younger of the two remaining is a square man with pomaded hair. The author uses this clue to alert the reader that it is Yuvanov, the Bulgarian from earlier in the chapter.

Stefan sees in Yuvanov's face animal hostility. Yuvanov reminds him of an animal trainer or a white slaver—someone who has beaten animals or people for so long that he has become fearful himself. The older man is about fifty-five years old with thin strands of gray hair, a calm forehead, and tired, sad eyes. It is Kondratiev.

Stefan knows his life is at stake, and he decides to make truth his weapon. The author uses simile to describe how Stefan's words pour out of him as blood spurts out of a deep wound. He accuses them of corrupting everything.

The author displays the Russians' reactions through their hands. Using simile, he describes Yuvanov's right hand resting flatly on a small table like a sleeping animal. Kondratiev's hands are tightly clasped together to express his tension. Then, the author uses an oxymoron to explain that Stefan hears the silence. The silence is ringing for an eternity.

Kondratiev and Yuvanov step out onto the bridge of the ship to talk. This is when the reader officially learns that it is indeed Yuvanov and Kondratiev. Kondratiev demands that Yuvanov immediately take the prisoner ashore and set him free, because he obviously has done nothing wrong. Yuvanov says that he will not do so, and Kondratiev pulls rank and orders him to do it. Yuvanov tries to connect Kondratiev with someone who is implicated in the Tulayev plot, and Kondratiev counters by telling Yuvanov that there is nothing in the Tulayev dossier that justifies indicting anyone.

Kondratriev leaves the boat not knowing for sure the fate of Stefan. Stefan and others who have been wrongly accused and put to death haunt Kondratriev's thoughts as he returns to the city by a small boat. The author brings back the term "done for" that Stefan thought when he regained consciousness. Now, Kondratriev ponders it. The city is done for, and the Revolution, the republic, and so many of his comrades—all done for.

At eleven o'clock, Kondratriev is driven to a government building for a conversation with officials about munitions. The consensus is there is too much ammunition to yield and not enough to win. They have a midnight supper, and an old Catalan statesman shares several glasses of champagne with Kondratriev. The men share a certain intimacy when they speak candidly with one another. The author uses the metaphor that they are disarmed before each other. They left their hypocrisy in the cloakroom.

The old Catalan statesman asks if Kondratriev has heard anything about his friend Señor Antonov-Ovseyenko. Kondratriev says that he has not. The old man guesses that he has been shot and tells Kondratriev that he also shared a bottle of champagne with Antonov-Ovseyenko in that very same room. Kondratriev predicts that he will probably end the same way.

The two men take a long time in saying goodbye. The author uses simile to describe that the men have a strange feeling that once their hands let go of each other, their fragile link, like a golden thread, will break and never be restored.

Kondratriev resolves to get back to Moscow as soon as possible and tell the Chief the truth before he receives all of the false reports sent from corrupt officials. As Kondratriev flies over the Soviet countryside, he notices how different it looks from the sun-drenched place he has just been. The dark, mossy forests look pre-human, and the author uses simile to describe the thatched roofs of homes looking as humble as old women, assembled randomly near plowed fields and rivers.

The Chief receives Kondratriev as soon as he arrives. When Kondratriev enters the huge room, he thinks it's empty, but the Chief stands up from behind a table at the far end of the room and walks toward him. Kondratriev almost doesn't believe he is real until he holds out both hands and greets him by first name. The two men talk over old times, and Kondratriev begins to relax and feel reassured that the Chief is his old friend in the flesh.

The Chief asks Kondratriev to tell him the whole truth about what is going on in Spain. He tells Kondratriev that he is tired of everyone telling him lies, and he relies on veterans like Kondratriev to tell him the truth. The Chief reveals that he feels as those he lives on the summit of an edifice of lies.

Kondratriev takes a risk and responds by asking the Chief if it is a little his fault. The Chief takes his criticism but then says he'd like to see what Kondratriev would do in his place. He uses the metaphor of a swamp to describe Russia. The farther you go, the more the ground gives. You sink when you least expect it. The Chief believes that it will take centuries to remake the human animal, and he doesn't have centuries, so he has to work with what he's got.

Kondratriev gives the Chief his honest report on Spain for over an hour. Then, the Chief asks Kondratriev what he believes is wrong in Moscow. Kondratriev uses the Chief's own words—lies. Everyone lies. Socialism cannot be built without oxygen. Then, the Chief asks Kondratriev if he thinks he has many faults. Kondratriev replies uncomfortably that it is not for him to judge the Chief. The Chief is the Party.

Kondratriev also takes a moment to make a case for Stefan Stern, and the Chief makes a note of his name as if he hasn't heard it before. Kondratriev wonders if his name is really new to the Chief.

The Chief then brings up the Tulayev case and says that Kondratriev was wrong about that one. It was a plot. Kondratriev assents to the Chief's belief.

The Chief asks another tough question—is the Political Bureau dissatisfied with me (meaning is Kondratriev dissatisfied with him). Kondratriev replies that the course of events is unsatisfying, but there is little that the Chief can do about it.

Then, the Chief asks Kondratriev what he wants to do next—maybe go to Asia. Kondratriev slips and replies that he cannot take anymore blood, so spare him the wars. He realizes immediately that he should not have spoken those words out loud. As they say goodbye, the Chief suggests that he take a vacation in the Caucasus. What remains unspoken between them is that Kondratriev pities the Chief because he cannot take a vacation; the Chief pities Kondratriev because he is not as important, and he won't be missed if he takes a vacation.

Chapter 6: Every Man Has His Own Way of Drowning

Chapter 6: Every Man Has His Own Way of Drowning Summary

Chapter six describes how several main characters are dealing with the accusations made against them. However, it starts off with a meeting of the prosecutors. Zvyeryeva, Fleischman, and Prosecutor Rachevsky meet with their superior, Deputy High Commissar Gordeyev. They agree that the Tulayev case is political, and it must reach a political conclusion, but no one wants to suggest a solid plan. Finally, they agree to come up with list of indictments that includes the right kind of political people to face punishment.

Then, the scene changes to Erchov's prison cell. Erchov has resisted interrogation for weeks, and one day they put his old friend Ricciotti in the same cell with him to talk things over. Ricciotti was arrested ten days before Erchov, and he has confessed to save the Party. Ricciotti eventually talks Erchov into confessing also, even though neither of them had anything to do with the Tulayev murder. He will do so as one final act of loyalty to his country.

in Makeyev's cell, he has protested his loyalty for a long time, but now he has no fight left. When he returns to his cell after an interrogation, he asks for a piece of paper and writes that he will cease all resistance and sign a sincere confession.

Finally, the scene turns to Rublev. He is spending weeks writing a manuscript that details the truth of what he knows about Party history. He is questioned by Zvyeryeva, and she is surprised that he is not following the Party line. She didn't think he would resist so strongly. Rublev even jokes with her to the point that she dismisses him.

Then, they send Popov into Rublev's cell to question him, because they are old friends. Popov tries to tell Rublev that it's his duty to do what the Party asks, and that is to confess. Rublev stands firm and says that he is now and has always been loyal to the Party, even though it is sick. He will not lie, but if the Party decides to kill him, they are actually killing the Party itself.

Chapter 6: Every Man Has His Own Way of Drowning Analysis

Chapter six describes how several of the main characters fair in prison. However, it begins with the principle officials in charge of the Tulayev case. There are a dozen officials going over a narrowed-down one hundred and fifty dossiers. The two examiners appointed to look at the most serious cases are Fleischman and Zvyeryeva. These two

people are former Chekists, which means that they should have been under suspicion in the old days. This is exactly why the leaders of the Party believe they will be extra vigilant as examiners. They report to Deputy High Commissar Gordeyev.

The author uses simile to describe how the Tulayev case has taken off in numerous directions. It seems to be linked to many other cases. It mingles with those cases, disappears in them, and then reemerges like a dangerous little blue flame under the ruins of a fire.

There are a half dozen lunatics who all confess to how they killed Tulayev. A female American tourist is one of them, and even though her lunatic ramblings have no basis in fact, it takes courage for the examiners to dismiss her case. In fact, they try in vain to get her to admit to another unsolved murder, but she will only talk about killing Tulayev. Gordeyev continues to send the American tourist and the other lunatics back to doctors for another diagnosis rather than dismissing them completely. Eventually, the doctors go mad. Zvyeryeva continues to consider the lunatics dangerous criminals.

Zvyeryeva, Fleischman, Prosecutor Rachevsky, and Gordeyev meet in Gordeyev's office. Prosecutor Rachevsky is the closest to the Chief and starts the conversation by saying that it is time they produced results. Gordeyev thinks to himself that is obvious, but he refrains from making suggestions. The author uses simile to describe Gordeyev's thoughts. Any error in this matter would be like a misstep by a man putting rivets on a skyscraper three hundred feet over the sidewalk. It would be a long fall that would show no mercy.

The four people in the room dance around each other with phrases that do not give specifics on what actions they should take. None of them wants the responsibility of making a wrong move.

Fleischman ponders Tulayev, the man behind the entire case. No one will remember him in a few years. In fact, most of the population has already forgotten him. There is nothing in the dossier to implicate anyone in his murder, no real clues for them to follow.

Prosecutor Rachevsky realizes that no one will say anything before he speaks, so he continues by saying that the case is political and it must have a political solution. The author takes a moment here to describe Rachevsky. He is an unhealthy looking man with a strong face: bulging forehead; a gray, bulbous chin; and a curving nose with dark hairy nostrils. The color of his face is sanguine with blotchy areas of violet. He has large chestnut-brown eyes. The author uses simile to describe that Rachevsky's eyes look like opaque marbles.

Rachevsky uses the metaphor of a work horse to describe himself. He is a plodding and stubborn beast of burden, who take on difficult tasks often with no real reward. Now that he has risen to power in the Party, he has stopped binge drinking, because he is afraid of what he might say when drunk. Prosecutor Rachevsky has risen to power because he has an aptitude for taking bits of facts and coming up with completely false hypotheses and fogging over the minds of the people so that they believe them. A

defendant once used simile to describe Rachevsky as a hypocritical bandit who talks with specific gestures, and all the time you can see that he has a knife up his sleeve.

Rachevsky goes on to lecture to the three other people in the room. Fleischman is disgusted by him. The author uses simile to describe Zvyeryeva's reaction: she blinks her eyes, as happy as a cat in the sun. Gordeyev mentally translates Rachevsky's long discourse into something more intelligible because he believes the Chief's directive is in there somewhere.

When Rachevsky finally reaches the conclusion of his speech, Gordeyev momentarily excuses himself to check on his daughter, who is practicing the piano in another room. Gordeyev needs this moment of solitude to think. They are going to need to come up with a list of indictments that will dig up a representative group of people: at least one ex-Trotskyist, one spy, et cetera. He knows it will be dangerous business. Gordeyev's daughter tells him that he looks angry, and he apologizes to the little girl and returns to his meeting.

When Gordeyev returns, he says, "The list of indictments", and no one will answer him. Prosecutor Rachevsky repeats Gordeyev's statement and says no more. The author uses the metaphor of a hippopotamus at the zoo suddenly sliding into his little concrete pool to describe Fleischman's response. He smiles and says, "It is for you, my esteemed comrades, to propose it".

Next, the scene changes to Erchov as he enters prison. He is not shocked that he has been arrested, but he is shocked that he does not recognize the underground prison where he is being held. He also has no idea what has happened to his wife, Valia, but this troubles him less than he expected.

The author uses the metaphor of a cigarette butt that a man crushes under his foot. If that cigarette butt could feel, it would experience the same anguish that Erchov feels in prison, knowing that his bodily life is now over.

For weeks Erchov is not allowed to see the sky and is continually interrogated. He becomes weaker every day and more and more afraid. Events start to take on a dreamlike quality.

Erchov is taken to appear before six people. He knows he must cry out his innocence, but he feels vaguely guilty—justly condemned in advance—and he has no idea why he feels like this. The Chief enters the room, and Erchov yells out that he feels he is going insane. The Chief tells him to act like the soldier he is and not create any scenes. Erchov realizes that he would have said the exact same thing if he was in the Chief's place.

Erchov feels as though the Chief's voice is so much like the voice inside of his head, that it calms him. He argues his innocence calmly from that point on. However, he knows it will do no good. Words mean nothing. The Chief cuts Erchov off mid-sentence and tells the guards to take the "cynical traitor" away.

Erchov spends several more weeks in his prison cell. The author uses physical characteristics, such as a bitter taste in his mouth and labored breathing, to show Erchov's mounting fear and anxiety. Erchov realizes that there is no way for him to commit suicide in his cell, so he must simply wait for death.

Erchov endures twenty-four hour investigations with hundreds of seemingly unrelated questions. When he is led back to his cell, he continues to dream about investigations. During one of these investigations, Erchov's old friend Ricciotti enters the room. Erchov thinks he's dreaming at first, but the interrogators leave, and Ricciotti sends for tea, cigarettes, and vodka.

Erchov examines Ricciotti's face. The author uses simile to say that it is bloodless like an old prisoner's. Then the author uses metaphor to say that the flame of intelligence is still alight in Ricciotti's eyes, but it shines through a cloud.

Ricciotti tells Erchov that he was arrested about ten days after him. Then, Ricciotti explains that the formalities for him are all over, and now he gets jam with every meal and newspapers.

Erchov drinks some tea and then a stiff drink of vodka. The author uses simile to describe that Erchov starts to feel like a man coming out of a fog. As some of his strength returns, he listens to Ricciotti tell him the story of how he committed suicide twice.

The first time Ricciotti committed suicide was after he heard that Erchov had been arrested, he got a Canadian passport. But he gave that passport back to the Liaison office. He could have escaped, but he didn't. He uses the metaphor of having the poisons of his own country already in his veins. He doesn't want to live anywhere else.

Ricciotti's second suicide occurred at a Party cell meeting. The speaker told lies about Erchov's treachery and everyone applauded in agreement—just to save themselves, not because any of it was true. Ricciotti got up to speak next, and he calmly told the truth. He said that mistakes may have been made due to overwhelming workloads, but that he had known Erchov for a long time, and Erchov was loyal and lived only for the Party and everyone knew it. Ricciotti was arrested the very next morning.

Ricciotti tells Erchov about his wife next. Valia had written to the cell Bureau to say that she wanted a divorce. She wanted to wash away the dishonor of unknowingly being the wife of an enemy of the people.

Erchov asks what now? Ricciotti tells him that it's time to give up. Resistance serves no purpose. Erchov argues that it's wrong to lie or admit to something he did not do. Ricciotti says he does not have the right to say such things about the Party. Ricciotti is willing to die for his country, even though he no longer really believes in the Party. He would rather die for his country than against it.

The two men continue to talk as they eat a reasonably good dinner and are given plenty of cigarettes to smoke. The author uses metaphor when Ricciotti compares the current

state of the country to performing surgery with an ax. The country is sacrificing its best people, because it doesn't know what else to do. Now, it is their turn to go.

Erchov is angry. He asks Ricciotti if he believes even one-fifth of what he's telling him and asks Ricciotti if they are paying him to talk Erchov into giving up. Ricciotti responds without anger. He says that no one is paying him. He doesn't want to die for nothing. He tells Erchov that they are children of the regime, and they are made to serve the regime.

Erchov still believes that it's mad to admit to crimes he did not commit. Ricciotti tells him that no one can resist the machine. One cannot resist the Party without becoming the enemy. They are both too loyal to do that.

Finally, Erchov relents and agrees with Ricciotti. Immediately, they are given tea, sandwiches, and brandy, and when Erchov returns to his room, there are newspapers for him to read. He hasn't been able to read newspapers for months.

Zvyeryeva gets the news by telephone early in the morning that Erchov has confessed, and she immediately calls Popov. After she hangs up, she admires herself in the mirror. None of her face is human anymore except for her eyes. In a sickeningly lonely scene, Zvyeryeva pleasures herself and tells her reflection that she's beautiful.

The next scene moves to Makeyev. For ten years, Makeyev's life has consisted of inflicting or swallowing humiliation. He used this tactic to rise to power. Now that Makeyev is in a prison cell, he has plunged into an animal desperation. The author uses simile to describe Makeyev as being like a steer which the slaughterer's hammer has not hit hard enough. His muscles are starting to become flabby, his beard has grown up to his eyes, and his chest is caved in.

When they begin questioning Makeyev, he believes the truth will come out and everything will be all right. He admits to some mistakes in judgment and believes his admissions might ruin his career but at least save his life. Then, interrogators start to wake Makeyev in the middle of the night and ask more sinister questions connecting him to the Tulayev case.

Makeyev is completely deflated. He has no fight left in him. The interrogators tell him that his own wife's statement proves that he was thrilled to hear Tulayev was dead. Makeyev remembers the conversation he had with his wife when she was upset about his affair, and he realizes how it could be twisted to be used against him. He wonders if Alia told the story to condemn her husband or save him.

As Makeyev is led back to his cell, he remembers attending the executions of four railwaymen years earlier. He recalls how differently each of them acted as they walked to their death. The incident shook him, but he got over it quickly, because he was an iron Bolshevik who didn't think.

When Makeyev returns to his cell, he asks for a sheet of paper and writes that he will cease all resistance and is ready to sign a complete and sincere confession.

The next scene turns to Rublev. Rublev refuses to answer any of the examiners' questions. He asks for access to books from the prison library and then tells them to leave him alone for three weeks to collect his thoughts. Thoughts of his wife, Dora, torment him the most. The author uses the metaphor of a plant to describe how Dora is strong under a defenseless gentleness, similar to how certain leaves look delicate but have a strong resistance and vitality to survive storms.

Rublev talks to Dora in his cell as if she is there with him. They have been so close that they finish each other's thoughts. They wondered once, not long before he was taken away, if they had missed their chance to die young in the Revolution—when they were still filled with optimism for their country. Rublev looks out the window and says (to Dora) that now his time has finally come.

Rublev spends the three weeks writing an objective manuscript of events that is filled with extremely accurate details. He spares nothing. He asks an invisible Dora every day when he finishes what she thinks of his writing. The invisible Dora says it is very clear and firm, and he should go on writing.

While Rublev is writing, he thinks about fields of poppies, and how each flower is individual and ever-changing. Thinking about the poppies helps Rublev grow accustomed to death, which is not far off for him.

Zvyeryeva sends for Rublev, and she is baffled that he doesn't look changed as most of the prisoners do. She thought that Rublev was "in line", but her conversation with him suggests the opposite. Zvyeryeva begins to fear that the investigation could fail.

Rublev jokes with Zvyeryeva and asks her to specify of what he is accused. She is not amused and sends him back to his cell. Rublev uses the metaphor of a cat to describe Zvyeryeva. When he returns to his cell, he happily tells invisible Dora that he sent the hideous cat running.

Next, Popov comes to visit Rublev in his cell. Popov speaks for a long time about good of the Party and what will happen to Rublev if he doesn't confess to something. Rublev breaks in and tells his old friend Popov that he looks just like Lenin—not the living Lenin but the embalmed body of Lenin. He sees danger in Popov's eyes, but Rublev doesn't stop. He calls him a graveyard maggot. Popov gives up on the conversation and collects his things to leave. In the doorway, he asks Rublev one last time what he can tell the Central Committee. Rublev replies that Popov can tell the Committee that he has lived his whole life for the Party, as sick as it is. If he must be crushed by his Party, then he consents, but he warns the villains who are doing the killing that they are killing the Party.

Rublev would like very much to shove Popov over a cliff, but he knows in truth, it's Popov's flabby hands pushing him toward the abyss instead.

Chapter 7: The Brink of Nothing

Chapter 7: The Brink of Nothing Summary

Chapter seven tells Ryzhik's story. He is an old Trotskyist who has been deported. Prosecutor Rachevsky, Gordeyev, Popov, and Zvyeryeva agree that Ryzhik is the perfect person to add to the Tulayev case. They need a Trotskyist to complete their investigation.

Ryzhik has been living in a place that he calls the Brink of Nothing for years, guarded by one soldier named Pakhomov. The two men become friends and spend their days playing cards, hunting, philosophizing, or listening to Pakhomov play the accordion.

One day, Pakhomov tells Ryzhik that his deportation is over and he has orders to take him to the city. Ryzhik is taken to the nearest town and then shuttled from prison to prison by freight car until he finally makes it back to Moscow.

Shortly after he is examined in a Moscow prison, Ryzhik is taken to a room to be questioned by Zvyeryeva and Gordeyev. Zvyeryeva is leading the investigation, but she cannot get any answers from Ryzhik. He demands to be returned to his cell, and Gordeyev chastises Zvyeryeva for not being better prepared for her examination. Much of the Tulayev case is resting on Ryzhik's confession.

When he returns to his cell, Ryzhik makes a decision to starve himself to death before the next interrogation. The soldiers suspect nothing, because he flushes his rations down the toilet. Eventually, one of the soldiers realizes he is ill, but it is too late to save him. The investigators are left looking at Ryzhik's corpse and wondering what to do next. Popov and Gordeyev throw the blame immediately on Zvyeryeva.

Chapter 7: The Brink of Nothing Analysis

Chapter seven introduces Ryzhik. He is an old Trotskyist deportee. So far he has miraculously escaped a harsher sentence, and some heads of bureaus believe that he must be under secret protection from high officials.

Ryzhik becomes part of this story because the prosecutor needs a Trotskyist to add to the dossier of the Tulayev case. After looking through a number of dossiers, Prosecutor Rachevsky, Gordeyev, Popov, and Zvyeryeva agree that Ryzhik is a perfect fit. They decide collectively that they will let him deny all guilt, but then Zvyeryeva will bring together secondary testimony to overwhelm all of his denials. She believes she has a wealth of material to work with (even though none of it has anything to do with Ryzhik). She justifies their actions by saying that the guilt of the counterrevolutionaries is collective.

The scene then changes to Ryzhik, living as a deportee in a distant region. The author again personifies the landscape by describing the incomparable dawns and the profound indifference of the desert lands. There are no boundaries or landmarks in this region, and Ryzhik is living in the last house of five that make up a hamlet named "Dirty Hole" that sits at the conjunction of two icy rivers. The house is owned by a childless couple who dislike him because he never crosses himself. Five families of fishermen live in the town. When Ryzhik was still allowed to write letters, he named this place the Brink of Nothing.

Sometimes Ryzhik shouts into the emptiness, and the sound of his own voice intoxicates him with violent grief. One of Ryzhik's treasures is a clock. The people of the village and surrounding areas come to see it, because they believe it is a magic device that makes time. It is comforting to Ryzhik. The author uses the metaphor of a mouse for the clock's ticking. It nibbles obstinately, devouring the silence of eternity. Ryzhik loves the clock, because he had lived for almost a year without it, and the silence of pure time almost drove him crazy.

When Ryzhik shows the clock to the old couple he lives with, they only have one word to say, "Beautiful". The author uses simile to describe the couple after Ryzhik shows them how the clock works. They cross themselves and then shuffle away like a pair of penguins.

Ryzhik is guarded by a man named Pakhomov, who lives in the most comfortable room of the five houses, about two-thirds of a mile from the house in which Ryzhik lives. Pakhomov has a wry sense of humor. The author describes his face as always having an expression of suspicious humility. His features and wrinkles are frozen in a moment when he wanted to cry but would not let himself. Pakhomov develops a reserved affection for his prisoner. He tells him that they each must do their duty, but if he was going to be in the middle of nowhere with someone, he's glad it's Ryzhik.

Ryzhik often visits Pakhomov's room, and Pakhomov plays the accordion for him or they play cards. From time to time, the two men go hunting in the simple, frozen landscape. It is hard for them to surprise the few animals, so they either have to chase them down or lie covered in snow for hours waiting for them. When they are out in the wilderness, they have a chance to share their philosophies. Pakhomov says that man is an evil beast. Ryzhik eventually agrees but adds, "Nevertheless, we will transform man".

One day, Pakhomov enters Ryzhik's room and excitedly tells him that he has just received orders to take him back to the city. He is surprised that Ryzhik isn't excited, but Ryzhik feels too old for another change, and he believes he is going to the city to die.

Pakhomov and Ryzhik travel by reindeer sled to the city. The author unfolds another beautiful panorama of moving landscape as they travel through the night. The sleigh glides over the nothingness that is the world. The stars twinkle and change from lightening blue to a soft, glacial green. The author uses simile to say the plain undulates like a sea, and then he personifies the stars by saying that they caress the plain.

Pakhomov and Ryzhik are lying under piles of furs while the driver of the sleigh keeps watch and sways with the rhythm of the revolving world. The two men fall asleep, and Ryzhik dreams he is dying. He is not fearful or bitter. His death is as simple as the end of night. At the end of his dream, the light of the stars, the Northern Lights, the sun, and the light of love all flow down to the world and nothing is really lost.

When they stop to stretch their legs, Pakhomov tells Ryzhik of a yellow secret service envelop that he has sewn into his tunic. He has never opened it, and he will not unless he receives a message to do so, but he knows it contains the orders to shoot Ryzhik.

When the men reach a wagon trail, they are all seized with emotion in coming back into civilization. Ryzhik feels his sadness return—a sadness that has run throughout his life and that he despises. Ryzhik and Pakhomov say goodbye to the reindeer sled driver and take the next part of their journey in peasant carts.

When they reach the town, Ryzhik and Pakhomov say goodbye on the threshold of the building that houses the Soviet and Security. Ryzhik is moved into a dank cell that smells like cat urine, but he can hear children's voices on the other side of the wall, and that makes him very happy. The author uses simile to describe that a little girl's voice is as refreshing as a trickle of water over the rocks of the taiga as she reads a story to other children.

The scene then jumps to soldiers leading Ryzhik to a freight car filled with prisoners. The author uses simile to describe the shabby cars as looking like old, disinterred coffins. Moans of prisoners are heard within them. Ryzhik climbs into one of the cars, and the door is padlocked behind him. He finds himself with a bunch of emaciated children, the oldest of which is around sixteen. The author uses simile again to describe the children's shaved skulls as being like the heads of plucked birds and their eyes are like the eyes of wildcats.

Ryzhik shares his food with the children, and he can hear their mouths salivating as he divides two herrings into seventeen pieces. The children enjoy the meal and tell Ryzhik a little bit about their horrific experience on the train so far. They talk late into the night, and then the children huddle against Ryzhik, because he is big and warm.

Ryzhik is shuttled from prison to prison. He uses simile to describe that he is like a stone carried along by a dirty flood. He is old and weak. He has no idea of what use he would be to the Party anymore. He uses simile again to describe himself as the last Oppositionist, crushed under the machine like a rabbit under a tank.

Ryzhik ends up back in Europe and believes he is nearing the end of his trip. He is taken to a prison where his cellmate recognizes him. The author uses simile to express the man's excitement. He jerks around the cell like a puppet, telling Ryzhik that everyone thought he was dead from a hunger strike or something else. It is magnificent to see one of the old Trotskyists still alive.

Ryzhik goes through the results of the three great trials in his mind as he sits in his cell, the lies, the deaths of at least five hundred men and three hundred women who had

disappeared. Ryzhik continues his investigation by asking his cell mate, Makarenko, to tell his story. Makarenko tells him horrific stories of defiance in the prisons until Ryzhik cannot take it any longer and tells him that is enough. He knows how it ends. He asks Makarenko if the prisons are now quiet. Makarenko replies that the prisons are thinking.

The next day, Ryzhik is taken under guard by train to Moscow. They put a basket of luxury foods on the seat next to Ryzhik, foods he had long forgotten. Ryzhik decides to enjoy as little of the food as possible, just enough to keep up his strength. He savors the food and thinks without fear that soon he will die.

He is taken to a prison in Moscow, and the next day he is examined and then taken to another room to be questioned. He recognizes Zvyeryeva immediately from previous cases. He knows she is crooked and can hardly believe that she has outlived so many valiant men. Gordeyev is also in the room.

Zvyeryeva informs Ryzhik that the Party considers his period of deportation finished. He has been charged with a capital crime, and she will offer him a way to exonerate himself. Ryzhik knows this game and refuses to answer any questions. He demands to be taken back to his cell.

As soon as Ryzhik is gone, Gordeyev chastises Zvyeryeva for not preparing better for the examination. Now, half of the trial is lost. Zvyeryeva swears she will break Ryzhik. She tells Gordeyev that he must give her carte blanche to force a confession out of Ryzhik or the failure of the trial will be his fault.

Back in his cell, Ryzhik thinks over his options and decides to go on a hunger strike that will kill him before Zvyeryeva questions him again. He asks for books, but the assistant warden tells him that he must makes his request for books at his next hearing. Ryzhik decides that he will read no more and uses his memory instead to draw up lines from books that have made him feel alive in the past.

The first three days of Ryzhik's hunger strike cause him very little suffering. The author uses simile to describe how his ears begin to hum like the sound in a sea shell. He continues to destroy the dark rye bread by breaking it up and flushing it down the toilet so the soldiers do not know he is starving himself.

The author painfully describes Ryzhik's deterioration in great detail. The warmth of life begins to leave him, and he constantly shivers. He no longer has the strength to stand; his jaws are decomposing; the glands under his ears swell; and his teeth ache. Finally, he begins to hallucinate about people who have been dead for a long time.

Finally, one of the soldiers realize that he is near death and runs for help. The author uses simile to describe the heavy tread of one of the soldiers coming into Ryzhik's cell. It echoes in Ryzhik's head like clods of earth on his coffin. The word spreads quickly that Ryzhik is dying.

The Chief responds to the news by ordering that Ryzhik be saved. He is too late. Ryzhik dies in his cell before the doctor is able to revive him. The important people begin to

immediately calculate the consequences. They have to establish responsibility, tell the Chief, and what will the Tulayev case be tied to now?

Popov asks who was in charge of the prisoner, and Gordeyev points the finger at Zvyeryeva. Popov asks her if she has been monitoring daily reports on his health, and she has to admit that she has not.

Chapter 8: The Road to Gold

Chapter 8: The Road to Gold Summary

Kondratiev's fate is chosen in chapter eight. Ever since he has returned from Spain, Kondratiev feels as though he is walking around in a fog. He has a job in Moscow at the Combustibles Trust, but the other directors avoid him. He feels as though he could be arrested any day.

Kondratiev wanders the streets all night and finally comes to the conclusion that if he is arrested, he will fight. He is summoned by the Party Committee, but it has nothing to do with an arrest. They want him to preside over the presentation of the flag to a tank battalion by workers in the Ilich factory. Of course, the Committee gives him a list of topics to discuss in his presentation.

Next, Kondratiev has a chance meeting with Popov. Popov fishes for incriminating evidence against Kondratiev, and Kondratiev responds by giving him an earful of the truth, causing Popov to flee the office.

Finally, the day of the speech arrives. Tension is built throughout the scene. First, Kondratiev believes that the C.C. car may take him to a prison instead of the event, but it doesn't. Then, the minutes get closer to the speech, and Kondratiev remains unsure of what he is going to say. The moment of truth occurs when he steps up to the podium. Kondratriev starts by repeating the normal Party line, but then he makes a decision to speak words that are alive. He speaks very frankly from the heart about the mistakes of the Party and his hopes for future generations to right the wrongs.

At the end of the speech, young soldiers are enthusiastically applauding, while older officials sit in silence, afraid of what Kondratiev has just said. Somehow, Kondratiev escapes being arrested on the spot. When he shows up for work the next day, his secretary nervously tells him to run for his life. She heard that he will be arrested.

Kondratiev follows through with his plan to fight back and tells his secretary to get the General Secretary's office on the line. She comes back later to inform him that the Chief himself wants to talk to him.

Kondratiev goes to the Chief's office without fear. He knows the end is near. The Chief asks him if he is a traitor, and Kondratiev responds brilliantly that he is not a traitor . . . either. And the Chief must know it to be true. Kondratiev goes on to tell the Chief everything he is thinking, the entire truth. He expects it will be his last chance to speak before he dies.

The Chief's response is a complete surprise. He tells Kondratiev that he will not be arrested. Instead, the Chief is sending him to Siberia to work on the Gold Trust. Kondratiev is almost angry. He had prepared himself for death. As he walks away from

the Chief's office, his physical body starts to become happy, but his mind still lags behind.

Kondratiev sits on a park bench pondering his future, and he notices a poor student sitting next to him. He offers the student a job, and the student responds that he would like to take it. He has nothing to lose. Kondratiev responds happily that he has nothing to lose, either.

Chapter 8: The Road to Gold Analysis

Chapter eight returns to Kondratiev's story. Ever since he has returned from Spain, he feels as though he's living in a vacuum. He has a job at the Combustibles Trust where he is in charge of carrying out special plans of the Central Bureau for military supplies, and he has to force himself to show up every day. His apartment is a mess. Kondratiev can hardly stand to do anything except look out the window. The author uses simile to describe the people on the streets being like busy ants. Kondratiev wonders how they find meaning in their existence.

Kondratiev looks at himself in the mirror and thinks it is ridiculous that he has lived so much and ended up like this. He feels like the walking dead. The directors in his office avoid him, as do many others. He wanders from place to place in a trance.

Kondratiev finally snaps out of his fog when he decides that he will fight. He knows that his dossier is making its way from office to office and he will be arrested any minute. When he is, he will fight.

Kondratiev thinks about the Chief. The author uses anaphora to describe Kondratiev's thoughts that the Chief is alone: alone with his poisoned documents; alone with millions of lying faces; alone with hug portraits of himself on buildings; alone with ghosts of the executed; alone with a county that has forsaken itself.

Wandering through the streets all night, Kondratiev tries to think of what to do next. He returns home in the morning light. He looks into the windows of his neighbors and envies people with their simple, little lives. He enters his apartment and doesn't want to get in bed. The author uses simile to show that the sheets are like a shroud to Kondratiev. He is not willing to lay down and die.

He looks out the window and tells the people below that he is going to fight. The Revolution needs a clean conscience. Kondratiev continues to grapple with his own despairing thoughts throughout the morning. Finally, he falls asleep and has a fantastic dream about eternal worlds.

When he wakes at about noon, Kondratiev shaves and then responds to a summons by the Party Committee. It is nothing worrisome. They want him to preside over the presentation of the flag to a tank battalion by workers in the Ilich factory. They would like him to give a good speech to the tank boys, and they provide him with an outline of topics he is allowed to speak on.

Kondratiev goes to buy cigarettes, and he is invited by a group of women to join them for tea. They recognize him as an official with the Central Committee. Popov appears and also joins them. After a brief conversation with the women, Popov invites Kondratiev to an office to talk. Kondratiev is suspicious of Popov. Popov asks what impression the trials produced abroad. Kondratiev knows Popov is a rat, so he replies with the stark truth. They didn't know what to make of the trials. They were demoralizing, and not even the best of their paid agents believed in them.

Popov is terrified by Kondratiev's response and asks him to speak lower. Kondratiev goes on to say that it's the truth and he would like to send the General Secretariat a memo on the subject to supplement the one he has prepared on the crimes committed in Spain. Kondratiev's dangerous answers make Popov flee his company.

Popov knows exactly where Kondratiev's dossier has traveled and what it holds. It includes dangerous documents like one that details the death of prisoner in Spain (probably Stefan Stern) and conflicting reports on how it happened. Popov and Gordeyev have tried to connect Kondratiev to a Trotskyist conspiracy in Barcelona, but they have not had much luck. Kondratiev's dossier also lists a long history of heroism and loyalty to the party.

Popov thinks of Kondratiev as a soldier, not an idealist. Soldiers never budge. Idealists can be manipulated, but soldiers are unpredictable. Popov believes the best thing to do with a soldier is shoot him and not say a word. Popov is worried about the Tulayev trial. Ryzhik's death messed up half of it, and now Kondratiev is threatening the other half. Popov has no idea what to report to the Chief.

The day of Kondratiev's speech arrives. He is slightly surprised that the C.C. car takes him to the event instead of to prison. On the way to deliver the speech, Kondratiev runs into a young soldier, the son of a man who was executed. He offers to get the young man some books on German tank tactics. He knows that the young man has every right to hate him.

The author builds tension throughout the next scene as the minutes tick by and it gets closer to the time of Kondratiev's speech. There are many people buzzing around Kondratiev, making sure that he has everything he needs. The author uses simile to describe that it is as if Kondratiev is surrounded by perfectly constructed manikins in their shiny uniforms.

Finally, Kondratiev faces the moment of his speech. He starts out by repeating the normal Party line, but then he decides he must find words that are alive, and he begins telling the truth. Kondratiev continues with a fiery discourse that inspires the young soldiers and deeply frightens the officials. At the end of the speech, some of the audience claps passionately and others sit in stunned silence.

At the reception following the speech, the young solder whose father was executed approaches Kondratiev and thanks him for what he said. Other officials circle around

dangerously close to Kondratiev, unsure what to do with him. Eventually, Kondratiev sneaks away from the party unseen.

When Kondratiev arrives at work the next day, his secretary is very frightened. The author uses physical characteristics to show her fear: her lips are pale, her hands are like ice, and Kondratiev sees dark desolation in her eyes. The secretary whispers to him that he must flee, because he is going to be arrested.

Kondratiev tells the secretary to get the General Secretary's office on the line. He is not going down without a fight. His secretary returns later and informs him that the Chief wants an audience with him at three o'clock. Kondratiev believes the end is near.

Kondratiev feels no fear when he enters the Chief's office. The first question the Chief asks is, "So you are a traitor too?" Kondratiev has a brilliant response. He says, "I am not a traitor, either. And you must know it".

The Chief is silent while Kondratiev tells him that above all he is loyal. However, he is stricken with grief over the loss of so many great men. It will take millenniums to produce men like that again.

The Chief responds that what had to be had to be. It is not for him to judge. Kondratiev goes on to warn the Chief that he will be utterly alone when the war comes. They now have a shortage of men who know what he knows, who have his history.

Somehow, Kondratiev's speech performs a miracle. It saves him. The Chief tells Kondratiev that he has been accused of treason. Kondratiev replies that he would expect those vermin to denounce him. The Chief admits that the examiners and particularly the new prosecutor are all idiots. But he has had enough talk of them. He tells Kondratiev that he has made his decision. He is sending Kondratiev to eastern Siberia to the Valley of Gold.

Kondratiev is almost mad at his reprieve. He expected death, and that is not going to happen. The author uses simile to describe Kondratiev as feeling like a man with vertigo above a chasm who knows that he has a double within him that longs for the relief of falling.

As Kondratiev leaves the Chief's office, a physical happiness grows inside of him, but his mind does not share it. He sits on a park bench and opens the briefcase he has been given with information on the Gold Trust. He thinks of inviting his secretary to come with him.

Kondratiev notices a poor young man with only one sock sitting next to him. Then, he goes on to ponder his new life in Siberia. At the end of the chapter, Kondratiev turns back to the young man sitting next to him. He finds out he is a student in his third year, studying technology. Kondratiev offers the young man work in Siberia. The young man accepts, saying he has nothing to lose. Kondratiev replies cheerfully that he has nothing to lose, either.

Chapter 9: Let Purity Be Treason

Chapter 9: Let Purity Be Treason Summary

Chapter nine begins with Prosecutor Rachevsky reading a newspaper clipping from a European newspaper. It tells of the upcoming trials in the case of Comrade Tulayev. This is the beginning of Rachevsky's trouble.

He is granted an audience with the Chief that lasts three minutes and forty seconds. When he returns to his office, he receives a call from Gordeyev asking why he let the story leak to a European paper. Rachevsky tries to pass the blame to Popov.

Rachevsky spends a drunken night in his government apartment near his office, and when he arrives at work the next day, Popov informs him that he has been relieved of his duties as prosecutor. His new assignment is Director of the Tourist Bureau. Upon hearing this news, Rachevsky turns strangely giddy. He buys a bottle of liquor and is fairly drunk by the time Popov drops him off at his home. Popov thinks the man is done for.

Then, the scene changes to Paris, France. Xenia is on a mission there to learn about the techniques for printing on cloth. She is both attracted to and disgusted by Paris. She believes that the people of Paris are victims of age-old capitalist exploitation.

While having breakfast in a café one morning, Xenia learns from the papers that her good friend Rublev has been arrested for the murder of Tulayev and has made a complete confession. She is horrified and turns to everyone she can in Paris to help her save her friend. She also sends a telegram home imploring her father (Popov) to save Rublev.

The Russian authorities take notice of Xenia's actions immediately and come after her. She is arrested and taken back to the U.S.S.R.

In the final scene of the chapter, Popov is at home. Gordeyev pays him a visit to tell him his daughter has been arrested. Gordeyev also informs Popov that he and his wife should also consider themselves under arrest and remain at home. Their phone lines have been cut, so they are unable to make any telephone calls to the outside world.

Chapter 9: Let Purity Be Treason Analysis

Chapter nine begins with Prosecutor Rachevsky reading a clipping from a foreign newspaper that announces the imminent trial of Comrade Tulayev's assassins. A few hours later, he has an audience with the Chief. The meeting lasts just under four minutes. The Chief starts by asking for Rachevsky to give a report. While he is speaking, Rachevsky has the feeling that he is falling from a skyscraper. The author

uses anaphora to accentuate Rachevsky's feeling of falling to the earth past oblongs of window, oblongs, oblongs.

After Rachevsky is dismissed, the author uses simile to describe Rachevsky walking away like an automaton. He decides shortly after the meeting that the only way out for him is to shoot himself. While sitting in his office pondering this idea, Rachevsky receives a call from Gordeyev, who wants to know more about the deplorable indiscretion that leaked the Tulayev trial to the European press. The author uses onomatopoeia in the word "spluttering" to describe Rachevsky trying to come up with a response. He tries to pass the blame on to Popov, but Gordeyev will not allow him to without written proof.

Rachevsky goes to a furnished apartment in the Government Houses where he often sleeps when he is busy. There are sixty cases that he has to get through by the morning. Rachevsky thinks again about committing suicide, but his daughter calls him to wish him a good night, and he does not follow through. He ends up drinking instead, and by the time he returns to the dossiers, he is having some trouble making out the syllables. The author uses simile to describe how his fingers catch the syllables, but then they get away like mice or rats, or like the lizards Rachevsky used to catch when he was a child with a noose made from a blade of grass. Rachevsky laughs at his own drunken joke that he has always been a specialist in nooses.

When Rachevsky arrives in his office the next day, Popov is waiting for him. Popov discovers that Rachevsky has not read the papers or his mail so he doesn't know that he has been relieved of his duties as Prosecutor to the Supreme Tribunal. Rachevsky responds without emotion. He weakly pushes his heavy briefcase across the table to Popov.

Popov informs him that his next appointment will be Director of the Tourist Bureau. Rachevsky is manically happy with the news. The two men leave in a Central Committee car, and Rachevsky has the driver stop at a store so that he can buy a bottle of alcohol. In the car, Rachevsky toasts to his job and says that he has only one regret: that he started his life by hanging lizards. Popov drops Rachevsky off at his home. He gets out of the car and steps heavily in a mud puddle, which makes him curse and laugh at the same time. The author uses simile to describe Rachevsky reaching to feel the bottle in his pocket while he bids Popov goodbye. His hand looks like a big crab. Popov concludes that Rachevsky is done for.

The scene then changes dramatically to Paris, France. Xenia Popova is on her mission there to learn about a new technique for printing on cloth. She is both fascinated and repulsed by the city. It has a rich history but the people are victims of age-old capitalist exploitation. Xenia feels superior to them. The author gives a very clear picture of Paris through what Xenia sees as she wanders about the city. She sees bookstalls with hundreds of books, the Louvre, the turbid yet bluish Seine, the spire of the Sainte Chapelle, the Eiffel Tower, and numerous other landmarks. She also uses simile to describe old, poverty-stricken houses with pots of flowers in the windowsills that were as surprising as a smile on the face of a sick child.

Xenia is intrigued by how nothing changes from one day to the next. She has breakfast at the same café every morning and hears the same conversations spoken between the proprietor and her regular customers. She wonders how these people live without anxiety or enthusiasm for the future. She uses simile to describe Madame Delaporte, the owner of the café, as looking like a large and very dignified cat.

It is while having breakfast in the café that Xenia reads the horrible news in the paper: her friend Rublev has been arrested and is on trial in Moscow in the Tulayev case. She wanders around in a panic and then stops in another café and start to compose a letter to the Chief. She realizes that the letter will not arrive in time, so her next idea is to send a telegram to her father. He will save his old friend Rublev. Xenia sends of a telegram, but she is unsure that it will do anything to help Rublev's situation.

Xenia tries to find Sukhov, who is a poet, the secretary of a section of the Poets' Syndicate. He writes poems that appear in the papers and in small volumes published by the State Publishing House. Sukhov is in love with Xenia, and she knows it. She asks for his help in proclaiming Rublev's innocence. The author uses simile to describe Sukhov sitting close to Xenia and looking down on her with eyes like a fine stallion's. But he tells her not to do anything foolish. He warns Xenia to stay out of it and tells her that if Rublev was arrested, he is probably guilty.

An upset Xenia leave Sukhov and calls on Professor Passereau, who is famous in two hemispheres for his studies of earthquakes. Passereau is a great man who has had an audience with the Chief. Xenia believes he can help her. Professor Passereau sympathizes with Xenia, but he tells her that there is nothing he can do. He believes if Rublev is innocent, the Supreme Tribunal will accord him justice.

The author uses the metaphor of a hurricane to describe how Xenia sweeps into Passereau's office, with her hostile mouth and eyes and her uneasy hands. She seems dangerous to Passereau. The author then uses simile to compare her to a stormy petrel.

Xenia goes to another professor in the editorial office of an extreme Left weekly. The professor compares these types of Russian catastrophes to Shakespearean tragedies. He has cried out against them in the past, but the political situation makes it impossible for him to put such an article in his paper today. He could try to at least call the Russian ambassador and express his concern. Xenia asks him to do so.

Xenia sweeps through several other editorial offices, but she does not have much luck in getting anyone to help her. She returns home tired and overcome with a feeling of nausea. She goes to the café, and while she is there she receives a phone call. Madame Delaporte believes she must be suffering from a lovers' quarrel.

When Xenia goes to the phone, she hears a male, Russian voice. He says his name is Krantz, and he is aware of her imprudent and criminal proceedings. He insists that she stop immediately. She hangs up on him.

Then, the First Secretary of the Embassy, Willi, enters the café. Madame Delaporte wrongly assumes he is the lover. Willi has brought a telegram for Xenia. It simply says, "Mother ill we both bet you return immediately". Willi has reserved a ticket for her to leave by plane on Wednesday. Xenia refuses to take the ticket. When she leaves the café, she knows she is being followed.

Xenia can hardly believe that now she is considered a traitor, too, and therefore her father will be thought of as a traitor. She uses simile to describe that it is like the ice breaking up on the Neva: large floes, like shattered stars, collide and battle and destroy one another until they disappear under the quiet sea swell.

Xenia shakes off the detective and finds a hotel for the night. She wakes the next morning and feels better. If there is no trial, then maybe Rublev will live. It's impossible that anyone would think such a pure man guilty of this crime. There is a knock on her door, and when she opens it, she is face to face with Krantz. He tells her to come with him, and when she protests, he says that then she will be labeled a traitor. Xenia reluctantly follows him to his waiting car that takes them to the airport. On the flight back, Krantz tells her that she is under arrest. From Minsk on, her journey will be managed by Security.

The scene then changes back to Moscow. Ever since Popov has received Xenia's insane telegram, he has been filled with fear. He is also tortured by his rheumatism. Gordeyev visits him at his home, dressed in uniform. Popov is in his dressing gown.

Gordeyev tells Popov that his daughter is under arrest. Gordeyev goes on to say in veiled terms that Popov is now also under suspicion because of his daughter and also because when Rachevsky was questioned about destroying a dossier, he said that he did it on Popov's orders. The author uses the metaphor of a beast tracked to its lair to describe Popov's piercing eyes.

Before leaving, Gordeyev tells Popov that it has been asked that he remain at home and not make any phone calls. Popov asks if he can make a call to the Chief, and Gordeyev tells him that his phone line has already been cut.

After Gordeyev leaves, Popov's wife enters the room and asks him how he feels. He responds in a very low voice that he is all right. Then, he informs her that Xenia is under arrest and both of them are under arrest, and he is very tired. He asks her not to turn on the light.

Chapter 10: And Still the Floes Came Down . . .

Chapter 10: And Still the Floes Came Down . . . Summary

The final chapter of the book begins with a character that started the book, Kostia. He has been sent by the Regional Committee as a militant from the Young Communists to work in a kolkhoze. It is here that he meets and falls in love with Maria.

Kostia and the agronomist of the kolkhoze are frustrated because there are no trucks to carry the wheat to the township thirty-four miles away. They come up with a plan where the people will carry the wheat on their backs if the Committee won't send them the trucks they need. Kostia and other leaders of the kolkhoze organize 165 people to carry sixty loads, and it takes them nearly four days, but they get the job done. When they arrive in the township, Kostia tells the president of the kolkhoze that he and Maria must have two weeks off because they are getting married.

The scene then moves back to Moscow and another familiar character from early in the book—Kostia's neighbor, Romachkin. Things are looking up for Romachkin. He has recently received a promotion and a raise, and he has developed his first real friendship with a widower in his fifties. The men talk quite a bit, even though they don't understand each other much. Romachkin admits to his friend that he has been tortured by injustice. His friend admits that he has wasted most of his life and is only now starting to learn about things like mechanics and astrophysics.

When Romachkin returns home and is reading in bed, he gets a visit from his old friend Kostia. Kostia sees in Romachkin's newspaper that three men have been executed in the Tulayev case, and his usual upbeat demeanor instantly changes. Before Kostia rushes off, he gives Romachkin the gift of his ebony-framed miniature. Kostia runs back to his wife in the room where they are staying and asks her if she would still love him if she knew he had killed a man. Maria tells him that they are moving forward now. She doesn't care about the past. She believes that he is a great and pure man.

The scene then changes to Comrade Fleischman's office. He has the arduous task of closing up the enormous files from the Tulayev case and sending parts of them to the right bureaus for archiving. Within the dossiers, Fleischman finds an unopened letter that says "unclassified" across it in red pen. He opens the letter and is shocked to read the long and unsigned confession of Kostia. Fleischman burns the letter and pronounces the Tulayev case closed.

In the final scene, Fleischman goes to the arena for an Athletic Festival. The arena is filled with young athletes, soldiers, flowers, and tanks in a grand parade. The sun is

"deployed" right on cue to set, gilding the clouds and creating a triumphant finish to the parade and to the novel.

Chapter 10: And Still the Floes Came Down . . . Analysis

In the final chapter, the character of Kostia reappears. The scene opens at a kolkhoze, and the author compares the life of a kolkhoze to an obstacle race. Then, the author goes through pages of obstacles that the people on these farms run into, including diseases of plants and animals, no gasoline for their tractors, famine, poor planting seasons, and corruption among officials. Kostia comes on the scene as a militant from the Young Communists who has been sent by the Regional Committee.

The current frustration of the kolkhoze is that there are no trucks to take their wheat to the co-op and pick up supplies for them. Kostia and the agronomist come up with a great idea at the same time. They will have the healthy members of the kolkhoze carry the bags of wheat on their backs the thirty-four miles to the township. Then, the Committee will have to give in and provide them with the supplies they need. As they come up with the plan, the author uses simile to say that the agronomist and Kostia fling sentences back and forth as if they are throwing stones.

The author then describes in detail the arduous three to four days of 165 carriers taking sixty loads of wheat across the plain. They bivouac on the banks of the rivers and sleep under the stars before carrying the loads again the next day. Even able-bodied women and teenage boys take part in the carrying.

During the trip, Kostia proposes to Maria, whom he loves deeply. He tells her that he loves her, and she responds simply that they can make a good, solid couple. Anguish overcomes Kostia, but he swallows hard. Maria does agree to marry him, and he is filled with such a powerful joy that it is almost like grief.

The last stretch of the trip is the hardest, but they carriers make it, and the president of the kolkhoze comes out to meet them with carts. Kostia tells the president that he and Maria need two-week leaves, because they are getting married. The president congratulates them.

The next scene returns to Moscow and another familiar character from the beginning of the novel, Romachkin. Outwardly, it does not seem that his life has changed much. He continues to work in the same office, but he has been given a promotion and an increase in salary. Romachkin is not yet a member of the Party, but he is now allowed to attend meetings. He continues to live in his small partitioned room in the communal building. Romachkin is even able to give directives to other workers in his office. He tells an assistant clerk that he needs a file in seven minutes, and the author uses simile to describe the clerk's reaction. The clerk looks at the clock as a donkey looks at his driver's whip.

Romachkin's new office has a view out a window, but rather than enjoying it, Romachkin thinks it would be a good idea to put opaque glass in the windows so that the outside world is not a distraction. Romachkin does see a fantastically surviving church from the window with a garden, and he finds it after work. This leads to him to a new accomplishment—a friendship. When he finds the church, he meets Filatov, who is a teaseler and a mattressmaker, a childless widower in his mid-fifties who lives in the vestibule of the church.

The men have long conversations, even though they don't understand each other very well at first. Filatov is studying mechanics and astrophysics at night; he likes to talk about the universe. Romachkin admits to Filatov that he has been tortured by injustice and is unsure if he voted correctly at a recent Party meeting for the execution of the three men condemned in the Tulayev case. Romachkin wonders if he is the only one who remembers pity. Filatov feels pity for the judges.

Romachkin returns to his little room, and his anxiety returns as well. He climbs into bed and starts to read the paper. The author uses one small article in the paper to reveal the fate of the accused in the Tulayev case. It mentions that the three men guilty of treason—Erchov, Makeyev, and Rublev—have been executed.

Just then, there is a knock on the door, and Romachkin is surprised to see his old neighbor, Kostia. They catch up with each other, and Kostia is as usual too vivacious for the small room. Kostia sees the small article about the Tulayev case, and his demeanor instantly changes. However, before he leaves, he gives Romachkin a gift—it is the ebony framed miniature of the unknown woman that brought Kostia such joy when he had lived next door. Romachkin is very appreciative of the gift. He asks Kostia if he believes there are really faces like the one in the picture in the world. Kostia replies hotly that living faces are much more beautiful.

Kostia says goodbye to his friend and runs back to the room where he is staying with his wife. The author compares his running through the streets to the night that he ran through the same streets after he shot Tulayev. When Kostia arrives at his destination, he wakes Maria and asks her if she would still love him if she knew he had killed a man. She tells him to stop waking her up to tell her his dreams. He asks her again, and she replies that she has seen enough death. They are now going forward. She believes that there is a great and pure force within Kostia. He shouldn't worry.

The next scene takes place in Comrade Fleischman's office. He is finding a final resting place for the dossiers in the Tulayev case. There are several volumes, and some of them will go to the Party Archives, others to the files of Security, the C.C., the General Secretariat, and the foreign branch of the Secret Service. A few of the files have been burned in the presence of a representative of the C.C. The author uses simile to say that human life is reflected in the files, just as the earth's fauna and flora are found in monstrous forms in a drop of stagnant water observed through a microscope.

Fleischman is alone with the papers, and the odor of death hangs around them. He comes across an unopened letter in which someone wrote "unclassified" in red ink

across. He opens the letter and finds the long, unsigned confession of Kostia. After Fleischman finishes reading, he mutters, "I knew it". He doesn't know whether to burst into tears or run away. Instead, he lights the candle which he uses to soften sealing wax. The author uses simile to describe the candle as being encrusted with red streaks like coagulated blood. In the flame of the bloodstained candle, Fleischman burns the letter.

Fleischman goes on to read what Rublev wrote in his notebooks and finds the information very interesting. Fleischman feels certain Rublev knew he was going to die, or he never would have spelled out the truth in such detail. After he is finished reading, the author uses simile again to describe Fleischman shutting the notebook gently, as he would have closed the eyes of a dead man.

Fleischman travels to the stadium for the Athletic Festival. He is in his military uniform that boasts two medals. The author uses simile again to describe his aging face as looking like a fat frog. Battalions of athletes march by, and the author once again uses simile to describe their footsteps on the ground are like a rhythmic rain of hail. This final scene is a triumphant parade of young athletes, tanks covered with flowers, and clouds in the background gilded by a setting sun. The author uses a military term in the last sentence. The setting sun is "deployed" powerfully over the sky—as if it has been ordered to do so.

Characters

Kostia

Kostia is a young man who remains optimistic about life, even though he lives in poverty in Moscow. His neighbor Romachkin gives him a gun, and Kostia carries it around with him for days. Finally, one February night, he uses the revolver to assassinate Comrade Tulayev in a random moment when he sees the man on the street. Kostia has a childish personality. He is tall and has a high forehead, unruly hair, and sea-green eyes.

Kostia provides the bookends for the novel and also the impetus for the entire plot. He is only seen in the first and the last chapters. In the last chapter, Kostia has lived many other adventures and has returned to Moscow with his wife, Maria. He reads in the paper that three men were executed for the murder of Comrade Tulayev. Kostia is tortured by guilt and sends an unsigned confession to the Central Committee, but he is never arrested. His letter remains unopened for a long time, but it is eventually found by Comrade Fleischman after the executions take place. Fleischman burns the confession and officially closes the case by filing the thousands of pages away in various archives.

Romachkin

Romachkin is an old, little, sickly looking man. He is Kostia's neighbor. Romachkin is an assistant clerk in the wages department of the Moscow Clothing Trust. His hair is always neatly brushed, his skin is sallow, and he has thin lips. Romachkin's colorless eyes often show fear. He is appalled when he realizes how much the newspapers lie to the public. He knows from his job that the statistics are being tampered with, and the U.S.S.R. is not as successful a country as the leaders would like citizens to believe.

Romachkin is torn with guilt that he is part of the machine that lies to the public and holds people in poverty. Romachkin buys a Colt revolver with the thought of imposing justice, but he is too afraid to pull the trigger. He gives the gun to his neighbor, Kostia, setting the main plot of the story in motion.

Romachkin also only appears in the first and the last chapters, but his actions are extremely important to the plot. He is tortured by injustice but too timid to do anything about it, so he plods along within the rules of the society in which he lives. He eventually gets a raise and a promotion. He suspects that Kostia may have killed Tulayev, but he is afraid to ask him directly what he did with the Colt revolver.

Maxim Andreyevich Erchov

Erchov is the High Commissar for Security and Commissar of the People for Internal Affairs. He is forty years old and in very good health but prematurely wrinkled. He has puffy eyelids, thin lips, and uneasy eyes. He is charged with the impossible task of

coming up with the terrorists who plotted to kill Tulayev, when he is fairly certain it was the act of an isolated individual. Erchov himself is arrested on his way back from vacation and eventually confesses to crimes he did not commit in order to remain loyal to his country. He is executed.

Gordeyev

Gordeyev is the Deputy High Commissar. He is a stout, blond man with a round face and a very faint mustache. His hair is pomaded, and he wears big tortoise-shell glasses. He is a dangerous man who uses unscrupulous means to make his way into power in the Party. Gordeyev becomes the head of the Tulayev case.

Ricciotti

Ricciotti is in charge of the foreign department. He is an old friend of Erchov, who shared in his sudden rise to power. He grew up on the shores of a beautiful bay and still has a Neapolitan-fisherboy beauty, with a fleck of gold in his eyes and a warm guitar player's voice. He has a wild imagination and is very loyal to the Party. Ricciotti is a unique man. He is arrested ten days after Erchov, and he confesses to crimes he did not commit in order to remain loyal to the Party. He also convinces Erchov to confess. One suspects that he made a deal to save his life.

Valia (Valentina Anisimovna)

Valia is Erchov's wife. She devotes hours to caring for her body, spending most of the day lounging almost naked in gauzy materials. Erchov meets Valia when she is a provincial woman from Yeniseisk. She has an innocent and self-assured animality that Erchov is attracted to immediately. Valia was the young wife of a battalion leader when Erchov met her, and he immediately talks her into divorcing her husband and marrying him. She has prominent nostrils that seem to be always scenting something and big, feline eyes. Valia also has golden curly hair, full lips, prominent cheekbones, and a clear, pink complexion. When Erchov is arrested, Valia writes a letter to the Committee asking for a divorce and claiming she had no idea she was married to a traitor.

Popov

Popov is a member of the Central Control Commission. Popov is unknown to the public, but he holds much power within the Party. He has thick, dirty-gray hair and an aging, deeply-lined face that is pimply from bad health. His nails are dirty and cracked and his skin is flabby. Popov also has a thin, faded beard and wears steel-rimmed spectacles. He hides under a guileless manner, but he is an old fox. Popov is eventually arrested principally because of his daughter's attempts try to save Rublev from execution.

Kiril Kirillovich Rublev

Rublev is an old man who works at the Academy of Sciences. He is a scholarly man who is smart and passionate about music. He is tall, thin, and broad shouldered, but he has begun to stoop in the last two years, not because of age but because of anxiety. He has a scanty beard and a big, bony nose and bushy eyebrows. The kids in the neighborhood call him Ivan the Terrible, and he does resemble portraits of the Bloody Czar. He is eventually arrested and charged with being part of a plot to kill Comrade Tulayev. He is executed for the crime.

Dora

Dora is Rublev's wife. She has calm, gray eyes. Dora is a smart woman who loves her husband dearly. She is relieved every day when he comes home to her and silently fears the day that the secret police will come and take him away. When that day comes, she remains calm, but her fear is obvious in her pale face and cold lips when she bids Rublev a hasty goodbye. Rublev knows that Dora is very strong underneath her outward gentleness. She is deported after Rublev's arrest, and she writes many letters to the Committee protesting his innocence.

Xenia Popova

Xenia is the daughter of Popov and a friend of Rublev and Dora. She is a beautiful young woman with wide, well-shaped, blue eyes fringed with long lashes. Rublev cannot believe that such a horrible person as Popov is her father. Xenia is sent on a mission to Paris, France to learn about a new printing technique for cloth. While she is there, she learns of Rublev's arrest. In trying to help save him, she is arrested for treason and brought back to the U.S.S.R.

Artyem Artyemiyevich Makeyev

Makeyev is an upwardly mobile man, born a lowly peasant from Akimovka. He is not a popular child because he is red-headed, pockmarked, and bowlegged from a case of rickets. Makeyev becomes a soldier in 1917 and slowly rises up the ladder of success, joining the Party in 1919 and eventually becoming the Regional Secretary of Kurgansk. Makeyev feels things rather than thinking them through. He acts on instinct. Makeyev is an imposing figure with deeply set eyes, arched brows, a heavy face, and a shaved conical head. He believes he is superior to everyone except for Party officials, who hold a higher rank than him. Makeyev is eventually arrested backstage at an opera and charged with being part of a plot to murder Comrade Tulayev. Makeyev at first protests his innocence but then ceases to resist and agrees to sign a full confession.

Alia Sayidovna

Alia is Makeyev's wife. She is a Tatar. Alia is a pretty, short, plump woman with sleek animal grace. She is clean and has bluish-black hair that is twined over her temples and doe eyes. Alia seems to be made up of soft curves that melt into each other. She has ancient Iranian gold coins hanging from her ears and fingernails that are painted pomegranate red. Her statement of a conversation with her husband helps to seal his fate.

Ivan Kondratiev

Kondratiev is an emissary of the U.S.S.R. who takes on many different disguises. He is a career revolutionary, over fifty years old. He is sent to Spain under disguise to collect information on the Revolution there, and he is very concerned with the reports he receives. They highlight corruption, lack of supplies, a starving population, and probable defeat. Kondratiev is tired and is beginning to believe that the rumors of corruption are true. After Kondratiev returns and gives his report to the Chief, he goes slightly mad as he tries to get used to his new position at the Combustibles Trust in Moscow. He is paranoid that soon he will be arrested along with many of his colleagues, but he decides he will fight. Kondratiev is the only accused man to escape arrest, partly because of his close friendship with the Chief. He tells the Chief the truth, and this miraculously saves his life. The Chief sends him to Siberia to work in the Gold Trust.

Yuvanov

Yuvanov is a Bulgarian who is working for the Russians in Spain. He is young, strong, and square and has an animally hostile face. His wavy, black hair is slicked back with pomade and his mustache is neatly trimmed. He would remind one of a lion tamer. Yuvanov has a discreet voice and velvety eyes that are unpleasant. He is responsible for creating false charges against Stefan Stern.

Stefan Stern

Stefan Stern is a revolutionary. He is a big man with green, slanted eyes, and his forehead is covered with messy, rust-brown hair. He meets Annie in Barcelona, and they live together in a pink house in Gracia and write papers, articles, and theses and meet regularly with comrades to discuss the progress of the Revolution in Spain. Stefan is around thirty-five years old at the time he is living in Spain. He is kidnapped and questioned and dies under shady circumstances on the boat where he is held captive.

Annie

Annie is Stefan Stern's lover. She is from the faraway north and has shed her bourgeois upbringing to become a permanent revolutionary. She is twenty-five years old when she meets Stefan in Barcelona. She has straight shoulders and a straight neck, and she carries her head high. Annie's eyebrows are delicate and almost invisible because they are so pale, and she has straw-blond hair and slate-gray eyes. She is a useful partner to Stefan, both emotionally and also because she is adept at typing and proofreading his work. Annie is petrified when she discovers Stefan has been kidnapped.

Fleischman

Fleischman is one of the examiners appointed to follow the most serious leads in the Tulayev case. He is a very fat, decorated man with flabby jowls, tired eyelids, thinning hair, and yellow blotches under his eyes. He has really started to age in recent years. Fleischman reads the unsigned confession of Kostia and burns it before filing away the Tulayev case and closing it for good.

Zvyeryeva

Zvyeryeva is one of the examiners appointed to follow the most serious leads in the Tulayev case. She has dyed hair and manicured nails. Face massages, creams, and makeup give Zvyeryeva an irritatingly young face of blurred features and indistinct wrinkles. Her eyes are hard and restless. She will use any tactics to get a confession.

Prosecutor Rachevsky

Prosecutor Rachevsky is the lead prosecutor in the Tulayev case. He pushes for results. Rachevsky looks unhealthy. He has a bulging forehead, gray bulbous chin, and a curving nose that is swollen at the base with dark, hairy nostrils. His skin is sanguine with blotchy areas of violet. He has large chestnut-brown eyes that look like opaque marbles. Rachevsky eventually goes mad under pressure and is relieved of his position as prosecutor and put in charge of tourism.

Ryzhik

Ryzhik is a deportee sent to the outer regions. His past is filled with prisons and deportations, and the authorities involved in the Tulayev case decide that he is the perfect old Trotskyist to add to the dossier of the case, even though he was nowhere near Moscow when Tulayev was killed. Ryzhik knows he will be executed, so he goes on a hunger strike and dies in prison before they are able to question him further.

Pakhomov

Pakhomov is the security officer in charge of guarding Ryzhik during his deportation. He has a wry sense of humor and develops a reserved affection for Ryzhik. His face always wears an expression of suspicious humility, as if he wants to cry but will not let himself. He has a rough, reddish complexion, russet eyes, and a flat, turned-up nose. He never quite smiles, as he has very bad teeth. He plays the accordion.

Tulayev

Comrade Tulayev is a stout man with a thick down-turning mustache and full cheeks. He is a clumsy man who has occasional bouts of drinking, and he is very loyal to the Party. Tulayev has a broad, flat nose. He is a high ranking member of the Central Committee, and his murder is the central event of the book. Tulayev is barely remembered by the general population after his death, but his death causes a chain reaction of arrests and accusations that affect the lives of hundreds of people.

The Chief

The Chief represents Stalin. He is the leader of the U.S.S.R., a tall, gaunt man with a bushy moustache and russet eyes. His portrait is shown all over the country, but he is seldom spotted in person. He smokes a short pipe and typically dresses in a coarse tunic without any identifying emblems. His face is very tense. The Chief admits to his close friends that he knows that officials constantly lie to him. He feels as though he stands on top of an edifice of lies.

Objects/Places

Ebony-Framed Portrait

Kostia is saving up for a much needed pair of boots, but instead he makes a frivolous purchase of an ebony-framed portrait of an unknown woman. The portrait is so tiny it fits easily in his large hands. He keeps it in his room, and it makes him happy to look at it. It's intoxicating for Kostia to gaze at the woman in the picture.

Colt Revolver

Romachkin buys this gun on the black market. It has a short barrel and a black cylinder. It's a forbidden weapon in the Soviet Union. Merely having it in one's possession is a crime. Romachkin buys it but doesn't have the nerve to use it. He gives it to Kostia, and Kostia uses it to kill Tulayev in a random act of violence.

The Wall Gazette

A propaganda paper put out by the Young Communist Bureau publishes a cartoon accusing a young girl named Maria of being kicked out of the party for having a venereal disease. This publication leads to her suicide, because she cannot live with the dishonor.

Moscow, U.S.S.R.

The original crime takes place in this city, which is also the headquarters of the government of the U.S.S.R. Much of the subsequent interrogation takes place within this city as well. It is described as a crumbling city where beautiful, old buildings are torn down to build skyscrapers, and a majority of the people live in poverty. It is also described as a painfully beautiful city. One of the most captivating descriptions of Moscow occurs on the night when Comrade Tulayev is shot.

Dossiers

A collection of papers that provide detailed information on a person. Thousands of dossiers are collected as evidence to arrest and condemn innocent people in the murder of Comrade Tulayev.

Yellow Envelope

Important and secret Party information always arrives in large, yellow envelopes that signify the urgency of the information.

Spain

The U.S.S.R. is helping revolutionaries fight a losing battle in a Civil War in Spain, but they are not supplying Spain with enough munitions and other support to get the job done. Kondratiev travels to Spain in disguise to find out how they are progressing, and he finds that they are fighting a losing battle that will soon end in defeat. Kondratiev returns to give his depressing report to the Chief. He is one of the few officials who tells the Chief the truth and does not end up in prison.

Black Car

Sleek, black cars are used to take away suspects in the plot to kill Comrade Tulayev one by one. They are a symbol of fear of the unknown and the authoritative, secretive power of the Party.

Half-Smoked Cigar

In Spain, when Annie is rushing around looking for Stefan (who has recently been abducted), she discovers a half-smoked cigar six feet from the entrance to their home. There have been no cigarettes available in the city for months, and no one who has recently been to their house smokes. The cigar signifies a wealthy, foreigner has been there. Annie immediately fears that the Russians have taken Stefan.

Pomade

Hair slicked back with pomade is an identifier for the slimier characters in this novel, such as Gordeyev and Yuvanov. Pomaded hair is associated with evil, corrupt men.

Ryzhik's Clock

A year after he is deported to the furthest regions, Ryzhik receives a clock in a secret gift package from a colony of deportees. He loves the clock, because its ticking nibbles away and devours the silence of time, which seems like an eternity. Without the clock, Ryzhik almost goes crazy, lost in pure, motionless time.

Paris, France

Xenia Popova is sent to Paris, France to learn about a new technique for printing on cloth. Chapter nine describes Xenia's stay in Paris. She is baffled, disgusted, and attracted by Paris. Xenia is interested in its history, but she is shocked by the opulence and age-old capitalist exploitation. She feels far superior to the people of France as a daughter of the people who have accomplished the Socialist revolution. It is in Paris that Xenia learns of Rublev's arrest and supposed confession. She asks everyone she knows to help her profess his innocence, but the Russian authorities find out and arrest her and bring her back to the U.S.S.R. to face charges of treason.

Themes

Sacrifice for a Greater Good

Most of the main characters who are accused of being part of the fictional plot to kill Comrade Tulayev are sacrificed in one way or another to the Party line. None of these individuals is without fault, but they are ultimately very loyal to the Party and have given much of their lives to build the machine. Yet, they are consumed by the very machine that they helped to build.

Some of the main characters go willingly, while others go kicking and screaming to their fate. There is a certain hopelessness in their cause. They are willing to give up their own lives for the greater good of their country, but will their deaths make a difference? Or are they contributing to the lies and corruption by admitting to crimes they did not commit?

Erchov and Ricciotti speak openly that they no longer believe in their Party. It has become too corrupt. But they do believe in their country, and they are willing to die to preserve its honor. Makeyev fights to maintain his innocence until he has used us his resistance and agrees to cease his resistance.

The Chief himself admits that he feels as though he is sitting on top of an edifice of lies. When asked if he is partly to blame, he responds that others would not want to be in his shoes. Human beings will take centuries to evolve, and he doesn't have centuries. He must work with what he has in the present. The question that Victor Serge presents here is does the sacrifice of good, honorable, and loyal comrades contribute to a greater good? Or does it hasten the demise of the Party and the end of the U.S.S.R.? Did they die in vain? The real killer is someone who acted on his own, not in the name of a larger cause. He is never caught in the case of Comrade Tulayev.

Honor versus Corruption

Many of the accused in this novel are struggling desperately to maintain their honor. Most of them have contributed much of their lives to building the U.S.S.R., but their contributions are wiped away the minute they are accused of being part of the plot to kill Comrade Tulayev. They know that the accusations are false, but there is nothing they can say or do to prove their innocence once their dossiers are in the hands of corrupt officials.

The examiners and the prosecutors have their own agenda. It is to create a political plot out of the death of Comrade Tulayev and find perpetrators that fit the profile. There is absolutely no evidence pointing toward the truth of this agenda, but they move forward regardless. Their corruption lies in the fact that they pull together bits of unrelated facts to condemn innocent people. The corruption goes all the way to the top—the Chief (Stalin) knows that he is being told countless lies, but he goes along with them if they fit into his grand plan for the Party and the country.

The government has become so corrupt that it is no longer interested in the truth. They need to find the conspirators in a plot to kill Tulayev—even though in reality there were no conspirators. It was a single man who made a rash decision to pull the trigger. Rumor and speculation take over, and corrupt officials create criminals out of thin air, with no real proof in the dossiers they have piled on their desks.

Ultimately, honorable men are convicted of plots that never existed. They maintain their honor by sacrificing themselves for their country, but ultimately corruption wins. The Case of Comrade Tulayev does nothing but spread the disease of lies and corruption throughout the government, weakening it rather than strengthening it. Corruption leads to fear and resentment among the people, and Victor Serge suggests that there will be dark days ahead.

Beauty in Tragedy

Victor Serge's book is a tragic depiction of the Stalinist Soviet Union, but Serge manages to bring out the beauty of the characters and of the country even among the atrocities that occur in the story. Humans are complex. No one is completely innocent, just as no one is completely guilty. Victor Serge brings out the good and bad aspects of each of his complex characters.

Stunning beauty of Spain is evident in the author's descriptions of a sundrenched land with pink and red houses. Even though Barcelona has been bombed, one has the sense that it is a magical city. The pink house where Stefan and Annie live is surrounded by flowers growing wildly mixed with weeds. It is a very romantic backdrop for his subsequent kidnapping.

In chapter seven, The Brink of Nothing, Ryzhik is exiled to a remote place he names the Brink of Nothing. He feels as though he is on the edge of the world. And yet, this land without landmarks is beautiful in its starkness.

The wintry scene in Moscow on a February night in the first chapter is one of the most gorgeous scenes in the book. Frost crystallizes on the snow, and it looks as if the entire city is sprinkled in diamonds. This enchanting place is the scene of Tulayev's murder.

Victor Serge takes every opportunity to place beauty and tragedy together. Maybe it is to point out that life is not black or white, good or bad. There are many facets to every situation.

Style

Point of View

The point of view in The Case of Comrade Tulayev is the third person omniscient. This point of view works very well as it gives the author the opportunity to delve into the minds and actions of a large list of main characters. This is a very complex novel, and it would not have nearly the depth and scope that it has if only one point of view was offered.

In using the third person omniscient, the reader is allowed to step into the thoughts of the accused, the prosecutors, and even the perpetrator of the crime. The third person omniscient also gives the author free license to describe in extremely beautiful detail the sweeping scenes of the Russian countryside, the starkness of the jail cells, and the blinding sunshine of Barcelona.

The author utilizes this point of view to its fullest to give very truthful and sometimes unflattering descriptions of characters. They are often described as if by a detached and very observant person. At other places in the book, because the point of view is omniscient, the reader gets glimpses of what characters think of each other—regarding their impressions of how another character appears or acts.

Setting

The Case of Comrade Tulayev is set mostly in the U.S.S.R. Many of the scenes take place in Moscow, with a few chapters that are set in outer reaches of the U.S.S.R. There is one chapter that is set in Barcelona, Spain and one chapter that takes place in Paris, France.

Victor Serge is a master of description, especially when it comes to the Russian countryside and the city of Moscow. He utilizes all of the senses to describe everything in detail, from vast expanses of land to cramped, stark jail cells.

Victor Serge's intricate descriptions place the reader within the scene and point out small but important details along the way, such as a clock or a yellow envelope. In this manner, Serge has full control over what the reader notices within a scene.

The author does not always set the scene before the action begins. He gives the reader clues throughout the chapter on the setting and its details. Sometimes these clues are provided when a character notices what is going on outside of a window or within a room. It is a very seamless presentation that gives the reader the feeling that they are part of the action and living within the story.

Language and Meaning

The language in The Case of Comrade Tulayev is highly descriptive. Victor Serge misses very few details in relating the characters and the settings. The stark reality of a situation is often set against painfully beautiful backdrops. The author is also unafraid to truthfully depict death and suffering within the novel.

Victor Serge's language is very active. He often personifies places in order to give movement to them. Windows yawn, snowflakes run. There is a constant movement in the scenery.

Victor Serge also incorporates long paragraphs of philosophy into this novel, usually in the form of thoughts or conversations of the main characters. These extensive passages bring out Serge's own views on the U.S.S.R., Socialism, Stalin, corruption, and the truth.

The author also uses dialogue to reveal relationships between characters and to exemplify strategies that individuals use against one another to get what they want. The interrogation scenes in particular are played out like chess games of dialogue. Also, the positive and negative sides of relationships of main characters to their wives are very revealing through dialogue.

Structure

The structure of the book is circular. It begins and ends with the protagonist, Kostia, the one who murders Comrade Tulayev and sets all of the subsequent action into motion. Chapter one, Comets are Born at Night, sets the scene in Moscow and gives the reader a taste of what citizens deal with every day in Moscow at this time. Chapter one is also extremely important, because it is where the crime occurs that sets of all subsequent action.

In chapters two through nine, separate stories unfold of characters who are caught up in the case of Tulayev. Some of them are wrongly accused and imprisoned; others are working diligently to come up with a political plot to explain the murder and criminals to fit the crime; and the Chief tries to make a decision that is right for his country. No one is safe from being accused, and there is much corruption and little truth in the case.

Chapter ten returns to Kostia, the man who acted alone in committing the crime. He is tortured by guilt after he finds out that three men were executed for a crime he committed. He sends an unsigned confession to the Committee. A member of the Committee burns the confession and closes the case.

Within this broad circular structure, Victor Serge uses a very organized format of introducing each one of the main characters. The main suspects are introduced one by one, and Serge offers a very detailed account of their lives up until they are arrested. Then, Serge circles back in later chapters to explain what happens to these characters

after they are arrested. Three of them are executed, one dies of hunger in prison, and only one escapes prison all together. The reader finds out in the final chapter that Kostia, the actual killer, remains free, even though he confesses in an anonymous letter to the Committee.

Quotes

"Romachkin was terrified by his twofold discovery—that he thought, and that the papers lied."
Chap. 1, p. 6

"Twenty-two people lived in the six rooms and the windowless nook at the back: twenty-two people, all clearly recognizable by the most furtive sounds they made in the stillness of night."
Chap. 1, p. 13

"Erchov felt the sarcasm in the back of his neck, the place where the executioner's bullet lodges."
Chap. 2, p. 37

"Erchov firmly shook a slimy hand, saw Popov to the door, shut the door, and stood helplessly in the center of his office. Nothing here was his any longer. A few minutes of hypocritical conversation had been enough to remove him from the controls."
Chap. 2, p. 58

"She kept down her joy at having him back, as a moment earlier she had kept down her fear that he would not come back. It would always be like that." The Case of Comrade Tulayev, Chapter 3, page 69.

"None of us any longer thought alone or acted alone: we acted, we thought, together, and always in the direction of the aspirations of innumerable masses, behind whom we felt the presence, the burning aspiration, of other yet greater masses—Proletarians of all countries, unite!"
Chap. 3, . 88

"His name would be on maps, among the blue curves of rivers, the green blotches of forest, the crosshatched hills, the sinuous black railroad line. For he had faith in himself as he had faith in the triumph of Socialism—and doubtless it was the same faith."
Chap. 4, p. 100

"Fields lay fallow, cattle disappeared, people ate the oil cake intended for the stock, there was no more sugar or gasoline, leather or shoes, cloth or clothes, everywhere there was hunger on impenetrable white faces, everywhere pilfering, collusion, sickness; in vain did Security decimate the bureaus of animal husbandry, agriculture, transport, food control, sugar production, distribution . . . The C.C. recommended raising rabbits."
Chap. 4, p. 111

"Men like myself have to have hearts of stone. We build on corpses, but we build."
Spoken by Makeyev. Chap. 4, p. 117

"THEY SHALL NOT GET THROUGH—NO PASARAN!—but we, shall we get through the week? Shall we get through the winter? Get through, get on. Only the dead Sleep sound in bed."
Chap. 5, p. 143

"The Chief waited like an impartial judge or an indifferent criminal. Impersonal, as real as things."
Chap. 5, p. 166

"His comrade's voice came to him from very far away. There were icy distances between them, in which dark planets revolved slowly . . . There was nothing between them except a mahogany table, empty tea glasses, an empty carafe of vodka, five feet of dusty carpet."
Chap. 6, p. 190

"I will admit to you that, at bottom, I no longer believe in the Party, but I believe in the country . . . This world belongs to us, we belong to it, even to the point of absurdity and abomination . . . But it is all neither so absurd nor so abominable as it seems at first sight."
Spoken by Ricciotti, Chap. 6, p. 189

"Ryzhik felt his sadness return, the sadness which was the texture of his life and which he despised."
Chap. 7, p. 226

"Ryzhik portioned out some of his dry bread and divided two herrings into seventeen pieces. He could hear the children's mouths salivating."
Chap. 7, p. 230

"Popov could think of nothing more to say. He put on his falsest smile of cordiality, his face was never grayer, his soul never shabbier."
Chap. 8, p. 268

"A physical happiness grew in him, but his mind did not share it."
Chap. 8, p. 288

"It was a minute in a peaceful universe, where people lived without discussing Plan quotas, without fearing purges, without devoting themselves to the future, without considering the problems of Socialism."
Chap. 9, p. 305

"Revolutions devour their children—we French have learned that only too well."
Spoken by Passereau, Chap. 9, p. 311

"It takes a great deal of fertilizer to feed exhausted soil. Who knows how many more men must be executed to feed the soil of Russia?"
Chap. 10, p. 346

Topics for Discussion

Is Kostia the hero of this novel? Why or why not?

Which of the accused to you believe acted the most honorably? Why?

How does suspicion play a key role in this novel?

Describe the different interrogation techniques used in this novel. Which were the most effective?

Does truth make an appearance in this novel? If so, where?

What is the role of the Chief in the overall storyline?

Why did the author name chapter six "Every Man Has His Own Way of Drowning"?

What did author Victor Serge mean when he said that the novelist who writes fiction is after "a richer and more general truth than the truth of observation"?