

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

That man sitting second from the window, the one with his clothes all creased; who'd think that he's an American Don't tell me! Surely Americans don't travel in slow trains; they go with the express, and even then it's not fast enough for them, the trains are quicker in America they say, with much bigger carriages, and a white-coated waiter brings you iced water and ice-creams, don't you know? Hello, boy, he shouts, fetch me some beer, bring a glass for everyone in the carriage, even if it costs five dollars, damn it! Good Lord! That's life in America, you know: it's no use trying to tell you.

The second one from the window dozed with his mouth open, all sweaty and tired, and his head hung down as if he were lifeless. Oh, God, oh, God, it's already eleven, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen days; for fifteen days and nights sitting on my box, sleeping on the floor, or on a bench, sticky with sweat, stupefied, and deafened with the rattle of the machines; this is the fifteenth day; if only I could stretch my legs, put a bundle of hay under my head and sleep, sleep, sleep ...

The fat Jewess by the window squeezed herself gingerly into the corner. That's it, at the end he'll go off, and fall on me like a sack; who knows what's wrong with him—looks as if he's rolled on the ground in his clothes, or something; you seem a bit queer to me, I should say, I should like to move right away; oh, God, if only the train would stop! And the man second from the window nodded, bent forward, and woke with a jerk.

"It's so hot," said the little old man, looking like a hawker, cautiously beginning a conversation. "Where are you going to?"

"To Kriva," the man got out with an effort.

"To Kriva," repeated the hawker professionally and graciously.

"And have you come far, a long way?"

The man second from the window made no reply, he only wiped his moist forehead with his grimy fist, and felt faint with weakness and giddiness. The hawker gave an offended snort and turned back towards the window. The other hadn't the heart to look through the window, he fixed his eyes on the filth on the floor and sat waiting for them to ask him again. And then he would tell them. A long way. All the way from America, sir. What do you say, all the way from America? And so you are coming all this distance for a visit? No, I'm going home. To Kriva, I have a wife there, and a little girl; she's called Hafia. She was three years old when I went away. So that's it, from

America! And how long were you there? Eight years. It's eight years now. And all the time I had a job in one place: as a miner. In Johnstown. I had a mate there; Michal Bobok was his name. Michal Bobok from Talamas. It killed him; that was five years ago. Since then I've had no one to talk to—I ask you, how was I to make myself understood? Oh, Bobok, he learned the lingo; but you know, when a chap has a wife, he thinks how he'll tell her one thing after another, and you can't do that in a strange tongue. She's called Polana.

And how could you do your job there when you couldn't make yourself understood? Well, like this: they just said, Hello, Hordubal, and they showed me my job. I earned as much as seven dollars a day, sir, seven. But living's dear in America, sir. You can't live even on two dollars a day—five dollars a week for bed. And then the gentleman opposite says: But then, Mr. Hordubal, you must have saved a nice tidy bit! Oh, yes, you could save. But I sent it home to my wife—did I tell you that she's called Polana? Every month, sir, fifty, sixty, and sometimes ninety dollars. I could do that while Bobok was alive, because he knew how to write. A clever man, that Bobok was, but he got killed five years ago; some wooden beams fell on him. Then I couldn't send any more money home, and I put it in a bank. Over three thousand dollars, I tell you, sir, and they stole it from me. But that's impossible, Mr. Hordubal! What did you say? Yes, sir, over three

thousand dollars. And you didn't prosecute them? Now I ask you, how could I prosecute them? Our foreman took me to some kind of a lawyer; he patted my shoulder. O.K., O.K., but you must pay in advance; and the foreman told him he was a swine and pushed me down the stairs again. It's like that in America, no use talking. Jesus Christ, Mr. Hordubal, three thousand dollars! That's a big sum of money, it's a whole fortune, God in Heaven, what bad luck! Three thousand dollars, how much is that in our money?

Juraj Hordubal felt a deep satisfaction: You'd all turn and look at me, all you people here, if I began to tell you; people would rush from all over the train to look at a man who had three thousand dollars stolen in America. Yessir, that's me. Juraj Hordubal raised his eyes and looked round at the people; the fat Jewess pressed herself into the corner, the hawker seemed to be offended, and looked out of the window, working his jaws, and an old woman with a basket on her lap eyed Hordubal as if she disagreed with something.

Juraj Hordubal closed up again. All right then, it's all the same, I needn't worry about you; for five years I've not spoken to a soul, and I managed that. And so, Mr. Hordubal, you're coming back from America without a cent? Oh, no, I had a good job, but I didn't put my money in the bank again, you bet! In a box, sir, and the key under my shirt, that's how it was. Seven hundred dollars I'm

taking home. Well, sir, I would have stayed there, but I lost my job. After eight years, sir. Locked out, sir. Too much coal, or something. From our pit six hundred were given leave, sir. And everywhere and everywhere there was nothing but people being sent away. No job for a man anywhere. That's why I'm coming back. Going home, you know. To Kriva. I have a wife there and some land. And Hafia, she was three then. I have seven hundred dollars under my shirt, and once more I shall begin to farm, or I shall work in a factory. Or fell trees.

And then, Mr. Hordubal, weren't you lonely without your wife and child? Lonely? My God! But I ask you, I sent them money, and I kept thinking, this will buy a cow, this an acre of land, this something for Polana, but she'll know herself what to buy. Every dollar was for something. And the money in the bank, that was enough for a herd of cows. Yess'r, and they pinched it from me. And did she ever write to you, your wife? She didn't. She can't write. And did you write to her? No, sir, can't write, sir. Ever since that Michal Bobok died I haven't sent her anything. I only put the money by. But at least you telegraphed to her that you were coming? What for, why, why waste money on that? It would give her a turn if she got a telegram, but she won't get it from me. Ha, ha, what do you think! Perhaps she thinks you're dead, Mr. Hordubal; don't you think if she hasn't heard a word from you for so many years—? Dead? A chap like me, dead! Juraj Hordubal

glanced at his knotted fists. A fellow like that, what an idea! Polana is sensible, she knows that I'm coming back. After all, we're all mortal; what if Polana is no longer alive? Shut up, sir; she was twenty-three when I went and strong, sir, strong as a horse—you don't know Polana; with that money, with those dollars I kept sending her, with those she wouldn't be alive? No, thank you.

The hawker by the window scowled and mopped his brow with a blue handkerchief. Perhaps he'll say again: It's so hot. Hot, sir! You call this hot? You ought to be on the lower deck, sir; or below in the shaft for anthracite. They put niggers down there, but I stood it, yess'r. For seven dollars. Hello, Hordubal! Hello, you niggahs! Yes, sir, a man can stand a lot. Not horses. They couldn't send any more horses down below to haul the trucks. Too hot, sir. Or the lower deck on the boat. ... A fellow can stand a lot if only he can make himself understood. They want something from you, you don't know what; and they shout, get into a temper, shrug their shoulders. Now I ask you, how could I find out in Hamburg how to get to Kríva? They can shout, but I can't. To go to America's nothing; someone puts you on the boat, someone waits for you there—but back, sir, nobody will help you. No, sir. It's a hard job to get home, sir.

And Juraj Hordubal nodded his head, then it nodded by itself, heavily and listlessly, and Juraj fell asleep. The fat Jewess by the window turned up her nose; the old woman

with the basket on her lap and the offended hawker glanced
at each other knowingly: that's what people are like now:
like cattle——