"God sees the truth, but bides his time."

Once upon a time there lived in the city of Vladimir a young tradesman named Aksenof. He had two shops and a house.

Aksenof had a ruddy complexion and curly hair; he was a very jolly fellow and a good singer. When he was young he used to drink too much, and when he was tipsy he was turbulent; but after his marriage he ceased drinking, and only occasionally had a spree.

1. Vladimir (vla dē’ mir’) is a Russian city east of Moscow.

Vocabulary

- turbulent (tur’ byə lənt) adj. agitated; unruly
One summer Aksenof was going to Nižhnï² to the great Fair. As he was about to bid his family good-bye, his wife said to him:

“Ivan Dmitrievitch, do not start today; I dreamed that some misfortune befell you.”

Aksenof laughed at her, and said, “Are you still afraid that I shall go on a spree at the Fair?”

His wife said, “I myself know not what I am afraid of, but I had such a bad dream; you seemed to be coming home from town, and you took off your hat, and I looked, and your head was all gray.”

Aksenof laughed. “That means good luck. See, I am going now. I will bring you some rich remembrances.”

And he bade his family farewell and set off. When he had gone half his journey, he fell in with a tradesman who was an acquaintance of his, and the two stopped at the same tavern for the night. They took tea together, and went to sleep in two adjoining rooms.

Aksenof did not care to sleep long; he awoke in the middle of the night, and in order that he might get a good start while it was cool, he aroused his driver and bade him harness up, went down into the smoky hut, settled his account with the landlord, and started on his way.

After he had driven forty versts,³ he again stopped to get something to eat; he rested in the vestibule of the inn, and when it was noon, he went to the doorstep and ordered the samovar to get ready; then he took out his guitar and began to play.

Suddenly a troïka⁴ with a bell dashed up to the inn, and from the equipage⁵ leaped an official with two soldiers; he came directly up to Aksenof, and asked, “Who are you? Where did you come from?”

Aksenof answered without hesitation and asked him if he would not have a glass of tea with him.

But the official kept on with his questions: “Where did you spend last night? Were you alone or with a merchant? Have you seen the merchant this morning? Why did you leave so early this morning?”

Aksenof wondered why he was questioned so closely; but he told everything just as it was, and asked, “Why do you put so many questions to me? I am not a thief or a murderer. I am on my own business; there is nothing to question me about.”

Then the official called up the soldiers, and said, “I am the police inspector, and I have made these inquiries of you because the merchant with whom you spent last night has been stabbed. Show me your things, and you men search him.”

They went into the tavern, brought in the trunk and bag, and began to open and search them. Suddenly the police inspector pulled out from the bag a knife, and demanded, “Whose knife is this?”

Aksenof looked, and saw a knife covered with blood taken from his bag, and he was frightened.

“And whose blood is that on the knife?”

Aksenof tried to answer, but he could not articulate his words:

2. Nižhnï Novgorod (nižh’ nô vô go ro’t) is a city in western Russia famous for its trade fairs.
3. Versts are Russian units of linear measure. One verst equals about two-thirds of a mile.
4. A troïka (tro’ ka) is a Russian carriage drawn by three horses lined up side-by-side.
5. Equipage (ek’ wa pij) means “horse-drawn carriage.”

**Vocabulary**

articulate (ar tık’ ya lát’) v. to pronounce distinct syllables and words; to express effectively
“I—don’t—know—I—that knife—it is—not mine.”

Then the police inspector said, “This morning the merchant was found stabbed to death in his bed. No one except you could have done it. The tavern was locked on the inside, and there was no one in the tavern except yourself. And here is the bloody knife in your bag, and your guilt is evident in your face. Tell me how you killed him and how much money you took from him.”

Aksenof swore that he had not done it, that he had not seen the merchant after he had drunk tea with him, that the only money that he had with him—eight thousand rubles—was his own, and that the knife was not his.

But his voice trembled, his face was pale, and he was all quivering with fright, like a guilty person.

The police inspector called the soldiers, commanded them to bind Aksenof, and take him to the wagon.

When they took him to the wagon with his feet tied, Aksenof crossed himself and burst into tears.

They confiscated Aksenof’s things and his money, and took him to the next city, and threw him into prison.

They sent to Vladimir to make inquiries about Aksenof’s character, and all the merchants and citizens of Vladimir declared that Aksenof, when he was young, used to drink and was wild, but that now he was a worthy man. Then he was brought up for judgment. He was sentenced for having killed the merchant and for having robbed him of twenty thousand rubles.

Aksenof’s wife was dumfounded by the event and did not know what to think. Her children were still small, and there was one at the breast. She took them all with her and journeyed to the city where her husband was imprisoned.

At first they would not grant her admittance, but afterward she got permission from the nachalniks and was taken to her husband.

When she saw him in his prison garb, in chains, together with murderers, she fell to the floor, and it was a long time before she recovered from her swoon. Then she placed her children around her, sat down amid them, and began to tell him about their domestic affairs and to ask him about everything that had happened to him.

He told her the whole story.

She asked, “What is to be done now?”

He said, “We must petition the Tsar. It is impossible that an innocent man should be condemned.”

The wife said she had already sent in a petition to the Tsar, but that the petition had not been granted. Aksenof said nothing, but was evidently very much downcast.

Then his wife said, “You see the dream I had, when I dreamed that you had become grayheaded, meant something, after all. Already your hair has begun to turn gray with trouble. You ought to have stayed at home that time.”

And she began to tear her hair, and she said, “Vanya, my dearest husband, tell your wife the truth: Did you commit that crime?”

Aksenof said, “So you, too, have no faith in me!” And he wrung his hands and wept.

Then a soldier came and said that it was time for the wife and children to go. And Aksenof for the last time bade his family farewell.

When his wife was gone, Aksenof began to think over all that they had said. When he remembered that his wife had also distrusted him, and had asked him if he had murdered the merchant, he said to himself, “It is evident that no one but God can know the truth of

Vocabulary

confiscate (kon’ fis kär’) v. to seize by authority

6. Nachalniks (nä chäl’nëks) means “chiefs.”
the matter, and He is the only one to ask for mercy, and He is the only one from whom to expect it.”

And from that time Aksenof ceased to send in petitions, ceased to hope, and only prayed to God. Aksenof was sentenced to be knotted, and then to exile with hard labor. And so it was done.

He was flogged with the knout, and then, when the wounds from the knout were healed, he was sent with other exiles to Siberia.

Aksenof lived twenty-six years in the mines. The hair on his head had become white as snow, and his beard had grown long, thin, and gray. All his gaiety had vanished. He was bent, his gait was slow, he spoke little, he never laughed, and he spent much of his time in prayer.

Aksenof had learned while in prison to make boots, and with the money that he earned he bought the “Book of Martyrs,” and used to read it when it was light enough in prison, and on holidays he would go to the prison church, read the Gospels, and sing in the choir, for his voice was still strong and good.

The authorities liked Aksenof for his submissiveness, and his prison associates respected him and called him “Grandfather” and the “man of God.” Whenever they had petitions to be presented, Aksenof was always chosen to carry them to the authorities; and when quarrels arose among the prisoners, they always came to Aksenof as umpire.

Aksenof never received any letters from home, and he knew not whether his wife and children were alive.

One time some new convicts came to the prison. In the evening all the old convicts gathered around the newcomers, and began to ply them with questions as to the cities or villages from which this one or that one had come, and what their crimes were.

At this time Aksenof also was sitting on his bunk, near the strangers, and, with bowed head, was listening to what was said.

One of the new convicts was a tall, healthy-looking old man of sixty years, with a close-cropped gray beard. He was telling why he had been arrested. He said:

“And so, brothers, I was sent here for nothing. I unharnessed a horse from a postboy's sledge, and they caught me with it and insisted that I was stealing it. But I said, 'I only wanted to go a little faster, so I whipped up the horse. And besides, the driver was a friend of mine. It's all right,' I said. 'No,' they said; 'you were stealing it.' But they did not know what and where I had stolen. I have done things which long ago would have sent me here, but I was not found out; and now they have sent me here without any justice in it. But what's the use of grumbling? I have been in Siberia before. They did not keep me here very long, though. . . .”

“Where did you come from?” asked one of the convicts.

“Well, we came from the city of Vladimir; we are citizens of that place. My name is Makar, and my father's name was Semyon.”

---

8. The “Book of Martyrs” by John Foxe (1516–1583) detailed the martyrdom (death of one who will not deny his or her beliefs) of English Protestants from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.

**Vocabulary**

- **gait** (gát) n. a manner of moving on foot
- **submissiveness** (sub mis' ɪv nes) n. willingness to yield to authority; obedience

394  UNIT 2
Aksenof raised his head and asked:

“Tell me, Semyonitch, have you ever heard of the Aksenofs, merchants in Vladimir city? Are they alive?”

“Indeed, I have heard of them! They are rich merchants, though their father is in Siberia. It seems he was just like any of the rest of us sinners. And now tell me, Grandfather, what were you sent here for?”

Aksenof did not like to speak of his misfortune; he sighed, and said:

“Twenty-six years ago I was condemned to hard labor on account of my sins.”

Makar Semyonof said:

“But what was your crime?”

Aksenof replied: “So I must have deserved this.”

But he would not give any further particulars; the other convicts, however, related why Aksenof had been sent to Siberia. They told how on the road someone had killed a merchant, and put the knife into Aksenof’s luggage, and how he had been unjustly punished for this.

When Makar heard this, he glanced at Aksenof, slapped himself on the knees, and said:

“Well, now, this is wonderful! This is really wonderful! You have been growing old, Grandfather!”

They began to ask him what he thought was wonderful, and where he had seen Aksenof. But Makar did not answer; he only repeated:

“A miracle, boys! How wonderful that we should meet again here!”

And when he said these words, it came over Aksenof that perhaps this man might know who had killed the merchant. And he said:

“Did you ever hear of that crime, Semyonitch, or did you ever see me before?”

“Of course I heard of it! The country was full of it. But it happened a long time ago. And I have forgotten what I heard,” said Makar.

“Perhaps you heard who killed the merchant?” asked Aksenof.

Makar laughed, and said:

“Why, of course the man who had the knife in his bag killed him. It would have been impossible for anyone to put the knife in your things and not have been caught doing it. For how could the knife have been in your bag? Was it not standing close by your head? And you would have heard it, wouldn’t you?”

As soon as Aksenof heard these words, he felt convinced that this was the very man who had killed the tradesman.

He stood up and walked away. All that night he was unable to sleep. Deep melancholy came upon him, and he began to call back the past in his imagination.

He imagined his wife as she had been when for the last time she had accompanied him to the Fair. She seemed to stand before him exactly as if she were alive, and he saw her face and her eyes, and he seemed to hear her words and her laugh.

Then his imagination brought up his children before him; one a boy in a little fur coat, and the other on his mother’s breast.

And he imagined himself as he was at that time, young and happy. He remembered how he had sat on the steps of the tavern when they arrested him, and how his soul was full of joy at that time.

And he remembered the place of execution where they had flogged him, and the executioner, and the people standing around, and the chains and the convicts, and all his twenty-six years of prison life, and he remembered his old age. And such melancholy came upon Aksenof that he was tempted to put an end to himself.

“And all on account of this criminal!” said Aksenof to himself.

And then he began to feel such anger against Makar Semyonof that he almost lost himself, and was crazy with desire to pay off the load of vengeance. He repeated prayers all night, but
could not recover his calm. When day came, he walked by Makar and did not look at him.

Thus passed two weeks. At night Aksenof was not able to sleep, and such melancholy had come over him that he did not know what to do.

One time during the night, as he happened to be passing through the prison, he saw that the soil was disturbed under one of the bunks. He stopped to examine it. Suddenly Makar crept from under the bunk and looked at Aksenof with a startled face.

Aksenof was about to pass on so as not to see him, but Makar seized his arm, and told him how he had been digging a passage under the wall, and how every day he carried the dirt out in his bootlegs and emptied it in the street when they went out to work. He said:

“If you only keep quiet, old man, I will get you out too. But if you tell on me, they will flog me; but afterward I will make it hot for you. I will kill you.”

When Aksenof saw the man who had injured him, he trembled all over with rage, twitched away his arm, and said, “I have no reason to make my escape, and to kill me would do no harm; you killed me long ago. But as to telling on you or not, I shall do as God sees fit to have me.”

On the next day, when they took the convicts out to work, the soldiers discovered where Makar had been digging in the ground; they began to make a search and found the hole. The chief came into the prison and asked everyone, “Who was digging that hole?”

All denied it. Those who knew did not name Makar, because they were aware that he would be flogged half to death for such an attempt.
Then the chief came to Aksenof. He knew that Aksenof was a truthful man, and he said: “Old man, you are truthful; tell me before God who did this.”

Makar was standing near, in great excitement, and he looked at the nachalnik, but he dared not look at Aksenof.

Aksenof’s hands and lips trembled, and it was some time before he could speak a word. He said to himself, “If I shield him—but why should I forgive him when he has been my ruin? Let him suffer for my sufferings! But shall I tell on him? They will surely flog him. But what difference does it make what I think of him? Will it be any the easier for me?”

Once more the chief demanded:
“Well, old man, tell the truth! Who dug the hole?”

Aksenof glanced at Makar and then said:
“I cannot tell, your Honor. God does not bid me tell. I will not tell. Do with me as you please; I am in your power.”

In spite of all the chief’s efforts, Aksenof would say nothing more. And so they failed to find out who dug the hole.

On the next night as Aksenof was lying on his bunk and almost asleep, he heard someone come along and sit down at his feet.

He peered through the darkness and saw that it was Makar.

Aksenof asked:
“What do you wish of me? What are you doing here?”

Makar remained silent. Aksenof arose and said:
“What do you want? Go away, or else I will call the guard.”

Makar went up close to Aksenof and said in a whisper:
“Ivan Dmitrivitch, forgive me!”

Aksenof said: “What have I to forgive you?”
“I killed the merchant and put the knife in your bag. And I was going to kill you too, but there was a noise in the yard; I thrust the knife in your bag and slipped out of the window.”

Aksenof said nothing, and he did not know what to say. Makar got down from the bunk, knelt on the ground, and said:
“Ivan Dmitrivitch, forgive me, forgive me for God’s sake. I will confess that I killed the merchant—they will pardon you. You will be able to go home.”

Aksenof said:
“It is easy for you to say that, but how could I endure it? Where should I go now? My wife is dead! My children have forgotten me. I have nowhere to go.”

Makar did not rise; he beat his head on the ground and said:
“Ivan Dmitrivitch, forgive me! When they flogged me with the knout, it was easier to bear than it is now to look at you. And you had pity on me after all this—you did not tell on me. Forgive me, for Christ’s sake! Forgive me, though I am a cursed villain!”

And the man began to sob.

When Aksenof heard Makar Semyonof sobbing, he himself burst into tears and said:
“God will forgive you; maybe I am a hundred times worse than you are!”

And suddenly he felt a wonderful peace in his soul. And he ceased to mourn for his home and had no desire to leave the prison but only thought of his last hour.

Makar would not listen to Aksenof and confessed his crime.

When they came to let Aksenof go home, he was dead.