

# Avi

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## **Translator's Preface**

“Avi” is a book written by my grandfather which the following is my translation of from its original language Russian. The main character of the book is named Avi, whose story follows my grandfather's life as he grew up and lived in the Soviet Union from the 40's to early 90s. Nevertheless, whenever I ask my grandfather if this should be considered his autobiography, his response is that one should rather see it as a story that's simply faithfully based on his life.

The reason I decided to translate the book in the first place is very simple: I simply wanted to know more about my grandfather, what life was like in the Soviet Union, and more vaguely where I come from. I first came aware of the book when I entered college, but it was only until graduate school that I realized that I had an important story to learn and the perfect book and person to learn it from. Hence, I started the practice of calling my grandfather every morning and read with him a page a day out of his book. Beyond the quality time I got to spend with him this way, his help was irreplaceable for two reasons.

One: his book is weirdly enough written in poetry form. As a result, its Russian is far harder than my home-schooled Russian could handle. I believe I needed him to define almost 1 out of 15 words that we encountered, including phrases and sayings unique to Russian. The second reason is that: I discovered that it's actually difficult to read an account of a life immersed in a way of living that's so drastically different from ours. Sitting in my roomy housing with hot runny water, easy to obtain groceries, career opportunities, cars, cheap clothing, etc. it's hard to imagine a life where either such things didn't exist or were hard to get. My grandfather's continuous reminders to "value what I have" is what set a vivid image in my head of what his life was like growing up. Don't get me wrong: his life was also full of joy and many adventures including El Brus, science, skis under starry nights, love, and so on.

While drafting my translation, I kept notes explaining many parts of the book including some that my grandfather was comfortable with sharing that indicate where the story deviates from his life. Their primary purpose is to explain particular points of the story to those who aren't acquainted with some of the historical and cultural features of the setting. They appear after every chapter and I hope that the

reader finds them useful and perks their curiosity as it did mine to learn more about what life was like at such a time and place.

One more thing: I find it interesting that the book is written in first person coming from a friend of Avi's. Why did my grandfather do that? Did he simply want to reflect on his own life from an outside point of view, or is there something else. Furthermore: I've asked my grandfather why he called the main character "Avi?" His response is always a secretive chuckle. I guess there's more to the name than simple chance, perhaps to remain in untold history to provide joy to visiting memories...

**I'm engaged to my own words,  
And maybe even you,  
Are also starting a new life,  
To cast a spell with lines of text.**

**I will my thoughts to sing in them,  
For its form to take its shape,  
And to carry both rhyme and rhythm,  
With courage and sagacious wisdom.**

**Firm are the nets of nonrecognition,  
Though my mind is incorruptible and nonconforming,  
I respectfully hear out common wisdom,  
But I never abandon my own thoughts:**

**Everything that my conscious has to offer,  
I entrust upon you sheet of paper,  
On it my faithful piece of graphite,  
With courage will perform a hymn.**

## Dedication

*I stumbled upon an old notebook,  
And memories began to flow.  
Once, with diligence, I'd write what had happened,  
But life, being rich in events,  
Distracted me away from those reflections,  
To the common tasks of every day.*

*Free to roam, upon the hills,  
A single thought is strolling, unrestricted,  
Sliding upon the days of old,  
And why? I myself don't know.  
But the shadows of the past are always with me,  
Restless in their nature,  
And until I write them down,  
Respite I will not find.*

*Prose isn't as comfortable to me as poetry,  
Ah, you would say: "you're just boasting,"  
Maybe gloating even, just a bit.  
Though poetry is strolling on its own, as I can see from a  
distance,  
This way I won't upset the attractive prose,  
She won't let herself be forgotten:*

*A most amazing and restless dame,  
And a pedagogue that teaches firmly,  
And unwaveringly observes the rules of etiquette...  
Not like the troublesome and romantic poet:  
His unrestricted lines,  
Move freely all around, and sometimes,  
He inserts a new idea somewhere,  
And never asks for forgiveness.*

*My dear reader, with respect,  
And with a little worry from within,  
I place my work in your hands to judge,  
I acknowledge your authority,  
One doesn't have to be a fortune teller,  
In order to, almost as if by chance,  
Recognize a famous character.  
Ah, there is no secret in all of this,  
And don't judge this work to harshly,  
For you're acquainted with all of this...  
But witness how a past poet wrote this down! ?*

*I did not write what follows,  
It was dictated to me by destiny herself.*

Sunset, sunset, you're alone,  
With this evening, let me tell you,  
A story of an old friend of mine,  
Which I often think about in my time of leisure.  
I share everything and so,  
Shh: don't tell anyone. 😊  
Maybe, some gold you'll share  
With my grandson someday,  
That I let sparkle in my lines.  
Unexpected thoughts play in my mind,  
At times piercing, though maybe a little strange.  
With a bit of nervousness my poem forms,  
It's all coming back to me from afar,  
Not erased from my memory before the time.

Paper guards my story now,  
With graphite lying by its side.

# Chapter 1

Distance falls on the quiet hills,  
And clouds bravely now form;  
They're preparing for their morning run,  
Carrying a greeting to the dry land below.  
Among all the mornings there is no better,  
And this one, without a doubt, is the best.  
Here I am walking among the hills,  
Oh, sleeping now would be such a sin.  
And with this heavenly morning,  
Comes to me the story of my youth.

Avi was born in a northern region,  
Where snowy blizzards bring frosted snow,  
Where leaden waves break the ocean,  
And thunder strikes upon its vastness.  
It's a land where the shining aurora  
Doesn't wake the endless night.  
The magic here is full of charm,  
And yet, filling fantasies to the brim,  
It doesn't break the lonely dullness,  
Occupied by fog and quiet stillness.

But does Avi remembers this:  
He was born at the end of a stingy summer,  
Recollecting the care of a kindly maid,  
And the gloominess of those winter days.  
At two years old his family set off for the Urals.  
The war, you see, with its dreadful might,  
Threw them far into the unimagined distance,  
With a quick and grim evacuation.  
There his mother saw her husband off to war,  
That seemed to last without an end.

His mother was left with all three kids,  
And great relief it seemed to be  
That produce cards were given out, at the factory where she  
worked.

Considering all her efforts, one wouldn't guess,  
That by cleverly adding to Avi's age,  
At a mere two years old  
Avi went to the daycare with his bigger sister,  
For they only took children starting from three.  
Avi clung to his sister's dress,  
As the daycare's sounds scared him so.

Avi remembers clearly to this day,  
How the children's screams took no break,  
With their endless "tararam."<sup>1</sup>  
For this reason, it isn't hard to understand  
Why he fell in love with books so much,  
And why he sat with them without end.  
He valued such times of thought,  
To which he devoted such attention.  
Lonely is a path as such,  
Which he followed for the many years ahead.

---

<sup>1</sup> "tararam" is an onomatopoeia here representing the constant chitter-chatter of the kids in the daycare.

Ah, the daily tasks flow by so quickly,  
We extinguish the flames of its endless void.  
We run because we fear ourselves,  
To be amongst the crowds that we love so much.  
We don't like to be left alone,  
Since we are not interesting to ourselves.  
But that's not at all for me,  
Despite that everyone's around me.  
The day-to-day create their own ball,  
To which attend both the old and young.

And now, my dear friend, back to Avi.  
Avi was tired of the noisy crowd,  
And as you'd know, he was alone,  
Sitting in one place, and often very still,  
While immersing himself in the realm of thought.  
No more a stranger in the universe of ideas,  
It seemed more real to him  
Than what he saw around him... without a doubt.  
And the enumerable ideas that filled his mind,  
Guided him to the fantasies of his dreams.

These times carry much discussion,  
But we'll let them go  
Since there are many sides that one can take.  
What will they allow us to forget?  
Our past joys, our past sorrows?  
We run from our lives without looking back,  
I pity such people, truthfully,  
Who play hide and seek with themselves like that...  
But the past is always with Avi,  
And hence, it's always with us as well.

Returning back to our story,  
Although contrary to my desires,  
I'll tell you of painful times,  
Of the long and grueling war,  
Of how our little Avi had to bear it all,  
Of those hungry years, with no hope in sight,  
Of what events he had to endure,  
And, of course, of the short moments of happiness that  
came to visit.

“All of this is ruled by fate,”  
Avi told me later many times.

A separate room, at last!  
Where there are walls, a roof,  
Such that one can shield themselves against the elements.  
But insulating against the cold, that's a little complicated,  
Since the fireplace was in poor condition.  
And obtaining coal was not so simple,  
And the winters lasted very long,  
Which were often both cold and damp.  
It was only in the evening public kitchen  
That people could find a little warmth sitting closer to the  
fire.

The discussions all continue: “When will the war finally  
end?”

It seemed to go on without an end.  
And Avi remembers a neighborhood girl named “Zoika,”  
That worked at the factory quiet often,  
Where teenagers resembled adults,  
And they'd work full shifts behind machinery.  
Oh, how it was all so tiring and not so simple,  
Alongside the hunger accompanying the frequent tears.  
They helped forge the motherland a victory...  
And their efforts weren't thrown into the Lethe River.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Lethe is the river of forgetfulness in Greek mythology.

How Avi remembers those evenings!  
As if just yesterday they took place:  
Zoika was sitting still, holding tight onto her own knees,  
While her mother, interrupting everybody, talked and  
talked nonstop.  
Her heart boiled as she went on about her husband,  
Is he alive in that terrible meatgrinder?  
Is he freezing in this frigid cold?  
Through tears she remembered all his jokes,  
Pouring words, not all of which were suitable for children,  
And then fell silent with a heavy air of grief.

While during all of this, the women peeled potatoes,  
As white roads would slither all around them,  
And while their skins peeled off like ribbons  
Light from a dim lamp reflected off of them.  
During all of this a gloomy silence stood,  
After which everyone would take their pots back into their  
rooms,  
While also carrying their sadness with them,  
And praying that the enemy's bullets  
Wouldn't hit their loved ones inadvertently,  
On a front so cruel and far.

In the morning, it's time for mom to go to work,  
And her children had to get up with her just as early.  
Dropping them off at the daycare, off to work she went,  
And at home there were new duties to take care of:  
The smallest child<sup>3</sup> was left with the elder grandfather,  
Who with difficulty lived through these times of war,  
His great age gave him no advantage.  
But fortunately, he was born of the stronger breed,  
And as such took Avi from the daycare,  
When the darker hours approached the evening.

But Avi wasn't so simple, no,  
He demanded that his elder grandfather  
Bring him at least some crust of bread.  
For he was hungry, since lunch time was so long ago:  
The soup was full of water, the buckwheat had no butter,  
And the compote wasn't sweet.  
However, a little later,  
Ms. Masha carried something home in her purse<sup>4</sup>...  
Who would dare to judge her?  
For she was widowed and had her own kids to take care of.

---

<sup>3</sup> The "smallest child" here refers to Avi's younger sister who is three years younger than him.

<sup>4</sup> Discussed in Chapter 1 Notes.

Ah, those years were hard:  
The elder grandfather didn't make it.  
"And so, just the four of us remained in that room,"  
Told me grieving Avi later.  
"The daycare was often closed on weekends,  
And we three children were left in that room all day,  
Since even on Sundays our mother would often work,  
Like that until the very evening... like birds inside a cage.  
At least there was a bucket in the corner and three plates,  
And three pieces of bread – all small and bland."

From outside the window, our friends are calling:  
"Open the window, jump out to us,  
For the ground is full of snow.  
We'll all have fun together,  
As we build a fort made of snow,  
And play until it's dark,  
Waging clever battles against each other!"  
And then they screamed: "All together!"  
That's how the kids tempted us outside,  
But we remembered mother's punishment and warning.

What did the children play about?  
The war of course; on this planet  
There was nothing more important.  
The visit of any soldier  
Felt like a celebration all around.  
Happy were those children  
Whose fathers came home to visit.  
But we had no such delight, for our father was fighting out  
at war.  
Avi pictured his own father with a sword,  
In a papakha<sup>5</sup> and a coat made of wool.

But everything has an end,  
The war was finally over: congratulations went all around,  
Along with rewards for all our fathers.  
But Avi stood deep in thought and silence,  
For he didn't remember his father at all.  
Nevertheless, impatience overtook him  
As he decorated with many shining tinsels,  
The dagger that he prepared for him as a gift.  
Even though it was made of wood,  
It shined like a real silver blade.

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<sup>5</sup> A type of headwear made of wool which is typically worn by men in the Caucasus.

But news from their father hasn't come,  
At least a message,  
Just a "hello" would be enough,  
For how could one live without any hope?!  
However, one evening,  
A military man came in in a service cap,  
With a backpack behind his shoulder...  
And suddenly with a scream,  
In tears Avi's mother threw herself into his arms:  
Alive and returned – what happiness!!

And Avi without delay  
Sat onto his father's knees,  
He looked over his medals,  
And listened to their melodious sound.  
"But where's your sword?" remembered Avi,  
"Did you really forget it at the front?"  
Everyone suddenly grew silent,  
"It just got dulled a bit in battle, it's in the shop being  
repaired."  
Everybody breathed easy again, and were happy with this  
little joke of his,  
Which they repeated time and time again.

## Chapter 1 Translator's Notes

- Avi was born in 1939 in the city of Murmansk. In 1941, Germans attacked and almost captured the city from Finnish territory which prompted the evacuation described at the beginning of the chapter. After they evacuated to a city in the Urals, Avi's mother worked as an engineer at a factory while Avi's father fought in the war. At first the living arrangements were that Avi, his two sisters, mother, and grandfather all lived together with another family. Later, as described on page 16, they were given a separate room to live in.
- On page 17 in the chapter it's mentioned that the women were peeling potatoes. Potatoes were in fact the main crop eaten in the Urals at the time.
- A curious phrase appears on page 18: "Ms. Masha carried something home in her purse." Ms. Masha worked at the day care and due to the shortage of food, she sometimes inconspicuously took food to take home and feed her kids.

## Chapter 2

In all corners of the country,  
Avi's father looked for a place to call their home.  
He looked for a big city that was cultured,  
Not too northern, nor too southern,  
And farther away from the western border.  
Then he remembered: a city next to a great river,  
Which he once visited in his youth.  
The city seemed cozy, even homey.  
And so very quickly, he bought a wooden house there...  
It all felt like an enchanted dream.

“Heat and dust, and the sun is burning,  
There we stand at an enormous gate  
While the movers bring everything in,  
‘What’s next, what’s next?’  
Our mother stands there, irritated and silent,  
She’s uncomfortable, and overheating,  
And our father looks concerned.  
We worry for him just a bit:  
For we’re not used to such weather,  
Since a desert surrounds us here, or something of that  
nature.”

But as we enter into the house, we see how cool it is and  
clean,  
We drink sour kvass with delightful greed.  
It seems, that not everything is really all that bad:  
“You’ll get used to it, and everything will be ok,  
On the fireplace, there’s a lot of room to sleep,  
Which will make the winters cozy.  
We’ll finally find peace in this home,  
Even though it might be hard at first...”  
Our father says, but our mother sits unspeaking,  
And so he starts again:

“The fireplace might be a little big,  
But at least there’s room to lie down on it in the winter,  
When it’s freezing, it will be great on it,  
We’re of course not used to this,  
And if you guys don’t like it,  
We can do a makeover,  
We can remove it, and in terms of sleep,  
We’re well accustomed to sleeping in beds,  
I know of one architect personally,  
To whom doing me a favor would be an honor.”

Then we saw a reimagined house:  
That shined with paint both white and blue,  
And instead of a Russian fireplace,  
A smaller one stood there burning every evening,  
Filled with firewood or coal,  
And one could stare at it for hours,  
How the flames dance all about,  
Jiggling and waving, like a flag.  
But eventually the cold overtakes the night,  
Until it becomes frigid and even damp.

Our father always dreamed about  
Having a house with a backyard,  
And that his relatives would live close by,  
And that they would often come by as guests,  
And thus life would have a lovely flow.  
No one would work too hard,  
And every member of the family could eat his fill...  
But none of this was essential,  
The fact that he was a Marxist was important,  
And by nature, an idealist.

Our Avi grew like everyone else:  
He played war, soccer, and chizhik.  
Like everyone, he ran barefoot upon the ground,  
But he never smoked in secret in the bushes.  
And didn't curse, even in thought  
Even though everyone around would swear.  
His thoughts were naively clean,  
He couldn't say a foul word out loud,  
Not because he was mute,  
But because he maintained a clean soul since birth.

Oh, how Avi wanted to go out and play:  
With the boys and their soccer ball in hand,  
Or to take part in the games of “chizhik,” “Lapta,”  
And “gorodki” along the dusty road,  
With bare feet maneuvering all around...  
Just outside the window stood the multitude of  
Arguments, laughter, and “tararam.”  
Life boiled wonderfully, and no one knew  
A different life... and those who did  
Hid it under their mask without a word.<sup>6</sup>

But stringent was the father’s warning:  
There’s time for work, and there’s time for play,  
“Until you’ve finished all your duties,  
Don’t even think about those games...”  
Avi was wise for his age,  
He worked hard and very well,  
He was hardworking, willful, and persistent,  
And thus completed his duties quickly,  
As he was strong, agile, and hot with energy.  
Oh well... his friends and their ball were going to have to  
wait!

---

<sup>6</sup> Mentioned in Chapter 2 notes.

First things first: the metallic reservoir  
In the garden needs to be full of water.  
With two buckets in his hand,  
He runs into the house with a smile.  
He travels many times to the water pump uphill.  
The buckets are full... time to go to the backyard again,  
Two blocks down, and with haste...  
Ah, at one point he lost count of how many steps he made.  
His hands would tire,  
And the water's weight increased its strain.

Avi was exhausted, but that's all right,  
At least the reservoirs are full.  
But time is rushing: faster, faster!  
The floors needed cleaning  
So that everything in the house was clean...  
What's after? Potatoes needed to be peeled.  
He took a pot and potatoes from the basement,  
And often not just few,  
For the whole family wanted to eat,  
And Avi was no exception.

Every day he would weed the flower garden,  
Looking carefully under every bush.  
If there was an open space, you could use a hoe,  
But careful! In the vegetable garden,  
You have to do it all by hand –  
So as not to wrinkle the plants' leaves.  
For a lot grew in that section –  
But then the produce ripened, and the flowers bloomed:  
Peas, strawberries, cucumbers,  
And tomatoes began to show their red.

Avi studied in the second shift,  
Often using the breaks to do his homework,  
For at home there was no time,  
And all of this when he was ten!  
He's got to eat and pack so quickly,  
In order to make it to class on time, even running.  
Packed everything: he's off to school,  
It was far, beyond the hill...  
He solved problems and he read,  
And didn't consider the load so tough.

Reader, I trust that it's clear to you  
That Avi was always first,  
He fantastically studied every year,  
And received excellent grades,  
Every single year that he was there.  
He was diligent, well-read, and very brave,  
And didn't get seduced into the darker nets,  
And always knew how to defend himself.  
Thanks to his mind and perseverance,  
He completed school with a golden medal.

Avi studied in a second-rate school,  
That stood upon a hilltop.  
The athletic building and the yard were big,  
And during the breaks the noise was so loud  
That it overpowered any sound of talk.  
Wait... someone's calling: he's made a weapon!  
Not a stick, but razor-sharp sword!  
It's almost as if the trumpets are singing:  
The duel of the sticks had just begun,  
And with merciless rules they began to clash.

How he remembers those freezing winters,  
Hungriily he trekked with his bag back home,  
While the stars flickered in the sky above,  
As the evening has set for quite some time now...  
Along the snowy trails,  
He struggled against the wind,  
While wearing his warm felt boots...  
His stomach gurgled – his hunger pushed:  
But, thank God, that the fireplace is burning,  
And that something's cooking on the stove.

Hurryingly he threw everything off to dry,  
The borscht is already steaming on the table,  
And the blushing mother,  
Is hurrying to set the table.  
Avi eats quickly, and even swiftly,  
And heat is slowly seeping into him.  
That's not surprising since everything inside of him was  
frozen:  
The cold is finally flowing out of him.  
And by habit he starts to tell  
His mother about his day.

Avi would tell everything that had happened back at  
school:

The “gorilla” forgot her notebook  
(That’s how they called their math teacher).  
When a titmouse<sup>7</sup> flew into the room,  
The hippopotamus came stomping after her,  
Trying to catch her several times,  
With a copious amount of sweat flowing down his face.  
He wasn’t a real hippo of course,  
He was just a heavy teacher running around the classroom  
On the fifth and final hour of the day.

Avi laughed loudly in the kitchen  
As he told the story of how they cleverly  
Were able to con the fox  
(That’s how they called their chemistry teacher).  
They swapped the bottle of alcohol with water,  
And the “fox” got really worried,  
As she poured in baking soda instead of salt.  
Ah, how angry she was after all of it,  
In the end the experiment did work out,  
For the class finally admitted to their prank.

---

<sup>7</sup> A type of small songbird.

In fourth grade Avi fell in love so much  
(He shared with me at one point)  
That he couldn't fall asleep, and when he did,  
She came to him in his dreams.  
He hurried to school: to see her quickly,  
And hear that melodious voice  
With which she spoke,  
And admire her straight beautiful figure.  
He later opened up to me  
About who she was: Nadeshda Alexandrovna.

She was a young teacher,  
As she entered the class, almost playfully,  
The whole fourth grade "B" class<sup>8</sup> froze,  
Even those who sat in the back.  
She was pretty, fashionable, and very charming,  
Dressed in a short black skirt,  
And was always in a joyful mood.  
She never carried a heavy seriousness:  
She mesmerized everyone all at once,  
And as such, enjoyed much success.

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<sup>8</sup> Each grade was broken up into sections "A," "B," "C," and so on.

I ask you for forgiveness,  
And I hope that you'll oblige,  
For I forgot to mention one thing,  
And this, in fact, explains it all:  
Avi studied in an all-boys school.  
In the postwar time, you see,  
Separated schools were in style,  
They discouraged us from sin that way.  
I don't take on the task of making a judgment,  
And won't say what's "wrong" or "right."

Forty pairs of attentive eyes  
Suddenly perk up all at once.  
And what does she see in them: attention,  
And even more: admiration.  
We forgave her immediately for everything,  
Her class became our favorite.  
At one point, forgiving her is something we forgot to do,  
We didn't even listen to her lectures anymore,  
But just basked in her lovely light,  
Ah, Avi's soul flew because of this.

Later on, she left that school,  
But the arguments still continued:  
Was she beautiful or lovely?  
She touched our young impassioned hearts.  
After some time, Avi bumped into her again by accident,  
He didn't even recognize her (that's how time fixes  
something),  
And she, it seems, didn't recognize him either.  
Time gives us guidance on where to go,  
Freshness goes away with it as well,  
Like juice, that ferments in the spring.

## Chapter 2 Translator's Notes

- Avi's family ended up settling in a Russian city on the Volga River. They lived in the outskirts of the city, and the wooden house that his father bought had electricity but no running water. In fact, in order to obtain water they needed to walk two blocks uphill to the nearest water pump.
- One of the aims of propaganda in the Soviet Union was to convince its people that life in their country was better than in the outside world. To avoid people knowing what it was actually like in other countries, the transport of information across the border was strictly controlled by the government. The sentence "Hid it under their mask without a word" on page 16 refers to the fact that those who did have an idea of what it was like beyond the border kept it to themselves out of fear of contradicting the propaganda.
- In the chapter Avi is described doing many chores around the house, which he started doing since he was 10 years old. When they moved in, the wooden floors weren't painted and so Avi had to scrub the floor very hard every time he was tasked with cleaning it. After about two or three years of living

at the house however, his father started painting the floor every year which made cleaning it considerably easier. One reason his father had to paint the floor so regularly compared to today's wooden floors is that paint wasn't as good at the time. Another reason is that paint was hard to obtain and expensive, and so the limited supply forced his father to dilute it in order to have enough.

- Due to the war and the resultant interruption in many kids' educations, classes were often filled with kids whose ages ranged several years. For instance, it wasn't uncommon to see 8-year-old and 15-year-old kids learning together in one class.
- Avi's mother, who was an engineer, worked 6 days a week. On the days that she worked, she left the house at 6:00 a.m. and returned from work at around 7:00 p.m. Avi's father on the other hand was much less stable when it came to work, often changing his job and not earning a lot for most of the time. At one point he taught languages at a school, but his short temper didn't work well with the fact that he had to teach kids there. Later, however, he did eventually obtain a job teaching at an institute.

- Avi's family was the only Jewish family in their neighborhood. Despite his father attending a Yeshiva in his youth, Avi's family never practiced any form of Jewish traditions.

## Chapter 3

He loves to learn and is always studious,  
But he's got no stable comrades back at school,  
And even though he's the finest student,  
He unfortunately has no friends with whom he could share  
    what's on his soul.

He's incomprehensible for all around,  
He's a fellow, but something's not quite it,  
His passion is not for soccer, but for books,  
Which he probably read about a hundred.  
And his name is a bit unusual,  
Not like Vasya, Kolya, Dima.

In section “B” of fourth grade,  
Kids played cards in the back during class:  
Those fellows were around sixteen: there’s “Evsei” and  
“Kolyan,”

For them, their brains were given exactly to play their  
cards.

Before the lesson they’d come up like barons:  
And ask in a low-pitched voice,  
“Let us copy down your work,” after which they took those  
notebooks as if they owned them,  
Which they returned later in a secret manner.  
Everyone learned how they could,  
And were shrewd, but never stupid.

“You do learning very well,  
After class, behind the gym,  
We’re waiting for you there. Frightened?!  
We’ll see how well you fight, little mouse!  
Don’t tremble! Everything will be by the rules,  
For we’re civilized, and know what’s what:  
Until the first blood; and yelps and screams  
Won’t save you here, and mind you,  
Not a single word to anyone!  
Well, are you ready to go to battle?!”

And here's the circle.  
The children are gathering all around,  
Everyone's interested: who and who?  
Avi looks: not a single friendly face around,  
And in the middle, his opponent's waiting,  
With an air of arrogance and a name of Marló,  
Standing with hubris before him,  
And Avi's body, it seemed, began to shrink.  
But determined to do battle, Avi went in,  
He wasn't afraid of all those threats!

The opponent is a classmate,  
Who loved these fights and missed them rarely.  
It seemed that he was older by one year,  
And now he stood there full of pride,  
Red headed and full of freckles,  
Heavy and strong as oak.  
He charged into battle,  
Trying to beat Avi off his feet.  
But Avi sidestepped swiftly,  
And was saved by his obtained agility.

Their play was ruthless and brutal,  
Mercilessly they'd carry out those fights.  
These are trials of our common youth,  
That we all had to go through:  
Tenderness and meekness were not in style,  
Since what followed the long war  
Seemed to give way to an anarchic postwar freedom,  
A vision relished by both the old and young.  
In those times Avi was just a kid,  
But with full seriousness he'd fight.

He was a native, and yet a stranger,  
Strong and agile, but never brutish.  
He was beaten many times in fights,  
But more often he was the one who'd land the hit,  
For he knew that the boys respected only those  
That didn't flee the circle full of tears,  
And those who never give up, as the biggest sin  
Was to desert a friend while weeping.  
Avi stood for his friends like a mountain,  
But nevertheless, didn't consider himself a hero.

Avi's father wasn't intimate,  
His life was a little different:  
He was well-read and very educated,  
Full of knowledge in excess,  
And many languages he knew,  
Not all of which gave him use.  
He wasn't accustomed to life itself though,  
Some cruel destiny seemed to weigh down on him...  
How often it is the case, that our knowledge  
Isn't enough to make our calling.

Only later did Avi understand  
That a big service his father did to him.  
He taught him an arduous science in the garden,  
And much experience he thus obtained:  
The cold showers, and the firewood,  
And digging the winter ditches  
To bury the grape vines before frost arrived:  
Neck-high deep they had to be in fact.  
And those wooden boards they'd carry,  
Under heavy rain, right until it was time for bed.

“Father, thank you for the science,  
Though much torment it would bring,  
That you made me work so hard,  
Even though I was so young.  
Thank you that both in heat and rain  
Arduous work I had to do:  
Mixing chicken feed with my two hands,  
Taking showers in the backyard.<sup>9</sup>  
It was all like an exhausting dream,”  
Told me Avi many times.

When Avi was finally all grown up,  
He told me all about  
How he wanted to run away from his family,  
As he couldn't take those scolding words anymore.  
But he pitied his mother and sisters,  
And was considerate, a trait that made him different.  
He was always respectful to his elders,  
Even though he grew up among the crazy,  
Among troublemaking kids and hooligans,  
In those postwar evil times.

---

<sup>9</sup> Discussed in Chapter 3 notes.

Avi isn't very tall,  
But he's strong as a borovik.<sup>10</sup>  
It seems, after all, that there was some benefit from all that  
work,  
Even though he worked till sweat,  
"Marló, do you remember all those fights we had?  
And how you yelled: 'know who's ours!'  
And how boots would fly off those feet,  
And how everyone would yell: 'come on!'"  
But Avi knew: not only was he fighting for himself,  
But for the Avi that he was: something that he was always  
proud to be!

So who was the victorious one you ask?  
Both fought with such diligence,  
And took turns being on top,  
So that in the end a draw was given.  
This repeated many times in life,  
When Avi had to fight for truth,  
For this purpose, the school came in handy,  
If you could really call that a "school!" Who knows?!  
What's the use of arguing, it was clear to Avi:  
Ultimately the school was not for nothing.

---

<sup>10</sup> "Borovik" is the Russian word for the mushroom "boletus edulis."

And then there was Eugene Novoshilov,  
An experienced and greedy swindler,  
With hands that weren't clean at all,  
And a self-proclaimed anti-Semite.  
He would often bother Avi in the hallways,  
Tease him, and try to rally up some fellows for his cause.  
Oh, how much Avi heard in those walls at school  
With which, of course, Avi was displeased.  
Fortunately, there were more good people around him,  
Which only makes one wonder why things got so bad at  
times.

But Eugene was taught a lesson,  
He even started studying in a different shift:  
As Avi grabbed a brick and scared him so,  
And thus no more trouble was heard from that mischief-  
maker.

That's how that poor kid grew,  
Like everyone else in Russia at the time,  
Hungry, but proud of the red flag,  
That fluttered over the expansive country.  
He was a fellow among strangers,  
And a stranger, among his own.

And Avi cannot forget,  
How dark the days became,  
When the wicked “Eugene” trumpeted out loud:  
“They’ll send Avi to Siberia, choo choo...”  
Yes, frightening those years became.  
“The father of the nations” showed:  
That pointless were all our efforts,  
And... all the Jews to the stations!  
Ah, why can’t fate be merciful?  
We’re probably the ones to blame for that, I guess!

The tyrant’s death struck all in awe,  
The whole nation trailed behind the coffin,  
Weeping, howling, with profound sorrow:  
“How are we going to live without our father?!”  
We were blind, deaf, and dumb  
Before the world, and fate itself,  
And only the walls could hear us,  
That divided both you and me.  
And those walls were so well built,  
That everlasting they seemed to be.

## Chapter 3 Translator's Notes

- The house that Avi's family lived in didn't have indoor plumbing and so they had to take showers in the backyard, which was done by pouring cold water out of a bucket on oneself.
- Avi's father made special arrangements to buy off leftover wood for firewood from a nearby factory that made furniture. From time to time a truck would drive by their house and throw a huge pile of wood in front of their home, which then Avi and his father would bring inside an enclosure in their backyard.
- At the very end of the chapter the author references news that spread of Stalin's plans to deport all Jews to Siberia – plans that never came to fruition due to his sudden death in 1953.

## Chapter 4

Their lived simply, but with dignity,  
And had fun in a variety of ways.  
Out in nature and in all the seasons:  
In the forest, on the Volga, in the unrestricted space.  
A bicycle, skates, and skis  
All toned Avi's body  
(Without them, he might have never made it)  
And those passions never cooled.  
He refined his own character,  
As it was his priceless capital.

Avi, do you remember,  
The times when, with our simple skis,  
We'd ski those steep hills at the construction site,  
While almost screaming from fear.  
The local boys blazed down the hill so fast,  
All day they rode together,  
And thus obtained a lot practice,  
And resembled professional sportsmen.  
They were the ones who were in charge,  
And didn't pay us much attention.

The distant sandy construction site,  
Abandoned, and left alone.  
Lonely it was until awakened  
By the sound of children's laughter:  
It generously gifted us with snowy hills,  
Where we laughed and played all day.  
And there was sand there in the summer, in which we'd run  
    around in our bare feet,  
And hunt for treasure in the ground.  
That's how we painted our youths in those days,  
And enjoyed our nature's bounty.

But Avi loved the forest most,  
As it was full of snowy wonders:  
Snowy garlands hanging off trees,  
And white attires all of the trees would wear,  
And silence stood all around.  
Ah, Avi was taken in by the whole sensation,  
Especially if a friend's nearby:  
It's like an enchanting dream.  
Those moments have sped away somewhere,  
And those times of magic I truthfully miss.

We'd move on simple skis,  
Which we strapped to our own boots.  
Avi's mother bought him bamboo poles,  
Of which he was so proud  
That even when it was time for sleep, he'd place them next  
to his own bed,  
And in the night he'd check that they're in their place,  
Admiring them with his sleepy gaze.  
No one's happiness could compare to his,  
And happiness is not something to be ashamed of,  
In fact, maybe, one could even envy him for that.

But those poles almost got Avi into trouble,  
As we recall what happened then in January:  
Just the two of us, Avi and I went out to ski,  
And then suddenly we hear yells and shouts from behind

us:

“Drop you sticks, sooner or later we’ll take them from  
you...”

A whole battalion of boys was in pursuit,  
For we numbered only two.

But then Avi raised his stick as if it was a sword,  
Like a warrior, he marched directly at his enemy,  
And often won in all such clashes.

Immediately the battalion halted and all stood silent:  
Such a character, it seems, they’ve never met.

As Avi swung his pole side to side

He yelled with all his might:

“Just try and come, I’ll pierce you through,  
Well, who’s brave? I’ll show no mercy, trust me,  
I’ll teach you all: what is what,  
Even death I do not fear!”

The boys watched a little dazed,  
Since such behavior they did not expect.

It isn't hard to understand those boys:  
It's easy to take away from the "weak",  
And poles were rare in those days you see,  
Since everyone around lived poorly so.  
Nevertheless, Avi learned his lesson:  
He didn't bring his poles to the forest again,  
And I helped him make a wooden stick,  
So that like everybody else he became poor again.  
It's impossible to build barriers against jealousy,  
Since even of the smallest the envious are glad to rob.

We were very adapted to the cold,  
Whole winter days we'd stroll among the trees.  
We quickly moved upon the ski trails,  
Although not hurrying to get anywhere.  
We knocked snow off the branches in a sportive manner,  
As it twirled around us in its powdered form,  
And fell quietly and slowly,  
Upon the invisible ski trail below.  
The world is full of wonders, my friend,  
And dear and pure they remain to us.

Our pockets merely contained the heels of loafs of bread,  
Which we ate in a simple hut,  
The hut was empty:  
As it seemed that no one lived there anymore,  
But it was welcoming to all who came,  
And offered cold water from the well.  
It was happy to have such company,  
For the crowd was homeless at the moment.  
Icy water was simply  
The most prized of heaven's treasures.

Skis and skis! But there were also ice skates,  
Which attached to boots were rare in those times.<sup>11</sup>  
But Avi begged his mother to buy them for him,  
And so to the sports store Avi and his mother went.  
“How expensive! And the boy is growing.  
He's already twelve,  
And we haven't much money to spare on these.  
Considering your growth, we'll buy... maybe for sixteen  
years of age.”  
And so Avi got his ice skates,  
But the trials were still ahead.

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<sup>11</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4 notes.

“The boots are big, but that’s all right,  
Since my boy’s feet are growing,”  
Avi’s mother said without anticipating,  
How hard it’d be for Avi on the ice at first.  
When Avi went out onto the rink,  
He watched those boys who skated since birth,  
But he couldn’t make a single step,  
And his fellow comrades laughed at him.  
It’s hard to learn without an instructor,  
And so a lot of effort he had to pour into this endeavor.

The palm of his feet would have to bend,  
And his bones felt the painful strain.  
His boots would hold on so and so,  
And his feet would shake side to side like swings.  
Unsteady, moving forward step by step,  
He faced many obstacles in his effort,  
But determined he was to win this fight,  
While clenched his teeth so that his moans were silent.  
Such a difficult game this was,  
But time to conquer it it was.

The rink is huge, and not maintained,  
There are no lockers, and no restrooms either.  
We put on our freezing skates,  
And left our old footwear in the same place,  
And make sure to mark that place,  
So that we don't lose them later,  
Ah, even for the footwear it's crowded here...  
It all feels like an awful dream.  
"But how did you live like that?!" you ask me:  
You don't get to choose your place of birth.

Afterwards, there's no energy left to go back home,  
Avi's excitement for the rink has drained.  
The cold is strengthening, and everyone's leaving,  
And darkness makes their footwear hard to find.  
Shivering, they put on their boots,  
That hardened in the freezing cold,  
Putting them on their feet while avoiding their freezing  
touch,  
But that's only possible in a fairytale.  
Now, to quickly get back to the warmth of our home,  
But how to move! Oh my goodness!

Grabbing his skates and boots,  
He ran back home in his socks: it wasn't close.  
He had to run at least, o say, half an hour.  
But fortunate it was that the night was bright:  
For the moon makes the snow shine and glitter,  
It was all like in a dream.  
I was awestruck, I won't deny,  
When Avi told me all of this.  
The biting January freeze up there,  
Well... at least those socks were woolen!

To ensure that his ice skates would tightly fit,  
He stuffed wadding into the toe of his boots,  
And tightened them with a flat string,<sup>12</sup>  
Oh, my goodness: how much cleverness was required!  
And all of this,  
Just so he could skate like the others.  
He put so much effort into skating,  
That all the evil tongues were finally silenced.  
This way he revealed to me his full life's canvas,  
No one else had to go through half as many trials.

---

<sup>12</sup> Discussed in Chapter 4 notes.

He never did become the king of skating among the boys,  
of course,  
Nevertheless, he eventually did become skilled at skating.  
He played hockey in a team,  
Everyone yelled to him: “score another!”  
He adeptly steered the hockey puck,  
Never doubting himself, and hitting it with precision:  
He cleverly outmaneuvered his opponent,  
And scored goals with utmost confidence,  
He might not have become a hockey idol,  
But wasn’t ever a frail Jew either.

## Chapter 4 Translator's Notes

- As described in the chapter, in addition to skis Avi was able to convince his mother to buy him ice skates as well. Such a purchase wasn't cheap since skates cost around 120 rubles which to put into perspective his mother's salary was about 1,000 rubles per month. For this reason, Avi's mother bought him skates that were several sizes bigger to take into account that he was growing; the idea being that until his feet were the right size, he'd put wadding into the front of the boot to fill in the remaining space. His feet never ended up growing to the right size however, and the fact that they were soft, too big, and didn't go high up on the leg caused him to be unstable in them. One way he tried to fix this was by wrapping a flat piece of string through a spacing between the boot and the skates several times so that his boot wouldn't wobble as much (see page 57).
- Ice skates consisted of two parts: the boot itself and the metallic skates that clipped underneath. The boot components were in fact harder to come back compared to the skates themselves. But once both

were obtained, the two were clipped together by a special master.

## Chapter 5

The freeze gripped, and winter came knocking on our door.  
Endlessly the winter seemed to last,  
The snow covered everything around us,  
As if it always looked that way.  
But livelier our lives became:  
That New Year's ball was coming soon,  
That we all anxiously awaited.  
Finally... it came:  
For the first time dreams came knocking on Avi's chest,  
To this day Avi remembers it.

In sixth grade it came to be,  
Avi recollects it as an enchanting dream,  
When that rough collection of boys at school  
Was invited to an evening New Year's ball:  
Where they would dance in that wonderful all-girls school.  
All the girls stood at the wall together,  
Standing patiently, anticipating to be invited  
By the boys to come and dance:  
Ah, Avi remembered that extraordinary waltz  
To which he danced the night away with a pretty girl in  
hand.

Then in eighth grade they combined the schools,  
Into one big collection of boys and girls,  
So that half the class was now full of girls,  
And none of us, of course, protested.  
Avi fell in love immediately,  
In the same year that that happened:  
She was slim, like a chamois,  
With strong brown eyes at that.  
There's no defense against love,  
And at all ages we're glad to meet it.

He blushed, even though she merely passed nearby,  
She was strict, no, more like had a heavy character.  
Our elbows would accidentally touch,  
And her look would almost say, “keep at it!”  
But Avi was apparently inept,  
And she probably wanted someone not as timid,  
Even though he’d often accompany her in thought...  
She found her happiness with someone else.  
Don’t rush love, it will find you on its own,  
And make you go crazy it undoubtedly will.

How capricious fate can be,  
What kind of thread is she pulling?  
No, it weaves patterned textiles!  
And knows everything ahead:  
Who will be poor, and who will be rich,  
Who it will reward with success,  
Who will be stingy, who will be generous,  
And who will be struck by evil sickness.  
If you blame fate for everything,  
Then you’ve chosen the wrong path in life.

Fall stood, but it wasn't golden,  
It was somehow sinister and completely different:  
The weather was cold and unstable,  
With an incomprehensible atmosphere; a little sleepy in its  
nature.  
But with conscientious determination, like always, he went  
to school,  
He loved to learn: he sought to know everything he could.  
And even though everything was covered in snow by now,  
He just wouldn't put on his coat,  
He often went dressed rather lightly:  
Donning only a shirt and a thin jacket.

The kids at school started to notice,  
That Avi began to swell,  
His eyes were always squinting now,  
And that his hands began to stiffen.  
His breath was heavy, and a shortness of breath appeared,  
And he moved his legs with the upmost effort.  
He hadn't experienced this even in a scary dream:  
He in fact had become really sick.  
He went to see the doctor, and they ran an analysis on him,  
"Healthy!" the analysis declared.

Avi stopped going to school,  
And the days became quite dull,  
Only sometimes did he lie and moan,  
Swollen and full of water.  
And so finally Avi's mother began to worry,  
And a repeat analysis they went and did,  
He can't sleep with an ease of mind,  
What will Mr. Analysis report?  
Don't trust every piece of paper,  
If you've burned yourself already.

A forbidding silence fell  
When they saw that all the numbers were misread,  
Everything seemed fine at first,  
Although all levels were suddenly above the norm a  
    hundred-fold...  
Panic spread: to the hospital we must send him, quick:  
Into the room for heavy illnesses!  
My unfortunate Avi was lying there, as scary as it was,  
It's difficult for me to recount all this, but I'll continue.  
What's important is that Avi was alive and breathing,  
As the curtains were lightly fluttering in the wind beside  
    him.

He's been four months in the hospital already,  
How long is it all planning to go on?!  
He's lost weight and even grown.  
The doctors are being prudent and can't decide:  
"It seems a little early to check him out,  
The norms are still far away, this illness will be with him  
forever now,  
And unusual behavior it is displaying,  
Maybe a home environment will be better for the boy?..."  
Fate does not put permanent stamps upon its work,  
And sometimes, it prefers to grant a new beginning to those  
who need it.

"Lad, how you've grown!  
All your clothes have become too small,  
And little hairs have appeared upon your cheeks,"  
Avi's father was surprised, you see, when he saw his son.  
What is there to be surprised about?!  
For while Avi was in the hospital,  
He'd rarely go and visit him.  
He was like a songbird in a cage,  
Taken prisoner by his ailment,  
With which in time, it seems, he came to terms with.

But now he's home, and the dog isn't so friendly to him at  
first,  
The hospital smell is strong with him you see,  
But soon she became affectionate again,  
And almost in an apologetic manner, she finally recognized  
our Avi again,  
How long Avi has been away from home!  
Everything's the same, but a little shorter,  
It's all starting to come back to him now,  
As if the sickness never struck!  
Ah, the welcoming walls in our home,  
They cannot bear any kind of change.

But Avi didn't go to school,  
He became thin and weak, and had no energy in him left:  
And spent yet another month at home.  
He began to review the material he missed with fervor,  
For the two main quarters<sup>13</sup> that he had missed:  
He hadn't been in school for half a year by now.  
But he's hard working, determined, and brave,  
And got up to speed on his own!  
His mother took a month off of work,  
To give full attention to her son.

---

<sup>13</sup> "Main quarters" refers to the two middle quarters of the school year.

He worked hard all day, even though no one told him to do  
so,  
And mastered everything on his own, except for math,  
That his mother helped with,  
They would get up early in the morning,  
And he would solve problem after problem,  
He probably solved hundreds of them:  
He was very proud,  
That even math he was going to overcome.  
He was gifted generously by fate,  
And thus fully mastered the whole curriculum.

Spring has arrived, everything's in bloom,  
And Avi began to go to school again.  
And would you know?! As always,  
He's bringing home all "fives."<sup>14</sup>  
He finished the year with excellent grades,  
And was still the top student,  
He believed in that, and probably knew it,  
And tasted victory ahead of time.  
Fate is fate, but you have to walk yourself,  
Only then will success be waiting for you ahead.

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<sup>14</sup> A grade of "five" is the Russian analog of an "A" in the grading system.

Tenth grade: Avi's finishing school,  
And serious exams have come upon them.  
Even though he knows the material, he's still worried,  
He'll help himself, and maybe, with just a bit from God as  
well?!

He passed all his exams with "perfection,"  
And all of this considering the obstacles he had to face.  
He personally received a golden medal,  
From the director of the school himself.  
All your dreams will remain fantasies  
If with the flow you choose to swim.

"Our Avi is the 'brain,'"  
All his friends would say and think.  
But physically he's also strong,  
And all the illnesses, like nightmares,  
Went away, although not quickly:  
He had to go through a lot of effort  
To force the sicknesses to go away!  
At least now he's full of strength.  
This is how he made himself,  
Considering all the hurdles he had to overcome.

He worked hard in the garden,  
And he walked on skis,  
Every day he was out in nature, both in winter and in  
summer,  
He even rubbed himself with snow.  
Faithfully carrying out all his warmups,  
And many pullups he would do.  
He, of course, was no ideal,  
But it was with all of this that he saved himself.  
Efforts aren't always rewarded right away,  
As age old wisdom repeats time and time again.

And in class, he's again the strongest,  
The fastest, the swiftest, and the most agile.  
He beats everybody on skis, as always,  
And is never in a gloomy mood.  
Respectful, humble, as before,  
He avoids the noisy day to day,  
And stays clear  
Of the useless crowd.  
He knows his own price –  
These stylish gatherings are strange to him.

## Chapter 5 Translator's Notes

- As described in the chapter, Avi fell sick one Autumn when he was around 12 – 13 years old with a sickness involving his kidneys.

## Chapter 6

Where to go study now?  
Avi wasn't certain ahead of time,  
And hasn't set a single passion yet:  
On his own he was going to have to decide on this.  
He loved and read a lot of literature,  
And great friends he was with the field of math.  
He read the classics, not the "common texts,"  
And with a chessboard he spent a lot of his free time.  
All the paths are open to him,  
On which should he go upon?

Avi was attracted to  
A university education, but his calling  
Only came much later –  
She found him herself.  
There he completed a degree in physics:  
In the beginning it was very difficult for Avi,  
Most, in fact, found the higher mathematics to be complex.  
But Avi actually felt her beauty,  
And all its obstacles he overcame,  
Even though his starting knowledge in it was small.

You see, he came from a provincial school,  
Which didn't differ from the city ones in principle,  
But elements of higher mathematics were covered in the  
city schools,  
Which Avi's never touched upon.  
So Avi had to get up to speed on those things that others  
already knew,  
Aside from lectures, he also read a lot of textbooks.  
At first all the formulas seemed so strange,  
But afterwards he started paying them respect.  
He loved to learn them so much,  
That soon the department became proud of him.

After lecture, he was off to the university's cafeteria:  
Even though it was cheap, he didn't adore its cooking.  
After that he headed towards the reading room,  
Not of course to write a cheat sheet,  
But to read several textbooks for comparison,  
To understand the material at a deeper level,  
Since often after lectures he was in doubt:  
Did he correctly understand the professor back in class?  
He brushed off anything that he didn't need,  
Which was strange to his inquisitive mind.

He heeded most the primary sources,  
To this day he remembers,  
How he meticulously read into every single line,  
It seems, he felt the currents of the very titans themselves,  
The formulas' movements, beauty, their magnificence,  
He absorbed them forever then.  
They were like the shine of lightening to him,  
And gave sustenance to the work he did, of course.  
He felt that in his field he was going to be the top,  
And time would soon prove him right.

After the long sitting, the boy ran down  
The steep stairs, jumping over steps  
Without paying any respect to them.  
He felt a slight concern,  
Was there anything left in the cafeteria?  
What? He didn't need much,  
Just a cup of kefir, to accompany his patty,  
And some bread to take with him on the road.  
We always hurry, and run on our way,  
To enter the future temple as quickly as we can.

He was fair with everyone and friendly,  
But no one really needed him.  
Everyone, you see, lived their own lives,  
And made friends with only those,  
Whose interests matched their own:  
There were those that studied constantly,  
And also drinkers and philanderers,  
To whom hard work seemed highly strange...  
Everything in our lives is all the same,  
In the end, everyone will yell: "forgive me, God!"

He was acquainted with many people,  
Which proved helpful in the years to come.  
All of them got to know each other upon entry into the  
University,  
When, per the school's decision,  
They were sent to the fields for a whole three months,<sup>15</sup>  
Where ripened wheat stood,  
On those immense expanses,  
Where there weren't enough people to collect it. He toiled  
and was hardworking:  
He was an obedient and honest youth,  
Whose eyes hadn't entirely opened yet.

They lived in huts right on the fields,  
Where fear rolled in at night:  
“Will the roof hold against the wind?”  
As the wind was often strong,  
But the huts matched its strength and so they held...  
They went to bed early since they were always extremely  
tired,  
The talks would go on though into the quiet night:  
Ah, various things made up their worries,  
As they were youths thrown into the steppe,  
So that on time they could collect the harvest.

---

<sup>15</sup> See explanation about “Kolkhozes” in Chapter 6 notes.

The work is hard on the platform<sup>16</sup>,  
And often times it's unbearable:  
The merciless sun is burning them,  
Their mouths and noses are full of dust,  
And their bodies are covered in the wheat's dust.  
The shovel gets heavier and heavier over time,  
But the young women<sup>17</sup> next to them are working and  
aren't tiring,  
While releasing jokes upon the students in generous  
amounts...  
All that free labor was wearisome to them,  
And commonplace it was in those times.

In the pond they washed away their sweat and dust,  
Which wasn't located far from them.  
There, in the evenings, they'd often sit around a fire,  
And sometimes songs they'd sing together.  
Young men from the village would come by:  
Their tense gaze slid upon the students,  
The unease between them hasn't passed  
From the time  
When they attacked the woman huts,  
A good lesson the students taught them then.

---

<sup>16</sup> The platform here refers to where they processed the wheat.

<sup>17</sup> The young women from the local village.

Ah, how Avi wanted to earn something,  
He argued tirelessly with the brigadier,  
So that his work was appreciated correctly,  
Since he worked and toiled like a Trojan...  
And, as a result of three months labor,  
And days of going hungry,  
He earned two bags of grain,  
And even that, in the opinion of the brigadier, was  
debatable.

With the help of his father, he proudly brought those bags  
back home from the station,  
Which he later showed off to everyone around.

He came back all burned and thin,  
But with grain to feed the chickens.  
School starts only in October,  
But he didn't pass the summer in vain:  
The students now knew who Avi was,  
And were surprised at his uncommon strength,  
And would sometimes call him "Andrew,"  
Since they were more used to that instead.  
With time, we get accustomed to everything,  
Including hard and draining work.

And it wasn't just one time,  
That he left his home like that:  
He worked in the fields in the spring,  
The autumn's cold, and summer's heat.  
And like that in the course of many years,  
He maneuvered skillfully around like everyone else:  
Want to study? Be ready  
To do everything that the party tells you to.  
That was the harsh reality and the law,  
But he got used to a life like that.

Dear reader, are you not tired  
Of this story about Avi?  
For the footsteps of that era have all faded,  
But haven't cooled in our minds.  
They... spin, just like fog,  
Return to us all over again:  
Lies, all words, fabrications, deception,  
And they haven't left, like a dream that wears us down.  
History is interesting to us because,  
It teaches us, maybe, something important for us to know.

Nothing's new below the moon,  
But I offer to her my piece of mind,  
To dress this story with both rhyme and rhythm,  
Which of course isn't perfect,  
But one which talks of Avi's past,  
Which still is with us and hasn't passed that long ago,  
Often screaming with its  
Silent and dried out mouth.  
We denounce different epochs,  
But distinguish them only by their dress.

With words, it seems, everything has been said:  
Joy, happiness, and sorrow  
Are all the emotions that poets were able to describe  
In all the idioms of the world.  
So what is their left for me?  
What does rhyme want to say?  
Of course, a versifier,  
But not a *poet*, on whom  
God wanted to put his stamp,  
But changed his mind he did, he didn't dare?!

Why try on the immortal gown?  
Isn't it better to ask the moon for help,  
Who has always been by my side?  
For I'm no stranger to her:  
I've shared my naïve secrets with her,  
Since my youth she's caught my eye,  
And my ideal she then became,  
Full of dreams and shining bright.  
She alone will understand me,  
And keep the secrets I imparted to her.

The night time gives me strength  
To continue my story here, and oh goodness!  
It turned out to be so real!  
Of course, it isn't perfect,  
Continue to read if you'd like dear reader,  
I will be very grateful to you if you do,  
And by doing so you will confirm,  
That the author is not obtuse.  
On fragile wings of inspiration,  
I sprint forward to what's ahead.

## Chapter 6 Translator's Notes

- On page 73 the author writes that  
“...he came from a provincial school,  
Which didn't differ from the city ones in  
principle, But elements of higher  
mathematics were covered in the city  
schools.”

All Soviet schools followed a standard curriculum set by the government. However, unlike the provincial school that Avi attended, city schools often covered more advanced material on top of the preset curriculum. For this reason, as the author mentions later on that page, when Avi first started studying at the university he was less prepared than his fellow classmates and thus had to get up to speed on a lot of material.

- Avi was exempted from taking the university's entrance exams since he finished school with a golden medal, which was very fortunate for him since he might not have passed these exams due to the fact that he came from a provincial school (see the previous point).
- In this chapter it's described how during several summers the university sent Avi and his class to

work on Kolkhozes (collective farms) for three months to collect the harvest. The reason this was done was that Kolkhozes simply did not have enough of a labor force to collect their own harvest. One explanation for this is that life on such collective farms was poorer compared to the city and so everyone who could tried moving to the cities. Avi recalls that it was really hot when he worked there since they were located in the Kazakhstan steppes. In addition, he had to work with wheat which created lots of dust flying around that landed on his sticky body full of sweat. There were little accommodations given: no breaks, no bathrooms, and no showers. They washed themselves at the end of the day by swimming in a nearby pond.

## Chapter 7

The day was full to the very brim:  
For after lecture, Avi headed straight away  
To the “science room” (that’s how they called their library),  
To study there for hours, what a guy!  
Instead of having a great time,  
Dancing at the disco,  
Playing the night away with cards, drinking wine,  
And flirting with the women,  
The bookish Avi mined for knowledge,  
Which proved very useful to him later.

He read the classics in the field of science,  
Ah, not everything his hands were able to reach,  
But what's important is that he grasped everything quickly,  
And knew that he was on the right path...  
The reading room was serene and calm,  
As he buried himself in books and journals.  
Science began to reveal her secrets to him,  
And he became awestruck with her beauty:  
Serpentine are the roads to science,  
It captured both Avi's heart and mind.

With the giants he reached the peaks,  
He believed in the purity of science,  
That rules the essence of all there is,  
And opens new gates in this field.  
The road is hard, of course, but wonderful,  
Paradoxical, and at times, not understandable at first,  
Graspable only by a genius,  
What is it that he's painting with those wide strokes...?  
But all of this lies in Avi's dreams,  
Impatiently being called for by the future.

As you understand, my dear reader,  
Avi stood for truth like a mountain...  
And studied everything with such diligence,  
And he loved math especially, gently in fact:  
Her logical nature, rigor, and allure  
That formed a splendid dance in his mind.  
The thought would sometimes bother him:  
Maybe the wrong road he took...  
The peaks of physics seemed so alien at the moment,  
But, in time, they would also win him over with their  
beauty.

Avi is a strong and handsome looking student,  
His fellow female students put their eyes on him.  
But he looked for and waited for that special one,  
With whom he'd want to intertwine his fate with.  
He didn't go out dating  
Just to spend his time,  
As others would do around him,  
So that later he wouldn't regret the time he lost.  
At the moment he was free from the spell of women,  
Which made him old fashioned in a way.

Wow! Look at the women all around,  
Come on, get to know them my good friend,  
And that's not even needed,  
Any female student would be glad,  
If Avi would just look at her,  
Explain to her the material,  
And then drown in her eyes,  
Acknowledging her emotions.  
But he passed by indifferently,  
That's how the picture looked.

And how many athletic women there are,  
Blonds, redheads, and those with brown hair,  
That Avi met at the sports club<sup>18</sup> that he attended,  
To which he brought two friends along!  
He took up the sport of mountain climbing,  
For which they trained for in the evenings.  
Later on he did admit,  
How hard it was for him at first.  
But Avi's strong and well built,  
And that sportive barrier he overcame.

---

<sup>18</sup> Discussed in Chapter 7 notes.

We trained rain or shine,  
That was our principle you see,  
We worked out regardless of the rain or snow,  
This way Avi trained to obtain his skill:  
To move the ball around in an agile manner,  
Here, there, and now near the net,  
As he makes his move that no one would expect,  
And scores with agility and precision!  
How strenuous such training was,  
But at least the expedition wouldn't be as painful.

We went on two expeditions in the winter,  
On skis when the weather was frigid cold:  
One of them took place in the local area  
Upon the snowy, untouched, and somewhat melancholic  
fields,  
We traveled for a week, stopping overnight in villages,  
And would warm ourselves near the fireplace.  
The howling of the wind over the flatness of the land,  
Scared us in the dreary night.  
That was just our first experience,  
But our spirit for adventure didn't wither.

In the second, we walked in the Urals upon our skis,  
And Avi remembers (he certainly did not forget),  
How the nights we spent on the snow inside our tents...  
Ah, how it wasn't all that easy:  
Just to not freeze up before the morning,  
We sawed the bigger chunks for firewood,  
And we would split them along the stem,  
And small pieces of wood we'd place in between the logs.  
Such an apparatus was called a "Nadya,"  
Which helped protect us from the cold.

Our expedition went through the Caucasus peaks,  
And Avi remembers more than once,  
The heat and glacier freeze that we endured.  
But he was proud, and even happy,  
That such steep mountains he overcame,  
And of the numerous passes  
And crevasses that we went over,  
And many trees that we cut down.  
We were all tough and strong,  
And true to our friendship powered by our youth.

The mountainous climbs weren't easy,  
Sleeping bags, tents, grains, and conserves  
Were all things that we had to carry with us.  
We even carried firewood onto the glaciers,  
So that we could cook our food  
And warm ourselves a bit,  
And sing songs around the fire...  
For tomorrow was another hard day to come...  
Nevertheless, the expedition was worth the effort,  
Since we encountered many magical moments along the  
way.

We trekked for two months in the Caucasus mountains,  
But didn't visit any of the mountain villages.  
We sometimes met the mountain dwellers:  
Sitting on their horses, they sometimes  
Invited us to see their nearby village.  
But our path lied farther from the roads,  
Going through the wild and quiet nature,  
And the time schedule was very strict...  
It's surprising that we didn't go wild at the time,  
And sang songs around the fire, and danced with joyous  
spirits.

How we longed for a lengthy rest!  
We hastened our walk through the mountains  
To make it faster to the alpine camp,  
To where the ranger was taking us.  
We were exhausted and wanted rest,  
To eat hot borscht and take a bath.  
For a long way we had traveled since,  
One which we never knew before,  
Our steps, quickened as we went,  
As if it wasn't a guide who was leading us, but a wizard!

We were met enthusiastically, and with compote  
Served on a tray by a dressed-up clown.  
Afterwards was dinner, and then refreshing sleep  
To the very morning in our own tents.  
And then, to the scented steaming room and bath,  
We lied on those benches while the steam rose up in  
clouds,  
Which was controlled by an experienced and gregarious  
“Vanya...”  
We'd lie like that for hours if we could,  
But all things come to an end,  
Now it was time for lunch again!

A day of rest was granted to us, and then  
We had classes every day,  
Where we learned alpinism and its basics...  
We had to know all the knots...  
All the theory that we covered  
Proved useful later on  
When spontaneous urges were controlled  
Using the lessons we were taught.  
We were instructed on how to climb and fall,  
But... we couldn't wait to go out and try it!

And here's practice, the ropes are up,  
You use those ropes to ascend the cliff in a nimble manner,  
With two feet against both sides  
You pull yourself up the vertical wall,  
Upwards and slowly, and with patience,  
And here's the end, one last pull...  
Yes, the exercise was diligently carried out,  
Even though some fear had its place:  
Descending was also hard,  
But that's merely just complaining.

Single day trips followed after that  
Into snowy and glacial expanses:  
The sun's intense, and the snow is bright,  
And your comrade is right behind you step by step,  
Roped up to you and ice axe in hand.  
Our boots don't slip since they have spikes,  
And only the creak of the snow below is heard in the utter  
silence,  
While a primordial poem forms itself:  
Snow and snow, we're on the glacier,  
How good it is that a friend's nearby.

But everything comes to an end at some point,  
And everyone's happy to finally leave the camp,  
For the path to Elbrus<sup>19</sup> lies ahead,  
And look, the alpine camp is now behind us...  
Now experienced, we climb higher and higher,  
It's harder to breath because of the altitude up here:  
But we want to get to the Caucasus ceiling.  
Our load is heavy and our energy dwindles as we trudge,  
We feel nauseous and our heads are spinning  
From the lack of oxygen up here.

---

<sup>19</sup> The highest mountain in the Caucasus mountains. It has two peaks: the western one is at 18,510 ft. while the eastern one is at 18,422 ft.

And here's some structure,  
And our spirits lift,  
The so called "Priut Eleven."<sup>20</sup>  
The two-peaked summit seemed so much closer now,  
But she's still far away,  
So that's why we'll camp right here tonight.  
The snow is so soft and deep,  
That you fall through it almost whole:  
But they didn't give us long to sleep,  
We had to get up at one in the night.

The snow was hardened by the nightly freeze,  
On frozen ice we leave our footprints.  
Our heading is the summit,  
And not that there's a peak in front of us,  
But a smoothed out two-headed giant.  
The wind is swirling and the ice is creaking,  
Will we indeed conquer this?  
The night is bright since the moon's awake:  
We landed in an enchanted world,  
And a feast of nature's magic.

---

<sup>20</sup> Priut Eleven is a camp at around 13,800 ft. on Elbrus with a building in which people can camp overnight.

You understand, of course, my perceptive reader,  
That Avi and I were roped up together.  
Ascending up without our backpacks or much gear,  
For everyone's merely carrying an ice axe with them...  
Ah, I have no energy to keep up this climb,  
I've weakened completely at this height,  
I sit in the snow: I'm not feeling well...  
But Avi's standing above me like a mage,  
His eyes are shining and intense:  
"Come on, come on, there's not much left!"

He lifted me and exclaimed: "forward!"  
And hence I overcame myself.  
The snow below us started creaking again,  
It's solid in the night and won't betray us...  
And here's the ridge between the peaks:  
An improvised lunch was set,  
And "a break!" was declared.  
But almost no one touched the food,  
We were nauseous, you see, and very tired,  
But sleep didn't manage to take Avi prisoner.

We rested a bit on the ridge,  
And we left many there to wait,  
Since they couldn't go any further.  
Ah, but our path still lies in front:  
Forward! Onto the western hat with Avi,  
She dominates over the surrounding mountains,  
And fiercely stands above us as we climb...  
Avi went into battle with the summit:  
He wants to at least once win this fight,  
His winning hour has finally come!

We stood proudly upon the summit,  
There wasn't anyone happier in the world.  
Underneath us stood the Ushba,<sup>21</sup> amidst gentle puffs of  
clouds,  
And covered in a snowy blanket.  
Underneath the clouds stood a herd of mountains,  
Below the boundless sky above,  
That picture is always with us...  
And our heads are spinning in a sweet nirvana...  
Dawn is soon to come, it's time to go,  
Beauties are plenty here my friends!

---

<sup>21</sup> A neighboring mountain (also with two peaks) standing at 15,450 ft.

Our expedition ended at the beach,  
Where the tourists passed,  
Lived in tents, swam in the sea,  
And enjoyed the sun.  
We almost looked at others from above,  
For no joke it was: two months we spent in the Caucasus  
    mountains...  
We sat around the fire underneath the starry night,  
And the youths listened to our stories with such wonder...  
Avi sat silent near the fire,  
Staring at the flames, deep in thought.

## Chapter 7 Translator's Notes

- Avi joined an expedition club at his university, where they physically trained in various ways such as doing pullups, playing athletics games, etc. On their first expedition described in the chapter, they trekked over farm lands on skis for about a week during the winter. They stopped at small villages along the way to rest.
- For their second expedition, they walked around the Southern Urals on skis during the winter. While they were there, they cut old trees and wood for firewood since it was freezing during the night. Someone always had to sit up at night to watch over the fire, and for bandits.
- On their third expedition, they went through the Caucasus mountains in order to climb Mt. Elbrus. They spent about 2 months in the mountains before ascending in order to acclimatize. Along the way they found many old abandoned weapons from the war, in particular German ones. On the night of the ascent of Elbrus, they didn't carry much with them: most merely took an ice axe. When they got to the ridge described on page 96 to rest, some went on to ascend the western peak, some to the eastern peak,

and some stayed put and waited because they didn't have any energy left to go further. Avi went to the western peak, which is higher than the eastern one by around 68 feet.

## Chapter 8

Classes have started, back to the university,  
And summer sends us its farewell...  
Endless assignments and exams,  
And many responsibilities on our shoulders...  
Avi was resolved: into science he wanted to go,  
Into academics, he knew, he wasn't going to make it:  
For no one was going to extend a friendly hand...  
He decided to start with the department's seminars,  
Even though it's applied – it's still science,<sup>22</sup>  
Although at first the seminars seemed a little boring.

---

<sup>22</sup> Discussed in Chapter 8 notes.

But little by little he starts understanding the problem,  
And his interest in it begins to form,  
He even makes comments from time to time,  
And is always polite as usual.  
As a result he drew attention, and was offered  
To present himself at the seminar.  
Many muttered, “a conceited youth!”  
But the rest sat in respectful silence...  
This became Avi’s trial,  
And nothing short of success was expected of him.

He wrote his thesis at the university,  
And no one in the world was happier than him:  
Our Avi was entering the scientific circle,  
Even though nobody really waited for him there.  
He had no protection from the beginning,  
He used ability and talent to make his progress,  
For some it almost seemed so mysterious:  
For they knew that no one did or would ever help him...  
He’s independent and didn’t have any blinkers<sup>23</sup> placed  
upon him,  
He had to swim completely against the current.

---

<sup>23</sup> “Blinkers” are side blinders placed on horses so that they can only see straightforward.

Avi's advisor was soon assigned,  
And a complicated problem he was given:  
To describe the phenomenon in a new device,  
And to obtain the needed equations for theoretical  
    computations.

The device was developed in a famous institute,  
And experimental results were in abundance,  
But the experimenters could not understand  
The theoretical underworkings of their effect!  
And so Avi, with bravery, attacked the problem,  
Even though this subject was completely new to him.

With a confident tone his professor  
Recommended a very popular approach:  
An old technique that was only approximate in nature,  
In addition to being disputable and lacking rigor.  
His advisor agreed without a doubt,  
That for the grade, this was the safest route to take,  
But whether actual results were to be obtained, that wasn't  
    very clear...

And so Avi chose a more complicated approach,  
One which of course was much more rigorous,  
Avi, in this way, overcame the temptation for the simple.

Avi was snickered at by the others,  
They all foresaw him failing in this endeavor.  
He rejected the safest route you see,  
And chose an original one that they considered hopeless.  
They didn't see or perceive the magnitude of his strength,  
And his power to penetrate the depth of a problem:  
Both knowledge and intuition lived in him,  
Which promised scientific victories in the future.  
In his thoughts he flew above the others,  
He felt the problem, and constantly lived with it.

Using the methods of celestial mechanics,  
He obtained a beautiful and wonderful result,  
Where his well roundedness played its role,  
And the influences of the classics...  
The department approved of his work,  
And even called him their "mathematical talent,"  
With some, maybe, concealed respect for him.  
But they hadn't seen Avi yet at his fullest strength...  
They had a high regard for his work, and marked it  
"excellent,"  
The department's head even congratulated Avi personally  
himself.

Spring soothes the song of birds,  
School is done and job assignments are approaching.<sup>24</sup>  
But Avi's dream is graduate school,  
Which is fully realistic for him:  
Since he had the highest grades and the best of manners,  
He was respectful and very pleasant in conversation,  
And everyone was convinced  
That the department's head wanted him as his student.  
Alas, realities of life are sometimes stronger,  
And Avi didn't make it into graduate school that spring.

Avi in fact suspected that that might happen,  
For the Party's committee's influence was heavy,  
And ruled over everybody's fate:  
To be a Jew was an awful sin.  
"Even though he's first on our list,  
We must send him to the factory,  
And take a second rater into graduate school instead,  
But at least he'll will be a native 'Russian.'"  
The times dictated the conditions of our lives,  
And we carried on our backs its heavy load.

---

<sup>24</sup> Discussed in Chapter 8 notes.

Even though Avi understood everything,  
He had a hard time believing what he saw:  
For he grew up in a country that was “free,”  
And a noble person he raised himself to be,  
Devoid of any kind of insecurities.  
Since childhood he knew that all were equal,  
And among the equal there he stood,  
Under the country’s big red flag.  
How painful is the heartache of growing up,  
And a late awareness of the realities of life.

As was written in the directive,  
Avi’s first day at the factory  
Was after break in September...  
And here Avi’s standing emptyhanded,  
In front of the entrance  
To a menacing looking building,  
Such that all desire to go inside fade away.  
But he proceeds forward,  
He moves towards fate directly,  
And the spectacular events henceforth to come.

Like an important persona,  
He was led to the patron's cabinet,  
Who turned out to be the factory's director.  
He was writing something at the time,  
For he wanted Avi to first take in  
All that stood in that expansive office.  
He then began: "We've been waiting for you,"<sup>25</sup>  
For quite some time we've had our eye on you:  
We know each other from the seminars,  
Where, not without purpose, you've spent your time.

I understand your disappointment,  
That to a factory you were assigned,  
While your desire was to fully give yourself to science...  
Believe us when we say that we need more than mere  
    hands right here,  
And that we've only recently been born.  
Boredom is not at all known to us,  
As we've tightly fused together here  
Both science and production.  
And don't be disappointed that with a red diploma<sup>26</sup>  
You've landed in a factory like this.

---

<sup>25</sup> In the original Russian text this "you" was written in the formal form (used to show respect).

<sup>26</sup> Diploma of the highest degree (rarely given).

You want to go to the theoretical division?  
I hope, that soon you'll impress everybody there:  
Our devices will be the best, I just know it!  
And your role in that will be immense, as I foresee.  
They will escort you, and get to work:  
There are many reports, both foreign and domestic, for you  
to read,  
Take your work seriously,  
Work diligently and hard:  
The results will show from your efforts,  
And you'll be happy with their outcomes.”

And here's the theoretical division:  
Everyone around here is both young and social.  
They immediately began to compare their strengths,  
And Avi quickly showed them that he isn't weak,  
And threw every one of them on their back,  
Giving them a triumphant look,  
And giving off a victorious cry:  
With this everyone was instantly convinced  
That a fighter has joined their ranks,  
And maybe even, finally, a leader.

Reports were many – he read them diligently,  
A lot of what he found there was debatable and repeated,  
But where should you look to find the correct answer?  
He asks his boss for some advice,  
But the latter doesn't know what to say:  
“Probably you should ask your foreign colleague?<sup>27</sup>”  
And so Avi returns to those papers,  
But clarity seems to elude him still...  
The day is done, and everybody runs back home,  
While our hero rushes to the library.

He sat for hours in the library  
With scientific journals in his hands,  
He's searching for some answers,  
Or at least some advice...  
And then finally, an idea comes to him:  
The intuition-based calculations made by the engineers  
Needed a rigorous theory to back them up,  
And to correct the errors that they incurred.  
With this Avi found what he was looking for,  
And was happy to discover the essence in the problem.

---

<sup>27</sup> A joke (explained in Chapter 8 notes).

Soon the devices became so natural to him,  
That even the electrons themselves became visible to him,  
He commanded a complete mastery over them,  
And courageously thought of his designs.  
Everyone kept saying: “Avi is our head!”  
But soon Avi began to think of a dissertation,  
And started to publish original papers around this time,  
While asking scientists for recommendations...  
A group of colleagues now surrounded him,  
Recognizing his qualities as a leader.

Two years have passed, now it's “master” Avi,  
Many scientists have acknowledged him by now.  
He gives lectures at seminars and conferences,  
And has gained respect from the academics,<sup>28</sup> both old and  
young.  
He gives talks at the department from which he graduated,  
Often bringing new ideas,  
The professor remembers this brave graduate, and even  
shows respect.  
A real scientist he has now become,  
His success is starting to blossom in this field,  
But still he holds love at a distance.

---

<sup>28</sup> Academics are members of an academy of sciences.

“Indeed you’ve written many papers,  
Even a lot of PhD candidates don’t have enough,  
And your abstract for a dissertation is very good,  
Which I hope will soon take its form.  
But, as head of the scientific committee,  
I cannot let you become a candidate any time soon,  
For this reason, please, listen to my advice:  
Maybe, you need to add a few things to your work...  
And by the way, there are preliminary exams that you have  
to pass,  
For which I can give you from half a year to a year to  
prepare for.

What? But the others haven’t taken them?  
Don’t argue with me,  
For we have to start with someone.  
I’ve heard that you’re full of brains,  
So we’ll start with you:  
You’ll present a variety of topics to me,  
But of course, not right now, later.  
You will give me much pleasure,  
By showing me what you know...  
That’s enough for now, farewell.”

The conversation with the professor is over,  
And so, without wasting a single moment,  
Avi hurries into “his reading room.”  
Obeying his aspirations,  
He quickly begins to work on his topics.  
He’s choosing the important path,  
And not the easiest one as always:  
What was the essence of each method of approximation?...  
But I won’t attempt to explain it to you,  
For I don’t understand it all myself.

That whole hot summer Avi worked,  
Getting acquainted with what the classics had to say about  
the subject,  
He read lots of books and journals,  
And the problem became clearer over time, losing its  
mystifying nature.  
He prepared very well,  
But recalling the professor’s behavior, he foresaw  
The passing this exam wasn’t going to be easy,  
For Avi was well grounded in reality...  
And here he’s meeting the department’s head again,  
To begin their discussion about methods of approximations.

The exam was short, which surprised our Avi,  
The professor was astonished by Avi's knowledge,  
And of course, gives him a grade of "five."  
But the professor wants to continue their discussion:  
"I was at a conference not too long ago,  
There an academic gave a lecture,  
While surprising everybody  
That on this topic he'd give a talk.  
He announced that he finally created a theory for a famous  
apparatus,  
And hence effectively ended all scientific debates about it.

His work is recognized and celebrated by scientists...  
But how does Avi approach this problem?!"  
"The problem is indeed difficult, and I'm well acquainted  
with it.

There's no point in celebrating it just yet:  
That theory is only good for students,  
And prompting long applause,  
It merely describes the kinematics of the effect.  
One has to agree with me on this point,  
That this theory doesn't take into account the important  
factors,  
And believe me when I tell you that still a long way we  
have to go.

To create a complete fundamental theory,  
One such singular effort will not suffice.  
Time dictates which methods we use of course,  
And removes our obstacles in the process:  
We are in fact already using them,  
You remember the report I gave at the seminar,  
Where I informed all my listeners,  
Who listened to me in a befuddled manner,  
That the computer era is upon us,  
Forcing us to move forward.

Of course, I believe that machines  
Will never replace the human mind  
(Even though it might seek to do so),  
And that they will always merely serve us:  
For creativity was placed into the hands of people,  
Since birth it is granted to us,  
Unlike computers, you see,  
We humans are designed for innovation...  
Yes, letting go of the old ways is often difficult,  
Since they often sit entrenched inside of us.”

But the discussion didn't end...  
As Avi told me later,  
The professor was in fact a little dazed,  
But remained important and confident in himself as always.  
He looked at Avi with curiosity,  
And then threw himself back in his wide chair:  
“Well, you've passed this exam with flying colors,”  
And then he gives Avi a cunning smile,  
“Now we'll need a technical survey from you as well,  
Which you will present to us in a year or two.”

## Chapter 8 Translator's Notes

- In the Soviet Union there was no such thing as a “bachelor’s degree.” The first available degree was a masters, which required 5 years of education. After that came a PhD, and then an even higher degree called “Doctor of Sciences.” The difference in the number of and respect associated to the degrees “PhD” and “Doctor of Sciences” was huge.
- Along with a free education, university students in the Soviet Union received stipends. A typical student received about 230 rubles per month and a student with excellent grades received 400 rubles per month. Since Avi studied in a department that received many funds from the radio electronics industry and he was an excellent student, his stipend was around 700 rubles per month. That was almost the salary of an engineer.
- While studying at the university, Avi starting going to seminars on radio electronics. Avi ended up choosing this subject for his master’s thesis, which he wrote at the University in which he analyzed the theoretics of a device that was developed at the Institute of Radio Physics and Electronics of the National Academy of Science of the Ukraine USSR.

We note that almost everybody instead wrote their master thesis at the laboratories where they ended up working at. Only those people who wanted to stay and continue their education after graduation wrote their thesis at the university.

- In the Soviet Union you were able to apply to stay in graduate school, but almost everybody got rejected. If you were rejected, then you were told where you were assigned to work. Since Avi was the best performing student, he technically had the right to choose himself if he wanted to stay and study or where he wanted to go work. But the party's committee at the university decided otherwise, and so Avi didn't end up going to graduate school after he graduated.
- The “menacing looking building” that Avi worked at had guards and fences all around. You couldn't get in without an id. Despite being relatively new, it was a very dirty place. The bathrooms were pretty awful too, consisting of rows of seats with no dividers, which were flushed simultaneously.
- On page 108 Avi asks his boss for advice on some of the contemporary literature regarding his research, and his boss answers “Probably you should ask your foreign colleague?” His boss was

joking since communication with the outside world was strictly forbidden.

- The salaries of simple workers were about twice as much as those of typical engineers, and skilled workers earned up to five times more. One explanation for this is that skilled workers were in deficit in many places and that there were already too many engineers. To give a further comparison, medical doctors got even less than engineers. However advancing your degree did have an impact on your salary. For instance, once Avi got his PhD later, he started making three times as much.
- Computers were used in the laboratory where Avi worked. At first, they used Soviet made computers called “Ural 1” and “Ural 2” which were able to make about 5,000 operations per second. Then they moved onto using the computer BESM 2, which was also developed in the Soviet Union and could do around 2,000,000 operations per second. The latter computer was huge: it stood in a large room with specialized cooling systems involving pipes and air blowers that prevented it from overheating. Its printer that printed results on a narrow strip of paper was also a large machine.

- For a long time, many older scientists and professors resisted the idea of using computers in radio electronics research because they preferred the more elegant “analytic” methods. However, recognizing the limitations of analytic methods and the power of numerical approximations, they began to work with computers more and more often after a while.
- At one point, Avi decided that he wanted to obtain a PhD. As described in the chapter, a professor at the university agreed to let Avi work on his PhD with him, but only on the condition that he could administer him an oral exam first in which Avi would give a technical survey on a topic in radio electronics. This was essentially an artificial obstacle that the professor put in Avi’s way to delay his PhD as no one else had to do this. Avi wasn’t even given a specific topic to focus on, he had to find one on his own with restrictions placed on what he could choose.

## Chapter 9

Our tasked hero is walking,  
With his head hanging low...  
“Why create obstacles for him?  
Are there even laws surrounding this:  
Only he was required to take that exam,  
And now there was this survey,  
Which the professor said couldn’t be the topic of his  
dissertation.  
Why are they tormenting him like that? ...  
Is it because he’s not a ‘native?’  
Even though he grew up here, he still does not belong.”

It's not in Avi's character to be despondent,  
These obstacles can only rouse and enrage him...  
Here again he's in the library in the evenings,  
And even at home he sometimes works into the night.  
He didn't choose a simple topic for his survey,  
He studies literature, both old and new, about the subject,  
And doesn't waste a single day.  
The essence slowly begins to reveal itself:  
He generalizes famed results  
That the academic outlines in his book.

The survey's finished; the assignment's done!  
Written both quickly and with quality,  
With everything explained in detail,  
Building upon the formulas derived before...  
The professor was astounded, in particular by the subject  
that Avi chose...  
Soon the survey was presented,  
And became a major interest for the department and its  
research,  
While lifting their burden in certain tasks...  
The presentation of this work was successful,  
And its two reviewers put in a lot of effort.

“And now, go ahead and write your dissertation,  
And get your endorsement at the factory,  
You will then present it to our department,  
And get my approval soon afterwards.<sup>29</sup>  
But don’t think that this will all go quickly,  
For we have many duties of our own,  
And in particular, you’ll have to wait your turn –  
Such is the life of one who seeks his PhD –  
Of course, I need to push my own students forward,  
They like you, have a lot of talent to their names.

You’ll need to send around your abstract ahead of time,  
Make twenty-five copies of them at least,  
Then find two respectable scientists to be your reviewers,  
And a reviewing organization at that as well.  
All of them will have to send to our department their  
assessments,  
Published, clear, and official.  
Only then will you hear a date from us for your defense,  
For now, that remains a certain secret...  
Forward! You have many tasks ahead,  
And don’t think I’m being harsh with you.”

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<sup>29</sup> Discussed in Chapter 9 notes.

Avi wrote the dissertation quickly and with ease,  
But where to print, now there's the puzzle!  
For strict rules they had regarding  
The printing of such secret work,<sup>30</sup>  
Was really no one going to help our Avi?  
Nevertheless, Avi somehow made arrangements with both  
    a boss and his typist...  
Slowly the printed work comes out of the typewriter,  
With plenty of mistakes and typos,  
But at least the task is moving forward,  
All of this while Avi's also doing his job.

All the diagrams were drawn in ink,  
By a drafter that Avi knew,  
Who gladly did the job, for a little compensation...  
Now to make copies of the drawings: oh, another headache!  
For he needs permission again on the grounds of secrecy,  
To have the authorized stamp on every page,  
But that's only half the story...  
Where to get good binding after that?!  
Young reader, fortunately, none of this is familiar to you,  
And Avi wouldn't ever want to go through that again.

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<sup>30</sup> Discussed in Chapter 9 notes.

The department has received all the reviews of the  
dissertation,  
All that's left to do is wait...  
All the papers and documents lie in their offices,  
It's as if everyone's asleep in that department.  
And finally, a date has been determined for his defense,  
Everything comes to an end at some point...  
The members of Avi's dissertation committee,  
Finally come in and sit down with their importance...  
Avi's concentrated and serious,  
For an important exam lies ahead of him.

First Avi's documents are read,  
Then, he's given a chance to give a lecture.  
He rises up upon the stage,  
While all the scientists are staring at him,  
As if a dream, he can see it all in front of him...  
Even now I feel a little worry,  
I admit to you dear reader.  
I'm proud of him: a big impression  
He's made on everybody,  
For a glorious triumph and furor all this was.

Avi effortlessly answered all the questions,  
And with crystal clarity he described his problem,  
He glided over everybody in his skill,  
And without stumbling, he gave  
Detailed explanations with his sharpened mind,  
He wasn't merely protecting himself, but advancing.  
He unintentionally heard at that meeting:  
"A big talent or a conceited fool,"  
An old professor whispered to his neighbor,  
But that, in fact, was long ago thrown into the Lethe River.

Many are proud of his achievements,  
While some, secretly, snickered at him,  
Trying to belittle his accomplishments,  
And thus trying to lift themselves a bit.  
But Avi knows his own worth,  
And doesn't notice all the whispers,  
He casts aside those falsehoods,  
Like dirty foam, in order to keep his current  
Of future aspirations clean,  
Of any kind of wicked forces.

And now what's next for Avi? For he's accomplished a lot:  
Our young engineer has received  
A diploma and higher salary, and it wasn't all a dream,  
Is this really it, is he finished building his career?!  
What about his previous ambitions?  
They weren't in applied sciences of course,  
His secret desire  
Is to escape the dullness of the day-to-day,  
And to contribute to the purer echelons of science,  
Ah, but that, at the moment, is still far away from him.

And here's a difficult meeting with his boss:  
The ability to study in the factory's library  
Where he'd learn to advance his knowledge  
Until it was time for supper, after that he'd devote all his  
time to work...  
In this way he could fulfill his own desires.  
Avi's boss agreed to his conditions,  
Since they prized Avi very much.  
He didn't air his indignation,  
But did consider Avi's willful behavior out of place,  
And too self-willed for one in his position.

How to understand our headstrong Avi!?  
Such people have never been understood:  
Sit contently and receive your salary,  
And mark how many days are left till your retirement.  
Don't make any reckless decisions,  
Always do the convenient thing,  
And listen to the opinions of your boss,  
The administration makes the complicated decisions, let  
                  them do it on their own.  
But Avi wasn't like that,  
He didn't like empty words.

But in certain difficult situations, Avi was indispensable,  
At the administrative meetings they had long discussions:  
“An important and attractive order has been made to us,  
As comrades, shall we proceed to take on this task?  
The advisors from the university have given their  
                  endorsement,  
To develop this device  
At a private meeting that we had,  
Even though it didn't pass without some argument...  
Only Avi is making a fuss,  
His judgment is that there's nothing original in this device.

And that we won't obtain the results that we expect,  
Even though... we desire big rewards,  
Well, will we take this order or not?  
Let Avi give a direct response!"  
The director stares into Avi's eyes,  
But Avi takes on the director's gaze:  
"Many souls have met in this cabinet,  
And everyone has had a chance to speak,  
But I will tell it to you straight,  
That they have all been telling you fairy tales."

And so, the order wasn't taken,  
Avi told me later many times...  
But the discussions didn't end with that,  
And arguments, of course, continued:  
Ah, we missed out on such a tasty piece.  
Everything eventually quieted down, but was definitely not  
forgotten,  
Even if it all had happened quite some time ago.  
Avi's boss wasn't happy:  
Avi was perhaps right in principle,  
But didn't know his place too well.

Avi begins to sow the seeds of resentment  
Among the bosses in the institute,  
As he stands there like a cliff,  
On heights that he achieved using his own creative mind.  
Intrigue swirls all around him,  
But he pays no heed to them,  
Discoveries occupy all his time,  
As he bravely ascends the scientific summits:  
He again is following the titans in their footsteps,  
Never tiring of learning more.

He indeed received a physics education,  
And yet, he lacked the fundamental knowledge,  
And so here he is, in the factory's library again,  
Without interruption, hour after hour,  
The diligent student sits and studies,  
In front of him is a set of textbooks:  
A famous course on theoretical physics,  
And he's ready to enter a wager,  
That he'll get through all of it, and be triumphant!  
Well, who will dare to disagree with Avi?!

What amazing expanses open up,  
When one immerses themselves in the arguments of the  
titans,  
And witnesses the stunning views from those summits...  
But Avi doesn't find his career fulfilling:  
The same thing every single day,  
Calculations on famous designs,  
A sluggish laziness even begins to form,  
And a disinterest for any kind of change...  
But fate begins to smile this time around:  
A shining hour has come upon our Avi!

An important order has come from a higher office,  
On the subject of programming  
Working automatic systems,  
To them, there's not a more important topic at the  
moment...

Promptly a theoretical laboratory was established,  
But who will become the leader of this project?  
Here's how that question was resolved:  
No one wanted to take that risky role...  
And so, with reluctance, they offered this job to Avi,  
He accepted! Which of course they all expected.

Straight away our Avi forms his skillful team,  
And it's made clear who is in charge:  
For the deadline is coming fast,  
And the task has a lot of weight.  
Failure to complete it  
Would be followed by misfortune  
And the danger of many losing their jobs.  
Life is, unfortunately, rich with problems...  
And Avi knows all of this,  
Nevertheless, he'll complete this task! There's no doubt  
about it!

There are many things for him to do,  
His schedule's filled to the very brim,  
All his thoughts are on this topic,  
What else is there for him to do?  
Everyday the administration calls him,  
They demand a report from him,  
And a stringent timetable they set for him,  
So that the workers don't fall asleep:  
What else can they do?  
For the whole development is done without them.

Faster, faster, time is racing,  
A heavy responsibility  
Avi puts on his shoulders,  
Will he have enough strength to make it,  
And finish the job before it's due?  
But Avi knows that he can do it,  
His God will help him in this task,  
In that he has no doubt.  
He's moving forward, like before,  
Carrying out what he was destined for.

How his students have grown up!  
Even if the paths were not so simple,  
That Avi recommended and laid out.  
As we know, he was a leader,  
And all his happily formed ideas,  
Were quickly programmed in,  
Their labor's fruits began to ripen,  
Which were later transformed into dissertations.  
A scientific crew he had constructed,  
In which he searched for an ideal.

It's time! He's writing his report,  
Only a handful of faces appear on the title page,  
And many are attempting to make it onto there,  
Often raising a tumult, with passions flying:  
But he crosses out free riders with a stern hand,  
He's uncompromising and firm,  
Many don't even know him anymore,  
And such actions will not be forgotten.  
Yes, Avi didn't want to change himself,  
And no one dared to command him to.

His actions will come back to bite him,  
Don't ask the pointless question "why?"  
Just don't be surprised with this, dear reader,  
This is how the Creator made us people:  
He put light into us, and shadows,  
He created our immortal souls,  
And gifted us with both night and day,  
And tasked us with a life of burdens...  
Untruths exist in our world, but why?  
The Creator didn't provide an answer.

But Avi is standing on the peaks of praise,  
Yet he finds no solace in lighthearted celebrations,  
He's again in the library all day,  
And we need not repeat again:  
That he's studying books, volume after volume,  
And entering the deepest thoughts.  
By now, you're well acquainted with this dear reader,  
He's flying in the clouds far away,  
And original ideas come to him,  
Which he cares for, but doesn't reveal just yet.

## Chapter 9 Translator's Notes

- In order to defend his PhD thesis, Avi needed to get a recommendation from an organization (such as the factory where he worked). On top of that, he also needed three more scientists with Doctor of Sciences degrees and a few organizations to review and send their opinions about his thesis to the department at which he planned to defend at. In contrast, it was much easier to do all of this if you were instead doing your PhD at the university since everything was already set up for the process: they had typists, copiers, binding services, drafters<sup>31</sup>, etc., and the professor would help arrange the reviewers and reviewing organizations for his students. Avi had to do all of this on his own. Moreover, his boss and work did not particular care about this endeavor of Avi's as they considered it his own personal business that he had to do on his own time and money. His boss even attempted to hinder Avi's efforts in order to get Avi to concentrate more on his work. When confronting

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<sup>31</sup> A profession of drawing formal technical schematic of machinery or apparatuses.

his boss about this (who was technically Avi's scientific advisor), Avi threatened to go to Moscow and defend his thesis with someone else.

- Avi loved to self-study, and so after completing his PhD he negotiated with his boss to use the first part of his work day to study on his own. His boss agreed to this since he highly prized Avi. One of the many physics textbooks that Avi went on to study this way was the “famous course on theoretical physics” mentioned on page 128, which was the ten volume series *Course of Theoretical Physics* by Landau and Lifshitz.
- The story of how Avi became the director of that laboratory was a little different than mentioned in the text. Their factory was given two years to work on the subject mentioned on page 129. Avi's boss was in charge of it, but he made no progress and left his position when there was about half a year left since he was angry about the fact that he wasn't promoted. Avi took over at that point and had to complete the task in whatever little time was left, which he did successfully.
- When they successfully finished the project, there was the question of where to put his former boss: on the title page, second page, or on neither since he

essentially did nothing and made no progress. Avi ended up placing him on the second page which caused much controversy.

## Chapter 10

Avi's well-roundedness

Is recognized by everyone:

His papers are clear and full of insight,

To look for mistakes in them is a pointless effort...

He's mastered all the disciplines in his field:

And he looks for something new, and finds it!

He's developed many new directions,

For his energy is always boiling,

There's a reason why his students value him so much,

He's always there for them to help.

As before he's fresh and fit,  
Later, tales and legends will be told of him.  
From the waking hours of early dawn,  
He walks to work through the forest,  
And I'll admit to slightly envying him,  
He could march for two hours to the factory  
Without ever sitting down to rest,  
And then not be tired afterwards all day...  
In the evening, he makes the same trip home,  
How could one not gasp in slight jealousy!

In the winter he goes by skis, regardless of the freeze,  
He comes to work, a little numb from the cold.  
He shakes the snow off of him, and proceeds to his working  
table,  
All as if he hadn't walked for two hours at all!  
In the darkness he goes back,  
He's alone in the forest... it's scary to even imagine,  
He slides upon his skis and is happy about his motion,  
Not thinking of how dangerous all this is.  
Avi is young and full of strength,  
And empathy he doesn't seek from anyone.

How magnificent it is in the forest, both in summer and in  
winter,  
Avi was born, without a doubt, to be a poet:  
He admires the ocean blue of the sky above,  
And doesn't feel alone at all,  
For his trusty skis or trail are with him,  
As they twist and turn around the trees,  
Oh, and there's a familiar aspen.<sup>32</sup>  
What could be better than these youthful days,  
He feels happiness in his motion,  
And life's sweetness and contentment.

And the devices are close to him,  
As if they are his children,  
He's developed an intuition and feel for them,  
And it seems, they feed a mutual love back to him.  
Without any hesitation, his designs  
Are immediately taken into production.  
He never moves on from them without some  
sentimentality,  
As he enters them into the computer archives.  
But his fields of interest are way too wide,  
They push his growth, and not with little force.

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<sup>32</sup> A type of tree that grows in the northern hemisphere.

In order not to fall behind life,  
He needs to become a doctor of physical-mathematical  
sciences,<sup>33</sup>  
And that wasn't his decision, but that of the circumstances  
around him.  
So he took this up upon his shoulders,  
And began to concentrate on his project.  
He foresaw many things to come of course,  
But didn't think that his dissertation,  
Would reveal the character of so many who'd upset his  
aspirations:  
Ah, many reminded him of their grievances,  
But in discussions they were defeated.

For Avi, the dissertation was merely a formality,  
Since it was well-known from the beginning,  
That already having obtained scientific recognition,  
He was worthy of the highest title.  
Only a select few can defend with just a report,  
But that doesn't apply to him you see:  
“For he does whatever he wants,  
So we will quietly use our power of ‘veto.’”  
That's what they decided with their “wisdom,”  
While cowering behind their secret.

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<sup>33</sup> Discussed in Chapter 10 notes

The institute's representative who frequented them said:  
"Reign in your 'self-willed' guy,  
Or else later on you'll have more tasks  
Than you'd be willing to handle...  
Ah, but we will make him give a presentation,  
And then have a serious discussion about his dissertation,  
Then we'll tie him by the hands and feet so tightly,  
That there will be no doubt at all,  
That his dissertation is premature and incomplete,  
And is not suitable for a defense at all!"

But poor Avi didn't know all this,  
And only felt and anticipated it:  
He'll need to go around hell more than once,  
That whole pack was going to be so ecstatic,  
When Avi trips on one of the loops,  
Be it in a discussion or a meeting.  
Right now, it's important to keep quiet,  
And not reveal his intentions prematurely,  
And then... tear it all up with one big hit,  
That uncivil and dreadful circle.

“The factory can’t give a review of your dissertation,  
And likewise the necessary recommendations for your  
defense,  
On the other hand, the university...  
For there’s not one scientist at our institution, and there’s  
never been one,  
We merely manufacture and are simple engineers:  
Producing more devices is our main and only role,  
We take necessary measures  
To complete our plans as fast as possible...  
Furthermore, more than once you’ll have to present your  
work there,  
And don’t start a needless protest...”

It’s good though that the world is so diverse,  
And that Avi wasn’t used to giving up,  
He took on this hefty task,  
And embarked on the completion of his quest.  
The time and place of his defense?  
He found out everything: the what, where, and how,  
After which he’ll find his recommendations.  
But all of that will come later: it’s not that simple,  
And only after he presents his scientific work,  
In the capital, at the Academy of Sciences.

“What is your university to us?  
What, is there nothing scarier than a cat?!  
How *we* decide, that’s the way it’s going to be,  
History will later judge us,  
And put everyone in their place.  
You’re a famous scientist, we know that,  
By the countless works that you have written,  
And what does their unusual ‘veto’ mean to us?!”  
The famous academic had spoken,  
He promised Avi to accept his dissertation for a defense.

And here’s how the story continues:  
In the university’s auditorium,  
Avi stands behind the podium,  
He is given careful heed,  
By the professors, associate professors, and students,  
And many more departments have showed their interest...  
Of course, no compliments are waiting for him,  
But rather a hard attack to be pressed upon him.  
Nervousness, naturally, doesn’t leave him,  
But he’s prepared for an intensive fight.

The head professor gives the signal to be quiet,  
But an unintelligible noise continues in the room:  
People whispering and snickering,  
And cracking nuts on the benches in the back.  
They came to see the show,  
Of how they were going to “press” and squeeze our Avi,  
For it’s a rare event to witness,  
Of how they deny a doctorate at someone’s defense.  
Everything was prepared ahead of time to fail our hero,  
And finally, he’s given a chance to speak.

He laid out everything that he wanted to say in forty-five  
minutes,  
And usually no more is ever given,  
He gave clear explanations for all the drawings,  
And worry wasn’t felt in him,  
But rather both strength and sureness  
In the ultimate accuracy of his arguments,  
Which struck with full swing  
At their scientific blindness.  
He was no rhetorician, and no Cicero,<sup>34</sup>  
But had full command over the auditorium.

---

<sup>34</sup> A famous political figure, writer, and orator in the Roman empire.

Avi finished, and hence the discussions all began,  
And they took hold of Avi with the tightest grip:  
They need to trample and belittle him,  
For he's an engineer, while only the elite reside here,  
The University is not your simple factory,  
We're the ones who push science forward,  
And Avi is a stranger to us,  
Only the echelon of this country can be here...  
What can one object when no one wants to even listen to  
    you,  
And think too highly of themselves.

With this the head professor ended all the discourse,  
He seems to have forgotten  
To give Avi the last word,  
They don't even seem to notice him anymore...  
Avi is again at the podium,  
With a calm, but serious look,  
He looks undefeated in this fight,  
And... is silent for a couple minutes.  
The whole auditorium becomes silent with suspense:  
What kind of objections could he make, late and needless at  
    this point?!

Avi, in the encampment of his adversaries,  
Pulls out a piece of paper from his pocket,  
And reads out loud, for all to hear,  
An applauding review from the academic,  
And that success for him is of course to be expected,  
And that all his results are innovative and true,  
He's marked with the sparks of God,  
For the whole country needs devices...  
Everyone stood... and applauded loudly...  
This is something the auditorium has never witnessed.

He defended perfectly in the capital,  
And the Academy of Sciences asked him to visit more,  
For a valuable consultant he was to them,  
And a frequent participant in their conferences...  
But back in the factory, he wasn't met with celebration,  
Rather, instead, with a hint of skepticism,  
And maybe, even, with just indifference,  
But that didn't diminish either his firmness, or self-  
assurance...  
At the end of such an eventful year,  
He heard "Avi is the pride of the Jewish people."

But Avi wasn't all just science,  
He had feelings too, even more than others had expected,  
Though he was far from the mysteries of love,  
Especially inebriating and free to roam pursuits.  
He faithfully waited for his love to come,  
And didn't pass the time with empty meetings,  
He knew ahead of time that she'll come to him, for certain:  
A destined novel of happiness to unfold.  
He desired and believed; she came to him in his dreams:  
A magical and wonderful fairy she seemed to him.

## Chapter 10 Translator's Notes

- Instead of taking the tram to work that went the long way around, Avi walked to work every day for about two hours. He arrived at work at around 8:30 a.m. When returning home, the forest through which he walked wasn't lit and so he relied on the natural light from the moon to see his path.
- He worked on his Doctor of Science's dissertation for around eight years and ended up defended it in the capital, in particular at the Academy of Sciences.
- On page 142 Avi's boss tells Avi "The factory can't give a review of your dissertation." As described on the page before that quote, this was all part of a scheme that the factory and the University had arranged to make Avi go through the University and give them a special report on his dissertation. When Avi first heard this, he found this very strange since he wasn't associated to the University in any way. The reason the beforementioned parties planned this was to have an easier time failing Avi when he defended.

## Chapter 11

Ah, they accidentally met not just once,  
Gaze ineptly sliding and then disappearing after that,  
As you can see, time wanted to test our Avi,  
His heart didn't feel the pull of love just yet:  
That's how a seed of wheat grows,  
When it's thrown onto moist soil,  
And waits until  
Someone comes over with a plough...  
Avi likewise isn't ready for love,  
And thus couldn't accept the gifts she offered.

Yes, modesty doesn't decorate us right now,  
Rather, maybe it even hinders us a bit,  
The more smug and brash,  
And the cruder the jokes,  
The bigger your success will be,  
Among the hooligans and tricksters,  
And any circles including those,  
Where elegant speech  
Will eclipse all sophisticated essence,  
And be accomplices to devious lies.

It only seems that we decide,  
That men are the ones who choose,  
And that the ladies cannot resist,  
As we tease them to come to us.  
But they do whatever they decide,  
And proceed to show their character to us,  
Revealing their light capricious nature,  
And teasing us right back.  
But inconspicuously they give a thorough glance,  
Not escaping sin after all.

There are as well, of course, women,  
Who keep themselves clean and angel-like,  
As if descended from up above,  
Ornamented by earthly beauty, and full of kindness,  
They look for purity that matches theirs,  
Among the youths of similar age,  
Reliable, good-natured, and noble,  
To whom a woman would not say “no”...  
The fitting are attracted to the suitable,  
For that’s how fate, with its unrestricted will, has deemed it  
so.

That time in spring has come when everything sings,  
The time for grand love has finally arrived...  
Was it accidental?! He went for an evening meeting,  
And then... by the ivory of her shoulders,  
And the proudness in her posture,  
He was taken prisoner...  
Ah, poor Avi, there was no escape for him,  
His heart stopped when his eyes met hers,  
He wasn’t thinking and didn’t judge,  
He saw in her his own ideal.

She was descending down at this moment,  
Was it all just by chance,  
Or did God intend for this to happen,  
For Avi to be so stunned by her?  
He followed slowly after her,  
Keeping a little bit to the side,  
I've said before, he was a poet,  
And as always, he was confounded by all of this,  
But he understood, that this was She,  
Who made him lose his mind this way.

She didn't even turn around,  
Was it all a single moment, or did time pass slowly?!  
That smile, and those teeth like pearls,  
She became dear to him, and not a stranger anymore,  
She quickly took him by the arm,  
There was warmth and tenderness in her,  
And he never regretted that meeting afterwards:  
For it was no accident, and was meant to be,  
Their hearts beat in unison,  
As this dream enveloped our two young souls.

She gave birth to two beautiful daughters,  
And was full with the energy of life,  
As if she came from the ground itself.  
And all of her energetic dreams,  
She turned into reality,  
And was always ready to do more.  
She invested into the future  
Her unfading and eternal beauty:  
Avi was a prisoner of her magic,  
And didn't observe any shortcomings in her nature.

He was surrounded by students, and commanded great  
respect,  
Yet they still didn't take him into the faculty's ranks,  
For he was irreplaceable to the factory.  
One phone call made by them, or something of that nature,  
And then a polite rejection, with some fictitious and made-  
up reason,  
For there was no way that the administration would let our  
Avi go,  
Since it was Avi who lit up their factory's prestige.  
Avi tried to leave many times,  
But the phone had greater influence,  
Which often played an overbearing role on people's lives.

His daughters grew, and soon it became cramped  
Within the walls and limits of that big country,  
And so they began to prepare for a long journey,  
For the times have changed, thank God for that.  
And what about Avi? He had to leave his job,  
Or else they wouldn't give permission to leave the country.  
He daydreamed about his future freedom,  
But those were merely drawings in his head,  
The winds above the country began to sing a different tune,  
And carried with it a fighting spirit.

And now he's free... but his daughters are far away,  
As he stays back home with his dearest all alone,  
They didn't give him permission to leave the country,  
He in fact foresaw and knew all this.  
But he won't give up, and is fighting for his freedom,  
And regularly submits requests to the "gray house,"<sup>35</sup>  
He's taking matters into his own hands, and thank God  
That he's not in a court house, or in prison...  
Many years passed like that,  
And unexpectedly, it was creative work that saved our  
Avi...

---

<sup>35</sup> The "gray house" refers to the KGB's building.

Avi missed his daughters,  
And thus was surprised himself,  
How both rhyme and rhythm began to form in him:  
It almost seemed that someone from up above  
Was dictating them to him.  
He hastens to write them down:  
The sound of wind, and the rain upon the roof,  
He writes down everything in his notebook,  
And as his notebooks and journals begin to fill,  
They gift him a sense of freedom of which he dreamed.

He never complains to anyone,  
And remains an optimist, always with a smile.  
But I know how hard his life is,  
And how long he'll have to wait,  
Before he overcomes this heavy obstacle.  
He was left without any means for sustenance,  
For that was the harsh reality of that "just" law.  
How he tried to overcome that "iron curtain,"  
Which still remained in place,  
Ah, how he would have happily danced upon its grave.

But one day, he paid a visit to that House again,  
Which he's visited for many months already,  
This time he went right past the sentry:  
"Stop! Where are you going?!"  
But what could stop our Avi now?  
It was almost as if he was being led,  
Of course, nobody was calling or expecting him...  
He bravely enters the door on the side,  
A woman's sitting there, with the rank of colonel,  
And a heap of papers sitting in front of her.

Attractive, with grayish hair,  
She didn't even seem all that important,  
And only looks with disbelief.  
But he presents himself, and with great doubt  
He believes that this conversation will amount to  
something,  
But what else could he do? He's determined,  
It's as if threw himself against the stormy sea,  
For an irrational act he's just committed:  
Sometimes it's the unwise decisions that we make  
That don't allow us to stray onto the wrong paths.

But Avi himself is quite nice looking,  
And nothing new will be revealed to you  
When I tell you that even though she was a colonel,  
She was still susceptible to instinctual wonders,  
And hence took a liking to our Avi.  
What will he finally say, she wondered,  
As she fixed her hair a bit,  
And then, he went on the direct attack,  
No wonder it takes courage to capture cities,  
Unfortunately, though, there are not that many.

How that duel ended, I don't know,  
With Avi's victory I assume...  
He began to appeal to sentiment,  
And pull on the strings of the heart's emotions:  
That such a beauty he's never seen,  
And that there's no way she couldn't understand him,  
And that her eyes looked so wonderful...  
Compassion ate her soul up,  
That he's separated from his daughters,  
And how all alone they've been left back here.

He said some more,  
He tried with all his strength,  
To wake the human inside of her,  
What else is there to say!  
But he was not the one who spoke, it was the heavens,  
They're the ones who helped him out.  
It was simply as if in Apollo's chariot  
That God himself passed right in front of her,  
She marveled at him,  
And finally filled up with good intentions.

Since then I haven't seen our Avi,  
But many have come across him later,  
Either in our city,  
Or far away, past the border.  
Rumors say that he lives in Jerusalem,  
With his great big family,  
And that he's the happiest in the world,  
And that he finally belongs, and is not a stranger.  
And, as always, he's hard at work,  
With what? No one seems to know precisely.

Now I say farewell to you,  
My friend, my dear reader,  
I value the patience you've given me,  
And I'm grateful for it too.  
Ah, I'm extremely happy,  
That you maintained your curiosity,  
And interest while listening to my story,  
And that you've come to befriend our Avi.  
I hope that someday, you'll come across each other,  
And just like I did, remain endearing friends...

*October 2013*

## Chapter 11 Translator's Notes

- The story of how Avi met his wife goes as follows. His future wife once noticed him in the circus when he was there with his sister. As she later arranged, Avi was later invited by his friends to go to a concert where he was told that he'd be able to meet a nice woman. On the "evening" of the concert on page 151, Avi went to the conservatory's building. However, they didn't let him in since he didn't have a ticket. He was about to go home, which is when his friends caught him in the last moment and told him "Ah, we'll get you through without a ticket, it's no big deal." They got him in, and after following a corridor they encountered large ascending stairs upon which he saw her coming down. She said, "well come on then," turned around, and they all went up.
- Avi and his future wife dated for about three months, and then they got married. She was a musician that taught at the conservatory.
- Once the borders of the Soviet Union started to open up, Avi and his wife wanted to move to Israel. But they didn't let Avi out because of the nature of his work. So, as described on page 149, he left his

job and then constantly asked permission from the emigration department to leave. His wife also quit her job at the conservatory so as not to further complicate things in the future. Only in three years did Avi manage to leave the country. During that period, they lived off of selling their stuff, which was good enough business to get by because during those times stores were empty. Meanwhile, on the same page it also mentions that “his daughters are far away,” which refers to the fact that his two daughters were able to leave the Soviet Union earlier and wait for their parents in Israel while they studied.

- In the emigrations building there was a captain who worked as a secretary and was the one who was in charge of informing Avi whether or not they’ve granted him permission to leave yet. For many months she told him that the answer was still “no.” But one day, as described on page 156, Avi quickly went right past her (described as the “sentry” in the text) right into the colonel’s office. That was a very risky and unheard-of move because ordinarily in such a situation he would have been arrested and could have suffered a serious fate. The colonel however took a liking to him and after hearing out Avi’s long plea she finally gave him permission to

leave the country. When Avi saw the captain later, she asked him “why did you have to do that?”

## **Afterword**

We've parted ways, dear reader,  
But it seems, that the Creator  
Desired for us to meet again.  
It's happened many times to me before  
When after many years of growing wiser,  
I stumble upon my past again,  
And with a soul a bit perplexed,  
I don't even recognize myself,  
For the past is always with us,  
And rules our destinies to come.

I met Avi many years later,  
When the past had already seemed to say “no:”  
It’s far away now, distant from the present,  
However, in future secrets it hides itself as well...  
We met in the Holy Land,  
Where I was brought to by fate itself,  
I still recall that meeting very well,  
And I can happily tell you,  
That Avi’s image hasn’t faded in my mind,  
And has entered my poetry once again.

It happened in Jerusalem,  
Oh... I can still see that bus exploding,  
When I just happened to be nearby,  
All of it felt like sheer Hell,  
I won’t describe to you those horrific and frightful details,  
And, unfortunately, it happened not just once...  
We mark our own futures,  
And thankfully, I wasn’t on that bus,  
And only stood nearby,  
And hence remained alive.

Swiftly police lines were being drawn,  
But the police and doctors were all confused:  
For where's the terrorist, where did he vanish to?  
Did he really escape into the nearby forest-park?!  
He detonated his bomb at a distance  
With the aid of a cellphone,  
And law enforcement was trying to solve the puzzle,  
Of when could the bomb have been carried onto the bus...  
Innocent people died,  
Including women, children, and the elderly.

Many volunteers came  
From a religious group,  
That provides assistance at such desperate times,  
God forbid for me to experience such a thing again...  
But who is that I see: is that Avi?!!  
He's energetic, as before,  
The whole picture though is a bit hazy in my mind...  
Oh, could one foretell such a killing?!  
Our suffering still continues without measure,  
Never knowing where God's path will lead us.

I yelled: “Avi, Avi!” ...  
He turned around a little dazed,  
As if someone from the other world was calling him,  
But he continued to do his task,  
Neatly collecting parts,  
To be sent for genetic tests  
For precise identifications,  
And provide visas to the heavens...  
The killed don’t ask for condolences,  
But pray that the stalking terrorist will be destroyed.

He threw me a note with his phone number,  
And returned to his heavy task,  
As I mournfully walked away,  
For a long time afterwards it all came back to me as  
    nightmares.

I called Avi later, of course,  
“We’ve been waiting for your call” –  
A female voice answered – “If you find it convenient, at  
    seven o’clock on Ben Yehuda”  
Indeed miracles happen in our lives!  
And our world is full of wonders,  
But only if you weren’t confused by the devil’s vices.

“I live in Jerusalem with my family,  
And I’m extremely happy here,  
Where I’m as free as a person should be.  
I can’t forget the past of course,  
Do I miss it? My work, maybe,  
I’ve left science until the time,  
But that doesn’t bother me at all,  
I’ve attained summits, and became a doyen in my field,  
Not everyone is able to leave the stage on time,  
And achieve such heights more than once.

I’ve opened up a new and infinite world for myself,  
It doesn’t compare to science of course,  
In both depth and paradoxicality in its ideas,  
But now, without bounds,  
It lives and grows within my soul,  
I don’t have the energy to stop,  
And for the first time in my life,  
I’ve realized that I’m a poet!  
God bestows many gifts upon us:  
And everyone’s free to choose their path.

When I first laid eyes on Jerusalem,  
I was astounded by its beauty,  
It always lived within my soul,  
It was always there, deep inside of me,  
But I never dreamed of its reality:  
Those dreams, it seems were frozen in the snow,  
And maintained its steady sleep  
In those expansive icy fields...  
But it managed to thaw me out,  
How wonderful it is that it wasn't all a dream.

I fell in love with these hills immediately,  
Live waves, they were dear to me,  
For I've extensively studied them before,  
And they've naturally entered the verse I write.  
I've been swimming in them for a long time now,  
And my songs for them never end,  
As they remind me of flowing waves.  
Yet here's what seems so strange to me:  
They're not born on our dear Earth,  
But draw our attention to their starry flicker.

And there's the sky, and there's blue:  
No matter where you set your gaze,  
The hand of God is seen,  
Who, I'm sure, is looking down  
Upon his city from time to time,  
And leaves writing in the form of rocks,  
Dispersed in seemingly chaotic fashion,  
Upon the territories of my favorite country.  
The country's small, but she's magnificent,  
No other country is as glorious as this!"

This is what Avi told me,  
His love for the Holy Land  
Touched me deeply to the core,  
Hi eyes on fire and full of energy as before...  
Ah, of course, time leaves its print,  
And even though a youthful spirit resides in him,  
Time has already said no to many things,  
As the calm metronome<sup>36</sup> keeps counting forward...  
But for those who maintain a youthful soul,  
Time can sometimes step aside for them.

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<sup>36</sup> A metronome is a device that makes a sound at regular intervals, used for example by musicians to practice their tempo.

And with pride he showed me  
The volumes of poetry books he wrote,  
Yet it seemed, there was slight melancholy in his eyes –  
That's connected to a lot in fact:  
Maybe it's the tax of age,  
The decline of energy from those youthful years.  
Ah, but he won't admit that though,  
For those memories have been kind to him...  
Move forward, and don't mind time,  
That way you won't feel its straining weight.

I was amazed at the immense collection of his works,  
Even though I knew, that Avi hasn't finished,  
For he found a new field to devote his talents to,  
All of which astounded me.  
And it is here that he conquered his second summit:  
All his feelings given life,  
In written poetry and rhyme,  
All of which laid dormant in his soul before.  
When God's spark lights up our talent,  
Our genuine accomplishments become uncountable.

Witness the painting of life portrayed in them!  
As essence splashes in their stormy waters:  
They recognize the flowers of love,  
And stories of pain and hardships,  
There lie songs of Jerusalem,  
A city so close and dear to him,  
Of human tears that fill our world,  
And of heaven, clean and free of sin...  
He was able to say a great deal of things,  
And pass it on to his descendants.

And the philosophical discussions that they contain,  
Reflecting certitude of the creation  
Of our world from merely “nothing,”  
And yet, he still doesn’t know what time is,  
Is it like an immense river?  
Carrying colossal energy downstream,  
Through twists and swirls,  
Becoming steeper and steeper as it flows.  
Yes, his poems have touched many themes,  
But that’s far from all that concerned our Avi.

He wrote of politics, of unchecked power,  
Of the crowds, and their wandering freedom,  
Tragedy and farse vibrate on one chord,  
And stories come alive with originality and humor.  
There are books for kids both big and small,  
With magnificent illustrations on their pages,  
There are books for older people just as well,  
All written by a soul of passion.  
All such noble work feeds Avi's spirit,  
The world hasn't seen someone like Avi before.

- And what about science, is this really it?
- For a long time now I've been having a thought or two.
- And in what field do you plan to apply your creative powers?
- First of all, I plan to live,  
Second, I have some ideas to explore,  
That have long been circulating in my mind,  
In that tenacious head of mine,  
And it's impossible for me to let them go.  
Ah, Avi, Avi, you're relentless,  
A persevering and endless pilgrim.

“But what’s important isn’t books, but my grandchildren,  
They were born here, and not for hardship,  
But for life in this wonderful world of ours,  
Despite the dangers that lurks upon it.  
And I am certain, that with honor they’ll defend it,  
For I’m rearing them to be fighters,  
As life here isn’t easy, and not so simple,  
But it’s good that they’re here with us.”  
All his life he searched for the essence,  
And has found that ideal in his descendants.

Well, that’s pretty much all about Avi.  
Have you heard of him by accident?!  
His name will soon be known by all, I’m sure of it,  
I measure his future by his talent.  
And in case you want to meet him someday,  
He lives happily in Jerusalem,  
And it can even happen  
That he’ll share with you his future fate.  
He knows what he’s living for,  
His talent will outlive him!

*December 2013*

## Afterword Translator's Notes

- When Avi was still in the Soviet Union with his wife, it became a little difficult to live with his daughters being far away in Israel. So, to keep his mind active he began pursuing a new passion of writing poetry. He liked the art so much, that he continues to produce many poetry books even after he reunited with his family in Israel.

*5/22/2022*