

Wretched Land by Mila Komarnisky, Chapter 12, Excerpt 2

It was one more day until Dmytro would return home, but there was no food left in the Verbitsky house and Khrystina and the children had not eaten for three days. They had eaten the last potato on Wednesday. Despite the small ration Khrystina fed the children every day, she couldn't manage to stretch the food thin enough. She saw their hungry eyes and boiled an extra potato for them. After they ate all the food stored in the house, they drank a lot of water but it did not diminish the hunger. It just burned in their empty stomachs, as if they were full of hot coals.

The children were weak from malnutrition. They did not play; they only spoke in feeble voices about the food Khrystina had served before the famine, especially on Christmas and on Easter holidays.

Even though Khrystina heated the house once a day, the children felt cold and lay in bed dressed in warm clothes. Finally, they stopped asking for food and only complained about the pain in their stomachs. Their cries split Khrystina's heart. When Ganna threw up a greenish, viscous looking liquid, Khrystina could not wait any longer. For the first time in her life, she had to go into the village and beg for food. She was heart-broken. She dressed in the only clothes that she had left, the ones she used to work in the barn. She put her felt boots and galoshes on her bare feet, took the baby, and went out into the street.

The day was cold and windy. The gale blew piles of snow in the yard and in the street. She walked along the quiet, empty street as snow crunched under her feet. All the dogs and cats had disappeared from the yards as well as their own dog, Tobik, and cat, Murka. The children missed them very much. They had called to them every day but they did not come home. Probably someone had caught the animals and had eaten them.

The love between Dmytro, an impoverished aristocrat turned farmer, and Khrystina, daughter of a wealthy landowner, carries their family through the horrors of the twentieth century that befell the Ukraine.

The author's website: www.komarnisky.com

The book trailer on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJk8YEF0aHI>