

## The Brink of Madness

Aloyzas BARONAS



Although well known as novelist, short story writer, poet, satirist, and journalist among the Lithuanian readers, Aloyzas Baronas is almost an unknown to the English-speaking public. Only very recently he debuted together with three other Lithuanian writers in an English anthology of short stories—Lithuanian Quartet (New York, Manyland Books, 1962). Aloyzas Baronas was born in Vabalninkas, Lithuania, in 1917. He first studied technology in Kaunas, then turned his attention to literature and philosophy. Later he continued his studies at the University of Goethe in Frankfurt, Germany. In 1949 he came to the USA and established his residence in Chicago, Ill. At present he is one of the editors of the Lithuanian newspaper Draugas.

Baronas is a representative of the middle generation of Lithuanian writers, who received their main training in Lithuania, but who matured in the literary sense in exile. The experiences of the Second World War and of exile are deeply imbedded in their characters and reflect in their work. In Baronas' works we find a preoccupation with the political and social upheavals in which a variety of personages attempt to locate themselves meaningfully in the universe. Baronas usually writes about the ordinary people whose motivation depends upon their individual conceptions of the surrounding world. Baronas' latest novel "Lieptai ir bedugnės"

(Foot Bridges and Abysses) won the major Lithuanian literary award, the Draugas literary prize for 1960. Aloyzas Baronas is principally a novelist, with a strong liking for the short story, one of which—"The Brink of Madness"—is presented in this issue. Baronas is one of the most prolific writers among the Lithuanian émigré writers. Some of his titles are: "Žvaigždės ir vėjai" (The Stars and the Winds), "Debesys plaukia pažemiu" (The Low Floating Clouds), "Antrasis krantas (The Second Coast), "Sodas už horizonto" (The Orchard Behind the Horizon), "Mėnesiena" (Moonlight), "Valandos ir amžiai" (Hours and Centuries), "Mėlyni karveliai" (Blue Pigeons, a story for children).

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Now, take Julius Bakutis — he never elbowed his way to the front. Even in Lithuania, where he was in the quartermaster's warehouses, he was a calm man and accepted salary increases without a qualm. He wasn't miserly, but at the same time he didn't squander his money. From his savings he was able to build himself a modest home, where he lived with his wife. And as the old saying goes, he never bothered anyone and no one was any trouble to him. During the summer months, he either mowed the lawn and pruned the dry branches from his cherry and apple trees, or he just sat on the front porch and stared out at silent sunsets that colored the quietly running stream.

Then, in spring and autumn, he worked in his garden and in the evening he read books. He enjoyed reading so much that he might be called a poet-farmer, though he had never written a poem.

Bakutis was of medium height and balding; he would gaze out through half-closed eyes with a quizzical squint, as though the sun were constantly blinding him. His wife was just as calm as he was. If there had not been chaos in Europe, these people would have lived out their lives as millions of others, as peacefully as the grass pales and the ripened fruit thuds to the ground at occasional puffs of the breeze in autumn. But the war drove them from their home, and Bakutis recalled with real sorrow how the fruit trees had murmured quietly in the summer and created melancholy and solitude in the winter and spring. Then at other times, when he was away from home, he thought he could hear the patter of rain on the tin roof; on

stormy nights he was fearful, too, that strange winds might shake off the cherries or unripped apples from his trees. But time passed and he overcame these preoccupations.

When Bakutis arrived in America he had reached almost threescore years. Often he wondered why he, at his age and without interest in politics, should ever have thought of leaving his homeland; but his nostalgia and doubts disappeared when he read in the newspapers of communism and the life there. What made Bakutis shudder was not the thought of being deported to Siberia or being crammed into the tiny confines of a communal farm, but the many lies the Bolsheviks told. Bakutis hated fraud and he trembled at the thought that he might be forced to lie and even to respect lying. He hated lying and that would have been the bitterest remedy of his homesickness. He had lost much, but he was free. And that thought was like refreshing water on his time-weary bones. Here he need not honor a thing that he hated. At first he did not know what to say to those who asked him how he liked it in this country, because everything seemed up-side-down. And when they referred to people as transplanted, he understood them in the literal sense, because he thought of his own orchard and it seemed to him that his trees would not grow here if they were transplanted. Nevertheless, he managed to live. He got used to it, and he survived. Man must be more sturdy than a tree. He clings as moss does on a rock, and lives.

Those first days were sadly shameful for Bakutis, especially when he rented a small apartment and the good neighbors gave him their old furniture and dishes. "This is for your new start in life," he was told, and it was then that he felt like a new-born babe, as though he had lost everything with never a hope to regain the accumulation of precious years; they could never be restored or exchanged. He was angered by a poverty that he had never merited or brought about. And as the neighbors handed him their gifts Bakutis did not rejoice, even though he knew well that he needed those things and that sooner or later he would have had to purchase them. Gifts lower a man, even though they are sincerely given. Bakutis swallowed all of this embarrassment like a bitter pill, and each day he worked harder in this land of plenty, almost skimping with his own hours, since he knew there was a chance to regain all that he had lost. He did not buy new furniture; he wore the same old clothes, and saved to buy a new home with a garden and an orchard, for he reasoned that he would again have, at least in part, some of the life that he had once known.

Bakutis found a job in an enamel factory. There he worked with older men. His own task was not too hard, nor was it too clean. No one hurried too much. This suited Bakutis perfectly, even though he had already acquired a certain nervous tension which he had not felt before. He worked as though he were in the quartermaster's warehouse, in an orderly, scrupulous manner — perhaps too scrupulously.

"I'll die here," he would say to his friends. "I'll never go anywhere else. I like it here. Besides, who will hire an old man like me?"

The days passed quietly one after another, as though they awaited the announcement of a worldwide sensation. Time ticked on and the tiring shrieks of sirens jangled the nerves. Each week the aging laborer punched a new time card and on Fridays he received his check; it was a usual, happy event. On Sunday, the thought that there would be more of the same on Monday began to flow through his veins and made him feel a certain deadening pain in his chest. On Tuesdays he felt better, and the pain seemed to begin to decrease to a minimum. Then the entire reaction would begin anew.

"I'll work here until I am pensioned," he constantly murmured, when his wife reminded him that others were earning more elsewhere.

The old saying that a bird in the hand is worth more than two in the bush had a real meaning for him, because he could almost feel the bird in his hand. He knew that by changing jobs constantly he was in real danger of losing that bird. He worked, he saved and gradually he won out. In fact, he saved enough to buy himself a little home. Here he could live in retirement or if there should come a chance to return to his homeland, he would not be empty-handed.

True, his home was small and built of wood, but somehow it all reminded him of the days in his homeland. The yard behind the house was not small, and it contained wildly growing lilac bushes and an old apple tree. Bakutis trimmed the lilac bushes and he carefully pruned the branches of the tree. He was sometimes not too happy, because he always felt that in the low-hanging fog Lithuania was not far away. It was a peaceful place, in any event. He planned to claim his pension in a few years, and he thought it would be nice to be able to work in his garden, planting berries, bushes, and apple trees.

He moved the old furniture into his new home. Some of it was still quite good, but other pieces were badly worn. It was because of this that Bakutis decided to destroy an old sofa he had received seven years before from an old bachelor who had died some years since. The first owner must have had it more than ten years before he gave it away. It was certainly not new then, and had long ago outlived its usefulness. Thus Bakutis was determined to go out and buy a new one. He bartered for it a long time; he even patted it and tried it out a few times, before he handed over the money. Immediately he dragged the old sofa out into the back yard and began the task of hacking it to pieces. He pulled out the cushions and quickly chopped at the wooden arm rests of the frame. As he did so, a bundle of dusty, yellowing newspapers, tied together with a rope, fell to the ground. He kicked the bundle and finally he bent over, picked it up and untied the rope.

It was a chilly, but a clear September day. A brisk wind stirred in the apple tree and rattled a loose board in the fence. Nevertheless, Bakutis began to perspire. In the bundle of newspapers there were green bills. They were dusty and faded, but the green of the dollar bills shone through quite clearly. He narrowed his half-closed eyes to slits, because he could

see ten and hundred-dollar bills. There weren't just a few; he could not say how many there were. He thought he must be dreaming. It was as though he heard the murmur of the swaying apple tree and the clatter of the loose board in the fence in the stillness of the night. But it was not a dream. The wind was cold and tugged at his loose coat-tails, and there before him was the old hacked-up sofa, which reminded him of a butchered animal carcass. How often he had dreamed of having money and a home, only to awake and find neither. Now he had not only the home, but an uncounted bundle of money as well. His forehead broke out in sweat and his fingers became numb. He had that strange, sickening feeling which could precede a heart attack.

Then, suddenly, he felt like a thief. Bakutis was filled with fear. He ran quickly into the house. His wife, who was in the parlor gathering up the dead leaves of the potted ferns, suddenly began to wonder why he had come in with such haste.

"Mother, look what I found," he said, and he dropped the bundle on the table as if it were on fire. Among the pages of the newspaper the green of the money gleamed, a little worse for the ravages of time, but nevertheless real money, in a huge amount.

His wife's handful of fern leaves began to fall to the floor as she began to tremble. She could not speak a word.

She turned in astonished glance at Bakutis, who immediately said, "Look, I found it in the old sofa. What do you think of that?"

He placed the money on the table as if he had stolen it. And then, as though he had really stolen it, he walked to the door and turned the key. And as he returned he remembered the story about the sale of souls to the devil. He recalled an English play he had seen on his neighbor's television set about a devil who had purchased a man's soul for a bag of money, and had sealed the bargain in blood. Bakutis had not sold his soul, but there he was in front of the money, which he could neither pick up nor push aside. Finally he moved the money. The paper sent up a cloud of dust. You would think that Bakutis could smell burning sulfur. Yet the money belonged to no one; it had been destined to be lost, and that was the intriguing and awesome truth.

Then they began to count the money. And with trembling hands they separated it into piles of hundreds and tens; they counted six and a half thousand dollars.

"Well, if we hid this money, and then just took a little at a time," the old man dared to say, "we could use it for emergencies. We could even finish paying for the house sooner."

"Whoever had it before certainly didn't need it," agreed Mrs. Bakutis at first, and then, as though she feared the words she had uttered, she added, "But why do we need it? Money that belongs to others only brings bad luck."

Bakutis argued the point: "Oh, I wouldn't say that! Don't some people win lotteries, and others inherit money?"

The green piles of money gleamed with an enticing sheen and with a promise of countless possibilities.

"Oh, that is a different matter," his wife argued against her wish.

The money was precious. It was happiness, like a return of all that they had lost during the war and exile.

He dreamt aloud: "Ah, we would travel to Europe. Why, we could even go to California for the winter!"

Then he fell silent for a few moments. He considered all the possibilities and the uncertain origin of the money. It was either a gift, and good luck, or bad luck and a sign of doom. Beyond the window it was a September day. The wind in the orchard stirred the apple tree, which was like a symbol of all the happiness he had enjoyed in his homeland. In the distance he heard the roar of a motor. Overhead a lone plane was lugubriously forging ahead through the autumn clouds. A siren wailed. The fire department, an emergency patrol, or even the police. A shiver ran down Mrs. Bakutis's spine. And as the siren wailed again she had visions of robbers, murders and hold-ups. Teenagers had once murdered an old pensioner for sixty cents. This thought shocked her, and suddenly she cried: "No, I don't want it. Throw it out or even burn it! It might be bloody. Someone may have murdered for it and then hidden it. It might be someone's life savings. No, we don't need it. Throw it away."

"How can that be?" Bakutis asked quietly.

Even though the woman's words seemed real, he could not completely understand their meaning. He knew the value of money. Throwing money away or burning it was just as great a crime as throwing a man out of the house. This was hard-earned money and jobs are not so easy to come by. Throwing it away would be a sin, like throwing out bread or some holy object. "No, it cannot be thrown out, we must give it to the Church, or an orphanage."

Both thought for a moment. It seemed as if the money and the apple tree quietly rustled together. It was in fact hard to distinguish between the quiet rustle of the green leaves of the apple tree and the green leaves on the table. The one reminded him of the past, of autumn and a certain unending melancholy; while the other stood for a life that one

sometimes tries and sometimes wishes to improve each day. He felt something like the contest of two opposite electric currents, and this shocked his soul.

Their hands trembled.

"If someone called for this money, we could never get it back from the Church or the orphanage," the old man said, as though he hated to think of giving the money back after their few minutes of joy and concern.

In the distance the long dying wail of the siren sounded a few more times. Again this filled Mrs. Bakutis with fear.

"Take it to the police. Let them do what they want with it. Tell them where you found it, and that will be the end of the matter."

Again the currents shocked Bakutis. The green scraps of paper uttered thousands of promises. Travel and rest. A paid-up mortgage. Suddenly all his unsolvable problems were resolved.

"Let's keep part of it," Bakutis said, as though he were trying to find a compromise in the agreement between himself and his wife.

"No, no, take it out of here now, at once," cried Mrs. Bakutis, and she went into the pantry and found a grocery bag. She jammed the money into the bag with the newspapers. Then her hands stopped trembling and her voice regained its natural tone.

Bakutis lifted the bag. A strange flame smoldered in his eyes. His cheeks reddened as though they had been chapped by a cold February wind. Again he placed the bag on the table, put on his coat and then stood waiting for something to happen.

"Take it out of here, and you'll feel better," his wife commanded.

Without a word he picked up the bag. It seemed to him as though he had refused to bargain with the devil, and that peace had returned after a sleepless night.

As he walked through the back yard he noticed the hacked-up sofa and all his desire for the money seemed to have vanished. His great concern was over how the police would take his explanation. On his way to the police station Bakutis began to think of what English words he should use; he thought of common, everyday words, and he tried to form sentences to explain this unusual case. He decided that no one would claim the money and that it would become his, part of it at least. This would be a fine feeling; his hope thus led him to believe that he might obtain something for himself.

This September Saturday was a little on the cold side, yet traces of the past summer were everywhere. Autumn flowers were blooming beside some of the homes. Some of the wilted leaves looked a little ragged. The police station was only about seven blocks away, and the old man walked.

Here and there the neighbors raked leaves. An occasional auto streaked down the pleasant tree-lined street and a few pedestrians passed by, their coat-tails waving in the wind; but no one dreamed that this old man with the paper bag under his arm was lugging a home, an auto, furniture, and a collection of other unusual items.

Before he entered the police station, the old man was filled with a certain dread; but then his fear, which reminded him of the time he had stolen peas from a neighbor's garden or of the time he had applied for his first job in America, suddenly vanished as he walked down the corridor that led into the squad room. Here everyone was on the move in every direction, and quite preoccupied. Some were paying fines, and others were registering lost or stolen goods. There seemed to be any number of reasons why people crossed the unfamiliar doorstep of the station. There were no sawed-off shotguns or iron bars. It was a place as ordinary as anywhere else.

At the information window he could see a uniformed officer listening to baseball results over the radio. Bakutis went up to the window and said in an ordinary tone: "I found some money". The officer raised his head and gave him a quizzical look. Just then his favorite team was at bat, and this old man annoyed him. Automatically, he reached for his record book and asked: "Name?"

Bakutis slowly pronounced his name and from the writing he could see that the first letter was already written incorrectly. But he said nothing. He immediately stated his address.

"How much did you find?" the officer asked.

Just then another officer approached the desk and they discussed the baseball results. They cast an occasional glance at Bakutis, as though they expected him to agree with them, but he only smiled sheepishly. He couldn't understand a thing they were saying, and he didn't care. After a few moments the officer asked: "How much did you find?"

"Six and a half thousand."

"How much?" asked the officer with a start and a wild-eyed stare. Bakutis did not look him in the eye, but lowered his gaze and mumbled the figure a second time.

The officer kept staring at Bakutis, who pronounced the figures incorrectly and seemed crazy as he did so.

"Do you speak Polish?" asked the officer in bad Polish, with every good intention to help Bakutis, who said nothing more but hurriedly pushed the bag under the grill.

Quickly the officer looked into the bag and pulled out some of the newspapers and took a deep breath. Now, this officer once had had a gunfight with a group of bandits. Bullets had whizzed over his head and lodged in the back seat of his car. One time he had chased a bank robber who threw a bag of money out of the car. All this had been in the line of duty. There had been other such events in his life, and he had never been afraid; but now this bag of money shocked him. Rarely did someone ever come in with money; usually they came to report sums that were lost. The officer's heart began to pound, his eyes sparkled, and he yearned to take a handful of the money. His hand trembled. He needed help. He telephoned his superior officer. Bakutis stood there and smiled. He was almost at peace with himself. The thrill of finding the money had already worn off, and his sense of balance had returned. It was as though he had been swimming the deep waters and could now feel solid ground under his feet.

The officer took the money out and threw the bag on the floor. For a moment he had forgotten about Bakutis. Suddenly he faced him and, conscious of his unnatural tone of voice, he said: "Wait here."

Bakutis grinned broadly. He would have waited without being told. Seeing the grin on Bakutis' face the officer felt silly and uncomfortable, as if he wanted to say: "You fool, you bring in a bag of money, and just grin about it."

A young police lieutenant walked in. He invited Bakutis into his office; the officer followed with the money and waited a while, as though he were expecting something to happen. The lieutenant waved him out and his contact with the money was ended. For him it was like simple surgery, such as the removal of a splinter from a finger, painful but necessary.

Bakutis described all that had happened, and the lieutenant noted everything down. Later he called in two other officers who carefully counted the money. Then he placed it in a fireproof safe, together with his notes. Bakutis wanted to finish the whole business as soon as possible. He had freed himself from the money and the temptation. Gone were the thousands of burning, fearfully tempting desires. Everything was finished.

"Can I go now?" asked Bakutis as he moved towards the door.

"Wait," said the lieutenant. He picked up the phone, spoke to someone, and then walked towards the door. He motioned to Bakutis: "I'll take you home."

As they reached the street, two officers sat in the car quietly talking. Bakutis got in and again repeated his home address.

When they reached his home, he saw a crowd of curious people watching the policemen in his back yard. The police lieutenant called Mrs. Bakutis from the house and they photographed the old couple beside the sofa. There it stood, its insides sticking out and the stuffing scattered about by the wind.

In ten minutes the affair was over, and the lieutenant said that the money would be turned over to the court, which would decide to whom it belonged.

The day had become evening. The wind had subsided and the sun drew its reddish disk behind a cloud. The air was heavy with the smell of burning leaves. The apple tree trembled ever so slightly as the setting sun painted its leaves an odd shade of red. Bakutis piled the remains of the sofa on the trash-heap, and when he went into the house and sat down to his supper, he felt somehow both sad and relieved.

"Eat your supper," his wife told him, and almost reading his thoughts, she added, "Huh, money, it was not ours. It would not have brought us any happiness."

"Quite true, now we can sleep peacefully. Otherwise, we would have been afraid, as though we had stolen it." Bakutis said this as he ladled the cabbage soup whose aroma and warmth quieted his nerves, which were beginning to act up like the insects that one feels as one lies on a new-mown hay.

That night Bakutis dreamed of his old orchard which he visited in a plane, of a California beach which he remembered from a picture on the calendar he had picked up at his bank, of a wild dash from the police station, and even of a battle with the devil. In the morning he got up without having rested much, but he was calm. His wife did not say a word. They did not refer to the money again, but on their way to church, Bakutis did remark: "Now, we walk calmly to church; otherwise we would have felt like thieves. If no one calls for the money, it will be ours. Then it will be a different matter, entirely."

"There is no reason to talk about it," Mrs. Bakutis answered. And they tried to forget the matter, to get it out of their blood, and to quiet their nerves. They tried to pretend that it had never happened, but still their thoughts returned to the event.

As the priest preached from the altar about the frailty and ignorance of man, Bakutis thought about how many years he had sat in that same sofa and never dreamed that he was sitting on money. When the collection was being taken up, he thought how much more he could have donated if he had kept it. He could have had a Mass said for whoever had hidden the money, and that would have had eternal value.

Usually Bakutis felt depressed on Sundays because he thought about going to work the next day; but this week he was anxious. Bakutis wanted the time to fly by, so that he could get into his ordinary routine and that his every-day worries could cover the recent event like a layer of sand.

On Monday Bakutis went to work as usual and worked a full day. It was no different from his other Mondays. With that day over, the week was started and it did not seem too difficult. Bakutis felt wonderful as he returned home from work. The day, warm and sunny, was quite reminiscent of summer. He walked quietly and briskly. He began to hum a song, almost too loudly, thinking, what is the name of that tune?

Tuesday it was the same, and when Wednesday morning rolled around he had forgotten the entire matter. On Monday the garbage collectors had carted away the remains of the sofa, and it seemed to him that they had also carted away his disgust, sadness and continual worries.

Two Lithuanians worked in the factory laboratory; they were in charge of the mixing of enamels. Bakutis usually greeted them, but had never tried to establish a close friendship. And they did not make a special effort to be friendly. One of them, Liudzius, was a chemistry graduate, while the other Kamcaitis, was an agriculturist from the same district in his homeland. They started work a half hour later than he did each day, and on their way through the factory they would stop to chat with Bakutis. But on Wednesday Bakutis had not yet started his work, and they approached him with curious grins. Liudzius, the younger of the two, had a copy of the community newspaper that was published on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays.

"Congratulations to the most honest man in the world!" Liudzius said, and it seemed that he really meant it.

"Brother, the papers are writing about you and it looks as if Diogenes does not need to hunt for an honest man with his candle," added Kamcaitis.

"Look," Liudzius said, spreading out the paper.

Bakutis blushed. Sure enough, there he stood with his wife beside the hacked-up sofa, somewhat uncomfortable from the wind, and shying away from being photographed. He and his wife seemed odd and almost ludicrous beside the broken frame of the sofa. The springs poked out through the stuffing in perfect circles, while the two old people looked as though they were ready to walk out of the picture. Above their heads were the huge numerals: \$6,500.00. Not one cent of the money was missing.

"See, how beautifully you advertise our country!" said Kamcaitis. "This is a very good story about you."

"You'll get the money, if no one calls for it. Buy yourself a copy of the paper," Liudzius said as the two walked away and left Bakutis gaping at them.

From that minute on, the dark aspect of the problem appeared. The devil went to work because Bakutis had refused the money. And worked with a devastating effect. Superficially, he worked with consistency and decorum, but his efforts were in fact merciless, destructive and exhausting. He boxed in deeper and tighter, as a screw is twisted into an oak frame. Thus, when Liudzius and Kamcaitis walked away a younger worker closed in and, tapping his head with his finger, shouted: "So, you found it and turned it in!" Then he pointed to the newspaper, "This is you, you crazy guy. Whoever hides money has no use for it."

"He'll get the money back. The court will award it to him," said another, as a crowd gathered, talking loudly and arguing, until the foreman came along and sent everyone back to work. When he had sent the men to their places, he said to Bakutis: "Don't be disappointed, if no one claims it, you'll get the money. Be happy. You're a lucky guy."

Nevertheless, this lucky guy had trembling hands. He did not want publicity for his country, he wanted to remain invisible. Really, he did not want to be bothered until he received his pension. He did not seek publicity for himself, nor the money, not even a court order. He reproached himself for having permitted the photograph. If he had only known, he would have run away or driven the reporters away with a stick. "This is a free country," he kept repeating to himself; he was angry at every one, and even thought he would have done better to throw the money into the trashcan.

Just before lunch-time one of his fellow-employees said: "Since Julius is now a rich man, he can buy the coffee."

Bakutis did not say a word. He went out and bought seven coffees for the group, paying seventy cents. He was exasperated. That was hard-earned money, and he would have to work almost a half-hour to pay for the coffee.

On his way home he bought the newspaper. The storekeeper tried to make him talk about how everything had happened, but Bakutis did not allow him to open the conversation. He hurried home as though he were being pursued, as if it were raining, or as if some misfortune had occurred at home.

In the house he and his wife read the article with the help of a dictionary. There was nothing more in the story than he already knew, except there were some kind words about his honesty.

"What are you so sad about? They wrote it and now it's forgotten," his wife commented, but he knew that it was not forgotten. People still knew about it.

"Sure, they'll forget, once they..." he consoled himself as he stared out the window into the dusk. In the back yard his apple tree swayed ever so gently, and in its branches and leaves he could almost see the laughing eyes of Satan. Bakutis trembled.

"Put something on, maybe you should even light the stove. It's a chilly night," his wife advised.

Bakutis remained quiet. He gazed out the window and he could see the laughing glances of Satan until his wife turned on the light and closed the drapes.

That night Bakutis slept fitfully. He was turning over the pages of the newspaper, he was even arguing with the police officer, and he was worried whether he would be able to explain things correctly, because the dream was in English. Later he awoke, got up, and drank some water. He went up to the window and looked out into the street. Solitary lights were burning. Off in the distance an airliner buzzed by, like some flying star. Through the edge of a cloud he could see the new moon. And again Bakutis saw the devil, the same one he had seen on TV, exchanging money for a soul. The devil grinned and winked. Bakutis drew the drapes tight.

Toward morning he fell asleep. He went off to work with some foreboding, as though unforeseen difficulties awaited him. He felt like some men do, as they go to the trenches. At work the men reminded him that he would soon be a rich man, that he would be able to buy a home, an auto, and that now he should at least be able to buy the coffee.

The days slipped by. Little by little the whole affair began to be forgotten. It dimmed, and slipped behind the fog, as it were. Bakutis began to feel better.

A half-year went by. The autumn was dry and the winter was cold and wet, and chilled one to the bone. Again Bakutis became famous. The court declared its decision: when no one claims the money, according to law it goes to the State. Since no one had claimed the money, it was certain that Bakutis would not receive it. Again the newspapers ran stories, and included Bakutis' picture. And now the devil went to work again. At the shop everyone had almost forgotten the matter, and now all the hostility and scorn began to reappear.

"Millionaire!" cried one redheaded employee, pointing to Bakutis, "He gives the Government six thousand dollars."

"You've got a screw loose," said another with a wave of the hand.

Then all the others turned against Bakutis as though the court decision were his fault. If some harder job turned up, everyone would say: "Let Julius go. He is a millionaire. He doesn't have to work; he had the money, but he likes to work. He gave it to the State."

"A real millionaire," said another as he placed his finger to his head with a laugh.

Bakutis could not sleep nights. Going home from the factory was like leaving a prison, being freed from the electric chair or escaping from a field of execution. A few hours at home and he felt relieved, but during the night and towards early morning he was seized by a severe depression. Bakutis left for work as though he were going to his own hanging.

"I wonder if I'll last the year and a half until my pension," he would say to his wife when she asked whether he could not quit his job and look for another somewhere else. Bakutis often wondered if the employees would ever forget the whole business, but it seemed that they were just getting started.

Sometimes when he could not sleep he would look out into the street. Snowflakes would spin and fall around the street lights. Mournful, cold stars would flash through gaps in the clouds. They scarcely seemed to tremble. At other times there was a chilling fog, and frost clung to the branches of the apple tree. All this made him happy. Bakutis knew that many things could pass away, but this yard, apple tree and home were his. He could long enjoy this solitude. But when the hatred began to swell up in him, he tried to pray. He asked the Lord for help and strength, and that everyone be made to forget about his honesty. This prayer sometimes turned to anger, and in his mind he would shout: "God, do you try me, because I was too honest?" At other times he would calm down and then his prayer became almost Pharisaical, crying that it is good that he is not a thief even though the factory curses him because of his honesty and seems to hate the just.

Bakutis withered. Sometimes it seemed to him that his heart began to beat more strongly, then at other times it slowed down because of his rage and worry. In the factory he was persecuted with the name of millionaire and he saw that the workers considered him a fool and that there would be no end to it. Bakutis shriveled up. His wife forced him to go to the doctor.

"Your heart is weak. Don't drink whiskey or coffee. Don't smoke," the doctor told him. Bakutis did not do any of those things. "Avoid fats, and don't let yourself worry," continued the doctor.

Bakutis was thin and he didn't worry; the fact is, he was being driven crazy. His was not a worry, it was an obsession.

The snow was beautiful, wonderful. The apple tree was the center of a romantic picture; the snow was fluffy, the heavens were gray and cold and the clouds were drifting high. The evening air was so dry, it would certainly turn cold. Bakutis shoveled the snow and took his time about it. He dug away slowly, taking deep breaths of air. He remembered reading about that in the newspaper. When the shoveling was finished, he felt a little tired and when he returned to the house, he lay down on the sofa, panting heavily.

"Are you tired?" his wife asked with a worried look.

"Just a little, but that is nothing," he replied and he really looked fine — his cheeks were tanned and healthy.

"Don't go to work any more. We'll be able to live for a year and a half until your pension."

Bakutis said nothing, because he was thinking of the five thousand that he would lose if he stopped working. That meant, too, that he would lose the interest on that amount. And now he is asked to stop working because he did not keep the money he had found! No. He would suffer through it, even if it killed him. But then, on second thought, no one was trying to kill him. All he needed was a little more willpower, and let them go hang.

In the morning Bakutis felt that his left arm was a little numb and there was a slight pain in the back of his neck. Oh, that was from the snow. At work he was lifting sheets of tin.

In a joking tone, a fellow employee said: "Millionaire, you must count those sheets like dollar bills."

"A crazy fool likes work," a young worker yelled at him in Russian. The pronunciation was bad, but Bakutis understood him. He did not say anything, but with lowered eyes kept piling up the sheets of tin.

"Don't talk in Russian, say it in English," another said, berating his friend. When the phrase was translated everyone got a good laugh out of it.

Bakutis kept piling the sheets of tin, without raising his head. Bakutis, slave away, Bakutis, don't give up. Not long now. Just a year and a half. Still Bakutis did not raise his eyes. He kept staring at the sheets of tin and suddenly they began to spin around. Everything whirled — the tin, the dollars, the grinning devil on TV, the police officer, his wife and the apple tree, both white and pale. Bakutis strained, thinking, why are they so white, is it because of the snow or the blossoms? Then it dawned on him and his mouth gaped.

They carried Bakutis out, gave him oxygen and injections but after a few days he died.

"Yes, your countryman gave away thousands and ran until he keeled over," remarked a fellow employee to Liudzius and Kamcaitis.

"And he could have lived without working," added another.

The shop whistle shrieked; inside, it sounded stifled, but outdoors its scream was loud and angry. Everyone dragged himself off to work.

"There is nothing you can do about it," mumbled Liudzius, as he shrugged his shoulders. As they approached the laboratory, Kamcaitis remarked: "Yes, it's as I said before, he was crazy. But who can tell how all this will be recorded in the eternal books." And, as he took off his coat, he added: "The cunning and the cheats are one step apart, and so are the honest men and the fools."

"That's quite true," agreed Ludzius, as he picked up his test tube. He continued: "Yes, quite true! Who can say where the brink of honesty, goodness, or madness begins or drops off?"

*Translated by P. P. ČINIKAS*