

it, he asked my mom, “Parik, tell me the truth. Did you win by cheating?” And my mother playfully replied, “You were so honest and trusting.”

Again, in his brevity, my father referred to “the infamous black cargo truck” that took him from the Rostov distribution center to the train station as the “Black Raven.” The fact that the notorious death truck is mentioned in most memoirs of the Gulag is significant because it speaks to the ominous impact the often short journey in that vehicle made on the poor prisoner. “Black Raven,” “Black Crow,” “Black Maria,” “Chorni Varon” (Углі ульнулі), this is how former prisoners remember that horrifying van. Suren Ghazaryan was likewise transported in the Black Raven—to Metekh, the city prison in Tbilisi.¹¹ Made of solid steel and painted black, the van was divided into cage-like compartments in which the prisoners were locked up. They could not see out and nobody outside could see them. During the Great Purge and the mass arrests as described in the memoirs, most arrests took place at night so that neighbors would not be frightened at seeing it happen so often. According to Solzhenitsyn, they had it all sorted out: arrests by night and demonstrations by day. “Along that same asphalt ribbon on which the Black Marias scurry at night, a tribe of youngsters strides by day with banners, flowers, and gay, untroubled songs.”¹² After World War II, as one prisoner remembered, these vehicles were often disguised so that the public would not realize how many arrests

¹¹ Ibid., p. 91.

¹² Solzhenitsyn, *Gulag Archipelago*, p. 7.