GOD SEES THE TRUTH, BUT WAITS

BY LEO N. TOLSTOY

In the town of Vladimir lived a young merchant named Ivan Dmitrich Aksionov. He had two shops and a house of his own.

Aksionov was a handsome, fair-haired, curly-headed fellow, full of fun, and very fond of singing. When quite a young man he had been given to drink, and was riotous when he had had too much; but after he married he gave up drinking, except now and then.

One summer Aksionov was going to the Nizhny Fair, and as he bade good-bye to his family, his wife said to him, “Ivan Dmitrich, do not start to-day; I have had a bad dream about you.”

Aksionov laughed, and said, “You are afraid that when I get to the fair I shall go on a spree.”

His wife replied: “I do not know what I am afraid of; all I know is that I had a bad dream. I dreamt you returned from the town, and when you took off your cap I saw that your hair was quite grey.”

Aksionov laughed. “That’s a lucky sign,” said he. “See if I don’t sell out all my goods, and bring you some presents from the fair.”

So he said good-bye to his family, and drove away.

When he had travelled half-way, he met a merchant whom he knew, and they put up at the same inn for the night. They had some tea together, and then went to bed in adjoining rooms.

It was not Aksionov’s habit to sleep late, and, wishing to travel while it was still cool, he aroused his driver before dawn, and told him to put in the horses.

Then he made his way across to the landlord of the inn (who lived in a cottage at the back), paid his bill, and continued his journey.

When he had gone about twenty-five miles, he stopped for the horses to be fed. Aksionov rested awhile in the passage of the inn, then he stepped out into the porch, and, ordering a samovar to be heated, got out his guitar and began to play.

Suddenly a troika drove up with tinkling bells and an official alighted, followed by two soldiers. He came to Aksionov and began to question him, asking him who he was and whence he came. Aksionov answered him fully, and said, “Won’t you have some tea with me?” But the official went on cross-questioning him and asking him. “Where did

you spend last night? Were you alone, or with a fellow-merchant? Did you see the other merchant this morning? Why did you leave the inn before dawn?"

Aksionov wondered why he was asked all these questions, but he described all that had happened, and then added, "Why do you cross-question me as if I were a thief or a robber? I am travelling on business of my own, and there is no need to question me."

Then the official, calling the soldiers, said, "I am the police-officer of this district, and I question you because the merchant with whom you spent last night has been found with his throat cut. We must search your things."

They entered the house. The soldiers and the police-officer unstrapped Aksionov's luggage and searched it. Suddenly the officer drew a knife out of a bag, crying, "Whose knife is this?"

Aksionov looked, and seeing a blood-stained knife taken from his bag, he was frightened.

"How is it there is blood on this knife?"

Aksionov tried to answer, but could hardly utter a word, and only stammered: "I—don't know—not mine." Then the police-officer said: "This morning the merchant was found in bed with his throat cut. You are the only person who could have done it. The house was locked from inside, and no one else was there. Here is this blood-stained knife in your bag and your face and manner betray you! Tell me how you killed him, and how much money you stole?"

Aksionov swore he had not done it; that he had not seen the merchant after they had had tea together; that he had no money except eight thousand rubles of his own, and that the knife was not his. But his voice was broken, his face pale, and he trembled with fear as though he went guilty.

The police-officer ordered the soldiers to bind Aksionov and to put him in the cart. As they tied his feet together and flung him into the cart, Aksionov crossed himself and wept. His money and goods were taken from him, and he was sent to the nearest town and imprisoned there. Enquiries as to his character were made in Vladimir. The merchants and other inhabitants of that town said that in former days he used to drink and waste his time, but that he was a good man. Then the trial came on: he was charged with murdering a merchant from Ryazan, and robbing him of twenty thousand rubles.

His wife was in despair, and did not know what to believe. Her children were all quite small; one was a baby at her breast. Taking them all with her, she went to the town

where her husband was in jail. At first she was not allowed to see him; but after much begging, she obtained permission from the officials, and was taken to him. When she saw her husband in prison-dress and in chains, shut up with thieves and criminals, she fell down, and did not come to her senses for a long time. Then she drew her children to her, and sat down near him. She told him of things at home, and asked about what had happened to him. He told her all, and she asked, “What can we do now?”

“We must petition the Czar not to let an innocent man perish.”

His wife told him that she had sent a petition to the Czar, but it had not been accepted.

Aksionov did not reply, but only looked downcast.

Then his wife said, “It was not for nothing I dreamt your hair had turned grey. You remember? You should not have started that day.” And passing her fingers through his hair, she said: “Vanya dearest, tell your wife the truth; was it not you who did it?”

“So you, too, suspect me!” said Aksionov, and, hiding his face in his hands, he began to weep. Then a soldier came to say that the wife and children must go away; and Aksionov said good-bye to his family for the last time.

When they were gone, Aksionov recalled what had been said, and when he remembered that his wife also had suspected him, he said to himself, “It seems that only God can know the truth; it is to Him alone we must appeal, and from Him alone expect mercy.”

And Aksionov wrote no more petitions; gave up all hope, and only prayed to God.

Aksionov was condemned to be flogged and sent to the mines. So he was flogged with a knot, and when the wounds made by the knot were healed, he was driven to Siberia with other convicts.

For twenty-six years Aksionov lived as a convict in Siberia. His hair turned white as snow, and his beard grew long, thin, and grey. All his mirth went; he stooped; he walked slowly, spoke little, and never laughed, but he often prayed.

In prison Aksionov learnt to make boots, and earned a little money, with which he bought *The Lives of the Saints*. He read this book when there was light enough in the prison; and on Sundays in the prison-church he read the lessons and sang in the choir; for his voice was still good.

The prison authorities liked Aksionov for his meekness, and his fellow-prisoners respected him: they called him “Grandfather,” and “The Saint.” When they wanted to petition the prison authorities about anything, they always made Aksionov their spokesman, and when there were quarrels among the prisoners they came to him to put things right, and to judge the matter.

No news reached Aksionov from his home, and he did not even know if his wife and children were still alive.

One day a fresh gang of convicts came to the prison. In the evening the old prisoners collected round the new ones and asked them what towns or villages they came from, and what they were sentenced for. Among the rest Aksionov sat down near the newcomers, and listened with downcast air to what was said.

One of the new convicts, a tall, strong man of sixty, with a closely-cropped grey beard, was telling the others what he had been arrested for.

“Well, friends,” he said, “I only took a horse that was tied to a sledge, and I was arrested and accused of stealing. I said I had only taken it to get home quicker, and had then let it go; besides, the driver was a personal friend of mine. So I said, ‘It’s all right.’ ‘No,’ said they, ‘you stole it.’ But how or where I stole it they could not say. I once really did something wrong, and ought by rights to have come here long ago, but that time I was not found out. Now I have been sent here for nothing at all… Eh, but it’s lies I’m telling you; I’ve been to Siberia before, but I did not stay long.”

“Where are you from?” asked some one.

“From Vladimir. My family are of that town. My name is Makar, and they also call me Semyonich.”

Aksionov raised his head and said: “Tell me, Semyonich, do you know anything of the merchants Aksionov of Vladimir? Are they still alive?”

“Know them? Of course I do. The Aksionovs are rich, though their father is in Siberia: a sinner like ourselves, it seems! As for you, Gran’dad, how did you come here?”

Aksionov did not like to speak of his misfortune. He only sighed, and said, “For my sins I have been in prison these twenty-six years.”

“What sins?” asked Makar Semyonich.

But Aksionov only said, “Well, well—I must have deserved it!” He would have said no more, but his companions told the newcomers how Aksionov came to be in Siberia;

how some one had killed a merchant, and had put the knife among Aksionov's things, and Aksionov had been unjustly condemned.

When Makar Semyonich heard this, he looked at Aksionov, slapped his *own* knee, and exclaimed, "Well, this is wonderful! Really wonderful! But how old you've grown, Gran'dad!"

The others asked him why he was so surprised, and where he had seen Aksionov before; but Makar Semyonich did not reply. He only said: "It's wonderful that we should meet here, lads!"

These words made Aksionov wonder whether this man knew who had killed the merchant; so he said, "Perhaps, Semyonich, you have heard of that affair, or maybe you've seen me before?"

"How could I help hearing? The world's full of rumours. But it's a long time ago, and I've forgotten what I heard."

"Perhaps you heard who killed the merchant?" asked Aksionov.

Makar Semyonich laughed, and replied: "It must have been him in whose bag the knife was found! If some one else hid the knife there, 'He's not a thief till he's caught,' as the saying is. How could any one put a knife into your bag while it was under your head? It would surely have woke you up."

When Aksionov heard these words, he felt sure this was the man who had killed the merchant. He rose and went away. All that night Aksionov lay awake. He felt terribly unhappy, and all sorts of images rose in his mind. There was the image of his wife as she was when he parted from her to go to the fair. He saw her as if she were present; her face and her eyes rose before him; he heard her speak and laugh. Then he saw his children, quite little, as they were at that time: one with a little cloak on, another at his mother's breast. And then he remembered himself as he used to be-young and merry. He remembered how he sat playing the guitar in the porch of the inn where he was arrested, and how free from care he had been. He saw, in his mind, the place where he was flogged, the executioner, and the people standing around; the chains, the convicts, all the twenty-six years of his prison life, and his premature old age. The thought of it all made him so wretched that he was ready to kill himself.

"And it's all that villain's doing!" thought Aksionov. And his anger was so great against Makar Semyonich that he longed for vengeance, even if he himself should perish for it. He kept repeating prayers all night, but could get no peace. During the day he did not go near Makar Semyonich, nor even look at him.

A fortnight passed in this way. Aksionov could not sleep at night, and was so miserable that he did not know what to do.

One night as he was walking about the prison he noticed some earth that came rolling out from under one of the shelves on which the prisoners slept. He stopped to see what it was. Suddenly Makar Semyonich crept out from under the shelf, and looked up at Aksionov with frightened face. Aksionov tried to pass without looking at him, but Makar seized his hand and told him that he had dug a hole under the wall, getting rid of the earth by putting it into his high-boots, and emptying it out every day on the road when the prisoners were driven to their work.

“Just you keep quiet, old man, and you shall get out too. If you blab, they’ll flog the life out of me, but I will kill you first.”

Aksionov trembled with anger as he looked at his enemy. He drew his hand away, saying, “I have no wish to escape, and you have no need to kill me; you killed me long ago! As to telling of you—I may do so or not, as God shall direct.”

Next day, when the convicts were led out to work, the convoy soldiers noticed that one or other of the prisoners emptied some earth out of his boots. The prison was searched and the tunnel found. The Governor came and questioned all the prisoners to find out who had dug the hole. They all denied any knowledge of it. Those who knew would not betray Makar Semyonich, knowing he would be flogged almost to death. At last the Governor turned to Aksionov whom he knew to be a just man, and said:

“You are a truthful old man; tell me, before God, who dug the hole?”

Makar Semyonich stood as if he were quite unconcerned, looking at the Governor and not so much as glancing at Aksionov. Aksionov’s lips and hands trembled, and for a long time he could not utter a word. He thought, “Why should I screen him who ruined my life? Let him pay for what I have suffered. But if I tell, they will probably flog the life out of him, and maybe I suspect him wrongly. And, after all, what good would it be to me?”

“Well, old man,” repeated the Governor, “tell me the truth: who has been digging under the wall?”

Aksionov glanced at Makar Semyonich, and said, “I cannot say, your honour. It is not God’s will that I should tell! Do what you like with me; I am in your hands.”

However much the Governor tried, Aksionov would say no more, and so the matter had to be left.

That night, when Aksionov was lying on his bed and just beginning to doze, some one came quietly and sat down on his bed. He peered through the darkness and recognised Makar.

“What more do you want of me?” asked Aksionov. “Why have you come here?”

Makar Semyonich was silent. So Aksionov sat up and said, “What do you want? Go away, or I will call the guard!”

Makar Semyonich bent close over Aksionov, and whispered, “Ivan Dmitrich, forgive me!”

“What for?” asked Aksionov.

“It was I who killed the merchant and hid the knife among your things. I meant to kill you too, but I heard a noise outside, so I hid the knife in your bag and escaped out of the window.”

Aksionov was silent, and did not know what to say. Makar Semyonich slid off the bed-shelf and knelt upon the ground. “Ivan Dmitrich,” said he, “forgive me! For the love of God, forgive me! I will confess that it was I who killed the merchant, and you will be released and can go to your home.”

“It is easy for you to talk,” said Aksionov, “but I have suffered for you these twenty-six years. Where could I go to now?... My wife is dead, and my children have forgotten me. I have nowhere to go...”

Makar Semyonich did not rise, but beat his head on the floor. “Ivan Dmitrich, forgive me!” he cried. “When they flogged me with the knot it was not so hard to bear as it is to see you now ... yet you had pity on me, and did not tell. For Christ’s sake forgive me, wretch that I am!” And he began to sob.

When Aksionov heard him sobbing he, too, began to weep. “God will forgive you!” said he. “Maybe I am a hundred times worse than you.” And at these words his heart grew light, and the longing for home left him. He no longer had any desire to leave the prison, but only hoped for his last hour to come.

In spite of what Aksionov had said, Makar Semyonich confessed his guilt. But when the order for his release came, Aksionov was already dead.

HOW A MUZHIK FED TWO OFFICIALS

BY M.Y. SALTYKOV [*N.Shchedrin*]

Once upon a time there were two Officials. They were both empty-headed, and so they found themselves one day suddenly transported to an uninhabited isle, as if on a magic carpet.

They had passed their whole life in a Government Department, where records were kept; had been born there, bred there, grown old there, and consequently hadn't the least understanding for anything outside of the Department; and the only words they knew were: "With assurances of the highest esteem, I am your humble servant."

But the Department was abolished, and as the services of the two Officials were no longer needed, they were given their freedom. So the retired Officials migrated to Podyacheskaya Street in St. Petersburg. Each had his own home, his own cook and his pension.

Waking up on the uninhabited isle, they found themselves lying under the same cover. At first, of course, they couldn't understand what had happened to them, and they spoke as if nothing extraordinary had taken place.

"What a peculiar dream I had last night, your Excellency," said the one Official. "It seemed to me as if I were on an uninhabited isle."

Scarcely had he uttered the words, when he jumped to his feet. The other Official also jumped up.

"Good Lord, what does this mean! Where are we?" they cried out in astonishment.

They felt each other to make sure that they were no longer dreaming, and finally convinced themselves of the sad reality.

Before them stretched the ocean, and behind them was a little spot of earth, beyond which the ocean stretched again. They began to cry—the first time since their Department had been shut down.

They looked at each other, and each noticed that the other was clad in nothing but his night shirt with his order hanging about his neck.

“We really should be having our coffee now,” observed the one Official. Then he bethought himself again of the strange situation he was in and a second time fell to weeping.

“What are we going to do now?” he sobbed. “Even supposing we were to draw up a report, what good would that do?”

“You know what, your Excellency,” replied the other Official, “you go to the east and I will go to the west. Toward evening we will come back here again and, perhaps, we shall have found something.”

They started to ascertain which was the east and which was the west. They recalled that the head of their Department had once said to them, “If you want to know where the east is, then turn your face to the north, and the east will be on your right.” But when they tried to find out which was the north, they turned to the right and to the left and looked around on all sides. Having spent their whole life in the Department of Records, their efforts were all in vain.

“To my mind, your Excellency, the best thing to do would be for you to go to the right and me to go to the left,” said one Official, who had served not only in the Department of Records, but had also been teacher of handwriting in the School for Reserves, and so was a little bit cleverer.

So said, so done. The one Official went to the right. He came upon trees, bearing all sorts of fruits. Gladly would he have plucked an apple, but they all hung so high that he would have been obliged to climb up. He tried to climb up in vain. All he succeeded in doing was tearing his night shirt. Then he struck upon a brook. It was swarming with fish.

“Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we had all this fish in Podyacheskaya Street!” he thought, and his mouth watered. Then he entered woods and found partridges, grouse and hares.

“Good Lord, what an abundance of food!” he cried. His hunger was going up tremendously.

But he had to return to the appointed spot with empty hands. He found the other Official waiting for him.

“Well, Your Excellency, how went it? Did you find anything?”

“Nothing but an old number of the *Moscow Gazette*, not another thing.”

The Officials lay down to sleep again, but their empty stomachs gave them no rest They were partly robbed of their sleep by the thought of who was now enjoying their pension, and partly by the recollection of the fruit, fishes, partridges, grouse and hares that they had seen during the day.

“The human pabulum in its original form flies, swims and grows on trees. Who would have thought it your Excellency?” said the one Official.

“To be sure,” rejoined the other Official. “I, too, must admit that I had imagined that our breakfast rolls, came into the world just as they appear on the table.”

“From which it is to be deduced that if we want to eat a pheasant, we must catch it first, kill it, pull its feathers and roast it. But how’s that to be done?”

“Yes, how’s that to be done?” repeated the other Official.

They turned silent and tried again to fall asleep, but their hunger scared sleep away. Before their eyes swarmed flocks of pheasants and ducks, herds of porklings, and they were all so juicy, done so tenderly and garnished so deliciously with olives, capers and pickles.

“I believe I could devour my own boots now,” said the one Official.

“Gloves, are not bad either, especially if they have been born quite mellow,” said the other Official.

The two Officials stared at each other fixedly. In their glances gleamed an evil-boding fire, their teeth chattered and a dull groaning issued from their breasts. Slowly they crept upon each other and suddenly they burst into a fearful frenzy. There was a yelling and groaning, the rags flew about, and the Official who had been teacher of handwriting bit off his colleague’s order and swallowed it. However, the sight of blood brought them both back to their senses.

“God help us!” they cried at the same time. “We certainly don’t mean to eat each other up. How could we have come to such a pass as this? What evil genius is making sport of us?”

“We must, by all means, entertain each other to pass the time away, otherwise there will be murder and death,” said the one Official.

“You begin,” said the other.

“Can you explain why it is that the sun first rises and then sets? Why isn’t it the reverse?”

“Aren’t you a funny man, your Excellency? You get up first, then you go to your office and work there, and at night you lie down to sleep.”

“But why can’t one assume the opposite, that is, that one goes to bed, sees all sorts of dream figures, and then gets up?”

“Well, yes, certainly. But when I was still an Official, I always thought this way: ‘Now it is dawn, then it will be day, then will come supper, and finally will come the time to go to bed.’”

The word “supper” recalled that incident in the day’s doings, and the thought of it made both Officials melancholy, so that the conversation came to a halt.

“A doctor once told me that human beings can sustain themselves for a long time on their own juices,” the one Official began again.

“What does that mean?”

“It is quite simple. You see, one’s own juices generate other juices, and these in their turn still other juices, and so it goes on until finally all the juices are consumed.”

“And then what happens?”

“Then food has to be taken into the system again.”

“The devil!”

No matter what topic the Officials chose, the conversation invariably reverted to the subject of eating; which only increased their appetite more and more. So they decided to give up talking altogether, and, recollecting the *Moscow Gazette* that the one of them had found, they picked it up and began to read eagerly.

BANQUET GIVEN BY THE MAYOR

"The table was set for one hundred persons. The magnificence of it exceeded all expectations. The remotest provinces were represented at this feast of the gods by the costliest gifts. The golden sturgeon from Sheksna and the silver pheasant from the Caucasian woods held a rendezvous with strawberries so seldom to be had in our latitude in winter…”

“The devil! For God’s sake, stop reading, your Excellency. Couldn’t you find something else to read about?” cried the other Official in sheer desperation. He snatched the paper from his colleague’s hands, and started to read something else.

“Our correspondent in Tula informs us that yesterday a sturgeon was found in the Upa (an event which even the oldest inhabitants cannot recall, and all the more remarkable since they recognised the former police captain in this sturgeon). This was made the occasion for giving a banquet in the club. The prime cause of the banquet was served in a large wooden platter garnished with vinegar pickles. A bunch of parsley stuck out of its mouth. Doctor P—— who acted as toast-master saw to it that everybody present got a piece of the sturgeon. The sauces to go with it were unusually varied and delicate—”

“Permit me, your Excellency, it seems to me you are not so careful either in the selection of reading matter,” interrupted the first Official, who secured the *Gazette* again and started to read:

“One of the oldest inhabitants of Viatka has discovered a new and highly original recipe for fish soup; A live codfish (*lota vulgaris*) is taken and beaten with a rod until its liver swells up with anger…”

The Officials’ heads drooped. Whatever their eyes fell upon had something to do with eating. Even their own thoughts were fatal. No matter how much they tried to keep their minds off beefsteak and the like, it was all in vain; their fancy returned invariably, with irresistible force, back to that for which they were so painfully yearning.

Suddenly an inspiration came to the Official who had once taught handwriting.

“I have it!” he cried delightedly. “What do you say to this, your Excellency? What do you say to our finding a muzhik?”

“A muzhik, your Excellency? What sort of a muzhik?”

“Why a plain ordinary muzhik. A muzhik like all other muzhiks. He would get the breakfast rolls for us right away, and he could also catch partridges and fish for us.”

“Hm, a muzhik. But where are we to fetch one from, if there is no muzhik here?”

“Why shouldn’t there be a muzhik here? There are muzhiks everywhere. All one has to do is hunt for them. There certainly must be a muzhik hiding here somewhere so as to get out of working.”

This thought so cheered the Officials that they instantly jumped up to go in search of a muzhik.

For a long while they wandered about on the island without the desired result, until finally a concentrated smell of black bread and old sheep skin assailed their nostrils and guided them in the right direction. There under a tree was a colossal muzhik lying

fast asleep with his hands under his head. It was clear that to escape his duty to work he had impudently withdrawn to this island. The indignation of the Officials knew no bounds.

“What, lying asleep here you lazy-bones you!” they raged at him, “It is nothing to you that there are two Officials here who are fairly perishing of hunger. Up, forward, march, work.”

The Muzhik rose and looked at the two severe gentlemen standing in front of him. His first thought was to make his escape, but the Officials held him fast.

He had to submit to his fate. He had to work.

First he climbed up on a tree and plucked several dozen of the finest apples for the Officials. He kept a rotten one for himself. Then he turned up the earth and dug out some potatoes. Next he started a fire with two bits of wood that he rubbed against each other. Out of his own hair he made a snare and caught partridges. Over the fire, by this time burning brightly, he cooked so many kinds of food that the question arose in the Officials’ minds whether they shouldn’t give some to this idler.

Beholding the efforts of the Muzhik, they rejoiced in their hearts. They had already forgotten how the day before they had nearly been perishing of hunger, and all they thought of now was: “What a good thing it is to be an Official. Nothing bad can ever happen to an Official.”

“Are you satisfied, gentlemen?” the lazy Muzhik asked.

“Yes, we appreciate your industry,” replied the Officials.

“Then you will permit me to rest a little?”

“Go take a little rest, but first make a good strong cord.”

The Muzhik gathered wild hemp stalks, laid them in water, beat them and broke them, and toward evening a good stout cord was ready. The Officials took the cord and bound the Muzhik to a tree, so that he should not run away. Then they laid themselves to sleep.

Thus day after day passed, and the Muzhik became so skilful that he could actually cook soup for the Officials in his bare hands. The Officials had become round and well-fed and happy. It rejoiced them that here they needn’t spend any money and that in the meanwhile their pensions were accumulating in St. Petersburg.

“What is your opinion, your Excellency,” one said to the other after breakfast one day, “is the Story of the Tower of Babel true? Don’t you think it is simply an allegory?”

“By no means, your Excellency, I think it was something that really happened. What other explanation is there for the existence of so many different languages on earth?”

“Then the Flood must really have taken place, too?”

“Certainly, else; how would you explain the existence of Antediluvian animals? Besides, the *Moscow Gazette* says——”

They made search for the old number of the *Moscow Gazette*, seated themselves in the shade, and read the whole sheet from beginning to end. They read of festivities in Moscow, Tula, Penza and Riazan, and strangely enough felt no discomfort at the description of the delicacies served.

There is no saying how long this life might have lasted. Finally, however, it began to bore the Officials. They often thought of their cooks in St. Petersburg, and even shed a few tears in secret.

“I wonder how it looks in Podyacheskaya Street now, your Excellency,” one of them said to the other.

“Oh, don’t remind me of it, your Excellency. I am pining away with homesickness.”

“It is very nice here. There is really no fault to be found with this place, but the lamb longs for its mother sheep. And it is a pity, too, for the beautiful uniforms.”

“Yes, indeed, a uniform of the fourth class is no joke. The gold embroidery alone is enough to make one dizzy.”

Now they began to importune the Muzhik to find some way of getting them back to Podyacheskaya Street, and strange to say, the Muzhik even knew where Podyacheskaya Street was. He had once drunk beer and mead there, and as the saying goes, everything had run down his beard, alas, but nothing into his mouth. The Officials rejoiced and said: “We are Officials from Podyacheskaya Street.”

“And I am one of those men—do you remember?—who sit on a scaffolding hung by ropes from the roofs and paint the outside walls. I am one of those who crawl about on the roofs like flies. That is what I am,” replied the Muzhik.

The Muzhik now pondered long and heavily on how to give great pleasure to his Officials, who had been so gracious to him, the lazy-bones, and had not scorned his work. And he actually succeeded in constructing a ship. It was not really a ship, but

still it was a vessel, that would carry them across the ocean close to Podyacheskaya Street.

“Now, take care, you dog, that you don’t drown us,” said the Officials, when they saw the raft rising and falling on the waves.

“Don’t be afraid. We muzhiks are used to this,” said the Muzhik, making all the preparations for the journey. He gathered swan’s-down and made a couch for his two Officials, then he crossed himself and rowed off from shore.

How frightened the Officials were on the way, how seasick they were during the storms, how they scolded the coarse Muzhik for his idleness, can neither be told nor described. The Muzhik, however, just kept rowing on and fed his Officials on herring. At last, they caught sight of dear old Mother Neva. Soon they were in the glorious Catherine Canal, and then, oh joy! they struck the grand Podyacheskaya Street. When the cooks saw their Officials so well-fed, round and so happy, they rejoiced immensely. The Officials drank coffee and rolls, then put on their uniforms and drove to the Pension Bureau. How much money they collected there is another thing that can neither be told nor described. Nor was the Muzhik forgotten. The Officials sent a glass of whiskey out to him and five kopeks. Now, Muzhik, rejoice.

THE SHADES, A PHANTASY

BY VLADIMIR G. KORLENKO

I

Amonth and two days had elapsed since the judges, amid the loud acclaim of the Athenian people, had pronounced the death sentence against the philosopher Socrates because he had sought to destroy faith in the gods. What the gadfly is to the horse Socrates was to Athens. The gadfly stings the horse in order to prevent it from dozing off and to keep it moving briskly on its course. The philosopher said to the people of Athens:

“I am your gadfly. My sting pricks your conscience and arouses you when you are caught napping. Sleep not, sleep not, people of Athens; awake and seek the truth!”

The people arose in their exasperation and cruelly demanded to be rid of their gadfly.

“Perchance both of his accusers, Meletus and Anytus, are wrong,” said the citizens, on leaving the court after sentence had been pronounced.

“But after all whither do his doctrines tend? What would he do? He has wrought confusion, he overthrows beliefs that have existed since the beginning, he speaks of new virtues which must be recognised and sought for, he speaks of a Divinity hitherto unknown to us. The blasphemer, he deems himself wiser than the gods! No, ‘twere better we remain true to the old gods whom we know. They may not always be just, sometimes they may flare up in unjust wrath, and they may also be seized with a wanton lust for the wives of mortals; but did not our ancestors live with them in the peace of their souls, did not our forefathers accomplish their heroic deeds with the help of these very gods? And now the faces of the Olympians have paled and the old virtue is out of joint. What does it all lead to? Should not an end be put to this impious wisdom once for all?”

Thus the citizens of Athens spoke to one another as they left the place, and the blue twilight was falling. They had determined to kill the restless gadfly in the hope that the countenances of the gods would shine again. And yet—before their souls arose the mild figure of the singular philosopher. There were some citizens who recalled how courageously he had shared their troubles and dangers at Potidæa; how he alone had prevented them from committing the sin of unjustly executing the generals after the victory over the Arginusæe; how he alone had dared to raise his voice against the tyrants who had had fifteen hundred people put to death, speaking to the people on the market-place concerning shepherds and their sheep.

“Is not he a good shepherd,” he asked, “who guards his flock and watches over its increase? Or is it the work of the good shepherd to reduce the number of his sheep and disperse them, and of the good ruler to do the same with his people? Men of Athens, let us investigate this question!”

And at this question of the solitary, undefended philosopher, the faces of the tyrants paled, while the eyes of the youths kindled with the fire of just wrath and indignation.

Thus, when on dispersing after the sentence the Athenians recalled all these things of Socrates, their hearts were oppressed with heavy doubt.

“Have we not done a cruel wrong to the son of Sophroniscus?”

But then the good Athenians looked upon the harbour and the sea, and in the red glow of the dying day they saw the purple sails of the sharp-keeled ship, sent to the Delian

festival, shimmering in the distance on the blue Pontus. The ship would not return until the expiration of a month, and the Athenians recollected that during this time no blood might be shed in Athens, whether the blood of the innocent or the guilty. A month, moreover, has many days and still more hours. Supposing the son of Sophroniscus had been unjustly condemned, who would hinder his escaping from the prison, especially since he had numerous friends to help him? Was it so difficult for the rich Plato, for Æschines and others to bribe the guards? Then the restless gadfly would flee from Athens to the barbarians in Thessaly, or to the Peloponnesus, or, still farther, to Egypt; Athens would no longer hear his blasphemous speeches; his death would not weigh upon the conscience of the worthy citizens, and so everything would end for the best of all.

Thus said many to themselves that evening, while aloud they praised the wisdom of the demos and the heliasts. In secret, however, they cherished the hope that the restless philosopher would leave Athens, fly from the hemlock to the barbarians, and so free the Athenians of his troublesome presence and of the pangs of consciences that smote them for inflicting death upon an innocent man.

Two and thirty times since that evening had the sun risen from the ocean and dipped down into it again. The ship had returned from Delos and lay in the harbour with sadly drooping sails, as if ashamed of its native city. The moon did not shine in the heavens, the sea heaved under a heavy fog, and on the hills lights peered through the obscurity like the eyes of men gripped by a sense of guilt.

The stubborn Socrates did not spare the conscience of the good Athenians.

“We part! You go home and I go to death,” he said to the judges after the sentence had been pronounced. “I know not, my friends, which of us chooses the better lot!”

As the time had approached for the return of the ship, many of the citizens had begun to feel uneasy. Must that obstinate fellow really die? And they began to appeal to the consciences of Æschines, Phædo, and other pupils of Socrates, trying to urge them on to further efforts for their master.

“Will you permit your teacher to die?” they asked reproachfully in biting tones. “Or do you grudge the few coins it would take to bribe the guard?”

In vain Crito besought Socrates to take to flight, and complained that the public, was upbraiding his disciples with lack of friendship and with avarice. The self-willed philosopher refused to gratify his pupils or the good people of Athens.

“Let us investigate.” he said. “If it turns out that I must flee, I will flee; but if I must die, I will die. Let us remember what we once said—the wise man need not fear death, he need fear nothing but falsehood. Is it right to abide by the laws we ourselves have made so long as they are agreeable to us, and refuse to obey those which are disagreeable? If my memory does not deceive me I believe we once spoke of these things, did we not?”

“Yes, we did,” answered his pupil.

“And I think all were agreed as to the answer?”

“Yes.”

“But perhaps what is true for others is not true for us?”

“No, truth is alike for all, including ourselves.”

“But perhaps when *we* must die and not some one else, truth becomes untruth?”

“No, Socrates, truth remains the truth under all circumstances.”

After his pupil had thus agreed to each premise of Socrates in turn, he smiled and drew his conclusion.

“If that is so, my friend, mustn’t I die? Or has my head already become so weak that I am no longer in a condition to draw a logical conclusion? Then correct me, my friend and show my erring brain the right way.”

His pupil covered his face with his mantle and turned aside.

“Yes,” he said, “now I see you must die.”

And on that evening when the sea tossed hither and thither and roared dully under the load of fog, and the whimsical wind in mournful astonishment gently stirred the sails of the ships; when the citizens meeting on the streets asked one another: “Is he dead?” and their voices timidly betrayed the hope that he was not dead; when the first breath of awakened conscience, touched the hearts of the Athenians like the first messenger of the storm; and when, it seemed the very faces of the gods were darkened with shame—on that evening at the sinking of the sun the self-willed man drank the cup of death!

The wind increased in violence and shrouded the city more closely in the veil of mist, angrily tugging at the sails of the vessels delayed in the harbour. And the Erinyes sang their gloomy songs to the hearts of the citizens and whipped up in their breasts that tempest which was later, to overwhelm the denouncers of Socrates.

But in that hour the first stirrings of regret were still uncertain and confused. The citizens found more fault with Socrates than ever because he had not given them the satisfaction of fleeing to Thessaly; they were annoyed with his pupils because in the last days they had walked about in sombre mourning attire, a living reproach to the Athenians; they were vexed with the judges because they had not had the sense and the courage to resist the blind rage of the excited people; they bore even the gods resentment.

“To you, ye gods, have we brought this sacrifice,” spoke many. “Rejoice, ye unsatiable!”

“I know not which of us chooses the better lot!”

Those words of Socrates came back to their memory, those his last words to the judges and to the people gathered in the court. Now he lay in the prison quiet and motionless under his cloak, while over the city hovered mourning, horror, and shame.

Again he became the tormentor of the city, he who was himself no longer accessible to torment. The gadfly had been killed, but it stung the people more sharply than ever—sleep not, sleep not this night, O men of Athens! Sleep not! You have committed an injustice, a cruel injustice, which can never be erased!

II

During those sad days Xenophon, the general, a pupil of Socrates, was marching with his Ten Thousand in a distant land, amid dangers, seeking a way of return to his beloved fatherland.

Æschines, Crito, Critobulus, Phædo, and Apollodorus were now occupied with the preparations for the modest funeral.

Plato was burning his lamp and bending over a parchment; the best disciple of the philosopher was busy inscribing the deeds, words, and teachings that marked the end of the sage’s life. A thought is never lost, and the truth discovered by a great intellect illumines the way for future generations like a torch in the dark.

There was one other disciple of Socrates. Not long before, the impetuous Ctesippus had been one of the most frivolous and pleasure-seeking of the Athenian youths. He had set up beauty as his sole god, and had bowed before Clinias as its highest exemplar. But since he had become acquainted with Socrates, all desire for pleasure and all light-mindedness had gone from him. He looked on indifferently while others took his place with Clinias. The grace of thought and the harmony of spirit that he found in Socrates seemed a hundred times more attractive than the graceful form and

the harmonious features of Clinias. With all the intensity of his stormy temperament he hung on the man who had disturbed the serenity of his virginal soul, which for the first time opened to doubts as the bud of a young oak opens to the fresh winds of spring.

Now that the master was dead, he could find peace neither at his own hearth nor in the oppressive stillness of the streets nor among his friends and fellow-disciples. The gods of hearth and home and the gods of the people inspired him with repugnance.

"I know not," he said, "whether ye are the best of all the gods to whom numerous generations have burned incense and brought offerings; all I know is that for your sake the blind mob extinguished the clear torch of truth, and for your sake sacrificed the greatest and best of mortals!"

It almost seemed to Ctesippus as though the streets and market-places still echoed with the shrieking of that unjust sentence. And he remembered how it was here that the people clamoured for the execution of the generals who had led them to victory against the Argunisæ, and how Socrates alone had opposed the savage sentence of the judges and the blind rage of the mob. But when Socrates himself needed a champion, no one had been found to defend him with equal strength. Ctesippus blamed himself and his friends, and for that reason he wanted to avoid everybody—even himself, if possible.

That evening he went to the sea. But his grief grew only the more violent. It seemed to him that the mourning daughters of Nereus were tossing hither and thither on the shore bewailing the death of the best of the Athenians and the folly of the frenzied city. The waves broke on the rocky coast with a growl of lament. Their booming sounded like a funeral dirge.

He turned away, left the shore, and went on further without looking before him. He forgot time and space and his own ego, filled only with the afflicting thought of Socrates!

"Yesterday he still was, yesterday his mild words still could be heard. How is it possible that to-day he no longer is? O night, O giant mountain shrouded in mist, O heaving sea moved by your own life, O restless winds that carry the breath of an immeasurable world on your wings, O starry vault flecked with flying clouds—take me to you, disclose to me the mystery of this death, if it is revealed to you! And if ye know not, then grant my ignorant soul your own lofty indifference. Remove from me these torturing questions. I no longer have strength to carry them in my bosom without an answer, without even the hope of an answer. For who shall answer them, now that the

lips of Socrates are sealed in eternal silence, and eternal darkness is laid upon his lids?”

Thus Ctesippus cried out to the sea and the mountains, and to the dark night, which followed its invariable course, ceaselessly, invisibly, over the slumbering world. Many hours passed before Ctesippus glanced up and saw whither his steps had unconsciously led him. A dark horror seized his soul as he looked about him.

III

It seemed as if the unknown gods of eternal night had heard his impious prayer. Ctesippus looked about, without being able to recognise the place where he was. The lights of the city had long been extinguished by the darkness. The roaring of the sea had died away in the distance; his anxious soul had even lost the recollection of having heard it. No single sound—no mournful cry of nocturnal bird, nor whirr of wings, nor rustling of trees, nor murmur of a merry stream—broke the deep silence. Only the blind will-o’-the-wisps flickered here and there over rocks, and sheet-lightning, unaccompanied by any sound, flared up and died down against crag-peaks. This brief illumination merely emphasised the darkness; and the dead light disclosed the outlines of dead deserts crossed by gorges like crawling serpents, and rising into rocky heights in a wild chaos.

All the joyous gods that haunt green groves, purling brooks, and mountain valleys seemed to have fled forever from these deserts. Pan alone, the great and mysterious Pan, was hiding somewhere nearby in the chaos of nature, and with mocking glance seemed to be pursuing the tiny ant that a short time before had blasphemously asked to know the secret of the world and of death. Dark, senseless horror overwhelmed the soul of Ctesippus. It is thus that the sea in stormy floodtide overwhelms a rock on the shore.

Was it a dream, was it reality, or was it the revelation of the unknown divinity? Ctesippus felt that in an instant he would step across the threshold of life, and that his soul would melt into an ocean of unending, inconceivable horror like a drop of rain in the waves of the grey sea on a dark and stormy night. But at this moment he suddenly heard voices that seemed familiar to him, and in the glare of the sheet-lightning his eyes recognised human figures.

IV

On a rocky slope sat a man in deep despair. He had thrown a cloak over his head and was bowed to the ground. Another figure approached him softly, cautiously climbing

upward and carefully feeling every step. The first man uncovered his face and exclaimed:

“Is that you I just now saw, my good Socrates? Is that you passing by me in this cheerless place? I have already spent many hours here without knowing when day will relieve the night. I have been waiting in vain for the dawn.”

“Yes, I am Socrates, my friend, and you, are you not Elpidias who died three days before me?”

“Yes, I am Elpidias, formerly the richest tanner in Athens, now the most miserable of slaves. For the first time I understand the words of the poet: ‘Better to be a slave in this world than a ruler in gloomy Hades.’”

“My friend, if it is disagreeable for you where you are, why don’t you move to another spot?”

“O Socrates, I marvel at you—how dare you wander about in this cheerless gloom? I—I sit here overcome with grief and bemoan the joys of a fleeting life.”

“Friend Elpidias, like you, I, too, was plunged in this gloom when the light of earthly life was removed from my eyes. But an inner voice told me: ‘Tread this new path without hesitation’, and I went.”

“But whither do you go, O son of Sophroniscus? Here there is no way, no path, not even a ray of light; nothing but a chaos of rocks, mist, and gloom.”

“True. But, my Elpidias, since you are aware of this sad truth, have you not asked yourself what is the most distressing thing in your present situation?”

“Undoubtedly the dismal darkness.”

“Then one should seek for light. Perchance you will find here the great law—that mortals must in darkness seek the source of life. Do you not think it is better so to seek than to remain sitting in one spot? *I* think it is, therefore I keep walking. Farewell!”

“Oh, good Socrates, abandon me not! You go with sure steps through the pathless chaos in Hades. Hold out to me but a fold of your mantle—”

“If you think it is better for you, too, then follow me, friend Elpidias.”

And the two shades walked on, while the soul of Ctesippus, released by sleep from its mortal envelop, flew after them, greedily absorbing the tones of the clear Socratic speech.

“Are you here, good Socrates?” the voice of the Athenian again was heard. “Why are you silent? Converse shortens the way, and I swear, by Hercules, never did I have to traverse such a horrid way.”

“Put questions, friend Elpidias! The question of one who seeks knowledge brings forth answers and produces conversation.”

Elpidias maintained silence for a moment, and then, after he had collected his thoughts, asked:

“Yes, this is what I wanted to say—tell me, my poor Socrates, did they at least give you a good burial?”

“I must confess, friend Elpidias, I cannot satisfy your curiosity.”

“I understand, my poor Socrates, it doesn’t help you cut a figure. Now with me it was so different! Oh, how they buried me, how magnificently they buried me, my poor fellow-Wanderer! I still think with great pleasure of those lovely moments after my death. First they washed me and sprinkled me with well-smelling balsam. Then my faithful Larissa dressed me in garments of the finest weave. The best mourning-women of the city tore their hair from their heads because they had been promised good pay, and in the family vault they placed an amphora—a crater with beautiful, decorated handles of bronze, and, besides, a vial.—”

“Stay, friend Elpidias. I am convinced that the faithful Larissa converted her love into several minas. Yet—”

“Exactly ten minas and four drachmas, not counting the drinks for the guests. I hardly think that the richest tanner can come before the souls of his ancestors and boast of such respect on the part of the living.”

“Friend Elpidias, don’t you think that money would have been of more use to the poor people who are still alive in Athens than to you at this moment?”

“Admit, Socrates, you are speaking in envy,” responded Elpidias, pained. “I am sorry for you, unfortunate Socrates, although, between ourselves, you really deserved your fate. I myself in the family circle said more than once that an end ought to be put to your impious doings, because—”

“Stay, friend, I thought you wanted to draw a conclusion, and I fear you are straying from the straight path. Tell me, my good friend, whither does your wavering thought tend?”

“I wanted to say that in my goodness I am sorry for you. A month ago I myself spoke against you in the assembly, but truly none of us who shouted so loud wanted such a great ill to befall you. Believe me, now I am all the sorrier for you, unhappy philosopher!”

“I thank you. But tell me, my friend, do you perceive a brightness before your eyes?”

“No, on the contrary such darkness lies before me that I must ask myself whether this is not the misty region of Orcus.”

“This way, therefore, is just as dark for you as for me?”

“Quite right.”

“If I am not mistaken, you are even holding on to the folds of my cloak?”

“Also true.”

“Then we are in the same position? You see your ancestors are not hastening to rejoice in the tale of your pompous burial. Where is the difference between us, my good friend?”

“But, Socrates, have the gods enveloped your reason in such obscurity that the difference is not clear to you?”

“Friend, if your situation is clearer to you, then give me your hand and lead me, for I swear, by the dog, you let me go ahead in this darkness.”

“Cease your scoffing, Socrates! Do not make sport, and do not compare yourself, your godless self, with a man who died in his own bed——“.

“Ah, I believe I am beginning to understand you. But tell me, Elpidias, do you hope ever again to rejoice in your bed?”

“Oh, I think not.”

“And was there ever a time when you did not sleep in it?”

“Yes. That was before I bought goods from Agesilaus at half their value. You see, that Agesilaus is really a deep-dyed rogue——”

“Ah, never mind about Agesilaus! Perhaps he is getting them back, from your widow at a quarter their value. Then wasn’t I right when I said that you were in possession of your bed only part of the time?”

“Yes, you were right.”

“Well, and I, too, was in possession of the bed in which I died part of the time. Proteus, the good guard of the prison, lent it to me for a period.”

“Oh, if I had known what you were aiming at with your talk, I wouldn’t have answered your wily questions. By Hercules, such profanation is unheard of—he compares himself with me! Why, I could put an end to you with two words, if it came to it——”

“Say them, Elpidias, without fear. Words can scarcely be more destructive to me than the hemlock.”

“Well, then, that is just what I wanted to say. You unfortunate man, you died by the sentence of the court and had to drink hemlock!”

“But I have known that since the day of my death, even long before. And you, unfortunate Elpidias, tell me what caused your death?”

“Oh, with me, it was different, entirely different! You see I got the dropsy in my abdomen. An expensive physician from Corinth was called who promised to cure me for two minas, and he was given half that amount in advance. I am afraid that Larissa in her lack of experience in such things gave him the other half, too——”

“Then the physician did not keep his promise?”

“That’s it.”

“And you died from dropsy?”

“Ah, Socrates, believe me, three times it wanted to vanquish me, and finally it quenched the flame of my life!”

“Then tell me—did death by dropsy give you great pleasure?”

“Oh, wicked Socrates, don’t make sport of me. I told you it wanted to vanquish me three times. I bellowed like a steer under the knife of the slaughterer, and begged the Parcæ to cut the thread of my life as quickly as possible.”

“That doesn’t surprise me. But from what do you conclude that the dropsy was pleasanter to you than the hemlock to me? The hemlock made an end of me in a moment.”

“I see, I fell into your snare again, you crafty sinner! I won’t enrage the gods still more by speaking with you, you destroyer of sacred customs.”

Both were silent, and quiet reigned. But in a short while Elpidias was again the first to begin a conversation.

“Why are you silent, good Socrates?”

“My friend; didn’t you yourself ask for silence?”

“I am not proud, and I can treat men who are worse than I am considerately. Don’t let us quarrel.”

“I did not quarrel with you, friend Elpidias, and did not wish to say anything to insult you. I am merely accustomed to get at the truth of things by comparisons. My situation is not clear to me. You consider your situation better, and I should be glad to learn why. On the other hand, it would not hurt you to learn the truth, whatever shape it may take.”

“Well, no more of this.”

“Tell me, are you afraid? I don’t think that the feeling I now have can be called fear.”

“I am afraid, although I have less cause than you to be at odds with the gods. But don’t you think that the gods, in abandoning us to ourselves here in this chaos, have cheated us of our hopes?”

“That depends upon what sort of hopes they were. What did you expect from the gods, Elpidias?”

“Well, well, what did I expect from the gods! What curious questions you ask, Socrates! If a man throughout life brings offerings, and at his death passes away with a pious heart and with all that custom demands, the gods might at least send some one to meet him, at least one of the inferior gods, to show a man the way. … But that reminds me. Many a time when I begged for good luck in traffic in hides, I promised Hermes calves——”

“And you didn’t have luck?”

“Oh, yes, I had luck, good Socrates, but——“.

“I understand, you had no calf.”

“Bah! Socrates, a rich tanner and not have calves?”

“Now I understand. You had luck, had calves, but you kept them for yourself, and Hermes received nothing.”

“You’re a clever man. I’ve often said so. I kept only three of my ten oaths, and I didn’t deal differently with the other gods. If the same is the case with you, isn’t that the

reason, possibly, why we are now abandoned by the gods? To be sure, I ordered Larissa to sacrifice a whole hecatomb after my death."

"But that is Larissa's affair, whereas it was you, friend Elpidias, who made the promises."

"That's true, that's true. But you, good Socrates, could you, godless as you are, deal better with the gods than I who was a god-fearing tanner?"

"My friend, I know not whether I dealt better or worse. At first I brought offerings without having made vows. Later I offered neither calves nor vows."

"What, not a single calf, you unfortunate man?"

"Yes, friend, if Hermes had had to live by my gifts, I am afraid he would have grown very thin."

"I understand. You did not traffic in cattle, so you offered articles of some other trade—probably a mina or so of what the pupils paid you."

"You know, my friend, I didn't ask pay of my pupils, and my trade scarcely sufficed to support me. If the gods reckoned on the sorry remnants of my meals they miscalculated."

"Oh, blasphemer, in comparison with you I can be proud of my piety. Ye gods, look upon this man! I did deceive you at times, but now and then I shared with you the surplus of some fortunate deal. He who gives at all gives much in comparison with a blasphemer who gives nothing. Socrates, I think you had better go on alone! I fear that your company, godless one, damages me in the eyes of the gods."

"As you will, good Elpidias. I swear by the dog no one shall force his company on another. Unhand the fold of my mantle, and farewell. I will go on alone."

And Socrates walked forward with a sure tread, feeling the ground, however, at every step.

But Elpidias behind him instantly cried out:

"Wait, wait, my good fellow-citizen, do not leave an Athenian alone in this horrible place! I was only making fun. Take what I said as a joke, and don't go so quickly. I marvel how you can see a thing in this hellish darkness."

"Friend, I have accustomed my eyes to it."

“That’s good. Still I, can’t approve of your not having brought sacrifices to the gods. No, I can’t, poor Socrates, I can’t. The honourable Sophroniscus certainly taught you better in your youth, and you yourself used to take part in the prayers. I saw you.”

“Yes. But I am accustomed to examine all our motives and to accept only those that after investigation prove to be reasonable. And so a day came on which I said to myself: ‘Socrates, here you are praying to the Olympians. Why are you praying to them?’”

Elpidias laughed.

“Really you philosophers sometimes don’t know how to answer the simplest questions. I’m a plain tanner who never in my life studied sophistry, yet I know why I must honour the Olympians.”

“Tell me quickly, so that I, too, may know why.”

“Why? Ha! Ha! It’s too simple, you wise Socrates.”

“So much the better if it’s simple. But don’t keep your wisdom from me. Tell me—why must one honour the gods?”

“Why. Because everybody does it.”

“Friend, you know very well that not every one honours the gods. Wouldn’t it be more correct to say ‘many’?”

“Very well, many.”

“But tell me, don’t more men deal wickedly than righteously?”

“I think so. You find more wicked people than good people.”

“Therefore, if you follow the majority, you ought to deal wickedly and not righteously?”

“What are you saying?”

“*I’m* not saying it, *you* are. But I think the reason that men reverence the Olympians is not because the majority worship them. We must find another, more rational ground. Perhaps you mean they deserve reverence?”

“Yes, very right.”

“Good. But then arises a new question: Why do they deserve reverence?”

“Because of their greatness.”

“Ah, that’s more like it. Perhaps I will soon be agreeing with you. It only remains for you to tell me wherein their greatness consists. That’s a difficult question, isn’t it? Let us seek the answer together. Homer says that the impetuous Ares, when stretched flat on the ground by a stone thrown by Pallas Athene, covered with his body the space that can be travelled in seven mornings. You see what an enormous space.”

“Is that wherein greatness consists?”

“There you have me, my friend. That raises another question. Do you remember the athlete Theophantes? He towered over the people a whole head’s length, whereas Pericles was no larger than you. But whom do we call great, Pericles or Theophantes?”

“I see that greatness does not consist in size of body. In that you’re right. I am glad we agree. Perhaps greatness consists in virtue?”

“Certainly.”

“I think so, too.”

“Well, then, who must bow to whom? The small before the large, or those who are great in virtues before the wicked?”

“The answer is clear.”

“I think so, too. Now we will look further into this matter. Tell me truly, did you ever kill other people’s children with arrows?”

“It goes without saying, never! Do you think so ill of me?”

“Nor have you, I trust, ever seduced the wives of other men?”

“I was an upright tanner and a good husband. Don’t forget that, Socrates, I beg of you!”

“You never became a brute, nor by your lustfulness gave your faithful Larissa occasion to revenge herself on women whom you had ruined and on their innocent children?”

“You anger me, really, Socrates.”

“But perhaps you snatched your inheritance from your father and threw him into prison?”

“Never! Why these insulting questions?”

“Wait, my friend. Perhaps we will both reach a conclusion. Tell me, would you have considered a man great who had done all these things of which I have spoken?”

“No, no, no! I should have called such a man a scoundrel, and lodged public complaint against him with the judges in the market-place.”

“Well, Elpidias, why did you not complain in the market-place against Zeus and the Olympians? The son of Cronos carried on war with his own father, and was seized with brutal lust for the daughters of men, while Hera took vengeance upon innocent virgins. Did not both of them convert the unhappy daughter of Inachos into a common cow? Did not Apollo kill all the children of Niobe with his arrows? Did not Callenius steal bulls? Well, then, Elpidias, if it is true that he who has less virtue must do honour to him who has more, then you should not build altars to the Olympians, but they to you.”

“Blaspheme not, impious Socrates! Keep quiet! How dare you judge the acts of the gods?”

“Friend, a higher power has judged them. Let us investigate the question. What is the mark of divinity? I think you said, Greatness, which consists in virtue. Now is not this greatness the one divine spark in man? But if we test the greatness of the gods by our small human virtues, and it turns out that that which measures is greater than that which is measured, then it follows that the divine principle itself condemns the Olympians. But, then—”

“What, then?”

“Then, friend Elpidias, they are no gods, but deceptive phantoms, creations of a dream. Is it not so?”

“Ah, that’s whither your talk leads, you bare-footed philosopher! Now I see what they said of you is true. You are like that fish that takes men captive with its look. So you took me captive in order to confound my believing soul and awaken doubt in it. It was already beginning to waver in its reverence for Zeus. Speak alone. I won’t answer any more.”

“Be not wrathful, Elpidias! I don’t wish to inflict any evil upon you. But if you are tired of following my arguments to their logical conclusions, permit me to relate to you an allegory of a Milesian youth. Allegories rest the mind, and the relaxation is not unprofitable.”

“Speak, if your story is not too long and its purpose is good.”

“Its purpose is truth, friend Elpidias, and I will be brief. Once, you know, in ancient times, Miletus was exposed to the attacks of the barbarians. Among the youth who were seized was a son of the wisest and best of all the citizens in the land. His

precious child was overtaken by a severe illness and became unconscious. He was abandoned and allowed to lie like worthless booty. In the dead of night he came to his senses. High above him glimmered the stars. Round about stretched the desert; and in the distance he heard the howl of beasts of prey. He was alone.

“He was entirely alone, and, besides that, the gods had taken from him the recollection of his former life. In vain he racked his brain—it was as dark and empty as the inhospitable desert in which he found himself. But somewhere, far away, behind the misty and obscure figures conjured up by his reason, loomed the thought of his lost home, and a vague realisation of the figure of the best of all men; and in his heart resounded the word ‘father.’ Doesn’t it seem to you that the fate of this youth resembles the fate of all humanity?”

“How so?”

“Do we not all awake to life on earth with a hazy recollection of another home? And does not the figure of the great unknown hover before our souls?”

“Continue, Socrates, I am listening.”

“The youth revived, arose, and walked cautiously, seeking to avoid all dangers. When after long wanderings his strength was nearly gone, he discerned a fire in the misty distance which illumined the darkness and banished the cold. A faint hope crept into his weary soul, and the recollections of his father’s house again awoke within him. The youth walked toward the light, and cried: ‘It is you, my father, it is you!’

“And was it his father’s house?”

“No, it was merely a night lodging of wild nomads. So for many years he led the miserable life of a captive slave, and only in his dreams saw the distant home and rested on his father’s bosom. Sometimes with weak hand he endeavoured to lure from dead clay or wood or stone the face and form that ever hovered before him. There even came moments when he grew weary and embraced his own handiwork and prayed to it and wet it with his tears. But the stone remained cold stone. And as he waxed in years the youth destroyed his creations, which already seemed to him a vile defamation of his ever-present dreams. At last fate brought him to a good barbarian, who asked him for the cause of his constant mourning. When the youth, confided to him the hopes and longings of his soul, the barbarian, a wise man, said:

“‘The world would be better did such a man and such a country exist as that of which you speak. But by what mark would you recognise your father?’

“‘In my country,’ answered the youth, ‘they reverenced wisdom and virtue and looked up to my father as to the master.’

“‘Well and good,’ answered the barbarian. ‘I must assume that a kernel of your father’s teaching resides in you. Therefore take up the wanderer’s staff, and proceed on your way. Seek perfect wisdom and truth, and when you have found them, cast aside your staff—there will be your home and your father.’

“And the youth went on his way at break of day—”

“Did he find the one whom he sought?”

“He is still seeking. Many countries, cities and men has he seen. He has come to know all the ways by land; he has traversed the stormy seas; he has searched the courses of the stars in heaven by which a pilgrim can direct his course in the limitless deserts. And each time that on his wearisome way an inviting fire lighted up the darkness before his eyes, his heart beat faster and hope crept into his soul. ‘That is my father’s hospitable house,’ he thought.

“And when a hospitable host would greet the tired traveller and offer him the peace and blessing of his hearth, the youth would fall at his feet and say with emotion: ‘I thank you, my father! Do you not recognise your son?’

“And many were prepared to take him as their son, for at that time children were frequently kidnapped. But after the first glow of enthusiasm, the youth would detect traces of imperfection, sometimes even of wickedness. Then he would begin to investigate and to test his host with questions concerning justice and injustice. And soon he would be driven forth again upon the cold wearisome way. More than once he said to himself: ‘I will remain at this last hearth, I will preserve my last belief. It shall be the home of my father.’”

“Do you know, Socrates, perhaps that would have been the most sensible thing to do.”

“So he thought sometimes. But the habit of investigating, the confused dream of a father, gave him no peace. Again and again he shook the dust from his feet; again and again he grasped his staff. Not a few stormy nights found him shelterless. Doesn’t it seem to you that the fate of this youth resembles the fate of mankind?”

“Why?”

“Does not the race of man make trial of its childish belief and doubt it while seeking the unknown? Doesn’t it fashion the form of its father in wood, stone, custom, and tradition? And then man finds the form imperfect, destroys it, and again goes on his

wanderings in the desert of doubt. Always for the purpose of seeking something better—"

"Oh, you cunning sage, now I understand the purpose of your allegory! And I will tell you to your face that if only a ray of light were to penetrate this gloom, I would not put the Lord on trial with unnecessary questions—"

"Friend, the light is already shining," answered Socrates.

V

It seemed as if the words of the philosopher had taken effect. High up in the distance a beam of light penetrated a vapoury envelop and disappeared in the mountains. It was followed by a second and a third. There beyond the darkness luminous genii seemed to be hovering, and a great mystery seemed about to be revealed, as if the breath of life were blowing, as if some great ceremony were in process. But it was still very remote. The shades descended thicker and thicker; foggy clouds rolled into masses, separated, and chased one another endlessly, ceaselessly.

A blue light from a distant peak fell upon a deep ravine; the clouds rose and covered the heavens to the zenith.

The rays disappeared and withdrew to a greater and greater distance, as if fleeing from this vale of shades and horrors. Socrates stood and looked after them sadly. Elpidias peered up at the peak full of dread.

"Look, Socrates! What do you see there on the mountain?"

"Friend," answered; the philosopher, "let us investigate our situation. Since we are in motion, we must arrive somewhere, and since earthly existence must have a limit, I believe that this limit is to be found at the parting of two beginnings. In the struggle of light with darkness we attain the crown of our endeavours. Since the ability to think has not been taken from us, I believe that it is the will of the divine being who called our power of thinking into existence that we should investigate the goal of our endeavours ourselves. Therefore, Elpidias, let us in dignified manner go to meet the dawn that lies beyond those clouds."

"Oh, my friend! If that is the dawn, I would rather the long cheerless night had endured forever, for it was quiet and peaceful. Don't you think our time passed tolerably well in instructive converse? And now my soul trembles before the tempest drawing nigh. Say what you will, but there before us are no ordinary shades of the dead night."

Zeus hurled a bolt into the bottomless gulf.

Ctesippus looked up to the peak, and his soul was frozen with horror. Huge sombre figures of the Olympian gods crowded on the mountain in a circle. A last ray shot through the region of clouds and mists, and died away like a faint memory. A storm was approaching now, and the powers of night were once more in the ascendant. Dark figures covered the heavens. In the centre Ctesippus could discern the all-powerful son of Cronos surrounded by a halo. The sombre figures of the older gods encircled him in wrathful excitement. Like flocks of birds winging their way in the twilight, like eddies of dust driven by a hurricane, like autumn leaves lashed by Boreas, numerous minor gods hovered in long clouds and occupied the spaces.

When the clouds gradually lifted from the peak and sent down dismal horror to embrace the earth, Ctesippus fell upon his knees. Later, he admitted that in this dreadful moment he forgot all his master's deductions and conclusions. His courage failed him; and terror took possession of his soul.

He merely listened.

Two voices resounded there where before had been silence, the one the mighty and threatening voice of the Godhead, the other the weak voice of a mortal which the wind carried from the mountain slope to the spot where Ctesippus had left Socrates.

"Are you," thus spake the voice from the clouds, "are you the blasphemous Socrates who strives with the gods of heaven and earth? Once there were none so joyous, so immortal, as we. Now, for long we have passed our days in darkness because of the unbelief and doubt that have come upon earth. Never has the mist closed in on us so heavily as since the time your voice resounded in Athens, the city we once so dearly loved. Why did you not follow the commands of your father, Sophroniscus? The good man permitted himself a few little sins, especially in his youth, yet by way of recompense, we frequently enjoyed the smell of his offerings—"

"Stay, son of Cronos, and solve my doubts! Do I understand that you prefer cowardly hypocrisy to searchings for the truth?"

At this question the crags trembled with the shock of a thundering peal. The first breath of the tempest scattered in the distant gorges. But the mountains still trembled, for he who was enthroned upon them still trembled. And in the anxious quiet of the night only distant sighs could be heard.

In the very bowels of the earth the chained Titans seemed to be groaning under the blow of the son of Cronos.

“Where are you now, you impious questioner?” suddenly came the mocking voice of the Olympian.

“I am here, son of Cronos, on the same spot. Nothing but your answer can move me from it. I am waiting.”

Thunder bellowed in the clouds like a wild animal amazed at the daring of a Lybian tamer’s fearless approach. At the end of a few moments the Voice again rolled over the spaces:

“Son of Sophroniscus! Is it not enough that you bred so much scepticism on earth that the clouds of your doubt reached even to Olympus? Indeed, many a time when you were carrying on your discourse in the market-places or in the academies or on the promenades, it seemed to me as if you had already destroyed all the altars on earth, and the dust were rising from them up to us here on the mountain. Even that is not enough! Here before my very face you will not recognise the power of the immortals—”

“Zeus, thou art wrathful. Tell me, who gave me the ‘Daemon’ which spoke to my soul throughout my life and forced me to seek the truth without resting?”

Mysterious silence reigned in the clouds.

“Was it not you? You are silent? Then I will investigate the matter. Either this divine beginning emanates from you or from some one else. If from you, I bring it to you as an offering. I offer you the ripe fruit of my life, the flame of the spark of your own kindling! See, son of Cronos, I preserved my gift; in my deepest heart grew the seed that you sowed. It is the very fire of my soul. It burned in those crises when with my own hand I tore the thread of life. Why will you not accept it? Would you have me regard you as a poor master whose age prevents him from seeing that his own pupil obediently follows out his commands? Who are you that would command me to stifle the flame that has illuminated my whole life, ever since it was penetrated by the first ray of sacred thought? The sun says not to the stars: ‘Be extinguished that I may rise.’ The sun rises and the weak glimmer of the stars is quenched by its far, far stronger light. The day says not to the torch: ‘Be extinguished; you interfere with me.’ The day breaks, and the torch smokes, but no longer shines. The divinity that I am questing is not you who are afraid of doubt. That divinity is like the day, like the sun, and shines without extinguishing other lights. The god I seek is the god who would say to me: ‘Wanderer, give me your torch, you no longer need it, for I am the source of all light. Searcher for truth, set upon my altar the little gift of your doubt, because in me is its solution.’ If you

are that god, harken to my questions. No one kills his own child, and my doubts are a branch of the eternal spirit whose name is truth."

Round about, the fires of heaven tore the dark clouds, and out of the howling storm again resounded the powerful voice:

"Whither did your doubts tend, you arrogant sage, who renounce humility, the most beautiful adornment of earthly virtues? You abandoned the friendly shelter of credulous simplicity to wander in the desert of doubt. You have seen this dead space from which the living gods have departed. Will you traverse it, you insignificant worm, who crawl in the dust of your pitiful profanation of the gods? Will you vivify the world? Will you conceive the unknown divinity to whom you do not dare to pray? You miserable digger of dung, soiled by the smut of ruined altars, are you perchance the architect who shall build the new temple? Upon what do you base your hopes, you who disavow the old gods and have no new gods to take their place? The eternal night of doubts unsolved, the dead desert, deprived of the living spirit—*this* is your world, you pitiful worm, who gnawed at the living belief which was a refuge for simple hearts, who converted the world into a dead chaos. Now, then, where are you, you insignificant, blasphemous sage?"

Nothing was heard but the mighty storm roaring through the spaces. Then the thunder died away, the wind folded its pinions, and torrents of rain streamed through the darkness, like incessant floods of tears which threatened to devour the earth and drown it in a deluge of unquenchable grief.

It seemed to Ctesippus that the master was overcome, and that the fearless, restless, questioning voice had been silenced forever. But a few moments later it issued again from the same spot.

"Your words, son of Cronos, hit the mark better than your thunderbolts. The thoughts you have cast into my terrified soul have haunted me often, and it has sometimes seemed as if my heart would break under the burden of their unendurable anguish. Yes, I abandoned the friendly shelter of credulous simplicity. Yes, I have seen the spaces from which the living gods have departed enveloped in the night of eternal doubt. But I walked without fear, for my 'Daemon' lighted the way, the divine beginning of all life. Let us investigate the question. Are not offerings of incense burnt on your altars in the name of Him who gives life? You are stealing what belongs to another! Not you, but that other, is served by credulous simplicity. Yes, you are right, I am no architect. I am not the builder of a new temple. Not to me was it given to raise from the earth to the heavens the glorious structure of the coming faith. I am one who digs dung, soiled by the smut of destruction. But my conscience tells me, son of Cronos,

that the work of one who digs dung is also necessary for the future temple. When the time comes for the proud and stately edifice to stand on the purified place, and for the living divinity of the new belief to erect his throne upon it, I, the modest digger of dung, will go to him and say: 'Here am I who restlessly crawled in the dust of disavowal. When surrounded by fog and soot, I had no time to raise my eyes from the ground; my head had only a vague conception of the future building. Will you reject me, you just one, Just, and True, and Great?'"

Silence and astonishment reigned in the spaces. Then Socrates raised his voice, and continued:

"The sunbeam falls upon the filthy puddle, and light vapour, leaving heavy mud behind, rises to the sun, melts, and dissolves in the ether. With your sunbeam you touched my dust-laden soul and it aspired to you, Unknown One, whose name is mystery! I sought for you, because you are Truth; I strove to attain to you, because you are Justice; I loved you, because you are Love; I died for you, because you are the Source of Life. Will you reject me, O Unknown? My torturing doubts, my passionate search for truth, my difficult life, my voluntary death—accept them as a bloodless offering, as a prayer, as a sigh! Absorb them as the immeasurable ether absorbs the evaporating mists! Take them, you whose name I do not know, let not the ghosts of the night I have traversed bar the way to you, to eternal light! Give way, you shades who dim the light of the dawn! I tell you, gods of my people, you are unjust, and where there is no justice there can be no truth, but only phantoms, creations of a dream. To this conclusion have I come, I, Socrates, who sought to fathom all things. Rise, dead mists, I go my way to Him whom I have sought all my life long!"

The thunder burst again—a short, abrupt peal, as if the egis had fallen from the weakened hand of the thunderer. Storm-voices trembled from the mountains, sounding dully in the gorges, and died away in the clefts. In their place resounded other, marvellous tones.

When Ctesippus looked up in astonishment, a spectacle presented itself such as no mortal eyes had ever seen.

The night vanished. The clouds lifted, and godly figures floated in the azure like golden ornaments on the hem of a festive robe. Heroic forms glimmered over the remote crags and ravines, and Elpidias, whose little figure was seen standing at the edge of a cleft in the rocks, stretched his hands toward them, as if beseeching the vanishing gods for a solution of his fate.

A mountain-peak now stood out clearly above the mysterious mist, gleaming like a torch over dark blue valleys. The son of Cronos, the thunderer, was no longer enthroned upon it, and the other Olympians too were gone.

Socrates stood alone in the light of the sun under the high heavens.

Ctesippus was distinctly conscious of the pulse-beat of a mysterious life quivering throughout nature, stirring even the tiniest blade of grass.

A breath seemed to be stirring the balmy air, a voice to be sounding in wonderful harmony, an invisible tread to be heard—the tread of the radiant Dawn!

And on the illumined peak a man still stood, stretching out his arms in mute ecstasy, moved by a mighty impulse.

A moment, and all disappeared, and the light of an ordinary day shone upon the awakened soul of Ctesippus. It was like dismal twilight after the revelation of nature that had blown upon him the breath of an unknown life.

In deep silence the pupils of the philosopher listened to the marvellous recital of Ctesippus. Plato broke the silence.

“Let us investigate the dream and its significance,” he said.

“Let us investigate it,” responded the others.

THE SIGNAL

BY VSEVOLOD M. GARSHIN.

Semyon Ivanov was a track-walker. His hut was ten versts away from a railroad station in one direction and twelve versts away in the other. About four versts away there was a cotton mill that had opened the year before, and its tall chimney rose up darkly from

behind the forest. The only dwellings around were the distant huts of the other track-walkers.

Semyon Ivanov's health had been completely shattered. Nine years before he had served right through the war as servant to an officer. The sun had roasted him, the cold frozen him, and hunger famished him on the forced marches of forty and fifty versts a day in the heat and the cold and the rain and the shine. The bullets had whizzed about him, but, thank God! none had struck him.

Semyon's regiment had once been on the firing line. For a whole week there had been skirmishing with the Turks, only a deep ravine separating the two hostile armies; and from morn till eve there had been a steady cross-fire. Thrice daily Semyon carried a steaming samovar and his officer's meals from the camp kitchen to the ravine. The bullets hummed about him and rattled viciously against the rocks. Semyon was terrified and cried sometimes, but still he kept right on. The officers were pleased with him, because he always had hot tea ready for them.

He returned from the campaign with limbs unbroken but crippled with rheumatism. He had experienced no little sorrow since then. He arrived home to find that his father, an old man, and his little four-year-old son had died. Semyon remained alone with his wife. They could not do much. It was difficult to plough with rheumatic arms and legs. They could no longer stay in their village, so they started off to seek their fortune in new places. They stayed for a short time on the line, in Kherson and Donshchina, but nowhere found luck. Then the wife went out to service, and Semyon continued to travel about. Once he happened to ride on an engine, and at one of the stations the face of the station-master seemed familiar to him. Semyon looked at the station-master and the station-master looked at Semyon, and they recognised each other. He had been an officer in Semyon's regiment.

"You are Ivanov?" he said.

"Yes, your Excellency."

"How do you come to be here?"

Semyon told him all.

"Where are you off to?"

"I cannot tell you, sir."

"Idiot! What do you mean by 'cannot tell you?'"

“I mean what I say, your Excellency. There is nowhere for me to go to. I must hunt for work, sir.”

The station-master looked at him, thought a bit, and said: “See here, friend, stay here a while at the station. You are married, I think. Where is your wife?”

“Yes, your Excellency, I am married. My wife is at Kursk, in service with a merchant.”

“Well, write to your wife to come here. I will give you a free pass for her. There is a position as track-walker open. I will speak to the Chief on your behalf.”

“I shall be very grateful to you, your Excellency,” replied Semyon.

He stayed at the station, helped in the kitchen, cut firewood, kept the yard clean, and swept the platform. In a fortnight’s time his wife arrived, and Semyon went on a hand-trolley to his hut. The hut was a new one and warm, with as much wood as he wanted. There was a little vegetable garden, the legacy of former track-walkers, and there was about half a dessiatin of ploughed land on either side of the railway embankment. Semyon was rejoiced. He began to think of doing some farming, of purchasing a cow and a horse.

He was given all necessary stores—a green flag, a red flag, lanterns, a horn, hammer, screw-wrench for the nuts, a crow-bar, spade, broom, bolts, and nails; they gave him two books of regulations and a time-table of the train. At first Semyon could not sleep at night, and learnt the whole time-table by heart. Two hours before a train was due he would go over his section, sit on the bench at his hut, and look and listen whether the rails were trembling or the rumble of the train could be heard. He even learned the regulations by heart, although he could only read by spelling out each word.

It was summer; the work was not heavy; there was no snow to clear away, and the trains on that line were infrequent. Semyon used to go over his verst twice a day, examine and screw up nuts here and there, keep the bed level, look at the water-pipes, and then go home to his own affairs. There was only one drawback—he always had to get the inspector’s permission for the least little thing he wanted to do. Semyon and his wife were even beginning to be bored.

Two months passed, and Semyon commenced to make the acquaintance of his neighbours, the track-walkers on either side of him. One was a very old man, whom the authorities were always meaning to relieve. He scarcely moved out of his hut. His wife used to do all his work. The other track-walker, nearer the station, was a young man, thin, but muscular. He and Semyon met for the first time on the line midway

between the huts. Semyon took off his hat and bowed. “Good health to you, neighbour,” he said.

The neighbour glanced askance at him. “How do you do?” he replied; then turned around and made off.

Later the wives met. Semyon’s wife passed the time of day with her neighbour, but neither did she say much.

On one occasion Semyon said to her: “Young woman, your husband is not very talkative.”

The woman said nothing at first, then replied: “But what is there for him to talk about? Every one has his own business. Go your way, and God be with you.”

However, after another month or so they became acquainted. Semyon would go with Vasily along the line, sit on the edge of a pipe, smoke, and talk of life. Vasily, for the most part, kept silent, but Semyon talked of his village, and of the campaign through which he had passed.

“I have had no little sorrow in my day,” he would say; “and goodness knows I have not lived long. God has not given me happiness, but what He may give, so will it be. That’s so, friend Vasily Stepanych.”

Vasily Stepanych knocked the ashes out of his pipe against a rail, stood up, and said: “It is not luck which follows us in life, but human beings. There is no crueller beast on this earth than man. Wolf does not eat wolf, but man will readily devour man.”

“Come, friend, don’t say that; a wolf eats wolf.”

“The words came into my mind and I said it. All the same, there is nothing crueller than man. If it were not for his wickedness and greed, it would be possible to live. Everybody tries to sting you to the quick, to bite and eat you up.”

Semyon pondered a bit. “I don’t know, brother,” he said; “perhaps it is as you say, and perhaps it is God’s will.”

“And perhaps,” said Vasily, “it is waste of time for me to talk to you. To put everything unpleasant on God, and sit and suffer, means, brother, being not a man but an animal. That’s what I have to say.” And he turned and went off without saying good-bye.

Semyon also got up. “Neighbour,” he called, “why do you lose your temper?” But his neighbour did not look round, and kept on his way.

Semyon gazed after him until he was lost to sight in the cutting at the turn. He went home and said to his wife: “Arina, our neighbour is a wicked person, not a man.”

However, they did not quarrel. They met again and discussed the same topics.

“All, mend, if it were not for men we should not be poking in these huts,” said Vasily, on one occasion.

“And what if we are poking in these huts? It’s not so bad. You can live in them.”

“Live in them, indeed! Bah, you!... You have lived long and learned little, looked at much and seen little. What sort of life is there for a poor man in a hut here or there? The cannibals are devouring you. They are sucking up all your life-blood, and when you become old, they will throw you out just as they do husks to feed the pigs on. What pay do you get?”

“Not much, Vasily Stepanych—twelve rubles.”

“And I, thirteen and a half rubles. Why? By the regulations the company should give us fifteen rubles a month with firing and lighting. Who decides that you should have twelve rubles, or I thirteen and a half? Ask yourself! And you say a man can live on that? You understand it is not a question of one and a half rubles or three rubles—even if they paid us each the whole fifteen rubles. I was at the station last month. The director passed through. I saw him. I had that honour. He had a separate coach. He came out and stood on the platform... I shall not stay here long; I shall go somewhere, anywhere, follow my nose.”

“But where will you go, Stepanych? Leave well enough alone. Here you have a house, warmth, a little piece of land. Your wife is a worker.”

“Land! You should look at my piece of land. Not a twig on it—nothing. I planted some cabbages in the spring, just when the inspector came along. He said: ‘What is this? Why have you not reported this? Why have you done this without permission? Dig them up, roots and all.’ He was drunk. Another time he would not have said a word, but this time it struck him. Three rubles fine!...”

Vasily kept silent for a while, pulling at his pipe, then added quietly: “A little more and I should have done for him.”

“You are hot-tempered.”

“No, I am not hot-tempered, but I tell the truth and think. Yes, he will still get a bloody nose from me. I will complain to the Chief. We will see then!” And Vasily did complain to the Chief.

Once the Chief came to inspect the line. Three days later important personages were coming from St. Petersburg and would pass over the line. They were conducting an inquiry, so that previous to their journey it was necessary to put everything in order. Ballast was laid down, the bed was levelled, the sleepers carefully examined, spikes driven in a bit, nuts screwed up, posts painted, and orders given for yellow sand to be sprinkled at the level crossings. The woman at the neighbouring hut turned her old man out to weed. Semyon worked for a whole week. He put everything in order, mended his kaftan, cleaned and polished his brass plate until it fairly shone. Vasily also worked hard. The Chief arrived on a trolley, four men working the handles and the levers making the six wheels hum. The trolley travelled at twenty versts an hour, but the wheels squeaked. It reached Semyon's hut, and he ran out and reported in soldierly fashion. All appeared to be in repair.

"Have you been here long?" inquired the Chief.

"Since the second of May, your Excellency."

"All right. Thank you. And who is at hut No. 164?"

The traffic inspector (he was travelling with the Chief on the trolley) replied: "Vasily Spiridov."

"Spiridov, Spiridov... Ah! is he the man against whom you made a note last year?"

"He is."

"Well, we will see Vasily Spiridov. Go on!" The workmen laid to the handles, and the trolley got under way. Semyon watched it, and thought, "There will be trouble between them and my neighbour."

About two hours later he started on his round. He saw some one coming along the line from the cutting. Something white showed on his head. Semyon began to look more attentively. It was Vasily. He had a stick in his hand, a small bundle on his shoulder, and his cheek was bound up in a handkerchief.

"Where are you off to?" cried Semyon.

Vasily came quite close. He was very pale, white as chalk, and his eyes had a wild look. Almost choking, he muttered: "To town—to Moscow—to the head office."

"Head office? Ah, you are going to complain, I suppose. Give it up! Vasily Stepanych, forget it."

“No, mate, I will not forget. It is too late. See! He struck me in the face, drew blood. So long as I live I will not forget. I will not leave it like this!”

Semyon took his hand. “Give it up, Stepanych. I am giving you good advice. You will not better things...”

“Better things! I know myself I shan’t better things. You were right about Fate. It would be better for me not to do it, but one must stand up for the right.”

“But tell me, how did it happen?”

“How? He examined everything, got down from the trolley, looked into the hut. I knew beforehand that he would be strict, and so I had put everything into proper order. He was just going when I made my complaint. He immediately cried out: ‘Here is a Government inquiry coming, and you make a complaint about a vegetable garden. Here are privy councillors coming, and you annoy me with cabbages!’ I lost patience and said something—not very much, but it offended him, and he struck me in the face. I stood still; I did nothing, just as if what he did was perfectly all right. They went off; I came to myself, washed my face, and left.”

“And what about the hut?”

“My wife is staying there. She will look after things. Never mind about their roads.”

Vasily got up and collected himself. “Good-bye, Ivanov. I do not know whether I shall get any one at the office to listen to me.”

“Surely you are not going to walk?”

“At the station I will try to get on a freight train, and to-morrow I shall be in Moscow.”

The neighbours bade each other farewell. Vasily was absent for some time. His wife worked for him night and day. She never slept, and wore herself out waiting for her husband. On the third day the commission arrived. An engine, luggage-van, and two first-class saloons; but Vasily was still away. Semyon saw his wife on the fourth day. Her face was swollen from crying and her eyes were red.

“Has your husband returned?” he asked. But the woman only made a gesture with her hands, and without saying a word went her way.

Semyon had learnt when still a lad to make flutes out of a kind of reed. He used to burn out the heart of the stalk, make holes where necessary, drill them, fix a mouthpiece at one end, and tune them so well that it was possible to play almost any air on them. He made a number of them in his spare time, and sent them by his

friends amongst the freight brakemen to the bazaar in the town. He got two kopeks apiece for them. On the day following the visit of the commission he left his wife at home to meet the six o'clock train, and started off to the forest to cut some sticks. He went to the end of his section—at this point the line made a sharp turn—descended the embankment, and struck into the wood at the foot of the mountain. About half a verst away there was a big marsh, around which splendid reeds for his flutes grew. He cut a whole bundle of stalks and started back home. The sun was already dropping low, and in the dead stillness only the twittering of the birds was audible, and the crackle of the dead wood under his feet. As he walked along rapidly, he fancied he heard the clang of iron striking iron, and he redoubled his pace. There was no repair going on in his section. What did it mean? He emerged from the woods, the railway embankment stood high before him; on the top a man was squatting on the bed of the line busily engaged in something. Semyon commenced quietly to crawl up towards him. He thought it was some one after the nuts which secure the rails. He watched, and the man got up, holding a crow-bar in his hand. He had loosened a rail, so that it would move to one side. A mist swam before Semyon's eyes; he wanted to cry out, but could not. It was Vasily! Semyon scrambled up the bank, as Vasily with crow-bar and wrench slid headlong down the other side.

"Vasily Stepanych! My dear friend, come back! Give me the crow-bar. We will put the rail back; no one will know. Come back! Save your soul from sin!"

Vasily did not look back, but disappeared into the woods.

Semyon stood before the rail which had been torn up. He threw down his bundle of sticks. A train was due; not a freight, but a passenger-train. And he had nothing with which to stop it, no flag. He could not replace the rail and could not drive in the spikes with his bare hands. It was necessary to run, absolutely necessary to run to the hut for some tools. "God help me!" he murmured.

Semyon started running towards his hut. He was out of breath, but still ran, falling every now and then. He had cleared the forest; he was only a few hundred feet from his hut, not more, when he heard the distant hooter of the factory sound—six o'clock! In two minutes' time No. 7 train was due. "Oh, Lord! Have pity on innocent souls!" In his mind Semyon saw the engine strike against the loosened rail with its left wheel, shiver, careen, tear up and splinter the sleepers—and just there, there was a curve and the embankment seventy feet high, down which the engine would topple—and the third-class carriages would be packed ... little children... All sitting in the train now, never dreaming of danger. "Oh, Lord! Tell me what to do!... No, it is impossible to run to the hut and get back in time."

Semyon did not run on to the hut, but turned back and ran faster than before. He was running almost mechanically, blindly; he did not know himself what was to happen. He ran as far as the rail which had been pulled up; his sticks were lying in a heap. He bent down, seized one without knowing why, and ran on farther. It seemed to him the train was already coming. He heard the distant whistle; he heard the quiet, even tremor of the rails; but his strength was exhausted, he could run no farther, and came to a halt about six hundred feet from the awful spot. Then an idea came into his head, literally like a ray of light. Pulling off his cap, he took out of it a cotton scarf, drew his knife out of the upper part of his boot, and crossed himself, muttering, “God bless me!”

He buried the knife in his left arm above the elbow; the blood spurted out, flowing in a hot stream. In this he soaked his scarf, smoothed it out, tied it to the stick and hung out his red flag.

He stood waving his flag. The train was already in sight. The driver would not see him—would come close up, and a heavy train cannot be pulled up in six hundred feet.

And the blood kept on flowing. Semyon pressed the sides of the wound together so as to close it, but the blood did not diminish. Evidently he had cut his arm very deep. His head commenced to swim, black spots began to dance before his eyes, and then it became dark. There was a ringing in his ears. He could not see the train or hear the noise. Only one thought possessed him. “I shall not be able to keep standing up. I shall fall and drop the flag; the train will pass over me. Help me, oh Lord!”

All turned black before him, his mind became a blank, and he dropped the flag; but the blood-stained banner did not fall to the ground. A hand seized it and held it high to meet the approaching train. The engineer saw it, shut the regulator, and reversed steam. The train came to a standstill.

People jumped out of the carriages and collected in a crowd. They saw a man lying senseless on the footway, drenched in blood, and another man standing beside him with a blood-stained rag on a stick.

Vasily looked around at all. Then, lowering his head, he said: “Bind me. I tore up a rail!”

THE DARLING

BY ANTON P. CHEKOV

Olenka, the daughter of the retired collegiate assessor Plemyanikov, was sitting on the back-door steps of her house doing nothing. It was hot, the flies were nagging and teasing, and it was pleasant to think that it would soon be evening. Dark rain clouds were gathering from the east, wafting a breath of moisture every now and then.

Kukin, who roomed in the wing of the same house, was standing in the yard looking up at the sky. He was the manager of the Tivoli, an open-air theatre.

“Again,” he said despairingly. “Rain again. Rain, rain, rain! Every day rain! As though to spite me. I might as well stick my head into a noose and be done with it. It’s ruining me. Heavy losses every day!” He wrung his hands, and continued, addressing Olenka: “What a life, Olga Semyonovna! It’s enough to make a man weep. He works, he does his best, his very best, he tortures himself, he passes sleepless nights, he thinks and thinks and thinks how to do everything just right. And what’s the result? He gives the public the best operetta, the very best pantomime, excellent artists. But do they want it? Have they the least appreciation of it? The public is rude. The public is a great boor. The public wants a circus, a lot of nonsense, a lot of stuff. And there’s the weather. Look! Rain almost every evening. It began to rain on the tenth of May, and it’s kept it up through the whole of June. It’s simply awful. I can’t get any audiences, and don’t I have to pay rent? Don’t I have to pay the actors?”

The next day towards evening the clouds gathered again, and Kukin said with an hysterical laugh:

“Oh, I don’t care. Let it do its worst. Let it drown the whole theatre, and me, too. All right, no luck for me in this world or the next. Let the actors bring suit against me and drag me to court. What’s the court? Why not Siberia at hard labour, or even the scaffold? Ha, ha, ha!”

It was the same on the third day.

Olenka listened to Kukin seriously, in silence. Sometimes tears would rise to her eyes. At last Kukin’s misfortune touched her. She fell in love with him. He was short, gaunt, with a yellow face, and curly hair combed back from his forehead, and a thin tenor voice. His features puckered all up when he spoke. Despair was ever inscribed on his face. And yet he awakened in Olenka a sincere, deep feeling.

She was always loving somebody. She couldn’t get on without loving somebody. She had loved her sick father, who sat the whole time in his armchair in a darkened room,

breathing heavily. She had loved her aunt, who came from Brianska once or twice a year to visit them. And before that, when a pupil at the progymnasium, she had loved her French teacher. She was a quiet, kind-hearted, compassionate girl, with a soft gentle way about her. And she made a very healthy, wholesome impression. Looking at her full, rosy cheeks, at her soft white neck with the black mole, and at the good naïve smile that always played on her face when something pleasant was said, the men would think, "Not so bad," and would smile too; and the lady visitors, in the middle of the conversation, would suddenly grasp her hand and exclaim, "You darling!" in a burst of delight.

The house, hers by inheritance, in which she had lived from birth, was located at the outskirts of the city on the Gypsy Road, not far from the Tivoli. From early evening till late at night she could hear the music in the theatre and the bursting of the rockets; and it seemed to her that Kukin was roaring and battling with his fate and taking his chief enemy, the indifferent public, by assault. Her heart melted softly, she felt no desire to sleep, and when Kukin returned home towards morning, she tapped on her window-pane, and through the curtains he saw her face and one shoulder and the kind smile she gave him.

He proposed to her, and they were married. And when he had a good look of her neck and her full vigorous shoulders, he clapped his hands and said:

"You darling!"

He was happy. But it rained on their wedding-day, and the expression of despair never left his face.

They got along well together. She sat in the cashier's box, kept the theatre in order, wrote down the expenses, and paid out the salaries. Her rosy cheeks, her kind naïve smile, like a halo around her face, could be seen at the cashier's window, behind the scenes, and in the café. She began to tell her friends that the theatre was the greatest, the most important, the most essential thing in the world, that it was the only place to obtain true enjoyment in and become humanised and educated.

"But do you suppose the public appreciates it?" she asked. "What the public wants is the circus. Yesterday Vanichka and I gave *Faust Burlesqued*, and almost all the boxes were empty. If we had given some silly nonsense, I assure you, the theatre would have been overcrowded. To-morrow we'll put *Orpheus in Hades* on. Do come."

Whatever Kukin said about the theatre and the actors, she repeated. She spoke, as he did, with contempt of the public, of its indifference to art, of its boorishness. She meddled in the rehearsals, corrected the actors, watched the conduct of the

musicians; and when an unfavourable criticism appeared in the local paper, she wept and went to the editor to argue with him.

The actors were fond of her and called her “Vanichka and I” and “the darling.” She was sorry for them and lent them small sums. When they bilked her, she never complained to her husband; at the utmost she shed a few tears.

In winter, too, they got along nicely together. They leased a theatre in the town for the whole winter and sublet it for short periods to a Little Russian theatrical company, to a conjuror and to the local amateur players.

Olenka grew fuller and was always beaming with contentment; while Kukin grew thinner and yellower and complained of his terrible losses, though he did fairly well the whole winter. At night he coughed, and she gave him raspberry syrup and lime water, rubbed him with eau de Cologne, and wrapped him up in soft coverings.

“You are my precious sweet,” she said with perfect sincerity, stroking his hair. “You are such a dear.”

At Lent he went to Moscow to get his company together, and, while without him, Olenka was unable to sleep. She sat at the window the whole time, gazing at the stars. She likened herself to the hens that are also uneasy and unable to sleep when their rooster is out of the coop. Kukin was detained in Moscow. He wrote he would be back during Easter Week, and in his letters discussed arrangements already for the Tivoli. But late one night, before Easter Monday, there was an ill-omened knocking at the wicket-gate. It was like a knocking on a barrel—boom, boom, boom! The sleepy cook ran barefooted, plashing through the puddles, to open the gate.

“Open the gate, please,” said some one in a hollow bass voice. “I have a telegram for you.”

Olenka had received telegrams from her husband before; but this time, somehow, she was numbed with terror. She opened the telegram with trembling hands and read:

“Ivan Petrovich died suddenly to-day. Awaiting propt orders for wuneral Tuesday.”

That was the way the telegram was written—“wuneral”—and another unintelligible word—“propt.” The telegram was signed by the manager of the opera company.

“My dearest!” Olenka burst out sobbing. “Vanichka, my dearest, my sweetheart. Why did I ever meet you? Why did I ever get to know you and love you? To whom have you abandoned your poor Olenka, your poor, unhappy Olenka?”

Kukin was buried on Tuesday in the Vagankov Cemetery in Moscow. Olenka returned home on Wednesday; and as soon as she entered her house she threw herself on her bed and broke into such loud sobbing that she could be heard in the street and in the neighbouring yards.

“The darling!” said the neighbours, crossing themselves. “How Olga Semyonovna, the poor darling, is grieving!”

Three months afterwards Olenka was returning home from mass, downhearted and in deep mourning. Beside her walked a man also returning from church, Vasily Pustovalov, the manager of the merchant Babakayev’s lumber-yard. He was wearing a straw hat, a white vest with a gold chain, and looked more like a landowner than a business man.

“Everything has its ordained course, Olga Semyonovna,” he said sedately, with sympathy in his voice. “And if any one near and dear to us dies, then it means it was God’s will and we should remember that and bear it with submission.”

He took her to the wicket-gate, said good-bye and went away. After that she heard his sedate voice the whole day; and on closing her eyes she instantly had a vision of his dark beard. She took a great liking to him. And evidently he had been impressed by her, too; for, not long after, an elderly woman, a distant acquaintance, came in to have a cup of coffee with her. As soon as the woman was seated at table she began to speak about Pustovalov—how good he was, what a steady man, and any woman could be glad to get him as a husband. Three days later Pustovalov himself paid Olenka a visit. He stayed only about ten minutes, and spoke little, but Olenka fell in love with him, fell in love so desperately that she did not sleep the whole night and burned as with fever. In the morning she sent for the elderly woman. Soon after, Olenka and Pustovalov were engaged, and the wedding followed.

Pustovalov and Olenka lived happily together. He usually stayed in the lumber-yard until dinner, then went out on business. In his absence Olenka took his place in the office until evening, attending to the book-keeping and despatching the orders.

“Lumber rises twenty per cent every year nowadays,” she told her customers and acquaintances. “Imagine, we used to buy wood from our forests here. Now Vasichka has to go every year to the government of Mogilev to get wood. And what a tax!” she exclaimed, covering her cheeks with her hands in terror. “What a tax!”

She felt as if she had been dealing in lumber for ever so long, that the most important and essential thing in life was lumber. There was something touching and endearing in the way she pronounced the words, “beam,” “joist,” “plank,” “stave,” “lath,” “gun-

carriage," "clamp." At night she dreamed of whole mountains of boards and planks, long, endless rows of wagons conveying the wood somewhere, far, far from the city. She dreamed that a whole regiment of beams, 36 ft. x 5 in., were advancing in an upright position to do battle against the lumber-yard; that the beams and joists and clamps were knocking against each other, emitting the sharp crackling reports of dry wood, that they were all falling and then rising again, piling on top of each other. Olenka cried out in her sleep, and Pustovalov said to her gently:

"Olenka my dear, what is the matter? Cross yourself."

Her husband's opinions were all hers. If he thought the room was too hot, she thought so too. If he thought business was dull, she thought business was dull. Pustovalov was not fond of amusements and stayed home on holidays; she did the same.

"You are always either at home or in the office," said her friends. "Why don't you go to the theatre or to the circus, darling?"

"Vasichka and I never go to the theatre," she answered sedately. "We have work to do, we have no time for nonsense. What does one get out of going to theatre?"

On Saturdays she and Pustovalov went to vespers, and on holidays to early mass. On returning home they walked side by side with rapt faces, an agreeable smell emanating from both of them and her silk dress rustling pleasantly. At home they drank tea with milk-bread and various jams, and then ate pie. Every day at noontime there was an appetising odour in the yard and outside the gate of cabbage soup, roast mutton, or duck; and, on fast days, of fish. You couldn't pass the gate without being seized by an acute desire to eat. The samovar was always boiling on the office table, and customers were treated to tea and biscuits. Once a week the married couple went to the baths and returned with red faces, walking side by side.

"We are getting along very well, thank God," said Olenka to her friends. "God grant that all should live as well as Vasichka and I."

When Pustovalov went to the government of Mogilev to buy wood, she was dreadfully homesick for him, did not sleep nights, and cried. Sometimes the veterinary surgeon of the regiment, Smirnov, a young man who lodged in the wing of her house, came to see her evenings. He related incidents, or they played cards together. This distracted her. The most interesting of his stories were those of his own life. He was married and had a son; but he had separated from his wife because she had deceived him, and now he hated her and sent her forty rubles a month for his son's support. Olenka sighed, shook her head, and was sorry for him.

“Well, the Lord keep you,” she said, as she saw him off to the door by candlelight. “Thank you for coming to kill time with me. May God give you health. Mother in Heaven!” She spoke very sedately, very judiciously, imitating her husband. The veterinary surgeon had disappeared behind the door when she called out after him: “Do you know, Vladimir Platonych, you ought to make up with your wife. Forgive her, if only for the sake of your son. The child understands everything, you may be sure.”

When Pustovalov returned, she told him in a low voice about the veterinary surgeon and his unhappy family life; and they sighed and shook their heads, and talked about the boy who must be homesick for his father. Then, by a strange association of ideas, they both stopped before the sacred images, made genuflections, and prayed to God to send them children.

And so the Pustovalovs lived for full six years, quietly and peaceably, in perfect love and harmony. But once in the winter Vasily Andreyich, after drinking some hot tea, went out into the lumber-yard without a hat on his head, caught a cold and took sick. He was treated by the best physicians, but the malady progressed, and he died after an illness of four months. Olenka was again left a widow.

“To whom have you left me, my darling?” she wailed after the funeral. “How shall I live now without you, wretched creature that I am. Pity me, good people, pity me, fatherless and motherless, all alone in the world!”

She went about dressed in black and weepers, and she gave up wearing hats and gloves for good. She hardly left the house except to go to church and to visit her husband’s grave. She almost led the life of a nun.

It was not until six months had passed that she took off the weepers and opened her shutters. She began to go out occasionally in the morning to market with her cook. But how she lived at home and what went on there, could only be surmised. It could be surmised from the fact that she was seen in her little garden drinking tea with the veterinarian while he read the paper out loud to her, and also from the fact that once on meeting an acquaintance at the post-office, she said to her:

“There is no proper veterinary inspection in our town. That is why there is so much disease. You constantly hear of people getting sick from the milk and becoming infected by the horses and cows. The health of domestic animals ought really to be looked after as much as that of human beings.”

She repeated the veterinarian’s words and held the same opinions as he about everything. It was plain that she could not exist a single year without an attachment, and she found her new happiness in the wing of her house. In any one else this would

have been condemned; but no one could think ill of Olenka. Everything in her life was so transparent. She and the veterinary surgeon never spoke about the change in their relations. They tried, in fact, to conceal it, but unsuccessfully; for Olenka could have no secrets. When the surgeon's colleagues from the regiment came to see him, she poured tea, and served the supper, and talked to them about the cattle plague, the foot and mouth disease, and the municipal slaughter houses. The surgeon was dreadfully embarrassed, and after the visitors had left, he caught her hand and hissed angrily:

"Didn't I ask you not to talk about what you don't understand? When we doctors discuss things, please don't mix in. It's getting to be a nuisance."

She looked at him in astonishment and alarm, and asked:

"But, Volodichka, what *am* I to talk about?"

And she threw her arms round his neck, with tears in her eyes, and begged him not to be angry. And they were both happy.

But their happiness was of short duration. The veterinary surgeon went away with his regiment to be gone for good, when it was transferred to some distant place almost as far as Siberia, and Olenka was left alone.

Now she was completely alone. Her father had long been dead, and his armchair lay in the attic covered with dust and minus one leg. She got thin and homely, and the people who met her on the street no longer looked at her as they had used to, nor smiled at her. Evidently her best years were over, past and gone, and a new, dubious life was to begin which it were better not to think about.

In the evening Olenka sat on the steps and heard the music playing and the rockets bursting in the Tivoli; but it no longer aroused any response in her. She looked listlessly into the yard, thought of nothing, wanted nothing, and when night came on, she went to bed and dreamed of nothing but the empty yard. She ate and drank as though by compulsion.

And what was worst of all, she no longer held any opinions. She saw and understood everything that went on around her, but she could not form an opinion about it. She knew of nothing to talk about. And how dreadful not to have opinions! For instance, you see a bottle, or you see that it is raining, or you see a muzhik riding by in a wagon. But what the bottle or the rain or the muzhik are for, or what the sense of them all is, you cannot tell—you cannot tell, not for a thousand rubles. In the days of Kukin and Pustovalov and then of the veterinary surgeon, Olenka had had an explanation for

everything, and would have given her opinion freely no matter about what. But now there was the same emptiness in her heart and brain as in her yard. It was as galling and bitter as a taste of wormwood.

Gradually the town grew up all around. The Gypsy Road had become a street, and where the Tivoli and the lumber-yard had been, there were now houses and a row of side streets. How quickly time flies! Olenka's house turned gloomy, the roof rusty, the shed slanting. Dock and thistles overgrew the yard. Olenka herself had aged and grown homely. In the summer she sat on the steps, and her soul was empty and dreary and bitter. When she caught the breath of spring, or when the wind wafted the chime of the cathedral bells, a sudden flood of memories would pour over her, her heart would expand with a tender warmth, and the tears would stream down her cheeks. But that lasted only a moment. Then would come emptiness again, and the feeling, What is the use of living? The black kitten Bryska rubbed up against her and purred softly, but the little creature's caresses left Olenka untouched. That was not what she needed. What she needed was a love that would absorb her whole being, her reason, her whole soul, that would give her ideas, an object in life, that would warm her aging blood. And she shook the black kitten off her skirt angrily, saying:

"Go away! What are you doing here?"

And so day after day, year after year not a single joy, not a single opinion. Whatever Marva, the cook, said was all right.

One hot day in July, towards evening, as the town cattle were being driven by, and the whole yard was filled with clouds of dust, there was suddenly a knocking at the gate. Olenka herself went to open it, and was dumbfounded to behold the veterinarian Smirnov. He had turned grey and was dressed as a civilian. All the old memories flooded into her soul, she could not restrain herself, she burst out crying, and laid her head on Smirnov's breast without saying a word. So overcome was she that she was totally unconscious of how they walked into the house and seated themselves to drink tea.

"My darling!" she murmured, trembling with joy. "Vladimir Platonych, from where has God sent you?"

"I want to settle here for good," he told her. "I have resigned my position and have come here to try my fortune as a free man and lead a settled life. Besides, it's time to send my boy to the gymnasium. He is grown up now. You know, my wife and I have become reconciled."

"Where is she?" asked Olenka.

“At the hotel with the boy. I am looking for lodgings.”

“Good gracious, bless you, take my house. Why won’t my house do? Oh, dear! Why, I won’t ask any rent of you,” Olenka burst out in the greatest excitement, and began to cry again. “You live here, and the wing will be enough for me. Oh, Heavens, what a joy!”

The very next day the roof was being painted and the walls whitewashed, and Olenka, arms akimbo, was going about the yard superintending. Her face brightened with her old smile. Her whole being revived and freshened, as though she had awakened from a long sleep. The veterinarian’s wife and child arrived. She was a thin, plain woman, with a crabbed expression. The boy Sasha, small for his ten years of age, was a chubby child, with clear blue eyes and dimples in his cheeks. He made for the kitten the instant he entered the yard, and the place rang with his happy laughter.

“Is that your cat, auntie?” he asked Olenka. “When she has little kitties, please give me one. Mamma is awfully afraid of mice.”

Olenka chatted with him, gave him tea, and there was a sudden warmth in her bosom and a soft gripping at her heart, as though the boy were her own son.

In the evening, when he sat in the dining-room studying his lessons, she looked at him tenderly and whispered to herself:

“My darling, my pretty. You are such a clever child, so good to look at.”

“An island is a tract of land entirely surrounded by water,” he recited.

“An island is a tract of land,” she repeated—the first idea asseverated with conviction after so many years of silence and mental emptiness.

She now had her opinions, and at supper discussed with Sasha’s parents how difficult the studies had become for the children at the gymnasium, but how, after all, a classical education was better than a commercial course, because when you graduated from the gymnasium then the road was open to you for any career at all. If you chose to, you could become a doctor, or, if you wanted to, you could become an engineer.

Sasha began to go to the gymnasium. His mother left on a visit to her sister in Kharkov and never came back. The father was away every day inspecting cattle, and sometimes was gone three whole days at a time, so that Sasha, it seemed to Olenka, was utterly abandoned, was treated as if he were quite superfluous, and must be

dying of hunger. So she transferred him into the wing along with herself and fixed up a little room for him there.

Every morning Olenka would come into his room and find him sound asleep with his hand tucked under his cheek, so quiet that he seemed not to be breathing. What a shame to have to wake him, she thought.

“Sashenka,” she said sorrowingly, “get up, darling. It’s time to go to the gymnasium.”

He got up, dressed, said his prayers, then sat down to drink tea. He drank three glasses of tea, ate two large cracknels and half a buttered roll. The sleep was not yet out of him, so he was a little cross.

“You don’t know your fable as you should, Sashenka,” said Olenka, looking at him as though he were departing on a long journey. “What a lot of trouble you are. You must try hard and learn, dear, and mind your teachers.”

“Oh, let me alone, please,” said Sasha.

Then he went down the street to the gymnasium, a little fellow wearing a large cap and carrying a satchel on his back. Olenka followed him noiselessly.

“Sashenka,” she called.

He looked round and she shoved a date or a caramel into his hand. When he reached the street of the gymnasium, he turned around and said, ashamed of being followed by a tall, stout woman:

“You had better go home, aunt. I can go the rest of the way myself.”

She stopped and stared after him until he had disappeared into the school entrance.

Oh, how she loved him! Not one of her other ties had been so deep. Never before had she given herself so completely, so disinterestedly, so cheerfully as now that her maternal instincts were all aroused. For this boy, who was not hers, for the dimples in his cheeks and for his big cap, she would have given her life, given it with joy and with tears of rapture. Why? Ah, indeed, why?

When she had seen Sasha off to the gymnasium, she returned home quietly, content, serene, overflowing with love. Her face, which had grown younger in the last half year, smiled and beamed. People who met her were pleased as they looked at her.

“How are you, Olga Semyonovna, darling? How are you getting on, darling?”

“The gymnasium course is very hard nowadays,” she told at the market. “It’s no joke. Yesterday the first class had a fable to learn by heart, a Latin translation, and a problem. How is a little fellow to do all that?”

And she spoke of the teacher and the lessons and the text-books, repeating exactly what Sasha said about them.

At three o’clock they had dinner. In the evening they prepared the lessons together, and Olenka wept with Sasha over the difficulties. When she put him to bed, she lingered a long time making the sign of the cross over him and muttering a prayer. And when she lay in bed, she dreamed of the far-away, misty future when Sasha would finish his studies and become a doctor or an engineer, have a large house of his own, with horses and a carriage, marry and have children. She would fall asleep still thinking of the same things, and tears would roll down her cheeks from her closed eyes. And the black cat would lie at her side purring: “Mrr, mrr, mrr.”

Suddenly there was a loud knocking at the gate. Olenka woke up breathless with fright, her heart beating violently. Half a minute later there was another knock.

“A telegram from Kharkov,” she thought, her whole body in a tremble. “His mother wants Sasha to come to her in Kharkov. Oh, great God!”

She was in despair. Her head, her feet, her hands turned cold. There was no unhappier creature in the world, she felt. But another minute passed, she heard voices. It was the veterinarian coming home from the club.

“Thank God,” she thought. The load gradually fell from her heart, she was at ease again. And she went back to bed, thinking of Sasha who lay fast asleep in the next room and sometimes cried out in his sleep:

“I’ll give it to you! Get away! Quit your scrapping!”

THE BET

BY ANTON P. CHEKHOV

I

It was a dark autumn night. The old banker was pacing from corner to corner of his study, recalling to his mind the party he gave in the autumn fifteen years before. There were many clever people at the party and much interesting conversation. They talked among other things of capital punishment. The guests, among them not a few scholars and journalists, for the most part disapproved of capital punishment. They found it obsolete as a means of punishment, unfitted to a Christian State and immoral. Some of them thought that capital punishment should be replaced universally by life-imprisonment.

“I don’t agree with you,” said the host. “I myself have experienced neither capital punishment nor life-imprisonment, but if one may judge *a priori*, then in my opinion capital punishment is more moral and more humane than imprisonment. Execution kills instantly, life-imprisonment kills by degrees. Who is the more humane executioner, one who kills you in a few seconds or one who draws the life out of you incessantly, for years?”

“They’re both equally immoral,” remarked one of the guests, “because their purpose is the same, to take away life. The State is not God. It has no right to take away that which it cannot give back, if it should so desire.”

Among the company was a lawyer, a young man of about twenty-five. On being asked his opinion, he said:

“Capital punishment and life-imprisonment are equally immoral; but if I were offered the choice between them, I would certainly choose the second. It’s better to live somehow than not to live at all.”

There ensued a lively discussion. The banker who was then younger and more nervous suddenly lost his temper, banged his fist on the table, and turning to the young lawyer, cried out:

“It’s a lie. I bet you two millions you wouldn’t stick in a cell even for five years.”

“If you mean it seriously,” replied the lawyer, “then I bet I’ll stay not five but fifteen.”

“Fifteen! Done!” cried the banker. “Gentlemen, I stake two millions.”

“Agreed. You stake two millions, I my freedom,” said the lawyer.

So this wild, ridiculous bet came to pass. The banker, who at that time had too many millions to count, spoiled and capricious, was beside himself with rapture. During supper he said to the lawyer jokingly:

“Come to your senses, young roan, before it’s too late. Two millions are nothing to me, but you stand to lose three or four of the best years of your life. I say three or four, because you’ll never stick it out any longer. Don’t forget either, you unhappy man, that voluntary is much heavier than enforced imprisonment. The idea that you have the right to free yourself at any moment will poison the whole of your life in the cell. I pity you.”

And now the banker, pacing from corner to corner, recalled all this and asked himself:

“Why did I make this bet? What’s the good? The lawyer loses fifteen years of his life and I throw away two millions. Will it convince people that capital punishment is worse or better than imprisonment for life? No, no! all stuff and rubbish. On my part, it was the caprice of a well-fed man; on the lawyer’s pure greed of gold.”

He recollected further what happened after the evening party. It was decided that the lawyer must undergo his imprisonment under the strictest observation, in a garden wing of the banker’s house. It was agreed that during the period he would be deprived of the right to cross the threshold, to see living people, to hear human voices, and to receive letters and newspapers. He was permitted to have a musical instrument, to read books, to write letters, to drink wine and smoke tobacco. By the agreement he could communicate, but only in silence, with the outside world through a little window specially constructed for this purpose. Everything necessary, books, music, wine, he could receive in any quantity by sending a note through the window. The agreement provided for all the minutest details, which made the confinement strictly solitary, and it obliged the lawyer to remain exactly fifteen years from twelve o’clock of November 14th, 1870, to twelve o’clock of November 14th, 1885. The least attempt on his part to violate the conditions, to escape if only for two minutes before the time freed the banker from the obligation to pay him the two millions.

During the first year of imprisonment, the lawyer, as far as it was possible to judge from his short notes, suffered terribly from loneliness and boredom. From his wing day and night came the sound of the piano. He rejected wine and tobacco. “Wine,” he wrote, “excites desires, and desires are the chief foes of a prisoner; besides, nothing is more boring than to drink good wine alone,” and tobacco spoils the air in his room. During the first year the lawyer was sent books of a light character; novels with a complicated love interest, stories of crime and fantasy, comedies, and so on.

In the second year the piano was heard no longer and the lawyer asked only for classics. In the fifth year, music was heard again, and the prisoner asked for wine. Those who watched him said that during the whole of that year he was only eating, drinking, and lying on his bed. He yawned often and talked angrily to himself. Books he

did not read. Sometimes at nights he would sit down to write. He would write for a long time and tear it all up in the morning. More than once he was heard to weep.

In the second half of the sixth year, the prisoner began zealously to study languages, philosophy, and history. He fell on these subjects so hungrily that the banker hardly had time to get books enough for him. In the space of four years about six hundred volumes were bought at his request. It was while that passion lasted that the banker received the following letter from the prisoner: “My dear gaoler, I am writing these lines in six languages. Show them to experts. Let them read them. If they do not find one single mistake, I beg you to give orders to have a gun fired off in the garden. By the noise I shall know that my efforts have not been in vain. The geniuses of all ages and countries speak in different languages; but in them all burns the same flame. Oh, if you knew my heavenly happiness now that I can understand them!” The prisoner’s desire was fulfilled. Two shots were fired in the garden by the banker’s order.

Later on, after the tenth year, the lawyer sat immovable before his table and read only the New Testament. The banker found it strange that a man who in four years had mastered six hundred erudite volumes, should have spent nearly a year in reading one book, easy to understand and by no means thick. The New Testament was then replaced by the history of religions and theology.

During the last two years of his confinement the prisoner read an extraordinary amount, quite haphazard. Now he would apply himself to the natural sciences, then he would read Byron or Shakespeare. Notes used to come from him in which he asked to be sent at the same time a book on chemistry, a text-book of medicine, a novel, and some treatise on philosophy or theology. He read as though he were swimming in the sea among broken pieces of wreckage, and in his desire to save his life was eagerly grasping one piece after another.

II

The banker recalled all this, and thought:

“To-morrow at twelve o’clock he receives his freedom. Under the agreement, I shall have to pay him two millions. If I pay, it’s all over with me. I am ruined for ever …”

Fifteen years before he had too many millions to count, but now he was afraid to ask himself which he had more of, money or debts. Gambling on the Stock-Exchange, risky speculation, and the recklessness of which he could not rid himself even in old age, had gradually brought his business to decay; and the fearless, self-confident, proud man of business had become an ordinary banker, trembling at every rise and fall in the market.

“That cursed bet,” murmured the old man clutching his head in despair… “Why didn’t the man die? He’s only forty years old. He will take away my last farthing, marry, enjoy life, gamble on the Exchange, and I will look on like an envious beggar and hear the same words from him every day: ‘I’m obliged to you for the happiness of my life. Let me help you.’ No, it’s too much! The only escape from bankruptcy and disgrace—is that the man should die.”

The clock had just struck three. The banker was listening. In the house every one was asleep, and one could hear only the frozen trees whining outside the windows. Trying to make no sound, he took out of his safe the key of the door which had not been opened for fifteen years, put on his overcoat, and went out of the house. The garden was dark and cold. It was raining. A damp, penetrating wind howled in the garden and gave the trees no rest. Though he strained his eyes, the banker could see neither the ground, nor the white statues, nor the garden wing, nor the trees. Approaching the garden wing, he called the watchman twice. There was no answer. Evidently the watchman had taken shelter from the bad weather and was now asleep somewhere in the kitchen or the greenhouse.

“If I have the courage to fulfil my intention,” thought the old man, “the suspicion will fall on the watchman first of all.”

In the darkness he groped for the steps and the door and entered the hall of the garden-wing, then poked his way into a narrow passage and struck a match. Not a soul was there. Some one’s bed, with no bedclothes on it, stood there, and an iron stove loomed dark in the corner. The seals on the door that led into the prisoner’s room were unbroken.

When the match went out, the old man, trembling from agitation, peeped into the little window.

In the prisoner’s room a candle was burning dimly. The prisoner himself sat by the table. Only his back, the hair on his head and his hands were visible. Open books were strewn about on the table, the two chairs, and on the carpet near the table.

Five minutes passed and the prisoner never once stirred. Fifteen years’ confinement had taught him to sit motionless. The banker tapped on the window with his finger, but the prisoner made no movement in reply. Then the banker cautiously tore the seals from the door and put the key into the lock. The rusty lock gave a hoarse groan and the door creaked. The banker expected instantly to hear a cry of surprise and the sound of steps. Three minutes passed and it was as quiet inside as it had been before. He made up his mind to enter.

Before the table sat a man, unlike an ordinary human being. It was a skeleton, with tight-drawn skin, with long curly hair like a woman's, and a shaggy beard. The colour of his face was yellow, of an earthy shade; the cheeks were sunken, the back long and narrow, and the hand upon which he leaned his hairy head was so lean and skinny that it was painful to look upon. His hair was already silvering with grey, and no one who glanced at the senile emaciation of the face would have believed that he was only forty years old. On the table, before his bended head, lay a sheet of paper on which something was written in a tiny hand.

"Poor devil," thought the banker, "he's asleep and probably seeing millions in his dreams. I have only to take and throw this half-dead thing on the bed, smother him a moment with the pillow, and the most careful examination will find no trace of unnatural death. But, first, let us read what he has written here."

The banker took the sheet from the table and read:

"To-morrow at twelve o'clock midnight, I shall obtain my freedom and the right to mix with people. But before I leave this room and see the sun I think it necessary to say a few words to you. On my own clear conscience and before God who sees me I declare to you that I despise freedom, life, health, and all that your books call the blessings of the world.

"For fifteen years I have diligently studied earthly life. True, I saw neither the earth nor the people, but in your books I drank fragrant wine, sang songs, hunted deer and wild boar in the forests, loved women... And beautiful women, like clouds ethereal, created by the magic of your poets' genius, visited me by night and whispered to me wonderful tales, which made my head drunken. In your books I climbed the summits of Elbruz and Mont Blanc and saw from there how the sun rose in the morning, and in the evening suffused the sky, the ocean and the mountain ridges with a purple gold. I saw from there how above me lightnings glimmered cleaving the clouds; I saw green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, cities; I heard syrens singing, and the playing of the pipes of Pan; I touched the wings of beautiful devils who came flying to me to speak of God... In your books I cast myself into bottomless abysses, worked miracles, burned cities to the ground, preached new religions, conquered whole countries...

"Your books gave me wisdom. All that unwearying human thought created in the centuries is compressed to a little lump in my skull. I know that I am cleverer than you all.

"And I despise your books, despise all worldly blessings and wisdom. Everything is void, frail, visionary and delusive as a mirage. Though you be proud and wise and

beautiful, yet will death wipe you from the face of the earth like the mice underground; and your posterity, your history, and the immortality of your men of genius will be as frozen slag, burnt down together with the terrestrial globe.

“You are mad, and gone the wrong way. You take falsehood for truth and ugliness for beauty. You would marvel if suddenly apple and orange trees should bear frogs and lizards instead of fruit, and if roses should begin to breathe the odour of a sweating horse. So do I marvel at you, who have bartered heaven for earth. I do not want to understand you.

“That I may show you in deed my contempt for that by which you live, I waive the two millions of which I once dreamed as of paradise, and which I now despise. That I may deprive myself of my right to them, I shall come out from here five minutes before the stipulated term, and thus shall violate the agreement.”

When he had read, the banker put the sheet on the table, kissed the head of the strange man, and began to weep. He went out of the wing. Never at any other time, not even after his terrible losses on the Exchange, had he felt such contempt for himself as now. Coming home, he lay down on his bed, but agitation and tears kept him a long time from sleeping…

The next morning the poor watchman came running to him and told him that they had seen the man who lived in the wing climb through the window into the garden. He had gone to the gate and disappeared. The banker instantly went with his servants to the wing and established the escape of his prisoner. To avoid unnecessary rumours he took the paper with the renunciation from the table and, on his return, locked it in his safe.

VANKA

BY ANTON P. CHEKHOV

Nine-year-old Vanka Zhukov, who had been apprentice to the shoemaker Aliakhin for three months, did not go to bed the night before Christmas. He waited till the master and mistress and the assistants had gone out to an early church-service, to procure

from his employer's cupboard a small phial of ink and a penholder with a rusty nib; then, spreading a crumpled sheet of paper in front of him, he began to write.

Before, however, deciding to make the first letter, he looked furtively at the door and at the window, glanced several times at the sombre ikon, on either side of which stretched shelves full of lasts, and heaved a heart-rending sigh. The sheet of paper was spread on a bench, and he himself was on his knees in front of it.

"Dear Grandfather Konstantin Makarych," he wrote, "I am writing you a letter. I wish you a Happy Christmas and all God's holy best. I have no mamma or papa, you are all I have."

Vanka gave a look towards the window in which shone the reflection of his candle, and vividly pictured to himself his grandfather, Konstantin Makarych, who was night-watchman at Messrs. Zhivarev. He was a small, lean, unusually lively and active old man of sixty-five, always smiling and blear-eyed. All day he slept in the servants' kitchen or trifled with the cooks. At night, enveloped in an ample sheep-skin coat, he strayed round the domain tapping with his cudgel. Behind him, each hanging its head, walked the old bitch Kashtanka, and the dog Viun, so named because of his black coat and long body and his resemblance to a loach. Viun was an unusually civil and friendly dog, looking as kindly at a stranger as at his masters, but he was not to be trusted. Beneath his deference and humbleness was hid the most inquisitorial maliciousness. No one knew better than he how to sneak up and take a bite at a leg, or slip into the larder or steal a muzhik's chicken. More than once they had nearly broken his hind-legs, twice he had been hung up, every week he was nearly flogged to death, but he always recovered.

At this moment, for certain, Vanka's grandfather must be standing at the gate, blinking his eyes at the bright red windows of the village church, stamping his feet in their high-felt boots, and jesting with the people in the yard; his cudgel will be hanging from his belt, he will be hugging himself with cold, giving a little dry, old man's cough, and at times pinching a servant-girl or a cook.

"Won't we take some snuff?" he asks, holding out his snuff-box to the women. The women take a pinch of snuff, and sneeze.

The old man goes into indescribable ecstasies, breaks into loud laughter, and cries:

"Off with it, it will freeze to your nose!"

He gives his snuff to the dogs, too. Kashtanka sneezes, twitches her nose, and walks away offended. Viun deferentially refuses to sniff and wags his tail. It is glorious

weather, not a breath of wind, clear, and frosty; it is a dark night, but the whole village, its white roofs and streaks of smoke from the chimneys, the trees silvered with hoar-frost, and the snowdrifts, you can see it all. The sky scintillates with bright twinkling stars, and the Milky Way stands out so clearly that it looks as if it had been polished and rubbed over with snow for the holidays…

Vanka sighs, dips his pen in the ink, and continues to write:

"Last night I got a thrashing, my master dragged me by my hair into the yard, and belaboured me with a shoe-maker's stirrup, because, while I was rocking his brat in its cradle, I unfortunately fell asleep. And during the week, my mistress told me to clean a herring, and I began by its tail, so she took the herring and stuck its snout into my face. The assistants tease me, send me to the tavern for vodka, make me steal the master's cucumbers, and the master beats me with whatever is handy. Food there is none; in the morning it's bread, at dinner gruel, and in the evening bread again. As for tea or sour-cabbage soup, the master and the mistress themselves guzzle that. They make me sleep in the vestibule, and when their brat cries, I don't sleep at all, but have to rock the cradle. Dear Grandpapa, for Heaven's sake, take me away from here, home to our village, I can't bear this any more… I bow to the ground to you, and will pray to God for ever and ever, take me from here or I shall die…"

The corners of Vanka's mouth went down, he rubbed his eyes with his dirty fist, and sobbed.

"I'll grate your tobacco for you," he continued, "I'll pray to God for you, and if there is anything wrong, then flog me like the grey goat. And if you really think I shan't find work, then I'll ask the manager, for Christ's sake, to let me clean the boots, or I'll go instead of Fedya as underherdsman. Dear Grandpapa, I can't bear this any more, it'll kill me… I wanted to run away to our village, but I have no boots, and I was afraid of the frost, and when I grow up I'll look after you, no one shall harm you, and when you die I'll pray for the repose of your soul, just like I do for mamma Pelagueya.

"As for Moscow, it is a large town, there are all gentlemen's houses, lots of horses, no sheep, and the dogs are not vicious. The children don't come round at Christmas with a star, no one is allowed to sing in the choir, and once I saw in a shop window hooks on a line and fishing rods, all for sale, and for every kind of fish, awfully convenient. And there was one hook which would catch a sheat-fish weighing a pound. And there are shops with guns, like the master's, and I am sure they must cost 100 rubles each. And in the meat-shops there are woodcocks, partridges, and hares, but who shot them or where they come from, the shopman won't say.

“Dear Grandpapa, and when the masters give a Christmas tree, take a golden walnut and hide it in my green box. Ask the young lady, Olga Ignatyevna, for it, say it’s for Vanka.”

Vanka sighed convulsively, and again stared at the window. He remembered that his grandfather always went to the forest for the Christmas tree, and took his grandson with him. What happy times! The frost crackled, his grandfather crackled, and as they both did, Vanka did the same. Then before cutting down the Christmas tree his grandfather smoked his pipe, took a long pinch of snuff, and made fun of poor frozen little Vanka… The young fir trees, wrapt in hoar-frost, stood motionless, waiting for which of them would die. Suddenly a hare springing from somewhere would dart over the snowdrift… His grandfather could not help shouting:

“Catch it, catch it, catch it! Ah, short-tailed devil!”

When the tree was down, his grandfather dragged it to the master’s house, and there they set about decorating it. The young lady, Olga Ignatyevna, Vanka’s great friend, busied herself most about it. When little Vanka’s mother, Pelagueya, was still alive, and was servant-woman in the house, Olga Ignatyevna used to stuff him with sugar-candy, and, having nothing to do, taught him to read, write, count up to one hundred, and even to dance the quadrille. When Pelagueya died, they placed the orphan Vanka in the kitchen with his grandfather, and from the kitchen he was sent to Moscow to Aliakhin, the shoemaker.

“Come quick, dear Grandpapa,” continued Vanka, “I beseech you for Christ’s sake take me from here. Have pity on a poor orphan, for here they beat me, and I am frightfully hungry, and so sad that I can’t tell you, I cry all the time. The other day the master hit me on the head with a last; I fell to the ground, and only just returned to life. My life is a misfortune, worse than any dog’s… I send greetings to Aliona, to one-eyed Tegor, and the coachman, and don’t let any one have my mouth-organ. I remain, your grandson, Ivan Zhukov, dear Grandpapa, do come.”

Vanka folded his sheet of paper in four, and put it into an envelope purchased the night before for a kopek. He thought a little, dipped the pen into the ink, and wrote the address:

“The village, to my grandfather.” He then scratched his head, thought again, and added: “Konstantin Makarych.” Pleased at not having been interfered with in his writing, he put on his cap, and, without putting on his sheep-skin coat, ran out in his shirt-sleeves into the street.

The shopman at the poulterer's, from whom he had inquired the night before, had told him that letters were to be put into post-boxes, and from there they were conveyed over the whole earth in mail troikas by drunken post-boys and to the sound of bells. Vanka ran to the first post-box and slipped his precious letter into the slit.

An hour afterwards, lulled by hope, he was sleeping soundly. In his dreams he saw a stove, by the stove his grandfather sitting with his legs dangling down, barefooted, and reading a letter to the cooks, and Viun walking round the stove wagging his tail.

HIDE AND SEEK

BY FIODOR SOLOGUB

Everything in Lelechka's nursery was bright, pretty, and cheerful. Lelechka's sweet voice charmed her mother. Lelechka was a delightful child. There was no other such child, there never had been, and there never would be. Lelechka's mother, Serafima Aleksandrovna, was sure of that. Lelechka's eyes were dark and large, her cheeks were rosy, her lips were made for kisses and for laughter. But it was not these charms in Lelechka that gave her mother the keenest joy. Lelechka was her mother's only child. That was why every movement of Lelechka's bewitched her mother. It was great bliss to hold Lelechka on her knees and to fondle her; to feel the little girl in her arms—a thing as lively and as bright as a little bird.

To tell the truth, Serafima Aleksandrovna felt happy only in the nursery. She felt cold with her husband.

Perhaps it was because he himself loved the cold—he loved to drink cold water, and to breathe cold air. He was always fresh and cool, with a frigid smile, and wherever he passed cold currents seemed to move in the air.

The Nesletyevs, Sergey Modestovich and Serafima Aleksandrovna, had married without love or calculation, because it was the accepted thing. He was a young man of thirty-five, she a young woman of twenty-five; both were of the same circle and well brought up; he was expected to take a wife, and the time had come for her to take a husband.

It even seemed to Serafima Aleksandrovna that she was in love with her future husband, and this made her happy. He looked handsome and well-bred; his intelligent grey eyes always preserved a dignified expression; and he fulfilled his obligations of a fiancé with irreproachable gentleness.

The bride was also good-looking; she was a tall, dark-eyed, dark-haired girl, somewhat timid but very tactful. He was not after her dowry, though it pleased him to know that she had something. He had connexions, and his wife came of good, influential people. This might, at the proper opportunity, prove useful. Always irreproachable and tactful, Nesletyev got on in his position not so fast that any one should envy him, nor yet so slow that he should envy any one else—everything came in the proper measure and at the proper time.

After their marriage there was nothing in the manner of Sergey Modestovich to suggest anything wrong to his wife. Later, however, when his wife was about to have a child, Sergey Modestovich established connexions elsewhere of a light and temporary nature. Serafima Aleksandrovna found this out, and, to her own astonishment, was not particularly hurt; she awaited her infant with a restless anticipation that swallowed every other feeling.

A little girl was born; Serafima Aleksandrovna gave herself up to her. At the beginning she used to tell her husband, with rapture, of all the joyous details of Lelechka's existence. But she soon found that he listened to her without the slightest interest, and only from the habit of politeness. Serafima Aleksandrovna drifted farther and farther away from him. She loved her little girl with the ungratified passion that other women, deceived in their husbands, show their chance young lovers.

"*Mamochka*, let's play *priatki*" (hide and seek), cried Lelechka, pronouncing the *r* like the *l*, so that the word sounded "pliatki."

This charming inability to speak always made Serafima Aleksandrovna smile with tender rapture. Lelechka then ran away, stamping with her plump little legs over the carpets, and hid herself behind the curtains near her bed.

"*Tiu-tiu, mamochka!*" she cried out in her sweet, laughing voice, as she looked out with a single roguish eye.

"Where is my baby girl?" the mother asked, as she looked for Lelechka and made believe that she did not see her.

And Lelechka poured out her rippling laughter in her hiding place. Then she came out a little farther, and her mother, as though she had only just caught sight of her, seized her by her little shoulders and exclaimed joyously: “Here she is, my Lelechka!”

Lelechka laughed long and merrily, her head close to her mother’s knees, and all of her cuddled up between her mother’s white hands. Her mother’s eyes glowed with passionate emotion.

“Now, *mamochka*, you hide,” said Lelechka, as she ceased laughing.

Her mother went to hide. Lelechka turned away as though not to see, but watched her *mamochka* stealthily all the time. Mamma hid behind the cupboard, and exclaimed: “*Tiu-tiu*, baby girl!”

Lelechka ran round the room and looked into all the corners, making believe, as her mother had done before, that she was seeking—though she really knew all the time where her *mamochka* was standing.

“Where’s my *mamochka*?” asked Lelechka. “She’s not here, and she’s not here,” she kept on repeating, as she ran from corner to corner.

Her mother stood, with suppressed breathing, her head pressed against the wall, her hair somewhat disarranged. A smile of absolute bliss played on her red lips.

The nurse, Fedosya, a good-natured and fine-looking, if somewhat stupid woman, smiled as she looked at her mistress with her characteristic expression, which seemed to say that it was not for her to object to gentlewomen’s caprices. She thought to herself: “The mother is like a little child herself—look how excited she is.”

Lelechka was getting nearer her mother’s corner. Her mother was growing more absorbed every moment by her interest in the game; her heart beat with short quick strokes, and she pressed even closer to the wall, disarranging her hair still more. Lelechka suddenly glanced toward her mother’s corner and screamed with joy.

“I’ve found ‘oo,” she cried out loudly and joyously, mispronouncing her words in a way that again made her mother happy.

She pulled her mother by her hands to the middle of the room, they were merry and they laughed; and Lelechka again hid her head against her mother’s knees, and went on lisping and lisping, without end, her sweet little words, so fascinating yet so awkward.

Sergey Modestovich was coming at this moment toward the nursery. Through the half-closed doors he heard the laughter, the joyous outcries, the sound of romping. He

entered the nursery, smiling his genial cold smile; he was irreproachably dressed, and he looked fresh and erect, and he spread round him an atmosphere of cleanliness, freshness and coldness. He entered in the midst of the lively game, and he confused them all by his radiant coldness. Even Fedosya felt abashed, now for her mistress, now for herself. Serafima Aleksandrovna at once became calm and apparently cold—and this mood communicated itself to the little girl, who ceased to laugh, but looked instead, silently and intently, at her father.

Sergey Modestovich gave a swift glance round the room. He liked coming here, where everything was beautifully arranged; this was done by Serafima Aleksandrovna, who wished to surround her little girl, from her very infancy, only with the loveliest things. Serafima Aleksandrovna dressed herself tastefully; this, too, she did for Lelechka, with the same end in view. One thing Sergey Modestovich had not become reconciled to, and this was his wife's almost continuous presence in the nursery.

"It's just as I thought... I knew that I'd find you here," he said with a derisive and condescending smile.

They left the nursery together. As he followed his wife through the door Sergey Modestovich said rather indifferently, in an incidental way, laying no stress on his words: "Don't you think that it would be well for the little girl if she were sometimes without your company? Merely, you see, that the child should feel its own individuality," he explained in answer to Serafima Aleksandrovna's puzzled glance.

"She's still so little," said Serafima Aleksandrovna.

"In any case, this is but my humble opinion. I don't insist. It's your kingdom there."

"I'll think it over," his wife answered, smiling, as he did, coldly but genially.

Then they began to talk of something else.

II

Nurse Fedosya, sitting in the kitchen that evening, was telling the silent housemaid Darya and the talkative old cook Agathya about the young lady of the house, and how the child loved to play *priatki* with her mother—"She hides her little face, and cries '*tiutiu*'!"

"And the mistress herself is like a little one," added Fedosya, smiling.

Agathya listened and shook her head ominously; while her face became grave and reproachful.

“That the mistress does it, well, that’s one thing; but that the young lady does it, that’s bad.”

“Why?” asked Fedosya with curiosity.

This expression of curiosity gave her face the look of a wooden, roughly-painted doll.

“Yes, that’s bad,” repeated Agathya with conviction. “Terribly bad!”

“Well?” said Fedosya, the ludicrous expression of curiosity on her face becoming more emphatic.

“She’ll hide, and hide, and hide away,” said Agathya, in a mysterious whisper, as she looked cautiously toward the door.

“What are you saying?” exclaimed Fedosya, frightened.

“It’s the truth I’m saying, remember my words,” Agathya went on with the same assurance and secrecy. “It’s the surest sign.”

The old woman had invented this sign, quite suddenly, herself; and she was evidently very proud of it.

III

Lelechka was asleep, and Serafima Aleksandrovna was sitting in her own room, thinking with joy and tenderness of Lelechka. Lelechka was in her thoughts, first a sweet, tiny girl, then a sweet, big girl, then again a delightful little girl; and so until the end she remained mamma’s little Lelechka.

Serafima Aleksandrovna did not even notice that Fedosya came up to her and paused before her. Fedosya had a worried, frightened look.

“Madam, madam,” she said quietly, in a trembling voice.

Serafima Aleksandrovna gave a start. Fedosya’s face made her anxious.

“What is it, Fedosya?” she asked with great concern. “Is there anything wrong with Lelechka?”

“No, madam,” said Fedosya, as she gesticulated with her hands to reassure her mistress and to make her sit down. “Lelechka is asleep, may God be with her! Only I’d like to say something—you see—Lelechka is always hiding herself—that’s not good.”

Fedosya looked at her mistress with fixed eyes, which had grown round from fright.

“Why not good?” asked Serafima Aleksandrovna, with vexation, succumbing involuntarily to vague fears.

“I can’t tell you how bad it is,” said Fedosya, and her face expressed the most decided confidence.

“Please speak in a sensible way,” observed Serafima Aleksandrovna dryly. “I understand nothing of what you are saying.”

“You see, madam, it’s a kind of omen,” explained Fedosya abruptly, in a shamefaced way.

“Nonsense!” said Serafima Aleksandrovna.

She did not wish to hear any further as to the sort of omen it was, and what it foreboded. But, somehow, a sense of fear and of sadness crept into her mood, and it was humiliating to feel that an absurd tale should disturb her beloved fancies, and should agitate her so deeply.

“Of course I know that gentlefolk don’t believe in omens, but it’s a bad omen, madam,” Fedosya went on in a doleful voice, “the young lady will hide, and hide…”

Suddenly she burst into tears, sobbing out loudly: “She’ll hide, and hide, and hide away, angelic little soul, in a damp grave,” she continued, as she wiped her tears with her apron and blew her nose.

“Who told you all this?” asked Serafima Aleksandrovna in an austere low voice.

“Agathya says so, madam,” answered Fedosya; “it’s she that knows.”

“Knows!” exclaimed Serafima Aleksandrovna in irritation, as though she wished to protect herself somehow from this sudden anxiety. “What nonsense! Please don’t come to me with any such notions in the future. Now you may go.”

Fedosya, dejected, her feelings hurt, left her mistress.

“What nonsense! As though Lelechka could die!” thought Serafima Aleksandrovna to herself, trying to conquer the feeling of coldness and fear which took possession, of her at the thought of the possible death of Lelechka. Serafima Aleksandrovna, upon reflection, attributed these women’s beliefs in omens to ignorance. She saw clearly that there could be no possible connexion between a child’s quite ordinary diversion and the continuation of the child’s life. She made a special effort that evening to occupy her mind with other matters, but her thoughts returned involuntarily to the fact that Lelechka loved to hide herself.

When Lelechka was still quite small, and had learned to distinguish between her mother and her nurse, she sometimes, sitting in her nurse's arms, made a sudden roguish grimace, and hid her laughing face in the nurse's shoulder. Then she would look out with a sly glance.

Of late, in those rare moments of the mistress' absence from the nursery, Fedosya had again taught Lelechka to hide; and when Lelechka's mother, on coming in, saw how lovely the child looked when she was hiding, she herself began to play hide and seek with her tiny daughter.