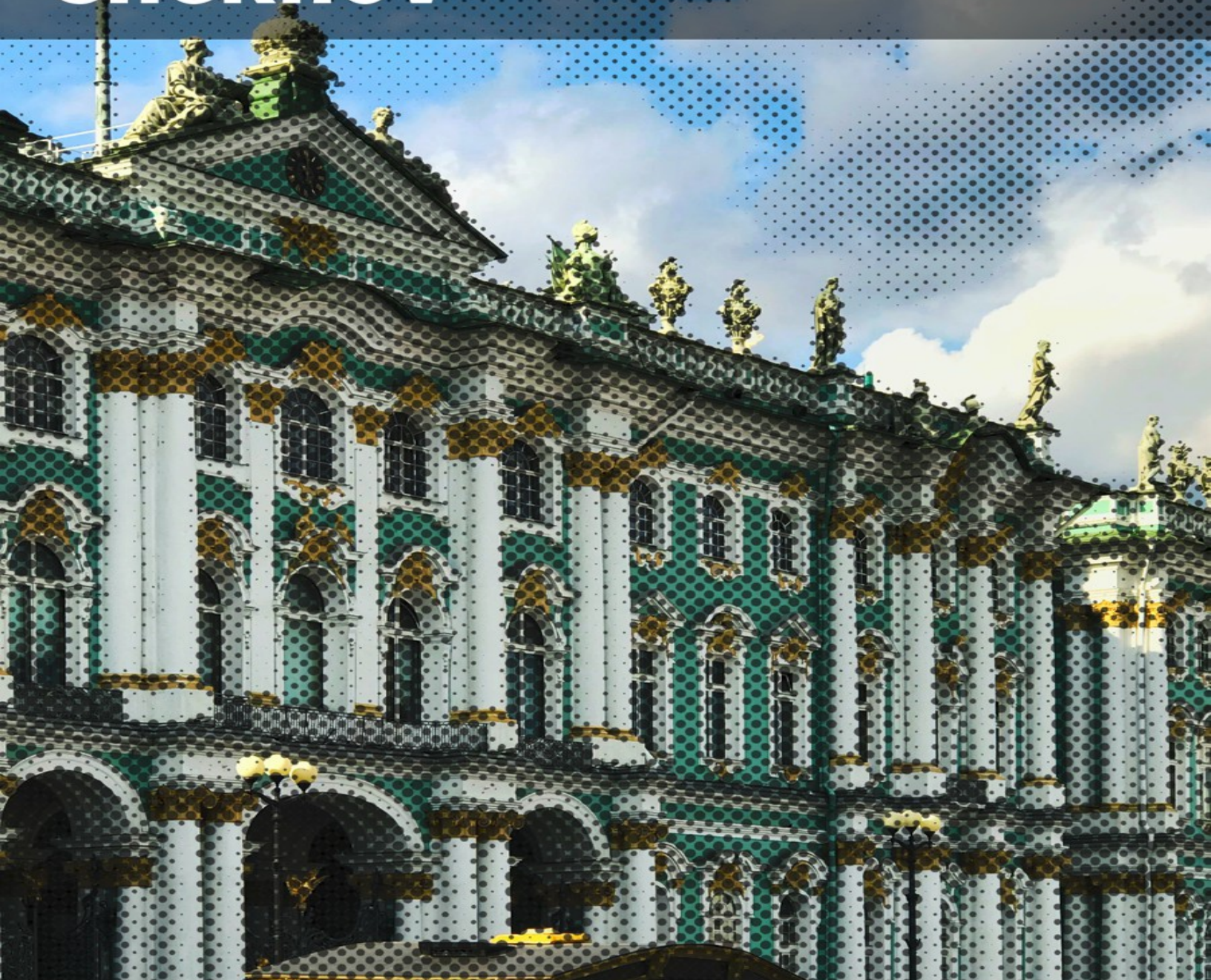


Anton Pavlovich Chekhov



*Russian Silhouettes:
More Stories
of Russian Life*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

STORIES OF CHILDHOOD

THE BOYS

GRISHA

A TRIFLE FROM REAL LIFE

THE COOK'S WEDDING

SHROVE TUESDAY

IN PASSION WEEK

AN INCIDENT

A MATTER OF CLASSICS

THE TUTOR

OUT OF SORTS

STORIES OF YOUTH

A JOKE

AFTER THE THEATRE

VOLODIA

A NAUGHTY BOY

BLISS

TWO BEAUTIFUL GIRLS

LIGHT AND SHADOW

THE CHORUS GIRL

THE FATHER OF A FAMILY

THE ORATOR

IONITCH

AT CHRISTMAS TIME

IN THE COACH HOUSE

LADY N——'S STORY

A JOURNEY BY CART
THE PRIVY COUNCILLOR
ROTHSCHILD'S FIDDLE
A HORSEY NAME
THE PETCHENEG
THE BISHOP

STORIES OF CHILDHOOD

Table of Contents

THE BOYS

Table of Contents

“Volodia is here!” cried some one in the courtyard.

“Voloditchka is here!” shrieked Natalia, rushing into the dining-room.

The whole family ran to the window, for they had been expecting their Volodia for hours. At the front porch stood a wide posting sleigh with its troika of white horses wreathed in dense clouds of steam. The sleigh was empty because Volodia was already standing in the front entry untying his hood with red, frostbitten fingers. His schoolboy’s uniform, his overcoat, his cap, his goloshes, and the hair on his temples were all silvery with frost, and from his head to his feet he exhaled such a wholesome atmosphere of cold that one shivered to be near him. His mother and aunt rushed to kiss and embrace him. Natalia fell down at his feet and began pulling off his goloshes. His sisters shrieked, doors creaked and banged on every side, and his father came running into the hall in his shirt-sleeves waving a pair of scissors and crying in alarm:

“Is anything the matter? We expected you yesterday. Did you have a good journey? For heaven’s sake, give him a chance to kiss his own father!”

“Bow, wow, wow!” barked the great black dog, My Lord, in a deep voice, banging the walls and furniture with his tail.

All these noises went to make up one great, joyous clamour that lasted several minutes. When the first burst of joy had subsided the family noticed that, beside Volodia, there was still another small person in the hall. He was wrapped in scarfs and shawls and hoods and was standing motionless in the shadow cast by a huge fox-skin coat.

“Volodia, who is that?” whispered Volodia’s mother.

“Good gracious!” Volodia exclaimed recollecting himself. “Let me present my friend Tchetchevitsin. I have brought him from school to stay with us.”

“We are delighted to see you! Make yourself at home!” cried the father gaily. “Excuse my not having a coat on! Allow me!—Natalia, help Mr. Tcherepitsin to take off his things! For heaven’s sake, take that dog away! This noise is too awful!”

A few minutes later Volodia and his friend were sitting in the dining-room drinking tea, dazed by their noisy reception and still rosy with cold. The wintry rays of the sun, piercing the frost and snow on the window-panes, trembled over the samovar and bathed themselves in the slop-basin. The room was warm, and the boys felt heat and cold jostling one another in their bodies, neither wanting to concede its place to the other.

“Well, Christmas will soon be here!” cried Volodia’s father, rolling a cigarette. “Has it seemed long since your mother cried as she saw you off last summer? Time flies, my son! Old age comes before one has time to heave a sigh. Mr. Tchibisoff, do help yourself! We don’t stand on ceremony here!”

Volodia's three sisters, Katia, Sonia, and Masha, the oldest of whom was eleven, sat around the table with their eyes fixed on their new acquaintance. Tchetchevitsin was the same age and size as Volodia, but he was neither plump nor fair like him. He was swarthy and thin and his face was covered with freckles. His hair was bristly, his eyes were small, and his lips were thick; in a word, he was very plain, and, had it not been for his schoolboy's uniform, he might have been taken for the son of a cook. He was taciturn and morose, and he never once smiled. The girls immediately decided that he must be a very clever and learned person. He seemed to be meditating something, and was so busy with his own thoughts that he started if he were asked a question and asked to have it repeated.

The girls noticed that Volodia, who was generally so talkative and gay, seldom spoke now and never smiled and on the whole did not seem glad to be at home. He only addressed his sisters once during dinner and then his remark was strange. He pointed to the samovar and said:

"In California they drink gin instead of tea."

He, too, seemed to be busy with thoughts of his own, and, to judge from the glances that the two boys occasionally exchanged, their thoughts were identical.

After tea the whole family went into the nursery, and papa and the girls sat down at the table and took up some work which they had been doing when they were interrupted by the boys' arrival. They were making decorations out of coloured paper for the Christmas tree. It was a thrilling and noisy occupation. Each new flower was greeted by the girls with shrieks of ecstasy, of terror almost,

as if it had dropped from the sky. Papa, too, was in raptures, but every now and then he would throw down the scissors, exclaiming angrily that they were blunt. Mamma came running into the nursery with an anxious face and asked:

“Who has taken my scissors? Have you taken my scissors again, Ivan?”

“Good heavens, won’t she even let me have a pair of scissors?” answered papa in a tearful voice, throwing himself back in his chair with the air of a much-abused man. But the next moment he was in raptures again.

On former holidays Volodia had always helped with the preparations for the Christmas tree, and had run out into the yard to watch the coachman and the shepherd heaping up a mound of snow, but this time neither he nor Tchetchevitsin took any notice of the coloured paper, neither did they once visit the stables. They sat by a window whispering together, and then opened an atlas and fell to studying it.

“First, we must go to Perm,” whispered Tchetchevitsin. “Then to Tyumen, then to Tomsk, and then—then to Kamschatka. From there the Eskimos will take us across Behring Strait in their canoes, and then—we shall be in America! There are a great many wild animals there.”

“Where is California?” asked Volodia.

“California is farther down. If once we can get to America, California will only be round the corner. We can make our living by hunting and highway robbery.”

All day Tchetchevitsin avoided the girls, and, if he met them, looked at them askance. After tea in the evening he was left alone with them for five minutes. To remain silent

would have been awkward, so he coughed sternly, rubbed the back of his right hand with the palm of his left, looked severely at Katia, and asked:

“Have you read Mayne Reid?”

“No, I haven’t—But tell me, can you skate?”

Tchetchevitsin became lost in thought once more and did not answer her question. He only blew out his cheeks and heaved a sigh as if he were very hot. Once more he raised his eyes to Katia’s face and said:

“When a herd of buffalo gallop across the pampas the whole earth trembles and the frightened mustangs kick and neigh.”

Tchetchevitsin smiled wistfully and added:

“And Indians attack trains, too. But worst of all are the mosquitoes and the termites.”

“What are they?”

“Termites look something like ants, only they have wings. They bite dreadfully. Do you know who I am?”

“You are Mr. Tchetchevitsin!”

“No, I am Montezuma Hawkeye, the invincible chieftain.”

Masha, the youngest of the girls, looked first at him and then out of the window into the garden, where night was already falling, and said doubtfully:

“We had Tchetchevitsa (lentils) for supper last night.”

The absolutely unintelligible sayings of Tchetchevitsin, his continual whispered conversations with Volodia, and the fact that Volodia never played now and was always absorbed in thought—all this seemed to the girls to be both mysterious and strange. Katia and Sonia, the two oldest ones, began to spy on the boys, and when Volodia and his friend went to

bed that evening, they crept to the door of their room and listened to the conversation inside. Oh! what did they hear? The boys were planning to run away to America in search of gold! They were all prepared for the journey and had a pistol ready, two knives, some dried bread, a magnifying-glass for lighting fires, a compass, and four roubles. The girls discovered that the boys would have to walk several thousand miles, fighting on the way with savages and tigers, and that they would then find gold and ivory, and slay their enemies. Next, they would turn pirates, drink gin, and at last marry beautiful wives and settle down to cultivate a plantation. Volodia and Tchetchevitsin both talked at once and kept interrupting one another from excitement. Tchetchevitsin called himself "Montezuma Hawkeye," and Volodia "my Paleface Brother."

"Be sure you don't tell mamma!" said Katia to Sonia as they went back to bed. "Volodia will bring us gold and ivory from America, but if you tell mamma she won't let him go!"

Tchetchevitsin spent the day before Christmas Eve studying a map of Asia and taking notes, while Volodia roamed about the house refusing all food, his face looking tired and puffy as if it had been stung by a bee. He stopped more than once in front of the icon in the nursery and crossed himself saying:

"O Lord, forgive me, miserable sinner! O Lord, help my poor, unfortunate mother!"

Toward evening he burst into tears. When he said good night he kissed his father and mother and sisters over and over again. Katia and Sonia realized the significance of his actions, but Masha, the youngest, understood nothing at all.

Only when her eye fell upon Tchetchevitsin did she grow pensive and say with a sigh:

“Nurse says that when Lent comes we must eat peas and Tchetchevitsa.”

Early on Christmas Eve Katia and Sonia slipped quietly out of bed and went to the boys’ room to see them run away to America. They crept up to their door.

“So you won’t go?” asked Tchetchevitsin angrily. “Tell me, you won’t go?”

“Oh, dear!” wailed Volodia, weeping softly. “How can I go? I’m so sorry for mamma!”

“Paleface Brother, I beg you to go! You promised me yourself that you would. You told me yourself how nice it would be. Now, when everything is ready, you are afraid!”

“I—I’m not afraid. I—I am sorry for mamma.”

“Tell me, are you going or not?”

“I’m going, only—only wait a bit, I want to stay at home a little while longer!”

“If that is the case, I’ll go alone!” Tchetchevitsin said with decision. “I can get along perfectly well without you. I want to hunt and fight tigers! If you won’t go, give me my pistol!”

Volodia began to cry so bitterly that his sisters could not endure the sound and began weeping softly themselves. Silence fell.

“Then you won’t go?” demanded Tchetchevitsin again.

“I—I’ll go.”

“Then get dressed!”

And to keep up Volodia’s courage, Tchetchevitsin began singing the praises of America. He roared like a tiger, he

whistled like a steamboat, he scolded, and promised to give Volodia all the ivory and gold they might find.

The thin, dark boy with his bristling hair and his freckles seemed to the girls to be a strange and wonderful person. He was a hero to them, a man without fear, who could roar so well that, through the closed door, one might really mistake him for a tiger or a lion.

When the girls were dressing in their own room, Katia cried with tears in her eyes:

“Oh, I’m so frightened!”

All was quiet until the family sat down to dinner at two o’clock, and then it suddenly appeared that the boys were not in the house. Inquiries were made in the servants’ quarters and at the stables, but they were not there. A search was made in the village, but they could not be found. At tea time they were still missing, and when the family had to sit down to supper without them, mamma was terribly anxious and was even crying. That night another search was made in the village and men were sent down to the river with lanterns. Heavens, what an uproar arose!

Next morning the policeman arrived and went into the dining-room to write something. Mamma was crying.

Suddenly, lo and behold! a posting sleigh drove up to the front door with clouds of steam rising from its three white horses.

“Volodia is here!” cried some one in the courtyard.

“Voloditchka is here!” shrieked Natalia, rushing into the dining-room.

My Lord barked “Bow, wow, wow!” in his deep voice.

It seemed that the boys had been stopped at the hotel in the town, where they had gone about asking every one where they could buy gunpowder. As he entered the hall, Volodia burst into tears and flung his arms round his mother's neck. The girls trembled with terror at the thought of what would happen next, for they heard papa call Volodia and Tchetchevitsin into his study and begin talking to them. Mamma wept and joined in the talk.

"Do you think it was right?" papa asked, chiding them. "I hope to goodness they won't find it out at school, because, if they do, you will certainly be expelled. Be ashamed of yourself, Master Tchetchevitsin! You are a bad boy. You are a mischief-maker and your parents will punish you. Do you think it was right to run away? Where did you spend the night?"

"In the station!" answered Tchetchevitsin proudly.

Volodia was put to bed, and a towel soaked in vinegar was laid on his head. A telegram was despatched, and next day a lady arrived, Tchetchevitsin's mamma, who took her son away.

As Tchetchevitsin departed his face looked haughty and stern. He said not a word as he took his leave of the girls, but in a copy-book of Katia's he wrote these words for remembrance:

"Montezuma Hawkeye."

GRISHA

[Table of Contents](#)

Grisha, a chubby little boy born only two years and eight months ago, was out walking on the boulevard with his

nurse. He wore a long, wadded burnoose, a large cap with a furry knob, a muffler, and wool-lined goloshes. He felt stuffy and hot, and, in addition, the waxing sun of April was beating directly into his face and making his eyelids smart.

Every inch of his awkward little figure, with its timid, uncertain steps, bespoke a boundless perplexity.

Until that day the only universe known to Grisha had been square. In one corner of it stood his crib, in another stood nurse's trunk, in the third was a chair, and in the fourth a little icon lamp. If you looked under the bed you saw a doll with one arm and a drum; behind nurse's trunk were a great many various objects: a few empty spools, some scraps of paper, a box without a lid, and a broken jumping-jack. In this world, besides nurse and Grisha, there often appeared mamma and the cat. Mamma looked like a doll, and the cat looked like papa's fur coat, only the fur coat did not have eyes and a tail. From the world which was called the nursery a door led to a place where people dined and drank tea. There stood Grisha's high chair and there hung the clock made to wag its pendulum and strike. From the dining-room one could pass into another room with big red chairs; there, on the floor, glowered a dark stain for which people still shook their forefingers at Grisha. Still farther beyond lay another room, where one was not allowed to go, and in which one sometimes caught glimpses of papa, a very mysterious person! The functions of mamma and nurse were obvious: they dressed Grisha, fed him, and put him to bed; but why papa should be there was incomprehensible. Aunty was also a puzzling person. She appeared and disappeared. Where did she go? More than

once Grisha had looked for her under the bed, behind the trunk, and under the sofa, but she was not to be found.

In the new world where he now found himself, where the sun dazzled one's eyes, there were so many papas and mammas and aunties that one scarcely knew which one to run to. But the funniest and oddest things of all were the horses. Grisha stared at their moving legs and could not understand them at all. He looked up at nurse, hoping that she might help him to solve the riddle, but she answered nothing.

Suddenly he heard a terrible noise. Straight toward him down the street came a squad of soldiers marching in step, with red faces and sticks under their arms. Grisha's blood ran cold with terror and he looked up anxiously at his nurse to inquire if this were not dangerous. But nursie neither ran away nor cried, so he decided it must be safe. He followed the soldiers with his eyes and began marching in step with them.

Across the street ran two big, long-nosed cats, their tails sticking straight up into the air and their tongues lolling out of their mouths. Grisha felt that he, too, ought to run, and he started off in pursuit.

"Stop, stop!" cried nursie, seizing him roughly by the shoulder. "Where are you going? Who told you to be naughty?"

But there sat a sort of nurse with a basket of oranges in her lap. As Grisha passed her he silently took one.

"Don't do that!" cried his fellow wayfarer, slapping his hand and snatching the orange away from him. "Little stupid!"

Next, Grisha would gladly have picked up some of the slivers of glass that rattled under his feet and glittered like icon lamps, but he was afraid that his hand might be slapped again.

“Good day!” Grisha heard a loud, hoarse voice say over his very ear, and, looking up, he caught sight of a tall person with shiny buttons.

To his great joy this man shook hands with nurse; they stood together and entered into conversation. The sunlight, the rumbling of the vehicles, the horses, the shiny buttons, all struck Grisha as so amazingly new and yet unterrifying, that his heart overflowed with delight and he began to laugh.

“Come! Come!” he cried to the man with the shiny buttons, pulling his coat tails.

“Where to?” asked the man.

“Come!” Grisha insisted. He would have liked to say that it would be nice to take papa and mamma and the cat along, too, but somehow his tongue would not obey him.

In a few minutes nurse turned off the boulevard and led Grisha into a large courtyard where the snow still lay on the ground. The man with shiny buttons followed them. Carefully avoiding the puddles and lumps of snow, they picked their way across the courtyard, mounted a dark, grimy staircase, and entered a room where the air was heavy with smoke and a strong smell of cooking. A woman was standing over a stove frying chops. This cook and nurse embraced one another, and, sitting down on a bench with the man, began talking in low voices. Bundled up as he was, Grisha felt unbearably hot.

“What does this mean?” he asked himself, gazing about. He saw a dingy ceiling, a two-pronged oven fork, and a stove with a huge oven mouth gaping at him.

“Ma-a-m-ma!” he wailed.

“Now! Now!” his nurse called to him. “Be good!”

The cook set a bottle, two glasses, and a pie on the table. The two women and the man with the shiny buttons touched glasses and each had several drinks. The man embraced alternately the cook and the nurse. Then all three began to sing softly.

Grisha stretched his hand toward the pie, and they gave him a piece. He ate it and watched his nurse drinking. He wanted to drink, too.

“Give, nursie! Give!” he begged.

The cook gave him a drink out of her glass. He screwed up his eyes, frowned, and coughed for a long time after that, beating the air with his hands, while the cook watched him and laughed.

When he reached home, Grisha explained to mamma, the walls, and his crib where he had been and what he had seen. He told it less with his tongue than with his hands and his face; he showed how the sun had shone, how the horses had trotted, how the terrible oven had gaped at him, and how the cook had drunk.

That evening he could not possibly go to sleep. The soldiers with their sticks, the great cats, the horses, the bits of glass, the basket of oranges, the shiny buttons, all this lay piled on his brain and oppressed him. He tossed from side to side, chattering to himself, and finally, unable longer to endure his excitement, he burst into tears.

“Why, he has fever!” cried mamma, laying the palm of her hand on his forehead. “What can be the reason?”

“The stove!” wept Grisha. “Go away, stove!”

“He has eaten something that has disagreed with him,” mamma concluded.

And, shaken by his impressions of a new life apprehended for the first time, Grisha was given a spoonful of castor-oil by mamma.

A TRIFLE FROM REAL LIFE

[Table of Contents](#)

Nikolai Ilitch Belayeff was a young gentleman of St. Petersburg, aged thirty-two, rosy, well fed, and a patron of the race-tracks. Once, toward evening, he went to pay a call on Olga Ivanovna with whom, to use his own expression, he was dragging through a long and tedious love-affair. And the truth was that the first thrilling, inspiring pages of this romance had long since been read, and that the story was now dragging wearily on, presenting nothing that was either interesting or novel.

Not finding Olga at home, my hero threw himself upon a couch and prepared to await her return.

“Good evening, Nikolai Ilitch!” he heard a child’s voice say. “Mamma will soon be home. She has gone to the dressmaker’s with Sonia.”

On the divan in the same room lay Aliosha, Olga’s son, a small boy of eight, immaculately and picturesquely dressed in a little velvet suit and long black stockings. He had been lying on a satin pillow, mimicking the antics of an acrobat he had seen at the circus. First he stretched up one pretty leg,

then another; then, when they were tired, he brought his arms into play, and at last jumped up galvanically, throwing himself on all fours in an effort to stand on his head. He went through all these motions with the most serious face in the world, puffing like a martyr, as if he himself regretted that God had given him such a restless little body.

“Ah, good evening, my boy!” said Belayeff. “Is that you? I did not know you were here. Is mamma well?”

Aliosha seized the toe of his left shoe in his right hand, assumed the most unnatural position in the world, rolled over, jumped up, and peeped out at Belayeff from under the heavy fringes of the lampshade.

“Not very,” he said shrugging his shoulders. “Mamma is never really well. She is a woman, you see, and women always have something the matter with them.”

From lack of anything better to do, Belayeff began scrutinizing Aliosha’s face. During all his acquaintance with Olga he had never bestowed any consideration upon the boy or noticed his existence at all. He had seen the child about, but what he was doing there Belayeff, somehow, had never cared to think.

Now, in the dusk of evening, Aliosha’s pale face and fixed, dark eyes unexpectedly reminded Belayeff of Olga as she had appeared in the first pages of their romance. He wanted to pet the boy.

“Come here, little monkey,” he said, “and let me look at you!”

The boy jumped down from the sofa and ran to Belayeff.

“Well,” the latter began, laying his hand on the boy’s thin shoulder. “And how are you? Is everything all right with

you?"

"No, not very. It used to be much better."

"In what way?"

"That's easy to answer. Sonia and I used to learn only music and reading before, but now we have French verses, too. You have cut your beard!"

"Yes."

"So I noticed. It is shorter than it was. Please let me touch it—does that hurt?"

"No, not a bit."

"Why does it hurt if you pull one hair at a time, and not a bit if you pull lots? Ha! Ha! I'll tell you something. You ought to wear whiskers! You could shave here on the sides, here, and here you could let the hair grow——"

The boy nestled close to Belayeff and began to play with his watch-chain.

"Mamma is going to give me a watch when I go to school, and I am going to ask her to give me a chain just like yours—Oh, what a lovely locket! Papa has a locket just like that; only yours has little stripes on it, and papa's has letters. He has a portrait of mamma in his locket. Papa wears another watch-chain now made of ribbon."

"How do you know? Do you ever see your papa?"

"I—n—no—I——"

Aliosha blushed deeply at being caught telling a fib and began to scratch the locket furiously with his nail. Belayeff looked searchingly into his face and repeated:

"Do you ever see your papa?"

"N-no!"

“Come, tell me honestly! I can see by your face that you are not telling the truth. It’s no use quibbling now that the cat is out of the bag. Tell me, do you see him? Now then, as between friends!”

Aliosha reflected.

“You won’t tell mamma?” he asked.

“What an idea!”

“Honour bright?”

“Honour bright!”

“Promise!”

“Oh, you insufferable child! What do you take me for?”

Aliosha glanced around, opened his eyes wide, and said:

“For heaven’s sake don’t tell mamma! Don’t tell a soul, because it’s a secret. I don’t know what would happen to Sonia and Pelagia and me if mamma should find out. Now, listen. Sonia and I see papa every Thursday and every Friday. When Pelagia takes us out walking before dinner we go to Anfel’s confectionery and there we find papa already waiting for us. He is always sitting in the little private room with the marble table and the ash-tray that’s made like a goose without a back.”

“What do you do in there?”

“We don’t do anything. First we say how do you do, and then papa orders coffee and pasties for us. Sonia likes pasties with meat, you know, but I can’t abide them with meat. I like mine with cabbage or eggs. We eat so much that we have a hard time eating our dinner afterward so that mamma won’t guess anything.”

“What do you talk about?”

“With papa? Oh, about everything. He kisses us and hugs us and tells us the funniest jokes. Do you know what? He says that when we grow bigger he is going to take us to live with him. Sonia doesn’t want to go, but I wouldn’t mind. Of course it would be lonely without mamma, but I could write letters to her. Isn’t it funny, we might go and see her then on Sundays, mightn’t we? Papa says, too, he is going to buy me a pony. He is such a nice man! I don’t know why mamma doesn’t ask him to live with her and why she won’t let us see him. He loves mamma very much. He always asks how she is and what she has been doing. When she was ill he took hold of his head just like this—and ran about the room. He always asks us whether we are obedient and respectful to her. Tell me, is it true that we are unfortunate?”

“H’m—why do you ask?”

“Because papa says we are. He says we are unfortunate children, and that he is unfortunate, and that mamma is unfortunate. He tells us to pray to God for her and for ourselves.”

Aliosha fixed his eyes on the figure of a stuffed bird, and became lost in thought.

“Well, I declare—” muttered Belayeff. “So, that’s what you do, you hold meetings at a confectioner’s? And your mamma doesn’t know it?”

“N-no. How could she? Pelagia wouldn’t tell her for the world. Day before yesterday papa gave us pears. They were as sweet as sugar. I ate two!”

“H’m. But—listen to me, does papa ever say anything about me?”

“About you? What shall I say?” Aliosha looked searchingly into Belayeff’s face and shrugged his shoulders. “Nothing special,” he answered.

“Well, what does he say, for instance?”

“You won’t be angry if I tell you?”

“What an idea! Does he abuse me?”

“No, he doesn’t abuse you, but, you know, he is angry with you. He says that it is your fault that mamma is unhappy, and that you have ruined mamma. He is such a funny man! I tell him that you are kind and that you never scold mamma, but he only shakes his head.”

“So he says I have ruined her?”

“Yes—don’t be angry, Nikolai Ilitch!”

Belayeff rose and began pacing up and down the room.

“How strange this is—and how ridiculous!” he muttered shrugging his shoulders and smiling sarcastically. “It is all *his* fault and yet he says *I* have ruined her! What an innocent baby this is! And so he told you I had ruined your mother?”

“Yes, but—you promised not to be angry!”

“I’m not angry and—and it is none of your business anyway. Yes, this is—this is really ridiculous! Here I have been caught like a mouse in a trap, and now it seems it is all my fault!”

The door-bell rang. The boy tore himself from Belayeff’s arms and ran out of the room. A moment later a lady entered with a little girl. It was Aliosha’s mother, Olga Ivanovna. Aliosha skipped into the room behind her, singing loudly and clapping his hands. Belayeff nodded and continued to walk up and down.

“Of course!” he muttered. “Whom should he blame but me? He has right on his side! He is the injured husband.”

“What is that you are saying?” asked Olga Ivanovna.

“What am I saying? Just listen to what your young hopeful here has been preaching. It appears that I am a wicked scoundrel and that I have ruined you and your children. You are all unhappy, and I alone am frightfully happy. Frightfully, frightfully happy!”

“I don’t understand you, Nikolai. What is the matter?”

“Just listen to what this young gentleman here has to say!” cried Belayeff pointing to Aliosha.

Aliosha flushed and then grew suddenly pale and his face became distorted with fear.

“Nikolai Ilitch!” he whispered loudly. “Hush!”

Olga Ivanovna looked at Aliosha in surprise, and then at Belayeff, and then back again at Aliosha.

“Ask him!” Belayeff continued. “That idiot of yours, Pelagia, takes them to a confectioner’s and arranges meetings there between them and their papa. But that isn’t the point. The point is that papa is the victim, and that I am an abandoned scoundrel who has wrecked the lives of both of you!”

“Nikolai Ilitch!” groaned Aliosha. “You gave me your word of honour!”

“Leave me alone!” Belayeff motioned to him impatiently. “This is more important than words of honour. This hypocrisy, these lies are intolerable!”

“I don’t understand!” cried Olga Ivanovna, the tears glistening in her eyes. “Listen, Aliosha,” she asked, turning to her son. “Do you really see your father?”

But Aliosha did not hear her, his eyes were fixed with horror on Belayeff.

“It cannot be possible!” his mother exclaimed, “I must go and ask Pelagia.”

Olga Ivanovna left the room.

“But Nikolai Ilitch, you gave me your word of honour!” cried Aliosha trembling all over.

Belayeff made an impatient gesture and went on pacing the floor. He was absorbed in thoughts of the wrong that had been done him, and, as before, was unconscious of the boy’s presence: a serious, grown-up person like him could not be bothered with little boys. But Aliosha crept into a corner and told Sonia with horror how he had been deceived. He trembled and hiccoughed and cried. This was the first time in his life that he had come roughly face to face with deceit; he had never imagined till now that there were things in this world besides pasties and watches and sweet pears, things for which no name could be found in the vocabulary of childhood.

THE COOK’S WEDDING

[Table of Contents](#)

Grisha, a little urchin of seven, stood at the kitchen door with his eye at the keyhole, watching and listening. Something was taking place in the kitchen that seemed to him very strange and that he had never seen happen before. At the table on which the meat and onions were usually chopped sat a huge, burly peasant in a long coachman’s coat. His hair and beard were red, and a large drop of perspiration hung from the tip of his nose. He was

holding his saucer on the outstretched fingers of his right hand and, as he supped his tea, was nibbling a lump of sugar so noisily that the goose-flesh started out on Grisha's back. On a grimy stool opposite him sat Grisha's old nurse, Aksinia. She also was drinking tea; her mien was serious and at the same time radiant with triumph. Pelagia, the cook, was busy over the stove and seemed to be endeavouring to conceal her face by every possible means. Grisha could see that it was fairly on fire, burning hot, and flooded in turn with every colour of the rainbow from dark purple to a deathly pallor. The cook was constantly catching up knives, forks, stove-wood, and dish-rags in her trembling hands, and was bustling about and grumbling and making a great racket without accomplishing anything. She did not once glance toward the table at which the other two were sitting, and replied to the nurse's questions abruptly and roughly without ever turning her head in their direction.

"Drink, drink, Danilo!" the nurse was urging the driver. "What makes you always drink tea? Take some vodka!"

And the nurse pushed the bottle toward her guest, her face assuming a malicious expression.

"No, ma'am, I don't use it. Thank you, ma'am," the driver replied. "Don't force me to drink it, goody Aksinia!"

"What's the matter with you? What, you a driver and won't drink vodka? A single man ought to drink! Come, have a little!"

The driver rolled his eyes at the vodka and then at the malicious face of the nurse, and his own face assumed an expression no less crafty than hers.

“No, no; you’ll not catch me, you old witch!” he seemed to be saying.

“No, thank you; I don’t drink,” he answered aloud. “That foolishness won’t do in our business. A workman can drink if he wants to because he never budes from the same place, but we fellows live too much in public. Don’t we now? Supposing I were to go into an inn and my horse were to break away, or, worse still, supposing I were to get drunk and, before I knew it, were to go to sleep and fall off the box? That’s what happens!”

“How much do you make a day, Danilo?”

“That depends on the day. There are days and days. A coachman’s job isn’t worth much now. You know yourself that drivers are as thick as flies, hay is expensive, travellers are scarce and are always wanting to go everywhere on horseback. But, praise be to God, we don’t complain. We keep ourselves clothed and fed and we can even make some one else happy—(here the driver cast a look in Pelagia’s direction)—if they want us to!”

Grisha did not hear what was said next. His mamma came to the door and sent him away to the nursery to study.

“Be off to your lessons, you have no business to be here!” she exclaimed.

On reaching the nursery, Grisha took up “Our Mother Tongue,” and tried to read, but without success. The words he had just overheard had raised a host of questions in his mind.

“The cook is going to be married,” he thought. “That is strange. I don’t understand why she wants to be married. Mamma married papa and Cousin Vera married Pavel

Andreitch, but papa and Pavel Andreitch have gold watch-chains and nice clothes and their boots are always clean. I can understand any one marrying them. But this horrid driver with his red nose and his felt boots—ugh! And why does nursie want poor Pelagia to marry?”

When her guest had gone, Pelagia came into the house to do the housework. Her excitement had not subsided. Her face was red and she looked startled. She scarcely touched the floor with her broom and swept out every corner at least five times. She lingered in the room where Grisha’s mamma was sitting. Solitude seemed to be irksome to her and she longed to pour out her heart in words and to share her impressions with some one.

“Well, he’s gone!” she began, seeing that mamma would not open the conversation.

“He seems to be a nice man,” said mamma without looking up from her embroidery. “He is sober and steady looking.”

“My lady, I won’t marry him!” Pelagia suddenly screamed. “I declare I won’t!”

“Don’t be silly, you’re not a baby! Marriage is a serious thing, and you must think it over carefully and not scream like that for no reason at all. Do you like him?”

“Oh, my lady!” murmured Pelagia in confusion. “He does say such things—indeed he does!”

“She ought to say outright she doesn’t like him,” thought Grisha.

“What a goose you are! Tell me, do you like him?”

“He’s an old man, my lady! Hee, hee!”