

When you see a wide village street on a moonlit night, with its cottages, haystacks, sleeping willows, your own soul becomes hushed; in that peace, hiding from toil, care, and grief in the shadows of the night, it turns meek, mournful, beautiful, and it seems that the stars, too, look down on it tenderly and with feeling, and that there is no more evil on earth, and all is well. Fields spread out to the left from the edge of the village; they were visible as far as the horizon, and across the whole breadth of those fields, flooded with moonlight, there was also no movement or sound.

"Right you are," Ivan Ivanych repeated. "And that we live in town, stifled, crowded, writing useless papers, playing cards—isn't that a case? And that we spend our lives among do-nothings, pettifoggers, stupid, idle women, that we say and hear all kinds of nonsense—isn't that a case? Here, if you like, I'll tell you an instructive story."

"No, it's time to sleep," said Burkin. "Good night."

They both went into the shed and lay down in the hay. And they had both already covered themselves and dozed off when light footsteps were heard: tap, tap . . . Someone was walking near the shed; walked and then stopped, and after a moment again: tap, tap . . . The dogs growled.

"That's Mavra out walking," said Burkin.

The steps died away.

"To see and hear people lie," said Ivan Ivanych, turning over on the other side, "and to be called a fool yourself for putting up with the lie; to endure insults, humiliations, not daring to say openly that you're on the side of honest, free people, and to have to lie yourself, to smile, and all that for a crust of bread, a warm corner, some little rank that's not worth a penny—no, it's impossible to live like that any longer!"

"Well, that's from another opera, Ivan Ivanych," said the teacher. "Let's get some sleep."

And ten minutes later Burkin was asleep. But Ivan Ivanych kept tossing from side to side and sighing. Then he got up, went out again, sat by the doorway, and lit his pipe.

JULY 1898

*Selected Stories of Anton Chekhov*

*Translated by Richard Pevear and Larissa  
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GOOSEBERRIES



Since early morning the whole sky had been covered with dark clouds; it was not hot, but still and dull, as usual on gray, bleak days, when clouds hang over the fields for a long time, you wait for rain, but it does not come. The veterinarian Ivan Ivanych and the high-school teacher Burkin were tired of walking, and the fields seemed endless to them. Far ahead the windmills of the village of Mironositskoe were barely visible, to the right a line of hills stretched away and then disappeared far beyond the village, and they both knew that this was the bank of the river, with meadows, green willows, country houses, and if you stood on one of the hills, from there you could see equally vast fields, telegraph poles, and the train, which in the distance looked like a crawling caterpillar, and in clear weather you could even see the town. Now, in the still weather, when all nature seemed meek and pensive, Ivan Ivanych and Burkin were imbued with love for these fields, and both thought how great, how beautiful this land was.

"Last time, when we were in the headman Prokofy's shed," said Burkin, "you were going to tell some story."

"Yes, I wanted to tell about my brother."

Ivan Ivanych gave a long sigh and lit his pipe, so as to begin the story, but just then it started to rain. And about five minutes later a hard rain was pouring down and there was no telling when it would end. Ivan Ivanych and Burkin stopped and considered; the dogs,

already wet, stood with their tails between their legs, looking at them tenderly.

"We'll have to take cover somewhere," said Burkin. "Let's go to Alekhin's. It's nearby."

"All right."

They turned aside and went on walking over the mowed fields, now straight, now bearing to the right, until they came to the road. Soon poplars appeared, a garden, then the red roofs of the barns; the river sparkled, and the view opened onto a wide pond with a mill and a white bathing house. This was Sofyino, where Alekhin lived.

The mill was working, drowning out the noise of the rain; the dam shook. Here by the carts stood wet horses, hanging their heads, and people walked about, their heads covered with sacks. It was damp, muddy, unwelcoming, and the pond looked cold, malevolent. Ivan Ivanych and Burkin felt thoroughly wet, dirty and uncomfortable, their feet were weighed down with mud, and when, after crossing the dam, they went up toward the master's barns, they were silent, as if angry with each other.

In one of the barns a winnowing machine was clattering; the door was open, and dust was pouring out of it. On the threshold stood Alekhin himself, a man of about forty, tall, stout, with long hair, looking more like a professor or an artist than a landowner. He was wearing a white, long-unwashed shirt with a braided belt, drawers instead of trousers, and his boots were also caked with mud and straw. His nose and eyes were black with dust. He recognized Ivan Ivanych and Burkin and was apparently very glad.

"Please go to the house, gentlemen," he said, smiling. "I'll be with you in a moment."

It was a big, two-storied house. Alekhin lived downstairs, in two vaulted rooms with small windows, where the stewards once lived; the furnishings here were simple, and it smelled of rye bread, cheap vodka, and harness. He rarely went upstairs to the formal rooms, only when he received guests. Ivan Ivanych and Burkin were met inside by a maid, a young woman of such beauty that they both stopped at once and looked at each other.

"You can't imagine how glad I am to see you, gentlemen," Alekhin said, coming into the front hall with them. "Quite unexpected! Pelageya," he turned to the maid, "give the guests something to change into. And, incidentally, I'll change, too. Only first I

must go and bathe—I don't think I've bathed since spring. Why not come to the bathing house, gentlemen, while things are made ready here."

The beautiful Pelageya, such a delicate girl and with such a soft look, brought towels and soap, and Alekhin went with his guests to the bathing house.

"Yes, I haven't bathed for a long time," he said, undressing. "My bathing house is nice, as you see, my father built it, but I somehow never have time to bathe."

He sat down on the step, soaped his long hair and neck, and the water around him turned brown.

"Yes, I declare . . ." said Ivan Ivanych, looking significantly at his head.

"I haven't bathed for a long time . . ." Alekhin repeated bashfully and soaped himself once more, and the water around him turned dark blue, like ink.

Ivan Ivanych went outside, threw himself noisily into the water and swam under the rain, swinging his arms widely, and he made waves, and the white lilies swayed on the waves; he reached the middle of the pond and dove, and a moment later appeared in another place and swam further, and kept diving, trying to reach the bottom. "Ah, my God . . ." he repeated delightedly. "Ah, my God . . ." He swam as far as the mill, talked about something with the peasants there and turned back, and in the middle of the pond lay face up to the rain. Burkin and Alekhin were already dressed and ready to go, but he kept swimming and diving.

"Ah, my God . . ." he repeated. "Ah, Lord have mercy."

"That's enough!" Burkin shouted to him.

They went back to the house. And only when the lamp was lit in the big drawing room upstairs, and Burkin and Ivan Ivanych, in silk dressing gowns and warm slippers, were sitting in armchairs, and Alekhin himself, washed, combed, in a new frock coat, was pacing about the drawing room, obviously enjoying the feeling of warmth, cleanness, dry clothes, light shoes, and when the beautiful Pelageya, stepping noiselessly over the carpet and smiling softly, served the tray with tea and preserves, only then did Ivan Ivanych begin his story, and it seemed that not only Burkin and Alekhin, but also the old and young ladies, and the military men, who gazed calmly and sternly from their gilded frames, listened to him.

"We're two brothers," he began, "I'm Ivan Ivanych, and he's

Nikolai Ivanych, some two years younger. I went in for studying and became a veterinarian, while Nikolai sat in a government office from the age of nineteen. Our father, Chimsha-Himalaysky, was a cantonist,<sup>1</sup> but he earned officer's rank in the service and left us hereditary nobility and a small estate. After his death, the estate went to pay debts, but, be that as it may, we spent our childhood in the freedom of the countryside. Just like peasant children, we spent days and nights in the fields, in the woods, tending horses, stripping bast,<sup>2</sup> fishing, and all the rest . . . And you know that anyone who at least once in his life has caught a perch or seen blackbirds migrating in the fall, when they rush in flocks over the village on clear, cool days, is no longer a townsman, and will be drawn towards freedom till his dying day. My brother languished in the office. Years passed, and he was still sitting in the same place, writing the same papers and thinking about the same thing—how to get to the country. And this languishing slowly formed itself into a definite desire, the dream of buying himself a small country place somewhere on the bank of a river or a lake.

"He was a kind, meek man, and I loved him, but I never sympathized with this desire to lock himself up for life in his own country place. It's a common saying that a man needs only six feet of earth. But it's a corpse that needs six feet, not a man. And they also say now that if our intelligentsia is drawn to the soil and longs for country places, it's a good thing. But these country places are the same six feet of earth. To leave town, quit the struggle and noise of life, go and hide in your country place, isn't life, it's egoism, laziness, it's a sort of monasticism, but a monasticism without spiritual endeavor. Man needs, not six feet of earth, not a country place, but the whole earth, the whole of nature, where he can express at liberty all the properties and particularities of his free spirit.

"My brother Nikolai, sitting in his office, dreamed of how he would eat his own shchi, the savory smell of which would fill the whole yard, eat on the green grass, sleep in the sun, spend whole hours sitting outside the gate on a bench, gazing at the fields and woods. Books on agriculture and all sorts of almanac wisdom were his joy, his favorite spiritual nourishment; he liked to read newspapers, too, but only the advertisements about the sale of so many acres of field and meadow, with a country house, a river and a garden, a mill and a mill pond. And in his head he pictured garden paths, flowers, fruit, birdhouses, carp in the pond—you know, all

that stuff. These imaginary pictures differed, depending on the advertisements he came upon, but for some reason gooseberries were unfailingly present in each of them. He was unable to imagine a single country place, a single poetic corner, that was without gooseberries.

"'Country life has its conveniences,' he used to say. 'You sit on the balcony drinking tea, and your ducks swim in the pond, and it smells so good, and . . . and the gooseberries are growing.'

"He'd draw the plan of his estate, and each time it came out the same: a) the master's house, b) the servants' quarters, c) the kitchen garden, d) the gooseberries. He lived frugally: ate little, drank little, dressed God knows how, like a beggar, and kept saving money and putting it in the bank. He was terribly stingy. It was painful for me to see, and I used to give him money, and send him something on holidays, but he put that away, too. Once a man gets himself an idea, there's nothing to be done.

"Years went by, he was transferred to another province, he was already over forty, and he went on reading the advertisements in the newspapers and saving money. Then I heard he got married. Still with the same purpose of buying himself a country place with gooseberries, he married an ugly old widow for whom he felt nothing, only because she had a little money. He was tightfisted with her, too, kept her hungry, and put her money in the bank under his name. Earlier she had been married to the postmaster and had become used to pies and liqueurs, but with her second husband she didn't even have enough black bread; she began to pine away from such a life, and about three years later she gave up her soul to God. And, of course, my brother never thought for a moment that he was guilty of her death. Money, like vodka, does strange things to a man. A merchant was dying in our town. Before he died, he asked to be served a dish of honey and ate all his money and lottery tickets with it, so that nobody would get them. Once I was inspecting cattle at the station, and just then one of the dealers fell under a locomotive and his foot was cut off. We carried him to the hospital, blood was pouring out—a horrible business—and he kept asking us to find his foot and worrying; in the boot on his cut-off foot there were twenty roubles he didn't want to lose."

"That's from another opera," said Burkin.

"After his wife's death," Ivan Ivanych went on, having reflected for half a minute, "my brother began looking for an estate to buy.

Of course, you can look for five years and in the end make a mistake and not buy what you were dreaming of at all. Brother Nikolai bought, through an agent, by a transfer of mortgage, three hundred acres with a master's house, servants' quarters, a park, but no orchard, or gooseberries, or ponds with ducks; there was a river, but the water in it was coffee-colored, because there was a brick factory on one side of the estate and a bone-burning factory on the other. But my brother Nikolai Ivanych didn't lament over it; he ordered twenty gooseberry bushes, planted them, sat down and began living like a landowner.

"Last year I went to visit him. I'll go, I thought, and see how things are there. In his letters my brother called his estate: the Chumbaroklov plot, alias Himalayskoe. I arrived in 'alias Himalayskoe' past noon. It was hot. Ditches, fences, hedges, lines of fir trees everywhere—I didn't know how to get into the courtyard, where to put the horse. I walked toward the house, and a ginger dog met me, fat, looking like a pig. It would have liked to bark, but was too lazy. The cook came out of the kitchen, barefoot, fat, also looking like a pig, and said that the master was resting after dinner. I went into my brother's room, he was sitting in bed, his knees covered with a blanket; he had grown old, fat, flabby; his cheeks, nose, and lips thrust forward—he looked as if he were about to grunt into the blanket.

"We embraced and wept with joy and with the sad thought that we had been young once, and were now both gray-haired, and it was time to die. He got dressed and took me around to view his estate.

"Well, how are you getting on here?" I asked.

"Oh, all right, thank God, I live well."

"He was no longer a timid and wretched little official, but a real landowner, a squire. He had settled in here, grown accustomed to it, relished it; he ate a lot, washed in a bathhouse, gained weight, was already at law with the commune and both factories, and was very offended when the peasants didn't call him 'Your Honor.' He took solid, squirely care of his soul, and did good deeds not simply but imposingly. And what were they? He treated the peasants for all ailments with soda and castor oil, and on his name day held a thanksgiving prayer service in the middle of the village, and then stood them all to a half-bucket of vodka, thinking it necessary. Ah, these horrible half-buckets! Today the fat landowner drags the peas-

ant to the head of the zemstvo for poaching, and tomorrow, for the holiday, he treats them to a half-bucket, and they drink and shout 'hurrah,' and bow down drunk before him. A change of life for the better, good eating, idleness, develop the most insolent conceit in a Russian. Nikolai Ivanych, who, while in the government office, was afraid to have his own views even for himself personally, now uttered nothing but truths, and in the tone of a government minister: 'Education is necessary, but for the people it is premature,' 'Corporal punishment is generally bad, but on certain occasions it is useful and indispensable.'

"I know the people and know how to handle them," he said. "The people like me. I have only to move a finger, and the people do whatever I want."

"And, note, it was all said with a kindly, intelligent smile. He repeated twenty times: 'We, the nobility,' 'I, as a nobleman'—obviously he no longer remembered that our grandfather was a peasant and our father a soldier. Even our family name, Chimsha-Himalaysky, which is essentially incongruous, now seemed sonorous, noble, and highly agreeable to him.

"But the point was not in him, but in myself. I want to tell you what a change took place in me during the few hours I spent at his place. In the evening, while we were having tea, the cook served a full plate of gooseberries. They weren't bought, they were his own gooseberries, the first picked since the bushes were planted. Nikolai Ivanych laughed and gazed silently at the gooseberries for a moment with tears in his eyes—he couldn't speak for excitement; then he put one berry in his mouth, glanced at me with the triumph of a child who has finally gotten his favorite toy, and said:

"How delicious!"

"And he ate greedily and kept repeating:

"Ah, how delicious! Try them!"

"They were tough and sour, but as Pushkin said, 'Dearer to us than a host of truths is an exalting illusion.'<sup>3</sup> I saw a happy man, whose cherished dream had so obviously come true, who had attained his goal in life, had gotten what he wanted, who was content with his fate and with himself. For some reason there had always been something sad mixed with my thoughts about human happiness, but now, at the sight of a happy man, I was overcome by an oppressive feeling close to despair. It was especially oppressive during the night. My bed was made up in the room next to my

brother's bedroom, and I could hear that he was not asleep and that he kept getting up and going to the plate of gooseberries and taking a berry. I thought: there are, in fact, so many contented, happy people! What an overwhelming force! Just look at this life: the insolence and idleness of the strong, the ignorance and brutishness of the weak, impossible poverty all around us, overcrowding, degeneracy, drunkenness, hypocrisy, lies . . . Yet in all the houses and streets it's quiet, peaceful; of the fifty thousand people who live in town there is not one who would cry out or become loudly indignant. We see those who go to the market to buy food, eat during the day, sleep during the night, who talk their nonsense, get married, grow old, complacently drag their dead to the cemetery; but we don't see or hear those who suffer, and the horrors of life go on somewhere behind the scenes. Everything is quiet, peaceful, and only mute statistics protest: so many gone mad, so many buckets drunk, so many children dead of malnutrition . . . And this order is obviously necessary; obviously the happy man feels good only because the unhappy bear their burden silently, and without that silence happiness would be impossible. It's a general hypnosis. At the door of every contented, happy man somebody should stand with a little hammer, constantly tapping, to remind him that unhappy people exist, that however happy he may be, sooner or later life will show him its claws, some calamity will befall him—illness, poverty, loss—and nobody will hear or see, just as he doesn't hear or see others now. But there is nobody with a little hammer, the happy man lives on, and the petty cares of life stir him only slightly, as wind stirs an aspen—and everything is fine.

"That night I understood that I, too, was content and happy," Ivan Ivanych continued, getting up. "Over dinner or out hunting, I, too, gave lessons in how to live, how to believe, how to govern the people. I, too, said that knowledge is light, that education is necessary, but that for simple people literacy is enough for now. Freedom is good, I said, it's like air, we can't do without it, but we must wait. Yes, that was what I said, but now I ask: wait in the name of what?" Ivan Ivanych asked, looking angrily at Burkin. "Wait in the name of what, I ask you? In the name of what considerations? They tell me that it can't be done all at once, that every idea is realized gradually, in due time. But who says that? Where are the proofs that it's so? You refer to the natural order of things, to the lawfulness of phenomena, but is there order and lawfulness in the

fact that I, a living and thinking man, must stand at a ditch and wait until it gets overgrown or silted up, when I could perhaps jump over it or build a bridge across it? And, again, wait in the name of what? Wait, when you haven't the strength to live, and yet you must live and want to live!

"I left my brother's early the next morning, and since then it has become unbearable for me to live in town. I'm oppressed by the peace and quiet, I'm afraid to look in the windows, because there's no more painful spectacle for me now than a happy family sitting around a table and drinking tea. I'm old and not fit for struggle, I'm not even capable of hatred. I only grieve inwardly, become irritated, vexed, my head burns at night from a flood of thoughts, and I can't sleep . . . Ah, if only I were young!"

Ivan Ivanych paced the room in agitation and repeated:

"If only I were young!"

He suddenly went up to Alekhin and began pressing him by one hand, then the other.

"Pavel Konstantinych!" he said in an entreating voice, "don't settle in, don't let yourself fall asleep! As long as you're young, strong, energetic, don't weary of doing good! There is no happiness and there shouldn't be, and if there is any meaning and purpose in life, then that meaning and purpose are not at all in our happiness, but in something more intelligent and great. Do good!"

And Ivan Ivanych said all this with a pitiful, pleading smile, as if he were asking personally for himself.

Then all three sat in armchairs at different ends of the drawing room and were silent. Ivan Ivanych's story satisfied neither Burkin nor Alekhin. With generals and ladies gazing from gilded frames, looking alive in the twilight, it was boring to hear a story about a wretched official who ate gooseberries. For some reason they would have preferred to speak and hear about fine people, about women. And the fact that they were sitting in a drawing room where everything—the covered chandelier, the armchairs, the carpets under their feet—said that here those very people now gazing from the frames had once walked, sat, drunk tea, and that the beautiful Pelageya now walked noiselessly here, was better than any story.

Alekhin had a strong desire to sleep; farming got him up early, before three in the morning, and his eyes kept closing, but he was afraid that the guests would start telling something interesting without him, and he would not leave. Whether what Ivan Ivanych

had said was intelligent or correct, he did not try to figure out; his guests were not talking of grain, or hay, or tar, but about something that had no direct bearing on his life, and he was glad and wanted them to go on . . .

"However, it's time for bed," said Burkin, getting up. "Allow me to wish you good-night."

Alekhin took leave of them and went to his room below, while the guests stayed upstairs. They were both put for the night in a big room with two old, carved wooden beds in it, and with an ivory crucifix in the corner. Their beds, wide and cool, made up by the beautiful Pelageya, smelled pleasantly of fresh linen.

Ivan Ivanych silently undressed and lay down.

"Lord, forgive us sinners!" he said, and pulled the covers over his head.

His pipe, left on the table, smelled strongly of stale tobacco, and Burkin lay awake for a long time and still could not figure out where that heavy odor was coming from.

Rain beat on the windows all night.

AUGUST 1898

## A MEDICAL CASE



A professor received a telegram from the Lialikovs' factory asking him to come quickly. The daughter of a certain Mrs. Lialikov, apparently the owner of the factory, was sick—nothing more could be understood from the long, witlessly composed telegram. The professor did not go himself, but sent his intern Korolev in his place.

He had to go two stations away from Moscow and then some three miles by carriage. A troika was sent to the station to pick Korolev up; the driver wore a hat with a peacock feather, and to all questions responded with a loud military "No, sir!" or "Yes, sir!" It was Saturday evening, the sun was setting. Crowds of workers came walking from the factory to the station and bowed to the horses that were bringing Korolev. And he was enchanted by the evening, and the country houses and dachas along the way, and the birches, and that quiet mood all around, when it seemed that, together with the workers, the fields, the woods, and the sun were preparing to rest on the eve of the holy day—to rest and perhaps to pray . . .

He was born and grew up in Moscow, did not know the countryside and had never been interested in factories or visited them. But he had chanced to read about factories and to visit factory owners and talk with them; and when he saw some factory in the distance or up close, he thought each time of how quiet and peaceful everything was outside, and how inside there must be the impenetrable ignorance and obtuse egoism of the owners, the tedious,

## THE DARLING



Olenka, daughter of the retired collegiate assessor Plemyanikov, was sitting on the back porch in her courtyard, deep in thought. It was hot, the flies were naggingly persistent, and it was so pleasant to think that it would soon be evening. Dark rain clouds were gathering from the east, and an occasional breath of moisture came from there.

Kukin, an entrepreneur and owner of the Tivoli amusement garden, who lodged there in the yard, in the wing, was standing in the middle of the yard and looking at the sky.

“Again!” he said in despair. “Again it’s going to rain! Every day it rains, every day—as if on purpose! It’s a noose! It’s bankruptcy! Every day terrible losses!”

He clasped his hands and went on, addressing Olenka:

“There’s our life for you, Olga Semyonovna. It could make you weep! You work, you do your utmost, you suffer, you don’t sleep, thinking how to do your best—and what then? On the one hand, the public is ignorant, savage. I give them the very best in operetta, fairy pageants, excellent music-hall singers, but is that what they want? Do they understand anything about it? They want buffoonery! Give them banality! On the other hand, look at the weather. It rains almost every evening. It started on the tenth of May, and it’s gone on non-stop all of May and June—simply awful! The public doesn’t come, but don’t I pay the rent? Don’t I pay the artists?”

The next day towards evening the clouds gathered again, and Kukin said, laughing hysterically:

“Well, so? Let it rain! Let the whole garden be flooded out, and me along with it! Let me not have any happiness either in this world or in the next! Let the artists sue me! What, sue? Hard labor in Siberia! The scaffold! Ha, ha, ha!”

And the third day it was the same . . .

Olenka listened to Kukin silently, seriously, and tears occasionally came to her eyes. In the end, Kukin’s misfortunes touched her, and she fell in love with him. He was small, skinny, with a yellow face and brushed-up temples; he spoke in a thin little tenor and when he spoke, his mouth went askew; and despair was always written on his face, but even so he aroused deep, true feeling in her. She forever loved someone, and could not live without it. Earlier she had loved her father, who now sat ill, in a dark room, in an armchair, and breathed heavily; she had loved her aunt, who occasionally, once or twice a year, had come from Briansk; and earlier still, while in high school, she had loved her French teacher. She was a quiet, good-natured, pitiful young lady, with meek, soft eyes, and very healthy. Looking at her plump pink cheeks, at her soft white neck with its dark birthmark, at the kind, naïve smile her face bore when she listened to something pleasant, men thought: “Yes, not bad at all . . .” and also smiled, and lady visitors could not refrain from seizing her hand in the middle of the conversation and saying, in a burst of pleasure:

“You darling!”

The house, which she had lived in since the day she was born, and which had been put in her name in the will, stood at the edge of town, in the Gypsy quarter, not far from the Tivoli garden; in the evening and at night she could hear music playing in the garden; rockets burst and crackled, and it seemed to her that it was Kukin wrestling with his fate and taking by storm his chief enemy—the indifferent public; her heart sank with sweetness, she did not feel sleepy at all, and when he came home towards morning, she tapped softly on her bedroom window and, showing him only her face and one shoulder through the curtains, smiled tenderly . . .

He proposed, and they were married. And when he had a proper look at her neck and her plump, healthy shoulders, he clasped his hands and said:

“You darling!”

He was happy, but since it rained on the day of the wedding and later that night, the look of despair never left his face.

After the wedding they had a good life. She sat in his box office, looked after things in the garden, recorded the expenses, handed out the pay, and her pink cheeks and sweet, naïve, radiant-looking smile flashed now in the box-office window, now backstage, now in the buffet. And she told her acquaintances that the most remarkable, the most important and necessary thing in the world was the theater, and that only in the theater could one find true pleasure and become educated and humane.

“But does the public understand that?” she said. “They want buffoonery! Yesterday we showed *Faust Inside Out*, and nearly all the boxes were empty, but if Vanechka and I produced some sort of banality, believe me, the theater would be packed. Tomorrow Vanechka and I are showing *Orpheus in the Underworld*.<sup>1</sup> Do come.”

And whatever Kukin said about the theater and actors, she repeated. She despised the public just as he did, for its ignorance and indifference to art; she interfered at rehearsals, corrected the actors, looked after the conduct of the musicians, and when the local newspaper spoke disapprovingly of the theater, she wept, and then went to the editorial offices for an explanation.

The actors loved her and called her “Vanechka and I” and “the darling.” She felt sorry for them and would lend them small sums of money, and if they happened to cheat her, she merely wept quietly, but did not complain to her husband.

In the winter they also had a good life. They rented the town theater for the whole winter and leased it for short terms, now to a Ukrainian troupe, now to a conjuror, now to local amateurs. Olenka gained weight and was all radiant with contentment, while Kukin grew skinnier and yellower and complained about terrible losses, though business was not bad all winter. He coughed at night, and she gave him raspberry and linden-blossom infusions, rubbed him with eau de cologne, and wrapped him in her soft shawls.

“Aren’t you my sweetie!” she said with complete sincerity, smoothing his hair. “Aren’t you my pretty one!”

During Lent he went to Moscow to recruit a company, and without him she could not sleep, but sat all night at the window and looked at the stars. And during that time she compared herself

to the hens, who also do not sleep all night and feel anxious when the cock is not in the chicken coop. Kukin was detained in Moscow and wrote that he would come for Easter, and in his letters gave orders concerning the Tivoli. But on the eve of Holy Monday, late at night, there suddenly came a sinister knocking at the gate; someone banged on the wicket as on a barrel: boom! boom! boom! The sleepy cook, splashing barefoot through the puddles, ran to open.

"Open up, please!" someone outside the gates said in a muted bass. "There's a telegram for you!"

Olenka had received telegrams from her husband before, but now for some reason she went numb. With trembling hands she opened the telegram and read:

"Ivan Petrovich died unexpectedly today mirst awaiting orders huneral Tuesday."

That was how it was written in the telegram—"huneral" and also the incomprehensible word "mirst." It was signed by the director of the operetta troupe.

"My little dove!" wept Olenka. "My sweet Vanechka, my little dove! Why did I meet you? Why did I know and love you? How could you go and leave your poor Olenka, poor, wretched me? . . ."

Kukin was buried on Tuesday, in Moscow, at the Vagankovo cemetery; Olenka came back on Wednesday, and as soon as she entered her room, she collapsed on the bed and wept so loudly that it could be heard in the street and the neighboring courtyards.

"The darling!" said the neighbor women, crossing themselves. "Darling Olga Semyonovna, the dear heart, how she grieves!"

Three months later Olenka was returning from church one day, sad, in deep mourning. One of her neighbors, Vassily Andreich Pustovalov, manager of the merchant Babakaev's lumberyard, happened to be walking beside her, also returning from church. He was wearing a straw hat and a white waistcoat with a gold chain, and looked more like a landowner than a dealer.

"There is order in all things, Olga Semyonovna," he said gravely, with sympathy in his voice, "and if one of our relations dies, it means that it's God's will, and in that case we must recollect ourselves and bear it with submission."

Having accompanied Olenka to the gate, he said good-bye and went on. After that she heard his grave voice all day, and the moment she closed her eyes, she pictured his dark beard. She liked him

very much. And apparently she had also made an impression on him, because shortly afterwards an elderly lady with whom she was barely acquainted came to have coffee with her, and had only just sat down at the table when she immediately began talking about Pustovalov, what a good, solid man he was, and how any bride would be pleased to marry him. Three days later Pustovalov himself came for a visit; he did not stay long, about ten minutes, and spoke little, but Olenka fell in love with him, so much so that she did not sleep all night and burned as in a fever, and in the morning sent for the elderly lady. The match was soon made, after which came the wedding.

Pustovalov and Olenka, once they were married, had a good life. He usually sat in the lumberyard till dinnertime, then left on business and was replaced by Olenka, who sat in the office till evening and there kept the accounts and filled orders.

"Nowadays the price of lumber goes up twenty percent a year," she would say to customers and acquaintances. "Gracious, before we dealt in local lumber, and now every year Vasechka has to go for lumber to Mogilev province. And the taxes!" she said, covering both cheeks with her hands in horror. "The taxes!"

It seemed to her that she had been dealing in lumber for a very, very long time, that lumber was the most important and necessary thing in life, and for her there was something dear and touching in the sound of the words beam, post, board, plank, batten, slat, lath, slab . . . At night, when she slept, she dreamed of whole mountains of boards and planks, of long, endless lines of carts carrying lumber somewhere far out of town; she dreamed of a whole regiment of ten-yard-long, ten-inch-thick logs marching upended against the lumberyard, of beams, posts, and slabs striking together, making the ringing sound of dry wood, all falling and rising up again, piling upon each other. Olenka cried out in her sleep, and Pustovalov said tenderly to her:

"Olenka, dear, what's the matter? Cross yourself!"

Whatever her husband thought, she thought, too. If he thought the room was hot or business was slow, she thought the same. Her husband did not like entertainment of any sort and stayed at home on Sundays, and so did she.

"You're always at home or in the office," her acquaintances said. "You should go to the theater, darling, or to the circus."

"Vasechka and I have no time for going to theaters," she replied gravely. "We're working people, we can't be bothered with trifles. What's the good of these theaters?"

On Saturdays she and Pustovalov went to the evening vigil, on Sundays to the early liturgy, and returning from church, they walked side by side, looking moved, a nice smell came from both of them, and her silk dress rustled pleasantly; and at home they had tea with fancy bread and various preserves, and then ate pastry. Each day at noon, in the yard and in the street outside the gates, there was a savory smell of borscht and roast lamb or duck, or, on fast days, of fish, and one could not pass the gate without feeling hungry. The samovar was always boiling in the office, and customers were treated to tea and bagels. Once a week the spouses went to the baths and came back side by side, both bright red.

"Still, we have a good life," Olenka said to her acquaintances, "thank God. God grant everyone a life like Vasechka's and mine."

When Pustovalov left for Mogilev province to buy lumber, she missed him very much and at night did not sleep but wept. Sometimes in the evening the regimental veterinarian Smirnin, a young man who was renting her wing, came to visit her. He told her some story or played cards with her, and that diverted her. Especially interesting were his stories about his own family life; he was married and had a son, but he was separated from his wife, because she had been unfaithful to him, and now he hated her and sent her forty roubles every month for his son's keep. And, listening to that, Olenka sighed and shook her head, and felt sorry for him.

"Well, God save you," she said, seeing him to the stairs with a candle as he took his leave. "Thank you for sharing my boredom, God grant you good health, and may the Queen of Heaven . . ."

And she always spoke so gravely, so sensibly, imitating her husband; the veterinarian was already disappearing through the door below when she called out to him and said:

"You know, Vladimir Platonych, you ought to make peace with your wife. Forgive her, if only for your son's sake! . . . The boy must understand everything."

And when Pustovalov came back, she told him in a low voice about the veterinarian and his unhappy family life, and they both sighed and shook their heads, and talked about the boy, who probably missed his father, and then, by some strange train of thought,

they both stood before the icons, bowed to the ground, and prayed to God to send them children.

And so the Pustovalovs lived quietly and placidly, in love and perfect harmony, for six years. Then one winter day Vassily Andreich, after drinking hot tea in the lumberyard, went out to deliver some lumber, caught cold, and fell ill. He was treated by the best doctors, but the disease took its toll, and after four months of illness, he died. And Olenka was widowed again.

"Why did you go and leave me, my little dove?" she wept, having buried her husband. "How am I to live without you now, wretched and unhappy as I am? Good people, have pity on me, an orphan . . ."

She went about in a black dress with weepers, and forever gave up wearing a hat and gloves, rarely left the house, except to go to church or visit her husband's grave, and lived at home like a nun. And only when six months had passed did she remove the weepers and begin opening the shutters of her windows. Occasionally she was seen in the morning, going to market for provisions with her cook, but how she lived now and what went on in her house could only be guessed. Guessed, for instance, from the fact that she was seen having tea in the garden with the veterinarian, while he read the newspaper aloud to her, or that, on meeting a lady of her acquaintance in the post office, she said:

"There's no proper veterinarian supervision in our town, and that results in many diseases. You keep hearing of people getting sick from milk or catching infections from horses and cows. In fact, the health of domestic animals needs as much care as the health of people."

She repeated the veterinarian's thoughts, and was now of the same opinion as he about everything. It was clear that she could not live without an attachment even for one year, and had found her new happiness in her own wing. Another woman would have been condemned for it, but no one could think ill of Olenka, and everything was so clear in her life. She and the veterinarian told no one about the change that had occurred in their relations and tried to conceal it, but they did not succeed, because Olenka could not keep a secret. When he had guests, his colleagues from the regiment, she would start talking about cattle plague, or pearl disease, or the town slaughterhouses, while she poured the tea or served

supper, and he would be terribly embarrassed and, when the guests left, would seize her by the arm and hiss angrily:

"I asked you not to talk about things you don't understand! When we veterinarians are talking among ourselves, please don't interfere. It's tedious, finally!"

But she would look at him in amazement and alarm and ask:

"Volodechka, what then am I to talk about?"

And with tears in her eyes she would embrace him, beg him not to be angry, and they would both be happy.

However, this happiness did not last long. The veterinarian left with his regiment, left forever, because his regiment was transferred to somewhere very far away, almost to Siberia. And Olenka was left alone.

Now she was completely alone. Her father had died long ago; his armchair was lying in the attic, dusty, one leg missing. She lost weight and lost her looks, and those who met her in the street no longer looked at her as before and no longer smiled at her; obviously, the best years were already past, left behind, and now some new life was beginning, unknown, of which it was better not to think. In the evenings Olenka sat on the back porch, and could hear music playing in the Tivoli and rockets bursting, but that called up no thoughts in her. She gazed indifferently at her empty courtyard, thought of nothing, wanted nothing, and later, when night fell, went to sleep and dreamed of her empty courtyard. She ate and drank as if against her will.

But chiefly, which was worst of all, she no longer had any opinions. She saw the objects around her and was aware of all that went on around her, but she was unable to form an opinion about anything and did not know what to talk about. And how terrible it was to have no opinions! You see, for instance, that a bottle is standing there, or that it is raining, or that a peasant is driving a cart, but why the bottle, the rain, or the peasant are there, what sense they make, you cannot say and even for a thousand roubles you could not say anything. With Kukin and Pustovalov, and later with the veterinarian, Olenka had been able to explain everything and give her opinion on anything you like, but now in her thoughts and in her heart there was the same emptiness as in her courtyard. And it felt as eerie and bitter as if she had eaten wormwood.

The town was gradually expanding on all sides; the Gypsy quarter was already called a street, and houses grew up and many lanes

appeared where the Tivoli garden and the lumberyard used to be. How quickly time flies! Olenka's house darkened, the roof rusted, the shed slumped, and the whole courtyard was overgrown with weeds and prickly nettles. Olenka herself aged and lost her looks. In summer she sits on her porch, and as usual in her soul it is empty, and tedious, and smells of wormwood, and in winter she sits at the window and looks at the snow. There is a breath of spring, the ringing of the cathedral bells is borne on the wind, and suddenly a flood of memories from the past comes, her heart is sweetly wrung, and abundant tears flow from her eyes, but this lasts only a minute, and then again there is emptiness, and she does not know why she is alive. The little black cat Bryska rubs against her and purrs softly, but Olenka is not touched by the cat's tenderness. Is that what she needs? She needs such love as would seize her whole being, her whole soul and mind, would give her thoughts, a direction in life, would warm her aging blood. And she shakes the black Bryska off her lap and says to her in vexation:

"Go, go . . . You've no business here!"

And so it went, day after day, year after year—and not one joy, and no opinions of any sort. Whatever the cook Mavra said was good enough.

One hot July day, towards evening, when the town herd was being driven down the street and the whole yard was filled with clouds of dust, someone suddenly knocked at the gate. Olenka herself went to open, looked, and was dumbstruck: outside the gate stood the veterinarian Smirnin, gray-haired now and in civilian dress. She suddenly remembered everything, could not help herself, burst into tears, and laid her head on his chest without saying a word, and was so shaken that she did not notice how they both went into the house then, how they sat down to tea.

"My little dove!" she murmured, trembling with joy. "Vladimir Platonych! Where did God bring you from?"

"I want to settle here for good," he told her. "I've retired and am here to try my luck on my own, to live a sedentary life. And it's time my son went to school. He's a big boy. You know, I made peace with my wife."

"Where is she?" asked Olenka.

"She's in the hotel with my son, and I'm going around looking for lodgings."

"Lord, dear heart, take my house! Isn't that lodgings? Oh, Lord, I

won't even take anything from you," Olenka became excited and again began to cry. "Live here, and I'll be content with the wing. Lord, what joy!"

The next day the roof of the house was being painted and the walls whitewashed, and Olenka, arms akimbo, strode about the yard giving orders. The former smile lit up on her face, and she became all alive, fresh, as if she had awakened after a long sleep. The veterinarian's wife came, a thin, plain lady with short hair and a capricious expression, and with her came Sasha, small for his years (he was going on ten), plump, with bright blue eyes and dimples on his cheeks. And as soon as the boy came into the yard, he ran after the cat, and immediately his merry, joyful laughter rang out.

"Auntie, is that your cat?" he asked Olenka. "When she has kittens, please give us one. Mama's very afraid of mice."

Olenka talked with him, gave him tea, and the heart in her breast suddenly warmed and was wrung sweetly, as if this boy were her own son. And when he sat in the dining room that evening repeating his lessons, she looked at him with tenderness and pity and whispered:

"My little dove, my handsome one . . . My little child, you came out so smart, so fair!"

"An island," he read, "is a piece of dry land surrounded on all sides by water."

"An island is a piece of dry land . . ." she repeated, and this was the first opinion she uttered with conviction after so many years of silence and emptiness in her thoughts.

And she had her own opinions now and over dinner talked with Sasha's parents about how difficult it was for children to study in school, but that all the same classical education was better than modern, because after school all paths are open: if you wish, you can be a doctor, if you wish, an engineer.

Sasha started going to school. His mother went to Kharkov to visit her sister and did not come back; his father went somewhere every day to inspect the herds, and sometimes was away from home for three days, and it seemed to Olenka that Sasha was completely abandoned, that he was not wanted in the house, that he was starving to death; and she moved him to her wing and set him up in a little room there.

And for six months now Sasha has been living with her in the wing. Each morning Olenka goes into his room; he is fast asleep,

his hand under his cheek, breathing lightly. She is sorry to wake him up.

"Sashenka," she says sadly, "get up, dear heart! It's time for school."

He gets up, dresses, says his prayers, then sits down to tea. He drinks three cups of tea and eats two big bagels and half a French roll with butter. He has not quite recovered from sleep and is therefore cross.

"You haven't learned your fable well, Sashenka," says Olenka, looking at him as if she were seeing him off on a long journey. "You worry me so. You must do your best, dear heart, study . . . Listen to your teachers."

"Oh, leave me alone, please!" says Sasha.

Then he marches down the street to school, a little boy, but in a big visored cap, with a satchel on his back. Olenka noiselessly follows him.

"Sashenka-a!" she calls.

He turns around, and she puts a date or a caramel in his hand. When they turn down the lane where his school is, he gets embarrassed that this tall, stout woman is following after him; he turns around and says:

"Go home, auntie, I can get there myself now."

She stops and looks after him without blinking, until he disappears through the doors of the school. Ah, how she loves him! Of all her former attachments, none was so deep, never before had her soul submitted so selflessly, so disinterestedly, and with such delight as now, when the maternal feeling burned in her more and more. For this boy who was not her own, for the dimples on his cheeks, for his visored cap, she would give her whole life, give it joyfully, with tears of tenderness. Why? Who knows why?

Having seen Sasha off to school, she slowly returns home, so content, so calm, so full of love; her face, which has grown younger in the last six months, smiles and beams; meeting her, looking at her, people feel pleasure and say to her:

"Good morning, darling Olga Semyonovna! How are you, darling?"

"School studies are getting difficult nowadays," she says at the market. "It's no joke, yesterday they gave the first-year students a fable to learn by heart, and a Latin translation, and a problem . . . It's hard for a little boy!"

And she starts talking about teachers, lessons, textbooks—saying all the same things that Sasha says about them.

Between two and three they have dinner together, in the evening they do his homework together and weep. As she puts him to bed, she spends a long time making the cross over him and whispering a prayer. Then, going to sleep, she dreams of the far-off, misty future when Sasha has finished his studies, has become a doctor or an engineer, has his own big house, horses, a carriage, gets married, has children . . . She falls asleep and keeps thinking about the same thing, and from her closed eyes tears flow down her cheeks. And the little black cat lies beside her and purrs:

“Purr . . . purr . . . purr . . .”

Suddenly there is a loud knocking at the gate. Olenka wakes up, breathless with fear; her heart pounds hard. Half a minute goes by and there is more knocking.

“It’s a telegram from Kharkov,” she thinks, beginning to tremble all over. “Sasha’s mother wants him in Kharkov . . . Oh, Lord!”

She is in despair; her head, her feet, her arms go numb, and it seems that no one in the whole world is unhappier than she. But another minute goes by, she hears voices: it is the veterinarian coming home from the club.

“Well, thank God,” she thinks.

The weight gradually lifts from her heart, she feels light again; she lies down and thinks about Sasha, who is fast asleep in the next room and occasionally murmurs deliriously:

“I’ll sh-show you! Get out! No fighting!”

JANUARY 1899

## ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS



The acting coroner and the district doctor were driving to the village of Syrnya for an autopsy. On the way they were caught in a blizzard, wandered in circles for a long time, and reached the place not at noon, as they had wanted, but only towards evening, when it was already dark. They put up for the night in the zemstvo<sup>1</sup> cottage. And right there in the zemstvo cottage, as it happened, also lay the corpse, the corpse of the zemstvo insurance agent Lesnitsky, who had come to Syrnya three days earlier and, having settled in the zemstvo cottage and ordered a samovar, had shot himself, quite unexpectedly for everyone; and the circumstance that he had put an end to his life somehow strangely, over the samovar, with food laid out on the table, gave many the occasion to suspect murder; an autopsy became necessary.

The doctor and the coroner stamped their feet in the front hall, shaking off the snow, and the beadle Ilya Loshadin, an old man, stood beside them holding a tin lamp and lighted the place for them. There was a strong smell of kerosene.

“Who are you?” asked the doctor.

“The biddle . . .” answered the beadle.

He also signed it that way at the post office: the biddle.

“And where are the witnesses?”

“Must’ve gone to have tea, Your Honor.”

To the right was the clean room, the “visiting” or master’s room, to the left the black room, with a big stove and a stove bench. The

2. See note 4 to "Ward No. 6."
3. A sign of protest; it was considered improper for a girl or woman to go out without covering her head.
4. Baikal is a sea-sized freshwater lake in Siberia famous for the depth and purity of its water; the Buryat are an Oriental nationality inhabiting the region around Baikal.
5. A folk motif: the hero cannot recover his lost beloved until he wears out a pair of iron shoes.
6. See note 19 to "Ward No. 6."
7. For Rurik see note 2 to "The Student." Petrushka, the peasant servant of Chichikov, hero of Gogol's *Dead Souls*, "liked not so much what he was reading about as the reading itself, or, better, the process of reading, the fact that letters are eternally forming some word, which sometimes even means the devil knows what" (Volume I, chapter 2).
8. A health spa in central France, known for its mineral waters.
9. A line from the fable "The Crow and the Fox," by I. A. Krylov (see note 24 to "A Boring Story"). The end of the fable is well known: the crow fails to hold on to the God-sent piece of cheese.

#### THE MAN IN A CASE

1. M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin (1826–89) was a liberal journalist and satirist best known for his dark novel *The Golovlevs* and his satirical history of Russia, *The History of a Certain Town*.
2. Henry Thomas Buckle (1821–94) was a liberal historian, author of *The History of Civilization in England* (1857–61), in which he formulated the idea that the development of civilization leads to the cessation of war between nations. There was also a George Buckle (b. 1857), a biographer and editor of the English magazine *Life*.
3. Fish is "lenten" but butter is not—thus Belikov strikes a middle path. In addition to the four major fast periods during the year (the Advent fast before Christmas, the Great Lent before Easter, the Peter and Paul fast, and the Dormition fast), Wednesdays and Fridays are also fast days in the Orthodox Church.

#### GOOSEBERRIES

1. Cantonists were sons of career soldiers, who were assigned to the department of the army from birth and educated in special schools at state expense.
2. Bast is the pliant inner bark of the linden tree, which when

stripped from the outer bark was put to a variety of uses in Russia, as material for roofing, shoes, wagon covers, and so forth.

3. An altered quotation from the poem "The Hero," by Alexander Pushkin; it should read, "Dearer to me than a host of base truths is the illusion that exalts."

#### A MEDICAL CASE

1. The reader will realize from this and other stories in the collection that summer nights in northern Russia are extremely short and dawn may come as early as two o'clock in the morning.
2. See note 16 to "A Boring Story." Tamara is the heroine of the long poem *The Demon* (1839).

#### THE DARLING

1. *Faust Inside Out* may be the Russian title of *Le Petit Faust* ("The Little Faust"), an operetta by French composer Florimond Hervé (1825–92). *Orpheus in the Underworld* is an operetta by Jacques Offenbach (1819–80), French composer of German origin.

#### ON OFFICIAL BUSINESS

1. See note 4 to "Ward No. 6."
2. That is, the emancipation of the serfs in 1861.
3. A line from *Eugeny Onegin*, by Alexander Pushkin.
4. "A little glass of Cliquot" (French). Cliquot is one of the finest champagnes.
5. "The Queen of Spades," a short story by Pushkin, was made into an opera by Tchaikovsky.

#### THE LADY WITH THE LITTLE DOG

1. See note 4 to "Gusev."
2. Selyanka is a casserole of cabbage and meat or fish, served in its own baking pan.
3. The Slavyansky Bazaar was a highly respectable hotel and restaurant in Moscow, frequented in Chekhov's time by artists, actors, and writers.

#### AT CHRISTMASTIME

1. Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–93), a French doctor known for his work on nervous ailments, invented a method of treatment by means of cold showers.