AI-Generated Graded Readers
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Publication webpage:
https://www1.gifu-u.ac.jp/~masaru/a1/ai-generated_graded_readers.html

Publication date: April 27, 2026

About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.
The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

Content Note

This adaptation is based on a historical literary work. It may contain expressions, attitudes, or depictions that some readers may consider inappropriate or offensive by today's standards. Such elements have been retained or reflected where necessary in order to preserve the historical and literary character of the original work.

Source Text

Original work: The Bet; The Lady with the Dog; The Darling; The Man in a Case; Gooseberries; About Love; The Black Monk; Ward No. 6; The Bishop; The Steppe
Author: Anton Pavlovich Chekhov
English Translation: S. S. Koteliansky, John Middleton Murry, and Constance Garnett

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Anton Chekhov, *Selected Short Stories by Anton Chekhov* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

CONTENTS

The Bet

Part 1: The Wild Bet

It was a dark autumn night. The old banker walked from one side of his study to the other. He could not rest, and he could not stop thinking. The wind moved outside the windows, and the house was quiet. In that silence, his mind went back fifteen years, to an evening party in this same house.

At that time, he had been a rich and proud man. Many clever guests had come to dinner. There were lawyers, writers, teachers, and other educated people. They sat at the table, ate well, drank wine, and talked about serious questions. One of those questions was the death penalty.

Most of the guests said that the death penalty was wrong. They said that no state had the right to take a human life. Some said that it was cruel and old-fashioned. Others said that a modern country should not kill people as punishment. They thought that life in prison would be better than execution.

The banker did not agree. He was younger then, and he liked to speak strongly. He said, “I think the death penalty is more kind than life in prison. Execution kills a person at once. Life in prison kills a person slowly, year after year. Which is more cruel? A man who kills you in a few seconds, or a man who takes your life away little by little?”

One of the guests answered, “Both are wrong. Their purpose is the same. Both take away life. The state is not God. It cannot give life back, so it has no right to take life away.”

A young lawyer was also sitting at the table. He was about twenty-five years old. The guests asked him what he thought. He was quiet for a moment, then he said, “The death penalty and life in prison are both wrong. But if I had to choose, I would choose life in prison. Any kind of life is better than no life at all.”

These words made the discussion much stronger. Everyone began to speak at the same time. Some guests agreed with the lawyer. Some guests said that a life without freedom was not really life. The banker listened for a while, but he

became more and more angry. At last he struck the table with his fist.

"That is not true!" he cried. "You would not stay in a prison room even for five years. I will bet two million that you cannot do it."

The room became quiet. The guests looked first at the banker, then at the young lawyer. It was a foolish thing to say, but the banker had said it in front of everyone. The lawyer's face changed. He was young, proud, and excited by the challenge.

"If you mean it," he said, "then I will not stay for five years. I will stay for fifteen."

"Fifteen years?" cried the banker. "Good. I agree. Gentlemen, you are all witnesses. I put two million on the table."

"And I put my freedom on the table," said the lawyer.

In this way, the strange and terrible bet was made. It was not made after calm thought. It came from pride, anger, and the heat of the moment. The guests were surprised, and some of them tried to stop it. But the banker and the lawyer had already given their words.

During supper, the banker began to feel pleased with himself. At that time, two million was not much to him. He was so rich that he did not count money carefully. He looked at the lawyer and spoke as if the matter were a joke. "Think again, young man," he said. "It is not too late. Two million means little to me, but you will lose the best years of your life."

The lawyer listened, but he did not take back his word. The banker went on, "You think you can stay for fifteen years, but you cannot. You will not last even three or four years. Remember this. A prison you choose for yourself is harder than a prison forced on you. You will know every day that you can leave, and that thought will make your life bitter."

Still the lawyer did not give up. He was young, and the future seemed large to him. Fifteen years sounded long, but two million sounded powerful. Perhaps he wanted to prove that his words were true. Perhaps he wanted the money. Perhaps he wanted both.

After that evening, they wrote the rules of the bet. The lawyer would live alone in a small building in the banker's garden. He could not leave that building. He

could not see people. He could not hear human voices. He could not receive letters from the outside world or read newspapers.

But he was allowed to have some things. He could have books, music, wine, and tobacco. He could write notes and send them through a small window. Through that same window, servants would give him what he asked for. But no one would speak to him, and he would speak to no one.

The time was fixed exactly. He had to stay there for fifteen years, from twelve o'clock on one November day to twelve o'clock on the same November day fifteen years later. If he crossed the door even two minutes too early, the banker would not have to pay him anything. This was written clearly. There could be no mistake.

When the guests left that night, the house became quiet again. The banker was still excited. The lawyer was still proud. Neither man truly understood what fifteen years meant. Neither man understood how long a day can be when a person is alone.

Now, fifteen years later, the old banker remembered everything. He remembered the voices, the wine, the bright room, and his own foolish pride. He remembered the young lawyer's face. He remembered the words that had changed both their lives. And as he walked alone in his study on that dark autumn night, he asked himself why he had ever made such a bet.

Part 2: Fifteen Years Alone

The lawyer's prison was a small building in the banker's garden. It was not a prison of stone walls and iron doors, but it was still a prison. He could see no one, and no one could speak to him. The world came to him only through a small window. Through that window he sent notes, and through it books and other things were given to him.

In the first year, he suffered greatly from being alone. People outside could not see his face, but they could hear music from his room. Day and night, the sound of the piano came from the little building. Sometimes it was loud and wild.

Sometimes it was slow and sad, as if the young man were speaking to himself through the music.

He refused wine and tobacco. He wrote that wine only made a person want things, and wanting things was dangerous for a man who could not leave his room. He also wrote that it was boring to drink good wine alone. Tobacco, he said, made the air bad. So in that first year, he asked mostly for easy books, such as love stories, crime stories, adventure stories, and funny plays.

In the second year, the piano became silent. The lawyer no longer played music every day. He began to ask for serious old books instead. He read the great writers of the past. Perhaps he wanted to leave his room in his mind, since he could not leave it with his body.

In the fifth year, music was heard again. This time, he also asked for wine. The servants who watched the little building said that he seemed to do almost nothing that year. He ate, drank, lay on his bed, and sometimes spoke angrily to himself. He did not read much, and he seemed tired of everything.

At night, he sometimes sat at his table and wrote for a long time. But in the morning, he tore up what he had written. No one knew what was in those pages. More than once, people outside heard him crying. The fifteen years had begun as a proud test, but now they had become a heavy fight inside his own heart.

Then, in the second half of the sixth year, a new hunger came over him. It was not hunger for food or wine. It was hunger for knowledge. He began to study languages, history, and deep questions about life. He asked for so many books that the banker could hardly send them fast enough.

For four years, he read with great force. Book after book was carried to the small window. He studied different countries, different times, and different ways of thinking. He learned languages so that he could read more. It was as if he wanted to hold the whole world inside that lonely room.

During this time, he sent the banker a letter. In it, he wrote several lines in six different languages. He asked the banker to show the letter to experts. If the experts found no mistake, he wanted a gun to be fired in the garden. Then he would know that his work had not been useless.

In the same letter, he wrote that the great minds of all countries spoke in different languages, but they all carried the same fire. He said he felt a wonderful happiness because he could understand them. The banker did what he asked. The letter was examined, and then two shots were fired in the garden. The sound told the lonely man that his hard work had been seen.

After the tenth year, his reading changed again. He sat at his table and read only the New Testament. The banker found this strange. This man had read hundreds of difficult books in several languages. Yet now he spent almost a whole year with one small book. But the lawyer did not seem to care whether others understood him or not.

After that, he read books about religion and the history of faith. Then, in the last two years, he began to read everything. His choices no longer followed a clear order. One day he wanted science. Another day he wanted medicine, poetry, stories, or books about God and the soul. He asked for many different kinds of books at the same time.

It seemed that he was like a man in a stormy sea. Around him were broken pieces of a ship. He caught one piece, then another, trying to save himself. Perhaps he was trying to find one truth that would be enough. Perhaps he had learned that no single book, no single idea, and no single pleasure could answer the whole question of human life.

So the years passed. Outside the little building, seasons changed many times. Snow came and melted. Trees became green and then lost their leaves. People in the main house grew older, and the banker's life also changed. But inside the garden building, the lawyer stayed alone with his books, his thoughts, and the long silence that he had chosen for himself.

Part 3: The Letter and the Escape

The banker stood in his study and thought of the next day. At twelve o'clock, the lawyer would be free. Then the banker would have to pay him two million. Fifteen years earlier, that money had seemed small to him. Now it was enough to

destroy him.

His life had changed badly. He had lost money in business and in risky deals. He had once been brave, proud, and sure of himself. Now he was old, afraid, and weak. He feared every change in the market, and he knew that his money was almost gone.

“That terrible bet,” he said to himself. “Why is that man still alive?” The lawyer was only forty years old. If he received the money, he could begin life again. He could marry, enjoy himself, and live as a rich man. The banker would be left with nothing.

The thought was too painful for him. He held his head in his hands and walked about the room. He imagined the lawyer thanking him every day for the happiness of his life. He imagined himself poor and ashamed, watching another man enjoy his last money. At last a dark thought came into his mind.

“There is only one way out,” he thought. “The man must die.”

The clock struck three in the morning. The whole house was asleep. Outside, the trees cried in the cold wind. The banker listened for a moment, then opened his safe. He took out the key to the garden room, the key that had not been used for fifteen years.

He put on his coat and went outside. The garden was dark, cold, and wet. Rain fell through the wind, and the trees bent and shook. He could hardly see the path, the statues, or the small building. Everything looked strange, as if the garden belonged to another world.

When he came near the little building, he called for the watchman twice. No one answered. The watchman was probably hiding from the rain and sleeping somewhere near the kitchen or the greenhouse. The banker was glad. If the lawyer died that night, people might blame the watchman first.

The banker found the steps and the door by touching the wall with his hands. He entered the hall of the little building and lit a match. The small flame showed an empty bed, a dark stove, and a narrow passage. No one was there. The seals on the prisoner’s door were still whole.

The match went out. The banker stood in the darkness and trembled. Then he

bent down and looked through the small window into the lawyer's room. A candle was burning weakly inside. The lawyer was sitting at the table, but the banker could see only his back, his hair, and his hands.

Books lay open on the table, on the chairs, and on the floor near him. The prisoner did not move. Five minutes passed, and still he sat like a dead man. Fifteen years of lonely life had taught him to sit without motion for a long time. The banker tapped softly on the window, but the lawyer did not turn.

Then the banker carefully broke the seals on the door. He put the key into the lock. The old lock made a rough sound, and the door opened with a long cry. The banker stopped and listened. He expected the lawyer to wake, shout, or run toward him. But the room stayed silent.

He went in. At the table sat a man who hardly looked human. His body was thin like a skeleton, and his skin was yellow and dry. His hair was long and already turning grey. His beard was wild, and his face looked old and tired, though he was only forty.

The banker looked at him with fear and disgust. The lawyer's hand held up his head, and that hand was so thin that it was painful to see. He seemed half dead already. On the table before him lay a sheet of paper. Something had been written on it in very small writing.

"Poor man," thought the banker. "He is asleep. Perhaps he is dreaming about the two million." Then the darker thought came back. "I only have to put him on the bed and cover his face with a pillow. He is so weak that no one will know. They will think he died naturally."

But first the banker took the paper from the table. He wanted to know what the lawyer had written. He held it near the candle and began to read. The letter said that at twelve o'clock the next day, the lawyer would receive his freedom. But before he left the room and saw the sun, he wanted to speak one last time.

In the letter, the lawyer wrote that he no longer wanted freedom, life, health, or the good things of the world. For fifteen years, he had studied human life through books. He had not seen the earth or people, but in books he had drunk wine, sung songs, hunted in forests, loved women, climbed mountains, seen

storms, visited cities, and entered many worlds. Books had given him the whole life of humankind.

He wrote that books had given him wisdom. He knew many things now, and in one way he was wiser than other people. But after learning so much, he had come to despise all worldly things. Beauty, wealth, power, learning, and fame would all end in death. Everything people loved would pass away like a dream.

The lawyer wrote that people had chosen the wrong path. They had taken lies for truth and ugly things for beautiful things. They had given up heaven for the earth. He no longer wanted to understand them. He no longer wanted the things they lived for.

At the end of the letter, he wrote that he would give up the two million. Once he had dreamed of that money as if it were paradise. Now he hated it. To prove that he did not want it, he would leave the room five minutes before the fixed time. By doing this, he would break the agreement and lose all right to the money.

When the banker finished reading, his hands were shaking. He put the paper back on the table. Then he bent down and kissed the strange, thin head of the sleeping man. Tears came into his eyes. He went out of the room quietly and left the little building.

Never in his life had he felt such shame. Even when he lost great sums of money, he had not hated himself as he hated himself now. He returned to his house and lay down on his bed. But he could not sleep for a long time. His mind was full of fear, pity, and self-disgust.

The next morning, the watchman came running to him in great alarm. He said that the man in the garden room had climbed out through the window and gone into the garden. From there, he had gone to the gate and disappeared. The banker went at once to the little building with his servants. They saw that the prisoner had truly escaped before the time.

The banker did not tell anyone about the letter. He did not want people to talk about the strange ending of the bet. He took the paper from the table and carried it back to his house. Then he locked it in his safe, with the same care he once gave to money.

The Lady with the Dog

Part 1: The Lady on the Sea-front

People in Yalta had begun to talk about a new visitor. They did not know her name, so they called her “the lady with the dog.” She was a young woman with fair hair, and she often walked along the sea-front alone. A small white dog ran behind her. She wore the same hat each time, and because no one seemed to be with her, people noticed her more and more.

Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov noticed her too. He had already been in Yalta for two weeks, so he was used to the town, the sea-front, the gardens, and the people who came and went. One day, while he was sitting in a public place near the sea, he saw the young woman walking past with her little dog. After that, he saw her again and again, in the gardens and in the square. Each time she was alone, and each time the white dog was with her.

Gurov was not yet forty, but he already had a daughter of twelve and two sons at school. He had married young, while he was still a student. His wife was tall, serious, and proud of being educated. She read a great deal and liked to speak in a careful, clever way. Gurov did not love her, and at home he felt uncomfortable and afraid of her quiet judgment.

He had been unfaithful to his wife many times. Because of this, he often spoke badly about women. When men talked about women in front of him, he sometimes called them a lower kind of person. But this was not the whole truth about him. He could not live comfortably without women, and after only two days among men, he felt bored and cold.

With men, Gurov was often silent and distant. With women, he felt free. He knew how to speak to them, how to listen, and how to be pleasant even when he said very little. There was something in him that women found interesting. He knew this, and he was also strongly drawn to them.

His past had taught him that such meetings often became difficult. At first, a new love seemed light and pleasant. It felt like a small holiday from ordinary life.

But after a time, it usually became heavy, secret, and painful. Still, whenever Gurov met an interesting woman, he forgot these lessons and felt that life was simple again.

One evening, he was eating in the public gardens. The lady with the little dog came slowly and sat at a table near him. Gurov looked at her carefully. Her clothes, her walk, and the way she held herself showed that she was married and from a good family. She seemed to be in Yalta for the first time, and she seemed bored.

A thought came into his mind. If she was alone, without her husband or friends, it would not be hard to speak to her. He remembered the stories people told about holiday towns, stories of easy meetings and short romances. He did not fully believe those stories, and he did not respect them. Yet now, with the young woman so near him, the idea of a quick secret romance took hold of him.

The little white dog came near his table. Gurov called it softly and shook his finger at it in play. The dog growled. Gurov shook his finger again. The young woman looked at him, then quickly looked down, and her face became red.

“He does not bite,” she said.

“May I give him a bone?” Gurov asked.

She nodded, and he gave the dog something from his plate. Then he asked, “Have you been in Yalta long?”

“Five days,” she answered.

“I have already been here two weeks,” he said.

For a short time, they were silent. They sat like strangers, but the first wall between them had already opened. Then she said, “Time passes quickly, but still it is dull here.” She did not look straight at him when she spoke.

Gurov smiled a little. “People always say that Yalta is dull,” he said. “A person can live in a small town for years and not complain. Then he comes here and says, ‘How dull it is! How dusty it is!’ You would think he had come from a very great city.”

She laughed. After that, they went on eating in silence for a while. It was not an unpleasant silence. They were still strangers, but now they were strangers who had begun to notice each other. When dinner was over, they walked side by side.

Their talk became easy. They spoke as people speak when they are away from home and do not have to hurry anywhere. They talked about the sea, which had a soft warm color in the evening light. They talked about the moon, and the bright path it made on the water. They talked about the heat of the day and the cooler air that came after sunset.

Gurov told her that he lived in Moscow. He had studied literature, but now he worked in a bank. He had once trained to be an opera singer, but he had given it up. He also told her that he owned two houses in Moscow. He said these things lightly, as if they were not very important.

From her, he learned that she had grown up in Petersburg. After her marriage, she had lived in a provincial town. She had been married for two years. Her husband might come to Yalta later because he also needed rest, but she was not sure. She spoke of him without much interest, and she was not even clear about his exact official work.

Gurov also learned her name. She was Anna Sergeyevna. The name stayed in his mind at once. When they parted that evening, he was sure that he would see her again the next day. It seemed natural and certain, as if Yalta itself had arranged it.

Later, in his hotel room, Gurov thought about her. He thought of how young she still seemed. Not long ago, perhaps, she had been a schoolgirl, like his own daughter. There was still something shy and unfinished in her laugh and in the way she spoke to a stranger. He felt that this might be the first time in her life that men had followed her with their eyes and spoken to her for hidden reasons.

When he went to bed, he remembered her thin neck and her gentle grey eyes. He also remembered the little dog running behind her on the sea-front. She was not like the women he had known before, or at least she did not yet seem like them. There was something helpless and sad about her. Thinking this, Gurov fell asleep.

Part 2: A Secret in Yalta

A week passed after Gurov and Anna Sergeyevna first met. It was a holiday, and the day was very hot. Indoors the air felt heavy, and outside the wind blew dust along the streets. People did not know what to do with themselves. Gurov often took Anna to a little public place and asked her to drink something cold.

In the evening, when the wind became weaker, they went to the pier to watch a steamer come in. Many people were walking near the harbour, and some carried flowers because they were waiting for friends or family. The sea was rough, so the steamer came late, after the sun had already gone down. It moved slowly in the dark water before it reached the pier.

Anna looked at the steamer and the passengers through her little glasses. She seemed to be looking for someone she knew, but she was also excited by the crowd and the evening. She spoke quickly and asked small questions, then forgot what she had just asked. In the push of the crowd, she dropped her glasses. Her eyes were bright, and Gurov watched her closely.

After a while, the crowd began to leave. It was now too dark to see faces clearly. The wind had stopped, but Gurov and Anna still stood there, as if they were waiting for someone else to come from the steamer. Anna became quiet. She smelled the flowers in her hand and did not look at him.

“The weather is better this evening,” Gurov said. “Where shall we go now? Shall we drive somewhere?” Anna did not answer. Then he suddenly put his arm around her and kissed her. At once he looked around in fear, because he wondered if anyone had seen them.

“Let us go to your hotel,” he said softly. They walked away quickly, without speaking much. Her room was warm and close, and there was a smell of perfume she had bought in a shop. Gurov looked at her and thought that people in the world were very different from one another. He had known many women before, but Anna did not seem like them.

She was shy and young in her manner. She seemed frightened by what had happened, as if someone had suddenly entered the room and accused her. Her face lost its color, and her hair fell sadly beside her cheeks. She sat with her head down and looked deeply unhappy. To Gurov, her sadness seemed strange, but also

touching.

“This is wrong,” she said. “You will be the first to despise me now.” There was a watermelon on the table, and Gurov cut himself a piece and began to eat it slowly. For a long time they were silent. The candle gave a weak light, and Anna’s face in that light looked pale and troubled.

“How could I despise you?” Gurov asked. “You do not know what you are saying.” Anna’s eyes filled with tears, and she asked God to forgive her. She said she was a bad woman and that she hated herself. She said she had not only deceived her husband, but had also deceived herself for a long time.

She told him that she had married when she was twenty. Since then, she had felt that life must have something more in it. She had wanted to live, truly live, though she did not clearly know what that meant. She had told her husband that she was ill and had come to Yalta. Now, she said, she had become a woman whom anyone could despise.

Gurov listened, but he did not fully understand her pain. Part of him was already a little tired of her tears and simple words. Still, he saw that she was truly suffering, and he did not want to be cruel. He spoke gently, kissed her, and tried to calm her. Little by little she became quieter, and at last they both began to smile again.

Later they went out. The sea-front was empty, and the town seemed almost dead under the night sky. The sea still moved and broke against the shore, and a single boat rocked on the dark water. A small light shone weakly on the boat. They found a carriage and drove to Oreanda.

As they drove, Gurov said that he had seen her surname written in the hotel. He asked if her husband was German. Anna said that perhaps his grandfather had been German, but her husband himself was Russian. This small talk did not matter much. They were both tired, and something had changed between them.

At Oreanda they sat near the church and looked down at the sea. Morning was beginning, but Yalta was still half hidden in mist. White clouds stood without moving on the tops of the mountains. The leaves did not move, insects made small sounds in the grass, and far below them the sea spoke with the same deep voice

again and again.

Gurov sat beside Anna and felt the strange peace of the place. The sea had sounded like this before any town had stood there, and it would sound like this after all people were gone. Beside him was a young woman who looked gentle and beautiful in the early light. He thought that the world itself was beautiful when people did not spoil it with lies, pride, and small selfish thoughts.

A man walked near them, looked at them, and then went away. Even this small thing seemed strange and beautiful in the quiet morning. They saw a steamer far off, moving through the pale light. Anna was silent for a long time. Then she said, “There is dew on the grass.”

“Yes,” Gurov answered. “It is time to go back.” They returned to the town. After that, they met every day at noon on the sea-front. They ate together, walked together, went out of town together, and looked at the sea as if it belonged to their secret life.

Anna often said that she slept badly and that her heart beat too fast. Sometimes she feared that Gurov did not respect her. Sometimes she was jealous, though there was no clear reason. When no one was near them, Gurov would suddenly draw her close and kiss her. He was careful and afraid of being seen, but he was also strongly held by her.

Their days were idle and bright. There was the heat, the smell of the sea, the well-dressed people walking up and down, and the soft danger of their secret. Gurov told Anna that she was beautiful and charming. He did not want to leave her even for a short time. But Anna often became thoughtful and sad, and she asked him again and again if he truly respected her.

They had expected that Anna’s husband might come to Yalta. Instead, a letter came from him. He wrote that something was wrong with his eyes and asked her to return home as soon as possible. Anna decided to go at once. “It is good that I am leaving,” she said. “It means that this must end.”

Gurov went with her on the journey to the station. They travelled all day, and when she entered the train, the moment of parting came quickly. After the second bell, Anna looked at him with a sad, sick face. “Let me look at you once more,”

she said. “I will remember you. Do not think badly of me. We are parting forever, and it must be so.”

The train moved away. Its lights soon disappeared into the dark, and after a little while there was no sound. Gurov stood alone on the platform and listened to the insects and the wires in the evening air. He felt as if he had just woken from a strange dream. He thought that another adventure in his life had ended, and that only a memory was left.

Yet he was not simply pleased or free. He felt sad, moved, and a little ashamed. Anna had not been happy with him, though he had been kind to her in his own way. She had seen him as better and higher than he really was. The air at the station already smelled of autumn, and the evening was cold. As he left the platform, Gurov thought that it was time for him to go back north.

Part 3: Gurov Cannot Forget

Gurov returned to Moscow when winter was beginning. The stoves were heated in the houses, and in the morning it was still dark when the children ate breakfast and got ready for school. For a short time each morning, the nurse lit a lamp. The first hard cold had come, and the city was white with frost and snow. After the warm sea and the mountains of Yalta, Moscow at first seemed strong, clean, and familiar.

Gurov had been born in Moscow, and the city soon took hold of him again. He walked through the streets in his fur coat and warm gloves. On Saturday evening, he heard the church bells, and the sound made his recent journey seem far away. Little by little, he returned to his old habits. He read newspapers, went to restaurants and clubs, ate with friends, and played cards.

At first he thought that Anna Sergeyevna would slowly fade from his memory. He expected that, after a month, she would become like other women from his past. He would remember her only sometimes, perhaps in a dream, with her sad smile and her little dog. That was how such things usually ended in his life. A woman came, touched him for a time, and then became only a memory.

But this time it did not happen. More than a month passed, and real winter came. Still, everything was clear in his mind, as if he had left Anna only yesterday. When he heard his children studying in the evening, or when music played in a restaurant, or when the wind cried in the chimney, Yalta suddenly returned to him. He saw the pier, the early morning mist, the steamer, the sea, and Anna's face.

He walked for a long time in his room, remembering everything. At first he smiled. Then memory became stronger than ordinary thought. Anna did not visit him only in dreams. She followed him everywhere like a shadow. When he closed his eyes, he saw her clearly, and she seemed younger, kinder, and more beautiful than before.

In the evening, he almost felt that she was near him. She seemed to look out from the bookcase, from the fireplace, and from the dark corners of the room. He thought he could hear the soft movement of her dress and her quiet breathing. In the street, he looked at women's faces, hoping to see someone like her. But no one was like her.

He wanted badly to tell someone about her. He wanted to speak of the sea, of Yalta, of her sadness, and of the strange happiness he had felt with her. But at home he could not speak about his love. Outside the house, he also had no one. He could not talk to people at the bank, or to men at the club, or to people who came to his house on business.

Once, he tried to speak about it in a general way. His wife looked at him with her dark eyebrows and said, "The part of a great lover does not suit you, Dmitri." Her words were cold and unpleasant. Gurov felt that she understood nothing. After that, he spoke even less at home.

One evening, after playing cards at the doctors' club, he left with another man. Suddenly he could not keep silent. "If only you knew," he said, "what an interesting woman I met in Yalta." The other man was already getting into his sledge. He turned back and shouted, "Dmitri Dmitritch! You were right this evening. That fish was not very fresh!"

These ordinary words made Gurov angry and ashamed. They seemed dirty to him, though there was nothing special in them. He thought of the empty evenings,

the card games, the eating, the drinking, and the same foolish talk repeated again and again. Was this life? Was this all that people cared about?

That night he could not sleep. The next day he had a headache, and the next night he slept badly again. He sat up in bed or walked through his room. He was tired of his children, tired of the bank, tired of clubs, tired of people. He did not want to go anywhere or talk about anything.

In December, during the holidays, he prepared for a journey. He told his wife that he had to go to Petersburg for a young friend's business. But he did not go to Petersburg. He went to the town where Anna lived. He did not know exactly what he would do there. He only knew that he wanted to see her and, if possible, speak with her.

He arrived in the morning and took the best room in the hotel. The room was not really good. The floor was covered with rough grey cloth, and on the table stood a dusty inkstand with a broken little figure on it. The hotel porter told him where Anna's husband lived. The man was known in the town, and he had his own house and horses.

Gurov walked slowly to the street and found the house. Opposite it stood a long grey fence with nails along the top. He looked at the fence, then at the windows of the house, then back at the fence. The fence made him feel trapped and angry. "Anyone would want to run away from a fence like that," he thought.

He did not dare go into the house. It was a holiday, so Anna's husband was probably at home. A note might fall into the wrong hands and ruin everything. The best thing, he decided, was to wait for chance. So he walked up and down the street, near the grey fence.

He saw a poor man go through the gate, and dogs ran at him. About an hour later, he heard a piano inside the house. The sound was faint, but he thought that Anna might be playing. Then the front door opened, and an old woman came out. Behind her ran the little white dog. Gurov almost called the dog, but his heart beat so hard that he could not remember its name.

He walked for a long time, and the fence seemed more hateful every minute. He began to think that Anna had forgotten him. Perhaps she was already happy

with someone else. Perhaps that was natural, he thought bitterly, for a young woman who had to look all day at that terrible grey fence.

At last he returned to his hotel. He sat on the sofa and did not know what to do. Then he ate dinner and slept for a long time. When he woke, the windows were dark. Evening had come. He sat on the bed under a cheap grey blanket and felt foolish and unhappy.

That morning at the station, he had seen a poster for a new performance at the theatre. Now he remembered it. Perhaps Anna would go to the first night. With this hope, he went to the theatre. The building was full, noisy, and hot. The music was not good, and the people looked ordinary and provincial, but Gurov watched every person who entered.

Then Anna came in. She sat in the third row. When Gurov saw her, his heart tightened. At that moment, he understood that no one in the world was closer or more important to him. She was not remarkable to anyone else in that crowd. She sat there with her little theatre glasses in her hand. But to him, she filled his whole life.

A tall, bent man with small side-whiskers came in with her and sat beside her. Gurov guessed that this was her husband. The man lowered his head as he walked, as if he were always bowing. There was something weak and official about him. Gurov remembered that Anna had once spoken of him with bitterness, and he felt that he understood why.

During the first break, Anna's husband went out to smoke. Anna stayed alone in her seat. Gurov went up to her. His voice trembled, and he forced himself to smile. "Good evening," he said.

She looked at him and turned pale. Then she looked again, as if she could not believe her eyes. She held her fan and theatre glasses tightly in her hands. For a moment neither of them spoke. She was sitting, and he was standing beside her, afraid because she was so frightened.

The music began again, and Gurov suddenly felt that everyone in the theatre was looking at them. Anna rose quickly and went toward the door. He followed her. They walked without thinking through passages and up and down stairs.

Officials, schoolboys, ladies, coats, uniforms, and bright buttons passed before their eyes like a confused dream.

On a narrow dark staircase, Anna stopped. “How you frightened me!” she said, breathing fast. “Oh, how you frightened me! Why have you come? Why?” She was still pale, and her eyes were full of fear and love.

“Anna, please understand,” Gurov said in a low voice. “Please understand me.” But she seemed hardly to hear him. She looked at him as if she wanted to remember every part of his face. Her unhappiness was clear, and it hurt him to see it.

“I am so unhappy,” she said. “I have thought only of you all this time. I live only by thinking of you. I wanted to forget you, but I could not. Why did you come? Why?”

Two schoolboys stood above them on the stairs, smoking and looking down. Gurov did not care. He drew Anna to him and kissed her face, her cheeks, and her hands. She pushed him away in fear. “What are you doing? We are mad. Go away today. Go away at once. People are coming.”

Someone was coming up the stairs. Anna spoke quickly, almost in a whisper. “You must go away. Do you hear me, Dmitri Dmitritch? I will come to Moscow. I have never been happy, and I am not happy now. I shall never be happy. But do not make me suffer more. My dear one, my good one, we must part now.”

She pressed his hand and began to go down the stairs quickly. As she went, she looked back at him, and he saw in her eyes that she truly was unhappy. Gurov stood still for a little while and listened until her steps were gone. Then he found his coat and left the theatre.

Part 4: The Hardest Part Begins

After that night in the theatre, Anna Sergeyevna began to come to Moscow. She came secretly, once every two or three months. She told her husband that she had to see a doctor because of a woman’s illness. Her husband believed her, or at least acted as if he believed her. Each time she came, she stayed at a hotel and sent

a message to Gurov.

Gurov lived two lives now. One life was open and ordinary. In that life, he went to the bank, ate dinner with his family, spoke with people at clubs, and did all the things expected of him. The other life was hidden. It was the life in which Anna existed, and to him it was the only life that felt true.

He often thought how strange this was. Everything important to him was secret from others. Everything false and empty was seen by everyone. People saw him as a husband, a father, a bank worker, and a man who liked good food and card games. But they did not see the part of him that suffered, hoped, feared, and loved.

One winter morning, a message came from Anna. Gurov was at home with his daughter. He was taking her to school, and the snow was falling in large wet flakes. The trees were white, and the air was soft and cold. His daughter walked beside him, and he answered her small questions as calmly as he could.

“Why does it snow in winter?” she asked.

“Because it is cold,” he answered.

“But why is it not cold in summer?” she asked.

He began to explain, but his thoughts were not with her. He was thinking that Anna was waiting for him at the hotel. He could see her in his mind, alone in a strange room, afraid and impatient. He looked at his daughter’s schoolbooks, her small face, and her simple trust, and he felt the pain of his divided life.

After he left his daughter at school, he went straight to the hotel. He knew the way well now. The stairs, the smell of the corridors, and the quiet of the rooms had become part of his secret world. He asked the servant where the lady from the provincial town was staying. Then he went up and knocked softly at her door.

Anna was in the room. She was wearing the same plain clothes she used for travel. When she saw him, she came toward him quickly, then stopped and covered her face. She was crying. Her little dog was not with her now, and the room seemed even more lonely because of that.

“How are you?” Gurov asked softly. “What is wrong?”

She could not answer at once. She turned away from him and stood near the window. The grey morning light fell on her face. She looked tired, and he saw that

she had suffered during the journey and before it. At last she said, “I cannot go on like this. I cannot bear it.”

Gurov went to her and took her hands. Her hands were cold. She looked at him with love and pain, as if both feelings were the same thing now. “I think of you all the time,” she said. “I try to live quietly, but I cannot. I lie to everyone. I come here and then go back, and everything begins again.”

He wanted to comfort her, but he did not know how. In the past, he had often known what to say to women. He had spoken gently, smiled, and found a way to make things lighter. But now he could not do that. Anna’s pain was his own pain too.

They sat together for a while without speaking. Then Anna began to cry again, not loudly, but with deep shame and exhaustion. Gurov felt helpless. He loved her, and yet he could not give her a free and honest life. He could only meet her in hidden rooms, between lies, journeys, and fear.

He looked at himself in the mirror while she cried. His hair was beginning to turn grey. This surprised him, though he knew he was no longer young. He thought of his past life, of all the light affairs he had once thought were love. How different they seemed now. Only now, when his hair was turning grey, had he truly loved for the first time.

He also saw Anna clearly. She was not a dream, not a holiday memory, and not an adventure. She was a living person, tired and frightened, and she needed him. He understood that he had become dearer to her than anyone else in the world. The thought filled him with tenderness, but also with fear.

“Do not cry, my dear,” he said. “We will think. We will find some way.” But even as he said this, he knew that the words were weak. There was no simple way. He had a wife and children. She had a husband. Their lives were tied by many visible and invisible ropes.

Anna wiped her eyes, but her face still trembled. “How can we live like this?” she asked. “How can we keep meeting in secret? We are not young children. We know what we are doing. Yet we do not know how to stop, and we do not know how to live openly.”

Gurov sat beside her and held her close. He kissed her hair, her face, and her hands. He felt that they were like two birds caught in different cages, trying to reach each other through the bars. Their love was real, but the world around it was narrow and hard. Every path seemed to lead to pain.

Still, when they were together, they felt that they had found the deepest part of life. Outside the room were the hotel servants, the streets, the bank, the school, the husbands and wives, the rules and names of ordinary life. Inside the room were only the two of them. For a short time, they could speak honestly and look at each other without pretending.

They talked for a long time. They spoke about leaving everything, but the words sounded frightening and unclear. They spoke about waiting, but waiting had already become suffering. They spoke about not meeting again, but they both knew that this was impossible. Silence followed each plan, because each plan was too hard.

The morning passed. The room became warmer, and the snow outside turned to wet drops on the window. Anna grew calmer, and Gurov felt a kind of sad peace. They were unhappy, but they were together. This was not enough, and yet it was all they had.

He understood that their love had changed them both. It had made his old life seem ugly and false. It had made Anna’s quiet married life impossible to bear. They had tried to hide their feelings, but the hidden thing had grown stronger than everything seen by the world.

They stood near the window and looked out at the grey Moscow street. People were moving below them, each person going somewhere, each person carrying a private life that others could not see. Gurov thought that perhaps every human life was like this. The outside was simple, but the inside was full of secrets.

He and Anna still believed that they would find an answer. They spoke of a new life, an honest life, a life in which they would not need to hide. They did not know what form that life could take. But they both felt that they could not return to the old lie forever.

And yet they also knew that the end was not near. The hardest part was not

behind them. It was still ahead. They would need a long time, much courage, and perhaps much more pain before they could find a way to live openly. Their story had not ended. It had only reached the place where the most difficult part began.

The Darling

Part 1: Olenka and the Theatre

Olenka was sitting on the back steps of her house. Her full name was Olga Semyonovna, but most people called her Olenka. She was the daughter of a retired official, and she had lived in the same house since she was a child. It was a hot day, and the flies troubled her. Dark clouds were gathering in the east, and from time to time a cool, wet smell came through the air.

In the garden stood Kukin, her neighbour. He was the manager of an open-air theatre called the Tivoli. He lived in a small building near Olenka's house, so she often saw him. He was a small, thin man with a yellow face and worried eyes. That day he was looking up at the clouds with despair.

"Again!" he cried. "It is going to rain again. It rains every day, as if the sky wants to ruin me. I work, I worry, I lose sleep, and what happens? The public does not come, but I must still pay the rent and the actors."

Olenka listened seriously. Kukin often spoke like this. He said the public did not understand good theatre. He said he gave them fine music, good plays, and clever performers, but they only wanted foolish shows. When the weather was bad, his face became even more hopeless, and his voice grew thin and sharp with pain.

The next evening, the same thing happened. Clouds came again, and Kukin walked in the garden like a man facing disaster. "Then rain!" he shouted toward the sky. "Flood the garden. Destroy me. Send me to prison if you like." He laughed strangely, but there was no happiness in the laugh.

Olenka heard him and felt sorry for him. At first she only pitied him. Then his trouble entered her heart more deeply. She began to think of him at night, when she heard music and noise from the Tivoli. She imagined him fighting against rain, debt, bad luck, and a public that did not understand him.

Olenka was the kind of woman who always needed someone to love. Earlier, she had loved her father, who now sat in a dark room and breathed with difficulty.

She had loved an aunt who visited from time to time. When she was at school, she had loved her French teacher. Her heart could not stay empty.

She was gentle, soft, and healthy. Her cheeks were rosy, and her eyes were kind. When people said something pleasant, she smiled with such simple warmth that others smiled too. Women often took her hand and said, “You darling!” Men also looked at her with pleasure. There was nothing proud or hard in her face.

Soon she loved Kukin. She watched for him. When he came home late after the theatre, she sometimes opened her curtain and smiled at him from her window. She could not sleep easily when she knew he was tired and unhappy. His troubles became her troubles, and his small victories became her joy.

Kukin asked her to marry him, and she agreed. When he saw her near him as his wife, he was happy and touched. He looked at her white neck and soft shoulders and said, “You darling!” But it rained on the day of their wedding, and even then his face kept its look of despair.

Their married life was good. Olenka sat in his office, helped with accounts, paid wages, and looked after small matters at the theatre. Her rosy face and gentle smile were seen at the office window, behind the refreshment counter, and near the stage. She became part of the Tivoli. She now felt that the theatre was the most important thing in life.

Soon she spoke just as Kukin spoke. “People do not understand art,” she said to friends and customers. “They want foolish things. Yesterday we gave a good play, and almost all the seats were empty. But if we had given them some cheap nonsense, the whole place would have been full.”

She repeated Kukin’s thoughts about actors, plays, music, and the public. Like him, she became angry when people did not respect theatre. She went to rehearsals, watched the actors, corrected small mistakes, and worried about the musicians. If a newspaper wrote something unkind about the Tivoli, she cried and then went to speak to the editor.

The actors liked her. They called her “the darling,” and they also joked that she always said “Vanitchka and I,” because she and Kukin seemed to think and speak as one person. She was kind to the actors and lent them small sums of money.

If someone deceived her, she cried alone, but she did not complain to her husband. She wanted the theatre family to be peaceful.

Winter came, and their life continued. They took a theatre in town and rented it to different groups for short periods. Olenka grew a little stouter and brighter. Kukin, however, became thinner and more yellow. He still complained about losses, even when business was not so bad.

At night, he often coughed. Olenka gave him hot tea with raspberry or lime flowers. She rubbed him with cologne and wrapped him in warm shawls. She stroked his hair and said, “You are my dear one. You are my sweet pet.” She said these words with complete truth, because all her heart was in him.

Before Lent, Kukin went to Moscow to find new performers. Without him, Olenka could not sleep. She sat by the window at night and looked at the stars. She felt like a hen that cannot rest when the cock is not in the yard. The house seemed empty, and every sound made her think of him.

Kukin was delayed in Moscow. He wrote that he would return at Easter and gave some instructions about the Tivoli. Olenka read the letter again and again. She tried to be useful and strong, but she was uneasy. The theatre, the garden, and the rooms all seemed to wait for him with her.

On the Sunday before Easter, late in the evening, someone knocked loudly at the gate. The sound was heavy and frightening, like blows on a barrel. The sleepy cook ran through the wet yard to open it. A thick voice outside said that there was a telegram for Olga Semyonovna.

Olenka had received telegrams from her husband before, but this time fear went through her whole body. Her hands shook as she opened it. The words were badly written, but the meaning was clear. Ivan Petrovitch Kukin had died suddenly in Moscow, and they were waiting for instructions about the funeral.

Olenka cried out as if her heart had been struck. “My darling, my Vanka, my precious one,” she sobbed. “Why did I meet you? Why did I love you? Your poor Olenka is alone now.” The words came from her again and again, because she could not believe that he was gone.

Kukin’s funeral took place in Moscow on Tuesday. Olenka returned home on

Wednesday. As soon as she entered the house, she threw herself on her bed and cried so loudly that the neighbours could hear her in the street. They crossed themselves and spoke softly. “Poor darling,” they said. “Poor Olga Semyonovna. How deeply she suffers.”

Part 2: Olenka and the Timber Yard

Three months after Kukin’s death, Olenka was coming home from church. She was still wearing deep black, and her face was sad. On the way, she met one of her neighbours, Vassily Andreitch Pustovalov. He was the manager for Babakayev, the timber merchant. He wore a straw hat, a white waistcoat, and a gold watch chain, and he looked serious and calm.

Pustovalov walked beside her and spoke in a low, kind voice. He said that when someone dear to us dies, we must accept it with strength. He said that such things happen by God’s will, and people must bear them with patience. His words were simple, but they came with such calm feeling that Olenka listened with all her heart. When he left her at her gate, she already felt less alone.

All that day, she heard his voice in her mind. When she closed her eyes, she saw his dark beard and his serious face. She liked him very much. It seemed that she had touched his heart too, because soon an older woman came to drink coffee with Olenka and began to praise him. She said he was a good man, steady and honest, and that any woman would be happy to marry him.

Three days later, Pustovalov came himself. He stayed only a short time and said very little. But when he left, Olenka loved him. She loved him so strongly that she could not sleep that night. In the morning she sent for the older woman, and soon everything was arranged. Before long, Olenka and Pustovalov were married.

Their married life was quiet and comfortable. Pustovalov sat in the office until dinner, then went out on business. After he left, Olenka took his place in the office. She wrote accounts, took orders, spoke to customers, and watched the work of the timber yard. Little by little, the whole world of timber became her world.

“Wood becomes more expensive every year,” she told customers and friends. “The price rises and rises. Once we sold wood from nearby places, but now Vassitchka must bring it from far away. And the cost of carrying it is terrible.” As she spoke, she put her hands to her cheeks with real worry. She felt these business troubles as deeply as if she had known them all her life.

Soon it seemed to her that timber was the most important thing in the world. Words like plank, beam, log, post, and board sounded warm and familiar to her. She liked hearing them and saying them. They were no longer only business words. They were words from the life she shared with her husband.

At night, she dreamed of timber. She saw mountains of planks and long lines of carts carrying wood far away. She dreamed that great beams stood up like soldiers and marched into the timber yard. Boards fell with a dry, loud sound, then rose again and piled themselves in high stacks. Sometimes she cried out in her sleep, and Pustovalov woke her gently and told her to cross herself.

His thoughts became her thoughts. If he said the room was too hot, she felt that it was too hot. If he said business was slow, she felt worried about business. He did not like theatres or public amusements, so she did not like them either. The Tivoli, which had once been the centre of her life, now seemed like empty nonsense.

Her friends sometimes said, “You are always at home or in the office. You should go to the theatre or the circus, darling.” Olenka answered with calm dignity, “Vassitchka and I have no time for theatres. We have work to do. What use are those things?” She said this as if she had always thought so. She had forgotten how strongly she had once defended the theatre.

On Saturdays, she and Pustovalov went to evening service. On holidays, they went to early mass. They walked home side by side with peaceful faces. Her silk dress made a pleasant soft sound, and they both smelled clean and good. At home they drank tea with sweet bread and jam, and later they ate pie.

Their house always seemed warm and well fed. At noon, the yard smelled of soup, meat, duck, or fish on fast days. In the office, the samovar was always hot, and customers were given tea and small dry cakes. Once a week, the husband and

wife went to the baths and came home together, both red in the face. “We have nothing to complain of,” Olenka told people. “I wish everyone lived as well as Vassitchka and I do.”

When Pustovalov had to go away to buy wood, Olenka suffered terribly. She could not sleep, and she cried at night. During those times, a young army veterinary surgeon named Smirnin sometimes came in during the evening. He rented the small building in their yard. He talked with her and played cards, and this helped her pass the time while her husband was away.

Smirnin told her about his unhappy family life. He had a wife and a little son, but he did not live with his wife because she had been unfaithful to him. He hated her, yet he still sent money every month for the child. Olenka sighed and shook her head when she heard this. She felt sorry for him, and she also felt sorry for the little boy who had to live between unhappy parents.

When Smirnin left in the evening, Olenka went with him to the stairs and held a candle for him. “God keep you, Vladimir Platonitch,” she said. “Thank you for coming to cheer me while Vassitchka is away. You should make peace with your wife for your son’s sake. The little boy must understand more than you think.” She spoke with the same calm and serious manner that Pustovalov used.

When Pustovalov came back, she told him quietly about Smirnin and his sad home. They both sighed and shook their heads. They talked about the child, who surely missed his father. Then, by a natural movement of thought, they went to the holy pictures, bowed before them, and prayed that God would give them children of their own. They lived in this quiet, peaceful love for six years.

But one winter day, after drinking hot tea in the office, Pustovalov went outside without his cap. He had to see about sending off some timber. The air was cold, and he caught a chill. At first it seemed like an ordinary illness, but he did not get better. Doctors came, and everything possible was done, but he grew weaker month after month.

After four months of illness, Pustovalov died. Olenka was a widow again. At the funeral and after it, she cried as if the world had ended for the second time. “I have no one now,” she sobbed. “My darling has left me. How can I live alone in

this misery?" The neighbours pitied her, for they knew that when Olenka loved, she gave her whole life.

She dressed in black again and almost stopped going out. She went only to church and to her husband's grave. For a long time, the shutters of her house stayed closed, and the rooms seemed heavy and silent. The theatre had once been gone from her heart, and now the timber yard was gone too. Once more, Olenka's life had lost the person who gave it meaning.

Part 3: No Opinion of Her Own

For many months after Pustovalov's death, Olenka lived very quietly. She wore black and went out only to church or to her husband's grave. The shutters of her house stayed closed, and from outside the place looked almost asleep. People in the town still pitied her, but they saw little of her now.

After half a year, she took off the long black mourning ribbons and opened the shutters again. Sometimes people saw her in the morning, going to market with her cook, Mavra. They wondered how she lived in the house and what she did with her days. There was no theatre life now, no timber business, and no husband's voice to fill the rooms.

Then people began to notice something new. Olenka was sometimes seen in her garden, drinking tea with Smirnin, the veterinary surgeon. He read the newspaper aloud to her, and she listened carefully. Soon, when she met people in town, she began to speak about animals, milk, meat, and public health. It was clear that his words were entering her heart and mind.

Once, at the post office, she met a lady she knew. Olenka spoke to her with great seriousness. "There is not enough inspection of animals in our town," she said. "That is why diseases spread. People can become ill from bad milk, or from sick horses and cows. The health of animals must be cared for, just like the health of people."

These were Smirnin's thoughts, but Olenka spoke them as if they were her own. She now agreed with him about everything. She worried about cattle disease,

slaughterhouses, and dirty milk. If he said a thing was important, she felt it was important too. A new world had opened before her, and it was the world of veterinary medicine.

In another person, people might have spoken badly of this change. They might have laughed or judged her. But with Olenka, it seemed natural. Everyone knew that she could not live long without loving someone. She did not plan or hide deeply; her heart simply moved toward the person who stood nearest to it.

Still, she and Smirnin tried to keep their closeness quiet. They did not tell people that anything had changed between them. But Olenka could never keep a secret well. When Smirnin had visitors from his regiment, she poured tea, served supper, and soon began to talk about animal disease. She spoke of cattle, horses, milk, and town slaughterhouses with a serious face.

Smirnin was ashamed when this happened. He did not like her speaking among professional men about things she did not really understand. After the guests left, he sometimes took her by the hand and spoke angrily. “I have asked you before,” he said. “Do not talk about matters you do not know. When veterinary surgeons are speaking, please do not join in.”

Olenka looked at him with fear and surprise. She did not understand what she had done wrong. Her eyes filled with tears, and she asked, “But, Voloditchka, what should I talk about?” Then she put her arms around him and begged him not to be angry. Before long, they were at peace again, and both were happy.

But this happiness also did not last. Smirnin’s regiment was moved far away, and he had to go with it. He left the town and did not come back. Perhaps he went to Siberia, or to some other distant place. For Olenka, the exact place did not matter; what mattered was that he was gone.

Now Olenka was completely alone. Her father had died long ago, and his old armchair was upstairs in the attic, dusty and broken. Kukin was gone. Pustovalov was gone. Smirnin was gone too. The people who had given shape and meaning to her life had all disappeared.

She began to grow thinner and less pretty. When people met her in the street, they no longer looked at her with the same pleasure. They no longer smiled and

said warm things as they once had. It seemed that her best years had passed, and that a new, dull life had begun. This new life was so empty that she did not even want to think about it.

In the evening, she sat on the back steps and heard the band playing at the Tivoli. She also heard the fireworks cracking and bursting in the distance. Long ago, those sounds had filled her heart with Kukin's troubles and dreams. Now they meant nothing to her. They were only sounds in the air.

She looked across her yard without interest. She did not think of anything clearly, and she did not wish for anything. At night, she went to bed and dreamed of the empty yard. She ate and drank because one must eat and drink, but even food seemed to have no meaning. Her life had no center.

The worst thing was that she had no opinions at all. She saw a bottle, the rain, a cart, a horse, or a person passing by, and she understood what she saw. But she could not say what it meant or what she thought about it. She had no words of her own. Her mind and heart felt as empty as the yard outside.

When Kukin had been alive, she could speak about the theatre. When Pustovalov had been alive, she could speak about timber. When Smirnin had been near her, she could speak about animal health and disease. Now there was nothing. The emptiness was bitter, like something harsh in the mouth.

Years passed in this way. The town grew larger, and the road near her house became a street. New houses appeared where open places had once been. The old Tivoli and the timber yard no longer seemed important parts of the town. Time moved forward, but Olenka did not seem to move with it.

Her own house grew old too. The roof became rusty, and the shed leaned to one side. The yard was full of weeds and nettles. In summer, she sat on the steps and felt the same emptiness as before. In winter, she sat by the window and looked at the snow.

Sometimes, when spring came, or when church bells rang, memories suddenly returned to her. For a moment, her heart became warm and painful. Tears filled her eyes, and she remembered voices, faces, and old days. But the feeling soon passed. Then the emptiness came back again.

A black kitten named Briska rubbed itself against her skirt and purred softly. But even the little cat could not comfort her. Olenka pushed it away and said with irritation, “Go away. I do not want you.” What she needed was not a pet. She needed a love that could take her whole heart, give her thoughts, and make her blood warm again.

So the days and years continued, one after another. Whatever Mavra the cook said, Olenka accepted. She had no strong thought to answer with. She was alive, but life seemed pale and useless. The house, the yard, and her heart all felt old and silent.

Then, one hot July evening, dust filled the yard as the cattle were driven past. Suddenly someone knocked at the gate. Olenka went to open it herself. When she looked out, she could not speak. Smirnin was standing there, older now, grey-haired, and dressed no longer as an officer.

In one moment, everything came back to her. She remembered the evenings, the newspaper, the talks, and the sound of his voice. She began to cry and let her head fall against his chest. She was so moved that she hardly noticed how they went into the house and sat down to tea.

“My dear Vladimir Platonitch,” she said, trembling with joy. “What has brought you here?” Smirnin told her that he wanted to settle in the town for good. He had left the army and hoped to work for himself. He also said that it was time for his boy to go to school, and that he had made peace with his wife.

“Where are they?” Olenka asked. Smirnin said that his wife and son were staying at the hotel, and that he was looking for rooms. At once Olenka became excited. “Rooms? Why not live in my house?” she cried. “Take my house. I do not need rent. I can live in the small building. Oh, how glad I am!”

Part 4: Sasha

The next day, the roof of Olenka’s house was painted, and the walls were made white again. Olenka walked about the yard with her hands on her sides and gave directions to the workers. Her face shone with the old soft smile. She looked bright

and busy, as if she had woken from a long sleep.

Smirnin's wife soon arrived. She was thin and plain, with short hair and an unhappy face. With her came little Sasha, a boy of ten. He was small for his age, with blue eyes, round cheeks, and little dimples. As soon as he entered the yard, he ran after the cat and laughed with a clear, happy laugh.

"Is that your cat, auntie?" he asked Olenka. "When she has kittens, please give us one. Mama is very afraid of mice." Olenka talked to him and gave him tea. While he sat at the table, her heart grew warm. It hurt sweetly in her breast, as if the boy were already her own child.

That evening, Sasha sat at the table and studied his lessons. Olenka watched him with deep love and pity. He was so small, and school seemed so serious and difficult. He read aloud, "An island is a piece of land with water all around it." Olenka repeated, "An island is a piece of land," and for the first time in many years, she said something with firm belief.

Now she had thoughts again. At supper, she spoke to Sasha's parents about school. She said the lessons were very hard, but a high school was better than a business school. With a high-school education, she said, a boy could become a doctor, an engineer, or many other useful things. These were Sasha's thoughts now, and they became hers too.

Sasha began to go to school. His mother soon went to Kharkov to visit her sister and did not return. His father went out every day to inspect animals and was often away from home for three days. Olenka felt that Sasha had been left alone. She thought no one cared for him properly, so she took him into the small building where she lived and gave him a room of his own.

For six months, Sasha lived there with her. Every morning, Olenka went into his room and found him asleep, with one hand under his cheek. He slept so quietly that she was sorry to wake him. She stood near the bed and looked at him for a moment before speaking. Then she said sadly and gently, "Sashenka, get up, darling. It is time for school."

He got up, dressed, said his prayers, and sat down to breakfast. He drank tea and ate bread, but he was still half asleep and a little cross. Olenka looked at him

as if he were going on a long, dangerous journey. “You do not know your lesson well enough, Sashenka,” she said. “You must work hard, darling. You must obey your teachers.”

“Oh, leave me alone,” Sasha said.

Then he went down the street to school. He was a small figure under a large school cap, with a bag over his shoulder. Olenka followed him quietly. After a little way, she called, “Sashenka!” and put a date or a sweet into his hand. He was ashamed when they came near the school street and turned back to her. “You should go home, auntie. I can go the rest of the way alone.”

Olenka stopped, but she did not go at once. She stood and watched him until he disappeared through the school gate. Her eyes stayed on the place where he had gone. Then she turned back slowly, full of love and peace. Her life had a purpose again.

She loved Sasha more deeply than she had loved anyone before. Her earlier loves had been strong, but this love was different. It was quiet, selfless, and full of tenderness. For this little boy, with his dimpled cheek and big school cap, she would have given her whole life gladly. She did not ask why. Her heart simply knew it.

During those months, Olenka became younger in face and spirit. People who met her in town smiled at her again. “Good morning, Olga Semyonovna, darling,” they said. “How are you?” She answered with warmth and began to speak at once about Sasha’s lessons, his teachers, and the difficulty of schoolwork.

“The lessons are very hard now,” she told people at the market. “Yesterday they gave him a fable to learn by heart, a Latin translation, and a problem. It is too much for such a little boy.” Then she talked about the teachers, the books, and the school rules. She said exactly what Sasha said, but her face showed complete belief.

At three o’clock, she and Sasha had dinner together. In the evening, they studied his lessons together. Sometimes they both cried over a difficult task. When she put him to bed, she stayed for a long time and made the sign of the cross over him. She whispered prayers and looked at him with a love that filled the whole

room.

After that, she went to bed and thought about his future. She imagined him grown up, finished with school, and working as a doctor or engineer. She imagined him with a large house, horses, a carriage, a wife, and children. These thoughts made tears come from her closed eyes. Beside her, the black cat purred softly in the dark.

But sometimes, in the night, there was a loud knock at the gate. Olenka woke at once, breathless with fear. Her heart beat hard, and her whole body became cold. Then there was another knock. “It must be a telegram from Kharkov,” she thought. “Sasha’s mother is calling him back.”

The thought filled her with despair. Her head, hands, and feet turned cold, and she felt that she was the most unhappy woman in the world. If Sasha were taken away, her life would become empty again. There would be no lessons, no schoolbooks, no small voice in the next room. There would be no one to love with her whole soul.

Then she heard voices outside. It was only Smirnin coming home from the club. “Thank God,” she thought. Little by little, the weight left her heart. She returned to bed and lay still, listening. In the next room, Sasha was sleeping deeply.

Sometimes he cried out in his sleep. “I will give it to you! Go away! Be quiet!” Olenka listened with a tender smile and a painful fear that never fully left her. She loved him so much that even his angry dreams were dear to her. Her life had become warm again, but it was also full of the fear that this warmth might be taken away.

The Man in a Case

Part 1: A Man Inside a Shell

At the far end of the village of Mironositskoe, two hunters stopped for the night in a barn. The barn belonged to the village elder, Prokofy. The two men had been out late, and now there was no reason to go farther. One of them was Ivan Ivanovitch, a tall, thin veterinary surgeon with long moustaches. The other was Burkin, a high-school teacher who knew the district well.

They did not sleep at once. Ivan Ivanovitch sat outside the barn door in the moonlight and smoked his pipe. Burkin lay inside on the hay, and in the darkness he could hardly be seen. The night was quiet, and the village seemed far from the busy world. Because they were not sleepy, they began telling each other different stories.

One of the stories was about Mavra, the elder's wife. She was a healthy and sensible woman, but she had never gone beyond her own village. She had never seen a town. She had never seen a railway. For the last ten years, she had mostly sat behind the stove and had gone into the street only at night.

Ivan Ivanovitch thought this was strange. Burkin did not. "There are many people like that," he said. "Some people want to hide from life. They pull back into themselves, like a snail going into its shell. Perhaps it comes from old human nature, or perhaps it is simply one kind of character. I do not know. I am not a scientist."

Then Burkin said that they did not need to look far for such a person. Two months earlier, a teacher named Belikov had died in their town. He had taught Greek at the high school. Ivan Ivanovitch had probably heard of him. Belikov was a strange man because he seemed to put everything, even himself, into a case.

Even in the finest weather, Belikov wore rubber overshoes, carried an umbrella, and put on a warm coat. His umbrella was in a cover. His watch was in a soft little case. Even his small knife for sharpening pencils was kept in a case. It seemed that every object he owned had to be protected from the open air.

His face also seemed hidden. He wore dark glasses, and he put cotton in his ears. When he rode in a carriage, he always wanted the cover put up. In this way, he tried to shut himself away from wind, sun, noise, chance, and other people. The real world troubled him. He wanted a wall between himself and everything alive.

Belikov's thoughts were the same as his clothes. He loved rules, orders, and clear prohibitions. If something was forbidden, he understood it and felt safe. If some order said, "Do not do this," then life was simple for him. But if something was allowed, he became uneasy, because he feared that trouble might come from it.

Whenever people spoke of a new school play, a reading room, or any small change in town life, he became worried. "It may lead to something bad," he would say. He did not say this loudly, but he said it often. The words seemed to follow him everywhere. They were like the sound of his rubber shoes in a quiet hall.

His love of Greek also had something of a hiding place in it. The old language was dead, and that comforted him. It did not change. It did not ask him to enter real life. He praised the Greek language with a kind of cold pleasure, and he often said that it sounded beautiful. To him, the past was safer than the present.

Belikov's room was small and narrow, almost like a box. His bed had curtains around it. At night, he covered his head with a blanket, but still he was afraid. The room was hot and close, and the wind beat against the door. He feared that a thief might come in, or that his servant might kill him, or that something else terrible might happen.

He slept badly. In the morning, he went to school pale and tired. The school building, the noise of the boys, and the duties of the day all seemed heavy to him. He did his work carefully, but without warmth. Everything about him seemed to say that life was dangerous and that a person should be careful every minute.

He also had a strange way of visiting other teachers. He would come into a colleague's room, sit down, and remain silent. He sat there for an hour or so, looking around with his pale face and dark glasses. Then he stood up and went away. He called this keeping friendly relations with his colleagues.

His visits were not pleasant. People felt as if he had brought cold air into the

room. No one knew what to say to him. They feared that any careless word might be repeated, misunderstood, or taken as something dangerous. So they sat quietly and waited for him to leave.

The teachers were afraid of him. Even the headmaster was afraid of him. This was strange, because Belikov was not strong, brave, or clever in any warm human way. He was small, narrow, and frightened. But his fear spread to others. It entered the school like damp air and made everyone cautious.

Under his influence, the teachers became afraid to speak freely. They were afraid to send letters, afraid to know new people, afraid to read certain books, and afraid to help poor students. They began to think first not of what was good or true, but of what might be reported and punished. In this way, Belikov's case grew larger than his own body.

The whole town felt him. People stopped giving evening parties. They did not arrange plays. They were careful about what they read and what they said. They even became afraid to teach poor children to read. It was as if Belikov's closed umbrella had opened over the whole town and shut out the open sky.

Yet he was not a cruel man in the ordinary sense. He did not shout. He did not strike anyone. He did not plan evil with a clear mind. His power came from fear, and perhaps from the fact that many people already had the same fear inside themselves. He only made that fear visible.

Burkin told all this quietly from the hay. Ivan Ivanovitch listened outside in the moonlight and smoked. The village around them was asleep, and the fields beyond the village were silent. In that stillness, Belikov's life seemed both small and frightening. He had tried to hide from the world, but somehow he had made the world around him hide too.

Part 2: The Whole Town Feels Afraid

Belikov's fear did not stay inside his own room. It spread through the school and then through the whole town. People did not love him, but they were afraid of him. The teachers, their wives, and even the headmaster felt uneasy when he

was near. They feared his quiet warnings more than another man's anger.

If someone suggested a school play, Belikov shook his head. If someone spoke of a reading room, he became worried. If a teacher wanted to let the students do something cheerful, he warned that the authorities might not like it. "It may lead to something bad," he always said. These words were simple, but they made people feel guilty before they had done anything wrong.

Because of him, people began to live carefully. They were afraid to speak loudly, afraid to write letters, afraid to make friends, and afraid to show kindness to poor students. They stopped doing many harmless things, not because there was a rule against them, but because there might be trouble later. This was Belikov's power. He made fear seem like wisdom.

Yet life in the town did not become completely still. A new teacher came to the school. His name was Kovalenko, and he taught history and geography. He was from the south, a tall, strong man with a loud voice and free movements. His face, clothes, and whole manner seemed open and full of life.

Kovalenko did not come alone. With him came his sister, Varenka. She was about thirty years old, but she was lively, warm, and still good-looking. She had dark eyes, a strong voice, and a laugh that filled a room. She sang songs from her home region, and when she laughed, she threw back her head and cried, "Ha, ha, ha!" as if she had no fear of anything.

At first, everyone liked Varenka. She was not shy, pale, or careful like many women in the town. She spoke freely, sang freely, and looked at people directly. Beside Belikov, she seemed like sunlight beside a closed box. Perhaps this was why the teachers and their wives soon had a strange idea.

One evening, after Varenka had sung and made everyone cheerful, someone said quietly that it might be good to arrange a marriage between her and Belikov. At first the idea seemed almost funny. Belikov was more than forty, and Varenka was about thirty. No one had ever imagined that a man who wore rubber shoes in all weather and slept behind bed curtains could fall in love or marry.

But in a provincial town, people often do unnecessary things because they are bored. The idea of this marriage gave everyone a new interest. The headmaster's

wife, the inspector's wife, and other ladies suddenly became lively and busy. They looked brighter, as if they had found a useful purpose. They began to speak of Belikov's future with great seriousness.

They said that marriage would be good for him. They said every man needed a home. They also said that Varenka was a suitable woman. She was from a respectable family, she had energy, and she seemed kind to him. Once the idea was spoken aloud, people could not leave it alone.

Varenka herself did not seem against the plan. Her life with her brother was not peaceful. Kovalenko was good-hearted, but he was rough and hot-tempered. He and Varenka argued from morning till night. Their voices could be heard in the street, and their quarrels often began over books, ideas, or some small question that hardly mattered.

Sometimes Kovalenko walked along the street with books in one hand and a heavy stick in the other. Varenka followed him, also carrying books, and argued loudly. "But you have not read it, Mihalik," she would say. "I know you have not read it." Then he struck the ground with his stick and shouted that he had read it. They were brother and sister, but they lived like two storms under one roof.

Such a life must have tired Varenka. She wanted a home of her own, or at least people thought so. In the town, many women believed that any marriage was better than waiting too long. They looked at Varenka, then at Belikov, and the plan seemed more and more possible. It did not matter that the two people were strangely matched.

Belikov began to visit Kovalenko's house as he visited the homes of other teachers. He came in, sat down, and said almost nothing. Varenka sang to him or looked at him with her dark eyes. Sometimes she laughed her loud free laugh, and Belikov sat bent and silent beside her. He looked as if he had been pulled out of his room with iron tools.

The teachers and their wives encouraged him. They told him that he ought to marry. They congratulated him before he had done anything. They spoke in solemn voices and said that marriage was an important step. All this attention confused him, but it also moved him. He began to think that perhaps he truly

should marry.

Varenka's portrait appeared on his table. This was a great change for Belikov. He came to Burkin and spoke about her, about family life, and about marriage. He did not speak warmly, but he spoke often. "Marriage is a serious step," he said again and again. The words sounded less like hope than like a warning to himself.

He did not change his habits. He still wore his rubber shoes, carried his umbrella, and kept his face hidden behind dark glasses. He still worried about rules and possible trouble. Yet there was now another thought inside his case. Varenka, with her songs and laughter, had somehow entered that narrow world.

Ivan Ivanovitch, listening to Burkin's story, said that someone should have taken away Belikov's rubber shoes and umbrella at once. Burkin answered that this was impossible. Belikov could not be changed so simply. Even when people pushed him toward marriage, he carried his old fear with him.

He became thinner and paler. He seemed nervous and almost ill. He had to decide something, but deciding was exactly what he feared most. Marriage would bring another person into his life, and that meant warmth, noise, disorder, and risk. He wanted the safety of rules, but everyone around him was pushing him toward life.

Kovalenko, however, did not like Belikov at all. He called him a spy and a small-minded man. He could not understand why people respected such a frightened teacher. To Kovalenko, Belikov was not careful or wise. He was simply a man who made free people feel trapped.

Still, the town continued to move the plan forward. People invited Belikov and Varenka to the same evenings. They placed them near each other at the theatre. They spoke to them as if the marriage were almost settled. Belikov listened, looked worried, and repeated that marriage was serious.

Perhaps, if nothing had happened, he might have proposed in the end. The pressure of other people was strong, and he was used to obeying pressure. Varenka was friendly to him, and everyone said the match was proper. But Belikov was still Belikov. Even love, or something like love, could not free him from fear.

He stood at the edge of a new life and could not step forward. He could not

step back either, because the whole town was watching. Day after day, he carried this thought under his umbrella and inside his heavy coat. Marriage, like everything else in the open world, seemed to him both necessary and dangerous. And because it was dangerous, he felt sure that it might lead to something bad.

Part 3: The Bicycle and the Stairs

The marriage plan might have continued for a long time if nothing had disturbed it. But then a strange and cruel joke appeared in the town. Someone drew a picture of Belikov walking with Varenka. In the picture, he wore his rubber shoes, carried his umbrella, and held Varenka by the arm. Under the picture were words that made the whole thing look like a foolish love story.

Copies of the picture were sent everywhere. Teachers at the boys' school received it. Teachers at the girls' school received it. Officials and other important people received it too. Belikov also received a copy, and it hurt him deeply. He did not see it as a joke. To him, it was a terrible public shame.

The next day was the first of May, a Sunday. The teachers and students had agreed to meet at the school and then walk together to a wood outside the town. Belikov came too, but his face looked green and sick. His lips shook, and he seemed darker than a storm cloud. "What wicked people there are," he said in a low voice.

Burkin felt sorry for him. The picture had been unkind, and Belikov truly suffered from it. They walked together for a little while. Then, all at once, Kovalenko came riding along the road on a bicycle. Behind him came Varenka, also on a bicycle, red in the face, tired, cheerful, and laughing.

"We are going on ahead!" she called. "What lovely weather!" She and her brother rode past and soon disappeared. Belikov stopped as if he had been turned to stone. His face changed from green to white. He stared at Burkin and seemed unable to breathe.

"What does this mean?" he asked. "Tell me, please. Have my eyes deceived me? Is it proper for schoolteachers and ladies to ride bicycles?" Burkin answered

calmly that he saw nothing wrong with it. If they liked riding, let them ride and enjoy themselves. But this answer only shocked Belikov more.

"How can you say that?" Belikov cried. "If teachers ride bicycles, what will the students do next? They will walk on their heads. There is no official permission for this. So it cannot be allowed." He was so disturbed that he could not continue the walk. He turned back and went home.

The next day, Belikov looked ill. He kept moving his fingers and rubbing his hands together. His face showed that he had not slept well. For the first time in his life, he left school before his work was finished. He did not eat dinner. Toward evening, though the weather was warm, he put on heavy clothes and went to see the Kovalenkos.

Varenka was not at home. Kovalenko was there alone. He had just been sleeping after dinner and was in a bad mood. When Belikov came in, Kovalenko looked at him coldly. "Please sit down," he said, but his voice was not welcoming.

Belikov sat in silence for about ten minutes. Kovalenko waited, heavy and angry, saying nothing. At last Belikov began to speak. "I have come because I am troubled," he said. "Someone has drawn a shameful picture of me and another person. I want to tell you clearly that I had nothing to do with it. I have given no reason for such ridicule. I have always behaved like a gentleman."

Kovalenko did not answer. He sat with a dark face and waited. Belikov paused, then went on in the same sad, slow voice. "I also have something else to say. I have worked as a teacher for many years. You have only recently begun. So, as an older colleague, I think it is my duty to warn you. Riding a bicycle is not suitable for someone who teaches young people."

"Why not?" Kovalenko asked in his deep voice.

"Surely you understand," Belikov said. "If the teacher rides a bicycle, what can we expect from the students? They will do all kinds of strange things. Yesterday I was horrified when I saw your sister. A lady, a young woman, on a bicycle! It was terrible."

Kovalenko's face grew red. "What exactly do you want from me?" he asked.

"I only want to warn you," Belikov answered. "You are young, and you have

a future. You must be very careful. You wear bright shirts, you walk in the street with books in your hands, and now there is the bicycle too. The headmaster may hear of it. Then higher officials may hear of it. Would that be good?"

Kovalenko could no longer control himself. "It is no one's business if my sister and I ride bicycles," he said angrily. "And let anyone who interferes in my private life go to the devil." These words frightened Belikov. He turned pale and stood up.

"If you speak to me in that way, I cannot continue," Belikov said. "And I ask you not to speak like that about the authorities in my presence. We must respect our superiors." Kovalenko looked at him with open anger. To him, Belikov now seemed more hateful than ever, with his warnings, fears, and hidden threats.

"I have said nothing against the authorities," Kovalenko said. "Leave me alone. I am an honest man, and I do not want to talk with a man like you. I do not like people who carry stories." His words were rough, and his voice filled the room. Belikov drew back, shocked by such direct hatred.

"You may say what you like," Belikov answered, "but I must tell you that I will have to report this conversation to the headmaster. I must do so, because there may be a wrong understanding later. I must say what happened." At these words, Kovalenko lost all patience. The thought of being reported by this small frightened man was more than he could bear.

"Report it?" he shouted. "Go and report it!" Then he seized Belikov by the collar from behind and pushed him out of the room. Belikov, with his rubber shoes, his umbrella, and his careful little body, went rolling down the stairs. The stairs were high and steep, but he reached the bottom without breaking anything. Perhaps his heavy coat and rubber shoes saved him.

Just at that moment, Varenka came in with two ladies. They were at the foot of the stairs and saw Belikov fall down step after step. For one second, there was silence. Then Varenka looked at his strange figure, his pale face, and his rubber shoes, and she burst into loud laughter. Her laugh rang through the stairway.

"Ha, ha, ha!" she laughed, unable to stop herself. The ladies laughed too, though they were confused. Belikov slowly rose. He was not badly hurt in body,

but something worse had happened. Varenka had seen him fall, and she had laughed.

This was the worst thing that could have happened to him. He had feared reports, rules, shame, and public talk all his life. Now shame had truly come. It was not a formal punishment, and no official had spoken. It was only laughter. But for Belikov, that laughter was stronger than any punishment.

He went home without saying anything. His umbrella, his coat, and his rubber shoes were still with him, but they could not protect him now. The open world had touched him at last. It had touched him through a joke, a bicycle, a quarrel, a fall, and the free laugh of the woman he might have married.

Part 4: After Belikov

After the fall on the stairs, Belikov went home and lay down. He did not go to school again. He did not visit anyone, and he did not answer people as before. When someone came to see him, he turned his face to the wall. It seemed that the laughter on the stairs had closed the last door of his life.

A month later, he died. His death surprised no one, and yet everyone felt that something important had happened. Belikov had lived as if he wanted to be hidden forever. Now, in his coffin, he seemed almost satisfied. His face looked calm, mild, and even pleasant. It was as if he had at last been put into a case from which he would never have to come out.

Many people went to his funeral. The teachers, the headmaster, and other townspeople walked behind the coffin. Everyone behaved seriously, as people must at a funeral. But deep inside, many of them felt relief. They felt that a heavy hand had been lifted from the town.

When they came back from the cemetery, the day was quiet and grey. No one said openly that they were glad, but many people felt it. They thought that now they could breathe more freely. The man who had frightened them with his warnings and fears was gone. The closed umbrella over the town seemed to have been taken away.

But that feeling did not last long. Only a week passed, and life became the same as before. The town was still narrow, dull, and heavy. People were still afraid to speak freely. They still lied, still hid their thoughts, still feared trouble, and still lived as if the open air itself were dangerous. Belikov had died, but the spirit of Belikov had not died.

Burkin stopped for a moment in his story. The barn was quiet. Outside, the moon shone over the village, and the night air was cool. Ivan Ivanovitch sat near the door and listened with a dark face. He had heard the story of one strange man, but he was thinking of something larger.

“Yes,” Ivan Ivanovitch said at last. “Belikov was in a case. But are we not also in cases? We live in crowded towns, write useless papers, sit in offices, tell lies, and listen to lies. We spend our lives among foolish rules and empty talk. Is that not a case too?”

Burkin did not answer at once. Ivan Ivanovitch went on, becoming more troubled as he spoke. “We are with people all day, but we do not say what we really think. We eat, sleep, work, and pretend that everything is normal. We fear one another. We fear life. We build walls around ourselves and call those walls peace.”

The teacher sighed. He was tired and did not want a long argument in the middle of the night. “No, no more,” he said. “It is time to sleep.” He turned over on the hay and made himself comfortable. The story had ended, and the night seemed to close over it.

But Ivan Ivanovitch did not sleep for a long time. He lay near the door and looked out into the moonlight. The village was silent. Somewhere far away, a dog barked once and then stopped. The fields lay open under the sky, wide and free, but human life still seemed shut up and airless to him.

He thought of Belikov, and then of many other people. He thought of those who feared every fresh word, every strong feeling, every free act. He thought of those who made a case not only for themselves, but also for everyone around them. Such people did not always wear rubber shoes or carry umbrellas. Sometimes they looked ordinary, and that made them harder to see.

In the elder’s house, Mavra was probably asleep behind the stove. She had never seen the world beyond her village, and perhaps she did not want to see it. But was her life so different from the lives of educated people? Ivan Ivanovitch could not stop asking this question. A person could hide behind a stove, behind rules, behind work, behind fear, or behind polite words.

Burkin soon fell asleep. His breathing became slow and even in the hay. Ivan Ivanovitch still smoked his pipe and watched the pale light outside the barn. The world was large, but people made it small. The night was open, but the human heart often lived behind a locked door.

At last he lay down, but sleep did not come easily. The story had made the silence heavier. The moon, the barn, the sleeping village, and the wide fields seemed to ask the same question again and again. How could people live like this, closed inside fear, when the open sky was above them?

Gooseberries

Part 1: Rain and Shelter

The sky had been covered with rain clouds since early morning. The day was quiet and heavy, not hot, but dull in the way that makes people wait for rain. Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin had been walking for a long time. The fields seemed endless to them, and their legs were tired.

Far ahead, they could see the windmills of the village of Mironositskoe. On the right, low hills ran away into the distance. They knew that beyond those hills there was a river, with meadows, willows, and farmhouses. If the weather had been clear, they might even have seen the town far away.

Now the whole country seemed soft and dreaming under the grey sky. The air was still. The fields, the hills, and the distant village looked quiet and beautiful. Both men felt love for that wide land, and both thought how large and good the country was.

“Last time we were in Prokofy’s barn,” Burkin said, “you were going to tell me a story.”

“Yes,” Ivan Ivanovitch answered. “I meant to tell you about my brother.”

Ivan Ivanovitch sighed deeply and lit his pipe. He was just about to begin when the rain started. At first it was only a little rain. Then, after a few minutes, it came down heavily and covered the whole sky. It was impossible to know when it would stop.

The two men stood in the open and did not know what to do. Their dogs, already wet, stood near them with their tails down and looked at them sadly. The rain fell harder and harder. The road, the grass, and their clothes quickly became wet. The pleasant feeling they had felt toward the countryside began to disappear.

“We must find shelter somewhere,” Burkin said. “Let us go to Alehin’s place. It is near here.”

“Come on,” said Ivan Ivanovitch.

They turned away from the open fields and walked through cut grass.

Sometimes they went straight forward, and sometimes they turned to the right. Soon they came out onto a road. Through the rain they saw poplar trees, then a garden, then the red roofs of barns. A river shone before them, and beyond it they saw a wide stretch of water, a windmill, and a white bathhouse.

This was Sofino, where Alehin lived. The watermill was working, and its sound covered the sound of the rain. The dam shook under the moving water. Wet horses stood near carts with their heads hanging down, and men walked about with sacks over their shoulders. Everything was damp, muddy, and uncomfortable.

Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin were wet all over. Mud stuck heavily to their boots. When they crossed the dam and went up toward the barns, they did not speak. They felt cold, dirty, and irritated, as people often do when they are wet and tired. It was as if each man were somehow angry with the other.

In one barn, a machine was working. The door stood open, and clouds of dust came out. Alehin himself stood in the doorway. He was about forty, tall and broad, with long hair. He looked more like a professor or an artist than a landowner.

His clothes were dirty from work. He wore a white shirt that badly needed washing, and a rope around his waist instead of a belt. His boots were covered with mud and straw. Dust blackened his nose and eyes. But when he recognized Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin, his face became bright with pleasure.

“Go into the house, gentlemen,” he said, smiling. “I will come very soon.”

The house was large and had two floors. Alehin usually lived downstairs, in the old rooms where estate workers had once lived. Those rooms had low arched ceilings and small windows. They smelled of rye bread, cheap vodka, and horse harness. He went upstairs to the better rooms only when guests came.

A young maid met Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin inside the house. She was so beautiful that both men stopped and looked at each other in surprise. Her name was Pelagea. She looked gentle and clean, and she seemed out of place in the plain rooms below. Soon Alehin came in after them and was clearly delighted to have visitors.

“You cannot imagine how glad I am to see you, my friends,” he said. “This is a wonderful surprise.” Then he turned to Pelagea and told her to bring the guests

something dry to wear. He said he would change too, but first he had to wash. He laughed and said that he almost thought he had not washed since spring.

He invited his guests to the bathhouse. Pelagea brought towels and soap, and the three men went out again through the rain. The bathhouse had been built by Alehin's father. Alehin seemed proud of it, though he said he never had time to use it. He sat down and began to soap his long hair and neck, and the water around him turned brown.

Ivan Ivanovitch looked at him with meaning and said nothing for a moment. Alehin became embarrassed and soaped himself again. This time the water around him turned almost dark blue. Burkin washed quietly, but Ivan Ivanovitch suddenly went outside and jumped into the pond with a loud splash.

He swam in the rain, throwing his arms wide. The water moved in large circles around him, and white flowers on the pond rose and fell. He swam to the middle, dived, came up in another place, and dived again. "Oh, my goodness!" he kept saying with real pleasure. "Oh, my goodness!"

He swam toward the mill and spoke to the peasants there. Then he came back and floated on his back in the middle of the pond, with his face turned up to the rain. Burkin and Alehin had already dressed and were ready to go. Still Ivan Ivanovitch kept swimming and diving. At last Burkin shouted to him that it was enough.

They went back to the house. Upstairs, the lamps were lit, and the room felt warm after the rain and bath. The guests were given dry clothes. Soon they were clean, comfortable, and ready for tea or supper. Outside, the rain still beat against the windows.

The large upper rooms seemed strange after the mud and cold water outside. There were good chairs, pictures, and the quiet order of a house used for guests. Ivan Ivanovitch, Burkin, and Alehin sat together, and the wet, grey world seemed far away for a little while. But Ivan Ivanovitch had not forgotten the story he meant to tell.

The rain made the windows dark. The smell of clean clothes, tea, and warm rooms filled the air. The men had escaped the fields, the mud, and the cold pond.

Now they could sit, rest, and speak. It was in this quiet shelter that Ivan Ivanovitch would begin the story of his brother.

Part 2: Nikolay's Dream

After they had washed and changed, the three men sat in the large room upstairs. Pelagea brought tea, jam, and other things to eat. The rain still beat against the windows, and outside everything was dark and wet. Alehin sat in a chair and listened with the pleasure of a man who rarely had visitors. Ivan Ivanovitch filled his pipe and began to speak about his brother.

"There were two of us," he said. "My brother Nikolay and I were sons of a small official. But our father had once been an officer, and when he died, he left us a title of nobility and nothing more. He also left debts. Because of those debts, our small estate was sold."

Ivan Ivanovitch said that he and his brother had spent their childhood in the country. They ran in the fields, watched horses, went fishing, and knew the smell of grass and earth. Because of that childhood, Nikolay could never love town life. When he grew up, he became a clerk in a government office, but his heart was always far away, in some imagined village.

Nikolay sat at his desk year after year and copied papers. The room was dull, the work was dull, and his life was narrow. But in his mind he saw another life. He saw a small estate, fields, a garden, a pond, ducks on the water, and trees near the house. More than anything, he dreamed of having gooseberry bushes.

"Country life has its poetry," Ivan Ivanovitch said. "But my brother did not think of the real country. He did not think of mud, work, sickness, bad roads, or lonely winters. He thought only of warm days, tea on the grass, soup made from his own vegetables, and gooseberries from his own garden. He wanted to be a landowner, even a very small one."

Nikolay read advertisements about estates for sale. He studied them the way another man might read love letters. If he saw the words "garden," "river," "mill," or "pond," he became excited. He drew plans in his notebook. In every plan there

was a house, a kitchen garden, a flower garden, a fish pond, and gooseberries.

He spoke of this dream all the time. “A man must have a piece of land,” he said. “Without land, he is not truly free.” He said this to Ivan Ivanovitch so often that Ivan became tired of hearing it. To Ivan, the dream seemed small and selfish. But to Nikolay, it was the whole meaning of life.

To get his estate, Nikolay began to save money. He lived badly and spent almost nothing. He ate little, dressed poorly, and looked old before his time. He put every coin aside for the future. He was not living in the present at all; he was only waiting for the day when he could buy his piece of land.

His saving became hard and ugly. He did not simply deny himself small pleasures. He became mean. He counted every kopeck and became afraid of spending money even when spending was necessary. His body grew thin, and his face became dry and closed. But still he dreamed of gooseberries.

Later, when he was already past forty, he married. He did not marry for love. He married an older widow who had money. She was a plain, gentle woman, and she had worked hard in life. She trusted him. But Nikolay wanted her money for his dream, and after the marriage he put her money into the bank in his own name.

Before the marriage, she had been used to better food and a more comfortable life. With Nikolay, everything changed. He kept her on poor food and saved every possible coin. She suffered quietly. Her health grew worse. Ivan Ivanovitch believed that his brother had not killed her with his hands, but had worn her out with his cold saving.

After three years, she died. Nikolay did not seem to understand his guilt. Perhaps he told himself that he had acted wisely and carefully. Perhaps he did not think about her much at all. His dream stood before him like a bright picture, and everything else became small beside it.

At last he had enough money. He bought an estate, though it was not the kind he had imagined. It had no river, no garden, no ducks, and no beautiful view. There were instead a house, some fields, a few poor buildings, and two factories nearby. One factory made bricks, and the other made something else that smelled bad. The water near the place was dark from factory waste.

But Nikolay was happy. He did not see the ugliness. He bought twenty gooseberry bushes and planted them. Then he settled down and began his new life as a landowner. He changed quickly. His old narrow dream had become real, and because it was real, he thought it was wonderful.

Some years later, Ivan Ivanovitch went to visit him. When he arrived, the estate looked poor and unpleasant. The grass was rough, the yard was untidy, and a fat red dog lay near the door. The dog was too lazy even to bark. A fat cook came out, also too lazy to speak clearly. Everything about the place seemed heavy and sleepy.

Nikolay himself had changed most of all. He had become fat and old. His cheeks, nose, and lips were thick. He looked like a pig, Ivan thought bitterly. Yet his face showed complete satisfaction. He was no longer a poor clerk dreaming of land. He was Nikolay Ivanovitch, a landowner, and he liked that more than anything.

He spoke to Ivan about his land, his peasants, and local matters. He used important words and gave advice as if he were a wise and experienced man. He complained about the people around him, but in the voice of a master. He had begun to believe that he belonged to a higher world than the peasants. The small estate had made him proud.

Ivan felt sad and angry as he listened. His brother had not become free. He had only entered another little prison, a prison made of comfort, pride, and self-satisfaction. Nikolay talked about good living and the joys of country life, but Ivan saw laziness, dirt, and a soul that had grown smaller. Still, Nikolay was happy, and that made the scene harder to bear.

In the evening, they sat at tea. The cook brought a plate of gooseberries, the first fruit from Nikolay's own bushes. Nikolay looked at them with deep feeling. His eyes became wet. For many years, he had dreamed of this moment. Now the dream was lying before him on a plate.

He took one gooseberry, put it in his mouth, and looked at Ivan with the face of a child. "How good they are!" he said. He ate another, then another. "How good they are!" he repeated. Ivan tasted one too. It was hard and sour. But Nikolay did not notice. To him, those sour gooseberries were the taste of happiness.

Ivan Ivanovitch looked at his brother and could not sleep that night. He heard Nikolay get up again and again, go to the table, and take another gooseberry. Each time, he seemed to enjoy it with quiet joy. In the darkness, Ivan thought of this happy man, of the dead wife, of the poor peasants, of the dirty estate, and of the sour fruit. He felt that this happiness had something terrible inside it.

Part 3: A Happy Man Must Be Reminded

Ivan Ivanovitch paused after speaking about the gooseberries. The rain still beat softly against the windows, and the large room had grown darker. Burkin and Alehin listened, but neither man spoke. The story of Nikolay, his estate, and his sour fruit seemed simple on the surface. Yet Ivan's face showed that, for him, it was not simple at all.

"That night," Ivan went on, "I understood something terrible. There are so many satisfied, happy people in the world. They eat, sleep, talk, and feel that everything is good enough. Around them there is poverty, sickness, ignorance, and sorrow. But inside their warm rooms, all is quiet. No one cries out loudly enough to wake them."

He stood up and began to walk about the room. His voice became more excited. "We see people suffer, but we grow used to it. We pass by poor houses, hungry faces, and unhappy lives. Then we go home, drink tea, and say that life is not so bad. This calm happiness is a heavy thing. It presses on the soul."

Ivan said that every happy person should have someone standing behind his door with a small hammer. Whenever that person became too calm and too pleased with himself, the hammer should knock. The sound should remind him that unhappy people exist. It should remind him that life may strike him too. No one has the right to forget suffering simply because his own table is full.

"Sooner or later, trouble comes to everyone," Ivan said. "Sickness comes. Poverty comes. Loss comes. Death comes. But when our trouble comes, no one may see or hear us. Others will be drinking tea, just as we once did. That is why people must not sleep through life. They must not shut themselves inside their

own small happiness."

Alehin sat very still. Burkin looked toward the dark windows. Ivan's words were not easy to answer. They were not a polite story for a rainy evening. They came from a man who was angry with himself, with his brother, and with the quiet comfort of the world.

"After I left my brother's house," Ivan said, "I could not bear town life in the same way. Its peace frightened me. When I saw a happy family sitting at a table and drinking tea, I felt pain. I am old now, and I am not fit for a great fight. I cannot even hate strongly. I can only feel sorrow and anger inside myself. At night my head burns with thoughts, and I cannot sleep."

He walked faster and repeated, "If only I were young. If only I were young." Then he suddenly went to Alehin and took his hands. His voice became almost begging. "Pavel Konstantinovitch," he said, "do not become calm and satisfied. Do not let life put you to sleep. While you are young and strong, do not become tired of doing good."

Ivan held Alehin's hands and looked at him with a sad smile. "There is no true happiness," he said. "There should not be happiness if it makes us blind. If life has a meaning, it is not our own comfort. It must be something greater, something more reasonable. Do good. That is what I ask you."

He stopped speaking. The three men sat in armchairs at different ends of the drawing room. The room was quiet, and the rain continued outside. On the walls, old portraits of generals and ladies looked down from their gold frames. In the half-darkness, their faces seemed almost alive.

Ivan's story had not truly satisfied Burkin or Alehin. It had troubled them, but it had not given them what they wanted. For some reason, in that elegant room, they wished to hear about graceful people, about women, about love, or about something beautiful. The story of a poor clerk who ate gooseberries felt heavy and grey.

The room itself seemed to pull their thoughts away from Ivan's anger. The covered chandeliers, the soft chairs, the carpet, and the old portraits all spoke of another life. People had once walked here, drunk tea here, and spoken in fine

voices. Pelagea moved quietly in and out of the room, beautiful and silent. Her presence seemed better to the men than any moral lesson.

Alehin was very sleepy. He had risen before three in the morning to look after his work, and now his eyes were closing. Still, he did not want to go away first. His visitors were speaking of things that had nothing to do with grain, hay, tar, or farm work. He liked that. It was rare for him, and he wanted them to go on.

But Burkin stood up at last. “It is time for bed,” he said. “Allow me to say good night.” Alehin said good night and went downstairs to his own rooms. The visitors stayed upstairs, where a large room had been prepared for them.

The room had two old wooden beds with carved decorations. In one corner there was an ivory cross. The beds were wide and cool, and the clean linen smelled pleasant. Pelagea had made them carefully. After the rain, the mud, the bath, and the long talk, the room seemed peaceful.

Ivan Ivanovitch undressed in silence and got into bed. “Lord, forgive us sinners,” he said, and pulled the cover over his head. There was a smell of pipe smoke from his tobacco lying on the table. Outside, the rain struck the windows gently through the night.

Burkin lay down too. For a while, neither man spoke. Ivan’s story remained in the room like a dark thought. The sour gooseberries, Nikolay’s happy face, the quiet estate, and the knocking hammer behind the door all seemed to stay in the air. Burkin was tired, but he could not forget them at once.

At last Burkin slept. Ivan Ivanovitch did not sleep. He sighed, turned from side to side, and listened to the rain. Then he got up and went outside again. He sat in the doorway, lit his pipe, and looked into the wet darkness.

The house was quiet behind him. The fields, the river, and the garden were hidden in rain. Somewhere in that darkness there were warm rooms and sleeping people. Somewhere there were people who had no warmth, no rest, and no one to hear them. Ivan sat alone and smoked, while the night kept falling softly around him.

About Love

Part 1: A Talk About Love

The next day, the rain was still near them in the air. At lunch, the table was full of good food. There were pies, crayfish, and meat cutlets, and after the cold fields of the day before, the warm room felt pleasant. Ivan Ivanovitch, Burkin, and Alehin sat together and ate slowly. For a time, nothing serious was said.

While they were eating, the cook came in to ask what they wanted for dinner. His name was Nikanor. He was of middle height, with a swollen face and small eyes. He had no beard, and his upper lip looked strange, as if his moustache had not been shaved but pulled out. He did not look gentle or handsome.

After he left, Alehin told his guests that Pelagea, the beautiful maid, was in love with Nikanor. This surprised them, because Pelagea was kind, clean, and lovely, while Nikanor was rough and often drunk. He also had a violent temper. When he drank too much, he shouted at her and sometimes beat her.

Pelagea did not want to marry him. She was ready to live with him, but she did not want to become his wife. Nikanor, however, was very religious in his own hard way. He said that living together without marriage was a sin. So he would accept nothing except marriage, though he did not treat her with tenderness.

When Nikanor was drunk, Pelagea hid upstairs and cried. At such times, Alehin and the servants stayed inside the house, ready to protect her if they had to. This sad and ugly love stood very near them, not in a book, but in the same house. Perhaps that was why their talk naturally turned to love.

“How does love begin?” Alehin said. “Why does Pelagea love Nikanor, when he is not like her in body or soul? Why does she not love someone kinder and more suitable? And how important is a person’s own happiness in love? We can ask all these questions, but we do not really know the answers.”

He spoke quietly, without trying to sound wise. He said that people had said many things about love, but only one thing seemed certain. Love was a great mystery. Everything else that people said was not a final answer. It was only

another question.

“One explanation may fit one love story,” he said, “but it will not fit ten others. That is why I think each case must be looked at separately. We should not speak of love as if one rule explains all people. Doctors look at each patient in his own condition. Perhaps love should be understood in the same way.”

“That is perfectly true,” Burkin said.

Alehin went on. He said educated Russians liked questions that could not be answered. They liked to put large thoughts around love. They decorated it with poetry, flowers, songs, and serious words. But often, when people were truly in love, their thoughts were not beautiful or clear at all.

He remembered a woman he had known when he was a student in Moscow. She was charming, and she shared his life for a time. Yet whenever he held her in his arms, she was thinking about money for the house and the price of meat. Love and daily life were mixed together in a very ordinary way. There were roses in the words people used, but there were also bills, food, rooms, and money.

“When we love,” Alehin said, “we ask ourselves too many questions. Is this honest or not? Is it wise or foolish? Where will it lead? Will it bring happiness or pain? I do not know whether these questions are good or bad. I only know that they get in the way. They make love heavy, difficult, and tiring.”

As he spoke, it seemed to Burkin and Ivan Ivanovitch that Alehin wanted to tell a story. There was something in his voice that was not only general talk. He was not simply discussing Pelagea and Nikanor. He was moving slowly toward something hidden in his own life.

People who live alone often carry stories inside them. They may work, eat, and speak of ordinary things for many years. But somewhere in the heart there is a memory that asks to be told. In towns, lonely men sometimes go to restaurants or baths only so they can talk to someone. In the country, such men tell their stories to guests.

Outside the windows, the sky was grey. The trees were wet from the rain, and drops still fell from the leaves. The roads were muddy, and there was nowhere pleasant to go. The weather itself seemed to hold the men in the house. It was the

right kind of day for sitting still and listening.

The room was quiet after Alehin stopped speaking. The remains of lunch were still on the table. Somewhere below or near the kitchen, servants moved softly, and the house gave small sounds. Pelagea, whose unhappy love had started the talk, passed in and out with her calm, beautiful face. Her silence made the subject feel even more real.

Burkin waited. Ivan Ivanovitch also waited, though he said nothing. They had heard enough to understand that Alehin was not speaking only as a landowner with guests at lunch. He had lived alone on this estate for a long time. Such a life could make a man silent on the outside and full of words inside.

Alehin looked tired, but now he was more awake than he had been the night before. Perhaps the talk of love had touched something that farm work and daily business usually covered. He sat at the table, looked out at the wet trees for a moment, and then turned back to his guests. It was clear that the real story was about to begin.

“I have lived here at Sofino for a long time,” he said at last. “I came here after I left the university.” Then he paused, as if choosing where to start. The rain, the quiet room, and the patient faces of his guests seemed to give him permission. So he began to tell them about his own life and the love that had once entered it.

Part 2: The House of the Luganovitches

Alehin said that he had lived at Sofino for many years. He came there after he left the university. By education and taste, he was not made for hard farm work. He liked study and quiet thought. But his father had left debts on the estate, and much of that debt had come from paying for Alehin’s education.

Because of this, Alehin decided not to leave the estate. He felt that he had no right to go away and live a comfortable educated life while the land remained in debt. So he stayed and worked. He ploughed, sowed, cut hay, and did many things with his own hands. His body ached, and sometimes he was so tired that he almost slept while walking.

At first, he tried to keep some of his old habits. He lived upstairs in the better rooms and ordered coffee and drinks after meals. At night he tried to read serious journals, as he had done before. But farm life did not leave much room for such habits. Work took all his time and strength.

Little by little, he moved downstairs and began to eat in the servants' kitchen. His fine rooms were used less and less. The life he had imagined for himself disappeared. What remained was mud, work, debts, servants, peasants, fields, and the endless business of keeping the estate alive.

In the first years, he was chosen as an honorary justice of the peace. This meant that he sometimes had to go to town for meetings and court work. He was glad of this. After weeks or months in the country, it was a pleasure to put on clean clothes, sit in a good chair, and speak with educated people.

In town, he was welcomed warmly. He made friends easily because he was lonely and hungry for conversation. One of the people he met was Luganovitch, a vice-president of the court. Luganovitch was about forty, kind, simple, and good-natured. He had the calm manner of a man who believed that legal order explained everything.

Alehin first came to know him during a court case. Four Jewish men had been charged with setting a fire, and Alehin felt that they were probably innocent. He became excited at dinner and spoke strongly about the case. He did not remember exactly what he said, but he remembered that Luganovitch's wife, Anna Alexyevna, kept looking at her husband and saying, "Dmitry, how can this be?"

Luganovitch answered softly and simply. He said that if a man had been brought before a court, then there must be reason for it. He thought that one should not question a sentence in private talk at dinner. Doubt belonged in legal papers, not in friendly conversation. To Alehin, this seemed too simple, but it was not unkind.

That dinner was the first time Alehin met Anna Alexyevna. She was young, fair-haired, and graceful. Her face was gentle, and her eyes were soft and full of feeling. She was not only beautiful; she seemed warm, intelligent, and alive. Alehin noticed small things at once, such as the way she and her husband

understood each other without many words.

After dinner, the husband and wife made coffee together. They moved around the room with quiet ease, as people do when they have long been happy in the same house. Later they played a duet on the piano. The fire was burning, evening came, and the rooms felt peaceful. Alehin went home with the image of that house in his heart.

That spring passed, and then the summer passed. Alehin stayed at Sofino the whole time and worked without a break. He was busy with the fields and had little time to think about the town. Yet the memory of Anna Alexyevna did not leave him. He did not think of her in clear words, but it was as if a light shadow rested on his heart.

In late autumn, there was a theatre performance in town for charity. Alehin went and was invited into the governor's box during the break. There he saw Anna Alexyevna again, sitting beside the governor's wife. At once he felt the same strong feeling. Her beauty, her kind eyes, and the sense that she was somehow near to him all returned.

They sat side by side and then went into the foyer. She looked at him carefully and said, "You have grown thinner. Have you been ill?" He told her that he had rheumatism in his shoulder and could not sleep well in rainy weather. She said he looked sad and older. She remembered that in the spring he had seemed younger, stronger, and full of life.

She also said that she had thought of him during the summer. When she was getting ready for the theatre that day, she had thought that she might see him. Then she laughed. Her words were simple, but for Alehin they were not small. They told him that he had not been alone in remembering.

The next day he had lunch at the Luganovitches' house. After lunch, they drove to their summer villa to make arrangements for winter, and Alehin went with them. He returned to town with them later and drank tea in their quiet home. Anna Alexyevna went from time to time to see if her little daughter was asleep. This small family life seemed very tender to him.

From that time on, whenever Alehin went to town, he visited the

Luganovitches. He came without warning, as if he belonged to the family. The servants smiled when they saw him. The children cried that Uncle Pavel Konstantinovitch had come and climbed around his neck. Everyone was happy to see him, and everyone believed that he was happy too.

But his heart was not peaceful. He loved Anna Alexyevna. He knew it, though he did not say it. He looked at her in the bright rooms, watched her with her children, heard her voice, and felt that his life at Sofino was poor and lonely beside this warmth. Yet she was married, and her husband was a good man who trusted him.

Alehin often asked himself what he could give her if he spoke. He did not have a beautiful or important life to offer. He was not a famous scholar, artist, or hero. He was a tired landowner with debts, mud, work, and worry. If he took her from one ordinary life, he might only bring her into another ordinary life, perhaps an even harder one.

He thought that Anna Alexyevna must be asking herself the same things. She had a husband, children, and a mother who loved her husband like a son. If she followed her feelings, she would have to lie, or she would have to tell the truth. Either choice would be painful and frightening. She also feared that her love might not bring Alehin happiness.

So they were silent. Years passed, and Anna Alexyevna had two children. Alehin still came to the house and was welcomed like a noble friend. The children loved him, and the grown-ups trusted him. Everyone thought his presence made the house brighter and better. No one seemed to understand what was happening inside him.

He and Anna Alexyevna often went to the theatre together. They walked there side by side and sat next to each other. Their shoulders sometimes touched. He took the opera glasses from her hand without a word, and in that small movement he felt that she was near him, that she belonged to him, and that they could not live without each other.

But after the theatre, they always said good-bye and parted like ordinary acquaintances. They did not speak the truth. In town, people may have talked

about them, but there was nothing clear for gossip to hold. Their love lived in silence, in small looks, in shared walks, and in words left unsaid.

In the later years, Anna Alexyevna began to go away more often to visit her mother or sister. She became low in spirit and felt that her life had been spoiled and left unfinished. Sometimes she did not want to see even her husband or children. Doctors treated her for nervous illness, but no medicine could answer what was wrong in her heart.

Still they remained silent. Around other people, she sometimes showed irritation toward Alehin. Whatever he said, she disagreed. If he argued with someone, she took the other person's side. If he dropped something, she spoke coldly and almost sharply. These small acts hurt him, but he understood that they came from pain, not from hatred.

Their love had become a secret wound. It was not strong enough to break the life around them, or perhaps they were not brave enough to let it do so. Yet it was too strong to disappear. They went on living as before, each day proper and calm on the outside, while inside them something waited, suffered, and grew tired.

Part 3: The Last Moment

The time came when Anna Alexyevna had to leave the town. Her husband had been given a new position in a western province, and the family was preparing to move. The furniture was packed, the rooms became empty, and the ordinary sounds of the house changed. Everyone was busy with boxes, letters, and last visits. Alehin went to the house as before, but now every visit felt like a farewell.

Anna Alexyevna was going first to the Crimea, because the doctors had advised her to rest there. After that, she would join her husband in his new town. The day of her journey came, and many friends went to the station to say good-bye. The platform was noisy with voices, bags, smoke, and the sound of the train. Alehin stood among the others, feeling that something final and terrible was close to him.

Anna Alexyevna said good-bye to her friends and entered the train. The people

on the platform gave her flowers and small gifts. Her face was pale, and she looked tired, but she tried to smile. Alehin helped carry one of her baskets into the carriage. Then he noticed that one small parcel had been left behind, so he took it and went into her compartment.

They were alone for a moment. Outside the window, people were moving and speaking, but inside the compartment the air seemed still. Anna Alexyevna sat near the window, and Alehin stood before her with the parcel in his hand. All the years of silence, visits, theatre evenings, small looks, and hidden pain seemed to gather in that small space.

Suddenly he understood that they could not continue pretending. It was too late to save their lives from pain, but it was also too late to keep lying to themselves. He looked at her, and she looked at him. In that moment, all their careful thoughts about duty, family, happiness, and right conduct seemed weak and unnecessary.

Alehin sat down beside her and began to speak. He told her that he loved her. He said the words that had been hidden for years. Anna Alexyevna began to cry, and he took her in his arms. He kissed her face, her shoulders, and her hands. For the first time, they were not only polite friends, but two people who had loved each other deeply and silently for a long time.

They both understood how unhappy they had been. They also understood that their love was not a small mistake or a passing feeling. It was something real and large, something that should have been stronger than fear. All their careful reasons now seemed poor. They had asked too many questions and had lost the living truth before them.

Alehin thought that when a person loves, one must begin from something higher than ordinary ideas of happiness or unhappiness, sin or virtue. One must not make love small by judging it only with rules. He did not know how to say this clearly, but he felt it strongly. Love was too deep to be measured by the usual questions people asked.

Yet this understanding came only at the moment of parting. The train would soon move. Anna Alexyevna was leaving, and he was not going with her. Their

confession did not open a new life; it only showed them the life they had failed to take. This made their words and kisses more painful.

The bell rang. Voices outside became louder. Someone passed the compartment door. Anna Alexyevna tried to stop crying, but tears kept coming. Alehin held her hands and looked at her as if he wanted to remember her forever. Then he knew that he had to leave.

He stepped out of the train. A moment later, it began to move. Anna Alexyevna stood at the window, pale and weeping. Alehin walked beside the carriage for a few steps. Then the train moved faster, and he stopped. He watched it go until it was far away.

After that, he returned to Sofino and to his work. But something had ended in him. He continued to live, manage the estate, meet people, and do what each day required. Yet the memory of Anna Alexyevna stayed with him like a light that had gone out but still hurt the eyes. He had loved her, and he had understood it fully only when he lost her.

When Alehin finished his story, the rain had stopped. The sun came out, and the garden looked fresh and bright after the long wet weather. Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin went out onto the balcony. From there they could see the wet trees, the river, the mill, and the open fields beyond. Everything shone softly in the clean air.

They stood for a while without speaking. Alehin's story had made them sad. They looked at the land around them and thought how beautiful it was. At the same time, they thought how many lives passed in silence, fear, and missed happiness. Beauty did not answer the pain, but it made the pain feel larger and more serious.

Burkin and Ivan Ivanovitch liked Alehin and felt sorry for him. They had seen his tired face, his dirty working clothes, and his life tied to the estate. Now they had also seen something hidden in him. He was not only a landowner who worked from morning to night. He was a man who had loved deeply and had lost the chance to be happy.

The guests looked again at the bright garden and the fields washed by rain.

The world seemed wide and peaceful. But inside that peace there was the sadness of things not said soon enough. The story was over, yet its silence remained with them.

The Black Monk

Part 1: Kovrin Comes to the Garden

Andrey Vassilitch Kovrin was a young scholar with a tired mind and weak nerves. He had worked too much, thought too much, and slept too little. He did not call a doctor in any formal way, but once, while drinking wine with a friend who was a doctor, he spoke of his condition. The doctor advised him to spend spring and summer in the country, where the air was fresh and life was quieter.

Just then, a long letter came from Tanya Pesotsky. She asked him to come and stay with her and her father at Borissovka. This was a good chance, and Kovrin decided that he truly needed rest. First he went to his own small place, Kovrinka, and spent three weeks alone. Then, when the roads were good enough, he took a carriage and drove to Borissovka.

The journey was pleasant. It was May, and the road was soft under the wheels. The carriage had good springs, so the movement was smooth and easy. Kovrin sat back and enjoyed the country air. The distance was not very great, only a little more than fifty miles, but it felt like a movement from one life into another.

Yegor Semyonitch Pesotsky, Tanya's father, had once been Kovrin's guardian and had helped bring him up. He was also famous all over Russia as a gardener. His house was large, with columns and stone lions near the entrance, though the outside was old and the plaster was falling away in places. A footman stood at the door, dressed in formal clothes. The house had the proud look of an old estate that had seen better days.

Behind and around the house lay a great park and garden. The old park was dark and serious, with paths, old trees, and a steep bank above the river. Pine trees grew there with roots showing like rough animal feet. Below, the water shone coldly, and birds flew up with sad cries. In that part of the estate, a person felt that he should sit down and write a sad poem.

But near the house, the mood was different. The yard, orchard, flower beds, and nurseries were full of life. Pesotsky's garden was huge and rich, and Kovrin

had never seen so many flowers anywhere else. There were roses, lilies, camellias, tulips of many colours, and many other plants. It was still only early spring, and the greatest beauty was still hidden in the hot-houses, but even the early flowers were enough to make the garden seem like a bright world of colour.

The decorative parts of the garden had seemed like fairyland to Kovrin when he was a child. Here nature had been trained into strange shapes. Fruit trees grew flat against supports. Other trees were cut into balls, umbrellas, arches, and even numbers. Some gooseberry and currant bushes looked almost like little palm trees, and a visitor had to look carefully to know what they were.

The most cheerful thing, however, was the constant movement of workers. From morning to evening, people with wheelbarrows, spades, and watering cans moved along the paths and around the trees. They were everywhere, like ants. The place did not feel sleepy or still. Even in bad weather, the garden seemed to breathe, work, and live.

Kovrin arrived at about ten o'clock in the evening. He found Tanya and her father in great anxiety. The sky was clear and full of stars, and the thermometer showed that there might be frost before morning. This was dangerous for the garden. To make matters worse, the gardener had gone into town, so they could not depend on him.

At supper, they talked of nothing but the frost. Yegor Semyonitch was deeply worried, and Tanya was worried too. It was decided that she should not go to bed. Between midnight and one o'clock, she would go through the garden and see that everything was being done properly. Her father would get up at three, or even earlier, to look after the danger himself.

Kovrin sat with Tanya all evening. After midnight, he went with her into the garden. It was cold, and a strong smell of smoke already filled the air. In the large commercial orchard, fires made from straw, dung, and other waste were burning slowly. Thick black smoke crept low over the ground and curled around the trees, protecting the flowers and future fruit from frost.

The orchard was planted in straight rows, like a chessboard. The trees were almost the same size, with similar trunks and tops, so in the smoke they looked

like rows of soldiers. Labourers moved among them like dark shadows. Only some cherries, plums, and apples were in flower, but all of them had to be saved. Near the nurseries, the air was clearer, and Kovrin could breathe more easily.

"When I was a child, I always sneezed from this smoke," Kovrin said. "But even now I do not understand how smoke can keep away frost."

"Smoke is like clouds when there are no clouds," Tanya answered.

"And why are clouds needed?" he asked.

"When the sky is covered with clouds, there is no frost," she said.

Kovrin laughed and took her arm. Tanya's serious face was cold from the night air. Her eyebrows were dark and fine, and her coat collar was turned up so high that it made her head hard to move. Her dress was lifted a little because of the wet grass. Looking at her, Kovrin suddenly felt how much she had grown.

"Good heavens," he said. "You are grown up now. When I last came here, five years ago, you were still a child. You were thin and long-legged, with your hair hanging over your shoulders. I used to tease you and call you a heron. How quickly time passes."

Tanya sighed and said that five years was a long time. She asked him honestly whether he felt strange with them now. He had his own important life, she said, and he had become someone. It was natural for people to grow apart. But still she wanted him to think of her and her father as his own people, because they had a right to that.

Kovrin promised that he did. Tanya spoke of how much her father loved him and admired him. She said that Yegor Semyonitch was proud of Kovrin's success and liked to think that he had helped make him what he was. Tanya did not try to take that comfort from him. She said that if the thought made her father happy, he should keep it.

Dawn was beginning to appear. The smoke and the tops of the trees became clearer in the pale air. Tanya said it was time to sleep, and she was cold. She thanked Kovrin for coming. Their life, she said, was only the garden, always the garden, with apples, pears, grafted trees, and endless work. Sometimes she longed for something different, and when Kovrin came, the whole house seemed brighter.

By the time they returned, Yegor Semyonitch had already risen. Kovrin did not feel sleepy, so he talked with the old man and went into the garden with him. Yegor Semyonitch was large, broad-shouldered, and heavy, and he suffered from asthma. Yet he walked so fast that Kovrin had difficulty keeping up. His whole face showed anxious energy, as if one lost minute could ruin everything.

The old man spoke of frost, soil, and air with great seriousness. He asked questions that Kovrin could not answer, then laughed and said no one could know everything. He asked whether Kovrin still worked mainly in philosophy. Kovrin said that he lectured in psychology and studied philosophy in general. Yegor Semyonitch looked at him with real delight and said, “God bless you, my boy. I am very happy about you.”

Suddenly the old man heard something and ran away with a terrible face. A moment later Kovrin heard him shouting from behind the trees. Someone had tied a horse to an apple tree. To Yegor Semyonitch, this was almost a crime. He cried out that everything was ruined, that the orchard was being destroyed, and that careless people had spoiled all his work.

When he came back, he still looked shaken and wounded. To him, the garden was not only a business. It was his life, his pride, and his child. Every tree mattered to him. Kovrin watched him and understood that in this house, the garden ruled over everyone.

In the country, however, Kovrin did not truly rest. He lived almost as nervously as he had lived in town. He read and wrote a great deal, studied Italian, and when he walked outside, he thought with pleasure of returning to his work. He slept very little. If he dozed for half an hour in the day, he often stayed awake all night and still felt strangely bright the next morning.

He talked much, drank wine, and smoked expensive cigars. Almost every day, young ladies from nearby houses came to the Pesotskys’. They sang and played the piano with Tanya, and sometimes a young neighbour brought his violin. Kovrin listened eagerly to the music. It tired him deeply, and his eyes often closed while his head fell to one side.

One evening after tea, he sat on the balcony with a book. In the drawing room,

Tanya, another young lady, and the violinist were practising a sad song. Kovrin tried to read, but the music drew his mind away from the page. He listened, tired and excited at the same time. The garden was quiet outside, the house was full of music, and his nerves seemed more awake than ever.

Part 2: The Legend and the First Vision

One evening after tea, Kovrin sat on the balcony with a book. In the drawing room, Tanya and another young woman were singing, and a young man was playing the violin. The music was sad and beautiful, and it reached Kovrin through the open doors. He tried to read, but the song slowly took his attention away from the page.

At first he did not understand the words. Then he listened more carefully. The song was about a young woman in a garden at night. She heard strange and wonderful sounds, so beautiful that she felt they could not belong to ordinary human life. They seemed to come from heaven and then return to heaven again. Kovrin's eyes began to close as he listened.

He felt tired, but not in an ordinary way. His body was weak, yet his mind was bright and restless. He stood up and walked through the drawing room and dining room. When the music ended, he took Tanya's arm and went with her out onto the balcony.

"I have been thinking all day about a legend," he said.

Tanya looked at him with interest. Kovrin said that he could not remember where he had heard the story. Perhaps he had read it somewhere. Perhaps someone had told it to him long ago. Perhaps he had dreamed it. He only knew that it had stayed in his mind all day.

The legend was strange. A thousand years ago, a monk dressed in black walked through a desert somewhere in Syria or Arabia. Far away from him, some fishermen saw another black monk moving slowly across the surface of a lake. But this second monk was not a real man. He was only a mirage, an image made by light and air.

Then, from that mirage, another mirage appeared. From that one came another, and then another. The image of the black monk was repeated again and again in the air. It moved from place to place and from country to country. People saw it in Africa, in Spain, in Italy, and far in the north.

After that, the image left the earth's air and began to wander through the whole universe. It moved among other worlds and stars. Perhaps it was now somewhere near Mars, or near a distant star. But the most important part of the legend was this: after exactly one thousand years, the black monk would return to the earth's air and appear again to people.

"And the thousand years are almost over," Kovrin said, smiling. "So, according to the legend, we may see the black monk today or tomorrow."

Tanya did not like the story. "What a strange mirage," she said.

Kovrin laughed. "The strangest thing is that I do not know where I got the legend from. Did I read it? Did I hear it? Did I invent it in a dream? I swear I do not remember. But it interests me. I have been thinking about it all day."

Tanya went back to the guests in the drawing room. Kovrin stayed outside for a little while, still thinking about the story. Then he left the house and walked slowly by the flower beds. The sun was setting. The flowers had just been watered, and they gave off a wet, heavy smell.

Inside the house, the music began again. From far away, the violin sounded almost like a human voice. Kovrin kept trying to remember the source of the legend. Where had it come from? Why did it seem so clear to him? Thinking of this, he turned toward the old park and walked without noticing how far he was going.

He went down a small path between the bare roots of the pine trees. The path led to the river. As he came near the water, some birds rose with sad cries, and two ducks flew away. The last light of the sunset touched parts of the dark pines, but the river itself was already black.

Kovrin crossed a narrow bridge to the other side. Before him lay a wide field of young rye. The rye was still low and green, and it moved softly in the evening air. There was no house, no person, and no sign of ordinary life anywhere near

him. The little path seemed to lead toward the place where the sun had just gone down.

The sky in that direction was wide and bright with the last fire of evening. Kovrin looked at it and felt that the world had become very open and very still. “How free it is here,” he thought. “How quiet and wide. It is almost as if the whole world is watching me and waiting for me to understand something.”

Then a light wind ran across the rye. The green field moved in waves. The breeze touched Kovrin’s uncovered head softly. A moment later, a stronger wind came, and the rye began to whisper. Behind him, from the pine trees, he heard a deep, hollow sound.

Kovrin stopped. Far away, near the horizon, something black rose toward the sky. At first it looked like a tall column of smoke, or like a dark turning wind. Its shape was not clear, but it was moving. It came forward with frightening speed, straight toward him across the field.

As it came nearer, it became smaller and clearer. Kovrin stepped aside into the rye to give it room. He had only just moved when the shape passed close by him. It was a monk dressed in black. His head was grey, his eyebrows were black, and his arms were crossed over his chest.

The monk did not walk. He floated. His bare feet did not touch the ground. He moved past Kovrin without a sound. Then, when he was already a little way beyond him, he turned his head and looked back. He nodded to Kovrin with a friendly smile, but there was something sly in the smile too.

Kovrin saw the monk’s face clearly. It was very pale, thin, and strange. It was not the face of an ordinary living man. Then the monk began to grow larger again as he moved away. He flew over the river, passed through the clay bank and the dark pine trees without touching them, and disappeared like smoke.

Kovrin stood still for a moment. He was not as frightened as another man might have been. Instead, he felt excited and almost glad. “So there must be some truth in the legend,” he said to himself. The thought pleased him. It was as if the strange story had chosen him.

He did not try to explain what he had seen. He did not ask whether he was ill,

dreaming, or awake. He only felt happy that he had seen the monk so near and so clearly. He had seen not only the black clothes, but the face, the eyes, and the smile. The vision had been real enough for him.

Slowly he went back toward the house. In the park and garden, people were moving about quietly. Inside, the guests were still playing music and talking. Everything was ordinary again. This made the vision seem even more wonderful, because he alone had seen it.

For a moment, he wanted to tell Tanya and Yegor Semyonitch. He wanted to say that the black monk had appeared just as in the legend. But then he thought they would be frightened. They would decide that he was ill or losing his mind. So he chose to say nothing.

When he entered the house, his mood was high and bright. He laughed aloud, sang, and even danced a little. The others looked at him with interest. To them, he seemed full of life and inspiration. Tanya watched him, and the visitors also noticed him. No one knew what he had seen in the field.

Kovrin felt that something wonderful had happened. The garden, the music, the evening sky, and the strange black figure all seemed joined in one secret meaning. He was tired, but his tiredness felt sweet. He was alone with his secret, and that made him feel not lonely, but chosen.

Part 3: Tanya’s Tears

After the first vision, Kovrin did not become afraid. He did not tell Tanya or Yegor Semyonitch what he had seen. He only kept the strange event inside himself like a secret gift. The next morning, he woke with a clear and happy feeling. It seemed to him that the garden, the house, the music, and even the air were brighter than before.

He worked with unusual energy. He read carefully, made notes, and looked from time to time at the open windows. Fresh flowers stood in vases on the table, still wet with dew. When he looked at them, pleasure seemed to move through his whole body. He felt as if every part of him was alive and singing quietly.

Yet he also understood that the black monk might have been a sign of illness. The thought came to him more than once. Perhaps no one else could see the monk because the monk was only in his mind. This idea frightened him for a moment, but only for a moment. Then he told himself that he was doing no harm to anyone, and that there was no reason to be afraid of a happy vision.

The thought made him calm again. He felt that ordinary people were too quick to fear anything unusual. If a strange sight brought joy and strength, why should it be hated? If his mind gave him a visitor who spoke to his deepest thoughts, why should he run from it? He smiled at these questions and returned to his work.

Days passed, and the feeling of secret happiness stayed with him. He walked in the park and in the garden, thinking of the monk and of the strange legend. Sometimes he almost expected to see the black shape again among the trees or across the field. The thought did not make the world darker. It made the world seem larger and more important.

At the same time, he began to look at Tanya in a new way. Before, he had remembered her as a child, a thin girl with long legs and loose hair. Now she was no longer a child. She was nervous, quick, serious, and full of feeling. She was always moving, always speaking, always worrying over the garden and her father.

Tanya's whole life was tied to the estate. She knew the workers, the trees, the hot-houses, and the smallest troubles of the garden. She loved her father, but their life together was not peaceful. They were too much alike in some ways. Both were quick, sensitive, and easily wounded. Because of this, small matters could grow into painful quarrels.

One morning, they quarrelled again. Tanya had said that they did not need to keep so many workers all the time, because some of them had done almost nothing for a week. Yegor Semyonitch took this as an attack on his whole way of managing the garden. He became angry, shouted, and said cruel things. Tanya burst into tears and shut herself in her room.

She would not come down to dinner or tea. At first, Yegor Semyonitch walked about with a proud, injured look. He seemed to be showing everyone that order and justice mattered more than soft feelings. But he could not keep that face for

long. Soon he became sad, walked through the park, sighed again and again, and ate nothing.

The sadness of father and daughter spread through the whole house. Even the servants and garden workers seemed quieter. Kovrin tried to work, but the heavy feeling reached him too. The rooms felt uncomfortable, and the garden no longer seemed so bright. At last, toward evening, he decided to help them make peace.

He went to Tanya's door and knocked. She let him in. Her face was swollen from crying, and red patches showed on her cheeks. Her eyes were still wet, and her hair was not carefully arranged. Kovrin looked at her with surprise and pity, because her grief seemed both childish and very deep.

"Come, Tanya," he said gently. "This is enough. You have cried, and now you must stop. It is wrong to stay angry for so long. Your father loves you more than anything in the world."

These words only made her cry harder. "You do not know how he hurts me," she said. "He makes my life terrible. I said almost nothing. I only said that some workers were not needed all the time. Then he shouted and said awful things to me. Why did he do that?"

Kovrin sat near her and smoothed her hair. He spoke softly, as one speaks to a child who has suffered too much. "You are both quick-tempered," he said. "You both speak too strongly when you are upset. You are both to blame, and you both love each other. Come with me, and I will make peace between you."

But Tanya was not ready to be comforted. She said her father had spoiled her whole life. She said he thought she was useless in the house. Perhaps he was right, she cried, and perhaps she should go away the next day and become a telegraph clerk. Her words came broken by sobs, and each small complaint seemed to carry years of tired love and anger.

Kovrin listened with growing tenderness. He had seen many clever women in towns and drawing rooms, but Tanya's open suffering moved him more than their cleverness. She did not hide herself well. Her pain came out in tears, quick words, and trembling hands. This made her seem weak, but also true.

"No, no," he said. "You must not speak like that. You belong here, and he

belongs here too. The house and garden would not be the same without you. Let us go to him now. He is suffering also."

Tanya wiped her eyes, but more tears came at once. She was ashamed of crying and angry that she could not stop. Kovrin took her hand and spoke to her until her breathing became calmer. He felt that he wanted to protect her, not only from her father's angry words, but from every pain that could touch her.

When they went out, the house was quiet. Yegor Semyonitch had already come to her locked door and called her name in a guilty voice. Now he was waiting like a man who had been punished. As soon as he saw Tanya, his proud look disappeared. He began to speak quickly and awkwardly, and she began to cry again.

The peace between them was not grand or solemn. It was made of tears, half-spoken apologies, and nervous little words. Yegor Semyonitch tried to laugh, then sighed. Tanya tried to be dignified, then broke down again. Kovrin stood near them and felt that the whole scene was strange, touching, and tiring.

Later that night, when the house became quiet, Kovrin remained awake. The quarrel had shown him how much feeling lived in this family. The garden was beautiful, but it was not peaceful. Under its flowers, trees, and careful order there were fear, pride, love, and pain. The people who served the garden were as nervous as the plants they tried to save from frost.

Yegor Semyonitch came to Kovrin and spoke of Tanya. He was ashamed of the quarrel, but he also wanted to explain himself. He said that Tanya was everything to him, and that the garden was everything too. If she married and left, what would become of the garden? What would happen to his life's work?

He said he feared that some fine gentleman might marry her and then care nothing for the estate. Such a man might rent the garden to people who only wanted money. In one year, everything could be ruined. He spoke with pain and fear, as if the trees were living children who might be abandoned.

Then he said something more direct. He loved Kovrin as if Kovrin were his own son. He was proud of him and trusted his mind and heart. If Tanya ever loved Kovrin, and if Kovrin loved Tanya, Yegor Semyonitch would be happy. He said

this plainly, because he did not like hidden thoughts.

Kovrin laughed, but he was deeply moved. After Yegor Semyonitch left, he sat alone and tried to read some articles about gardening. The articles were full of anger, pride, and sharp words, though they were only about apples, soil, and grafting. Kovrin thought that even this peaceful work was full of struggle. Everywhere, he thought, people with ideas were nervous, sensitive, and ready for pain.

He thought again of Tanya. Her thin figure, her dark clever eyes, her quick steps, and her tears all came back to him. She was weak and strong at the same time. She was tied to the garden, to her father, and perhaps now to him. Kovrin could not read any more. The house was silent, but inside him happiness, pity, and excitement were all awake.

Part 4: Chosen for Greatness

After that night, Kovrin could not return to ordinary calm. The thought of the black monk came back again and again. The thought of Tanya also stayed with him. He tried to read Yegor Semyonitch's articles about the garden, but the words did not hold his mind. He walked about the room, sat down, stood up again, and felt a strange joy moving inside him.

At last he went outside. The evening was quiet, and the garden was growing darker. The air smelled of flowers, damp earth, and leaves. In the distance, the house still had light in its windows. Kovrin walked slowly through the park, not knowing whether he wanted to be alone or whether he was waiting for someone.

Then the black monk appeared again. He was sitting on a bench, dressed in black, as before. His pale face could be seen in the evening light, and his dark eyebrows gave him a serious look. Kovrin was not frightened. He felt as if he had been expecting this meeting.

The monk spoke to him calmly. He said that Kovrin was one of the few people chosen for a higher life. Such people, he said, did not live only for food, sleep, comfort, and small happiness. They served truth. They moved human life forward,

even if ordinary people did not understand them.

Kovrin listened with deep pleasure. He had often had such thoughts himself, but he had not dared to say them so clearly. Now the monk seemed to speak from inside his own soul. The words did not sound like empty praise. They sounded like a secret truth that had finally been spoken aloud.

“But what is the meaning of eternal truth?” Kovrin asked.

The monk did not answer directly. His face began to grow unclear, as if evening mist were passing over it. First his features became difficult to see. Then his head and hands seemed to melt into the dark bench and the shadows around him. A moment later he was gone.

“The vision is over,” Kovrin said, and he laughed softly. “What a pity.”

He walked back toward the house feeling light and happy. The monk’s words had not only pleased his pride. They had touched his whole being. To be chosen, to serve truth, to give one’s youth, strength, and even health for a great idea seemed to him a beautiful fate. He remembered his past work, his long study, and his teaching, and he felt that the monk had not spoken too strongly.

Tanya came to meet him in the park. She had changed her dress and seemed to have been looking for him. When she saw his face, she stopped in surprise. His eyes were shining, and there were tears in them. He looked so joyful that she became uneasy.

“You are here,” she said. “We have been looking everywhere for you. What is the matter with you, Andryusha? How strange you look.”

Kovrin put his hands on her shoulders. “I am happy, Tanya,” he said. “More than happy. Dear Tanya, you are a wonderful, good person. I am so glad. I am so very glad.” He kissed both her hands with sudden warmth, and she looked at him in confusion.

He wanted to tell her about the monk, but he stopped himself. If he told her everything, she might think he was mad. She might become afraid, and then the secret beauty of the moment would be spoiled. So he spoke only of what he could speak of safely. He spoke of her.

“I love you, Tanya,” he said. “I am used to loving you. To see you near me

every day has become necessary to me. When I go away, I do not know how I shall live without you. Come with me. Be mine."

Tanya tried to laugh, but the laugh did not come. Colour rose in her face, and she began to breathe quickly. She walked faster, not toward the house, but deeper into the park. "I never thought of this," she said, twisting her hands. "I never thought of it." Her voice sounded frightened, but not unhappy.

Kovrin walked beside her and spoke gently. He told her again that he loved her. He said that life without her would be empty. He did not speak like a calm man making a careful proposal. He spoke like a man carried forward by joy, by the evening, by the monk's words, and by his own sudden certainty.

Tanya's face changed many times as she listened. She looked frightened, then happy, then almost ready to cry. Her whole life had been the garden and her father, and now a new life had opened before her without warning. Kovrin was dear to her, and she had admired him for years. Yet the thought of leaving home, and of being loved by him, was too large to take in at once.

At last she stopped and looked at him. She did not give a long answer. She did not speak about the future or about practical things. But her eyes, her tears, and the way she let him hold her hands answered him. Kovrin understood that she loved him too.

When they returned to the house, everything seemed changed. Yegor Semyonitch soon understood what had happened. He was deeply moved, and his happiness was almost noisy. He spoke quickly, laughed, sighed, and looked at Kovrin as if he had received the greatest gift possible. The garden, his daughter, and the man he loved like a son now seemed joined together in his mind.

From that time, Kovrin's happiness grew even stronger. He often saw the black monk, sometimes in the park and sometimes in the house. Once or twice a week, the monk appeared to him and spoke with him for a long time. These meetings did not trouble him. They delighted him, because he was now sure that such visions came only to special people who rose above the crowd.

One day, during dinner, the monk appeared at the window of the dining room. Kovrin was delighted. He began speaking about ideas that might interest the monk.

Yegor Semyonitch and Tanya listened and smiled, thinking that he was speaking to them. They did not know that his real listener was the black visitor in the window.

The monk listened kindly and nodded from time to time. Kovrin spoke more and more brightly. He felt clever, free, and full of power. To Tanya and her father, he seemed charming and inspired. They could not guess that the center of his joy was invisible to them.

Summer moved toward its end. The days of the church fast came, and after them the wedding was planned. Yegor Semyonitch wanted everything to be splendid. He did not want a small quiet wedding. He wanted music, guests, food, wine, servants running everywhere, and the whole house filled with celebration.

The wedding lasted two days and two nights. A great amount of money was spent on food and drink. Fine things were ordered from Moscow, and many people came. There were toasts, music, noise, movement, and laughter. Servants hurried from room to room, and the rooms were so crowded that no one could feel real peace.

Kovrin passed through it all as if in a bright dream. Tanya was beside him, young, pale, and excited. Yegor Semyonitch looked proud and tired, but happy. The garden outside went on living its own careful life, while inside the house people ate, drank, spoke loudly, and celebrated the new marriage.

Yet under the joy, something restless remained. Kovrin’s happiness was too high and too sharp to be simple. The monk’s words still rang in him. He believed that he was chosen for greatness, and that ordinary rules did not fully belong to him. The wedding joined him to Tanya and to the garden, but it also carried him farther into the strange bright world that only he could see.

Part 5: Cured and Unhappy

One long winter night, Kovrin lay in bed and read a French novel. Tanya had gone to sleep long before. She was not used to town life, and in the evenings she often had headaches. Now she slept badly and spoke strange broken words in her

dreams. Kovrin listened to her for a while and felt that the room was too hot.

At three o'clock, he put out the light and tried to sleep. But sleep did not come. Tanya still spoke now and then, and her restless voice troubled him. At half past four, he lit the candle again. Then he saw the black monk sitting in an armchair near the bed.

The monk greeted him calmly and asked what he was thinking about. Kovrin said he was thinking about fame. In the novel he had just read, a young scholar suffered because he wanted to be famous. Kovrin said he could not understand such suffering. Fame seemed to him like a toy that no longer interested a grown man.

The monk agreed with him. He said that Kovrin was wise because he no longer cared for empty praise. What did it matter if people remembered a name, or wrote it on a stone after death? Time would destroy the letters in the end. Kovrin nodded and asked the monk to speak about happiness instead.

When the clock struck five, Kovrin was sitting on the bed with his feet on the carpet. He spoke to the monk as if to an old friend. He said that his own happiness had become so great that it almost frightened him. From morning to night, he felt joy, and this joy filled him so completely that there was no room for sadness or boredom. Even sleeplessness did not make him dull.

The monk asked why joy should seem strange. He said that joy should be natural for a person with a high mind. The more free and developed a person was, the more pleasure life should give him. Great men of the past, he said, had known joy. A person should rejoice, not be ashamed of happiness.

Kovrin laughed and answered lightly. He asked whether the gods might become angry with too much happiness. Then Tanya woke and looked at him in terror. He was speaking to the armchair, laughing, and moving his hands. His eyes were bright, and there was something strange in his voice and face.

"Andryusha, whom are you talking to?" she asked, taking his hand. Kovrin was confused for a moment. Then he pointed to the chair and said that the monk was sitting there. Tanya looked, saw nothing, and cried that no one was there. She put her arms around him as if she wanted to protect him from the empty chair.

She was trembling so much that he began to tremble too. She said that he was ill and that she had noticed it for a long time. He often spoke to himself, smiled strangely, and did not sleep. Her father had noticed it too. As she spoke, Kovrin looked again at the chair and saw that it was empty.

Only then did fear enter him fully. His arms and legs became weak, and he began to dress without knowing why. He understood the meaning of the black monk and of all those bright talks. They were not signs that he was chosen. They were signs that his mind was ill.

Tanya dressed too, and they went into the dining room. Yegor Semyonitch stood there in his dressing gown, holding a candle. He had been woken by Tanya's crying. Kovrin wanted to make a joke and say that he had gone mad, but he could not speak. He only moved his lips and smiled bitterly.

Tanya kept saying that he must not be frightened. Her voice shook, and she repeated that everything would pass. Yegor Semyonitch looked shocked and helpless. No one knew what to do. At nine in the morning, they put Kovrin into a coat, wrapped him warmly, and took him in a carriage to a doctor.

Summer came again, and the doctor advised them to go to the country. Kovrin had recovered in the ordinary sense. He no longer saw the black monk. He drank a great deal of milk, worked only two hours a day, and did not smoke or drink wine. Everyone watched him carefully, and every part of his life was made quiet and safe.

But this safety did not make him happy. On the evening before Elijah's Day, there was a religious service in the house. The large old room smelled of church smoke, and Kovrin felt bored and heavy. He went out into the garden without looking at the bright flowers. He walked through the paths, sat on a bench, then went down to the river.

The same dark pine trees stood near the water. The year before, they had seen him full of joy, power, and hope. Now they seemed silent and cold, as if they did not know him. His beautiful long hair had been cut short. His face was paler and fuller, and his walk was slow.

He crossed the little bridge and stood where he had first seen the black monk.

The rye was gone now, and cut oats lay in rows. The sun had set, and the red light on the horizon promised wind for the next day. Kovrin stood there for a long time, waiting without admitting that he was waiting. But nothing came.

When he returned to the house, the service was over. Tanya and her father were sitting on the steps of the veranda and drinking tea. They stopped talking when they saw him. Kovrin guessed at once that they had been speaking about him. This made him angry, though they had said nothing wrong.

Tanya gently told him that it was time for his milk. He refused and sat on the lower step. She said in a guilty voice that the milk was good for him. Kovrin laughed bitterly and said that it had made him heavier by a pound. Then he pressed his head in his hands and asked why they had cured him.

He said that medicines, milk, baths, rest, and constant watching would soon make him stupid. When he had been ill, he had been happy, confident, and original. Now he was sensible, but he was like everyone else. He was ordinary, and life bored him. The visions had harmed no one, he said, so why had they been taken away?

Yegor Semyonitch sighed and said it was painful to listen to such talk. Kovrin answered coldly that he did not have to listen. The old man became confused and cleared his throat, though he had done nothing wrong. Kovrin now found other people difficult to bear, especially Yegor Semyonitch. He looked at him with irony and dislike.

Tanya watched them both with fear. She could not understand how their warm family feeling had changed so quickly. Her father seemed older every day, and her husband had become sharp, bored, and unkind. She no longer laughed or sang. She ate little, slept badly, and waited all the time for something terrible to happen.

Kovrin went into the house to avoid saying too much. The dining room was dark, and moonlight lay in pale patches on the floor and piano. The smell of night flowers came through the open window. It reminded him of the previous summer, when the same smell and the same moonlight had filled him with joy. He wanted that old feeling back.

He went to his study, lit a strong cigar, and ordered wine. But the cigar tasted

bitter, and the wine had lost its old pleasure. Because he had given up these habits, even a little tobacco and wine made his heart beat fast. He felt dizzy and unwell. In the end, he had to take his medicine.

Before bed, Tanya begged him to be kinder to her father. She said Yegor Semyonitch loved him and was being destroyed by his coldness. Kovrin answered that he could not and did not want to. When she asked why, he said only that her father was unpleasant to him. Then he told her not to talk about it, since the old man was her father.

Tanya pressed her hands to her temples. She said that something awful was happening in the house. Kovrin, once so clever and noble, now became angry over small things. She kissed his hands and begged him not to be angry. He answered with cruel words about her father, calling him selfish, overfed, and stupidly hopeful.

Tanya sat down on the bed and put her head on the pillow. Her voice was weak with exhaustion. She said that this life was torture and that there had not been one peaceful moment since winter. Kovrin answered with cold sarcasm, as if she and her father were innocent victims and he were a monster. His face looked ugly to her then, because hatred did not suit it.

She wanted to wound him in return, but the wish frightened her. She saw that she too was becoming hard and angry. Without saying the cruel thing that had risen to her lips, she left the bedroom. Kovrin remained alone, cured of his visions, but empty, bitter, and unhappy.

Part 6: The Last Black Monk

Two years passed. Kovrin received an appointment as a professor at the university, and his first lecture was announced for the second of December. A notice was put up in the university corridor. But on the appointed day, he sent a telegram saying that illness prevented him from giving the lecture. The beginning of his new work had to be delayed.

He was ill with bleeding from the throat. Often he spat blood, and two or three

times a month he lost a large amount of blood. After that, he became very weak and sleepy. The illness did not greatly frighten him, because his mother had suffered from the same trouble for many years. The doctors said there was no immediate danger, but they told him to avoid excitement, live regularly, and speak as little as possible.

In January, the lecture again could not take place. In February, it was too late to begin the course. Everything had to be put off until the next year. Kovrin accepted this quietly. His mind was calm now, but it was a poor kind of calm, without joy or power.

He was no longer living with Tanya. He lived with another woman, Varvara Nikolaevna, who was two years older than he was. She cared for him as if he were a child. He gave in to her easily. When she decided that they should go to the Crimea for his health, he agreed, though he felt from the beginning that the journey would bring nothing good.

They reached Sevastopol in the evening and stopped at a hotel. They meant to rest there and continue to Yalta the next day. Both of them were tired from the journey. Varvara Nikolaevna drank tea, went behind the screen, and soon fell asleep. Kovrin did not go to bed.

An hour before leaving for the station, he had received a letter from Tanya. He had not opened it. Now it lay in his coat pocket, and the thought of it troubled him. Deep in his heart, he believed that his marriage to Tanya had been a mistake. He was glad that their separation was final, but the letter brought back memories he did not want.

He remembered how cruel he had been during the last months of their life together. He had been angry because he felt empty and bored. He had no more visions, no more joy, and no more belief in himself. Instead of blaming his own illness and his own weakness, he had hurt Tanya and her father, who were not guilty.

He remembered tearing up his work during that time. Page after page had gone out of the window, flying into the garden and catching on the trees and flowers. As he destroyed those papers, he felt that they were full of false pride and empty

greatness. But after the last page was torn, bitterness took hold of him. He went to Tanya and said cruel things.

Worst of all, he once told her that her father had helped arrange their marriage. He said this because he wanted to wound her. Yegor Semyonitch heard the words by chance and ran into the room. He could not speak. He only stamped his feet and made a terrible sound, like an animal in pain. Tanya looked at her father, screamed, and fainted.

This memory now returned with shame. Kovrin went out onto the balcony. The night was warm, and the smell of the sea came up from below. The bay shone in the moonlight and the lights of the town. Its colour was hard to name, a soft mixture of blue, green, and silver.

Below the balcony, some windows were open. Women's voices and laughter came from the lower floor. There seemed to be an evening party in the hotel. The sound of happy people made Kovrin feel more alone. He stood there for a while, then went back into the room and opened Tanya's letter.

The letter said that her father had just died. Tanya wrote that Kovrin had killed him. The garden was being ruined, and strangers were now managing it. Everything that her father had feared was happening. She said she hated Kovrin with her whole soul and hoped that he would die soon.

She wrote that she had once believed he was an extraordinary man, a genius. She had loved him because she believed this. But he had turned out to be a sick and broken man. Kovrin could read no more. He tore the letter into pieces and threw it away.

At once, a fear came over him. Varvara Nikolaevna was sleeping behind the screen, and he could hear her breathing. From below came laughter and women's voices. But to him, it seemed that there was no living soul in the whole hotel except himself. Tanya had cursed him, and he felt as if some dark power from the past might enter the room again.

He knew from experience that work could calm his nerves. He took a manuscript from his red folder and sat down at the table. It was only a plan for a small book, something he had prepared in case he felt bored in the Crimea. He

forced himself to read it and think about it. Little by little, his calm mood seemed to return.

He began to think about the small rewards of life. To become a professor before forty, to teach ordinary ideas in ordinary words, to become a respectable but not great scholar, he had worked for many years. He had studied day and night, suffered illness, lived through an unhappy marriage, and done foolish and unjust things. Now he saw clearly that he was not a great man. He was only ordinary.

This thought did not hurt him as much as it once would have. He told himself that every person must be satisfied with what he is. Yet the pieces of Tanya's letter lay white on the floor and kept pulling his eyes away from the manuscript. At last he stood up, picked them up, and threw them out of the window. But the sea wind blew them back onto the window ledge.

Again fear and unrest came over him. He went out onto the balcony. The bay looked alive, full of blue, green, and fiery eyes. It seemed to call to him. The night was hot and close, and for a moment he thought that it would be good to go down and swim.

Suddenly, from below the balcony, a violin began to play. Two soft women's voices began to sing. Kovrin knew the song at once. It was the same song about the young woman in the garden who heard sounds so strange and beautiful that they seemed to come from heaven. His breath stopped, and a sweet pain moved through his heart.

Then he saw a tall black column far across the bay. It looked like a whirlwind or a dark waterspout. It came quickly over the water toward the hotel, growing smaller and darker as it moved. Kovrin stepped aside just in time. The black monk, with grey head, black eyebrows, bare feet, and crossed arms, floated past him and stood in the room.

"Why did you not believe me?" the monk asked gently. "If you had believed that you were a genius, you would not have spent these two years in such sadness."

Kovrin already believed him. In one moment, all his old joy returned. He remembered the garden, the rye field, the park, Tanya's young face, his studies, his courage, and the bright feeling that life was great and beautiful. He tried to

answer the monk, but blood flowed from his throat onto his chest. He touched it with his hands, not understanding at first what was happening.

He tried to call Varvara Nikolaevna, who was sleeping behind the screen. But the name that came from him was not hers. “Tanya,” he said. Then he fell to the floor, raised himself on his arms, and called again, “Tanya.”

He called to Tanya, to the great garden with flowers wet from dew, to the dark park, to the pine trees with rough roots, to the rye field, to his youth, his learning, his courage, and his joy. He called to life itself, because life suddenly seemed wonderfully beautiful. Blood was near his face on the floor, and he could no longer speak. But a great happiness filled him completely.

Below the balcony, the serenade continued. The black monk bent near him and whispered that he was a genius. He said that Kovrin was dying only because his weak human body could no longer serve such a great spirit. When Varvara Nikolaevna woke and came from behind the screen, Kovrin was dead. A happy smile remained on his face.

Ward No. 6

Part 1: The Ward

In the hospital yard there was a small building. It stood apart from the main hospital, almost hidden by tall weeds, nettles, and wild plants. The roof was rusty, the chimney was broken, and the front steps were rotten and covered with grass. Behind the building stood a grey fence with sharp nails on top. Everything about the place looked lonely, poor, and forgotten.

A narrow path led to the building. A person had to walk carefully because of the nettles. Inside the first door was a dark entry. Old hospital things lay everywhere along the walls and near the stove. There were torn gowns, old trousers, striped shirts, broken shoes, and dirty mattresses, all lying in ugly heaps and giving off a sick smell.

In this entry, the porter Nikita was often lying on the rubbish with a pipe between his teeth. He was an old soldier, short and thin, but he had strong fists and a hard face. His eyebrows hung low over his eyes, and his red nose made his face look even rougher. He loved order more than anything. In his mind, order meant that he had the right to beat people.

Nikita did not think deeply about cruelty. He was a simple, dull, practical man who believed that rules must be obeyed. If a patient made noise, moved too much, or did something he did not like, Nikita struck him. He hit faces, backs, chests, or whatever part of the body was nearest. He was sure that without blows there would be no peace in the ward.

Beyond the entry was one large room. It took up almost the whole building. The walls were painted a dirty blue, and the ceiling was black from smoke. In winter the stove smoked badly, and the air became heavy and choking. Iron bars covered the windows from the inside, and the wooden floor was grey, rough, and full of splinters.

The smell in the room was terrible. It was a smell of old cabbage soup, smoke, dirty clothes, insects, and sickness. When a person first entered, it felt almost like

entering a cage for animals. Beds were fixed to the floor, and on them sat or lay men in blue hospital gowns and old nightcaps. These men were the patients of Ward No. 6.

There were five patients in all. The first man lay nearest the door. He was tall and thin, with bright red whiskers and eyes that looked as if he had been crying for a long time. He sat with his head on his hand and stared at one place. Day and night he grieved, sighed, shook his head, and sometimes smiled bitterly.

This first patient rarely joined any conversation. If someone asked him a question, he often did not answer. When food was given to him, he ate and drank almost without knowing what he was doing. His cough was painful to hear, and his thin face had a feverish colour. It was clear that he had a serious lung disease.

The second patient was very different. He was a small old Jewish man named Moiseika. He had a pointed beard and curly black hair. During the day, he walked quickly from one window to another, or sat on his bed with his legs folded under him. He sang softly, laughed to himself, and moved like a lively child.

Moiseika had lost his reason many years before, when his small hat factory burned down. He was harmless, and because of this, he was the only patient allowed to leave the building and even go into the street. People in town knew him well. Boys and dogs often followed him as he walked in his poor gown, strange cap, and slippers, asking for a little money or food.

Sometimes someone gave him bread. Sometimes someone gave him a small coin or a drink. Then he returned to the ward feeling rich and lucky. But whatever he brought back, Nikita took from him. Nikita turned out his pockets roughly and angrily, and said that he would not allow such rule-breaking again.

Moiseika liked to help the other patients. He brought them water, covered them when they slept, and promised to bring each of them a coin or a new cap. He also fed the patient on his left with a spoon, because that man could not move well. Moiseika did not do these things from clear pity. He copied the kindness of the man who lay on his right, Ivan Dmitritch Gromov.

Ivan Dmitritch was the only patient in the ward who came from the educated class. He was thirty-three years old and had once worked in the law courts and in

a government office. Now he suffered from a terrible fear that people were watching him, hunting him, and preparing to arrest him. Sometimes he lay curled on his bed. Sometimes he walked from corner to corner, as if he were trying to escape without leaving the room.

He was always tense and excited. The smallest sound could frighten him. If someone moved in the entry, or if a voice was heard in the yard, he lifted his head and listened. His face then showed fear and disgust. It was as if he expected enemies to come for him at any moment.

Yet there was something fine in Ivan Dmitritch. His face was pale and unhappy, but his eyes were warm and intelligent. Deep suffering had marked his features, but it had not made him stupid or empty. He was polite, helpful, and gentle with the other patients, except when Nikita came near him. If someone dropped a button or spoon, Ivan quickly picked it up. Every morning he greeted the others, and every night he wished them good night.

His illness showed itself most clearly in the evenings. He wrapped himself in his gown, trembled all over, and began to walk quickly between the beds. His teeth shook, and his whole body looked as if it were in fever. Then he began to speak. At first the words were broken and confused, but soon they became a long, passionate speech.

He spoke of human evil, cruelty, and injustice. He spoke of prison bars, violence, and the beautiful future that would one day come. His words were wild, but they were not foolish. They had pain, intelligence, and moral anger in them. In that dirty room, among sick and broken men, his voice sometimes sounded like the voice of a man still fighting for human dignity.

Part 2: Ivan Dmitritch’s Fear

Ivan Dmitritch had not always lived behind bars. Before his illness became strong, he lived in town and tried to work like other people. He had a difficult character, and he was often gloomy, but he was educated, sensitive, and honest. He felt other people’s pain sharply. When he saw cruelty or injustice, it touched

him more deeply than it touched most men.

One autumn morning, he was walking through muddy side streets to collect some money owed to him. His coat collar was turned up, and the mud splashed around his boots. He was in a dark mood, as he often was in the morning. In one narrow street, he met two prisoners in chains, guarded by four soldiers with guns.

He had seen prisoners before. Usually they made him feel pity and discomfort. But this time the sight struck him in a new and terrible way. Suddenly he thought that he too could be put in chains and led through the mud to prison. The thought came quickly, without warning, and then it would not leave him.

After he finished his errand, he met a police officer he knew near the post office. The officer greeted him and walked a few steps beside him. There was nothing strange in this, but Ivan Dmitritch felt that it was suspicious. Why had the officer spoken to him? Why had he walked with him? A small ordinary meeting became dark and frightening in his mind.

At home, he could not forget the prisoners, the soldiers, or the police officer. All day, he tried to read, but the words would not stay in his head. In the evening, he did not light his lamp. At night, he could not sleep. He kept thinking that he might be arrested, chained, and thrown into prison.

He knew that he had done no serious wrong. He knew that he was not a murderer, a thief, or an enemy of the law. But this knowledge did not comfort him. “A person can be accused by mistake,” he thought. “Someone can lie. A judge can be careless. An innocent man can be destroyed by forms, papers, and cold officials.”

He thought of judges, police officers, and doctors who dealt every day with the suffering of others. Perhaps, after many years, they stopped feeling pity. Perhaps suffering became only part of their work. To Ivan Dmitritch, this idea was horrible. A man could lose his freedom not because anyone hated him, but because no one cared enough to save him.

The next morning, he woke in terror. Cold sweat stood on his forehead. He felt sure that he might be arrested at any moment. Because the fear had stayed with him all night, he thought it must have some real cause. “Such a thought cannot

come for nothing," he told himself. The fear now seemed stronger than common sense.

A policeman walked slowly past his windows. Ivan Dmitritch thought that this could not be by chance. Two men stood silently near the house, and he wondered why they were silent. Every person who passed the window seemed to be watching him. Every stranger in the yard seemed like a spy.

At midday, the chief of police often drove down the street in his carriage. He was simply going from his estate to his office. But Ivan Dmitritch thought that he was driving faster than usual. He imagined that the chief was hurrying to say that a dangerous criminal was in town. The criminal, of course, was Ivan Dmitritch himself.

He began to fear every knock at the gate and every ring of the bell. When he met police officers or gendarmes, he smiled too much and began to whistle, so that he would look calm. At night, he could not sleep, but he forced himself to snore loudly. He wanted his landlady to think that he was sleeping, because if she knew he was awake, she might suspect that his conscience was guilty.

He tried to reason with himself. He told himself that arrest was not truly terrible if a man had a clean conscience. He told himself that his fears were sick and foolish. But the more he reasoned, the worse his fear became. It was like cutting trees in a wild forest; the harder he worked, the thicker the forest seemed.

Soon he began to avoid people. His work had never given him much pleasure, but now it became impossible. He feared that someone might put a bribe in his pocket and then accuse him. He feared that he might make a mistake in an official paper and be called a criminal. He feared that he might lose someone else's money, though there was no reason for such a fear.

His mind became very active in one terrible direction. Each day it invented new dangers. At the same time, he lost interest in books and ordinary life. His memory grew weaker. The outside world became smaller and smaller, while the fear inside him became larger and larger.

In spring, after the snow melted, two half-rotten bodies were found in a ravine near the cemetery. They were the bodies of an old woman and a boy, and people

said they had been murdered. The whole town talked about the bodies and the unknown killers. For Ivan Dmitritch, this news was unbearable.

He began to walk through the streets with a forced smile. When he met people he knew, he turned pale, then red, and spoke quickly. He said that no crime was worse than killing the weak and helpless. He said this because he wanted people to understand that he could never have done such a thing. But the need to act innocent made him even more exhausted.

At last he decided to hide. He thought that, in his position, the safest place was his landlady's cellar. He sat there all day, then all night, then another day. It was cold and dark. When evening came, he crept back to his room like a thief and stood there without moving until morning.

Before sunrise, some workmen came into the house to repair the kitchen stove. Ivan Dmitritch knew this in one part of his mind. But fear told him that they were police officers in disguise. He slipped out of the flat without his coat or hat and ran along the street. Dogs chased him, a peasant shouted somewhere behind him, and the wind roared in his ears.

It seemed to him that the whole force of the world was behind him. Law, violence, police, prison, and human cruelty all seemed to be rushing after him at once. He ran without knowing where to go. Then people stopped him and brought him home. His landlady sent for a doctor.

Doctor Andrey Yefimitch came, looked at him, and ordered simple treatment. He told the landlady to put cold cloths on Ivan Dmitritch's head and give him drops. Then he shook his head and went away. He said he would not come again, because one should not interfere too much with people who were going mad.

Ivan Dmitritch had no money to stay at home and be cared for. Soon he was sent to the hospital. First he was put in another ward, but he could not sleep and disturbed the other patients. After that, by the doctor's order, he was moved to Ward No. 6. Within a year, the town forgot him. His books were left in a shed, and boys tore them apart.

In the ward, his life became almost motionless. To his left was Moiseika, the lively old man who wandered and sang. To his right was a fat peasant who looked

almost round. This man's face was empty, and it seemed that all thought and feeling had left him long ago. A sharp, heavy smell always came from him.

Nikita had to clean after this fat patient, and he beat him cruelly. The most terrible thing was not only the beating. A person can almost grow used to the sight of blows. The terrible thing was that the patient did not cry out, move away, or even look angry. He only moved a little, like a heavy barrel pushed from the side.

The fifth patient had once worked in the post office. He was a thin fair-haired man with a good-natured but sly face. His eyes were calm and cheerful, as if he carried a pleasant secret inside him. Under his pillow or mattress, he kept something hidden. Sometimes he went to the window, turned away from the others, and put something on his chest.

He believed that he had received important honours from the government. "Congratulate me," he often said to Ivan Dmitritch. "I have received a great order with a star. Usually it is only given to foreigners, but they are making an exception for me." Ivan Dmitritch answered with irritation that he understood nothing about such things. But the former post worker went on dreaming of even greater honours.

Life in Ward No. 6 was terribly monotonous. In the morning, most of the patients washed in the entry and dried themselves with the skirts of their gowns. Then Nikita brought tea in tin mugs, one mug for each man. At midday they had sour cabbage soup and boiled grain. In the evening, they ate the grain left from dinner.

Between meals, they lay down, slept, looked out of the windows, or walked from one corner to another. Every day was the same. The former post worker spoke of the same imaginary honours. Moiseika moved about in the same childish way. Ivan Dmitritch listened for footsteps and feared that some new injustice was coming.

Almost no one visited Ward No. 6. New patients rarely came. Once every two months, the barber appeared, drunk and smiling, and the patients trembled when they saw him. Otherwise, they saw only Nikita. So the days passed, closed, dirty, and empty, while Ivan Dmitritch's bright and wounded mind lived on inside the cage.

Part 3: The Doctor Who Stopped Caring

Doctor Andrey Yefimitch Ragin had come to the town many years earlier. When he first saw the hospital, he was shocked by its condition. The rooms were dirty, crowded, and full of bad smells. Patients, nurses, and servants lived almost on top of one another. Insects were everywhere, and the air felt heavy with sickness and neglect.

Operations were done badly, and instruments were not clean. There was little order and little true care. People stole hospital food and supplies, and everyone knew it. The old doctor before him had sold hospital medicine secretly. The hospital was supposed to help the sick, but in many ways it only added more suffering.

At first, Andrey Yefimitch wanted to change everything. He was an honest and educated man, and he understood that the hospital was almost useless in its present state. But when he looked more carefully, he felt helpless. The town was poor, the officials were careless, and the people around him were used to the old ways. To make a clean and humane hospital, he would need money, strong support, and many honest workers.

He did not have these things. He also did not have a strong will. He could see what was wrong, but he could not fight day after day against it. He soon told himself that the hospital was only a small part of a much larger evil. If he closed it, the sick would only suffer somewhere else. If people were ignorant and cruel, one doctor could not remake the whole town.

Little by little, he stopped trying. At first, he examined patients carefully every day. Then he saw fewer and fewer of them. He began to feel that most illnesses could not really be cured. Death would come sooner or later in any case. If a person was going to die, he thought, why should a doctor trouble him with medicines that changed almost nothing?

These thoughts gave him a kind of excuse. He told himself that suffering was part of life, and that human beings must learn to understand it calmly. He began

to believe that the mind mattered more than the body. If a man had inner peace, he thought, then pain and poverty could not truly destroy him. This idea sounded noble, but it also helped him avoid action.

Andrey Yefimitch was not a bad man. He was quiet, polite, and gentle. He never shouted at servants and rarely gave orders. If someone asked him for something, he usually said, “Very well,” in a soft voice. His face was large and heavy, with a tired look, but his eyes were kind and intelligent.

He lived a lonely life. In the morning, he sometimes went to the hospital and saw a few patients. He asked questions, gave simple orders, and then returned home. By degrees, even these visits became less important to him. The medical assistant and the other hospital workers did most things in their usual careless way.

At home, the doctor read a great deal. He loved books more than almost anything. History and philosophy gave him more pleasure than medicine. He read slowly, with deep attention, often stopping to think. His rooms were full of books and old journals, and he spent many hours at his table, turning pages while the town outside went on in its small, dull way.

In the afternoon, he drank beer. In the evening, his only close friend sometimes came to visit him. This friend was Mihail Averyanitch, the postmaster. He had once been a landowner and an officer, and he liked to speak loudly about the past. He was kind in his way, but noisy, proud, and easily excited.

The doctor liked him because there was no one better to talk with. They sat together, drank beer or tea, and spoke about life, intelligence, and the sad condition of the world. Andrey Yefimitch often said that the human mind was the finest thing on earth. He believed that conversation between thoughtful people was almost the highest pleasure. But such conversation was rare in their town.

Mihail Averyanitch agreed with him loudly, though he did not always understand him. He spoke of old days, army life, honour, and the foolishness of modern people. Then he would grow emotional and almost angry. The doctor listened with a calm smile. He knew his friend was not a deep thinker, but even imperfect conversation was better than silence.

After Mihail Averyanitch left, Andrey Yefimitch usually returned to his books.

Sometimes he thought with sorrow that he had wasted his life. He had studied, hoped, and dreamed in youth, but now he lived in a dirty provincial town and did almost nothing useful. Yet instead of changing his life, he opened another book and tried to rise above his sadness through thought.

In the hospital, life continued as before. Patients came and went. Some recovered, some died, and some were forgotten. Ward No. 6 remained behind its fence, with Nikita at the door and the five patients inside. The doctor hardly ever went there. Perhaps he felt disgust. Perhaps he felt shame. Perhaps he simply did not want to see what could not be repaired.

A young doctor named Hobotov later came to the hospital. He was not deeply educated, but he was practical and sure of himself. He wore high boots, carried a small medical book, and acted as if he knew what had to be done. He did not respect Andrey Yefimitch much. To him, the older doctor seemed lazy, strange, and useless.

Hobotov began to watch him. He saw that Andrey Yefimitch rarely treated patients seriously and spent most of his time reading. He saw that the hospital was badly run. But Hobotov was not a reformer either. He wanted a better position, more authority, and perhaps the older doctor's place. His interest in the hospital was mixed with personal ambition.

Andrey Yefimitch noticed this, but he did not fight him. He disliked arguments and public quarrels. He believed that life was too short and too empty for such struggles. If people wanted to misunderstand him, let them misunderstand. If younger men wanted power, let them have it. This calmness looked like wisdom to him, but to others it often looked like weakness.

His daily life became more and more fixed. Books, beer, quiet meals, rare conversations, and long thoughts filled his days. The real hospital, with its smells, wounds, cries, dirty beds, and frightened people, moved farther away from his heart. He knew it was there, but he did not feel it with his body. He thought about suffering as an idea, not as something that strikes a living person.

This was the great danger in him. He was kind, but his kindness did not move him to act. He was intelligent, but his intelligence made him passive. He hated

cruelty in words, but he allowed cruelty to continue beside him. Ward No. 6 stood in the hospital yard, and Nikita's fists kept order there, while the doctor sat in his room and read about truth, freedom, and the human soul.

Part 4: First Talks in Ward No. 6

One day, Andrey Yefimitch walked into the hospital yard and saw Moiseika returning from the town. The little old man was wearing his strange cap and poor slippers, and he carried some small things that people had given him. His face was bright with childish pleasure. He smiled, muttered to himself, and seemed proud of his treasures.

Nikita was waiting in the entry of Ward No. 6. As soon as Moiseika came in, Nikita searched him roughly. He took away the bread, coins, and other little gifts. Moiseika did not fight him. He only looked sad for a moment, then began to move about the entry as before. Andrey Yefimitch watched this and felt a dull discomfort.

He entered the ward. The same heavy smell struck him at once. The blue walls, barred windows, grey floor, and fixed beds were just as they had always been. The patients looked at him with dull surprise, because the doctor did not often come there. Nikita stood behind him, ready to keep order.

Ivan Dmitritch was lying on his bed with his head in his hands. When he saw the doctor, he sat up quickly. His face changed at once. Fear, anger, and hope passed over it together. "A doctor has come," he said bitterly. "Good. Perhaps you have come to see how we are being killed here."

Andrey Yefimitch spoke gently. He asked how Ivan Dmitritch was feeling. The question made Ivan laugh angrily. How could a man feel, he asked, when he was locked in such a place? How could he feel when a stupid soldier could beat him, when the room stank, and when no one cared whether he lived or died?

The doctor did not become angry. He listened and looked at Ivan's thin face and bright eyes. There was intelligence in this man, and pain had not destroyed it. Andrey Yefimitch suddenly felt interested. In all his years in the town, he had met very few people who could speak with such force.

Ivan Dmitritch accused the hospital, the doctors, the town, and the whole order of life. He said that innocent people could be shut away, forgotten, and treated like animals. He said that cruelty was hidden behind rules and official words. He spoke quickly, sometimes losing the thread, but his feeling was real. His hands shook, and his eyes burned.

"It is terrible," he said. "It is terrible to know that no one will listen. A person can cry out, and the walls answer nothing. A person can say he is innocent, and the answer is a locked door. What am I to do? Tell me that. What am I to do?"

Andrey Yefimitch sat down near him and thought for a moment. He wanted to speak kindly, but his habit of thinking calmly was stronger than his pity. "The best thing in your position would be to run away," he said. "But that is useless. You would be caught. When society decides to protect itself from criminals, madmen, or inconvenient people, it is very strong."

Ivan Dmitritch stared at him. The doctor went on in the same quiet voice. He said that there was only one thing left for Ivan to do. He must accept that his presence in the ward was unavoidable. As long as prisons and madhouses existed, someone would be put inside them. If it was not Ivan, it would be another man.

These words did not comfort Ivan. "My being here is no use to anyone," he said. Andrey Yefimitch answered that perhaps, in the far future, there would be no prisons or madhouses. Perhaps there would be no bars and no hospital gowns. But until that time came, someone would always suffer in such places. He said this almost sadly, but also as if it were a law of nature.

Ivan Dmitritch smiled with sharp irony. He said that men like the doctor and Nikita had nothing to do with the future. Still, he believed that better days would come. He might not live to see them, but the children of other people would. Truth and justice would win one day. The thought filled him with sudden excitement.

He stood up and stretched his hands toward the barred window. His eyes shone. From behind the bars, he blessed the people of the future. He greeted them with all his heart and rejoiced for them. In that ugly room, his voice became almost joyful. For a moment, he seemed to forget his own bed, his gown, and Nikita's fists.

Andrey Yefimitch was pleased by this passion, though he also found it a little theatrical. He said that even if prisons and madhouses disappeared, the basic facts of life would remain. People would still suffer, grow old, and die. Even under the brightest future, every person would one day be put in a coffin and lowered into the earth.

"And immortality?" Ivan Dmitritch asked.

The doctor smiled and said he did not believe in it. Ivan Dmitritch answered that he did. If immortality did not exist, he said, the great human mind would one day create it. Andrey Yefimitch liked this answer. He said it was good to have faith. With such belief, even a man behind walls could live with some happiness.

Then the doctor asked whether Ivan had studied somewhere. Ivan said that he had been at the university but had not finished. Andrey Yefimitch nodded with interest. He said that Ivan was a thinking man and that in any place he could find peace inside himself. Free thought and contempt for the foolish noise of the world, he said, were two of the greatest gifts a person could have.

Ivan Dmitritch suddenly became angry. He did not want to hear about peace inside oneself. He cried that he loved life passionately. He was full of fear, he said, and he knew that he was ill. But there were moments when his whole being thirsted for life. He wanted movement, freedom, people, forests, the sea, and everything that had been taken from him.

He walked up and down the ward in great agitation. Then his voice grew lower, and he asked for news. What was happening in the town? What was happening in the world? Andrey Yefimitch began with the town. He said it was terribly dull. There was no one to talk to, and no one new except the young doctor Hobotov.

Ivan Dmitritch remembered Hobotov and spoke of him with dislike. Andrey Yefimitch agreed that Hobotov had little culture. He then spoke of the strange emptiness of the town and of how real thinking people seemed never to come there. Ivan listened closely, asking questions. The ward was growing dark, but the conversation went on.

Then Andrey Yefimitch began to tell him what was being written in newspapers and journals, both in Russia and abroad. Ivan listened with hungry

attention. For a short time, he seemed like a free educated man speaking with another educated man in an ordinary room. But suddenly he remembered where he was. He clutched his head, lay down, and turned his back to the doctor.

"You will not hear another word from me," he said rudely. "Leave me alone."

Andrey Yefimitch asked why, but Ivan only repeated that he should leave. The doctor shrugged and went out. In the entry, he told Nikita that the place should be cleaned because the smell was terrible. Nikita answered respectfully that it would be done. Then the doctor returned to his rooms.

On the way back, Andrey Yefimitch kept thinking about Ivan Dmitritch. He thought that in all the years he had lived in the town, this was perhaps the first person with whom he could truly speak. Ivan was ill and angry, but he could reason. He cared about the right things. That evening, while reading and later while lying in bed, the doctor remembered him again and again.

The next morning, Andrey Yefimitch decided to visit Ward No. 6 once more. Ivan was lying with his head in his hands and his legs drawn up. The doctor greeted him gently. Ivan answered into the pillow that he was not the doctor's friend and that the doctor would get nothing from him. His voice was rough and suspicious.

Andrey Yefimitch was confused. He said that they had spoken peacefully the day before, and perhaps he had said something awkward. Ivan sat up and looked at him with red eyes. He said that he knew why the doctor had come. The doctor was either a spy or a doctor sent to test him. To Ivan, both were the same.

Andrey Yefimitch smiled and sat down near the bed. He tried to explain that he had no hidden purpose. He had come only because he enjoyed talking with him. Ivan did not believe him at once. His sick fear made every kindness look like a trap. But after a while, his anger softened into sharp irony, and the conversation began again.

From that time, the doctor visited Ward No. 6 more and more often. At first Ivan received him with suspicion. Then he grew used to him. Their talks were not peaceful, but they were alive. In that dirty room, among the beds and barred windows, Andrey Yefimitch found the conversation he had long wanted and had

never found in the town.

Part 5: People Begin to Suspect Him

After that, Andrey Yefimitch went to Ward No. 6 almost every day. He did not always stay long, but sometimes he remained there for hours. He sat on Ivan Dmitritch's bed or on the stool near it, and the two men spoke. Their talks were not friendly in the simple sense. Ivan was often angry, suspicious, and sharp, while the doctor was calm, gentle, and slow. But the doctor enjoyed these talks more than anything else in town.

Ivan Dmitritch did not accept the doctor's ideas. He said that Andrey Yefimitch knew nothing about real life. The doctor had read books, drunk beer, and lived quietly in warm rooms, while other people suffered. Ivan had suffered since childhood, he said, and therefore he understood life better. He had the right to speak of pain, fear, prison, and injustice. The doctor, he said, had only looked at suffering from the outside.

Andrey Yefimitch answered without anger. He said that he did not want to change Ivan's faith or defeat him in argument. What mattered was not whether one man had suffered more than the other. What mattered was that both of them could think. In this town of empty talk and dull habits, it was a great thing to meet even one person who could reason seriously.

These words did not calm Ivan. He walked about the ward, pulling his gown around him and moving his hands. He said that the doctor's calm ideas were only possible for a man who had never been crushed. A man with warm blood and nerves must answer pain with cries, dirt with disgust, and evil with anger. To feel strongly was not weakness. It was life itself.

The doctor spoke of inner peace. He said that there was no true difference between a comfortable study and a hospital ward if a man had peace inside himself. A thinking person, he said, should look for good and evil not in rooms, food, clothes, or comfort, but in his own mind. The outside world was small beside the freedom of thought.

Ivan laughed bitterly at this. He said such teaching might be useful in a warm country, where a man could lie in a barrel, eat fruit, and enjoy the sun. But in Russia, with cold rooms, hunger, police, and beatings, such words sounded foolish. If the old Greek philosopher Diogenes had lived in a Russian winter, Ivan said, he would have begged to be let into a house.

Andrey Yefimitch answered that a person could learn not to feel cold and pain so sharply. He spoke of wise men who taught that pain was partly an idea in the mind. If a person changed the idea, the pain would become weaker. The wise man, he said, was different from other people because he did not fear suffering and was not surprised by human foolishness.

Ivan became more angry. “Then I must be an idiot,” he said, “because I suffer and I am not content.” He pointed to the fat peasant lying near them and said that only a man who had lost almost all feeling could live without reacting to pain. A living person must respond to the world. The higher and more sensitive a person is, the more strongly he feels reality.

The doctor liked Ivan’s answer. He said that Ivan reasoned very well. But Ivan did not want praise. He said he was not a philosopher and did not want to be one. He wanted freedom, fresh air, justice, and a human life. He wanted people to stop speaking beautifully about suffering and to understand what suffering truly was.

Their talks often went on like this. The doctor remained gentle and interested. Ivan became excited, then tired, then suspicious again. Sometimes he refused to speak and turned his face to the wall. Sometimes he spoke with great fire, as if the whole ward, the whole hospital, and the whole town were on trial before him.

Soon everyone in the hospital knew that the old doctor had taken to visiting Ward No. 6. Sergey Sergeyitch, the medical assistant, could not understand it. Nikita could not understand it. The nurses could not understand it. They wondered why the doctor sat for hours with a madman, why he wrote no prescriptions, and what he could possibly be saying there.

Daryushka was also troubled. The doctor no longer drank his beer at the usual time. Sometimes he was late for dinner, which had hardly ever happened before. Mihail Averyanitch came to the doctor’s house and often did not find him there.

This too seemed strange. The doctor's quiet and fixed life had begun to change.

One day at the end of June, Hobotov came to see Andrey Yefimitch about some matter. He did not find him at home. Someone told him that the old doctor had gone to the ward for mental patients. Hobotov became curious and went across the hospital yard. When he reached the small building, he stopped in the entry and listened.

Inside the ward, Ivan Dmitritch was speaking loudly. "We shall never agree," he said. "You will not make me believe what you believe. You do not know real life. You have never known true suffering. You have lived beside the suffering of others, like a man feeding from it, while I have suffered every day of my life."

Andrey Yefimitch answered quietly. He said again that he did not want to convert him. He only cared that they could speak together as thinking people. He was tired, he said, of the senselessness, stupidity, and empty habits of the town. Speaking with Ivan gave him pleasure because Ivan was intelligent and alive. Their different views did not destroy the bond between them.

Hobotov opened the door a little and looked in. He saw Ivan Dmitritch in his nightcap, wrapped in his gown, moving nervously and making sharp faces. Beside him sat Andrey Yefimitch with his head lowered. The doctor's face was red and helpless, and he looked deeply sad. Hobotov smiled in a way that was not kind and looked at Nikita.

Nikita shrugged his shoulders, as if to say that he too had noticed strange things. The next day, Hobotov came again with Sergey Sergeyitch. They stood in the entry and listened to the voices from the ward. When they came out, Hobotov said that the old doctor had completely lost his mind.

Sergey Sergeyitch sighed and carefully stepped around the puddles so that his polished boots would not become dirty. He said that he had expected this for a long time. In this way, the suspicion became stronger. Andrey Yefimitch had found, in Ward No. 6, the only conversation that gave him life. But to the people around him, this very fact was proof that he himself was becoming mad.

Part 6: The Examination and the Journey

After Hobotov and Sergey Sergeyitch began to whisper about him, Andrey Yefimitch noticed a new feeling around him. People looked at him differently. The hospital workers became too careful when they spoke to him. Daryushka watched him with worried eyes. Even Mihail Averyanitch, who had always been noisy and direct, now seemed tender in a strange, uncomfortable way.

One day Andrey Yefimitch received a letter from the mayor. It asked him to come to an important meeting. He dressed and went, expecting an ordinary discussion about hospital business. In the room he found several men: the mayor, Hobotov, another doctor, the military commander, and a member of the town council. They spoke first about moving the dispensary to another building.

Andrey Yefimitch answered calmly. He said that such a change would cost money and would not solve the real problem. He repeated what he had said years before: the hospital was too expensive for the town in its present form, and the whole medical system should be arranged differently. The others listened, but no one truly wanted to think about the matter. A few men made light jokes, and the conversation became empty.

Tea was brought in. Then the military commander touched Andrey Yefimitch's hand and said that he had forgotten his friends. They all began to speak about how dull the town was. There was no theatre, no music, and no real society. Young men did not dance; they only crowded near the food table or played cards. Everyone agreed that a decent person could hardly live there.

Andrey Yefimitch listened for a while, then began to speak in his slow voice. He said it was sad that people wasted their minds and hearts on cards, gossip, and cheap pleasures. They had books, thought, and conversation open to them, yet they did not want them. To him, the life of the mind was the only thing truly worth having. Everything else seemed low and small.

Hobotov listened very carefully. Then, in a serious voice, he asked, "Andrey Yefimitch, what day of the month is it?" The question surprised the old doctor, but he answered. Then Hobotov and the other doctor asked what day of the week it was, how many days there were in a year, and whether it was true that a

remarkable prophet lived in Ward No. 6.

At that last question, Andrey Yefimitch became red. He said that Ivan Dmitritch was mentally ill, but that he was an interesting young man. After that, the men asked no more questions. When he was putting on his coat in the entry, the military commander touched his shoulder and said with a sigh that it was time for old men like them to rest.

As soon as Andrey Yefimitch left the building, he understood what had happened. The meeting had been an examination of his mind. The foolish questions, the careful looks, and the embarrassed kindness all came back to him at once. For the first time in his life, he felt deeply insulted by medical ignorance. The men who had judged him knew almost nothing about the human mind.

That evening, Mihail Averyanitch came to see him. He did not greet him in the usual way, but took both his hands at once. He spoke with great emotion and said that he loved him as a friend. Then he said the truth must be spoken plainly. The doctors believed that Andrey Yefimitch needed rest and a change of scene.

At first, the old doctor refused. He said he felt perfectly well and did not wish to go anywhere. The thought of leaving his rooms, his books, Daryushka, and his fixed habits seemed wild and almost impossible. But then he remembered the meeting and the shame he had felt there. The idea of leaving a town where foolish people looked at him as a madman began to seem almost pleasant.

Mihail Averyanitch said they could go to Moscow, Petersburg, and Warsaw. He spoke of Warsaw with special warmth, because he had spent happy years there long ago. Andrey Yefimitch listened, tired and passive. At last he asked where exactly they would go. In that question, Mihail Averyanitch heard agreement, and he became joyful.

A week later, Andrey Yefimitch was advised to take a rest from his duties. This meant, in truth, that he should resign. He accepted it with almost no feeling. A week after that, he and Mihail Averyanitch were sitting in a posting carriage and driving toward the nearest railway station. The autumn days were cool and clear, and the distant land looked blue and open.

They had to travel a long way before reaching the station. At stopping places,

the tea glasses were dirty, or the horses were slow to be harnessed. Each time, Mihail Averyanitch became red in the face and shouted at the servants. He ordered people about as if he were still an officer or a rich landowner. Andrey Yefimitch watched him in silence and felt more tired with every hour.

In the carriage, Mihail Averyanitch talked without stopping. He told stories of the Caucasus, Poland, campaigns, officers, women, danger, and old friends. He opened his eyes wide, laughed loudly, and breathed almost into the doctor's face. Andrey Yefimitch could not think. He felt trapped beside this loud, affectionate, unbearable man.

In the train, they travelled in a cheap third-class carriage. Mihail Averyanitch quickly made friends with the other passengers. He moved from one seat to another, complained about the railway, praised horses, and spoke loudly about farming, bad harvests, and government mistakes. He allowed no one else to speak for long. Andrey Yefimitch sat in silence and thought bitterly, "Which of us is really mad?"

In Moscow, Mihail Averyanitch put on an old military coat and walked about as if he still belonged to the army. Soldiers saluted him, and this pleased him. He took Andrey Yefimitch to holy places, museums, famous buildings, and restaurants. He prayed before an icon with tears in his eyes and asked the doctor to kiss it too. Andrey Yefimitch felt embarrassed and obeyed.

They looked at large bells, old cannons, churches, and city views. Mihail Averyanitch enjoyed everything loudly. At restaurants, he studied the menu for a long time and spoke to waiters in a lordly tone. Andrey Yefimitch walked, looked, ate, and drank, but one feeling filled him more and more strongly. He wanted to be alone.

After two days, he could not bear it. He told his friend that he was ill and wanted to stay in the hotel room for the whole day. Mihail Averyanitch answered that, in that case, he would stay too, because he also needed rest. Andrey Yefimitch lay on the sofa with his face to the wall and clenched his teeth while his friend talked on and on.

Mihail Averyanitch spoke about politics, horses, rogues in Moscow, and many

other things. His voice filled the room. The doctor said almost nothing. He felt that every word struck him like a small blow. He had left his town to rest from humiliation, but now he was more tired than before.

From Moscow they went on to Petersburg, and then to Warsaw. Mihail Averyanitch became more excited as they came nearer to the city of his memories. But Warsaw did not bring peace. There, his friend met old acquaintances, went out, played cards, and lost money. Then he came back ashamed and borrowed from Andrey Yefimitch, promising to repay everything soon.

The doctor gave him the money. He did not argue. He was too tired for anger, and he wanted only for the journey to end. Yet the loan became another weight in his mind. Later, when he tried to think of large ideas or distant time, the small shame of that Warsaw debt came back and spoiled everything.

By the time they returned home, Andrey Yefimitch was exhausted. The journey had not cured him, rested him, or opened any fresh life. It had only shown him more clearly how helpless he was among people. His old position was gone, his peace was gone, and even his books and rooms no longer waited for him in the same way. The town to which he returned was the same town, but he himself had become poorer, weaker, and more alone.

Part 7: The Trap

When Andrey Yefimitch returned from the journey, his life was changed. He no longer had his old position at the hospital. Hobotov now worked in his place. The town did not speak of it in cruel words, but the fact was clear. The old doctor had been pushed aside, and the young doctor had taken the room he once occupied.

Andrey Yefimitch also had little money left. He had spent much during the journey, and he had given Mihail Averyanitch the money lost in Warsaw. The hospital no longer paid him as before. He had not saved much, because he had never truly cared about money. Now, for the first time, he had to think about ordinary costs with fear.

He moved from his former rooms into a small house near the edge of town.

The house belonged to a woman from the lower class, and it was not comfortable. He had three small rooms. In the kitchen and other parts of the house, the woman lived with her children and a lover who often got drunk. The rooms were noisy, poor, and unpleasant.

Daryushka came with him and looked after him as well as she could. She cooked, cleaned, and tried to keep the small rooms in order. But she could not make the place peaceful. At night, when the lover came home drunk, the children cried and the woman shouted. Then Andrey Yefimitch felt that even his own small corner of life had been taken from him.

He still had his books, but even reading became harder. He tried to sit at the table and return to his old thoughts. But the books no longer gave the same comfort. Sometimes he read a page and understood nothing. Sometimes his mind stopped on small troubles: unpaid bills, a bad smell from the kitchen, a child crying, or the memory of Hobotov sitting in his old place.

Mihail Averyanitch visited him often. He came with the face of a man who wished to be kind and useful. But to Andrey Yefimitch, his visits were torture. His friend spoke loudly, sighed, promised to repay the debt, and advised him to be cheerful. He said that rest would make everything better. He did not understand that every word hurt.

Hobotov also came to see him. He entered with the manner of a doctor visiting a patient. He advised Andrey Yefimitch to take medicines, to go for walks, and to avoid excitement. Sometimes he brought a bottle of medicine and left it on the table. He meant, or seemed to mean, to be helpful, but his presence filled the old doctor with shame and anger.

Andrey Yefimitch felt more and more that these men were treating him as a sick person, perhaps even as a mad person. Their soft voices, serious looks, and careful questions were worse than open insult. If they had attacked him plainly, he might have answered. But their kindness closed around him like a net.

One day, Mihail Averyanitch and Hobotov came together. Andrey Yefimitch was sitting in his room, tired and unhappy. They began to speak in their usual way. Mihail Averyanitch said that he was looking better and that he must not lose

courage. Hobotov said he should take his medicine regularly. Their voices were calm, heavy, and false.

Suddenly something broke inside Andrey Yefimitch. He felt that he could not bear one more word. All the anger and shame of the past weeks rose in him at once. His face became red, and his hands trembled. He stood up and shouted at them to leave him alone.

The two men looked at him in surprise. Mihail Averyanitch began to say something gentle, but this made the doctor even angrier. He shouted that they were stupid, vulgar, and shameless. He said he did not need their friendship or their medicine. Then he seized the bottle Hobotov had brought and threw it hard to the floor.

The bottle broke, and the medicine spread over the floor with a strong smell. “Go away!” Andrey Yefimitch cried. “Both of you, go away!” His voice was rough and unlike his usual voice. For a moment, the room was silent except for his heavy breathing.

Mihail Averyanitch and Hobotov went out. On the stairs, Mihail Averyanitch was deeply upset, but Hobotov’s face was serious and almost pleased. To him, the old doctor’s outburst was another sign that something was wrong with his mind. For Andrey Yefimitch, however, the anger passed quickly and left only shame.

The next morning, Mihail Averyanitch came again. He looked sad and moved, and he spoke as if nothing bad had happened. He said that he forgave everything and only wanted to help. Then he told Andrey Yefimitch that he should trust the doctors and follow their advice. Andrey Yefimitch listened with pain and lowered his eyes.

He said that his friend had no need to trouble himself. He also said that the whole situation was strange and foolish. For more than twenty years, he had lived quietly and honestly. Now, because he had spoken with one patient and because dull people did not understand him, he was being treated as mad. He felt caught in a machine that could not be stopped.

“If society decides that you are mad,” he said, “there is no escape. Everything you do is taken as proof. If you are calm, they say you are hiding your illness. If

you are angry, they say the illness is clear. It is a trap."

Mihail Averyanitch did not understand. He only took his hand and begged him to rest. Hobotov came later and spoke in the same official doctor's voice. He said that Andrey Yefimitch should go with him to the hospital for a short time. There was a man there, he said, whom he wanted the old doctor to see. It would not take long.

Andrey Yefimitch felt too tired to refuse. He put on his coat and went with Hobotov. They walked through familiar streets toward the hospital. The autumn air was cold, and the town looked dull and poor. As they entered the hospital yard, Andrey Yefimitch felt a faint fear, though he did not yet know why.

Hobotov led him not to the main building, but toward the small building in the yard. It was Ward No. 6. Andrey Yefimitch stopped for a moment. The weeds, the rotten steps, and the grey fence were all before him. He knew the place too well. Still, Hobotov spoke calmly and asked him to come in.

Inside the ward, the same smell met him. Ivan Dmitritch looked up from his bed. Moiseika moved near the window. Nikita stood in the entry. Hobotov told Andrey Yefimitch to wait there for a moment, saying that he would return soon with a stethoscope or some other thing. Then he went out.

Andrey Yefimitch sat down and waited. Minutes passed. Hobotov did not return. A strange heaviness entered the room. Nikita came in carrying a hospital gown, underclothes, and slippers. He put them on the bed and said respectfully, but firmly, that the doctor should change his clothes.

At first, Andrey Yefimitch did not understand. Then he understood everything. His face became cold. He looked at Nikita, at the gown, at the barred windows, and at the patients. There had been no patient for him to examine. Hobotov had brought him here as a patient.

"There must be some mistake," he said quietly. But Nikita only repeated that he should change. His voice was polite, yet it held the full power of the ward. Andrey Yefimitch felt that if he refused, Nikita would force him. The trap had closed. The man who had once spoken calmly about suffering was now inside the place where suffering had a locked door.

Part 8: Real Life

Andrey Yefimitch looked at the hospital clothes on the bed. The gown was old, and the slippers were poor and shapeless. He could still hardly believe that these things were meant for him. Only a little while ago, he had walked through the hospital yard as a former doctor. Now he was being told to undress like a patient.

Nikita stood near him and waited. His face was respectful, but his body was firm and heavy. Andrey Yefimitch understood that this man would obey orders without thinking. If he refused, Nikita would not discuss ideas with him. Nikita would simply use his hands, as he had always done.

The old doctor slowly took off his coat, waistcoat, and trousers. He felt ashamed, though no one seemed to care. His watch, notebook, cigarettes, and other small things were taken away. Then he put on the hospital gown and slippers. The clothes smelled of smoke, dirty cloth, and something sour.

When he was dressed, he sat on a bed. He thought that everything was the same. Whether he wore his own clothes or this gown, whether he sat in his study or in this ward, life itself was not changed. He tried to repeat his old thoughts calmly. But the smell, the bars, and the loss of his own things made those thoughts weak.

Ivan Dmitritch watched him closely from his bed. His face showed excitement and cruel pity. “So they have put you here too,” he said. “You drank the blood of others, and now others will drink yours. Excellent.” His words were bitter, but there was truth in them, and Andrey Yefimitch had no answer.

“There must be some mistake,” the doctor said. “It is only a misunderstanding.” He tried to smile, but the smile did not appear. His lips felt dry and heavy. He looked toward the door and listened for Hobotov’s steps, though he already knew that Hobotov would not come back.

The evening came slowly. The ward grew darker, and the patients became more restless. Moiseika moved from window to window and sang softly. The former post-office worker whispered about his imaginary honours. The fat peasant

lay without thought or movement, like a thing rather than a man. Ivan Dmitritch walked and watched the doctor with burning eyes.

Andrey Yefimitch suddenly wanted very much to go home. He wanted his books, his table, his bed, and Daryushka's quiet movements in the next room. He wanted to smoke a cigarette and drink tea. These were small things, but now they seemed precious. For the first time, he felt with his whole body what it meant not to be allowed to leave.

He went to the door and called Nikita. "I must go out," he said. "Only for a moment. I will walk in the yard." Nikita answered that it was not allowed. The doctor explained that he was not truly a patient, that there had been a mistake, and that he needed to speak with Hobotov. Nikita again said that it was not allowed.

Ivan Dmitritch laughed loudly. "Now you understand," he said. "Reason with him. Explain philosophy to him. Tell him that pain is only an idea. Tell him that a wise man can be happy in any place." Then his laughter changed into anger. "Open the door!" he shouted. "Open it, you beast!"

Nikita came in with a dark face. He told Ivan Dmitritch to be quiet. Ivan shouted more loudly, and Andrey Yefimitch also felt anger rising in him. Until that moment, he had never truly shouted in the ward as a helpless man. Now he struck the door with his fist and cried that he must be let out. His voice sounded strange to him, thin and desperate.

"Open the door!" Ivan cried again. "This is violence. This is murder." Andrey Yefimitch repeated that there had been a mistake, and that he must be released at once. The two voices filled the ward. Moiseika became frightened, and the former post-office worker stood near his bed with a confused smile.

Nikita moved quickly. He pushed Ivan Dmitritch away first, then turned to Andrey Yefimitch. With his heavy fist, he struck the old doctor in the face. Then he struck him again on the back. Andrey Yefimitch fell onto the bed, and for a moment he saw sparks and darkness together.

Pain ran through his whole body. His teeth seemed to be biting something soft, and he tasted blood in his mouth. A terrible wave rose inside him, not only from the blow, but from sudden understanding. Men had been beaten like this in this

ward for years. He had known it in words, but he had not known it in his flesh.

He lay still, unable to breathe properly. Ivan Dmitritch was also thrown onto his bed, groaning and cursing. Nikita went out, and the door was locked again. The ward became quieter, but the quiet was worse than the shouting. Andrey Yefimitch listened to his own heart and felt horror enter him deeply.

He understood that for more than twenty years, people had suffered here every day. They had been cold, hungry, dirty, beaten, and forgotten. He had known the facts, but they had seemed distant, almost abstract. Now one blow from Nikita had destroyed all his calm ideas. Pain was not a thought in the mind. Pain was real, immediate, and impossible to argue away.

He wanted to think, but his thoughts broke apart. He wanted to pray, but no prayer came. He wanted to call for help, but he knew no one would listen. This knowledge was the worst part. The door, the bars, the gown, and Nikita's fist had made the whole truth simple.

During the night, he shook with fear and shame. He did not sleep. Sometimes he thought he heard Mihail Averyanitch's voice, sometimes Daryushka's steps, and sometimes Hobotov returning with an apology. But each time, there was only the ward, the breathing of patients, and the locked door.

In the morning, he was very weak. His face was swollen from the blow, and his body ached. He lay on the bed and did not want to move. Ivan Dmitritch spoke to him several times, but Andrey Yefimitch answered little. Something in him had already given way.

Hobotov came into the ward during the day. He looked at the old doctor with a professional face and said that he should rest. He ordered some medicine and went away. Andrey Yefimitch looked at him without anger now. Anger required strength, and he had almost none left.

Later, Mihail Averyanitch came. He stood near the bed, red-faced and ashamed, holding a little bag of tea and some sweet biscuits. His lips trembled, and he tried to speak cheerfully. "My friend," he said, "you must keep up your courage. This will pass." Andrey Yefimitch looked at him and understood that nothing would pass in the way his friend meant.

Daryushka also came. She stood silently near the bed and cried. She did not know what to say, and perhaps there was nothing to say. The sight of her simple grief touched him more than Mihail Averyanitch's loud pity. He wanted to thank her, but he could not form the words.

Toward evening, a strange heaviness came over him. He felt cold, then hot, and the room began to move in his eyes. A greenish light seemed to fill the ward. He heard voices, but they came from far away. His body no longer belonged to him.

A thought passed through him that everything in life was ending very simply. Books, philosophy, work, pride, shame, fear, and pain were all moving away. He did not have a clear last idea. He only felt tired, very tired, as if he had been walking for many years and had finally been allowed to stop.

That evening, Andrey Yefimitch died. The next day, he was buried. Only Mihail Averyanitch and Daryushka followed the coffin to the cemetery. The town went on as before, the hospital went on as before, and Ward No. 6 remained in the yard behind its grey fence.

The Bishop

Part 1: His Mother Has Come

The evening service was being held in the Old Petrovsky Convent. It was the night before Palm Sunday, and the church was full of people. The candles were burning low, and the air seemed dim and smoky. The crowd moved slowly, like a dark sea. Bishop Pyotr stood before them, tired and unwell, giving out the palm branches.

He had been ill for three days. His throat was dry, his breathing was quick, and his shoulders ached from weariness. His legs trembled under his heavy church clothes. The service seemed endless to him. The women's choir sang, a nun read the prayers, and somewhere above, a disturbed woman cried out from time to time.

The bishop looked at the faces coming toward him, but in the half-light they all seemed almost the same. Old faces, young faces, men's faces, women's faces, all moved past him with the same serious eyes. He could not see the doors clearly. It seemed that the people had no end, as if the whole world were slowly passing before him.

Then, suddenly, he saw an old woman in the crowd. She came toward him as if in a dream. She looked like his mother, Marya Timofyevna, whom he had not seen for nine years. Perhaps it was truly she, or perhaps it was only another old woman who looked like her. She took a palm branch from him and went away, smiling kindly and looking back at him.

For no clear reason, tears began to run down the bishop's face. His heart became peaceful and soft. Everything seemed good, and yet he wept. He kept looking toward the left choir, where the prayers were being read in the dim light. Soon someone near him also began to cry. Then someone farther away cried too, and little by little, quiet weeping moved through the church.

A few minutes later, the choir sang again, and everything became as it had been before. The service ended. When the bishop went outside and got into his carriage, the bells were ringing with a bright, rich sound. The monastery garden

lay under the moon. The white walls, white crosses, white birch trees, black shadows, and the far moon all seemed to live a silent life of their own.

It was early April. The day had been warm, but now the air was cool, with a light touch of frost. Still, spring could be felt everywhere. The road from the convent to the town was sandy, and the horses had to go slowly. On both sides of the carriage, people walked home from church in the moonlight. All was quiet and thoughtful.

The carriage passed through the town. The shops were closed, but near one rich merchant's shop, people had gathered to see the new electric lights. The bright lights shook and flashed strangely in the dark street. Then the carriage went on through wider, darker streets, out toward the open road and the smell of pine trees.

Soon the bishop saw the walls and towers of the Pankratievsky Monastery, where he lived. Behind the wall rose the high bell tower, and beside it the golden domes shone in the moonlight. Above everything was the same quiet moon. The carriage entered the gate, and dark figures of monks could be seen here and there among the stones.

As the bishop went into his rooms, the lay brother told him that his mother had arrived while he was away. The bishop stopped at once. "My mother? When did she come?" he asked. The lay brother said she had come before the evening service and had first asked where he was. Then she had gone to the convent.

"Then it was really her I saw in the church," the bishop said. He laughed with joy, almost like a child. The lay brother added that she would come the next day. She had a little girl with her, probably a grandchild, and they were staying at an inn. The bishop asked what time it was and was sorry to hear that it was already after eleven.

He sat for a while in the parlour, still unable to believe that his mother was so near. His arms and legs were stiff, and his head ached. He felt hot and uncomfortable, yet joy kept rising inside him. After a time, he went into his bedroom. Through the wall, he could hear Father Sisoy coughing in the next room.

The bishop changed his clothes and began his prayers before sleep. He read the old familiar words carefully, but his thoughts kept moving toward his mother.

She had had nine children and many grandchildren. She had lived for most of her life in a poor village with her husband, a deacon. The bishop remembered her from early childhood, and he remembered how deeply he had loved her.

Childhood now seemed to him brighter and happier than it had probably been. When he had been sick as a boy, his mother had cared for him with such tenderness. Memories and prayers mixed together in his mind like light from one flame. The prayers did not stop the memories. The memories made the prayers warmer.

When he lay down in the dark, more pictures came to him. He saw his dead father, his mother, and his native village of Lesopolye. He heard the creak of wheels, the crying of sheep, and church bells on bright summer mornings. He remembered priests, teachers, school, village jokes, and old faces that had disappeared long ago.

Some memories made him smile. He remembered Father Simeon, a mild and gentle priest, and another priest who drank too much. He remembered a schoolmaster who was kind but also a drinker, and who had strange Latin words on his wall. He remembered his childhood self, Pavlusha, following a holy icon barefoot and bareheaded with simple faith and complete happiness.

He turned over in bed and tried to stop thinking. “My mother has come,” he remembered again, and he laughed quietly. The moon shone into the room and made pale shapes on the floor. A cricket sounded somewhere. Through the wall, Father Sisoy was snoring, and the sound seemed lonely and old.

At half past one, the bells began to ring for morning prayers. Father Sisoy coughed, muttered, and walked about barefoot in the next room. The bishop called him. A little later, the old man came in with a candle, wearing his cassock over his underclothes and an old faded cap on his head.

“I cannot sleep,” the bishop said, sitting up. “I must be ill. I do not know what it is. Fever, perhaps.” Father Sisoy said that he had probably caught cold and should be rubbed with fat. He yawned and crossed himself. Then he spoke of the new electric lights in town and said he did not like them.

Father Sisoy was old, thin, bent, and always displeased with something. His

eyes stood out angrily, like a crab's eyes. "I do not like it," he said as he went away. "I do not like it at all." The bishop remained awake, weak and feverish, but still filled with the strange joy of knowing that his mother had come.

Part 2: Dinner with Mother and Katya

The next day was Palm Sunday. Bishop Pyotr served in the cathedral in town, then visited the diocesan bishop, who was old and ill. After that, he went to see a very sick old lady, the widow of a general. Only then did he return home. He was already tired before the day was half over, but he was glad because his mother was coming to dinner.

Between one and two o'clock, his mother arrived with Katya, his niece. Katya was eight years old and had bright red hair. The spring sun came through the windows and lay on the white tablecloth. Outside, beyond the double windows, rooks and starlings were making noise in the garden. The room felt warm, bright, and almost happy.

Marya Timofyevna looked at her son with love, but also with shyness. "It is nine years since we last saw each other," she said. "When I looked at you in the monastery yesterday, I thought you had hardly changed. Perhaps you are thinner, and your beard is a little longer. And at the service, everyone cried. I cried too, though I do not know why."

She spoke affectionately, but the bishop felt something painful in her manner. She was his mother, yet she seemed unsure how to speak to him. Should she speak simply, as to her son, or respectfully, as to a bishop? She smiled, then became serious. She looked more like a poor deacon's widow than like a mother sitting with her own child.

Katya watched him with open curiosity. She stared without blinking, as if trying to understand what kind of person her uncle was. Her red hair stood out around her head under a ribbon, almost like a small bright crown. She had a turned-up nose and clever, lively eyes. Before dinner began, she had already broken a glass, so her grandmother quietly moved the other glasses away from

her.

The bishop listened to his mother and looked at Katya. He remembered how, long ago, his mother had taken him and his brothers and sisters to visit richer relatives. In those days, she had been busy with her children. Now she was busy with grandchildren. Time had moved on, but she was still caring for someone weaker than herself.

She told him about his sister Varenka. Varenka had four children, and Katya was the eldest. Her husband, Father Ivan, had fallen ill and died. Now poor Varenka had been left with almost nothing. Marya Timofyevna spoke simply, but the bishop heard years of worry in her voice.

The bishop asked about his eldest brother, Nikanor. His mother said that Nikanor was alive and managing, though he had little. Then she spoke of Nikanor's son, Nikolasha. The boy had not wanted to enter the Church. He had gone to the university to become a doctor. "Perhaps he is right," she said. "Who knows? God's will be done."

Katya suddenly said, "Nikolasha cuts up dead people." As she spoke, she spilled water over her knees. Her grandmother told her calmly to sit still, say a prayer, and go on eating. Then she took the glass away from the child. The bishop almost smiled, but his heart also felt strangely heavy.

"How long it is since we have seen each other," he said. He stroked his mother's hand and shoulder with tenderness. "When I was abroad, I missed you very much, mother. In the evenings I often sat at an open window, listening to music somewhere outside. Then homesickness came over me, and I felt I would give everything just to be at home and see you."

His mother smiled brightly for a moment. Then, almost at once, she made her face serious and said, "Thank you." The words hurt him more than she could know. Why did she thank him? Why did she speak as if he were a stranger or a high official? He looked at her and suddenly felt that he did not fully know her anymore.

His mood changed. The joy of the morning grew weaker. His head began to ache as it had the day before, and his legs felt painfully tired. The fish at dinner seemed stale and tasteless. He was thirsty all the time, and the bright room, the

voices, and even his mother's presence began to press on him.

After dinner, two rich landowning ladies came to visit him. They sat for a long time with stiff, serious faces and said almost nothing. Then the archimandrite came on business. He was quiet and rather deaf, and speaking with him also tired the bishop. By evening, the bells began ringing for vespers, and the sun was going down behind the wood.

When the bishop returned from church, he said his prayers quickly and went to bed. He wrapped himself up as warmly as he could. The memory of the fish at dinner troubled him, and the moonlight in the room made him uneasy. He could not rest. From the next room, he heard voices.

Father Sisoy was talking about politics. He spoke in his usual strange, rough way, mixing countries and peoples together as if all history were a village rumour. Then the bishop heard his mother's voice. She was telling Sisoy about visits, prayers, and tea. Again and again, she said that they had drunk tea, as if drinking tea had been one of the main events of her life.

The bishop lay still and listened. With Sisoy, his mother spoke freely. She chatted, remembered, and even laughed. With him, her own son, she had been careful and respectful. This hurt him deeply. He had wanted to be a son again for a little while, but his rank stood between them like a wall.

Slowly, his thoughts moved back over his own life. He remembered the seminary, where he had once taught Greek. Even then, he had needed spectacles to read. Later he had become a monk, then a school inspector, then had written his learned work and risen higher and higher. When he was still young, life had seemed easy, pleasant, and very long.

Then illness had come. He had grown thin and almost blind, and doctors had advised him to go abroad. He remembered the white church where he had served there, the warm sea, the high bright rooms where he had lived, and his new writing desk covered with books. He had read much and written often. Yet even in that distant place, he had longed for Russia.

Every day abroad, a blind beggar woman had played a guitar under his window and sung about love. When he listened to her, he always thought of the past,

though he did not know why. Now eight years had passed. He had returned to Russia and become a bishop. But the old life seemed far away, like something seen through mist.

In the next room, Katya suddenly laughed and said that Father Sisoy had a green beard. The bishop remembered that the old man's grey beard truly had a greenish colour, and he laughed too. Sisoy became angry and scolded the child. His rough voice sounded almost comforting because it was natural and free.

A little later, Father Sisoy came into the bishop's bedroom with a candle. He was surprised that the bishop was already in bed. The bishop said he had a fever and that his head was bad. Sisoy had bought a candle that day and wanted to rub him with tallow. He spoke as if this were the most sensible cure in the world.

Sisoy took off the bishop's shirt and began rubbing his chest and back. He muttered prayers and small complaints as he worked. He said he had walked into town and had visited the chief priest, but he did not like him. "I do not like him," he repeated. The bishop sat weakly in the candlelight, ill, tired, and strangely sad after the day he had waited for with such joy.

Part 3: Everything Feels Empty

The diocesan bishop, a very fat old man, was ill with pain in his joints and had been in bed for more than a month. Because of this, Bishop Pyotr had to visit him almost every day. He also had to receive many people who came asking for help. They came with papers, complaints, tears, and requests. Since he himself was ill, all these small matters seemed heavier than before.

He was struck by how empty and unimportant many of the requests seemed. People cried over things that appeared petty to him. Their fear, ignorance, and helplessness tired him. At such times, he thought he understood the old diocesan bishop better. That old man had once written a serious book about the freedom of the will, but now his whole life seemed lost in small church business.

Bishop Pyotr felt that he himself had become separated from ordinary Russian life while he was abroad. Now that he was back, much of it felt strange and

difficult to him. The peasants seemed rough. The women who came for help seemed dull and frightened. The students and teachers in the seminaries often seemed uncultivated and even harsh. He did not want to think this way, but the thoughts came.

There were also endless papers. Documents came in and went out by the thousands. Some papers gave marks for the behaviour of priests, their wives, and even their children. A priest might receive a five, a four, or sometimes a three, as if human life could be measured like schoolwork. The bishop had to read these papers, talk about them, and write reports. His day was filled with work that gave his soul no peace.

He had almost no free minute. From morning to night, someone wanted something from him. His mind was troubled by names, facts, petitions, complaints, and formal duties. Only in church did he feel quiet. There, among the prayers, candles, and singing, he could forget the small business of the day and feel that life still had a deeper meaning.

Another thing troubled him too. People were afraid of him. He had never wanted to make anyone afraid. By nature he was quiet, modest, and gentle. But because he was a bishop, everyone in the province seemed small and guilty when they stood before him. They bowed too low, spoke too softly, and watched every word.

Even old priests were timid with him. Some people fell at his feet as if he were not a man but a holy image. Not long before, an old priest's wife had come to ask him something important. But when she stood before him, she became so frightened that she could not speak. She went away without saying what she needed.

This filled him with pain and sometimes with anger. He never liked to speak badly of people in his sermons, because he felt sorry for everyone. Yet when people came to him like frightened children, unable to speak simply, he sometimes lost patience. He became angry, threw their papers on the floor, and then felt ashamed. He wanted human closeness, but his position turned human beings into petitioners.

During all his time there, almost no one had spoken to him simply as one person speaks to another. Even his mother was not natural with him. With Father Sisoy she could talk freely, laugh, and remember small things. But with her own son she became serious, careful, and almost silent. This was not her true nature, and he felt it painfully.

He wondered why things had become like this. Was he no longer her Pavlusha? Was he only "your holiness" now? He wanted to hear her ordinary voice, the voice of his childhood. He wanted her to scold him, laugh at him, or speak about foolish family matters without fear. But between them stood his rank, his robes, his title, and many years of distance.

Only old Father Sisoy behaved freely with him. Sisoy had spent his whole life near bishops and had outlived eleven of them. Perhaps that was why he was not afraid. He said whatever came into his head, complained about everything, and did not try to sound respectful in every sentence. He was a tiring and foolish old man, but the bishop felt more at ease with him than with almost anyone else.

On Tuesday, after the church service, Bishop Pyotr went to the diocesan bishop's house and received petitions there. The work excited and angered him. When he finally left, he felt worse than before. He longed only to go home, lie down, and be quiet. His head ached, his body was weak, and the fever had not left him.

But as soon as he reached home, he was told that a young merchant named Erakin had come to see him. Erakin gave large sums to charities, so the bishop could not refuse him. The merchant said he had come about a very important matter. Bishop Pyotr received him, though every part of him wanted rest.

Erakin stayed about an hour. He spoke loudly, almost shouting, and it was hard to understand what he truly wanted. His words were full of half-finished thoughts and respectful phrases. He seemed to think his matter was terribly important, but the bishop could not find its clear shape. The loud voice beat against his tired head.

When the merchant finally left, he bowed and spoke in a confused way. "God grant it may be so," he said. "It is most necessary, your holiness. It depends on the situation. I trust it may be so." Then he went away, leaving behind only noise and

weariness. The bishop sat for a moment and felt that even kindness had become exhausting.

After the merchant came the Mother Superior from a distant convent. She too had business, questions, and worries. The bishop listened and answered as well as he could. Then, before he had time to breathe, the bells began to ring for vespers. He had to go to church again.

In the evening, the monks sang beautifully. Their voices were deep, full, and calm. A young priest with a black beard led the service. The words of the prayers spoke of the Bridegroom who comes at midnight and of the heavenly house made ready for the feast. As the bishop listened, he did not feel fear or sorrow for his sins. Instead, he felt peace.

The singing carried him far back into the past. He remembered childhood and youth, when he had heard the same words and the same church music. Those days now rose before him bright, living, and joyful. Perhaps they had not really been so happy at the time. But memory made them shine. He wondered whether, in the next life, people would look back on this life in the same way.

He sat near the altar in the darkness. Tears ran down his face again. He had reached everything a man in his position could reach. He had faith, rank, learning, and honour. Yet something was still unclear. Something was missing. He felt that he had not found the most important thing.

He did not want to die. The thought of death frightened him, not because he had no faith, but because life still seemed unfinished. Somewhere in the past, perhaps in childhood, at the academy, or abroad, he had dreamed of something greater and freer. That dream had never fully taken shape, but it had not died. It still troubled him like a quiet voice.

He listened to the singing and felt both peace and sadness. The church was dark, the voices were beautiful, and the service moved on in its old order. For a moment, the small business of papers, visitors, and formal respect disappeared. He was only a tired, ill man listening to music and remembering his life.

“How well they sing today,” he thought. “How beautiful it is.” The thought comforted him, but only for a short time. Behind the beauty, the emptiness

remained. He had faith, yet he still longed for something he could not name. He was surrounded by people, yet he felt deeply alone.

Part 4: Easter without Him

The next day was Wednesday in Holy Week. Bishop Pyotr went on with his duties, but he was weaker than before. His head was heavy, his throat was dry, and every movement tired him. Still, there were services, papers, visitors, and church business. He could not simply lie down and be ill like an ordinary man.

His mother came again with Katya. The bishop was glad to see them, but he had little strength for talking. Marya Timofyevna looked at him with fear, though she tried to hide it. She could see that he was ill. His face was thinner, his eyes were tired, and there was a strange weakness in his smile.

Katya sat near the table and talked in her quick childish way. She told him about her brothers and sisters, about school, and about small family matters. Once she laughed so hard that her red hair shook around her face. The bishop looked at her and felt tenderness. Children, he thought, still belonged to the simple world from which adults were slowly separated.

Marya Timofyevna wanted to speak to him as a mother, but again she could not do it freely. She asked about his health in careful words. She said he should rest more, but she said it almost respectfully, as if asking permission to worry. The bishop felt pain at this. He wished she would touch his forehead and speak to him as she had when he was a sick boy.

On Thursday, he served in the cathedral. The service was long and solemn. The church was full, and the candles burned before the icons. The singing rose and fell in the high space above him. Bishop Pyotr stood, bowed, read, blessed, and moved as the service required, but he felt as if he were doing all this from far away.

At times, he almost lost the words. His legs shook, and sweat came over him. Yet he felt a strange peace too. The beauty of the service, the dark church, the lights, the voices, and the faces of the people all entered him deeply. He knew he

was very ill, but he did not want the service to stop.

Afterward, when he returned home, he could hardly stand. His illness grew suddenly worse. His head burned, and his body shook with fever. He was put to bed. Doctors came, spoke quietly, and looked serious. Soon it was clear that the sickness was dangerous.

His mother was told that he was very ill. When she came into the room, she no longer looked at him as a bishop. Fear and love broke through all the careful respect that had stood between them. She went close to him, looked into his face, and began to weep. Now he was not “your holiness” to her. He was her son, her poor Pavlusha.

“My dear son,” she whispered. “My little one, why are you so ill?” Her voice was the old voice of his childhood. The bishop heard it through the heat and weakness, and something in his heart became calm. He had wanted this nearness, and now it had come. But it had come only when life was leaving him.

Katya was frightened and quiet. Father Sisoy came in and out, muttering and complaining as usual, but more softly than before. The lay brother moved carefully around the room. The doctors gave medicine and spoke of what might be done. But the bishop understood very little now. The room, the faces, and the voices seemed to move away from him.

On Friday, his condition grew worse. He sometimes knew the people around him, and sometimes he did not. He asked for his mother, then seemed to forget that she was beside him. He thought of Lesopolye, of bells, of childhood mornings, of the icon processions, and of his mother’s young face. The past and the present mixed together.

Marya Timofyevna sat near him and held his hand. She no longer cared about rank, visitors, or proper words. Her face was old and full of grief. She watched each breath and seemed to suffer with him. When he moved, she bent over him. When he was still, she looked at him with terror.

Toward Saturday, he became very weak. Outside, the town was preparing for Easter. In houses, people were baking, cleaning, and getting ready for the great feast. In churches, there were prayers and quiet movement. But in the bishop’s

room, time had become slow and heavy. Each breath seemed difficult.

Before dawn on Saturday, Bishop Pyotr died. He had been a bishop, a learned man, and a person of high church rank. But at the end, he died simply, like every other human being. His mother stood near him and wept for her son. To her, all his titles and honours disappeared. Only Pavlusha remained.

The next day was Easter Sunday. The town was full of joy. Bells rang everywhere, bright and loud. People greeted one another, kissed, smiled, and said that Christ had risen. Churches were filled with light. The weather was fine, and the whole town seemed to breathe spring and celebration.

For a short time, people spoke of the bishop's death. They said he had been young, gentle, and good. They remembered his services and his quiet face. But Easter was stronger than grief. Life quickly moved forward, as life always does. People had their families, meals, visits, and holiday joy.

A month later, a new bishop came. People began to speak of him instead. After that, even he was replaced in people's talk by other matters. The dead bishop was slowly forgotten. This was not because people were cruel. It was because ordinary life is strong, busy, and forgetful.

Only his mother remembered him constantly. She went back to her distant town, where she lived with one of her sons-in-law. Sometimes in the evening, she sat outside with other old women. They talked about children, grandchildren, prices, illnesses, and church matters. Then she would say quietly that she had once had a son who was a bishop.

The other old women listened, but not all of them believed her. Perhaps they thought she was proud, or perhaps they thought she was only confused with age. A bishop seemed too high and distant to be the son of this small poor old woman. So they looked at her politely and said little.

Marya Timofyevna did not argue. She only repeated it sometimes, softly and with tears in her eyes. She remembered his childhood face, his illness, his tired smile, and his hand in hers at the end. Other people forgot him, but she did not. In her heart, the bishop remained her Pavlusha, her son, whom she had loved before anyone knew his name.

The Steppe

Part 1: Leaving Home

Early one July morning, an old covered chaise drove out of the town of N. It was a poor, worn-out carriage, the kind that no rich person would use for a long journey. It shook, rattled, and cried at every movement, as if it were complaining. A small pail hanging behind it knocked against the back, making a rough sound. The leather on the body of the chaise was old and loose, and the whole thing seemed ready to fall apart.

Three grown people and one boy were travelling in it. Ivan Ivanitch Kuzmitchov, a merchant, sat inside the chaise. He had a shaved face, glasses, and a straw hat, and he looked more like an office clerk than a merchant. Beside him sat Father Christopher, an old priest from the Church of St. Nikolay. He was small, with long hair, a grey cassock, a wide hat, and a coloured belt.

Kuzmitchov looked businesslike and serious. He had just said good-bye to his family and had eaten and drunk well before leaving, so his face still had some warmth in it. Yet even this warmth was already fighting with his usual hard manner. Father Christopher was different. He looked at the world with wet, kind eyes and smiled so broadly that the smile seemed to reach the edges of his hat.

The coachman was Deniska, a young man who sat in front and drove the two lively bay horses. Beside him, holding tightly to his elbow, sat a boy of nine. This was Yegorushka, Kuzmitchov's nephew. His face was brown from the sun, but it was also wet with tears. He was being taken away from home to go to school.

Yegorushka's mother, Olga Ivanovna, was Kuzmitchov's sister. She was a widow and loved educated people and polite society. She had begged her brother to take the boy with him on his business journey and place him in school. So now Yegorushka was sitting high beside Deniska, bouncing up and down as the chaise moved quickly over the road. He did not really understand where he was going or why he had to go.

The wind blew his red shirt out behind him like a small balloon. His new hat,

decorated with a peacock feather, kept slipping backward on his head. Everything felt strange and wrong. The town was still near, but already it seemed to be leaving him. He felt very unhappy and wanted to cry again.

As the chaise passed the prison, Yegorushka looked at the high white walls, the barred windows, the guards, and the cross on the roof. He remembered going there with his mother for a church feast. He also remembered going there at Easter with Deniska and Ludmila the cook. They had taken Easter bread, eggs, cakes, and meat to the prisoners. The prisoners had thanked them and crossed themselves, and one had given him a small metal buckle made by hand.

Then the prison was left behind. The chaise passed black dirty factories and then the green cemetery behind its stone wall. White crosses and stones showed through the cherry trees. Yegorushka remembered that when the trees were in flower, everything looked white, as if the graves had disappeared into blossoms. When the cherries were ripe, red spots appeared among the white stones like drops of blood.

His father and his grandmother lay in that cemetery. His grandmother, Zinaida Danilovna, had once been lively and quick. She had often brought him soft rolls with poppy seeds from the market. When she died, she was placed in a long narrow coffin, and coins were put on her eyes because they would not stay closed. Now she only slept there under the trees, day and night.

After the cemetery came the brickworks. Smoke rose in dark clouds from low roofs made of reeds. Men and horses moved inside the smoke, all covered with red dust. The sky above the brickworks looked dirty, and the shadows of the smoke lay across the road and fields. Then the town ended, and the open country began.

Yegorushka looked back at the town for the last time. He pressed his face against Deniska's elbow and began to weep bitterly. Kuzmitchov heard him and spoke sharply. "Are you crying again, little baby?" he said. "If you do not want to go, then stay behind. No one is forcing you."

Father Christopher tried to comfort him at once. "Never mind, Yegor boy," he said kindly. "Never mind, my child. Pray to God. You are not going for harm, but

for good. Learning is light, and ignorance is darkness." He spoke quickly and warmly, as if good words could cover the boy like a blanket.

Kuzmitchov asked, "Do you want to go back?" Yegorushka sobbed and said that he did. His uncle answered that he might as well go back then, because the journey was a great trouble for very little gain. Father Christopher again began to speak of learning, faith, parents, church, and country. To him, education seemed a holy and useful thing.

Kuzmitchov did not fully agree. He lit a cheap cigar and said that learning helped some people, but only confused others. His sister, he said, did not understand business and wanted to turn Yegorushka into a gentleman. If everyone became educated, there would be no one left to trade or sow grain. Father Christopher answered that if everyone only traded and sowed grain, there would be no one to learn.

Each man seemed pleased with his own answer. They both became serious and cleared their throats. Deniska, who had listened without understanding much, shook his head, stood a little in his seat, and struck the horses with his whip. Then there was silence. The chaise rolled on into the open steppe.

Before them lay a wide plain without clear end. Low hills stood around it, one behind another, and in the distance they became soft and purple. It was impossible to tell where the plain began or where it ended. The sun had already risen behind the town. Its light slowly spread across the earth, first far away, then nearer and nearer.

A warm ray touched Yegorushka's back. Soon the whole steppe threw off the grey light of morning. Dew shone on the grass, and for a short time everything seemed fresh and alive. Birds crossed the road with cheerful cries. Small animals called from the grass. Insects began their thin, endless music.

But this freshness did not last. The dew quickly dried, and the air grew still. The grass drooped under the heat. The birds became quiet, and the living sounds faded. The sky above the steppe looked very deep and clear, but also empty. There were no forests, no high mountains, and no shade, only the plain, the low hills, and the great sky.

The chaise went on and on. Yegorushka saw the same things again and again: grass, hills, sky, and rooks moving slowly over the dry land. A hawk flew low, stopped in the air for a moment, then shot away like an arrow. Far ahead, a windmill turned its arms. It looked like a small man waving from the distance.

Sometimes a white stone or a piece of broken pottery appeared near the road. Sometimes a dry willow tree stood alone, with a blue crow on one branch. A small animal ran across the track and vanished into the grass. Then everything became the same again. The steppe seemed to repeat itself forever.

At last a wagon loaded with sheaves came toward them. A sleepy peasant girl lay on top of the load. She lifted her head and looked at the travellers through the heat. Deniska stared at her, and the horses stretched their noses toward the sheaves. The chaise came so close that it almost touched the wagon.

Deniska shouted a rude joke at the girl. She only smiled sleepily, moved her lips, and lay down again. Soon a single poplar tree came into view on a low hill. It stood alone, graceful and green. Yegorushka could not stop looking at it. He wondered, without putting it into clear words, whether that lonely tree was happy.

Around the poplar, wheat stretched like a yellow carpet. On the hills, some of it had already been cut and tied into sheaves. Lower down, people were still working. Six mowers stood in a row and swung their scythes together. The bright blades flashed in the sun and made a sharp singing sound.

Women were binding the sheaves. Their movements were slow and tired in the terrible heat. A black dog ran toward the chaise with its tongue hanging out, but it stopped halfway and did not bark. It was too hot even to bark. One woman straightened her aching back and watched Yegorushka’s red shirt for a long time as the chaise passed.

Then the wheat was left behind too. Again there were the dry plain, the sunburnt hills, and the burning sky. The same hawk hung above the earth. The windmill still turned in the distance, and it seemed that the travellers would never reach it. Perhaps it was not waiting for them. Perhaps it was moving away.

Father Christopher and Kuzmitchov were silent. Deniska shouted at the horses and struck them with the whip. Yegorushka had stopped crying now. The heat, the

movement, and the endless plain had made him dull and tired. He felt as if he had been travelling for many hours and as if the sun had been burning his back for half his life.

His uncle's face had lost the warmth of the morning. It now showed only business and impatience. Father Christopher still smiled gently and looked at the world as if every hill and blade of grass were part of God's work. The heat seemed to have fixed a pleasant thought inside his head. He was quiet, but his face remained kind.

Kuzmitchov asked Deniska if they would catch up with the wool wagons that day. Deniska looked at the sky, rose in his seat, whipped the horses, and said that, God willing, they would catch them by nightfall. Just then, dogs began barking. Several steppe sheepdogs rushed out, fierce and angry, and surrounded the chaise.

They barked at the horses, the carriage, and the people as if they hated all of them. Their shaggy faces and red angry eyes came close to the wheels. Deniska was pleased by the chance to strike them with his whip. The horses rushed forward, and Yegorushka had to hold on tightly. He was not afraid, but he looked at the dogs with the same anger Deniska showed.

Soon they came upon a flock of sheep. Kuzmitchov ordered Deniska to stop. An old shepherd, barefoot and in torn clothes, came forward with a long stick in his hand. Another shepherd stood far off at the other side of the flock. Both looked old and strange, like men from ancient Bible stories.

Kuzmitchov asked whose sheep they were. The old shepherd shouted that they belonged to Varlamov. The other shepherd repeated the same thing from far away. Kuzmitchov asked if Varlamov himself had passed that way the day before. The shepherd answered that only his clerk had passed.

The chaise moved on again. The shepherds, the sheep, and the angry dogs were left behind. Yegorushka looked ahead at the soft purple distance. The windmill slowly became larger, and at last he could see its two sails clearly. One was old and patched, and the other was new and bright in the sun.

Yet when the chaise went straight forward, the windmill seemed to move to the left. It did not come closer in the proper way. It kept watching Yegorushka

with its shining sail and waving at him from the side. Deniska said that a man named Boltva had built it for his son. A little later, Boltva's farm also came into view, but the strange windmill still did not fall behind. To Yegorushka, it seemed almost like a magician.

Part 2: Heat, Water, and the Wide Plain

Near midday, the chaise turned off the road to the right. It went slowly for a short distance and then stopped. Yegorushka heard the soft sound of running water. At the same time, a different air touched his face. It was cool and gentle, like a hand laid on hot skin.

Water was running from a little pipe fixed in the side of a low rocky hill. It fell in a thin clear stream and then hurried away over the ground, shining in the sun. Near its source, it spread into a small pool. The hot earth drank much of it almost at once, but farther away, green reeds showed where the water still lived. When the chaise came near, three birds flew up from the reeds with sharp cries.

The travellers got out to rest and feed the horses. Kuzmitchov, Father Christopher, and Yegorushka sat on a mat in the narrow shade made by the chaise and the horses. The shade was small, but after the open road it felt good. They drank water, ate hard-boiled eggs, cucumbers, and pies, and for a little while the journey seemed less cruel.

Father Christopher became talkative after eating. He looked kindly at Yegorushka and began to speak of his own childhood. He said that he too had studied when he was young. Before he was fifteen, he could read and speak learned languages and knew many subjects. Important churchmen had praised him, and people had expected him to become a great scholar.

But he had not continued his studies. His parents had wanted him near them, and he had obeyed. He said this without deep sadness. To him, obedience to parents was better than fasting or prayer. Kuzmitchov listened, but his mind was still on business. He only said that learning was good, but it would not help them if they failed to catch Varlamov.

Deniska stood near the horses and pretended not to notice the food. He killed horseflies on the horses' backs with great seriousness, as if this were important work. When Kuzmitchov called him to eat, he came shyly to the mat. He chose the thickest and least fresh cucumbers, took two cracked eggs, and touched a pie with his finger as if afraid to take too much. When he was told to take it, he moved away and ate with such loud pleasure that even the horses turned to look at him.

After the meal, Kuzmitchov took a sack from the chaise and put it under his head. He told Yegorushka to watch it and make sure no one stole it. Father Christopher took off his outer clothes, and Yegorushka was surprised to see that the priest wore ordinary trousers and boots under his church clothes. Without his cassock, he looked strange to the boy, almost like a man from an adventure book.

The two older men lay down under the chaise and soon slept. Deniska also stretched himself on the grass and told Yegorushka to watch the horses. Then he fell asleep too. The place became very still. The horses chewed and snorted, the sleepers breathed heavily, the little stream talked to itself, and from time to time the three birds cried in the reeds.

The heat became stronger after the meal. Yegorushka could hardly breathe. He walked toward the reeds and looked around. He saw the same wide land as before: the plain, the low hills, the sky, and the purple distance. Only the windmill was gone now, left far behind. A small group of houses stood on a hill, but there were no people, no trees, and no shade near them. The village looked dried up by the sun.

To pass the time, Yegorushka caught a grasshopper and held it near his ear. He listened to its thin music for a long time. Then he chased yellow butterflies and found himself back near the chaise without knowing how he had returned. His uncle and Father Christopher were still asleep. The horses were still resting. Time seemed to have stopped in the hot air.

He went to the water pipe and drank. The water was very cold and smelled faintly of the plant from which the pipe was made. At first he drank eagerly. Then the cold ran through his mouth, chest, and whole body, and water spilled down onto his shirt. He went back to the chaise and looked at the sleeping men.

Kuzmitchov's sleeping face still looked serious and full of business. Even in sleep, he seemed to be thinking of wool, wagons, prices, and Varlamov. Father Christopher looked different. His face was soft and pleased, and perhaps he was dreaming of his old studies, church stories, good food, and friendly talk. Yegorushka looked from one face to the other and felt the difference between them without fully understanding it.

Then he heard a song. It was far away, soft, and sad, and he could not tell where it came from. At first it seemed to come from the right, then from the left, then from above, and then from the earth itself. As he listened, he almost felt that the dry grass was singing. The song seemed to say that the grass was not guilty, that it wanted to live, and that the sun was burning it for no reason.

At last Yegorushka saw the singer. On the hill near the farthest house, a peasant woman was sowing something from a sieve. White dust fell slowly around her. Near her stood a small boy in only a shirt. He stood very still, as if the song or the red colour of Yegorushka's shirt had bewitched him.

Later, the same little boy suddenly appeared on one of the rocks above the stream. He looked at Yegorushka with wide eyes and an open mouth. The red shirt, the chaise, and the sleeping travellers seemed strange to him. The two boys stared at each other for a long time without speaking. At last Yegorushka asked his name, and the boy answered in a deep little voice, "Tit."

After that, neither boy said another word. Tit climbed carefully up the rocks, always looking back as if afraid that Yegorushka might hit him from behind. Then he disappeared over the hill. Yegorushka sat down, put his arms around his knees, and rested his head on them. The heat pressed on his neck and back, and the sad song came and went in the still air.

Deniska woke first. He washed at the stream, then suddenly became playful. He challenged Yegorushka to race him to the reeds, and though Yegorushka was tired, he ran after him. Deniska was already a grown young man and soon to be married, but he still loved games like a boy. He ran, hopped on one leg, and looked very proud when he won.

Then Deniska became serious and caught a large grasshopper in the grass. He

showed it to Yegorushka, and they touched its green back and feelers. Deniska caught a fat fly and gave it to the grasshopper. The grasshopper calmly bit the fly, as if this were the most ordinary thing in the world. Then they let both insects go, and the damaged fly flew off toward the horses.

Soon Kuzmitchov woke and looked toward the distance at once. His first thought was clearly of business. He told Father Christopher to get up because it was time to leave. Father Christopher woke smiling, washed, dressed, and then took out a little prayer book. Kuzmitchov was impatient, but the old priest insisted on saying his daily psalms. He stood facing east and prayed while Kuzmitchov waited with anger in his face.

At last they started again. The scene looked almost the same as before noon. The low hills sank into the purple distance, the grass passed by, and the same rooks and hawk moved over the steppe. The air was even heavier now. There was no wind, no fresh sound, and no cloud.

Then, near evening, the steppe seemed unable to bear the heat any longer. A grey cloud appeared behind the hills. Suddenly a strong wind broke loose and rushed over the plain. Dust rose in dark turning columns, dry plants rolled and jumped across the road, and small things flew up toward the sky. A large bird rose from the grass and flashed in the sun, then turned away in fear.

Thunder sounded far beyond the hills, and for a moment fresh air came to them. Deniska whistled happily and struck the horses. Kuzmitchov and Father Christopher held their hats and looked toward the hills, hoping for rain. But the struggle did not last. The wind weakened, the dust settled, the cloud hid itself, and the still heat returned. Only the troubled birds cried somewhere in the distance as evening began to fall.

Part 3: The Inn in the Steppe

Evening came slowly over the steppe. The sun went down, but the heat did not leave at once. The air was still heavy, and the grass looked tired and dark. The chaise rolled on through the fading light, and Yegorushka sat without speaking.

His whole body ached from the shaking of the road.

At last, lights appeared ahead. The horses turned toward a low building near the road. It was an inn, standing alone in the wide steppe. Near it were sheds, carts, and dark shapes that might have been horses or cattle. The place looked poor and lonely, but after the endless road it seemed almost like a town.

As soon as the chaise stopped, a man ran out to meet them. This was Moisey Moisevitch, the innkeeper. He was thin, quick, and full of movement. He bent, smiled, lifted his hands, and spoke all at once, as if he were delighted and frightened at the same time. His whole body seemed to welcome the travellers.

“Ivan Ivanitch! Father Christopher!” he cried. “What a joy! What a great joy! Please come in. Please rest. You must have tea. You must eat something.” His words came so fast that Yegorushka could hardly follow them. The innkeeper seemed afraid that the guests might disappear if he did not speak quickly enough.

Kuzmitchov asked at once about the wool wagons. He did not waste time on greetings. Moisey Moisevitch told him that one group of wagons had passed early in the morning. Another group had stopped there for dinner and had gone on toward evening. Kuzmitchov listened sharply, with the face of a man counting time and money in his head.

Then Kuzmitchov asked whether Varlamov had been there. Moisey Moisevitch said that Varlamov himself had not come. His clerk had passed the day before and had said that Varlamov would be at the Molokan farm that day. This news made Kuzmitchov decide that they must go on quickly. He wanted to catch the wagons and then find Varlamov.

Moisey Moisevitch was horrified. “Go on now?” he cried. “At night? No, no, Ivan Ivanitch. You must stay. You must drink tea. Tomorrow morning you can catch anyone you like.” He bent and spread his hands as if begging for mercy. He seemed ready to hide their caps or lock the door if that would keep them there.

Kuzmitchov said that there was no time. Father Christopher, however, smiled kindly and said that one cup of tea would not delay them long. Kuzmitchov gave in. At once, Moisey Moisevitch became joyful and ran to the door. He shouted for the samovar as if the whole house were on fire.

The travellers went into the big room. To Yegorushka, it seemed strange and unpleasant after the open steppe. The air smelled sour and old. The walls were dirty, and old pictures hung there, dark with age and flies. A lamp burned weakly, and its light made the corners look even darker.

Yegorushka sat down on a sofa and looked around. Everything in the room seemed strange to him: the old furniture, the greasy table, the pictures, the heavy smell, and the quick, bent movements of Moisey Moisevitch. The innkeeper kept smiling and bowing, but his smile did not make the room warmer. It made the boy feel more tired.

A minute later, another man came in with a tray. This was Solomon, Moisey Moisevitch's brother. He was small, thin, and dark, with a long nose and sharp eyes. His clothes looked poor, and his face had a hard, mocking smile. He put the tray down and looked away, as if he despised the room, the guests, and himself.

Yegorushka noticed that smile at once. It was not a happy smile, and it was not a polite smile. It seemed to say that everything was foolish and ugly. Solomon did not move like the innkeeper. Moisey Moisevitch bent and twisted in front of the guests, but Solomon stood as if he cared for no one.

Tea was brought. Moisey Moisevitch hurried about, offering food, sugar, glasses, and small dishes. He wanted to please everyone. Kuzmitchov drank quickly and asked questions about the road, the wagons, and Varlamov. Father Christopher drank more slowly and spoke to the innkeeper with gentle kindness.

During the tea, Kuzmitchov took out his sack of money. He and Father Christopher had business to discuss, and they began to count banknotes. To Yegorushka, the notes looked dirty and ordinary, not like the great power that adults seemed to see in them. Kuzmitchov handled them without tenderness, stuffing them back into the sack as if they were waste paper. Yet everyone in the room seemed to understand that the sack was important.

Yegorushka was sleepy, but he watched everything. The grown men's world seemed strange to him. They spoke of wool, money, wagons, prices, and Varlamov. These words seemed dry and heavy. He could not understand why adults cared so much about them, or why his uncle's face became so sharp whenever business

was mentioned.

Father Christopher began to speak to Solomon. He called him Solomon the Wise and asked how business was. Solomon looked at him with the same dark smile. “What business?” he asked. His voice sounded rough, as if every friendly question hid an insult.

Father Christopher only meant ordinary business, but Solomon answered in a strange way. He said that he was a servant to his brother, his brother was a servant to the guests, and the guests were servants to Varlamov. Then he added that if he had ten million, Varlamov himself would become his servant. The words were bitter and proud.

Kuzmitchov frowned. He did not like such talk. “How can you compare yourself with Varlamov?” he asked. To him, Varlamov was a great man, a rich man, and someone to be respected. Solomon’s answer was sharp. He said that Varlamov lived only for money and gain, while he himself had thrown away his own money. Therefore, he said, he was freer than Varlamov.

This was hard for the others to understand. Father Christopher looked troubled, and Kuzmitchov looked angry. Solomon spoke more quickly. He said that after their father died, each brother had received six thousand roubles. Moisey Moisevitch had bought an inn, married, and had children. Solomon had put his money into the stove and burned it.

To Yegorushka, this sounded impossible. Money was something adults chased across the steppe. It was counted, hidden, guarded, and spoken of with serious faces. How could a man burn it? He looked at Solomon and felt that the man was like someone from a bad dream, not fully human and not fully unreal.

Moisey Moisevitch was afraid of his brother’s talk. He looked from the guests to Solomon and back again. He begged them not to be angry. He said Solomon was strange, that he was not in his right mind, and that he brought trouble on the family. He spoke softly now, almost in despair, as if he had said these same words many times before.

“He respects nobody,” Moisey Moisevitch said. “He fears nobody. He laughs at everyone.” He said that even Varlamov had once been insulted by Solomon and

had punished them both. The innkeeper could not understand why he himself had suffered for his brother's words. He kept asking why he was to blame if God had made Solomon strange.

Solomon heard this and smiled. The smile made Yegorushka uncomfortable. It had anger in it, but also pride and pain. He seemed to hate money, yet money was the only language everyone around him understood. He seemed to despise people, yet he could not leave them. He stood in the corner, thin and dark, like a shadow that had learned to laugh.

The room grew heavier. Tea glasses stood on the table, and the lamp gave off a tired yellow light. The smell of the room, the adults' voices, and the long journey pressed on Yegorushka. He no longer wanted to understand anything. He only wanted to sleep.

Moisey Moisevitch went on sighing and explaining that Solomon did not sleep at night, but only thought and thought. What he thought about, no one knew. If one spoke to him, he became angry and laughed. He wanted nothing, feared nothing, and loved no one. The innkeeper said this with real grief, as if his brother were both a shame and a wound in his house.

Yegorushka's eyes began to close. He saw Solomon's long nose, sharp eyes, and bent little figure moving before him in the yellow light. The shadow from the nose crossed the face in a strange way. The mocking smile grew larger in the boy's tired mind. For a moment, Solomon no longer seemed like a man in an inn, but like a dark spirit from a dream.

The voices became distant. Kuzmitchov spoke of leaving. Father Christopher said something kind. Moisey Moisevitch begged and sighed. Solomon laughed once, suddenly and harshly, then went out. Yegorushka lay back on the sofa, still hearing the grown men's words about money, wagons, and Varlamov, until the room and the steppe outside melted together in sleep.

Part 4: The Countess and the Road Again

Yegorushka slept on the sofa in the inn, but his sleep was not peaceful. The

room smelled of tea, dust, and old walls, and the voices of the adults came to him through his dreams. Sometimes he heard Moisey Moisevitch running about and whispering. Sometimes he heard Father Christopher's kind voice or Kuzmitchov's sharper business voice. The name Varlamov also seemed to move through the room like a person whom everyone feared and needed.

Suddenly there was a new sound outside. Wheels stopped at the front door, and horses moved in the yard. Moisey Moisevitch became more excited than before. His steps ran from one room to another, and his voice rose and fell in a hurry. Someone important had arrived, and even in sleep Yegorushka felt that the whole inn had changed.

He opened his eyes only a little. The lamp burned weakly, and the room seemed full of moving shadows. Then, all at once, a woman's face came very near his own. He saw black eyebrows, large brown eyes, soft cheeks with dimples, and a smile that seemed to shine over her whole face. A fine pleasant smell came with her, unlike anything in the inn.

"What a pretty boy!" the lady said. "Whose boy is he? Look, Kazimir Mihalovitch, what a charming child. Good heavens, he is asleep." Then she bent down and kissed Yegorushka warmly on both cheeks. He smiled, but he was not sure whether he was awake or still dreaming. To him, the beautiful lady seemed to have come from some bright world very far from the dusty inn.

The door moved, and hurried footsteps passed in and out. Someone called his name in a low voice. "Yegorushka, Yegorushka, get up. It is time to go." Deniska, or perhaps someone else, lifted him and helped him stand. Yegorushka was still half asleep, and the room seemed to move around him.

As he was led toward the door, he saw the lady again. She was wearing a black dress and stood in the middle of the room. She looked at him, smiled, and nodded kindly, as if they were old friends. Near the door stood a handsome dark man in a round hat and leather gaiters. Yegorushka guessed that this man was with her.

Outside the front door stood a fine new carriage with two black horses. A groom in smart clothes sat on the box, holding a long whip. The carriage, the horses, and the groom all looked rich and clean. They did not seem to belong to

the same world as Moisey Moisevitch's poor inn. Only Solomon came out to see the travellers leave, and his face looked tight with the wish to laugh.

Father Christopher climbed into the chaise and whispered, "The Countess Dranitsky." Kuzmitchov also whispered, "Yes, Countess Dranitsky." Even Deniska spoke quietly for a time. The arrival of the countess had made a strong impression on everyone. Only after the chaise had gone some distance from the inn did Deniska dare to shout at the horses again.

The inn soon became only a small dim light behind them. Yegorushka sat beside Deniska, still sleepy, with the night air on his face. He thought about the beautiful countess and about Varlamov, the man whom everyone seemed to seek. He had never seen Varlamov, but he had heard his name many times. People said he had huge lands, countless sheep, and more money than anyone could imagine.

At home, Yegorushka had also heard many stories about Countess Dranitsky. She owned great lands, many sheep, horses, and a large house with wonderful rooms. People said that in one room there were pictures of old Polish kings on the walls. They also said there was a great clock shaped like a rock, with a golden horse and a golden rider on it. When the clock struck, the rider moved his sword.

People said many other things too. Twice a year, the countess gave great balls. Gentlemen, officials, and rich neighbours came from all parts of the province. They drank tea from silver samovars and ate rare fruit even in winter. A band played day and night, and the guests danced under bright lights. Yegorushka thought of all this and remembered the lady's face and her smile.

Kuzmitchov was probably thinking of the countess too. After they had driven a little way, he began to speak about the man who looked after some of her business. He said that Kazimir Mihalovitch was taking money from her left and right. When Kuzmitchov had bought wool from her some time before, that man had made a large profit for himself. Father Christopher answered that such things often happened when careless rich people trusted the wrong helpers.

"And she does not care," Kuzmitchov said. "She has too much money and too little attention." His voice was both respectful and disapproving. To him, money was not a thing to be left sleeping in other people's hands. It was a thing to be

watched, counted, guarded, and used carefully.

Father Christopher sighed and said that wealth could be a heavy burden too. A poor man suffered because he had too little. A rich person suffered because everyone wanted something from him. Kuzmitchov did not answer at once. He was thinking about prices, wool, wagons, Varlamov, and the time they were losing on the road.

The night grew deeper. The steppe, which had been hot and dusty by day, now became wide, pale, and mysterious. The moon rose and spread a thin light over the grass. Far away, low hills and old burial mounds stood still and dark. Sometimes a stone figure or a lonely bush looked almost like a person waiting beside the road.

Yegorushka's eyes opened and closed. When he was awake, he saw the pale road, the horses' backs, and the soft dust under the wheels. When he almost slept, the road changed into a dream. The countess's face, Solomon's sharp smile, Moisey Moisevitch's quick hands, and the unknown Varlamov all mixed together. He could not tell whether they belonged to the world or to sleep.

The insects sang without stopping in the grass. Now and then a bird cried in the darkness with a strange voice, as if it were surprised or afraid. The sky looked very deep and full of stars. Yegorushka felt both small and strangely happy under it. The steppe at night did not seem empty; it seemed full of hidden life and old stories.

The chaise moved on for a long time. Father Christopher and Kuzmitchov spoke less and less. Deniska bent forward over the horses, sometimes silent, sometimes clicking his tongue. The wheels creaked, the pail knocked behind the chaise, and the harness made small sounds in the dark. Everything was quiet, but the quiet was not simple. It was the deep quiet of a huge land through which people were only passing.

After some time, Yegorushka heard voices ahead. The chaise slowed down. Dark shapes appeared on the road, one after another, long and heavy. Men moved near them, and horses could be heard breathing in the night. The wool wagons were near. Yegorushka opened his eyes more widely, because another part of the

journey was about to begin.

Part 5: Among the Waggoners

Yegorushka opened his eyes when the chaise stopped. At first he did not understand where he was. The moonlight, the road, the horses, and the dark shapes ahead all seemed part of a dream. Then he heard men's voices and saw a long line of wagons stretching along the road. Each wagon was piled high with great bales of wool, so that the horses looked small beside them.

Kuzmitchov called out to the men and asked whether they had seen Varlamov. The answer came back from the darkness that they had not. Kuzmitchov decided at once to go on to the Molokan farm, where Varlamov might be spending the night. Then he called to the wagoners and asked them to take Yegorushka with them. There was no reason, he said, for the boy to be shaken about in the chaise while the wagons were going the same way more slowly.

Yegorushka climbed down from the box. Several strong hands took hold of him and lifted him upward. A moment later, he was sitting high on a soft, damp bale of wool. The sky seemed very near, and the earth seemed far below. His coat and bundle were thrown up after him, and he quickly made a pillow with the bundle and covered himself.

Deniska shouted from below that the men must not be unkind to the boy. Kuzmitchov also called out that he was trusting them. The chaise creaked and moved away into the darkness, not along the road but off to one side. For a short time, Yegorushka could hear the pail knocking behind it. Then even that sound died away.

The wagons stood still for another minute. Then someone shouted from the front, and the first wagon creaked forward. The second followed, then the third, and then the one on which Yegorushka lay. The whole long train began moving slowly through the night. Yegorushka held the cord around the bales, smiled with sleepy comfort, and soon fell asleep as if he were in his own bed.

When he woke again, the sun had already risen. It was partly hidden behind

an old burial mound, and its light spread in long golden lines over the plain. The land looked different from the day before. There were no hills now, only a brown, wide, cheerless steppe with small mounds here and there. Far ahead, a village showed white in the morning light, with blue smoke rising from its chimneys.

The road was much broader than any road Yegorushka had ever seen. It stretched across the steppe like a huge grey river of dust. He wondered who needed such a wide road. It made him think of old heroes, giant horses, and great chariots racing side by side. Along the road stood telegraph poles, growing smaller and smaller until they disappeared into the distance.

Yegorushka was lying on the last wagon, so he could see much of the train. There were about twenty wagons, and one driver walked beside every few wagons. Near his wagon walked an old man with a grey beard, red eyelids, and a sharp nose. His face looked stern and thoughtful, though perhaps he was not truly stern. He kept slapping his thighs and stamping his bare feet as he walked.

The old man noticed that Yegorushka was awake. “Ah, you are awake, youngster,” he said. “Are you Ivan Ivanitch’s son?” Yegorushka answered that he was his nephew. The old man said that Ivan Ivanitch was a good man and that he had gone to the Molokans. Then he added that his own feet were bad and swollen, so he had taken off his boots.

The old man’s name was Panteley. He spoke in a thin, frozen-sounding voice, as if his lips were cold even in summer. Once he began talking, he did not stop easily. He told Yegorushka that he was going to school, and that learning was a good thing. A man, he said, should have not one brain, but two or even three: one from birth, one from study, and one from a good life.

Panteley then spoke of death, repentance, saints, his brothers, his home village, and many other things. His words did not follow one clear path. They came out in small pieces, like things taken from many pockets. Yegorushka listened for a while, then stopped trying to understand. The old man seemed to be speaking as much to himself as to the boy.

Ahead of them walked another driver in a reddish-brown coat. He had a swelling under one eye and carried a whip. As he walked, he waved his arms as if

he were leading an invisible choir. This was Emelyan. He had once sung in a church choir, but after he caught cold while bathing in the Donets, his voice had been ruined.

Another driver walked with a strange stiff step, almost like a wooden soldier. His face was tied up in a cloth, and his chin was badly swollen. This was Vassya. His eyes looked dull and muddy, but he could see farther than anyone else. The others did not notice him much, but in the distance he saw animals, small movements, and hidden things that no one else could find.

Suddenly a strong young driver ran to one side of the road and began beating something on the ground with his whip. He was broad-shouldered, fair-haired, and full of careless strength. Another man, short and black-bearded, ran up and began laughing in a deep foolish voice. This black-bearded man was Kiruha, and the strong young man was Dymov.

“Dymov has killed a snake!” Kiruha cried, laughing. But someone shouted that it was not a dangerous snake, only a harmless grass snake. Vassya hurried to the dead creature and became deeply upset. “Why did you kill it?” he cried in a sad voice. “What had it done to you?” His anger surprised Yegorushka, because the creature was already dead and small in the dust.

Panteley said calmly that grass snakes should not be killed. They were gentle creatures, he said, and friendly to people. He added that Dymov was a rough fellow and that Kiruha was foolish for laughing. Then he told Vassya not to be angry, because anger would not bring the snake back. Vassya still looked wounded, as if a living friend had been murdered.

Emelyan joined them and asked what they were talking about. When he heard, he said little. His own sorrow was different. He was thinking of the music that still lived inside him though his voice was gone. “I have no voice,” he said sadly. “Without a voice, I am like a worker without hands.” Then he waved his arms again, trying to show how the old church music should sound.

Vassya looked up and noticed Yegorushka on the bale. His wet, narrow eyes became soft. “There is a little gentleman riding with us,” he said shyly. Then he laughed at the idea that a little gentleman might also become a wagon driver and

sell wool. Emelyan glanced up too, but only for a moment. His thoughts soon returned to the lost beauty of the song in his head.

A little before the village, the wagons stopped near a well. Kiruha lay flat on the wooden frame and lowered a pail into the dark hole. His head and shoulders disappeared so far inside that only his short legs could be seen. When he saw his own reflection far below, he laughed loudly, and the well answered him with an echo. His face was red when he stood up again.

Dymov was the first to drink. He drank, laughed, turned to speak to Kiruha, and then shouted several filthy words across the steppe. Yegorushka did not know exactly what they meant, but he knew they were bad. He remembered how decent people hated such words. He also remembered the dead grass snake, and his dislike for Dymov became stronger.

Just then Dymov saw him near the well and made a coarse joke about him. Kiruha laughed until he coughed, and someone else laughed too. Yegorushka turned red and decided firmly that Dymov was a wicked man. Dymov looked handsome and strong, with his open shirt, bare head, and bright careless eyes. But to Yegorushka, all that strength now seemed cruel.

Panteley also came to the pail, but he did not drink from it like the others. He took from his pocket a little green glass from an icon lamp, wiped it carefully, filled it with water, and drank from that. Then he filled it again, wrapped it in a rag, and put it back. When Yegorushka asked why he drank from a lamp glass, Panteley only answered that each person had his own way.

Suddenly Vassya looked into the distance and spoke in a tender voice. “Dear thing,” he said. “Beautiful thing.” The others asked what he saw. He answered that a fox was lying on her back and playing like a dog. Everyone looked, but no one else could see it. Only Vassya, with his strange long sight, could see the secret life of the steppe.

Later Yegorushka learned that Vassya often saw what others could not see. He saw foxes playing, hares washing their faces with their paws, and great birds quietly caring for their wings. The common brown steppe, which seemed empty to other people, was full of life for him. When he smiled at something far away, it

was hard not to envy him.

Soon the wagons began to move again. From the village, church bells rang for the morning service. The sound came softly across the steppe and mixed with the creaking wheels, the horses' steps, and the low voices of the men. Yegorushka climbed back onto the wool, still thinking of Dymov, Vassya, Panteley, and the dead grass snake. He felt that he had entered another world, rougher and stranger than the one he had known before.

Part 6: A Day by the River

The wagons stopped on the bank of a river near a village. The sun was burning as strongly as it had burned the day before. The air did not move, and the heat seemed to lie on the earth like a heavy blanket. There were a few willow trees near the water, but their shade fell on the river, not on the ground. Even under the wagons, where there was some shelter, the air was close and tiring.

The river looked blue because it held the colour of the sky. To Yegorushka, the water seemed to call to him. Styopka, a young wagoner whom he now noticed clearly for the first time, took off his clothes quickly and ran down the steep bank. He jumped into the water, dived several times, then turned onto his back and closed his eyes with pleasure. His face wrinkled as if the cold water were both hurting and pleasing him.

On such a hot day, the sound of water was like music. Dymov and Kiruha watched Styopka for a moment, then undressed too. They laughed loudly and jumped into the river one after the other. The quiet little river was suddenly full of splashing, shouting, coughing, and happy noise. Kiruha laughed as if someone were trying to drown him, while Dymov chased him and tried to catch him by the leg.

Yegorushka undressed too. He did not climb carefully down the bank. Instead, he ran and jumped from the high edge into the river. For one bright moment, he flew through the air. Then he fell deep into the water, but he did not reach the bottom. Something cold, soft, and strong lifted him back toward the light.

He came up, blowing water from his mouth and nose. The sun shone on the river so strongly that bright spots and dark patches moved before his eyes. He quickly dived again and opened his eyes under the water. Everything looked green and cloudy, like a strange night sky. Again the water lifted him, and when he came up, he breathed so deeply that the freshness seemed to fill not only his chest but his whole body.

After that, he gave himself completely to the river. He floated on his back, splashed, dived, turned on his side, and swam as he liked. The other bank was thick with reeds, golden in the sun, and their heavy flowers hung down toward the water. In one place the reeds shook and whispered, because Styopka and Kiruha were looking for crayfish among them. Kiruha shouted with joy when he caught one and held it up for everyone to see.

Yegorushka swam to the reeds and began to feel among the roots. The mud was soft, wet, and unpleasant under his hands. Suddenly he felt something sharp, perhaps a crayfish. At that same moment, someone seized his leg and pulled him up. He came out of the water coughing and saw Dymov's wet, laughing face close to his own.

Dymov held his leg tightly and looked ready for more rough play. Yegorushka tore himself away in fear and disgust. He hated the feeling of Dymov's hand on him. "Fool!" he shouted. "I will hit you in the face." Then, because this did not seem strong enough, he added another angry insult.

Dymov did not care. He swam away laughing and called to Kiruha that they should catch fish. The water had lost its pleasure for Yegorushka. He climbed out and began to dress. On the bank, Panteley and Vassya were sitting with their legs hanging down, watching the bathers. Emelyan stood in the water up to his knees, holding the grass with one hand and rubbing himself with the other.

Emelyan looked strange and almost sad. His thin shoulders stuck out, and the swelling under his eye made his face uneven. He seemed afraid of the water, as if it were the same river that had once stolen his singing voice. Yegorushka asked Vassya why he did not bathe. Vassya answered that he did not care for it, and then explained that his swollen chin came from his work at a match factory, where the

air had made men's jaws rot.

Styopka soon came back from the village with a net. Dymov and Kiruha had already been in the water too long, and their bodies were turning cold and blue. Still, they began fishing eagerly. At first they went too deep, splashed, fell, and became caught in the net. Panteley shouted from the bank that they were only frightening the fish and should go to a shallower place.

After some trouble, they found a better place near the reeds. Now the fishing became serious. They moved slowly through the water, drawing the net, beating the surface with their hands, and trying to drive fish toward it. Styopka followed with a pail, holding up his shirt with his teeth so that it would not get wet. Each time they caught something good, he lifted it up in the sun and shouted proudly.

Soon the pail was full. A small pike pushed its ugly nose above the water inside it. Around it moved many little fish and crayfish. Yegorushka stirred the water with his hand, and the pike disappeared under the moving bodies. Vassya looked into the pail with wet, tender eyes, then took out a little fish, put it into his mouth, and began to chew it calmly.

Styopka cried out in surprise that Vassya was eating a live fish. Vassya answered quietly that it was not the kind of fish Styopka had named, but another kind. He pulled the tail out of his mouth, looked at it with strange gentleness, and put it back again. As he chewed, Yegorushka felt uneasy. With his swollen chin, dull eyes, sharp sight, and soft pleasure in the living fish, Vassya seemed almost like an animal.

Yegorushka became bored and walked away from the wagons. Soon he found himself in the village church. The service was nearly over, and he stood with his forehead against someone's back, listening to the choir. He did not understand the church singing and did not care for it much. Then he saw the back of Emelyan's head, still red and wet from the river, and suddenly felt deep pity for him.

Emelyan's hair had been badly cut, and his ears stood out in an awkward way. Yegorushka remembered his lost voice, his hand movements, and his shy body in the water. He wanted to be friendly. "I am here too," he said, putting out his hand. But Emelyan looked at him sternly from under his brows and said, "Do not play

in church."

Yegorushka moved closer to the icon stand. There he saw a serious gentleman and a stout elderly lady standing on a carpet before everyone else. The gentleman held himself very straight, as if he were a soldier or an important official. The lady held her head to one side, as if she had done a great favour to someone and did not want thanks. Around them stood many village heads, thick and still.

Yegorushka began kissing the icons. Before each one, he bowed slowly to the floor. The cold touch of the floor against his forehead gave him a strange pleasure. When the church servant came out with long snuffers to put out the candles, Yegorushka hurried to him and asked if the holy bread had been given out. The man answered roughly that there was none.

After the service, Yegorushka went out and wandered around the market-place. He had seen villages before, so nothing there seemed very new. At last he entered a shop with a wide strip of red cloth hanging above the door. Inside, the place was dark and smelled of leather, tar, groceries, and damp floor. A broad-faced shopkeeper stood behind the counter, drinking tea and sighing deeply after every sip.

Yegorushka bought a small amount of sunflower seeds. He also looked for a long time at some old cakes and asked their price. Then he showed the cake that the Jewish woman had given him the day before and asked how much such a cake would cost. The shopkeeper studied it with great seriousness and answered slowly. He then asked whose boy Yegorushka was, but the answer did not seem to interest him much.

The shopkeeper offered him tea, and Yegorushka accepted, though shyly. He sat on a folding chair and drank from a glass, happy to have something like his usual morning tea. Before he could ask about sweets, a customer came in, and the shopkeeper went to the other half of the shop. The two men argued for a long time about oats. The customer kept saying that the oats were so bad that even hens would laugh at them.

When Yegorushka returned to the river, a small fire was smoking on the bank. The wagoners were cooking dinner. Styopka stood in the smoke, stirring a pot

with a large spoon. Kiruha and Vassya sat nearby, cleaning the fish with red eyes from the smoke. The net lay before them, covered with slime and weeds, and on it shone fish and crawling crayfish.

The fish and crayfish were put into the boiling water. Styopka added millet and salt, tasted the food, and made a satisfied sound. Everyone except Panteley sat down near the pot with spoons. Panteley told them sharply to give the boy a spoon too, because he must be hungry. Kiruha said it was only peasant food, but Panteley answered that peasant food was good enough when one was hungry.

Yegorushka ate standing close to the pot and looking down into it. The millet smelled of fish, and fish scales were mixed into it. The crayfish were hard to catch with a spoon, so the men picked them out with their hands. The food looked rough, but it tasted very good to Yegorushka. It reminded him of crayfish soup that his mother made at home on fast days.

While they ate, the men talked about their past lives. Yegorushka slowly understood that all of them had once had better days, or believed they had. Panteley spoke of old journeys before the railway, when merchants were richer and life seemed larger. Emelyan spoke of the time when he had sung in a choir and could read music well. Kiruha had once been a fine coachman, Vassya had worked in a factory, and Dymov had lived easily before his father sent him out to work.

As they talked, the present seemed poor and small beside the past. Yegorushka did not yet understand that many adults love remembering more than living. He believed that the men around the pot were all wounded by fate. Then Dymov, thinking of his father, became dark and sullen. His eyes fell on Yegorushka, and he told him rudely to take off his cap while eating.

Yegorushka took off his hat without speaking, but the food lost its taste. Panteley and Vassya said something in his defence, but he hardly heard them. Anger sat heavily inside him. He decided that somehow, someday, he would hurt Dymov in return, whatever it cost him.

After dinner, the men went to the wagons and lay down in the shade. The heat was still too strong for travel. Panteley told Yegorushka to lie down too and said

they would start when God wished it. Soon snoring came from under the wagons. Yegorushka first thought of going back to the village, but then he yawned, stretched out near the old man, and let the heavy afternoon close over him.

Part 7: Night Stories

The wagons stayed by the river all day. They did not start again until the sun was going down. Yegorushka lay once more on top of the wool bales, and the wagon moved slowly under him. The wheels creaked softly, and the bales rose and fell with the movement. Below him, Panteley walked in his old careful way, stamping his sore feet, slapping his thighs, and muttering to himself.

The air was full of the thin music of the steppe. Insects sang in the grass, and the sound seemed to come from everywhere at once. Yegorushka lay on his back with his hands under his head and looked up at the sky. The sunset first burned gold, then slowly grew pale. Along the edge of the world, the last light seemed to fold itself away like great wings going to sleep.

The day was leaving, and night was coming from the east. The steppe changed as the light changed. The grass, the road, the wagons, and the men all became softer and less clear. Far away, burial mounds stood like dark sleeping animals. The telegraph poles, which had been sharp in the day, now looked lonely and thin against the evening sky.

Yegorushka felt tired, but he did not want to sleep. The river, the church, the shop, the fish stew, and Dymov’s insult still moved in his mind. The day had been long and full of strange people. Now, in the evening, everything seemed farther away and more serious. Even the wagoners’ quiet steps had a different sound in the dark.

After a time, the wagons stopped near the road. The men began to make a fire. Dry grass and twigs burned quickly, and red light jumped up around the pot. Near the fire stood a lonely wooden cross. It had been put there long ago, and in the moving light it looked both poor and frightening.

Yegorushka stood beside Panteley with his hands in his pockets and watched

the fire eat the grass. The others sat or lay near the wagons, thinking their own thoughts. The red light moved over their faces and over the cross. A lonely grave in the open steppe made the whole place feel sadder. It was as if the unknown dead man under the cross were still listening to the night.

“Grandfather,” Yegorushka asked, “why is that cross here?”

Panteley looked at the cross, then looked toward Dymov. “Nikola,” he said, “is this the place where the mowers killed the merchants?” Dymov lifted himself slowly on one elbow and looked at the road. He seemed not to want to speak. At last he said, “Yes. This is the place.”

No one spoke for a little while. Kiruha broke some dry stalks and pushed them under the pot. The fire rose brighter, and black smoke wrapped itself around Styopka. The shadow of the cross danced on the road beside the wagons. Then Dymov, still unwillingly, began to tell the story.

He said that two merchants, a father and son, had once travelled that road selling holy pictures. They stopped at an inn not far away, and the old merchant drank too much. He began to boast that he had a great deal of money with him. Some mowers were staying at the same inn and heard him. They remembered the words and decided to follow the merchants.

Early the next morning, the merchants prepared to leave. The mowers asked to travel with them. They said the road was lonely and that it would be safer and more cheerful to go together. The merchants agreed. They had to move slowly because of the holy pictures, and this suited the mowers well.

When they reached the place near the cross, the mowers attacked them with their scythes. The young merchant was strong and brave. He took a scythe from one of the men and fought hard. But there were too many of them. In the end, the mowers killed both merchants and dragged their bodies from the road.

Panteley crossed himself and sighed. Kiruha said that there was another cross on the other side of the road. Someone said it was still standing. Dymov added that the killers did not find as much money as they had expected. They had murdered two men for almost nothing. Three of the mowers later died from wounds, because the young merchant had cut them badly before he fell.

Everyone looked at the cross again. The night seemed deeper around it. Somewhere in the distance, a bird cried in a sad voice, as if telling everyone to sleep. The fire burned lower and made small red movements in the dark. Even Dymov was silent after his own story.

“There are many wicked people in the world,” Emelyan said.

“Many,” Panteley agreed. He moved closer to the fire, as if the story had made him cold. Then he began to tell his own story. His voice was low and old, and the words came slowly. He said that long ago, more than thirty years earlier, he had been driving a merchant from Morshansk. The merchant had money, and there were robbers in those parts.

Panteley’s story moved in many directions. There were dark roads, bad men, knives, fear, and God’s help. Sometimes it was hard to understand what truly happened and what had grown larger in the telling. Yegorushka believed every word. The cross, the fire, the dark wool bales, and the huge steppe made even the wildest parts of the story feel possible.

Later, when he was older, Yegorushka would remember that Panteley often told stories that were probably not true. The old man had travelled all over Russia and had seen many real things. His own wife and children had died in a fire. Yet when he sat by a campfire, he often told not his own life, but tales of robbers, miracles, and strange deaths. Perhaps the true past was too heavy for him to carry in words.

The men ate their porridge in silence after the stories. No one wanted to speak of ordinary matters. The night, the grave, the fire, and the wide empty land had made everything seem both terrible and wonderful. In Russia, Yegorushka felt, even a story full of robbers and blood did not sound completely false. Life itself was strange enough to make such stories believable.

The others ate from the pot, but Panteley sat a little apart. He ate from his own wooden bowl with his own spoon. The spoon was made of cypress wood and had a small cross on it. Yegorushka remembered the little glass from which Panteley drank water and quietly asked Styopka why the old man sat by himself.

“He is an Old Believer,” Styopka and Vassya whispered. They said the words

carefully, as if speaking of a secret weakness or a hidden illness. Yegorushka looked at Panteley with new interest. The old man's separate bowl, separate spoon, prayers, and muttering now seemed to belong to one deep and old way of life.

Silence came again. The fire grew smaller, and the darkness pressed closer. Suddenly Vassya lifted his head and listened. His dull eyes fixed themselves on one point in the distance. "Someone is coming," he said.

The others looked where he was looking, but they saw nothing. "Where?" Dymov asked. Vassya said that there was something white moving across the open steppe. Everyone listened. At first there was no sound at all, only the insects and the low fire. Then, after a little while, they heard grass rustling and dry twigs breaking under quick feet.

Dymov joked that perhaps the murdered merchant was walking over the steppe. The men looked at the cross and then at one another. They laughed, but the laugh was not fully free. They were ashamed of their fear and laughed because of that. Still, they kept listening.

The steps came nearer. Vassya said the person was carrying something. The dark steppe, which had seemed empty a moment before, now held a hidden visitor coming toward the fire. The men waited without speaking. Yegorushka stood close to Panteley and watched the darkness, feeling that the night stories had not ended, but had begun to enter real life.

Part 8: Konstantin and Varlamov

The steps came nearer through the grass. The men sat still and watched the dark place beyond the fire. Then someone coughed. A moment later, the red light opened around a stranger, and he stood before them. At first, strangely, they noticed not his clothes or his face, but his smile.

It was a broad, gentle, happy smile, like the smile of a child waking from sleep. It was so warm that it was hard not to smile back. The stranger was about thirty, tall and awkward, with long arms, long legs, and a long nose. His neck was short, so he looked a little bent. He wore a clean white shirt, white trousers, and new

high boots, and among the wagoners he looked almost fine.

In his arms he carried a large white bird. The stock of a gun showed behind his shoulder. He stopped in the circle of light as if he were surprised by his own arrival. For half a minute he looked at the men, still smiling, as if he wanted them to see how happy he was.

“Bread and salt, friends,” he said.

“You are welcome,” Panteley answered.

The stranger put the bird near the fire. It was a dead bustard. The men came closer and looked at it with interest. Dymov asked how he had killed it. The stranger said he had used large shot, because a bird like that would not let a man come near enough for smaller shot. Then he offered to sell it for twenty kopecks.

No one wanted to buy it. Someone said it might be good roasted, but it would be too tough boiled. The stranger looked sorry for a moment. He said that if he took it to the gentry at the farm, they might give him half a rouble. But the farm was twelve miles away, and he did not want to go so far.

He sat down near the fire, laid his gun beside him, and accepted a spoon. He began to eat the porridge, but it did not seem that he tasted it. Sometimes he lifted a full spoon to his mouth, and sometimes the spoon was almost empty. His eyes were soft and shining. He seemed not drunk, but full of some strange, foolish happiness.

“Who are you?” Dymov asked.

The stranger did not answer. He had not heard the question. Dymov asked again, more loudly. Then the man started, as if he had just returned from another place. “I am Konstantin Zvonik from Rovno,” he said. “It is three miles from here.” Then, as if he wanted them to know he was not an ordinary poor man, he quickly added, “We keep bees and fatten pigs.”

Panteley asked whether he lived with his father or in a house of his own. Konstantin said he now lived in his own house. He had separated from the family because he had just married. He had been married only eighteen days. When he said this, his smile became wider, and his whole face turned red.

“Marriage is a good thing,” Panteley said. “God’s blessing is on it.”

Kiruha laughed and said that Konstantin's young wife was sitting at home while he wandered around the steppe. At these words, Konstantin almost jumped. "But she is not at home," he cried. "She has gone to her mother for three days. Yes, she has gone away, and I feel as if I were not married at all."

He waved his hand, laughed, and looked around at everyone with joy and wonder. He wanted to be quiet and think of her, but happiness pushed the words out of him. He said she had gone to Demidovo and would be back the next day for dinner. He seemed ashamed to speak so openly to strangers, but he could not stop.

Dymov asked if he missed her. Konstantin cried that of course he did. They had been married such a short time, and now she was away. He said she was lively, clever, full of laughter and song. When she was near him, his head turned round with happiness. Now she was gone, and he wandered over the steppe like a fool, as if he had lost something.

"You love her, then," Panteley said.

But Konstantin hardly heard him. He repeated that she was fine, clever, and a wonderful housewife. No other girl among ordinary people in the whole province could be compared with her. He said he knew she missed him too. He knew his little magpie, as he called her. She would come back, but until then he could not stay quietly at home.

Then he began to tell them how he had won her. For three years, he said, he had suffered. He had first seen her at a fair and had fallen in love so strongly that he could not eat or sleep. He lived in Rovno, and she lived in Demidovo, more than twenty miles away. Still, he walked there again and again just to see her.

He sent people to ask for the marriage, but she always said no. He sent gifts too: earrings, cakes, and honey. Still she refused him. He knew that he was not handsome. He was almost thirty, with pimples on his face and a beard like a goat. She was young, beautiful, and full of fire. Her family also had money, so his own good position did not make the difference.

His parents tried to cure his love in their own ways. His mother called a village woman who knew charms. His father beat him. Nothing helped. At last,

Konstantin decided to give up and go to town to become a cab driver. Before leaving, he went once more to Demidovo to look at her for the last time.

There he found her near the river with some young people. Anger and despair came over him. He called her aside and spoke to her for a long time. He did not remember what he said. The words had poured out of him like water from a pipe. But something in those words changed her. After three years of refusing him, she fell in love with him.

“What did you say to her?” Dymov asked.

Konstantin laughed and spread his hands. He did not know. He could not remember a single proper sentence. At that time he had spoken without breathing, but now he could hardly say anything. All he knew was that she had married him, and now she was away at her mother’s. Because of that, he was walking about the steppe, unable to stay at home.

By now everyone understood that he was not merely cheerful. He was painfully happy. His smile, eyes, shoulders, hands, and every movement showed it. He sat down, got up, changed his place, stretched out, then sat again. There was too much joy inside him for his body to hold. At last he became quieter and looked into the fire.

The sight of this happy man made the others sad. No one spoke for a little while. Dymov stood up and walked near the fire with slow steps. His shoulders moved heavily, as if some hidden weight had settled on him. He looked at Konstantin, then sat down again. Everyone seemed to be thinking of happiness, and each man felt that he did not have it.

The fire grew small. As its red light died, the moonlight became clearer. The whole width of the road could now be seen, with the wagons, the wool bales, the shafts, and the horses chewing quietly. On the other side of the road, the second cross showed dimly in the pale light. The place no longer seemed frightening. It seemed sad.

Dymov rested his cheek on his hand and began to hum a low, mournful song. Konstantin smiled sleepily and joined him in a thin voice. They sang for a short time, then stopped. Emelyan suddenly moved his elbows and fingers, as if he were

still leading a choir. Tears came into his eyes, and he begged the men to sing something sacred.

No one wanted to sing. Emelyan tried alone. He waved his arms, moved his head, opened his mouth, and worked with his whole body. But no real song came from him. Only rough, broken sounds came out. He sang with his hands, his eyes, and even his swollen face, but his lost voice did not return.

Yegorushka felt the same sadness as the others. He climbed back onto the wool bales and lay down. He looked at the sky and thought of Konstantin and his wife. Why did people marry? What were women for in the world? The questions were not clear in his mind, but they moved there softly. He thought of Countess Dranitsky and her beautiful eyes, and he felt ashamed without knowing why.

The warm night seemed to bend over him and whisper in his ear. It seemed that the countess herself was looking at him and smiling, perhaps even wanting to kiss him. Near the dying fire, Konstantin and the wagoners sat like dark figures. Far away, near the road, another red light shone, perhaps another campfire where other people were cooking.

Suddenly Kiruha shouted a rough song about Mother Russia. His voice broke and stopped almost at once. The steppe took the sound and carried it away in a heavy echo. Then Panteley said it was time to go. The men began to put the horses in again.

While they worked, Konstantin walked beside the wagons and talked again about his wife. He could not leave the subject. When the wagons began moving, he shouted good-bye and thanked them for their welcome. Then he said he would go toward the far light. He could not bear to stay still. Soon he disappeared into the mist, and for a long time they could hear his quick steps as he went to tell other strangers about his happiness.

When Yegorushka woke the next morning, the sun had not yet risen. The wagons were standing still. Near the front wagon, a man in a white cap and cheap grey clothes sat on a small Cossack horse and spoke with Dymov and Kiruha. Far ahead stood low white barns and small houses with tiled roofs, but there were no trees or yards around them.

Yegorushka asked Panteley what village it was. Panteley said it was the Armenian settlement, where Armenians lived. Then he looked toward the man on horseback and spoke with deep respect. That man was Varlamov. At once Yegorushka got up on his knees. This was the famous Varlamov whom everyone sought, the man who was always on the road and who had more money than Countess Dranitsky.

It was hard to believe that this small grey man on an ugly little horse was the great Varlamov. Panteley said he was a fine man, one of those on whom the earth rested. Other people would still be sleeping, but Varlamov was already out in the steppe, checking papers and business. He did not let things slip.

A rider came quickly from the settlement, leaning far to one side and waving his whip, as if he wanted to show everyone how well he rode. He gave Varlamov a little book with papers in it. Varlamov looked through them and suddenly asked where Ivantchuk's letter was. The rider searched and could not find it.

Varlamov became angry at once. He waved his whip and ordered the man away. The rider sat still for a moment, hat in hand, confused and ashamed. Varlamov turned his horse and rode slowly along the wagons, still looking at the papers. When he passed the last wagon, Yegorushka looked hard at him.

Varlamov had a simple sunburnt face, a small grey beard, and red skin wet with dew. His face had the same businesslike coldness as Kuzmitchov's face, but there was a great difference between them. Kuzmitchov always looked anxious, as if he feared being late or losing money. Varlamov did not look anxious. He seemed like a man who made the price himself and depended on no one.

He did not look at Yegorushka. Only the little horse looked at the boy with large foolish eyes, and even that look showed no interest. Panteley took off his hat and bowed. Varlamov noticed him without turning from the papers and asked how he was. His voice was small and unclear, but everyone heard the authority in it.

After he passed, the men stayed serious. Varlamov had impressed them all. The rider who had lost the letter remained near the front wagon, still holding his hat and looking crushed. Panteley muttered that Varlamov was harsh, but a good man. Then Varlamov put the papers into his pocket, and the little horse, as if it

knew his thoughts, suddenly started forward and carried him away along the road.

Part 9: The Storm and Illness

On the following night, the wagoners stopped again and cooked their porridge. This time there was no cheerful talk around the fire. The air was close and heavy, and everyone felt oppressed by it. They drank a great deal of water, but their thirst did not go away. The moon was red and dull, as if it too were sick.

The stars looked dim, and the mist over the steppe was thicker than before. The distance seemed cloudy and tired. Nature itself seemed to be waiting for something bad. The men sat near the fire with low heads, and even the flames looked small and uneasy.

Panteley sighed again and again and spoke of his aching feet. Vassya said his jaw hurt and that bad weather was coming. Emelyan did not wave his arms as he often did when he remembered church music. He sat still and looked sadly at the fire. Yegorushka was tired too, and the hot day had given him a headache.

Dymov lay on his stomach and chewed a straw. His face showed boredom and anger. Perhaps the heat, the slow road, and the empty steppe had become too much for him. To drive away his own dullness, he began to trouble the others.

He looked at Emelyan and spoke with cruel contempt. He said that Emelyan, because he had once been a church singer, thought he was better than the others. He accused him of always sitting closest to the pot and being the first to put in his spoon. The words were foolish, but they were spoken to wound.

Emelyan asked why Dymov was attacking him. His voice was rough because of his ruined throat, but there was pain in it. Panteley and Vassya tried to stop the quarrel. They told Dymov not to make trouble over nothing. But Dymov only laughed and went on.

Emelyan suddenly lost patience and called Dymov a bad name. Dymov rose at once, his eyes full of blood and anger. He snatched the spoon from Emelyan’s hand and threw it far into the darkness. Kiruha, Vassya, and Styopka ran to look for it. Emelyan turned to Panteley with a helpless, asking look, and then his face

broke down. He began to cry like a child.

Yegorushka had hated Dymov for a long time. Now his anger became too strong to hold. The air seemed to press on his chest, and the fire seemed to burn his face. He wanted to run away to the wagons, but Dymov's cruel eyes held him where he stood. Suddenly he stepped forward and cried that Dymov was the worst of them all.

After saying this, he should have run away at once. But he could not move. He went on shouting that Dymov would burn in hell and that he would complain to Ivan Ivanitch. Dymov laughed and asked whether he should pull the boy's ear. Then something strange happened inside Yegorushka. He began to shake, stamp his feet, and scream, "Beat him! Beat him!"

Tears poured from his eyes. He felt ashamed and frightened by his own voice. He ran back to the wagon, climbed onto the wool bales, and lay there trembling. He whispered, "Mother, mother," again and again. The men, the fire, the dark bales, and the distant lightning all seemed terrible and unfriendly to him now.

He wondered where his uncle was, and where Father Christopher and Deniska were. Why had they not returned? Had they forgotten him? This thought filled him with such fear that he almost wanted to jump from the wagon and run back along the road. But he remembered the dark crosses and the lightning, and he stayed where he was.

After Yegorushka ran away, the men were silent for a long time. Then they began to speak in low voices. They said that something was coming and that they should move quickly. They finished supper, put out the fire, and began to harness the horses. Their broken words and hurried movements showed that they expected trouble.

Before they started, Dymov came quietly to Panteley and asked the boy's name. Panteley answered that it was Yegory. Dymov climbed up on the wheel and looked at Yegorushka. His face was pale and tired now, and there was no cruelty in it. "Yera," he said softly, "hit me."

Yegorushka stared at him in surprise. Lightning flashed at that moment. Dymov repeated that it was all right and that the boy should hit him. But without

waiting, he jumped down and began walking beside the wagons. “How dreary I am,” he said in a voice that was half angry and half crying. Then he told Emelyan not to be offended and said that their life was hard and cruel.

Lightning flashed on the right, and another flash answered it far away. Panteley threw something large and dark up to Yegorushka. It was a mat. He told the boy to cover himself because rain was coming. Yegorushka sat up and looked around. The distance had grown blacker, and pale light was blinking there more and more often.

A great black cloud was moving toward them. It came slowly but powerfully, with torn pieces hanging from its lower edge. More dark pieces of cloud gathered on both sides of the horizon. Thunder growled clearly. Yegorushka crossed himself and hurried to put on his coat.

Suddenly a violent wind rushed over the steppe. It almost tore away his bundle and mat. The mat struck his face and beat against the wool bales. Dust rose along the road, and the smell of rain and wet earth came with the wind. The grass roared so loudly that the creaking wheels and the thunder were almost lost in it.

Yegorushka knelt on the bales and tried to cover himself. Someone shouted from the front of the wagons, and Panteley answered in a high broken voice. Then thunder cracked across the sky and rolled from one side to the other. Yegorushka whispered a prayer and crossed himself quickly. The black sky opened with white fire, and another clap of thunder followed.

The rain did not come at once. This made the waiting worse. Yegorushka looked out from under the mat, but everything was black. He could not see Panteley, the wagon, or even his own hands clearly. The lightning became so bright that it hurt his eyes.

Then the wind lifted the mat one last time, and a cold drop fell on his knee. Another ran over his hand. A moment later, rain began to beat on the road, the shafts, and the wool bales. It beat on the mat too, quickly and noisily, as if the rain and the mat were talking to each other.

Yegorushka tried to protect his knees, then his back, then his legs. But water found him everywhere. It ran down his sleeves and into his collar. His shoulders

grew cold, and the wetness entered under his clothes. At last he stopped trying. He sat still and waited for the storm to end.

The thunder became terrible. It cracked above his head like a huge tree breaking in the sky. Lightning flashed again and again, so bright that it shone through his closed eyes. When he opened them by accident, he saw water running from the mat, shining on his hands and sleeves. He thought the sky had broken and might fall on him.

Then he saw something worse. In the lightning, three huge figures seemed to be following the wagon. They carried long points in their hands and moved with heavy steps. Their faces were covered, and their heads were bent. To the frightened boy, they looked like giants from a dream.

“Panteley! Grandfather!” he cried. But the thunder answered louder than any human voice. In another flash, he saw Panteley walking beside the wagon with a mat over his hat and shoulders. Farther away, Emelyan looked like a strange triangle under his covering. Vassya walked as usual, lifting his feet stiffly in the rain. No one heard Yegorushka.

The storm seemed endless. Yegorushka no longer prayed, called, or thought clearly. He was simply cold, wet, and sure that the thunder would kill him. Then, at last, he heard voices near the wagon. Panteley called up to him and told him to get down.

When Yegorushka opened his eyes, the giants were close to the wagon. But now they were only ordinary peasants carrying pitchforks. Between them and the wagon shone the window of a low hut. The wagons had stopped in a village. With people talking nearby and a lighted window before him, Yegorushka felt less afraid, though lightning still filled the sky.

He went into the hut. A thin old woman with a bent back and sharp chin met him with a candle in her hand. She sighed and said that God had sent a terrible storm. She told him to take off his wet things. Yegorushka pulled off his coat and stood with his arms and legs spread apart, because every movement felt cold and unpleasant.

The old woman gave him sweet melon, watermelon, and black bread. He ate

because she offered it, but the cold fruit made him feel even colder. She kept sighing that her own men were out on the steppe and must be wet through. Then she made a bed for him from old rags and sheepskins. Yegorushka was too shy to undress before her, so he only took off his boots and lay down.

Panteley came in later and whispered with the old woman. He said that some of the men had gone into huts, but two had stayed with the horses because the horses might be stolen. Then he went out again to take his turn. Yegorushka lay under the heavy sheepskin and shivered. His arms and legs twitched, his whole body shook, and he could not get warm.

During the night, feverish dreams came to him. The little boy Tit seemed to enter the room, grow taller and taller, and turn into a windmill. Father Christopher appeared in church clothes and sprinkled the windmill with holy water until it stopped moving. Yegorushka knew these were dreams, but he could not free himself from them. His mouth was dry, and his head felt heavy.

Before morning, he got up and went outside. The rain had stopped, but the sky was still grey. He walked through the muddy yard in his wet coat and found a small shed. There he sat on a heap of dry dung and began to cry. He looked at his fine holiday coat and felt sorry for it, and then sorry for himself. He felt that both he and the coat had been abandoned to fate.

A large wet white dog came into the shed and looked at him. It did not bark. It sniffed at him, found the sticky piece of Jewish cake in his pocket, ate it, and went away. Soon someone shouted in the street that Varlamov's men were there. Yegorushka went out and found the wagons standing near the gate.

The wagoners were wet, muddy, sleepy, and dull. Yegorushka looked at them and thought how comfortless it must be to live as a peasant. He sat beside Panteley on a shaft and said that he was cold. Panteley yawned and answered that they would soon arrive, and that he would get warm. Then the wagons started again.

The sun came out and dried the earth, the wool, and Yegorushka's clothes. But he still shivered and felt sick. Whenever he closed his eyes, he saw Tit, the windmill, Dymov with angry fists, Varlamov on his small horse, and happy Konstantin with the bird in his arms. All these people seemed tiresome, heavy,

and unbearable to him now.

Toward evening, he lifted his head to ask for water. The wagons were standing on a large bridge over a broad river. Below, black smoke lay above the water, and through it he saw a steamer pulling a barge. Beyond the river rose a great hill with houses and churches on it. At the foot of the hill, an engine was moving near railway trucks.

Yegorushka had never seen steamers, engines, or such a broad river before. But now he felt no wonder. He only felt ill. He turned quickly toward the edge of the bale and was sick. Panteley looked at him, cleared his throat, and shook his head. “Our little lad has fallen ill,” he said. “He must have caught cold in the storm. It is a bad thing to be away from home.”

Part 10: The New Life

The wagons stopped at a large inn for merchants, not far from the river quay. As Yegorushka climbed down from the wagon, he heard a familiar voice. Someone was helping him and saying that they had arrived the evening before and had been waiting for him all day. Yegorushka looked into the speaker’s spotted, cheerful face and remembered Deniska. Deniska told him that his uncle and Father Christopher were inside, drinking tea.

Deniska led him into a large two-storied building. It looked dark and gloomy, and it reminded Yegorushka of the poorhouse in his own town. They went through the entry, climbed a dark staircase, and passed along a narrow corridor. At last they entered a small room where Ivan Ivanitch and Father Christopher were sitting at the tea table. When they saw the boy, both men looked surprised and pleased.

Father Christopher greeted him warmly and jokingly called him a future learned man. Kuzmitchov also welcomed him, though his face still had its usual businesslike look. Yegorushka kissed his uncle’s hand and Father Christopher’s hand, then sat down at the table. Father Christopher poured tea for him and asked many questions about the journey. He said that travelling with wagons was not travelling at all, but real torture.

Yegorushka wanted to complain at once. He wanted to tell them about the storm, the cold, Dymov, the frightening night, and how ill he felt. But Father Christopher's voice confused his thoughts. The old priest spoke quickly about the wool, the business, and the good price they had received. Before Yegorushka could find the first words of his complaint, his strength left him.

He got up from the table, went to the sofa, and lay down. Father Christopher was surprised and asked what was wrong. Yegorushka leaned his head against the wall and began to cry. "I am ill," he said. The old priest touched his forehead and cheek and saw that the boy was feverish.

Ivan Ivanitch came closer too and looked worried. Father Christopher said that Yegorushka must have caught cold, or perhaps had eaten something bad. He asked whether the boy wanted soup, but Yegorushka said no. He said that earlier he had been cold, but now he was hot and ached all over. The old priest decided that the boy needed sleep more than anything.

Father Christopher helped him undress, gave him a pillow, and covered him with a quilt and Ivan Ivanitch's coat. Then he walked away quietly and sat down again. Yegorushka closed his eyes, and at once the room disappeared. He was back beside the campfire on the steppe, with Emelyan waving his hands and Dymov looking at him with red mocking eyes. In his fever, he cried out, "Beat him, beat him!"

Father Christopher said softly that the boy was delirious. Ivan Ivanitch sighed and said that it was a nuisance. The old priest said they should rub him with oil and vinegar, and that, with God's help, he would be better the next day. Later, when the room was dark except for the small lamp before the icon, Father Christopher came to the sofa. He rubbed Yegorushka's chest and back, whispering prayers as he worked.

The night seemed long to Yegorushka. He heard Father Christopher praying before the icon and then lying down on the little sofa. He heard Ivan Ivanitch moving on the floor. The clock in the corridor struck ten, and he thought morning would never come. Feverish dreams pressed on him, and he pushed his forehead against the back of the sofa, trying to escape them.

But morning came sooner than he expected. When he opened his eyes, sunlight was lying on the floor of the little hotel room. Father Christopher and Ivan Ivanitch were not there. The room had been put in order, and his cleaned boots stood side by side near the sofa. It seemed strange and wonderful that he was not on the wool bales, and that there was no rain or lightning above him.

He got up and dressed quickly. He felt much better, though his legs and neck were still weak. He remembered the broad river, the steamer, and the railway engine he had seen dimly the day before, and he wanted to run to the quay and look at them properly. Just then Father Christopher came in from church, smiling and carrying holy bread and a small parcel. He asked how the boy was and was glad to hear that he felt well.

The parcel held caviar, dry fish, and a loaf of bread. Father Christopher said that one should not eat luxuries every day, but there was an invalid in the room, so this time it could be forgiven. He spread caviar on bread and gave it to Yegorushka. Then, while drinking tea, he began to give advice about school. He told the boy to study carefully, not only by memory but also with understanding.

The old priest said a person should learn many things: languages, history, geography, mathematics, and religion. He said that learning gave light to life, while ignorance was darkness. He also told Yegorushka never to become proud if he became educated. A learned man must not despise his mother, his uncle, or simple people. If he did, Father Christopher said, sorrow would come to him.

Father Christopher would have spoken much longer, but Ivan Ivanitch entered and said that their business was settled. They could have gone home that day, but first they had to arrange Yegorushka’s lodging. His mother had written the name of an old friend, Nastasya Petrovna Toskunov, who lived somewhere in the town. Ivan Ivanitch took a crumpled note from his pocket and read the address. Then he told Yegorushka to come with him at once.

They went out into the yard. The wagons and drivers had already gone to the quay, and only the old chaise stood in a dark corner. Yegorushka looked at it and silently said good-bye to it. Then he followed his uncle through the town. They went up a broad street, crossed a marketplace, asked a policeman for directions,

and walked for a long time through poorer and poorer streets.

At last they found the right lane and the old grey gate. Inside was a large yard full of weeds and burdocks. Far from the gate stood a little house with a red roof and green shutters. A stout woman was feeding chickens and calling to them in a sharp voice. When Ivan Ivanitch told her who he was and whose son Yegorushka was, she stared at him, then suddenly burst into tears.

This was Nastasya Petrovna. She remembered Yegorushka's mother and called her by her old familiar name. She threw her arms around the boy, kissed him, wet his face with tears, and said that he looked just like his mother. Then she hurried them into the house, still crying and speaking at the same time. The rooms were close and full of icons, flowers, and the smell of an old lived-in home.

While Ivan Ivanitch spoke with Nastasya Petrovna in the drawing room, Yegorushka went into another room. There was a sewing machine, a birdcage with a starling, and more flowers. A little girl stood near the machine and looked at him without blinking. She had a sunburnt face and round cheeks. Yegorushka asked her name, and after a shy pause she answered softly that she was Katka.

Soon it was decided that Yegorushka would live there. Ivan Ivanitch promised to pay for his board each month. Nastasya Petrovna was afraid to take another person's child, because he might fall ill or suffer in some way, but she was also touched and pleased. Ivan Ivanitch told Yegorushka to obey her and not be troublesome. Then he said he would come again the next day.

That day, Yegorushka ate cabbage soup beside Nastasya Petrovna and answered her endless questions. In the evening, he sat at the same table and listened while she talked about his mother's youth, her own marriage, and her children. Sometimes she laughed, and sometimes she cried. Katka kept dropping her grandmother's thimble and crawling under the table to find it, where she stayed a long time and looked at Yegorushka's feet.

Yegorushka was put to sleep on a chest. Nastasya Petrovna told him that if he became hungry in the night, there was chicken under a plate in the little passage. He lay still and looked into the dark. The stove cricket sounded softly, and the lamp made a faint hum. He was safe now, but he felt very sad.

The next morning, Ivan Ivanitch and Father Christopher came to say good-bye. Nastasya Petrovna wanted to make tea for them, but Ivan Ivanitch was in a hurry and said there was no time. Before leaving, they all sat for a minute in silence. Then Ivan Ivanitch stood up and told Yegorushka to work hard, obey Nastasya Petrovna, and remember his mother. He took a ten-kopeck coin from his purse and gave it to him.

Father Christopher blessed the boy slowly. He also gave him ten kopecks and told him to study well. Yegorushka kissed his hand and began to cry, because something in his heart told him that he would never see the old priest again. Ivan Ivanitch said that he had already applied to the high school and that Yegorushka would have to take the entrance examination in August. Then the two men went out.

Through his tears, Yegorushka could not see them clearly. He ran to the window, but they were already out of the yard. Then he rushed out through the gate. He saw Ivan Ivanitch and Father Christopher just as they were turning the corner, one waving his crooked stick and the other his staff.

Yegorushka felt that with those two men, everything he had known until now was leaving him forever. His mother, his old home, the town of N., the road, the steppe, the wagons, Father Christopher's smile, and even his uncle's sharp voice all seemed to move away at once. He sank onto the little bench by the gate and cried bitterly. In this way, he greeted the new and unknown life that was beginning for him now.