

# **Tales of the Wilderness**

Boris Pilniak

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# Tales of the Wilderness

**Boris Pilniak**

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TALES OF THE WILDERNESS

By

BORIS ANDREYEVICH VOGAU (Boris Pilniak, pseud.)

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

PRINCE D. S. MIRSKY

**TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY F. O'DEMPSEY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

## I. RUSSIAN FICTION SINCE CHEKHOV

The English reading public knows next to nothing of contemporary Russian Literature. In the great age of the Russian Realistic Novel, which begins with Turgeniev and finishes with Chekhov, the English reader is tolerably at home. But what came after the death of Chekhov is still unknown or, what is worse, misrepresented. Second and third-rate writers, like Merezhkovsky, Andreyev, and Artsybashev, have found their way into England and are still supposed to be the best Russian twentieth century fiction can offer. The names of really significant writers, like Remizov and Andrey Bely, have not even been heard of. This state of affairs makes it necessary, in introducing a contemporary Russian writer to the English public, to give at least a few indications of his place in the general picture of modern Russian Literature.

The date of Chekhov's death (1904) may be taken to mark the end of a long and glorious period of literary achievement. It is conveniently near the dividing line of two centuries, and it coincides rather exactly with the moment when Russian Literature definitely ceased to be dominated by Realism and the Novel. In the two or three years that followed the death of Chekhov Russian Literature underwent a complete and drastic transformation. The principal feature of the new literature became the decisive preponderance of Poetry over Prose and of Manner over Matter a state of things exactly opposite to that which prevailed during what we may conveniently call the Victorian age. Poetry in contemporary Russian Literature is not only of greater intrinsic merit than prose, but almost all the prose there is has to such an extent been permeated with the methods and standards of poetry that in the more extreme cases it is almost impossible to tell whether what is printed as prose is really prose or verse.

Contemporary Russian Poetry is a vigorous organic growth. It is a self-contained movement developing along logically consistent lines. It has produced much that is of the very first order. The poetry of Theodore Sologub, of Innocent Annensky, [Footnote: The reader will notice the quotations from Annensky in the first story of this volume.] of Vyacheslav Ivanov, and of Alexander Blok, is to our best understanding of that perennial quality that will last. They have been followed by younger poets, more debatable and more debated, many of them intensely and daringly original, but all of them firmly planted in the living tradition of yesterday. They learn from their elders and teach their juniors the true touchstone of an organic and vigorous movement. What is perhaps still more significant the level of minor poetry is extraordinarily high, and every verse-producer is, in varying degrees, a conscious and efficient craftsman.

The case with prose is very different. The old nineteenth century realistic tradition is dead. It died, practically, very soon after Chekhov. It has produced a certain amount of good, even excellent, work within these last twenty years, but this work is disconnected, sterile of influence, and more or less belated; at the best it has the doubtful privilege of at once becoming classical and above the age. Such for instance was the case of Bunin's solitary masterpiece *The Gentleman from San Francisco*, and of that wonderful series of Gorky's autobiographical books, the fourth of which appeared but a few months ago. These, however, can hardly be included in the domain of Fiction, any more than his deservedly famous *Reminiscences of Tolstoy*. But Gorky, and that excellent though minor writer, Kuprin, are the only belated representatives of the fine nineteenth century tradition. For even Bunin is a poet and a stylist rather than a story teller: his most characteristic stories are works of pure atmosphere, as diffuse and as skeletonless as a picture by Claude Monet.

The Symbolists of the early twentieth century (all the great poets of the generation were Symbolists) tried also to create a prose of their own. They tried many directions but they did not succeed in creating a style or founding a tradition. The masterpiece of this Symbolist prose is Theodore Sologub's great novel *The Little Demon* [Footnote: English translation.] (by the way a very inadequate rendering of the Russian title). It is a great novel, probably the most perfect Russian *novel* since the death of Dostoyevsky. It breaks away very decidedly from Realism and all the traditions of the nineteenth century. It is symbolic, synthetic, and poetical. But it is so intensely personal and its achievements are so intimately conditioned by the author's idiosyncrasies that it was quite plainly impossible to imitate it, or even to learn from it. This is still more the case with the later works of Sologub, like the charming

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but baffling and disconcerting romance of *Queen Ortruda*.

The other Symbolists produced nothing of the same calibre, and they failed to attract the public. The bestsellers of the period after 1905 were, naturally enough, hybrid writers like Andreyev. The cheap effect of his cadenced prose, his dreary and monotonous rhetoric, his sensational way of treating essential problems were just what the intelligentsia wanted at the time; it is also just what nobody is likely to want again. Another writer of problem stories was Artsybashev. His notorious *Sanin* (1907) is very typical of a certain phase of Russian life. It has acquired a somewhat unaccountable popularity among the budding English intelligentsia. From the literary point of view its value is nil. Artsybashev and Andreyev were very second-rate writers; they had no knowledge of their art and their taste was deplorably bad and crude, but at least they were in a way, sincere, and gave expression to the genuine vacuum and desolation of their hearts. But around them sprung up a literature which sold as well and better than they did, but was openly meretricious and, fortunately, ephemeral. If it has done nothing else the great Revolution of 1917 has at least done one good thing in making a clean sweep of all this interrevolutionary (1905–1917) fiction.

All this literature appealed to certain sides of the "intellectual" heart, but it could not slake the thirst for fiction. It was rather natural that the reading public turned to foreign novelists in preference to the native ones. It may be confidently said that three-quarters of what the ordinary Russian novel-reader read in the years preceding the Revolution were translated novels. The book-market was swamped with translations, Polish, German, Scandinavian, English, French and Spanish. Knut Hamsun, H. G. Wells, and Jack London were certainly more popular than any living Russian novelist, except perhaps the Russian Miss Dell, Mme. Verbitsky. In writers like Jack London and H. G. Wells the reader found what he missed in the Russian novelists a good story thrillingly told. For no reader, be he ever so Russian, will indefinitely put up with a diet of problems and imitation poetry.

While all these things were going on on the surface of things and sharing between themselves the whole of the book-market, a secret undercurrent was burrowing out its bed, scarcely noticed at first but which turned out to be the main prolongation of the Russian novel. The principal characteristic of this undercurrent was the revival of realism and of that untranslatable Russian thing *byt*, [Footnote: *Byt* is the life of a definite community at a definite time in its individual, as opposed to universally human, features.] but a revival under new forms and in a new spirit. The pioneers of this movement were Andrey Bely and Remizov. There was little in common between the two men, except that both were possessed with a startlingly original genius, and both directed it towards the utilization of Russian *byt* for new artistic ends.

Andrey Bely was, and is, a poet rather than a novelist. His prose from the very beginning exhibits in its extreme form the Symbolist tendency towards wiping away the difference between poetry and prose: in his later novels his prose becomes distinctly metrical, it is prose after all only because it cannot be divided into *lines*; it can be divided into *feet* very easily. But, though such prose is essentially a hybrid and illegitimate form, Bely has achieved with it things that have probably never been achieved with the aid of anything like his instruments. The first of the series of his big novels appeared in 1909: it is the *Silver Dove*, a story of Russian mystical sectarians and of an intellectual who gets entangled in their meshes. At its appearance it sold only five hundred copies. His next novel *Petersburg* (1913) had not a much greater success. The third of the series is *Kotik Letaev* (1917). The three novels form a series unique in its way. Those who can get over the initial difficulties and accustom themselves to the very peculiar proceedings of the author will not fail to be irresistibly fascinated by his strange genius. The first novel, the *Silver Dove*, is in my opinion the most powerful of the three. It combines a daring realism, which is akin to Gogol both in its exaggerations and in its broad humour, with a wonderful power of suggestion and of atmosphere. One of its most memorable passages is the vast and elemental picture of the Wind driving over the Russian plain; a passage familiarised to satiety by numerous more or less clever imitations. *Petersburg* is a political novel. It is intended to symbolise the Nihilism, the geometrical irreality of Petersburg and Petersburg bureaucracy. The cold spirit of system of the Revolutionary Terrorists is presented as the natural and legitimate outcome of bureaucratic formalism.

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A cunningly produced atmosphere of weird irreality pervades the whole book. It is in many ways a descendant of Dostoyevsky and has in its turn again produced a numerous family of imitations, including Pilniak's most characteristic tales of the Revolution. *Kotik Letaev*, the last and up to the present the least imitated of Bely's novels, is the story of a child in his very first years. In it the "poetical" methods of the author reach their full development; but at the same time he achieves miracles of vividness and illusion in the realism of his dialogue and the minute, but by no means dry, analysis of the movements of his hero's subconscious Ego. In spite of the enormous difference of style, methods, and aims Bely approaches in many ways the effects and the achievements of Proust.

Remizov is very different. He is steeped in Russian popular and legendary lore. His roots are deep down in the Russian soil. He is the greatest living master of racy and idiomatic Russian. He has also written prose that elbows poetry, and that was looked upon with surprise and bewilderment until people realised that it was poetry. But his importance in the history of the Russian Novel is of another kind. It is firstly in his deliberate effort to deliteralize Russian prose, to give it the accent, the intonation, and the syntax of the *spoken* language. He has fully achieved his ends; he has created a prose which is entirely devoid of all bookishness and even on the printed page gives the illusion of being heard, not seen.

Few have been able to follow him in this path; for in the present state of linguistic chaos and decomposition few writers have the necessary knowledge of Russian, the taste and the sense of measure, to write anything like his pure and flexible Russian. In the hands of others it degenerates into slang, or into some personal jargon closely related to Double Dutch.

Remizov, however, has been more influential in another way, by his method of treating Russian *life*. The most notable of Remizov's provincial stories [Footnote: In the second edition it is called *The Story of Ivan Semenovich Stratilatov*.] *The Unhushable Tambourine* was written at one time with Bely's *The Silver Dove*, in 1909. At the time it met with even greater indifference: it was refused by the leading magazine of the literary party to which the author belonged, and could appear only some years later in a collection of short stories. But it at once became known and very soon began to make school. Remizov's manner was to a certain degree a reversion to the nineteenth century, but to such aspects of that century that had before him been unnoticed. One of his chief inspirers was Leskov, a writer who is only now coming into his own. Remizov's *Tambourine* and his other stories of this class are realistic, they are representations of real life, of *byt*", but their Realism is very different from the traditional Russian realism. The style is dominated not by any "social" pre-occupation, but by a deliberate bringing forward of the grotesque. It verges on caricature, but is curiously and inseparably blended with a sympathy for even the lowest and vilest specimens of Mankind which is reminiscent of Dostoyevsky. It would be out of place here to give any detailed account of Remizov's many-sided genius, of his *Tales of the Russian People*, of his *Dreams* (real night-dreams), of his books written during the War and the Revolution (*Mara* and *The Noises of the Town*). In his later work he tends towards a greater simplicity, a certain primitiveness of outline, and a more concentrated style. Remizov's disciples, as might be expected, have been more successful in imitating the grotesqueness of his caricatures and the vivid and intense concentration of his character painting than in adopting his sympathetic and human attitude or in speaking his pure Russian.

The first of the new realists to win general recognition was A. N. Tolstoy, who speedily caught and vulgarised Remizov's knack of creating grotesque provincial characters. He has an easy way of writing, which is miles apart from Remizov's perfect craftsmanship, a love for mere filth, characteristic of his time and audience, and water enough to make his writings palatable to the average reader. So he early became the most popular of the literary novelists of the years before the Revolution.

A far more significant writer is Michael Prishvin. He belongs to an older generation and attracted some attention by good work in the line of descriptive journalism before he came in touch with Remizov. A man of the soil, he was capable of following Remizov's lead in making his Russian more colloquial and less bookish, without slavishly imitating him. He was unfortunately too much absorbed by his journalistic work to give much time to

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literature. But he wrote at least one story which deserves a high rank in even the smallest selection of Russian stories *The Beast of Krutoyarsk* (1913). It is the story of a dog, and is far the best animal story in the whole of Russian literature. The animal stories of Rudyard Kipling and Jack London were very popular in Russia at that time, but Prishvin is curiously free from every foreign, in fact from every bookish, influence; his story smells of the damp and acid soil of his native Smolensk province, and even Remizov was to him only a guide towards the right use of words and the right way of concentrating on his subject.

Prishvin stands alone. But in the years 1913–1916 the Russian literary press was flooded with short stories modelled on the *Unhushable Tambourine*. The most promising of these provincialists was E. Zamyatin, whose stories [Footnote: *Uyezdnoe*, which may be rendered as something provincial. ] are as intense and packed with suggestive ugliness as anything in Remizov, but lack the master's unerring linguistic flair and his profound and inclusive humanness. Zamyatin's stories are most emphatically *made*, manufactured, there is not an ounce of spontaneity in them, and, especially in the later work where he is more or less free from reminiscences of Remizov, they produce the impression of mosaic laboriously set together. They are overloaded with pointedly suggestive metaphor and symbolically expressive detail, and in their laborious and disproportionate elaborateness they remind you of the deliberate ugliness of a painting by some German Expressionist. [Footnote: Zamyatin was during the war a shipbuilding Engineer in the Russian service at Newcastle. He has written several stories of English life which are entirely in his later expressionist manner (*The Islanders*, Berlin, 1922)].

When the Revolution came and brought Russia that general impoverishment and reversion to savagery and primitive manners which is still the dominant feature of life in the U.S.S.R., literature was at first faced with a severe crisis. The book market was ruined. In the years 1918–1921 the publication of a book became a most difficult and hazardous undertaking. During these years the novel entirely disappeared from the market. For three years at least the Russian novel was dead. When it emerged again in 1922 it emerged very different from what it had been in 1917. As I have said, the surface literature of pre–Revolutionary date was swept away altogether. The new Realism of Remizov and Bely was triumphant all along the line. The works of both these writers were among the first books to be reprinted on the revival of the book–trade. And it soon became apparent that practically all the young generation belonged to their progeny. The first of these younger men to draw on himself the attention of critics and readers was Pilniak, the author of the present volume, on whom I shall dwell anon in greater detail.

In Petersburg there appeared a whole group of young novelists who formed a sort of professional and amicable confraternity and called themselves the Serapion Brothers. They were all influenced by Remizov; they were taught (in the very precise sense of the word they had regular classes) by Zamyatin; and explained the general principles of Art by the gifted and light–minded young formalist critic, Victor Shklovsky. Other writers emerged in all ends of Russia, all of them more or less obsessed by the dazzling models of Bely and Remizov.

All the writers of this new school have many features in common. They are all of them more interested in Manner than in Matter. They work at their style assiduously and fastidiously. They use an indirect method of narrating by aid of symbolic detail and suggestive metaphor. This makes their stories obscure and not easy to grasp at first reading. Their language is elaborate; it is as full as possible of unusual provincial words, or permeated with slang. It is coarse and crude and many a page of their writings would not have been tolerated by the editor of a pre–Revolution Russian magazine, not to speak of an English publisher. They choose their subjects from the Revolution and the Civil War. They are all fascinated by the elemental greatness of the events, and are in a way the bards of the Revolution. But their Revolutionism is purely aesthetical and is conspicuously empty of ideas. Most of their stories appear on the pages of official Soviet publications, but they are regarded with rather natural mistrust by the official Bolshevik critics, who draw attention to the essentially uncivic character of their art.

The exaggerated elaborateness and research of their works makes all these writers practically untranslatable; not that many of them are really worth translating. Their deliberate aestheticism using as they do revolutionary

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subjects only as material for artistic effect prevents their writings from being acceptable as reliable pictures of Russian post–Revolutionary life. And it is quite obvious that they have very few of the qualities that make good fiction in the eyes of the ordinary novel–reader.

There are marked inequalities of talent between them, as well as considerable differences of style. Pilniak is the most ambitious, he aims highest and at his worst falls lowest. Vyacheslav Shishkov, a Siberian, is notable for his good Russian, a worthy pupil of Remizov and Prishvin. Vsevolod Ivanov, another Siberian, is perhaps the most interesting for the subjects he chooses (the Civil War in the backwoods of Siberia), but his style is, though vigorous, diffuse and hazy, and his narrative is lost in a nebula of poetically–produced atmosphere.

Nicholas Nikitin, who is considered by some to be the most promising of all, is certainly the most typical of the school of Zamyatin; his style, overloaded with detail which swamps the outline of the story, is disfigured by the deliberate research of unfamiliar provincial idioms. Michael Zoshchenko is the only one who has, in a small way, reached perfection in his rendering of the common slang of a private soldier. But his art savours too much of a pastiche; he is really a born parodist and may some day give us a Russian *Christmas Garland*.

The most striking feature of all these story–tellers is their almost complete inability to tell a story. And this in spite of their great reverence for Leskov, the greatest of Russian story–tellers. But of Leskov they have only imitated the style, not his art of narrative. Miss Harrison, in her notable essay on the Aspects of the Russian Verb, [Footnote: *Aspects and Aorists*, by Jane Harrison, Cambridge University Press, 1919.] makes an interesting distinction between the perfective and imperfective style in fiction. The perfective is the ordinary style of an honest narrative. The imperfective is where nothing definitely happens but only goes on indefinitely becoming. Russian Literature (as the Russian language, according to Miss Harrison) has a tendency towards the imperfective. But never has this imperfective been so exclusively paramount as now. In all these stories of thrilling events the writers have a most cunning way of concealing the adventure under such a thick veil of detail, description, poetical effusion, idiom, and metaphor, that it can only with difficulty be discovered by the very experienced reader. To choose such adventures for subjects and then deliberately to make no use of them and concentrate all attention on style and atmosphere, is really a *tour de force*, the crowning glory and the *reductio ad absurdum* of this imperfective tendency.

These extremities, which are largely conditioned by the whole past of Russian Literature, must naturally lead to a reaction. The reading public cannot be satisfied with such a literature. Nor are the critics. A reaction against all this style is setting in, but it remains in the domain of theory and has not produced work of any importance. And it is doubtful whether it will. If even Leskov with his wonderful genius for pure narrative has failed to influence the moderns in any way except by his mannerisms of speech, the case seems indeed desperate. Those who are most thirsty for good stories properly told turn their eyes westwards, towards Stevenson and Dumas and E. A. T. Hoffmann. Better imitate Pierre Benoit than go on in the way you are doing, says Lev Lunts, one of the Serapion Brothers, in a violent and well–founded invective against modern Russian fiction. [Footnote: In Gorky's miscellany, *Beseda*. N3, 1923.] But though he sees the right way out pretty clearly Lunts has not seriously tried his hand at the novel. [Footnote: As I write I hear of the death of Lev Lunts at the age of 22. His principal work is a good tragedy of pure action without atmosphere or psychology (in the same *Beseda*, N2).] A characteristic sign of the times is a novel by Sergey Bobrov, [Footnote: *The Specification of Iditol*. Iditol being the name of an imaginary chemical discovery.] a precious poet and a good critic, where he adopts the methods of the film–drama with its rapid development and complicated plot, and carefully avoids everything picturesque or striking in his style. But the common run of fiction in the Soviet magazines continues as it was, and it is to be feared that there is something intrinsically opposed to the perfective narrative in the constitution of the contemporary Russian novelist.



## II. BORIS PILNIAK

Boris Pilniak (or in more correct transliteration, Pil'nyak) is the pseudonym of Boris Andreyevich Wogau. He is not of pure Russian blood, but a descendant of German colonists; a fact which incidently proves the force of assimilation inherent in the Russian milieu and the capacity to be assimilated, so typical of Germans. For it is difficult to deny Pilniak the appellation of a typical Russian.

Pilniak is about thirty–five years of age. His short stories began to appear in periodicals before the War, and his first book appeared in 1918. It contained four stories, two of which are included in the present volume (*Death and Over the Ravine*). A second volume appeared in 1920 (including the *Crossways*, *The Bielokonsky Estate*, *The Snow Wind*, *A Year of Their Lives*, and *A Thousand Years*). These volumes attracted comparatively little attention, though considering the great scarcity of fiction in those years they were certainly notable events. But *Ivan–da–Marya* and *The Bare Year*, published in 1922, produced a regular boom, and Pilniak jumped into the limelight of all–Russian celebrity. The cause of the success of these volumes, or rather the attention attracted by them, lay in their subject–matter: Pilniak was the first novelist to approach the subject of Soviet *Byt*, to attempt to utilise the everyday life and routine of Soviet officialdom, and to paint the new forms Russian life had taken since the Revolution. Since 1922 editions and reprints of Pilniak's stories have been numerous, and as he follows the rather regrettable usage of making up every new book of his unpublished stories with reprints of earlier work the bibliography of his works is rather complicated and entangled, besides being entirely uninteresting to the English reader.

The most interesting portion of Pilniak's works are no doubt his longer stories of Soviet life written since 1921. Unfortunately they are practically untranslatable. His proceedings, imitated from Bely and Remizov, would seem incongruous to the English reader, and the translation would be laid aside in despair or in disgust, in spite of all its burning interest of actuality. None of the stories included in this volume belong to this last manner of Pilniak's, but in order to give a certain idea of what it is like I will attempt a specimen–translation of the beginning of his story *The Third Metropolis* (dated May–June 1922), reproducing all his typographical mannerisms, which are in their turn reproduced rather unintelligently, from his great masters, Remizov and Bely. The story, by the way, is dedicated To A. M. Remizov, the Master in whose Workshop I was an apprentice.

## THE THIRD METROPOLIS

### I. NOW OPEN

By the District Department for Popinstruct [Footnote: That is District Department for popular instruction in Russian, *Uotnarobraz.*] provided with every commodity.

#### BATHS

(former Church school in garden) for public use with capacity to receive 500 persons in an 8–hour working–day.

Hours of baths:

Monday municipal children's asylums (free)

Tuesdays, Friday, Saturday males

Wednesday, Thursday females

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Price for washing  
adults ¥0kop.gold  
children 5kop.gold

DISDEPOPINSTRUCT [Footnote: That is District Department for popular instruction in Russian, *Uotnarobraz.*]

Times: Lent of the eighth year of the World War and of the downfall of European Civilisation (see Spengler) and sixth Lent since the great Russian Revolution; in other words: March, Spring, breaking-up of the ice when the Russian Empire exploded in the great revolution the way Rupert's drops explode, casting off Estia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Monarchy, Chernov, Martov, the Dardanelles – Russian Civilisation, Russian blizzards –

and when –  
Europe  
was:  
nothing but one Ersatz  
from end to end  
(Ersatz a German word  
means the adverb  
instead. )

*Place*: there is no place of action. Russia, Europe, the world, fraternity.

*Dramatis persona*: there are none. Russia, Europe, the world, belief, disbelief, civilisation, blizzards, thunderstorms, the image of the Holy Virgin. People, men in overcoats with collars turned up, go-alones, of course; women; but women are my sadness, to me who am a romanticist

the only thing, the most  
beautiful, the greatest  
joy.

All this does after all make itself into some sort of sense, but the process by which this is at length attained is lengthy, tedious, and full of pitfalls to the reader who is unfamiliar with some dozen modern Russian writers and is innocent of Soviet life.

In the impossibility of giving an intelligible English version of the *Bare Year* and its companions, the stories contained in this volume have been selected from the early and less sensational part of Pilniak's writings and will be considerably less staggering to the average English intelligence.

\* \* \* \* \*

There are two things an English reader is in the habit of expecting when approaching a new Russian writer: first he expects much and complains when he does not get it; to be appreciated by an English reader the Russian writer must be a Turgenev or a Chekhov, short of that he is no use. Secondly in every Russian book he expects to find ideas and a philosophy. If the eventual English reader approaches Pilniak with these standards, he will be disappointed; Pilniak is not a second Dostoyevsky, and he has singularly few ideas. It is not that he has no ambition in the way of ideas, but they are incoherent and cheap. The sort of historical speculations he indulges in may be appreciated at their right value on reading *A Thousand Years*. In later books he is still more self-indulgent in this direction, and many of his stories are a sort of muddle-headed historical disquisitions rather than stories in any acceptable sense of the word. Andrey Bely and his famous *Petersburg* are responsible for this habit of

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Pilniak's, as well as for many others of his perversities.

Pilniak is without a doubt a writer of considerable ability, but he is essentially unoriginal and derivative. Even in his famous novels of Soviet life, it is only the subject matter he has found out for himself the methods of treating it are other peoples'. But this imitativeness makes Pilniak a writer of peculiar interest: he is a sort of epitome of modern Russian fiction, a living literary history, and this representative quality of his is perhaps the chief claim on our attention that can be advanced on behalf of the stories included in this book. Almost every one of them can be traced back to some Russian or foreign writer. Each of them belongs to and is eminently typical of some accepted literary genre in vogue between 1910 and 1920. *The Snow* and *The Forest Manor* belong to the ordinary psychological problem-story acted among intellectuals; they have for their ancestors Chekhov, Zenaide Hippus, and the Polish novelists. *Always on Detachment*, belongs to the progeny of A. N. Tolstoy, with the inevitable blackguardly seduction of a more or less pure girl or woman at the end. *The Snow Wind* and *Over the Ravine* are animal stories, for which, I believe, Jack London is mainly responsible. In *A Year of Their Lives* the same animal method is transferred to the treatment of primitive human life, and the shadow of Knut Hamsun is plainly discernible in the background. *Death*, *The Heirs*, and *The Belokonsky Estate* are first class exercises in the manner of Bunin, and only *A Thousand Years* and *The Crossways* herald in, to a certain extent, Pilniak's own manner of invention. From the point of view of ideas *The Crossways* is the most interesting in the book, for it gives expression to that which is certainly the root of all Pilniak's conception of the Revolution. It is to use two terms which have been applied to Russia by two very different schools of thought but equally opposed to Europe a Scythian or an Eurasian conception. To Pilniak the Revolution is essentially the Revolt of peasant and rural Russia against the alien network of European civilisation, the Revolt of the crossways against the highroad and the railroad, of the village against the town. A conception, you will perceive, which is opposed to that of Lenin and the orthodox Communists, and which explains why official Bolshevism is not over-enthusiastic about Pilniak. *The Crossways* is a good piece of work (it can hardly be called a story) and it just gives a glimpse of that ambitious vastness of scale on which Pilniak was soon to plan his bigger Soviet stories.

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But taken in themselves and apart from his later work I think the stories in the manner of Bunin will be found the most satisfactory items in this volume. Of these *Death* was written before the Revolution and, but for an entirely irrelevant and very Pilniakish allusion to Lermontov and other deceased worthies, it is entirely unconnected with events and revolutions. Very imperfective and hardly a story, it is nevertheless done with sober and conscientious craftsmanship, very much like Bunin and very unlike the usual idea we have of Pilniak. The only thing Pilniak was incapable of taking from his model was Bunin's wonderfully rich and full Russian, a shortcoming which is least likely to be felt in translation.

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The other two Buninesque stories, *The Belokonsky Estate* and *The Heirs*, are stories (again, can the word story be applied to this rampantly imperfective style?) of the Revolution. They display the same qualities of sober measure and solid texture which are not usually associated with the name of Pilniak. These two stories ought to be read side by side, for they are correlative. In *The Belokonsky Estate* the representative of the old order, Prince Constantine, is drawn to an almost heroic scale and the new man cuts a poor and contemptible figure by his side. In the other story the old order is represented by a studied selection of all its worst types. I do not think that the stories were meant as a deliberate contrast, they are just the outcome of the natural lack of preconceived idea which is typical of Pilniak and of his passive, receptive, plastical mind. As long as he does not go out of his way to give expression to vague and incoherent ideas, the outcome of his muddle-headed meditations on Russian History, this very shortcoming (if shortcoming it be) becomes something of a virtue, and Pilniak an honest membrana vibrating with unbiassed indifference to every sound from the outer world.

## Tales of the Wilderness

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The reader may miss the more elaborate and sensational stories of Soviet life. But I have a word of consolation for him they are eminently unreadable, and for myself I would never have read them had it not been for the hard duties of a literary critic. In this case as in others I prefer to go direct to the fountain-source and read Bely's *Petersburg* and the books of Remizov, which for all the difficulties they put in the way of the reader and of the translator will at least amply repay their efforts. But Pilniak has also substantial virtues: the power to make things live; an openness to life and an acute vision. If he throws away the borrowed methods that suit him as little as a peacock's feathers may suit a crow, he will no doubt develop rather along the lines of the better stories included in this volume, than in the direction of his more ambitious novels. And I imagine that his *opus magnum*, if, in some distant future he ever comes to write one, will be more like the good old realism of the nineteenth century than like the intense and troubled art of his present masters; I venture to prophesy that he will finally turn out something like a Soviet (or post-Soviet) Trollope, rather than a vulgarised Andrey Bely.

D. S. MIRSKY.

May, 1924.

## TALES OF THE WILDERNESS

### THE SNOW

I

The tinkling of postillion-bells broke the stillness of the crisp winter night a coachman driving from the station perhaps. They rang out near the farm, were heard descending into a hollow; then, as the horses commenced to trot, they jingled briskly into the country, their echoes at last dying away beyond the common.

Polunin and his guest, Arkhipov, were playing chess in his study. Vera Lvovna was minding the infant; she talked with Alena for a while; then went into the drawing-room, and rummaged among the books there.

Polunin's study was large, candles burnt on the desk, books were scattered about here and there; an antique firearm dimly shone above a wide, leather-covered sofa. The silent, moonlit night peered in through the blindless windows, through one of which was passed a wire. The telegraph-post stood close beside it, and its wires hummed ceaselessly in the room somewhere in a corner of the ceiling a monotonous, barely audible sound, like a snow-storm.

The two men sat in silence, Polunin broad-shouldered and bearded, Arkhipov lean, wiry, and bald.

Alena entered bringing in curdled milk and cheese-cakes. She was a modest young woman with quiet eyes, and wore a white kerchief.

Won't you please partake of our simple fare? she asked shyly, inclining her head and folding her hands across her bosom.

Silent and absent-minded, the chess-players sat down to table and supped. Alena was about to join them, but just then her child began to cry, and she hurriedly left the room. The tea-urn softly simmered and seethed, emitting a low, hissing sound in unison with that of the wires. The men took up their tea and returned to their chess. Vera Lvovna returned from the drawing-room; and, taking a seat on the sofa beside her husband, sat there without stirring, with the fixed, motionless eyes of a nocturnal bird.

## Tales of the Wilderness

Have you examined the Goya, Vera Lvovna? Polunin asked suddenly.

I just glanced through the *History of Art*; then I sat down with Natasha.

He has the most wonderful devilry! Polunin declared, and, do you know, there is another painter Bosch. *He* has something more than devilry in *him*. You should see his Temptation of St. Anthony!

They began to discuss Goya, Bosch, and St. Anthony, and as Polunin spoke he imperceptibly led the conversation to the subject of St. Francis d'Assisi. He had just been reading the Saint's works, and was much attracted by his ascetical attitude towards the world. Then the conversation flagged.

It was late when the Arkhipovs left, and Polunin accompanied them home. The last breath of an expiring wind softly stirred the pine-branches, which swayed to and fro in a mystic shadow-dance against the constellations. Orion, slanting and impressive, listed across a boundless sky, his starry belt gleaming as he approached his midnight post. In the widespread stillness the murmur of the pines sounded like rolling surf as it beats on the rocks, and the frozen snow crunched like broken glass underfoot: the frost was cruelly sharp.

On reaching home, Polunin looked up into the overarching sky, searching the glittering expanse for his beloved Cassiopeian Constellation, and gazed intently at the sturdy splendour of the Polar Star; then he watered the horses, gave them their forage for the night, and treated them to a special whistling performance.

It struck warm in the stables, and there was a smell of horses' sweat. A lantern burned dimly on the wall; from the horses' nostrils issued grey, steamy cloudlets; Podubny, the stallion, rolled a great wondering eye round on his master, as though inquiring what he was doing. Polunin locked the stable; then stood outside in the snow for a while, examining the bolts.

In the study Alena had made herself up a bed on the sofa, sat down next it in an armchair and began tending her baby, bending over it humming a wordless lullaby. Polunin sat down by her when he came in and discussed domestic affairs; then took the child from Alena and rocked her. Pale green beams of moonlight flooded through the windows.

Polunin thought of St. Francis d'Assisi, of the Arkhipovs who had lost faith and yet were seeking the law, of Alena and their household. The house was wrapped in utter silence, and he soon fell into that sound, healthy sleep to which he was now accustomed, in contrast to his former nights of insomnia.

The faint moon drifted over the silent fields, and the pines shone tipped with silver. A new-born wind sighed, stirred, then rose gently from the enchanted caverns of the night and soared up into the sky with the swift flutter of many-plumed wings. Assuredly Kseniya Ippolytovna Enisherlova was not asleep on such a night.

## II

The day dawned cold, white, pellucid breathing forth thin, misty vapour, while a hoar-frost clothed the houses, trees, and hedges. The smoke from the village chimneypots rose straight and blue. Outside the windows was an overgrown garden, a snow-covered tree lay prone on the earth; further off were snow-clad fields, the valley and the forest. Sky and air were pale and transparent, and the sun was hidden behind a drift of fleecy white clouds.

Alena came in, made some remark about the house, then went out to singe the pig for Christmas.

## Tales of the Wilderness

The library—clock struck eleven; a clock in the hall answered. Then there came a sudden ring on the telephone; it sounded strange and piercing in the empty stillness.

Is that you, Dmitri Vladimirovich? Dmitri Vladimirovich, is that you? cried a woman's muffled voice: it sounded a great way off through the instrument.

Yes, but who is speaking?

Kseniya Ippolytovna Enisherlova is speaking", the voice answered quietly; then added in a higher key: Is it you, my ascetic and seeker? This is me, me, Kseniya.

You, Kseniya Ippolytovna? Polunin exclaimed joyfully.

Yes, yes ... Oh yes!... I am tired of roaming about and being always on the brink of a precipice, so I have come to you ... across the fields, where there is snow, snow, snow and sky ... to you, the seeker.... Will you take me? Have you forgiven me that July?

Polunin's face was grave and attentive as he bent over the telephone:

Yes, I have forgiven, he replied.

\* \* \* \* \*

One long past summer, Polunin and Kseniya Ippolytovna used to greet the glowing dawn together. At sundown, when the birch—trees exhaled a pungent odour and the crystal sickle of the moon was sinking in the west, they bade adieu until the morrow on the cool, dew—sprinkled terrace, and Polunin passionately kissed as he believed the pure, innocent lips of Kseniya Ippolytovna.

But she laughed at his ardour, and her avid lips callously drank in his consuming, protesting passion, only to desert him afterwards, abandoning him for Paris, and leaving behind her the shreds of his pure and passionate love.

That June and July had brought joy and sorrow, good and ill. Polunin was already disillusioned when he met Alena, and was living alone with his books. He met her in the spring, and quickly and simply became intimate with her, begetting a child, for he found that the instinct of fatherhood had replaced that of passion within him.

Alena entered his house at evening, without any wedding—ceremony, placed her trunk on a bench in the kitchen, and passing quickly through into the study, said quietly:

Here I am, I have come. She looked very beautiful and modest as she stood there, wiping the corner of her mouth with her handkerchief.

Kseniya Ippolytovna arrived late when dusk was already falling and blue shadows crept over the snow. The sky had darkened, becoming shrouded in a murky blue; bullfinches chirruped in the snow under the windows. Kseniya Ippolytovna mounted the steps and rang, although Polunin had already opened the door for her.

The hall was large, bright, and cold. As she entered, the sunrays fell a moment on the windows and the light grew warm and waxy, lending to her face as Polunin thought a greenish—yellow tint, like the skin of a peach, and infinitely beautiful. But the rays died away immediately, leaving a blue crepuscular gloom, in which Kseniya Ippolytovna's figure grew dim, forlorn, and decrepit.

## Tales of the Wilderness

Alena curtsayed: Kseniya Ippolytovna hesitated a moment, wondering if she should give her hand; then she went up to Alena and kissed her.

Good evening", she cried gaily, you know I am an old friend of your husband's.

But she did not offer her hand to Polunin.

Kseniya Ippolytovna had greatly changed since that far-off summer. Her eyes, her wilful lips, her Grecian nose, and smooth brows were as beautiful as ever, but now there was something reminiscent of late August in her. Formerly she had worn bright costumes now she wore dark; and her soft auburn hair was fastened in a simple plait.

They entered the study and sat down on the sofa. Outside the windows lay the snow, blue like the glow within. The walls and the furniture grew dim in the twilight. Polunin grave and attentive hovered solicitously round his guest. Alena withdrew, casting a long, steadfast look at her husband.

I have come here straight from Paris", Kseniya explained. It is rather queer I was preparing to leave for Nice in the spring, and was getting my things together, when I found a nest of mice in my wardrobe. The mother-mouse ran off, leaving three little babes behind her; they were raw-skinned and could only just crawl. I spent my whole time with them, but on the third day the first died, and then the same night the other two.... I packed up for Russia the next morning, to come here, to you, where there is snow, snow.... Of course there is no snow in Paris and it will soon be Christmas, the Russian Christmas.

She became silent, folded her hands and laid them against her cheek; for a moment she had a sorrowful, forlorn expression.

Continue, Kseniya Ippolytovna", Polunin urged.

I was driving by our fields and thinking how life here is as simple and monotonous as the fields themselves, and that it is possible to live here a serious life without trivialities. You know what it is to live for trivialities. I am called and I go. I am loved and I let myself be loved! Something in a showcase catches my eye and I buy it. I should always remain stationary were it not for those that have the will to move me....

I was driving by our fields and thinking of the impossibility of such a life: I was thinking too that I would come to you and tell you of the mice.... Paris, Nice, Monaco, costumes, English perfumes, wine, Leonardo da Vinci, neo-classicism, lovers, what are they? With you everything is just as of old.

She rose and crossed to the window.

The snow is blue-white here, as it is in Norway I jilted Valpyanov there. The Norwegian people are like trolls. There is no better place than Russia! With you nothing changes. Have you forgiven me that July?

Polunin approached and stood beside her.

Yes, I have forgiven", he said earnestly.

But I have not forgiven you that June! she flashed at him; then she resumed: The library, too, is the same as ever. Do you remember how we used to read Maupassant together in there?

Kseniya Ippolytovna approached the library-door, opened it, and went in. Inside were book-cases behind whose glass frames stood even rows of gilded volumes; there was also a sofa, and close to it a large, round, polished

## Tales of the Wilderness

table. The last yellow rays of the sun came in through the windows. Unlike that in the study, the light in here was not cold, but warm and waxy, so that again Kseniya Ippolytovna's face seemed strangely green to Polunin, her hair a yellow-red; her large, dark, deep-sunken eyes bore a stubborn look.

God has endowed you with wonderful beauty, Kseniya, Ippolytovna, Polunin said gravely.

She gave him a keen glance; then smiled. God has made me wonderfully tempting! By the way, you used to dream of faith; have you found it?

Yes, I have found it.

Faith in what?

In life.

But if there is nothing to believe in?

Impossible!

I don't know. I don't know. Kseniya Ippolytovna raised her hands to her head. The Japanese, Naburu Kotokami, is still looking for me in Paris and Nice... I wonder if he knows about Russia.... I have not had a smoke for a whole week, not since the last little mouse died; I smoked Egyptians before .... Yes, you are right, it is impossible not to have faith.

Polunin went to her quickly, took her hands, then dropped them; his eyes were very observant, his voice quiet and serious.

Kseniya, you must not grieve, you must not.

Do you love me?

As a woman no, as a fellow-creature I do, he answered firmly.

She smiled, dropped her eyes, then moved to the sofa, sat down and arranged her dress, then smiled again.

I want to be pure.

And so you are! Polunin sat down beside her, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees.

They were silent.

Kseniya Ippolytovna said at last: You have grown old, Polunin!

Yes, I have grown old. People do, but there is nothing terrible in that when they have found what they sought for.

Yes, when they have found it.... But what about now? Why do you say that? Is it Alena?

Why ask? Although I am disillusioned, Kseniya, I go on chopping firewood, heating the stove, living just to live. I read St. Francis d'Assisi, think about him, and grieve that such a life as his may not be lived again. I know he was absurd, but he had faith, And now Alena I love her, I shall love her for ever. I wish to feel God!



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Kseniya Ippolytovna looked at him curiously:

Do you know what the baby–mice smelt like?

No, why do you ask?

They smelt like new–born babies like human children! You have a daughter, Natasha. That is everything.

The sun sank in an ocean of wine–coloured light, and a great red wound remained amidst the drift of cold clouds over the western horizon. The snow grew violet, and the room was filled with shadowy, purplish twilight. Alena entered and the loud humming of the telegraph wires came through the study's open door.

By nightfall battalions of fleeting clouds flecked the sky; the moon danced and quivered in their midst a silver–horned goddess, luminous with the long–stored knowledge of the ages. The bitter snow–wind crept, wound, and whirled along in spirals, loops, and ribbons, lashing the fields, whining and wailing its age–old, dismal song over the lone desolate spaces. The land was wretched, restless, and forlorn; the sky was overcast with sombre, gaping caverns shot through with lurid lines of fire.

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At seven o'clock the Arkhipovs arrived.

Kseniya Ippolytovna had known them a long time: they had been acquaintances even before Arkhipov's marriage. As he greeted her now, he kissed her hand and began speaking about foreign countries principally Germany, which he knew and admired. They passed into the study, where they argued and conversed: they had nothing much to talk about really. Vera Lvovna was silent, as usual; and soon went to see Natasha. Polunin also was quiet, walking about the room with his hands behind his back.

Kseniya Ippolytovna jested in a wilful, merry, and coquettish fashion with Arkhipov, who answered her in a polite, serious, and punctilious manner. He was unable to carry on a light, witty conversation, and was acutely conscious of his own awkwardness. From a mere trifle, something Kseniya Ippolytovna said about fortune–telling at Christmas, there arose an old–standing dispute between the two men on Belief and Unbelief.

Arkhipov spoke with calmness and conviction, but Polunin grew angry, confused, and agitated. Arkhipov declared that Faith was unnecessary and injurious, like instinct and every other sentiment; that there was only one thing immutable Intellect. Only that was moral which was intelligent.

Polunin retorted that the intellectual and the non–intellectual were no standard of life, for was life intelligent? he asked. He contended that without Faith there was only death; that the one thing immutable in life was the tragedy of Faith and the Spirit.

But do you know what Thought is, Polunin?

Yes, indeed I do!

Don't smile! Do you not know that Thought kills everything? Reflect, think thrice over what you regard as sacred, and it will be as simple as a glass of lemonade.

But death?

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Death is an exit into nothing. I have always that in reserve when I am heart-broken. For the present I am content to live and thrive.

When the dispute was over, Vera Lvovna said in a low voice, as calm as ever:

The only tragic thing in life is that there is nothing tragical, while death is just death, when anyone dies physically. A little less metaphysics!

Kseniya Ippolytovna had been listening, alert and restless.

But all the same, she answered Vera Lvovna animatedly, Isn't the absence of tragedy the true tragedy?

Yes, that alone.

And love?

No, not love.

But aren't you married?

I want my baby.

Kseniya Ippolytovna, who was lying on the sofa, rose up on her knees, and stretching out her arms cried:

Ah, a baby! Is that not instinct?

That is a law!

The women began to argue. Then the dispute died down. Arkhipov proposed a game of chance. They uncovered a green table, set lighted candles at its corners and commenced to play leisurely and silently as in winter. Arkhipov sat erect, resting his elbows at right angles on the table.

The wind whistled outside, the blizzard increased in violence, and from some far distance came the dismal, melancholy creaking and grinding of iron. Alena came in, and sat quietly beside her husband, her hands folded in her lap. They were killing time.

The last time, I sat down to play a game of chance amidst the fjords in a little valley hotel; a dreadful storm raged the whole while, Kseniya Ippolytovna remarked pensively. Yes, there are big and little tragedies in life!

The wind shrieked mournfully; snow lashed at the windows. Kseniya stayed on until a late hour, and Alena invited her to remain overnight; but she refused and left.

Polunin accompanied her. The snow-wind blew violently, whistling and cutting at them viciously. The moon seemed to be leaping among the clouds; around them the green, snowy twilight hung like a thick curtain. The horses jogged along slowly. Darkness lay over the land.

Polunin returned alone over a tractless road-way; the gale blew in his face; the snow blinded him. He stabled his horses; then found Alena waiting up for him in the kitchen, her expression was composed but sad. Polunin took her in his arms and kissed her.

Do not be anxious or afraid; I love only you, no one else. I know why you are unhappy.

## Tales of the Wilderness

Alena looked up at him in loving gratitude, and shyly smiled.

You do not understand that it is possible to love one only. Other men are not able to do that, Polunin told her tenderly.

The hurricane raged over the house, but within reigned peace. Polunin went into his study and sat down at his desk; Natasha began to cry; he rose, took a candle, and brought her to Alena, who nursed her. The infant looked so small, fragile, and red that Polunin's heart overflowed with tenderness towards her. One solitary, flickering candle illumined the room.

There was a call on the telephone at daybreak. Polunin was already up. The day slowly broke in shades of blue; there was a murky, bluish light inside the rooms and outside the windows, the panes of which were coated with snow. The storm had subsided.

Have I aroused you? Were you still in bed? called Kseniya.

No, I was already up.

On the watch?

Yes.

I have only just arrived home. The storm whirled madly round us in the fields, and the roads were invisible, frozen under snow ... I drove on thinking, and thinking of the snow, you, myself, Arkhipov, Paris ... oh, Paris...! You are not angry with me for ringing you up, are you, my ascetic?... I was thinking of our conversation.

What were you thinking?

This.... We were speaking together, you see.... Forgive me, but you could not speak like that to Alena. She would not understand ... how could she?

One need not speak a word, yet understand everything. There is something that unites without the aid of speech not only Alena and me, but the world and me. That is a law of God.

So it is, murmured Kseniya. Forgive me ... poor old Alena.

I love her, and she has given me a daughter....

Yes, that is true. And we ... we love, but are childless... We rise in the morning feeling dull and depressed from our revels of overnight, while you were wisely sleeping. Kseniya Ippolytovna's voice rose higher. 'We are the heisha-girls of lantern-light,' you remember Annensky? At night we sit in restaurants, drinking wine and listening to garish music. We love but are childless.... And you? You live a sober, righteous and sensible life, seeking the truth.... Isn't that so?' Truth! Her cry was malignant and full of derision.

That is unjust, Kseniya, answered Polunin in a low voice, hanging his head.

No, wait, continued the mocking voice at the other end of the line; here is something more from Annensky: 'We are the heisha-girls of lantern-light!'... 'And what seemed to them music brought them torment'; and again: 'But Cypris has nothing more sacred than the words *I love*, unuttered by us' ...

That is unjust, Kseniya.

## Tales of the Wilderness

Unjust! She laughed stridently; then suddenly was silent. She began to speak in a sad, scarcely audible whisper: But Cypris has nothing more sacred than the words *I love*, unuttered by us.... I love ... love.... Oh, darling, at that time, in that June, I looked upon you as a mere lad. But now I seem small and little myself, and you a big man, who defends me. How miserable I was alone in the fields last night! But that is expiation.... You are the only one who has loved me devotedly. Thank you, but I have no faith now.

The dawn was grey, lingering, cold; the East grew red.

### III

Kseniya Ippolytovna's ancestral home had reared its columns for fully a century. It was of classic architecture, with pediment, balconied hall, echoing corridors, and furniture that seemed never to have been moved from the place it had occupied in her forefathers' time.

The old mansion greeted her the last descendant of the ancient name with gloomy indifference; with cold, sombre apartments that were terrible by night, and thickly covered with the accumulated dust of many years. An ancient butler remained who recalled the former times and masters, the former baronial pomp and splendour. The housemaid, who spoke no Russian, was brought by Kseniya.

Kseniya Ippolytovna established herself in her mother's rooms. She told the one ancient retainer that the household should be conducted as in her parents' day, with all the old rules and regulations. He thereupon informed her that it was customary in the times of the old masters for relatives and friends to gather together on Christmas Eve, while for the New Year all the gentry of the district considered it their duty to come, even those who were uninvited. Therefore it was necessary for her to order in the provisions at once.

The old butler called Kseniya Ippolytovna at eight; then served her with coffee. After she had taken it, he said austere:

You will have to go round the house and arrange things, Barina; then go into the study to read books and work out the expenses and write out recipes for your house-party. The old gentry always did that.

She carried out all her instructions, adhering rigorously to former rules. She was wonderfully quiet, submissive, and sad. She read thick, simply-written books those in which the old script for *sh* is confused with that for *t*. Now and then, however, she rang up Polunin behind the old man's back, talking to him long and fretfully, with mingled love, grief, and hatred.

In the holidays they drove about together in droskies, and told fortunes: Kseniya Ippolytovna was presented with a waxen cradle. They drove to town with some mummers, and attended an amateur performance in a club. Polunin dressed up as a wood-spirit, Kseniya as a wood-spirit's daughter out of a birch-grove. Then they visited the neighbouring landowners.

The Christmas holidays were bright and frosty, with a red morning glow from the east, the daylight waxy in the sun, and with long blue, crepuscular evenings.

### IV

The old butler made a great ado in the house at the approach of the New Year. In preparation for a great ball, he cleared the inlaid floors, spread carpets, filled the lamps; placed new candles here and there; took the silver and the dinner-services out of their chests, and procured all the requisites for fortune-telling. By New Year's Eve the house was in order, the stately rooms glittering with lights, and uniformed village-lads stood by the doors.

## Tales of the Wilderness

Kseniya Ippolytovna awoke late on that day and did not get up, lying without stirring in bed until dinner time, her hands behind her head. It was a clear, bright day and the sun's golden rays streamed in through the windows, and were reflected on the polished floor, casting wavy shadows over the dark heavy tapestry on the walls. Outside was the cold blue glare of the snow, which was marked with the imprints of birds' feet, and a vast stretch of clear turquoise sky.

The bedroom was large and gloomy; the polished floor was covered with rugs; a canopied double bedstead stood against the further wall; a large wardrobe was placed in a corner.

Kseniya Ippolytovna looked haggard and unhappy. She took a bath before dinner; then had her meal alone, in solitary state, drowsing lingeringly over it with a book.

Crows, the birds of destruction, were cawing and gossiping outside in the park. At dusk the fragile new moon rose for a brief while. The frosty night was crisp and sparkling. The stars shone diamond-bright in the vast, all-embracing vault of blue; the snow was a soft, velvety green.

Polunin arrived early. Kseniya Ippolytovna greeted him in the drawing-room. A bright fire burnt on the hearth; beside it were two deep armchairs. No lamps were alight, but the fire-flames cast warm, orange reflections; the round-topped windows seemed silvery in the hoar-frost.

Kseniya Ippolytovna wore a dark evening dress and had plaited her hair; she shook hands with Polunin.

I am feeling sad to-day, Polunin, she said in a melancholy voice. They sat down in the armchairs.

I expected you at five. It is now six. But you are always churlish and inconsiderate towards women. You haven't once wanted to be alone with me or guessed that I desired it! She spoke calmly, rather coldly, gazing obstinately into the fire, her cheeks cupped between her narrow palms. You are so very silent, a perfect diplomat.... What is it like in the fields to-day? Cold? Warm? Tea will be served in a moment.

There was a pause.

At last Polunin broke the silence.

Yes, it was bitterly cold, but fine. After a further pause he added: When we last talked together you did not say all that was in your mind. Say it now.

Kseniya Ippolytovna laughed:

I have already said everything! Isn't it cold? I have not been out to-day. I have been thinking about Paris and of that ... that June.... Tea should be ready by this time!

She rose and rung the bell, and the old butler came in.

Will tea be long?

I will bring it now, Barina.

He went out and returned with a tray on which were two glasses of tea, a decanter of rum, some pastries, figs, and honey, and laid them on the little table beside the armchairs.

Will you have the lamps lighted, Barina? he inquired, respectfully.

## Tales of the Wilderness

No. You may go. Close the door.

The old butler looked at them knowingly; then withdrew.  
Kseniya turned at once to Polunin.

I have told you everything. How is it you have not understood? Drink up your tea.

Tell me again, he pleaded.

Take your tea first; pour out the rum. I repeat I have already told you all. You remember about the mice? Did you not understand that? Kseniya Ippolytovna sat erect in her chair; she spoke coldly, in the same distant tone in which she had addressed the butler.

Polunin shook his head: No, I haven't understood.

Dear me, dear me! she mocked, and you used to be so quick-witted, my ascetic. Still, health and happiness do not always sharpen the wits. You are healthy and happy, aren't you?

You are being unjust again, Polunin protested. You know very well that I love you.

Kseniya Ippolytovna gave a short laugh: Oh, come, come! None of that! She drank her glass of tea feverishly, threw herself back in the chair, and was silent.

Polunin also took his, warming himself after his cold drive.

She spoke again after a while in a quiet dreamy tone: In this stove, flames will suddenly flare up, then die away, and it will become cold. You and I have always had broken conversations. Perhaps the Arkhipovs are right when it seems expedient, kill! When it seems expedient, breed! That is wise, prudent, honest.... Suddenly she sat erect, pouring out quick, passionate, uneven words:

Do you love me? Do you desire me ... as a woman?... to kiss, to caress?... You understand? No, be silent! I am purged.... I come to you as you came to me that June.... You didn't understand about the mice?... Or perhaps you did.

Have you noticed, have you ever reflected on that which does not change in man's life, but for ever remains the same? No, no, wait!... There have been hundreds of religions, ethics, aesthetics, sciences, philosophical systems: they have all changed and are still changing only one law remains unaltered, that all living things whether men, mice, or rye are born, breed, and die.

I was packing up for Nice, where a lover expected me, when suddenly I felt an overwhelming desire for a babe, a dear, sweet, little babe of my own, and I remembered you .... Then I travelled here, to Russia so as to bear it in reverence.... I am able to do so now!...

Polunin rose and stood close to Kseniya Ippolytovna: his expression was serious and alarmed.

Don't beat me, she murmured.

You are innocent, Kseniya, he replied.

Oh, there you go again! she cried impatiently. Always sin and innocence! I am a stupid woman, full of beliefs and superstitions nothing more like all women. I want to conceive here, to breed and bear a child here. Do you

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wish to be the father?

She stood up, looking intently into Polunin's eyes.

What are you saying, Kseniya? he asked in a low, grave, pained tone.

I have told you what I want. Give me a child and then go anywhere back to your Alena! I have not forgotten that June and July.

I cannot, Polunin replied firmly; I love Alena.

I do not want love, she persisted; I have no need of it. Indeed I have not, for I do not even love you! She spoke in a low, faint voice, and passed her hand over her face.

I must go, the man said at last.

She looked at him sharply. Where to?

How do you mean 'where to'? I must go away altogether!

Ah, those tragedies, duties, and sins again! she cried, her eyes burning into his with hatred and contempt. Isn't it all perfectly simple? Didn't you make a contract with me?

I have never made one without love. And I love only Alena. I must go.

Oh, what cruel, ascetical egoism! she cried violently. Then suddenly all her rage died down, and she sat quietly in the chair, covering her face with her hands.

Polunin stood by, his shoulders bowed, his arms hanging limply. His face betrayed grief and anxiety.

Kseniya looked up at him with a wan smile: It is all right there is no need to go... It was only my nonsense.... I was merely venting my anger.... Don't mind me .... I am tired and harassed. Of course I have not been purged. I know that is impossible... We are the 'heisha-girls of lantern-light'.... You remember Annensky? ... Give me your hand.

Polunin stretched out his large hand, took her yielding one in his and pressed its delicate fingers.

You have forgiven me? she murmured.

He looked at her helplessly, then muttered: I cannot either forgive or not forgive. But ... I cannot!

Never mind; we shall forget. We shall be cheerful and happy. You remember: 'Where beauty shines amidst mire and baseness there is only torment'.... You need not mind, it is all over!

She uttered the last few words with a cry, raised herself erect, and laughed aloud with forced gaiety.

We shall tell fortunes, jest, drink, be merry like our grandfathers ... you remember! ...Had not our grandmothers their coachmen friends?

She rang the bell and the butler came in.

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Bring in more tea. Light the fire and the lamps.

The fire burnt brightly and illuminated the leather-covered chairs. The portrait frames on the walls shone golden through the darkness. Polunin paced up and down the room, his hands behind his back; his footsteps were muffled in the thick carpet.

Sleigh bells began to ring outside.

It was just ten o'clock as the guests assembled from the town and the neighbouring estates. They were received in the drawing-room.

Taper, the priest's son, commenced playing a polka, and the ladies went into the ballroom; the old butler and two footmen brought wax candles and basins of water, and the old ladies began to tell fortunes. A troupe of mummers tumbled in, a bear performed tricks, a Little Russian dulcimer-player sang songs.

The mummers brought in with them the smell of frost, furs, and naphthaline. One of them emitted a cock's crow, and they danced a Russian dance. It was all merry and bright, a tumultuous, boisterous revel, as in the old Russian aristocracy days. There was a smell of burning wax, candle-grease, and burning paper.

Kseniya Ippolytovna was the soul of gaiety; she laughed and jested cheerfully as she waltzed with a Lyceum student, a General's son. She had re-dressed her hair gorgeously, and wore a pearl necklace round her throat. The old men sat round card-tables in the lounge, talking on local topics.

At half past eleven a footman opened the door leading into the dining-room and solemnly announced that supper was served. They supped and toasted, ate and drank amid the clatter of knives, forks, dishes, and spoons. Kseniya made Arkhipov, Polunin, a General and a Magistrate sit beside her.

At midnight, just as they were expecting the clock to chime, Kseniya Ippolytovna rose to propose a toast; in her right hand was a glass; her left was flung back behind her plaited hair; she held her head high. All the guests at once rose to their feet.

I am a woman, she cried aloud. I drink to ourselves, to women, to the gentle, to the homely, to happiness and purity! To motherhood! I drink to the sacred she broke off abruptly, sat down and hung her head.

Somebody cried: Hurrah! To someone else it seemed that Kseniya was weeping. The clock began to chime, the guests shouted Hurrah! clinked glasses, and drank.

Then they sang, while some rose and carried round glasses to those of the guests who were still sober and those who were only partially intoxicated. They bowed. They sang *The Goblets*, and the basses thundered:

Drink to the dregs! Drink to the dregs! Kseniya Ippolytovna offered her first glass to Polunin. She stood in front of him with a tray, curtsied without lifting her eyes and sang. Polunin rose, colouring with embarrassment:

I never drink wine, he protested.

But the basses thundered: Drink to the dregs! Drink to the dregs!

His face darkened, he raised a silencing arm, and firmly repeated:

I never drink wine, and I do not intend to.



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Kseniya gazed into the depths of his eyes and said softly:

I want you to, I beg you.... Do you hear?

I will not, Polunin whispered back.

Then she cried out:

He doesn't want to! We mustn't make him against his will! She turned away, offered her glass to the Magistrate, and after him to the Lyceum student; then excused herself and withdrew, quietly returning later looking sad and as if she had suddenly aged.

They lingered a long while over supper; then went into the ball-room to dance, and sing, and play old fashioned games. The men went to the buffets to drink, the older ones then sat in the drawing-room playing whist, and talked.

It was nearly five o'clock when the guests departed. Only the Arkhipovs and Polunin remained. Kseniya Ippolytovna ordered coffee, and all four sat down at a small table feeling worn out. The house was now wrapt in silence. The dawn had just broken.

Kseniya was tired to death, but endeavoured to appear fresh and cheerful. She passed the coffee round, and then fetched a bottle of liqueur. They sat almost in silence; what talk they exchanged was desultory.

One more year dropped into Eternity, Arkhipov said, sombrely.

Yes, a year nearer to death, a year further from birth, rejoined Polunin.

Kseniya Ippolytovna was seated opposite him. Her eyes were veiled. She rose now to her feet, leaned over the table and spoke to him in slow, measured accents vibrating with malice:

Well, pious one! Everything here is mine. I asked you to-day to give me a baby, because I am merely a woman and so desire motherhood.... I asked you to take wine... You refused. The nearer to death the further from birth, you say? Well then, begone!

She broke into tears, sobbing loudly and plaintively, covering her face with her hands; then leant against the wall, still sobbing. The Arkhipovs ran to her; Polunin stood at the table dumbfounded, then left the room.

I didn't ask him for passion or caresses. ... I have no husband! Kseniya cried, sobbing and shrieking like a hysterical girl. They calmed her after a time, and she spoke to them in snatches between her sobs, which were less violent for a while. Then she broke out weeping afresh, and sank into an armchair.

The dawn had now brightened; the room was filled with a faint, flickering light. Misty, vaporous, tormenting shadows danced and twisted oddly in the shifting glimmer: in the tenebrous half-light the occupants looked grey, weary, and haggard, their faces strangely distorted by the alternate rise and fall of the shadows. Arkhipov's bald head with its tightly stretched skin resembled a greatly elongated skull.

Listen to me, you Arkhipovs, Kseniya cried brokenly. Supposing a distracted woman who desired to be pure were to come and ask you for a baby would you give her the same answer as Polunin? He said it was impossible, that it was sin, that he loved someone else. Would you answer like that, Arkhipov, knowing it was the woman's last her only chance of salvation her only love? She looked eagerly from one to the other.

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No, certainly not I should answer in a different way, Arkhipov replied quietly.

And you, Vera Lvovna, a wife ... do you hear? I speak in front of you?

Vera Lvovna nodded, laid her hand gently on Kseniya's forehead, and answered softly and tenderly:

I understand you perfectly.

Again Kseniya wept.

\* \* \* \* \*

The dawn trod gently down the lanes of darkness. The light grew clearer and the candles became dim and useless. The outlines of the furniture crept out of the net of shadows. Through the blue mist outside the snow, valley, forest, and fields were faintly visible. From the right of the horizon dawn's red light flushed the heavens with a cold purple.

Polunin drove along by the fields, trotting smoothly behind his stallion. The earth was blue and cold and ghostly, a land carved out of dreams, seemingly unsubstantial and unreal. A harsh, bitter wind blew from the north, stirring the telegraph-wires by the roadside to a loud, humming refrain. A silence as of death reigned over the land, yet life thrilled through it; and now and then piping goldfinches appeared from their winter nests in the moist green ditches, and flew ahead of Polunin; then suddenly turned aside and perched lightly on the wayside brambles.

Night still lingered amid the calm splendour of the vast, primeval forest. As he drove through the shadowed glades the huge trees gently swayed their giant boughs, softly brushing aside the shroud of encompassing darkness.

A golden eagle darted from its mist-wreathed eyrie and flew over the fields; then soared upwards in ever-widening circles towards the east where, like a pale rose ribbon stretched across the sky, the light from the rising sun shed a delicate opalescent glow on the snow, which it transformed to an exquisite lilac, and the shadows, to which it lent a wonderful, mysterious, quivering blue tint.

Polunin sat in his seat, huddled together, brooding morosely, deriving a grim satisfaction from the fact that all the same he had not broken the law. Henceforth, he never could break it; the thought of Kseniya Ippolytovna brought pain, but he would not condemn her.

At home, Alena was already up and about; he embraced her fondly, clasped her in his arms, kissed her forehead; then he took up the infant and gazed lingeringly, with infinite tenderness, upon her innocent little face.

The day was glorious; the golden sunlight streamed in through the windows in a shining cataract, betokening the advent of spring, and made pools of molten gold upon the floor. But the snow still lay in all its virgin whiteness over the earth.

## A YEAR OF THEIR LIVES

I

To the north, south, east, and west in all directions for hundreds of miles stretched forests and bogs enveloped in a wide-spread veil of lichen. Brown-trunked cedars and pines towered on high. Beneath there was a thick, impenetrable jungle of firs, alders, wild-berries, junipers, and low-hanging birches. Pungent, deep-sunken,

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lichen-covered springs of reddish water were hidden amidst undergrowth in little glades, couched in layers of turf bordered by red bilberries and huckleberries.

With September came the frosts fifty degrees below zero. The snow lay everywhere crisp and dazzling. There was daylight for three or four hours only; the remainder of the time it was night. The sky was lowering, and brooded darkly over the earth. There was a tense hush and stillness, only broken in September by the lowing of mating elks. In December came the mournful, sinister howling of the wolves; for the rest of the time a deep, dreadful, overpowering silence! A silence that can be found only in the wastelands of the world.

A village stood on the hill by the river.

The bare slope descended to the water's edge, a grey-brown granite, and white slatey clay, steep, beaten by wind and rain. Clumsy discoloured boats were anchored to the bank. The river was broad, dark, and cold, its surface broken by sombre, choppy, bluish waves. Here and there the grey silhouettes of huts were visible; their high, projecting, boarded roofs were covered by greenish lichen. The windows were shuttered. Nets dried close by. It was the abode of hunters who went long excursions into the forests in winter, to fight the wild beasts.

### II

In the spring the rivers now broad, free and mighty overflowed their banks. Heavy waves broke up the face of the waters, which sent forth a deep, hoarse, subdued murmur, as restless and disquieting as the season itself. The snow thawed. The pine-trees showed resinous lights, and exhaled a strong, pungent odour.

In the day-time the sky was a broad expanse of blue; at dusk it had a soft murky hue and a melancholy attraction. In the heart of the woods, now that winter was over, the first deed of the beasts was being accomplished birth. Eider-ducks, swans, and geese were crying noisily on the river.

At dusk the sky became greenish and murky, merging into a vast tent of deepest blue studded with a myriad of shining golden stars. Then the eider-ducks and swans grew silent and went to roost for the night, and the soft warm air was thrilled by the whines of bear-cubs and the cries of land-rails. It was then that the maidens assembled on the slope to sing of Lada and to dance their ancient dances, while strapping youths came forth from their winter dwellings in the woods and listened.

The slope down to the river was steep; below was the rustling sound of water among the reeds. Everything was wrapt in stillness, yet everywhere the throb and flow of life could be heard. The maidens sat huddled together on the top of the slope, where the granite and slate were covered with scanty moss and yellow grass.

They were dressed in gaily-coloured dresses: all of them strong and robust; they sang their love-songs old and sad and free and gazed into the gathering opalescent mists. Their songs seemed to overflow from their hearts, and were sung to the youths who stood around them like sombre, restive shadows, ogling and lustful, like the beasts in their forest-haunts.

This festive coupling-time had its law.

The youths came here to choose their wives; they quarrelled and fought, while the maidens remained listless, yielding to them in all. The young men ogled and fought and he who triumphed first chose his wife. Then he and she together retired from the festival.

### III

Marina was twenty when she proceeded to the river-bank.

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Her tall, somewhat heavy body was wonderfully moulded, with strong muscles and snowy skin. Her chest, back, hips, and limbs were sharply outlined; she was strong, supple, and well developed. Her round, broad breast rose high; her hair, eye-brows and eye-lashes were thick and dark. The pupils of her eyes were deep and liquid; her cheeks showed a flush of red. Her lips were soft like a beast's large, sensuous and rosy. She walked slowly, moving her long straight legs evenly, and slightly swaying from her hips....

She joined the maidens on the river slope.

They were singing their mysterious, alluring and illusive songs.

Marina mingled among the crowd of maidens, lay down upon her back, closed her dreamy eyes, and joined in the festive chorus. The maidens' souls became absorbed in the singing, and their song spread far and wide through all the shadowy recesses of the woods, like shining rays of sunlight. Their eyes closed in langour, their full-blooded bodies ached with a delicious sensation. Their hearts seemed to grow benumbed, the numbness spreading through their blood to their limbs; it deprived them of strength, and their thoughts became chaotic.

Marina stretched her limbs sensuously; then became absorbed in the singing, and she also sang. She felt strangely inert; only quivering at the sound of the lusty, excited voices of the youths.

Afterwards she lay on a couch in her suffocatingly close room; her hands were clasped behind her head; her bosom swelled. She stretched, opened her dark pensive eyes wide, compressed her lips, then sank again into the drowsy langour, lying thus for many hours.

She was twenty, and had grown up free and solitary with the hunters, the woods, and the steep and the river from her birth.

### IV

Demid lived on his own plot of ground, which, like the village, stood on a hill above the river. But here the hill was higher and steeper, sweeping the edge of the horizon. The wood was nearer, and its grey-trunked cedars and pines rose from their beds of golden moss to shake their crests to the stars and stretch their dark-green forest hands right up to the house. The view was wide and sweeping from here: the dark, turbulent river, the marsh beyond, the deep-blue billowing woods fringing the horizon, the heavy lowering sky all were clearly visible.

The house, made of huge pines, with timbered walls, plain white-washed ceilings and floors, was bestrewn with pelts of bears, elks, wolves, foxes, and ermines. Gunpowder and grape-shot lay on the tables. In the corners was a medley of lassoes, snares, and wolftraps. Some rifles hung round the walls. There was a strong pungent odour, as though all the perfumes of the woods were collected here. The house contained two rooms and a kitchen.

In the centre of one of the rooms stood a large, rough-hewn table; round it were some low wooden stools covered with bear-skin. This was Demid's own room; in the other was the young bear, Makar.

Demid lay motionless for a long time on his bear-skin bed, listening to the vibrations of his great body how it lived and throbbed, how the rich blood coursed through its veins. Makar, the bear, approached, laid his heavy paws on his chest, and amicably sniffed at his body. Demid stroked the beast on its ear, and it seemed as if the man and animal understood each other. Outside the window loomed the wood.

Demid was rugged and broad-shouldered, a large, quiet, dark-eyed, good man. He smelt of the woods, and was strong and healthy. Like all the hunters, he dressed in furs and a rough, home-woven fabric streaked with red. He wore high, heavy boots made of reindeer hide, and his coarse, broad hands were covered with broken chilblains.

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Makar was young, and, like all young things, he was foolish. He liked to roll about, and was often destructive he would gnaw the nets and skins, break the traps, and lick up the gunpowder. Then Demid punished him, whereupon Makar would turn on his heel, make foolish grimaces, and whine plaintively.

V

Demid went to the maidens on the slope and took Marina to his plot of land. She became his wife.

VI

The dark-green, wind-swept grass grew sweet and succulent in summer. The sun seemed to shine from out a deep blue ocean of light. The nights were silvery, the sky seemed dissolved into a pale, pellucid mist; sunset and dawn co-mingled, and a white wavering haze crept over the earth. Here life was strong and swift, for it knew that its days were brief.

Marina was installed in Makar's room, and he was transferred to Demid's.

Makar greeted Marina with an inhospitable snarl when he saw her for the first time; then, showing his teeth, he struck her with his paw. Demid beat him for this behaviour, and he quieted down. Then Marina made friends with him.

Demid went into the woods in the daytime, and Marina was left alone.

She decorated her room in her own fashion, with a crude, somewhat exaggerated, yet graceful, taste. She hung round in symmetrical order the skins and cloth hangings, brightly embroidered with red and blue cocks and reindeers. She placed an image of the God-Mother in the corner; she washed the floor; and her multi-coloured room smelling as before of the woods began to resemble a forest-chapel, where the forest folk pray to their gods.

In the pale-greenish twilight of the illimitable night, when only horn-owls cried in the woods and bear-cubs snarled by the river, Demid went in to Marina. She could not think her mind moved slowly and awkwardly like a great lumbering animal she could only feel, and in those warm, voluptuous, star-drenched nights she yielded herself to Demid, desiring to become one with him, his strength, and his passion.

The nights were pale, tremulous, and mysterious. There was a deep, heavy, nocturnal stillness. White spirals of mist drifted along the ground. Night-owls and wood spirits hooted. In the morning was a red blaze of glory as the great orb of day rose from the east into the azure vault of heaven.

The days flew by and summer passed.

VII

It snowed in September.

It had been noticeable, even in August, how the days drew in and darkened, how the nights lengthened and deepened. The wood all at once grew still and dumb; it seemed as though it were deserted. The air grew cold, and the river became locked in ice. The twilight was slow and lingering, its deepening shadows turning the snow and ice on the river to a keen, frosty blue.

Through the nights rang the loud, strange, fierce bellowing of the elks as they mated; the walls shook, and the hills re-echoed with their terrible roar.

## Tales of the Wilderness

Marina was with child in the autumn.

One night she woke before dawn. The room was stifling from the heat of the stove, and she could smell the bear. There was a faint glimmer of dawn, and the dark walls showed the window frames in a wan blue outline. Somewhere close by an old elk was bellowing: you could tell it was old by the hoarse, hissing notes of its hollow cries.

Marina sat up in bed. Her head swam, and she felt nauseated. The bear lay beside her; he was already awake and was watching her. His eyes shone with quiet, greenish lights; from outside, the thin crepuscular light crept into the room through little crevices.

Again Marina felt the nausea, and her head swam; the lights in Makar's eyes were re-enkindled in Marina's soul into a great, overwhelming joy that made her body quiver with emotion . . . Her heart beat like a snared bird all was wavering and misty, like a summer morn.

She rose from her bed of bear-skin furs, and naked, with swift, awkward, uncertain steps, went in to Demid. He was still asleep she put her burning arms about him and drew his head to her deep bosom, whispering to him softly:

A child ... it is the child....

Little by little, the night lifted and in through the windows came the daylight. The elk ceased his bellowing The room filled with glancing morning shadows. Makar approached, sniffed, and laid his paws on the bed. Demid seized his collar with his free hand and patting him fondly said:

That is right, Makar Ivanych you know, don't you? Then turning to Marina, he added: What do you think, Marinka? Doesn't he know? Doesn't the old bear know, Marinka?

Makar licked Demid's hand, and laid his head knowingly on his forepaws. The night had gone; rays of lilac-coloured light illumined the snow and entered the house. Round, red, and distant rose the sun. Below the hill lay the blue, ice-bound river, and away beyond it stretched the ribbed outline of the vast, marshy Siberian forest. Demid did not enter it that day, nor on many of the following days.

### VIII

The winter descended.

The snow lay in deep layers, blue by day and night, lilac in the brief intervals of sunrise and sunset. The pale, powerless sun seemed far away and strange during the three short hours that it showed over the horizon. The rest of the time it was night. The northern lights flashed like quivering arrows across the sky, in their sublime and awful majesty. The frost lay like a veil over the earth, enveloping all in a dazzling whiteness in which was imprisoned every shade of colour under the sun. Crimson, purples, softest yellows, tenderest greens, and exquisite blues and pinks flashed and quivered fiercely under the morning rays, shimmering in the brilliance. Over all hung the hush of the trackless desert, the stillness that betokened death!

Marina's eyes had changed they were no longer dark, limpid, full of intoxication; they were wonderfully bright and clear. Her hips had widened, her body had increased, adding a new grace to her stature. She seldom went out, sitting for the most part in her room, which resembled a forest-chapel where men prayed to the gods. In the daytime she did her simple housekeeping chopped wood, heated the stove, cooked meat and fish, helped Demid to skin the beasts he had slain, and to weed their plot of land. During the long evenings she spun and wove clothes for the coming babe. As she sewed she thought of the child, and sung and smiled softly.

## Tales of the Wilderness

An overwhelming joy possessed Marina when she thought of her approaching motherhood. Her heart beat faster and her happiness increased. Her own possible sufferings held no place in her thoughts.

In the lilac glow of dawn, when a round moon, solemn and immense, glowed in the south-western sky, Demid took his rifle and Finnish knife, and went on his sleigh into the forest.

The pine-trees and cedars stood starkly under their raiment of snow mighty forest giants beneath them clustered prickly firs, junipers and alders. The stillness was profound. Demid sped from trap to trap, from snare to snare, over the silent soundless snow. He strangled the beasts; he fired, and the crack of his gun resounded through the empty space. He sought for the trail of the elks and wolf-packs. He descended to the river and watched for otters, caught bewildered fish amidst the broken ice, and set his nets afresh. The scenes all round him were old and familiar. The majesty of day died down in the west on a flaming pyre of vivid clouds, and the quivering, luminous streamers of the north re-appeared.

Standing in his plot of ground in the evening, he cut up the fish and meat, hung it up to freeze, threw pieces to the bear, ate some himself, washed his hands in ice-cold water, and sat down beside Marina big and rugged, his powerful legs wide apart, his hands resting heavily on his knees. The room became stifling with his presence. He smiled down quietly and good-naturedly at Marina.

The lamp shone cheerfully. Outside was snow, frost, and peace. Makar approached and lounged on the floor. There was an atmosphere of quiet joy and comfort in the chapel-like room. The walls cracked in the frost; some towels embroidered in red and blue with reindeer and cocks hung over them. Outside the frozen windows was darkness, cold, and night.

Demid rose from his bench, took Marina tenderly and firmly in his arms, and led her to the bed. The lamp flickered, and in the half-light Makar's eyes glowed. He had grown up during the winter and he was now an adult bear with a sombre, solemn air and a kind of clumsy skill. He had a large flat nose and grave, good-natured eyes.

## IX

It was the last days of December. There had been a merry Christmas festival and the snow had lain thick on house and slope. Wolves were now on the trail. Then Marina felt the first stirring of her child; soft, gentle movements, like the touch of eiderdown upon her body. She was filled with a triumphant joy, and pressed her hands softly and tenderly to her side; then sang a lullaby of how her son should become a great hunter and slay a thousand and three hundred elks, a thousand and three hundred bears, a thousand and three hundred ermines, and take the chief village beauty as his wife!

There was misty frost, the night, and stillness outside the stillness that whispers of death. Wolves crept up to the plot of land, sat on their hind-legs and howled long and dismally at the sky.

In the spring the shores of the river were strewn with wild flocks of swans, geese, and eider-ducks. The forest resounded with the stir of the beasts. Its woody depths echoed with the noise of bears, elks, wolves, foxes, owls, and woodcocks. The herbage began to sprout and flourish. The nights now drew in, and the days were longer. Dawn and sunset were lilac and lingering. The twilight fell in pale green, shimmering floods of light, and as it deepened and spread the village maidens gathered again on the river slope and sang their songs of Lada, the Spring God.

In the morning the sun rose in a glory of golden splendour and swam into the limpid blue heavens. There, enthroned, it spent the many hours of spring. Then came the Easter Festival when, according to the legend, the sun smiled and the people exchanged red eggs as its symbol.

X

On this Festival, Marina became a mother.

That night the bear left Demid. He must surely have scented the spring and gone into the forest to find himself a mate.

He left late at night, after breaking down the door. It was dark. A scarcely noticeable streak of light lay over the eastern horizon. Somewhere afar the village maidens were singing their songs of Lada.

## **A THOUSAND YEARS**

LET THE DEAD BURY THE DEAD. *Matthew*, ch. vii.

It was night time when Prince Constantine arrived at his brother's little cabin. Young Vilyashev himself opened the door, and throughout the brief conversation that ensued they remained in darkness not even a candle was lighted. Tall, lean, cadaverous, dressed in a much-worn day suit, his cap under his arm, Constantine stonily listened to Vilyashev's terse account of their sister's last moments.

She died peacefully, the young man told his brother, and she was quite calm to the end, for she believed in God. But she could not rid herself of memories of the past. How could she when the present shows such an awful contrast? Famine, scurvy, typhus, sorrow brood over the countryside. Our old home is the hands of strangers: we ourselves are outcasts living in a peasant's cabin. Imagine what this meant to a delicately nurtured woman! Men are wild beasts, brother.

There were three of us, Constantine said with quiet bitterness you, Natalia, and myself. It is ended! I travelled here in a cattle-truck, walking from the station on foot and was too late for the funeral.

She was buried yesterday. She knew from the first she was dying, and would not stir a step from here.

Poor girl, sighed Constantine. She had lived here all her life.

He left abruptly without a word of farewell, and they did not meet again until the next evening: both had spent the day wandering about the valleys.

At dawn the following morning Vilyashev ascended a steep hill; on the flat summit of a tumulus that crowned it he observed an eagle tearing a pigeon to pieces. At his approach the bird flew up into the clear, empty sky, towards the east, emitting a low, deep, unforgettable cry that echoed dolefully over the fragrant fields.

From the hill and tumulus could be seen a vast panorama of meadows, thickets, villages, and white steeples of churches. A golden sun rose and swung slowly above the hill, gilding the horizon, the clouds, hill-ridges, and the tumulus; steeping them in wave upon wave of shimmering yellow light.

Below, in wisps and long slender ribbons, a rosy mist crept over the fields; it covered everything with the softest of warmly tinted light. There was a morning frost, and thin sheets of ice crackled in the dykes. An invigorating breeze stirred gently, as if but half-awakened, and tenderly ruffled fronds of bracken, sliding softly upward from moss and roots, tremulously caressing the sweet-smelling grass, to sweep grandly over the hill-crest in ripples and eddies, increasing in volume as it sped.

The earth was throbbing: it panted like a thirsty wood-spirit. Cranes sent their weird, mournful cries echoing over



## Tales of the Wilderness

the undulating plains and valleys; birds of passage were a-wing. It was the advent of teeming, tumultuous, perennial spring.

Bells tolled mournfully over the fragrant earth. Typhus, famine, death spread like a poisonous vapour through the villages, through the peasants' tiny cabins. The windowless huts waved the rotting straw of their thatch in the wind as they had done five hundred years ago, when they had been taken down every spring to be carried further into the forests ever eastward to the Chuvash tribe.

In every hut there was hunger. In every hut there was death. In every one the fever-stricken lay under holy ikons, surrendering their souls to the Lord in the same calm, stoical and wise spirit in which they had lived.

Those who survived bore the dead to the churches, and went in consternation and dread through the fields carrying crosses and banners. They dug trenches round the villages and sprinkled the dykes with Holy Water; they prayed for bread and for preservation from death, while the air resounded with the tolling of bells.

Nevertheless, at eventide the maidens came to the tumulus arrayed in their home-woven dresses, and sang their old, old songs, for it was spring and the mating season for all living things. Yet they sang alone, for their youths had been given to the Moloch of war: they had gone to Uralsk, to Ufa, and to Archangel. Only old men were left to plough the fields in the spring.

Vilyashev stood dejectedly on the crest of the hill, a solitary, lonely figure outlined darkly against the clear blue background of sky and distance. He gazed unseeingly into space; thought and movement alike were suspended. He was only conscious of pain. He knew all was ended. Thus his errant forbear from the north may have stood five hundred years ago, leaning upon his lance, a sword in his chain girdle.

Vilyashev pictured him with a beard like Constantine's. He had had glory and conquest awaiting him; he strode the world a victorious warrior! But now little Natalya who had died of famine-typhus had realized that they were no longer needed, neither she, nor Constantine, nor himself! She was calling to him across the great gulf; it was as if her words were trembling on the air, telling him the hour had struck. The Vilyashev's power had been great; it had been achieved by force; by force it had been overthrown, the vulture-nest was torn to pieces. Men had become ravenous.

The Prince descended and made his way to the river Oka, ten miles distant, wandering all day through the fields and dales a giant full seven feet high, with a beard to his waist. The heavy earth clung to his boots. At last he flung himself on to the ground, burying his face in his hands, and lay motionless, abandoning himself to an anxious, sorrowful reverie.

Snow still lay on the lowlands, but the sky was warm, pellucid, expansive. The Oka broadened out rushing in a mighty, irresistible torrent towards its outlet, and inundating its banks. Purling brooks danced and sang their way through the valleys. The wind breathed a feeling of expectancy sweet, tender, evanescent, like the day-dream of a Russian maiden who has not yet known the secrets of love. With delicate gossamer fingers it gently caressed the barren hill that frowned above the Oka, uttering its gentle poignantly-stirring song at the same time.

Larks warbled. From all around echoed the happy cries of birds; the vernal air thrilled and vibrated in great running arpeggios to the wonder-music of the winds. The river alone preserved a rigid silence.

Vilyashev brooded a long while beside the swiftly running waters; but at sunset's approach he rose hastily, and returned to the tumulus. The sky was wrapped in its evening shroud of deep, mysterious darkness. Set brightly against the sombre background of the tumulus-crowned hill stood shining silver birch trees and dark shaggy firs: they now looked wan and spectral in the fading light. For a fleeting moment the world glowed like a huge golden ball; then the whole countryside was one vast vista of green, finally merging into a deep illimitable purple. Down

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the valley crept the mist, trailing its filmy veils over point and peak and ridge. The air throbbed with the cries of geese and bitterns. The hush of the spring-time night set in and covered the world that hush that is more vibrant than thunder, that gathers the forest sounds and murmurs to itself, and weaves them all into a tense, vernal harmony.

Prince Constantine's gaunt form struck a sharp note of discord as he walked straight up to the tumulus. His presence breathed conflict and stress that accorded ill with the universal peace of nature.

He greeted his brother, and began to smoke; the light from his cigarette illumined his eagle nose and bony brow; his quiet grey eyes gleamed with a wintry look.

One longs to fly away like a bird in the spring, he murmured; then added with a sharp change of tone; How did Natalya die?

In her right mind, thank God! But, she had lived torn by a madness of hatred and contempt, loathing all, despising all.

What wonder, look around you! cried Constantine. He hesitated a moment then said softly: To-morrow is the Annunciation the recollection of that festival made me think. Look around!

The tumulus stood out sheer and stark, a grim relic of a bygone age. There was a faint rustling through last year's wormwood. The air arose from the plains in a crescendo of quivering chords, gushing upward like a welling spring. There was the scent of decaying foliage. The sky beyond had darkened, charged to the brim with mystery. The atmosphere became moist and cold; the valley lay beneath empty, boundless, a region of illimitable space.

Do you hear? Constantine asked.

Hear what?

The earth's groans.

Yes, it is waking. Do you hear the soft stir and shudder among the roots of the flowers and grass? The whisper of the trees, the tremor of leaves and fronds? It is the earth's joyful welcome to the Spring.

Constantine shook his head: Not joy ... sorrow. The air is permeated with the scent of decay. To-morrow will see the Annunciation, a great festival, little brother, and that recollection has set me thinking. Look round you! Everywhere are savages men gone mad with blood and terror. Death, famine, barbarity ride the world! Idolatry is still rampant: to this day men believe in wood-spirits, witches and the devil and God, oh yes, men still believe in God! They bury their dead when the bodies should be burnt. They seek to drive away typhus by religious processions!

He laughed mockingly.

I stood the whole time in the train to avoid infection. But the people do not even think of that: their one thought is bread. I wanted to sleep through the journey; but a wretched woman, starving before my very eyes, prevented me. She said she was going to a sister so as to get milk to drink. She made me feel sick; she could not say bread, meat, milk, and butter, but called them 'brud,' 'mate,' 'mulk,' and 'buzzer'. 'Ah, for a bit of buzzer how I will ate it and enjoy it!' she kept muttering.

I tell you, Vilyashev, the people are bewildered. The world is returning to savagery. Remember the history of all times and of all peoples an endless repetition of schisms, deceptions, stupidity, superstition and cannibalism not

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so long ago as late as the Thirty Years War there was cannibalism in Europe; human flesh was cooked and eaten.... Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! How fine they sound! But better for Fraternity ever to remain a mere ideal than to be introduced by the butt-end of a rifle.

Constantine took off his cap, and his bony forehead seemed pale and green in the ghostly darkness of the night. His eyes were deep sunken, and for an instant his face resembled a skull.

I am bewildered, brother; I feel so utterly alone! I am wretched and disillusioned. In what does man transcend the beast?... He turned towards the west, and a cruel, rapacious, predatory look flitted over his face; he took a piece of bread from his overcoat pocket and handed it to Vilyashev:

Eat, brother; you are hungry.

From the valley uprose the muffled chime of a church bell, and a low baying of dogs could be heard round the village settlements. Great gusts of wind swept over the earth, which shook and trembled beneath their rush. In thin, high, piercing notes it ascended the song of the winds to the setting sun.

Listen, continued Constantine; I was thinking of the Annunciation ... and I had a dream.

The red glow of sunset was slowly fading. Around stretched huge, slumbering, primeval forests, shadow-filled bogs, and wide green marshes. Wolves howled mournfully through the woods and the valleys. Carts were creaking; horses were neighing; men were shouting this wild race of the Ancient Russians was marching to collect tribute. Down a forest roadway they went, from the Oka to the rivers Sozh and Desna.

A Prince pitched his camp on a hill: his son lay dying with the slowly-sinking sunlight. They prayed to the gods to spare the princeling. They burned youths and maidens at the stake. They cast men into the river to appease the water-spirit. They invoked the ancient Slavic god Perun. They called on Jesus and the Mother of God. In vain! In the terrible, lurid light of that vernal evening the princeling died.

Then they slew his horse and his wife, and raised the tumulus.

In the Prince's suite was an Arab scholar named Ibn-Sadif. He was as thin as an arrow, pliant as a bow, as dark as pitch, with the eyes and nose of an eagle under his white turban. He was a wanderer over the earth, for, learned in all else, he still sought knowledge of men and of countries. He had gone up by the Volga to the Kama and to the Bulgarians. Now he was wending his way with the Russians to Kiev and Tsargrad.

Ibn-Sadif ascended the hill, and beheld a blazing pile. On a log of wood lay a maiden with her left breast ripped open; flames licked her feet. Around were sombre, bearded men with swords in their hands. An ancient Shaman priest was circling in front of the funeral pyre and shouting furiously.

Ibn-Sadif turned aside from the fire, and descended the forest pathway to the river.

The sky was thickly studded with stars that shone like points of living gold in the warm deeps of the night; the water gave back a glittering reflection. The Arab gazed up at that vast space where the shining constellations swam towards the bosom of the Infinite, then down at their fantastically mirrored image in the river's depths and cried aloud:

'Woe! Woe!'

In the far distance beyond the water the wolves howled.

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At nightfall Ibn–Sadif joined the Prince who was directing the ancient funeral rites. The Arab raised his hands to the sky; his white garments flew round him like the wings of a bird; in a shrill, eerie voice like an eagle's he cried to the fierce bearded men gathered around:

'This night just a thousand years ago, the Archangel told the Mother of God in Nazareth of the coming of your God, Jesus. Woe! A thousand years ago! Can it be?'

Thus spoke Ibn–Sadif. None in the camp knew of the Annunciation, of that fair, sacred day when the birds will not even build their nests lest their labour desecrate its holiness.

Constantine paused; then lifted his head and listened.

Do you hear, brother? Bells are tolling! Do you hear how the dogs are barking?... And, just as of yore, death, famine, barbarity, cannibalism shadow the earth. I am heart stricken!

The night deepened to an intense blue; a faint chill stole through the air. Prince Constantine sat down resting his head on his stick. Suddenly he rose:

It is late and cold; let us go. I am miserable, for I have lost my faith. This reversion to savagery is horrible and bewildering. What are we? What can we do when barbarians surround us? The loneliness and desolation of our plight! I feel utterly lost, Vilyashev. We are no good to anyone. Not so long ago our ancestors used to flog peasants in the stables and abduct maidens on their wedding–nights. How I curse them! They were wild beasts! Ibn–Sadif spoke the truth ... a thousand years and still the Mark of the Beast!

The Prince's cry was low; but deep, and wild. Vilyashev answered quietly:

I have the strength of a mailed knight, Constantine. I could smash, rend, and trample the peasants underfoot as my forebears did, but they have wound themselves round my heart; they are like little children!

They went along by the hill; the tumulus was left behind. A light sparkling frost powdered the rich loamy earth. Through the darkness, swimming with purple shadows, came a great continuous murmur from the ancient forests. A pair of cranes cried softly as they roosted for the night, and a pearl grey mist rolled down to the meadows and enveloped them in innumerable murkyscarves. The brothers entered a village as still as the grave. Somewhere beyond, a dog barked. Not a sound broke the utter, solemn silence as they walked along.

There is typhus and barbarity in every peasant's hut, Constantine muttered. Then he, too, lapsed into silence, listening.

Beyond some huts on a village by–path girls' voices could be heard singing an Annunciation hymn. In the vast depths of silence it sounded solemn, simple, sane. The two princes felt it to be as immutable as the Spring with its law of birth. They remained standing there a long while, resting first on one foot, then on the other. Each felt that mankind's blood and energy still flowed bright and unsullied despite the world upheaval.

Good! That is infinitely touching. That will not die, declared Vilyashev. It has come down to us through the Ages.

Aye, replied Prince Constantine bitterly, wonderfully good. Pathetically good. Abominably good!

From the bend in the road the girls appeared in their coloured aprons; they passed decorously in pairs, singing:

Rejoice, O Virgin Mother! Blessed art Thou amongst women ....

## Tales of the Wilderness

The earth was moist and exhaled a sweet, delicate odour of rich, fresh vegetation. Reluctantly, at last, the two brothers resumed their way. They heard the weird midnight-crowing of the cock. A pale silvery moon the last before Easter Day rose gently in the East, letting down its luminous web from the sky, flinging back the dark shadows of the night.

On reaching home, the cabin seemed damp and cold and inexpressibly dreary as on the day Natalya died; when the door had slammed incessantly. The brothers went hastily to their rooms without speaking or lighting up. Constantine lay on Natalya's bed.

At dawn he awoke Vilyashev.

I am going. Goodbye! It is ended! I am going out of Russia, out of Europe. Here, where we were born, they have called us their masters, their fathers carrion crows, vultures! Like the fierce Russian tribes of old, they have let loose the hounds of destruction on wolves and hares and men alike! Woe!... Ibn-Sadif!

Constantine lighted a candle on a table, and crossed the room. In the strange blue light of dawn his livid shadow fell on the whitewashed wall. Vilyashev was amazed; the shadow was so extraordinarily blue and ghastly it seemed as if his brother were dead.

## OVER THE RAVINE

I

The ravine was deep and dark.

Its yellow clay slopes, overgrown with red-trunked pines, presented craggy ridges; at the bottom flowed a brook. Above, right and left, grew a pine forest dark, ancient, covered with lichen and shubbery. Overhead was a grey, heavy, low-hanging sky.

Man seldom came to this wild and savage spot.

The trees had in the course of time been uprooted by storms of wind and rain, and had fallen just where they stood, strewing the earth, rotting, emitting thick pungent odours of decaying pinewood. Thistles, chicory, milfoil, and wormwood had flourished there for years undisturbed, and they now covered the ground with thorny bristles. There was a den of bears at the bottom of the ravine; many wolves prowled through the forest.

Over the edge of the steep, yellow slope hung a fallen pine, and for many years its roots were exposed, raised on high in the air. They looked like some petrified octopus stretching up its hideous tentacles to the elements, and were already covered with lichen and juniper.

In the midst of these roots two great grey birds a male and a female had built themselves a nest.

They were large and grey, thickly covered by yellowish-grey and cinnamon-coloured feathers. Their wings were short, broad, and strong; their feet, armed with great claws, were covered with black down. Surmounting their short, thick necks were large quadratic heads with yellow, rapaciously curved beaks and round, fierce, heavy looking eyes.

The female was the smaller. Her legs were more slender and handsome, and there was a kind of rough, heavy gracefulness in the curves of her neck. The male was fierce and stiff; his left wing did not fold properly; he had injured it at the time he had fought other males for his mate.

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There was steepness on three sides of their nest. Above it was the wide expanse of the sky. Around, about, and beneath it lay bones washed and whitened by the rain. The nest itself was made of stones and mud, and overspread with down.

The female always sat in the nest.

The male hummed to himself on the end of a root that was suspended over the steep, alone, peering far into the distance around and below him with his heavy, pensive eyes; perched with his head sunk deep into his shoulders and his wings hanging heavily down.

## II

These two great birds had met here, not far from the ravine, one evening at twilight.

It was spring; the snow was thawing on the slopes, whilst in the forest and valleys it became grey and mellow; the pine-trees exhaled a pungent odour; and the brook at the bottom of the ravine had awakened.

The sun already gave warmth in the daytime. The twilight was verdurous, lingering, and resonant with life. Wolf-packs were astir, and the males fought each other for the females.

This spring, with the sun and the soft breeze, an unwonted heaviness pervaded the male-bird's body. Formerly he used to fly or roost, croak or sit silent, fly swiftly or slowly, because there were causes both around and within him: when hungry he would find a hare, kill, and devour it; when the sun was too hot or the wind too keen, he would shelter from them; when he saw a crouching wolf, he would hastily fly away from it.

Now it was no longer so.

It was not a sense of hunger or self-preservation now that induced him to fly, to roost, cry, or be silent: something outside of him and his feelings now possessed him.

When the twilight came, as though befogged, not knowing why, he rose from the spot on which he had perched all day and flew from glade to glade, from crag to crag, moving his great wings softly and peering hard into the dense, verdurous darkness. In one of the glades he saw birds similar to himself, a female among them. Without knowing why, he threw himself amidst them, feeling an inordinate strength within him and a great hatred for all the other males.

He walked slowly round the female, treading hard on the ground, spreading out his wings, tossing back his head to look askance at the males. One, he who until now had been victor, tried to impede him then flew at him with beak prepared to strike, and a long silent, cruel fight began. They flew at each other, beating with their bills, chests, wings, and claws, blindly rumpling and tearing each others' feathers and body.

His opponent proved the weaker and drew off; then again he threw himself towards the female and walked round her, limping a little now, and trailing his blood-stained left wing along the ground.

Pine-trees surrounded the glade; the earth was bestrewn with dry, withered leaves; the night sky was blue.

The female was indifferent to him and to all; she strode calmly about the glade, pecked at the ground, caught a mouse and quietly swallowed it. She appeared to pay no attention to the males.

It was thus all night long.

## Tales of the Wilderness

But when the night began to pale and over the east lay the greenish–blue outline of dawn, she moved close to him who had conquered the rest, leaned her back against his breast, tipped his injured wing tenderly with her bill as though she would nurse and dress it; then slowly rising from the ground, she flew towards the ravine.

And he, moving his injured wing painfully but without heeding it, emitting shrill cries of joy, flew after her.

She came down just by the roots of that pine where afterwards they built their nest.

The male perched beside her. He was irresolute and apparently abashed.

The female strutted several times round him, scenting him again. Then, pressing her breast to the ground, tail uplifted, her eyes half–closed she waited. The male threw himself towards her, seized her comb with his bill, clapping the ground with his heavy wings; and through his veins there coursed such a wonderful ecstasy, such invigorating joy, that he was dazzled, feeling nothing else save this delicious rapture, croaking hoarsely and making the ravine reverberate with a dull echo that ruffled the stillness of the early morn.

The female was submissive.

### III

In the winter the pines stood motionless and their trunks were a greyish brown. The snow lay deep, swept into great drifts which reared in a dark pile towards the ravine. The sky was a grey stretch; the days short and almost dim.

At night the tree–boles cracked in the frost and their branches broke. The pale moon shone calmly in the stillness, and seemed to make the frost still harder.

The nights were weirdly horrible with the frost and the phosphorescent light of the moon; the birds sat tucked in their nest, pressing close together to keep themselves warm. Yet still the frost penetrated their feathers, got into their skin and made their feet, bills, and backs feel cold. The errant light of the moon was also disquieting; it made the whole earth appear to be a great wolfish eye that was why it shone so terribly!

The birds had no sleep.

They turned painfully in their nest, changing their position; their large green eyes emitted a greenish light. Had they possessed the power of thought, they would certainly have longed for the advent of morning.

While it was still an hour before dawn, as the moon was fading and the first faint glimmer of daylight approaching, they began to feel hungry; in their mouths there was a disagreeable, bitterish taste, and from time to time their craws painfully contracted.

When the grey morning had at last come, the male bird flew off for his prey; he flew slowly, spreading his wings wide and rarely flapping them, vigilantly eying the ground beneath him. He usually hunted for hares. It was sometimes a long while before he found one; then he rose high over the ravine and set out on a distant flight from his nest, far away from the ravine into the vast white expanse of snow.

When there were no hares about, he seized young foxes and magpies, although their flesh was unsavoury. The foxes would defend themselves long and stubbornly, biting viciously, and they had to be attacked cautiously and skilfully. It was necessary to strike the bill at once into the animal's neck near its head, and, immediately clutching its back with the talons, to rise into the air for there the fox ceased all resistance.

## Tales of the Wilderness

With his prey the bird flew back to his nest by the ravine, and here he and his mate at once devoured it. They ate but once in the day, and so satiated themselves that they could move only with difficulty afterwards, and their crops hung low. They even ate up the snow which had become soaked with blood. The female threw the bones that remained down the side of the steep.

The male perched himself on the end of a root, ruffling his feathers in an effort to make himself more comfortable; and the blood coursed warmly through his veins after his meal.

The female was sitting in the nest.

Towards evening the male, for some unknown reason, began to croak.

Oo–hoo–hoo–oo! he cried in guttural tones, as though the sound in his throat came from across the water.

Sometimes as he sat solitary on his height, the wolves would observe him, and one of the famished beasts would begin clambering up the precipitous side of the ravine.

The female would then take fright, and flap her wings; but the male would look down calmly with his big, glistening eyes, watching the wolf slowly clamber, slip and fall headlong downwards, bringing a heap of snow with it, tumbling over and over and yelping in fright.

The twilight crept on.

### IV

In March, as the days lengthened, the sun grew warmer; the snow darkened and thawed; the twilight grew balmy; and the wolf–packs stirred, while prey became more abundant, for now all the forest denizens felt the overwhelming, entrancing throb of Spring, and wandered through the glades, down the ravines and into the woods, powerless under the sway of the early Spring–time langour; and it was easy to catch them.

The male–bird brought all his kill to his mate he ate little himself: only what she left him, usually the entrails, the flesh of the thoracic muscles, the skin and the head, although she usually pecked out the eyes as the most savoury portion.

The sun was bright. There was a soft, gentle breeze. At the bottom of the ravine the dark, turbulent brook rushed gurgling between the sharp outlines of its snow–laden banks.

It was cool. The male–bird sat roosting with his eyes closed, his head sunk deep into his shoulders. Outwardly he bore a look of great humility, of languishing expectation, and a droll look of guiltiness wholly unbecoming to his natural severity.

At dusk he grew restless. He stood up on his feet, stretched his neck, opened wide his round eyes, spread out his wings, beating the air with them: then closed them again. Curling up into a ball, drawing his head into his shoulders and blinking, he croaked:

Oo–hoo–hoo–hoo! The rueful cry scared the forest denizens.

And the echo in the ravine answered back:

Oo–oo...



## Tales of the Wilderness

The twilight was green, merging into blue. The sky was spangled with great glowing stars. The pine-trees exhaled an oily odour. In the night-frost, the brook at the bottom of the ravine grew still. Somewhere, caught in its current, birds were crying. Yet all was in a state of watchful calm.

When at length the night set in, the male stealthily and guiltily approached the female in the nest, cautiously spreading his big, awkward feet, which were so clumsy on the ground . . . A great and beautiful passion urged him to the side of his mate.

He perched beside her, smoothing her feathers with his bill, still with that droll absurd look of guilt. The female responded to his caresses; she was very soft and tender; but behind this tenderness could be detected her great strength and power over the male: perhaps she realized it herself.

In the language of instinct, she said to her mate:

Yes, you may.

The male succumbed to his passion, and she yielded to him.

V

It was thus for a week or ten days.

Then at last, when the male came to her one night-time, she said:

No! Enough!

She spoke instinctively, for another time had come the time for the birth of her children.

The male-bird, abashed, as though conscience-stricken at not having divined the bidding of his mate earlier, went away from her only to return at the end of a year.

VI

From Spring-time, all through the Summer until September, the male and female were absorbed in the great, beautiful, indispensable task of breeding their young. In September the fledgelings took wing.

The Spring and Summer developed in their multi-coloured glory: they burned with fiery splendour; the pine-trees glowed with a resinous phosphorescence. There was the fragrance of wormwood. Chicory, blue-bells, buttercups, milfoil, and cowslip blossomed and faded; prickly thistles abounded.

In May the nights were deeply blue.

In June they were pale green.

The dawn broke in a blood-red flare like a great conflagration, and at night pale silvery mists moved along the bottom of the ravine, washing the tops of the pines.

At first the nest contained five grey eggs with green speckles. Then came the little birds, big-headed, with disproportionately large yellow mouths, their bodies covered with down. They chirruped plaintively, stretching their long necks out from the nest, and they ate voraciously.

## Tales of the Wilderness

They flew in June, though as yet clumsily, piping, and awkwardly fluttering their immature wings.

The female was with them all the time, ruffling her feathers, solicitous and petulant.

The male had no power of thought and hardly any of feeling, but within him was a sense of pride in his own work, which he carried on with joy. His whole life was dominated with an instinct which subjugated his will and his desires to the care of his young.

He hunted for prey.

He had to obtain a great deal, because both his fledglings and his mate were voracious. He had to fly sometimes as far as the river Kama, in order to catch seagulls, which hovered over the huge, white, unfamiliar, many-eyed monsters that floated over the water, puffing, and smelling strangely like forest fires the steamers!

He fed his fledgelings himself, tearing the meat into pieces. And he watched attentively how, with wide open beaks, they seized the little lumps of meat and, rolling their eyes and almost choking in the effort, swallowed them.

Sometimes one of the fledgelings awkwardly fell out of the nest and rolled down the steep. Then he hastily and anxiously flew after it, bustling and croaking as though he were grumbling; he would take it cautiously and clumsily in his talons and carry it, a frightened flustered atom, back to the nest. There he would smooth its feathers with his great beak for a long time, strutting round it, standing high on his legs, and continuing his anxious croaks.

He dared not sleep at nights.

He perched on the end of a root, vigilantly peering into the darkness, guarding his nestlings and their mother from danger. The stars were above him. At times, as though scenting the fullness and beauty of life, he fiercely and ruefully uttered his croak scaring the night.

## VII

He lived through the Winter in order to live. Through the Spring and Summer he lived to breed. He was unable to think. He acted instinctively, because God had so ordained it. Instinct alone guided him.

He lived to eat in the Winter so that he should not die. The Winters were cold and cruel.

In the Spring he bred. Then the blood coursed warmly through his veins. It was calm; the sun was bright; the stars glittered; and all the time he longed to stretch himself, to close his eyes, to smite the air with his wings, and to croak with an unreasoning joy.

The birdlings flew away in the autumn. The old birds and the young bade adieu for ever with indifference. Rain came, mists swept by, the sky hung lowering over the earth. The nights were dreary, damp and dark. The old couple sat together in their nest, trying to cover themselves and sleep. They froze and tossed about in discomfort. Their eyes gleamed with greenish-yellow lights.

Thus passed the thirteen years of their life together.

\* \* \* \* \* X

Then the male-bird died.

## Tales of the Wilderness

His wing had been injured in youth, at the time he fought for his mate. As the years rolled on, he found it more and more difficult to hunt his prey: he had to fly ever farther and farther for it, and in the nights he could get no rest because of the overwhelming pain that shot right through the whole of his wing, and tormented him terribly. Formerly he had not heeded the injury; now he found it grew exceedingly grave and painful.

He did not sleep, but let his wing hang down as though he were thrusting it from him. And in the morning he was hardly able to use it when he flew off after his prey.

His mate forsook him.

She flew away from the nest at dusk one evening in early spring.

He sought for her all through the night at dawn he found her with another male, young and strong, who croaked tenderly round her. Then the old bird felt life was over: he had lost all that made it beautiful. He flew to fight his younger rival, but his attack was weak and wavering. The young one rushed at him violently and passionately, tore his body, and croaked menacingly. The female watched the fray with indifference, as she had done many years before.

The old bird was beaten.

Fluttered, blood-stained, with one eye swollen, he flew back to his nest and painfully perched himself on the end of a root. Something within him told him his life was at an end. He had lived in order to eat and to breed. Now he had only to die. Instinct told him that. For two days he sat perched above the steep, quiet, immovable, his head sunk deep into his shoulders.

Then, calmly, unperceivingly, he died. He fell down from the steep and lay with his legs crooked and turned upward.

This was during the night. The stars were brilliant. Birds were crying in the woods and over the river. Somewhere owls hooted.

The male-bird lay at the bottom of the ravine for five days. His body was already decaying, and emitted a bitter, offensive odour.

A wolf came and devoured it.

## ALWAYS ON DETACHMENT

Alexander Alexandrovitch Agrenev, engineer, spent all day in the quarry, laying and exploding dynamite. In the village below was a factory, its chimneys belching smoke; and creaking wagonettes sped backwards and forwards from the parapet. Above on the cliff stood huge sappy pines. All day the sky was grey and cloudy, and the smoke from the chimneys spread like a low pall over the earth. The dynamite exploded with a great detonation and expulsion of smoke.

The autumn darkness, with its sharp, acid, sweet tang, was already falling as Agrenev proceeded homeward with the head-miner, Eduardovich Bitska, a Lithuanian, and the lights from the engine-house shone brightly in the distance.

The engineer's quarters lay in a forest-clearing on the further side of the valley; the cement structures of its small buildings stood out in monotonous uniformity; the blue light of its torches flared and hissed, throwing back dark

## Tales of the Wilderness

shadows from the trunks and branches of the pine-trees, which laced, interlaced, and glided dusky and intangible between the tall straight stems, finally melting amidst the foliage.

His skin jacket was sticking to Agrenev's back, as, no doubt, Bitska's was also.

My missus will soon be home, Bitska said cheerfully he had recently been married. He spoke in broken Russian, with a foreign accent.

In Agrenev's house it was dark. The warm glow from the torches outside fell on the window-ledges and illuminated them, but inside the only light was that visible through the crevices of his wife's tightly closed door: his beloved wife so aloof so strange. The rain had started, and its drip on the roof was like the sound of water-falls: he changed, washed, took up a newspaper. The maid entered and announced that tea was ready.

His wife tall, slim, beautiful, and strange was standing by the window, her back to him, a book in her hand; a tumbler was on the window-sill close beside her. She did not turn round as he entered, merely murmuring: Have some tea.

The electric light gave a brilliant glow. The freshly varnished woodwork smelt of polish. She did not say another word, but returned to her book, her delicate fingers turning over the leaves as, standing with bent head, she read.

Are you going out this evening, Anna? he asked.

Eh? No, I am staying in.

Is there anyone coming?

Eh? No, nobody. Are *you* going out?

I am not sure. I am going to-morrow on Detachment duty for a week.

Eh? Oh yes, on Detachment.

Always the same! No interest in him; indifferent, absorbed in other things. How he longed to stay and talk to her, on and on, of everything; of the utter impossibility of life without love or sympathy, of the intensity of his own love, and the melancholy of his evenings. But he was silent.

Is Asya asleep? he inquired at last.

Yes, she is asleep.

A nickel tea-pot and a solitary tumbler stood on the table with its white cloth falling in straight folds. The ticking of the clock sounded monotonously.

She does not deceive, nor betray, nor leave me, he thought; but she is strange, strange and a mother!

## II

At last the earth was cloaked in darkness, the torches hung like gleaming balls of fire, the pattering of the rain echoed dismally, and above it, drowning all other sounds, was the dreary roar of the factory.

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He sauntered through the straight-cut avenues of the park towards his club, but near the school turned aside and went in to see Nina. They had known each other from childhood, attending the same school, Nina his faithful comrade and devoted slave and ever since he had remained for her the one and only man, for she was of those who love but once. Since then she had been flung about Russia, striven to retain her honour, vainly tilting against the windmills of poverty and temptation had failed, been broken, and now had crept back that she might live near him.

He walked through the school's dark corridors and knocked.

Come in.

Alone, in a grey dress, plain-featured, her cheek red where it had rested against the palm of her hand, she sat beside a little table in the bare, simple room, a book on her lap. With a pang, Agrenev noted her sunken eyes. But at sight of him they brightened instantly, and she rose from her seat, putting the book aside.

You darling? Welcome! Is it raining?

Greeting! Nina. I have just come in for a moment.

Take off your coat, she urged. You will have some tea? Her eyes and outstretched hands both said: Thank you, thank you. How are you doing? she asked him anxiously.

I am bored. I can do nothing. I am utterly bored.

She placed the tea-urn on the table in her tiny kitchen, laid some pots of jam by her copy-book, seated him in the solitary armchair, and bustled round, all smiles, her cheeks flushing the spot where she had rested her hand all the long evening still showing red, all-loving, all-surrendering, yet undesired.

You musn't wait on me like this, Nina, Agrenev protested; ... Sit down and let us talk.

Their hands touched caressingly, and she sat down beside him.

What is it, my dear? She stroked his hand and its touch warmed her! What is it?

At times indignation overcame her at the thought of life; she wrung her hands, spoke with hatred, and her eyes darkened in anger. At times she fell on her knees in tears and supplication; but with Alexander Alexandrovitch she was always tender, with the tenderness of unrequited love.

What is it, darling?

I am bored, Nina. She ... Anna ... does not love me; she does not leave me, nor deceive me, but neither does she love me. I know you love ...

At home four walls ... Coldness ... The miner, Bitska, making jokes all day in the rain ... the fuse to be lighted in the quarry, the slow igniting to be watched. Thirty years had been lived ... five-tenths of his life ... a half ... ten-twentieths. It was like a blank cartridge ... no kindness ... a life without feeling ... all blank ...

The lamp seemed to go out and something warm lay over his eyes. The palm of a hand. Nina's words were calm at first; then they grew frantic.

## Tales of the Wilderness

Leave her, leave her, darling! Come to me, to me who wants you! What if she doesn't love you? I do, I love you ...

He was silent.

You say nothing? I will give you all; you shall have everything! Come to me, to me who will give to you so gladly! She is as dead; she needs nothing! Do you hear? You have me ... I will take all the suffering on myself ...

\* \* \* \* \*

The lamp streamed forth clearly again. A little grey clod of humanity fell on to the maiden's narrow bed.

It was so intensely dark that the blackness seemed to close in on one like a great wall, and it was difficult to see two paces ahead. Close to the barracks some men were bawling to the music of a mouth-organ. Under cover of the gloom someone whistled between his fingers, babbling insolence and nonsense. The torches glowed through the tangled network of branches and leaves like globes of fire.

Agrenev walked along, carrying a lantern, by the light of which he mechanically picked his steps; close to his heels, Nina hurried through the darkness and puddles. On every side there was the rustling of pines, hundreds of them, their immense stems towering upwards into obscurity. Although invisible, their presence could be felt. The place was wild and dreary, odours of earth, moss, and pine-sap mingled together in an overpowering perfume; it was the heart of a vast primeval forest. Agrenev murmured as if to himself:

No, Nina, I do not love you. I want nothing from you.... Anna ... her father ordered her to marry me.... Ancient blood.... Anna told me she would never love.... Asya is growing up under her influence.... I love my little daughter ... yet she is strange too ... she looks at me with vacant eyes ... my daughter! I stole her mother out of a void! I go home and lie down alone ... or I go to Anna and she receives me with compressed lips. I do not want a daughter from you, Nina ... Why should I? To-morrow will ... be the same as yesterday.

By the door of his house in the engineer's quarters, he remembered Nina, and all at once became solicitous:

You will catch cold, my dear. It will be terrible for you getting back ...

He stood before her a moment silently; then stretched out his hand:

Well, the best of luck, my dear!

A band of youths strolled by. One of them flashed a lantern-light on the doorway.

Aha! Sky-larking with the engineers! Ha! Ha! Ha!

They began chattering among themselves and sang in chorus a ribald doggerel:

Once upon a time a wench  
Appeared before a judge's bench..

III

Before he went to bed Agrenev laid out cards to play Patience, ate a cold supper, stood a long time staring at the light from under Anna's door, then knocked.

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Come in.

He entered for a moment, and found her sitting at a table with a book, which she laid down upon an open copybook diary. When, when is he to know what is written there?

He spoke curtly:

I go to Moscow the first thing to-morrow on Detachment. Here is some money for the housekeeping.

Thanks. When do you return?

In a week that is, Friday next week. Is there anything you need?

No thanks. She rose, came close and kissed him on the cheek near his lips. A safe journey. Goodbye. Do not waken Asya.

And she turned away, sat down at the table, and took up her book again.

In the early hours of the morning a horse was yoked, and Agrenev drove with Bitska over the main road to the station. It was wet. The sombre figures of workmen were dimly seen through the rain and darkness, hastening to the factory. The staff drove round in a motor as the shrill sound of the factory horn split the silence.

Bitska in a bowler-hat, red-faced, with thin whiskers such as are worn by the Letts, looked gravely round:

You have not slept, Robert Edouardovitch? asked Agrenev.

No, I have not, and I am not in a good humour either. The man was silent a moment, then burst out; Now I am forty years, and my wife she is eighteen. I am in vants of an earnest housekeeper. But my wife, she is always jesting and dragging me by the how do you call it the beard! And laughing and larking.... His little narrow eyes wrinkled up into a wry smile: Ah, the larking vench!

## THE WOLF'S RAVINE

In childhood, as a small lad, Alexander Alexandrovitch Agrenev had heard from listening to his mother's conversation how lo and behold! one morning at 9 o'clock Nina Kallistratovna Zamotkina had proceeded with her daughter to Doctor Chasovnikov's flat, in order to deliver a slap in the face to his wife for having broken up the family hearth by a liaison with Paul Alexander Zamotkin, Nina Kallistratovna's husband.

The child Agrenev had vividly pictured to himself how Nina Kallistratovna had walked, holding her daughter with one hand, an attache-case in the other: of course her bearing must have been singular, as she was going to the flat to administer a slap in the face; no doubt she had walked either in a squatting or a bandy-legged fashion. The family hearth must have been something extremely valuable, as she was going to deliver a slap in the face on its account perhaps it was some kind of stove.

It was highly interesting in the child's imagination to picture Nina Kallistratovna entering the flat, swinging back her arm, and delivering the slap: her gait, her arms, the flat all had a sudden hidden and exceedingly curious meaning for the child.

This had remained out of his childhood memories of the little town and province, where all had seemed unusual as childhood itself.

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Now in the Wolf's Ravine Agrenev recalled this incident, and he brooded bitterly over the certainty that no one would ever deliver a slap in the face on his account! What vulgarity slaps in the face!... and a slap in the face was no solution.

It was now autumn, and as he stood in the ravine waiting for Olya, the cranes flew low over his head, stretching themselves out like arrows and crying discordantly. A wintry sulphurous light overspread the eastern sky, and the blue crest of the Vega shone out above him tremendous and triumphant, sweeping up into the very heart of the flaming sunset.

On a sudden, Olya arrived, her figure darkly silhouetted an instant a tiny insignificant atom against the vastness of the hill and sky as she stood poised on the brink of the ravine; then she clambered down its precipitous side to Agrenev.

Alexander Alexandrovitch Agrenev, mining engineer and married man, and Olya Andreevna Golovkina!

\* \* \* \* \*

She was a school teacher, who, after passing through the eight classes of her college, now resided with her aunt. She was always known as Olya Golovkina, although she bore the ancient Russian surname made famous in the time of Peter the Great by Senator Golovkin. But even in the time of Peter the Great this name had sunk into the gutter and had left in this town a street Golovkinskaya, and in that same Golovkinskaya Street a house, by the letting of which Olya's aunt made her living.

Agrenev knew that the aunt whose name he had never heard was an old maid, and that she had one joy Olya. He knew she sat at her window without a lamp throughout the evenings, waiting for Olya; and that for this reason her niece, on leaving him, went round by the back-way, in order to obviate suspicion.

Nothing was ever said of the aunt in a personal way; the name was uttered only indirectly, as though applying to a substance and not to a human being.

Olya was a very charming girl, of whom it was difficult to say anything definite: such a pretty provincial maid, like a slender willow-reed.

The town lay over hillocks and fields and the ancient quarries, all its energies flowing out from the factory at the further end and a casual conversation which occurred in the spring at the beginning of Agrenev's acquaintance with Olya was characteristic alike of the town and of her. Agrenev had said apropos of something:

Balmont, Blok, Brusov, Sologub...

She interrupted him hastily a slender little reed: As a whole I know little of foreign writers ...

In the town neither in the high-school, the library, nor the newspapers did they know of Balmont or Blok, but Olya loved to declaim by rote from Kozlov, and she spoke French.

The factory lived its dark, noisy, unwholesome life sunk in poverty beneath the surface, steeped in luxury above; the little town lived amid the fields, scared and pressed down by the factory, but still carrying on its own individual life.

Beyond it, on the side away from the factory, lay the pass called the Wolf's Ravine. On the right, close to the river, was a grove where couples walked. They never descended to the ravine, because it was so unpoetic, a treeless, shallow, dull, unterrifying spot. Yet it skirted the hills, dominated the surrounding country; and people



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lying flat in the channel at its summit could survey the locality for a mile round without being seen themselves.

Alexander Alexandrovitch was a married man. The shepherd lads tending their herds at pasture began to notice how every evening a man on a bicycle turned off the main road into the ravine, and how soon after a girl hurried past them following in his steps, like a reed blown in the wind. As befitted their kind, the shepherds cried out every abomination after her.

All the summer Olya had begged Agrenev to bring her books to read; she did not notice, however, that he had never once brought her any!

Then one evening, early in September, after a spell of rain which had prevented their meeting for some days, there happened that which was bound to happen which happens to a maiden only once in her life. They used always to meet at eight, but eight in September was not like eight in June. The rain was over, but a chill, desolating, autumnal wind remained. The sky was laden with heavy, leaden clouds; it was cold and wretched. That evening the cranes flew southward, gabbling in the sky. The grass in the ravine was yellow and withered. There was sunshine there in the daytime, and Olya wore a white dress. It was there the two of them, Agrenev and Olya, usually bade each other adieu.

But on that evening, Agrenev accompanied Olya to her home, and both were absorbed by the same thought the aunt! Was she sitting by the window without a lamp waiting for her niece, or had she already lighted it in order to prepare the supper? Olya hoped desperately that her aunt would be in her usual place and the lamp unlit, so that she could slip by into her room unseen and secretly change her clothes.

Not only did Olya and Alexander Alexandrovitch walk arm-in-arm but they pressed close together, their heads bent the one to the other whispering ... only of the aunt. Olya could not think of the pain or the joy or the suffering she was only thinking how she could pass her aunt unnoticed; Agrenev felt cold and sickened at the thought of a possible scandal.

They discovered there was a light at the aunt's window, and Olya began to tremble like a reed, whispering hoarsely almost crying:

I won't go in! I won't go in!

But all the same she did a willow-reed blown in the wind. Agrenev arranged to meet her the next day in the factory office, so that he might hear whether the aunt had created a scene or not, although he did not admit that reason, even to himself.

In the ravine when Olya after yielding all wept and clung to his knees, Agrenev's heart had been pierced with pangs of remorse. In the pitchblack darkness overhead the wild-geese could be heard rustling their wings as they flew southward, scared by his cigarette the tenth in succession.

Southward, geese, southward!... But you shall go nowhere, slave, useless among the useless! Then he remembered that slap in the face Nina Kallistratovna had given for her husband nobody would give Olya Golovkina one for him! Olya is a useless accidental burden, he thought.

Then Agrenev dismissed her from his mind; and, as he bicycled from Golovkinskaya Street through the whole length of the town, past the factory to the engineers' quarters there was no need to hide now it was dark he thought only of Olya's aunt: of how she was an old maid with nothing else in her life but her niece, and that Olya was hiding her tragedy from her; of how she spent the entire evenings sitting alone by the window in the dark assuredly not on Olya's account, but because she was dying; all her life she had been dying, as the town was dying where Kozlov was read; as he, Agrenev, was dying; as the maidenhood of Olya had died. How powerful is

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the onward rush of life! What tragedy lay in those evenings by the window in the darkness!

Every morning the housemaid used to bring Alexander Alexandrovitch in his study a cup of lukewarm coffee on a tray. Then he went out to the factory the rest of the household was still asleep. There he came into contact with the workmen, and saw their hopeless, wretched, impoverished lives; listened to Bitska's jests, and to the rumbling of the wagonettes identified himself with the life of the factory, which dominated all like some fabulous brooding monster.

During the luncheon interval he went home, washed himself, and listened to his wife rattling spoons on the other side of the wall. And this made up the entire substance of his life! Yes, it was certainly interesting how Nina Kallistratovna had entered that flat, swung back her hand which hand had it been? was it the one in which she held the attache-case or was that transferred to the other hand first? and delivered the smack to Madame Chasovnikova. Then there was Olya, darling Olya Golovkina, from whom as from them all he desired nothing.

That night, when he reached home at last, his daughter came in and made him a curtsy, saying:

Goodnight, daddy.

Alexander Alexandrovitch caught her in his arms, placed her on his knees his beloved, his only little daughter.

Well, little Asya, what have you been doing? he asked.

When you went out to Olya Golovkina Mummy and I played tig.

The next morning, when Olya came into the office for business as usual, she exclaimed joyfully:

My aunt has not found out anything. She opened the door for me without lighting the lamp, and as she groped through the passage I ran quickly past her. Then I changed my clothes and appeared at supper as though nothing had happened!

A willow-reed blown by the wind!

In the office were many telephone calls and the rattling of counting-boards. Agrenev and Olya sat together and arranged when to meet again. She did not want to go to the Ravine because of the shepherd boys' rude remarks. Alexander Alexandrovitch did not tell her all was known at home. As she said goodby she clung to him like a reed in the wind and whispered:

I have been awake all night. You have noticed surely that I have not called you by any name; I have no name for you.

And she begged him not to forget to bring her some books.

All that was known of the town was that it lay at the intersection of such and such a latitude and longitude. But articles on the factory were printed each year in the industrial magazines, and also occasionally in the newspapers, as when the workmen struck or were buried under a fall of limestone. The factory was run by a limited company. Alexander Alexandrovitch Agrenev made out the returns for his department; these were duly printed not to be read, but so that beneath them might appear the signature: A. A. Agrenev, Engineer. Olya only kept a report-book and the name-rolls, placing in her reports so many marks opposite the pupil's names.

## THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING

Mammy rose in the morning just as usual during those interminable months. I was accustomed to calling Alexander Alexandrovitch's mother mammy. She always wore a dark dress and carried a large white handkerchief which she continually raised to her lips. It was bright and cheerful in the dining-room. The tea-service stood on the table and the samovar was boiling. The room always made me feel that we were going away into the country, for all the pictures had been taken down, and a mirror that had been casually hung on the walls was now shrouded in a linen sheet. I generally rise very early, say my prayers, and immediately look at the newspapers. Formerly I scarcely even thought of them and was quite indifferent to their contents; now I cannot even imagine life without them! By the time my morning cup of tea is brought, I have already read all the news of the world, and I tell it to Mammy, who cannot read the papers herself.

She has the room Alexander Alexandrovitch formerly occupied; she is tall, always dresses in black, and there is a certain severity about her general demeanour. This is quite natural. She invariably makes the sign of the Cross over me, kisses me on the forehead and lips, and then as ever turns quickly away, bringing her handkerchief to her lips. I know, though, what it is that distresses her it is that Georgie is killed, and Alexander Alexandrovitch is still Out there . . . and that I, Anna, alone am left to her of her family.

We are always silent at tea: we generally are at all times. She asks only a single question:

What is in the newspapers?

She always utters it in a hoarse voice, and very excitedly and clumsily I tell her all I know. After breakfast I walk about outside the window looking at the old factory and awaiting the postman's arrival.

Thus I pass my days one by one, watching for the post, for the newspapers, enduring the mother's grief and my own. And whenever I wait for the letters, I recall a little episode of the War told me by a wounded subaltern at an evacuated point. He had sustained a slight head wound, and I am certain he was not normal, but was suffering from shell-shock. Dark-eyed, swarthy, he was lying on a stretcher and wearing a white bandage. I offered him tea, but he would not take it; pushing aside the mug and gripping my hand he said:

Do you know what war is? Don't laugh! bayonets ... do you understand? his voice rose in a shriek ... into bayonets ... that is, to cut, to kill, to slaughter one another men! They turned the machine-guns on us, and this is what happened: the private Kuzmin and I were together, when suddenly two bullets struck him. He fell, and, losing all sense of distinction, forgetting that I was his officer, he stretched out his arms towards me in a sort of half-conscious way, and cried: "Towny, bayonet me!" You understand? "Towny, bayonet me!" But you cannot understand.... Do not laugh!

He told me this, now whispering, now shrieking. He told me that I could not understand; but I can . . . Towny, bayonet me! Those words express all the terror of war for me Georgie's death, Alexander's wound, the mother's grief; all, all that the War has brought: they express it with such force that my temples ache with an almost physical sense of anguish,

Towny, bayonet me! How simple, how superhuman!

I remember those words every day, especially when in the hall waiting for the post. Alexander writes seldom and his letters are very dry, merely telling me that he is well, that either there are no dangers or that they have passed; he writes to us all at the same time, to mother, to Asya, and to me.

It was like that to-day. I was waiting for the postman. He came and brought several letters, one of them from

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Alexander. I did not open it at once, but waited for Mother.

This is what he wrote:

Darling Anna,

Yesterday and to-day (a Censor's erasure) I feel depressed and think of you, only of you. When things are quiet and there is little doing many a fine thing passes unobserved; I allude to the flowers, of which I am sending you specimens. They grow quite close to the trench, but it is difficult and dangerous to get them, as one may easily be killed. I have seen such flowers before, but am ignorant of their name.

Goodbye. My love. Forgive the 'army style'; this letter is for you alone.

The letter contained two of those little blue violets which spring up directly the snow has melted.

I handed the letter, as always, to his mother that she might read it too; her lips began to tremble, and her eyes filled with tears as she read, but in the midst of her tears she laughed. And we both of us, I the young woman, and Mammy the old mother, laughed and cried simultaneously, tightly clasped in each other's arms. I had pictured the War hitherto in the words: Towny, bayonet me! . And now Alexander had sent me from it violets! Two violets that are still unfaded.

I had noticed before the phenomenon of the four seasons suddenly bursting, as it were, upon the human consciousness. I remember that happening to me in my childhood when on holiday in the country. The summer was still in full swing, everything seemed just as usual, when suddenly one morning, in a most ordinary gust of wind, the red-vine leaves, then some three weeks old, were blown into my eyes, and all at once I realized that it was autumn. My mood changed on the instant, and I prepared to go home, back to town.

How many years is it since I have seen the autumn, winter, or spring since I felt their magic? But to-day, after a long-past summer, I have all at once felt the call of the spring. Only to-day I have noticed that our windows are tightly closed, that I am wearing a dark costume, that it is already May, and that bluebells are blossoming in the fields. I had forgotten that I was young. I remembered it to-day.

And I know further that I have faith, that I have love love of Georgie and Alexander. I know too, although there is so much terror, so much that is foolish and ugly, there is still youth, love, and the spring and the blue violets that grow by the trenches.

After Mammy and I had wept and laughed in each other's embrace, I went out alone into the fields beyond the factory to love, to think, to dream . . . I love Alexander Alexandrovitch for ever and ever...

## THE SEAS AND HILLS

A rainy night, trenches not in the forest lands of Lithuania, but at the Vindavo-Rybinsky station in Moscow itself. The train is like a trench; voices are heard from the adjoining carriage.

Where do you come from? Yes, yes, that is so, truly! You remember the ravine there, all rocks, and the lake below; many met their doom there. Let me introduce you to the Commander of the Third Division. Give me a light, old fellow! We are back from furlough.

The train is going at nightfall to Rzhov, Velikiya Luki, and Polotsk. Outside on the platform the brethren are lying at ease under benches, drinking tea, and full of contentment. The gas-jets shine dimly in the rain, and behind the

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spattered panes of glass the women's eyes gleam like lamp-lights. There is a smell of naphthaline.

Where is the Commandant's carriage? No women allowed here! Men only! We're for the front! And there is a smell of leather, tar, and leggings a smell of men.

Yes, yes, you're right! Ha-ha! He is a liar, an egregious liar! No, I bet you a beauty like that isn't going headlong into an attack!

There is a sound of laughing and a deep base voice speaking with great assurance. The third bell.

Where's the Commandant's carriage? Well, goodbye! Ha-ha-ha-ha! He lies, Madam, I assure you, he lies. Bah! those new boots they have issued have given me corns; I'll have to send them back.

This conversation proceeded from beneath a bench and from the steps that led to a top-compartment; the men hung up their leggings which, though marked with fresh Government labels, were none the less reeking with perspiration. The lamps moved along the platform and disappeared into the night; the figures of women and stretcher-bearers silently crept along; a sentry began to flirt with one of the former; the rain fell slantingly, arrow-like, in the darkness.

They reached Rzhov at midnight in the train; the men climbed out of the windows for tea; then clambered in again with their rifles; the carriages resounded with the rattling of canteens. It was raining heavily and there was a sound of splashing water. The brethren in the corridors grumbled bitterly as they inspected papers. Under the benches there was conversation, and also garbage.

Then morning with its rose-coloured clouds: the sky had completely cleared; rain-drops fell from the trees; it was bright and fragrant. Velikiya Luki, Lovat; at the station were soldiers, not a single woman.

The train eludes the enemy's reconnaissance. Soldiers, soldiers, soldiers! rifles, rifles! canteens: the brethren! It is no longer Great Russia; around are pine woods, hills, lakes, and the land is everywhere strewn with cobble-stones and pebbles -whilst at every little station from under fir-trees creep silent, sombre figures, barefooted and wearing sheep-skin coats and caps in the summer. It is Lithuania.

The enemy's reconnaissance is a diversion: otherwise the day is long and dreary all routine like a festival; already one knows

the detachment, the number of wounded, the engagements with the enemy. Many had alighted from the train at Velikiya Luki, and nobody had got in. We are quiet and idle all day long.

Then towards night we reach Polotsk the white walls of the monastery are left behind; we come to the Dvina, and the train rumbles over a bridge. Now we journey by night only, without a time-table or lights, and again under a drizzling rain. The train stops without whistling and as silently starts again. Around us all is still, as in October; the country-side is shrouded by night. Men alight at each stop after Polotsk; no one sits down again; and at every stop thirty miles of narrow gauge railway lead to the trenches. What monotony after Moscow! after the hustle and clatter of an endless day! There is the faintest glimmer of dawn, and the eastern sky looks like a huge green bottle.

Get up we have arrived!

Budslav station; the roof is demolished by aeroplane bombs. Soldiers sleep side by side in a little garden on asphalt steps beneath crocuses. A drowsy Jew opens his bookstall on the arrival of the train: he sells books by Chirikov, Von Vizin, and Verbitskaya. And from the distance, with strange distinctness, comes a sound like muffled clapping.

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What is that? Must be the heavy artillery. Where is the Commandant? The Commandant is asleep!...

A week has passed by in the trenches, and another week has commenced. The bustle of the first few days is over; now all is in order. In a corner of a meadow, a little way from the front, hangs a man's body; the head by degrees has become severed from the trunk. But I do not see very much. We sleep in the day.

It is June, and there is scarcely any night. I know when it is evening by the sound of the firing; it begins from beyond the marshes at seven o'clock. Moment after moment a bullet comes zip into my dug-out: scarcely a second passes before there is another zip. The sound of the shot itself is lost amid the general crashing of guns; there is only the zip of the bullet as it strikes the earth or is embedded in the beams overhead. And so on all through the night, moment after moment, until seven in the morning.

There are three of us in the dug-out; two are playing chess, but I am reading the same thing over and over again, for I am tired to death of lying idle, of sleeping and walking. Poor indeed are men's resources, for in three days we had exhausted all we had to say. Yesterday a soldier who had lost his hand when scouting, came running in to us crying wildly:

Bayonet me, Towny, Bayonet me!

Sometimes we come out at night to enjoy the fireworks. They fire on us hoping to unnerve us, and their bullets strike zip–zip–zip into our earthworks. We stand and look on as though spell-bound. Guns belch out in the distance, a green light begins to quiver over the whole horizon. Rockets incessantly tear their way, screaming, through the air, amongst them some similar to those we ourselves used to send up over the river Oka. Balls of fire burst in twain, and huge discs emitting a hundred different deadly lights flare above us.

Soon the rockets disappear, and from behind the frost creep three gigantic luminous figures; at first they stretch up into the sky, then, quivering convulsively, they fall down upon us, upon the trenches upon our right and left. In their lurid light our uniforms show white. Over the graves in the Lithuanian forests stand enormous crosses as enormous as those in Gogol's *Dreadful Vengeance* and now, on the hill behind us, we discern two of them, one partly shattered and overhanging the other a bodeful grim reminder!

Always soldiers, soldiers, soldiers. Not a single old man, not a single woman, not a single child. For three weeks now I have not seen a glimpse of a woman. That is what I want to speak of the meaning of woman.

We were dining at a spot behind the lines, and from the other side of the screen a woman laughed: I never heard sweeter music. I can find no other words sweeter music. This sister had come up from the hospital; her dress, her veil what a joy! She had made some remark to the Commanding Officer: I have never heard more beautiful poetry than those words. All that is best, most noble, most virginal all that is within me, all that life has bestowed is woman, woman! That is what I wish to explain.

I visited the staff cinema in the evening. I took a seat in a box. When the lights were switched off, I wrote in blue pencil on the railing in front of me:

I am a blonde with blue eyes. Who are you? Come, I am waiting.

I had done a cruel thing!

Directly I had written those words, I felt ashamed. I could not stay in the cinema. I wandered about between the benches, went out into the little village, walked round its chapels every window of which was smashed; and gathered a bunch of forget–me–nots from a ditch by the cemetery. On returning to the crowded cinema I noticed that the box in which I had been sitting was empty; presently an officer entered it; sat down leisurely to enjoy the

## Tales of the Wilderness

pictures; read what I had written; and all at once became a different man. I had injected a deadly poison, he left the box. I walked out after him. He went straight in the direction of the chapel. Ah, I had done a cruel thing!

I had written of a blonde with blue eyes; and I went out, saw her, and awaited her I who had written the message. It seemed as though hundreds of instruments were making music within me, yet my heart was sad and weighed down with oppression it felt crushed. More than anything, more than anything in the whole world, I loved and awaited a blonde who did not exist, to whom I would have surrendered all that was most beautiful within me.

I could not stay in the cinema, but crawled through the trenches. On the hill towered the two huge crosses; sitting down beneath their shadow, I clenched my hands, and murmured:

Darling, darling, darling! Beloved and tender one! I am waiting.

Far in the distance, the green rockets soared skyward, the same as those we used to send up over the river Oka. Then the gargantuan fingers of a searchlight began to sweep the area, my uniform appeared white in its gleam, and all at once a shell fell by the crosses. I had been observed, I had become a target.

The bullets fell zip–zip–zip into the earthworks. I lay in my bunk and buried my head in the pillow. I felt horribly alone as I lay there, murmuring to myself, and breathing all the tenderness I was capable of into my words:

Darling, darling, darling!...

### III

Love!

Can one credit the romanticists that across the seas and hills and years there is so strange a thing as a single–hearted love, an all–conquering, all–subduing, all–renovating love?

In the train at Budslav where the staff–officers were billeted it was known that Lieutenant Agrenev had such a single, overmastering, life–long love.

A wife the woman, the maiden who loves only once to whom love is the most beautiful and only thing in life, will do heroic deeds to get past all the Army ordinances, the enemy's reconnaissance, and reach her beloved. To her there is but one huge heart in the world and nothing more.

Lieutenant Agrenev's quarters were in a distant carriage, Number 30–35.

The Staff Officers' train stood under cover. No one was allowed to strike a light there. In the evening, after curtaining the windows with blankets, the officers gathered together in the carriage of the General Commanding the XXth Corps, to play cards and drink cognac. Someone cynically remarked that there was a close resemblance between life at the front and life in a monastery, in as much as in both the chief topic of conversation was women: there was no reason, therefore, why monks should not be sent to the front for fasting and prayer.

While they were playing cards, the guard, Pan Ponyatsky, came in and spoke to the cavalry–captain Kremnev. He told him of a woman, young and very beautiful. The captain's knees began to tremble; he sat helplessly on the step of the carriage, and fumbled in his pocket for a cigarette. Pan Ponyatsky warned him that he must not strike a light. In the distance could be heard the roar of cannon, like an approaching midnight storm. Kremnev had never felt such a throbbing joy as he felt now, sitting on the carriage step. Pan Ponyatsky repeated that she was a beauty, and waiting that the captain must not delay; and led him through the dark corridor of the train.

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The carriage smelt of men and leather; behind the doors of the compartments echoed a sound of laughter from those who were playing cards. The two men walked half the length of the train.

As they passed from one waggon to another they saw the flare of a rocket in the distance, and in its baleful green light the number of carriage£0–35 loomed in faint outline.

Pan Ponyatsky unlocked the door and whispered:

Here. Only mind, be quiet.

The Pan closed the door after Kremnev. It was an officer's compartment; there was a smell of perfume, and on one of the lower bunks was a woman sleeping. Kremnev threw off his cloak and sat down by the sleeping figure.

The door opened; Pan Ponyatsky thrust in his head and whispered:

Don't worry about her, sir; she is all right, only a little quieter now. Then the head disappeared.

Love! Love over the seas and hills and years!

It had become known that a woman was to visit Agrenev, and forthwith he was ordered away for twenty–four hours on Detachment. Who then would ever know what guard had opened the door, what officer had wrought the deed? Would a woman dare scream, having come where she had no right to be? Or would she dare tell ... to a husband or a lover? No, not to a husband, nor a lover, nor to anyone! And Pan Ponyatsky? Why should he not earn an odd fifty roubles? Who was he to know of love across the seas and hills?

Yesterday, the day before, and again to–day, continuous fighting and retreating. The staff–train moved off, but the officers went on foot. A wide array of men, wagons, horses, cannon, ordinance. All in a vast confusion. None could hear the rattling fire of the machine–guns and rifles. All was lost in a torrential downpour of rain. Towards evening there was a halt. All were eager to rest. No one noticed the approaching dawn. Then a Russian battery commenced to thunder. They were ordered to counter–attack. They trudged back through the rain, no one knew why Agrenev, Kremnev, the brethren three women.

## THE SNOW WIND

A cruel, biting blizzard swept across the snow; over the earth moved misty, fantastic clouds, that drifted slowly across the face of a pale troubled moon. Towards night–fall, the wolves could be heard in the valley, howling a summons to their leader from the spot where the pack always assembled.

The valley descended sharply to a hollow thickly overgrown with red pines. Thirteen years back an unusually violent storm had swept the vicinity, and hurled an entire pine belt to the ground. Now, under the wide, windy sky, spread a luxuriant growth of young firs, while little oaks, hazels, and alders here and there dotted the depression.

Here the leader of the wolf–pack had his lair. Here for thirteen years his mate had borne his cubs. He was already old, but huge, strong, greedy, ferocious, and fearless, with lean legs, powerful snapping jaws, a short, thick neck on which the hair stood up shaggily like a short mane and terrified his younger companions.

This great, gaunt old wolf had been leader for seven years, and with good reason. By day he kept to his lair. At night, terrible and relentless, he prowled the fields and growled a short summons to his mates. He led the pack on their quests for food, hunting throughout the night, racing over plains and down ravines, ravening round farms



## Tales of the Wilderness

and villages. He not only slew elks, horses, bulls, and bears, but also his own wolves if they were impudent or rebellious. He lived as every wolf must live to hunt, to eat, and to breed.

In winter the snow lay over the land like a dead white pall, and food was scarce. The wolves sat round in a circle, gnashed their teeth, and wailed long and plaintively through the night, their noses pointed at the moon.

Five days back, on a steep slope of the valley not far from the wolf track to a watering place, and close to a belt of young fir-trees surrounded by a snow-topped coppice, some men from a neighbouring farm had set a powerful wolf-trap, above which they had thrown a dead calf. On their nocturnal prowls the wolves discovered the carcass. For a long time they sat round it in the grey darkness, howling plaintively, hungrily gnashing their fangs, afraid to move nearer, and each one timidly jostling the other forward with cruel vicious eyes.

At last one young wolf's hunger overcame his fear; he threw himself on the calf with a shrill squeal, and after him rushed the rest, whining, growling, raising their tails, bending their bony backs, bristling the hair on their short thick necks and into the trap fell the leader's mate.

They paid no attention to her, but eagerly devoured the calf, and it was only when they had finished and cleared away all traces of the orgy that they realised the she-wolf was trapped there for good.

All night she howled and threw herself about, saliva falling from her dripping jaws, her eyes rolling wildly and emitting little sparks of green fire as she circled round and round on a clanking chain. In the morning two farm-hands arrived, threw her on their sleigh and drove away.

The leader remained alone the whole day. Then, when night again returned, he called his band together, tore one young wolf to pieces, rushed round with lowered head and bristling hair, finally leaving the pack and returning to his lair. The wolves submitted to his terrible punishment, for he was their chief, who had seized power by force, and they patiently awaited his return, thinking he had gone on a solitary food-hunt.

But as the night advanced and he did not come, they began to howl their urgent summons to him, and now there was an undercurrent of menace in their cries, the lust to kill, for the code of the wild beasts prescribed only one penalty for the leader who deserted his pack death!

## II

All through that night, and the following days and nights, the old wolf lay immovable in his lair. At last, with drooping head, he rose from his resting-place, stretched himself mournfully, first on his fore-paws, then on his hind-legs, arched his back, gnashed his fangs and licked the snow with his clotted tongue. The sky was still shrouded in a dense, velvety darkness: the snow was hard, and glittered like a million points of white light. The moon a dark red orb was blotted over with ragged masses of inky clouds and was fast disappearing on the right of the horizon; on the left, a crimson dawn full of menace was slowly breaking. The snow-wind blew and whistled overhead. Around the wolf, under a bleak sky, were fallen pines and little fir trees cloaked with snow.

He moved up to a lone, naked waste above the valley, emerged from the wood, and stood with lowered head by its border, listening and sniffing. Here the wind blew more strongly, the trees cracked and groaned, and from the wide dark expanse of open country came a sense of dreary emptiness and bitter cold.

The old wolf raised his head, pointed his nose, and uttered a prolonged howl. There was no answer. Then he sped to the watering place and to the river, to the place where his mate had perished.

He loped along swiftly, noiselessly, crouching on the earth, unnoticeable but for his glistening eyes, which made him terrible to encounter suddenly.

## Tales of the Wilderness

From a hill by the riverside a village could be descried, its mole-like windows already alight, and not far distant loomed the dark silhouette of a lonely farm.

The wolf prowled aimlessly through the quiet, snow-covered fields. Although it was a still, dark night, the blue lights of the approaching dawn proclaimed that March had already come. The gale blew fiercely and biting, driving the snow in swirls and spirals before it.

All was smooth at the place where the trap had been set; there was not a trace of the recent death, even the snow round the trap had been flattened out. The very scent of the she-wolf had been almost entirely blown away. The wolf again raised his head and uttered a deep, mournful howl; the moonlight was reflected in his expressionless eyes, which were filled with little tears, then he lowered his head to the earth and was silent.

A light twinkled in the farm-house windows. The wolf went towards it, his eyes gleaming with vicious green sparks. The dogs scented him and began a loud, terrified barking. The wolf lay in the snow and howled back loudly. The red moon was swimming towards the horizon, and swift murky clouds glided over it. Here by the river-side, and down at the watering-place, in the great primeval woods and in the valleys, this wolf had lived for thirteen years. Now his mate lay in the yard of yonder farm-house. He howled again. A man came out into the yard and shouted savagely, thinking a pack of wolves were approaching.

The night passed, but the wolf still wandered aimlessly, his broad head drooping, his ferocious eyes glaring. The moon sank, slanting and immense, behind the horizon, the dawn-light increased, a universal murmuring filled the air, shadowy vistas of pine-trees, firs and frowning ravines began to open up in all directions. The morning glow deepened into rivers and floods of delicate, interchanging colour. Under the protean play the snow changed its dress to lilac. The wolf withdrew to its lair.

By the fallen pine trees where grew delicate green firs, fat, clumsy little cubs, born earlier in the spring, played among the cones and the belt of young spruces that guarded the entrance to their lair.

### III

The morning came, its clear blue bringing an assurance that it was March to those desolate places lying in lonely grandeur beneath a smiling sky. It whispered that the winter was passed and that spring had come. Soon the snow would melt and the sodden earth would throb and pulse with vernal activity, and it would be impossible not to rejoice with Nature.

The snow thickened into a grey shining crust under the warm rays of the sun, to deepen into blue where the shadows fell. The fir-trees, shaggy and formidable, seemed especially verdant and welcoming to the tide of sunlight that flowed to their feet, and lay there collected in the little hollows about their roots. The woodpecker could be heard amidst the pines, and daws, tomtits and bullfinches carolled merrily as they spread their wings and preened their plumage in the sun. The pines exhaled their pungent, resinous, exhilarating odour.

The wolf lay under cover all day. His bed was bestrewn with decaying foliage and overgrown with moss. He rested his head on his paws, gazing solemnly before him with small tear-stained eyes; he lay there motionless, feeling a great weariness and melancholy. Around him was a thick cluster of firs overspread with snow.

Twice the old wolf raised his head, opened his jaws wide and gave a bitter plaintive whine; then his eyes grew dim, their ferocity died down, and he wagged his tail like a cub, striking a thick branch a sharp blow with it. Then again he relapsed into melancholy immobility.

At last, as the day declined, as the naming splendour of the dying sun sailed majestically towards the west and sank beneath the horizon in a glory of spilled violets and purples, and as the moon uprose, a huge, glowing lantern

## Tales of the Wilderness

of light, the old wolf for the first time showed himself angry and restless. He emerged from his cover and commenced a loud howling, fiercely bristling his hair; then he sat on his hind-legs and whined as though in great pain, again, as if driven wild by this agony, he began to scatter and gnaw at the snow. Finally at a swift pace, and crouching, he fled into the fields, to the neighbourhood of the farm near which the wolf-traps were laid.

Here it was dark and cold, the snow-wind rose afresh, harsh and violent, and the crusted snow cut the animal's feet. The last scent of the she-wolf, which he had sniffed only the previous day, had completely disappeared. In some remote part of the valley the pack were howling in rage and hunger for their leader.

Tossing himself about and howling, the old wolf rushed madly over hill and hollow. The night passed; he dashed about the fields and valleys, went down to the river, ran into the deep fastness of the forest and whined ferociously, for there was nothing left for him to do. He had lived to eat and to breed. Man, by an iron trap, had severed him from the law; now he knew only death awaited him.

\* \* \* \* \*

### IV

While it was yet quite dark, a farm-hand rose from his warm bed to go to the village on business. He put on a wadded jacket and fur-lined cap, lighted a pipe the glow illuminating his pock-marked hands and went out into the yard. The dogs leaped round him, uttering timid cowardly whines. He grinned, kicked them aside, and opened the gate.

Outside darkness had descended softly from the heavens, and lovingly overspread a tired world; greenish clouds floated through the blue-black sea of naked space and the snow gleamed greyish blue beneath a turbid moon. The keen snow-wind swept the ground in a fury of white swirls.

The man glanced up at the sky, whistled, and strode off to the village at a brisk swinging pace. He did not mark a wolf stealing along close by the road and running on ahead of him. But when he was near the village he came to a sudden halt. There, on the road in front of him, a huge, lean, much-scarred wolf sat on its hind legs by a crossway. With hideous, baleful green eyes it watched his approach. The man whistled, and waved his arm. The wolf did not stir: its eyes grew dim for a moment; then lighted up again with a cruel ferocious glare.

The man struck a match and took a few steps forward: still the wolf did not stir. Then the man halted, the smile left his face, and he looked anxiously about him. All around stretched fields, the village was yet in the distance. He made a snow-ball and flung it ingratiatingly at the wolf. The brute remained still, only champing its jaws and bristling the hair on its neck.

A moment the man remained there; then turned back. He walked slowly at first; then he began to run. Faster and faster he flew; but, as he neared his farm, he beheld the wolf again on the road before him. It was once more sitting on its haunches, and it licked its dripping jaws. Now terror seized the unfortunate peasant. He shouted; then wheeled, and ran back blindly. He shrieked wildly as he ran mad with fear, unaware what he was doing. There was a death-like hush over the snow-laden earth that lay supine beneath the cloud-ridden moon. The frenzied man alone was screaming.

Gasping, staggering, with froth on his lips, he reached the village at last. There stood the wolf! He dashed from the road tossing his arms, uttering hoarse terrified cries; his cap had fallen off long before, his hair and red scarf were streaming in the wind. Behind him came the relentless pad, pad of the wolf; it's hot, fetid breath scorched the nape of his neck; he could hear it snapping its jaws. He stumbled, lurched forward, fell: as he was about to lift himself from the deep spongy snow, the wolf leaped upon him and struck him from behind a short, powerful blow on the neck.

## Tales of the Wilderness

The man fell to rise no more! A moment, and then his horrible choking cries had ceased. Through the vastness rang the wolf's savage, solitary howling.

V

At dusk when the snow-wind was rushing through the darkness of the night a wild turbulent cataract of icy air the wolf-pack gathered together in the valley and howled. They were calling for a leader.

The sky spread above them, wan and pallid, the wind moaned and whistled through the feathery tops of the pine-trees. Amid the snow the wolves sat in a circle on their haunches and howled dismally. They were hungry and had not eaten for six days; their leader had deserted them. He who had led them on their hunts and prowls, who seven years back had killed their former leader and established his own chieftainship, had now left them forlorn.

Sitting in a circle, howling with gleaming eyes and bristling hair, they were mournful yet vicious; like helpless slaves they did not know what to do. Only one young wolf, a brother of the one their leader had recently killed, strutted about independently and gnashed his teeth, conscious of his strength and agility. In the pride of his youthful vigour he had conceived the ambition to make himself the leader; he certainly had no thought that this was a fatal step entailing in the end his doom. For it is the Law of the Pack that death is meted out to the usurper of power. He commenced to howl proudly, but the others paid no heed, they only drooped their heads and howled in fear and trembling.

Gradually the dawn broke. Faint and silvery, the moon was sinking through pale, luminous veils in the west; in the east there glowed a fierce red light like that of a camp fire. The sky was still shrouded in darkness, the snow glimmered a cold pallid blue in the half-light.

The old wolf, fresh from his kill, slowly descended the valley where his pack had gathered. At sight of his grey, gaunt form they rushed forward to meet him, and as they ran none seemed to know what was about to happen; they advanced fawning and cringing until the young wolf, with a savage squeal, dared to throw himself upon the leader in a sudden fierce attack: then they all suddenly remembered his desertion of them, their law which demands death for its infringement, and with glistening bared teeth they too flung themselves upon him. He made no resistance. He died and was torn to pieces which, with his bones, were quickly devoured.

\* \* \* \* \*

VI

The leader died seven days after the death of his mate.

A week later, beneath a golden sun and a smiling blue sky, the snow was melting, cleansing the earth for the breath of spring. Streamlets became abundant, twining like shining ribbons of molten light through the fields and valleys, the river grew swollen and turbid, becoming a fierce impassable flood, and the little fir trees grew still more feathery and verdant.

The young wolf, like the old one before him, now became leader and took a mate; she was the daughter of the old leader, and she went into the cover to breed.

## THE FOREST MANOR

I

## Tales of the Wilderness

Dark, yellow snow still lay in the ravines from under which flowed icy streamlets; on the surface it was thawing, and last year's grass pointed up like stiff golden arrows to the cold Heavens. Here and there, in bright sunny patches, appeared the first yellow flowers. The sky was dull and overcast, laden with massy, leaden-coloured clouds.

A carrion-crow flew low over the trees and the twittering birds fell silent. When the menace had passed they broke forth anew in triumphant song, once more absorbed by the joy of living,

The swelling earth gurgled happily beneath the soft kiss of the warm humid wind, and from somewhere afar came reverberating sounds of spring; perchance from the people in the village across the water, or perchance from the warbling birds over the streams.

Ivanov the forester came out on to the door-step which had already dried, and lighted a cigarette; it burned but slowly in the moist atmosphere of the deepening twilight.

It will be hot, Mitrich, thank God! remarked the watchman, Ignat, as he passed by with some buckets.... Snipe will be about to-morrow, and we will have to hunt right into Easter.

He went into the cow-house, then returned, sat down on a step, and rolled a cigarette.

The pungent odour of his bad tobacco mingled with the sweet aroma of dying foliage and melting snow. Beyond the river a church bell was ringing for the Lenten festival, and there was a melancholy thrill in its notes as they crossed the water.

That must be the seventh Gospel, said Ignat. They will be coming out with the candles soon. Then he added abruptly: The river won't reach to a man's waist in the summer and now it is like a torrent; they have been hardly able to cross it in the long boat ... Spring, ah!... Well, I shall certainly have to clean out my double-barrelled gun to-day. With a business-like air he spat into a puddle and vigorously inhaled his cigarette smoke.

The cranes will come down by the garden for the night, at dusk, judging by all portents, and to-morrow we will go after the grouse, replied Ivanov, and listened intently to the myriad sounds of evening.

Ignat also listened, bending his shaggy head sideways to the earth and the sky. He caught some desired note and agreed:

Yes, it must be so. I can hear the beat of their wings. I am truly thankful. At dawn to-morrow we must get out the drosky. We will go to the Ratchinsky wood and have a look. We can get through all right by the upper road.

From the right of the steps, his daughter Aganka skipped gaily on to the terrace and began beating the dust out of a sheep-skin coat with thin brown sticks. It was cold and she commenced to dance for warmth, singing in a shrill voice:

The nightingale sings  
In the branches above  
The nightingale brings  
No rest to his love!

Ignat gave her an indulgent look; nevertheless he said sternly: Come, come! That is sin ... it is Lent and you singing!

Aganka merely laughed.

## Tales of the Wilderness

There is no sin now! she retorted, turning her back to the steps and propping up her right leg as she vigorously beat the sheepskin coat.

Ignat playfully threatened her then smiled and said to Ivanov: A fine girl, isn't she?... She is not yet sixteen and is already a flirt! Its no use talking to her. She won't remain in the house at night, but must go slipping off somewhere.

Aganka turned round sharply, tossing her head. Well, I am not a dead creature!

You are not, my girl; indeed you are not only hold your tongue!

Ivanov glanced at her. She was like a little wild fawn with her fresh young body and sparkling eyes, always so ready to bewitch. His own weary eyes involuntarily saddened for a moment; then he said cheerily, in a louder tone than necessary:

Well, isn't that the right attitude? Isn't it the best way? Love while you can, Aganka, have a happy time.

Oh, yes, let her have a happy time by all means ... it is young blood's privilege. replied Ignat.

The bells again rang out for the Gospel. The sky grew darker and darker. Ravens croaked hoarsely amidst the verdant foliage of the trees. Ignat put his ear to the ground, listening. From the distance, from the garden, the ravines, and the pasturage came the low cries of cranes, barely audible amid the subdued rustling of the spring. Ignat thrust forward his bearded face, it looked at first serious and attentive, then it grew cunning and became animated with joy.

The cranes have come down! he cried in an excited whisper, as though afraid of frightening them. Then he began to bustle about, muttering:

I must grease the double-barrel....

Ivanov also bestirred himself. Because while tracking the cranes he would be seeing her, Arina's image now came vividly before him broad, strong, ardent, with soft sensual lips, and wearing a red handkerchief.

Get the drosky out at dawn to-morrow, he ordered Ignat. We will go to the Ratchinsky wood. I will go there now and have a look round.

## II

The panelled walls and the stove with its cracked tiles were only faintly visible in the soft twilight which filled Ivanov's study. By the walls stood a sofa, and a desk whose green cloth was untidily bestrewn with the accumulated litter of years and copiously spotted with candle grease, reminiscent of the long, dreary nights Ivanov had spent a prey to loneliness.

A heap of horse trappings collars, straps, saddles, bridles lay by the large, square, bare windows. During the winter nights wolves watched the gleam of yellow candlelight within them. Now outside was the tranquil, genial atmosphere of Spring with all its multi-coloured splendour. Against a deep-blue sky with an orange streak like a pencil line drawn across the horizon, showed the sharp, knotted twigs of the crotagus and the lilac beneath the windows.

Ivanov lighted a candle and commenced manufacturing cartridges to pass away the time. Lydia Constantinovna entered the room.

## Tales of the Wilderness

Will you have tea here or in the dining-room? she inquired.

Ivanov declined tea with a wave of his hand.

All through the years of the Revolution Lydia Constantinovna had lived in the Crimea, coming to Marin-Brod for a fortnight the previous summer, afterwards leaving for Moscow. Now she had returned for the Easter holidays, but not alone the artist Mintz accompanied her. Ivanov had never heard of him before.

Mintz was clean-shaven and had long fair hair; he wore steel-rimmed pince-nez over his cold grey eyes which he often took off and put on again; when he did so his eyes changed, looking helpless and malicious without the glasses, like those of little owlets in daylight; his thin, shaven lips were closely compressed, and there was often an expression of mistrust and decrepitude in his face; his conversation and movements were noisy.

Lydia Constantinovna had arrived with Mintz the day before at dusk; Ivanov was not at home. They had gone for a walk in the evening, returning only at two o'clock when dawn was just about to break, and a cold mist hung over the earth like a soft grey veil. They were met by barking dogs which were quickly silenced by the lash of Ignat's whip.

Ivanov had come home earlier, at eleven o'clock, and sat by his study window alone, listening to the gentle sounds of night and the ceaseless hootings of the owls in the park. Lydia Constantinovna did not come to him, nor did he go in to her.

It was in the daytime that Ivanov first saw the artist. Mintz was sitting in the park on a dried turf-bench, and gazing intently at the river. Ivanov passed him. The artist's shrunken ruffled figure had an air of desolation and abandonment.

The drawing-room was next to Ivanov's study. There still remained out of the ruin a carpet and some armchairs near the large, dirty windows, an old piano stood unmoved, and some portraits still hung on the walls.

Lydia Constantinovna and Mintz came in from the back-room. Lydia walked with her usual brisk, even tread, carrying herself with the smooth, elastic bearing and graceful swing of her beautiful body that Ivanov remembered so well.

She raised the piano-cover and began playing a dashing bravura that was strikingly out of place in the dismantled room, then she closed the piano-lid with a slam.

Aganka entered with the tea on a tray.

Mintz walked about the dim room, tapping his heels on the parquet floor, and though he spoke loudly, his voice held a note of yearning pain.

I was in the park just now. That pond, those maple avenues disintegrating, dying, disappearing drive me melancholy mad. The ice has already melted in the pond by the dam. Why can we not bring back the romantic eighteenth century, and sit in dressing-gowns, musing with delicious sadness over our pipes? Why are we not illustrious lords?

Lydia Constantinovna smiled as she answered: Why not indeed! That is a poetic fancy. But the reality is very much worse. Marin-Brod has never been a country house, it is a forest manor, a forestry-office and nothing more ... nothing more.... I always feel an interloper here. This is only my second day and I am already depressed. Her tone was sad, yet it held just a perceptible note of anger.

## Tales of the Wilderness

Reality and Fancy? Certainly I am an artist, for I always see the latter, the beautiful and spiritual side, Mintz declared; and added in an undertone: Do you remember yesterday ... the park?

Oh, yes, the park, Lydia replied in a tired, subdued tone. They hold the Twelfth Gospel Service to-day; when I was a young girl, how I used to love standing in church with a candle I felt so good. And now I love nothing!

It was already quite dark in the drawing room. A wavering, greenish-golden light streamed in through the windows and played on the dim walls. Ivanov came out of his study. He was wearing high boots and a leather jacket, and carried a rifle under his arm. He went silently to the door. Lydia Constantinovna stopped him.

Are you going out again, Sergius? Is it to hunt?

Yes.

Ivanov stood still and Lydia went up to him. She had dark shadows under her eyes, and the hand of time already bearing away her youth and beauty lay upon her marvellously white skin, at her lips and on her cheeks, in faint, scarcely visible wrinkles. Ivanov noticed it distinctly.

Does one hunt at night in the dark? I did not know that, Lydia said, repeating I did not know....

I am going to the wood.

I have come back here after not having seen you for months, and we have not yet spoken a word....

Ivanov did not reply, but went out. His footsteps echoed through the great house, finally dying away in the distance. The front-door slammed, shaking the whole mansion, which was old and falling to pieces.

Lydia Constantinovna remained in the middle of the room, her face turned to the door. Mintz approached, took her hand, and raised it to his lips.

You must not take it to heart, Lit, he said softly and kindly.

She freed her hand and laid it on Mintz's shoulder.

No, one should not take it to heart, she assented in a low voice, One should not.... But listen, Mintz.... How strange it all is! Once he loved me very much, though I never loved him.... But my youth was spent here, and now I feel unhappy.... I remember all that happened in this drawing-room, it was the first time. If only I could have all over again! Perhaps I should act differently then. I feel sorry now for my youth and inexperience, though formerly I cursed them, and I am far from regretting all that followed afterwards. But I need a refuge now.... If you only knew how much he loved me in those days!...

Lydia Constantinovna was silent a moment, her head bent, then flinging it back she gave a hollow sardonic laugh.

Oh, what nonsense I talk! Well, we will be cheerful yet. I am tired, that is all. How stuffy it is in here!... Open the windows, Mintz ... Now let down the blinds ... They live on milk and black bread here and are happy but I have a bottle of brandy in my trunk. Get it out! Light the chandelier.

Mintz opened the windows. From outside came a cool, refreshing breeze laden with the moist and fragrant perfumes of spring. Dusk had crept over the sky, which was flecked with warm vernal clouds.

III



## Tales of the Wilderness

The heavens were a glorious, triumphant, impenetrable blue; there was a faint glimmer of greenish light on the Western horizon over which brooded damp low clouds. The air was humid, soft, and redolent with the aroma of earth and melting snow. From all around came a faint medley of echoing sounds.... The wind fell completely, not a tree stirred; the ferns stood motionless with all the magic of the springtime among their roots. So calm and still was the night, the earth herself, it seemed, stopped turning in that wonderful stillness.

Ivanov lighted a cigarette, and as the match flared between his fingers, illuminating his black beard, his trembling hands were distinctly visible. His pointer Gek came out of the darkness and fawned round his legs.

Through the darkness of the windless night rang the church bell tolling for the last Gospel Service; it seemed to peal just outside the manor. The yard was silent, but once or twice Aganka's voice could be heard from the cattle-shed calling to the cows, and the sound of milk falling into her pail was faintly audible.

Ivanov listened to the church chimes and the subdued sounds of night round the manor, then noiselessly, well accustomed to the obscurity, he descended the steps; only Gek was at his side, the other dogs did not hear him.

Cold raindrops fell from the trees in tiny shining globules of iridescent light, close by him an owl fluttered in a tangle of branches, uttering its dreadful cry of joy as it flashed past.

Ivanov walked through the fields, descended by a chalky ribbon of a footpath to the ravine, crossed over it by a narrow shadow-dappled pathway hidden among a maze of trees, and made his way along its further ridge to a forest watch-house. It stood in a bare open space, exposed to the swift rushing Dance of the Winds, and close to the naked trunks of three ancient pines that still reared their grim, shaggy heads to the sky and spilled their pungent balsam perfumes into the air. Behind it loomed the faint grey shadow of an embankment.

A dog at the watch-house began to bark. Gek growled in return and suddenly disappeared. The dogs became silent. A man appeared on the step with a lantern.

Who is there? he asked quietly.

It is I, said Ivanov.

You, Sergius Mitrich?... Aha! But Arina is still at church ... went off there ... busy with her nonsense. The watchman paused. Shall I go in and turn off the light? The express will soon be passing. Will you come in? Arina will be back before long. The wife's at home.

No, I'm going into the forest.

As you wish. The watchman passed along the embankment with his lantern and approached the bridge.

Ivanov left the watch-house, and went into the forest, walking along the edge of the ravine towards the river slope. A train rushed out from the forest on the further side of the river, its flaming eyes reflected in the dark shiny water; it moved forward, rolling loudly and harshly over the bridge.

It was that hour of spring-time when, despite the many noises, there was still an atmosphere of peace, and the burgeoning, luxuriantly-clad earth could almost be heard breathing as it absorbed the vernal moisture; the clash of the stream as it struck the rocks in the ravine was hushed for the night. Nevertheless it seemed as though the bold-browed, rugged wood-demon awakened by spring was shaking his wings in the water.

Beyond the ravine and wood, beyond the river to the right, left, behind, and before, the birds still chirruped over the currents. Below, not many steps away, the stream flowed almost noiselessly; only, as though immeasurably

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remote the confused gurgle of its waters broke the profound quiet. Far away rose a soft murmur. The air hummed and shook with the roar of distant rapids.

Ivanov leaned against a birch tree, laid his rifle beside him, struck a match and began to smoke. The flickering light illuminated the white trunks of the trees, the withered herbage of last year's growth and a path leading down the embankment. Arina had descended it many times.

The church bells in the village were ringing for evensong. From the church precincts twinkled the yellow lights of candles and lanterns, then there was the hum of people's voices. Many of the lights dispersed to the right and left, others moved down to the river side. There was the sound of foot-falls on the bottom of a boat and the splashing of oars. Someone called out:

Wai ... ait ... Mitri ... ich!

There was a clanking of iron a boat-chain; then stillness. Only the lights showed that the boat had been launched into the middle of the river and was floating down stream. Soon the murmur of voices again, and the splash of oars, and now these sounds were quite close to Ivanov. One of the men was teasing the girls, the latter laughed at first, then all at once they were silent.

The boat was made fast to the bridge, the passengers bustling about for a long time on landing. The ferryman collected his paper roubles, the men continued merry-making with the girls. Their rugged forms their chest, knees and chins were clearly discernible in the lights they carried. They all strolled up a narrow pathway, but one light withdrew from the rest and moved along a short cut that led to the watch-house it was Arina's. Ivanov held Gek in tightly, the dog was straining to rush down the embankment.

Arina slowly ascended the steep incline, planting her broad, short heavily-shod feet firmly in the sticky mud; her breath came pantingly. She wore a red jacket, unbuttoned in the front through which her large bosom was visible in the lantern-light. The reflection shone upon her bent face, illuminating her lips, her bluish cheek-bones and dark arched brows; only her eyes were invisible in the darkness, and their cavities seemed enormous. The night's density gave way before the light of her lantern and the silvery trunks of birch trees glimmered ahead.

Ivanov crossed the road in front of her. Arina stopped with a sudden gasp, and he felt the touch of her warm breath.

How you scared me! she exclaimed quickly, stretching out her hand. How are you? I have been at the church service. How you scared me!

Ivanov was about to draw her hand towards him, but she withdrew it, saying sternly: No, you musn't, I'm in a hurry to get home, I have no time. Let me go.

Ivanov smiled faintly, and dropped her hands.

All right, it does not matter, I will come to-morrow at dusk. Then in a low voice he added: Will you come?

Arina moved closer to him, and she too spoke under her breath: Yes, come this way. And we will have a walk ... Bother my father! But go now, I am in a hurry ... there is the house to put straight... I feel the baby under my heart. Go!

The first warm rain drops fell from the invisible sky as Ivanov walked across the meadows; at first they were sparse, pattering noisily on his leather jacket; then they began to fall more heavily and he was soon enveloped in the sonorous downpour of a vernal shower. Close to the manor Gek darted aside and disappeared down the ravine,

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from whence arose the rustling of wings, and the perturbed cries of cranes. Gek barked, some dogs on a neighbouring farm answered him; to these, others responded from a distant village, and then again, from far away there was borne over the earth the clear springtime baying of other dogs.

On entering the main avenue of the park, Ivanov noticed the glow of a cigarette suddenly disappearing down a side-walk; afterwards he encountered Aganka at a gate.

You! he exclaimed. On the run as usual? So you have made friends with a smoker this time?

The girl giggled loudly and ran off, splashing through the mud towards the cow-shed; then she called out innocently:

I have put the milk by the window in your study.

Ivanov lingered a while on the doorstep scraping the mud off his boots, then stretched himself vigorously, working the muscles of his arms and reflecting that it was high time for him to be in bed, in a sound healthy sleep, so as to be up at dawn on the morrow.

### IV

In the drawing-room a chandelier hung above the sofa and round table near the piano; it had not been lighted for many years, indeed not since the last Christmas before the Revolution. Now once again it was illumined, and the dull yellow flare of its candles dimly shining out of their dust-laden pendants lit up the near side of the room and its contents; at the further side, however, where doors led into the hall and a sittingroom, there was a complete wreckage. The chairs, armchairs, and couches had vanished through the agency of unknown hands, leaving only fragments of broken furniture, and odds and ends of utensils heaped together in casual profusion in a dark corner, only penetrated by grey, ghostlike shadows. The curtains were closely drawn; outside the rain pattered drearily on the windows.

Lydia Constantinovna played a long while on the piano, at first a bravura from the operas, then some classical pieces, Liszt's Twelfth Rhapsody, and finally ended with the artless music of Ooppel's A Summer's Night in Berezovka a piece she used to play to Ivanov when she was his fiancée.

She played it through twice; then broke off abruptly, rising from her seat and shaking with gusts of malicious laughter. Still laughing loudly and evilly, she began to sip brandy out of a high narrow glass.

Her eyes were still beautiful, with the beauty of lakes in autumn when the trees are shedding their leaves. She seated herself on the sofa, and lay back among its cushions, her hands clasped behind her head, in an attitude of utter abandonment. Her legs in their open-work stockings were plainly visible under her black silk skirt, and she crossed them, leisurely placing her feet, encased in their patent leather shoes, upon a low footstool.

She drank a great deal of brandy in slow sips, and as she pressed her beautiful lips to the glass she vilified everybody and everything Ivanov, the Revolution, Moscow, the Crimea, Marin-Brod, Mintz, and herself.

Then she became silent, her eyes grew dull, she began to speak quietly and sadly, with a foolish helpless smile.

Mintz was drinking and pacing up and down the room, speaking volubly with noisy derision. The brandy flowed through his veins, warming his sluggish blood; his thoughts grew vivid and spiteful, engendering sarcastic, malicious remarks. Whenever he took a drink, he removed his pince-nez for a moment, and his eyes became evil, vacant and bemused.

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Lydia Constantinovna sat in the corner of the sofa, covered her shoulders with a plaid shawl, and crossed her legs in the Turkish fashion.

What a smell of chipre there is, Mintz, she murmured in a low voice. I think I must be tipsy. Yes, I must be. When I drink a great deal I always begin to think there are too many perfumes about. They suffocate me, I get their taste in my mouth, they sing in my ears and I feel ill.... What a smell of chipre ... it is my favourite perfume: do you smell it?

She looked at Mintz with a half dazed stare, then continued:

In an hour's time I shall be having hysterics. It is always the way when I drink too much. I don't feel cheerful any longer, I feel melancholy now, Mintz. I feel now as though ... as though I have wept on this sofa all through the night ... Oh, how happy we used to be once upon a time, she sighed tearfully, then added with a giggle. Why I hardly know what I am saying!

Mintz was walking up and down the room, measuring his steps extremely carefully. He halted in front of Lydia Constantinovna, removed his glasses and scowled:

But I, when I drink, I begin to see things with extraordinary clearness: I see that we are melancholy because the devil only knows why or for what we are living; I see that life is impossible without faith; that our hearts and minds are exhausted with the endless discussions in cafes, attics and promenades. I realise that no matter what happens, villainy will always exist. I see, too, that we have been drinking because we feel lonely and dull yes, even though we have been joking and laughing boisterously; I see that there is now the great joy and beauty of spring outside so different from the distorted images visible to warped minds and clouded eyes; I see, moreover, that the Revolution has passed us by after throwing us aside, even though the New Economic Policy may put on us our feet again for a while, and that ... that ... Mintz did not finish, but turned round abruptly and strode away with an air of self-assertion, into the remote end of the room, where the debris was littered.

Yes, that is true ... you are right, answered Lydia Constantinovna. But then I do not love Sergius, I never have done.

Of course I am right, Mintz retorted severely from his dim corner. People never love others. They love themselves through others.

Ivanov came in from the hall in his cap and muddy boots, carrying his rifle. Without a single word he passed through the room and went into his study. Mintz watched him in severe silence, then followed him. Inside he leaned against the door-post with a wry smile:

You are shunning me all this time. Why?

You imagine it, returned Ivanov.

He lighted a candle on his desk, took off his coat, changed his boots and clothes, hung up his rifle.

That is ridiculous! Mintz replied coldly. I very seldom imagine things. I want to say how very comfortable you seem here, because this is the very essence of comfort.... Look at me! I have painted pictures, sold them, painted more in order to sell those also though I ceased painting long ago and I lived in garrets because I must have light, and by myself because my wife will not come to such a place.... True, she is no longer with me, she deserted me long ago! Now I have only mistresses.... And I envy you because ... because it is very cold in garrets.... You understand me?

## Tales of the Wilderness

Mintz took off his pince-nez and his eyes looked bewildered and malignant: In the name of all who had been tortured, all who have exchanged the springtime beauty of the parks for the erotic atmosphere of boudoirs; all who in the soft luxury of their homes forgot, and have now lost their claim on Russia I say you are supremely comfortable, and we envy you! One may work here, one may even ... marry ... You have never painted, have you?

No.

Mintz was silent, then suddenly said in a low tone: Look here! We have some brandy. Shall we have a drink?

No, thank you. I want to sleep. Good night.

I want to talk!

Ivanov extinguished the candle, through custom finding his bread and milk in the dark, and hastily consumed it without sitting down. Mintz stood a moment by the door; then went out, slamming it behind him.

Lydia Constantinovna now had her feet on the carpet and her head was bowed. Her eyes under their long lashes were blank and limp, like lakes amid reeds. Her hands were clasped round her knees.

How was Sergius? she enquired, without raising her head.

Boorish, he has gone to bed, answered Mintz.

He was about to sit beside her, but she rose, arranged her hair mechanically, and smiled faintly and tenderly not at Mintz, but into the empty space.

To bed? Well, it is time. Good rest! she said softly. Ah, how the perfume torments me. I feel giddy.

She went to the other end of the room, Mintz following her, and halted on the threshold. In the stillness of the night the pattering rain could be heard distinctly. Lydia Constantinovna leaned against the white door, throwing back her head, and began to speak; avoiding Mintz's eyes, she endeavoured to express herself simply and clearly, but the words seemed dry as they fell from her lips:

I am very tired, Mintz, I am going to bed at once. You go too. Goodbye until tomorrow. We shall not meet again to-night. Do you understand, Mintz? It is my wish.

Mintz stood still, his legs wide apart, his arms akimbo, his head hanging. Then with a sad, submissive smile he answered in an unexpectedly mild tone: Very well, then, All right, I understand you. It is quite all right.

Lydia Constantinovna stretched out her hand, speaking in the unaffected, friendly way she had desired earlier: I know you are a malicious, bored, lonely cynic, like ... like an old homeless dog ... But you are kind and intelligent.... You know I will never leave you we are so.... But now I am going in to him ... just for the last time.

Mintz kissed her hand without speaking, then his tall, bony, somewhat stooping figure disappeared down the corridor.

V

## Tales of the Wilderness

Lydia Constantinovna's bedroom was cold and gloomy. As formerly, it contained a huge four-poster, a chest of drawers, a dressing table and a wardrobe. The rain beat fiercely against the window panes running down in tiny glass globules.

Lydia lighted two candles, and placed them beside the tarnished mirror. Some toilette belongings, relics of her childhood, lay on the chest-of-drawers, and the contents of the baggage she had brought with her the previous day were scattered about the room. The candles burnt dimly, their yellow tongues flickering unsteadily over the tarnished mirror.

She changed her garments and put on a loose green negligé, then re-arranged her hair into plaits, forming them into a coronet which made her head appear very small and graceful.

From force of habit she opened a bottle of perfume, moistened the palms of her hands and rubbed them over her neck and bosom. At once she felt giddy, even the cold, dampish sheets on her bed seemed to smell of chipre.

Lydia sat down on the edge of her bed in her green negligé, listening to the sounds around her. Outside, there was a continuous howling and barking of dogs, now and then she could distinguish the croaking of half-awakened crows in the park.

The clock struck eleven, then half-past, someone passed along the corridor, Aganka cleared up in the dining-room, Mintz walked to and fro in the drawing-room, then all became quiet.

Lydia Constantinovna went to the window and gazed out for a long time. Then, quietly, she left her bedroom and crept down to Ivanov's study. All around her it was dark, cold and silent as she passed through the empty, spacious rooms. A forgotten candle still burnt wanly in the drawing-room, and a rat ran out from under the table.

She was again plunged in darkness when she entered Ivanov's study, and she was greeted by a smell of horse trappings and joiners' glue.

Ivanov was asleep on the sofa. He lay on his back, his arms extended; the outlines of his body could just be discerned. Lydia sat down quietly beside him and laid her hand on his breast. Ivanov sighed, drew in his arms and raised his head quickly from the pillow:

Who is there?

It is I, Sergius me Lida, answered Lydia Constantinovna in a rapid whisper. I know you do not wish to speak to me. I am bored ... I returned here in a happy mood, not even thinking of you, and now all at once I feel wretched.... Oh, those perfumes! How they torment me.... She passed her hand over her face, then was silent. Ivanov sat up.

What is the matter Lida? What do you want? he asked drowsily, and he lighted a cigarette. The light shone on them as they sat half-dressed on the sofa. Ivanov had a rugged, lumbering look.

What do I want? Lydia Constantinovna murmured. Age creeps on me, Sergius, and a lonely old age is terrible ... I feel so weary.... I came here happy enough, now I am miserable. I can think of nothing but the time you and I spent here together ... I am always playing A Summer's Night in Berezovka do you remember? I used to play it to you in those days.... Well, so there you see.... Age creeps on and I am longing for a home.... To-day they had the Twelfth Gospel Service.... Surely we still have a word for each other? Her face clouded in sudden doubt.

You have been with Arina then? she questioned sharply.

Ivanov did not answer immediately.

## Tales of the Wilderness

I have grieved and worried greatly, Lida, he said at last, but that does not matter. These four years I have lived alone, and have placed the past behind me. It is gone for ever. These four years I have struggled against death, and struggled for my daily bread. You know nothing of all this, we are as strangers.... Yes, I have been with Arina. Soon I shall have a son. I do not know if I am broken or merely tired, but for the moment I feel all right. I am going to bring Arina here, she will be my wife and keep house for me. And I shall live.... I am keeping step with some elemental Force . . . I shall have a son.... It will be a totally different life for me, Lida.

And for me Moscow as ever wine, theatres, cafes, Mintz, an eternal hurly-burly ... I am sick of it!

I cannot help you, Lida. I too am sick of all that, but now I am at peace. We must all work out our own salvation.

Ivanov spoke very quietly and simply. Lydia Constantinovna sat bowed and motionless, as if fearing to move, clasping her knees with both hands. When Ivanov ceased speaking she rose noiselessly and went towards the door. She stood on the threshold a brief moment then, went out. The candle still burnt fitfully in the drawing-room. The house was wrapt in silence.

## THE BIELOKONSKY ESTATE

Ivan Koloturov, President of the Bielokonsky Committee of the Poor, had ploughed his tiny holding for twenty years. He always rose before dawn and worked dug, harrowed, threshed, planed, repaired with his huge, strong, pock-marked hands; he could only use his muscular strength.

On rising in the morning, he prepared his hash of potatoes and bread, and went out of the hut to work on the land, with cattle, with wood, stone and iron. He was honest, careful, and laborious. While still a lad of five he had, while driving from the station, helped a stranger in a mechanic's overalls to a seat; the man had told him all were equal in the sight of God, that the land belonged to the peasants, that the proprietors had stolen it from them, and that a time would come when he would have to do things.

Ivan Koloturov did not understand what he would have to do, but when the fierce wave of the Revolution broke over the country and swept into the Steppe, he was the first to rise to do things. Now he felt disillusioned. He had wanted to do everything honestly, but he was only able to work with his hands and muscles.

They elected him to the County Committee. He was accustomed to rise before dawn and set to work immediately. Now he was not permitted to do anything before ten o'clock. At ten he went to the Committee where, with the greatest difficulty, he put his name to papers but this was not work: papers came in and went out independently of him. He did not understand their purport, he only signed them.

He wanted to do something! In the spring he went home to the plough. He had been elected in the Autumn, President of the Committee of the Poor, and he established himself in Prince Prozorovsky's domain, putting on his soldier brother's great coat and carrying a revolver in his belt.

He went home in the evening. His wife met him sullenly, jerking her elbows as she prepared some mash. The children were sitting on the stove, some little pigs grunted in a corner. There was a strong smell of burning wood.

You won't care to eat with us now after the Barin's meal, nagged the old woman. You are a Barin yourself now. Ha, ha!

Ivan remained silent, sitting down on a bench beneath the Ikon.

## Tales of the Wilderness

So you mix with rascals now, she persisted, yes, that is what they are, Ivan Koloturov. Discontented rascals!

Peace, fool! You don't understand. Be quiet, I say!

You are ashamed of me, so you are hiding.

We will live there together soon.

Not I! I will not go there.

Idiot!

Ah, you have already learnt to snarl, the old woman jibed. Ate your mash then! But perhaps you don't relish it after your Barin's pork.

She was right, he had already eaten pork, and she had guessed it. Ivan began to puff. You are an idiot, I tell you, he growled.

He had come home to have a business talk about their affairs, but he left without settling anything. The old woman's sharp tongue had stung him in a tender spot. It was true that all the respectable peasants had stood aside, and only those who had nothing to lose had joined the Committee.

Ivan passed through the village. As he walked across the park, he saw a light burning in the stables and went over to discover the reason. He found some lads had assembled there and were playing cards and smoking. He watched them awhile, frowningly.

This is stupid! You will set the place alight, he grumbled.

What if we do? the men answered sulkily. It is for you to defend other people's property?

Not other peoples' ours! he retorted, then turned away.

Ivan! they shouted after him; have you the wine-cellar key? There are spirits in there if you don't give it to us, we shall break in....

The house was dark and silent. The huge, spacious apartments seemed strange, terrible. The Prince still occupied the drawing-room. Ivan entered his office formerly the dining-room and lighted a lamp. He went down on his knees and began to pick up the clods of earth that lay on the floor; he threw them out of the window, then fetched a brush and swept up. He could not understand why gentlemen's boots did not leave a trail of dirt behind them.

Then he went into the drawing-room and served the final notice on the Prince while the men were accommodating themselves in the kitchen. Then he joined them, lying down on a form without undressing. After a long time he fell asleep.

He awoke the next morning while all were still sleeping, rose and walked round the manor. The lads were still playing cards in the stable.

Why aren't you asleep? one of them asked him.

I have had all I want, he replied. He called the cow-herd. The man came out, stood still, scratched his head, and swore angrily indignant at being aroused.



## Tales of the Wilderness

Don't meddle in other people's affairs, he grunted. I know when to wake.

The dawn was fine, clear and chilly. A light appeared in the drawing-room, and Ivan saw the Prince go out, cross the terrace and depart into the Steppe.

At ten o'clock, the President entered the office, and set about what was, in his opinion, a torturous, useless business the making out an inventory of the wheat and rye in each peasant's possession. It was useless because he knew, as did everyone in the village, how much each man had; it was torturous because it entailed such a great deal of writing.

Prince Prozorovsky had risen at daybreak. The sun glared fiercely over the bare autumn-swept park and into the drawing-room windows. The wedding cry of the ravens echoed through the autumnal stillness that hung broodingly over the Steppe.

On such a dazzling golden day as this, the Prince's ancestors had set off with their blood-hounds in by-gone days. In this house a whole generation had lived now the old family was forced to leave it for ever!

A red notice The Bielokonsky Committee of the Poor had been affixed to the front door the previous evening, and the intruders had bustled all night arranging something in the hall. The drawing-room had not so far been touched; the gilt backs of books still glittered from behind glass cases in the study. Oh books! Will not your poison and your delights still abide?

Prince Prozorovsky went out into the fields; they were barren but for dead rye-stalks that stuck up starkly from the earth. Wolves were already on the trail. He wandered all day long, drank the last wine of autumn and listened to the ravens' wedding cries.

When he had beheld this bird's carnival as a child, he had clapped his hands, crying: Hurrah for my wedding! Hurrah for my wedding! He had never had a wedding. Now his days were numbered. He had lived for love. He had known many affections, had felt bitter pangs. He had tasted the poison of the Moscow streets, of books and of women; had been touched by the autumnal sadness of Bielokonsky, where he always stayed in the autumn. Now he knew grief!

He walked aimlessly through the trackless fields and down into hollows; the aspens glowed in a purple hue around him; on a hill behind him the old white house stood amid the lilac shrubbery of a decaying park. The crystal clear, vast, blue vista was immeasurably distant.

The hair on his temples was already growing thin and gray there was no stopping, no returning!

He met a peasant, a rough, plain man in a sheep-skin jacket, driving a cart laden with sacks. The man took off his cap and stopped his horse, to make way for the ... *gentleman*.

Good morning, little Father, he wheezed, then addressed his beast, pulled the reins, drove on, then stopped again and called out:

Listen, Barin, I want to tell you....

The Prince turned round and looked at the man. The peasant was old, his face was covered with hair and wrinkles.

What will your Excellency do now?

That is difficult to say, replied the Prince.

## Tales of the Wilderness

When will you go? the old man asked. Those Committees of the Poor are taking away the corn. There are no matches, no manufacturers, and I am burning splinters for light.... They say no corn is to be sold.... Listen, Barin, I will take some secretly to the station. People are coming from Moscow ... and ... and ... about thirty five of them ... thirty five I tell you!... But then, what will there be to buy with the proceeds?... Well, well! It is a great time all the same ... a great time, Barin! Have a smoke, your Excellency.

Prozorovsky refused the proffered pipe, and rolled himself a small cigar of an inferior brand. Around was the Steppe. No one saw, no one knew of the peasant's compassion. The prince shook hands with him, turned sharply on his heel and went home.

The cold, clear, glassy water in the park lake was blue and limpid, for it was still too early for it to freeze all over. The sun was now sinking towards the west in an ocean of ruddy gold and amethyst.

Prince Prozorovsky entered his study, sat down at the desk and drew out a drawer full of letters. No! he could not take all his life away with him: He laid the drawer on the desk, then went into the drawing-room. A jug of milk and some bread stood on an album-table. The Prince lighted the fire, burnt some papers, and stood by the mantelpiece drinking his milk and eating the bread, for he had grown hungry during the day.... The milk was sour, the bread stale.

Already the room was filling with the dim shadows of evening, a purplish mist hung outside; the fire burnt with a bright yellow flame.

Heavy footsteps echoed through the silence of the corridor, and Ivan Koloturov appeared in the doorway. Koloturov! As young lads they had played together, Ivan had developed into a sober, sensible, thrifty, and industrious peasant. Standing in the middle of the room, the President silently handed the Prince his paper it had taken him a whole hour to type it out.

On the sheet was typed To the Barin Prozorovsky. The Bielokonsky Committee of the Poor order you to withdraw from the Soviet Estate of Bielokonsky and from the district precincts. President Koloturov.

Very well, said the Prince quietly; I will go this evening.

You will take no horse.

I will go on foot.

As you like, Koloturov replied. You will take nothing with you. He turned round, stood a moment with his back to the Prince, then went out of the room.

At that instant, a clock struck three quarters of the hour. It was the work of Kuvaldin, the eighteenth century master. It had been in the Moscow Kremlin and had afterwards travelled through the Caucasus with the Vadkovsky Princes. How many times had its ticking sounded during the course of those centuries.

Prozorovsky sat down by the window and looked out at the neglected park. He remained there for about an hour, leaning his arms on the marble sill, thinking, remembering. His reflections were interrupted by Koloturov. The peasant came in silently with two of his men and passed through into the office. They endeavoured silently to lift a writing-table. Something cracked.

The Prince rose and put on his big grey overcoat, a felt hat, and went out. He walked through the rustling gold-green foliage of the park, passed close by some stables and a distillery, descended into a dell, came up on its opposite side. Then, feeling tired, he decided to walk slowly walk twenty miles on foot for the first time in his

## Tales of the Wilderness

life. After all, how simple the whole thing was ... it was only terrible in its simplicity.

The sun had already sunk beneath the horizon. The last ravens had flown. An autumn hush over-hung the Steppe. He walked on briskly through the wide, windy, open space, walking for the first time he knew not whither, nor wherefore. He carried nothing, he possessed nothing. The night was silent, dark, autumnal, and frosty.

He walked on briskly for eight miles, heedless of everything around, then he stopped a moment to tie his shoe lace. Suddenly he felt an overwhelming weariness and his legs began to ache; he had covered nearly forty miles during the day.

In front of him lay the village of Makhmytka; he had often ridden there in his youth on secret visits to a soldier's wife; but now he would not go to her; no, not for anything in the world! The village lay pressed to the earth and was ornamented with numerous stacks which smelt of straw and dung. On its outskirts the Prince was met by a pack of baying dogs, who flitted over the ground like dark, ghostly shadows as they leapt round him.

At the first cabin he tapped at the little window, dimly lighted within by some smouldering splinters.

Who is there? came the tardy response.

Let me in for the night, good people, called the Prince.

Who is it?

A traveller.

Well, just a minute, came the grudging answer.

A bare-footed peasant in red drawers came out holding a lighted splinter over his head and looking round.

Ah! he exclaimed, it is you, Prince! So you were too wise to stay, were you? Well, come in.

An immense quantity of straw was spread over the floor. A cricket was chirruping, and there was a smell of soot and dung.

Lay yourself down, Barin, and God bless you!

The peasant climbed on to the stove and sighed. His old wife began to mutter something, the man grumbled, then said to the Prince:

Barin, you can have your sleep, only get up in the morning and leave before daylight, so that none will see you. You know yourself these are troubled times, there is no gainsaying it. You are a gentleman, Barin, and gentlemen have got to be done away with. The old woman will wake you.... Sleep now.

Prozorovsky lay down without undressing, put his cape under his head and at once caught a cockroach on his neck! Some young pigs grunted in a corner. The hut was swarming with vermin, blackened by smoke and filled with stench. Here, where men, calves and pigs herded all together, the Prince lay on his straw, tossing about and scratching. He thought of how, some centuries hence, people would be writing of this age with love, compassion, and tenderness. It would be thought of as an epoch of the most sublime and beautiful manifestation of the human spirit.

## Tales of the Wilderness

A little pig came up, sniffed all round him, then trotted away again. A low, bright star peeped in through the window. How infinite the world seemed!

He did not notice when he fell asleep. The old woman woke him at daybreak and led him through the backyard. The dawn was bright and cold, and the grass was covered with a light frost. He walked along briskly, swinging his stick, the collar of his overcoat turned up. The sky was marvellously deep and blue.

At the station the Prince squeezed himself into a warm place on the train, amongst other passengers carrying little sacks and bags of flour. Thus, pressed against the sides of a truck, his clothes bedaubed with white flour, he journeyed off to Moscow.

Prince Prozorovsky had left at evening. Immediately after, furniture was pulled about and re-arranged, the veneer was chipped off the desk. The clock was about to be transferred to the office, but some one noticed that it had only one hand. None of the men realised that Kuvaldin's old clocks were necessarily one-handed, and moved every five minutes simply because the minutes were not counted singly in those days. Somebody suggested that the clock could be removed from its case.

Take the clock out of the box, Ivan Koloturov ordered. Tell the joiners to put some shelves in it, it will do as a cupboard for the office.... Now then, don't stamp, don't stamp!

That night an old woman came running in. There was a great turmoil in the village: a girl had been abused no one knew by whom, whether by the villagers themselves or the people who had come from Moscow for flour; the old woman began to accuse the Committee men. She stood by the window and reviled them at the top of her voice. Ivan Koloturov drove her away with a blow on the neck, and she went off wailing bitterly.

It was pitch-dark. The house was quiet. Milkmaids outside were singing boisterously. Ivan went into the study, sat down on the sofa, felt its softness, found a forgotten electric lamp and played with it, flashing its light on the walls as he passed through. He noticed the clock on the floor of the drawing-room and began to think what he would do with it, then he picked it up and threw it into the water-closet. A band of his men had broken their way into the other end of the house, and some one was thumping on the piano; Ivan Koloturov would have liked to have driven them away, to prevent them from doing damage, but he dared not. He suddenly felt sorry for himself and his old wife and he wanted to go home to his stove.

A bell clanged supper! Ivan quietly stole to the wine-cellar, filled up his jug, and drank, then hurriedly locked the cellar door.

On the way home he fell down in the park; he lay there a long time, trying to lift himself, wanting all the while to say something and to explain but he fell asleep.

The dark, dismal autumn night enfolded the empty, frozen, desolate Steppe.

## DEATH

I

It seemed as though the golden days of St. Martin's summer had come to stay.

The sun shone without warmth in the vast blue expanse of sky, across which swept the gabbling cranes on their annual flight southward. A hoar-frost lay in the shadow of the houses. The air was crisp and sapphire, the cold invigorating, a brooding stillness wrapped the world.

## Tales of the Wilderness

The vine-wreathed columns on the terrace, the maple avenue and the ground beneath, all glowed under a purple pall of fallen leaves. The lake shone blue and smooth as a mirror, reflecting in its shining surface the white landing-stage and its boat, the swans and the statues. The fruit was already plucked in the garden and the leaves were falling. What a foolish wanton waste this stripping of the trees after summer seemed!

In days such as these, the mind grows at once alert and calm. It dwells peacefully on the past and the future. The individual feels impelled by a kind of languor just to walk over the fallen leaves, to look in the gardens for unnoticed, forgotten apples, and to listen to the cries of the cranes flying south.

### II

Ippolyte Ippolytovich was a hundred years old less three months and some days. He had been a student in the Moscow University with Lermontov, and they had been drawn together in friendship through their mutual admiration of Byron. In the sixties, he was then close to his fiftieth birthday he constantly conferred with the Emperor Alexander on liberative reforms, and pored over Pisarev's writings in his own home.

It was only by the huge, skeleton frame over which stretched the parchment skin, that it could be seen he had once been a tall, big, broad-shouldered man; his large face was covered with yellowish-white hair that crept from the nose, the cheek-bones, the forehead and the ears, while the skull was completely bald; the eyes were white and discoloured; the hands and legs shrunken, and seemed as though emaciated by nature's own design.

There was a smell of wax in his room, and that peculiar fusty odour that pervades every old nobleman's home. It was a large, bare apartment containing only a massive mahogany writing-table, covered with a faded green cloth and bestrewn with a quantity of old-fashioned ornaments; there was also an armchair and a sofa.

The moulded ceiling, the greenish-white marbled walls, the dragon fire-place, the inlaid flooring of speckled birch, the window panes, rounded at the tops, curtainless and with frequent intersecting of their framework, all, had become tarnished and lustreless, covered over with all the colours of the rainbow. Through the windows streamed the mellow golden rays of the autumn sun, resting on the table, a part of the sofa, and on the floor.

For many years the old man had ceased to sleep at night so as to sit up by day. It might truly be said that he slept almost the entire twenty-four hours, and also that he sat up during the whole of that time! He was always slumbering, lying with half-open, discoloured eyes on a large sofa tapestried in pig-skin of English make, and covered with a bear-skin rug. He lay there day and night, his right arm flung back behind his head. Whenever, by day or night, he was called by his name Ippolyte Ippolytovich, he would remain silent a moment collecting his wits, then answer:

Eh?

He had no thoughts. All that took place round him, all that he had gone through in life, was meaningless to him now. It was all outlived, and he had nothing to think about. Neither had he any feelings, for all his organs of receptivity had grown dulled.

At night mice could be heard; while through the empty, columned hall out of which his room opened, rats scurried, flopping about and tumbling down from the armchairs and tables. But the old man did not hear them.

### III

Vasilisa Vasena came every morning at seven o'clock; she was a country-woman of about thirty seven, strong, healthy, red-faced, reminiscent of a July day in her floridness and vigorous health.

## Tales of the Wilderness

She used to say quietly: Good morning to you, Ippolyte Ippolytovich.

And he would give a base Eh? in a voice like a worn-out gramophone record.

Vasena promptly began washing him with a sponge, then fed him with manna-gruel. The old man sat bent up on the sofa, his hands resting on his knees. He ate slowly from a spoon. They were silent, his eyes gazing inwardly, seeing nothing. Sunbeams stole in through the window and glistened on his yellowish hair.

Your good son, Ilya Ippolytovich, has come, Vasena said.

Eh?

Ippolyte Ippolytovich had married at about the age of forty; of his three sons only Ilya was living. The old man called his son to memory, pictured him in his mind, but felt neither joy nor interest felt nothing!

Dimly, somewhere far away in the dark recesses of his memory, lurked a glimmering, wavering image of his son; at first he saw him as an infant, then as a boy, finally a youth. He recollected that now already he too was almost an old man. It came to him that once, long ago, this image was necessary and very dear to him, that afterwards he had lost sight of it, and that now it had become meaningless to him.

Dully, through inertia, the old man inquired: He has come, you say?

Yes, came in the night, alone. He is resting now.

Eh? He has come to have a look at me before I die.

Vasena promptly answered: Lord! you are not so young as to...

They were silent. The old man lay back on the sofa and slept.

Ippolyte Ippolytovich, you must take your walk!

Eh?

It was a St. Martin's Summer. Over the scattered blood-red vine leaves on the terrace, which was deluged in mellow autumnal sunshine, the bent-up old man walked, leaning heavily on a bamboo cane, and supported by the sturdy Vasena. He had a skull-cap pulled down low over his forehead, and wore a long, black overcoat.

## IV

Sometimes the old man relapsed into a state of coma, lasting several hours. Then life seemed to have ebbed from him entirely. A clay-like pallor over-spread his face, he had the lips and open, glassy eyes of a corpse, and he scarcely breathed. Then they sent post-haste for the doctor, who sprinkled him with camphor, gave him oxygen and produced artificial respiration. The old man slowly came to, rolling his eyes.

Another minute and it would have been death, the doctor would say in a deep, grave voice.

When the old man had at length recovered, Vasena used to say to him: Lord! We were so frightened, we were so frightened! ... We thought you were quite gone. Yes, we did. For you know, you are not so young as to....

## Tales of the Wilderness

Ippolyte Ippolytovich was silent and indifferent, only at moments, half-closing and screwing up his eyes, and straightening out his lips, he laughed:

He-he! He-he! Then added, slyly: I am dying, you say? He-he! He-he!

V

Ilya Ippolytovich walked through the empty rooms of the dying house. How dusty and mouldy it seemed! The sun came through the tarnished window-panes and the specks of dust looked golden in its radiant light. He entered the room where he had passed his childhood. Dust lay everywhere, on the window-sills, on the floor, and on the furniture. Here and there fresh boot-prints were visible. A thin portmanteau not belonging to the house and pasted over with many labels lay on a table. A hard, icy stillness pervaded the entire place.

Ilya Ippolytovich was stout like his father, but he still walked erect. His hair was already thinning and growing grey over the temples, but his face was clean-shaven, like a youth's. His lips were wrinkled and he had large, grey, weary eyes.

He felt gloomy and unhappy, because his father's days were numbered; and he brooded miserably over the awkwardness of approaching death, wondering how one should behave towards a man who was definitely doomed. To and fro, from corner to corner, he walked, with restless, springy steps.

He met his father on the terrace.

Hallo, father! he said briskly, with an intentional show of carelessness.

The old man looked at him blindly, not recognising his son at first. But afterwards he smiled, went up the steps, and gave his cheek to be kissed. It smelt of wax.

Eh? said the old man.

Ilya kissed him, laughed hilariously, and slapped him lightly on the shoulder: It is a long time since we met, father. How are you?

His father looked at him from beneath his cap, gave a feeble smile, then said after a pause: Eh?

Vasena answered for him: You may well ask how he is doing, Ilya Ippolytovich! Why, we are fearing the worst every day.

Ilya threw her a reproachful glance and said loudly: It is nonsense, father! You have still a hundred years to live! You are tired, let us sit down here and have a talk together.

They sat down on the marble steps of the terrace. Silence. No words came to Ilya. Try as he might, he could not think what to say.

Well, I am still painting pictures, he tried at last; I am preparing to go abroad.

The old man did not hear him; he looked at his son without seeing or understanding, plunged in his own reflections.

You have come to look at me? You think I shall die soon? he asked suddenly.

## Tales of the Wilderness

Ilya Ippolytovich grew very pale and muttered confusedly: What are you saying, father? What do you mean?

But his father no longer heard. He had fallen back in his chair, his eyes half-closed and glassy, his face utterly expressionless. He was asleep.

### VI

The sun was shining, the sky was blue; in the limpid spaces above the earth there was a flood of crystal light.

Ilya Ippolytovich strolled through the park and thought of his father. The old man had lived a full, rich, and magnificent life. It had possessed so much that was good, bright and necessary. Now death! Nothing would remain. Nothing! And this nothing was terrible to Ilya Ippolytovich.

Does not living man recognize life, the world, the sun, all that is around and within him, through himself? he reflected. A man dies, and the world dies for him. Thenceforward he feels and recognises nothing. Nothing! Then what is the use of living, developing, working, when in the end there will be nothing?... Was there no great wisdom in his father's hundred years? Nor in his fatherhood?

A crane was crying somewhere overhead. The sound came from a scarcely visible dark arrow in the cloudless sky, which flew south. Red, frost-covered leaves were rustling underfoot. Ilya's face was pale, the wrinkles round his lips made him seem tired and feeble. He had spent his whole life alone, in the solitude of a cold studio, living arduously among pictures, for the sake of pictures. To what end?

### VII

Ippolyte Ippolytovich sat in the large, bare dining-room eating chicken cutlets and broth. A napkin was tied round his neck as if he were a child. Vasena fed him from a tea-spoon, and afterwards led him into his study. The old man lay down on a sofa, put his hand behind his head and fell asleep, his eyes half-open.

Ilya went to him in the study. He again made a pretence of being cheerful, but his tired eyes betrayed grief, and behind his clean-shaven face, his grey English coat, and yellow boots, somehow one felt there was a great shaken and puzzled soul suffering, yet seeking to conceal its anguish.

He sat down at his father's feet.

For a long time the old man searched his face with his eyes, then in a scraping, worn-out piping voice, said:  
Eh?

It is so long since we met, father, I am longing to have a chat with you! Somehow I have no one dearer to me than you! Absolutely no one! How are you, sir?

The old man gazed before him with bleary eyes. He did not seem to have heard. But suddenly screwing up his eyes, straightening out his lips and opening his empty jaws, he laughed:

He-he! he-he! he laughed, and said jovially: I am dying soon. He-he! he-he!

However, Ilya no longer felt as embarrassed as on that first occasion on the terrace. In a hasty undertone, almost under his breath, he asked:

But aren't you afraid?



## Tales of the Wilderness

No! He—he!

Don't you believe in God?

No! He—he!

They were silent for a long time after that. Then the old man raised himself on his elbows with a sly grin.

You see, he said, when a man is worn out ... sleep is the best thing for him ... that is so with dying ... one wants to die.... Understand? When a man is worn out....

He was silent for a moment, then grinned and repeated:

He—he! He—he! Understand?

Ilya gave his father a long look, standing there motionless, with wide-open eyes, feeling a thrill of utter horror.

But the old man was already slumbering.

### VIII

Day faded. The blue autumnal twilight spread over the earth and peeped in through the windows. A purple mist filled the room with vague, spectral shadows. Outside was a white frost. A silvery moon triumphantly rode the clear cold over-arching sky.

Ippolyte Ippolytovich lay upon his sofa. He felt nothing. The space occupied by his body resembled only a great, dark, hollow bin in which there was nothing! Close by, a rat flopped across the floor, but the old man did not hear. A teasing autumnal fly settled on his eyebrow, he did not wink. From the withered toes to the withered legs, to the hips, stomach, chest, and heart, passed a faint, agreeable, scarcely noticeable numbness.

It was evening now and the room was dark; the mist gathered thick and threatening through the windows. Outside in the crisp, frosty moonlight, it was bright. The old man's face all over-grown with white hair and his bald skull, had a death-like look.

Vasena entered in her calm yet vigorous manner. Her broad hips and deep bosom were only loosely covered by a red jacket.

Ippolyte Ippolytovich, it is time for your meal, she called in a matter of fact tone.

But he did not reply, nor utter his usual Eh?

They sent at once for the doctor, who felt his pulse, pressed a glass to his lips, then said in a low, solemn tone:

He is dead.

Vasena, standing by the door, and somewhat resembling a wild animal, answered calmly:

Well he wasn't so young as to.... Haven't we all got to die! What is it to him now? He and his had everything in their day! Dear Lord, they had everything!

### IX

### DEATH

## Tales of the Wilderness

Low, downy cloudlets drifted over the sky in the early hours of the morning. Dark, lowering masses followed in their wake. The snow fell in large, cold, soft, feather-like flakes.

St. Martin's Summer was past, to be succeeded by the advent of another earthly joy the first white covering of snow, when it is so delicious to follow the fresh footprints of the beasts, a rifle in hand.

### THE HEIRS

I

Legend says that from the Sokolovaya Mountain called the Mountain of Falcons, came Stenka Razin. It is written in books that from thence came also Emelian Pugachev.

The Sokolovaya Mountain towers high above the Volga and the plains, making a dark, precipitous descent to the pirate river below.

Across the Volga lies an ancient town. By the Glebychev Ravine, close to the old Cathedral guarded by one of Pugachev's guns, stands a mansion with a facade of ochre-coloured-columns. In olden days, when it was the residence of the princely Rastorovs' balls were held there, but decay had set in during the last twenty years, and Kseniya Davydovna the mistress old, ill, a spinster, was drawing to the end of her days.

She died in October, 1917, and now the tumbling, plundered house was occupied by the heirs.

They had been scattered over the face of Russia, had spent their lives in Petersburg, Moscow and Paris; for twenty years the house had stood vacant and moribund. Then the Revolution came! The instinctive fury of the masses burst forth and the remnants of the Rastorov family gathered in their old nest to be hidden from the Revolution and famine.

Snow-storms galloping snowy chargers howled over the Steppe, the Volga, and the town. Elemental, all-devastating, as in the days of Stenka Razin thundered the Revolution.

The rooms in the ancient mansion were damp, dark and chilly. The old cathedral could be seen from the window, and down below lay the Volga, seven miles wide, wrapt in a dazzling sheet of snow, its steamers moored to their wharves.

The family lived as a community at first, but their communism was nominal, for each barricaded and entrenched himself in his own room, with his own pot and samovar. They lived tedious, mean, malignant, worthless lives, execrating existence and the Revolution; they lived utterly apart from the turmoil that now replaced the placid even flow of the old regime: they were outside current events, and their thoughts for ever turned back to the past, awaiting its return.

General Kirill Lvovich awoke at seven o'clock. Everything was crowded closely together in the room, which was bedroom, drawing-room and dining-room combined. The blue dusk of morning was visible through the heavy blinds of the low window. The general put on his tasselled Bukhara dressing-gown and went outside, then returned coughing hoarsely.

Anna, he snarled, ask your kinsfolk which of them left the place in such a state. Don't they know we have no servants? It is your turn to set the samovar to-day. Are there no cigarette boxes? he walked about the room, his hands behind his back, diamond rings glittering on his fingers.

## Tales of the Wilderness

And it is your turn to go for the rations, retorted Anna Andreevna.

That will do, I know it. There are four families living in the house and they cannot organise themselves so as to go in turn for the rations. Give me a sheet of paper and some ink.

The general sat down at the table and wrote out a notice:

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have no servants;  
We must see to things ourselves. We can't  
all perch like eagles, therefore,  
I beg you to be more careful.  
Kirill L. Lezhner.

Kirill Lvovich was not one of the heirs, it was his wife who came of the Rastorov family, and he had merely accompanied her to the ancestral mansion. Lvovich took his notice and hung it on the lavatory door. Then again he paced the floor, his jewels sparkling brilliantly.

Why the devil do Sergius and his family occupy three rooms, and we only one? he grumbled. I shall leave this den. They don't behave like relatives! Are there no cigarettes?

Anna Andreevna, a quiet, weary, feeble woman, replied tonelessly: You know there are none. But I will look for some butt-ends in a moment. Lina sometimes throws away the unused cigarette wraps.

What bourgeois they are throwing away fag-ends and keeping servants! her husband complained.

The dark twining corridor was strewn with rubbish, for no one had the will or wish to keep it neat. Anna Andreevna rummaged by the stove of Sergius Andreevich, Lina's husband, looking among the papers and sweepings. She peered into the stove and discovered that Leontyevna, the maid a one-eyed Cyclop had filled it with birch-wood, whereas it had been agreed that the rotting timber from the summer-house should be used as fuel first.

After enjoying a cigarette of his own tobacco, the general went out to the courtyard for firewood, returning with a bundle of sticks from the summer-house. The samovar was now ready and he sat down to his tea, leisurely drinking glass after glass, while Anna Andreevna heated her stove in the corridor.

A dim, wintry dawn was gradually breaking. The family of Sergius the former head of a ministerial department could be heard rousing themselves behind the wall.

You have had sufficient albumen; take hydrates now, rose Lina's voice, calling to her children.

Potatoes?

Yes.

And fat?

You have had enough fat.

The general smiled craftily, then muttered grumpily:

## Tales of the Wilderness

That is not eating, that is scientific alimentation. He cut himself a piece of bacon, ate it with some white bread, and drank more tea with sweet root and candied melon.

Gradually the occupants of the house roused themselves and half-dressed, sleepy carrying their towels, empty samovars, and tooth brushes they began to pass along the corridor in front of the general's open door.

Kirill Lvovich eyed them maliciously as he sat drinking his tea and inwardly cursed them all.

The Cyclop, Leontyevna, Sergius Andreevich's servant, tramped in heavily with her man's boots from the Labour Exchange; her solitary eye peered searchingly into Anna Andreevna's stove.

I'll see she's not deceiving us over the firewood, she shouted aggressively: Oh, what a store she's got!

But you have used the birch-wood, the general hit back from his room.

The Cyclop flew into a rage and slapped her thighs. One of the periodic scenes ensued.

What? Leontyevna cried, I am not trusted, I am being spied on! Lina Fedorovna, I am going to complain to the Exchange.

Lina Fedorovna joined in from behind her door.

She isn't trusted, she is being spied on, she echoed, there must be spies in this house! And they call themselves intellectual people!

But you took the birch-wood! protested Lvovich.

And they call themselves intellectual! screamed Lina.

The general came out into the passage and said severely:

It is not for *us* to judge, Lina Fedorovna. We are not the heirs here. But it seems strange to me that Sergius should occupy three rooms, and Anna only one yes, very strange indeed.

The quarrel became more violent. Satisfied, the general put on his overcoat and went out to take his place in the ration queue. Lina ran to her husband; he went to get an explanation of the scene, but Lvovich was not to be found, however; he remonstrated with his sister, Anna Andreevna.

This spying is impossible, it must stop, he insisted.

But, can't you understand, it all began with searching for the butt-end of a cigarette? Anna pleaded in deep distress.

Lina had gone upstairs and was telling the whole story to Ekaterina. Anna appealed to her younger brother, Constantine, a Lyceum student, but he told her he was busy, immediately sitting down at his desk to write. Soon after, however, he rose and went to Sergius.

Busy? he asked.

What? Yes, I am busy.

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Have a smoke.

They began to smoke an inferior brand of tobacco known as Kepsten. They were silent.

Will you have a game of chess? Constantine asked after a while.

Yes...But no, I think not, Sergius replied.

Just one game?

Just one? Well, only one!

They sat down and played chess. Constantine was dressed in a rumpled Lyceum uniform; he wore rings on his fingers, like the general and Sergius, and an antique gold chain hung round his neck.

Being in constant dread of requisitioners and robbers they had divided all the jewellery between them, and wore it for safety.

The brothers played one game, then a second, a fourth, a sixth smoking and quarrelling, disagreeing over the moves and trying to re-arrange them. The general returned from the ration queue in the market and came along the passage. He peeped in at the two players through the open door, and after some hesitation decided to enter.

Greenhorns, you don't know how to play! he said.

What do you mean? Don't know how to play?

Now, now, don't fly into a rage. If I am wrong excuse an old man ... I sent Kirka for the newspaper, I gave him a twenty copeck piece for a tip.

I am not in a rage!

Very well, then that's all right. But throw over your chess. Let us play a game of chance.

They sat down and played it for the entire day, only interrupting the game to go to their rooms for dinner.

Whenever Sergius had to pay a fine he would say:

Anyhow, Kirill Lvovich, you have an objectionable manner.

Now, now, greenhorn! the general would reply.

They had not a penny between them. Katerina Andreevna had been appointed guardian of their possessions. The men refused to recognise her authority and called it merely a femocracy. Only Sergius still had some capital, the proceeds of an estate he had sold before the Revolution. Therefore he could well afford to keep a servant.

Upstairs with Katerina were two girls who had thrown up their careers on principle the one her college studies, the other her Conservatoire courses. They kept up a desultory conversation while helping to clean potatoes. Presently Anna and Lina joined them, and they all went down to the storeroom and began rummaging through their grandparents' old wardrobes. They turned over a variety of crinolines, farthingales, bustles and wigs, laying on one side the articles of silver, bronze and porcelain for the Tartars were coming after dinner. The storeroom smelt of rats. Packed along its walls were boxes, coffers, trunks, and a huge pair of rusty scales.

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They all gathered together on the arrival of the Tartars, who greeted them with handshakes. The general snorted. One of the Tartars, an old man wearing new goloshes over felt boots, spoke to Katerina:

How d'ye do, Barina?

The general leisurely swung one leg over the other, and said stiffly:

Be good enough to state your price.

The two Tartars looked over the old-fashioned articles, criticised them, none too well, and fixed the most ridiculous prices. The general burst out laughing and tried to be witty. Katerina grew angrier and angrier, until at last she could no longer contain herself:

Kirill Lvovich, she shouted, you are impossible! Very well, came the infuriated reply; I am not one of the heirs, I can go!

They calmed him, however, and then began bargaining with the Tartars, who slung the old-fashioned articles carelessly over their arms laces worked by serfs, antique, hand made candle-sticks, a field-glass and an acetylene lamp.

The twilight spread gently over the town, and through its dusky, star-spangled veil, loomed the old Cathedral reminiscent of Stenka Razin; now and then came the chime of its deep-toned bells.

The Tartars at length succeeding in striking a bargain, rolled the goods up into neat little packs with their customary promptitude, paid out Kerensky notes from their bulging purses and left.

Then the heirs divided the proceeds. They were sitting in the drawing-room. Blinds covered the low windows; some portraits hung on the walls, a chandelier was shrouded in a muslin wrapper that had not been changed for years. A yellow oaken piano was covered with dust, and the furniture's velvet covering was tarnished and threadbare. The house struck cold.

The heirs were dressed fantastically; the general in a dressing-gown with gold embroideries and tassels; Sergius wore a black hooded coat; Lina a warm hare-skin jacket, and Katerina, the eldest the moustached guardian a man's thick overcoat, a petticoat and felt shoes. On all were jewels rings, ear-rings, bracelets and necklaces.

Sergius remarked ungallantly:

This is a trying time for us all, and I propose that we divide the proceeds among us according to the number of consumers.

I am not one of the heirs, the general hastily interposed.

I don't share your socialistic views. Constantine informed Sergius with a cold smile; I think they should be divided according to the number of heirs.

A heated argument followed, above which rang the Cathedral bells. At last, with great difficulty, they came to an agreement. Then Katerina brought in the samovar. All fetched their own bread and sweet roots and drank the tea, thankful not to have to prepare it for themselves.

Suddenly with unexpected sadness and, therefore, unusually well the general began to speak:

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When I a lieutenant–bridegroom met our Aunt Kseniya for the first time, she was wearing that bustle that you sold just now. Ah, will things ever be the same again? If I were told the Bolshevik tyranny would endure for another year, I should shoot myself! For, good Lord, what I suffer! How my heart is wrung! And I am an old man.... Life is simply not worth living.

All burst into tears; the general wept as old men weep, the moustached Katerina cried in a sobbing bass. Neither could Anna Andreevna, nor the two girls who stood clasping each other in the corner, refrain from shedding tears, the girls for their youth and the sparkling joys of their maidenhood of which they had been deprived.

I would shoot them all if I could! Katerina declared.

Then Sergius' children, Kira and Lira, came in and Lina told them they might take some albumen. Kira put butter on his.

The moon rose.... The stars shone brilliantly. The snow was dead–white. The river Volga was deserted. It was dark and still by the old Cathedral. The frost was hard and crisp, crackling underfoot. The two young girls, Kseniya and Lena, with Sergius and the general, were returning to the mansion to fetch their handsleights and toboggan down the slope to the river.

Constantine had gone into town, to a club of cocaine–eaters, to drug himself, utter vulgar platitudes, and kiss the hands of loose women. Leontyevna, the Cyclop maid from the Exchange, lay down on a bench in the kitchen to rest from the day's work, said her prayers, and fell into a sound sleep.

The general stood on the door–steps. Sergius drew up the sleighs, and they took their seats three abreast Kseniya, Elena and himself, and whirled along over the crackling snow, down to the ice–covered Volga. The sleighs flew wildly down the slope, and in this impetuous flight, in the sprinkling and crackling snow, and bitter, numbing frost, Kseniya dreamed of a wondrous bliss: she felt a desire to embrace the world! Life suddenly seemed so joyous.

The frost was harsh, cruel and penetrating. On regaining the house the general bristled up like a sparrow he was frozen and called out from the door–step:

Sergius! There is a frost to–day that will certainly burst the water–pipes. We will have to place a guard for the night.

Perhaps Sergius, and even the old man, had had a glimpse of wonderful happiness in the sleigh's swift flight over the snow. The former called back:

Never mind! and again whirled wildly down from the old Cathedral to the Volga, where the boats and steamers plied amid the deep–blue, massive ice–floes, so sparkling and luminous in their snowy raiment.

But the general had now worked himself up to a state of great excitement. He rushed indoors and roused everyone:

I tell you, it will freeze and the pipes will burst unless you let the water run a little. There are 27 degrees of frost!

But the tap is in the kitchen and Leontyevna is sleeping there, objected Lina.

Well, waken her!

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Impossible!

Damn rot! snarled the general and went into the kitchen and shook Leontyevna, explaining to her about the pipes.

I will go to the Exchange and complain! Not even letting one rest!...Stealing in to an undressed woman!...

Lina jabbered her words after her like a parrot. Sergius ran in.

Leave off, please, he begged. It is I who am responsible. Let Leontyevna sleep.

Certainly, I am not one of the heirs, the general retorted smoothly.

The night and the frost swept over the Volga, the Steppe, and Saratov. The general was unable to sleep. Kseniya and Lena were crying in the attic. Constantine arrived home late, and noiselessly crept in to Leontyevna.

Bluish patches of moonlight fell in through the windows.

The water pipes froze in the night and burst.

## THE CROSSWAYS

Forest, thickets, marshes, fields, a tranquil sky and the crossways! The sky is overcast at times with dove-coloured clouds; the forest now gabbles, now groans in the glittering summer sunshine.

The crossways creep and crawl like a winding thread, without beginning and without end. Sometimes their stretch tires and vexes one wants to go by a shorter route and turns aside, goes astray, comes back to the former way. Two wheel-tracks, ripple grass, a foot-path and around them, besides sky or rye or snow or trees, are the crossways, without beginning or end or limit. And over them pass the peasants singing their low toned songs. At times these are sorrowful, as endless as the crossways themselves: Russia was borne in these songs, born with them, from them.

Our ways lie through the crossways as they ever have done, and ever will. All Russia is in the crossways amid the fields, thickets marshes, and forests.

But there were also those Others who wanted to march over the bog-ways, who planned to throw Russia on to her haunches, to press on through the marshlands, make main-roads straight as rules, and barricade themselves behind granite and steel, forgetful of Russia's peasant cottages. And on they marched!

Sometimes the main-road is joined by the crossways, and from them to the main-road and over it passes the long vaunted Rising, the people's tumult, to sweep away the Unnecessary, then vanish back again into the crossways.

Near the main-road lies the railway. By turning aside from it, walking through a field, fording a river, penetrating first through a dark aspen grove, then through a red pine belt, skirting some ravines, threading a way across a village, trudging wearily through dried-up river-beds and on through a marsh, the village of Pochinki is reached, surrounded by forest.

In the village were three cottages, their backs to the forest; their rugged noses seemed to scowl from beneath the pine-trees, and their dim, tear-dribbling window-eyes looked wolfish. Their grey timbers lay on them like wrinkles, their reddish-yellow thatch, like bobbed hair, hung to the ground. Behind them was the forest; in front,



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pasture, thickets, forest again, and sky. The neighbouring crossways coiled round them in a ring, then narrowed away into the forest.

In all three cottages dwelt Kononovs: they were not kinsfolk, though they bore that name, closer linked through their common life than kinsmen ever were. Kononov–Yonov, the One–Eyed, was the village elder: he no longer remembered his grandfather's name, but knew the olden times well, and remembered how his great–grandfathers and his great–great–grandfathers had lived and how it was good for men to live.

From the oldest to the youngest they toiled with all their strength from spring to autumn, from autumn to spring, and from sunrise to sundown, growing grey like their hen–coops from smoke, scorching in the heat and steaming sweat like boiling tar.

The kinsfolk of Yonov the One–eyed made tar besides tilling the land, while Yonov himself kept bee–hives in the forest. The sisters Yonov barked lime–trees and made bast shoes. It was a hard, stern life, with its smoke, heat, frosts, and languour; but they loved it profoundly.

The Kononovs lived alone in friendship with the woods, the fields, and the sky; yet ever engaged in stubborn struggle against them. They had to remember the rise and set of the sun, the nights and the dung–mounds. They had to look into putrid corners, watch for cold blasts from the north, and give ear to the rumbling and gabbling of the forest.

They knew:

With January, mid–winter time,  
Starts the year its frosty prime,  
Blows wild the wind e'er yet'tis still,  
Crackles the ice in the frozen rill;  
Epiphany betimes is past,  
Approaches now the Lenten Fast.

In February there's a breath of heat,  
Summer and winter at Candlemas meet.  
In April the year grows moist and warm the air,  
The old folks' lives without their doors bids fair;  
The woodcock then comes flying from the sea,  
Brings back the Spring from its captivity.

Under a showery sky,  
Bloom wide the fields of rye,  
Ever blue and chill  
May will the granaries fill.

It was necessary to work stubbornly, sternly, in harmony with the earth, to fight hand–to–hand with the forest, the axe, the plough and the scythe. They had learnt to keep their eyes wide open, for each had to hold his own against the wood–spirit, the rumbling forest, famine, and the marshes. They had learnt to know their Mother–Earth by the birds, sky, wind, and stars, like those men of whom Yonov the One–Eyed told them those who of old wended their way to Chuvsh tribes and the Murman Forest.

All the Kononovs were built alike, strong, rugged, with short legs and broad, heavy feet like juniper–roots, long backs, arms that hung down to their knees, shoulder–blades protruding as though made for harness, mossy green eyes that gazed with a slow stubborn look, and noses like earthen whistles.

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They lived with the rye, horses, cows, the sheep, the woods, and the grass. They knew that as the rye dropped seeds to the ground and reproduced in abundance so also bred beast and bird, counteracting death with birth. They knew too that to breed was also man's lot.

Ulyanka reached her seventeenth year, Ivan his eighteenth: they bowed to the winds and went to the altar.

Ivan Kononov did not think of death when he went to the war, for what was death when through it came birth? Were there not heat-waves and drought in summer? Did not the winter sweep the earth by blizzards? Yet in spring all began to pulsate again with life.

The War came: Ivan Kononov went without understanding, without reason what concern was it of Pochinki? He was dragged through towns, he pined in spittle-stained barracks; and then he was sent to the Carpathians. He fired. He fought hand-to-hand: he fled; he retreated forty versts a day, resting in the woods singing his peasant-songs with the soldiers and yearning for Pochinki. He found all spoke like Grandfather Yonov the One-Eyed; he learnt of the land in the olden time order, of the people's Rising. At its approach he went on furlough to Pochinki, met it there, and there remained.

The Rising came like happy tidings, like the cool breath of dawn, like a May-time shower:

Under a showery sky  
Bloom wide the fields of rye,  
Ever blue and chill  
May will the granaries fill.

Formerly there were the village constable, the district clerk, trumperies, requisitions, and taxations; for then it was the gentry who were the guardians. But now, Yonov the One-Eyed croaked exultantly:

Now it's ourselves! We ourselves! In our own way! In our own world! The land is ours! We are the masters: it is the Rising! *Our* Rising!

There were no storms that winter; it was cold and dark, and the wolf-packs were astir. One after another the inhabitants were stricken down with typhoid it was with typhoid that they paid for the Rising! Half the village succumbed and was borne on the peasants' sleighs to the churchyard.

By Candlemas, when winter and summer meet, all the provisions were exhausted, and the villagers drove to the station. But even that had changed. New people congregated there, some shouting, others hurrying to and fro with sacks. The villagers returned with nothing and sat down to their potatoes.

In the spring prayers were offered up for the dead and a religious procession paraded round the village, the outskirts of which were bestrewn with ashes. Then the villagers started to take tar and bast shoes to the station; they wanted to sell them, and with the proceeds buy ploughshares, harrows, scythes, sickles, and leather straps. But they never reached the station.

Their way led them through fields all lilac-coloured in the glowing sun: there they encountered an honest peasant dressed in a short fur jacket and a cap beneath which his look was calm and grave.

He told them there was nothing at the station, that the townsfolk themselves were running like mice; and he urged them to go to Poriechie, to give Silvester the blacksmith some tar for his ploughshares, and, if he had none, to make them some of his own hand-ploughshares; then to go and sow flax. The towns were dying out. The towns were no more! It was the people's Rising, and they had to live as in the olden days: there were no towns then, and there was no need for them.

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They turned back. To Poriechie for tar.... Silvester made them a hand-plough.... Grandfather Yonov the One Eyed stalked round the fields exhorting to sow: We have to live by ourselves! Now we ourselves are the Masters! Ourselves alone! It is the Rising!

They worked from dawn till sunset with all their strength, fastening their belts tight round their bodies to stifle the pangs of hunger.

The summer passed in heat-waves, thunder and lightning. The forest gabbled in the storms at night. Towards autumn it began to rustle, leafless, beneath the showers of rain. The rye, oats, millet, and buckwheat were carried into the corn-kilns and barns, and the fields lay stripped and bare.

The corn had been harvested; there was enough and to spare till the fallow crop was reaped. The air in the peasants' cottages was bedimmed by the smoke from the stoves; Grandfather Yonov the One-Eyed climbed on to his, to tell his grandchildren fairytales and to rest.

The nights grew dark and damp, the forest began to rumble, and wolves approached from the marshlands. A new couple had grown up, bowed to the winds and wedded; half the village had perished the previous winter, and it was necessary to breed. The people lived in their cabins together with the calves, the sheep, and the swine. They used splinters for lights, striking the light from flint.

Often at night starving people from the towns brought money, clothes, foot-ware, bundles of odds-and ends in short anything they could steal from the towns and exchange for flour. They rapped on the windows like thieves.

The Kononov women sat at their looms while the men went a-preying in the forest. And so they toiled on stubbornly, sternly, alone, fighting hand-to-hand with the night, with the forest and with the frost. The crossways to the forests became choked, and they made new ways to the marshlands, to the Seven Brothers, to the wastelands. Life was hard and stern. The peasants looked out upon the world from beneath their brows, as their cottages from beneath the pines; and they lived gladsomely, as they should.

They knew it was the Rising. And in the Rising there could be no falling back.

Forests, thickets, fields, a tranquil sky and crossways!... Sometimes the crossways joined the main-road that ran alongside the railway. Both led to the towns where dwelt Those Others who had yearned to march over the crossways, who had made the main-roads straight as rules. And to the towns the elemental Rising of the Crossways brought death.

There, lamenting the past, in terror before the people's Rising, all were employed in offices filling up papers. All for safety held official positions, all to a man busying themselves over papers, documents, cards, placards, and speeches until they were lost in a whirlwind of words.

The food of the towns was exhausted; the lights had gone out; there was neither fuel nor water. Dogs, cats, mice, all had disappeared even the nettles on the outskirts had been plucked by famished urchins as vegetable for soup. Into the cookhouses, whence cutlery had vanished, crowded old men in bowlers and bonneted old women, whose bony fingers clutched convulsively at plates of leavings.

Everywhere there were groups of miscreants selling mouldy bread at exorbitant prices. The dead in their thousands, over whom there was no time to carry out funeral rites, were borne away to the churches.

Famine, disease, and death swept the towns. The inhabitants grew savage in their craving for bread. They starved. They sat without light. They froze. They pulled down the hedges and wooden buildings to warm their dying hearths and their offices. The red-blood life deserted the towns; indeed it had never really existed in them; and

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there came a white–paper life that was death. When death means life there is no death, but the towns were still–born.

There were harrowing scenes in the spring, when, like incense at funeral–rites, the smoky wood–piles smouldered on the pillaged, ransacked, and bespattered streets with their broken windows, boarded–up doors, and defaced walls, consuming carrion and enveloping the town in a stinking and stifling vapour.

Men with soft–skinned hands still frequented restaurants, still wooed lascivious women, still sought to pillage the towns; they even plundered the very corpses, hoping to carry loot into the country, to barter it for the bread that had been gained by horny–handed labour. Thus might they postpone their deaths another month, thus might they still fill up papers, still go on wooing (legally) carnal women and await their heart's desire, the return of the decadent past. They were afraid to recognise that only one thing was left them, to rot in death to die that even the past they longed for was a way to death for them.

... Forests, thickets, fields, a tranquil sky....

Many dwelt in the towns amongst them a certain man, no different from the rest. He had no bread, and he too went into the country to bargain for flour in exchange for his gramophone. Producing all the necessary papers, permits, and licences, he proceeded to the railway, which was dying because it too was of the towns.

At the station there were thousands of others with permits to travel for bread, and because of those thousands only those without permits succeeded in boarding the train. This particular man fastened himself on the lower step of a carriage, under sacks that hung from the roof, travelling thus for some forty miles. Then he and his gramophone were thrown off, and for the first time in his life he tramped thirty miles on foot under the weight of a gramophone.

At the next station he climbed on to the roof of a carriage and travelled a hundred miles further. Then he was thrown off again, But there the main–road passed the railway; by turning aside from it, walking through a field, fording a river, making a way through the woods, skirting the ravines, trudging through river beds, and traversing the marshes he reached the village of Pochinki.

He arrived there with his gramophone at sundown. The red light of the sun was reflected on the windows, the women–folk were milking the cows: it was already autumn and the daylight faded rapidly. The man with the gramophone tapped at the window and Kononov Ivan lifted the shutter.

Look, comrade, I've a gramophone here, to exchange for flour ... a gramophone, a musical instrument, and records....

Throwing back his shoulders, Kononov–Ivan stood by the window then stooped, looked askance at the sunset, at the fields, at the musical instrument. He reflected a moment, then muttered absently:

Aint wanted.... Go to Poriechie.... and the shutter dropped.

A sombre sky in autumnal lights and the crossways.... Two wheel–tracks, ripple–grass, a foot–path. Sometimes the wanderer tired, that path seemed interminable, without beginning or ending. He turned aside, went astray, returned on his tracks evermore to the thickets, forests, marshes....