

# **To the Russian Soldier**

Leonid Andreyev



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SOLDIER, what hast thou been under Nicholas the Secone? Thou hast been a slave of the autocrat. Conscience, honor, love for the people, were beaten out of thee in merciless training by whip and stick.

"Kill thy father and thy mother if they raise their hands against me," commanded the autocrat, — and thou becamest a parricide.

"Kill thy brother and thy sister, thy dearest friend and everyone who raises a hand against me," commanded the autocrat, — and thou didst kill thy brother and thy dearest friend, and becamest like Cain, shedding the blood of thy kin.

When the gray coats appeared in the streets and the rifles and bayonets glittered — we knew what that meant: it was death stalking! It meant death to those innocent and hungry ones who thirsted for brighter life and raised their voices bravely against the tyrant. It meant death, destruction, peril, tears, and horror. Thou wast terrible, Soldier!

But thou wast brave in the field, Russian Soldier. . . . Thou wast a martyr, but thou wast never a traitor, nor a coward, Soldier!

The Russian people loved thee secretly for this and waited for thy awakening. . . . They called to thee: "Come to us, beloved brother! Come to thy people. The people are waiting for thee!"

Soldier, what hast thou been in the days of the Revolution?

Thou hast been our love, our happiness, our pride. We did not know as yet who thou wast. We were still in dread of the gray coats, we still mistrusted the dashing cossacks. And dost thou remember, Soldier, how the heart of the people leaped when the first blow of the cossack's sabre fell not on the head of his brother but on that of the policeman—executioner? Dost thou remember it?

But still we were not able to believe. Already our hearts were overcome with joy, happiness took our breath away, but still we did not believe. How is it possible to believe all at once in freedom?

Yet the soldiers are bringing it with them! They are coming, stalwart, brave, beautiful, in their armed power. They are coming to give their life for freedom. As yet they themselves do not know whether they are all awakened. The Tsar's hirelings shoot at them from the roofs and from behind street corners. The soldiers expect only death, yet they are coming, stalwart, brave, beautiful!

Then we believed them. The throne of the Romanovs cracked with a noise heard throughout the world. For the first time in our life soldiers' bullets sang a new song — not the song of death, of shame, and of degradation, but the wonderful song of freedom and of joy. . . .

And what hast thou become now, Soldier?

When cursing, drunken, thou didst come tearing down peaceful streets in thy automobiles, threatening women and children with guns, bragging, debauching, swearing the basest of oaths — didst thou hear the answer of the people? "Be accursed! Be accursed!" Thou didst shoot in mad frenzy, and the people yelled fearlessly to thee: "Be accursed!"

Scoundrel! With quick-firing guns didst thou threaten; yet invalids, old men, and women grabbed at thy rifle with their bare hands and tore it away from thee. And thou didst give it away, overcome with shame, helpless, sweating, ugly.

Soldier! How many didst thou kill in those days? How many orphans hast thou made? How many bereaved mothers hast thou left inconsolable? Dost thou hear the words that their lips whisper? The lips from which thou hast banished forever the smile of happiness? — "Murderer, Murderer!"

But what of mothers? What of orphans? A moment came unforeseen and still more terrible. Thou hast betrayed Russia. Thou hast thrown thy native land that nourished thee under the feet of the enemy, thou Soldier, our sole defense!

## To the Russian Soldier

Everything is entrusted to thee: the life and welfare of Russia; our fields and forests; our peaceful rivers; our villages and cities; our temples and those who are praying in them.

And all this thou hast betrayed, Soldier! — the quiet fields, and the young, buoyant liberty. Behind thy back grain was ripening in the fields — Russia's sacred treasury; now the Germans will reap it. Under thy protection the people were working in their villages; now they are running along all the highways, leaving dead in their wake. Children and old men are weeping — they have no roof over their heads, no home, only death staring into their faces.

Ah! how thou didst run from the enemy, Russian Soldier! Never before has the world seen such a rout, such a mob of traitors. It knew the one Judas, while here were tens of thousands of Judases running past each other, galloping, throwing down rifles, quarrelling, and still boasting of their "meetings." What are they hurrying for? They hurry to betray their native land. They do not even wait for the Germans to shoot, so great is their haste to betray Russia, so ready are they to deliver her almost by force into the hands of the astounded enemy.

And what hast thou done to thy officers, Soldier? See, what piles of them lie in the fields appealing to the all-merciful and all-forgiving God with their still, sightless eyes! They called thee — thou didst not obey. They went alone to their death — and they died. They died, Soldier!

And what hast thou done to thy comrades? Traitor! Dost thou see their bodies? Dost thou see the ditches where careless German hands have thrown them? It is thou who didst kill them!

But look ahead of thee, Soldier! Dost thou see that terrible structure that is being erected in Russia?

It is the scaffold.

And for whom is it? For thee, Soldier! For thee, traitor and coward, who hast betrayed Russia and her liberty. Thou seest, but thou dost not understand as yet. Thou dost not understand our sorrow.

Was Russia not happy in having destroyed the scaffold as it seemed forever, and in giving its accursed memory to oblivion. But now it grows again, unwelcome, sinister, evil, like the shadows of night.

Thou hast torn the body of Russia. Now thou desirest to tear her heart and soul — thou, Soldier.

Thou, Soldier, whom we loved and whom we still love.

Arise! — Look at thy country which is calling in distress.

Awake! — If cruel fate has no laurels of victory in store for thee, put the crown of thorns on thy head. Through it thou shalt find expiation, through it thou shalt regain our love.

Russia is dying, Russia is calling to thee:

"Arise, dear Soldier!"