

GREAT BOOKS  
SEMINARS IN OJAI



# *Russian Short Stories III*

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Chekov

# The Bet

5 IT WAS a dark autumn night. The old banker was walking up and down his study and remembering how, fifteen years before, he had given a party one autumn evening. There had been many clever men there, and there had been interesting conversations.

10 Among other things they had talked of capital punishment. The majority of the guests, among whom were many journalists and intellectual men, disapproved of the death penalty. They considered that form of punishment out of date, immoral, and

15 unsuitable for Christian States. In the opinion of some of them the death penalty ought to be replaced everywhere by imprisonment for life.

“I don’t agree with you,” said their host the banker.

20 “I have not tried either the death penalty or imprisonment for life, but if one may judge *a priori*, the death penalty is more moral and more humane than imprisonment for life. Capital punishment kills a man at once, but lifelong imprisonment kills him

25 slowly. Which executioner is the more humane, he who kills you in a few minutes or he who drags the life out of you in the course of many years?”

30 “Both are equally immoral,” observed one of the guests, “for they both have the same object – to take away life. The State is not God. It has not the right to take away what it cannot restore when it wants to.”

Among the guests was a young lawyer, a young man of five-and-twenty. When he was asked his opinion, he said: 40

“The death sentence and the life sentence are equally immoral, but if I had to choose between the death penalty and imprisonment for life, I would certainly 45 choose the second. To live anyhow is better than not at all.”

A lively discussion arose. The banker, who was younger and more nervous in those days, was 50 suddenly carried away by excitement; he struck the table with his fist and shouted at the young man:

“It’s not true! I’ll bet you two millions you wouldn’t stay in solitary confinement for five years.” 55

“If you mean that in earnest,” said the young man, “I’ll take the bet, but I would stay not five but fifteen years.” 60

“Fifteen? Done!” cried the banker. “Gentlemen, I stake two millions!”

“Agreed! You stake your millions and I stake my freedom!” said the young man. 65

1 And this wild, senseless bet was carried out! The  
banker, spoilt and frivolous, with millions beyond his  
reckoning, was delighted at the bet. At supper he made  
fun of the young man, and said:

5 “Think better of it, young man, while there is still  
time. To me two millions are a trifle, but you are losing  
three or four of the best years of your life. I say three  
or four, because you won’t stay longer. Don’t forget  
10 either, you unhappy man, that voluntary confinement  
is a great deal harder to bear than compulsory. The  
thought that you have the right to step out in liberty  
at any moment will poison your whole existence in  
prison. I am sorry for you.”

15 And now the banker, walking to and fro, remembered  
all this, and asked himself: “What was the object  
of that bet? What is the good of that man’s losing  
fifteen years of his life and my throwing away two  
20 millions? Can it prove that the death penalty is better  
or worse than imprisonment for life? No, no. It was  
all nonsensical and meaningless. On my part it was  
the caprice of a pampered man, and on his part simple  
greed for money. . . .”

25 Then he remembered what followed that evening.  
It was decided that the young man should spend the  
years of his captivity under the strictest supervision in  
one of the lodges in the banker’s garden. It was agreed  
30 that for fifteen years he should not be free to cross the  
threshold of the lodge, to see human beings, to hear  
the human voice, or to receive letters and newspapers.  
He was allowed to have a musical instrument and  
books, and was allowed to write letters, to drink wine,  
35 and to smoke. By the terms of the agreement, the only

relations he could have with the outer world were 36  
by a little window made purposely for that object.  
He might have anything he wanted – books, music,  
wine, and so on – in any quantity he desired by  
writing an order, but could only receive them through 40  
the window. The agreement provided for every detail  
and every trifle that would make his imprisonment  
strictly solitary, and bound the young man to stay  
there *exactly* fifteen years, beginning from twelve  
o’clock of November 14, 1870, and ending at twelve 45  
o’clock of November 14, 1885. The slightest attempt  
on his part to break the conditions, if only two  
minutes before the end, released the banker from the  
obligation to pay him two millions.

50 For the first year of his confinement, as far as one  
could judge from his brief notes, the prisoner suffered  
severely from loneliness and depression. The sounds  
of the piano could be heard continually day and night  
from his lodge. He refused wine and tobacco. Wine, 55  
he wrote, excites the desires, and desires are the worst  
foes of the prisoner; and besides, nothing could be  
more dreary than drinking good wine and seeing no  
one. And tobacco spoilt the air of his room. In the  
first year the books he sent for were principally of a 60  
light character; novels with a complicated love plot,  
sensational and fantastic stories, and so on.

In the second year the piano was silent in the lodge,  
and the prisoner asked only for the classics. In the fifth 65  
year music was audible again, and the prisoner asked  
for wine. Those who watched him through the  
window said that all that year he spent doing nothing  
but eating and drinking and lying on his bed,  
frequently yawning and angrily talking to himself. 70

1 He did not read books. Sometimes at night he would sit down to write; he would spend hours writing, and in the morning tear up all that he had written. More than once he could be heard crying.

5 In the second half of the sixth year the prisoner began zealously studying languages, philosophy, and history. He threw himself eagerly into these studies – so much so that the banker had enough to do to get him the books he ordered. In the course of four years some  
10 six hundred volumes were procured at his request. It was during this period that the banker received the following letter from his prisoner:

15 “My dear Jailer, I write you these lines in six languages. Show them to people who know the languages. Let them read them. If they find not one mistake I implore you to fire a shot in the garden. That shot will show me that my efforts have not been thrown away.  
20 The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages, but the same flame burns in them all. Oh, if you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels now from being able to understand them!” The prisoner’s desire was fulfilled. The banker ordered two  
25 shots to be fired in the garden.

Then after the tenth year, the prisoner sat immovably at the table and read nothing but the Gospel. It seemed strange to the banker that a man who in four  
30 years had mastered six hundred learned volumes should waste nearly a year over one thin book easy of comprehension. Theology and histories of religion followed the Gospels.

35 In the last two years of his confinement the

prisoner read an immense quantity of books quite 36 indiscriminately. At one time he was busy with the natural sciences, then he would ask for Byron or Shakespeare. There were notes in which he demanded at the same time books on chemistry, and a manual 40 of medicine, and a novel, and some treatise on philosophy or theology. His reading suggested a man swimming in the sea among the wreckage of his ship, and trying to save his life by greedily clutching first at one spar and then at another. 45

## II

The old banker remembered all this, and thought: 50  
“To-morrow at twelve o’clock he will regain his freedom. By our agreement I ought to pay him two millions. If I do pay him, it is all over with me: I shall be utterly ruined.” 55

Fifteen years before, his millions had been beyond his reckoning; now he was afraid to ask himself which were greater, his debts or his assets. Desperate gambling on the Stock Exchange, wild speculation 60 and the excitability which he could not get over even in advancing years, had by degrees led to the decline of his fortune and the proud, fearless, self-confident millionaire had become a banker of middling rank, trembling at every rise and fall in his investments. 65  
“Cursed bet!” muttered the old man, clutching his head in despair “Why didn’t the man die? He is only forty now. He will take my last penny from me, he will marry, will enjoy life, will gamble on the Exchange; while I shall look at him with envy like a beggar, and 70

1 hear from him every day the same sentence: 'I am  
indebted to you for the happiness of my life, let me  
help you!' No, it is too much! The one means of being  
5 saved from bankruptcy and disgrace is the death of  
that man!"

It struck three o'clock, the banker listened; everyone  
was asleep in the house and nothing could be heard  
outside but the rustling of the chilled trees. Trying to  
10 make no noise, he took from a fireproof safe the key of  
the door which had not been opened for fifteen years,  
put on his overcoat, and went out of the house.

It was dark and cold in the garden. Rain was falling.  
15 A damp cutting wind was racing about the garden,  
howling and giving the trees no rest. The banker  
strained his eyes, but could see neither the earth nor  
the white statues, nor the lodge, nor the trees. Going  
to the spot where the lodge stood, he twice called  
20 the watchman. No answer followed. Evidently the  
watchman had sought shelter from the weather, and  
was now asleep somewhere either in the kitchen or in  
the greenhouse.

25 "If I had the pluck to carry out my intention,"  
thought the old man, "Suspicion would fall first upon  
the watchman."

He felt in the darkness for the steps and the door, and  
30 went into the entry of the lodge. Then he groped his  
way into a little passage and lighted a match. There  
was not a soul there. There was a bedstead with no  
bedding on it, and in the corner there was a dark  
cast-iron stove. The seals on the door leading to the  
35 prisoner's rooms were intact.

When the match went out the old man, trembling 36  
with emotion, peeped through the little window. A  
candle was burning dimly in the prisoner's room. He  
was sitting at the table. Nothing could be seen but his  
back, the hair on his head, and his hands. Open books 40  
were lying on the table, on the two easy-chairs, and on  
the carpet near the table.

Five minutes passed and the prisoner did not once 45  
stir. Fifteen years' imprisonment had taught him to sit  
still. The banker tapped at the window with his finger,  
and the prisoner made no movement whatever in  
response. Then the banker cautiously broke the seals  
off the door and put the key in the keyhole. The rusty 50  
lock gave a grating sound and the door creaked. The  
banker expected to hear at once footsteps and a cry of  
astonishment, but three minutes passed and it was as  
quiet as ever in the room. He made up his mind to go  
in.

55  
At the table a man unlike ordinary people was sitting  
motionless. He was a skeleton with the skin drawn  
tight over his bones, with long curls like a woman's  
and a shaggy beard. His face was yellow with an earthy  
tint in it, his cheeks were hollow, his back long and 60  
narrow, and the hand on which his shaggy head was  
propped was so thin and delicate that it was dreadful  
to look at it. His hair was already streaked with silver,  
and seeing his emaciated, aged-looking face, no one  
would have believed that he was only forty. He was 65  
asleep. . . . In front of his bowed head there lay on the  
table a sheet of paper on which there was something  
written in fine handwriting.

"Poor creature!" thought the banker, "he is asleep 70

1 and most likely dreaming of the millions. And I have  
 only to take this half-dead man, throw him on the  
 bed, stifle him a little with the pillow, and the most  
 conscientious expert would find no sign of a violent  
 5 death. But let us first read what he has written here . . .”

The banker took the page from the table and read as  
 follows:

10 “To-morrow at twelve o’clock I regain my freedom  
 and the right to associate with other men, but before  
 I leave this room and see the sunshine, I think it  
 necessary to say a few words to you. With a clear  
 conscience I tell you, as before God, who beholds me,  
 15 that I despise freedom and life and health, and all that  
 in your books is called the good things of the world.

“For fifteen years I have been intently studying earthly  
 life. It is true I have not seen the earth nor men, but  
 20 in your books I have drunk fragrant wine, I have  
 sung songs, I have hunted stags and wild boars in the  
 forests, have loved women. . . Beauties as ethereal  
 as clouds, created by the magic of your poets and  
 geniuses, have visited me at night, and have whispered  
 25 in my ears wonderful tales that have set my brain in  
 a whirl. In your books I have climbed to the peaks of  
 Elburz and Mont Blanc, and from there I have seen  
 the sun rise and have watched it at evening flood the  
 sky, the ocean, and the mountain-tops with gold and  
 30 crimson. I have watched from there the lightning  
 flashing over my head and cleaving the storm-clouds.  
 I have seen green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, towns.  
 I have heard the singing of the sirens, and the strains  
 of the shepherds’ pipes; I have touched the wings of  
 35 comely devils who flew down to converse with me

of God. . . . In your books I have flung myself into  
 the bottomless pit, performed miracles, slain, burned  
 towns, preached new religions, conquered whole  
 kingdoms. . . .

“Your books have given me wisdom. All that the  
 unresting thought of man has created in the ages is  
 compressed into a small compass in my brain. I know  
 that I am wiser than all of you.

“And I despise your books, I despise wisdom and the  
 blessings of this world. It is all worthless, fleeting,  
 illusory, and deceptive, like a mirage. You may be  
 proud, wise, and fine, but death will wipe you off the  
 face of the earth as though you were no more than  
 50 mice burrowing under the floor, and your posterity,  
 your history, your immortal geniuses will burn or  
 freeze together with the earthly globe.

“You have lost your reason and taken the wrong path.  
 55 You have taken lies for truth, and hideousness for  
 beauty. You would marvel if, owing to strange events  
 of some sorts, frogs and lizards suddenly grew on apple  
 and orange trees instead of fruit, or if roses began to  
 smell like a sweating horse; so I marvel at you who  
 60 exchange heaven for earth. I don’t want to understand  
 you.

“To prove to you in action how I despise all that you  
 live by, I renounce the two millions of which I once  
 65 dreamed as of paradise and which now I despise. To  
 deprive myself of the right to the money I shall go  
 out from here five hours before the time fixed, and so  
 break the compact. . . .”

1 When the banker had read this he laid the page on the  
table, kissed the strange man on the head, and went  
out of the lodge, weeping. At no other time, even  
when he had lost heavily on the Stock Exchange, had  
5 he felt so great a contempt for himself. When he got  
home he lay on his bed, but his tears and emotion  
kept him for hours from sleeping.

Next morning the watchmen ran in with pale faces,  
10 and told him they had seen the man who lived in the  
lodge climb out of the window into the garden, go to  
the gate, and disappear. The banker went at once with  
the servants to the lodge and made sure of the flight  
of his prisoner. To avoid arousing unnecessary talk, he  
15 took from the table the writing in which the millions  
were renounced, and when he got home locked it up  
in the fireproof safe.

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# The Bishop

## I

THE evening service was being celebrated on the eve  
 of Palm Sunday in the Old Petrovsky Convent. When  
 they began distributing the palm it was close upon  
 ten o'clock, the candles were burning dimly, the wicks  
 wanted snuffing; it was all in a sort of mist. In the  
 twilight of the church the crowd seemed heaving like  
 the sea, and to Bishop Pyotr, who had been unwell  
 for the last three days, it seemed that all the faces  
 – old and young, men's and women's – were alike,  
 that everyone who came up for the palm had the same  
 expression in his eyes. In the mist he could not see the  
 doors; the crowd kept moving and looked as though  
 there were no end to it. The female choir was singing,  
 a nun was reading the prayers for the day.

How stifling, how hot it was! How long the service  
 went on! Bishop Pyotr was tired. His breathing  
 was laboured and rapid, his throat was parched,  
 his shoulders ached with weariness, his legs were  
 trembling. And it disturbed him unpleasantly when  
 a religious maniac uttered occasional shrieks in the  
 gallery. And then all of a sudden, as though in a dream  
 or delirium, it seemed to the bishop as though his own  
 mother Marya Timofyevna, whom he had not seen for  
 nine years, or some old woman just like his mother,  
 came up to him out of the crowd, and, after taking a  
 palm branch from him, walked away looking at him

all the while good-humouredly with a kind, joyful  
 smile until she was lost in the crowd. And for some  
 reason tears flowed down his face. There was peace  
 in his heart, everything was well, yet he kept gazing  
 fixedly towards the left choir, where the prayers were  
 being read, where in the dusk of evening you could  
 not recognize anyone, and – wept. Tears glistened on  
 his face and on his beard. Here someone close at hand  
 was weeping, then someone else farther away, then  
 others and still others, and little by little the church  
 was filled with soft weeping. And a little later, within  
 five minutes, the nuns' choir was singing; no one was  
 weeping and everything was as before.

Soon the service was over. When the bishop got  
 into his carriage to drive home, the gay, melodious  
 chime of the heavy, costly bells was filling the whole  
 garden in the moonlight. The white walls, the white  
 crosses on the tombs, the white birch-trees and black  
 shadows, and the far-away moon in the sky exactly  
 over the convent, seemed now living their own life,  
 apart and incomprehensible, yet very near to man. It  
 was the beginning of April, and after the warm spring  
 day it turned cool; there was a faint touch of frost, and  
 the breath of spring could be felt in the soft, chilly air.  
 The road from the convent to the town was sandy, the  
 horses had to go at a walking pace, and on both sides  
 of the carriage in the brilliant, peaceful moonlight  
 there were people trudging along home from church



1 through the sand. And all was silent, sunk in thought;  
 everything around seemed kindly, youthful, akin,  
 everything – trees and sky and even the moon, and  
 one longed to think that so it would be always.

5 At last the carriage drove into the town and rumbled  
 along the principal street. The shops were already  
 shut, but at Erakin's, the millionaire shopkeeper's, they  
 were trying the new electric lights, which flickered  
 10 brightly, and a crowd of people were gathered round.  
 Then came wide, dark, deserted streets, one after  
 another; then the highroad, the open country, the  
 fragrance of pines. And suddenly there rose up before  
 the bishop's eyes a white turreted wall, and behind it  
 15 a tall belfry in the full moonlight, and beside it five  
 shining, golden cupolas: this was the Pankratievsky  
 Monastery, in which Bishop Pyotr lived. And here,  
 too, high above the monastery, was the silent, dreamy  
 moon. The carriage drove in at the gate, crunching  
 20 over the sand; here and there in the moonlight there  
 were glimpses of dark monastic figures, and there was  
 the sound of footsteps on the flag-stones . . .

“You know, your holiness, your mamma arrived while  
 25 you were away,” the lay brother informed the bishop  
 as he went into his cell.

“My mother? When did she come?”

30 “Before the evening service. She asked first where you  
 were and then she went to the convent.”

“Then it was her I saw in the church, just now! Oh,  
 Lord!”

35

And the bishop laughed with joy. 36

“She bade me tell your holiness,” the lay brother went  
 on, “that she would come to-morrow. She had a little  
 girl with her – her grandchild, I suppose. They are  
 40 staying at Ovsyannikov's inn.”

“What time is it now?”

“A little after eleven.” 45

“Oh, how vexing!”

The bishop sat for a little while in the parlour,  
 hesitating, and as it were refusing to believe it was so  
 late. His arms and legs were stiff, his head ached. He  
 was hot and uncomfortable. After resting a little he  
 went into his bedroom, and there, too, he sat a little,  
 still thinking of his mother; he could hear the lay  
 brother going away, and Father Sisoy coughing the  
 55 other side of the wall. The monastery clock struck a  
 quarter.

The bishop changed his clothes and began reading  
 the prayers before sleep. He read attentively those old,  
 60 long familiar prayers, and at the same time thought  
 about his mother. She had nine children and about  
 forty grandchildren. At one time, she had lived with  
 her husband, the deacon, in a poor village; she had  
 lived there a very long time from the age of seventeen  
 65 to sixty. The bishop remembered her from early  
 childhood, almost from the age of three, and – how  
 he had loved her! Sweet, precious childhood, always  
 fondly remembered! Why did it, that long-past time  
 that could never return, why did it seem brighter,  
 70

1 fuller, and more festive than it had really been? When  
 in his childhood or youth he had been ill, how tender  
 and sympathetic his mother had been! And now his  
 prayers mingled with the memories, which gleamed  
 5 more and more brightly like a flame, and the prayers  
 did not hinder his thinking of his mother.

When he had finished his prayers he undressed and  
 lay down, and at once, as soon as it was dark, there  
 10 rose before his mind his dead father, his mother, his  
 native village Lesopolye. . . the creak of wheels, the  
 bleat of sheep, the church bells on bright summer  
 mornings, the gypsies under the window – oh, how  
 sweet to think of it! He remembered the priest of  
 15 Lesopolye, Father Simeon – mild, gentle, kindly;  
 he was a lean little man, while his son, a divinity  
 student, was a huge fellow and talked in a roaring  
 bass voice. The priest’s son had flown into a rage with  
 the cook and abused her: “Ah, you Jehud’s ass!” and  
 20 Father Simeon overhearing it, said not a word, and  
 was only ashamed because he could not remember  
 where such an ass was mentioned in the Bible. After  
 him the priest at Lesopolye had been Father Demyan,  
 who used to drink heavily, and at times drank till he  
 25 saw green snakes, and was even nicknamed Demyan  
 Snake-seer. The schoolmaster at Lesopolye was Matvey  
 Nikolaitch, who had been a divinity student, a kind  
 and intelligent man, but he, too, was a drunkard; he  
 never beat the schoolchildren, but for some reason  
 30 he always had hanging on his wall a bunch of birch-  
 twigs, and below it an utterly meaningless inscription  
 in Latin: “Betula kinderbalsamica secuta.” He had a  
 shaggy black dog whom he called Syntax.

35 And his holiness laughed. Six miles from Lesopolye

was the village Obnino with a wonder-working 36  
 ikon. In the summer they used to carry the ikon in  
 procession about the neighbouring villages and ring  
 the bells the whole day long; first in one village and  
 then in another, and it used to seem to the bishop 40  
 then that joy was quivering in the air, and he (in those  
 days his name was Pavlusha) used to follow the ikon,  
 bareheaded and barefoot, with naïve faith, with a naïve  
 smile, infinitely happy. In Obnino, he remembered  
 now, there were always a lot of people, and the priest 45  
 there, Father Alexey, to save time during mass, used  
 to make his deaf nephew Ilarion read the names of  
 those for whose health or whose souls’ peace prayers  
 were asked. Ilarion used to read them, now and then  
 getting a five or ten kopeck piece for the service, and 50  
 only when he was grey and bald, when life was nearly  
 over, he suddenly saw written on one of the pieces of  
 paper: “What a fool you are, Ilarion.” Up to fifteen at  
 least Pavlusha was undeveloped and idle at his lessons,  
 so much so that they thought of taking him away from 55  
 the clerical school and putting him into a shop; one  
 day, going to the post at Obnino for letters, he had  
 stared a long time at the post-office clerks and asked:  
 “Allow me to ask, how do you get your salary, every  
 month or every day?” 60

His holiness crossed himself and turned over on the  
 other side, trying to stop thinking and go to sleep.

“My mother has come,” he remembered and laughed. 65

The moon peeped in at the window, the floor was  
 lighted up, and there were shadows on it. A cricket  
 was chirping. Through the wall Father Sisoy was  
 snoring in the next room, and his aged snore had a 70

1 sound that suggested loneliness, forlornness, even  
 vagrancy. Sisoy had once been housekeeper to the  
 bishop of the diocese, and was called now “the former  
 Father Housekeeper”; he was seventy years old, he  
 5 lived in a monastery twelve miles from the town and  
 stayed sometimes in the town, too. He had come to  
 the Pankratievsky Monastery three days before, and  
 the bishop had kept him that he might talk to him  
 at his leisure about matters of business, about the  
 10 arrangements here . . .

At half-past one they began ringing for matins. Father  
 Sisoy could be heard coughing, muttering something  
 in a discontented voice, then he got up and walked  
 15 barefoot about the rooms.

“Father Sisoy,” the bishop called.

Sisoy went back to his room and a little later made his  
 20 appearance in his boots, with a candle; he had on his  
 cassock over his underclothes and on his head was an  
 old faded skull-cap.

“I can’t sleep,” said the bishop, sitting up. “I must be  
 25 unwell. And what it is I don’t know. Fever!”

“You must have caught cold, your holiness. You  
 must be rubbed with tallow.” Sisoy stood a little and  
 yawned. “O Lord, forgive me, a sinner.”

30 “They had the electric lights on at Erakin’s today,” he  
 said; “I don’t like it!”

Father Sisoy was old, lean, bent, always dissatisfied  
 35 with something, and his eyes were angry-looking and

prominent as a crab’s.

36

“I don’t like it,” he said, going away. “I don’t like it.  
 Bother it!”

40

## II

Next day, Palm Sunday, the bishop took the service in  
 the cathedral in the town, then he visited the bishop of 45  
 the diocese, then visited a very sick old lady, the widow  
 of a general, and at last drove home. Between one and  
 two o’clock he had welcome visitors dining with him -  
 - his mother and his niece Katya, a child of eight years  
 50 old. All dinner-time the spring sunshine was streaming  
 in at the windows, throwing bright light on the white  
 tablecloth and on Katya’s red hair. Through the double  
 windows they could hear the noise of the rooks and  
 the notes of the starlings in the garden.

55

“It is nine years since we have met,” said the old lady.  
 “And when I looked at you in the monastery yesterday,  
 good Lord! you’ve not changed a bit, except maybe  
 you are thinner and your beard is a little longer. Holy  
 60 Mother, Queen of Heaven! Yesterday at the evening  
 service no one could help crying. I, too, as I looked  
 at you, suddenly began crying, though I couldn’t say  
 why. His Holy Will!”

60

And in spite of the affectionate tone in which she  
 65 said this, he could see she was constrained as though  
 she were uncertain whether to address him formally  
 or familiarly, to laugh or not, and that she felt herself  
 more a deacon’s widow than his mother. And Katya  
 gazed without blinking at her uncle, his holiness, as  
 70

70

1 though trying to discover what sort of a person he  
 was. Her hair sprang up from under the comb and  
 the velvet ribbon and stood out like a halo; she had  
 a turned-up nose and sly eyes. The child had broken  
 5 a glass before sitting down to dinner, and now her  
 grandmother, as she talked, moved away from Katya  
 first a wineglass and then a tumbler. The bishop  
 listened to his mother and remembered how many,  
 many years ago she used to take him and his brothers  
 10 and sisters to relations whom she considered rich;  
 in those days she was taken up with the care of her  
 children, now with her grandchildren, and she had  
 brought Katya . . .

15 “Your sister, Varenka, has four children,” she told  
 him; “Katya, here, is the eldest. And your brother-  
 in-law Father Ivan fell sick, God knows of what, and  
 died three days before the Assumption; and my poor  
 Varenka is left a beggar.”

20 “And how is Nikanor getting on?” the bishop asked  
 about his eldest brother.

“He is all right, thank God. Though he has nothing  
 25 much, yet he can live. Only there is one thing: his son,  
 my grandson Nikolasha, did not want to go into the  
 Church; he has gone to the university to be a doctor.  
 He thinks it is better; but who knows! His Holy Will!”

30 “Nikolasha cuts up dead people,” said Katya, spilling  
 water over her knees.

“Sit still, child,” her grandmother observed calmly,  
 and took the glass out of her hand. “Say a prayer, and  
 35 go on eating.”

“How long it is since we have seen each other!” said 36  
 the bishop, and he tenderly stroked his mother’s hand  
 and shoulder; “and I missed you abroad, mother, I  
 missed you dreadfully.”

40 “Thank you.”

“I used to sit in the evenings at the open window,  
 lonely and alone; often there was music playing, and  
 all at once I used to be overcome with homesickness 45  
 and felt as though I would give everything only to be  
 at home and see you.”

His mother smiled, beamed, but at once she made a  
 grave face and said: 50

“Thank you.”

His mood suddenly changed. He looked at his mother  
 and could not understand how she had come by that 55  
 respectfulness, that timid expression of face: what was  
 it for? And he did not recognize her. He felt sad and  
 vexed. And then his head ached just as it had the day  
 before; his legs felt fearfully tired, and the fish seemed  
 to him stale and tasteless; he felt thirsty all the time. . . 60

After dinner two rich ladies, landowners, arrived  
 and sat for an hour and a half in silence with rigid  
 countenances; the archimandrite, a silent, rather deaf  
 man, came to see him about business. Then they 65  
 began ringing for vespers; the sun was setting behind  
 the wood and the day was over. When he returned  
 from church, he hurriedly said his prayers, got into  
 bed, and wrapped himself up as warm as possible.

70

1 It was disagreeable to remember the fish he had eaten  
at dinner. The moonlight worried him, and then he  
heard talking. In an adjoining room, probably in the  
parlour, Father Sisoy was talking politics:

5 “There’s war among the Japanese now. They are  
fighting. The Japanese, my good soul, are the same as  
the Montenegrins; they are the same race. They were  
under the Turkish yoke together.”

10 And then he heard the voice of Marya Timofyevna:

“So, having said our prayers and drunk tea, we went,  
you know, to Father Yegor at Novokatnoye, so. . .”

15 And she kept on saying, “having had tea” or “having  
drunk tea,” and it seemed as though the only thing  
she had done in her life was to drink tea.

20 The bishop slowly, languidly, recalled the seminary,  
the academy. For three years he had been Greek  
teacher in the seminary: by that time he could not  
read without spectacles. Then he had become a monk;  
he had been made a school inspector. Then he had  
25 defended his thesis for his degree. When he was thirty-  
two he had been made rector of the seminary, and  
consecrated archimandrite: and then his life had been  
so easy, so pleasant; it seemed so long, so long, no end  
was in sight. Then he had begun to be ill, had grown  
30 very thin and almost blind, and by the advice of the  
doctors had to give up everything and go abroad.

“And what then?” asked Sisoy in the next room.

35 “Then we drank tea . . .” answered Marya Timofyevna.

“Good gracious, you’ve got a green beard,” said Katya 36  
suddenly in surprise, and she laughed.

The bishop remembered that the grey-headed Father 40  
Sisoy’s beard really had a shade of green in it, and he  
laughed.

“God have mercy upon us, what we have to put up 45  
with with this girl!” said Sisoy, aloud, getting angry. “  
Spoilt child! Sit quiet!”

The bishop remembered the perfectly new white 50  
church in which he had conducted the services while  
living abroad, he remembered the sound of the  
warm sea. In his flat he had five lofty light rooms; in  
his study he had a new writing-table, lots of books.  
He had read a great deal and often written. And he  
remembered how he had pined for his native land,  
how a blind beggar woman had played the guitar  
under his window every day and sung of love, and 55  
how, as he listened, he had always for some reason  
thought of the past. But eight years had passed and  
he had been called back to Russia, and now he was  
a suffragan bishop, and all the past had retreated far  
away into the mist as though it were a dream. . . . 60

Father Sisoy came into the bedroom with a candle.  
“I say!” he said, wondering, “are you asleep already,  
your holiness?” 65

“What is it?”

“Why, it’s still early, ten o’clock or less. I bought a 70  
candle to-day; I wanted to rub you with tallow.”

1 “I am in a fever . . .” said the bishop, and he sat up. “I really ought to have something. My head is bad. . . .”

Sisoy took off the bishop’s shirt and began rubbing his  
5 chest and back with tallow.

“That’s the way . . . that’s the way . . .” he said. “Lord Jesus Christ . . . that’s the way. I walked to the town to-day; I was at what’s-his-name’s -- the chief priest  
10 Sidonsky’s . . . I had tea with him. I don’t like him. Lord Jesus Christ . . . That’s the way. I don’t like him.”

### 15 III

The bishop of the diocese, a very fat old man, was ill with rheumatism or gout, and had been in bed for over a month. Bishop Pyotr went to see him almost every day, and saw all who came to ask his  
20 help. And now that he was unwell he was struck by the emptiness, the triviality of everything which they asked and for which they wept; he was vexed at their ignorance, their timidity; and all this useless, petty business oppressed him by the mass of it, and it  
25 seemed to him that now he understood the diocesan bishop, who had once in his young days written on “The Doctrines of the Freedom of the Will,” and now seemed to be all lost in trivialities, to have forgotten  
30 everything, and to have no thoughts of religion. The bishop must have lost touch with Russian life while he was abroad; he did not find it easy; the peasants seemed to him coarse, the women who sought his help dull and stupid, the seminarists and their teachers  
35 uncultivated and at times savage. And the documents

coming in and going out were reckoned by tens of 36 thousands; and what documents they were! The higher clergy in the whole diocese gave the priests, young and old, and even their wives and children, marks for their behaviour – a five, a four, and sometimes even a 40 three; and about this he had to talk and to read and write serious reports. And there was positively not one minute to spare; his soul was troubled all day long, and the bishop was only at peace when he was in church. 45

He could not get used, either, to the awe which, through no wish of his own, he inspired in people in spite of his quiet, modest disposition. All the people in the province seemed to him little, scared, and guilty 50 when he looked at them. Everyone was timid in his presence, even the old chief priests; everyone “flopped” at his feet, and not long previously an old lady, a village priest’s wife who had come to consult him, was so overcome by awe that she could not utter a single 55 word, and went empty away. And he, who could never in his sermons bring himself to speak ill of people, never reproached anyone because he was so sorry for them, was moved to fury with the people who came to consult him, lost his temper and flung their petitions 60 on the floor. The whole time he had been here, not one person had spoken to him genuinely, simply, as to a human being; even his old mother seemed now not the same! And why, he wondered, did she chatter away to Sisoy and laugh so much; while with him, her 65 son, she was grave and usually silent and constrained, which did not suit her at all. The only person who behaved freely with him and said what he meant was old Sisoy, who had spent his whole life in the presence of bishops and had outlived eleven of them. And so 70

1 the bishop was at ease with him, although, of course,  
he was a tedious and nonsensical man.

After the service on Tuesday, his holiness Pyotr was in  
5 the diocesan bishop's house receiving petitions there;  
he got excited and angry, and then drove home. He  
was as unwell as before; he longed to be in bed, but  
he had hardly reached home when he was informed  
that a young merchant called Erakin, who subscribed  
10 liberally to charities, had come to see him about a  
very important matter. The bishop had to see him.  
Erakin stayed about an hour, talked very loud, almost  
shouted, and it was difficult to understand what he  
said.

15 "God grant it may," he said as he went away. "Most  
essential! According to circumstances, your holiness! I  
trust it may!"

20 After him came the Mother Superior from a distant  
convent. And when she had gone they began ringing  
for vespers. He had to go to church.

In the evening the monks sang harmoniously, with  
25 inspiration. A young priest with a black beard  
conducted the service; and the bishop, hearing of  
the Bridegroom who comes at midnight and of the  
Heavenly Mansion adorned for the festival, felt no  
repentance for his sins, no tribulation, but peace at  
30 heart and tranquillity. And he was carried back in  
thought to the distant past, to his childhood and  
youth, when, too, they used to sing of the Bridegroom  
and of the Heavenly Mansion; and now that past  
rose up before him – living, fair, and joyful as in all  
35 likelihood it never had been. And perhaps in the

other world, in the life to come, we shall think of the 36  
distant past, of our life here, with the same feeling.  
Who knows? The bishop was sitting near the altar. It  
was dark; tears flowed down his face. He thought that  
here he had attained everything a man in his position 40  
could attain; he had faith and yet everything was not  
clear, something was lacking still. He did not want to  
die; and he still felt that he had missed what was most  
important, something of which he had dimly dreamed  
in the past; and he was troubled by the same hopes for 45  
the future as he had felt in childhood, at the academy  
and abroad.

"How well they sing to-day!" he thought, listening to  
the singing. "How nice it is!" 50

#### IV

55 On Thursday he celebrated mass in the cathedral; it  
was the Washing of Feet. When the service was over  
and the people were going home, it was sunny, warm;  
the water gurgled in the gutters, and the unceasing  
trilling of the larks, tender, telling of peace, rose from 60  
the fields outside the town. The trees were already  
awakening and smiling a welcome, while above them  
the infinite, fathomless blue sky stretched into the  
distance, God knows whither.

65 On reaching home his holiness drank some tea, then  
changed his clothes, lay down on his bed, and told  
the lay brother to close the shutters on the windows.  
The bedroom was darkened. But what weariness, what  
pain in his legs and his back, a chill heavy pain, what 70

1 a noise in his ears! He had not slept for a long time  
 – for a very long time, as it seemed to him now, and  
 some trifling detail which haunted his brain as soon  
 as his eyes were closed prevented him from sleeping.  
 5 As on the day before, sounds reached him from the  
 adjoining rooms through the walls, voices, the jingle  
 of glasses and teaspoons. . . Marya Timofyevna was  
 gaily telling Father Sisoy some story with quaint turns  
 of speech, while the latter answered in a grumpy,  
 10 ill-humoured voice: “Bother them! Not likely! What  
 next!” And the bishop again felt vexed and then hurt  
 that with other people his old mother behaved in a  
 simple, ordinary way, while with him, her son, she  
 was shy, spoke little, and did not say what she meant,  
 15 and even, as he fancied, had during all those three  
 days kept trying in his presence to find an excuse for  
 standing up, because she was embarrassed at sitting  
 before him. And his father? He, too, probably, if he  
 had been living, would not have been able to utter a  
 20 word in the bishop’s presence . . .

Something fell down on the floor in the adjoining  
 room and was broken; Katya must have dropped a cup  
 or a saucer, for Father Sisoy suddenly spat and said  
 25 angrily:

“What a regular nuisance the child is! Lord forgive my  
 transgressions! One can’t provide enough for her.”

30 Then all was quiet, the only sounds came from  
 outside. And when the bishop opened his eyes he saw  
 Katya in his room, standing motionless, staring at  
 him. Her red hair, as usual, stood up from under the  
 comb like a halo.

35

“Is that you, Katya?” he asked. “Who is it downstairs  
 who keeps opening and shutting a door?” 36

“I don’t hear it,” answered Katya; and she listened. 40

“There, someone has just passed by.”

“But that was a noise in your stomach, uncle.”

He laughed and stroked her on the head. 45

“So you say Cousin Nikolasha cuts up dead people?”  
 he asked after a pause.

“Yes, he is studying.” 50

“And is he kind?”

“Oh, yes, he’s kind. But he drinks vodka awfully.” 55

“And what was it your father died of?”

“Papa was weak and very, very thin, and all at once his  
 throat was bad. I was ill then, too, and brother Fedya;  
 we all had bad throats. Papa died, uncle, and we got  
 60 well.”

Her chin began quivering, and tears gleamed in her  
 eyes and trickled down her cheeks.

65 “Your holiness,” she said in a shrill voice, by now  
 weeping bitterly, “uncle, mother and all of us are left  
 very wretched. . . Give us a little money. . . do be kind  
 . . . uncle darling. . .” 70



1 He, too, was moved to tears, and for a long time was too much touched to speak. Then he stroked her on the head, patted her on the shoulder and said:

5 “Very good, very good, my child. When the holy Easter comes, we will talk it over. . . I will help you. . . I will help you. . .”

His mother came in quietly, timidly, and prayed  
10 before the ikon. Noticing that he was not sleeping, she said:

“Won’t you have a drop of soup?”

15 “No, thank you,” he answered, “I am not hungry.”

“You seem to be unwell, now I look at you. I should think so; you may well be ill! The whole day on your legs, the whole day. . . And, my goodness, it makes  
20 one’s heart ache even to look at you! Well, Easter is not far off; you will rest then, please God. Then we will have a talk, too, but now I’m not going to disturb you with my chatter. Come along, Katya; let his holiness sleep a little.”

25 And he remembered how once very long ago, when he was a boy, she had spoken exactly like that, in the same jestingly respectful tone, with a Church dignitary. . . Only from her extraordinarily kind eyes  
30 and the timid, anxious glance she stole at him as she went out of the room could one have guessed that this was his mother. He shut his eyes and seemed to sleep, but twice heard the clock strike and Father Sisoy coughing the other side of the wall. And once more  
35 his mother came in and looked timidly at him for a

minute. Someone drove up to the steps, as he could  
hear, in a coach or in a chaise. Suddenly a knock, the door slammed, the lay brother came into the bedroom. 36

“Your holiness,” he called. 40

“Well?”

“The horses are here; it’s time for the evening service.” 45

“What o’clock is it?”

“A quarter past seven.”

He dressed and drove to the cathedral. During all  
the “Twelve Gospels” he had to stand in the middle  
of the church without moving, and the first gospel,  
the longest and the most beautiful, he read himself.  
A mood of confidence and courage came over him.  
That first gospel, “Now is the Son of Man glorified,”  
55 he knew by heart; and as he read he raised his eyes from time to time, and saw on both sides a perfect sea of lights and heard the splutter of candles, but, as in past years, he could not see the people, and it seemed  
60 as though these were all the same people as had been round him in those days, in his childhood and his youth; that they would always be the same every year and till such time as God only knew.

His father had been a deacon, his grandfather a  
65 priest, his great-grandfather a deacon, and his whole family, perhaps from the days when Christianity had been accepted in Russia, had belonged to the priesthood; and his love for the Church services, for the priesthood, for the peal of the bells, was deep 70

1 in him, ineradicable, innate. In church, particularly  
 when he took part in the service, he felt vigorous,  
 of good cheer, happy. So it was now. Only when the  
 eighth gospel had been read, he felt that his voice had  
 5 grown weak, even his cough was inaudible. His head  
 had begun to ache intensely, and he was troubled by a  
 fear that he might fall down. And his legs were indeed  
 quite numb, so that by degrees he ceased to feel them  
 and could not understand how or on what he was  
 10 standing, and why he did not fall. . .

It was a quarter to twelve when the service was over.  
 When he reached home, the bishop undressed and  
 went to bed at once without even saying his prayers.  
 15 He could not speak and felt that he could not have  
 stood up. When he had covered his head with the  
 quilt he felt a sudden longing to be abroad, an  
 insufferable longing! He felt that he would give his  
 life not to see those pitiful cheap shutters, those low  
 20 ceilings, not to smell that heavy monastery smell. If  
 only there were one person to whom he could have  
 talked, have opened his heart!

For a long while he heard footsteps in the next room  
 25 and could not tell whose they were. At last the door  
 opened, and Sisoy came in with a candle and a tea-cup  
 in his hand.

“You are in bed already, your holiness?” he asked.  
 30 “Here I have come to rub you with spirit and vinegar.  
 A thorough rubbing does a great deal of good. Lord  
 Jesus Christ! . . . That’s the way. . . that’s the way. . . I’ve  
 just been in our monastery. . . I don’t like it. I’m going  
 away from here to-morrow, your holiness; I don’t want  
 35 to stay longer. Lord Jesus Christ. . . That’s the way. . .”

Sisoy could never stay long in the same place, and 36  
 he felt as though he had been a whole year in the  
 Pankratievsky Monastery. Above all, listening to him  
 it was difficult to understand where his home was,  
 whether he cared for anyone or anything, whether he 40  
 believed in God. . . He did not know himself why he  
 was a monk, and, indeed, he did not think about it,  
 and the time when he had become a monk had long  
 passed out of his memory; it seemed as though he had  
 been born a monk. 45

“I’m going away to-morrow; God be with them all.”

“I should like to talk to you. . . I can’t find the time,”  
 said the bishop softly with an effort. “I don’t know 50  
 anything or anybody here. . .”

“I’ll stay till Sunday if you like; so be it, but I don’t  
 want to stay longer. I am sick of them!” 55

“I ought not to be a bishop,” said the bishop softly.  
 “I ought to have been a village priest, a deacon. . . or  
 simply a monk. . . All this oppresses me. . . oppresses  
 me.” 60

“What? Lord Jesus Christ. . . That’s the way. Come,  
 sleep well, your holiness! . . . What’s the good of  
 talking? It’s no use. Good-night!”

The bishop did not sleep all night. And at eight 65  
 o’clock in the morning he began to have hemorrhage  
 from the bowels. The lay brother was alarmed, and  
 ran first to the archimandrite, then for the monastery  
 doctor, Ivan Andreyitch, who lived in the town. The  
 doctor, a stout old man with a long grey beard, made 70

1 a prolonged examination of the bishop, and kept  
shaking his head and frowning, then said:

“Do you know, your holiness, you have got typhoid?”

5 After an hour or so of hemorrhage the bishop looked  
much thinner, paler, and wasted; his face looked  
wrinkled, his eyes looked bigger, and he seemed  
older, shorter, and it seemed to him that he was  
10 thinner, weaker, more insignificant than any one, that  
everything that had been had retreated far, far away  
and would never go on again or be repeated.

“How good,” he thought, “how good!”

15 His old mother came. Seeing his wrinkled face and his  
big eyes, she was frightened, she fell on her knees by  
the bed and began kissing his face, his shoulders, his  
hands. And to her, too, it seemed that he was thinner,  
20 weaker, and more insignificant than anyone, and now  
she forgot that he was a bishop, and kissed him as  
though he were a child very near and very dear to her.

“Pavlusha, darling,” she said; “my own, my darling  
25 son! . . . Why are you like this? Pavlusha, answer me!”

Katya, pale and severe, stood beside her, unable to  
understand what was the matter with her uncle,  
why there was such a look of suffering on her  
30 grandmother’s face, why she was saying such sad and  
touching things. By now he could not utter a word,  
he could understand nothing, and he imagined he was  
a simple ordinary man, that he was walking quickly,  
cheerfully through the fields, tapping with his stick,  
35 while above him was the open sky bathed in sunshine,

and that he was free now as a bird and could go where 36  
he liked!

“Pavlusha, my darling son, answer me,” the old  
woman was saying. “What is it? My own!” 40

“Don’t disturb his holiness,” Sisoy said angrily, walking  
about the room. “Let him sleep. . . what’s the use. . .  
it’s no good. . .”

45 Three doctors arrived, consulted together, and went  
away again. The day was long, incredibly long, then  
the night came on and passed slowly, slowly, and  
towards morning on Saturday the lay brother went  
in to the old mother who was lying on the sofa in the 50  
parlour, and asked her to go into the bedroom: the  
bishop had just breathed his last.

Next day was Easter Sunday. There were forty-  
two churches and six monasteries in the town; the 55  
sonorous, joyful clang of the bells hung over the  
town from morning till night unceasingly, setting  
the spring air a quiver; the birds were singing, the  
sun was shining brightly. The big market square was  
noisy, swings were going, barrel organs were playing, 60  
accordions were squeaking, drunken voices were  
shouting. After midday people began driving up and  
down the principal street.

In short, all was merriment, everything was 65  
satisfactory, just as it had been the year before, and as  
it will be in all likelihood next year.

A month later a new suffragan bishop was appointed,  
and no one thought anything more of Bishop Pyotr, 70

1 and afterwards he was completely forgotten. And only  
the dead man's old mother, who is living to-day with  
her son-in-law the deacon in a remote little district  
town, when she goes out at night to bring her cow in  
5 and meets other women at the pasture, begins talking  
of her children and her grandchildren, and says that  
she had a son a bishop, and this she says timidly, afraid  
that she may not be believed. . .

10 And, indeed, there are some who do not believe her.

15

20

25

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