



Russia's Lost Literature of the Absurd
————— *A Literary Discovery*

SELECTED WORKS OF

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The Cashier

Masha found a mushroom, picked it, and brought it to the market. At the market someone punched Masha on the head and told her he would kick her in the legs, too. Masha became frightened and ran away. Masha ran to the co-op and wanted to hide behind the cash register. The manager saw Masha and asked, "What do you have there in your hands?" And Masha said, "A mushroom." The manager said, "Aren't you a sharp one! Do you want me to fix you up with a job?" Masha said, "You won't." The manager said, "I will, too," and he fixed her up with the job of running the cash register.

Masha kept running the register, and suddenly she died. A militiaman came, wrote it all down, and ordered the manager to pay a fifteen-ruble fine.

The manager asked, "Why should I pay a fine?" The militiaman said, "For murder." The manager became frightened, quickly paid the fine, and said, "Take this dead cashier away as quickly as possible." The salesclerk from the fruit department said, "No, that's not true; she was not the cashier. She only turned the handle on the cash register. The cashier is sitting over there." The militiaman said, "We don't care. We've been told to carry away the cashier, and we will carry her away." The militiaman went up to the cashier. The cashier lay down on the floor behind the cash register and said,

"I'm not going." The militiaman asked, "Why won't you come, you fool?" The cashier said, "You are going to bury me alive."

The militiaman started to lift the cashier off the floor but could not lift her up, because the cashier was very fat. "Pull her out by her feet," said the salesclerk from the fruit department.

"No," said the manager, "this cashier is sort of like my wife. So I ask you not to pull her clothes off down below."

The cashier said, "Do you hear? Don't dare to pull my clothes off down below."

The militiaman picked up the cashier under her arms and dragged and threw her out of the co-op.

The manager ordered the salesclerks to clean up the store and to start doing business.

"And what are we to do with the dead woman?" asked the salesclerk from the fruit department, pointing at Masha.

"My God," said the manager, "we got everything mixed up. Really, what should we do with the dead woman?"

"Who will sit behind the cash register?" asked the salesclerk. The manager clutched his head. With his knee he knocked apples all over the counter and said, "This is terrible."

"This is terrible," the salesclerks said all together.

Suddenly the manager stroked his mustache and said, "Ho, ho. It is not so easy to stump me. We'll put the dead woman at the cash register; maybe the public won't figure out who it is that is sitting behind the cash register."

They put the dead woman behind the cash register, stuck a cigarette between her teeth so she would look more like a live woman, and for the sake of verisimilitude put a mushroom in her hand.

The dead woman sat behind the cash register as though she was alive; only the color of her face was very green, and one eye was open and the other completely shut.

"That's all right," said the manager; "she will do."

The public was knocking at the door and getting excited. Why was the co-op not opening up? One woman especially, in a silk coat, started shouting and shaking her bag, and aimed her heel at the door handle. Behind her an old woman with a pillowcase on her head shouted, swore, and called the manager of the co-op a scoundrel.

The manager opened the door and let the public in. The people right away ran into the meat department and then to where the sugar and pepper are sold. The old woman went at once to the fish department but on the way looked up at the cashier and stopped.

"Oh," she said, "may the Lord bless us!"

The woman in the silk coat had already been in all the departments and headed for the cash register. But as soon as she looked at the cashier, she stopped, stood silently, and stared. The salesclerks also were silent and stared at the manager. The manager looked up from behind the counter and waited to see what would happen next.

The woman in the silk coat turned to the salesclerks and asked, "Who is that sitting behind your cash register?"

The salesclerks were silent because they didn't know what to answer.

The manager was also silent.

People gathered from all directions. There was a crowd in the street. Doormen appeared. Whistles were heard. In a word, a real sensation.

The crowd was all set to stand around the co-op until nightfall. But somebody said that in Lamp Lane an old woman was falling out of the window. So the crowd at the co-op thinned out, because many people went over to Lamp Lane.

Fedya Davydovich

Fedya slowly sneaked up to the butter dish and finally seizing a moment when his wife was bending over to cut her toenails, he quickly, in one movement, slipped all the butter out of the butter dish with his finger and put it into his mouth. As he was closing the butter dish, Fedya inadvertently made a noise with the lid. His wife immediately drew herself up, and seeing the empty butter dish, pointed to it with the scissors and said severely: "There is no butter in the butter dish. Where is it?"

Fedya looked surprised and, stretching his neck, looked into the butter dish.

"The butter is inside your mouth," said his wife, pointing with her scissors at Fedya.

Fedya shook his head to say no.

"Aha," said his wife, "you are silent and you twist your head, because your mouth is packed full of butter."

Fedya bulged his eyes and waved his arms at his wife, as though to say, "What are you saying? Not at all." But his wife said, "You are lying. Open your mouth."

"Um, um, um," said Fedya.

"Open your mouth," his wife repeated.

Fedya spread his fingers wide and mumbled something, as though to say, "Oh, my, yes, I forgot, I'll be right back," and got up to leave the room.

“Stop!” his wife shouted.

But Fedya speeded up and disappeared out the door. His wife rushed after him, but she stopped at the door because she was naked, and in that state she could not go out into the hall where other occupants of the apartment walked around.

“He’s gone,” said his wife, sitting down on the couch. “Hell!”

Fedya went along the hall as far as a door on which hung a sign that said, “Entrance Strictly Forbidden,” opened the door, and went into the room.

The room he entered was narrow and long, with the window covered by newspaper. At the right, against a wall, stood a dirty broken couch, and near the window was a table made from a board, one end of which was placed on the night table and the other on the back of a chair. On the wall at the left hung a double shelf on which was an indefinite something.

There was nothing else in the room, unless one counts a man lying on the couch, with a pale green face, dressed in a long ragged brown coat and black nankeen trousers, out of which stuck clean washed feet. This man was not sleeping, and he stared intently at the man who entered.

Fedya bowed, scraped his feet, and taking the butter out of his mouth, showed it to the man who was lying down.

“One ruble fifty,” the man said without changing his position.

“Too little,” said Fedya.

“Enough,” said the man.

“Well, all right,” said Fedya, and slipping the butter from his finger, put it on the shelf.

“Come to get the money tomorrow morning,” the man said.

“What!” shouted Fedya. “I need it now. Only one ruble fifty!”

“Get out,” the man said sharply, and Fedya ran out of the room on tiptoe, closing the door behind him carefully.

The Beginning of a Beautiful Day (A Symphony)

The rooster had hardly crowed when Timofey jumped out of the window onto the roof and frightened all the passers-by who were on the street at that hour. The peasant Khariton stopped, picked up a stone, and threw it at Timofey. Timofey disappeared somewhere. "That is a clever one!" the herd of people shouted, and Zubov ran full speed and rammed his head into a wall. "Oh!" a woman with a swollen cheek shouted. But Komarov beat up the woman, and the woman ran howling through the doorway. Fetelyushin walked past and laughed at them. Komarov walked up to him and said, "Hey, you greaseball," and hit Fetelyushin in the stomach. Fetelyushin leaned against the wall and started to hiccup. Romashkin spat from the top-story window, trying to hit Fetelyushin. At that moment, not far from there, a big-nosed woman was beating up her kid with a trough. A fattish young mother rubbed a pretty little girl's face against the brick wall. A little dog broke its thin leg and rolled around on the pavement. A little boy ate some kind of loathsome thing out of a spittoon. At the grocery store there was a long line for sugar. The women swore loudly and pushed one another with bags. The peasant Khariton got drunk on denatured alcohol and stood in front of the women with unbuttoned trousers and said bad words.

Thus began a beautiful summer day.

Symphony No. 2

Anton Mikhailovich spat, said "Ugh," spat again, said "Ugh" again, spat again, said "Ugh" again, and went out. The hell with him. I'd better tell you about Ilya Pavlovich.

Ilya Pavlovich was born in 1893 in Constantinople. When he was still a small boy, they moved to Petersburg, and there he graduated from the German School on Kirochnaya Street. Then he had a job in some kind of store; then he did something else; and when the Revolution started, he emigrated. Well, the hell with him. I'd better tell you about Anna Ignatievna.

But it is not so easy to tell you about Anna Ignatievna. First of all, I know almost nothing about her, and secondly, I have just fallen off my chair and forget what I was going to say. So I'd better tell you about myself.

I am tall, fairly intelligent; I dress meticulously and in good taste; I don't drink, I don't go to the races, but I like ladies. And ladies don't dislike me. They like it when I go out with them. Serafima Izmaylovna invited me to her place more than once, and Zinaida Yakovlevna also said that she was always glad to see me. But a funny thing happened to me with Marina Petrovna that I want to tell you about. An absolutely ordinary thing, but an amusing one. Because of me, Marina Petrovna lost all her hair—bald as the palm of your hand. It happened this way: once I went to see Marina Petrovna, and bang! she lost all her hair. That was all.

An Unsuccessful Show

(Petrakov-Gorbunov comes on the stage, wants to say something, but hiccups. He starts to vomit. He exits. Enter Pritykin.)

PRITYKIN: Petrakov-Gorbunov had to . . . *(He vomits and runs away.)*

(Makarov enters.)

MAKAROV: Egor . . . *(He runs away.)*

(Serpukhov enters.)

SERPUKHOV: So as not to be . . . *(He vomits and runs away.)*

(Kurova comes out.)

KUROVA: I should . . . *(She runs away.)*

(A little girl comes out.)

LITTLE GIRL: Daddy asked me to tell you that the theater is closing. We all feel sick.

Curtain

The Carpenter Kushakov

Once upon a time there lived a carpenter. His name was Kushakov. Once he walked out of his house and went to a store to buy carpenter's glue.

There was a thaw, and the street was very slippery. The carpenter took a few steps, slipped, fell, and broke his forehead. "Ugh," said the carpenter, got up, went to the drugstore, bought a bandage, and fixed up his forehead.

But when he walked out onto the street and took a few steps, he slipped again, fell, and broke his nose.

"Phool" said the carpenter, went into the drugstore, bought a bandage, and pasted his nose together with the bandage.

Then he walked out again onto the street; again he slipped; he fell and broke his cheek.

Again he had to go in the drugstore and fix up his cheek with a bandage.

"You know," the druggist said to the carpenter, "you fall so often and hurt yourself, I advise you to buy several bandages."

"No," said the carpenter, "I'm not going to fall any more." But when he walked out onto the street, he slipped again, fell, and broke his chin.

"Lousy icel" the carpenter shouted and again ran into the drugstore.

"You see," said the druggist, "you fell down again."

“No,” shouted the carpenter. “I don’t want even to hear about it. Give me a bandage, quick.”

The druggist gave him a bandage. The carpenter bandaged up his chin and ran home.

At home they didn’t recognize him and didn’t let him into his apartment.

“I am the carpenter Kushakov,” the carpenter shouted.

“You don’t say!” the people in the apartment answered, and bolted the door and put on the chain.

The carpenter Kushakov stood for a moment on the stairs, spat, and went out to the street.

Blue Notebook No. 10

There was once a red-haired man who had no eyes and no ears. He also had no hair, so he was called red-haired only in a manner of speaking.

He wasn’t able to talk, because he didn’t have a mouth. He had no nose, either.

He didn’t even have any arms or legs. He also didn’t have a stomach, and he didn’t have a back, and he didn’t have a spine, and he also didn’t have any other insides. He didn’t have anything. So it’s hard to understand whom we’re talking about.

So we’d better not talk about him any more.

Falling-Out Old Women

An old woman fell out of a window because she was too curious. She fell and broke into pieces.

Another old woman leaned out the window and looked at the one that had broken into pieces, but because she was too curious, she also fell out of the window—fell and broke into pieces.

Then a third old woman fell out of the window, then a fourth, and then a fifth.

When the sixth old woman fell out of the window, I became fed up with watching them and went to the Maltsevsky Market, where they said a blind man had been presented with a knit scarf.

An Event on the Street

Once a man jumped out of a streetcar, but so clumsily that he fell under an automobile.

Traffic on the street stopped, and a policeman tried to find out how the accident had happened.

The driver was explaining something for a long time, pointing with his finger at the front wheels of the automobile. The policeman felt the wheels with his hand and wrote the name of the street in his little book.

A fairly large crowd gathered round.

A man with dim eyes kept falling off the policeman's stand all the time.

A woman kept looking around all the time at another woman, who in her turn kept looking around all the time at the first woman.

Then the crowd dispersed and traffic started moving again.

The citizen with the dim eyes kept on falling off the stand for a long time, but in the end he, too, clearly despairing of getting himself securely seated on the policeman's stand, simply lay down on the sidewalk. At that moment a man who was carrying a chair fell down hard, under the streetcar.

A policeman came again; again a crowd gathered, and traffic stopped. The man with the dim eyes again started falling off the policeman's stand. Well, and then everything became all right, and even Ivan Semyonovich Karpov went into a restaurant.

A Sonnet

An amazing thing happened to me: I suddenly forgot which came first, 7 or 8.

I went to my neighbors and asked them what they thought about that.

I was really amazed when they told me that they too couldn't remember the counting sequence. They remembered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, but they forgot what came after that.

We all went into the grocery store at the corner of Znamensky and Basseyayaya streets and asked the cashier. The cashier smiled sadly, took a tiny little hammer out of her mouth, and slightly twitching her nose, said, "I think 7 comes after 8 in those cases when 8 comes after 7."

We thanked the cashier and ran joyfully out of the store. But then, thinking over the cashier's words, we again fell silent, because her words turned out to make no sense.

What were we to do? We went into the summer park and counted trees. But after we reached 6, we stopped and argued. Some thought: 7 came next, and others that 8 came next.

We argued for a long time, but fortunately a little boy fell off a park bench and broke both jaws. This distracted us from our argument.

Then we all went home.

Vindication

I don't want to boast. But when Volodya hit me in the ear and spat in my eyes, I let him have it in a way he will never forget. It was then that I beat him with the little gas stove; yesterday I beat him with the flatiron. So he did not die right away. And where is there any proof that I cut off his leg that day? He was still alive. And I beat Andryusha to death only because I was carried away by my momentum. I am not at all responsible for that. Why did Andryusha and Liza Antonovna come in there? Who was forcing them to come in that door?

I've been accused of being bloodthirsty. It's been said I drank the blood. That is a lie. I only lapped up the puddles and the spots. It's natural to want to wipe out the traces of even the most innocent transgression. And I did not rape Liza Antonovna. First of all, she was not a virgin any more. Secondly, I was dealing with a corpse. So the accusation is beside the point. So what if she was about to have a baby! I took the child out of her. And if it wasn't capable of living, that's not my fault. I did not tear off its head. It's the fault of that thin neck. It was simply unfit for life. It's true I stomped on the dog. But it's simply cynical to accuse me of murdering a dog, when right alongside it, three human lives had been lost. I'm not counting the baby. Let us say, and I might even agree, that there was a certain amount of cruelty on my part. But to try me because I defecated on those victims is, if you pardon

me, absurd. Defecating is a natural human need. So how can it be something indecent? I do understand certain fears my defense attorney has, but I believe I shall be completely vindicated.

A Meeting

The other day a man went to work, but on his way, he met another man, who had bought a loaf of Polish bread and was on his way home, to his own place.

That's about all.

Incidents

Once Orlov ate too many ground peas and died. Krylov found out about it and died too. Spiridonov up and died all by himself. Spiridonov's wife fell off the cupboard and also died. Spiridonov's children drowned in the pond. Grandma Spiridonov took to drink and hit the road. Mikhailov stopped combing his hair and caught a skin disease. Kruglov drew a picture of a lady with a whip in her hand and lost his mind. Perekhrestov was sent four hundred rubles by telegram and put on such airs that they fired him at his office.

Good people, but they don't know how to take themselves in hand.

Petrakov

The other day Petrakov wanted to go to bed, but he missed the bed and plopped down beside it. He bumped the floor so hard that he lay on the floor and couldn't get up.

So Petrakov gathered himself together and with all his strength pulled himself up on all fours. But his strength gave out, and he fell down again on his stomach and lay there.

Petrakov lay on the floor for five hours. At first he simply lay there; then he fell asleep.

Sleep put strength into Petrakov. He woke up feeling perfectly fine, got up, walked around the room, and lay down carefully on his bed. "Well, now I'll sleep," he thought. But he didn't feel like sleeping any more. He turned from side to side and couldn't fall asleep at all.

That's about all.

A Lynching

Petrov is on horseback and, turning to the crowd, makes a speech about what will happen if in place of the public park there is built an American-style skyscraper. The crowd listens and evidently agrees. Petrov writes something in his notebook. Out of the crowd comes a man of medium height who asks Petrov what he wrote in his little notebook. Petrov answers that that's his own business. The man of medium height insists. One word leads to another, and an argument starts. The crowd takes the side of the man of medium height, and to have his life Petrov urges on his horse. He hides beyond a turn in the road.

The crowd gets excited, and for lack of another victim seizes the man of medium height and tears off his head. The torn-off head rolls along the pavement and gets stuck in the drain. . . .

The crowd, having satisfied its passions, disperses.

Losing Things

Andrey Andreevich Myasov bought a wick at the market and carried it home.

Along the way Andrey Andreevich lost the wick and went into a store to buy 150 grams of Poltava sausage. Then Andrey Andreevich went to a dairy store and bought a bottle of yogurt; then he drank a small mug of kvas at a counter and waited in line to buy a newspaper. The line was quite long, and Andrey Andreevich spent about twenty minutes waiting in it, but when he got to the paper boy, he had just sold the last newspaper right in front of his nose.

Andrey Andreevich stood around for a while, then left for home, but on the way he lost the yogurt, went into a bakery, bought a French roll—but lost the Poltava sausage.

Then Andrey Andreevich went directly home, but along the way he fell down, lost the French roll, and broke his pince-nez.

Andrey Andreevich came home angry and right away went to bed to sleep, but he couldn't fall asleep for a long time, and when he did fall asleep, he had a dream: he dreamed that he had lost his toothbrush and was cleaning his teeth with some kind of candle holder.

What They Sell in the Stores Nowadays

Koratygin came to Tikakeev's and didn't find him at home. Tikakeev just then was at the store and bought sugar, meat, and cucumbers. Koratygin hung around Tikakeev's door and was about to write him a note, when he looked and saw Tikakeev carrying an oilcloth bag in his hand.

Koratygin saw Tikakeev and shouted to him, "I've been waiting for you a whole hour."

"That's not true," said Tikakeev; "I was only gone for twenty-five minutes."

"I don't know about that," Koratygin said, "but I've been here for a whole hour."

"Don't lie," said Tikakeev. "It's a shame to lie."

"My dear sir," said Koratygin, "will you please take the trouble to choose your expressions carefully?"

"I think . . .," Tikakeev was about to say, but Koratygin interrupted him. "If you think . . .," he said, but here Tikakeev interrupted Koratygin and said, "You are a fine guy yourself."

These words so enraged Koratygin that he squeezed one of his nostrils with a finger and from his other nostril blew his nose at Tikakeev.

Tikakeev took a big cucumber out of his bag and hit Koratygin with it over the head.

Koratygin clutched his head, fell down, and died. That's how big the cucumbers are that they sell in the stores nowadays.

Anecdotes about Pushkin's Life

1

Pushkin was a poet, and all the time he was writing something. Once Zhukovsky found him writing and shouted at him, "You really are a scribbler!"

From that time on, Pushkin loved Zhukovsky and in friendly fashion called him simply Zhukov.

2

As is known, Pushkin could never grow a beard. This bothered him a lot, and he always envied Zakharyn, who on the contrary really had a properly growing beard. "His grows and mine doesn't grow," Pushkin often complained, pointing at Zakharyn with his fingernails. And each time he was right.

3

Once Petrushevsky broke his watch and sent for Pushkin. Pushkin came, looked at Petrushevsky's watch, and put it back on the chair. "What do you say, Brother Pushkin?" Petrushevsky asked. "The wheels stopped going round," Pushkin said.

4

When Pushkin broke his legs, he got about on wheels. His friends liked to tease Pushkin and caught the wheels. Pushkin

became angry and wrote poems in which he swore at his friends. He called these poems "erpigarms."

5

Pushkin spent the summer of 1829 in the country. He would get up early in the morning, drink a pitcher of milk, and run to the river to bathe. After bathing in the river, Pushkin would lie down on the grass and sleep till lunch. After lunch Pushkin would sleep in his hammock. When he met smelly peasants, Pushkin would nod to them and hold his nose with his fingers. The smelly peasants would take off their caps and say, "It's nothing."

6

Pushkin loved to throw rocks. As soon as he saw a rock, he would throw it. Sometimes he became so excited that he stood, all red in the face, waving his arms, throwing rocks, simply something awful.

7

Pushkin had four sons, all idiots. One didn't even know how to sit on a chair and fell off all the time. Pushkin himself also sat on a chair rather badly. It was simply killing: they sat at the table; at one end, Pushkin kept falling off his chair continually, and at the other end, his son. Simply enough to make one split one's sides with laughter.

An Optical Illusion

Semyon Semyonovich, having put on his glasses, looks at a pine tree and sees that a peasant is sitting in the pine tree and shaking his fist at him.

Semyon Semyonovich, having taken off his glasses, looks at the pine tree and sees that nobody is sitting in the pine tree.

Semyon Semyonovich, having put on his glasses, looks at the pine tree and again sees that a peasant is sitting in the pine tree and shaking his fist at him.

Semyon Semyonovich, having taken off his glasses, again sees that nobody is sitting in the pine tree.

Semyon Semyonovich, having put on his glasses again, looks at the pine tree again, sees that a peasant is sitting in the pine tree and is shaking his fist at him.

Semyon Semyonovich doesn't want to believe in this phenomenon and decides it is an optical illusion.

A Suite

Since a long time ago, people have been reflecting on what intelligence and stupidity are. With respect to this, I remember an incident. When my aunt gave me a desk, I said to myself, "I'll sit down at the desk, and the first idea I'll come up with at that desk will be an especially intelligent one." But I wasn't able to think up an especially intelligent idea. Then I said to myself, "Very well. I didn't succeed in thinking up an especially intelligent idea, so I'll think up an especially stupid one." But I wasn't able to think up an especially stupid idea, either.

It is very difficult to do anything extreme. It is easier to do something in the middle. The center requires no effort. The center is equilibrium. There's no struggle there.

A Young Man Who Astonished a Watchman

"Well!" said the watchman, examining the fly. "If one put carpenter's glue on it, it might be all done for. What a thing! Just simple glue."

"Hey, you," a young man who was wearing yellow gloves shouted at the watchman.

The watchman understood immediately that it was he who was being spoken to, but he went on looking at the fly.

"What do they call you?" the young man shouted again. "You ox, you."

The watchman squashed the fly with his finger and said, without turning his head in the direction of the young man: "What are you yelling for? Aren't you ashamed? I hear you anyway. No need to yell."

The young man brushed off his trousers with his gloves and asked in a delicate voice, "Tell me, old man, which way to heaven?"

The watchman looked at the young man, screwed up one eye, then screwed up the other eye, then rubbed his beard, then looked at the young man once more and said, "Don't loiter around; get a move on."

"Excuse me," said the young man. "I'm on urgent business. They even have a room ready for me there."

"Fine," said the watchman; "show me your ticket."

"I don't have a ticket. They told me they would let me in without one," said the young man, looking straight at the watchman.

"Well!" said the watchman.

"So what do you say?" asked the young man. "Will you let me through?"

"All right, all right," said the watchman. "Go ahead."

"But which way should I go? Where?" the young man asked. "I don't even know the way."

"Where do you have to go?" the watchman asked and made a severe face.

The young man put his hand over his mouth and said in a very low voice, "To heaven."

The watchman leaned forward, moved his right foot so as to stand more firmly, stared at the young man, and asked sternly: "What's the matter. Are you playing the fool?"

The young man smiled, raised one of his yellow-gloved hands, waved it over his head, and suddenly disappeared.

The watchman sniffed the air. The air smelled of burned feathers.

"Oh, my, my," said the watchman; he unbuttoned his jacket, scratched his stomach, spat at the spot where the young man had stood, and slowly went into his hut.

A Dream

Kalugin fell asleep and dreamed a dream. He was sitting in some bushes, and a militiaman went past the bushes.

Kalugin woke up, scratched his mouth, and fell asleep again, and again he dreamed a dream. He was walking past some bushes, and in the bushes a militiaman was sitting and hiding.

Kalugin woke up, put a newspaper under his head so as not to make the pillow wet with his slobbering, and fell asleep again, and again he dreamed a dream. He was sitting in some bushes, and a militiaman was walking past the bushes.

Kalugin woke up, changed the newspaper, lay down, and again fell asleep. He fell asleep and again he had a dream. He was walking past some bushes, and a militiaman was sitting in the bushes.

At that point Kalugin woke up and decided to sleep no more, but immediately he fell asleep and had a dream. He was sitting behind a militiaman, and bushes were walking past.

Kalugin shouted and turned over in his bed, but he was no longer able to wake up.

Kalugin slept for four days and nights in a row, and the fifth day he woke up so thin that he had to tie his boots to his feet with twine so that they would not keep falling off.

In the bakery, where Kalugin always bought wheat bread, they didn't recognize him and slipped him bread that was half rye.

The Sanitary Commission inspected the apartment house and saw Kalugin, and declared him to be unsanitary and good for nothing, and ordered the apartment cooperative to throw Kalugin out with the trash.

They folded Kalugin in two and threw him out with the trash.

Grigoryev and Semyonov¹

GRIGORYEV: (*Hits Semyonov in the face.*) Well, winter has started. Time to make a fire in the stove. What do you think?

SEMYONOV: I think—if we are to think seriously about your remark—that perhaps we really ought to make a fire in the stove.

GRIGORYEV: (*Hits Semyonov in the face.*) And what do you think? Is the winter this year going to be cold or warm?

SEMYONOV: Perhaps, considering that the summer was rainy, the winter will be cold. If the summer is wet, the winter is always cold.

GRIGORYEV: (*Hits Semyonov in the face.*) I never feel cold.

SEMYONOV: That is absolutely correct, what you just said. You are never cold. You have that kind of constitution.

GRIGORYEV: (*Hits Semyonov in the face.*) I'm never cold.

SEMYONOV: Ouch!

GRIGORYEV: (*Hits Semyonov in the face.*) What do you mean, ouch?

SEMYONOV: (*Holds his cheek.*) Ouch! My face hurts.

GRIGORYEV: Why does it hurt? (*With those words, hits Semyonov in the face.*)

SEMYONOV: (*Falling on a chair*) Ouch! I myself don't know why.

GRIGORYEV: (*Kicking Semyonov in the face*) Nothing hurts me.

SEMYONOV: I'll teach you, son of a bitch, not to pick fights.

(*Tries to get up.*)

GRIGORYEV: (*Hitting Semyonov in the face*) Look, we've got a teacher here!

SEMYONOV: (*Falls on his back.*) You dirty bastard!

GRIGORYEV: Now, now, choose your words more carefully.

SEMYONOV: (*Trying to rise*) I've put up with a lot, but this is too much. Obviously, one can't get along with you peacefully. It's your own fault.

GRIGORYEV: (*Kicks Semyonov in the face.*) Just go on talking and talking. We will listen.

SEMYONOV: (*Falls on his back.*) Ouch!

¹ In the manuscript this dialogue has no title.—Ed.

A Play

SHASHKIN (*Standing in the center of the stage*): My wife has run away. What can I do? It's all the same; once she's run away, you won't get her to come back. One must be philosophical and wise and understand that anything can happen. Blessed is he who has wisdom. Kurov doesn't have wisdom, but I have. I read a book in the public library twice. It said very intelligent things about everything.

I take an interest in everything, even in languages. I can count in French and know how to say *stomach* in German: *der Magen*. That's how. Even the painter Kozlov is my friend. We drink beer together. And Kurov? He can't even tell time. He blows his nose in his hands, eats fish with a fork, sleeps with his shoes on, doesn't brush his teeth. Phooey! That's what I call a peasant. Take him into society. They'll throw you out and curse you. If you are an intellectual, don't go around with a peasant.

You can't get the better of me. If I've got to talk to a count—I talk to a count. If I have to talk to a baron—I talk to a baron. You can't even figure out right away what kind of person I am.

It's true that I know German badly, although I do know that *stomach* is *der Magen*. But if they say to me, "Der Magen findel moeey," already I don't know what it is. But Kurov doesn't even know *der Magen*. And she ran away with that

kind of a dummy. You can see what she wanted! You see, she doesn't consider me a man. She says, "You have a voice like a woman." But it's not a voice like a woman but a voice like a child. A delicate voice, a child's voice, not at all a woman's voice. What a fool she is. What did she want Kurov for? The painter Kozlov says that I'm just made for a portrait.

Sleep Teases a Man

Markov took off his shoes, sighed, and lay down on the couch. He felt like sleeping, but as soon as he shut his eyes, the desire to sleep immediately went away. Markov opened his eyes and reached out for a book. But sleep again attacked him, and Markov, without having touched the book, lay down and shut his eyes again. But as soon as he shut his eyes, sleep fled again, and his mind became so clear that Markov could have solved in his head algebraic problems with equations with two unknowns.

Markov tortured himself for a long time, not knowing what to do, to sleep or to stay awake. In the end, having tortured himself through and through, and having come to hate himself and his room, Markov put on his coat and hat, took a cane, and walked outside. A fresh breeze calmed Markov. He felt happier and wanted to go back to his own room.

When he came into his room, he felt a pleasant, tired sensation in his body and wanted to sleep. But as soon as he lay down on the couch and shut his eyes, sleep vanished immediately.

Markov leaped off the couch in a rage and, without hat or coat, rushed toward the Tauride Park.

A Fable

A certain short man said, "I'd do anything if only I could be just a little taller."

He had hardly finished saying this when he saw a witch standing in front of him.

"What do you want?" the witch asked him.

The short man stood there, and he was so frightened, he couldn't say anything.

"Well?" said the witch.

The short man stood there and said nothing. The witch disappeared.

At that point the short man started crying and biting his nails. First he bit all the nails on his fingers and then those on his toes.

Reader, think hard about this fable and you will feel pretty strange.

The Connection

Philosopher!

1. I am writing to you in answer to your letter which you are about to write to me in answer to my letter which I wrote to you.
2. A violinist bought a magnet and was carrying it home. Along the way, hoods jumped him and knocked his cap off his head. The wind picked up the cap and carried it down the street.
3. The violinist put the magnet down and ran after the cap. The cap fell into a puddle of nitric acid and dissolved.
4. In the meantime, the hoods picked up the magnet and hid.
5. The violinist returned home without a coat and without a cap, because the cap had dissolved in the nitric acid, and the violinist, upset by losing his cap, had left his coat in the streetcar.
6. The conductor of the streetcar took the coat to a secondhand shop and exchanged it there for sour cream, groats, and tomatoes.
7. The conductor's father-in-law ate too many tomatoes, became sick, and died. The corpse of the conductor's father-in-law was put in the morgue, but it got mixed up, and in place of the conductor's father-in-law, they buried some old woman.

8. On the grave of the old woman, they put a white post with the inscription "Anton Sergeevich Kondratev."

9. Eleven years later, the worms had eaten through the post, and it fell down. The cemetery watchman sawed the post into four pieces and burned it in his stove. The wife of the cemetery watchman cooked cauliflower soup over that fire.

10. But when the soup was ready, a fly fell from the wall, directly into the pot with this soup. They gave the soup to the beggar Timofey.

11. The beggar Timofey ate the soup and told the beggar Nikolay that the cemetery watchman was a good-natured man.

12. The next day the beggar Nikolay went to the cemetery watchman and asked for money. But the cemetery watchman gave nothing to the beggar Nikolay and chased him away.

13. The beggar Nikolay became very angry and set fire to the cemetery watchman's house.

14. The fire spread from the house to the church, and the church burned down.

15. A long investigation was carried on but did not succeed in determining the cause of the fire.

16. In the place where the church had stood a club was built, and on the day the club opened a concert was organized, at which the violinist who fourteen years earlier had lost his coat performed.

17. In the audience sat the son of one of those hoods who fourteen years before had knocked the cap off that violinist.

18. After the concert was over, they rode home in the same streetcar. In the streetcar behind theirs, the driver was the same conductor who once upon a time had sold the violinist's coat in a secondhand shop.

19. And so here they are, riding late at night through the city: in front, the violinist and the hood's son; and in back, the driver, the former conductor.

20. They ride along and don't know what connection there is between them, and they won't know till the day they die.

1937

From a Notebook

An old man was scratching his head with both hands. In places where he couldn't reach with both hands, he scratched himself with one, but very, very fast. And while he was doing it, he blinked rapidly.

Steam, or so-called smoke, came out of the chimney of the locomotive. A beautiful bird flew into that smoke and flew out of it ruffled and disheveled.

Khvilishevsky ate cranberries and tried not to wince. He expected everybody to say: What strength of character! But nobody said anything.

A dog could be heard sniffing at the door. Khvilishevsky squeezed a toothbrush with his hand and stuck out his eyes so as to hear better. "If the dog comes in," Khvilishevsky thought to himself, "I'll hit it right in the temple with this bone handle."

... Bubbles of some kind flew out of the box. Khvilishevsky left the room on tiptoe and quietly shut the door behind him. "The hell with it," Khvilishevsky said to himself. "It's none of my business what's in it. Really! The hell with it."

A fat man invented a way of losing weight. And he lost weight. Ladies besieged him and questioned him about how he had managed to lose weight. But the man who had lost weight told the ladies that losing weight looks good on men but doesn't look good on ladies and that ladies must be plump. And he was absolutely right.