

Introduction

Friend of the gentle Muses! You dispense their
gifts
As much with brilliance as with modesty.
Your voice rang out among us first,
And all Ukraine applauds thee
LXX ... CC ... , 1816¹

The Other Voice

Many readers will be surprised to find Liubov Yakovlevna Krichevskaya, a writer born in the first year of the nineteenth century, in a series entitled the Other Voice in Early Modern Europe. However, the “early modern” age, that is, “the period in which Russia was transformed from an essentially medieval, feudal culture into a modern, secularized, European empire,”² is generally acknowledged among Russian historians to have begun later and lasted much longer than the comparable period in the West. In terms of literature, Marcus Levitt explains, the early modern period extends into the early nineteenth century: “During what might be called the ‘early modern’ period ... , the ‘classical’ hierarchical system of genres underwent three basic transmutations in Russia before it was finally dethroned in the nineteenth century: the seventeen-century baroque; mid-eighteenth-century Russian classicism; and the sentimentalism of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century.”³ In fact, of the forty-nine writers included in the volume *Early Modern Russian Writers*, over a third lived well into the nineteenth century. And while Krichevskaya’s cosmopolitan contemporary Alexander Pushkin would be honored as

1. This poem, signed with the cryptograph “LXX ... CC ...,” was dedicated to L. Krichevskaya. It appeared in the journal *Ukrainskii vestnik*, volume two, issue 4, of 1816, alongside the first two published verses of Krichevskaya, “Vera, Nadezhda, Liubov” and “R—vu.”

2. Marcus Levitt, introduction to *Early Modern Writers, Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Marcus Levitt, vol. 150 of *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Detroit, New York, and London: Brucoli Clark Layman, and Gale Research, Inc., 1995), ix.

3. *Ibid.*, xi.

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“the father of modern Russian literature,” Levitt argues that those authors who, like Krichevskaya, wrote outside of Pushkin’s influence and continued to develop sentimental forms belong still to the early modern age.⁴ Accepting the relatively recent dating of this period, readers may be all the more surprised at the dearth of women writers, at least in the scholarly literature. In fact, only two women are included in the above-mentioned volume: Catherine the Great and her friend Princess Ekaterina Dashkova. Moreover, their wealth and status make them hardly representative voices of the time. And so, the work of Krichevskaya, long unavailable in either English or Russian, promises to lend greater insight into the other voice in the literature of that turbulent and still understudied period known as early modern Russia.

Appearing on the Russian literary scene during the reign of Alexander I (1801–1825), Krichevskaya stands out in the history of Russian literature for a number of reasons. Not only did she manage to publish her work in the early nineteenth century, a time when there were very few successful women writers in Russia, but she did so in the provincial city of Kharkov, located in Little Russia, or present-day Ukraine, not in Russia’s “two capitals”—St. Petersburg and Moscow, the undisputed centers of Russian literary culture of the time. Moreover, she was one of only a small group of writers—male or female—who attempted to live off their literary earnings, in her case to support her widowed mother and unmarried younger sisters. Driven by financial need as well as writerly ambition, Krichevskaya was nonetheless constrained by the modesty and self-abnegation expected of women at the time, leading her to reflect in her literary work on the idea of woman’s agency, that is, how and to what extent women might control their lives and direct their destiny. Krichevskaya’s prose fiction alternately displays great confidence, desperate hope, and profound ambivalence that a woman’s exercise of selfless virtue will indeed be rewarded in this life with the financial security and domestic happiness she sought, while her poetry is also punctuated by moments of utter despair, as in the poem “Another Song,” where her lyric subject makes the abject declaration, “The poor of this world ought not to love!”

4. *Ibid.*, xiv.

In a literary tradition that has marginalized and obscured the contribution of its women writers, Krichevskaya has for too long now been “hidden from history.” Alessandra Tosi claims that the neglect of women writers like Krichevskaya was institutionalized by the Soviet scholarly establishment, whose teleological view of literary history privileged realism, relegating early nineteenth-century sentimentalism, for all practical purposes, to the dustbin of history.⁵ Such a dismissive evaluation of this mode of writing had very real consequences for the subsequent study of this literature. As Tosi explains, “[I]t not only swept away the complexity and richness characterising this age of Russian fiction, but also resulted in there being only a sparse number of both scholarly studies on the period and, crucially, new editions of early nineteenth-century works.”⁶ Due to the unavailability of Krichevskaya’s works, even scholars of Russian women’s literature make only the most cursory mention of her literary output, if they acknowledge it at all.⁷ However, as an unmarried provincial woman of modest means pursuing a professional career as a writer in the early nineteenth century, Krichevskaya occupies a unique place in Russian letters, and a comprehensive analysis of her work promises to shed new light on the development of early nineteenth-century Russian literature and on the role played in it by women writers.

The Historical Context

Liubov Krichevskaya lived through a rather turbulent time—politically, socially, and culturally—in Russian history, famously chronicled by Leo Tolstoy in the novel *War and Peace*. This era was marked by

5. Alessandra Tosi, *Waiting for Pushkin: Russian Fiction in the Reign of Alexander I (1801–1825)*, *Studies in Slavic Literature and Poetics*, 44 (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), 12. I follow Tosi in not capitalizing “sentimentalism,” “pre-romanticism,” and “romanticism” in recognition of the fact that the highly syncretic nature of Russian literature at the time makes it difficult to set chronological boundaries or to describe these modes of writing as discrete “schools” (*ibid.*, 207).

6. *Ibid.*

7. For example, the biographical sketch of Krichevskaya in Adele Marie Barker and Jehanne M. Gheith, eds., *A History of Women’s Writing in Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 332, is incomplete, leaving out any mention of her major works, such as the epistolary novel *Count Gorsky (Graf Gorskii, 1837)*.

the accession to the Russian throne of the more liberal-minded Alexander I, the Napoleonic Wars with the burning of Moscow and the Russian occupation of Paris, the liberal Decembrist revolt of 1825, and the repressive reign of Nicholas I that followed. This was a time of intense social and cultural tumult in Russia. As Tosi notes, “The early nineteenth century is a momentous time for Russian cultural life. The new freedom enjoyed by Russians at the beginning of Alexander’s ‘liberal’ reign injected new life into artistic activities in general, and into the literary arena in particular. The number of Russians taking up the pen soared, and began to include non-aristocratic writers and female authors, whilst literary institutions such as societies and journals proliferated.”⁸

Despite the increasing number of women writers, the early nineteenth century was an age dominated by men, quite unlike the preceding century, during which four women occupied the Russian throne and Princess Dashkova served as the first president of the Russian Academy of Science. Krichevskaya was born less than a decade after the death of Catherine the Great and only three years after the latter’s son and heir, Paul I, issued the law of succession that instituted male primogeniture, which excluded women from inheriting the crown. The presence of women in politics was greatly reduced, and women’s influence was largely restricted to social venues, such as salons and artistic patronage. As Catriona Kelly notes, “the emergence of women’s writing in Russia was linked with a *decline* in women’s real political and economic powers.”⁹ Not surprisingly, the idea of woman’s power, or agency, is at the heart of Krichevskaya’s work.

Krichevskaya began her literary career in the second decade of the nineteenth century, during that flowering of Russian literature referred to as the Golden Age, when a pleiad of extremely talented—and almost exclusively male—lyric poets appeared. Among them was arguably Russia’s greatest poet, Alexander Pushkin, who made his literary debut in 1814, just two years before Krichevskaya did. However, the fact that Pushkin (1799–1837) and Krichevskaya were almost perfect contemporaries does more to highlight the differences

8. Tosi, *Waiting for Pushkin*, 12–13.

9. Catriona Kelly, *A History of Russian Women’s Writing, 1820–1992* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 8.

in male and female literature than to point out any similarities, and helps to explain the increasing marginalization of women's writing in Russia. The literary output of the cosmopolitan Pushkin was marked by a highly sophisticated use of romantic irony, something few women writers of the time were free to imitate, confined as they were to more naïve, sentimental modes.¹⁰ Only a generation before, one of Russia's most popular and respected authors, Nikolai Karamzin, had championed the sentimental tale, but by the 1820s male authors were largely abandoning sentimentalism or lampooning it. However, very few women authors were able to escape "the prescriptions of sentimentalism as *the* feminine trend."¹¹ And while sentimentalism exerted a similar influence on women writers in the West, the Russian case, Tosi argues, "is more extreme in terms of both the hold and the long-term effects sentimental views had on women writing."¹²

In order to give a better sense of the intensely hybrid cultural context in which Krichevskaya pursued her art, it is interesting to note that not all the female authors who took up the pen at that time in Russia wrote in Russian. French was then the first language of Russia's aristocratic elite, and while men were typically forced to learn Russian in their formal schooling in order to pursue careers in the civil service or the military, Russian women were under little compulsion to learn the national language, at least not until the Napoleonic Wars set off a wave of patriotism. And so, three of Krichevskaya's female near-contemporaries—Natalia Golovkina (1769–1849), Yulia Krüdener (1764–1825), and Zinaida Volkonskaya (1792–1862)—wrote almost entirely in French.¹³

The first decades of the nineteenth century also witnessed the establishment of Bible societies, which spread pietism through the educated classes of Russian society and, as Catriona Kelly notes, "encouraged women to express their spirituality in a way that the Or-

10. For a discussion of romantic irony in the works of Pushkin, see Monika Greenleaf, *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

11. Tosi, *Waiting for Pushkin*, 134.

12. *Ibid.*, 213.

13. For more on these writers, see Iuri Lotman, "Russkaia literatura na frantsuzskom iazyke," in Iu. M. Lotman, *Izbrannye stat'i: V trekh tomakh* (Tallinn: Aleksandra, 1994), 3: 350–368.

thodox Church of Russia historically had not.”¹⁴ Such “enthusiastic religiosity” was perhaps a reaction to the restricted roles available to women in the public sphere; in any case, it is strongly evident throughout Krichevskaya’s oeuvre, but especially in her lyric poetry. In the late twenties and early thirties, however, the Russian reading public’s taste for poetry waned, and many authors, such as Krichevskaya and her more famous contemporary Pushkin, turned increasingly to prose.

The city of Kharkov, where Krichevskaya spent her entire life, may have been far from the cultural centers of St. Petersburg and Moscow, where the poets of Pushkin’s pleiad spent their time among Russia’s cosmopolitan elite, but it was no backwater. Although it was indeed provincial according to a number of indices—its population in 1802 was just over 10,000, while that of St. Petersburg in 1800 was close to 220,000, and “until the 1830s even the city’s main roads were not always passable by carriage”¹⁵—it underwent rapid expansion and development throughout Krichevskaya’s life. Located at the confluence of the Uda, Lopan, and Kharkov Rivers, it served as a major trading point between the north and south of the Russian Empire from the end of the eighteenth century. At that time it became known as a vibrant educational and cultural center, serving an enormous geographic region that included much of Ukraine, portions of the Caucasus, and some southern Russian provinces, as well as the Don region. In 1796 it was made a provincial capital, and in 1799 it became a Russian Orthodox archdiocese, whose Cathedral of the Dormition was adorned with an iconostasis designed by Francesco Bartolomeo Rastrelli, the architect who transformed the face of St. Petersburg under the Empresses Anna and Elizabeth II.

The most significant event in the evolution of Kharkov’s cultural life was undoubtedly the founding in 1804 of Kharkov University, one of four universities chartered by the reform-minded tsar Al-

14. Catriona Kelly, “Sappho, Corinna, and Niobe: Genres and Personae in Russian Women’s Writing, 1760–1820,” in *A History of Women’s Writings in Russia*, ed. Adele Marie Barker and Jehanne M. Gheith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 37–61, at 47.

15. L. Makedonov, s.v. “Khar’kov,” *Entsyklopediia*, ed. I. E. Andrevskii (St. Petersburg: F. A. Brokgauz-I. A. Efron, 1903), 74: 109–17, at 115.

exander I, and the second-oldest university in Ukraine.¹⁶ In 1824, the university press began publishing the *Ukrainian Journal* (Ukrainskii zhurnal), which, together with the Kharkov-based journal *Ukrainian Herald* (Ukrainskii vestnik), became an important publication venue for the young Krichevskaya. The city's cultural expansion was especially rapid during Krichevskaya's adolescence, following the Napoleonic Wars. For example, in 1812 the Kharkov nobility founded a beneficent society to educate the children of those with insufficient resources. In 1813 the Society of Sciences was established, in 1816 a section of the Bible Society, in 1817 the Student Society of Lovers of the Russian Word, in 1820 the Student Bible Community, and in 1823 the Bible Community of Gymnasium Students. Kharkov would become a center of Ukrainian romantic nationalism in the 1830s, something which seems to have had little effect on Krichevskaya, although it catapulted her cousin Grigory (Hrihorii) Kvitka-Osnovianenko to lasting fame as a Ukrainian writer.

Despite the founding of universities, each with its own press, and the emergence of new journals during the reign of Alexander I, it was still quite an achievement to be published in Russia, especially for a provincial woman writer. Consider the fact that in the first five years of the nineteenth century, "the average number of books published in Russia was 400 volumes per year and steadily increased to 585 in 1825."¹⁷ Moreover, in a society with an illiteracy rate of 96 percent, the reading public was fairly sophisticated, restricted as it was "to a small elite, mainly represented by the high society of Moscow and St. Petersburg."¹⁸ On top of all that, there was the issue of censorship. The fact that Krichevskaya managed to publish three volumes of her fiction and another volume of historical anecdotes, which she edited, is certainly testimony to her talent and drive.

16. The University of Lviv was founded in the seventeenth century when western Ukraine was under Polish rule.

17. Tosi, *Waiting for Pushkin*, 34.

18. *Ibid.*, 35.

Biography and Works

Krichevskaya was born on the family estate near Kharkov in 1800, and her career as a writer was, in many respects, as much a necessity as it was a vocation. Her father died when the author was only twelve, leaving her and her four younger sisters without a dowry and, therefore, for all intents and purposes, unmarriedable. Moreover, as the eldest child, Krichevskaya became responsible for the welfare of her entire family, and so it would seem to be no coincidence that all of her heroines are fatherless, and in her novel *Count Gorsky* the heroine, whose name is also Liubov, experiences the death of her father at a very early age. And while mother-daughter relationships are portrayed with great warmth and sympathy in her work, providing for a widowed mother is nonetheless an agonizing burden for many of her heroines of modest means (in, e.g., *Blind Mother* and *No Good without Reward*), who must choose between the care of their mothers and their own happiness.

If her father's death necessitated that Krichevskaya pursue a literary career to support herself (and her family), her first cousin Kvitka-Osnovianenko made such a career a real possibility for the young girl. In an age when women writers "depended on the goodwill of the male writers who edited journals" to get published,¹⁹ Kvitka-Osnovianenko, as an editor of *Ukrainskii vestnik*, as well as an active supporter of Kharkhov theatricals, appears to have played an important role in Krichevskaya's professional life.²⁰ Kvitka-Osnovianenko no doubt helped his cousin to get published in the journal he edited and may have been responsible for the staging of Krichevskaya's play *No Good without Reward*. And while it seems from Krichevskaya's poetry and other writings that she and her cousin were very close, Kvitka-Osnovianenko's support for the young writer may have also been inspired by more abstract principles. A social progressive, Kvitka-Osnovianenko was, among other things, a founder of the Kharkhov Institute for Noble Girls (Institut blagorodnykh devits), reflecting a

19. Kelly, "Sappho, Corinna, and Niobe," 56.

20. It is interesting to note that while Kvitka-Osnovianenko wrote in Ukrainian, his cousin Liubov did not. Although fluent in at least French and Russian, Krichevskaya probably did not read and write in Ukrainian.

commitment to expanding educational opportunities for women.²¹ The proceeds from Krichevskaya's first book-length publication, the two-volume collection of selected works, *My Moments of Leisure* (*Moi svobodnye minuty*, 1817–18), went to support this school. In any case, it is clear that Kvitka-Osnovianenko encouraged his cousin to write, going so far as to praise her literary talent in verse, to which Krichevskaya responded in the poem “To Gr—ry F—ch Kv—ka. In Answer to His Verses of September 17,” thanking her cousin “for all you wished for me,” and chiding him for his compliments: “Dear friend! Why did you praise me so/And place me among the very good?”

Such a reaction may have been inspired at least in part by Krichevskaya's self-consciousness over her limited education, which she describes briefly in a footnote to the poem “To Rtishchev” and in the preface to *My Moments of Leisure*. The education she received was directed by her “gentle, good-hearted mother” (1: iv) and involved for the most part the study of religion, or catechism, as she describes it.²² Nevertheless, Krichevskaya insists that she was content with her modest education—“Thank God! I feel that this is enough for a truly Christian life” (1: iv)—although she does note that it was perhaps insufficient for one hoping to assume “the lofty title of writer” (1: iv), underscoring the challenges women faced in trying to accommodate Christian humility with writerly ambition.

Krichevskaya's description of her limited education was certainly exaggerated; her translations from French and the breadth of her reading suggest that her education extended a good deal beyond the study of the catechism—thanks to her intellectual curiosity and discipline. Her heroines also tend to take the improvement of their minds very seriously. The eponymous heroine of her novella *Emma*, for example, “would be practicing a difficult piece of music

21. S. Shakhovskii, introduction to *G. F. Kvitka-Osnov'ianenko. Povesti* (Kiev: Radians'kii Pis'mennik, 1954), 5.

22. However, one should not, perhaps, make too much of the gender implications of such an education. Kvitka-Osnovianenko, who belonged to the nobility and who, like Krichevskaya, spent his entire life in and around Kharkov, had a similar religion-based education. As he himself put it, “I lived in a time when education did not go very far” (Shakhovskii, introduction, 4).

or traveling through Greece with Anacharsis” in her free time while her sister was “hopping about at a ball.” Moreover, we know from her short autobiographical essays that Krichevskaya read widely. In fact, she liked to copy down in a notebook all the edifying passages she came across, although she notes with some humor that many writers express completely opposite opinions with equal conviction—occasionally, on the very same page!²³ This interest in entertaining and instructive quotations from works of literature and history led to one of Krichevskaya’s greatest publishing successes: *Historical Anecdotes and Selected Quotations of Famous People* (*Istoricheskie anekdoty i izbranye izrecheniia izvestnykh liudei*, 1826), largely taken from French sources. The breadth of her reading is also suggested by the authors she cites in her novel *Count Gorsky*, a virtual who’s who of Russian romanticism: Pushkin, Ivan Kozlov, Alexander Bestuzhev-Marlinsky, and Vasily Zhukovsky. In any case, while Krichevskaya’s description of her education may be overly modest, it nonetheless reflects the reality that women of her day, no matter what their social station, generally did not have access to an education in such prestigious disciplines as classical languages, law, and the hard sciences.

Attempting to live off her earnings as a writer, Krichevskaya may have been the first “professional” woman writer in Ukraine.²⁴ Such a literary career was only just imaginable in Russia at a time when, as Joe Andrew notes, “the reading public was modestly expanding [and] there was increased professionalization and commercialization of literature.”²⁵ Moreover, a system of female patronage was emerging, evidenced by the dedication of *Count Gorsky* to Princess Emelia Petrovna Trubetskaya by an “appreciative Liubov Krichevskaya,” “filled with true gratitude for a kind deed rendered in days of sorrow”—most probably following the death of her mother in the early 1830s and the subsequent loss of property. Nevertheless, social mores of the time constrained women writers—including those, like Krichevskaya, who

23. “Moi zamechaniia” (My Comments), in *Moi svobodnye minuty* 1817, 1:138).

24. I. V. Zborovets’ and O. P. Nasonova, “G. F. Kvitka-Osnov’ianenka i L. Ia. Krichevsk’ka,” *Radians’ke Literaturoznavstvo* 11 (November 1978): 44.

25. Joe Andrew, trans., *Russian Women’s Shorter Fiction: An Anthology, 1835–1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), viii.

entertained professional ambitions—to present their work as amateurish, unprofessional, the fruits of their spare time.

Outside such dedications and isolated passages in her verses and semiautobiographical prose, relatively little is known of the life of Liubov Krichevskaya, including how and when she died. Court papers from the late 1830s indicating a legal dispute with her brother over their mother's small estate and a letter from Krichevskaya to the literary critic Pyotr Pletnev asking him to intercede with Grand Duchess Maria Nikolaevna for patronage underscore the increasing material difficulties Krichevskaya faced toward the end of her life. It was certainly no easy task to live as a professional writer at that time—for anyone, let alone a woman. Consider, for instance, the difficulties faced by Krichevskaya's contemporary, the much better-connected Pushkin, dubbed by André Maynieux "a professional writer in the full sense of the term."²⁶ The absence of copyright laws alone was a major impediment to those who sought to live off their literary earnings. Moreover, for women, writing was not generally considered "a respectable long-term profession, comparable with, say, a position at court."²⁷ This is reflected in the fact that "most women writers of that period apologize for writing,"²⁸ a phenomenon reflecting what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe as an "anxiety of authorship."²⁹

As was typical of authors of her time, Krichevskaya wrote in virtually all literary genres, publishing a collection of lyric poetry (*My Moments of Leisure*, 1817), dramas (*Blind Mother*, 1818, and *No Good without Reward*, 1826), short prose fiction (*Two Novellas: Corinna and Emma*, 1827), and a novel (*Count Gorsky*, 1837). Her gradual move from lyric poetry to prose fiction appears to reflect the shifting tastes

26. André Maynieux, *Pouchkine: Homme de lettres et de la littérature professionnelle en Russie* (Paris: Librairie des Cinq Continents, 1966), 15.

27. Kelly, "Sappho, Corinna, and Niobe," 42.

28. Yael Harussi, "Women's Social Roles as Depicted by Women Writers in Early Nineteenth-Century Russian Fiction," in *Issues in Russian Literature before 1917: Selected Papers of the Third World Congress for Soviet and East European Studies* (Columbus, OH: Slavica, 1989), 40.

29. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 45.

of the time. In 1826, Krichevskaya published her only nonfictional work, *Historical Anecdotes and Selected Quotations of Famous People*. Zborovets and Nasonova note a distinct antimonarchic tone in some of the stories, which ridicule the capriciousness of kings. Such a tone was, of course, in keeping with the general aspiration among Russia's elite in the years following the defeat of Napoleon for greater constraints on the will of the monarch, as embodied in a constitutional monarchy or even a republic. However, there is no direct confirmation elsewhere in Krichevskaya's writing of liberal political leanings. Krichevskaya's last published work was her longest, the epistolary two-volume novel *Count Gorsky*. It seems to have been the least successful—both financially and critically—of all her works. The last recorded mention of the author occurred in 1841 in a letter by Kvitka-Osnovianenko to his friend, the literary critic Pletnev. With that, one of the first professional women of letters in the Russian Empire virtually disappeared from literary history.

Analysis of Krichevskaya's Works

In December 1833, on the cusp of a minor boom in Russian women's writing that would take place in the 1830s and 1840s, historian and bibliographer M. N. Makarov published a piece in the St. Petersburg journal *Damskii zhurnal* (Ladies' Journal), entitled "Materials for a History of Russian Woman Authors" (Materialy dlia istorii ruskikh [sic] zhenshchin-avtorov), which consisted of seven short biographies of contemporary woman writers (two of whom earned their literary reputation as translators of French and German literature). All of the women published their work in Russia's "two capitals"—St. Petersburg and Moscow—except for Krichevskaya, described in the opening lines of her biographical sketch as "a native of Little Russia, the daughter of a Kharkov civil servant of modest means, who was brought up in Kharkov" (49). The biography ends with the promising remark: "If this Little Russian writer is given the necessary support, her prose could rank among the finest in comparison with that of other Russian woman writers" (150). This compliment, however, also implies that a comparison of her prose with that of Russian male authors was unthinkable.

*Several Excerpts from a Journal Dedicated
to My Friends*

June 1. Early morning. Everyone is sleeping, and I, with my sadness and with pen and paper in hand, go into the garden. I sit down in a covered walkway to write to you. Not far from me there's music playing, and my soul is transported to you. God! What sorrowfully sweet moments You send us!

Now I'm writing from beneath a beautiful pear tree. Not far away a spacious meadow opens up before me, and there some seventy Russian peasants are cutting hay. There's a village beautifully situated beyond the river. But I'll describe to you a scene that's even closer and more astonishing. Behind the plum tree there sits a young girl. The same emotion has led the two of us to go out walking so early in the morning. For me, it was love for you. For her, it was love for a young gardener. But she's the winner. They're together, while I'm alone! Perhaps you're still sleeping, my dears! And your guardian angel—is he carrying my sigh to you? I say “your guardian angel” because my sigh is so pure. I go over to a rose bush that beckons me: a sweet flower bends toward me! But cruel fate has declared: “Foolish one! That flower isn't for you!” My dears! I was made to share my soul with you, but we are separated by an abyss!

A girl and a rose cannot be concealed. This is so, my friends! My observation is amusing, but true. This is my proof: I went over to a rose bush and kissed the finest rose, imagining that I was kissing you. I then decided to pick it so that when I read you this I could say, “There it is!” I took hold of its stem, but cursed etiquette whispered in my ear, “You can't pick flowers without the hostess's permission.” And the stem fell from my hands! I walked away, then stopped and looked at the rose, thinking, “I feel sorry for you ... No, no! I won't be separated from you. Who would bother me if, after I picked you, I hid you—and no one knew you existed.” And so I picked the rose and hid it in my reticule; I then walked into the parlor. The hostess sat me down next to her and spoke to me of this and that until at last the conversation turned to the topic of young ladies. “How nice it is,” the hostess said, “when a young lady behaves herself well ... Do you smell

that, my dear? Don't you smell a rose? Where could it be?" I smiled and answered: "Indeed, Madame. In my opinion, no matter how hard a good girl tries to hide herself, her principles and talents will reveal her." And as if to confirm it, the rose spread its fragrance throughout the room and the hostess tried to find out where it was. A girl and a rose cannot be concealed!

You, my dear ones! You do not shine in society, but there are many who love you, praise you, and admire you!

June 2. I'm on the Dniepr, my friends! Now seated by the window, I see how proudly this magnificent river flows! I can see the Nenasytinsky Rapids, which produce a wild and deafening noise; I see the planks of dilapidated wooden barges sail by. I look at the rocky hills on the other shore of the Dniepr and at the buildings of Mr. S.'s estate, beautifully scattered across those hills. A stone church with a garden surrounded by small trees adds even more charm to this picture. But you are far away from me, my friends! You're not looking at these sights. Perhaps you're sitting next to one another at this very minute, remembering me—and the picture that sadness has painted in my heart? There you can see the same turbulence as on the Dniepr; and there you feel the same pounding as the boats against the rapids! The desire to see you cannot be interrupted by severe weather or by the gloom that surrounds me! Often toward evening I travel to you in my thoughts. I imagine that I'm wandering with you in K. I stop beside a lime tree and read the initials and hieroglyphs engraved upon it. And you are with me; you understand me! Ah! What a burden for the heart when we look around us and do not meet with a single familiar glance, a glance that would penetrate our heart and restrain its yearning with sympathy! Why this multitude of people! One person who is dear to us is enough to make things seem beautiful. And this clear moon, reflected in the Dniepr in a thousand beams, would instill such sadness in me if not for your sweet face in my imagination. It's time to sleep. May your guardian angels be with you! My eyes are very sleepy, but this paper is as much a magnet for my pen as you are for my heart. Perhaps you're imagining now that your friend is talking with you, and then pressing you to her heart, saying, "It's time to sleep!"

June 3. Today we got up early and left. I must confess I'll miss the Dniepr! Although the road was beautiful, we sat in silence. Now I'm writing to you from the estate of K. He's not at home so I'm writing to you from his study, from his writing desk, with his pen. Before me lie several books. I open one and see the verse, "The Tear of a Friend on a Foreign Shore!"

How long until I see
 The sweet land of my birth?
 How long until I feel,
 My friend, your tender gaze?

I pictured myself here. I cannot imagine how strange man is! My separation from you oppresses me, but at the same time I find a certain joy in being far from you. This is my school! Through this separation, I come to know myself, which is something truly difficult. During that happy and, one might say, blessed time we spend together, my dear ones, tenderness alone fills my heart. My mind forgets itself and is occupied with you. But here, it is occupied with you and me. To know a person is very difficult! No matter how good a camera obscura may be, it's always more difficult to picture something in it when there's no illumination from the sun. In the same way, no matter how intelligent a person may be, without a ray of knowledge, one cannot penetrate him. When you look at a flower—let's say, a purple one, a violet—it's sometimes darker and sometimes lighter, sometimes fresh and sometimes wilted. Ah! That's an image of ourselves! We can never say, even about the most virtuous man, "He is always the same!" No, my friends! Good will be good. But it is impossible to be so for even a few minutes if the seed of evil or thoughtlessness has been planted in his heart! Is it not true that you, my friends, whose hearts overflow at the slightest tenderness, are sometimes worse and sometimes better?

My Comments

In my youth I had the habit of copying down excerpts from every book I read. Without delving into the precise study of a well-turned phrase, I would write them down with pleasure and at times laugh at the contradictory thoughts that give the true picture of our lives. Often in my excerpts, the very same writer, on the very same page, with

equal eloquence tries to convince us to love and to loath. Recently, while looking over these excerpts, I was unexpectedly touched when I came across the words, "One who's never seen the rising sun cannot sense God's majesty!" I underlined these words on the paper but not in my heart, which will never stop sensing that the infinite Being appears to us with equal majesty in the smallest blade of grass no less than in the stars that illuminate us! When we seek that great God, how close He is to us! Our will is an impediment that prevents us from seeing His incomprehensible majesty in everything. If a single sunrise portrays Him to us, then how pitiful are those who, out of innocent carelessness, sleep through half the day, let alone the sunrise. And can it be that God in His majesty will, for this sin alone, without taking into account all their goodness, refuse to shine upon them? No! This thought shouldn't frighten men! Can only that which blinds us represent God, who condescends to us with meekness and humility, God who lives not in a king's palace, but among the wretched and the poor, among those who are sick in body and soul, and those who are in need of happiness in this life. He didn't let Himself be known in a shining flash of light reaching to the ends of the earth or in the majesty of the Creator, the sight of which makes holy men tremble. He let Himself be known through mercy, that immeasurable representation of godliness, which brings God closer to man, and man to that Great God, who alone can fully allow every heart to feel God's majesty.

In the full brilliance of the rising sun, an evildoer flees his vice, racing into impenetrable thickets to hide his crime. Does he feel God's majesty? Does he see it? Does he perceive it? Why would he? To curse the heavenly sphere that halted his cruelty? The sun, halfway through its path, also shames the idler who, having no wish to part with his pleasant dreams, enjoys his rest in bed without opening an eye. But the sweetest rest, this happy carelessness, cannot shut his heart to the voice of the suffering. No sooner is his ear struck by a sickly cry than he rushes toward it without a second thought. He wipes away tears and presses every unfortunate one to his heart. He gives them everything and is even ready to sacrifice his bed, which only an hour before was the sweetest thing in the world to him. The mother of that poor family, on her knees, lifting her arms and begging the Creator to bestow happiness on the benefactor who, carried away by his emotions

and enlightened by a ray of inexplicable beatitude, is such a spectacle that no one could look at him without flying to God in his thoughts. I believe that the evildoer himself, the one for whom the rising sun inspired only indignation or failed to make him notice it at all, this evildoer would tremble in his soul at this, and in that moment would know God, who gives to man the joy of the angels.

We often see people through the weaknesses of our hearts, immersed as they are in all the misfortunes of this world. The evildoer is indifferent to the rising and setting of the sun, day and night, and even the passing years. He would disappear in this life and in life eternal if God in His mercy, as a demonstration of His majesty, didn't send him a kind, gentle, and indulgent friend, who doesn't reproach him, but sympathizes with him, who doesn't frighten him with the wrath of God, but together with him falls before the Lord and with his heart's emotion begs His mercy. Oh! Is not such a friend, such a priceless gift from God, capable of convincing every soul of the greatness of God!

Man! Made in the image of that God! Once you grasp the will of the Creator, can you accept with indifference that the sun—or anything else— could represent more than you yourself the majesty for which you alone were destined? The finest aim of God's works is our heart, which is so darkened by our delusions that it cannot reflect God's incomprehensible majesty.

A Plan for a Temple of Love in the Heart

The great Architect who built our hearts arranged them very simply. The best part He gave to love, which decorated it according to its wonderful taste.

The large hall of love has three entrances and several more secret doors. The interior of the temple is white, the ceiling is a heavenly color, and the throne of love is pink with a white pedestal. Vases with myrtle, roses, and other fragrant flowers, placed around the throne, fill the entire temple with an indescribable aroma! The first entrance into the temple of love is a direct path from the myrtle and roses; Sentiment stands guard at this entrance and hands the visitor over to Hope, who leads him to the throne of love. Directly opposite is Love, sitting upon her beautiful throne. How majestic she is in her white garments!

No Good without Reward; A Comedy in Three Acts

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Mrs. Dobrova¹

Aurora, her daughter²

Count Vetrov, renting rooms in the home of Mrs. Dobrova³

Countess Pustilgina, also renting rooms in the home of

Mrs. Dobrova⁴

Stradaev⁵

Erast, Stradaev's son

Yulia, Stradaev's daughter

Pravdin, a rich merchant and the brother of Mrs. Dobrova⁶

Vyskalov⁷

Boy, non-speaking part

ACT I

SCENE I

Mrs. Dobrova's room, poorly furnished, but tidy

AURORA (*alone, sewing*): If I provide my dear mother with peace of mind, will I ever have any for myself? Oh, no! A feeling of virtue can't make us happier if we separate ourselves—even in our thoughts—from belonging to our beloved. A certain philosopher once said in vain, "One must try to quiet the whispering of the heart; the more one sacrifices, the more pleasing the reward." What a wonderful convic-

1. *Dobrova* is derived from the Russian adjective *dobryi*, meaning "good" or "good-hearted."

2. *Aurora* is the Latin word for "dawn."

3. *Vetrov* is related to the word *veter*, "wind," the adjective for which, *vetrennyi*, can be used to describe a frivolous, inconstant person.

4. *Pustilgina* (*Pustil'gina*) alludes phonetically to the word *pustel'ga*, "bird of prey," which can also be used to designate a frivolous or vacuous person.

5. *Stradaev* is derived from the verb *stradat'*, "to suffer."

6. *Pravdin* is related to the noun *pravda*, "truth."

7. *Vyskalov* is derived from the verb *vzyskazať*, meaning "to force payment."

tion! But I'd like to ask this thinker how he would feel if he were in my place!

SCENE II

AURORA AND COUNTESS PUSTILGINA

COUNTESS: Good afternoon, Aurora! Allow me to rest here beside you. (*Throws herself into a chair.*) That ball has tired me to death. Has the Count arrived?

AURORA: I don't know. (*Looks at the Countess.*) Countess, you're terribly altered. Is it possible to take such little care of yourself?

COUNTESS: Altered? Why should it be so? I'm as accustomed to this tiring occupation as you are to your work. Two hours at my toilette will erase even the traces of that fatigue that so frightens you.

AURORA: Perhaps. But that lifestyle is incomprehensible to me.

COUNTESS: We'll see if you say that when you're the Count's wife. I'm sure that within a few days you'll be taking lessons from me in the art of passing the time. However, Aurora, you won't receive those lessons unless you promise not to use your dangerous charms to eclipse me.

AURORA: You're joking, Countess. Could you ever fear me? I'm accustomed to solitude or, better put, obscurity, and harbor no hopes of pleasing society. Society loves only those who can be of some use to it. It's tiresome to be someplace where we mean nothing to others and find nothing for ourselves.

COUNTESS: How is it possible to find no pleasure for yourself among so many people?

AURORA (*smiling*): People who confer their praise or criticism upon our outer appearance? People who one moment liken us to a goddess

and the next fail to recognize us? And you want me to exchange my beloved corner for high society? No, Countess!

COUNTESS: But of course you've forgotten that you'll be dependent on your husband, who'd probably die if he had to spend two consecutive hours in your beloved corner.

AURORA (*downcast*): You're right, Countess! I must disregard my own will.

COUNTESS: That's the other extreme, my friend! You don't know the Count well if you think he'll deprive you of your will. Locking wives in towers has gone out of fashion. Today you're free to go anywhere—as long as you don't run into your husband. But tell me, Aurora, is it truly more pleasurable to sit with your head bent over your work than to be where we can see everyone, take an interest in everyone and, best of all, have everyone take an interest in us?

AURORA: That's pleasing only to someone who has prepared herself for life in society, whose desires are fulfilled by rushing to social functions, whereas my desires ... Ah! Shall we stop talking about this?

COUNTESS: With such an alluring face, with such talents—fie, my friend, it's a sin to be so unsociable. Does pleasure hold us in its grasp? No, we hold pleasure in ours!

AURORA: You're right, when we find it in our own hearts—but when it departs, we begin to search for it in vain in others; and we can't expect anything even from time itself, which, they say, heals all wounds; it carries our life along without making it any more pleasant.

COUNTESS: O my sweet Aurora! What gloomy thoughts! When I used to see you always so calm, I envied your happiness.

AURORA: My happiness? O Countess! You envied a poor man his empty purse!

COUNTESS: It's good the Count can't hear that.

AURORA: Do you think I've hidden from him how little my status will add to the brilliance of his social life? But he doesn't want to understand me, and I cannot grasp what has induced him to ask for my hand.

COUNTESS (*laughs*): What else if not true and passionate love.

AURORA: To give myself over to that thought would be a mark of excessive pride. I don't consider the Count capable of constant affection. It would be enough if he were governed by pity for our poverty, which would guarantee my future peace of mind.

COUNTESS: No one has ever remarked that the Count likes to sacrifice himself. But then, why lose the hope that your virtue will make of him a completely new man. I know personally the power of your alluring meekness, although I'm one step further removed than the Count from your perfection.

AURORA: Countess! You imagine that you're still at the ball, surrounded by people who take compliments for the truth.

COUNTESS: But that is the truth. Remember that I'm saying it to a woman, and I wouldn't have said such a thing in another place for anything. But I don't consider you, Aurora, an earthly creature. And I confess that if I could choose another character for myself, I would choose yours.

AURORA (*with emotion*): How kind you are, Countess. But perhaps it's not my character but my circumstances that have made me who I am.

COUNTESS: All the same. You only imagine that a happier lot would have made you different. (*Rises.*) Goodbye, dear! New conquests await me this very day. I must take advantage of them before you enter society.

SCENE III

AURORA (*alone*): It seems to me that this wide world is darker than a dungeon, and that my gaze will never find another who speaks to my heart. O Erast! If you've forgotten me, then why can't I know it before I have to renounce you forever? Forgotten—what a horrible word! Do I really want to hear it? Oh, that news, whether we want to hear it or not, always arrives too soon. It would be better, much better, while I still know nothing, to tear from my heart the priceless hope that has dwelled there until now and, clutching that incurable organ with these two hands, throw it without thinking into the abyss that opens up before me. Only those who have loved and have had to part with their beloved forever can understand my feelings!

SCENE IV

AURORA AND MRS. DOBROVA

AURORA (*approaches her mother*): Mama, aren't you feeling well?

MRS. DOBROVA: Don't worry, my dear! Perhaps a better future will give me strength.

AURORA (*brings her mother a chair and herself sits down to work*): You're so weak, you deny me any hope of finding joy in the future. You want to make my future bitter, not sweet.

MRS. DOBROVA: No, my dear! I wouldn't want to add to your sorrows, but I'm afraid the unbreakable chain of those sorrows will diminish your hope.

AURORA: Is it possible for a heart that trusts in God's boundless mercy to lose hope? No, Mama! No misfortune in the world can deprive me of hope. Didn't you always tell me that we are truly unhappy only when, in our confusion, we lose hope in the Creator's favor? When we rely on it, we are always and everywhere happy.

MRS. DOBROVA: That's right, my Aurora! May that faith always dwell in your heart! I'm also upset that I've had no news of my brother; I expected some word from him.

AURORA: Don't worry, Mama. Perhaps he'll show up soon.

MRS. DOBROVA: Perhaps! But then I won't need any human help; then the sorrow of seeing my daughter sacrifice her own happiness will have driven me to the grave.

AURORA: Isn't your peace of mind my happiness? O Mama! My heart never feels so much satisfaction as when it provides you with a single moment of pleasure.

MRS. DOBROVA: But there are also moments, my dear, when the most virtuous of us experiences extreme sorrow, and I wouldn't want to be the cause of sorrow for you.

AURORA: Dear Mama, what sorrow? When one has a heart that's always ready to do good, that loves all people as brothers, and does everything possible for them, can one be entirely miserable?

MRS. DOBROVA: And do people treat you in kind?

AURORA: That's their business, not mine. (*She embraces her mother.*) If everyone had a teacher like mine, they'd all act the same way toward me.

MRS. DOBROVA: Of course, my dear! It's better to be mistaken in people's gratitude than to shut your heart to them ... I've been waiting now for hours for Vzyskalov to come. Our promissory note comes due today, and I don't know what to do about it.

AURORA: Don't be distressed, Mama! Hasn't invisible help from heaven often delivered us from difficult situations at a time when my arms were still too weak to do anything for you, and my heart couldn't feel

the full weight of your responsibility? I think the Count will pay what he owes us for the rental of his rooms.

MRS. DOBROVA: But won't it be difficult for you to ask him about it?

AURORA: If the Count has a noble heart, I'll need few words to convince him. Besides, we're only asking for what is ours.

MRS. DOBROVA: Aurora! When I imagine you spending your life beside this Count, my heart can't help but tremble. God sees whether I'm coolly sacrificing your welfare.

AURORA: How often this welfare is nothing but the fancy of our imagination! I hope that when I'm able to provide for you in your old age, it will disappear like the stars before the rising sun. The Count is just thoughtless, but when I see how well he treats you, I will of course love him.

MRS. DOBROVA: Love? O my child! That emotion isn't under our control. God forbid that I should ever see remorse on that sweet face!

AURORA: No! You will never see that, Mama! (*She hears a noise from behind the door.*)

MRS. DOBROVA: It seems the Count is here. I'll leave you two alone. Talk to him, my dear! (*She leaves.*)

AURORA: Alright, Mama!

SCENE V

AURORA (*alone, looking out the window*): The Count is leaving the courtyard. And now I have to wait until he returns with a thousand oaths of eternal faithfulness—and not a single one of them will touch my heart. O Mama! You'll tremble when you see me united to this man. Don't be afraid, my dear! I have enough strength to hide my tears

from your penetrating gaze. And I'll suffer alone so that you might have peace of mind.

Exits.

ACT II

SCENE I

COUNT VETROV AND COUNTESS PUSTILGINA

(the same room; the two enter from opposite sides of the stage)

COUNT: It's you ... what a pleasant encounter!

COUNTESS *(taking a seat)*: I doubt that it's your first this morning.

COUNT: You insult me if you think that my heart can take equal pleasure in every woman's gaze.

COUNTESS: God keep me from such a thought!

COUNT: Can anyone compare to you? At first sight my heart gave you the advantage over all the beauties of this world.

COUNTESS: If only over those to whom you've paid the same compliment, it would be enough.

COUNT: Are you unwilling to accept my amazement? Don't you understand the sighing of my heart? You—

COUNTESS: —Again with your heart! I assure you, Count, that I am as acquainted with your heart as I am with the stage sets for *Rusalka*.⁸

8. In Slavic mythology, a *rusalka* is a water sprite, a female ghost or mermaid-like demon that lives at the bottom of rivers. With songs, dancing and laughter, rusalkas would lure handsome men to the river bottom to live with them. Countess Pustilgina appears to be referring to the popular magical comic opera *Dneprovskaia rusalka* (The Water Sprite of the Dnieper), based on the German opera *Das Donauweibchen* by the Viennese composer Ferdinand Kauer, about a love affair between a rusalka and a prince. The rusalka later interferes

Two Novellas

Corinna

As I approached the beautiful city of K., the final rays of the setting sun were playing on its golden cupolas. Admiring the charms of the surrounding countryside, I was carried away by a thousand different things but didn't dare fix my gaze on any one, afraid that in doing so I would miss something else. I ordered the top of my carriage to be lowered, and as I looked around I took pride in Mother Nature and in the fact that I had been chosen to enjoy her. I was unaware that I'd reached the city until the heavy chain of the access gate took me from my pleasant thoughts. I identified myself and then hurried into the city.

Chance led me to an encounter with my dear friend R. I jumped down from the carriage and rushed to embrace him. And as it was still rather early and the weather was beautiful, I ordered my servants to continue to my apartment while I entrusted myself to my friend. "I was going to the garden outside the city," he said to me. "So much the better," I answered, "I would follow you anywhere." "But aren't you tired from your trip?" he asked me. "Oh, no, my friend! Youth and pleasure are companions that are hard to fatigue." Hand in hand, we walked to the garden gates, engrossed in the conversation of true friends. The garden was filled with people of both sexes and the unaffected merriment on the faces of everyone we met predisposed my heart to pleasure. But after walking down several paths, I was stopped by a sight that poisoned my pleasant mood.

An attractive young man, dressed in black, was gazing silently at an empty bench. Enormous tears streamed down his face. In a tone expressing despair, he kept uttering the name "Corinna." But suddenly, as if in oblivion, he began to jump about and laugh very loudly. The wildness of his gaze indicated to me that he was mad.

"What a state!" I said, turning to R.

"And do you know the reason for it?" he responded with a sigh.

"Who is this unfortunate man?"

“Baron N.”

“It must be love that’s brought him to this pitiful state.”

“You’ve guessed correctly, my friend. And if you want to know the details of his story, no one can satisfy you better than I, as I played a role in his terrible drama.” I asked him to tell me the story at once, for the sight of this man forced every heart to extend its sympathy to him. “His story,” said R., “is as brief as the period of his suffering. I always compare him to a flower that at the dawn of a beautiful day adorns a clearing. Toward midday it’s broken by a violent storm, but its charming bloom, now bent toward the ground, hasn’t lost its beauty.”

As we spoke, we approached the unfortunate man, who, upon hearing my friend, rushed to embrace him, repeating Corinna’s name in a voice full of suffering. When he saw me, he begged me to take pity on him and give him back Corinna. “People have taken her away from me,” he said and, seeing that I was crying, took my hand and pressed it to his heart, saying, “My tears are here. But don’t cry!” He then exclaimed in a firm tone of voice, “People won’t believe these are tears.” He embraced R. again and left, saying, “She doesn’t cry anymore.” This man tormented me, and I begged my friend to tell me about his misfortune. As nothing else could interest me on this walk, my dear friend R. and I began to wander through the streets, and I learned the following from him:

“It seems it hasn’t yet been two years since the illness of old Baron N., a local resident and president of the local Assembly of the Nobility, brought his son back home. The latter retired from the army with enormous regret, as his youth and the ongoing campaign made him quite attached to military service. Moreover, what’s a twenty-year-old man to do at home, especially one who feels himself capable of great deeds?

“He struggled a long time with melancholy and tried to drive it away with a variety of pursuits. But ultimately his father noticed that with every passing hour he was becoming more withdrawn. Because his illness didn’t allow him to introduce his son into the finest homes in the city, he entrusted this task to a friend in the hope that new acquaintances and a desire to be liked would dispel his son’s gloom. And in fact, young N. did become more cheerful. I met him at the

home of Prince B., my uncle, and, finding in him every merit, became his friend.

“Often, with the candor of a friend, he would complain of his idle life and ask me what he should do. ‘Get married,’ I would say. ‘At my age? Is that warranted? Especially when I haven’t chosen anyone?’ I tried to convince him that this wouldn’t be difficult as he spent his time among the city’s most beautiful women. ‘Oh, that makes it even more difficult!’ he answered, ‘because only the heart can choose what is beautiful. And besides, what do you call beautiful? Not that unbearable affectedness that I see every day?’ ‘But truly, not all of them are like that. What about Miss B., for example?’ ‘I like her more than all the others because she’s your cousin. But admit that she displays a rather unbecoming arrogance.’ ‘Oh, you’re too picky,’ I said to him, and with that our conversation ended. N. became visibly less withdrawn, however, whenever he was at my uncle’s.

“Miss B., to be fair, was much admired. A brilliant fortune and experience in the beau monde made her an idol of society, and so, having grown accustomed to the awe in which she was generally held, she looked upon sincere praise with disdain and often caused offense with her haughtiness. Although she wasn’t a beauty, she possessed many agreeable traits, which she enhanced with the deftness and cunning of a refined coquette. She had been schooled in self-satisfaction and exulted when she saw herself surrounded by a crowd of adoring men who pursued her. Her true character, however, had yet to reveal itself.

“You’ve seen N. and can judge how he was then, so it’s no wonder he attracted all of Laura’s attention (that was Miss B.’s name). She immediately tried to chain him to her chariot wheels without any consideration for how those chains would feel. He seemed to put up no resistance, perhaps because he himself didn’t know what he was doing.

“When his father was informed of everything by his friend, he suggested that he ask for her hand in marriage. N. shuddered at the very thought of it, but his father’s words—‘I’ll die without seeing you happy’—compelled him to make up his mind that very moment. And while still asleep, I was brought a note from him, which contained the following: ‘Rejoice, dear R.! I will soon be your cousin. Laura is my fiancée.’ I rushed over to congratulate him but was surprised to see no

joy in him. He even sighed as he shook my hand, and it was not until I called him ‘cousin’ that a pleasant smile appeared on his face.

“The prospect of marriage didn’t seem to dispel his melancholy. He appeared more cheerful only when he was next to the high-spirited Laura. It was winter and the wedding was set for May. When spring arrived, preparations for the festivities got underway and Laura, like a small child, leapt about, trying on every article of clothing ordered for the wedding. But N. remained withdrawn and shared in her joy with only a smile.

“At that time Countess L., the sister of Princess B., returned from abroad, where she’d spent the last several years for the sake of her only daughter’s education. As her health prevented her from going to the city, she wrote to the Princess and asked her to visit her at her country estate, which was no more than twenty miles away. Preparations for the wedding and the diversions of the city, however, delayed the trip for quite some time.

“At last, one fine morning we set off in Laura’s foppish carriage. That day N. was particularly dull, as if he sensed the gravity of that day. Noticing this, Laura told him his gloom upset her. ‘If someone saw us, they’d think you were about to be incarcerated rather than married.’

‘My gloom is nothing new. It’s a part of my nature.’

‘But we’re visiting a home where you’re a stranger and where they’ll judge my happiness from your expression.’

‘What do strangers matter?! It’s enough if you find it true.’

‘Oh,’ she said, turning up her nose, ‘We’re not in Arcadia. And what they call domestic bliss is now completely out of fashion!’ N. fell silent, but his expression betrayed how much her words had affected him. How could one display such flippancy in a conversation with someone who was sensitive to the smallest kindness? To our chagrin, Laura made jokes the entire way, and N. sat quietly and smiled so as not to reveal how much all this upset him.

“We arrived at Countess L.’s., and as we passed through her charming little house, we found everywhere the most refined taste. We were shown into the parlor where the Countess greeted us with a smile. She then paid each of us a welcome that appealed to the heart’s sentiment. Her manner and appearance were so engaging that after knowing her for only a moment, one had infinite trust in her. She

combined majesty with naturalness in such a way that when you looked at her you couldn't decide what was most marvelous in her and what was more fitting for her: to obey or to command.

"The room was filled with lemon and peach trees in full bloom. The most beautiful paintings, rare not because of their golden frames but because of the works themselves, were arranged in perfect symmetry. The main wall of the room was decorated with portraits of the Countess and her daughter. In one, the mother was painted with an expression of grief, and her daughter, with angelic innocence, was shown wiping the tears from her mother's eyes. The Countess saw how N. examined the portraits and said in a gentle voice, 'That's my Corinna. She's shown here as a child, but she wipes away my tears to this day.' 'And where is my cousin?' asked Laura. 'She's in the garden,' answered the Countess. 'We've spent our time apart ever since our return. I've had to take care of my disordered household, and Corinna has completely taken charge of the garden.' N. glanced out the window, and I noticed how his expression changed. I walked over to him and caught sight of Corinna walking in the garden. I wish in vain I could describe her to you. The ordinary word 'beautiful' wouldn't give you a full understanding. It's not enough that her height, face, and figure were enchanting—there was an indescribable charm about her!

"When she entered the room, she was even more captivating. The unexpected surprise of finding us there enlivened her face with the sweetest hint of shyness. She cast a glance over all of us and then stopped at Mr. N., whose confusion was evident. The Countess, after introducing her to everyone, asked Laura to be a loving cousin to her: 'You were just children when you were separated. Now, if only you choose to do so, you can find in one another a friend.' Corinna embraced Laura and swore, it seemed with her whole heart, to love her. Laura was otherwise disposed. Her tongue was tied with envy and astonishment. Perhaps for the first time in her life she saw before her a creature who was superior to her in every way, and she vowed to hate her cousin, although she said with feigned kindness, 'That will depend on Corinna!' 'Corinna!' said the Countess, 'you still haven't met Mr. N. He's Laura's fiancé!' 'Cousin!' Corinna exclaimed and extended her hand to him, saying, 'I can't say why, but I feel as though I know you!' N. kissed her hand but was unable to utter a single word.

“Corinna and Laura were inseparable until lunch. The latter, fearing N.’s attention toward Corinna, led her cousin several times from the room. What a useless precaution! When mutual sympathy binds two creatures who have just noticed each other, what is powerful enough to tear that bond asunder? What can stop two hearts that are racing toward one another? Corinna said almost nothing to N. and rarely looked at him. She respected him as her cousin’s fiancé and considered her feelings to be a fitting tribute to the familial ties that now united them. Subterfuge and ruse were unknown to her. Her conversation was always simple and persuasive. As soon as she began to say something, her expression would become animated, and her voice, which spoke to your soul, left an indelible impression on it. If I found her to be such a perfect creation, made to bring happiness to a gentle heart, what must N. have felt? His heart, which was drawn to everything refined, was enchanted by her charm.

“After lunch, Laura once again took Corinna away, and we asked the Countess if we might go into the garden. ‘I’d be delighted!’ she said, ‘although you won’t find anything entertaining there. The garden was completely neglected, and what’s best in it now is the work of my daughter.’ And so, N. entered the garden as if it were a sanctuary, where with every step he hoped to find traces of Corinna. Although it was obvious that the garden was very new, taste and selection were nonetheless evident throughout. The linear perspective was intersected by the most meandering paths, which led either to a temple of sincerity or to a monument to the daughters of love.

“Unaware, we walked very far from the house, but our conversation often broke down because my companion preferred to think rather than speak. Then suddenly our eyes came upon a patch of ground where spring seemed to bloom eternal. Everything indicated that this place had received the most attention from the garden’s proprietress. A superbly built fence separated it from the rest of the garden and in the center of this level expanse stood a pavilion built in an uncommon architectural style; and it was surrounded by tall oaks, the tops of which were hidden from view.

“We approached the doors of the pavilion and gave each other an inquiring look: Should we go in? But curiosity overpowered us and we extended our arms at the same time to open the doors. This temple

was dedicated, of course, to the pursuits of Corinna and her mother. Simple furniture indicated how little luxury was valued here. Bookshelves in each of the corners were filled with books by the finest authors. On the bureau stood a bust of Countess L., and surrounding its small marble base was a wreath made of fresh flowers, which had been placed there by a gentle hand so as not to hide the inscription carved at the bottom of the bust. Delighted, we read these words: 'O dearest mother! Be my inspiration! Every look I cast at your image gives me new strength to imitate you in virtue.'

"You must admit, my friend, this is not one of those pretentious and forced inscriptions through which the intellect strives to display itself. These words appeared to be written in a single stroke by a gentle hand. They revealed the boundless virtue of a heart that has yet to be darkened by a single earthly sorrow and that hopes to protect itself from such sorrows with virtue.

"An unfinished painting on an easel was also a true, ideal reflection of the one who'd painted it. It featured a sacrificial altar, not illuminated, but warmed by a small blue flame. At the foot of this altar was a nest in which a dove was shown covering its chick with its wing. She seemed to be trying to protect it from a storm that was raging in the distance, bending back the treetops in the grove. A woman dressed in white, or rather, Corinna, was on her knees embracing the altar, below which was the inscription 'What sacrifice could represent my gratitude?' 'My God!' exclaimed N., 'her soul is as pure as all her pursuits!' He turned around and caught sight of the sweet image of Corinna. Here she was represented as an adult and again beside her mother, who was gazing at her with a celestial joy, herself surprised at such a collection of pleasing qualities.

"A work basket stood on the table and beside it was an open volume of sermons by Bossuet.¹ Near the sofa were frames with embroidery. Curious at seeing all this, we turned over the frames and found that here, too, art was debating with intellect. Corinna had undoubtedly embroidered the scene for the Countess and in the design had placed the following allegorical picture: a sky-blue temple was covered with the most delicate curtain, which was partially lifted to reveal a charming scene inside. Love, Friendship, and Sincer-

1. Jacques Benigne Bossuet (1627–1704) was a French bishop, writer, and orator.

ity, adorned with beautiful masks, were embracing a cheerful youth, while Truth, lifting the other side of the curtain, revealed the interior of the temple, in which the same passions, now without masks, could be seen in their true form. A tender mother led her child to the temple and put the child into the arms of Truth. And here were embroidered the words ‘Under the protection of Truth, what has a heart to fear?’ ‘Ah, she has yet to learn what there is to fear!’ exclaimed N. with a sigh. ‘Often Truth itself reveals to us things that, when we’re unable to possess them, deprive us of all our happiness!’ There was also a piano, and everything was neat and orderly. I confess I can’t remember how we managed to leave that beautiful place.

“I would have carried on a conversation about Corinna on our way back, but N.’s curt replies convinced me to be silent. Then suddenly, as we walked down a garden path, N. stopped, pressed my hand firmly, and said, ‘Let’s listen!’ I stopped and heard Laura and Corinna talking nearby.

“Corinna: ‘Yes, dear cousin! It seems to me you’ll be happy. The bearing of your N. displays the finest attributes.’

“Laura: ‘What do you mean, the finest attributes? Not that eternal brooding that’s unattractive in a fiancé and intolerable in a husband?’

“Corinna: ‘Isn’t it up to you to dispel that brooding with friendly sympathy, which can cure not only fits of melancholy but the most varied wounds inflicted by sorrow?’

“Laura: ‘And so, instead of a wife, you’d like me to become a nursemaid, amusing my husband with a rattle while I yawn with boredom?’

“Corinna: ‘I’m saying what I feel. Personally, I don’t understand how someone could wish to entrust her fate to a person toward whom she can display no sympathy. Isn’t that the same as intentionally destroying him?’

“Laura (*laughing*): ‘That’s beautifully put! It’s a great misfortune indeed to possess a woman of the greatest elegance and to be the richest man in the entire region! But see here, Corinna, so that I don’t entertain any suspicion, are you enchanted by my doleful fiancé?’

“I glanced over at N. and from the glow of his cheeks I could see the intense emotion with which he awaited her response.

“You have nothing to fear!” said Corinna, “The appearance of any suffering individual would compel me to say the same. And Mr. N. will be my cousin, and for that reason I wish that you could make him happy. ‘We’ll see what fate disposes.’ ‘Oh, no, no!’ Corinna repeated, ‘promise me he’ll be happy, otherwise I won’t let you leave this spot.’ N. took my hand and squeezed it tightly. But Laura replied that she was surprised Corinna should give her such advice. Corinna asked her not to be angry and assured her she had no wish to distress her, at which point they got up and left in silence.

“Without speaking, N. threw himself on my shoulder. Now pale, he groaned but didn’t say a word. It seemed this conversation had laid the future out before him. But within a quarter of an hour he’d collected himself and was calm. After witnessing such emotions and such an inner struggle, I found it odd to see him in his present state.

“When we entered the parlor, Laura was playing the harp and, raising her voice to the heavens, appeared calm, whereas Corinna looked with sadness at N. ‘You must certainly have learned to sing?’ asked Laura, moving the harp toward her. ‘Very little,’ answered Corinna, ‘I have almost no voice.’ ‘Perhaps, something,’ urged Laura, already sensing that she would triumph, ‘Something. You’re among friends.’ ‘Then you’ll have to answer for my mistakes,’ said Corinna, who took the harp, tried it out for quite a while, and then, without the slightest affectation, began to sing this song:

Love, they often tell me,
Love is life’s great joy.
Don’t trust them, others say to me,
For love will happiness destroy!

O heart! How will you now decide,
O, whom will you believe?
If only dreams in love reside,
My gentle heart may be deceived.
How can I hope to find my bliss
In opinions so opposed?
O heart! Avoid the tender traps
To which you’ll be exposed.

Write to me, Sonechka. Answer me, dear friend! At least tell me that you take some interest in your loyal friend,

Countess Liubov Gorskaya

LETTER II

From Pravin to Count Gorsky
Village of Uspenskoye
January 25, 183 ...

Your Excellency Vladimir Nikolaevich!

I had the honor of receiving your letter and was aggrieved that you, dear Count, with your excellent heart, have yet to find the kind of friend who isn't afraid to vex you and would have warned you long ago to keep away from that woman. And now, God willing, money will be enough to correct the evil she's done to you.

Having already sent you all our revenue, I didn't know what else to do. So I was glad when I thought to ask the advice of Countess Liubov Ivanovna. She happened to have some money and was happy to give me as much as necessary, telling me to send it to you as soon as possible so that you'd be calm—kind soul! You see, it's true, Your Excellency, that we seek happiness across the seas, not knowing that it's standing right behind us.

If you need the money for Princess Zelskaya, give her one or two thousand, Your Excellency, but don't let your beautiful soul have her as a friend.

Forgive me, dear Count, for interfering in your business. Please know how much I've loved you from your earliest years, and so I hope that you have no doubt when I tell you I have only one main task in my old age—to think of your happiness and to serve you as the son of my benefactor and protector.

Your Excellency's most humble servant,

Ivan Pravin

LETTER III

From Count Gorsky to Alexander Lvov
Saint Petersburg
February 12, 183 ...

I'd truly intended to visit you, dear Alexander, when a completely unforeseen incident kept me in Saint Petersburg. I was given a rather important commission and was then required to go to Kh. Province. And so, these two things robbed me of the joy of embracing you. What can be done, my friend? Although there are so many things deep down in our hearts that cannot be dredged to the surface without the help of friendship, we must wait for that happy moment. But before that, my friend, I'll recount to you in a letter some of the things I've done, which seem important to me because only now in my twenty-fourth year have I learned that it's possible, with perfectly sound judgment, to do stupid things. Indeed, it's not easy to admit this, dear friend! It's not easy to say that I've been deceived by the one I loved like the first dream of youth, and once I'd surrendered to the power of this conniving woman, I was unable to see how incapable she was of nurturing a true attachment.

I can picture how you're frowning at these words, listing for me all your previous predictions. But it's no use, my friend! Doesn't a good thing always come at a high price? And experience is worth several years of your life and a few thousand rubles.

You'll see, Alexander, that I'll make good use of this lesson! I have proof of it: I've taken leave of Princess Eugenia Petrovna Zelskaya forever, and this isn't just a moment's whim on the part of lovers, nor is it the cooling of a fickle heart that has found itself another object. No, my friend, I now see perfectly that the woman is depraved and will never be able to devote herself permanently to me.

When we parted, I was sincerely angry with myself that I'd been her plaything for so long. She, on the other hand, was utterly indifferent and that very evening was planning to go to a ball. And so judge for yourself whether this could have been that exalted love that makes our lives happy.

But that's not all, Alexander! I must tell you all my acts of folly. My gentle Princess, having received several promissory notes from me for a significant sum, suddenly demanded payment. It would have been easy to refute it all, but you know my principles. The Princess nevertheless has an exceptionally kind heart: taking advantage of my blindness toward her, she could have had my entire estate transferred to her name. How can I not thank her for such condescension?

To pay off the promissory notes, I gave away all my cash, sold things I'd purchased to please her but that were still at my place, and borrowed from friends. But it still wasn't enough. At that point I was again forced to bother my good-hearted estate manager, who'd gotten me out of such scrapes more than once before, in particular when some dress affair was approaching and the Princess needed new clothes.

I'd noticed long ago that this poor old man was in love with my wife. He does nothing without her advice, and now, it seems, he rushed to her. Perhaps the sly old man had heard some time ago that she had money, and the Countess, convinced by his eloquence or simply wanting to do me a favor, sent the entire sum and with a kindness I wouldn't have expected, considering her usual coldness. Evidently, this is the effect of the Caucasian waters, my friend!

Ivan Ivanovich is enraptured by her. And you'd laugh at the artfulness with which he praises the Countess, basing his hopes, of course, on my quarrel with the Princess. I don't actually believe that my wife was in some plot with him. Her indifference toward me and, even more, her exemplary upbringing wouldn't allow her to do that. Be that as it may, I'm very grateful to her and I'd rather be indebted to that modest woman than to the coquette I now despise.

I confess to you that I'm in a state of embarrassment over whether or not to write to the Countess. She and I stopped writing to one another a long time ago and since then know almost nothing about each other. When Mrs. Svetlova died, the Countess informed me of it in a most incoherent note, which represented her confusion about what to write. I excused her even then.

You know, Alexander, I don't know that woman's mind, which her grandmother praised, or her heart, which was constricted by illness—or her comeliness, which withered, they say, from bouts of fe-

ver. In short, I know her very little, although I lived with her for three long months.

I can't say anything bad about her, my friend, because she was always quiet, meek, and even excessively good. She seemed to want to hide herself in my presence. And so the fact that I had no desire to look at her or to unriddle her behavior is forgivable, especially when, after being compelled to marry her, I failed to see in my wife the slightest hint of love. And in place of that emotion, she exhibited only fear or alarm when she approached me, and even worse than that was the unbearable, icy indifference with which she suffered my rudeness.

But God be with her! Now, by sending the money, she has very artfully reminded me of her and forced me to think that perhaps I was wrong about her. Blinded by Jenny's charms and lured by her cunning, I couldn't—and didn't—want to see anything.¹

I know what you'll say—what's keeping you from returning to your wife? No, my friend. I don't abide by the saying, "Whatever kills you will cure you." I've lived long enough under the sway of a woman's whims, and who can assure me I won't find even more of that in the Countess? Now at least we don't annoy each other.

This is what results from premature calculations and marriages that are arranged by cold reason alone! If Liubov Ivanovna had been allowed to make her own choice, she would, of course, be happy and might have provided happiness to a husband who was not too discriminating. But is that my fault? Am I happy myself, my friend?

They say that since ancient times Kh. has been famous for the beauty of its women. I'm on my way there and will perhaps find compensation for what I've lost. But this is the problem, Alexander! I don't know if it's my age or the emptiness of my heart, but I've become difficult to please.

A long time ago, the first requirement of my heart was nothing more than rosy cheeks, clear eyes, and a smiling mouth. But now it's all different, my friend! I look around and seek in the most charming face an expressive quality and that exalted dignity that, without severity, puts a stop to our lust and, without frivolity, draws us near.

1. Count Gorsky here uses the English diminutive for Eugenia, Jenny, rather than the Russian version, Zhenia.

Such emotional refinement, isn't that, too, a result of the lessons of Princess Eugenia Petrovna? Oh! I'm very grateful to her. And if I'm ever made happy again by a woman's love, it will surely not be the kind of love she gave me.

Good-bye, my friend. Remembering that you love me despite all my faults encourages me, and I look forward to the future.

LETTER IV

From Mrs. Sokolova to her Sister
Village of Velikoye
February, 183 ...

I was delighted by the arrival of your husband, my sweet Aniuta! And as we spent the whole time talking about you and your children, I utterly failed to notice the days fly by. Your husband is already preparing to depart, and I don't dare detain him; I know you must be anxious, having been without him for so long.

I don't know how to tell you, my dear friend, how much your happiness pleases me! Your husband, with tears in his eyes, praised your meekness, and despite his years he loves you tenderly and appreciates your patience with his gloominess, which is a consequence of his disposition, not of any coldness toward you.

However, dear Aniuta, you have cause to reproach him—he's been unfaithful to you more than once. Our beloved Countess Liubov Ivanovna stole him away with her beauty and her attention to him, especially in her home, where she knows how to be affable with everyone. But she occupied herself with Nikolai Vasilievich, in particular, saying that this was a debt she was paying for your love of her.

Your husband will also tell you about my Sashenka. Unwilling to be separated from her any longer, I took her out of the boarding school—but she'll benefit no less here as the Countess has taken her completely under her wing, and Sashenka is attached to her with all her heart.

You can judge, my dear, how much this pleases me! And how could I fail to see the advantage for my daughter's morality when virtue itself is instructing her!

The more I learn about this outstanding woman, the more I'm amazed at how, at such a young age, she has been able to earn general respect and love. Would you believe, Aniuta, that her presence alone makes everyone well-behaved and forces us all to watch ourselves so as not to say something that might displease Countess Gorskaya?

I can't understand, my friend, how it is that such an intelligent man as Count Gorsky is unable to find happiness with her. Let's suppose that her appearance then wasn't in fact beautiful. Nonetheless, she has possessed an angelic goodness from childhood. And now, after her trip to the Caucasus, she's become incomparably more beautiful than before.

Since then, the Countess has lived alone and has become even more modest and careful, as if the eyes of a jealous husband were watching her. Recently, one of our obliging neighbors, amazed by her blossoming beauty, told her that she could now take revenge on the Count. If you could have seen, Aniuta, the majesty with which she replied that she had no right to judge her husband's faults and so knows of no reason for revenge, and that, out of respect for him, she could never permit anyone to speak ill of the man who'd given her his name.

And with this, her gracious adviser fell silent, as did the hope in the hearts of many young men who commonly believe that a beautiful woman who isn't loved by her husband is fair game.

Such an outburst was especially displeasing to Prince Belsky, who's now on leave due to his mother's illness and who, upon first meeting the Countess, appeared to be captivated by her. A very sweet young man, but somewhat frivolous. He is also a neighbor of the Countess and, although not as handsome or intelligent as the Count, who knows? Perhaps she would be much happier with him!

Good-by, my Aniutushka! Kiss your children for me. The little one, they say, looks very much like my Sashenka, so embrace her an extra time for me. Write to me soon and tell me about your husband's trip home and whether he gave you all our kisses.