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THE STRANGE ONE

A Story of the 1880's

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*Progress Publishers
Moscow
1978*

Ocr: <http://home.freeuk.com/russica2>

I

"Is it a long way yet to a station, coachman?"

"'Tis likely we won't reach it afore the storm. See, how the snow's a-whirlin'? The norther is upon us!"

The snowstorm is indeed drawing near. Evening has brought a sharper nip into the air. The snow cracks weirdly under the runners, and from the shadowy wood comes the howling of the harsh winter wind—the norther. Their branches jutting out above our path, the fir-trees rock sullenly in the gathering dusk of a winter's early night.

Cold and discomfort! The sledge is narrow, bumping against my sides; the swords and pistols of the guards get in the way, while the sledge bell tinkles a long and dreary chant in tune with the rising blizzard.

But then, luckily, on the edge of the roaring forest there looms into view the light of the stationhouse.

And presently my two guards, with much clanging of their arsenal of arms, shake off the snow in the doorway of a dark, overheated, smoke-begrimed hut—the stationhouse. Bleak and cheerless! The woman of the house sets a splinter of burning wood into a holder.

"Is there anything to eat, woman?"

"Nothing in the house."

"Fish? You've a river nearby."

"What fish we had, the otter ate."

"Surely potatoes...."

"Nay, good sirs, this year's potatoes have all been nipped by the frost."

That was that—but happily enough a samovar turned up. The tea made us warm, and the woman brought in some bread and onions in a basket. Outdoors the storm gathered force, powdery snow lashed against the window panes, and the flame in the lamp shuddered fitfully.

The woman says, "Stay the night—you can't start out in weather like that."

"Very well, we'll stay," replies one of the guards. "You are in no hurry either, sir? You see what these parts are like, and where you're going, trust my word, 'tis e'en worse."

There now fell a silence on the hut. The woman of the house, too, folded the spindle with the yarn, blew out the light, and retired. Gloom and hush reigned—broken only by the wild pounding of the wind.

I could not sleep. As though precipitated by the bluster of the storm, there rushed into my mind one dismal thought after another.

The same gendarme who spoke before inquired politely: "Not asleep, sir?" He was the senior of the two, a likeable man, with a pleasant, even somewhat refined face. Prompt and proficient at his job, he could afford to be less rigid, and thus dispense with needless restrictions and formalities.

"No, sleep won't come."

For a while neither of us spoke. I sensed that he, too, was still awake, a prey to thoughts of his own. His young subordinate, however, slept the sound sleep of a robust but greatly fatigued person, and from time to time muttered something in his slumbers.

The senior gendarme's husky voice broke in again. "It beats me," he said, "why young persons like yourself, well-bred and educated, as can be seen, do this to their lives."

"Do what?"

"Why pretend, sir? We can see that's not the sort of life you've been used to from your young days."

"What of it? There's been time to get unused...."

"And are you happy about it?" he asked doubtfully.

"Are you about your own lot?"

For a while Gavrilov (let us call my interlocutor by that name) was silent and seemed lost in thought.

"No, I am not happy," he announced. "Trust my word, there are times when I have no use for anything. Why I cannot tell, but sometimes I could lie down and die."

"Do you find the service so hard to bear?"

"Service is service—it's no picnic, to be sure. And we're driven pretty hard by our superiors. But it's not that...."

"What then?"

"Who knows...."

Another pause followed.

"What's the service? You need to look sharp, and that's the gist of it. Besides, I'll be going home soon. I'm a recruit man, and my term will be up shortly. My commander tells me I ought to stay on though. I've got a good name with the force, he says, but in the village... What'll I do there?"

"Will you stay?"

"No. True, as to home... I'm no longer used to the hard peasant toil—and the grub, not to speak of the rough peasant ways, the coarseness."

"Why hesitate then?"

He thought a little and said:

"I'd like to tell you a story—if you're not afraid of being bored. Something that happened to me...."

"I don't mind," I said.

II

I began service in 1874, in a cavalry troop, assigned there directly from the new recruits. I served well, did my best, you might say, mostly on detail—now to a parade, now to a theatre; *you* know how it is. Then, too, I knew how to read and write. My superiors were beginning to take notice of me. Our chief, the major, happened to be a fellow countryman of mine. Seeing as how I tried, one day he summons me into his presence and says: "Gavrilov, I'll have you made a sergeant.... Have you ever gone on deportation routes?" I answer: "Never, Your Excellency!"

"I'll put you down for a subordinate on the next route—to get the knack of it. It's plain sailing really." I replied that I'd do my duty.

It was quite true that I had never been assigned on deportation routes with—well, folk like yourself. Plain sailing it may be. But there are ordinance papers that you have to understand, and situations needing prompt action. Well, then....

About a week later the orderly summons me to our major and along with me a sergeant. The major says: "You're assigned to a deportation route." And to the sergeant: "That's your subordinate, sergeant; he's new on the job." Then he told us to keep our eyes open, and added he was sure we'd cope with the job, like the smart fellows we were. "You're to pick up a Miss Morozova," he went on, "a political exile, at the fortress prison. Here are your ordinance papers. You can collect the travelling money tomorrow—and off you go!"

And so Sergeant Ivanov was to go as my senior and I, a private, was much like the second gendarme with me now. The senior man carries the official pouch, receives the travelling money and the ordinance papers. He signs for everything, keeps accounts—well, and the private with him is his help: he runs errands, keeps an eye on the personal effects, and looks after other such matters.

Next morning when we left headquarters—it was barely getting light—I saw that Ivanov had already had a drink or two. As a matter of fact he was not at all a suitable man for our kind of job and has long since been demoted. He behaved proper in front of his superiors, and to curry favour with them even informed falsely on his fellows. But once out of his superior's sight, he let himself go and his first thought was a drink.

We came to the prison, submitted a form as required—and stood there waiting. I was curious about the girl-prisoner. I knew we would be going a long way with her—in fact it was this same route, except that you are assigned to a village and she was to a town. Curious I was, I suppose, because it was my first trip, and I wondered—what was a girl political prisoner like?

We waited for almost an hour while her personal effects were being put together; all they amounted to was a light bundle, with a skirt in it, and one or two other things. There were also a few books—nothing else. I thought: her parents must be folk of meagre means. When she was led out I was struck by her youth. She seemed a mere child. Her fair hair was drawn back into a single braid, and her cheeks were flushed. But later I was to see how really pale she was, in fact, chalk-white, all through the journey. I pitied her the moment I saw her. You'll excuse me, but, of course, I never thought she was wrongly punished. She must have committed some political crime, sure enough, but still I pitied her, pitied her from the bottom of my heart.

While she was getting dressed—putting on her coat and galoshes—we were shown her belongings. It was one of the rules; we were obliged to examine a prisoner's things. We also asked if she had any money with her. She had one ruble and twenty kopecks, which Ivanov took into his keeping. Then he said: "I have to search your person, miss."

She flared at these words. Her eyes blazed, her cheeks flushed deeper. She pressed her lips together in anger. What a look she gave us! It made me cower; I dared not so much as approach her. But Ivanov, quite tipsy as usual, was not to be put off. He walked right up to her. "I've got to, orders is orders!" he said.

She now let out a shout that made even Ivanov back away. Her face became pale, all blood gone from it, her eyes flashed darkly and she was furious. She stamped her foot and spoke hotly. I hardly listened, I must admit. The prison warden, too, got frightened and gave her a glass of water. "Calm down," he said, "have pity on yourself!" But she let him have it, too. "Boors and lacqueys, that's what you are, the lot of you!" she cried. And she went on hurling abuse at us. Now, surely, that's not the way to talk to people who are over you. Full of venom, I thought her then.... Aristocratic spawn!

In the end the warden took her into an adjoining room from which they soon returned with a woman guard. "We found nothing on her!" the warden said. She glared at him almost laughing right into his face. As to Ivanov—he really did not give a hang, but went on muttering. "It's against the rules. I know my orders!" The warden ignored him. He could see Ivanov was drunk, and a drunken man inspires little faith.

We started out on our journey. As our coach passed through the city streets, the girl-prisoner kept peering out of the window, as if she were saying farewell to the city or searching the streets for people she knew. Ivanov then lowered the curtains. She huddled into her corner and kept her eyes averted. I was sorry for her, I must admit. I lifted the curtain's edge, pretending that I wished to look out of the window myself, and opened up the view for her. Only she did not look, but kept sitting sullenly in her corner, biting her lips so that I thought the blood would come.

We started out by rail on a clear day in autumn—the month was September. But sunny as it was, a raw wind was blowing—yet our young lady kept opening up the window, and would sit there leaning out to catch the wind. Our orders for transporting prisoners were to keep the windows shut. Ivanov had slumped down on his bunk and was soon snoring; and I could not pluck up the courage to tell her that the window must be kept shut. When I finally did she seemed deaf to my words as though she had not heard them. I waited and then said:

"You're sure to catch cold, miss."

She turned her head, opened her eyes wide and gazed as though she had reason to be surprised.... Then she said: "Let it be!" And the next minute she was leaning out of the window again. I now gave it up and let her do as she pleased.

It seemed that she had calmed down a little. From time to time she closed the window, huddling herself into her light coat for warmth. The wind, as I told you, was raw and biting. But then she would soon be looking out again—most likely taking joy in the scenery after being locked away in prison. She cheered up and even smiled to herself. At such times it was a pleasure to look at her!... Cross my heart, it was....

The narrator paused to think a little and then continued with a somewhat embarrassed air.

I wasn't broken into the job, of course. Later, after a good many trips, I knew better. But then it looked odd to me—wherefore, I thought, are we taking this chit of a girl to some godforsaken place? Don't judge me too harshly, sir, if I tell you I thought of asking the proper permission to wed the miss. I'll knock the nonsense out of her, I said to myself. After all I was not just anybody—I was an official! There's no denying it, I was young and foolish. I see it now. The priest, at the confessional, said this thought of mine was leading me into evil, for the girl, to be sure, was a godless creature.

From Kostroma we were to go on by a mail-waggon. Most of the time Ivanov was dead drunk and asleep. He only woke up to toss off another bottleful. He reeled when he got out of the train. That's bad, I thought. I feared he might lose the government money in his keeping. But he got to the waggon all right, tumbled in and was soon snoring for all he was worth. It was very awkward to have our miss sit down beside him. She gave him a look full of disgust—shrinking from him, she curled up and squeezed into a corner. I sat down beside the driver. And now we started out. The wind blew from the north. Even I shivered with the cold. The girl took to coughing badly. She put a handkerchief to her mouth. There were stains of blood on it when she took it away, and it wrung my heart to see them. "Oh, that's bad, miss," I tell her. "You're ill! 'Twas wrong to go on this long journey—and in the cold autumn. Wrong!"

She lifted up her eyes, and now seemed to be quite furious again.

"Are you dull-witted, or something? Isn't it clear I'm not going of my own accord? You're my gaoler, and yet you dare thrust your pity on me!"

"You ought to apply to be put in hospital. 'Tis better than to travel in this cold weather. And it's pretty far you will be going."

"Where?" she inquired.

There are strict orders not to tell prisoners their place of destination. She saw I hesitated and turned away. "Never mind, I didn't really mean to ask—and *you* stop prying into my affairs."

Yet I blurted it out to her, and added, "You see what a far place it is." She tightened her lips, frowned but said nothing.

I shook my head. "You're young, miss," I said, "and you don't know what you're in for!"

I was really annoyed. But she only gave me another of her looks and said:

"There you're mistaken, I do know what I'm in for well enough. But the hospital—thank you! If I have to die, I'd much rather it was out of prison, among my own. And should I recover, I would again prefer it to happen outside the prison

walls. Do you imagine the wind or the cold weather to be the cause of my illness? Nothing of the kind!"

Hearing her speak the way she did—about recovering among her *own*—I asked, "Have you relatives where you're going?"

"No, I've no relatives there," she replied. "And the town is strange to me, but I'm bound to meet exiles like myself—comrades." I was surprised to hear her call strangers "her own"; would anyone bother to give her food without money when they did not know her? But I asked no more questions. She looked displeased—and I did not want to upset her.

"All right," I reckoned. "Let be! She's not had it hard yet. Wait till she gets knocked about and learns how bitter 'tis to live in strange parts...."

That evening the sky became overcast. A sharp wind rose, and it began to rain. With the mud not yet dried from previous rains, the road turned into a squelchy mass. Mud spattered all of my back, and the girl, too, got her share of splashes. It was bad luck for her—the weather getting so foul. The rain beat into her face, and though we rode in a covered cab, and I had put some matting over the roof for added protection, there were leaks everywhere. I saw that she was chilled. She was all trembling and her eyes were closed. Raindrops trickled down her face. She grew very pale and did not move—as though she fainted. I became quite alarmed. Indeed, it was a bad turn that things took. Ivanov was drunk. There he was snoring, caring for nothing. And I, so green on the job, could not think of what to do.

We arrived in the town of Yaroslavl close to nightfall. I shook Ivanov awake, and we went to the station. I asked for a samovar to be prepared. There were boats sailing from Yaroslavl. But we had strict orders against taking exiles by boat. For us, though, there was an advantage in boat travel as we could save a little on the fare. But it meant taking a chance. There were policemen, as you know, walking the quay, and local gendarmes—like ourselves—who could report us. But the girl said: "I refuse to go any farther by stage. I don't care how you do it but take me by boat." Ivanov who could barely open his eyes after all the drinks he had was furious. "You have no say in the matter," he said, "and will go where you're taken!" She said nothing to him, but spoke to me:

"I'll not go on! Is that clear?"

I now took Ivanov aside: "Why not go by boat? You'll only gain by it, for you'll save on the fare." He was willing, but afraid. "There's a colonel in charge here, so we better watch our step, but you could go and ask—not me, I feel bad." The colonel's house was a short distance away. "Let's go together and bring the miss along," I suggested. I was afraid to leave them behind, for Ivanov could drop down drunk somewhere and go to sleep, and the girl could walk off or do herself some harm, for which there would be hell to pay. When we went to the colonel and he asked what we wanted, it was the girl who put the matter before him, but she did not do it in the proper way. Instead of pleading humbly—saying please, do kindly permit—she tackled him in her usual haughty-like manner. "By what right..." she began, and went on with one bold word after another, the kind you political fellows like so much. That's just what gets under the skin of those on top. They want you to be humble. Still, he listened to what she had to say, and replied civilly enough. "There's nothing I can do, the law forbids it!"

"The law!" she sneered.

"Yes, that's the law." The colonel's answer was final.

For the moment I forgot myself, I admit. "It may be the law all right, Your Excellency," I said, "but the young lady's ailing." With a severe look, he asked, "What's your name?" Then turning to her: "And you, miss, if you're ill, had best go to the prison hospital." She turned and walked away without another word. We followed. She wanted to avoid the hospital, and since she had already refused to go into one in the first place, who could expect her to remain here, in these strange parts, and with practically no money to her name?

There was nothing we could do now. Ivanov fell on me: "A nice mess you've got us into, you dolt; we'll both have to answer." He would not hear of staying overnight in the town and ordered the horses to be harnessed. We were to start out night or no night. The girl had gone into the station-house. She was lying down on a couch trying to get a little warmer when we came in. "Get up, miss, the horses are ready," we told her. She jumped to her feet, drew herself up, and stared straight into our faces. I must say she gave me a fright. "You brutes," she started speaking, so angry and plaintive-like, too. And though it was Russian we could not make out much. The words were too clever. In the end she said: "You have the power over me; you can hasten my death. Have it your way, I'm ready to go!" The samovar was on the table, but she had not had her tea. We brewed our own tea, and I poured some for her. I also cut her a chunk of the white loaf we had brought along. "Help yourself," I said, "it'll warm you up." She now paused in the middle of putting on her galoshes, eyed me curiously, shrugged, and said:

"You're a funny fellow! Have you gone out of your senses to think I'm going to share your tea with you?" How hurt I was by her words! To this day the blood rushes to my face when I think of them. Take yourself, you aren't squeamish about sharing our meals. Nor was the gentleman Rubanov, another exile, the son of an army officer, mind you. But that miss was. She demanded a samovar all to herself, and as you could expect paid double the price for the tea and sugar. And her having no more than a ruble and twenty kopecks!

III

The narrator fell silent. For a while the house subsided into a stillness, broken only by the even breathing of the young gendarme, and the hiss of the storm outside the window.

"Not napping, are you?" asked Gavrilov.

"No, go on, I'm listening."

After another short pause he continued.

I suffered much on account of her. It rained all night. The weather was beastly. We passed through woods—they moaned something fearful. I could not see her face—it was pitch dark and murky all the time. And yet—would you believe it? There she was before my eyes as though I saw her in broad daylight: the eyes, the angry face, her body chilled to the bone, and the look, fixed on some point ahead of her as though she were turning her thoughts over and over in her mind. When we were leaving the station, I put a sheepskin coat over her shoulders. "That'll keep you warm," I said. But she threw it off: "It's your coat, *you* wear it!" The coat was mine all right, but I thought of an answer. "It's not mine," I said, "it's in the kit for prisoners." Only then did she put it on.

But it did not do her much good: when it became light I saw how awful she looked. After the next station she insisted that Ivanov get in with the coachman. He grumbled, but saw it was best not to cross her—his head had cleared a bit. I sat down at her side.

We drove on for three whole days and nights, stopping nowhere, for our orders were—not to stop over for the night, except "when overtaken by extreme fatigue", and even then only in well-patrolled towns. And how few towns there are in these parts you know full well.

At last our journey was over. When the town she was assigned to came into sight, what a load it was off my chest! I must tell you, towards the end I almost had to support her in my arms. This was after I saw her lying unconscious, her head getting knocked against the side of the coach with every bump in the road. I lifted her up and let her rest with her weight on my right arm. At first she pushed me away. "Don't you dare touch me," she said. But later she did not mind. Perhaps it was because she fainted again. Her eyes were shut, shadows darkened the lids, but the face was sweet, less angry. She even looked happier, laughed in her sleep and cuddled to me for warmth. The poor girl— might be dreaming of pleasant things. As we neared the town, she came to. The sky had cleared, the sun was looking out, and she cheered up a bit. But when we arrived, there were orders for her to go on. She was not to stay in that town—a gubernia capital. The local gendarmes were away on missions of their own and so she was to continue in our charge. When I came to tell her we must start, the police station was full of people. They were young ladies, gentlemen, students, obviously from among the local exiles. Like old friends, they shook her hand, asked questions, and before saying good-bye handed her some money and a fine wool shawl to keep her warm on the way.

She was cheerful the rest of the journey, but coughed a great deal. And she never as much as looked our way.

We arrived in the small town of her exile and handed her over to the police. She asked if there was a person by the name of Ryazantsev living in the town and was told there was. Then the district police officer came. He asked if she had an idea where she would lodge. "No," she replied, "but I'll look up Ryazantsev." He gave a shrug. She picked up her bundle and left—without saying good-bye to us.

IV

The narrator paused to listen if I was still awake.

"And you never saw her again?"

"I did, though I wish I hadn't.

...I saw her again soon afterwards. We had just got back when we were sent again to the same part of the country. We were taking there a student exile by the name of Zagryazhsky. He was a jolly young man, who sang songs and liked a drink or two. He was assigned to an even farther place of exile. When we stopped on our way at the very town to which the girl was exiled, I was curious to know how she was getting on. "Is the miss we brought here?" I asked. "Oh, yes, she's

here all right," they told me. "But she's a strange one. Soon as she arrived she went off to one of the exiles and has not been seen since. She lives at his place. There's some as say she ails and there's others that say she's his mistress. People will wag their tongues...." I now remembered her saying: "I want to die among my *own*." And I grew so very curious ... nay, more than that, plainly speaking, I hankered to visit her. And so I will, I thought. She saw no ill-treatment from me, I figured, and I bore her no grudge.

Good folk showed me the way. She lived at the far end of town, in a small house with a low door. I walked into the exile's quarters. What I saw was a light room, kept tidy, with a cot in a corner, and the corner draped-off. There were lots of books on the table, and on the shelves. A tiny place was set apart for a workshop where a bench served as a second bed.

When I came in the girl was sitting on the cot, huddled in her shawl, her legs tucked under her. She was sewing. The exile called Ryazantsev was sitting beside her, on a bench, and reading aloud to her. He wore specs, a serious-like fellow he looked. She listened as she sewed. When I opened the door and she saw me, the girl raised herself a little, caught the man's hand and gasped. The eyes were big, dark and fearful. And her face was even paler than before. She clutched tight at his hand. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Calm yourself!" He did not see me. Then she let go his hand and made to rise. "Fare ye well!" she said to him. "It looks like they even grudge me a quiet death." At this moment he turned his head and his eyes fell on me. He jumped to his feet, and it looked to me he was going to make a dash for me and kill me. He was a tall man, quite healthy-looking....

They thought I came to take her off again. But then he saw me—standing there, frightened out of my wits, and that I've come alone. He took her hand into his own. "Compose yourself," he said. Then he spoke to me: "And you, young gallant, what brings you here?"

I explained that I came quite on my own, with no special purpose. I had brought the young lady to the town. She had been very sick on the way. All I wanted was to know how she was. He softened. But she was as angry as ever, seething really. Why?—you could ask. Ivanov, to be sure, was not civil enough, but had I not always taken her part?

Now that he understood what it was all about, he turned laughing to her: "See, that's just what I had told you." These words made it clear that there was some talk about me before—she must have told him about the journey.

"Sorry if I scared you," I put in. "I chose the wrong time to come. I'll be leaving now, and don't think poorly of me."

Ryazantsev got up, and, after giving me a searching look, held out his hand.

"Look in on your way back, if you can spare the time," he said.

The girl gave us her mocking smile.

"I can't see any reason for him looking in again," she said, "nor why you should invite him."

"It's quite all right! Let him come if he likes," Ryazantsev said, and added, "Do look in, it'll be all right." I missed much of what they said afterwards. It's because you, gentle folk, can talk smart among yourselves. I would have liked to stay and get the hang of it. But it would be too awkward and—suspicious to them perhaps. And so I left.

We saw the gentleman Zagryazhsky to his destination, and before we knew it were back in that very town. There the police chief summoned the senior guard.

"You're to remain here until further orders," he said. "I received a wire to that effect. You have to wait for the mail." We stayed, of course.

There, I thought, I'll go and see them again—if only to find out from the landlord how the young lady was. "She's poorly," the landlord said, "like as not will pass away soon. And if they don't call a priest, I'm afraid I might answer for it." In the middle of our talk Ryazantsev stepped out of his part of the house. He greeted me and said: "So, you're here again? Why don't you come in?" I walked in with a quiet step and he came in after me. "Oh, it's that odd fellow again," said the girl. "Have you sent for him?"

"Of course, I didn't, he came quite on his own." I was too hurt to keep quiet.

"What have I done, miss," I blurted out, "for for you to be so mad with me? Do you take me for an enemy?"

"Just that," she said, "and it's high time you knew it! Of course, you're an enemy!" Her voice now sounded weak and faint, her cheeks flamed red, but she was indeed so comely that I could go on looking forever at her. Then the thought came to me: she won't last long, I must ask her to forgive me. What if she passes away without forgiving me? "Forgive me," I said, "if I have wronged you." I spoke as a good Christian should.... Only there she was getting enraged again.... "Forgive? Now really! Never! Don't expect it! I may be dying, but there is no forgiveness in my heart for you!"

The narrator fell silent, and after thinking a little continued more softly and intensely.

And again they were deep in their own kind of talk. Being an educated man you might catch the drift of it, and so I'll relate to you the words I remember. The words had stuck in my memory but I don't know their meaning.

Ryazantsev had said: "He's visiting you now not as a gendarme at all. He was one when he took you here, as he will take others. Then he acted on his orders. But has he come here on any orders? What do you say yourself, whatever your name is?"

"My name's Stepan."

"And your patronymic?"

"Petrovich."

"Surely, Stepan Petrovich, you've come here out of fellow feeling, am I right?"

"Of course, out of fellow feeling. You've put it very aptly. Our orders forbid such calls. If my superiors learn of this visit, I'll get into trouble."

"There, do you see that?" he said clasping her hand. And she pulled it away quickly.

"I don't see anything at all. It is you who see and imagine things. As to us (meaning her and myself) we are simple-minded enough to call a spade a spade. Yes, we are enemies! The business of the likes of him is to keep an eye on us; our business is to try and outsmart them. Look at him standing there listening—and I assure you if he knew what we were talking about he'd hurry up and put it all down in a report against us." Ryazantsev turned to me, staring point-blank out of his spectacles. His eyes were sharp but kind. "What have you got to say to that?" he asked. "But no, you needn't explain anything. In fact, I believe it is you who have cause to be offended."

And indeed by the orders and by my sworn office I was expected—if the interest I served was opposed—to tell even on my own father. But since it was not

for that I had dropped in, I did feel hurt, indeed touched on the raw. I turned to go, but Ryazantsev stopped me.

"Don't go yet, Stepan Petrovich, stay a while," he said. "It's not nice," he now spoke to her. "Nor is it so much a matter of your not forgiving or refusing to make peace with him. Perhaps if he had himself got at the bottom of it all, he would not forgive you. It is that you refuse to admit that an enemy, too, can be human. And that makes you no better than a sectarian!"

"If I'm that," she retorted, "you're a lukewarm prig! All you care about is your books."

The word she used made him jump to his feet. It was as though she had struck him a blow, and she now started in fright herself.

"A prig, you say. You know very well that's not true."

"I suppose I do, but did *you* speak the truth?"

"I did, you're every inch the boyarina Morozova...."

She paused to think and then held out her hand to him. He took it. She peered into his face and said: "I believe you are right!" I felt rather foolish standing there and watching them. There was a lump in my throat. Then she turned to me and with a look no longer angry gave me her hand. "I'll tell you what," she said, "I still hold us to be enemies for life, but I'll shake hands with you. And I do wish, aside from orders, you turn into a human being one day. I'm fatigued," she added to Ryazantsev.

I took my leave. Ryazantsev followed me out. Standing in the yard with him I thought I saw the tears start in his eyes.

"How long will you be staying in the town, Stepan Petrovich?" he asked.

"Another two or three days perhaps, until the mail arrives."

"If you feel like dropping in again," he said, "you're welcome. You're not a bad fellow considering the job you have."

"I'm sorry, I scared her...."

"You did—next time have the landlady first tell us of your arrival."

"There's just something I'd like to know. You mentioned boyarina Morozova. Would that mean that the young lady, too, is of boyar stock?"

"Boyar or no boyar, but she sure comes of a stock you can break—you've broken her already, as a matter of fact—but never bend. That you saw for yourself. People of her kind do not bend."

I now said good-bye.

V

She died soon afterwards. I did not see the funeral, for I was busy at the police station. It was not until the next day that I ran into Ryazantsev. He looked terrible.

He was a tall fellow, with a serious face. He used to look kindly enough at me before, but this time he met me with a dark scowl. He took my hand to shake it, but then right away dropped it and turned his face away. "I hate the sight of you," he said. "Be off, fellow, be off!" His head sank on his chest and he walked away. I returned to my quarters so put out that I could not take a morsel of food for two days. It was from that time on that a sadness came over me—like a worm eating me.

Next day the police chief called us. "You may go now, your paper has come," he said. The paper was an order for the young lady's further deportation. Too late! The Lord had pity on her, and took the matter in his own hands!

...Mind you, this is not the end of the story. On our way back we stopped at a station. When we walked into the station-room there was a samovar on the table. There were, too, all sorts of refreshments laid out to which an old lady was treating the station mistress. She was a tiny, neat and cheerful old soul, chattering much, and telling the station mistress all about her own affairs. "See, I sold the house I inherited," she was saying, "packed my belongings, and am now on my way to my little dove. What a surprise it'll be to her! To be sure, the darling will be cross. She'll scold me but I know she'll be happy to see me. True, she wrote to me that I must not come, on no account. But never mind that."

It was as though somebody gave me a poke in my side. I hurried into the kitchen. "Who may that old lady be?" I ask the kitchen wench. "She be none other than the mother of that young lady you took along this way," she answers. I staggered at these words. My face showed how shaken I was. "What's the matter with you, soldier?" asks the wench.

"Be still! Don't you go yelling," I say. "The young lady is dead."

And here the tart—a pretty loose one she was, carrying on with all the travellers—claps her hands in dismay, lets out a loud wail and dashes out of the house. I picked up my hat, and I walked out, too. The old lady was still talking to the station mistress and her chatter rang in my ears. I can't tell you how terrible I felt on her account. I stumbled down the road—quite a while later Ivanov overtook me with the cart and I climbed in.

VI

...That's the way it was. Then the police chief reported my visit to the exile's home, and the colonel at Kostroma reported, too, the way I pleaded for the young lady. One thing followed another so that my superior would not recommend me for promotion. "You don't deserve to be made a sergeant," he says to me. "You're no better than an old woman. What you need, you fool, is to be put in the cooler." Only the way I felt then I could not care less and was not a bit sorry for what I had done.

And all the while I was unable to put that angry young lady out of my mind. Even as I speak now she is there before my eyes.

What could it mean? Is there any one who could explain it? You're not asleep, are you, sir?

I was not asleep.... The gloom of the little hut tucked away in the woods tormented my soul, and the sad image of the dead girl loomed in the darkness amidst the muffled wailing of the storm....

THE STRANGE ONE

"The Strange One" was written in March 1880 during Korolenko's detention at the Vyshne-Volochek transit prison (February-June 1880), pending further deportation to Siberia. "How he managed to write it in the common cell with the endless commotion and tumult that went on," reminisced S.Shvetsov, one of the "politicals", "is beyond my comprehension.... He read 'The Strange One' to us at one of our meetings (right in the common cell). It produced a tremendous impression." The idea was suggested by a story related to Korolenko by a gendarme who convoyed him at the beginning of 1880 from Beryozovskiye Pochinki to Vyatka. He has endowed his heroine, a girl exile, with the features of Evelyn Ulanovskaya whom Korolenko met in exile. The story first appeared abroad (London).