

ANTON CHEKHOV

The Lady with the Little Dog

A story in four parts, first published in 1899. Translated from the Russian.

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I Yalta



Yalta. The seafront, toward evening.

It was said that a new face had appeared on the seafront: a lady with a little dog. Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov, who had been in Yalta for two weeks and had grown accustomed to it, had also begun to take an interest in new faces. Sitting in Vernet's pavilion, he saw a young lady walk along the seafront, a blonde, not tall, wearing a beret; a white spitz ran after her.

And after that he met her in the public garden and in the square several times a day. She walked alone, always in the same beret, with the white spitz; nobody knew who she was, and people simply called her "the lady with the little dog."

"If she is here without her husband and without acquaintances," Gurov reflected, "it would not be a bad idea to make her acquaintance."

He was not yet forty, but he already had a twelve-year-old daughter and two sons at school. He had been married off early, when he was still a second-year student, and now his wife seemed half as old again as he was. She was a tall woman with dark eyebrows, erect, imposing, dignified, and, as she called herself, a thinking woman. She read a great deal, omitted the hard sign in her letters, called her husband not Dmitri but Dimitri, while he secretly considered her shallow, narrow,

graceless, was afraid of her, and did not like to be at home. He had begun to be unfaithful to her long ago, had been unfaithful often, and probably for that reason spoke almost always ill of women, and when they were discussed in his presence he would call them:

"The lower race!"

He thought he had been taught enough by bitter experience to call them whatever he liked, and yet he could not have lived even two days without "the lower race." In the company of men he was bored and ill at ease, with them he was taciturn and cold, but when he was among women he felt free, knew what to talk about with them and how to carry himself; even being silent with them came easily to him. In his appearance, his character, his whole nature there was something attractive, elusive, which disposed women toward him and drew them; he knew it, and some force drew him to them as well.

Experience, repeated many times, indeed bitter experience, had taught him long ago that every involvement, which at the beginning so pleasantly varies life and presents itself as a sweet and easy adventure, with decent people, especially Muscovites, slow to move, indecisive, inevitably grows into a whole problem, extraordinarily complicated, and the situation in the end becomes burdensome. But at every new meeting with an interesting woman this experience somehow slipped from memory, and he wanted to live, and everything seemed so simple and amusing.

And so one evening he was dining in the garden, and the lady in the beret came up unhurriedly to take the neighboring table. Her expression, her gait, her dress, her hairstyle told him that she was from respectable society, married, in Yalta for the first time and alone, and that she was bored here… There is much untruth in tales of the impurity of local morals; he despised them and knew that such tales are for the most part made up by people who would gladly sin themselves if they knew how, but when the lady sat down at the next table, three paces from him, he remembered those stories of easy conquests, of trips to the mountains, and the tempting thought of a quick, fleeting liaison, of an affair with an unknown woman whose name and surname you do not know, suddenly took hold of him.

He beckoned the spitz to him affectionately and, when it came up, shook a finger at it. The spitz growled. Gurov shook his finger again.

The lady glanced at him and at once lowered her eyes.

“He doesn’t bite,” she said, and blushed.

“May I give him a bone?” And when she nodded in assent, he asked pleasantly: “Have you been in Yalta long?”

“Five days or so.”

“And I am already dragging out my second week here.”

They were silent a little.

“Time passes quickly, and yet it’s so dull here!” she said, not looking at him.

“It’s only the custom to say that it’s dull here. Some provincial lives at home somewhere in Belyov or Zhizdra and isn’t bored, but he arrives here and says: ‘Ah, how dull! Ah, the dust!’ You’d think he had come from Granada.”

She laughed. Then both went on eating in silence, like strangers; but after dinner they walked off side by side, and a light, playful conversation began, the talk of free, contented people who do not care where they go or what they talk about. They strolled and talked of how strangely the sea was lit; the water was a lilac color, so soft and warm, and a golden band ran across it from the moon. They talked of how stifling it was after the hot day. Gurov told her that he was a Muscovite, a philologist by education, but worked in a bank; that he had once prepared to sing in a private opera but had given it up; that he owned two houses in Moscow… And from her he learned that she had grown up in Petersburg but married in S., where she had lived for two years now, that she would stay in Yalta about another month, and that her husband, who also wanted a rest, might come for her. She could not explain where her husband worked, whether in the Provincial Board or in the Provincial Zemstvo Council, and this seemed funny even to her. And Gurov also learned that her name was Anna Sergeyevna.

Then in his room he thought of her, of how tomorrow she would surely meet him. It had to be so. Going to bed, he remembered that only recently she had been a schoolgirl, studying, just as his daughter did now; he remembered how much timidity and awkwardness there was in her laughter, in her conversation with a stranger. It must have been the first time in her life that she was alone in such surroundings, where people follow her and look at her and speak to her with one secret purpose, which she could not fail to guess. He remembered her thin, weak neck, her beautiful gray eyes.

And it seemed that a little more and the solution would be found, and then a new, beautiful life would begin; and it was clear to both that the end was still far, far off and that the most complicated and difficult part was only just beginning.

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Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860–1904), *Dama s sobachkoi*, first published in *Russkaya Mysl*, December 1899.

English translation and illustrations made for this edition, 2026. Draft edition: the translation has not yet been through a human editor.

him, and it would have been unthinkable to tell her that all this must some day come to an end; and she would not have believed it.

He went up to her and took her by the shoulders to caress her, to joke, and at that moment saw himself in the mirror.

His hair was already beginning to turn gray. And it seemed strange to him that he had aged so in recent years, had become so plain. The shoulders on which his hands lay were warm and trembling. He felt compassion for this life, still so warm and beautiful, but probably already near to beginning to fade and wither, like his own. Why did she love him so? He had always seemed to women not what he was, and they had loved in him not himself but the man their imagination created and whom they eagerly sought in their lives; and afterward, when they noticed their mistake, they went on loving all the same.

And not one of them had been happy with him. Time passed, he made acquaintances, grew close, parted, but never once loved; there was everything you like, but only not love.

And only now, when his hair had turned gray, he had fallen in love, as one should, truly, for the first time in his life.

Anna Sergeyevna and he loved each other like very close, kindred people, like husband and wife, like tender friends; it seemed to them that fate itself had meant them for each other, and it was incomprehensible why he had a wife and she a husband; and they were like two migratory birds, male and female, who had been caught and made to live in separate cages. They forgave each other what they were ashamed of in their past, forgave everything in the present, and felt that this love of theirs had changed them both.

Before, in sad moments, he had comforted himself with whatever reasoning came into his head; now he was past reasoning, he felt deep compassion, wanted to be sincere, tender…

“Stop, my dear,” he said. “You’ve cried, and that’s enough… Now let us talk, we shall think of something.”

Then they took counsel for a long time, talked of how to free themselves from the necessity of hiding, deceiving, living in different towns, not seeing each other for long periods. How to be free of these unbearable fetters?

“How? How?” he asked, clutching his head. “How?”

“There is something pitiable about her all the same,” he thought, and began to fall asleep.

II Oreanda



Oreanda. Dawn, and the sound of the sea below.

A week had passed since they met. It was a holiday. It was stuffy indoors, and in the streets dust whirled in a gale and hats were torn off. All day one was thirsty, and Gurov often went into the pavilion and offered Anna Sergeyevna now water with syrup, now ice cream. There was nowhere to go.

In the evening, when it had quieted a little, they went out on the pier to watch the steamer come in. There were many strollers on the landing stage; people had gathered to meet someone and held bouquets. And here two peculiarities of the smartly dressed Yalta crowd stood out clearly: elderly ladies were dressed like young ones, and there were many generals.

Because of the rough sea the steamer arrived late, when the sun had already set, and it turned a long time before it moored at the pier. Anna Sergeyevna looked at the steamer and the passengers through her lorgnette, as if searching for acquaintances, and when she turned to Gurov her eyes shone. She talked a great deal, and her questions were abrupt, and she herself at once forgot what she had asked; then she lost her lorgnette in the crowd.

open, seen and known by all who needed to, full of conventional truth and conventional deceit, exactly like the lives of his acquaintances and friends, and another, running its course in secret. And by some strange concurrence of circumstances, perhaps accidental, everything that was important, interesting, necessary to him, in which he was sincere and did not deceive himself, which made up the kernel of his life, took place in secret from others, while everything that was his lie, his shell in which he hid to conceal the truth, such as his work at the bank, arguments at the club, his “lower race,” going with his wife to anniversary celebrations, all that was open. And by himself he judged others, did not believe what he saw, and always supposed that every person lives his real, most interesting life under the cover of secrecy, as under the cover of night. Every personal existence rests on secrecy, and perhaps partly for this reason a cultured person is so nervously anxious that personal privacy be respected.

Having walked his daughter to school, Gurov set out for the Slavyansky Bazaar. He took off his fur coat downstairs, went up, and knocked softly at the door. Anna Sergeyevna, dressed in his favorite gray dress, tired by the journey and the waiting, had been expecting him since last evening; she was pale, looked at him and did not smile, and no sooner had he come in than she fell upon his breast. As though they had not seen each other for two years, their kiss was long, lingering.

“Well, how do you live there?” he asked. “What is new?”

“Wait, I’ll tell you in a moment… I can’t.”

She could not speak because she was crying. She turned away from him and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

“Well, let her cry, and I’ll sit a while,” he thought, and sat down in an armchair.

Then he rang and told them to bring him tea; and afterward, as he drank his tea, she kept standing with her back turned, facing the window… She was crying from agitation, from the sorrowful awareness that their life had turned out so sadly; they could only see each other in secret, hid from people like thieves! Was not their life shattered?

“Well, stop!” he said.

It was obvious to him that this love of theirs would end not soon, no one knew when. Anna Sergeyevna was becoming more and more attached to him, adored

IV Moscow



Moscow. Two migratory birds, kept in separate cages.

And Anna Sergeyevna began to come to him in Moscow. Once every two or three months she left S. and told her husband that she was going to consult a professor about her women's complaint, and her husband believed and did not believe. Arriving in Moscow, she stayed at the Slavyansky Bazaar and at once sent a man in a red cap to Gurov. Gurov went to her, and no one in Moscow knew of it.

Once he was going to her in this way on a winter morning (the messenger had been to him the evening before and had not found him in). With him walked his daughter, whom he wanted to walk to school; it was on the way. Large, wet snow was falling.

"It is three degrees above freezing now, and yet it is snowing," Gurov said to his daughter. "But this warmth is only at the surface of the earth; in the upper layers of the atmosphere the temperature is quite different."

"Papa, why is there no thunder in winter?"

He explained that too. He talked and thought that he was going to a rendezvous and not a living soul knew of it and probably never would. He had two lives: one

The smart crowd dispersed, faces could no longer be seen, the wind had died down completely, and Gurov and Anna Sergeyevna stood as if waiting to see whether someone else would come off the steamer. Anna Sergeyevna was silent now and smelled her flowers, not looking at Gurov.

"The weather has got a little better toward evening," he said. "Where shall we go now? Shall we drive somewhere?"

She made no reply.

Then he looked at her intently and suddenly embraced her and kissed her on the lips, and he was enveloped by the scent and dampness of the flowers, and at once he looked around fearfully: had anyone seen?

"Let us go to your room…" he said quietly.

And both walked off quickly.

Her room was stuffy and smelled of the perfume she had bought in the Japanese shop. Gurov, looking at her now, thought: "What meetings one has in life!" From the past he kept the memory of carefree, good-natured women, cheerful with love, grateful to him for happiness, however brief; and of those, like his wife, for instance, who loved without sincerity, with excessive talk, affectedly, with hysteria, with an expression as though it were not love, not passion, but something more significant; and of two or three very beautiful, cold ones, across whose faces a predatory expression would suddenly flash, a stubborn desire to take, to snatch from life more than it can give, and these were women past their first youth, capricious, unreasoning, domineering, unintelligent, and when Gurov cooled toward them their beauty aroused hatred in him and the lace on their underclothes seemed to him then like scales.

But here it was all the same timidity, the awkwardness of inexperienced youth, an uneasy feeling; and there was an impression of bewilderment, as though someone had suddenly knocked at the door. Anna Sergeyevna, this "lady with the little dog," took what had happened in some special way, very seriously, as her fall, so it seemed, and this was strange and inappropriate. Her features drooped and faded, and on either side of her face her long hair hung sadly; she sank into thought in a dejected pose, like a sinner in an old painting.

"It is wrong," she said. "You will be the first not to respect me now."

On the table in the room there was a watermelon. Gurov cut himself a slice and began to eat unhurriedly. At least half an hour passed in silence.

Anna Sergeyevna was touching; there came from her the purity of a decent, naive woman who had lived little; a single candle burning on the table barely lit her face, but one could see that she felt troubled.

“Why should I stop respecting you?” asked Gurov. “You don’t know what you are saying.”

“May God forgive me!” she said, and her eyes filled with tears. “It is terrible.”

“You sound as if you are justifying yourself.”

“How can I justify myself? I am a bad, low woman, I despise myself and do not think of justification. It is not my husband I have deceived, but myself. And not only now, I have been deceiving myself for a long time. My husband may be an honest, good man, but he is a lackey! I don’t know what he does there, how he serves, I only know that he is a lackey. When I married him I was twenty, curiosity tormented me, I wanted something better; there is, I told myself, another kind of life. I wanted to live! To live and live… Curiosity burned me… you don’t understand this, but I swear to God, I could no longer control myself, something was happening to me, I couldn’t be held back, I told my husband I was ill, and came here… And here I have gone about as in a daze, like a madwoman… and now I have become a vulgar, worthless woman whom anyone may despise.”

Gurov was already bored listening; he was irritated by the naive tone, by this repentance, so unexpected and out of place; had it not been for the tears in her eyes, one might have thought she was joking or playing a part.

“I don’t understand,” he said quietly. “What is it you want?”

She hid her face against his chest and clung to him.

“Believe me, believe me, I beg you…” she said. “I love an honest, pure life, and sin is loathsome to me, I do not know what I am doing. Simple people say: the evil one led me astray. And now I can say of myself that the evil one has led me astray.”

“Enough, enough…” he murmured.

He looked into her fixed, frightened eyes, kissed her, spoke quietly and tenderly, and little by little she calmed down, and her cheerfulness returned; both began to laugh.

On a narrow, gloomy staircase, where it was written “Entrance to the amphitheater,” she stopped.

“How you frightened me!” she said, breathing heavily, still pale, stunned. “Oh, how you frightened me! I am barely alive. Why did you come? Why?”

“But understand, Anna, understand…” he said in a low voice, hurrying. “I implore you, understand…”

She looked at him with fear, with entreaty, with love, looked intently, to hold his features more firmly in her memory.

“I suffer so!” she went on, not listening to him. “All this time I have thought only of you, I have lived on thoughts of you. And I wanted to forget, to forget, but why, why did you come?”

Higher up, on the landing, two schoolboys were smoking and looking down, but Gurov did not care; he drew Anna Sergeyevna to him and began to kiss her face, her cheeks, her hands.

“What are you doing, what are you doing!” she said in horror, pushing him away. “We have both gone mad. Leave today, leave at once… I implore you by all that is holy, I beg you… Someone is coming!”

Someone was coming up the stairs from below.

“You must leave…” Anna Sergeyevna went on in a whisper. “Do you hear, Dmitri Dmitrich? I will come to you in Moscow. I have never been happy, I am unhappy now and never, never shall be happy, never! Do not make me suffer still more! I swear I will come to Moscow. But now let us part! My dear, kind, precious one, let us part!”

She pressed his hand and began to go quickly down, looking back at him all the while, and from her eyes it could be seen that she really was not happy. Gurov stood a little, listened, then, when all was quiet, found his coat and left the theater.

Anna Sergeyevna came in too. She sat in the third row, and when Gurov looked at her his heart contracted, and he understood clearly that for him now there was in the whole world no person nearer, dearer, or more important; she, lost in the provincial crowd, this small woman, remarkable in nothing, with a vulgar lorgnette in her hands, now filled his whole life, was his grief, his joy, the only happiness he now wished for himself; and to the sound of the bad orchestra, the wretched provincial fiddles, he thought how lovely she was. Thought and dreamed.

Together with Anna Sergeyevna a young man came in and sat down beside her, with small side-whiskers, very tall, stooping; at every step he shook his head and seemed to be constantly bowing. This was probably the husband whom she, in Yalta, in a rush of bitter feeling, had called a lackey. And indeed in his long figure, in his side-whiskers, in his small bald patch there was something lackey-like and modest; he smiled sweetly, and in his buttonhole glittered some academic badge, like a lackey's number.

In the first interval the husband went out to smoke; she remained in her seat. Gurov, who was also sitting in the stalls, went up to her and said in a trembling voice, smiling with effort:

"Good evening."

She glanced at him and turned pale, then looked again in horror, not believing her eyes, and tightly clasped her fan and lorgnette together in her hands, evidently struggling with herself not to faint. Both were silent. She sat, he stood, frightened by her confusion, not daring to sit down beside her. The tuning violins and flute began to sound, suddenly it became frightening, it seemed that from all the boxes people were looking. But now she rose and quickly walked to the exit; he followed her, and both went about aimlessly, through corridors, up and down stairs, and before their eyes flashed people in judicial, teaching, and crown-estate uniforms, all with badges; ladies flashed, fur coats on hangers, a draught blew, enveloping them in the smell of tobacco butts. And Gurov, whose heart was beating hard, thought:

"O Lord! And what are these people for, this orchestra…"

And at that moment he suddenly remembered how that evening at the station, after seeing Anna Sergeyevna off, he had told himself that everything was over and they would never meet again. But how far it still was from the end!

Afterward, when they went out, there was not a soul on the seafront; the town with its cypresses had a completely dead look, but the sea was still roaring and beating against the shore; a single boat rocked on the waves, and a lantern flickered sleepily on it.

They found a cab and drove to Oreanda.

"Downstairs in the hall just now I learned your surname: it is written on the board, von Diderits," said Gurov. "Is your husband a German?"

"No, I think his grandfather was a German, but he himself is Orthodox."

At Oreanda they sat on a bench not far from the church, looked down at the sea, and were silent. Yalta was barely visible through the morning mist, white clouds stood motionless on the mountaintops. The leaves did not stir on the trees, cicadas called, and the monotonous, hollow sound of the sea, rising from below, spoke of peace, of the eternal sleep that awaits us. So it roared below when there was neither Yalta nor Oreanda here, so it roars now and will roar as indifferently and hollowly when we are no more. And in this constancy, in this complete indifference to the life and death of each of us, there lies hidden, perhaps, the pledge of our eternal salvation, of the unceasing movement of life on earth, of unceasing perfection. Sitting beside a young woman who at dawn seemed so beautiful, soothed and enchanted at the sight of this fairytale setting, sea, mountains, clouds, wide sky, Gurov thought how, essentially, when you think about it, everything in this world is beautiful, everything except what we ourselves think and do when we forget the higher aims of existence, our human dignity.

Someone came up, probably a watchman, looked at them and went away. And this detail seemed so mysterious and also beautiful. One could see the steamer arrive from Feodosia, lit by the morning glow, with its lights already out.

"There is dew on the grass," said Anna Sergeyevna after a silence.

"Yes. It is time to go home."

They went back to town.

After that they met every noon on the seafront, had lunch together, dined, walked, admired the sea. She complained that she slept badly and that her heart beat anxiously, asked always the same questions, stirred now by jealousy, now by fear that he did not respect her enough. And often in the square or garden, when no one was near, he would suddenly draw her to him and kiss her passionately.

Complete idleness, these kisses in broad daylight, given warily and with fear that someone might see, the heat, the smell of the sea, and the constant flicker before the eyes of idle, smartly dressed, well-fed people seemed to have transformed him; he told Anna Sergeyevna how beautiful she was, how seductive, was impatiently passionate, would not leave her side a step, while she often fell into thought and kept begging him to admit that he did not respect her, did not love her in the least, and saw in her only a vulgar woman. Almost every evening, rather late, they drove out of town somewhere, to Oreanda or to the waterfall; and the outing was a success, the impressions each time unfailingly beautiful and majestic.

They expected her husband to come. But a letter came from him in which he announced that his eyes had begun to hurt and begged his wife to return home as soon as possible. Anna Sergeyevna hurried.

"It is good that I am leaving," she said to Gurov. "It is fate itself."

She went by carriage, and he accompanied her. They traveled all day. When she took her seat in the carriage of the express train, and the second bell rang, she said:

"Let me look at you once more… Look once more. Like that."

She did not cry, but was sad, as though ill, and her face trembled.

"I will think of you… remember you," she said. "God be with you, stay well. Do not think ill of me. We are parting forever, it must be so, because we should never have met at all. Well, God be with you."

The train left quickly, its lights soon vanished, and a minute later the noise was no longer heard, as though everything had conspired on purpose to end this sweet oblivion, this madness more quickly. And, left alone on the platform and looking into the dark distance, Gurov listened to the chirr of grasshoppers and the humming of the telegraph wires with the feeling of having just woken up. And he thought that in his life there had been one more adventure or escapade, and it too was now over, and only a memory remained… He was moved, sad, and felt a slight remorse; for this young woman, whom he would never see again, had not been happy with him; he had been cordial and warm to her, but all the same in his manner with her, in his tone and caresses, there showed through, like a shadow, a slight mockery, the somewhat coarse arrogance of a happy man who is, moreover, almost twice her age. All the time she had called him kind, extraordinary, lofty; ev-

walking along the street and by the fence and waited for this chance. He saw a beggar go in at the gate and the dogs attack him, then, an hour later, he heard someone playing the piano, and the sounds reached him faint and indistinct. It must have been Anna Sergeyevna playing. The front door suddenly opened, and some old woman came out, and after her ran the familiar white spitz. Gurov wanted to call the dog, but his heart suddenly began to pound, and in his agitation he could not remember the spitz's name.

He walked on and hated the gray fence more and more, and already thought with irritation that Anna Sergeyevna had forgotten him and was perhaps already amusing herself with someone else, and this was so natural in the position of a young woman forced from morning till night to look at this accursed fence. He returned to his room and sat a long time on the sofa not knowing what to do, then dined, then slept a long time.

"How foolish and restless it all is," he thought on waking, looking at the dark windows; it was already evening. "Here I've had my sleep for some reason. What shall I do now at night?"

He sat on the bed, covered with a cheap gray blanket, like a hospital one, and taunted himself with vexation:

"So much for the lady with the little dog… So much for the adventure… Sit here now."

Already that morning, at the station, a poster with very large letters had caught his eye: it was the first performance of "The Geisha." He remembered this and went to the theater.

"It is quite possible that she goes to first nights," he thought.

The theater was full. And here, as in all provincial theaters generally, there was a haze above the chandelier, the gallery was noisily restless; in the front row before the performance local dandies stood with their hands behind their backs; and here, in the governor's box, in the first seat sat the governor's daughter in a boa, while the governor himself modestly hid behind the curtain, and only his hands could be seen; the curtain swayed, the orchestra took a long time tuning. All the while the audience was coming in and taking their seats, Gurov searched greedily with his eyes.

"What?"

"You were right earlier: the sturgeon was off!"

These words, so ordinary, for some reason suddenly outraged Gurov, seemed to him humiliating, unclean. What savage manners, what faces! What senseless nights, what uninteresting, unnoticed days! Frenzied card playing, gluttony, drunkenness, constant talk always about the same thing. Useless affairs and talk always about the same thing take for their share the best part of one's time, the best strength, and in the end what remains is some stunted, wingless life, some nonsense, and one cannot leave or run away, as though sitting in a madhouse or in a prison gang!

Gurov did not sleep all night and raged, and then spent the whole day with a headache. And the following nights he slept badly, kept sitting up in bed and thinking, or paced from corner to corner. The children bored him, the bank bored him, he did not want to go anywhere or talk about anything.

In December, during the holidays, he got ready for a journey and told his wife he was going to Petersburg to petition on behalf of a young man, and went to S. Why? He did not know well himself. He wanted to see Anna Sergeyevna and talk with her, to arrange a meeting if possible.

He arrived in S. in the morning and took the best room in the hotel, where the whole floor was covered with gray soldier's cloth and on the table stood an inkwell, gray with dust, with a horseman on a horse, who had his arm raised with a hat in it, and whose head was broken off. The porter gave him the necessary information: von Diderits lived on Old Goncharnaya Street, in his own house, which was not far from the hotel, lived well, richly, kept his own horses, everyone in town knew him. The porter pronounced it: Drydyrits.

Gurov walked unhurriedly to Old Goncharnaya and found the house. Directly opposite the house stretched a fence, gray, long, studded with nails.

"A fence like that would make anyone run away," thought Gurov, glancing now at the windows, now at the fence.

He reasoned: today was a holiday, the offices were closed, and the husband was probably at home. And in any case it would be tactless to go into the house and cause embarrassment. If he sent a note, it might fall into the husband's hands, and then everything could be spoiled. Best of all to rely on chance. And he kept

idently he had seemed to her not what he was in reality, which means he had involuntarily deceived her…

Here at the station there was already a smell of autumn, the evening was cool.

"It is time for me, too, to go north," thought Gurov, leaving the platform. "High time!"

III The Grey Fence



The town of S. The grey fence on Old Goncharnaya Street.

At home in Moscow everything was already wintry, the stoves were lit, and in the mornings, when the children were getting ready for school and drinking tea, it was dark, and the nurse would light the lamp for a short while. The frosts had already begun. When the first snow falls, on the first day of sleigh riding, it is pleasant to see the white ground, the white roofs, one breathes softly and gladly, and in those days one remembers one's young years. The old lindens and birches, white with hoarfrost, have a good-natured look, they are nearer to the heart than cypresses and palms, and near them one no longer wants to think of mountains and sea.

Gurov was a Muscovite; he returned to Moscow on a fine, frosty day, and when he put on his fur coat and warm gloves and strolled along Petrovka, and when on Saturday evening he heard the ringing of bells, his recent trip and the places he had visited lost all their charm for him. Little by little he plunged into Moscow life, greedily read three newspapers a day and said that he did not read the Moscow papers on principle. He was already drawn to restaurants, clubs, dinner parties, anniversary celebrations, and was already flattered that famous lawyers

and actors visited him and that in the Doctors' Club he played cards with a professor. He could already eat a whole portion of selyanka from the pan…

A month would pass, he thought, and Anna Sergeyevna would be covered in memory with fog and would only occasionally appear in his dreams with a touching smile, as others had. But more than a month passed, deep winter came, and in his memory everything was clear, as though he had parted from Anna Sergeyevna only yesterday. And the memories flared up ever more strongly. Whether in the evening quiet there carried into his study the voices of children preparing lessons, or he heard a romance or an organ in a restaurant, or a blizzard howled in the fireplace, suddenly everything revived in memory: what had happened on the pier, and the early morning with mist on the mountains, and the steamer from Feodosia, and the kisses. He would walk long about the room and remember and smile, and then memories passed into daydreams, and the past mingled in imagination with what was to come. Anna Sergeyevna did not appear in his dreams but followed him everywhere like a shadow, and watched him. Closing his eyes, he saw her as if alive, and she seemed more beautiful, younger, tenderer than she had been; and he himself seemed to himself better than he had been then, in Yalta. In the evenings she looked at him from the bookcase, from the fireplace, from the corner; he heard her breathing, the gentle rustle of her clothes. In the street he followed women with his eyes, looking for one who resembled her…

And now a strong desire tormented him to share his memories with someone. But at home he could not speak of his love, and outside the home there was no one. Not with his tenants, and not at the bank. And what was there to say? Had he loved then? Had there been anything beautiful, poetic, or instructive, or simply interesting in his relations with Anna Sergeyevna? And he had to speak vaguely of love, of women, and no one guessed what it was about, and only his wife twitched her dark eyebrows and said:

"The role of a dandy does not suit you at all, Dimitri."

One night, leaving the Doctors' Club with his card partner, an official, he could not help saying:

"If you only knew what a charming woman I met in Yalta!"

The official got into his sleigh and drove off, but suddenly turned and called:

"Dmitri Dmitrich!"