

3. 苦 恼

Misery



大雪纷飞的夜晚，马车夫姚纳·帕塔波夫在路边等着拉活儿。他蜷坐在驭座上，大雪盖满了全身，但他却浑然不觉。他那匹瘦马也和它的主人一样，僵直着白色的身躯，呆立在那儿。他们守在这儿已经很长时间了，从午饭之前出来到现在还没拉到一个客人。

一个穿灰色军大衣的军人上了他的车，要去维堡。姚纳反应迟缓，出发以后，赶的车跌跌撞撞地不听使唤，不是差点撞上马车就是险些蹭到行人。这个军人看来还不坏，姚纳便向他说出了自己一直想找人诉说的事情，那便是他的儿子死了。军人问他儿子得了什么病，这更加剧了姚纳诉说的欲望，便把整个身子转过来，打算对他讲一讲，但是一不小心车子又给驾歪了，挨了路人的咒骂。此时，军人也不耐烦了，催促他赶路。之后军人便闭目养神，不想再听他说什么了。把客人送到维堡之后，姚纳把马车停在路边，又一动不动了，不一会儿，他和马又被雪染白了。

来了三个年轻人，叫嚷着要去警察大街，而且吝啬地只给二十戈比。但对于姚纳来说，钱已经无所谓，只要有乘客肯听他诉说便行。但似乎这一次的这几位更让他失望。三个年轻人满口粗话，其中一个驼子嘲笑姚纳的破帽子，还因为嫌姚纳赶车慢打了他的后颈一拳；一个高个子醉醺醺地说自己去喝白兰地的事情；另一个问姚纳有没有老婆。姚纳刚想跟他搭话趁机诉说一下儿子去世的苦闷，他们就到了目



向自己的马儿诉说

的地下车了。

姚纳再次陷入了孤寂，因为拉车而平息了片刻的丧子之痛，再一次更加凶猛地向他袭来……姚纳痛苦地望着街上匆匆赶路的行人，怎么找不到一个愿意倾听他诉说自己苦恼的人？姚纳看见一个看门人，决定过去跟他说说话，但是这个看门人也不耐烦地把他打发走了。姚纳弯下腰，任凭苦恼把自己包围，他知道向别人诉说已经没有用处。但是没过几秒钟，他便忍不住了，他想要回车行去找那里的伙计们碰碰运气。

回去以后他便后悔了，人们一个个都蜷卧在地板上、灶台上和长凳上打鼾，姚纳看了这情形，后悔不该这么早回来。今天吃饱肚子的钱还没赚够呢，他想，如果能把自己的事情处理得井井有条，也许就不会苦恼了。这时，墙角的一个年轻车夫爬起来想要喝口水。姚纳赶快凑过去，跟他说他的儿子死了，但是年轻人又埋头睡去了，什么反应也没有。

姚纳痛苦地长叹了一口气。儿子死了快一个星期了，他还没有好好地、原原本本地跟什么人说一说，跟他们描述一下儿子得了什么病，怎么受了折磨，怎么下葬的。他还想起了现在村里只剩下了女儿阿尼亚一个人了，也应该说说女儿。姚纳的这些事情要是给一个人说了，他准会哀痛得号啕大哭的。但是却没有一个人愿意听听老头的诉说。

姚纳走到马厩里打算寻思点别的东西，不能老让这件事情这么折磨自己，但是当他看到自己那匹瘦马时，便禁不住跟马儿诉说起他的痛苦来。马儿一边嚼着草，一边静静地倾听着，还不时朝自己主人的手上喷着口热气。姚纳就这样把所有要说的话统统讲给了自己的马儿听。

“To whom shall I tell my grief?”

THE twilight of evening. Big flakes of wet snow are whirling lazily about the street lamps, which have just been lighted, and lying in a thin soft layer on roofs, horses' backs, shoulders, caps. Iona Potapov, the sledge-driver, is all white like a ghost. He sits on the box without stirring, bent as double as the living body can be bent. If a regular snowdrift fell on him it seems as though even then he would not think it necessary to shake it off. . . .

His little mare is white and motionless too. Her stillness, the angularity of her lines, and the stick-like straightness of her legs make her look like a halfpenny gingerbread horse. She is probably lost in thought. Anyone who has been torn away from the plough, from the familiar gray landscapes, and cast into this slough, full of monstrous lights, of unceasing uproar and hurrying people, is bound to think.

It is a long time since Iona and his nag have budged. They came out of the yard before dinnertime and not a single fare yet. But now the shades of evening are falling on the town. The pale light of the street lamps changes to a vivid color, and the bustle of the street grows noisier.

“Sledge to Vyborgskaya!” Iona hears. “Sledge!”

Iona starts, and through his snow-plastered eyelashes sees an officer in a military overcoat with a hood over his head.

“To Vyborgskaya,” repeats the officer. “Are you asleep? To Vyborgskaya!”

In token of assent Iona gives a tug at the reins which sends cakes of snow flying from the horse’s back and shoulders. The officer gets into the sledge. The sledge-driver clicks to the horse, cranes his neck like a swan, rises in his seat, and more from habit than necessity brandishes his whip. The mare cranes her neck, too, crooks her stick-like legs, and hesitatingly sets off. . . .

“Where are you shoving, you devil?” Iona immediately hears shouts from the dark mass shifting to and fro before him. “Where the devil are you going? Keep to the r-right!”

“You don’t know how to drive! Keep to the right,” says the officer angrily.

A coachman driving a carriage swears at him; a pedestrian crossing the road and brushing the horse’s nose with his shoulder looks at him angrily and shakes the snow off his sleeve. Iona fidgets on the box as though he were sitting on thorns, jerks his elbows, and turns his eyes about like one possessed as though he did not know where he was or why he was there.

“What rascals they all are!” says the officer jocosely. “They are simply doing their best to run up against you or fall under the horse’s feet. They

must be doing it on purpose.”

Iona looks at his fare and moves his lips. . . . Apparently he means to say something, but nothing comes but a sniff.

“What?” inquires the officer.

Iona gives a wry smile, and straining his throat, brings out huskily: “My son . . . er . . . my son died this week, sir.”

“H’m! What did he die of?”

Iona turns his whole body round to his fare, and says:

“Who can tell! It must have been from fever. . . . He lay three days in the hospital and then he died. . . . God’s will.”

“Turn round, you devil!” comes out of the darkness. “Have you gone cracked, you old dog? Look where you are going!”

“Drive on! drive on! . . .” says the officer. “We shan’t get there till tomorrow going on like this. Hurry up!”

The sledge-driver cranes his neck again, rises in his seat, and with heavy grace swings his whip. Several times he looks round at the officer, but the latter keeps his eyes shut and is apparently disinclined to listen. Putting his fare down at Vyborgskaya, Iona stops by a restaurant, and again sits huddled up on the box. . . . Again the wet snow paints him and his horse white. One hour passes, and then another. . . .

Three young men, two tall and thin, one short and hunchbacked, come up, railing at each other and loudly stamping on the pavement with their goloshes.

“Cabby, to the Police Bridge!” the hunchback cries in a cracked voice. “The three of us, . . . twenty kopecks!”

Iona tugs at the reins and clicks to his horse. Twenty kopecks is not a fair price, but he has no thoughts for that. Whether it is a rouble or whether it is five kopecks does not matter to him now so long as he has a fare. . . . The three young men, shoving each other and using bad language, go up to the sledge, and all three try to sit down at once. The question remains to be settled: Which are to sit down and which one is to stand? After a long altercation, ill-temper, and abuse, they come to the conclusion that the hunchback must stand because he is the shortest.



“Well, drive on,” says the hunchback in his cracked voice, settling himself and breathing down Iona’s neck. “Cut along! What a cap you’ve got, my friend! You wouldn’t find a worse one in all Petersburg. . . .”

“He-he! . . . he-he! . . .” laughs Iona. “It’s nothing to boast of!”

“Well, then, nothing to boast of, drive on! Are you going to drive like this all the way? Eh? Shall I give you one in the neck?”

“My head aches,” says one of the tall ones. “At the Dukmasovs’ yesterday Vaska and I drank four bottles of brandy between us.”

“I can’t make out why you talk such stuff,” says the other tall one angrily. “You lie like a brute.”

“Strike me dead, it’s the truth! . . .”

“It’s about as true as that a louse coughs.”

“He-he!” grins Iona. “Me-er-ry gentlemen!”

“The devil take you!” cries the hunchback indignantly. “Will you get on, you old plague, or won’t you? Is that the way to drive? Give her one with the whip. Hang it all, give it her well.”

Iona feels behind his back the jolting person and quivering voice of the hunchback. He hears abuse addressed to him, he sees people, and the feeling of loneliness begins little by little to be less heavy on his heart. The hunchback swears at him, till he chokes over some elaborately whimsical string of epithets and is overpowered by his cough. His tall companions begin talking of a certain Nadyezhda Petrovna. Iona looks round at them. Waiting till there is a brief pause, he looks round once more and says:

“This week . . . er . . . my . . . er . . . son died!”

“We shall all die, . . .” says the hunchback with a sigh, wiping his lips after coughing. “Come, drive on! drive on! My friends, I simply cannot stand crawling like this! When will he get us there?”

“Well, you give him a little encouragement . . . one in the neck!”

“Do you hear, you old plague? I’ll make you smart. If one stands on ceremony with fellows like you one may as well walk. Do you hear, you old dragon? Or don’t you care a hang what we say?”

And Iona hears rather than feels a slap on the back of his neck.

“He-he! . . .” he laughs. “Merry gentlemen. . . . God give you health!”



“Cabman, are you married?” asks one of the tall ones.

“I? He he! Me-er-ry gentlemen. The only wife for me now is the damp earth. . . . He-ho-ho!. . . . The grave that is! . . . Here my son’s dead and I am alive. . . . It’s a strange thing, death has come in at the wrong door. . . . Instead of coming for me it went for my son. . . .”

And Iona turns round to tell them how his son died, but at that point the hunchback gives a faint sigh and announces that, thank God! they have arrived at last. After taking his twenty kopecks, Iona gazes for a long while after the revelers, who disappear into a dark entry. Again he is alone and again there is silence for him. . . . The misery which has been for a brief space eased comes back again and tears his heart more cruelly than ever. With a look of anxiety and suffering Iona’s eyes stray restlessly among the crowds moving to and fro on both sides of the street: can he not find among those thousands someone who will listen to him? But the crowds flit by heedless of him and his misery. . . . His misery is immense, beyond all bounds. If Iona’s heart were to burst and his misery to flow out, it would flood the whole world, it seems, but yet it is not seen. It has found a hiding-place in such an insignificant shell that one would not have found it with a candle by daylight. . . .

Iona sees a house-porter with a parcel and makes up his mind to address him.

“What time will it be, friend?” he asks.

“Going on for ten. . . . Why have you stopped here? Drive on!”

Iona drives a few paces away, bends himself double, and gives himself up to his misery. He feels it is no good to appeal to people. But before five minutes have passed he draws himself up, shakes his head as though he feels a sharp pain, and tugs at the reins. . . . He can bear it no longer.

“Back to the yard!” he thinks. “To the yard!”

And his little mare, as though she knew his thoughts, falls to trotting. An hour and a half later Iona is sitting by a big dirty stove. On the stove, on the floor, and on the benches are people snoring. The air is full of smells and stuffiness. Iona looks at the sleeping figures, scratches himself, and regrets that he has come home so early. . . .



马车夫姚纳蜷缩在驾驶座位上

“I have not earned enough to pay for the oats, even,” he thinks. “That’s why I am so miserable. A man who knows how to do his work, . . . who has had enough to eat, and whose horse has had enough to eat, is always at ease. . . .”

In one of the corners a young cabman gets up, clears his throat sleepily, and makes for the water-bucket.

“Want a drink?” Iona asks him.

“Seems so.”

“May it do you good. . . . But my son is dead, mate. . . . Do you hear? This week in the hospital. . . . It’s a queer business. . . .”

Iona looks to see the effect produced by his words, but he sees nothing. The young man has covered his head over and is already asleep. The old man sighs and scratches himself. . . . Just as the young man had been thirsty for water, he thirsts for speech. His son will soon have been dead a week, and he has not really talked to anybody yet. . . . He wants to talk of it properly, with deliberation. . . . He wants to tell how his son was taken ill, how he suffered, what he said before he died, how he died. . . . He wants to describe the funeral, and how he went to the hospital to get his son’s clothes. He still has his daughter Anisya in the country. . . . And he wants to talk about her too. . . . Yes, he has plenty to talk about now. His listener ought to sigh and exclaim and lament. . . . It would be even better to talk to women. Though they are silly creatures, they blubber at the first word.

“Let’s go out and have a look at the mare,” Iona thinks. “There is always time for sleep. . . . You’ll have sleep enough, no fear. . . .”

He puts on his coat and goes into the stables where his mare is standing. He thinks about oats, about hay, about the weather. . . . He cannot think about his son when he is alone. . . . To talk about him with someone is possible, but to think of him and picture him is insufferable anguish. . . .

“Are you munching?” Iona asks his mare, seeing her shining eyes. “There, munch away, munch away. . . . Since we have not earned enough for oats, we will eat hay. . . . Yes, . . . I have grown too old to drive. . . . My son ought to be driving, not I. . . . He was a real cabman. . . . He ought to have lived. . . .”

Iona is silent for a while, and then he goes on:



“That’s how it is, old girl. . . . Kuzma Ionitch is gone. . . . He said good-by to me. . . . He went and died for no reason. . . . Now, suppose you had a little colt, and you were own mother to that little colt. . . . And all at once that same little colt went and died. . . . You’d be sorry, wouldn’t you? . . .”

The little mare munches, listens, and breathes on her master’s hands. Iona is carried away and tells her all about it.