



11-12-1904

Bratishka, my Bratishka,

Once again I am surprised by your magnificent predictability. I shall not spend any more words on love and how its shadow is sometimes our own. On the many times we fall in love simply because - alas! - nobody will fall for us. The game you've started is a game of catch, like those we played as children, over the long, tedious afternoons when our mother was visiting her friends and our father away on business. Everything will be confusing, and deeply important, and harshly enjoyable in its own way. You will run and run, but the doors to home will open eventually and we will need to go back inside, for our family is waiting and dinner is getting cold.

'Tis true, you have made your move, but you move too much like a knight. Not because you took my horse for your escape - how many times we stole from each other as children, and with such malicious innocence! - but because you remind me of the chess piece, the one you never know how to use. It moves lopsidedly, hops around, forever avoids the direct path. You cannot take Peter by siege by moving like that.

In the city, people know the smell of those too drenched in magic, those too full of love. They have no pity for fools. Yet in its tense brilliance, a faceless, restless mask beckons. More than anything I would love to return to Peter at your side, you know this, and the charm of your words would not be enough to keep me away, you know this too.

But why depart now, of all possible times? This is a sad sentence for me. There are many kinds of love. The love for one's woman is the most visible, but the love for one's people is stronger. Things are moving, and we can no longer watch in silence. The courtyard we played in is now the whole world. We must defend it. And we will, my comrades and I. But this duty is not without consequence. The growl of the Tsar's hounds keeps me away from my dear Peter: the time will come soon and I would never forgive myself for seeing it from the inside of a cell. When history calls, I must be ready.

You should have chosen Paris, my brother. You will see that Peter is not the city of lovers, but the city where reality is bathed in reddish light. The days are filled with cries, with waving red banners; at dusk the dozing city is bloodied by the setting sun. At night red sings on clothes, on cheeks, on the lips of prostitutes. Only pale morning can chase away the last tinge of colour from emaciated faces. But we want this morning to be radiant.

And what am I supposed to do with you, then?

Starik

11-15-1904



My fleeing brother,

First you take me for a wiseman, and now a judge. I won't let myself be bound forever, not by these trappings nor by common sense, which is all too often nothing more than concealed cowardice. The snow storm that force you to prolong your stay are no more than evidence of what I already knew in my heart. Everyone is destined to pass through the forests of transient things, until they reach what is true and eternal. That is why these forests are attractive, and why we never seem to grasp their fleetingness: because we feel in them the inkling of future, actual truth.

So I have but one choice: to saddle your horse and race against the freezing storm, damned be your heart. And your advice too, for nothing in the world would make me follow it.

I do not know if you will find this news pleasant, but I absolutely cannot change, not where you are concerned, whether you agree or not, and whatever happens I will stay with you my whole life, in one way or the other. For this reason we will meet at that inn, where we once were no more than merry country boys that thought the world lay before them like a book, like a glass to down in one gulp.

Now we know that everything is different, that the ship of innocence sank against the rocks of daily life.

Not for you, perhaps, and this is why you must never lose anything of what you are. Not even for the sake of an unspeakable love. A part of me keeps repeating that this kind of decision is not up to me. But I am your brother Starik, and I have the audacity and the insolence to think and feel that for all my impotence and mortal fragility I am better suited to guard over your eternal youth than anyone else.

This is why I have already donned my coat and I write these last few lines with my boots already strapped on.

We will change everything, you and I, together.

Yours
Starik

11-20-1904

You are truly a reckless fool!

I write this letter sitting by the bed where I saw you lose your senses, where you clutched between your fingers your last, unfinished letter to me. The worst welcome I could ever get in this inn I used to cherish.

I write this letter, pretending this is all a game, because if we were to speak in all seriousness, you fully alert and me completely honest, we would come to blows. If I haven't already loaded you on a carriage it's not because of this mangled leg of yours, filling my thoughts with anguish, but because I refuse to drag my brother home like a chained dog.

We have all been in love. And we all know, as we live, that one can die of love. But that death is of the heart, of feelings, of reason. You are dying like a soldier dies in war. And what are you going to do with this love that treats you like a general would?

'My whole life, with no reservations, belongs to you, from principle to end. Play with it, if you want. If I ever manage to accomplish anything, to impress, to leave a fleeting trace of stardust on something, it will all be yours'.

You read this passage to me once, for a dark-haired girl. You spent all your time talking about her. You will always have my sympathy, and I know you need to chase after your love, but you must not let it hunt you down like this.

It pains me to see my brother look as feverish and troubled as a veteran. Luckily she runs fast- love always does!- and soon there will be three of us again. You, me, and the shadow of love to come. It will be wonderful to be able to tell you about new things then, things that set aflutter the heart of many, these days. We will dive in together and rebuild it all. We will make it so that everything begins anew; so that our false, monstrous life becomes righteous, clean, merry, beautiful.

When such ideas, asleep since time immemorial in the heart of men, in the heart of the people, break free from the tethers that once restrained them and erupt like a raging torrent, destroying dams and tearing down the useless riverbanks, that is what we call a revolution.

But sleep for now, Bratishka.

I will sleep as well, and when we rise even Peter will seem lighter.

Starik



11-25-1904

My young lord,



As a soldier, my manners are curt, but I don't want it to be said that Čudovo is a den of ungrateful beasts. For your visit here and for the generosity you have shown me, I give my thanks to you.

It causes me great dismay that I could not find the young lady you were looking for.

You must understand that I am surrounded by simple people, good workers with hunched backs that, though eager to obey yours truly in virtue of my past in the army, cannot certainly become trackers on command.

If, God forbid, your prey should keep escaping you for long, come visit me again on your way back.

Here you will find a friend, and by then I may have three or four cossacks on my hand, tough people who should better suit your needs.

In any event, know that I remain optimistic towards your pursuit.

Do not give in to despair for the visit of that physician and his bleak words: everyone knows that doctors are the same as lawyers, the sole difference being that lawyers only rob you, but doctors rob you and kill you too.

I realise that my being an efficient, pragmatic person may bother intellectuals such as the good doctor.

And such as your brother, there is no use in denying it.

He seems to be the kind of man who thinks money the most hideous, vulgar thing in existence: while he is doubtlessly right, it is because money can accomplish everything. And you have no shortage of it, nor are you one of those lesser men that find it hard to divorce themselves from their savings, so the girl will certainly be yours.

Forgive my confidence, but I admire your passion. Such feelings are common to us Russians and still manage to surprise the whole of Europe.

Do not let despair take you, and break a lance in favour of this poor soldier with your brother. Though he seems to find extraordinary pleasure in his own thin-skinned irritability, surely his great intellect will allow him to realise his reaction was far more intense than necessary.

I consider being on your side a great privilege.

At your service, now and forever

The humble Ensign of Čudovo



12-3-1904

My child,

I heard about your mockery of my deacon, whose only fault was answering the call of your good host to administer to you the anointing of the sick. Fear not, I will not impose upon you outside of this letter, for one cannot be forced into the Grace of God as if it was a burlap sack.

Yet I pray that you will acknowledge my deep concern.
Not for your injury, but for your soul.

I am told you are in pursuit of a woman.

That you go around gathering rumours, witnesses, tracks.

I am certain she has not disappeared from this world, she could be anywhere among us, perhaps simply wearing a different mantle.

But people are frivolous and shallow: a woman with a different mantle looks like another woman entirely.

Desist, return home, take care of yourself and of us all.
I do not know you, Bratishka, but even as I listen to the accounts of your intemperance I am able to see the man you could grow into, if only you were to fight with strength and patience to get back onto the righteous path and aim for a better purpose.

How much good you could do to the world!

If you spent as much effort towards good as you do to track down this woman, sacrificing as much self-respect, as much ambition, as much compassion towards yourself as you sacrifice to her altar: how would the Earth flourish around you!

Keep in mind that the worst thing to do is not to make yourself guilty in the eyes of others. The worst is to make yourself guilty in your own eyes and in the eyes of God, when confronted with the wealth of power and gifts that fate has granted you

Your destiny is to be a great man: do not lose nor demean yourself.

The Pope of Vyšnij Volocěk

12-13-1904



Dear cousin,

I still cannot describe my surprise at meeting you and Starik here, in Tver'.

It almost felt like seeing two characters from the books I so love appear right on my doorstep, for such is the effect of hearing about you so often without ever being able to see you, ever since I was but a little girl.

Yet I dare hope that it was as natural for you to share your pain as it was for me to welcome it. I don't believe I can give you any better advice with this letter, but at least this sheet won't remain blank and silent as I did before you, ignorant as I am in the matters of the heart.

I do not think you are free to go back, like my father says and you yourself acknowledge. It is not enough to force your leg to move to deny its painful state; in the same way, a ticket to Saint Petersburg attached to this letter would not be enough to push you on a train back.

I know nothing about love, but I know much about hope and I know it is the implacable tyrant of our lives. Perhaps I am wrong, perhaps my words are illogical and the irrefutable demonstration of your freedom. I certainly would be the last to deny it to you.

Instead I would like to tell you that during a long journey, the mind lingers in the place of departure as the first few stops go by. Then all of a sudden it turns to the destination, and there it begins to build castles out of things to come. Perhaps the woman that agitates your fantasies is not your true destination, but the place you departed from, and sometime soon you will leave her behind. For a new destination, one that you would never have imagined before you set off. One that you may have already reached.

I would like to tell you all this, but I dare not. 'Tis hope that wields the pen, the ruthless tyrant. And at her order I will wait patiently for an answer, one that could set us both free.

With unabated fondness and renewed hope

Your cousin



12-20-1904

Mister Bratishka,

First wagon, left side, eager as you are to see the next station come. Am I wrong?
It's child's play to leave this letter in your path, as I have been following you for so long
that it's easy to tell your next move. From Saint Petersburg, you may wonder?
Yes, but I was there well before your arrival, when your brother was alone in town.
Or better yet, in bad company.

I guess everyone knows to wag their tail when they stumble into a flock of sheep,
but he got our attention more than anyone else.

How lucky he is to be so clever: he never runs out of nonsense to spout!

But I digress. And you cannot afford to lose more time, since you have so very little left.
I've seen my share of wars and I can smell a fatal wound. One such as yours.
Instead of struggling to find a lady, you should start mourning your miserable life.

And what better way to save your soul than to finally arrange for a good deed?
Convince your brother not to return. Let him handle your burial in Moscow or
better yet wander the steppes if he doesn't want to follow you on your final journey.

A bishop cannot be judged by a layman, and that is true of every authority.
Strange how a man of letters like professor Starik seems to have forgotten this fact,
and allowed his tongue to outrun his brain. But us, we're paid to never forget.

Don't look for me on the train, you would not recognise me.

Anonymity is my second skin. Spare me your letters about love and revolution.

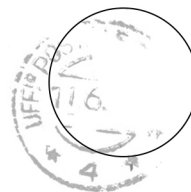
I am granting you this clemency simply because following you has made the folly
of your struggles perfectly clear.

I do not need to strip you of the dignity of thought you worked so hard to nurture.
I just need you to stay out of Saint Petersburg one way or the other.

People say that in the long run, truth will triumph; but it is untrue.

Ochrana

Модулярный
телег - 61



ТЕЛЕГРАММА

НТФ - II

НОМЕР	КВАЛИФИКАЦИЯ	НАЗНАЧЕНИЯ	ИМЯ ОТПРАВИТЕЛЯ
3456		Saint Petersburg	Starik

Stop all the clocks. Burn every letter and more than anything burn this loathsome message.

Our Bratishka is dead. Forgive me brother for I failed to be Your keeper.

If at night you hear my far cries, kindle Your fire at once, and I shall obey Fate and
read into the dancing flames.

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