

THE WHITE POODLE

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THE WHITE POODLE

I

They were strolling players making their way along narrow mountain paths from one summer resort to another, on the south coast of the Crimea. Usually they were preceded by Arto—a white poodle with a lion cut— who trotted along with his long pink tongue lolling out on one side. When he came to a cross-road he would stop and look back questioningly, wagging his tail. By certain signs that he alone knew, he would unerringly pick the right way and go on at a run, his ears flapping gaily. Behind the dog came Sergei, a boy of twelve, who carried under his left arm a rolled-up rug for acrobatics, and in his right hand a dirty little cage with a goldfinch, trained to pull out of a box coloured slips of paper telling the

future. Old Martin Lodizhkin shamblingly brought up the rear, a hurdy-gurdy on his crooked back.

The hurdy-gurdy was an old one; it gave out croaking, coughing sounds, having undergone innumerable repairs during its long life. It played two tunes: a dreary German waltz by Launer and a gallop from "Journey to China," both of which had been in vogue some thirty or forty years ago and were now completely forgotten. There were two treacherous pipes in it. One of them, the treble, did not work at all and as soon as its turn came the music seemed to stutter, limp and stumble. In the other pipe, which played a low note, the valve did not close at once; having begun to boom, it would go on, drowning or jumbling up the other sounds, until it suddenly decided to break it off. The old man was well aware of these shortcomings, and he sometimes remarked jokingly, but with a shade of hidden sadness:

"Well, it can't be helped. It's an ancient instrument, with a cold. When I start it people say, 'Pah, what a nasty thing!' But the pieces used to be nice ones, and fashionable too, only the gentry of today have no admiration for my music. What they want is 'The Geisha,' 'Under the Double-Headed Eagle,' the waltz from The Bird-Seller.' Then there are those pipes. I took the instrument to a repair shop, but they wouldn't tackle the job. 'You've got to put in new pipes,' they told me. 'And you'd do better still to sell this old wheezer to some museum as a relic.' Oh, well! It's fed you and me so far, hasn't it, Sergei, and let's hope it will serve us some more."

The old man was as fond of the hurdy-gurdy as you can be of a living thing that is close to you, or perhaps even related to you. He had got used to it during the long years of his hard wanderer's life, and had come to see it as something animate, almost rational. Once in a while, as he spent the night at a dingy inn, the hurdy-gurdy, which usually stood on the floor beside him, would all of a sudden give out a feeble sound, sad, lonely and trembling as an old man's sigh. Then Lodizhkin would stroke its carved side and whisper tenderly, "Life isn't easy, is it, my friend? Don't give in."

He was as fond of the poodle and the boy, who went with him on his eternal wanderings, as of the hurdy-gurdy, or perhaps a little more. He had "hired" the boy five years before from a hard-drinking widowed shoemaker, whom he had undertaken to pay two rubles a month. But soon the shoemaker died, leaving Sergei tied to the old man by a sincere affection, and by everyday interests.

II

The path ran along the high, steep shore, winding in the shade of ancient olive-trees. The sea, glimpsed occasionally between the trees, seemed to rise in a calm, powerful wall as it stretched away, and through the pattern of silvery-green foliage its colour showed even bluer and deeper. Cicadas were chirping shrilly everywhere—in the grass, in the cornel shrubs and wild briers, in the vineyards and trees; the air was quivering with their resonant, monotonous clamour. It was a sultry, windless day, and the hot earth was scorching to the feet.

Sergei, who was walking ahead of the old man as usual, stopped and waited for him.

"What is it, Sergei?" asked the old man.

"It's so hot, Grandad Lodizhkin, I just can't stand it! How about a dip?"

With a habitual movement the old man adjusted the hurdy-gurdy on his back and mopped the sweat off his face with his sleeve.

"Nothing could be better," he said with a sigh and a longing glance at the cool blue of the sea. "But the trouble is we'd feel even worse afterwards. A doctor's assistant I know told me sea-salt makes you flabby."

"Perhaps it isn't true," Sergei remarked doubtfully.

"Not true! Why should he have lied to me? He's a serious man, doesn't drink, has a little house in Sevastopol. Besides, there's no way down to the sea here. Wait till we get to Miskhor, and then we'll wash our sinful bodies a bit. It's a good thing to bathe before dinner and then take a nap—a very good thing."

Hearing the murmur of conversation behind him, Arto turned back and came running. His mild blue eyes blinked against the glaring sunlight, and his long, lolling tongue trembled with fast breathing.

"Well, doggie my friend? Warm, is it?" said the old man.

The dog yawned tensely, curling its tongue, shook all over and gave a thin whine.

"Yes, my friend, there's nothing you can do. It says 'in the sweat of thy brow,' " Lodizhkin went on, in edifying tones. "Of course you haven't got a brow but still— All right, now, run along, you've no business hanging about here. You know, Sergei, I must say I like it when it's warm like this. It's just that the instrument's a bit heavy, and if it wasn't for the work I'd lie down somewhere on the grass, in the shade, with my belly up, and stay there. Sunshine's the best thing for old bones."

The path ran downwards and joined a wide, dazzling white road, hard as stone. This was the beginning of an old park, owned by a count, with beautiful villas, flowerbeds, glass-houses and fountains scattered throughout its rich greenery. Lodizhkin knew those places well; every year he made the round of them in the grape-gathering season, when the whole Crimea filled with well-dressed, wealthy and gay people. The colourful luxuriance of southern plants did not move the old man, but there were many things that delighted Sergei, who had never been in those parts before. The magnolias with their hard, glossy leaves that seemed varnished, and their white blossoms the size of large plates; vine arbours hung with heavy clusters of grapes; the huge platans, many centuries old, with their light bark and powerful crowns; tobacco plantations, brooks and waterfalls, and the magnificent fragrant roses that were everywhere—in flowerbeds, on fences, on the walls of the villas—the charm of all this life in bloom kept the boy's simple soul in a state of rapture, so that he was tugging at the old man's sleeve every moment.

"Look at those fish in the founting, Grandad Lodizhkin—they're made of gold! Honest, they are, Grandad, strike me dead if they aren't!" the boy would cry, pressing his face to the iron fence of a garden, with a large fountain in the middle. "And the peaches, Grandad! See how many there are! All on one tree!"

"Go on, you silly boy. Don't stand here gaping!" the old man would reply, pushing him jokingly. "Wait till we get to the town of Novorossiisk and go south again. That's something really worth seeing. There's Sochi, for example, and

Adler, and Tuapse, or Sukhum and Batum farther south. Why, you get goggle-eyed looking. Take the palm-tree, for one thing. It's a wonder! It has a shaggy trunk, like felt you'd say, and each leaf is big enough to cover both of us."

"Honest to God?" said Sergei, happily amazed.

"You just wait—you'll see for yourself. There are lots of things! Oranges, for instance, or, say, lemons. You've seen 'em in the shops, haven't you?"

"Well?"

"Well, they grow in the air. Just like that, on a tree, like apples or pears at home. And the people there are quite a queer lot: Turks and Pershings and Circassians, all of them in robes and with daggers. A tough bunch!

And sometimes you see Ethiopians there. I've seen them often in Batum."

"Ethiopians! I know. The ones with horns," said Sergei confidently.

"It's a lie about the horns—they aren't that bad. But they're black as boots, and even shiny. They've got thick and red lips and big white eyes, and woolly hair, like a black sheep's."

"I suppose they're terrible, those Ethiopians?"

"Of course when you aren't used to them you feel a bit scared, but afterwards you see that other people aren't afraid and you get bolder. There are all kinds of things there, my boy. You'll see them for yourself when we get there. The only trouble is fever. It's swamps and rot all around, and besides there's that heat. Those who live there don't mind it because it doesn't do them any harm, but strangers have a hard time. Well, our tongues have been wagging long enough, Sergei. Come on, get in through the wicket. The gentry who live in this villa are very nice people. You only have to ask me—I know!"

But that day brought them no luck. From some places they were driven away the moment they were seen coming; in others, as soon as the hurdy-gurdy sent forth its first wheezy, twanging notes, people waved them away from balconies with annoyed impatience, in still others the servants told them that "the master" hadn't arrived yet. True, they were paid for their performance at two villas, but it was a niggardly sum. Nevertheless, the old man did not scoff at any reward, however small. As he walked back to the road he jingled the coppers contentedly in his pocket.

"Two and five makes seven kopeks," he would say good-humouredly. "That isn't to be sneezed at, either, Sergei. Seven by seven runs up to a half ruble, and that means a square meal for the three of us, and a place to sleep the night, and a swig of vodka for the weak old man Lodizhkin, because of his many ailments. Ah, but the gentry can't understand! They're too stingy to give us twenty kopeks and too proud to give five, so they tell us to get out. Why not give three kopeks rather than nothing? I don't take offence, I don't mind. Why should I?"

Lodizhkin was a modest man and did not grumble even when he was driven away. But that day his habitual placidity was upset by a beautiful, plump, seemingly very kind lady, the mistress of a splendid villa surrounded by a flower garden. She listened attentively to the music and looked with still greater attention at Sergei's acrobatic feats and Arto's tricks. Then she questioned the boy at great length about his age and his name, about where he had learned his gymnastics and whether the old man was related to him, what his parents had been, and so on. Then she told them to wait, and walked into the house.

She did not reappear for ten minutes or perhaps a quarter of an hour, and the longer she kept them waiting the higher soared their vague but bold expectations.

The old man even whispered to the boy, shielding his mouth with his hand, "Well, Sergei, we're in luck, believe me: I know, my boy. She'll give us some clothes or shoes. That's quite certain!"

Finally the lady came out again, dropped a small white coin down into the hat Sergei held up, and was gone at once. The coin turned out to be an old ten-kopek piece effaced on both sides and, moreover, with a hole in it. The old man looked at it for a long time with a puzzled air. When they were out on the road and far from the villa, he still held the coin in his palm as if weighing it.

"Yes, that was a fine trick she played on us!" he muttered, stopping all of a sudden. "I can tell you that. And we fools tried so hard to please her. She'd have done better to give us a button or something. You can at least sew it on somewhere. But what am I to do with this trash? The lady probably thinks the old man'll slip it on to somebody at night, on the sly. Oh, no, you're very much mistaken, madam. Old Lodizhkin will not go in for that sort of thing! No, he won't! Here's your precious ten kopeks! Take it!"

Indignantly and proudly he threw away the coin, which dug into the white dust of the road with a faint tinkle.

In this manner the old man, the boy and the dog made the round of all the villas, and were about to go down to the beach. There was one more villa, the last, on their left. It was shut out of sight by a high white wall above which, on the other side, a serried row of dusty slender cypresses rose like so many long, greyish-black spindles. Only through the wide cast-iron gate, with fretwork of an intricate lace-like design, could you see a corner of the fresh silky-green lawn, the rounded flower-beds and, far in the background, a covered walk smothered in a dense growth of vines. In the middle of the lawn stood the gardener, watering the roses with a long hose. He had put his finger to the nozzle, and the sun picked out all the colours of the rainbow in a fountain of spray.

The old man was about to walk past, but peering in at the gate he stopped in wonder.

"Wait a bit, Sergei," he called to the boy. "I think I can see people in there. That's funny. I've passed here so many times but I never saw a soul. Let's hear what it says, Sergei my boy!"

"Friendship Villa. No trespassing," Sergei read the inscription skilfully engraved on one of the gate-posts.

"Friendship, eh?" echoed the old man, who could not read. "That's it! That's just the right word—friendship. We've had bad luck all day, but now we're going to make up for it. I can scent it like a hound. Here, Arto, you son of a dog! Step right in, Sergei. And always ask me—I know!"

III

The garden walks were neatly strewn with coarse gravel that crunched underfoot, and bordered with big pink shells. Wonderful bright-coloured flowers filling the air with a sweet fragrance rose from the flower-beds, above a carpet of variegated grasses. Clear water gurgled and splashed in the fountains; creeping plants hung in garlands from beautiful bowls suspended between the trees, and on

marble pillars in front of the house stood two glittering ball-shaped mirrors, in which the man, the boy and the dog were reflected head downwards, in ludicrous, distorted shapes.

On the smooth-rolled ground in front of the balcony, Sergei spread out his rug, and the old man, having set up the hurdy-gurdy, was going to start turning the handle when there was a strange, unexpected interruption.

A boy somewhere between eight and ten, screaming at the top of his voice, burst out on to the veranda from inside the house. He wore a light sailor suit, and his arms and knees were bare. His curly fair hair flowed carelessly to his shoulders. Six people ran out after him: two pinafores women; an old fat footman in a tail-coat, without beard or moustache but with long grey side-whiskers; a thin, red-haired, red-nosed damsel in a blue checked frock; a young, sickly-looking but very beautiful lady in a pale blue lace dressing-gown, and lastly a stout, bald-headed gentleman in a tussore suit and gold-rimmed spectacles. They were all waving their arms in a flurry, talking loudly and jostling each other. It was easy enough to guess that the cause of their excitement was the boy in the sailor suit, who had darted out so suddenly.

Meanwhile the boy, who did not stop screaming for a second, flopped down on his stomach on the stone floor, rolled quickly over on to his back and started to kick and to wave his arms in fury. The adults fussed around him. The old footman entreatingly pressed his hands to his starched shirt-front and said plaintively, his long whiskers shaking, "Master Nikolai Apollonovich! Please don't vex your mummy, sir—get up. I beg of you to take medicine, sir. It's very sweet indeed, sir, it's plain syrup. Please, get up."

The pinafores women wrung their hands and chattered away in frightened servile voices. The red-nosed damsel, gesticulating tragically, shouted something very touching but absolutely unintelligible in a foreign language. The gold-spectacled gentleman admonished the boy in a sober boom, cocking his head from side to side and gravely lifting his hands. As for the beautiful, sickly lady, she moaned languidly and dabbed her eyes with a handkerchief of fine lace.

"Ah, Trilly, oh, my God! I implore you, my angel. Mummy implores you. Please take the medicine, please; you'll feel better at once: both your tummy and your head will be all right. Please do it for my sake, my pet! Do you want Mummy to kneel before you, Trilly? Well, here I am kneeling before you. Do you want me to give you a gold coin? Two gold coins? Five gold coins, Trilly? Do you want a real little donkey? A real little pony? Do say something to him, doctor!"

"I say, Trilly, be a man, will you?" boomed the stout gold-spectacled gentleman.

"Aaaaah!" squawked the boy, wriggling on the floor and kicking madly.

Despite his extreme agitation he tried to hit out with his heels at the stomachs and legs of those bustling about him, but they were rather deft in dodging his kicks.

Sergei, who had been watching the scene for a long time with curiosity and astonishment, now gently nudged the old man in the ribs.

"What's got into him, Grandad Lodizhkin?" he asked in a whisper. "Are they going to whip him?"

"Whip him, indeed! Why, he could flog any of them himself. He's just a spoilt brat. Probably sick, too."

"You mean crazy?" Sergei suggested.

"How should I know? Hush!"

"Aaaaah!" the boy yelled, more and more loudly. "Pigs! Fools!"

"Let's start, Sergei. I know!" Lodizhkin commanded suddenly, and began to grind the hurdy-gurdy with a determined air.

The twanging, wheezing sounds of the old gallop rang out in the garden. Those on the veranda were startled, and the boy stopped screaming for a few seconds.

"Oh, my God, they'll upset poor Trilly still more!" the lady in the blue dressing-gown cried plaintively. "Oh, send them away, send them away at once! And that dirty dog. Dogs always have such horrible diseases. Well, don't stand like a statue, Ivan!"

In weary disgust she raised her handkerchief to dismiss the three; the red-nosed damsel rolled her eyes, and someone else hissed threateningly. With a quick, soft step the man in the tail-coat ran down the steps and up to the old man, with a terrified look on his face, his arms thrown wide apart.

"W-what's the meaning of this?" he snorted in a hoarse, choking whisper that was at once frightened and angrily overbearing. "Who permitted this? Who let you in? Go away! Get out!"

The hurdy-gurdy gave a dismayed squeak and stopped.

"Allow me to explain, good sir," old Lodizhkin began politely.

"None of your explanations! Go away!" the tail-coated man cried, with something like a hiss deep in his throat.

In an instant his fat face went crimson, and his eyes opened incredibly wide, as if they had come out of their sockets, and rolled round and round. It was so terrible a sight that the old man stepped back.

"Come on, Sergei," he said, hurriedly shouldering the hurdy-gurdy. "We'd better go!"

But they were no more than a few yards away when fresh deafening screams pealed from the balcony.

"Aaaaah! I want it! I do! Aaah! Bring 'em here! Call 'em! I want it!"

"But, Trilly! Oh, my God, Trilly! Bring them back this instant!" the nervous lady groaned. "How brainless you all are! Did you hear what I told you, Ivan? Call those beggars back at once!"

"Hey! You there! Hey, you! Organ-players! Come back!" several voices called from the veranda.

The fat footman, his whiskers flying, bounded like a big rubber ball after the departing players.

"Hey! Musicians! Listen, come back! Back!" he shouted, gasping and waving his arms. "Good old man"—he had at last caught hold of the old man's sleeve—"turn back! The gentry want to see your pantomin. Quick!"

"Well, I never!" The old man shook his head and sighed, but he walked up to the veranda, took down the hurdy-gurdy, and began to grind out the gallop from where he had left off.

The tumult on the balcony died down. The lady with the boy and the gold-spectacled gentleman stepped up to the railing; the others hung back respectfully. The gardener wearing an apron came and stopped not far from the old man. The gate-keeper, who had emerged from nowhere, posted himself behind the gardener. He was a huge bearded man with a sombre, pock-marked face topped by a low forehead. He wore a new pink shirt with slanting rows of black dots.

To the wheezing, stuttering sounds of the gallop Sergei spread out the rug on the ground, threw off his canvas trousers (they were made of an old sack, and a square trade mark adorned their seat), slipped off his old jacket and remained in his shabby tights which, much mended as they were, looked neat on his thin but strong, lithe body. By imitating adults he had already acquired the style of a genuine acrobat. As he ran on to the rug he put his hands to his lips and then, with a sweeping theatrical gesture, spread out his arms, as if blowing two swift kisses to his audience.

With one hand the old man played the hurdy-gurdy, wringing a wheezy, coughing melody out of it, and with his free hand he tossed various objects to the boy, who nimbly caught them in mid air. Sergei's repertoire was small, but he performed well, doing "a clean job," as acrobats would say, and enjoying it, too. He threw up an empty beer bottle, so that it turned over several times in the air, then suddenly caught it bottom up on the edge of a plate and balanced it for a few seconds; he juggled with four ivory balls and with two candles which he caught simultaneously with two candlesticks; he also played with three objects at a time—a fan, a wooden cigar and an umbrella. They all went up and down in the air, never reaching the ground, and suddenly the umbrella came to be over his head and the cigar in his mouth, while the fan cooled his face with a coquettish swing. In conclusion Sergei himself turned several somersaults on the rug, performed a "frog," did an "American knot," and walked about on his hands. Having exhausted his stock of "tricks," he blew two more kisses to his audience and went panting up to the old man to take his place at the hurdy-gurdy.

Now came Arto's turn. The dog knew that perfectly well; in fact, with a jerky, nervous bark he was already jumping at the old man, who was edging out of the strap. Perhaps what the clever poodle meant to say was that, in his view, it was folly to engage in acrobatic exercises when the temperature was over a hundred degrees in the shade. But with a cunning air old Grandad Lodizhkin brought out from behind his back a thin cornel whip. "I guessed as much!" Arto barked in annoyance for the last time and reluctantly got on his hind legs, his blinking eyes fixed on his master.

"Beg, Arto! Good," said the old man, holding the whip over the poodle's head. "Turn over. Good. Turn over. Do it again—again. Now dance, doggie, dance! Sit up! What? You don't want to? Sit up, I'm telling you. Ha, so there! I'll teach you! Now say 'how d'you do' to the ladies and gentlemen. Well? Arto!" the old man raised his voice menacingly.

"Wow!" the poodle barked with disgust. Then he looked at his master, blinking sorrowfully, and added another two wows.

"The old man doesn't understand me at all!" the disgruntled bark seemed to say.

"That's better. Politeness first. And now let's jump a bit," the old man went on, holding out the whip low above the ground. "Allez! Don't you stick out your tongue. Allez! Houp! Fine. Now do it again, noch einmal. Allez! Houp! Allez! Houp! Wonderful, doggie. I'll give you a carrot when we get home. Oh, so you don't care for carrots? I quite forgot. Then take my top hat and beg the ladies and gentlemen. They may give you something more to your taste."

The old man stood up the dog on his hind legs and thrust into his mouth the ancient, greasy cap which he had so humorously called a top hat. Holding the cap in his teeth, Arto walked up with a mincing gait to the veranda. A small mother-

of-pearl purse flashed in the sickly lady's hands. Those around her smiled indulgently.

"Well? What did I tell you?" the old man whispered jauntily, bending to Sergei. "You just ask me—I know, my boy. It can't be less than a ruble."

Just then an almost inhuman shriek came from the veranda; it was so piercing that Arto dropped the cap and skipped to his master, glancing back fearfully, his tail between his legs.

"I wa-a-nt it!" shrieked the curly-headed boy, stamping his feet. "I want the do-o-og! Trilly wants the do-o-og!"

Once again there was a turmoil on the veranda. "Oh, my God! Ah, Nikolai Apollonovich! Master! Calm yourself, Trilly, I implore you!"

"The dog! Get the dog! I want it! Beasts, fools!" howled the boy.

"But don't be upset, my angel!" stammered the lady in the blue dressing-gown. "You want to stroke the doggie? All right, my darling, all right, just a moment. Do you think Trilly may stroke that dog, doctor?"

"Speaking generally, I wouldn't recommend it"—the doctor spread out his hands in dismay—"but if it's thoroughly disinfected, say, with boric acid or a weak solution of carbolic acid, then I should think—er—"

"Get the do-og!"

"Just a second, my own darling, just a second. As you say, doctor, we'll have it washed with boric acid, arid then——But, Trilly, don't get so excited! Please bring your dog here, old man. Don't be afraid, you'll be paid for it. Now tell me, it isn't sick by any chance? I mean, it isn't mad? Or perhaps it has echinococci?"

"I don't want to stroke it, I don't!" Trilly screamed, bubbling at mouth and nose. "I want it for my own! Fools, beasts! I want it for good! Want to play with it myself. Always!"

"Listen, old man, come up here," said the lady, trying to make herself heard above the boy's screaming. "Ah, Trilly, you'll kill your mummy with your cries. Why were those musicians let in here at all! Come up nearer—nearer, I tell you! That's it. Oh, but don't cry, Trilly, Mummy will do anything you wish. I implore you. Do calm the child, miss! Please, doctor. How much do you want, old man?"

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The old man took off his cap; there was a respectfully wretched expression on his face.

"As much as it may please your ladyship to give, Your Excellency. I'm a poor man and any donation is a boon to me. I'm sure you won't wrong an old man."

"Ah, how stupid you are! You'll get a sore throat, Trilly dear. Try to understand, will you: the dog is yours, not mine. How much, now? Ten? Fifteen? Twenty?"

"Aaa! I wa-antit! Give me the dog, the do-og!" squalled the boy, kicking the footman in the round belly.

"You mean—I'm sorry, Your Highness," stammered Lodizhkin. "I'm a stupid old man. Can't make it out at once and, besides, I'm a bit hard of hearing. What was it you said, please? For my dog?"

"Oh, my goodness! Are you acting a fool?" the lady flared up. "Give Trilly a glass of water, nurse, quick! I'm asking you a plain question: How much do you want for your dog? Do you understand—your dog, the dog!"

"The dog! The do-og!" the boy shrieked, louder than ever.

Lodizhkin put on his cap; he was offended.

"I don't deal in dogs, your ladyship," he said, with cold dignity. "As for this dog here, madam, it feeds (and clothes the two of us." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder at Sergei. "And it's absolutely impossible for me to sell it."

Meanwhile Trilly was screaming as shrilly as a locomotive whistle. A glass of water was brought to him, but he furiously splashed it out in the governess's face.

"But listen to me, you crazy old man! There is nothing that can't be bought or sold," the lady insisted, pressing her temples with her palms. "Miss, wipe your face, quick, and fetch my smelling-salts. Perhaps your dog is worth a hundred rubles? Or two hundred? Three hundred? Answer me! Say something to him, doctor, for heaven's sake!"

"Get ready, Sergei," grumbled Lodizhkin. "They want the dog, do they? Come here, Arto!"

"Just a moment, my good man," drawled the stout, gold-spectacled man in a superior boom. "You'd better stop putting on airs, my man, if you'll take my advice. Ten rubles is the most I'd pay for your dog, with yourself into the bargain. Just think, you dolt, what a fortune you're being offered!"

"I thank you most humbly, sir, only—" He shouldered the hurdy-gurdy with a groan. "Only I can't do that—sell it, I mean. Better look for a dog somewhere else. Good day. You go ahead, Sergei."

"And have you got a passport?" the doctor roared suddenly. "I know your kind of riff-raff!"

"Gate-keeper! Semyon! Throw them out!" cried the lady, her face distorted with fury.

The sombre gate-keeper in the pink shirt stepped forward with an ominous look. A terrific uproar arose on the veranda: Trilly was yelling at the top of his voice, his mother was moaning, the nurse and under-nurse were cackling in a patter, and the doctor was booming like an angry bumble-bee. But the old man and Sergei had no chance to see the end of it all. Preceded by the thoroughly terrified poodle, they hurried to the gate almost at a run. The gate-keeper followed close on their heels, pushing the old man on from behind.

"Loafing around here, you tramps!" he said threateningly. "You should thank God you got away with a whole skin, you damned gaffer. But next time you turn up you can be sure I'll give it to you—I'll punch your head and take you to the uryadnik. You scum!"

The old man and the boy walked a long way in silence, then suddenly they looked at each other as if by agreement, and broke into merriment; first Sergei burst out laughing, and, then, rather self-consciously, the old man smiled as he looked at the boy.

"Well, Grandad Lodizhkin? You know everything, don't you?" Sergei teased him slyly.

"Ye-es, my boy. We got into a fix, all right." The old man shook his head. "What a vicious brat he is, though. I wonder how they brought him up to be like that.' Just think: twenty-five people dance to his piping. I'd certainly give it to him hot if I could have my way. Give me the dog, he says. Why, he might want the moon from the sky next—what then? Come here, Arto, come, my doggie. God, what a day! It's simply amazing!"

"Couldn't have been better," Sergei commented sarcastically. "One lady gave us clothes, another a ruble. You certainly know everything in advance, Grandad Lodizhkin."

"Hold your tongue, you whipper-snapper," the old man growled good-humouredly. "Remember how you scuttled from the gate-keeper? I thought I'd never catch up with you. That gate-keeper isn't to be trifled with, is he?"

The three came out of the park and went down a steep, crumbling path to the beach. There the cliffs receded a little, leaving a narrow, flat strip covered with pebbles, against which the sea now rippled gently. Dolphins were turning somersaults in the water some five hundred yards off shore, showing momentarily their round, glossy backs. Far out on the horizon, where the azure satin of the sea was bordered by a dark-blue velvet ribbon, the sails of fishing boats stuck up trimly, slightly pink in the sun.

"Here's where we'll bathe, Grandad Lodizhkin," said Sergei resolutely. He had already contrived, while walking, to pull off his trousers, hopping along on one leg. "Let me help you with the instrument."

He stripped swiftly, slapped his naked body to which the sun had given a chocolate tan, and flung himself into the water, setting up waves of seething foam.

The old man took off his clothes unhurriedly. He shaded his eyes with his hand and peered at Sergei with an affectionate grin.

"He's growing into a fine lad," he thought to himself. "A bit bony, to be sure—you can see all his ribs—but he'll be a sturdy chap."

"I say, Sergei! Don't swim too far. Look out for porpoises."

"I'd grab it by the tail if I saw one!" Sergei shouted back.

The old man lingered in the sun for a long time, feeling his arm-pits. He then stepped down into the water very gingerly, and before dipping he carefully wetted his bald red crown and his hollow sides. His sallow body was flabby and weak, his legs surprisingly thin, and his back with the sharp protruding shoulder-blades was hunched from carrying the hurdy-gurdy for so many years.

"Granda-d Lodizhkin, look!" cried Sergei.

He turned a somersault in the water, and the old man, who had gone in up to his waist, taking little dips with blissful snorts, cried in alarm, "Stop fooling, you puppy. Don't you dare! I'll show you!"

Arto was barking in a frenzy, running up and down the beach. He was worried because the boy had swum out so far. "Why show off?" he seemed to ask. "Here's dry land and that's where you should stay. It's so much safer."

He even ran into the water up to his belly and lapped a little. But he found the briny water distasteful, and the light waves rustling against the beach gravel frightened him. So he scrambled ashore and started barking at Sergei. "Who's interested in those foolish tricks? Why not stay on the beach, beside the old man? Oh, what a nuisance that boy is!"

"Hey, Sergei, come out, will you now—you've had enough!" the old man called.

"Just a minute, Grandad Lodizhkin," the boy replied. "Look, I can swim like a duck. Whoo-oo!"

At last he swam up to the beach, but before dressing he snatched up Arto, went back into the sea, carrying the dog, and hurled him far out into the water. The dog started at once to swim back, snorting offensively, with nothing but his nose and floating ears above the water. He got out and shook himself, sending a shower of spray at the old man and Sergei.

"Look, Sergei—I think that man's heading our way," said Lodizhkin, staring upwards.

Shouting incoherently and waving his arms, a man was coming hurriedly down the path. It was the sombre gatekeeper in the black-spotted pink shirt, who, a quarter of an hour earlier, had turned them out of the villa.

"What does he want?" asked the old man in perplexity.

IV

The gate-keeper went on shouting as he came down at a clumsy trot, his sleeves flapping in the wind and his shirt-front swelling like a sail.

"Hallo-o-o there! Wait a bit!"

"Curse you and blast you," grumbled Lodizhkin. "It must be about Arto again."

"Let's lick him, Grandad," Sergei suggested bravely.

"Oh, don't be silly. Good heavens, what people!"

"Listen," the gate-keeper gasped, even before reaching them. "Sell the dog, will you? We just can't manage the young master. He just keeps squealing, 'I want the dog, I want it!' The mistress has sent me to buy the dog, no matter what the price."

"That's rather silly of the mistress!" Lodizhkin retorted, feeling much more confident on the beach than he had at the villa. "Besides, who says she's a mistress to me? She may be a mistress to you, but I don't care a fig who she is. Please leave us alone, for Christ's sake, and—and lay off."

But the gate-keeper would not give in. He sat down on the shingle, next to the old man, and said, poking his fingers awkwardly in front of him, "But can't you see, you fool?"

"Fool yourself," the old man snapped calmly.

"Wait a second! I didn't mean it that way. How touchy you are. Just think: what's a dog to you? You can pick up another puppy, teach it how to stand up, and there you are again. Well? Am I wrong? Eh?"

The old man was busy tightening the belt round his trousers.

"Keep yapping," he said with affected indifference, in reply to the gate-keeper's persistent questioning. "I'll give you my answer all in one."

"And here they are offering you a whale of a sum right away!" the gate-keeper went on heatedly. "Two or three hundred rubles all at once! Of course I must get something for the trouble I'm taking. But just imagine: three hundred rubles! Why, you could open a grocery."

While talking like that the gate-keeper took a piece of sausage out of his pocket and hurled it to the poodle. Arto snatched it in mid-air, swallowed it at a gulp, and fawningly wagged his tail.

"That all?" asked Lodizhkin briefly.

"There isn't much to be said. Gimme the dog and let's call it a bargain."

"I see," the old man said with a sneer. "So you suggest I should sell the dog, eh?"

"Of course, I do. Why not? The trouble is, the young master's so wild. Once he gets it into his head to have something he'll kick up hell. He just wants it, and that's all there is to it. It ain't so bad when his father's away, but when he's here, holy smoke! Everybody runs about like mad. His father's an engineer—perhaps you've heard the name—Mr. Obolyaninov? He builds railways all over Russia. A

millionaire! And the boy's his only son. So he's up to mischief all the time. If it's a pony he wants, he gets a pony. If it's a boat, he gets a real boat. There just isn't a thing he can't have."

"What about the moon?"

"Just what d'you mean?"

"I mean, did he never want the moon down from the sky?"

"Well, now, what an idea!" The gate-keeper was taken aback. "So what do you say, good man? Is it a deal?"

The old man, who in the meantime had pulled on his brown jacket, green with age at the seams, straightened proudly as far as his bent back would let him.

"I'll tell you this much, my lad," he began, with a touch of solemnity. "Suppose you had a brother or, say, a friend, one that you'd known since you were kids. Hold on, don't waste your sausage on the dog—that won't get you anywhere; better eat it yourself. As I was saying, suppose you had a faithful friend since you were kids. How much d'you think you'd sell him for?"

"Some comparison!"

"You asked for it. Tell your master who's building a railway"—the old man raised his voice—"tell him all isn't sold that is bought. Yes! And you'd better stop stroking the dog, that's no use. Come here, Arto, you son of a dog, I'll teach you! Get ready, Sergei."

"You're an old fool, that's what you are," the gatekeeper burst out, losing his temper at last.

"Perhaps I am a fool, but you're a cur, a Juda's, a mean sneek," Lodizhkin countered. "Tell your grand lady when you see her that I send her my love and humble compliments. Roll up that rug, Sergei! Oh, my back, my poor back! Let's go."

"So that's how it is!" said the gate-keeper, meaningly.

"Exactly!" replied the old man.

The three plodded along the same seaside road. Glancing back by chance Sergei saw the gate-keeper watching them. He looked preoccupied and sullen. With all the five fingers of one hand he was studiously scratching the red-haired nape of his neck under the cap, which had slipped down over his eyes.

V

Old Lodizhkin had long ago marked a nook between Miskhor and Alupka, beneath the lower highway, where you could have a nice meal. There he now led his companions. A bubbling spring sent its cool water running out of the ground in the shade of crooked oaks and dense hazel bushes, not far from a bridge spanning a muddy, turbulent mountain stream. It had hollowed out in the soil a shallow bowl from which it flowed to the stream in a thin meandering line that glittered in the grass like quicksilver. Every morning and evening you could see at the spring pious Turks drinking the water or performing their sacred ablutions.

"Heavy are our sins and scanty is our food," said the old man, sitting down in the cool shade of the hazel bushes. "Well, Sergei, blessings on our food!"

Out of his canvas bag he took a loaf of bread, a dozen tomatoes, a chunk of Bessarabian cheese, and a bottle of olive-oil. The salt was tied up in a rag of doubtful cleanness. Before starting the meal he crossed himself and whispered for a long time. Then he broke up the loaf into three unequal parts; one of them, the biggest, he held out to Sergei—the boy was growing and had to be fed properly—the second he left for the poodle, and the third, the smallest, he kept for himself.

"In the name of the Father and the Son. The eyes of all look upon Thee, O Lord," he whispered as he fussily distributed the food and poured oil upon it. "Eat, Sergei!" The three ate their frugal meal, slowly and silently, as real workers always do. All that could be heard was the noise of the three pairs of jaws munching. Arto was eating his share a little way off, sprawled on his belly and holding the bread with his forefeet. The old man and Sergei took turns to dip the ripe tomatoes into the salt, and as they bit into them the blood-red juice ran over their lips and hands; bread and cheese followed each bite of tomato. When they had stilled their hunger they drank from a tin mug, which they held under the running water. The water was crystal-clear and had an excellent taste; it was so cold that the mug dimmed on the outside. The day's heat and the long walk had exhausted them, for they had risen at dawn. The old man could hardly keep his eyes open. Sergei yawned and stretched.

"Shall we take a little snooze, my boy?" asked the old man. "Let me have a last drink. My, lovely!" He took the mug away from his lips with a gasp, and clear drops of water trickled down his moustache and beard. "If I was a king I'd always drink this water—from morning till night! Here, Arto, come here! Well, God gave us a meal with nobody to steal, so we had our food and it was good."

The old man and the boy lay down on the grass side by side, pillowing their heads on their old jackets. The dark leaves of the gnarled spreading oaks rustled overhead, and the serene blue sky showed through them. The brook leaping from rock to rock gurgled monotonously and soothingly, as if trying to charm someone by its lulling babble. For a while the old man tossed and groaned and mumbled, but to Sergei the voice seemed to be coming from some soft and sleepy distance, and the words were as mysterious as in a fairy-tale.

"First of all I'll buy you an outfit: pink tights with gold, and satin shoes, also pink. In Kiev, Kharkov or, say, the city of Odessa—that's where they have real circuses! Lamps as thick as stars, all electricity. Perhaps five thousand people sit there, or even more—I don't know exactly. We must think up an Italian name for you. D'you call Yestifeyev or Lodizhkin a name? It's just trash—no imagination at all. But we'll put you on a poster and call you Antonio, or—here's a nice name— Enrico or Alfonso."

The boy heard no more. A soft, sweet drowsiness overcame him, weakening and paralyzing his body. The old man also fell asleep, losing all of a sudden the thread of his favourite after-dinner thoughts about Sergei's brilliant future in the circus. Once it seemed to him in his sleep that Arto was snarling at someone. A half-conscious recollection of the gate-keeper in the pink shirt flitted across his drowsy mind; yet, overpowered by sleep, fatigue and heat, he was unable to get up. He only called to the dog lazily, without opening his eyes, "Back, Arto! I'll teach you, you tramp!"

But immediately his thoughts tangled and straggled in heavy, shapeless visions.

Sergei's voice roused the old man. The boy was running up and down on the other side of the brook, whistling shrilly and shouting in anxiety and fright, "Here, Arto! Come back! Whew, whe-e-ew! Come back, Arto!"

"What are you yelling for, Sergei?" asked Lodizhkin gruffly, straightening his numbed arm with an effort.

"We've lost the dog, that's what!" the boy retorted irritably. "The dog's gone."

He gave a sharp whistle and called once more, "Arto-o-o!"

"Rubbish! He'll come back," said the old man. But he scrambled quickly to his feet and started calling the dog in an angry, quaking falsetto, husky with sleep, "Come here, Arto, you son of a dog!"

With small unsteady steps he ran over the bridge and up the highway, calling the dog again and again. The smooth, dazzling white road stretched away before him for nearly a quarter of a mile, but there was not a single form, not a shadow, upon it.

"Arto! Arto my doggie!" wailed the old man piteously. Then he suddenly bent down and squatted.

"So!" he muttered in a hollow voice. "Sergei! Come up here."

"What's the matter now?" the boy cried rudely, walking up to Lodizhkin. "Found something you didn't lose?"

"What's this, Sergei? I mean this—what is it? Do you understand?" the old man asked him, almost in a whisper.

He was looking at the boy with miserable, perplexed eyes, while his trembling hand pointed to the ground.

A fairly big gnawed piece of sausage lay in the white dust, with a dog's footprints all around it.

"He's lured away the dog, that ruffian!" the old man whispered in fright, still squatting. "It must be him—it's clear enough. Remember him on the beach feeding sausage to the dog?"

"It's clear enough," Sergei repeated with sullen fury.

The old man's eyes, wide open, suddenly filled with large tears and started blinking. He covered them with his hands.

"What shall we do now, Sergei dear? Eh? What shall we do?" asked the old man, rocking to and fro and sobbing helplessly.

"What shall we do! What shall we do!" Sergei aped him angrily. "Get up, Grandad Lodizhkin—let's go."

"Let's go," the crestfallen old man agreed meekly, rising from the ground. "Yes, let's go, Sergei dear!"

Sergei lost his temper.

"Stop slobbering, will you!" he shouted at the old man as if he had been his elder. "They have no right to lure away other people's dogs. What are you gaping at me for? Am I wrong? We'll go right there and say, 'Give us back the dog!' And if they don't we'll go to the J. P. That's all there is to it."

"To the J. P.—yes, of course. You're right about the J. P.," Lodizhkin muttered with an inane, bitter smile, while his eyes shifted in awkward embarrassment. "To the J. P., yes—Only, we can't go to the J. P."

"Why not? There's one law for all. Why should we be scared?" the boy interrupted him impatiently.

"Please, Sergei, don't be cross with me. They won't give us back the dog, anyway." He lowered his voice with a mysterious air. "I'm worried about my

passport. Did you hear what that gentleman said? 'Have you got a passport?' he says. See how it is? Now the passport I've got"—the old man's face took on a frightened look, and he went on in a scarcely audible whisper—"that passport isn't mine, Sergei."

"What d'you mean, not yours?"

"Just that. I lost mine in Taganrog, or perhaps somebody stole it. For two years after that I shifted and hid and gave bribes and wrote petitions. At last I saw I couldn't keep it up any longer, living like a rabbit—being afraid of everybody. I had no peace. One day a Greek popped up in a doss-house in Odessa. That's easy,' he said. 'You fork out twenty-five rubles, old man,' he says, '-and I'll provide you with a passport that will last you till you die.' I turned it over in my mind. 'Come what may,' I said to myself. 'Get it,' I says. Ever since then, my boy, I've been using somebody else's passport."

"Oh, Grandad!" Sergei sighed with a sob. "It's such a pity we lost the dog. Such a fine dog, too!"

"Sergei, my own dear boy!" The old man stretched out his trembling hands. "If only I had a proper passport, do you really think I'd be scared because they're generals? Why, I'd grab them by the throat! 'What's this?' I'd say. 'What right have you to steal dogs? There's no such law!' But now we're done for, Sergei. If I went to police the first thing they'd say would be, 'Show your passport! Are you Martin Lodizhkin of Samara?' 'Yes, sir.' But I'm not Lodizhkin—I'm Ivan Dudkin, a peasant. God alone knows who that Lodizhkin is. How do I know he isn't a thief or a runaway convict? Or even a murderer? We can't do anything, Sergei, believe me we can't. It's no use."

The old man's voice broke off. Fresh tears rolled down the deep wrinkles on his face, browned by the sun. Sergei, who had been listening in silence, his lips pressed tight and his face pale with emotion, suddenly caught the old man under the arms to raise him.

"Come on, Grandad," he said in an imperious but friendly tone. "To hell with the passport—come on! We can't spend the night out here on the highway."

"You dear, dear boy," the old man murmured, shaking from head to foot. "It's such a clever dog, is our poor Arto. We'll never have another so good."

"All right, all right. Get up," Sergei commanded. "Here, let me brush you. Keep your chin up!"

They did not perform any more that day. Though still a boy, Sergei well knew the fatal meaning of that terrible word, "passport." He therefore did not insist on looking for Arto, going to the Justice of the Peace, or taking any other strong measures. But while he walked to the doss-house beside the old man, his face kept its new, stubborn expression, as if he were planning something big and exceedingly important.

Without previous agreement, but apparently moved by the same secret desire, they purposely made a long detour in order to pass Friendship Villa again. They lingered for a moment at the gate, in the vague hope of seeing Arto, or at least hearing his bark.

But the wrought-iron gate of the magnificent villa was tightly shut, and there was an unruffled, solemn quiet in the shady garden, under the slender, melancholy cypresses.

"Gentry, are they!" hissed the old man, putting into the exclamation all the bitterness that filled his heart!

"That's enough—come on," the boy commanded grimly and pulled at his companion's sleeve.

"Perhaps Arto will run away from them, Sergei dear?" The old man gave a sob. "What do you think, my boy?"

But the boy made no reply. He was walking ahead with a firm stride. He kept his eyes fixed on the road, his thin eyebrows gathered in an angry frown.

VI

They reached Alupka in silence. All the way the old man groaned and sighed, while Sergei still wore his angry, determined look. They put up for the night at a dingy Turkish coffee-house that bore the splendid name of "Yildiz," or "Star." For night companions they had Greek stone-cutters, Turkish navvies, a few Russian workmen who kept body and soul together by doing odd jobs, and several of the shady tramps of whom there are so many in southern Russia. As soon as the coffee-house closed at the usual hour they all lay down on the benches which lined the walls, and also on the floor; the more experienced took the necessary precaution of putting their clothes, and anything else of value, under their heads.

It was well past midnight when Sergei, who had been lying on the floor beside the old man, rose quietly and began to dress. Pale moonlight poured in through the wide windows; it lay on the floor in a slanting pattern, and in it the faces of the sprawling men looked tormented and dead.

"Vere you koing at zis time of night, boy?" Ibrahim, the young Turk who owned the coffee-house, called sleepily to Sergei.

"Let me out, I must go!" Sergei replied in a stern, business-like tone. "Get up, now, you Turkish clod!"

Ibrahim unlocked the door, yawning, scratching himself and clicking his tongue reproachfully. The narrow streets of the Tatar section were sunk in an intense dark blue shade that covered the roadway and with its jagged edge reached the foot of the houses opposite, whose low walls showed very white in the moonlight. Dogs were barking on the far outskirts of the town. The resounding clatter of an ambling horse came from somewhere on the upper highway.

The boy walked past the white mosque with the green onion-shaped dome, surrounded by a silent group of dark cypresses, and went to the highway down a narrow, crooked lane. He wore nothing but his tights, so as to move more easily. The moon beat down on his back, and his shadow ran ahead of him in a black, strangely shortened silhouette. From the dark curly shrubs which crouched on both sides of the highway, a bird called monotonously at regular intervals, in a tenuous voice, "Sleep! Sleep!" It seemed as-if the bird were obediently guarding some melancholy secret in the still night, trying in vain to overcome drowsiness and fatigue, and sending forth its- hopeless plaint, "Sleep! Sleep!" And above the dark shrubs and the bluish tops of the distant forests, the Ai Petri peak thrust its twin prongs skywards, looking as light and clear-cut and airy as if it had been made from a giant piece of silvery cardboard.

Sergei was awed by the majestic silence, in which his steps rang so sharply and audaciously, but at the same time a kind of tickling, dizzy courage filled his heart.

As the road curved the sea sprang into view. Immense and placid, it heaved with calm dignity. A narrow, shimmering silvery path stretched to the shore from the horizon; it was lost to sight out at sea, with only occasional spangles flashing here and there, but just short of the beach it spread out like a liquid, glittering metal band, running along the entire shore.

Noiselessly Sergei stole into the park through the wooden wicket. It was quite dark in there, under the dense trees. A restless brook murmured in the distance, and you could sense its damp, cool breath. The wooden floor of a bridge thudded loudly under the boy's feet. The water beneath it was black and terrible. Here at last was the high iron gate, patterned like lacework and entwined by the creeping stalks of wistarias. Cutting through the foliage of the trees, the moonlight glided over the fretwork in feeble phosphorescent spots. Beyond was darkness and a timid, alert silence.

For a few seconds Sergei wavered, feeling almost afraid. But he overcame the sensation and whispered, "I'll get in just the same! It's all one!"

The gate was not difficult to climb. The elegant cast-iron scrolls of the pattern served as dependable supports for his tenacious hands and small muscular feet. A broad stone arch topped the gate at a great height. Sergei groped his way up on to it, then, lying flat on his belly, lowered his feet on the other side, and began to push down the whole of his body, at the same time feeling with his feet for some support. Then he was hanging from the arch, with only his fingers clinging to the edge, but still he found no foothold. It had not occurred to him that the arch over the gate projected much more deeply inside than it did outside, and terror gripped his heart as his hands grew numb and his weakening body heavier.

At last he could hold on no longer. His fingers let go the sharp edge and he hurtled down.

He heard the coarse gravel crunch under his weight and felt a sharp pain in his knees. Stunned by the fall, he stood for a few seconds on all fours. It seemed to him that all the people in the villa were going to wake up, the gloomy gate-keeper in the pink shirt would come running, and there would be a general turmoil. But the silence in the garden was as profound and solemn as before. He could hear only a low, monotonous hum filling the garden.

"Why, it's the ringing in-my ears," he guessed. He rose, to his feet; the garden, which seemed full of aromatic dreams, was terrible and mysterious and beautiful as in a fairy-tale. Flowers hardly visible in the dark swayed gently in the beds, bending to each other with vague anxiety, as if whispering among themselves and spying on him. The slender, fragrant cypresses slowly shook their pointed tops, with a pensive and reproachful air. And in the dense shrubs beyond the brook, the weary little bird kept on wrestling with drowsiness and repeating its submissive plaint, "Sleep! Sleep! Sleep!"

Sergei did not recognize the place at night, amid the tangle of shadows that lay on the walks. He wandered long on the crunching gravel until he came to the house.

Never before in his life had the boy felt so painfully, so completely helpless and forsaken. The house seemed full of merciless crouching enemies stealthily watching through the dark windows every movement of the small, weak boy, and smiling maliciously as they silently waited for some signal, for someone's angry, thunderous command.

"Not in the house—it can't be in the house," the boy whispered, as in a dream. "It would howl in the house and bother everybody."

He walked round the villa. In the wide courtyard behind it there were several buildings that were less elaborate than the house and were probably occupied by the servants. As in the big house, there was no light in any of the windows, except that the dark panes reflected the moon with a ghastly, uneven shine. "I'll never get out of here, never!" Sergei thought in anguish. For an instant he recalled Lodizhkin and the old hurdy-gurdy, the nights spent in coffee-houses, the meals taken at cool springs. "There won't be any more of that!" he said to himself sadly. But as his thoughts grew hopeless fear gave way in his heart to a dull, grim despair.

Suddenly a thin yelp that sounded like a groan caught his ear. The boy halted on tiptoe, with bated breath, his muscles taut. The sound was repeated. It seemed to come from a stone cellar near where he was standing. Treading on a flower parterre, the boy stepped up to the wall in which there were some crude rectangular glassless holes. He put his face against one of these and whistled. There was a slight noise somewhere below, but it died away at once.

"Arto! Arto!" Sergei called, in a tremulous whisper.

Instantly a frantic, broken barking filled the whole garden, echoing in its every corner. There was complaint and anger and physical pain in it, combined with a joyous welcome. The boy could hear the dog trying to break loose from something that held him in the dark cellar.

"Arto! Doggie! Arto dear!" the boy responded tearfully.

"Shut up, blast you!" came a harsh boom from below. "You damned nuisance!"

There was a thump in the cellar. The dog gave a long, broken howl.

"Don't you dare to beat him! Don't dare to beat the dog, you beast!" Sergei screamed in a frenzy, scratching the stone wall with his nails.

All that happened next Sergei could remember only dimly afterwards, as if he had been delirious. The cellar door crashed open, and the gate-keeper rushed out. Barefoot and with nothing on but his underwear, his bearded face livid in the bright moonlight, he appeared to Sergei as a giant, an enraged ogre.

"Who is there? I'll shoot you down!" his voice thundered in the garden. "Catch the thief! Help!"

But just then Arto darted like a white bouncing ball out of the dark doorway, barking. A bit of cord dangled from his neck.

However, the boy had no time for the dog. The formidable appearance of the gate-keeper had gripped him with a supernatural terror, bound his feet, and paralyzed his small, slight body. Luckily the stupor did not last long. Almost unconsciously, Sergei gave a desperate shriek and, mad with fear, started to run blindly away from the cellar.

He sped on like a hare, his feet suddenly becoming as strong as two steel springs. Arto raced alongside him, barking happily. The gate-keeper, cursing furiously, tore along behind them.

Sergei ran into the gate but instantly sensed rather than realized that there was no way out there. There was a dark narrow pathway between the white stone wall and the cypresses growing along it. Without hesitating, and prompted by fear alone, he ducked, dashed into it, and ran along the wall. The sharp cypress needles, smelling pungently of resin, lashed him across the face. He tripped on roots and fell and bruised his hands more than once, but he rose again and sped

on, unaware of the pain, almost doubled up, deaf to his own cries. Arto shot after him.

Thus, like a little animal caught in an endless, snare and mad with terror, he scampered along the narrow passage formed by the high wall on one side and the serried row of cypresses on the other. His mouth was dry and each gasping breath pricked his chest with a thousand needles. He heard the gate-keeper's footsteps to the right and then to the left, and, losing his head completely, he now rushed forward, now turned back again, passing the gate repeatedly and plunging afresh into the dark, narrow pathway.

At last he was spent. A cold, mortal anguish, a dull indifference to all danger, took hold of him despite his wild terror. He sat down under a tree, leaned his exhausted body against its trunk, and shut his eyes. Closer and closer crunched the sand under his enemy's heavy feet. Arto was whining softly, his nose on Sergei's knees.

Boughs pushed apart rustled two yards from the boy. He looked up involuntarily, and suddenly bounded to his feet, beside himself with joy. He had not noticed until then that the wall opposite the place where he had been sitting was no more than three and a half feet high. Its top was studded with bits of bottle glass stuck into lime, but that did not stop Sergei. In the twinkling of an eye he seized Arto and stood him with his forefeet on the top of the wall. The clever dog understood perfectly what was wanted. He clambered up on the wall, wagged his tail, and started to bark triumphantly.

Sergei followed him just as a hulking dark figure emerged from the parted cypress boughs. Two lithe forms—the dog's and the boy's—jumped softly on to the road. Savage, foul curses came after them in a filthy torrent.

Whether because the gate-keeper was slower than the two friends or because he was tired chasing about the garden, or because he had lost hope of catching the fugitives; he gave up the pursuit. Nevertheless, the two ran for long without stopping to rest, both of them strong and agile, as if borne on wings by the joy of deliverance. The poodle soon regained his habitual playfulness. Sergei still glanced back fearfully now and then, but Arto leapt up at him in glee, shaking his ears and the bit of cord, and trying hard to lick the boy's face.

Sergei did not recover his calm until they reached the spring where they had taken their meal the day before. Dog and boy put their mouths to the cool fountain and drank long and deeply of the fresh, delicious water. They would push each other aside, raise their heads momentarily to draw breath, the water trickling from their lips, and bend over the fountain with renewed thirst, unable to pull away from it. And when they finally tore themselves away and walked on, the water splashed and gurgled in their overfilled bellies. They were out of danger, all the terrors of the night were gone, and it was a pleasure to walk along the white road bright with moonshine, between dark shrubs that were already drenched with morning dew, their refreshed leaves smelling sweetly.

At the coffee-house Ibrahim greeted the boy with a reproachful whisper, "Vass ze idea of kadding about, boy? Vass ze idea? Iss a bad sing you did, very bad."

Sergei did not want to wake up the old man, but Arto did it for him. Instantly he found the old man among the forms huddled on the floor, and before Lodizhkin knew what was happening the dog, yelping happily, had licked him all over the face. The old man woke up; he saw the cord round the poodle's neck, and the boy lying covered with dust by his side, and he understood. He asked Sergei how it all

had come about, but the boy was already asleep, his arms thrown apart and his mouth wide open.

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