



A Dreary Story

Anton Chekhov, Constance Garnett (Translation)

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Roya Shakeri says

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M.Javad says

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Pardis Parto says

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Mehrdad says

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Ibrahim Saad says

Somayeh says

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Vishy says

This is my second Chekhov long story. It is around sixty pages long – the size of a short novella. The narrator of the story is Nikolay Stepanovitch. Nikolay is a professor of medicine at the university. He is over sixty years old. He has a health condition and he feels that he doesn't have long to live. The story starts with Nikolay describing how his morning starts after a sleepless night (because he has insomnia), how his wife is the first person who meets him while he is still in bed and comes and have a short conversation with him, how his daughter comes next and it goes on to describe his day – his arrival at the university, his meeting with his two assistants, his lecture, his meetings with students, his work at his office, the constant interruptions by students and other doctors who need his favour, the visit by Katya who is like his daughter. While describing his day, Nikolay also describes in detail the various people he meets. They are wonderful character sketches. After describing a typical day, Nikolay goes on to describe his relationship with Katya in detail and how she came to be a kind of adopted daughter to him and the relationship that Katya has with the rest of his family. In this part of the story, one of my favourite passages is the one in which Nikolay describes his thoughts on the theatre (Katya is a former theatre actress). It makes me smile everytime I read it. It goes like this :

"I have never shared Katya's inclinations for the theatre. To my mind, if a play is good there is no need to trouble the actors in order that it may make the right impression; it is enough to read it. If the play is poor, no acting will make it good."

Events in the story move at a steady pace after that and I am not going to describe what happens – you should read the book.

I had a couple of problems with the story. The first one was the title. I don't know whether Chekhov was trying to say something with that title – that there is more to the story than meets the eye. The story was anything but dreary. The character sketches were masterfully done, Nikolay is a wonderful narrator and the beautiful Chekovian passages keep flowing throughout the book. The second problem I had was with the ending. The ending had two parts. I loved the first part. The second part – I couldn't understand it. I don't know whether one needed to be Russian to understand it. If you read the story, do let me know what you think.

The story had many beautiful passages. Some of them come when the narrator shares his thoughts and others come in the middle of a conversation between some of the characters. I think the novella length suits

Chekhov very well. It gives him room to tell a story and sneak in many beautiful passages and thoughts. One of my favourite passages was about teaching and lecturing. I think it is the finest passage on giving lectures that I have read. Here it is :

To lecture well – that is, with profit to the listeners and without boring them – one must have, besides talent, experience and a special knack; one must possess a clear conception of one's own powers, of the audience to which one is lecturing, and of the subject of one's lecture. Moreover, one must be a man who knows what he is doing; one must keep a sharp lookout, and not for one second lose sight of what lies before one.

A good conductor, interpreting the thought of the composer, does twenty things at once : reads the score, waves his baton, watches the singer, makes a motion sideways, first to the drum then to the wind instruments, and so on. I do just the same when I lecture. Before me a hundred and fifty faces, all unlike one another; three hundred eyes all looking straight into my face. My object is to dominate this many-headed monster. If every moment as I lecture I have a clear vision of the degree of its attention and its power of comprehension, it is in my power. The other foe I have to overcome is in myself. It is the infinite variety of forms, phenomena, laws, and the multitude of ideas of my own and other people's conditioned by them. Every moment I must have the skill to snatch out of that vast mass of material what is most important and necessary, and, as rapidly as my words flow, clothe my thought in a form in which it can be grasped by the monster's intelligence, and may arouse its attention, and at the same time one must keep a sharp lookout that one's thoughts are conveyed, not just as they come, but in a certain order, essential for the correct composition of the picture I wish to sketch. Further, I endeavour to make my diction literary, my definitions brief and precise, my wording, as far as possible, simple and eloquent. Every minute I have to pull myself up and remember that I have only an hour and forty minutes at my disposal. In short, one has one's work cut out. At one and the same minute one has to play the part of savant and teacher and orator, and it's a bad thing if the orator gets the upper hand of the savant or of the teacher in one, or vice versa.

One of my other favourite passages came at the end of the story. It is beautiful, philosophical and very Russian. This is how it goes :

When I have wanted to understand somebody or myself I have considered, not the actions, in which everything is relative, but the desires.

"Tell me what you want, and I will tell you what manner of man you are."

And now I examine myself : what do I want?

I want our wives, our children, our friends, our pupils, to love in us, not our fame, not the brand and not the label, but to love us as ordinary men. Anything else? I should like to have had helpers and successors. Anything else? I should like to wake up in a hundred years' time and to have just a peep out of one eye at what is happening in science. I should have liked to have lived another ten years... What further? Why, nothing further. I think and think, and can think of nothing more. And however much I might think, and however far my thoughts might travel, it is clear to me that there is nothing vital, nothing of great importance in my desires. In my passion for science, in my desire to live, in this sitting on a strange bed, and in this striving to know myself – in all the thoughts, feelings, and ideas I form about everything, there is no common bond to connect it all into one whole. Every feeling and every thought exists apart in me, and in all my criticisms of science, the theatre, literature, my pupils, and in all the pictures my imagination draws, even the most skilful analyst could not find what is called a general idea, or the god of a living man.

And if there is not that, then there is nothing.

I loved 'A Dreary Story'. I will be reading my favourite passages from the story again. This is the third Chekhov long story that I have read. There are still four more to go. I feel sad that there are only four more.

Have you read ‘A Dreary Story’? What do you think about it?

Pouria Roshani says

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Elmira Shahan says

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Shuka says

Zahra says

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Ahmad Sharabiani says

Skuchnaya istoria, Anton Chekhov

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Marzieh Torabi says

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Atena says

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Bilal Baydoun says

"Indifference is a paralysis of the soul, a premature death."

Mohsen abbasi says