SHORT STORIES
BY RUSSIAN AUTHORS

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PREFACE

THE stories collected in this volume represent the development of Russian literature, more particularly of the Russian short story, from the classical Pushkin period in the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present day, or rather to the war and the revolution. This chronological limit gives a certain completeness to the book, making it a representation of pre-revolutionary life and literature as opposed to the post-revolutionary period—and inviting a comparison with the latter.

The volume opens with the famous "Queen of Spades," one of the best short stories of Pushkin, and a very representative one of Russia's greatest poet and prosaist. *Pushkin* (1799–1837) was the Peter the Great of Russian literature. He gave Russia her modern literary language in verse and prose, and created perfect models in poetry, drama, novel and short story. Greatly influenced as he was by the western genius of Shakespeare, of Byron, and a romantic poet in the western sense himself, Pushkin was at the same time a deeply national poet, and there is an all-pervading atmosphere of inner truth in his works which has ever since been characteristic of Russian literature. Pushkin's genius was of a composite nature. His pessimistic outlook on the problems of existence often gave way to a light-hearted mental attitude characteristic of eighteenth-century France; the Voltairian religious scepticism of many an irreverent poem has a counterpart in deeply religious poems, such as "The Madonna" and others, very national in the simplicity of religious emotion. He united also a patriotic disposition and strong national pride with revolutionary feelings, manifested in his poems to the heroes of the December uprising in 1824. Altogether, Pushkin was—as Dostoievsky has appropriately called him—a universal mind and soul, and has from the outstart of Russian literature given a universal significance to its national values.

"The Queen of Spades," a gem of Russian romantic literature, perfect in its artistic finish, shows both sides

of Pushkin's genius—his western spirit and the deep affinity with the Russian soil. The fantastic ghost story is told with an entrancing power of imagination, yet with sufficient psychological motives to make it real. The background is strongly realistic, giving in a rapid glimpse a true picture of Russian high society under Alexander I., with picturesque details of home life. The central figure of the story, the half-demonic old countess, represents French eighteenth-century culture and spirit, but remains true at the same time to the Russian instinct of pity in the romantic fantasy of her apparition as a ghost. It is an afterthought of pity for the victim of betrayed love that moves her soul to disclose the fatal secret to the unfortunate gambler.

Pushkin, so to speak, represents the majestic entrance to the temple of Russian literature. With *Nicolas Gogol* (1809–1852) begins its true history, or rather its tragedy, and Gogol's masterpiece, "The Cloak," shows this tragic spirit at its highest. Gogol was the first to reveal the tragedy of Russian personality crushed by the arbitrary state power of Tsardom. The hero of "The Cloak," a small official, who has lost not only his dignity but all sense of personality under the tyranny of the all-powerful and soulless bureaucratic régime, is one of the most impressive types of Gogol's portrait gallery ("The Inspector-General," "Dead Souls," etc.) which forms a formidable act of accusation against Tsardom, Russia and the Russians. Being a Ukranian himself, Gogol reserved all his idyllic and sympathetic character-painting for the good-natured though lazy-going southern types of the Ukranian part of Russia.

Gogol's relentless satire of Russian officialdom is mitigated, however, by his compassionate love for the wretched and the miserable in Russia, and his faith in Russia's future. "The Cloak," above all, is Gogol's pathetic and inspired plea for pity, and reflects the essentially Russian cult of commiseration and pity which becomes afterwards the keystone of Dostoievsky's message to the world.

The position of *Tolstoy* (1828–1910) in this process of the literary development of Russia stands in contrast to Gogol. Where Gogol accuses, Tolstoy takes the defence

of Russian realities and of the psychology of the Russian masses. Tolstoy sees in the mind and the soul of the Russian peasant all that is good and supremely wise, and would like to see all the standards of culture subordinated to the instinct of truth of the Russian masses, as opposed to the egotism and perverted morals of the higher classes. He praises above all that quality of forbearance which is the subject of "Korney Vasiliev," and is a recurrent problem of many tales and novels of Russia's great writer.

The writers of the next generation, represented in the present volume by Chehov, Andreyev, Korolenko, Kuprin and Gorky, are divided between the satire of Gogol and the idealism of Tolstoy. *Chehov* is satirical, and the chief object of his satire is the old Russian "intelligenzia," with its incapacity for action and its dreamy idealism. But just as Gogol was full of love and understanding for the very objects of his violent indictments, Chehov shows a melancholy tenderness for his awkward heroes, incapable, most of them, of taking a footing in life. There are ideal types of women in his tales and his plays, and, as we see in the half-ironical, half-pathetic "The Kiss," Chehov pities more than he condemns such dreamy "failures in life" as the hero of that tale.

Leonid Andreyev gives a stronger impulsive touch to Chehov's sceptical and pessimistic moods. His satire assumes often a cruel tone with a nightmare touch, due to a marked influence of Edgar Poe. "A Grand Slam" is a model of Andreyev's earlier and milder vein, and has a very appealing humane side to its ironical representation of human existence and what is called "chance" in man's life.

The most tender-hearted and even sentimental among the writers of that generation was *Vladimir Korolenko*, represented in the volume by "The Murmuring Forest," his finest tale. Korolenko shares to some degree Tolstoy's idealism. Universe and existence are full of harmony; but blinded humanity has lost its way in it. Such is his conception of life's tragedy, and his tales are accordingly a series of symphonies interrupted by the cries for help of a distracted humanity.

Kuprin, a strongly realistic writer full of colour, is again one of those who have denounced the realities of

Russia and have shown up the darkest sides of its existence in the past. Even the titles of his tales are significant—"A Ditch," "The Swamp"—and he describes a miserable humanity, resigned to live in "ditches" and "swamps" without the power or will to struggle for the way out to the light.

The conditions, types, subjects, represented by these writers, are now of the past, swept away by the Russian revolution, but their work will remain for all time. Post-revolutionary Russia and its new writers do not come within the scope of this preface. The transition between the pre- and post-revolutionary periods is represented by Maxim Gorky, who is still the man of the day at the present time.

R. S. TOWNSEND.

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English translations of short stories by the authors represented in this book have been published as follows:—

ALEKSANDR SERGYEEVICH PUSHKIN (1799–1837), Russian Romance (Mrs. J. B. Telfer), 1875; Prose Tales (T. Keane), 1894; The Captain's Daughter and other Tales (T. Keane), 1915; Three Tales (R. T. Curvall), 1919. NIKOLAI VASILIEVICH GOGOL (1809–1852), Taras Bulba and other Stories (John Cournos), Everyman's Library, 1906; The Mantle and other Stories (Claud Field), 1915. LEO NIKOLAEVITCH TOLSTOY (1828–1910), numerous English translations. VLADIMIR GALEKTIONOVICH KOROLENKO, Two Tales (S. Stepniak and W. Westall), 1892; The Murmuring Forest and other Stories (Marian Fell), 1916. ANTON PAVLOVICH CHEHOV (1860–1904), The Black Monk and other Stories (R. E. C. Long), 1903; The Kiss and other Stories (R. E. C. Long), 1908; Stories of Russian Life (Marian Fell), 1914; The Bet and other Stories (S. Koteliansky and J. M. Murry), 1915; Russian Silhouettes (Marian Fell), 1915; The Steppe and other Stories (A. L. Kaye), 1915; The Chameleon and four other Tales (P. Selver), 1916; The Tales of Chehov (Constance Garnett), 1916–22; My Life and other Stories (S. Koteliansky and Gilbert Cannan), 1920. LEONID NIKOLAEVICH ANDREYEV, Silence and other Stories (W. H. Lowe), 1910; The Little Angel and other Stories, 1915; The Crushed Flower and other Stories, 1917. ALEKSANDR IVANOVICH KUPRIN, The River of Life and other Stories (S. Koteliansky and J. M. Murry), 1915; A Slav Soul and other Stories (Stephen Graham), 1916; The Bracelet of Garnets and other Stories (Leo Pasvolsky), 1919. MAXIM GORKY, The Outcasts and other Stories, 1902; The Tales (A. S. Rappoport), 1906; Tales of Two Countries, 1914; Chelkash and other Stories, 1915. THEODOR SOLOGUB, The Old House and other Tales (John Cournos), 1915; The Sweet-Scented Name and other Stories (Stephen Graham), 1915; The Little Demon (John Cournos), 1916; The Created Legend (John Cournos), 1916; Little Tales (John Cournos), 1917.

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SHORT STORIES BY RUSSIAN WRITERS

THE QUEEN OF SPADES

By A. S. PUSHKIN

1799–1837

A CARD party was in progress at the house of Narumov, a lieutenant of the Guards. The long winter's night passed unobserved, and it was five o'clock in the morning when supper was served. The winners ate ravenously, the rest sat listless by their empty places. With the appearance of the champagne the conversation grew animated and general.

"How did you fare, Surin?" the host asked.

"Lost, as usual. I have no luck at all. I play *mirandole*, always keep cool, am never flustered, yet I always lose."

"Do you mean you have not once been tempted to back the red? Your strength of mind amazes me."

"And what do you think of Hermann?" one of the guests remarked, indicating a young officer of the Engineers. "He has never touched a card in his life, never made a bet; yet he sits watching us play till five in the morning!"

"Cards attract me greatly," Hermann observed,

"but my position is such that I cannot sacrifice a necessity for a doubtful luxury."

"Hermann is German and careful; he does not surprise me," Tomsky remarked. "The person who is a wonder is my grandmother, the Princess Anna Fedorovna."

"How? Why?" the guests all cried.

"I can never understand," Tomsky continued, "why she never plays."

"There is nothing extraordinary in that," Narumov said; "you must remember she is an old lady of eighty."

"Do you know anything about her?"

"No, nothing at all."

"Oh, then I must tell you. Sixty years ago my grandmother went to Paris and became the rage there. The people ran after her carriage to get a glimpse of the Muscovite Venus. Richelieu made love to her, and my grandmother assures us that he nearly shot himself because she treated him coldly. In those days the women used to play faro. One evening at the Court, she lost a considerable sum to the Duke d'Orléans. When she reached home, grandmother removed the beauty-spots from her face, took off her hoops, informed grandfather of her loss and insisted that he must pay her debt. My grandfather, who is dead now, was, as far as I can remember, almost like a steward to his wife and was mortally afraid of her. Nevertheless, when he heard of her loss he was furious; he produced a packet of bills showing

that they had spent more than half a million in six months. In Paris their Moscow and Saratov estates were not available for sale, he pointed out; the end of it was that he absolutely refused to pay. My grandmother boxed his ears and slept apart from him that night to show her displeasure. In the morning she sent for her husband hoping that the conjugal deprivation would have had some effect on him, but she found him obdurate. For the first time in her life she condescended to arguments and explanations. There were differences between debts and debts, she told him, and a prince could not be treated like a coachman. But all her eloquence failed to move him, and grandmother did not know what to do. She happened to be slightly acquainted with a most remarkable man. You may have heard of Count St. Germain, of whom so many wonderful stories are told. He was reputed to be a kind of wandering Jew, and was supposed to possess the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone. Some people looked upon him as a charlatan and Kazanov, in his *Memoirs*, says that he was a spy. Be that as it may, St. Germain, for all his mysteriousness, was a man of a very venerable appearance and possessed a highly-polished society manner. Grandmother likes to think of him to this day, and gets angry whenever anyone says a disrespectful word about him. Grandmother knew that St. Germain could lay his hand on large sums of money and resolved to appeal to him. She sent a note asking

him to come and see her immediately. The strange old man came and found her in great grief. Grandmother described her husband's barbarity in the very blackest of colours, and told him at last that all her hopes were placed on his friendship and kindness only. St. Germain reflected. 'I could lend you the money,' he said, 'but I know that you would not rest contented until you had paid me, and I do not wish to plunge you into further worries. There is another way; you can win the money back again.' 'But, my dear count,' grandmother objected, 'don't you understand that we have no money at all?' 'You have no need of money,' St. Germain replied. 'Listen to me.' And he told her a secret which each of us would pay dearly to possess."

The young players listened with increased attention. Tomsky lighted his pipe, took a pull or two, and continued:

"That same evening, grandmother appeared at Versailles, *au jeu de la reine*. The Duke d'Orléans kept the bank. Grandmother excused herself, inventing some tale for not having brought the money to pay her debt, and sat down to play. She chose three cards, which she placed one after another; they won each time, and grandmother was quite freed of her debt."

"Pure chance!" one of the guests remarked.

"A fairy tale," Hermann observed.

"The cards may have been marked," put in a third

"I do not think so," Tomsky replied gravely.

"Do you mean to say that you have a grandmother who can divine three consecutive winning cards and you have never got her to tell you how it is done?" Narumov asked.

"Yes, the deuce!" Tomsky replied. "She had four sons of whom my father was one, and all were confirmed gamblers, but she never disclosed her secret to one of them, though it would have been useful to them and to me too. But my uncle, Count Ivan Ilitch, told me, on his word of honour —mind—that the late Chaplitsky, who died in want after having squandered millions, once lost three hundred thousand roubles to Zoritch, I think it was. Grandmother, who was generally severe on the escapades of young men, for some reason took pity on Chaplitsky. She gave him three cards which he was to place one after another, exacting a promise from him that he would never play again in his life. Chaplitsky appeared at Zoritch's, and they sat down to play. On the first card Chaplitsky staked fifty thousand and won, then again, until he had won more than he had lost.... However, we must get to bed; it is nearly six."

The dawn was beginning to break. The young men finished their glasses and departed, each his own way.

II

The old Countess —— was seated in her dressing-room in front of a looking-glass. Three

maids were in attendance. One held a pot of rouge, another a box of pins, the third a night-cap trimmed with flame-coloured ribbons. The countess had not the smallest pretensions to beauty; it had long since faded, but she retained all the habits of her younger days, assiduously followed the fashions of the 'seventies, and spent as much time over her toilet as she had done sixty years ago. Her companion sat at the window at an embroidering-frame.

"Good morning, Grand'maman," said a young man entering the room. "*Bonjour*, Mademoiselle Lise. Grand'maman, I have come to ask something of you."

"What is it, Paul?"

"May I introduce a friend of mine to you, and bring him to your ball on Friday?"

"Bring him to the ball and introduce me to him there. Did you go to —— yesterday?"

"I should think I did! It was jolly; we danced till five o'clock. Mademoiselle Eletskaya looked charming."

"Charming, my dear! You are easy to please. You should have seen her grandmother, the Princess Daria Petrovna. That reminds me, she must be very old, the Princess Daria Petrovna."

"But she died seven years ago, Grand'maman," Tomsky said absently.

The young girl raised her head and made a sign to the young man. He recollected that it was an understood thing the countess was not to be told

about the death of her contemporaries and bit his lip. The countess greeted the intelligence with extreme indifference.

"Dead?" she asked. "And I did not know. She and I were maids-of-honour in the same year, and when we were presented, Her Majesty . . ."

For the hundredth time the countess repeated to her nephew the same tale.

"Help me up, Paul, please," she said later. "Lizanka, where is my snuff-box?"

And accompanied by her maids the countess withdrew behind the screens. Tomsky remained with the girl.

"Who is your friend whom you wish to introduce?" Lizaveta Ivanovna asked softly.

"Narumov. Do you know him?"

"No. Is he a soldier or a civilian?"

"A soldier."

"In the Engineers?"

"No, in the Cavalry. What made you think he was in the Engineers?"

The girl laughed, but made no reply.

"Paul!" the countess called from behind the screen; "try and send me a new novel, only not of the modern kind, please."

"Then how can I send you a new one, Grand'-maman?"

"I meant a novel where the hero did not strangle his father or mother, and where there were no drowned bodies. I cannot stand drowned bodies. Is there such a novel nowadays?"

"Would you like a Russian one?"

"Are there Russian novels? Send one by all means, Paul."

"I am sorry, Grand'maman; I must go. I am sorry, Lizaveta Ivanovna. What made you think that Narumov was in the Engineers?"

And Tomsky took his leave.

Lizaveta Ivanovna remained alone. She left her work and gazed out of the window. A little later a young officer appeared round the street corner. A flush spread over Lizaveta's cheeks; she resumed her work, bending her head low over the canvas. At this moment the countess entered, fully dressed.

"Order the carriage, Lizanka," she said. "We will go for a drive."

Lizanka rose from the frame and began to put away her work.

"Are you deaf, my dear?" the countess cried. "Order the carriage at once!"

"Just going," the girl answered quietly, and ran out of the room.

A servant entered and handed the countess a book sent by Prince Paul Alexandrovitch.

"Thank the prince for me. Lizanka, Lizanka, where are you off to?"

"To put on my things."

"There is plenty of time, my dear. Sit down here. Open the first volume and read aloud."

The girl took the book and began to read.

"Can't you read louder?" the countess asked.

"Are you asleep, my dear? Wait a moment. Bring me a foot-stool. A little nearer, please."

Lizaveta Ivanovna read a couple of pages; the countess yawned.

"Put down the book," she said; "what nonsense it is, to be sure! Have it sent back to Prince Paul with my thanks. Is the carriage ready?"

"Yes," Lizaveta Ivanovna said, looking out into the street.

"Why are you not dressed?" the countess asked. "I have always to wait for you. You are impossible, my dear."

Liza ran away to her room. Two minutes had scarcely passed when the countess rang violently. Three maids ran in at one door, a footman at another.

"How is it I cannot make you hear?" the countess demanded. "Tell Lizaveta Ivanovna that I am waiting for her."

Lizaveta Ivanovna entered in a cloak and hat.

"At last, my dear!" the countess greeted her. "What finery to be sure! Quite superfluous, my dear. There is no one to captivate! . . . What is the weather like? I believe there is a wind."

"No, your Highness, there is no wind," the footman replied.

"Are you sure? Open the window. You see, there is a wind, and a cold one, too. I shall not want the carriage Lizanka, we will not go for our drive to-day. I am afraid your finery was all put on for nothing."

"What a life!" Lizaveta Ivanovna thought.

And truly, Lizaveta Ivanovna was the most unhappy of beings. The bread of others is bitter, says Dante, and the steps leading to a stranger's doors are difficult to tread. And who should know the bitterness of dependence more than the companion and dependent of a celebrated old society woman? The countess had not a bad heart, but she had been spoiled by the world, and had become capricious, mean and egotistical, with the cold egotism of all old people who have loved in their own day and are out of place in the present. She still participated in all society functions, dragged herself to balls where she sat in corners painted and powdered and attired in the fashion of her own day, a formidable, hideous presence. The guests on their arrival came and bowed to her ceremoniously, but no one took the least notice of her afterwards. At her own house she entertained the whole town, but could not recognise a single face. Her numerous menials growing fat and grey in her corridors and servants' hall, did what they liked, vying with each other to rob her. Lizaveta Ivanovna was the household martyr. Did she pour out the tea, she had to account for every lump of sugar used; did she read aloud, she was responsible for the author's shortcomings; did she accompany the countess in her drives, she had to answer for the weather and the paving of the roads. She was supposed to have a fixed salary, but she never received it, yet she was expected to