

*A. Pisemsky*

ONE  
THOUSAND  
SOULS



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PUBLISHING HOUSE

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А. Ф. Писемский

ТЫСЯЧА ДУШ

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY IVY LITVINOVA  
DESIGNED BY Y. GOLYAKHOVSKY



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## *Part One*

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### I

**I**TEM FROM bulletin issued by Civil Service Authorities: "Collegiate Assessor Godnev, Permanent Inspector of N. Municipal School, has resigned, retaining the right to wear uniform and receive the pension appertaining to his rank." Further on there follows: "Candidate Kalinovich appointed inspector to N. School."

On reading this order the author fell into involuntary meditation. "Alas!" said he to himself, "there is no permanency in this world. So Pyotr Mikhailich Godnev is no longer an inspector, though according to the most accurate calculations he bore this title for precisely twenty-five years. What will the old fellow do now? Will he change his way of living? And where will he spend the morn-



ings from eight to two, now that he no longer has his inspector's cubby-hole to go to?"

Godnev, who was a widower, lived with his daughter Nastenka in a little house with a garden in the town of N., and was the legitimate owner of thirty souls in a village not far from the town. A spinster of forty-five, by the name of Pelageya Evgrafovna, kept house for him. Despite her age, and the fact that she was no beauty, the wife of the local superintendent of police, a lady prone to coming out with indiscreet remarks, said he should have atoned for his sin by marrying his charming chatelaine, though others, more moderate in their opinions, asked what could be the sin of such old people, and why should they marry?

Pyotr Mikhailich was known not only by everyone in the town and the district, but, I believe, by half the gubernia too. Every day at seven in the morning he went to the market for provisions, and was moreover in the habit of addressing everyone he met on the way. For example, if a worthy burgheress happened to thrust her kerchiefed head out of the window of her dilapidated dwelling when he passed, he would invariably greet her:

"Good day, Fyokla Nikiforovna!"

"Good day, Pyotr Mikhailich!" she would reply.

"Have you been long back from the gubernia town?"

"I got back yesterday, Sir. I didn't come back by the coach, Sir. I trudged back through all this dirt."

"How go your affairs?"

"My case has reached the higher authorities."

"Ah well—a good thing it's got so high!"

"Is that a good thing, Sir?"

"Very good! Very good!" Godnev would say, proceeding on his way.

To tell the truth, Pyotr Mikhailich did not know what his neighbour's case was, or whether it really was a good

thing that it had reached the higher authorities, he just wanted to cheer her up.

In front of the merchant's brick-built abode stood the merchant's coachman with his sheepskin jacket slung over his shoulders, and Pyotr Mikhailich considered it his duty to say something pleasant to him too.

"Well, brother, have you broken in your horse?" he asked.

"More or less. It takes time," answered the coachman.

"Yes, yes, I saw you! You're a fine fellow—you know how to drive!"

The coachman gave a gratified smile.

Godnev got to the butcher's shop just as the owner was opening it.

"Aha, Siliverst Petrovich, up rather late today!" said Godnev.

"Can't be helped, Pyotr Mikhailich! I got delayed somehow. How's my lad getting on? How are things over there?" said the butcher, going behind the counter.

"Your lad? He's all right—he's a clever lad. A bit wild, though. Broke two panes in the schoolroom window again yesterday," replied Pyotr Mikhailich.

"Lord have mercy on us!" exclaimed the butcher, shrugging his shoulders. "What I'm going to do with that lad I simply don't know! Nobody can say I spoil him! Oh, what's the good!"

"Come now! You shouldn't be too severe. You can spoil by beating, too."

"You've got to beat an imp like that, though," replied the butcher, and added: "Shall I weigh you a bit of beef?"

"Very well—a bit of beef, then. But mind it's tender!"

"I'm not likely to give you a tough bit. We don't sell you the bad cuts—we keep them for our general's ladies."

"You want me to believe that? What droll creatures you shopkeepers are!"

"We do, I assure you! I should like to know what that dame and the postmaster are hoarding their money for!"

Pyotr Mikhailich only laughed and shook his head.

From the butcher's he went into the yard behind some small shops, where the women were selling rolls, earthenware pots, vegetables, thread, and all sorts of other articles.

"You here again with your onions!" said Pyotr Mikhailich to a woman standing beside a great basket of onions. He could not bear onions.

"Now, now, good old gentleman, don't spoil my trade—take a string yourself, then you can talk!"

"I don't eat onions, silly creature!"

"That's your sort, you gents—'don't eat onions.' You only like sweets."

"Now don't be cross, I'll take a string!" said Godnev, and bought some onions, which he presented to the next beggar he met, with the words: "Here's some onions for you! But don't eat them without bread, they're bitter. Come round to my house and they'll give you a bit of bread."

A priest came towards him. Pyotr Mikhailich bowed to him from afar.

"Good day!" he said, taking off his cap and approaching for a blessing.

"Good day!" replied the priest in deep bass accents.

"Well, Father, have you read my book?"

"I have, I was going to return it to you this very day, with my thanks. A very pleasant work."

"Yes, yes, an instructive book. Bring it round when you have time."

"I'll be sure to," replied the priest, bowing obsequiously.

On returning home Pyotr Mikhailich went straight to the kitchen, where the cook, under the personal supervision of Pelageya Evgrafovna, was lighting the stove.

"Here you are, oh, Commander! The fruits and gifts of the earth!" he said, handing the housekeeper a paper bag which she took and emptied of its contents, shaking her head and emitting exclamatory sounds something like: Eh, eh, eh . . . hey, hey, hey. . . .

"Now what are you grumbling for? How you nag, Mistress! Is my marketing so bad?"

To this remark Pelageya Evgrafovna replied in mocking tones:

"Oh no—very good, of course!" She was never satisfied with what Pyotr Mikhailich bought, and she was right, for some of his tradesmen friends sold him short weight, others sold him stale goods, and careful house-keeping and cleanliness were a sort of insatiable passion in Pelageya Evgrafovna. Though of German descent, she could not speak a word of any other language but Russian. When she had arrived (why, nobody knew) at the tiny district town, she almost died of starvation at first, till she was taken to the hospital. Pyotr Mikhailich, noticing a new patient during one of his visits to the wards, entered into conversation with her, and having been widowed that year, took her into his home to look after the little Nastenka. But Pelageya Evgrafovna, beginning as a nurse, gradually took the whole household under her care. From early morn till late at night she flitted hither and thither about the house and its outbuildings. Now she climbed into the hayloft, now she ran down to the cellar, or busied herself in the garden. She polished and swept whatever could be swept and polished, and, most important of all, her sleeves rolled up and, enveloped in an apron from eight in the morning, she did the cooking. To give her her due she was a great hand at the preparation of certain dishes. Her greatest triumphs were at salting and pickling, and the fish she salted in Lent was so delicious that whenever Pyotr Mikhailich ate it—and on

sultry summer days it was preceded by cold beet-soup—he would say:

“Lucullus himself never had such fish and such soup, gentlemen!”

Pelageya Evgrafovna always washed Pyotr Mikhailich’s cuffs and neckcloths, Nastenka’s collars, sleevelets and lace fichus, and would undoubtedly have washed everything else, if her strength had sufficed, for she said it made her quite ill to see the linen after it came back from the laundress.

It would have been hard to say when Pelageya Evgrafovna slept and what she ate, and she was not fond of being asked about this. She snatched a sip of tea at odd moments, only sitting down to table for a minute or two, though her place was always laid there. Hardly had the roast been served when she would jump up and go to the kitchen for something. And when Pyotr Mikhailich asked her on her return: “How is it that you never eat anything yourself, oh, Commander?” she would only laugh and reply: “If I didn’t eat I shouldn’t be alive,” and again set off for the kitchen.

Pelageya Evgrafovna only accepted her wages (120 paper rubles a year)\* after a certain amount of coercion. Pyotr Mikhailich usually brought her ten rubles at the end of the month.

“What’s this?” asked the housekeeper.

“Your money. Money’s a good thing. Kindly take it and sign for it,” her master replied.

“Oh, stop your nonsense!” she would say, turning aside and looking out of the window.

“Law and order are not nonsense, Ma’am. Kindly take it,” said Godnev still more insistently.

\* The paper money issued in Russia in 1769 underwent extreme fluctuations, owing to which there were two money units—the silver ruble and the paper ruble. In the eighteen forties the paper ruble was valued at about 27 kopeks in silver.—*Tr.*

"As if I didn't get my keep here!" said Pelageya Evgrafovna, still looking out of the window.

"Come now, take it! You know I don't like this!" said Godnev more insistently than ever.

Pelageya Evgrafovna took the money angrily and flung it contemptuously into her work-basket.

And every time tears of gratitude came into her eyes, despite the dissatisfied expression of her face.

"Took a beggar off the side of the road, saved her from starvation, and still wants to pay her wages. Ought to be ashamed of himself! You've got a daughter of your own—you'd do better to save something up for her," she muttered.

"Don't you dare to say that to me, Commander, d'you hear? It's not for you to teach me!" Pyotr Mikhailich said, shouting her down, and Pelageya Evgrafovna took her wages without another word, but always unwillingly.

Having handed over his purchases to his housekeeper, Pyotr Mikhailich would go into his drawing-room and drink tea with Nastenka. The conversation between father and daughter was almost always something of this sort:

"Again sitting up all night, Nastasia Petrovna! It's not right, my dear, it isn't, you know! There's a time for work, a time for rest, and a time for sleep."

"I was reading, Papa. I've finished the book I got yesterday."

"And that's wrong, too. What will there be for us to read today? There'll be nothing to read in the evening."

"Oh, I'll finish reading it to you. I'll read it again with the greatest pleasure. Fancy that Valentine turned out ever such a bad man!"

"Now don't tell me! Read it to me! I'd rather find out what happened from the author," interrupted Pyotr Mikhailich, and Nastenka did not go on.

After this they usually parted. Nastenka sat down to

read her book or copy out certain passages, or strolled in the garden. She never did any housework or needlework. Pyotr Mikhailich, for his part, donned his uniform and set off for school. He was usually met in the entrance by the hall porter, Gavrilich, an invalided soldier, nicknamed "Grater" by the schoolboys on account of his deeply pitted face. It required the truly Christian patience of Pyotr Mikhailich to keep Gavrilich as school porter for ten years, for the invalid was obtuse, lazy and ill-mannered from sheer old age. He seldom cleared away or cleaned up anything, so that Pyotr Mikhailich was obliged at least once a month to engage women at his own expense to scrub the floors. The porter was in the habit of breakfasting early on warmed-up cabbage soup, which he usually put in the oven of the inspector's room every evening and kept there till the next morning. Almost every time Pyotr Mikhailich arrived in the morning, he said:

"Again steaming up the place with your soup, Grenadier! My, how stuffy it is here! It's suffocating!"

"You always think I'm heating up my soup," protested Gavrilich.

"Well, and so you are, and denying it, too, telling lies in your old age, you sinner!"

"Look in the oven yourself, you'll see there's nothing there."

"I know there's nothing in the oven—you've eaten it. You don't even take the trouble to wipe the fat off your face, you blockhead. And you dare to answer back! I'll sack you, mind, and you can go begging in the streets."

"Sack me! As if people can't live by begging!" replied Grater, going out.

"Fool!" Pyotr Mikhailich called after him.

But here the matter always ended.

After busying himself in the inspector's room over the drawing up of various reports, Pyotr Mikhailich would make the rounds of the school between lessons, usually

beginning with the first form, in which there were usually clouds of dust.

"Savages! Tatar hordes! Hey, there! Quiet! Silence! Be so quiet that you could hear a pin drop!" cried the old man, looking very stern.

It became a little quieter in the room.

"If you make a noise again I'll give it you—all of you! I'll give one in every ten a wiggling," he concluded solemnly, and went out.

In the passage a little ruffian ran into him, almost knocking him over.

"What are you up to?" cried Pyotr Mikhailich, flinging out his arms. "You're like an unbroken colt. Just you wait, I'll put a bridle on you!"

"Pyotr Mikhailich, Modest Vasilich made me go without dinner. It's not my fault," said Kalashnikov, a third-form pupil, a hulking, unbrushed, unwashed lad of about eighteen, wearing a padded jacket.

"You probably deserved it," said Pyotr Mikhailich.

"I didn't do anything, so help me! Ask anyone! Everyone knows how unfair he is to me. I can't stop in today—it's a market-day. I must help my dad in the shop."

"All the better, you'll be sorry, and understand it's wrong to play the fool and be rude," said Pyotr Mikhailich and got away quickly.

Kalashnikov imitated him, making sure that the old man heard him:

"'It's wrong to play the fool and be rude,' old cock! I'll go without my cap! Much good may it do you!" he cried, tearing a corner off a map on the wall in his rage.

Severity and harsh measures were simply not in Pyotr Mikhailich's character. He managed the boys with more or less success, having them flogged in extreme cases, a task he always imposed on Gavrilich, never witnessing its performance and instructing him to administer the punishment less with a view to pain than to humiliation.



But Gavrilich, who cherished a profound hatred for the boys, administered such punishment (so long as the culprit was not too strong for him) that the victim, once escaped from the inspector's room, sobbed for two hours. When Pyotr Mikhailich had to deliver a rebuke or a reproof to the teachers, he was at his wit's end. As a matter of fact the only one who required this was the history teacher, Ekzarkhatov, a university graduate, and no fool. He knew his subject well, and for almost the whole of every month he was quiet, thoughtful, conscientious and extremely taciturn. But the day after he received his monthly salary he always came to lessons tipsy. He would joke with the boys, and then sally forth into the street, his hat on one side, a cigar between his lips, singing or whistling. Should occasion arise he was even ready to pick a quarrel. He would feel a yearning for female company and to satisfy it would go to the river-bank and stand beside the rafts on which the laundresses washed the linen. Whenever he came up against crockery, window-panes, or members of his household, he would strike out. But after he had slept all this excitement off no one was so quiet as he. While living in Moscow he had married a widow-woman of uncertain social position with five children—a stupid quarrelsome person who, he said, had driven him to drink. While her husband was on the rampage his wife took refuge with neighbours. But when he recovered, she nagged at him mercilessly, and if he ventured to say a single word she would throw whatever came to hand at him, tug at her own hair till it stuck out wildly, and rush off to complain to Pyotr Mikhailich, fairly bursting into the inspector's room and bawling: "Father Pyotr Mikhailich, for God's sake, help me! What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

"What's the matter? What d'you want of me?" Godnev would ask, though he knew very well what the matter was.