

# The Cattle-dealers

Anton Chekhov

THE long goods train has been standing for hours in the little station. The engine is as silent as though its fire had gone out; there is not a soul near the train or in the station yard.

A pale streak of light comes from one of the vans and glides over the rails of a siding. In that van two men are sitting on an outspread cape: one is an old man with a big gray beard, wearing a sheepskin coat and a high lambskin hat, somewhat like a busby; the other a beardless youth in a threadbare cloth reefer jacket and muddy high boots. They are the owners of the goods. The old man sits, his legs stretched out before him, musing in silence; the young man half reclines and softly strums on a cheap accordion. A lantern with a tallow candle in it is hanging on the wall near them.

The van is quite full. If one glances in through the dim light of the lantern, for the first moment the eyes receive an impression of something shapeless, monstrous, and unmistakably alive, something very much like gigantic crabs which move their claws and feelers, crowd together, and noiselessly climb up the walls to the ceiling; but if one looks more closely, horns and their shadows, long lean backs, dirty hides, tails, eyes begin to stand out in the dusk. They are cattle and their shadows. There are eight of them in the van. Some turn round and stare at the men and swing their tails. Others try to stand or lie down more comfortably. They are crowded. If one lies down the others must stand and huddle closer. No manger, no halter, no litter, not a wisp of hay. . . .\*

At last the old man pulls out of his pocket a silver watch and looks at the time: a quarter past two.

"We have been here nearly two hours," he says, yawning. "Better go and stir them up, or we may be here till morning. They have gone to sleep, or goodness knows what they are up to."

The old man gets up and, followed by his long shadow, cautiously gets down from the van into the darkness. He makes his way along beside the train to the engine, and after passing some two dozen vans sees a red open furnace; a human figure sits motionless facing it; its peaked cap, nose, and knees are lighted up by the crimson glow, all the rest is black and can scarcely be distinguished in the darkness.

"Are we going to stay here much longer?" asks the old man.

No answer. The motionless figure is evidently asleep. The old man clears his throat impatiently and, shrinking from the penetrating damp, walks round the engine, and as he does so the brilliant light of the two engine lamps dazzles his eyes for an instant and makes the night even blacker to him; he goes to the station.

The platform and steps of the station are wet. Here and there are white patches of freshly fallen melting snow. In the station itself it is light and as hot as a steam-bath. There is a smell of paraffin. Except for the weighing-machine and a yellow seat on which a man

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wearing a guard's uniform is asleep, there is no furniture in the place at all. On the left are two wide-open doors. Through one of them the telegraphic apparatus and a lamp with a green shade on it can be seen; through the other, a small room, half of it taken up by a dark cupboard. In this room the head guard and the engine-driver are sitting on the window-sill. They are both feeling a cap with their fingers and disputing.

"That's not real beaver, it's imitation," says the engine-driver. "Real beaver is not like that. Five roubles would be a high price for the whole cap, if you care to know!"

"You know a great deal about it, . . ." the head guard says, offended. "Five roubles, indeed! Here, we will ask the merchant. Mr. Malahin," he says, addressing the old man, "what do you say: is this imitation beaver or real?"

Old Malahin takes the cap into his hand, and with the air of a connoisseur pinches the fur, blows on it, sniffs at it, and a contemptuous smile lights up his angry face.

"It must be imitation!" he says gleefully. "Imitation it is."

A dispute follows. The guard maintains that the cap is real beaver, and the engine-driver and Malahin try to persuade him that it is not. In the middle of the argument the old man suddenly remembers the object of his coming.

"Beaver and cap is all very well, but the train's standing still, gentlemen!" he says. "Who is it we are waiting for? Let us start!"

"Let us," the guard agrees. "We will smoke another cigarette and go on. But there is no need to be in a hurry. . . . We shall be delayed at the next station anyway!"

"Why should we?"

"Oh, well. . . . We are too much behind time. . . . If you are late at one station you can't help being delayed at the other stations to let the trains going the opposite way pass. Whether we set off now or in the morning we shan't be number fourteen. We shall have to be number twenty-three."

"And how do you make that out?"

"Well, there it is."

Malahin looks at the guard, reflects, and mutters mechanically as though to himself:

"God be my judge, I have reckoned it and even jotted it down in a notebook; we have wasted thirty-four hours standing still on the journey. If you go on like this, either the cattle will die, or they won't pay me two roubles for the meat when I do get there. It's not traveling, but ruination."

The guard raises his eyebrows and sighs with an air that seems to say: "All that is unhappily true!" The engine-driver sits silent, dreamily looking at the cap. From their faces one can see that they have a secret thought in common, which they do not utter, not because they

want to conceal it, but because such thoughts are much better expressed by signs than by words. And the old man understands. He feels in his pocket, takes out a ten-rouble note, and without preliminary words, without any change in the tone of his voice or the expression of his face, but with the confidence and directness with which probably only Russians give and take bribes, he gives the guard the note. The latter takes it, folds it in four, and without undue haste puts it in his pocket. After that all three go out of the room, and waking the sleeping guard on the way, go on to the platform.

"What weather!" grumbles the head guard, shrugging his shoulders. "You can't see your hand before your face."

"Yes, it's vile weather."

From the window they can see the flaxen head of the telegraph clerk appear beside the green lamp and the telegraphic apparatus; soon after another head, bearded and wearing a red cap, appears beside it -- no doubt that of the station-master. The station-master bends down to the table, reads something on a blue form, rapidly passing his cigarette along the lines. . . . Malahin goes to his van.

The young man, his companion, is still half reclining and hardly audibly strumming on the accordion. He is little more than a boy, with no trace of a mustache; his full white face with its broad cheek-bones is childishly dreamy; his eyes have a melancholy and tranquil look unlike that of a grown-up person, but he is broad, strong, heavy and rough like the old man; he does not stir nor shift his position, as though he is not equal to moving his big body. It seems as though any movement he made would tear his clothes and be so noisy as to frighten both him and the cattle. From under his big fat fingers that clumsily pick out the stops and keys of the accordion comes a steady flow of thin, tinkling sounds which blend into a simple, monotonous little tune; he listens to it, and is evidently much pleased with his performance.

A bell rings, but with such a muffled note that it seems to come from far away. A hurried second bell soon follows, then a third and the guard's whistle. A minute passes in profound silence; the van does not move, it stands still, but vague sounds begin to come from beneath it, like the crunch of snow under sledge-runners; the van begins to shake and the sounds cease. Silence reigns again. But now comes the clank of buffers, the violent shock makes the van start and, as it were, give a lurch forward, and all the cattle fall against one another.

"May you be served the same in the world to come," grumbles the old man, setting straight his cap, which had slipped on the back of his head from the jolt. "He'll maim all my cattle like this!"

Yasha gets up without a word and, taking one of the fallen beasts by the horns, helps it to get on to its legs. . . . The jolt is followed by a stillness again. The sounds of crunching snow come from under the van again, and it seems as though the train had moved back a little.

"There will be another jolt in a minute," says the old man. And the convulsive quiver does, in fact, run along the train, there is a crashing sound and the bullocks fall on one another again.

"It's a job!" says Yasha, listening. "The train must be heavy. It seems it won't move."

"It was not heavy before, but now it has suddenly got heavy. No, my lad, the guard has not gone shares with him, I expect. Go and take him something, or he will be jolting us till morning."

Yasha takes a three-rouble note from the old man and jumps out of the van. The dull thud of his heavy footsteps resounds outside the van and gradually dies away. Stillness. . . . In the next van a bullock utters a prolonged subdued "moo," as though it were singing.

Yasha comes back. A cold damp wind darts into the van.

"Shut the door, Yasha, and we will go to bed," says the old man. "Why burn a candle for nothing?"

Yasha moves the heavy door; there is a sound of a whistle, the engine and the train set off.

"It's cold," mutters the old man, stretching himself on the cape and laying his head on a bundle. "It is very different at home! It's warm and clean and soft, and there is room to say your prayers, but here we are worse off than any pigs. It's four days and nights since I have taken off my boots."

Yasha, staggering from the jolting of the train, opens the lantern and snuffs out the wick with his wet fingers. The light flares up, hisses like a frying pan and goes out.

"Yes, my lad," Malahin goes on, as he feels Yasha lie down beside him and the young man's huge back huddle against his own, "it's cold. There is a draught from every crack. If your mother or your sister were to sleep here for one night they would be dead by morning. There it is, my lad, you wouldn't study and go to the high school like your brothers, so you must take the cattle with your father. It's your own fault, you have only yourself to blame. . . . Your brothers are asleep in their beds now, they are snug under the bedclothes, but you, the careless and lazy one, are in the same box as the cattle. . . . Yes. . . ."

The old man's words are inaudible in the noise of the train, but for a long time he goes on muttering, sighing and clearing his throat. . . . The cold air in the railway van grows thicker and more stifling. The pungent odor of fresh dung and smoldering candle makes it so repulsive and acrid that it irritates Yasha's throat and chest as he falls asleep. He coughs and sneezes, while the old man, being accustomed to it, breathes with his whole chest as though nothing were amiss, and merely clears his throat.

To judge from the swaying of the van and the rattle of the wheels the train is moving rapidly and unevenly. The engine breathes heavily, snorting out of time with the pulsation of the train, and altogether there is a medley of sounds. The bullocks huddle together uneasily and knock their horns against the walls.

When the old man wakes up, the deep blue sky of early morning is peeping in at the cracks and at the little uncovered window. He feels unbearably cold, especially in the back and the feet. The train is standing still; Yasha, sleepy and morose, is busy with the cattle.

The old man wakes up out of humor. Frowning and gloomy, he clears his throat angrily and looks from under his brows at Yasha who, supporting a bullock with his powerful shoulder and slightly lifting it, is trying to disentangle its leg.

"I told you last night that the cords were too long," mutters the old man; "but no, 'It's not too long, Daddy.' There's no making you do anything, you will have everything your own way. . . . Blockhead!"

He angrily moves the door open and the light rushes into the van. A passenger train is standing exactly opposite the door, and behind it a red building with a roofed-in platform -- a big station with a refreshment bar. The roofs and bridges of the trains, the earth, the sleepers, all are covered with a thin coating of fluffy, freshly fallen snow. In the spaces between the carriages of the passenger train the passengers can be seen moving to and fro, and a red-haired, red-faced gendarme walking up and down; a waiter in a frock-coat and a snow-white shirt-front, looking cold and sleepy, and probably very much dissatisfied with his fate, is running along the platform carrying a glass of tea and two rusks on a tray.

The old man gets up and begins saying his prayers towards the east. Yasha, having finished with the bullock and put down the spade in the corner, stands beside him and says his prayers also. He merely moves his lips and crosses himself; the father prays in a loud whisper and pronounces the end of each prayer aloud and distinctly.

". . . And the life of the world to come. Amen," the old man says aloud, draws in a breath, and at once whispers another prayer, rapping out clearly and firmly at the end: ". . . and lay calves upon Thy altar!"

After saying his prayers, Yasha hurriedly crosses himself and says: "Five kopecks, please."

And on being given the five-kopeck piece, he takes a red copper teapot and runs to the station for boiling water. Taking long jumps over the rails and sleepers, leaving huge tracks in the feathery snow, and pouring away yesterday's tea out of the teapot he runs to the refreshment room and jingles his five-kopeck piece against his teapot. From the van the bar-keeper can be seen pushing away the big teapot and refusing to give half of his samovar for five kopecks, but Yasha turns the tap himself and, spreading wide his elbows so as not to be interfered with fills his teapot with boiling water.

"Damned blackguard!" the bar-keeper shouts after him as he runs back to the railway van.

The scowling face of Malahin grows a little brighter over the tea.

"We know how to eat and drink, but we don't remember our work. Yesterday we could do nothing all day but eat and drink, and I'll be bound we forgot to put down what we spent. What a memory! Lord have mercy on us!"

The old man recalls aloud the expenditure of the day before, and writes down in a tattered notebook where and how much he had given to guards, engine-drivers, oilers. . . .

Meanwhile the passenger train has long ago gone off, and an engine runs backwards and

forwards on the empty line, apparently without any definite object, but simply enjoying its freedom. The sun has risen and is playing on the snow; bright drops are falling from the station roof and the tops of the vans.

Having finished his tea, the old man lazily saunters from the van to the station. Here in the middle of the first-class waiting-room he sees the familiar figure of the guard standing beside the station-master, a young man with a handsome beard and in a magnificent rough woollen overcoat. The young man, probably new to his position, stands in the same place, gracefully shifting from one foot to the other like a good racehorse, looks from side to side, salutes everyone that passes by, smiles and screws up his eyes. . . . He is red-cheeked, sturdy, and good-humored; his face is full of eagerness, and is as fresh as though he had just fallen from the sky with the feathery snow. Seeing Malahin, the guard sighs guiltily and throws up his hands.

"We can't go number fourteen," he says. "We are very much behind time. Another train has gone with that number."

The station-master rapidly looks through some forms, then turns his beaming blue eyes upon Malahin, and, his face radiant with smiles and freshness, showers questions on him:

"You are Mr. Malahin? You have the cattle? Eight vanloads? What is to be done now? You are late and I let number fourteen go in the night. What are we to do now?"

The young man discreetly takes hold of the fur of Malahin's coat with two pink fingers and, shifting from one foot to the other, explains affably and convincingly that such and such numbers have gone already, and that such and such are going, and that he is ready to do for Malahin everything in his power. And from his face it is evident that he is ready to do anything to please not only Malahin, but the whole world -- he is so happy, so pleased, and so delighted! The old man listens, and though he can make absolutely nothing of the intricate system of numbering the trains, he nods his head approvingly, and he, too, puts two fingers on the soft wool of the rough coat. He enjoys seeing and hearing the polite and genial young man. To show goodwill on his side also, he takes out a ten-ruble note and, after a moment's thought, adds a couple of rouble notes to it, and gives them to the station-master. The latter takes them, puts his finger to his cap, and gracefully thrusts them into his pocket.

"Well, gentlemen, can't we arrange it like this?" he says, kindled by a new idea that has flashed on him. "The troop train is late, . . . as you see, it is not here, . . . so why shouldn't you go as the troop train?\*" And I will let the troop train go as twenty-eight. Eh?"

"If you like," agrees the guard.

"Excellent!" the station-master says, delighted. "In that case there is no need for you to wait here; you can set off at once. I'll dispatch you immediately. Excellent!"

He salutes Malahin and runs off to his room, reading forms as he goes. The old man is very much pleased by the conversation that has just taken place; he smiles and looks about the room as though looking for something else agreeable.

"We'll have a drink, though," he says, taking the guard's arm.

"It seems a little early for drinking."

"No, you must let me treat you to a glass in a friendly way."

They both go to the refreshment bar. After having a drink the guard spends a long time selecting something to eat.

He is a very stout, elderly man, with a puffy and discolored face. His fatness is unpleasant, flabby-looking, and he is sallow as people are who drink too much and sleep irregularly.

"And now we might have a second glass," says Malahin. "It's cold now, it's no sin to drink. Please take some. So I can rely upon you, Mr. Guard, that there will be no hindrance or unpleasantness for the rest of the journey. For you know in moving cattle every hour is precious. To-day meat is one price; and to-morrow, look you, it will be another. If you are a day or two late and don't get your price, instead of a profit you get home -- excuse my saying it -- with out your breeches. Pray take a little. . . . I rely on you, and as for standing you something or what you like, I shall be pleased to show you my respect at any time."

After having fed the guard, Malahin goes back to the van.

"I have just got hold of the troop train," he says to his son. "We shall go quickly. The guard says if we go all the way with that number we shall arrive at eight o'clock to-morrow evening. If one does not bestir oneself, my boy, one gets nothing. . . . That's so. . . . So you watch and learn. . . ."

After the first bell a man with a face black with soot, in a blouse and filthy frayed trousers hanging very slack, comes to the door of the van. This is the oiler, who had been creeping under the carriages and tapping the wheels with a hammer.

"Are these your vans of cattle?" he asks.

"Yes. Why?"

"Why, because two of the vans are not safe. They can't go on, they must stay here to be repaired."

"Oh, come, tell us another! You simply want a drink, to get something out of me. . . . You should have said so."

"As you please, only it is my duty to report it at once."

Without indignation or protest, simply, almost mechanically, the old man takes two twenty-kopeck pieces out of his pocket and gives them to the oiler. He takes them very calmly, too, and looking good-naturedly at the old man enters into conversation.

"You are going to sell your cattle, I suppose. . . . It's good business!"



Malahin sighs and, looking calmly at the oiler's black face, tells him that trading in cattle used certainly to be profitable, but now it has become a risky and losing business.

"I have a mate here," the oiler interrupts him. "You merchant gentlemen might make him a little present. . . ."

Malahin gives something to the mate too. The troop train goes quickly and the waits at the stations are comparatively short. The old man is pleased. The pleasant impression made by the young man in the rough overcoat has gone deep, the vodka he has drunk slightly clouds his brain, the weather is magnificent, and everything seems to be going well. He talks without ceasing, and at every stopping place runs to the refreshment bar. Feeling the need of a listener, he takes with him first the guard, and then the engine-driver, and does not simply drink, but makes a long business of it, with suitable remarks and clinking of glasses.

"You have your job and we have ours," he says with an affable smile. "May God prosper us and you, and not our will but His be done."

The vodka gradually excites him and he is worked up to a great pitch of energy. He wants to bestir himself, to fuss about, to make inquiries, to talk incessantly. At one minute he fumbles in his pockets and bundles and looks for some form. Then he thinks of something and cannot remember it; then takes out his pocketbook, and with no sort of object counts over his money. He bustles about, sighs and groans, clasps his hands. . . . Laying out before him the letters and telegrams from the meat salesmen in the city, bills, post office and telegraphic receipt forms, and his note book, he reflects aloud and insists on Yasha's listening.

And when he is tired of reading over forms and talking about prices, he gets out at the stopping places, runs to the vans where his cattle are, does nothing, but simply clasps his hands and exclaims in horror.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" he says in a complaining voice. "Holy Martyr Vlassy! Though they are bullocks, though they are beasts, yet they want to eat and drink as men do. . . . It's four days and nights since they have drunk or eaten. Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

Yasha follows him and does what he is told like an obedient son. He does not like the old man's frequent visits to the refreshment bar. Though he is afraid of his father, he cannot refrain from remarking on it.

"So you have begun already!" he says, looking sternly at the old man. "What are you rejoicing at? Is it your name-day or what?"

"Don't you dare teach your father."

"Fine goings on!"

When he has not to follow his father along the other vans Yasha sits on the cape and strums on the accordion. Occasionally he gets out and walks lazily beside the train; he stands by the engine and turns a prolonged, unmoving stare on the wheels or on the workmen tossing

blocks of wood into the tender; the hot engine wheezes, the falling blocks come down with the mellow, hearty thud of fresh wood; the engine-driver and his assistant, very phlegmatic and imperturbable persons, perform incomprehensible movements and don't hurry themselves. After standing for a while by the engine, Yasha saunters lazily to the station; here he looks at the eatables in the refreshment bar, reads aloud some quite uninteresting notice, and goes back slowly to the cattle van. His face expresses neither boredom nor desire; apparently he does not care where he is, at home, in the van, or by the engine.

Towards evening the train stops near a big station. The lamps have only just been lighted along the line; against the blue background in the fresh limpid air the lights are bright and pale like stars; they are only red and glowing under the station roof, where it is already dark. All the lines are loaded up with carriages, and it seems that if another train came in there would be no place for it. Yasha runs to the station for boiling water to make the evening tea. Well-dressed ladies and high-school boys are walking on the platform. If one looks into the distance from the platform there are far-away lights twinkling in the evening dusk on both sides of the station -- that is the town. What town? Yasha does not care to know. He sees only the dim lights and wretched buildings beyond the station, hears the cabmen shouting, feels a sharp, cold wind on his face, and imagines that the town is probably disagreeable, uncomfortable, and dull.

While they are having tea, when it is quite dark and a lantern is hanging on the wall again as on the previous evening, the train quivers from a slight shock and begins moving backwards. After going a little way it stops; they hear indistinct shouts, someone sets the chains clanking near the buffers and shouts, "Ready!" The train moves and goes forward. Ten minutes later it is dragged back again.

Getting out of the van, Malahin does not recognize his train. His eight vans of bullocks are standing in the same row with some trolleys which were not a part of the train before. Two or three of these are loaded with rubble and the others are empty. The guards running to and fro on the platform are strangers. They give unwilling and indistinct answers to his questions. They have no thoughts to spare for Malahin; they are in a hurry to get the train together so as to finish as soon as possible and be back in the warmth.

"What number is this?" asks Malahin

"Number eighteen."

"And where is the troop train? Why have you taken me off the troop train?"

Getting no answer, the old man goes to the station. He looks first for the familiar figure of the head guard and, not finding him, goes to the station-master. The station-master is sitting at a table in his own room, turning over a bundle of forms. He is busy, and affects not to see the newcomer. His appearance is impressive: a cropped black head, prominent ears, a long hooked nose, a swarthy face; he has a forbidding and, as it were, offended expression. Malahin begins making his complaint at great length.

"What?" queries the station-master. "How is this?" He leans against the back of his chair and goes on, growing indignant: "What is it? and why shouldn't you go by number eighteen? Speak more clearly, I don't understand! How is it? Do you want me to be

everywhere at once?"

He showers questions on him, and for no apparent reason grows sterner and sterner. Malahin is already feeling in his pocket for his pocketbook, but in the end the station-master, aggrieved and indignant, for some unknown reason jumps up from his seat and runs out of the room. Malahin shrugs his shoulders, and goes out to look for someone else to speak to.

From boredom or from a desire to put the finishing stroke to a busy day, or simply that a window with the inscription "Telegraph!" on it catches his eye, he goes to the window and expresses a desire to send off a telegram. Taking up a pen, he thinks for a moment, and writes on a blue form: "Urgent. Traffic Manager. Eight vans of live stock. Delayed at every station. Kindly send an express number. Reply paid. Malahin."

Having sent off the telegram, he goes back to the station-master's room. There he finds, sitting on a sofa covered with gray cloth, a benevolent-looking gentleman in spectacles and a cap of raccoon fur; he is wearing a peculiar overcoat very much like a lady's, edged with fur, with frogs and slashed sleeves. Another gentleman, dried-up and sinewy, wearing the uniform of a railway inspector, stands facing him.

"Just think of it," says the inspector, addressing the gentleman in the queer overcoat. "I'll tell you an incident that really is A1! The Z. railway line in the coolest possible way stole three hundred trucks from the N. line. It's a fact, sir! I swear it! They carried them off, repainted them, put their letters on them, and that's all about it. The N. line sends its agents everywhere, they hunt and hunt. And then -- can you imagine it? -- the Company happen to come upon a broken-down carriage of the Z. line. They repair it at their depot, and all at once, bless my soul! see their own mark on the wheels What do you say to that? Eh? If I did it they would send me to Siberia, but the railway companies simply snap their fingers at it!"

It is pleasant to Malahin to talk to educated, cultured people. He strokes his beard and joins in the conversation with dignity.

"Take this case, gentlemen, for instance," he says. "I am transporting cattle to X. Eight vanloads. Very good. . . . Now let us say they charge me for each vanload as a weight of ten tons; eight bullocks don't weigh ten tons, but much less, yet they don't take any notice of that. . . ."

At that instant Yasha walks into the room looking for his father. He listens and is about to sit down on a chair, but probably thinking of his weight goes and sits on the window-sill

"They don't take any notice of that," Malahin goes on, "and charge me and my son the third-class fare, too, forty-two roubles, for going in the van with the bullocks. This is my son Yakov. I have two more at home, but they have gone in for study. Well and apart from that it is my opinion that the railways have ruined the cattle trade. In old days when they drove them in herds it was better."

The old man's talk is lengthy and drawn out. After every sentence he looks at Yasha as though he would say: "See how I am talking to clever people."

"Upon my word!" the inspector interrupts him. "No one is indignant, no one criticizes. And why? It is very simple. An abomination strikes the eye and arouses indignation only when it is exceptional, when the established order is broken by it. Here, where, saving your presence, it constitutes the long-established program and forms and enters into the basis of the order itself, where every sleeper on the line bears the trace of it and stinks of it, one too easily grows accustomed to it! Yes, sir!"

The second bell rings, the gentlemen in the queer overcoat gets up. The inspector takes him by the arm and, still talking with heat, goes off with him to the platform. After the third bell the station-master runs into his room, and sits down at his table.

"Listen, with what number am I to go?" asks Malahin.

The station-master looks at a form and says indignantly:

"Are you Malahin, eight vanloads? You must pay a rouble a van and six roubles and twenty kopecks for stamps. You have no stamps. Total, fourteen roubles, twenty kopecks."

Receiving the money, he writes something down, dries it with sand, and, hurriedly snatching up a bundle of forms, goes quickly out of the room.

At ten o'clock in the evening Malahin gets an answer from the traffic manager: "Give precedence."

Reading the telegram through, the old man winks significantly and, very well pleased with himself, puts it in his pocket.

"Here," he says to Yasha, "look and learn."

At midnight his train goes on. The night is dark and cold like the previous one; the waits at the stations are long. Yasha sits on the cape and imperturbably strums on the accordion, while the old man is still more eager to exert himself. At one of the stations he is overtaken by a desire to lodge a complaint. At his request a gendarme sits down and writes:

"November 10, 188-. -- I, non-commissioned officer of the Z. section of the N. police department of railways, Ilya Tchered, in accordance with article II of the statute of May 19, 1871, have drawn up this protocol at the station of X. as herewith follows. . . ."

"What am I to write next?" asks the gendarme.

Malahin lays out before him forms, postal and telegraph receipts, accounts. . . . He does not know himself definitely what he wants of the gendarme; he wants to describe in the protocol not any separate episode but his whole journey, with all his losses and conversations with station-masters -- to describe it lengthily and vindictively.

"At the station of Z.," he says, "write that the station-master unlinked my vans from the troop train because he did not like my countenance."

And he wants the gendarme to be sure to mention his countenance. The latter listens

wearily, and goes on writing without hearing him to the end. He ends his protocol thus:

"The above deposition I, non-commissioned officer Tchered, have written down in this protocol with a view to present it to the head of the Z. section, and have handed a copy thereof to Gavril Malahin."

The old man takes the copy, adds it to the papers with which his side pocket is stuffed, and, much pleased, goes back to his van.

In the morning Malahin wakes up again in a bad humor, but his wrath vents itself not on Yasha but the cattle.

"The cattle are done for!" he grumbles. "They are done for! They are at the last gasp! God be my judge! they will all die. Tfoo!"

The bullocks, who have had nothing to drink for many days, tortured by thirst, are licking the hoar frost on the walls, and when Malachin goes up to them they begin licking his cold fur jacket. From their clear, tearful eyes it can be seen that they are exhausted by thirst and the jolting of the train, that they are hungry and miserable.

"It's a nice job taking you by rail, you wretched brutes!" mutters Malahin. "I could wish you were dead to get it over! It makes me sick to look at you!"

At midday the train stops at a big station where, according to the regulations, there was drinking water provided for cattle.

Water is given to the cattle, but the bullocks will not drink it: the water is too cold. . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Two more days and nights pass, and at last in the distance in the murky fog the city comes into sight. The journey is over. The train comes to a standstill before reaching the town, near a goods' station. The bullocks, released from the van, stagger and stumble as though they were walking on slippery ice.

Having got through the unloading and veterinary inspection, Malahin and Yasha take up their quarters in a dirty, cheap hotel in the outskirts of the town, in the square in which the cattle-market is held. Their lodgings are filthy and their food is disgusting, unlike what they ever have at home; they sleep to the harsh strains of a wretched steam hurdy-gurdy which plays day and night in the restaurant under their lodging.

The old man spends his time from morning till night going about looking for purchasers, and Yasha sits for days in the hotel room, or goes out into the street to look at the town. He sees the filthy square heaped up with dung, the signboards of restaurants, the turreted walls of a monastery in the fog. Sometimes he runs across the street and looks into the grocer's shop, admires the jars of cakes of different colors, yawns, and lazily saunters back to his room. The city does not interest him.

At last the bullocks are sold to a dealer. Malahin hires drovers. The cattle are divided into

herds, ten in each, and driven to the other end of the town. The bullocks, exhausted, go with drooping heads through the noisy streets, and look indifferently at what they see for the first and last time in their lives. The tattered drovers walk after them, their heads drooping too. They are bored. . . . Now and then some drover starts out of his brooding, remembers that there are cattle in front of him intrusted to his charge, and to show that he is doing his duty brings a stick down full swing on a bullock's back. The bullock staggers with the pain, runs forward a dozen paces, and looks about him as though he were ashamed at being beaten before people.

After selling the bullocks and buying for his family presents such as they could perfectly well have bought at home, Malahin and Yasha get ready for their journey back. Three hours before the train goes the old man, who has already had a drop too much with the purchaser and so is fussy, goes down with Yasha to the restaurant and sits down to drink tea. Like all provincials, he cannot eat and drink alone: he must have company as fussy and as fond of sedate conversation as himself.

"Call the host!" he says to the waiter; "tell him I should like to entertain him."

The hotel-keeper, a well-fed man, absolutely indifferent to his lodgers, comes and sits down to the table.

"Well, we have sold our stock," Malahin says, laughing. "I have swapped my goat for a hawk. Why, when we set off the price of meat was three roubles ninety kopecks, but when we arrived it had dropped to three roubles twenty-five. They tell us we are too late, we should have been here three days earlier, for now there is not the same demand for meat, St. Philip's fast has come. . . . Eh? It's a nice how-do-you-do! It meant a loss of fourteen roubles on each bullock. Yes. But only think what it costs to bring the stock! Fifteen roubles carriage, and you must put down six roubles for each bullock, tips, bribes, drinks, and one thing and another. . . ."

The hotel-keeper listens out of politeness and reluctantly drinks tea. Malahin sighs and groans, gesticulates, jests about his ill-luck, but everything shows that the loss he has sustained does not trouble him much. He doesn't mind whether he has lost or gained as long as he has listeners, has something to make a fuss about, and is not late for his train.

An hour later Malahin and Yasha, laden with bags and boxes, go downstairs from the hotel room to the front door to get into a sledge and drive to the station. They are seen off by the hotel-keeper, the waiter, and various women. The old man is touched. He thrusts ten-kopeck pieces in all directions, and says in a sing-song voice:

"Good by, good health to you! God grant that all may be well with you. Please God if we are alive and well we shall come again in Lent. Good-by. Thank you. God bless you!"

Getting into the sledge, the old man spends a long time crossing himself in the direction in which the monastery walls make a patch of darkness in the fog. Yasha sits beside him on the very edge of the seat with his legs hanging over the side. His face as before shows no sign of emotion and expresses neither boredom nor desire. He is not glad that he is going home, nor sorry that he has not had time to see the sights of the city.

"Drive on!"

The cabman whips up the horse and, turning round, begins swearing at the heavy and cumbersome luggage.

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\* On many railway lines, in order to avoid accidents, it is against the regulations to carry hay on the trains, and so live stock are without fodder on the journey. -- Author's Note.

\*\*The train destined especially for the transport of troops is called the troop train; when they are no troops it takes goods, and goes more rapidly than ordinary goods train. -- Author's Note.

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