

The Petchenyeg

Anton Chekhov

IVAN ABRAMITCH ZHMUHIN, a retired Cossack officer, who had once served in the Caucasus, but now lived on his own farm, and who had once been young, strong, and vigorous, but now was old, dried up, and bent, with shaggy eyebrows and a greenish-grey moustache, was returning from the town to his farm one hot summer's day. In the town he had confessed and received absolution, and had made his will at the notary's (a fortnight before he had had a slight stroke), and now all the while he was in the railway carriage he was haunted by melancholy, serious thoughts of approaching death, of the vanity of vanities, of the transitoriness of all things earthly. At the station of Provalye -- there is such a one on the Donetz line -- a fair-haired, plump, middle-aged gentleman with a shabby portfolio stepped into the carriage and sat down opposite. They got into conversation.

"Yes," said Ivan Abramitch, looking pensively out of window, "it is never too late to marry. I myself married when I was forty-eight; I was told it was late, but it has turned out that it was not late or early, but simply that it would have been better not to marry at all. Everyone is soon tired of his wife, but not everyone tells the truth, because, you know, people are ashamed of an unhappy home life and conceal it. It's 'Manya this' and 'Manya that' with many a man by his wife's side, but if he had his way he'd put that Manya in a sack and drop her in the water. It's dull with one's wife, it's mere foolishness. And it's no better with one's children, I make bold to assure you. I have two of them, the rascals. There's nowhere for them to be taught out here in the steppe; I haven't the money to send them to school in Novo Tcherkask, and they live here like young wolves. Next thing they will be murdering someone on the highroad."

The fair-haired gentleman listened attentively, answered questions briefly in a low voice, and was apparently a gentleman of gentle and modest disposition. He mentioned that he was a lawyer, and that he was going to the village Dyuevka on business.

"Why, merciful heavens, that is six miles from me!" said Zhmuhin in a tone of voice as though someone were disputing with him. "But excuse me, you won't find horses at the station now. To my mind, the very best thing you can do, you know, is to come straight to me, stay the night, you know, and in the morning drive over with my horses."

The lawyer thought a moment and accepted the invitation.

When they reached the station the sun was already low over the steppe. They said nothing all the way from the station to the farm: the jolting prevented conversation. The trap bounded up and down, squeaked, and seemed to be sobbing, and the lawyer, who was sitting very uncomfortably, stared before him, miserably hoping to see the farm. After they had driven five or six miles there came into view in the distance a low-pitched house and a yard enclosed by a fence made of dark, flat stones standing on end; the roof was green, the stucco was peeling off, and the windows were little narrow slits like screwed-up eyes. The farm stood in the full sunshine, and there was no sign either of water or trees anywhere round. Among the neighbouring landowners and the peasants it was known as the Petchenyegs' farm. Many years before, a land surveyor, who was passing through the neighbourhood and put up at the farm, spent the whole night talking to Ivan Abramitch, was not favourably impressed, and as he was driving away in the morning said to him grimly:

Livros Grátis

<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>

Milhares de livros grátis para download.

"You are a Petchenyeg,* my good sir!"

* The Petchenyegs were a tribe of wild Mongolian nomads who made frequent inroads upon the Russians in the tenth and eleventh centuries.--Translator's Note.

From this came the nickname, the Petchenyegs' farm, which stuck to the place even more when Zhmuhin's boys grew up and began to make raids on the orchards and kitchen-gardens. Ivan Abramitch was called "You Know," as he usually talked a very great deal and frequently made use of that expression.

In the yard near a barn Zhmuhin's sons were standing, one a young man of nineteen, the other a younger lad, both barefoot and bareheaded. Just at the moment when the trap drove into the yard the younger one flung high up a hen which, cackling, described an arc in the air; the elder shot at it with a gun and the hen fell dead on the earth.

"Those are my boys learning to shoot birds flying," said Zhmuhin.

In the entry the travellers were met by a little thin woman with a pale face, still young and beautiful; from her dress she might have been taken for a servant.

"And this, allow me to introduce her," said Zhmuhin, "is the mother of my young cubs. Come, Lyubov Osipovna," he said, addressing her, "you must be spry, mother, and get something for our guest. Let us have supper. Look sharp!"

The house consisted of two parts: in one was the parlour and beside it old Zhmuhin's bedroom, both stuffy rooms with low ceilings and multitudes of flies and wasps, and in the other was the kitchen in which the cooking and washing was done and the labourers had their meals; here geese and turkey-hens were sitting on their eggs under the benches, and here were the beds of Lyubov Osipovna and her two sons. The furniture in the parlour was unpainted and evidently roughly made by a carpenter; guns, game-bags, and whips were hanging on the walls, and all this old rubbish was covered with the rust of years and looked grey with dust. There was not one picture; in the corner was a dingy board which had at one time been an ikon.

A young Little Russian woman laid the table and handed ham, then beetroot soup. The visitor refused vodka and ate only bread and cucumbers.

"How about ham?" asked Zhmuhin.

"Thank you, I don't eat it," answered the visitor, "I don't eat meat at all."

"Why is that?"

"I am a vegetarian. Killing animals is against my principles."

Zhmuhin thought a minute and then said slowly with a sigh:

"Yes . . . to be sure. . . . I saw a man who did not eat meat in town, too. It's a new religion they've got now. Well, it's good. We can't go on always shooting and slaughtering, you know; we must give it up

some day and leave even the beasts in peace. It's a sin to kill, it's a sin, there is no denying it. Sometimes one kills a hare and wounds him in the leg, and he cries like a child. . . . So it must hurt him!"

"Of course it hurts him; animals suffer just like human beings."

"That's true," Zhmuhin assented. "I understand that very well," he went on, musing, "only there is this one thing I don't understand: suppose, you know, everyone gave up eating meat, what would become of the domestic animals -- fowls and geese, for instance?"

"Fowls and geese would live in freedom like wild birds."

"Now I understand. To be sure, crows and jackdaws get on all right without us. Yes. . . . Fowls and geese and hares and sheep, all will live in freedom, rejoicing, you know, and praising God; and they will not fear us, peace and concord will come. Only there is one thing, you know, I can't understand," Zhmuhin went on, glancing at the ham. "How will it be with the pigs? What is to be done with them?"

"They will be like all the rest -- that is, they will live in freedom."

"Ah! Yes. But allow me to say, if they were not slaughtered they would multiply, you know, and then good-bye to the kitchen-gardens and the meadows. Why, a pig, if you let it free and don't look after it, will ruin everything in a day. A pig is a pig, and it is not for nothing it is called a pig. . . ."

They finished supper. Zhmuhin got up from the table and for a long while walked up and down the room, talking and talking. . . . He was fond of talking of something important or serious and was fond of meditating, and in his old age he had a longing to reach some haven, to be reassured, that he might not be so frightened of dying. He had a longing for meekness, spiritual calm, and confidence in himself, such as this guest of theirs had, who had satisfied his hunger on cucumbers and bread, and believed that doing so made him more perfect; he was sitting on a chest, plump and healthy, keeping silent and patiently enduring his boredom, and in the dusk when one glanced at him from the entry he looked like a big round stone which one could not move from its place. If a man has something to lay hold of in life he is all right.

Zhmuhin went through the entry to the porch, and then he could be heard sighing and saying reflectively to himself: "Yes. . . . To be sure. . . . By now it was dark, and here and there stars could be seen in the sky. They had not yet lighted up indoors. Someone came into the parlour as noiselessly as a shadow and stood still near the door. It was Lyubov Osipovna, Zhmuhin's wife.

"Are you from the town?" she asked timidly, not looking at her visitor.

"Yes, I live in the town."

"Perhaps you are something in the learned way, sir; be so kind as to advise us. We ought to send in a petition."

"To whom?" asked the visitor.

"We have two sons, kind gentleman, and they ought to have been sent to school long ago, but we never see anyone and have no one to advise us. And I know nothing. For if they are not taught they will have

to serve in the army as common Cossacks. It's not right, sir! They can't read and write, they are worse than peasants, and Ivan Abramitch himself can't stand them and won't let them indoors. But they are not to blame. The younger one, at any rate, ought to be sent to school, it is such a pity!" she said slowly, and there was a quiver in her voice; and it seemed incredible that a woman so small and so youthful could have grown-up children. "Oh, it's such a pity!"

"You don't know anything about it, mother, and it is not your affair," said Zhmuhin, appearing in the doorway. "Don't pester our guest with your wild talk. Go away, mother!"

Lyubov Osipovna went out, and in the entry repeated once more in a thin little voice: "Oh, it's such a pity!"

A bed was made up for the visitor on the sofa in the parlour, and that it might not be dark for him they lighted the lamp before the ikon. Zhmuhin went to bed in his own room. And as he lay there he thought of his soul, of his age, of his recent stroke which had so frightened him and made him think of death. He was fond of philosophizing when he was in quietness by himself, and then he fancied that he was a very earnest, deep thinker, and that nothing in this world interested him but serious questions. And now he kept thinking and he longed to pitch upon some one significant thought unlike others, which would be a guide to him in life, and he wanted to think out principles of some sort for himself so as to make his life as deep and earnest as he imagined that he felt himself to be. It would be a good thing for an old man like him to abstain altogether from meat, from superfluities of all sorts. The time when men give up killing each other and animals would come sooner or later, it could not but be so, and he imagined that time to himself and clearly pictured himself living in peace with all the animals, and suddenly he thought again of the pigs, and everything was in a tangle in his brain.

"It's a queer business, Lord have mercy upon us," he muttered, sighing heavily. "Are you asleep?" he asked.

"No."

Zhmuhin got out of bed and stopped in the doorway with nothing but his shirt on, displaying to his guest his sinewy legs, that looked as dry as sticks.

"Nowadays, you know," he began, "all sorts of telegraphs, telephones, and marvels of all kinds, in fact, have come in, but people are no better than they were. They say that in our day, thirty or forty years ago, men were coarse and cruel; but isn't it just the same now? We certainly did not stand on ceremony in our day. I remember in the Caucasus when we were stationed by a little river with nothing to do for four whole months -- I was an under-officer at that time -- something queer happened, quite in the style of a novel. Just on the banks of that river, you know, where our division was encamped, a wretched prince whom we had killed not long before was buried. And at night, you know, the princess used to come to his grave and weep. She would wail and wail, and moan and moan, and make us so depressed we couldn't sleep, and that's the fact. We couldn't sleep one night, we couldn't sleep a second; well, we got sick of it. And from a common-sense point of view you really can't go without your sleep for the devil knows what (excuse the expression). We took that princess and gave her a good thrashing, and she gave up coming. There's an instance for you. Nowadays, of course, there is not the same class of people, and they are not given to thrashing and they live in cleaner style, and there is more learning, but, you know, the soul is just the same: there is no change. Now, look here, there's a landowner living here among us; he has mines, you know; all sorts of tramps without passports who don't know where to go work for him. On Saturdays he has to settle up with the workmen, but he doesn't care to pay them,

you know, he grudges the money. So he's got hold of a foreman who is a tramp too, though he does wear a hat. 'Don't you pay them anything,' he says, 'not a kopeck; they'll beat you, and let them beat you,' says he, 'but you put up with it, and I'll pay you ten roubles every Saturday for it.' So on the Saturday evening the workmen come to settle up in the usual way; the foreman says to them: 'Nothing!' Well, word for word, as the master said, they begin swearing and using their fists. . . . They beat him and they kick him . . . you know, they are a set of men brutalized by hunger -- they beat him till he is senseless, and then they go each on his way. The master gives orders for cold water to be poured on the foreman, then flings ten roubles in his face. And he takes it and is pleased too, for indeed he'd be ready to be hanged for three roubles, let alone ten. Yes . . . and on Monday a new gang of workmen arrive; they work, for they have nowhere to go. . . . On Saturday it is the same story over again."

The visitor turned over on the other side with his face to the back of the sofa and muttered something.

"And here's another instance," Zhmuhin went on. "We had the Siberian plague here, you know -- the cattle die off like flies, I can tell you -- and the veterinary surgeons came here, and strict orders were given that the dead cattle were to be buried at a distance deep in the earth, that lime was to be thrown over them, and so on, you know, on scientific principles. My horse died too. I buried it with every precaution, and threw over three hundredweight of lime over it. And what do you think? My fine fellows -- my precious sons, I mean -- dug it up, skinned it, and sold the hide for three roubles; there's an instance for you. So people have grown no better, and however you feed a wolf he will always look towards the forest; there it is. It gives one something to think about, eh? How do you look at it?"

On one side a flash of lightning gleamed through a chink in the window-blinds. There was the stifling feeling of a storm coming, the gnats were biting, and Zhmuhin, as he lay in his bedroom meditating, sighed and groaned and said to himself: "Yes, to be sure ----" and there was no possibility of getting to sleep. Somewhere far, far away there was a growl of thunder.

"Are you asleep?"

"No," answered the visitor.

Zhmuhin got up, and thudding with his heels walked through the parlour and the entry to the kitchen to get a drink of water.

"The worst thing in the world, you know, is stupidity," he said a little later, coming back with a dipper. "My Lyubov Osipovna is on her knees saying her prayers. She prays every night, you know, and bows down to the ground, first that her children may be sent to school; she is afraid her boys will go into the army as simple Cossacks, and that they will be whacked across their backs with sabres. But for teaching one must have money, and where is one to get it? You may break the floor beating your head against it, but if you haven't got it you haven't. And the other reason she prays is because, you know, every woman imagines there is no one in the world as unhappy as she is. I am a plain-spoken man, and I don't want to conceal anything from you. She comes of a poor family, a village priest's daughter. I married her when she was seventeen, and they accepted my offer chiefly because they hadn't enough to eat; it was nothing but poverty and misery, while I have anyway land, you see -- a farm -- and after all I am an officer; it was a step up for her to marry me, you know. On the very first day when she was married she cried, and she has been crying ever since, all these twenty years; she has got a watery eye. And she's always sitting and thinking, and what do you suppose she is thinking about? What can a woman think about? Why, nothing. I must own I don't consider a woman a human being."

The visitor got up abruptly and sat on the bed.

"Excuse me, I feel stifled," he said; "I will go outside."

Zhmuhin, still talking about women, drew the bolt in the entry and they both went out. A full moon was floating in the sky just over the yard, and in the moonlight the house and barn looked whiter than by day; and on the grass brilliant streaks of moonlight, white too, stretched between the black shadows. Far away on the right could be seen the steppe, above it the stars were softly glowing -- and it was all mysterious, infinitely far away, as though one were gazing into a deep abyss; while on the left heavy storm-clouds, black as soot, were piling up one upon another above the steppe; their edges were lighted up by the moon, and it looked as though there were mountains there with white snow on their peaks, dark forests, the sea. There was a flash of lightning, a faint rumble of thunder, and it seemed as though a battle were being fought in the mountains.

Quite close to the house a little night-owl screeched monotonously:

"Asleep! asleep!"

"What time is it now?" asked the visitor.

"Just after one."

"How long it is still to dawn!"

They went back to the house and lay down again. It was time to sleep, and one can usually sleep so splendidly before rain; but the old man had a hankering after serious, weighty thoughts; he wanted not simply to think but to meditate, and he meditated how good it would be, as death was near at hand, for the sake of his soul to give up the idleness which so imperceptibly swallowed up day after day, year after year, leaving no trace; to think out for himself some great exploit -- for instance, to walk on foot far, far away, or to give up meat like this young man. And again he pictured to himself the time when animals would not be killed, pictured it clearly and distinctly as though he were living through that time himself; but suddenly it was all in a tangle again in his head and all was muddled.

The thunderstorm had passed over, but from the edges of the storm-clouds came rain softly pattering on the roof. Zhmuhin got up, stretching and groaning with old age, and looked into the parlour. Noticing that his visitor was not asleep, he said:

"When we were in the Caucasus, you know, there was a colonel there who was a vegetarian, too; he didn't eat meat, never went shooting, and would not let his servants catch fish. Of course, I understand that every animal ought to live in freedom and enjoy its life; only I don't understand how a pig can go about where it likes without being looked after. . . ."

The visitor got up and sat down. His pale, haggard face expressed weariness and vexation; it was evident that he was exhausted, and only his gentleness and the delicacy of his soul prevented him from expressing his vexation in words.

"It's getting light," he said mildly. "Please have the horse brought round for me."

"Why so? Wait a little and the rain will be over."

"No, I entreat you," said the visitor in horror, with a supplicating voice; "it is essential for me to go at once."

And he began hurriedly dressing.

By the time the horse was harnessed the sun was rising. It had just left off raining, the clouds were racing swiftly by, and the patches of blue were growing bigger and bigger in the sky. The first rays of the sun were timidly reflected below in the big puddles. The visitor walked through the entry with his portfolio to get into the trap, and at that moment Zhmuhin's wife, pale, and it seemed paler than the day before, with tear-stained eyes, looked at him intently without blinking, with the naïve expression of a little girl, and it was evident from her dejected face that she was envying him his freedom -- oh, with what joy she would have gone away from there! -- and she wanted to say something to him, most likely to ask advice about her children. And what a pitiable figure she was! This was not a wife, not the head of a house, not even a servant, but more like a dependent, a poor relation not wanted by anyone, a nonentity. . . . Her husband, fussing about, talking unceasingly, was seeing his visitor off, continually running in front of him, while she huddled up to the wall with a timid, guilty air, waiting for a convenient minute to speak.

"Please come again another time," the old man kept repeating incessantly; "what we have we are glad to offer, you know."

The visitor hurriedly got into the trap, evidently with relief, as though he were afraid every minute that they would detain him. The trap lurched about as it had the day before, squeaked, and furiously rattled the pail that was tied on at the back. He glanced round at Zhmuhin with a peculiar expression; it looked as though he wanted to call him a Petchenyeg, as the surveyor had once done, or some such name, but his gentleness got the upper hand. He controlled himself and said nothing. But in the gateway he suddenly could not restrain himself; he got up and shouted loudly and angrily:

"You have bored me to death."

And he disappeared through the gate.

Near the barn Zhmuhin's sons were standing; the elder held a gun, while the younger had in his hands a grey cockerel with a bright red comb. The younger flung up the cockerel with all his might; the bird flew upwards higher than the house and turned over in the air like a pigeon. The elder boy fired and the cockerel fell like a stone.

The old man, overcome with confusion, not knowing how to explain the visitor's strange, unexpected shout, went slowly back into the house. And sitting down at the table he spent a long while meditating on the intellectual tendencies of the day, on the universal immorality, on the telegraph, on the telephone, on velocipedes, on how unnecessary it all was; little by little he regained his composure, then slowly had a meal, drank five glasses of tea, and lay down for a nap.

Livros Grátis

(<http://www.livrosgratis.com.br>)

Milhares de Livros para Download:

[Baixar livros de Administração](#)

[Baixar livros de Agronomia](#)

[Baixar livros de Arquitetura](#)

[Baixar livros de Artes](#)

[Baixar livros de Astronomia](#)

[Baixar livros de Biologia Geral](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência da Computação](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência da Informação](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciência Política](#)

[Baixar livros de Ciências da Saúde](#)

[Baixar livros de Comunicação](#)

[Baixar livros do Conselho Nacional de Educação - CNE](#)

[Baixar livros de Defesa civil](#)

[Baixar livros de Direito](#)

[Baixar livros de Direitos humanos](#)

[Baixar livros de Economia](#)

[Baixar livros de Economia Doméstica](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação - Trânsito](#)

[Baixar livros de Educação Física](#)

[Baixar livros de Engenharia Aeroespacial](#)

[Baixar livros de Farmácia](#)

[Baixar livros de Filosofia](#)

[Baixar livros de Física](#)

[Baixar livros de Geociências](#)

[Baixar livros de Geografia](#)

[Baixar livros de História](#)

[Baixar livros de Línguas](#)

[Baixar livros de Literatura](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura de Cordel](#)
[Baixar livros de Literatura Infantil](#)
[Baixar livros de Matemática](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina](#)
[Baixar livros de Medicina Veterinária](#)
[Baixar livros de Meio Ambiente](#)
[Baixar livros de Meteorologia](#)
[Baixar Monografias e TCC](#)
[Baixar livros Multidisciplinar](#)
[Baixar livros de Música](#)
[Baixar livros de Psicologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Química](#)
[Baixar livros de Saúde Coletiva](#)
[Baixar livros de Serviço Social](#)
[Baixar livros de Sociologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Teologia](#)
[Baixar livros de Trabalho](#)
[Baixar livros de Turismo](#)