

Muscovite Spring (I)

Stories of a Reckless Girl

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Alexander Nikolayevich

Alexander Nikolayevich and Ivan Ivanovich lunch in one of the most select restaurants in Moscow.

The taste of caviar, smoked salmon and soft cherry pie is sometimes quenched with a pony of vodka, poured down with immeasurable courage by these two gentlemen, whom only God knows what mystery brought them together and allowed a friendship between Alexander Nikolayevich, a charming and elegant man, and Ivan Ivanovich, a vain and greedy snob.

Could they have shared a common passion for playing cards or French literature, or perhaps, could fate's way be made responsible for them sitting at this very table on a sunny April afternoon?

Ivan Ivanovich orders tea as well. He leisurely sweetens it with exactly five heaped spoons of sugar and then sips from his porcelain teacup while holding up his right hand pinkie.

Alexander Nikolayevich shifts in his chair, looking as if nothing pleases him. At times, he watches the two elderly women sharing desert, other times, he looks over the window at the hasty people passing by on the sidewalk without even casting a look at the restaurant.

‘If I try harder I think I could hear their thoughts’, Alexander Nikolayevich said out loud, taking even himself by surprise.

‘What is that you said, my dear friend?’, Ivan Ivanovich replied mouthful.

‘Nothing, nothing. I was thinking aloud.’

‘I hope we will manage to find a coach soon, since everybody’s out on the streets at this time of day.’

‘We will. We will, Ivan Ivanovich. Not to worry.’

Ivan Ivanovich beckons to the waiter to bring him another glass of vodka and stuffs another piece of pie into his mouth.

Alexander Nikolayevich is completely absent minded and cannot follow his mate’s speech about the bank accounts owned by the powerful figures of Moscow.

He shakes his head and blinks as if he’s listening, while kneading the calico table napkin.

‘...and Orlov just bought his mistress a mink coat.’

Alexander Nikolayevich had to turn his attention to Ivan Ivanovich who had drawn nearer so as to whisper the latest news about ‘noble’ Orlov’s extramarital life.

The waiter shows up at the table and interrupts their private conversation by discreetly clearing his throat.

Ivan Ivanovich personally takes the glass of vodka from the salver and treats himself with a serious gulp which brings the red up to his cheeks.

‘You know’, Alexander Nikolayevich began, ‘I cannot understand why people get married out of favour. Like me, for instance, I’m not in love with Valeriya Sinadina Pavlova, but I must please my family by tying myself to her.’

A few seconds pass away. The faces of the two elderly women sitting at the table next to theirs are lost in a moment of melancholy and Ivan Ivanovich seems to be thinking and pondering over his friend's statement. He finishes drinking his vodka, sets his pocket watch after the restaurant's and passes his hand through the toupee which covers up his premature baldness.

'We will indeed have a hard time finding a coach at this time of day, Alexander Nikolayevich.'

(To be continued)

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