

MY BROTHER AT HOME¹

BY ALEXANDER CHEKHOV

[ANTON'S CHEKHOV'S eldest brother here gives a picture of the family life when Anton was going up for his final examination in medicine. Only the sister Marie is disguised as Ludniska. The brothers bear their real names, and the mother, the aunt, even the dog, are all on hand.]

ANTON PAVLOVICH, a medical student in his fifth course, sat at his table and read the lectures on hygiene. To-morrow would be his exam. With one hand he supported his head, with the other he nervously turned the pages of the lectures. He hurried to read through, to master, to group together, and to get it all in as speedily as possible, so that he could appear before the examining professor the next day with a clear face and unblushing. For that purpose he shut the door of his room, and with the zeal of a man who has an exam. hanging over his head he gave himself to the study of the unfamiliar science.

'Confound it!' he muttered to himself; 'somehow I'll have to get through this tough job. But there's so little time. Anyhow, I'll manage it, provided only the locust does not disturb me. . . .'

By the 'locust' he meant Mamma, Auntie, and the other members of the family. Alas, a quarter of an hour later the door gently opened, and through the aperture Auntie Glafira's face thrust itself, all wrinkled like a baked

apple. With much timidity, yet in a loud whisper, she began calling the pet dog.

'Corbey, Corbey boy, Corbeau, come — have something to eat. . . . Poor thing, it has had nothing to-day. . . . Corbey!'

Anton silently looked under the table and under the chairs, and quietly said: —

'Auntie, the dog is n't here. You must look for it somewhere else. And please don't interrupt me.'

'All right, my dear, I won't. Only the dog is sure to be hungry. It'll break my heart.'

'Well, you can find it and feed it. Only leave me alone. I asked you all not to come in here this evening.'

'All right, darling Antosha, read on, and good luck. . . . We won't come in — no, we won't. Only you see it's a sin in God's sight to let an animal go hungry. Yes, yes, I'm going; don't be cross. . . .'

Auntie disappeared. Anton set himself to work:

'Antosha, may I come in?' came Mother's voice from behind the door. 'Only for a second. I won't disturb you.'

'Well?'

Mother came in.

'You know, the washerwoman has n't brought your shirt for to-morrow. How will you go to your exam. to-morrow? I sent three times to her, the villainess; she says the air is damp and the linen does n't dry. Do tell me, for the love of

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our Saviour, what to do. Your professor surely is n't a youngster. . . . He'll see at once that you're wearing a dirty shirt. . . .'

'Please leave me alone. I'll manage in the dirty shirt. Can't you see that you're hindering me in my work?'

'Who? I hindering you?' Merciful heavens! I take all the trouble I can to see that he has clean linen, and now he blames me! That's right — beget children, spend all your health on them, and then wait for their gratitude!'

'Will you keep on like that for a long time?'

'I'm going — I'm going! Only let me speak my mind. How I ached for you; how I suffered when you all were young; what a lot I had to endure from your father on your account. . . .'

Anton got up impatiently, and with his lectures in his hands he began pacing the room.

'You're right,' he said. 'I value it all; only give me the chance of reading in peace what I must, am obliged to, do now. You know, don't you, that I have an exam. to-morrow?' And stopping his ears with his hands, Anton resumed his reading. Mother went on talking for another three minutes; but seeing that she was not being listened to, she left the room. Yet she went away complaining. Anton plunged again into his lectures.

From behind the door came the voice of his brother, a schoolboy.

'Anton, have n't you got my pencil on your table? Sorry to trouble you. . . . I see you have got it in your hand. You're using it?'

'Do you want it?'

'No, not particularly. I only wanted to know who had my pencil. Excuse my disturbing you. By the way, how are things with you? Mother said you had an exam. to-morrow. . . . Well, how are things? Are you ready or not?

Do you hope to pass it? Pity I'm not a student, for I might help you. I could shove under the door an answer to the examiner's question. Never mind my schoolboy's uniform; it does n't signify that I understand less than —'

'Look here, Misha,' Anton said imploringly, 'I have no time now to chat with you. Leave me in peace, and, if you can and wish, see that the women-folk don't disturb me.'

'Right you are. Be sure I shall use all my influence.'

'But you, too, must take yourself off to the Devil.'

'Thanks, awfully.'

The schoolboy brother went away terribly hurt. Anton resumed his reading, and even sat down again.

In two minutes the door timidly opened. Auntie thrust her head through.

'Antosha, why did you hurt Misha?'

Anton went on reading.

'He's crying now. To hurt the boy for no reason at all, for just nothing. He only wanted just to have a little talk. . . .'

'Auntie, if you care for me ever so little, please go away.'

'The only thing he knows: "Go away — go away!" When I called here for the little dog I saw the frightful eyes you made at me; I saw your savage look. All the same, you should n't have hurt Misha. On the Day of Judgment you will have to account for it. . . .'

'God! How can one work for an exam. in such conditions?'

'Work — please do. Who does n't let you?' Auntie exclaimed in surprise, and went out.

'Now, thank Heaven!' Anton said in a whisper. But —

Entered his only sister, Ludnisa: —
'Excuse me, Antosha, I'm so trou-

bled. Tell me, please, what does "psychic substance" mean? Do explain it to me; be so good.'

'My dear, I have no time; nor do I know.'

'But you are at the faculty of medicine!'

'What of that?'

'What? You must know everything!'

'Really, you must leave me alone now, my dear. . . .'

'That's the only thing I hear from you. You're rude. I'm going. You are rude!'

After his sister left the room Anton breathed freely and plunged into his lectures.

Silence fell on the house. Then Mother began ever so gently turning her worn-out sewing machine; but that deliberate slowness was apt to set even the strongest nerves on edge. Mother tried to turn the wheel softly, so as not to disturb Anton, without noticing, however, that the sound was heart-rending.

'Antosha, may Mother work the machine as usual?' asked Auntie, thrusting her head in again.

'Off you go! She may!'

'Glory be to the Lord! And we'd thought you would n't permit her.'

Came a sudden and furious ringing of the bell. Furious knocks followed. Entered, somewhat staggering, Anton's elder brother, a boozier, though a nice fellow; but always in fear for his state of health.

'Anton, I've come to you for a prescription.'

'What's wrong with you?'

'The liver. I'm afraid it must be pneumonia in my lungs. Altogether rotten. Give me a prescription!'

'Don't drink too much vodka . . . and if you can, take yourself off at once. . . . But wait a moment — what have you had to-day?'

'Only vodka and beer. I say, had n't you better come to my place? You could examine me there — give me an auscultation; but you must use a Tcherenov stethoscope — I don't believe in any other.'

'Have you anyone there?'

'Not a soul!'

Anton thought for a moment.

'Well, now, forget your liver, which gives you no pain. . . .'

'That is so. But I'm only afraid that it might perhaps go wrong.'

'Keep quiet. And so, I say, forget your liver, have another bottle of beer, and go straight to bed. I'm coming along with you to take your pulse. I'll stay to-night with you. Have you got lamp oil? That's right. You need n't take any sudorific. I'll take good care of you. Come along!'

All the household came out to urge Anton to stay at home. But, for a reason quite inexplicable to them, Anton preferred the company of his drunken brother, and went away with him to drink — without, however, forgetting to take his lectures.

Having arrived at his brother's room, Anton gave him some more beer, put him to bed, took his pulse, and then sat down to study his lectures.

LIFE, LETTERS, AND THE ARTS

The Martyred Toad

To Dr. G. Kato, Professor of Physiology in the Keio University at Tokyo, the world owes a double debt of gratitude — the one scientific, the other moral. The Doctor's scientific fame rests on his discovery of a new theory regarding the effect of narcotics on the nervous system. He has shown that all our nerves succumb simultaneously to an anæsthetic, and not one after another in order of size.

To the layman, who does not know how such a fact is established, this announcement has the hollow ring peculiar to all scientific utterances. Not until the veil is lifted and the methods of research are revealed do we understand that the end is justified by the means. We now approach the second and more important part of the Doctor's contribution.

In 1922 Dr. Kato had embarked upon the study of this theme, and by the time of the earthquake his chain of evidence was nearly complete. As work was impossible during the disturbance, he set his assistants to catching toads, a sport in which they soon became highly proficient. Gruesome experiments ensued, and the curtain descends on the first act in December of the same year. Twenty specialists in laboratory overalls smeared with the blood of martyred toads cheer and weep over a glass of beer while their chief assures them that the truth of his discovery is established. The cheers are for the scientist; the tears, we hope, are for the seventy thousand toads who have died the death of martyrs to the true faith.

In the years that have elapsed since then, Dr. Kato has, we suspect, been haunted by the departed spirits of this horde of uncomplaining heroes. Only in this way can we explain his latest move. Early in August the International Physiological Conference is holding its twelfth annual meeting in Stockholm. Thither our Japanese doctor is repairing together with 118 Japanese toads. These he plans to present to various institutions in Germany and Sweden. Already his little traveling companions have been invited to make themselves at home in the aquarium at the Berlin Zoo. We should like to think that Dr. Kato is atoning for his wholesale slaughter by giving the friends and — who knows? — the relations of his victims the advantages of a European background unto the third and fourth generation.

The Soul of a Goldfish

THE *Saturday Review* of London recently offered a prize of one guinea 'for the best fragment, not exceeding five hundred words, of a novel in the ultra-subjective manner written from the point of view of a goldfish.' The following effort bore away the prize: —

. . . the waves of thought flowed out billowing, receding, breaking against the green, untamable ridges shaken by surging, golden restlessness.

You knew that you were beautiful. But then you had known that for a long, long time. Ever since you had seen the shadow of a lucent flame that was your swift, eager self startlingly alive against the dimness of an un-