Albion's Daughter

A splendid carriage with rubber tires, a fat coachman, and a velvet seat pulled up to the house of the landowner Gryabov. Out of the carriage sprang the district marshal of the nobility, Fyodor Andreyitch Ottsov. A sleepy footman met him in the hall.

"Are the masters at home?" asked the marshal.

"No, sir. The mistress has gone visiting with the children, and the master is fishing with the governess, miss. Since early morning, sir."

Ottsov stood for a moment, thought it over, and went down to the river to look for Gryabov. He found him about two versts from the house, on reaching the river. Looking down from the steep bank and seeing Gryabov, Ottsov burst out laughing... Gryabov, a big, fat man with a very large head, was sitting on the sand with his legs tucked under him Turkish-fashion, and fishing. His hat was on the back of his neck, and his necktie had slipped to one side. Beside him stood a tall, thin Englishwoman with bulging, crab-like eyes and a large bird's nose, resembling a hook more than a nose. She was dressed in a white muslin dress, through which her thin, yellow shoulders showed through strongly. A little gold watch hung from a gold belt. She was fishing too. A deathly silence reigned around them both. Both were motionless as the river on which their floats bobbed.

"The hunt is a mortal passion, but the fate is bitter!" laughed Ottsov. "How do you do, Ivan Kuzmitch!"

"Ah, is that you?" asked Gryabov, not taking his eyes off the water. "Come?"

"As you see... And you're still at your nonsense! Haven't got over it yet?"

"The devil knows... I've been fishing all day, since morning... Nothing's biting today. Neither I nor this hag have caught a thing. We sit and sit, and not a single thing! You could just shout for help."

"Oh, to hell with it. Let's go drink vodka!"

"Wait... Maybe we'll catch something. The fish bite better towards evening... I've been sitting here, brother, since early morning! It's such a bore, I can't even tell you. What devil made me take to this fishing! I know it's rubbish, and still I sit! I sit like some scoundrel, like a convict, and I stare at the water like some fool! I ought

to be going to the haymaking, and here I am fishing. Yesterday the bishop served at Khaponyevo, and I didn't go, I sat here with this sterlet... with this she-devil..."

"But... are you out of your mind?" asked Ottsov, glancing awkwardly at the Englishwoman. "Swearing in front of a lady... and about her at that..."

"The devil take her! It's all the same, she doesn't understand a word of Russian. Praise her or scold her, it's all the same to her! Look at that nose! One look at that nose and you'd faint! We sit together whole days, and not a single word! She stands there like a scarecrow, goggling her eyes at the water."

The Englishwoman yawned, changed her worm, and cast her line.

"I'm amazed, brother, I really am!" Gryabov went on. "The fool has lived in Russia ten years, and not a single word of Russian!.. Some little aristocrat of ours goes over to them and quickly learns to bark in their language, but they... the devil knows them! Look at the nose! Look at the nose!"

"Now, stop it... It's awkward... Why attack a woman?"

"She's not a woman, she's a spinster... She's dreaming of suitors, I'll bet, the devil's doll. And she smells of some kind of rot... I've come to hate her, brother! I can't look at her with indifference! When she looks at me with those great eyes, it makes my whole body creep, as if I'd struck my elbow on a railing. She likes fishing too. Look: she fishes and performs a rite! She looks at everything with contempt... She stands there, the wretch, and knows that she is a human being and that, therefore, she is the king of nature. And do you know what her name is? Wilka Charlyezovna Tfyce! Bah!.. you can't even say it!"

The Englishwoman, hearing her name, slowly turned her nose towards Gryabov and measured him with a contemptuous look. From Gryabov she raised her eyes to Ottsov and doused him with contempt. And all this silently, solemnly, and slowly.

"See?" asked Gryabov, roaring with laughter. "There, take that! Oh, you hag! I only keep this triton for the children's sake. If it weren't for the children, I wouldn't let her within ten versts of my estate... The nose is exactly like a hawk's... And the waist? This doll reminds me of a long nail. You know, I'd just take and hammer it into the ground. Wait... I think I've got a bite..."

Gryabov jumped up and raised his rod. The line went taut... Gryabov jerked it again and didn't pull out the hook.

"Snagged!" he said and winced. "On a rock, probably... Damn it..."

Suffering showed on Gryabov's face. Sighing, moving restlessly, and muttering curses, he began to jerk at the line. The jerking led to nothing. Gryabov turned pale.

"What a pity! I'll have to go into the water."

"Oh, drop it!"

"I can't... It's good fishing towards evening... What a commission, Lord forgive me! I'll have to go into the water. I'll have to! If only you knew how I don't want to undress! I'll have to shoo the Englishwoman away... It's awkward to undress in front of her. After all, she is a lady!"

Gryabov took off his hat and necktie.

"Miss... er..." he addressed the Englishwoman. "Miss Tfyce! Je vous prie... Well, how am I to tell her? Well, how am I to tell you so you'll understand? Listen... go over there! Go away over there! Do you hear?"

Miss Tfyce doused Gryabov with contempt and emitted a nasal sound.

"What's that? Don't understand? Go away, they're telling you, from here! I need to undress, you devil's doll! Go over there! Over there!"

Gryabov tugged at the miss's sleeve, pointed to the bushes, and squatted down: go behind the bushes and hide there... The Englishwoman, vigorously moving her eyebrows, rapidly spoke a long English sentence. The landowners burst out laughing.

"It's the first time in my life I've heard her voice... Quite a voice, I must say! She doesn't understand! Well, what am I to do with her?"

"Spit on it! Let's go have a drink of vodka!"

"I can't, they should be biting now... Evening... Well, what do you say I should do? What a commission! I'll have to undress in front of her..."

Gryabov took off his frock coat and waistcoat and sat down on the sand to take off his boots.

"Listen, Ivan Kuzmitch," said the marshal, laughing into his fist. "This, my friend, is mockery, torment."

"Nobody asked her not to understand! It's a lesson for them, foreigners!"

Gryabov took off his boots, his trousers, threw off his underclothes, and found himself in Adam's costume. Ottsov clutched his stomach. He turned red from both

laughter and embarrassment. The Englishwoman moved her eyebrows and blinked her eyes... A haughty, contemptuous smile flitted across her yellow face.

"I need to cool down," said Gryabov, slapping his thighs. "Tell me, if you please, Fyodor Andreyitch, why do I get this rash on my chest every summer?"

"Oh, get into the water quickly or cover yourself with something! You beast!"

"And she doesn't even blush, the wretch!" said Gryabov, getting into the water and crossing himself. "Brr... cold water... Look how she moves her eyebrows! She won't go away... She stands above the crowd! He-he-he... And she doesn't count us as human beings!"

Wading into the water up to his knees and stretching himself to his full enormous height, he winked and said:

"This, brother, is not England for her!"

Miss Tfyce coolly changed her worm, yawned, and cast her line. Ottsov turned away. Gryabov unhooked the line, ducked under, and clambered out of the water snorting. Two minutes later he was sitting on the sand again and fishing.

I beg you (French: Je vous prie).