Grisha

Grisha, a small, plump boy born two years and eight months ago, is walking with his nurse along the boulevard. He is wearing a long quilted burnous, a scarf, a big hat with a fluffy pom-pom, and warm galoshes. He feels stuffy and hot, and on top of that the April sun, now in full blaze, beats straight into his eyes and pinches his eyelids.

His whole clumsy figure, walking timidly and uncertainly, expresses extreme bewilderment.

Until now Grisha had known only one four-cornered world, where in one corner stood his bed, in another the nurse's trunk, in the third a chair, and in the fourth burned a votive lamp. If you looked under the bed, you would see a doll with a broken arm and a drum, and behind the nurse's trunk there were lots of different things: spools of thread, bits of paper, a box without a lid, and a broken jack-in-the-box. In this world, besides the nurse and Grisha, Mama and the cat were often to be found. Mama was like a doll, and the cat like Papa's fur coat, only the coat had no eyes or tail. From the world called the nursery, a door led into the space where they dined and drank tea. Here stood Grisha's chair on high legs and hung a clock, existing only to swing its pendulum and strike. From the dining room one could pass into the room where red armchairs stood. Here on the carpet there was a dark stain for which Grisha was still being threatened with a finger. Beyond this room there was another into which he was not allowed and where Papa flitted by — a most mysterious personage! The nurse and Mama were comprehensible: they dressed Grisha, fed him, and put him to bed, but what Papa existed for was unknown. There was another mysterious personage — Aunt, who had given Grisha the drum. She would appear and then disappear. Where did she disappear to? Grisha had more than once peeped under the bed, behind the trunk, and under the sofa, but she was not there...

In this same new world, where the sun cuts his eyes, there were so many Papas, Mamas, and Aunts that he did not know whom to run to. But strangest and most absurd of all were the horses. Grisha looked at their moving legs and could not understand anything: he looked at the nurse for her to resolve his bewilderment, but she was silent.

Suddenly he heard a terrible tramp... Along the boulevard, marching in step, a crowd of soldiers with red faces and bath brooms under their arms was moving straight toward him. Grisha went cold all over with terror and looked questioningly

at the nurse: was it dangerous? But the nurse did not run or cry, so it was not dangerous. Grisha followed the soldiers with his eyes and himself began to march in time with them.

Two big cats with long muzzles, lolling tongues, and tails cocked up ran across the boulevard. Grisha thought he too needed to run, and ran after the cats.

"Stop!" the nurse shouted at him, roughly grabbing his shoulders. "Where are you off to? Have you been told to play tricks?"

There was some nurse sitting and holding a small trough of oranges. Grisha walked past her and silently took an orange for himself.

"What are you doing that for?" cried his companion, slapping his hand and snatching the orange away. "Fool!"

Now Grisha would have liked with pleasure to pick up the little piece of glass lying underfoot and sparkling like a votive lamp, but he was afraid he would be struck on the hand again.

"My respects to you!" Grisha suddenly heard, almost right at his ear, someone's loud, deep voice, and saw a tall man with bright buttons.

To his great delight, this man offered his hand to the nurse, stopped with her, and began to talk. The glare of the sun, the noise of carriages, the horses, the bright buttons — all this was so amazingly new and not frightening that Grisha's soul was filled with a feeling of delight and he began to laugh.

"Let's go! Let's go!" he shouted at the man with the bright buttons, tugging at his coat tail.

"Where shall we go?" asked the man.

"Let's go!" insisted Grisha.

He wanted to say that it would be nice to take Papa, Mama, and the cat along too, but his tongue said quite the wrong thing.

A little later the nurse turned off the boulevard and led Grisha into a big yard where there was still snow. The man with the bright buttons also followed them. They carefully avoided the lumps of snow and puddles, then went up a dirty, dark staircase into a room. Here there was much smoke, it smelled of frying, and some woman was standing by the stove frying cutlets. The cook and the nurse kissed and, together with the man, sat down on a bench and began to talk in low voices. Grisha, wrapped up, became unbearably hot and stuffy.

"What's this about?" he thought, looking around.

He saw the dark ceiling, a fire hook with two prongs, the stove, which looked out with a big black hole...

"Ma-ma!" he drawled.

"There, there, there!" cried the nurse. "You'll wait!" The cook put a bottle, three glasses, and a pie on the table. The two women and the man with the bright buttons clinked glasses and drank several times each, and the man embraced now the nurse, now the cook. And then all three began to sing quietly.

Grisha reached for the pie and was given a piece. He ate and watched the nurse drink... He too wanted a drink.

"Give me! Nurse, give me!" he begged.

The cook let him take a sip from her glass. He stared with wide eyes, grimaced, coughed, and then waved his hands about for a long time, while the cook looked at him and laughed.

Having returned home, Grisha began to tell Mama, the walls, and the bed where he had been and what he had seen. He spoke not so much with his tongue as with his face and hands. He showed how the sun gleamed, how the horses ran, how the terrible stove looked, and how the cook drank...

In the evening he could not get to sleep at all. The soldiers with the brooms, the big cats, the horses, the piece of glass, the trough of oranges, the bright buttons — all this had gathered into a heap and was pressing on his brain. He tossed from side to side, babbled, and in the end, unable to bear his excitement, began to cry.

"But you have a fever!" said Mama, touching his forehead with her palm. "What could have caused this?"

"The stove!" cried Grisha. "Go away from here, stove!"

"Probably he ate too much..." decided Mama.

And Grisha, bursting with the impressions of the new life he had just experienced, received a spoonful of castor oil from Mama.