SENILIA PROSE POEMS — text 1 of 3

My dear reader, do not run through these poems in succession: you will probably get bored — and the book will fall from your hands. But read them piecemeal: one today, another tomorrow, — and perhaps one of them will drop something into your soul.

The last day of June; for a thousand versts around, Russia — the native land.

The whole sky is flooded with even blue; only one little cloud on it — now drifting, now melting. Calm, warmth... the air is like fresh milk!

Larks are ringing; pot-bellied pigeons are cooing; swallows wheel silently; horses snort and chew; dogs do not bark and stand, meekly wagging their tails.

There is a smell of smoke, and of grass — and a little of tar — and a little of leather. The hemp fields have already grown strong and give off their heavy but pleasant scent.

A deep but gentle ravine. On the sides, in several rows, big-headed willows split at the bottom. A stream runs along the ravine; at its bottom small pebbles seem to tremble through the light ripples. In the distance, at the edge of the earth and sky — a bluish line of a great river.

Along the ravine — on one side neat little barns, small huts with tightly closed doors; on the other side five or six pine log houses with shingle roofs. Above each roof a tall pole of a starling box; above each porch a carved iron curly-maned horse. The uneven window panes gleam with rainbow colors. Jugs with bouquets are painted on the shutters. In front of each hut stands properly a sound bench; on the earthen banks cats are curled up in balls, pricking up their translucent ears; behind the high thresholds the cool entryways darken.

I lie at the very edge of the ravine on a spread rug; around me whole heaps of freshly mown, overpoweringly fragrant hay. Clever hosts have scattered the hay in front of the huts: let it dry a little more in the hot sun, and then into the barn! How glorious it will be to sleep on it!

Curly children's heads stick out of every heap; crested hens are looking for midges and bugs in the hay; a white-lipped puppy is floundering in the tangled blades.

Russet-haired lads, in clean shirts girded low, in heavy boots with trim, exchange lively words, leaning with their chests on the unhitched cart, — they jest.

From the window peeks a round-faced young woman; she laughs either at their words or at the children's frolicking in the piled hay.

Another young woman with strong arms is pulling a large wet bucket from the well... The bucket trembles and sways on the rope, dropping long fiery drops.

Before me stands the old hostess in a new checkered skirt, in new bast shoes.

Large puffed beads in three rows are wrapped around the dark thin neck; the gray head is tied with a yellow kerchief with red speckles; it hangs low over the dimmed eyes.

But the aged eyes smile kindly; the whole wrinkled face smiles. Probably the old woman is living out her seventh decade... and even now you can see: she was a beauty in her time!

Spreading the sunburned fingers of her right hand, she holds a pot of cold unskimmed milk, straight from the cellar; the walls of the pot are covered with dewdrops, like pearls. On the palm of her left hand the old woman offers me a large slice of still warm bread. "Eat, my dear, to your health, passing guest!"

A rooster suddenly crowed and flapped his wings busily; in answer to him, unhurried, a locked-up calf mooed.

"— Good oats! — comes the voice of my coachman."

O contentment, peace, abundance of the free Russian village! O silence and grace!

And it seems to me: what need have we here of the cross on the dome of Holy Sophia in Tsargrad and all that we city people strive so hard for?