Spring Torrents

Happy years,
Happy days—
Like spring waters
They rushed past!

…At about two in the morning he returned to his study. He dismissed the servant who had lit the candles and, throwing himself into an armchair by the fireplace, covered his face with both hands.

Never before had he felt such weariness—of body and soul. He had spent the whole evening with pleasant ladies and educated men; some of the ladies were beautiful, almost all the men distinguished by wit and talents—he himself had conversed very successfully and even brilliantly... and, with all that, never before had that "taedium vitae," of which the Romans already spoke, that "disgust with life," seized him with such irresistible force, never before had it suffocated him. Were he a little younger, he would have wept from anguish, from boredom, from irritation: a bitter, acrid, burning bitterness, like the bitterness of wormwood, filled his whole soul. Something importunately loathsome, repulsively oppressive hemmed him in on all sides, like an autumn, dark night; and he knew not how to rid himself of this darkness, of this bitterness. There was no counting on sleep: he knew he would not fall asleep.

He began to reflect... slowly, languidly, and spitefully.

He reflected on the vanity, the pointlessness, the vulgar falsity of all human things. All ages gradually passed before his mind's eye (he himself had recently passed his fifty-second year)—and not one found mercy before him. Everywhere the same eternal pouring from empty into void, the same churning of water, the same half-conscientious, half-conscious self-delusion—whatever the child amuses itself with, so long as it does not cry—and then suddenly, quite like snow on one's head, old age will come crashing down—and with it that constantly growing, all-corroding and undermining fear of death... and splash into the abyss! It is well enough if life plays out that way! But otherwise, perhaps, before the end, infirmities, sufferings will spread like rust over iron... Not covered with stormy waves, as the poets describe it, did the sea of life appear to him—no; he imagined this sea as preternaturally smooth, motionless, and transparent to its very dark bottom; he himself sits in a small, unsteady boat—and there, on that dark, silty bottom, like enormous fish, ugly monsters are barely visible: all the ailments of life,

diseases, sorrows, madness, poverty, blindness... He looks—and now one of the monsters emerges from the gloom, rises higher and higher, becomes ever more distinct, ever more disgustingly distinct... Another minute—and the boat he is propping up will capsize! But now it seems to dim again, it recedes, sinks to the bottom—and lies there, barely stirring its fins... But the appointed day will come—and it will capsize the boat.

He shook his head, leapt from the armchair, paced the room once or twice, sat down at the writing desk and, pulling out one drawer after another, began rummaging through his papers, through old letters, mostly from women. He himself did not know why he was doing this, he was looking for nothing—he simply wanted to rid himself of the thoughts that tormented him by some outward occupation. Having unfolded several letters at random (in one of them there turned out to be a dried flower, tied with a faded ribbon)—he merely shrugged his shoulders and, glancing at the fireplace, tossed them aside, probably intending to burn all this useless rubbish. Hastily thrusting his hands now into one drawer, now into another, he suddenly opened his eyes wide and, slowly drawing out a small octagonal box of antique design, slowly lifted its lid. In the box, beneath a double layer of yellowed cotton wool, lay a small garnet cross.

For several moments he examined this cross in bewilderment—and suddenly gave a faint cry... His features expressed something between regret and joy. A similar expression appears on a man's face when he is suddenly confronted with another person whom he lost sight of long ago, whom he once loved tenderly and who now unexpectedly rises before his gaze, the same as ever—and utterly changed by the years.

He rose and, returning to the fireplace, sat down again in the armchair—and again covered his face with his hands... "Why today? precisely today?"—he thought, and he remembered much that had long passed...

This is what he remembered...

But first one must state his name, patronymic, and surname. His name was Sanin, Dmitry Pavlovich.

This is what he remembered:

The affair was in the summer of 1840. Sanin had passed his twenty-second year, and he was in Frankfurt, on his way back from Italy to Russia. He was a man of small means, but independent, almost without family. Upon the death of a distant relative, he had come into several thousand rubles—and he resolved to spend them abroad, before entering the service, before finally placing upon himself that official

collar without which a secure existence had become unthinkable for him. Sanin carried out his intention to the letter and managed so skillfully that on the day of his arrival in Frankfurt he had exactly as much money as was needed to reach Petersburg. In 1840 there were precious few railways; gentlemen tourists traveled by stagecoach. Sanin took a seat in the "Beiwagen"; but the stagecoach did not depart until the eleventh hour of the evening. There was plenty of time left. Fortunately, the weather was fine—and Sanin, after dining at the famous inn of the "White Swan," set off to wander about the city. He went to see Dannecker's Ariadne, which pleased him little, visited Goethe's house, from whose works he had, however, read only "Werther"—and that in a French translation; strolled along the bank of the Main, grew bored, as befits a respectable traveler; finally, in the sixth hour of the evening, tired, with dusty feet, he found himself in one of the most insignificant streets of Frankfurt. This street he could not forget for a long time afterward. On one of its few houses he saw a sign: "Italian Confectionery of Giovanni Roselli" announced itself to passersby. Sanin went in to drink a glass of lemonade; but in the first room, where, behind a modest counter, on the shelves of a painted cupboard, resembling an apothecary's, stood several bottles with gold labels and as many glass jars with rusks, chocolate cakes, and candies—in this room there was not a soul; only a gray cat sat blinking and purring, kneading its paws, on a tall wicker chair by the window, and, glowing bright red in the slanting ray of the evening sun, a large ball of red wool lay on the floor beside an overturned basket of carved wood. A muffled noise could be heard in the adjoining room. Sanin stood a while and, letting the bell on the door ring out to the end, said, raising his voice: "Is no one here?" In the same instant the door from the adjoining room opened wide—and Sanin could not help but be astonished.

in an additional (trailer) carriage (German: Beiwagen).