

Novgorod the Great

Andrew Drummond

CONTENTS

1. HER FIRST HUSBAND'S PECULIARLY BECOMING
NAKEDNESS.
2. A PERPETUITY OF SLOTH, IGNORANCE AND BIGOTED
SUPERSTITION.
3. HE FREQUENTLY MISTOOK A LAXATIVE FOR AN
APHRODISIAC.
4. NEVER WEAR RIGHT AND LEFT SHOES.
5. AT THE SIGHT OF THE INN-KEEPER'S DAUGHTER, HE
RECOVERS HIS APPETITE
6. HE VACATES HIS MARRIAGE-BED FOR THE HONOURED
GUEST.
7. A COUPLE OF RESTLESS HOURS ON A BED OF MOSS.
8. SHE FOLLOWS THE DEVIL THROUGH THE CLOSING DOOR.
9. AN OLD GENTLEMAN BLEACHED BY THE SHADOW OF
DEATH.
10. THE ENDLESS ROAD AND THE TYRANNY OF THE COACH.
11. HER SAD ACQUAINTANCE WITH MEN.
12. HER MOTHER ADVISED HER THAT A WOMAN NEEDS HAVE
SEVERAL HUSBANDS.
13. IN SPITE OF HIS TEETH, HE WAS STILL A FRENCHMAN.
14. HE SPEAKS OF THE NOCTURNAL SECRETS OF HIS HAREM.
15. NO BLANKET - A GREAT OVERSIGHT IN A SIBERIAN
WINTER.
16. NEVER MIND LONDON, HE SAID, HELP ME TO PISS.
17. HE TALKS BLITHELY OF REVOLUTION AS IF IT WERE OF
NO CONSEQUENCE.
18. THE PASSAGE OF LARGE ARMIES OF MICE.
19. LIBERTY ! - THE CRY OF THE FRENCHMAN AND THE END
OF ALL HONOUR.
20. HE FOUND THE LIFE OF A TROUBADOUR MOST
DESIRABLE.
21. LORD BYRON SWAM THE HELLESPONT, AND JOHN
COCHRANE THE OKHOTA.
22. THEY PICK UP A PEN AND CAST DOWN AUTOCRACY.

23. FREQUENTLY, TRUTH IS A LIBEL. THE GREATER THE TRUTH, THE GREATER THE LIBEL.
24. SHE CONSIDERS MARRIAGE; HE CONSIDERS ESCAPE.
25. IF ONE SLEEPS ON A RAISED BEDSTEAD, THE ALLIGATORS WILL NOT CARRY YOU OFF.
26. A LARGE SNAKE, WHOSE STING IS INSTANT DEATH.
27. THE FREE ENJOYMENT OF A PASSION.
28. I FORWARDED MY WIFE ON, IN THE CHARGE OF A COSSACK.
29. THIS MAN SMELLS WORSE THAN THE MAJOR'S BED-PAN.
30. CONFOUND THE KEY-HOLE, HE EXCLAIMED.
31. 'TIS THE COLOUR THEY CALL *BLACK* !
32. HER BEAUTY WOULD MUCH EXPOSE HER.
33. HE PREPARES TO TALK LONG AND LOUD OF LIBERTY.
34. DEGENERACY, RHUBARB AND MILLIONS OF SQUIRRELS.
35. HE TOOK THE ONLY COURSE OPEN TO AN HONOURABLE MAN, AND FLED TO EUROPE.
36. THE GOAT IS THE BEAST WHICH MOST DELIGHTS THE LADIES OF SCOTLAND.
37. IT WAS WITH SOME FACILITY THAT HE DEFRAUDED THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT.
38. OMELETTES.
39. THE SWAGGERING JACKS IN OFFICE.
40. WITH THESE SENTIMENTS, HE CONCLUDED HIS NARRATION.
41. THE BREAKFAST OF CHERNOBOG, MASTER OF THE INFERNAL DARKNESS.
42. AN AXE MAY STRIKE MORE SWIFTLY THAN A BOOK.
43. NO SOONER WAS THE BOTTLE EMPTY THAN SHE FELL TO MOURNING.
44. VLADIMIR IVANOVICH, SHE CRIED, YOU HAVE LOST YOUR MIND.
45. IT WAS, UNFORTUNATELY, A VERY EMPTY BOAST.
46. HE FINISHED - AS ALL MEN DO - WITH A GREAT DEAL OF NOISE.
47. THE TOMB BELCHED FORTH SMOKE AND FIRE.
48. HER HUSBAND IS ENGAGED IN THE MEASUREMENT OF THE BLACK SEA.

**HER FIRST HUSBAND'S
PECULIARLY BECOMING NAKEDNESS.**

“At last,” said Ksenia quite unnecessarily, “the morning.”

“And soon,” added Horatio, a great hope rising in his breast, “we shall have breakfast.”

Ksenia considered him thoughtfully for a moment. “I am, sir,” she began rather boldly, “as you know, a woman who has mourned the death of a husband.”

“Alas,” confirmed Horatio with far too much enthusiasm, anticipating those words which must surely follow.

“A husband,” asserted Ksenia, permitting herself to advance from the Particular to the General by virtue of having experienced some of those creatures at very close quarters indeed, “needs his breakfast.”

Horatio turned and eyed the front door of the inn which had, a moment before, slammed shut. “But perhaps we must wait a little longer.”

“No matter,” said Ksenia, so pressed by the light breeze that she leaned slightly into the shelter of Horatio’s arm.

“No matter at all,” said Horatio, leaning ever so slightly towards the woman, and feeling a tremor. “There are things which are worth waiting for.”

“I am, sir,” repeated Ksenia, after a pause, “as you know, a woman who has mourned the death of a husband.”

“It is a pity,” confirmed Horatio, his stomach agitated, and not from hunger.

“There are men,” she continued, “who cannot wait for their breakfast, and there are men,” she eyed Horatio, “who can be persuaded to wait. My first husband was one who could not wait. My next one should be more tractable.”

“Your first husband,” answered Horatio, quite incapable of directing the conversation towards the result for which he yearned, “ate, as I recall, horses and wolves for breakfast.”

“Infrequently,” she assured him.

“My own preference is for strong tea, plenty of bread, and perhaps two eggs.” As he served up this menu, Horatio cursed himself for a fool.

“Two eggs, sir?” asked Ksenia, one eyebrow raised. “Is one not enough?”

Horatio wondered whether the moment was slipping away from him, just as rapidly as that log yonder, bobbing and growling in the current of the River Volkhov, slipping away from Novgorod, to St Petersburg and the Gulf of Finland and oblivion. A commotion within the inn distracted them both for a moment. On turning back to review the river, Horatio paused for one brief instant, and then plunged in recklessly, up to his neck. “What, if I may ask, would a woman look for in a man, should she seek another husband?”

“What she would want,” she replied without hesitation, “is one who did not ask so many questions.” As she delivered this tart retort, fermented in a long day followed by a longer night, she immediately cursed herself for a fool. What is ‘love’: sweet regret and bitter tears. In love, the adjectives may always be transposed.

Horatio was a man who could readily take a hint. He fell to considering the surrounding buildings, rather than the water. And was enormously relieved to hear, after a solitary cloud had drifted from one tower to another, the following statement of preference:

“If I were to take another husband, he would be one who took his breakfast with me, took his supper with me, and shared my bed at night, every night.”

Horatio mentally ticked these items off on the fingers of his left hand and nodded in satisfaction.

“If I were to take another husband, he would be one who would engage in no perilous journeys - no journeys, sir - no perilous service, and no perilous politics.”

Horatio completed his left hand, and proceeded eagerly upon his right. The first he could promise; the second he could guarantee; the third lay only in the power of Tsar and the Police, but he must suppose it to be achievable.

“If I were to take another husband, he would be one who took me to my mother’s home in Kamtchatka, lived with me there, and brought up our children there.”

This final set of demands, taking as its *sine qua non* a successful journey to the farthest end of the earth, could easily be met: having arrived at the farthest end of the earth, it would be no hardship to stay there and rear as many children as were required. A cottage, a book and a cat would, of course, greatly complement the whole. The matter rested simply on the journey to Kamtchatka - indeed, everything rested on it - for in far Kamtchatka, one would doubtless be beyond the reach of Tsar and the Police, the only other ticklish point so far.

Horatio pondered the matter of Kamtchatka, the number of *verts* across Siberia to reach it, and **the average degrees of cold (by Réaumur) in Siberia.**

At length, Ksenia recalled him to the city of Novgorod the Great. “And will you take your breakfast with me?” she asked. Horatio struggled to determine whether this was - or was not - a firm proposal. Finding that no determination was required, he took her elbow.

The decision to enter the inn at that precise moment was not necessarily the best one. For, as Horatio pushed back the door and ushered his friend before him, his glance fell upon the inn-keeper and his wife, who were both on the floor, entwined in the closest possible discussion of the meaning of the words ‘Love’ and ‘Family’.

“Oh,” said Ksenia, unable to avert her gaze. At length, she addressed Horatio, unaccountably reminded of an omission: “Sir, I have not yet told you of the peculiarly becoming nakedness of my first husband.”

“Ah,” he replied, looking thoughtfully at the ceiling, and attentively avoiding

the blissful domestic scene
before him, “but I believe I have heard that story.”