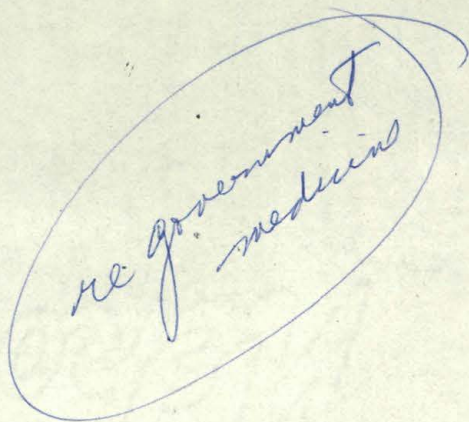


ALEKSANDR I.
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THE
CANCER
WARD

Translated from the Russian
by Rebecca Frank



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THE OLD DOCTOR

In a lifetime of seventy-five years and in a half century of healing the sick, Doctor Oreshchenkov had not raised himself stone mansions, but back in the twenties he had bought a one-story frame cottage with a small garden. He had lived in it ever since. The cottage stood on a quiet street. The street had a wide, tree-lined boulevard down the middle of it, and spacious sidewalks separated the house from the roadway by a good forty-five feet. Back in the past century trees had taken root on these walks. Now they had thick trunks. In summer their tops spread out into a dense green roof, and the foot of each broad trunk was dug about, cleared, and protected by an iron grating. On sultry days people walked here without feeling the harshness of the sun, and cold irrigation water ran in a brick-lined gutter along the sidewalk. This grassy street surrounded the noblest and most attractive part of the town and was one of its best adornments. (But the officials of the city Soviet grumbled that these widely spaced, one-story houses were too spread out, making utility lines expensive, and it was time to tear them down and build five-story apartment houses.)

The bus line did not run close to Oreshchenkov's house, and Lyudmila Afanasyevna went on foot. It was a very warm, dry evening. It was still twilight; one could still see the trees in their first soft bloom, some more green than others (the candle-shaped poplars were still bare), preparing for night-fall. But Dontsova looked down at her feet, not up. This

whole spring had been not blithe, but unreal; and who could tell what would happen to Lyudmila Afanasyevna in the time it took for all these trees to burst into leaf, wither, and shed their foliage? Besides, she had been so busy all spring that she had not found a moment to stop, throw back her head and look upward.

The Oreshchenkov house had both a wicket door and, alongside it, a massive door with a brass handle and heavy, old-fashioned panels in pyramid-shaped relief. In such homes these great old doors were most often sealed shut, and one entered through the wicket door. But here the two stone steps before the door were not overgrown with grass and moss, and the brass tablet on the door had a high polish. Engraved on it in slanting calligraphy was the name: "Doctor D. T. Oreshchenkov." The electric bell worked.

Lyudmila Afanasyevna pressed the button. She heard steps, and Doctor Oreshchenkov himself opened the door. He wore an old brown suit that had once been very good and an open-collar shirt.

"Ah, Lyudochka!" The corners of his lips turned up ever so slightly, but in him this represented the broadest smile. "I've been waiting. Come in. I'm very glad to see you. Glad, and also not glad, because you wouldn't come to see the old man if it were good news."

She had telephoned to ask permission to come. She could have told him the whole story over the phone, but that would have been impolite. Now, guiltily, she insisted that she would have come to visit even if she were not in trouble. He did not let her remove her coat herself.

"Allow me," he said. "I'm not a complete wreck yet!"

In the hall he hung her coat on the long, polished, dark wooden bar that held a row of hooks, ready for many patients or guests, and led her across the smoothly painted wooden floors. A corridor took them past the best, bright room, where Oreshchenkov's oldest granddaughter lived and where a piano stood, its note-stand open and gay with scattered music.

They passed the dining room, where the windows, covered with a tracery of dry grape vines, looked out on the yard, and where a large and expensive phonograph stood; and reached the office, lined with bookshelves and containing a heavy old desk, an old couch and easy chairs.

"Do you know, Dormidont Tikhonovich," Dontsova said, peering about at the walls, "I think you have even more books than before."

"Why, no." Oreshchenkov shook his big, solid head lightly—all his gestures were slight. "True, I did buy a few dozen lately. Do you know from whom?" He almost twinkled, but again it was almost; you had to be used to him to notice these fine shadings. "From Aznacheyev. He retired on pension, he's sixty, you see. On the day he retired he confessed he didn't want to be a radiologist, he didn't want to have anything more to do with medicine; he's a confirmed bee-keeper, and now he won't do anything but keep bees. How can a man do that? If you want to be a bee-keeper, why waste your best years? Well, where do you want to sit, Lyudochka?" he asked, addressing the grey-haired grandmother in the diminutive, as though she were a girl. And then he decided for her: "You'll be most comfortable in this armchair."

"I don't intend to stay long, Dormidont Tikhonovich. I just stopped in for a minute," Dontsova protested, but sank deep into the soft armchair and immediately felt relaxed and even confident that they would now reach the best decision here. The burden of constant responsibility, the burden of taking charge and the burden of choosing what to do with her life—all this had lifted from her shoulders when he had taken her coat in the hall, and now disappeared completely as she sank into this easy chair. Restfully, her eyes took in the familiar office, and she looked tenderly at the old marble washstand in the corner—not a modern washbasin, but a washstand with a pitcher and a bowl, all covered and very clean. She looked directly at Oreshchenkov, glad that he was

alive, that he was here, and that he would take all her anxieties upon himself. He was still standing. He stood straight. He had no tendency to stoop at all; his shoulders were braced and he held his head as erect as ever. He always had such a confident look, as though, healing others, he could not possibly fall ill himself. A small, pointed, silver beard flowed from the center of his chin. He had not lost his hair, it was not even completely white, and it lay in an even part that seemed to have changed little over the years. His features were of the kind that do not move, no matter what emotions he might feel—they remained smooth, calm and in place. Only his arched brows took upon themselves the whole effect of what he was experiencing and showed it by the tiniest movement.

"As for me, Lyudochka, please excuse me if I sit at the desk. It's not that I want to be formal. It's just that I'm used to it."

It would be strange if he were not used to it. There had been a time when a steady stream of patients came to this office, and some sat here through long, painful conversations on which their future depended; he had sat in this chair every day, then less often, but even now he received patients here. The details of this setting were engraved in patients' memories through the twists and turns of these conversations: the green baize on the desk, outlined by the dark brown molding around the desktop, the old carved letter opener, the nickel-plated tongue depressor, the calendar with leaves that flipped over, the inkwell with the copper lid, and the strong, dark tea cooling in the glass. The doctor sat behind his desk except when he had to let the patient rest from his gaze and think things over; then he rose and strode to the washstand or the bookshelves. Doctor Oreshchenkov's steady, attentive eyes never turned aside without reason, he did not look down at the papers on his desk or out the window, he did not lose a minute of the time at his disposal for observing

the patient or visitor. His eyes were the chief instrument by which Doctor Oreshchenkov studied patients or pupils and conveyed to them his decision or purpose.

Among the many persecutions that Dormidont Tikhonovich had endured in his life—for revolutionary activity in 1902, when he had spent a week in jail with other students; then for the fact that his late father had been a clergyman; then for the fact that during the first imperialist war he had been a brigade medical officer in the czar's army, and had not merely been a medical officer, for as witnesses testified, he had mounted a horse when the regiment began to retreat in panic, had turned the regiment about and led it back into the thick of the imperialist slaughter against the German workers—among all these persecutions the most persistent and stringent had been directed against the fact that Doctor Oreshchenkov clung stubbornly to his right to conduct a private medical practice, although this was forbidden more and more severely everywhere as a source of private enterprise and enrichment, a non-laboring occupation that constantly, at every step, is a breeding ground for the bourgeoisie. For several years he had had to take down his doctor's sign and to turn patients away from the door, no matter how they begged or how ill they were—because both volunteer and paid agents of the tax office had been planted next door, and the patients themselves might talk, and this threatened the doctor with the loss of all work and even of housing.

For all that, it was the right to a private practice that he cherished most in his work. Without that engraved brass plate on the door he felt he was living fraudulently, under an assumed name. On principle he refused to defend either a Candidate's or a doctoral dissertation, declaring that a dissertation doesn't testify in the least to the ability to treat patients, that a patient even feels ill at ease if his doctor is a professor, and that the time spent on a dissertation would be better spent in mastering an additional specialty. In thirty years at the local medical institute alone, Oreshchenkov had

worked his way through the therapeutic clinic, the pediatric, the surgical, the infectious disease clinic, the urological and even the ophthalmological clinic, and only after this had he become a radiologist and oncologist. A compression of the lips by just one millimeter expressed his opinion of "Honored Scientists." As he put it, if a man were called Honored while he was still alive, and Scientist to boot, that was the end of him; this kind of glory hindered him in treating patients in the same way that elaborate clothing hindered a person's movements. An Honored Scientist was followed about by a suite, like a new Christ by apostles: He did not have the right to be mistaken, he did not have the right to be ignorant of anything, he was even refused the right to think things over. He might be fed up with everything, lazy or behind the times, and conceal it, but everyone expected miracles of him without fail.

Oreshchenkov wanted none of this for himself, only the brass plate on his door and the bell that any passerby could ring.

Happily for him, Oreshchenkov once happened to save the life of the son of a prominent local leader when the son was at death's door. Another time he saved a leader himself, not this one, but another important one. And members of several other prominent families. All this occurred right here in the same town, he never moved away; and thus the fame of Doctor Oreshchenkov was established in influential circles, and he acquired a certain protective renown. Perhaps in a purely Russian city this would not have made it easier for him, but here, in this more easygoing Oriental town they were able to overlook the fact that he had again hung up his brass plaque and again received patients at home. After the war he no longer held a regular permanent appointment, but served as consultant at several hospitals and attended meetings of the medical societies. Thus, after sixty-five, he began unhindered to lead the kind of life that he considered right for a doctor.

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"Dormidont Tikhonovich, I've come to ask you whether you would come to the hospital to give me a gastro-intestinal examination. We'll arrange it for any day that's convenient for you."

She looked grey and her voice faltered. Oreshchenkov watched her steadily and unwaveringly, and his arched brows did not express a millimeter's surprise.

"Certainly, Lyudmila Afanasyevna. We'll pick a day. But tell me your symptoms now, anyway. And what you think yourself."

"I'll tell you my symptoms right away, but as for what I think—you know, I try not to think! That is, I think about it too much, I've begun to lose sleep, and it would be best if I didn't know. Seriously. You decide whether I ought to enter the hospital, and I'll enter, but I don't want to know more. If I'm to be operated on, I'd rather not know the diagnosis, so as not to be thinking during the operation: What can they do for me now? And what will they discover? Do you understand?"

Whether it was because of the deep armchair or her sagging shoulders, she did not look like a big, strong woman now. She had shrunk.

"Perhaps I understand, Lyudochka, but I don't agree. Why do you talk of an operation first thing?"

"Well, you have to be prepared . . ."

"Why didn't you come sooner, then? Of all people, *you* should know enough for that."

"It's hard to say, Dormidont Tikhonovich," sighed Dontsova. "That's the way life is, you get caught up in the whirl of things. Of course I should have come sooner. But don't think I've let it go far!" she protested vigorously to herself. Her rapid, businesslike manner of speech returned. "It seems unfair that I, an oncologist, should be stricken by an oncological ailment, when I know every one of them,

when I imagine all the attendant effects, the consequences, and the complications."

"There's no injustice here," his deep and measured voice said persuasively. "This is the surest test of a doctor: to suffer an illness in his own specialty."

(What was just about it? Why was it a sure test? He reasoned thus because he had not been ill himself.)

"Do you remember Panya Fyodorova, the nurse? She used to say: '*Oi*, why have I become so abrupt with the patients? It's time I fell ill again myself . . .'"

"I never thought I'd suffer so!" Dontsova's clasped hands crackled.

Yet in these minutes she felt less tortured than she had in a long time.

"What symptoms have you noticed?"

She began to relate them, at first in general outline, but he demanded all the precise details.

"But, Dormidont Tikhonovich, I don't want to take up your whole Saturday evening! If you are coming to give me an x-ray examination anyway . . ."

"Don't you know what a heretic I am? That I worked twenty years before I took up Roentgenology? And what diagnoses I made, Lyudochka! It's like when you have an exposure meter or a watch: When you rely on them, you forget how to gauge the camera exposure by eye or to tell the time by your senses. When you don't have them, you catch on quickly."

Dontsova began to relate her symptoms, differentiating and grouping them and forcing herself not to omit the details that might lead to a grave diagnosis (although involuntarily she wanted to omit some and to hear: "It's all nonsense, Lyudochka, you're worrying over something trivial.") She mentioned her blood condition, its poor composition and the increased E.S.R. He heard her out and began to ask further questions. Sometimes he nodded, as at something quite un-

derstandable, trivial, likely to be encountered in anybody, but still he did not say "nonsense." The thought flashed through Dontsova's mind that essentially he had probably already made the diagnosis and she might even ask him for it right now, without waiting for the x-ray. But it was very frightening to ask right off, now, outright, and to hear his presumption, right or wrong. The blow had to be held off, softened by several days of waiting.

How friendly their conversations had been when they met at medical conferences and meetings! But now she had come to confess to an illness, as if to a crime, and the thread of equality between them had snapped. No, it wasn't equality—there had never been equality with a teacher; but, what was more glaring, by her confession she had excluded herself from the noble category of doctors and joined the suppliant, dependent category of patients. True, Oreshchenkov did not examine her now. He continued to talk with her as a guest. He seemed to be inviting her to remain in both categories at once, but she was crushed and she could no longer carry herself as before.

"In fact, Verochka Gangart is so good a diagnostician now that I would have complete confidence in her," Dontsova fired the words with the rapid delivery that her crowded workday had made habitual, "but as long as you are here, Dormidont Tikhonovich, I decided . . ."

"A fine one I'd be if I refused my own pupils." Oreshchenkov's eyes never left her. Dontsova did not see well now, but for the past two years she had noticed the glimmer of abstraction in his steady gaze. It had begun to appear after the death of his wife. "Well, and if you have to . . . go on sick leave? Then would Verochka substitute for you?"

("Go on sick leave"—he had found the gentlest of words for it. But did this mean, did it mean that what she had was *not* nothing?)

"Yes, she has developed, she's fully capable of running the department."

Oreshchenkov nodded and took his straggly small beard in his hand. "She may have developed, but has she married?" Dontsova shook her head.

"Neither has my granddaughter." Oreshchenkov's voice dropped to a whisper without any need. "Can't find anyone who's right for her. It's not simple." An almost imperceptible movement of his brows showed his concern.

He refused to put things off and proposed to examine Dontsova on Monday.

(Was there such a hurry, then?)

There came perhaps that pause when it is appropriate to rise and take one's leave with thanks. Dontsova rose. But Oreshchenkov insisted that she have a glass of tea.

"But I really don't want to!" Lyudmila Afanasyevna assured him.

"I do! It's just time for my tea."

He was pulling her out of the ranks of the criminally ill and into the ranks of the hopelessly healthy.

"Are the young folks home?"

The "young folks" were the same age as Dontsova.

"No. My granddaughter isn't here, either. I'm alone."

(Yet he had received her in his office! Because only here would his words carry their true gravity and influence.)

"I won't let you bother with making tea for me."

"No bother. I have a full thermos. As for the cookies and the dishes from the buffet, all right, you can bring them."

They went to the dining room and sat down to tea at a corner of the square oak table, which was big enough for an elephant to dance on, so big that it could probably never be carried out of any door here. A wall clock, of the same vintage, showed it was still early.

Dormidont Tikhonovich began to talk of his granddaughter, his favorite. She had long ago finished the Conservatory, she played beautifully, and she was bright, something not too usual among musicians, and attractive. He showed a new photo of her, but did not talk much, for he

did not want to take up all of Lyudmila Afanasyevna's attention with his granddaughter. Indeed, she could no longer give *all* of her attention to anything, because it had been smashed to bits and could not be put together again. How strange it was to sit here and drink glass after glass of tea with a person who already imagined the extent of your danger, who perhaps already foresaw the further course of the illness, but uttered not a word about it, merely passed the cookies.

She had an excuse to talk too, not about her divorced daughter, that was too painful, but about her son. Her son had reached the eighth grade and he had concluded and declared that he saw no sense in going on with his studies! Neither his father nor his mother could find an argument to fight this; all their arguments bounced off him. You have to become a cultured person! "What for?" Culture is the most important thing! "The most important thing is to enjoy life." But without an education you won't have a good specialty! "I don't need it." Then will you become an ordinary laborer? "No, no donkey work for me." But what will you live on? "I'll always find something. You have to know how." He had got in with dubious company, and Lyudmila Afanasyevna was alarmed.

Oreshchenkov's expression seemed to show that without listening to this story he had heard it all long ago.

"One of the troubles is that we have lost a very important mentor of young people," he said, "the family doctor. Girls of fourteen and boys of sixteen have to talk with a doctor. Not at their desks in a classroom of forty—that's no way to talk—and not in the school medical office, with three minutes for each pupil. It has to be the same uncle they've been showing their throats to since childhood, the same doctor who has sat at tea with the family. Suppose this disinterested uncle, this kind and stern doctor who can't be taken in by wheedling or a show of temper, as parents can, sits down with the boy or girl in his office and shuts the door and starts

up a leisurely conversation that is both embarrassing and very interesting, and the doctor guesses, without any questions from the youngsters, what's on their minds, and himself provides the important and difficult answers. And suppose he invites them in for a second talk. He is not only forewarning them against missteps and wrong impulses, against harm to their bodies, but their whole picture of the world is cleansed and falls into place. As soon as their major anxiety and chief urge is understood, they no longer imagine they are hopelessly misunderstood in other respects also. From that moment, all their parents' other arguments reach them better."

He had embarked on this topic because of Lyudmila Afanasyevna's own talk of her son. Since she was having trouble with her son, this would be just the time for her to hear this and ponder how to apply it to her son's case. Oreshchenkov spoke in a full, pleasant voice that had not cracked with age. His clear eyes shone with lively meaning that added conviction. But Dontsova noticed that minute by minute she was losing the blessed calm that had refreshed her in the armchair in the office, and a sense of depression was rising in her chest and choking her. She had the sensation of something lost or something being lost even now as she listened to his logical thoughts when she ought to be getting up, leaving, hurrying—though she didn't know where or why.

"That's right," she agreed. "We have neglected sex education."

"We consider that children, like wild animals, should learn everything themselves. So they do . . . like animals. We consider it unnecessary to prevent perversion because it is foreordained that in a healthy society all children should be normal. And they are left to learn from one another. They pick up distorted, muffled information. We consider it necessary to guide our children in every sphere of life except this one; this one is 'shameful.' So sometimes you encounter a grown woman who has never experienced her full feelings,

simply because *he* didn't know how to approach her on their first night."

"Mm-yes," said Dontsova.

"Yes!" Oreshchenkov said firmly. He noticed the fleeting anxiety, the troubled impatience that showed in Dontsova's face, but if she, who did not want to *know*, was to take her x-ray examination Monday, the worst thing would be to let her dwell on her symptoms this Saturday evening, and he had to distract her by conversation; and what could be a better topic for doctors? "In general, the family doctor is the most comforting figure in our lives, but he has been cut down and foreshortened. Without him, the family cannot exist in a modern society. Just as a mother knows the tastes of each one in the family, so he knows each one's needs. It's no shame to go to the family doctor with any trivial complaint that you wouldn't take to the clinic, where you have to take a number, wait in line, and face a doctor who treats nine patients an hour. And it's from the trivial complaints that all the neglected illnesses arise. How many grown people, right now, at this very minute, are tossing about blindly, wishing they could find the kind of doctor and the kind of person to whom they could express their most deeply concealed, even shameful, fears? This search for a doctor is the kind of thing you don't always discuss even with your friends, and you certainly don't advertise for one in the newspapers; it is essentially as intimate as the search for a mate. Sometimes it's easier to find a wife than to find a doctor nowadays who is prepared to give you as much time as you need and understands you completely, all of you."

Lyudmila Afanasyevna frowned. Abstractions. While her head was crowded with symptoms, and the symptoms arranged themselves in the worst array.

"All right, but how many of these family doctors would be needed? They just can't be fitted into our system of universal, free, public health services."

"Universal and public—yes, they could. Free, no," Oreshchenkov confidently asserted.

"But the fact that it is free is our greatest achievement."

"Is it such a great achievement? What do you mean by 'free'? The doctors don't work without pay. It's just that the patient doesn't pay them, they're paid out of the public budget. The public budget comes from those same patients. Treatment isn't free, it's just depersonalized. If the cost of it were left with the patient, he'd turn the ten rubles over and over in his hands. But when he really needed help, he'd come to the doctor five times over."

"But he wouldn't be able to afford it."

"He'd say to hell with new window curtains and a second pair of shoes, what good are they if he isn't in good health? Is it better the way it is now? You'd pay anything for careful and sympathetic attention from the doctor, but everywhere there's a schedule, a quota the doctors have to meet; next! And as for those of our clinics that charge fees, the pace there is even worse. And what do patients come for? For a certificate to be absent from work, for sick leave, for certification for invalids' pensions; and the doctor's job is to catch the frauds. Doctor and patient as enemies—is that medicine? Take medicines. In the twenties all medicines were free. Do you remember?"

"Really? I guess they were. One forgets."

"Surely you can't have forgotten. Everything was free. But they had to change back to charging for medicines. Why?"

"Was it too expensive for the government?" Dontsova said with an effort, and blinked a long time.

"Not only. Mostly, it was inefficient. The patient took every medicine he could get, since it was free, and then threw out half of it. Mind you, I don't say all treatment should be paid for by the patient. But the first visit should. After a patient has been ordered to enter a hospital, where complicated ap-

paratus is needed, it would be only right for it to be free. But even there, consider your own hospital: Why do two surgeons operate, while three stand around watching? Because salaries have been allocated for them, why worry? But if the fees came from the patients, not one patient would go to them, and your Khalmukhamedov would run off in a trice. Or Pantekhina. One way or another, Lyudochka, the doctor has to depend on the impression he makes on the patients. On his popularity. And in our setup he doesn't depend on the patients."

"Thank God he doesn't depend on all of them! On troublemakers like Paulina Zavodchikova . . ."

"He should depend on her, too."

"Oh, no! What a humiliation that would be!"

"Is it better to be dependent on the chief doctor? Why is it more honest to collect a salary from the cashier, like a bureaucrat?"

"What about the inquisitive patients, the Rabinoviches or the Kostoglotovs, who bother you with theoretical questions—are we supposed to tell them everything and answer all their arguments?"

Not a crease furrowed Oreshchenkov's brow. He had always known Lyudmila Dontsova's capacities, and they were very good; single-handed, she was able to consider and cope with very difficult cases. The small, modest items she had contributed to medical journals contained descriptions of perhaps two hundred of the most difficult diagnoses. Diagnosis was the most difficult part of medicine. Why should anyone expect more of her?

"Yes. And answer them all," he nodded calmly.

"When would you have time?" she declared indignantly, and warmed to the dispute. It was all very well and good for him, wandering about in house slippers. "Do you realize the pace we have to keep in the medical institutions nowadays? You never faced pressures like that in your time. How many patients there are now for each doctor!"

"With the right system for first visits to a private doctor," Oreshchenkov answered, "there would be fewer patients in the hospitals and clinics—and fewer of them who have to wait to gain admission. The private doctor to whom the patient would turn first should have just as many patients as his memory and his personal knowledge permit. Then he would treat each one as a single complex. To treat individual ailments separately is to function on the level of a rural doctor's assistant."

"Oh-h-h!" sighed Dontsova wearily. As if their private conversation could change or correct anything in the great course of events! "It's frightening to say that the patient should be treated as a single complex in this day and age."

Oreshchenkov saw that he ought to stop, but in his old age he had developed the failing of being carried away by his words.

"The patient's organism doesn't know that our knowledge is compartmentalized. It, the organism, isn't compartmentalized. As Voltaire said, physicians prescribe medicines they don't know for the organism of the patient, which they know even less. How are we to understand the patient as a complex unit if the anatomist who draws the charts works from cadavers, but the living person is not his specialty? If the radiologist makes a big reputation for himself on bone fractures, but the gastro-intestinal tract is not his specialty? The patient is tossed like a basketball from one specialist to another. And the upshot is the doctor who develops a passion for bee-keeping. If you want to understand the patient as a single complex, you don't have room for any other passion. The doctor himself has to be a single complex. The doctor himself!"

"The doctor himself, too!" she almost groaned. Had her head been clear and her spirit strong, these inexhaustible arguments would naturally have interested her, but now they only exhausted her further, it was hard for her to focus her mind on them.

You're like that yourself, Lyudochka, don't belittle yourself. It's not a new idea. We old-time doctors were all like that—clinicians, not administrators. But nowadays the chief doctor of a provincial hospital wants ten specialists on his staff before he'll do anything."

He was finishing; he realized from her tired, blinking eyes that this conversation, intended to distract her, had not been good for her. At this moment the door of the veranda swung open and there entered what seemed to be a dog, but as large, warm and incredible as a human who had for some reason got down on all fours. Lyudmila Afanasyevna's momentary impulse was to be afraid, but she could no more be frightened by it than by the sight of a wise human being with sad eyes.

He padded softly, even thoughtfully, about the room, unaware that anyone here could be surprised at his entrance. Only once, waving an introductory greeting, he lifted his thick white brush of a tail, flapped it in the air, and put it down. Except for his drooping black ears, he was russet and white, the two colors forming a complicated pattern in his fur; he seemed to have a white blanket on his back, his sides were a bright red, and his rear was almost orange. He came up to Lyudmila Afanasyevna and sniffed at her knees, but unobtrusively. He did not sit close to the table on his hind end, as might have been expected of some dogs, or express any interest in the food on the table, but merely raised his head slightly above the level of the table and stood thus on all fours, looking across it with his round, moist-brown eyes in transcendental abstraction.

"What breed is he?" Lyudmila Afanasyevna asked in amazement, and for the first time that evening completely forgot about herself and her pain.

"Saint Bernard." Oreshchenkov gave the dog an encouraging look. "Everything would be fine, except that his ears are too long, and when Manya feeds him she gets annoyed:

'What am I going to do with them, tie them with a rope to keep them from slopping into the dish?'"

Lyudmila Afanasyevna scrutinized the dog in admiration. He was too huge to walk the streets and he would not be allowed in any public conveyance. Just as the only place for the Abominable Snowman was in the Himalayas, so the only life for such a dog was in a one-story house with a garden.

Oreshchenkov cut off a slice of the pie and offered it to the dog. He did not throw it to him, as one throws a tidbit out of pity or for amusement's sake to other dogs who stand on their hind legs or jump up and show their teeth—this dog stood on his hind legs not to beg, but to place his forepaws on a person's shoulders in sign of friendship. Oreshchenkov offered him the pie as an equal, and the dog, as an equal, slowly took it from the open palm-plate with his teeth, not out of hunger but out of politeness.

Somehow the arrival of this calm, thoughtful dog refreshed and cheered Lyudmila Afanasyevna, and as she rose from the table she thought that her case was not so bad after all, even if she had to undergo an operation, and that she had not paid enough attention to what Dormidont Tikhonovich had been saying, and:

"How unpardonable of me! Here I came with my own troubles and didn't even ask how you are feeling. How are you?"

He stood facing her, erect, solid, even burly, with eyes that were not the least bit clouded, and ears that heard everything, and it was hard to believe he was twenty-five years older than she.

"Not bad, so far," he said, with a not very warm but quite goodnatured smile. "In general, I've decided not to be ill before I die. I'll die, as they say, suddenly."

He saw her to the door, returned to the dining room, and sank into the rocking chair of bent black wood, with its

yellow wickerwork back worn by many years. He gave himself a light push and when the chair came to rest he did not rock any more. He froze in the relaxed, reclining position that a rocker allows, and sat motionless for a long time.

He had to rest frequently nowadays. Just as his body demanded restoration of its forces, so his inner state, particularly since the loss of his wife, demanded immersion in silence, free of any outward sound, any conversation, working thoughts, free even of all that made him a doctor. His inner state seemed to demand cleansing and transparency. This silent immobility, in which his thoughts were not focused on anything and did not even roam about, gave him this sense of clarity and completeness.

At such moments the whole meaning of existence—of his own life throughout the long past and the short future, and his late wife's, and his young granddaughter's, and everybody's in general—seemed to him to be not in their chief activity, in which they were constantly engrossed, in which all interest was supposed to lie and by which they were known to people. It was in the degree to which they were able to keep unclouded, unfrozen and undistorted the image of eternity that sits within each person.

Like a silver moon in a calm pond.