

**SMIRNOV.**

[Yells]

Your husband, died in my debt for two shipments of oats that he bought from me. Since I've got to pay my bills to-morrow, I will ask you again, madam, to pay me my money to-day.

**POPOVA.**

[Her eyes downcast]

Sir, in my solitude I have grown unaccustomed to the masculine voice, and I can't stand shouting. I must ask you not to disturb my peace.

**SMIRNOV.**

Pay me my money, and I'll go.

**POPOVA.**

I told you very plainly; I don't have any money; wait until the day after to-morrow.

**SMIRNOV.**

And I told you very plainly that I don't want the money the day after to-morrow. I want it to-day. If you don't pay me to-day, I'll have to hang myself tomorrow.

**POPOVA.**

But what can I do if I don't have the money? You're so strange!

**SMIRNOV.**

So you won't pay me now? Eh?

**POPOVA.**

I can't.

**SMIRNOV.**

In that case I'll stay here and wait until I get it. [Sits down] You won't pay me until the day after to-morrow? Very well! I'll stay here until the day after tomorrow. [Jumps up] I ask you: Do I have to pay my bills tomorrow, or don't I? Maybe you think this is a joke?

**POPOVA.**

You don't know how to behave with a woman!

**SMIRNOV.**

No, I do know how to behave with a woman!

**POPOVA.**

No, you don't! You're a rude, ill-bred man! Decent people don't talk to a woman like that!

**SMIRNOV.**

Madam, in my time I've seen more women than you've seen sparrows! I've fought three duels over women. I've refused twelve women, and nine have refused me! Yes! There was a time when I played the fool. I used to love passionately, madly but now--you must excuse me! You won't get around me like

that now! I've had enough! Present company excepted, all women, are insincere, envious, liars to the marrow of their bones, vain, trivial, merciless, unreasonable.

You look at one, you have a million transports of joy, and then you look into her soul--and see a ravenous crocodile! But the most disgusting thing of all is that this crocodile imagines that it is its privilege and monopoly, to have tender feelings. You have the misfortune to be a woman, so tell me truthfully, have you ever seen a woman who was sincere, faithful, and constant? You haven't! You'll see a cat with a horn or a white crow sooner than you'll see a faithful woman!

**POPOVA.**

Then, according to you, who is faithful and constant in love? Is it the man?

**SMIRNOV.**

Yes!

**POPOVA.**

The man!

[Laughs bitterly]

Let me tell you about the men I've known. the best was my late husband.... I loved him passionately with all my being, I gave him my youth, my happiness, my life, my fortune, I worshipped him and... and this best of men . . . he used to leave me alone for weeks, in order to make love to other women; he wasted my money, made fun of my feelings.... And, in spite of all that, I loved him and was true to him. And now that he is dead, I have shut myself for ever within these four walls, and will wear these weeds to the very end....

**SMIRNOV.**

[Laughs contemptuously]

Weeds!... what do you take me for - so mysterious, so poetic!

You may have buried yourself alive, but you didn't forget to powder your face!

**POPOVA.**

How dare you speak to me like that?

**SMIRNOV.**

Pay me my money and I'll go.

**POPOVA.**

I won't give you any money!

**SMIRNOV.**

Oh, yes, you will.

.

**POPOVA.**

[Choking with rage]

So you sit down?

**SMIRNOV.**

I do.

**POPOVA.**

I ask you to go away!

**SMIRNOV.**

Give me my money....

**POPOVA.**

I don't want to talk to impudent scoundrels! Get out!

[Pause]

Aren't you going? No?

**SMIRNOV.**

No.

**POPOVA.**

No?

**SMIRNOV.**

No!

**POPOVA.**

Get out now.

**SMIRNOV.**

Can't you be more polite?

**POPOVA.**

[Clenches her fists and stamps her foot]

You're a boor! An ugly bear! A monster!

**SMIRNOV.**

What? What did you say?

**POPOVA.**

I said you are a bear, a monster!

**SMIRNOV.**

Do you think that just because you're a poetic creature you can insult me like that? Eh? No, we're going to fight now! Pistols!

**POPOVA.**

Do you think I'm afraid of you just because you have large fists and a bull's neck? Eh? You monster!

**SMIRNOV.**

We're going to fight! Nobody is going to insult me, and I don't care if you are a woman.

**POPOVA.**

[Trying to interrupt him]

Bear! Bear! Bear!

**SMIRNOV.**

It's about time we got rid of this prejudice that only men are responsible for their insults. To hell with it. if you want equality of rights you can have it.

**POPOVA.**

With pistols? Fine!

**SMIRNOV.**

Right now.

**POPOVA.**

This very minute!

[Is going, but turns back]

How happy I will be to put a bullet into your thick head!

[Exit.]

**SMIRNOV.**

I'll bring her down like a chicken! I'm not a little boy or a sentimental puppy. If she fights, well that's equality of rights, emancipation, and all that! Equality of the sexes! I'll shoot her on principle! But what a woman! She accepted my challenge! My God, it's the first time in my life that I've seen....

That is a woman I can understand! A real woman! I'm even sorry I have to kill her! I like her! I like her! I'm almost ready to let the debt go... and I'm not even angry any more ....

[Enter POPOVA with pistols.]

**POPOVA.**

Here are the pistols.... But before we fight you have to show me how to fire them. I've never even held a pistol before.

**SMIRNOV.**

[Examining the pistols]

.... You must hold the revolver like this....

**POPOVA.**

Like this?

**SMIRNOV.**

Yes, like this.... Then you cock the trigger, and take aim like this.... Put your head back a little! Hold your arm out straight.... Like that.... Then you press this thing with your finger--and that's all. The important thing is to keep cool and try not to jerk your arm.

**POPOVA.**

Very well.... It's inconvenient to shoot indoors, let's go into the garden.

**SMIRNOV.**

Alright. But I warn you, I'm going to fire in the air.

**POPOVA.**

Are you afraid? Yes? Ah! No, sir, you don't get out of it! You come with me! I won't have any peace until I've put a hole in your hateful forehead. Are you afraid?

**SMIRNOV.**

Yes, I am afraid.

**POPOVA.**

You're lying! Why won't you fight?

**SMIRNOV.**

Because... because you... because I like you.

**POPOVA.**

[Laughs]

You like me! You dare to say that you like me!

[Points to the door]

That's the way to the garden.

**SMIRNOV.**

[Takes the pistol in silence and goes to the door. There he stops for half a minute, while they look at each other in silence, then he hesitatingly approaches POPOVA]

Listen.... Are you still angry? Do you understand... how can I say this?... The fact is, you see, it's like this, so to speak....

[Shouts]

Well, is it my fault that I like you? Damn it! I like you! Do you understand? I... I almost love you!

**POPOVA.**

Get away from me--I hate you!

**SMIRNOV.** God, what a woman! I've never in my life seen someone like you! I'm lost!

**POPOVA.**

Stand back, or I'll fire!

**SMIRNOV.**

Fire, then! You don't understand how happy I would be to die before those beautiful eyes, to be shot by a pistol held in that little, velvet hand.... I'm out of my mind! Think, and make up your mind right now, because if I leave, we'll never see each other again! Decide now.... I am a landowner, of respectable character, have a reasonable income, I own some fine horses.... Will you be my wife?

**POPOVA.**

[Indignantly shakes her revolver]

Let's fight! Let's go!

**SMIRNOV.**

I'm out of my mind, I'm in love like a boy, like a fool!

[Snatches her hand, she screams with pain]

I love you!

[Kneels]

I love you as I've never loved before! I'm on my knees like a fool, offering you my hand. Yes or no? You don't want me? Very well!

[Gets up and quickly goes to the door.]

**POPOVA.**

Stop.

**SMIRNOV.**

[Stops]

Well?

**POPOVA.**

Nothing, go away.... No, stop.... No, go away, go away! I hate you! Or no.... Don't go away! Oh, if you knew how angry I am, I am so angry! What are you waiting for? Get out!

**SMIRNOV.**

Good-bye.

**POPOVA.**

Yes, yes, go away!...

[Yells]

Where are you going? Stop.... No, go away. Oh, how angry I am! Don't come near me, don't come near me!

**SMIRNOV.**

[Approaching her]

I love you! Why would I want to fall in love with you? To-morrow I've got to pay my bills, and begin mowing, and here you are ....

[Puts his arms around her]

I'll never forgive myself for this....

**POPOVA.**

Get away from me! Take your hands away! I hate you! Let's go and fight!

[A prolonged kiss.]

**POPOVA.**

[Lowering her eyes]

Luka, tell them in the stables that Toby isn't to have any oats at all to-day.