

# **TALES OF THE REVOLUTION**

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Tales of the revolution by Michael Artzibashef

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**MICHAEL ARTZIBASHEF**

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BY MICHAEL ARTZIBASHEF

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TRANSLATED BY  
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**SHEVIRIOF**

# SHEVIRIOF

## CHAPTER I

At the twilight hour, when the stairs of the lodging-house from roof to basement were steeped in a dense, black fog, and the windows on each landing resembled blurred spots in the gloom, somebody rang a bell at one of the doors. Behind this greasy door with its ragged covering of oilcloth the crazy old bell made an angry sound that lasted for a long time, and then subsided in a faint buzz, as that of a fly caught in a spider's net ; a long-drawn lament for its miserable lot.

Nobody answered the bell. The ringer stood there, rigid and erect as a post. His figure showed in blacker relief against the general gloom. So motionless did he remain, that a lean cat, slinking downstairs, never heeded him as it passed. There was something sinister about him ; kindly, joyous, open-hearted men are not wont to stand thus.

On the stairs it was cold and silent, while in the dreary dusk rancid vapours arose, the evil stench that pervades a huge lodging-house crammed from cellar to attic with dirty, sickly, hungry, besotted human beings. As one ascended the stairs, the fog became denser, and, in the weird black figure on the landing it was as though it had taken human shape.

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From the street came distant sounds of clattering droszkies and jingling tramway-bells, while in the courtyard far below harsh, angry voices could be heard. Yet up here all was deadly still. Suddenly the house-door banged, and the noise re-echoed throughout the building. Footsteps could be heard. Some one was coming upstairs at a great rate, hurrying round each landing, and taking two stairs at a time. As the steps reached the last landing and a figure was about to dash past the dim window the man outside the door suddenly moved towards it.

"Who's there?" cried the newcomer in a tone that betrayed more than mere astonishment.

"Is there a room to let, here? Perhaps you may know?" asked the man at the door, sharply and decisively.

"Oh! a room? I really can't say. . . . Yes, I believe there is. You'd better ring."

"I have done so already."

"Ah! but here we have a special way of ringing; like this, do you see?"

He caught hold of the bell and tugged at it with all his might. No faint tinklings now, but an absolute scream which suddenly ceased. It was as if a tin pot full of peas as it were tumbling down the stairs had bumped against the wall. Then there was a rustling sound, and through a gap in the opening door a streak of yellow light revealed the grey head of an old woman.

"Maximova, here's some one inquiring about your room," explained the newcomer, a gaunt, lanky student. Entering first, he went along the passage where the air was musty and damp as that of the