

**LEISURE HOUR
SERIES - NO. 88.
VIRGIN SOIL**

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Leisure Hour Series - No. 88. Virgin Soil by Ivan Turgéniéff & T. S. Perry

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IVAN TURGÉNIEFF & T. S. PERRY

**LEISURE HOUR
SERIES - NO. 88.
VIRGIN SOIL**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

(Leisure Hour Series.)

FATHERS AND SONS.

SMOKE.

LIZA.

ON THE EVE.

DIMITRI ROUDINE.

SPRING FLOODS; LEAR.

VIRGIN SOIL.

LEISURE HOUR SERIES—No. 83

VIRGIN SOIL

BY
IVAN TURGÉNIEFF

TRANSLATED WITH THE AUTHOR'S SANCTION

FROM THE FRENCH VERSION

BY T. S. PERRY



NEW YORK
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1877

VIRGIN SOIL.

I.

IN the spring of 1868, toward one o'clock in the afternoon, a young man about twenty-seven years old, negligently and even shabbily clad, was ascending the back-stairs of a five-storied house in Officers street, at St. Petersburg. Shuffling up in his worn-out galoshes, and balancing awkwardly his clumsy, misshapen body, he at last reached the last step of the staircase, and stopped before a dilapidated door which had been left half open, and then, without ringing the bell, but coughing loudly to announce his presence, he entered a narrow, half-lit anteroom.

"Is Neshdanof here?" he asked in a deep bass voice.

"No, it is I; come in!" a rather harsh woman's voice answered from the next room.

"Mashurina?" asked the new-comer.

"Yes—and you, Ostrodumof?"

"Pimen Ostrodumof."

He at once took off his galoshes, hung his threadbare coat on a nail, and entered the room whence the woman's voice had issued.

It was a dingy, low-studded room, with walls stained of a dull green, dimly lit by two dusty windows. Its furniture consisted of nothing but an iron bed in a corner, a table in the middle of the room, a few chairs, and a stand heaped up with piles of books.

Near the table was sitting a woman about thirty years old, bare-headed, clad in a black woolen dress, who was smoking a cigarette. When she saw Ostrodumof enter she held out her large red hand, without a word. He shook her hand also without a word, dropped into a chair, and took from his pocket the stump of a cigar.

Mashurina gave him light for his cigar, and both, without exchanging a word, or even a look, began to puff clouds of blue smoke into the close air of the room, which was already saturated with tobacco.

"Have you seen Neshadanof?" asked Ostrodumof at last.

"Yes; he's coming. He went to carry some books to the library."

"Why has he been running about so, lately?" said Ostrodumof, turning aside to spit. "It is impossible nowadays ever to find him."

"He's getting bored," she replied.

"Getting bored!" repeated Ostrodumof reproachfully. "What an absurdity! Just as if we had nothing to do! We are wondering how we shall get through with this job, and he's getting bored!"

"Has any letter come from Moscow?" asked Mashurina after a moment's pause.

"Yes, day before yesterday."

"Have you read it?"

Ostrodumof simply nodded his head.

"And what was in it?"

"We shall have to start soon."

Mashurina took the cigarette from her mouth. "Why so? I understood that everything was going on well there."

"Yes, everything is in pretty fair condition. But there is a man there who is not sure—you understand—he must be removed, or possibly got out of the way altogether. And then there are other things. You, too, you're called for."

"In the letter?"

"Yes, in the letter."

Mashurina tossed back her thick hair, which, carelessly braided and fastened behind, was falling over her forehead and brows.

"Very well," she said; "if that is the order there is nothing to be said."

"Of course. But without money it can't be done, and where is the money to come from?"

Mashurina reflected.

"Neshdanof must get some," she said in a low voice, as if talking to herself.

"It was just for that I came," remarked Ostrodumof.

"You have the letter with you?" asked Mashurina suddenly.

"Yes. Do you want to read it?"

"Give it to me. No, don't; we will read it together later."

"I told you the truth," muttered Ostrodumof; "you need not doubt me."

"Oh, I know you did."

They were again silent, and again the little puffs of smoke escaping from their silent lips mounted in light spirals above their curly heads. There was a sound of steps in the anteroom.

"There he is!" murmured Mashurina.

The door was thrust open and a head slipped through the opening, but it was not Neshdanof's. It was a round face; the hair was black and coarse, the forehead broad and wrinkled; the little brown eyes moved restlessly beneath the thick eyebrows; a nose like a duck's beak, turned up at the end, and a little rosy mouth made up the rest of the face.

This head looked around, bowed, smiled—showing two rows of little white teeth—and entered the room at the same time with a feeble, short-armed body, and legs half bandy, half lame.

On seeing him both Mashurina and Ostrodumof wore on their faces the same expression of indulgent disdain, very much as if they had said to themselves, "Oh, it's only he." They made no movement and uttered no sound. But the new arrival so far from being discouraged at this reception seemed rather to be pleased with it.

"What does this mean?" he cried with a squeaking voice. "A duet? Why not a trio? But where is the first tenor?"

"Is it Neshdanof you mean, Mr. Pakline?" asked Ostrodumof with an earnest air.

"Yes, exactly, Mr. Ostrodumof."

"He will probably return soon, Mr. Pakline."

"Delighted to hear it, Mr. Ostrodumof."

The little cripple turned toward Mashurina, who sat scowling, still smoking her cigarette.

"How do you do, my dear—my dear—oh, how stupid I am! I can never remember your first name, nor that of your father."*

Mashurina shrugged her shoulders.

"Why should I tell you them? You know my surname. What more do you want? And why do you ask how I am? You see I'm not dead."

"True, perfectly true!" cried Pakline, inflating his nostrils and moving his uneven eyebrows. "If you were dead your very humble servant would not have the pleasure of seeing you here and of talking with you. Consider my questions as the result of an old bad habit. As for the name, and your father's name—you see it seems queer for me to call you Mashurina simply. I know you always sign your letters Bonaparte—I mean Mashurina—but nevertheless—in talking. . . ."

"But who asked you to talk to me?"

Pakline gave a little nervous laugh, as if he had swallowed something the wrong way.

"Come, come, my dove, don't be angry, give me your hand. You are very good, I know, and I am not so bad. Come."

Pakline held out his hand. Mashurina looked at him frowningly, but yet she stretched out her own.

"You are very anxious to know my Christian name," she said, without changing her expression; "well, it is Fiokla."†

"And mine Pimen," added Ostrodumof's deep voice.

"Ah, this is very instructive, very instructive; but then

*In Russia it is seldom that any one is addressed in conversation by his surname; the Christian name alone would be too intimate or too familiar. The customary form of address—which has the advantage of being familiar with inferiors and respectful with superiors—is like the ancient Greek formula, Achilles Peiades, or son of Peleus. Thus the author of this novel is called Ivan Sergeitch, that is to say, Ivan the son of Serge.—*Zr.*

† That is, Thekla.—*Zr.*

tell me, O Fiokla, and you; O Pimen, why you always treat me so coldly, while I—

“Mashurina thinks, and she is not alone in her opinion,” interrupted Ostrodumof, “that it is impossible to have confidence in you because you always look at things from the ridiculous side.”

Pakline turned quickly on his heels.

“Ah, those who judge me always make the same mistake, my dear Pimen. In the first place, I'm not always laughing, and then it doesn't mean anything, and it is possible to have confidence in me. The proof of this is the flattering confidence which has been shown me more than once by your friends. I'm an honest man, my dear Pimen.”

Ostrodumof muttered something between his teeth, and Pakline, shaking his head, repeated, but this time without a smile, “No, I'm not always laughing; I'm not a happy man; just look at me!”

Ostrodumof raised his eyes to his face. In fact, when Pakline was not laughing or talking, his face wore an expression of sadness mingled with dread; this expression became comical and even mischievous the moment he opened his mouth. But Ostrodumof kept silence. Pakline turned again toward Mashurina.

“And how are your studies getting on? Are you making progress in your philanthropic art? It must be a hard business helping an inexperienced citizen to make his first appearance in the world, eh?”

“Oh, not at all, provided the little citizen is not much bigger than you are,” answered Mashurina smiling with a satisfied air.

Mashurina had just received the diploma of midwife. Eighteen months before she had left her family—who were nobles of moderate wealth in the south of Russia—and she had come to St. Petersburg with six rubles in her pocket; she had entered the school of obstetrics, and by hard work she had reached the grade she wanted. She was unmarried and very chaste. “Nothing remarkable!” a skeptic will cry, remembering what we said of her appearance. “An astonishing and rare thing,” we shall take the liberty of saying in our turn.