

THE GOLLOVLEV FAMILY

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The Gollovlev family by N. E. Shchedrin

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N. E. SHCHEDRIN

**THE GOLLOVLEV
FAMILY**

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By N. E. SHCHEDRIN



TRANSLATED BY
ATHELSTAN RIDGWAY

LONDON
JARROLD & SONS

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The Gollovlev Family.

CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY COUNCIL.

AFTER giving an account of his voyage to Moscow, where he had been to look into the rent owing by the serfs who lived there,* the steward was leaving the room, at a sign from his mistress, when a curious hesitation suddenly overtook him. He moved his feet restlessly, as if he were in doubt whether to say something.

Arina Pétrovna noticed the least movements of her household. She even possessed in the highest degree the art of guessing their most secret thoughts. So her steward's reticence made her at once uneasy.

"Well, what more have you to say?" she quickly asked.

"That's all," stammered Anton Vassilieff, who was trying all the time to get away.

"Now, don't tell lies! There's something else you want to tell me. I see it in your eyes."

But Anton Vassilieff could not make up his mind to speak out, and went on acting as before.

"Come, speak, you weathercock, and don't fidget about so," said Arina Pétrovna in an irritated tone.

* During the time of serfdom, the landlords used to authorise the serfs to go into some town to carry on any kind of industry, provided they paid a certain amount of money.

The lady of the house liked to give her people nicknames, and though she treated Anton Vassilieff as a weathercock, it was not because she suspected his fidelity, but his tongue was too long. In the middle of the property he managed was a busy market-town, containing numerous restaurants. And, upon my word, Anton loved to take tea at one of them, and to make a parade there of his mistress's power, though he often let slip an indiscreet word amid his braggadocio. Arina Pétrovna was always at law, and it frequently happened that her confidential agent's babbling revealed his mistress's ruses of war before she had put them in execution.

"Well, yes, there certainly is——" Anton Vassilieff at last mumbled.

"What?" inquired Arina Pétrovna quite uneasy.

She was an arbitrary woman, who was moreover gifted with a great power of imagination, and in a moment she saw passing before her eyes a crowd of pictures, each more disquieting than the others to her authority. Her face, too, grew pale, and she rose quickly from her seat.

"Stépane Vladimiritch has sold his house," continued the steward, stopping after each word.

"Well?"

"He has sold it."

"How's that? Why? Come along, speak!"

"Because of debts, they say. The reason for the sale is doubtless not well to mention."

"So it was the police who had it sold?—the court?"

"It would seem it's the police. The house was put up to auction and sold for eight thousand roubles."

Arina Pétrovna let herself fall heavily into her armchair and looked towards the window. She

seemed to have lost consciousness of herself for the moment. If anyone had come to tell her that Stépane Vladimiritch had just committed a murder, or that the peasants of Golovleff had revolted and refused to go to forced labour, or even that serfdom had been abolished, she would have been less thunderstruck. Her lips moved; she stared fixedly without seeing. Her pre-occupation was such that she did not even pay attention to an incident that happened at the moment, and which would certainly have provoked inquiry at any other time. A little girl—the little Douniachka—was running full speed, hiding something under her apron; she wanted to creep up to the window, but seeing the lady of the house, she turned round, then slowly retraced her steps.

Arina Pétrovna appeared to regain consciousness and exclaimed:

“Ah! yes! That’s fine!”

Then she stopped, and the silence that heralds a storm reigned anew in the room for some minutes.

“So you say the police sold the house for eight thousand roubles?” she asked again.

“Yes, lady, that’s so.”

“Selling the blessing of his parents.* How charming! How noble! You dirty hound! Be off!”

Arina Pétrovna felt clearly she must take a prompt resolution, but, being still under the influence of the blow which had struck her, she was incapable of deciding anything, and her ideas, becoming inextricably confused, went off in all directions. To her way of thinking the sale of the house could not have taken place without notice, and there must surely have been an

* It is a tradition in certain classes of Russian society to designate under the phrase *paternal blessing* the holy images, and, in exceptional cases, the real or personal property which parents give their children on certain occasions.