

(28)

I looked at the words. And then paused. Completely satisfied with their eloquence, I signed my name to the letter.

(29)

*“Mayakovskaya.”*

The doors open and in straggles a woman wrapped in dirty cloths. Her skin is crusty and blackened; her face has been burnt by the sun. In her arms she holds a baby whose skin is even dirtier. The passengers look at the woman in amazement. For them, she is the first, but not the last and not even the only person who is asking for alms in this way — in the neighboring car a five-year-old gypsy boy is playing an accordion, and in the car next to him a legless man looks up pitifully from a wooden cart. The doors close and the train jerks into motion. Dear passengers! the woman begins in a plaintive voice, Please excuse me for turning to you like this. My husband and I have come from another city that is very far away. Our documents and our money were stolen. Now we’re living at the train station and don’t have enough money to pay for our way back home. Help us please! Please help us by giving within your means.... By now the train is roaring in the tunnel and the woman’s last sentences are less heard than felt. The woman and her baby make their way down the aisle. The other passengers give what they can — here a hundred rubles, there a green plastic metro token, here and there a fistful of worthless coins — and the woman gathers the money with her head bent humbly. Gratefully. Slowly she drags her burden toward us, bringing with her as she goes the eyes of our fellow travelers. Watching her approach, we become mesmerized. Colors become muted. Sounds fall away. Meekly the woman approaches until she is directly in front of us. Head bent, hand outstretched, she is waiting — as are the rest of the passengers — for us to give within our means....

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Irina and I agreed to meet outside the U.S. Embassy on Tuesday at exactly 6:00 a.m. No Fuzz! I said. Go to hell! she said.

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