

XV -The witch and other Stories

Chapter II of "The Witch and Other Stories" shifts the focus from the tavern scene to a day in the life at Dr. B. O. Mozelweiser's hydropathic establishment, emphasizing routine amidst the New Year's Day celebrations. Early in the morning, Andrey Hrisanfitch, the porter adorned in a freshly braided uniform, engages in his daily duties with a notable enthusiasm for the holiday, greeting visitors with New Year's wishes. His interaction with a general, a regular patron, underscores the mundanity of his role, as they exchange customary greetings and the general inquires, as always forgetfully, about the purposes of the rooms.

The narrative takes a tender turn when Andrey receives a letter from the country addressed to him, which he immediately hands over to his wife, Yefimya, without detaining himself from his newspaper. This gesture, lacking direct communication, reveals dimensions of their relationship, characterized by routine and unspoken understandings. Yefimya's reaction to the letter is profound; through her tears and joy, she immerses herself and her children in the vivid descriptions of their country home, bringing to life its simplicity, warmth, and the deep connection to familial roots. The letter evokes a strong emotional response, highlighting her longing for the peaceful, idyllic life away from their current setting.

The dichotomy between Andrey's detached demeanor and Yefimya's emotional depth is striking. Andrey's absence during the moments of Yefimya's vulnerability suggests a disconnection or a prioritization of his duties over family time. It becomes evident that Andrey, perhaps caught up in the demands of his job, had previously neglected to mail letters Yefimya had given him, letters that never reached their intended recipients.

The chapter closes with Andrey responding to another work duty, showcasing the relentless nature of his job and further complicating the narrative of a man caught between professional obligations and personal disconnect. Yefimya's fear of Andrey hints at deeper issues within their relationship, subtly illustrated through her reactions and the atmosphere of the room when he is present. This chapter cleverly juxtaposes the celebration of a new year, symbolizing new beginnings, with the stark reality of the characters' lives, encapsulating themes of longing, routine, and the complexity of interpersonal relationships.