

Chapter 15_The Time Machine ...

In the chapter titled "THE TIME MACHINE," the narrator reflects on the idea of his wife, Helga, and the passage of time. He describes a hand on a railing, which he believes might belong to Helga, who is now a middle-aged woman, aged forty-five. The narrator grapples with the thought of what Helga might have experienced during her sixteen years as a prisoner following the Russian invasion of the Crimea. He expresses disbelief that the vibrant and joyful Helga he once knew could still exist after such harrowing experiences.

His musings become darker as he considers the fate that befell women prisoners on the Russian front, hinting at a grim reality where survival meant being subjected to dehumanizing labor and oppressive conditions. The narrative paints a vivid picture of the hardships women faced in a war that transformed them into mere shadows of their former selves—diggers in frosty fields, pullers of carts, devoid of identity and joy.

As he continues down the stairs, the narrator's disbelief leads him to confront the woman in question. Upon seeing her, he is met with an unexpected sight: she smiles at him with a familiar warmth, raising her chin to reveal her features clearly. Despite her snow-white hair, she embodies the essence of his beloved Helga, appearing untouched by the passage of time. The contrast between his memories and the reality before him is striking; she retains the lithe and blooming spirit he remembers from their wedding night. This encounter intensifies the emotional journey of the narrator, illustrating the complexities of love, loss, and the enduring power of memory amid the unforgiving realities of life and war.