

# **The Schoolmaster and Other Stories**

By

Anton Chekhov

[Web-Books.Com](http://Web-Books.Com)

# The Schoolmaster and Other Stories

The Schoolmaster .....	3
Enemies .....	9
The Examining Magistrate.....	20
Betrothed .....	25
From The Diary Of A Violent-Tempered Man.....	41
In The Dark .....	50
A Play .....	55
A Mystery .....	60
Strong Impressions .....	65
Drunk .....	69
The Marshal's Widow.....	75
A Bad Business .....	79
In The Court.....	84
Boots.....	90
Joy.....	94
Ladies .....	96
A Peculiar Man .....	100
At The Barber's.....	104
An Inadvertence .....	108
The Album .....	112
Oh! The Public .....	114
A Tripping Tongue .....	118
Overdoing It .....	121
The Orator .....	125
Malingers.....	128
In The Graveyard .....	131
Hush! .....	133
In An Hotel .....	136
In A Strange Land .....	139

## The Schoolmaster

FYODOR LUKITCH SYSOEV, the master of the factory school maintained at the expense of the firm of Kulikin, was getting ready for the annual dinner. Every year after the school examination the board of managers gave a dinner at which the inspector of elementary schools, all who had conducted the examinations, and all the managers and foremen of the factory were present. In spite of their official character, these dinners were always good and lively, and the guests sat a long time over them; forgetting distinctions of rank and recalling only their meritorious labours, they ate till they were full, drank amicably, chattered till they were all hoarse and parted late in the evening, deafening the whole factory settlement with their singing and the sound of their kisses. Of such dinners Sysoev had taken part in thirteen, as he had been that number of years master of the factory school.

Now, getting ready for the fourteenth, he was trying to make himself look as festive and correct as possible. He had spent a whole hour brushing his new black suit, and spent almost as long in front of a looking-glass while he put on a fashionable shirt; the studs would not go into the button-holes, and this circumstance called forth a perfect storm of complaints, threats, and reproaches addressed to his wife.

His poor wife, bustling round him, wore herself out with her efforts. And indeed he, too, was exhausted in the end. When his polished boots were brought him from the kitchen he had not strength to pull them on. He had to lie down and have a drink of water.

"How weak you have grown!" sighed his wife. "You ought not to go to this dinner at all."

"No advice, please!" the schoolmaster cut her short angrily.

He was in a very bad temper, for he had been much displeased with the recent examinations. The examinations had gone off splendidly; all the boys of the senior division had gained certificates and prizes; both the managers of the factory and the government officials were pleased with the results; but that was not enough for the schoolmaster. He was vexed that Babkin, a boy who never made a mistake in writing, had made three mistakes in the dictation; Sergeyev, another boy, had been so excited that he could not remember seventeen times thirteen; the inspector, a young and inexperienced man, had chosen a difficult article for dictation, and Lyapunov, the master of a neighbouring school, whom the inspector had asked to dictate, had not behaved like "a good comrade"; but in dictating had, as it were, swallowed the words and had not pronounced them as written.

After pulling on his boots with the assistance of his wife, and looking at himself once more in the looking-glass, the schoolmaster took his gnarled stick and set off for the dinner. Just before the factory manager's house, where the festivity was to take place, he had a little mishap. He was taken with a violent fit of coughing . . . He was so shaken by

it that the cap flew off his head and the stick dropped out of his hand; and when the school inspector and the teachers, hearing his cough, ran out of the house, he was sitting on the bottom step, bathed in perspiration.

"Fyodor Lukitch, is that you?" said the inspector, surprised. "You . . . have come?"

"Why not?"

"You ought to be at home, my dear fellow. You are not at all well to-day. . . ."

"I am just the same to-day as I was yesterday. And if my presence is not agreeable to you, I can go back."

"Oh, Fyodor Lukitch, you must not talk like that! Please come in. Why, the function is really in your honour, not ours. And we are delighted to see you. Of course we are! . . ."

Within, everything was ready for the banquet. In the big dining-room adorned with German oleographs and smelling of geraniums and varnish there were two tables, a larger one for the dinner and a smaller one for the hors-d'oeuvres. The hot light of midday faintly percolated through the lowered blinds. . . . The twilight of the room, the Swiss views on the blinds, the geraniums, the thin slices of sausage on the plates, all had a naïve, girlishly-sentimental air, and it was all in keeping with the master of the house, a good-natured little German with a round little stomach and affectionate, oily little eyes. Adolf Andreyitch Bruni (that was his name) was bustling round the table of hors-d'oeuvres as zealously as though it were a house on fire, filling up the wine-glasses, loading the plates, and trying in every way to please, to amuse, and to show his friendly feelings. He clapped people on the shoulder, looked into their eyes, chuckled, rubbed his hands, in fact was as ingratiating as a friendly dog.

"Whom do I behold? Fyodor Lukitch!" he said in a jerky voice, on seeing Sysoev. "How delightful! You have come in spite of your illness. Gentlemen, let me congratulate you, Fyodor Lukitch has come!"

The school-teachers were already crowding round the table and eating the hors-d'oeuvres. Sysoev frowned; he was displeased that his colleagues had begun to eat and drink without waiting for him. He noticed among them Lyapunov, the man who had dictated at the examination, and going up to him, began:

"It was not acting like a comrade! No, indeed! Gentlemanly people don't dictate like that!"

"Good Lord, you are still harping on it!" said Lyapunov, and he frowned. "Aren't you sick of it?"

"Yes, still harping on it! My Babkin has never made mistakes! I know why you dictated like that. You simply wanted my pupils to be floored, so that your school might seem better than mine. I know all about it! . . ."

"Why are you trying to get up a quarrel?" Lyapunov snarled. "Why the devil do you pester me?"

"Come, gentlemen," interposed the inspector, making a woebegone face. "Is it worth while to get so heated over a trifle? Three mistakes . . . not one mistake . . . does it matter?"

"Yes, it does matter. Babkin has never made mistakes."

"He won't leave off," Lyapunov went on, snorting angrily. "He takes advantage of his position as an invalid and worries us all to death. Well, sir, I am not going to consider your being ill."

"Let my illness alone!" cried Sysoev, angrily. "What is it to do with you? They all keep repeating it at me: illness! illness! illness! . . . As though I need your sympathy! Besides, where have you picked up the notion that I am ill? I was ill before the examinations, that's true, but now I have completely recovered, there is nothing left of it but weakness."

"You have regained your health, well, thank God," said the scripture teacher, Father Nikolay, a young priest in a foppish cinnamon-coloured cassock and trousers outside his boots. "You ought to rejoice, but you are irritable and so on."

"You are a nice one, too," Sysoev interrupted him. "Questions ought to be straightforward, clear, but you kept asking riddles. That's not the thing to do!"

By combined efforts they succeeded in soothing him and making him sit down to the table. He was a long time making up his mind what to drink, and pulling a wry face drank a wine-glass of some green liqueur; then he drew a bit of pie towards him, and sulkily picked out of the inside an egg with onion on it. At the first mouthful it seemed to him that there was no salt in it. He sprinkled salt on it and at once pushed it away as the pie was too salt.

At dinner Sysoev was seated between the inspector and Bruni. After the first course the toasts began, according to the old-established custom.

"I consider it my agreeable duty," the inspector began, "to propose a vote of thanks to the absent school wardens, Daniel Petrovitch and . . . and . . . and . . ."

"And Ivan Petrovitch," Bruni prompted him.

"And Ivan Petrovitch Kulikin, who grudge no expense for the school, and I propose to drink their health. . . ."

"For my part," said Bruni, jumping up as though he had been stung, "I propose a toast to the health of the honoured inspector of elementary schools, Pavel Gennadievitch Nadarov!"

Chairs were pushed back, faces beamed with smiles, and the usual clinking of glasses began.

The third toast always fell to Sysoev. And on this occasion, too, he got up and began to speak. Looking grave and clearing his throat, he first of all announced that he had not the gift of eloquence and that he was not prepared to make a speech. Further he said that during the fourteen years that he had been schoolmaster there had been many intrigues, many underhand attacks, and even secret reports on him to the authorities, and that he knew his enemies and those who had informed against him, and he would not mention their names, "for fear of spoiling somebody's appetite"; that in spite of these intrigues the Kulikin school held the foremost place in the whole province not only from a moral, but also from a material point of view."

"Everywhere else," he said, "schoolmasters get two hundred or three hundred roubles, while I get five hundred, and moreover my house has been redecorated and even furnished at the expense of the firm. And this year all the walls have been repapered. . . ."

Further the schoolmaster enlarged on the liberality with which the pupils were provided with writing materials in the factory schools as compared with the Zemstvo and Government schools. And for all this the school was indebted, in his opinion, not to the heads of the firm, who lived abroad and scarcely knew of its existence, but to a man who, in spite of his German origin and Lutheran faith, was a Russian at heart.

Sysoev spoke at length, with pauses to get his breath and with pretensions to rhetoric, and his speech was boring and unpleasant. He several times referred to certain enemies of his, tried to drop hints, repeated himself, coughed, and flourished his fingers unbecomingly. At last he was exhausted and in a perspiration and he began talking jerkily, in a low voice as though to himself, and finished his speech not quite coherently: "And so I propose the health of Bruni, that is Adolf Andreyitch, who is here, among us . . . generally speaking . . . you understand . . ."

When he finished everyone gave a faint sigh, as though someone had sprinkled cold water and cleared the air. Bruni alone apparently had no unpleasant feeling. Beaming and rolling his sentimental eyes, the German shook Sysoev's hand with feeling and was again as friendly as a dog.

"Oh, I thank you," he said, with an emphasis on the *oh*, laying his left hand on his heart. "I am very happy that you understand me! I, with my whole heart, wish you all things good. But I ought only to observe; you exaggerate my importance. The school owes its flourishing condition only to you, my honoured friend, Fyodor Lukitch. But for you it

would be in no way distinguished from other schools! You think the German is paying a compliment, the German is saying something polite. Ha-ha! No, my dear Fyodor Lukitch, I am an honest man and never make complimentary speeches. If we pay you five hundred roubles a year it is because you are valued by us. Isn't that so? Gentlemen, what I say is true, isn't it? We should not pay anyone else so much. . . . Why, a good school is an honour to the factory!"

"I must sincerely own that your school is really exceptional," said the inspector. "Don't think this is flattery. Anyway, I have never come across another like it in my life. As I sat at the examination I was full of admiration. . . . Wonderful children! They know a great deal and answer brightly, and at the same time they are somehow special, unconstrained, sincere. . . . One can see that they love you, Fyodor Lukitch. You are a schoolmaster to the marrow of your bones. You must have been born a teacher. You have all the gifts -- innate vocation, long experience, and love for your work. . . . It's simply amazing, considering the weak state of your health, what energy, what understanding . . . what perseverance, do you understand, what confidence you have! Some one in the school committee said truly that you were a poet in your work. . . . Yes, a poet you are!"

And all present at the dinner began as one man talking of Sysoev's extraordinary talent. And as though a dam had been burst, there followed a flood of sincere, enthusiastic words such as men do not utter when they are restrained by prudent and cautious sobriety. Sysoev's speech and his intolerable temper and the horrid, spiteful expression on his face were all forgotten. Everyone talked freely, even the shy and silent new teachers, poverty-stricken, down-trodden youths who never spoke to the inspector without addressing him as "your honour." It was clear that in his own circle Sysoev was a person of consequence.

Having been accustomed to success and praise for the fourteen years that he had been schoolmaster, he listened with indifference to the noisy enthusiasm of his admirers.

It was Bruni who drank in the praise instead of the schoolmaster. The German caught every word, beamed, clapped his hands, and flushed modestly as though the praise referred not to the schoolmaster but to him.

"Bravo! bravo!" he shouted. "That's true! You have grasped my meaning! . . . Excellent! . . ." He looked into the schoolmaster's eyes as though he wanted to share his bliss with him. At last he could restrain himself no longer; he leapt up, and, overpowering all the other voices with his shrill little tenor, shouted:

"Gentlemen! Allow me to speak! Sh-h! To all you say I can make only one reply: the management of the factory will not be forgetful of what it owes to Fyodor Lukitch! . . ."

All were silent. Sysoev raised his eyes to the German's rosy face.

"We know how to appreciate it," Bruni went on, dropping his voice. "In response to your words I ought to tell you that . . . Fyodor Lukitch's family will be provided for and that a sum of money was placed in the bank a month ago for that object."

Sysoev looked enquiringly at the German, at his colleagues, as though unable to understand why his family should be provided for and not he himself. And at once on all the faces, in all the motionless eyes bent upon him, he read not the sympathy, not the commiseration which he could not endure, but something else, something soft, tender, but at the same time intensely sinister, like a terrible truth, something which in one instant turned him cold all over and filled his soul with unutterable despair. With a pale, distorted face he suddenly jumped up and clutched at his head. For a quarter of a minute he stood like that, stared with horror at a fixed point before him as though he saw the swiftly coming death of which Bruni was speaking, then sat down and burst into tears.

"Come, come! . . . What is it?" he heard agitated voices saying. "Water! drink a little water!"

A short time passed and the schoolmaster grew calmer, but the party did not recover their previous liveliness. The dinner ended in gloomy silence, and much earlier than on previous occasions.

When he got home Sysoev first of all looked at himself in the glass.

"Of course there was no need for me to blubber like that!" he thought, looking at his sunken cheeks and his eyes with dark rings under them. "My face is a much better colour to-day than yesterday. I am suffering from anemia and catarrh of the stomach, and my cough is only a stomach cough."

Reassured, he slowly began undressing, and spent a long time brushing his new black suit, then carefully folded it up and put it in the chest of drawers.

Then he went up to the table where there lay a pile of his pupils' exercise-books, and picking out Babkin's, sat down and fell to contemplating the beautiful childish handwriting. . . .

And meantime, while he was examining the exercise-books, the district doctor was sitting in the next room and telling his wife in a whisper that a man ought not to have been allowed to go out to dinner who had not in all probability more than a week to live.



## Enemies

BETWEEN nine and ten on a dark September evening the only son of the district doctor, Kirilov, a child of six, called Andrey, died of diphtheria. Just as the doctor's wife sank on her knees by the dead child's bedside and was overwhelmed by the first rush of despair there came a sharp ring at the bell in the entry.

All the servants had been sent out of the house that morning on account of the diphtheria. Kirilov went to open the door just as he was, without his coat on, with his waistcoat unbuttoned, without wiping his wet face or his hands which were scalded with carbolic. It was dark in the entry and nothing could be distinguished in the man who came in but medium height, a white scarf, and a large, extremely pale face, so pale that its entrance seemed to make the passage lighter.

"Is the doctor at home?" the newcomer asked quickly.

"I am at home," answered Kirilov. "What do you want?"

"Oh, it's you? I am very glad," said the stranger in a tone of relief, and he began feeling in the dark for the doctor's hand, found it and squeezed it tightly in his own. "I am very . . . very glad! We are acquainted. My name is Abogin, and I had the honour of meeting you in the summer at Gnutchev's. I am very glad I have found you at home. For God's sake don't refuse to come back with me at once. . . . My wife has been taken dangerously ill. . . . And the carriage is waiting. . . ."

From the voice and gestures of the speaker it could be seen that he was in a state of great excitement. Like a man terrified by a house on fire or a mad dog, he could hardly restrain his rapid breathing and spoke quickly in a shaking voice, and there was a note of unaffected sincerity and childish alarm in his voice. As people always do who are frightened and overwhelmed, he spoke in brief, jerky sentences and uttered a great many unnecessary, irrelevant words.

"I was afraid I might not find you in," he went on. "I was in a perfect agony as I drove here. Put on your things and let us go, for God's sake. . . . This is how it happened. Alexandr Semyonovitch Paptchinsky, whom you know, came to see me. . . . We talked a little and then we sat down to tea; suddenly my wife cried out, clutched at her heart, and fell back on her chair. We carried her to bed and . . . and I rubbed her forehead with ammonia and sprinkled her with water . . . she lay as though she were dead. . . . I am afraid it is aneurism . . . . Come along . . . her father died of aneurism."

Kirilov listened and said nothing, as though he did not understand Russian.

When Abogin mentioned again Paptchinsky and his wife's father and once more began feeling in the dark for his hand the doctor shook his head and said apathetically, dragging out each word:

"Excuse me, I cannot come . . . my son died . . . five minutes ago!"

"Is it possible!" whispered Abogin, stepping back a pace. "My God, at what an unlucky moment I have come! A wonderfully unhappy day . . . wonderfully. What a coincidence. . . . It's as though it were on purpose!"

Abogin took hold of the door-handle and bowed his head. He was evidently hesitating and did not know what to do--whether to go away or to continue entreating the doctor.

"Listen," he said fervently, catching hold of Kirilov's sleeve. "I well understand your position! God is my witness that I am ashamed of attempting at such a moment to intrude on your attention, but what am I to do? Only think, to whom can I go? There is no other doctor here, you know. For God's sake come! I am not asking you for myself. . . . I am not the patient!"

A silence followed. Kirilov turned his back on Abogin, stood still a moment, and slowly walked into the drawing-room. Judging from his unsteady, mechanical step, from the attention with which he set straight the fluffy shade on the unlighted lamp in the drawing-room and glanced into a thick book lying on the table, at that instant he had no intention, no desire, was thinking of nothing and most likely did not remember that there was a stranger in the entry. The twilight and stillness of the drawing-room seemed to increase his numbness. Going out of the drawing-room into his study he raised his right foot higher than was necessary, and felt for the doorposts with his hands, and as he did so there was an air of perplexity about his whole figure as though he were in somebody else's house, or were drunk for the first time in his life and were now abandoning himself with surprise to the new sensation. A broad streak of light stretched across the bookcase on one wall of the study; this light came together with the close, heavy smell of carbolic and ether from the door into the bedroom, which stood a little way open. . . . The doctor sank into a low chair in front of the table; for a minute he stared drowsily at his books, which lay with the light on them, then got up and went into the bedroom.

Here in the bedroom reigned a dead silence. Everything to the smallest detail was eloquent of the storm that had been passed through, of exhaustion, and everything was at rest. A candle standing among a crowd of bottles, boxes, and pots on a stool and a big lamp on the chest of drawers threw a brilliant light over all the room. On the bed under the window lay a boy with open eyes and a look of wonder on his face. He did not move, but his open eyes seemed every moment growing darker and sinking further into his head. The mother was kneeling by the bed with her arms on his body and her head hidden in the bedclothes. Like the child, she did not stir; but what throbbing life was suggested in the curves of her body and in her arms! She leaned against the bed with all her being, pressing against it greedily with all her might, as though she were afraid of disturbing the peaceful and comfortable attitude she had found at last for her exhausted body. The bedclothes, the rags and bowls, the splashes of water on the floor, the little paint-brushes and spoons thrown down here and there, the white bottle of lime water, the very air, heavy and stifling--were all hushed and seemed plunged in repose.

## Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

