**An Elderly Patient**

**By Dick Lachman**

She hardly thought the visit was worthwhile
And just as I was opening her file
She said that she was too old to be treated
A statement that she several times repeated

I reassured her that I understood
Her situation but perhaps we could
Review her treatment options just for now
To understand the why and what and how

She was a happy person all her life
A loving mother, grand-mother and wife
She understood how blessed her life had been
Yet knew this was a fight she might not win

She said that she had not the energy
To pursue a treatment course with me
She said that she felt quite prepared to die
Then fear welled up and she began to cry

I consoled her, did the best I could
To describe some treatments that she should
Consider in the context of her age
Ideas that she could comprehend and gauge

She trusted me enough to move ahead
As we worked to dispel her fear and dread
And so her quality of life remained
As each day she saw happiness sustained

I treated her for two years from that day
Then was informed that she had passed away
But this had been a clear cut victory
A gift to her and certainly to me

**My Time On Earth**

**By Dick Lachman**

What if life took only one rotation of a fan
Birth and death occurring both within so short a span
Or how about an hour, so what difference would this be
Is it too short a time to count or would I still be me?
What if a life occurred completely within just one week?
Would we have time to search and find whatever we should seek?
Or how about one year? Would this be time enough to say
I lived my life completely and fulfilled it day by day
Perhaps a decade really is the logical extent
To figure out exactly what our time on earth has meant
A century may be too long, too long for us to stay
Avoiding many obstacles while keeping death at bay
Do lives derive their value from the length of time we're here
Does the metronome of life decide who's worthless and who's dear
Or is it not at all that way, do we derive our worth
Within our daily battles on this battleground called Earth
It must be more than time to say who's better and who's best
Who follows or who leads as an example for the rest
I only hope my epitaph contains a simple rhyme
Explaining how my life on earth made good use of my time.

**Misery**

Anton Chekhov

THE twilight of evening. Big flakes of wet snow are whirling lazily about the street lamps,

which have just been lighted, and lying in a thin soft layer on roofs, horses' backs,

shoulders, caps. Iona Potapov, the sledge-driver, is all white like a ghost. He sits on the box

without stirring, bent as double as the living body can be bent. If a regular snowdrift fell on

him it seems as though even then he would not think it necessary to shake it off. . . . His

little mare is white and motionless too. Her stillness, the angularity of her lines, and the

stick-like straightness of her legs make her look like a halfpenny gingerbread horse. She is

probably lost in thought. Anyone who has been torn away from the plough, from the

familiar gray landscapes, and cast into this slough, full of monstrous lights, of unceasing

uproar and hurrying people, is bound to think.

It is a long time since Iona and his nag have budged. They came out of the yard before

dinnertime and not a single fare yet. But now the shades of evening are falling on the town.

The pale light of the street lamps changes to a vivid color, and the bustle of the street grows

noisier.

"Sledge to Vyborgskaya!" Iona hears. "Sledge!"

Iona starts, and through his snow-plastered eyelashes sees an officer in a military overcoat

with a hood over his head.

"To Vyborgskaya," repeats the officer. "Are you asleep? To Vyborgskaya!"

In token of assent Iona gives a tug at the reins which sends cakes of snow flying from the

horse's back and shoulders. The officer gets into the sledge. The sledge-driver clicks to the

horse, cranes his neck like a swan, rises in his seat, and more from habit than necessity

brandishes his whip. The mare cranes her neck, too, crooks her stick-like legs, and

hesitatingly sets of. . . .

"Where are you shoving, you devil?" Iona immediately hears shouts from the dark mass

shifting to and fro before him. "Where the devil are you going? Keep to the r-right!"

"You don't know how to drive! Keep to the right," says the officer angrily.

A coachman driving a carriage swears at him; a pedestrian crossing the road and brushing

the horse's nose with his shoulder looks at him angrily and shakes the snow off his sleeve.

Iona fidgets on the box as though he were sitting on thorns, jerks his elbows, and turns his

eyes about like one possessed as though he did not know where he was or why he was

there.

"What rascals they all are!" says the officer jocosely. "They are simply doing their best to

run up against you or fall under the horse's feet. They must be doing it on purpose."

Iona looks as his fare and moves his lips. . . . Apparently he means to say something, but

nothing comes but a sniff.

"What?" inquires the officer.

Iona gives a wry smile, and straining his throat, brings out huskily: "My son . . . er . . . my

son died this week, sir."

"H'm! What did he die of?"

Iona turns his whole body round to his fare, and says:

"Who can tell! It must have been from fever. . . . He lay three days in the hospital and then

he died. . . . God's will."

"Turn round, you devil!" comes out of the darkness. "Have you gone cracked, you old dog?

Look where you are going!"

"Drive on! drive on! . . ." says the officer. "We shan't get there till to-morrow going on like

this. Hurry up!"

The sledge-driver cranes his neck again, rises in his seat, and with heavy grace swings his

whip. Several times he looks round at the officer, but the latter keeps his eyes shut and is

apparently disinclined to listen. Putting his fare down at Vyborgskaya, Iona stops by a

restaurant, and again sits huddled up on the box. . . . Again the wet snow paints him and his

horse white. One hour passes, and then another. . . .

Three young men, two tall and thin, one short and hunchbacked, come up, railing at each

other and loudly stamping on the pavement with their goloshes.

"Cabby, to the Police Bridge!" the hunchback cries in a cracked voice. "The three of us, . . .

twenty kopecks!"

Iona tugs at the reins and clicks to his horse. Twenty kopecks is not a fair price, but he has

no thoughts for that. Whether it is a rouble or whether it is five kopecks does not matter to

him now so long as he has a fare. . . . The three young men, shoving each other and using

bad language, go up to the sledge, and all three try to sit down at once. The question

remains to be settled: Which are to sit down and which one is to stand? After a long

altercation, ill-temper, and abuse, they come to the conclusion that the hunchback must

stand because he is the shortest.

"Well, drive on," says the hunchback in his cracked voice, settling himself and breathing

down Iona's neck. "Cut along! What a cap you've got, my friend! You wouldn't find a worse

one in all Petersburg. . . ."

"He-he! . . . he-he! . . ." laughs Iona. "It's nothing to boast of!"

"Well, then, nothing to boast of, drive on! Are you going to drive like this all the way? Eh?

Shall I give you one in the neck?"

"My head aches," says one of the tall ones. "At the Dukmasovs' yesterday Vaska and I drank

four bottles of brandy between us."

"I can't make out why you talk such stuff," says the other tall one angrily. "You lie like a

brute."

"Strike me dead, it's the truth! . . ."

"It's about as true as that a louse coughs."

"He-he!" grins Iona. "Me-er-ry gentlemen!"

"Tfoo! the devil take you!" cries the hunchback indignantly. "Will you get on, you old

plague, or won't you? Is that the way to drive? Give her one with the whip. Hang it all, give

it her well."

Iona feels behind his back the jolting person and quivering voice of the hunchback. He

hears abuse addressed to him, he sees people, and the feeling of loneliness begins little by

little to be less heavy on his heart. The hunchback swears at him, till he chokes over some

elaborately whimsical string of epithets and is overpowered by his cough. His tall

companions begin talking of a certain Nadyezhda Petrovna. Iona looks round at them.

Waiting till there is a brief pause, he looks round once more and says:

"This week . . . er. . . my. . . er. . . son died!"

"We shall all die, . . ." says the hunchback with a sigh, wiping his lips after coughing.

"Come, drive on! drive on! My friends, I simply cannot stand crawling like this! When will

he get us there?"

"Well, you give him a little encouragement . . . one in the neck!"

"Do you hear, you old plague? I'll make you smart. If one stands on ceremony with fellows

like you one may as well walk. Do you hear, you old dragon? Or don't you care a hang what

we say? "

And Iona hears rather than feels a slap on the back of his neck.

"He-he! . . . " he laughs. "Merry gentlemen . . . . God give you health!"

"Cabman, are you married?" asks one of the tall ones.

"I? He he! Me-er-ry gentlemen. The only wife for me now is the damp earth. . . . He-ho-ho!.

. . .The grave that is! . . . Here my son's dead and I am alive. . . . It's a strange thing, death

has come in at the wrong door. . . . Instead of coming for me it went for my son. . . ."

And Iona turns round to tell them how his son died, but at that point the hunchback gives a

faint sigh and announces that, thank God! they have arrived at last. After taking his twenty

kopecks, Iona gazes for a long while after the revelers, who disappear into a dark entry.

Again he is alone and again there is silence for him. . . . The misery which has been for a

brief space eased comes back again and tears his heart more cruelly than ever. With a look

of anxiety and suffering Iona's eyes stray restlessly among the crowds moving to and fro on

both sides of the street: can he not find among those thousands someone who will listen to

him? But the crowds flit by heedless of him and his misery. . . . His misery is immense,

beyond all bounds. If Iona's heart were to burst and his misery to flow out, it would flood

the whole world, it seems, but yet it is not seen. It has found a hiding-place in such an

insignificant shell that one would not have found it with a candle by daylight. . . .

Iona sees a house-porter with a parcel and makes up his mind to address him.

"What time will it be, friend?" he asks.

"Going on for ten. . . . Why have you stopped here? Drive on!"

Iona drives a few paces away, bends himself double, and gives himself up to his misery. He

feels it is no good to appeal to people. But before five minutes have passed he draws

himself up, shakes his head as though he feels a sharp pain, and tugs at the reins. . . . He can

bear it no longer.

"Back to the yard!" he thinks. "To the yard!"

And his little mare, as though she knew his thoughts, falls to trotting. An hour and a half

later Iona is sitting by a big dirty stove. On the stove, on the floor, and on the benches are

people snoring. The air is full of smells and stuffiness. Iona looks at the sleeping figures,

scratches himself, and regrets that he has come home so early. . . .

"I have not earned enough to pay for the oats, even," he thinks. "That's why I am so

miserable. A man who knows how to do his work, . . . who has had enough to eat, and

whose horse has had enough to eat, is always at ease. . . ."

In one of the corners a young cabman gets up, clears his throat sleepily, and makes for the

water-bucket.

"Want a drink?" Iona asks him.

"Seems so."

"May it do you good. . . . But my son is dead, mate. . . . Do you hear? This week in the

hospital. . . . It's a queer business. . . ."

Iona looks to see the effect produced by his words, but he sees nothing. The young man has

covered his head over and is already asleep. The old man sighs and scratches himself. . . .

Just as the young man had been thirsty for water, he thirsts for speech. His son will soon

have been dead a week, and he has not really talked to anybody yet . . . . He wants to talk of

it properly, with deliberation. . . . He wants to tell how his son was taken ill, how he

suffered, what he said before he died, how he died. . . . He wants to describe the funeral,

and how he went to the hospital to get his son's clothes. He still has his daughter Anisya in

the country. . . . And he wants to talk about her too. . . . Yes, he has plenty to talk about

now. His listener ought to sigh and exclaim and lament. . . . It would be even better to talk

to women. Though they are silly creatures, they blubber at the first word.

"Let's go out and have a look at the mare," Iona thinks. "There is always time for sleep. . . .

You'll have sleep enough, no fear. . . ."

He puts on his coat and goes into the stables where his mare is standing. He thinks about

oats, about hay, about the weather. . . . He cannot think about his son when he is alone. . . .

To talk about him with someone is possible, but to think of him and picture him is

insufferable anguish. . . .

"Are you munching?" Iona asks his mare, seeing her shining eyes. "There, munch away,

munch away. . . . Since we have not earned enough for oats, we will eat hay. . . . Yes, . . . I

have grown too old to drive. . . . My son ought to be driving, not I. . . . He was a real

cabman. . . . He ought to have lived. . . ."

Iona is silent for a while, and then he goes on: "That's how it is, old girl. . . . Kuzma Ionitch is gone. . . . He said good-by to me. . . . He went and died for no reason. . . . Now, suppose you had a little colt, and you were own mother to that little colt. . . . And all at once that same little colt went and died. . . . You'd be sorry, wouldn't you? . . ."

The little mare munches, listens, and breathes on her master's hands. Iona is carried away

and tells her all about it.