The Torrents Of Spring

Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev

Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev

The Torrents Of Spring

PUBLISHER NOTES:

Take our Free
Quick Quiz and Find Out Which
Best Side Hustle is ✓**Best for You**.

✓ **VISIT OUR WEBSITE**:

→ ***LYFREEDOM.COM*** ← ← ***CLICK HERE*** ←

‘Years of gladness,
Days of joy,
Like the torrents of spring
They hurried away.’
– *From an Old Ballad.*

... At two o’clock in the night he had gone back to his study. He had dismissed the servant after the candles were lighted, and throwing himself into a low chair by the hearth, he hid his face in both hands.

Never had he felt such weariness of body and of spirit. He had passed the whole evening in the company of charming ladies and cultivated men; some of the ladies were beautiful, almost all the men were distinguished by intellect or talent; he himself had talked with great success, even with brilliance ... and, for all that, never yet had the *taedium vitae* of which the Romans talked of old, the ‘disgust for life’, taken hold of him with such irresistible, such suffocating force. Had he been a little younger, he would have cried with misery, weariness, and exasperation: a biting, burning bitterness, like the bitter of wormwood, filled his whole soul. A sort of clinging repugnance, a weight of loathing closed in upon him on all sides like a dark night of autumn; and he did not know how to get free from this darkness, this bitterness. Sleep it was useless to reckon upon; he knew he should not sleep.

He fell to thinking ... slowly, listlessly, wrathfully. He thought of the vanity, the uselessness, the vulgar falsity of all things human. All the stages of man’s life passed in order before his mental gaze (he had himself lately reached his fifty-second year), and not one found grace in his eyes. Everywhere the same ever-lasting pouring of water into a sieve, the ever-lasting beating of the air, everywhere the same self-deception – half in good faith, half conscious – any toy to amuse the child, so long as it keeps him from crying. And then, all of a sudden, old age drops down like snow on the head, and with it the ever-growing, ever-gnawing, and devouring dread of death ... and the plunge into the abyss! Lucky indeed if life works out so to the end! May be, before the end, like rust on iron, sufferings, infirmities come... . He did not picture life’s sea, as the poets depict it, covered with tempestuous waves; no, he thought of that sea as a smooth, untroubled surface, stagnant and transparent to its darkest depths. He himself sits in a little tottering boat, and down below in those dark oozy depths, like prodigious fishes, he can just make out the shapes of hideous monsters: all the ills of life, diseases, sorrows, madness, poverty, blindness... . He gazes, and behold, one of these monsters separates itself off from the darkness, rises higher and higher, stands out more and more distinct, more and more loathsomely distinct... . An instant yet, and the boat that bears him will be overturned! But behold, it grows dim again, it withdraws, sinks down to the bottom, and there it lies, faintly stirring in the slime... . But the fated day will come, and it will overturn the boat.

He shook his head, jumped up from his low chair, took two turns up and down the room, sat down to the writing-table, and opening one drawer after another, began to rummage among his papers, among old letters, mostly from women. He could not have said why he was doing it; he was not looking for anything – he simply wanted by some kind of external occupation to get away from the thoughts oppressing him. Opening several letters at random (in one of them there was a withered flower tied with a bit of faded ribbon), he merely shrugged his shoulders, and glancing at the hearth, he tossed them on one side, probably with the idea of burning all this useless rubbish. Hurriedly, thrusting his hands first into one, and then into another drawer, he suddenly opened his eyes wide, and slowly bringing out a little octagonal box of old-fashioned make, he slowly raised its lid. In the box, under two layers of cotton wool, yellow with age, was a little garnet cross.

For a few instants he looked in perplexity at this cross – suddenly he gave a faint cry... . Something between regret and delight was expressed in his features. Such an expression a man's face wears when he suddenly meets some one whom he has long lost sight of, whom he has at one time tenderly loved, and who suddenly springs up before his eyes, still the same, and utterly transformed by the years.

He got up, and going back to the hearth, he sat down again in the arm-chair, and again hid his face in his hands... . 'Why to-day? just to-day?' was his thought, and he remembered many things, long since past.

This is what he remembered... .

But first I must mention his name, his father's name and his surname. He was called Dimitri Pavlovitch Sanin.

Here follows what he remembered.

I

It was the summer of 1840. Sanin was in his twenty-second year, and he was in Frankfort on his way home from Italy to Russia. He was a man of small property, but independent, almost without family ties. By the death of a distant relative, he had come into a few thousand roubles, and he had decided to spend this sum abroad before entering the service, before finally putting on the government yoke, without which he could not obtain a secure livelihood. Sanin had carried out this intention, and had fitted things in to such a nicety that on the day of his arrival in Frankfort he had only just enough money left to take him back to Petersburg. In the year 1840 there were few railroads in existence; tourists travelled by diligence. Sanin had taken a place in the '*bei-wagon*'; but the diligence did not start till eleven o'clock in the evening. There was a great deal of time to be got through before then. Fortunately it was lovely weather, and Sanin after dining at a hotel, famous in those days, the White Swan, set off to stroll about the town. He went in to look at Danneker's Ariadne, which he did not much care for, visited the house of Goethe, of whose works he had, however, only read *Werter*, and that in the French translation. He walked along the bank of the Maine, and was bored as a well-conducted tourist should be; at last at six o'clock in the evening, tired, and with dusty boots, he found himself in one of the least remarkable streets in Frankfort. That street he was fated not to forget long, long after. On one of its few houses he saw a signboard: 'Giovanni Roselli, Italian confectionery', was announced upon it. Sanin went into it to get a glass of lemonade; but in the shop, where, behind the modest counter, on the shelves of a stained cupboard, recalling a chemist's shop, stood a few bottles with gold labels, and as many glass jars of biscuits, chocolate cakes, and sweetmeats – in this room, there was not a soul; only a grey cat blinked and purred, sharpening its claws on a tall wicker chair near the window and a bright patch of colour was made in the evening sunlight, by a big ball of red wool lying on the floor beside a carved wooden basket turned upside down. A confused noise was audible in the next room. Sanin stood a moment, and making the bell on the door ring its loudest, he called, raising his voice, 'Is there no one here?' At that instant the door from an inner room was thrown open, and Sanin was struck dumb with amazement.

II

A young girl of nineteen ran impetuously into the shop, her dark curls hanging in disorder on her bare shoulders, her bare arms stretched out in front of her. Seeing Sanin, she rushed up to him at once, seized him by the hand, and pulled him after her, saying in a breathless voice, 'Quick, quick, here, save him!' Not through disinclination to obey, but simply from excess of amazement, Sanin did not at once follow the girl. He stood, as it were, rooted to the spot; he had never in his life seen such a beautiful creature. She turned towards him, and with such despair in her voice, in her eyes, in the gesture of her clenched hand, which was lifted with a spasmodic movement to her pale cheek, she articulated, 'Come, come!' that he at once darted after her to the open door.

In the room, into which he ran behind the girl, on an old-fashioned horse-hair sofa, lay a boy of fourteen, white all over – white, with a yellowish tinge like wax or old marble – he was strikingly like the girl, obviously her brother. His eyes were closed, a patch of shadow fell from his thick black hair on a forehead like stone, and delicate, motionless eyebrows; between the blue lips could be seen clenched teeth. He seemed not to be breathing; one arm hung down to the floor, the other he had tossed above his head. The boy was dressed, and his clothes were closely buttoned; a tight cravat was twisted round his neck.

The girl rushed up to him with a wail of distress. 'He is dead, he is dead!' she cried; 'he was sitting here just now, talking to me – and all of a sudden he fell down and became rigid... . My God! can nothing be done to help him? And mamma not here! Pantaleone, Pantaleone, the doctor!' she went on suddenly in Italian. 'Have you been for the doctor?'

'Signora, I did not go, I sent Luise,' said a hoarse voice at the door, and a little bandy-legged old man came hobbling into the room in a lavender frock coat with black buttons, a high white cravat, short nankeen trousers, and blue worsted stockings. His diminutive little face was positively lost in a mass of iron-grey hair. Standing up in all directions, and falling back in ragged tufts, it gave the old man's figure a resemblance to a crested hen – a resemblance the more striking, that under the dark-grey mass nothing could be distinguished but a beak nose and round yellow eyes.

'Luise will run fast, and I can't run,' the old man went on in Italian, dragging his flat gouty feet, shod in high slippers with knots of ribbon. 'I've brought some water.'

In his withered, knotted fingers, he clutched a long bottle neck.

'But meanwhile Emil will die!' cried the girl, and holding out her hand to Sanin, 'O, sir, O *mein Herr!* can't you do something for him?'

'He ought to be bled – it's an apoplectic fit,' observed the old man addressed as Pantaleone.

Though Sanin had not the slightest notion of medicine, he knew one thing for certain, that boys of fourteen do not have apoplectic fits.

'It's a swoon, not a fit,' he said, turning to Pantaleone. 'Have you got any brushes?'

The old man raised his little face. 'Eh?'

'Brushes, brushes,' repeated Sanin in German and in French. 'Brushes,' he added, making as though he would brush his clothes.

The little old man understood him at last.

'Ah, brushes! *Spazzette!* to be sure we have!'

'Bring them here; we will take off his coat and try rubbing him.'

'Good ... *Benone!* And ought we not to sprinkle water on his head?'

'No ... later on; get the brushes now as quick as you can.'

Pantaleone put the bottle on the floor, ran out and returned at once with two brushes, one a hair-brush, and one a clothes-brush. A curly poodle followed him in, and vigorously wagging its tail, it looked up inquisitively at the old man, the girl, and even Sanin, as though it wanted to know what was the meaning of all this fuss.

Sanin quickly took the boy's coat off, unbuttoned his collar, and pushed up his shirt-sleeves, and arming himself with a brush, he began brushing his chest and arms with all his might. Pantaleone as zealously brushed away with the other – the hair-brush – at his boots and trousers. The girl flung herself on her knees by the sofa, and, clutching her head in both hands, fastened her eyes, not an eyelash quivering, on her brother.

Sanin rubbed on, and kept stealing glances at her. Mercy! what a beautiful creature she was!

III

Her nose was rather large, but handsome, aquiline-shaped; her upper lip was shaded by a light down; but then the colour of her face, smooth, uniform, like ivory or very pale milky amber, the wavering shimmer of her hair, like that of the Judith of Allorio in the Palazzo-Pitti; and above all, her eyes, dark-grey, with a black ring round the pupils, splendid, triumphant eyes, even now, when terror and distress dimmed their lustre... . Sanin could not help recalling the marvellous country he had just come from... . But even in Italy he had never met anything like her! The girl drew slow, uneven breaths; she seemed between each breath to be waiting to see whether her brother would not begin to breathe.

Sanin went on rubbing him, but he did not only watch the girl. The original figure of Pantaleone drew his attention too. The old man was quite exhausted and panting; at every movement of the brush he hopped up and down and groaned noisily, while his immense tufts of hair, soaked with perspiration, flapped heavily from side to side, like the roots of some strong plant, torn up by the water.

'You'd better, at least, take off his boots,' Sanin was just saying to him.

The poodle, probably excited by the unusualness of all the proceedings, suddenly sank on to its front paws and began barking.

'*Tartaglia – canaglia!*' the old man hissed at it. But at that instant the girl's face was transformed. Her eyebrows rose, her eyes grew wider, and shone with joy.

Sanin looked round ... A flush had over-spread the lad's face; his eyelids stirred ... his nostrils twitched. He drew in a breath through his still clenched teeth, sighed... .

'Emil!' cried the girl ... 'Emilio mio!'

Slowly the big black eyes opened. They still had a dazed look, but already smiled faintly; the same faint smile hovered on his pale lips. Then he moved the arm that hung down, and laid it on his chest.

'Emilio!' repeated the girl, and she got up. The expression on her face was so tense and vivid, that it seemed that in an instant either she would burst into tears or break into laughter.

'Emil! what is it? Emil!' was heard outside, and a neatly-dressed lady with silvery grey hair and a dark face came with rapid steps into the room.

A middle-aged man followed her; the head of a maid-servant was visible over their shoulders.

The girl ran to meet them.

'He is saved, mother, he is alive!' she cried, impulsively embracing the lady who had just entered.

'But what is it?' she repeated. 'I come back ... and all of a sudden I meet the doctor and Luise ... '

The girl proceeded to explain what had happened, while the doctor went up to the invalid who was coming more and more to himself, and was still smiling: he seemed to be beginning to feel shy at the commotion he had caused.

'You've been using friction with brushes, I see,' said the doctor to Sanin and Pantaleone, 'and you did very well... . A very good idea ... and now let us see what further measures ... '

He felt the youth's pulse. 'H'm! show me your tongue!'

The lady bent anxiously over him. He smiled still more ingenuously, raised his eyes to her, and blushed a little.

It struck Sanin that he was no longer wanted; he went into the shop. But before he had time to touch the handle of the street-door, the girl was once more before him; she stopped him.

'You are going,' she began, looking warmly into his face; 'I will not keep you, but you must be sure to come to see us this evening: we are so indebted to you – you, perhaps, saved my brother's life, we want to thank you – mother wants to. You must tell us who you are, you must rejoice with us ... '

'But I am leaving for Berlin to-day,' Sanin faltered out.

'You will have time though,' the girl rejoined eagerly. 'Come to us in an hour's time to drink a cup of chocolate with us. You promise? I must go back to him! You will come?'

What could Sanin do?

'I will come,' he replied.

The beautiful girl pressed his hand, fluttered away, and he found himself in the street.

IV

When Sanin, an hour and a half later, returned to the Rosellis' shop he was received there like one of the family. Emilio was sitting on the same sofa, on which he had been rubbed; the doctor had prescribed him medicine and recommended 'great discretion in avoiding strong emotions' as being a subject of nervous temperament with a tendency to weakness of the heart. He had previously been liable to fainting-fits; but never had he lost consciousness so completely and for so long. However, the doctor declared that all danger was over. Emil, as was only suitable for an invalid, was dressed in a comfortable dressing-gown; his mother wound a blue woollen wrap round his neck; but he had a cheerful, almost a festive air; indeed everything had a festive air. Before the sofa, on a round table, covered with a clean cloth, towered a huge china coffee-pot, filled with fragrant chocolate, and encircled by cups, decanters of liqueur, biscuits and rolls, and even flowers; six slender wax candles were burning in two old-fashioned silver chandeliers; on one side of the sofa, a comfortable lounge-chair offered its soft embraces, and in this chair they made Sanin sit. All the inhabitants of the confectioner's shop, with whom he had made acquaintance that day, were present, not excluding the poodle, Tartaglia, and the cat; they all seemed happy beyond expression; the poodle positively sneezed with delight, only the cat was coy and blinked sleepily as before. They made Sanin tell them who he was, where he came from, and what was his name; when he said he was a Russian, both the ladies were a little surprised, uttered ejaculations of wonder, and declared with one voice that he spoke German splendidly; but if he preferred to speak French, he might make use of that language, as they both understood it and spoke it well. Sanin at once availed himself of this suggestion. 'Sanin! Sanin!' The ladies would never have expected that a Russian surname could be so easy to pronounce. His Christian name – 'Dimitri' – they liked very much too. The elder lady observed that in her youth she had heard a fine opera – Demetrio e Polibio' – but that 'Dimitri' was much nicer than 'Demetrio.' In this way Sanin talked for about an hour. The ladies on their side initiated him into all the details of their own life. The talking was mostly done by the mother, the lady with grey hair. Sanin learnt from her that her name was Leonora Roselli; that she had lost her husband, Giovanni Battista Roselli, who had settled in Frankfort as a confectioner twenty – five years ago; that Giovanni Battista had come from Vicenza and had been a most excellent, though fiery and irascible man, and a republican withal! At those words Signora Roselli pointed to his portrait, painted in oil-colours, and hanging over the sofa. It must be presumed that the painter, 'also a republican!' as Signora Roselli observed with a sigh, had not fully succeeded in catching a likeness, for

in his portrait the late Giovanni Battista appeared as a morose and gloomy brigand, after the style of Rinaldo Rinaldini! Signora Roselli herself had come from 'the ancient and splendid city of Parma where there is the wonderful cupola, painted by the immortal Correggio!' But from her long residence in Germany she had become almost completely Germanised. Then she added, mournfully shaking her head, that all she had left was *this* daughter and *this* son (pointing to each in turn with her finger); that the daughter's name was Gemma, and the son's Emilio; that they were both very good and obedient children – especially Emilio ... ('Me not obedient!' her daughter put in at that point. 'Oh, you're a republican, too!' answered her mother). That the business, of course, was not what it had been in the days of her husband, who had a great gift for the confectionery line ... ('*Un grand uomo!*' Pantaleone confirmed with a severe air); but that still, thank God, they managed to get along!

V

Gemma listened to her mother, and at one minute laughed, then sighed, then patted her on the shoulder, and shook her finger at her, and then looked at Sanin; at last, she got up, embraced her mother and kissed her in the hollow of her neck, which made the latter laugh extremely and shriek a little. Pantaleone too was presented to Sanin. It appeared he had once been an opera singer, a baritone, but had long ago given up the theatre, and occupied in the Roselli family a position between that of a family friend and a servant. In spite of his prolonged residence in Germany, he had learnt very little German, and only knew how to swear in it, mercilessly distorting even the terms of abuse. '*Ferroflucto spitchebubbio*' was his favourite epithet for almost every German. He spoke Italian with a perfect accent – for was he not by birth from Sinigali, where may be heard '*lingua toscana in bocca romana*'! Emilio, obviously, played the invalid and indulged himself in the pleasant sensations of one who has only just escaped a danger or is returning to health after illness; it was evident, too, that the family spoiled him. He thanked Sanin bashfully, but devoted himself chiefly to the biscuits and sweetmeats. Sanin was compelled to drink two large cups of excellent chocolate, and to eat a considerable number of biscuits; no sooner had he swallowed one than Gemma offered him another – and to refuse was impossible! He soon felt at home: the time flew by with incredible swiftness. He had to tell them a great deal – about Russia in general, the Russian climate, Russian society, the Russian peasant – and especially about the Cossacks; about the war of 1812, about Peter the Great, about the Kremlin, and the Russian songs and bells. Both ladies had a very faint conception of our vast and remote fatherland; Signora Roselli, or as she was more often called, Frau Lenore, positively dumfoundered Sanin with the question, whether there was still existing at Petersburg the celebrated house of ice, built last century, about which she had lately read a very curious article in one of her husband's books, '*Bettezze delle arti*'. And in reply to Sanin's exclamation, 'Do you really suppose that there is never any summer in Russia?' Frau Lenore replied that till then she had always pictured Russia like this – eternal snow, every one going about in furs, and all military men, but the greatest hospitality, and all the peasants very submissive! Sanin tried to impart to her and her daughter some more exact information. When the conversation touched on Russian music, they begged him at once to sing some Russian air and showed him a diminutive piano with black keys instead of white and white instead of black. He obeyed without making much ado and accompanying himself with two fingers of the right hand and three of the left (the first, second, and little finger) he sang in a thin nasal tenor, first 'The Sarafan,' then 'Along a Paved Street'. The ladies