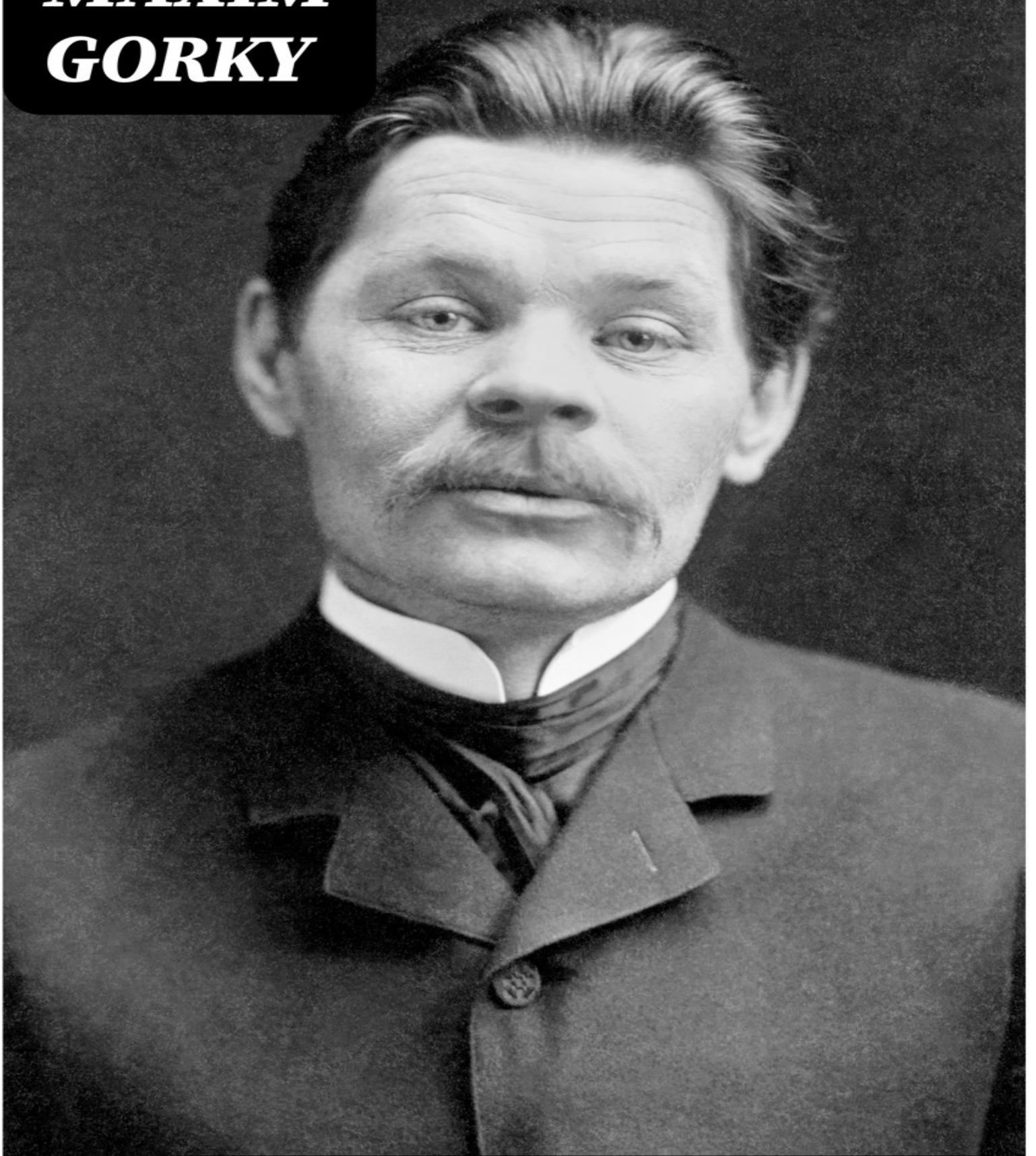


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TCHELKACHE

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When the longshoremen, leaving their work, were dispersed in noisy groups over the wharf, buying food from the open-air merchants, and settling themselves on the pavement, in shady corners, to eat, Grichka Tchelkache, an old jail-bird, appeared among them. He was game often hunted by the police, and the entire quay knew him for a hard drinker and a clever, daring thief. He was bare-headed and bare-footed, and wore a worn pair of velvet trousers and a percale blouse torn at the neck, showing his sharp and angular bones covered with brown skin. His touseled black hair, streaked with gray, and his sharp visage, resembling a bird of prey's, all rumped, indicated that he had just awakened. From his moustache hung a straw, another clung to his unshaved cheek, while behind his ear was a fresh linden leaf. Tall, bony, a little bent, he walked slowly over the stones, and, turning his hooked nose from side to side, cast piercing glances about him, appearing to be seeking someone among the 'longshoremen. His long, thick, brown moustache trembled like a cat's, and his hands, behind his back, rubbed each other, pressing closely together their twisted and knotty fingers. Even here, among hundreds of his own kind, he attracted attention by his resemblance to a sparrow-hawk of the steppes, by his rapacious leanness, his easy stride, outwardly calm but alert and watchful as the flight of the bird that he recalled.

When he reached a group of tatterdemalions, seated in the shade of some baskets of charcoal, a broad-shouldered