

Revolutionary Porcelain

by

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Scenes from Moscow Life

Cast of Characters

ART CRITIC, solitary, attractive middle-aged woman

ACTOR, the same age

Apartment squeezed with furniture. On the walls, shelves, and table—statues, plates, and other porcelain items from the 1920s. ART CRITIC half reclining on the sofa. In the middle of the room an unassembled white cabinet. A knock on the door. ART CRITIC gets up, lets in the ACTOR.

ACTOR: The bell doesn't work.

ART CRITIC: I'm sorry. Do you see what's going on in here. *(Points at the unassembled cabinet.)* A nightmare! They assume that I can put together a cabinet out of these boards.

ACTOR pulls out his tools, gets to work. ART CRITIC return to the sofa, examines the working ACTOR.

ART CRITIC: Forgive me, what's your name?

ACTOR: *(Gloomily.)* Gamlet.

ART CRITIC: Are you Armenian?

ACTOR: No, Danish. *(He examines the interior, grins.)* Do you collect revolutionary porcelain as a hobby?

ART CRITIC: A hobby?? Revolutionary porcelain, I'll have you know, is my profession. I hope you don't have a hobby of cabinet assembly. It's interesting that you're familiar with revolutionary porcelain. In my dissertation, I study the image of the worker in different periods after the October Revolution. Do you understand? *(Awkwardly.)* Should I make some tea? I have a cake, layered.

The ACTOR shakes his head.

In that case, I won't interfere, work... *(Sits down on the sofa, hums without words the melody of "Such a Snowfall, Such a Snowfall..." or another infantile Soviet song of the 1970s, off-key.)* It's stuck in my head. You know, your face looks familiar.

The ACTOR shrugs his shoulders, turns away.

ART CRITIC: Tell me, what's your real job?

ACTOR: You know, I'm just proletariat.

ART CRITIC: Proletariat? *(Laughs.)* That only exists in novels. In novels, and also *(pointing at the statues)* in artifacts. Proletariat! To today's ear, it sounds archaic, wild. Like a "hussar colonel." Or like an "old prince."

The ART CRITIC walks around the ACTOR.

No, I've definitely met you before. This song...Wait! I saw you on the stage! Isn't that right, you're an actor? *(She sings, swaying.)* Such a snowfall, such a snowfall...You were wearing a uniform...military. Fess up!

The song is playing. The ACTOR transforms. Active, determined, he looks straight ahead, remaining motionless. His body acquires a sculpted look, as if he himself is a porcelain piece. During the refrain ("Snow is circling, flying, flying...") the ACTOR performs light dance moves with one part of his body, then freezes again.

ART CRITIC: I'm very embarrassed, but I can't remember your name.

ACTOR: *(Stops her with a gesture, he is possessed by inspiration).* Shhh.

ART CRITIC: Seriously, the play was not bad, but your role was the best. The prick of art. Do you know what I mean? Artistic truth. Can't confuse it with anything. Proto-language, proto-relationships, and then—a song, a dance. I applauded, I even shouted "Bravo," and I do that rarely.

ACTOR: *(Snapping out of his role.)* Yes, once someone shouted.

ART CRITIC: Why don't they give you any lines? During the entire play—not a single line. I don't understand.

ACTOR: *(Shrugs his shoulders.)* What can't you understand? What can one do? It's theater.

ART CRITIC: *(Sighs sorrowfully).* Monstrous situation.

ACTOR returns to the assembly of the cabinet.

At the end of the day, he obviously is a talented man, he feels keenly, makes money assembling cabinets. Allow me to help you.

They work on the cabinet together.

ACTOR: Here, hold this. It doesn't fit... Just a moment...Let's teach it a lesson. *(Strikes with a hammer. Sound of cracking wood.)*

ART CRITIC: Perhaps I should make some tea?

ACTOR: I'd like something stronger.

ART CRITIC: Make the tea stronger?

The ACTOR laughs, quite rudely.

I get it. But it's only eleven o'clock.

The ACTOR shrugs his shoulders.

Wait a second, I have some rubbing alcohol for compresses. For headaches and neck aches... Can you drink rubbing alcohol?

ACTOR: *(Grinning)*. Try me.

*Sits down at the table. The ACTOR drinks the rubbing alcohol.
The ART CRITIC looks at him with interest and alarm.*

ACTOR: Revolutionary porcelain... Of course, you need all this—books, porcelain, a dissertation...

ART CRITIC: And you don't need it?

ACTOR: *(Shakes his head, he's already drunk)*. No. I don't need a-ny-thing.

ART CRITIC: But why? Why don't you need a-ny-thing?

ACTOR: *(Smiles with confusion)*. I don't know. I don't need.

ART CRITIC: And new roles? Who would you like to play?

ACTOR: I? *(Thinking. Then states unexpectedly with passion.)* Hamlet! *(Jumps on the chair, a chisel in his hand.)* I'm Hamlet! And my blood runs cold?¹ *(Gestures that he forgot the rest.)*

¹ All lines from Aleksander Blok's poem, "I'm Hamlet Now..." as translated by Alec Vagapov.

ART ART CRITIC: (*Dejectedly*). When treachery is up to scheming...

ACTOR: Yes, yes. And something, something love.

ART CRITIC: Is in my heart, among the living...

ACTOR: Ophelia, the cold of life...

ART CRITIC: Has taken you away, my dear.

ACTOR: The prince of Demark, in a strife, hit with a blade, I am dying here!

The ACTOR swings the chisel, threatening to smash the porcelain, wounds himself and the ART CRITIC. She hurriedly puts away the porcelain into the cabinet.

ACTOR: (*Suddenly deeply touched*). Prince. Touching, isn't it?

ART CRITIC: Yes, very.

ACTOR: It's easy to offend an actor.

ART CRITIC: And it's practically impossible to make him happy.

ACTOR: There is a Hamlet in all of us... Do you understand? In everyone...

ART CRITIC: In the theater?

ACTOR: In the theater, yes... Sweetie, come with me to the play tonight. And then we can have a sit somewhere. (*Hopelessly waves his hand.*) Ah...not you... You have porcelain. And I'm a common man.

ART CRITIC: I see. Not very complicated. Are we going to finish the cabinet?

ACTOR: (*Lies down on the sofa, sizes up the cabinet*). And why is it so white?

ART CRITIC: (*Shrugs her shoulders*). Small space, light objects look larger, expand the space.

ACTOR: (*Yawning*). That's why, I guess, they don't make black condoms...

The ACTOR is asleep. The ART CRITIC covers him with a plaid, arranges the figurines on the cabinet shelves, produces cash, puts it in the ACTOR's pocket, collects his tools. It gets darker in the room. The ART CRITIC turns on the light, touches the ACTOR's shoulder.

ART CRITIC: Get up, it's time. Six o'clock. You'll be late for the play.

ACTOR: My entrance is towards the end.

ART CRITIC: I remember.

ACTOR: Oh, the trials and tribulations.

ART CRITIC: Don't even go there. The bitterness and despair.

ACTOR: I behaved badly, right?

ART CRITIC: No, not at all. You were an angel.

ACTOR: *(In the doorway).* And what now?

ART CRITIC: Yes, of course. The rest is silence.

ACTOR: Should I go? *(Attempting to hug her.)*

ART CRITIC: Go, go. *(Frees herself from his arms.)* Will you make it? Please be careful.

The ACTOR leaves.

ART CRITIC: *(At him.)* Prince...

The ART CRITIC slams the door loudly. The cabinet falls, collapses. The revolutionary porcelain is smashed.

THE END