

TODAY I WROTE NOTHING

THE SELECTED WRITINGS OF
DANIIL KHARMS

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OVERLOOK DUCKWORTH

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To Marina Vladimirovna Malich

BLUE NOTEBOOK #10

There was a redheaded man who had no eyes or ears. He didn't have hair either, so he was called a redhead arbitrarily.

He couldn't talk because he had no mouth. He didn't have a nose either.

He didn't even have arms or legs. He had no stomach, he had no back, no spine, and he didn't have any insides at all. There was nothing! So, we don't even know who we're talking about.

We'd better not talk about him any more.

SONNET

A peculiar thing happened to me: I suddenly forgot what comes first—7 or 8?

I set off to ask my neighbors what their thoughts were on the matter.

How great was their surprise—and mine, too—when they suddenly realized that they also could not recall the counting order. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 they remember, but what comes next they've forgotten.

We all went down to the commercial store called "Gastronom" that's on the corner of Znamenskaya and Basseynaya Streets, and asked the cashier there about our incomprehension. Smiling a sad smile, the cashier extracted a small hammer from her mouth, and twitched her nose slightly. She said: "In my opinion seven comes after eight, but only when eight comes after seven."

We thanked the cashier and in utter joy ran out of the store. But after pondering deeply the cashier's words grief came over us again, for it seemed that not a word of hers made any sense to us.

What was there to do? We went to the Summer Garden and began counting the trees there. But when we reached the number 6 we stopped counting and began to argue: some thought seven was next in the order, others—8.

We would have argued very long, but, luckily, just then somebody's child toppled off a park bench and broke both of its jaws. This distracted us from the argument.

After that, everyone went home.

PETROV AND MOSKITOV

PETROV:

Hey, Moskitov!

Let's catch mosquitoes!

MOSKITOV:

No way, I'm not ready for that;

Let's better catch cats.

AN OPTICAL ILLUSION

Semyon Semyonovich, having put on his spectacles, looks at a pine tree and this is what he sees: in the pine tree sits a man showing him his fist.

Semyon Semyonovich, taking off his spectacles, looks at the pine and sees that no one is sitting in the tree.

Semyon Semyonovich, putting on his spectacles, looks at the pine tree and again he sees that a man is sitting in the tree, showing him his fist.

Semyon Semyonovich, taking off his spectacles, again sees that there is no one sitting in the pine tree.

Semyon Semyonovich, putting his spectacles on again, looks at the pine tree, and, as previously, he sees that in the pine tree sits a man showing him his fist.

Semyon Semyonovich does not wish to believe this phenomenon and deems this phenomenon an optical illusion.

PUSHKIN AND GOGOL

GOGOL (*falls onto the stage from behind the curtains and lies still*).

PUSHKIN (*walks out, trips on Gogol and falls*): What the devil! Could it be Gogol!

GOGOL (*getting up*): What a filthy, no-good . . . ! Won't let you alone. (*Walks, trips on Pushkin and falls.*) Could it really be Pushkin I tripped on!

PUSHKIN (*getting up*): Not a moment's peace! (*Walks, trips on Gogol and falls.*) What the devil! It couldn't be—Gogol again!

GOGOL (*getting up*): Always something going wrong! (*Walks, trips on Pushkin and falls.*) What filthy, no-good . . . ! On Pushkin again!

PUSHKIN (*getting up*): Foolery! Foolery all over the place! (*Walks, trips over Gogol and falls.*) What the devil! Gogol again!

GOGOL (*getting up*): This is mockery, through and through! (*Walks, trips on Pushkin and falls.*) Pushkin again!

PUSHKIN (*getting up*): What the devil! Truly the devil! (*Walks, trips on Pushkin and falls.*) On Gogol!

GOGOL (*getting up*): Filthy-good-for-nothings! (*Walks, trips over Pushkin and falls.*) On Pushkin!

PUSHKIN (*getting up*): What the devil! (*Walks, trips over Gogol and falls behind the curtains.*) Gogol!

GOGOL (*getting up*): Filthy good-for-nothings! (*Walks off stage.*)

From offstage the voice of Gogol is heard:
"Pushkin!"

CURTAIN.

THE CARPENTER KUSHAKOV

There once lived a carpenter and his name was Kushakov.

One day he walked out of his house and went to a kiosk to buy some carpenter's glue.

It was during a thaw, and the streets were very slippery.

The carpenter took a few steps, slipped, fell, and busted his head.

"Oh well," said the carpenter, got up and went to a drugstore, bought a bandage and taped up his head.

But when he walked out onto the street and took a few steps, he slipped again, fell, and busted his nose.

"Phooey," said the carpenter, went to the drugstore, bought a bandage, and taped up his nose with it.

Then he went outside again, slipped again, fell and busted his cheek.

He had to go to the drugstore again and tape up his cheek with a bandage.

"Listen here," said the pharmacist to the carpenter. "You fall and bust yourself up so often that I'd advise you to buy a few extra bandages."

"No," said the carpenter, "no more falling!"

But when he went outside he slipped again, fell and busted his chin.

"Lousy ice!" screamed the carpenter and took off for the drugstore.

"See now," said the pharmacist, "you've gone and fallen again."

"No!" screamed the carpenter. "I don't want to hear it! Quick, give me the bandage!"

The pharmacist gave him the bandage; the carpenter taped up his chin and ran home.

But at home they didn't recognize him and wouldn't let him into the apartment.

MAKAROV AND PETERSEN

#3

MAKAROV: Here, in this book, it is written of our desires and about the fulfillment of our desires. Read this book and you will understand how vain our desires are. You will likewise understand how easy it is to fulfill the desires of another, and how difficult it is to fulfill a desire of your own.

PETERSEN: What's with the solemn tone? That's the way Indian chiefs talk.

MAKAROV: This book is such, that it is necessary to speak of it loftily. I take off my hat just thinking about it.

PETERSEN: And do you wash your hands before touching this book?

MAKAROV: Yes, one's hands must also be washed.

PETERSEN: You should wash your feet, too, just in case.

MAKAROV: That is not at all witty. Moreover, it's rude.

PETERSEN: So what's this book all about?

MAKAROV: The name of this book is mysterious . . .

PETERSEN'S VOICE: Hee-hee-hee!

MAKAROV: The name of this book is **MALGIL**.

(Petersen vanishes.)

MAKAROV: Lord! What is this? Petersen!

PETERSEN'S VOICE: What happened? Makarov! Where am I?

MAKAROV: Where are you? I can't see you!

PETERSEN'S VOICE: And where are you? I can't see you either! What's with these spheres?

MAKAROV: What do I do? Petersen, can you hear me?

PETERSEN'S VOICE: I can hear you! But what happened? And what are these spheres?

MAKAROV: Can you move?

PETERSEN'S VOICE: Makarov! Do you see the spheres?

MAKAROV: What spheres?

PETERSEN'S VOICE: Let go! . . . Let me go! . . . Makarov! . . .

(Silence. Makarov stands in awe, then he grabs the book and opens it.)

MAKAROV: *(reading)*: ". . . Gradually man loses his shape and turns into a sphere. And, having become a sphere, he loses all his desires."

CURTAIN.

LYNCH LAW

Petrov gets on his horse and, addressing the crowd, delivers a speech about what would happen if, in place of the public garden, they'd build an American skyscraper. The crowd listens and, it seems, agrees. Petrov writes something down in his notebook. A man of medium height emerges from the crowd and asks Petrov what he wrote down in his notebook. Petrov replies that it concerns himself alone. The man of medium height presses him. Words are exchanged and discord begins. The crowd takes the side of the man of medium height and Petrov, saving his life, drives his horse on and disappears around the bend. The crowd panics and, having no other victim, grabs the man of medium height and tears off his head. The torn-off head rolls down the street and gets stuck in the hatch of a sewer drain. The crowd, having satisfied its passions, disperses.

THE MEETING

Now, one day a man went to work and on the way he met another man, who, having bought a loaf of Polish bread, was heading back home where he came from.

And that's it, more or less.

AN UNSUCCESSFUL PLAY

Petrakov-Gorbunov comes out on stage, tries to say something, but hiccups. He begins to feel sick. He leaves.

Enter Pritykin.

PRITYKIN: His honor, Petrakov-Gorbunov, asked me to excuse . . .
(Begins to vomit and runs away.)

Enter Makarov.

MAKAROV: Egor Pritykin . . . *(Makarov vomits. He runs away.)*

Enter Serpukhov.

SERPUKHOV: So as not to . . . *(He vomits and runs away.)*

Enter Kurova.

KUROVA: I would be . . . *(She vomits and runs away.)*

Enter Little Girl, running.

LITTLE GIRL: Daddy asked me to tell all of you that the theater is closing. All of us are getting sick!

CURTAIN.

KNOCK!

Summer. A writing desk. A door to the right. A picture on the wall. A horse is drawn on the picture, and in the horse's mouth, a gypsy. Olga Petrovna is splitting wood. Every time she strikes the wood, the pince-nez falls from Olga Petrovna's nose. Evdokim Osipovich sits in an armchair, smoking.

OLGA PETROVNA *(drives the wood splitter into the log, which, however, doesn't split a bit).*

EVDOKIM OSIPOVICH: Knock!

OLGA PETROVNA *(putting on her pince-nez, strikes the log).*

EVDOKIM OSIPOVICH: Knock!

OLGA PETROVNA *(putting on her pince-nez, strikes the log).*

EVDOKIM OSIPOVICH: Knock!

OLGA PETROVNA *(putting on her pince-nez, strikes the log).*

EVDOKIM OSIPOVICH: Knock!

OLGA PETROVNA *(putting on her pince-nez):* Evdokim Osipovich! I beg you, do not utter that word, "knock."

EVDOKIM OSIPOVICH: Okay, okay.

OLGA PETROVNA *(strikes the log with the splitter).*

EVDOKIM OSIPOVICH: Knock!

OLGA PETROVNA *(putting on her pince-nez):* Evdokim Osipovich! You promised me you wouldn't say that "knock" word!

EVDOKIM OSIPOVICH: Okay, okay, Olga Petrovna! I won't do it again.

OLGA PETROVNA *(strikes the log with the splitter).*

EVDOKIM OSIPOVICH: Knock!

MASHKIN KILLED KOSHKIN

Comrade Koshkin danced around Comrade Mashkin.

Com. Mashkin followed Com. Koshkin with his eyes.

Com. Koshkin waved his arms in an insulting way and made disgusting contortions with his legs.

Com. Mashkin furrowed his brow.

Com. Koshkin wiggled his belly and added a stomp with his right foot.

Com. Mashkin let out a yelp and threw himself at Com. Koshkin.

Com. Koshkin tried to flee, but he tripped and was caught up with by Com. Mashkin.

Com. Mashkin punched Com. Koshkin in the head.

Com. Koshkin yelped and dropped to his hands and knees.

Com. Mashkin whopped Com. Koshkin with a kick under the stomach and punched him once more in the back of the head.

Com. Koshkin sprawled out on the floor and died.

Mashkin killed Koshkin.

SLEEP MOCKS A MAN

Markov took off his boots and, sighing, lay down on the couch. He wanted to sleep, but as soon as he closed his eyes, his desire to sleep instantly vanished. Markov would open his eyes and grope for a book. But drowsiness would come over him again and, without reaching the book, Markov would lie back down and close his eyes again. But just as his eyes closed, sleep would drift away from him again, and his consciousness would become so clear that Markov could solve algebraic equations with two variables in his head.

For a long time Markov suffered in this way, not knowing what he should do: To sleep or to be wakeful? Finally, suffering all he could stand and growing to loathe himself and his room, Markov put on his coat and hat, and, with cane in hand, went out into the street. The fresh air calmed Markov. He felt at peace in his soul and a desire came upon him to return to his room.

Upon entering his room, he felt a pleasant exhaustion in his body and wanted to sleep. But as soon as he lay down on the couch and closed his eyes, his drowsiness instantly evaporated.

At wits end, Markov sprung from the couch and without hat or coat rushed off in the direction of the Tavrichesky Garden.

THE WERLD

I told myself that I see the world. But the whole world was not accessible to my gaze, and I saw only parts of the world. And everything that I saw I called parts of the world. And I examined the properties of these parts and, examining these properties, I wrought science. I understood that the parts have intelligent properties and that the same parts have unintelligent properties. I distinguished them and gave them names. And, depending on their properties, the parts of the world were intelligent or unintelligent.

And there were such parts of the world which could think. And these parts looked upon me and upon the other parts. And all these parts resembled one another, and I resembled them. And I spoke with these parts.

I said: parts thunder.

The parts said: a clump of time.

I said: I am also part of the three turns.

The parts answered: And we are little dots.

And suddenly I ceased seeing them and, soon after, the other parts as well. And I was frightened that the world would collapse.

But then I understood that I do not see the parts independently, but I see it all at once. At first I thought that it was NOTHING. But then I understood that this was the world and what I had seen before was not the world.

And I had always known what the world was, but what I had seen before I do not know even now.

And when the parts disappeared their intelligent properties ceased being intelligent, and their unintelligent properties ceased being unintelligent. And the whole world ceased to be intelligent and unintelligent.

But as soon as I understood that I saw the world, I ceased seeing it. I became frightened, thinking that the world had collapsed. But

while I was thinking this, I realized that had the world collapsed then I would already not be thinking this. And I watched, looking for the world, but not finding it.

And soon after there wasn't anywhere to look.

Then I realized that since before there was somewhere to look—there had been a world around me. And now it's gone. There's only me.

And then I realized that I am the world.

But the world—is not me.

Although at the same time I am the world.

But the world's not me.

And I'm the world.

But the world's not me.

And I'm the world.

But the world's not me.

And I'm the world.

And after that I didn't think anything more.

May 30, 1930

Daniil Kharms

I understood while walking in the woods:
 a wheel looks like the water should.
 So listen up: some time ago
 I was dying of thirst almost,
 my stomach longed to be filled with H₂O
 I stood,
 my legs would go no longer.
 I sat,
 and light flooded the window.
 I lay down,
 and my thought was a goner.

September 2, 1933

Dear

Nikandr Andreyevich,

I received your letter and understood right away that it was from you. First I thought, what if it's not from you, but as soon as I opened it I knew it was from you, but I almost thought that it wasn't from you. I am glad that you have long been married because when a person marries the one whom he wanted to marry that means he has achieved that which he wanted. And so I am very glad that you got married because when a man marries someone he wanted to marry that means that he got what he wanted. Yesterday I received your letter and right away I thought that this letter was from you, but then I thought it seemed that it wasn't from you, but I unsealed it and saw it was certainly from you. You did very well to write me. At first you didn't write to me and then suddenly you did write, although earlier, before you didn't write me for some time you also wrote to me. As soon as I received your letter I decided right away that it was from you and that's why I'm very glad that you had already married. Because if a man wants to get married then he must get married no matter what. That's why I am so very glad that you finally married precisely the one you wanted to marry. And you did very well to write me. I was overjoyed when I saw your letter and right away I thought it was from you. Although, to tell the truth, while I was opening it a thought flashed through my mind that it was not from you, but then in the end I decided that it was from you. Thanks for writing. I am grateful to you for this and very happy for you. Perhaps you can't imagine why I am so happy for you, but I'll tell you straight away that I am happy for you because, because you got married and married precisely the person you wanted to marry. And, you know, it is very good to marry precisely the person you want to marry because precisely then you get what you wanted. And that is precisely the reason that I am so happy for you. And I am also happy that you wrote me a letter. Even from afar I knew that the letter was from you, but when I took it in my hands I thought: and what if it's not from you? And then I thought: no, of course it is from

you. I myself am opening the letter and at the same thinking: from you or not from you? From you or not from you? And then, when I opened it I could clearly see that it was from you. I was overjoyed and decided I would also write you a letter. I have lots to tell you, but I literally don't have the time. What I had time to tell you, I have told you in this letter, and the rest I will write you later because now I have no time left at all. At the least it's good that you wrote me a letter. Now I know that you've long been married. I knew, too, from previous letters, that you got married, and now I see it again: it's completely true, you got married. And I am very happy that you got married and wrote me a letter. As soon as I saw your letter, I knew that you had gotten married again. Well, I thought, it's good that you got married again and wrote me a letter about it. Now write to me and tell me, who is your new wife and how did it all happen. Relay my greetings to your new wife.

Daniil Kharms

September and October 25, 1933

ON THE ILLS OF SMOKING

You should quit smoking in order to boast of your will power.

It would be nice, not having smoked for a week and having acquired confidence in yourself that you will be able to hold back from smoking, to come into the company of Lipavsky, Oleinikov, and Zabolotsky, so that they would notice on their own that all evening you haven't been smoking.

And when they ask, "Why aren't you smoking?" you would answer, concealing the frightful boasting inside you, "I quit smoking."

A great man must not smoke.

It is good and useful to employ the fault of boastfulness to rid yourself of the fault of smoking.

The love of wine, gluttony, and boastfulness are lesser faults than smoking.

A man who smokes is never at the height of his circumstance, and a smoking woman is capable of just about anything. And so, comrades, let us quit smoking.

1933

The little old man scratched himself with both hands. The places he couldn't reach with both hands, the old man scratched with one, but quick-quick. And the whole time he quickly blinked with his eyes.

Steam, or so-called smoke, poured out of the steam train's pipe. And a festive bird, flying into this smoke, flew out of it all greasy and crumpled.

Khvilishchevsky ate cranberries trying not to wrinkle up his face. He was waiting for everyone to say: "What strength of character!" But nobody said anything.

He could hear the dog sniffing at the door. Khvilishchevsky clenched his toothbrush in his fist and opened his eyes wide in order to hear better. "If that dog comes in here," thought Khvilishchevsky, "I'll hit it right in the temple with this ivory handle."

. . . Some sort of bubbles came out of the box. Khvilishchevsky removed himself from the room on tippy-toes and closed the door quietly behind him. "Screw it!" said Khvilishchevsky to himself. "It ain't my business what's in it. Really! Screw it!"

Khvilishchevsky wanted to shout: "I won't let you in!" But his tongue got tangled somehow and it came out: "I ton't wet you in." Khvilishchevsky squinted his right eye and exited the hall with dignity. But still it seemed to him that he heard Zukkerman snigger.

(1933-1934)

THE DIFFERENCE IN HEIGHT BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE

HUSBAND: I spanked my daughter and now I'm going to spank my wife.

WIFE & DAUGHTER (*from behind the door*): Bahbahbahbahbah! Moomoomoomoomoooo!

HUSBAND: Ivan! Butler???? Ivan!

Enter Ivan. Ivan has no hands.

IVAN: At your service!

HUSBAND: Where are your hands, Ivan?!

IVAN: In the war years I was bereft of them in the excitement of battle!

(1930-1934)

[BLACK WATER]

Andrei Ivanovich spat into a cup of water. Right away the water turned black. Andrei Ivanovich squinted his eyes and looked intently into the cup. The water was very black. Andrei Ivanovich's heart started beating faster.

Meanwhile, Andrei Ivanovich's dog awoke. Andrei Ivanovich walked over to the window and fell into thought.

Suddenly something big and dark swept past him and flew out the window. It was Andrei Ivanovich's dog flying out and rushing like a crow onto the roof of the opposite house. Andrei Ivanovich knelt down in a squat and began to moan.

Comrade Popugayev ran into the room.

"What's with you? Are you sick?" asked comrade Popugayev.

Andrei Ivanovich was silent and rubbed his face with his hands.

Comrade Popugayev took a look into the cup on the table.

"What is that you have there in the cup?" he asked Andrei Semyonovich*.

"Don't know," said Andrei Semyonovich.

Comrade Popugayev instantly vanished. The dog flew back in through the window again, lay down in its former place and fell asleep.

Andrei Semyonovich walked up to the table and drank the cup of black water.

And it became light in Andrei Semyonovich's soul.

August 21 (1934)

A neck stuck out from the collar of the fool's shirt, and on the neck was a head. The head was at one time closely cropped. By now the hair had grown out like a brush. The fool talked about a lot of things. No one listened to him. Everyone thought: when will he shut up and leave? But the fool, noticing nothing, continued talking and laughing.

Finally, Elbov couldn't stand it any longer and came up to the fool and said, curtly and viciously, "Make yourself scarce this very minute." The fool looked around at a loss, without a clue of what was going on. Elbov gave the fool a clout on the ear. The fool flew out of his chair and dropped to the floor. Elbov gave him a kick and the fool went flying through the doorway and rolled down the stairs.

So it is in life: a fool through and through and yet he wants to express himself. They need to be punched in the snout. That's right, in the snout!

Wherever I look, everywhere I see this foolish mug of a convict. A boot in the snout is what they need.

(August 1934)

I was born in the reeds. Like a mouse. My mother gave birth to me and put me in the water. And I swam away. Some kind of fish with four whiskers on her nose circled around me. I started crying. And the fish started crying. Suddenly we noticed that some porridge was floating atop the water. We ate the porridge and began to laugh. We were very happy, and we swam along with the current until we met a crayfish. He was an ancient, great crayfish; it held an ax in its claws. A naked frog followed swimming behind the crayfish. "Why are you always naked," asked the crayfish, "aren't you ashamed?"—"There's nothing shameful in it," answered the frog. "Why should we be ashamed of our fine bodies, given us by nature, when we are not ashamed of the vile acts that we ourselves perpetrate."—"Your words are true," said the crayfish. "And I do not know how to answer you. I suggest we ask a human, because humans are smarter than we. We are only smart in the fables that man writes about us, i.e. it means once more that it is the human that is smart and not us." But then the crayfish noticed me and said: "And we don't even have to swim anywhere to find him—because here he is, a human." The crayfish swam over to me and asked: "Should one be embarrassed of one's own body? You, human, answer us!"—"I am a human and I will answer you: One should not be embarrassed of one's own body."

(1934-1937)

Now I will tell you how I was born, how I grew up and how the first signs of genius manifested themselves in me. I was born twice. It happened like this.

My dad was wed to my mom in 1902, but only at the end of 1905 did my parents bring me into this world because dad wished for his child to be born on new year's day without fail. Dad calculated that the conception must take place on April 1st and only on that day rolled up to mom with the proposition to conceive a child.

The first time dad rolled up to my mom was April 1st, 1903. Mom had been waiting for this moment for a long time and was awfully happy. But dad, evidently, was in a joking mood and couldn't help but say, "April Fool's!"

Mom got awfully upset and didn't let dad near her that day. There was nothing to do but wait until the following year.

In 1904, on April 1st, dad weaseled up to mom with the same proposition. But, remembering the previous year's incident, mom said that she didn't want to be made a fool of once more, and again didn't let dad near her. No matter how much dad raged, it couldn't be helped.

And only a year later my father was able to talk my mother into conceiving me.

And that's how my conception occurred on April 1st, 1905.

Yet, all of dad's calculations were foiled because I ended up being born prematurely, four months before I was due.

Dad threw such a fit that the midwife who had taken me out was flustered and started shoving me back into the place I'd just crawled out of.

Witness to all this was a student we knew from the Military Medical Academy who proclaimed that shoving me back in wouldn't work. Despite the words of the student they shoved me in after all. But, as it turned out, though they really did shove me back in, they shoved me into the wrong place.

Here began a terrible commotion. The birth-mother crying

"Bring me my baby!" And the reply: "Your child," they say, "is inside of you." "What!" says the birth-mother, "how can the child be inside me when I just gave birth to it!"

"But," they say to the birth-mother, "perhaps you're mistaken?"

"What do you mean, mistaken!" shouts the birth-mother. "How I can be mistaken! I saw it with my own two eyes. Just a second ago the child was lying right here on the sheet."

"This is true," comes the reply, "but maybe he crawled in somewhere." In short, they just don't know what to say.

And the birth-mother keeps making a ruckus and demanding her baby.

They had to call an experienced doctor. The experienced doctor examined the birth-mother and threw up his hands. But then he thought of something and gave the birth-mother a good-sized helping of English salts. The birth-mother made a bowel movement, and that's how I came into the world for the second time.

At that point my dad flew into another fit of rage, saying something like, what, you call this a birth?, and he went on to say it's not even a person yet, more like half-way to a fetus, and that it should either be shoved back in or else put in an incubator.

And so they put me in an incubator.

September 25, 1935

[Translated with Simona Schneider]

MY TIME IN THE INCUBATOR

I spent four months in the incubator. I remember only that the incubator was made of glass, was transparent and had a thermometer. I sat inside the incubator on cotton-wool. I don't remember anything more.

After four months they took me out of the incubator. This was done exactly on the First of January, 1906. That's how I was born for the third time, if you like. Since then the day of my birth has been said to be January 1st.

(September 1935)

[Translated with Simona Schneider]

A FABLE

One short man said: "I would give anything if only I were even a tiny bit taller."

He barely said it when he saw a lady medegician standing in front of him.

"What do you want?" says the medegician.

But the short man just stands there so frightened he can't even speak.

"Well?" says the medegician.

The short man just stands there and says nothing. The medegician vanishes.

And the short man started crying and biting his nails. First he chewed off all the nails on his fingers, and then on his toes.

Reader! Think this fable over and it will make you somewhat uncomfortable.

(1935)

[Translated with Eugene Ostashevsky]

There lived a man called Kuznetsov. One time his stool broke. He left his house and went to the store to buy carpenter's glue in order to glue the stool back together.

When Kuznetsov was walking past a house under construction, a brick fell from high up and hit Kuznetsov on the head.

Kuznetsov fell, but hopped right back on his feet and groped his head. An enormous lump had popped out.

Kuznetsov rubbed the lump and said:

"I am citizen Kuznetsov, I emerged from my house and set out for the store in order to . . . in order to . . . in order to . . . Ack! What's this! I forgot why I was on my way to the store!"

At the same time a second brick fell from the roof and again struck Kuznetsov on the head.

"Ack!" Kuznetsov cried out, he grasped his head in his hands and discovered a second lump.

"What a story!" said Kuznetsov. "I, citizen Kuznetsov, emerged from my house and set out for the . . . for the . . . Where was I going? I forgot where I was going!"

At this point, a third brick fell from above onto Kuznetsov and on Kuznetsov's head a third lump appeared.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" Kuznetsov shouted, seizing his head. "I, citizen Kuznetsov, emerged from . . . emerged from . . . the cellar? No. Emerged from an all night boozier? No! Where did I emerge from?"

A fourth brick fell from the roof, hit Kuznetsov across the back of his head and on the back of his head appeared a fourth lump.

"So and so!" said Kuznetsov, scratching his forehead. "I . . . I . . . I . . . Who am I? It sounds like I forgot what my name is. What a story! What's my name? Vasily Petukhov? No. Nikolai Shumaker? No. Pantelei Sumpter? No, so who am I?"

But now a fifth brick fell from the roof and hit Kuznetsov's occiput so hard that Kuznetsov definitively forgot everything in the universe and, crying "Uga-gu," ran down the street.

Suddenly, there's a doorbell. What is it? Some people come in saying, "Let's go for a ride."

"Where to?" the professor's wife asks.

"To the madhouse," the people answer.

The professor's wife kicked and screamed and dug her heels in, but the people grabbed her and drove her away to the madhouse.

And so here sits a perfectly normal wife of a professor on a cot in the madhouse, holding a fishing rod and catching invisible fish on the floor.

This professor's wife is only a sorry example of just how many unfortunate people there are in life, who occupy a place in life, that they are not meant to occupy.

Daniil Kharms

August 21, 1936

[Translated with Simona Schneider]

HOW ONE MAN FELL TO PIECES

"They say all the good babes are wide-bottomed. Oh, I just love big-bosomed babes. I like the way they smell." Saying this he began to grow taller and, reaching the ceiling, he fell apart into a thousand little spheres.

Panteley, the janitor came by and swept up all these balls into the dustpan, which he usually used to gather horse manure, and took the balls away to some distant part of the yard.

All the while the sun continued to shine as before, and puffy ladies continued, as before, to smell enchantingly.

Aug 23, 1936

Natasha was surprised, but said nothing and went to her room to grow up.

She grew and grew and in four years became a mature young lady. Natasha's dad, meanwhile, had grown old and bent. But whenever they remember how they took each other for dead, they fall down laughing on the couch. Sometimes they laugh for twenty minutes straight.

And the neighbors, hearing their laughter, get dressed and go out to the movies. One time, they went out and never came back again. I think they got run over.

(September 1, 1936)

SOMETHING ABOUT PUSHKIN

It's hard to say something about Pushkin to a person who doesn't know anything about him. Pushkin is a great poet. Napoleon is not as great as Pushkin. Bismarck compared to Pushkin is a nobody. And the Alexanders, First, Second and Third, are just little kids compared to Pushkin. In fact, compared to Pushkin, all people are little kids, except Gogol. Compared to him, Pushkin is a little kid.

And so, instead of writing about Pushkin, I would rather write about Gogol.

Although, Gogol is so great that not a thing can be written about him, so I'll write about Pushkin after all.

Yet, after Gogol, it's a shame to have to write about Pushkin. But you can't write anything about Gogol. So I'd rather not write anything about anyone.

Kharms

December 15, 1936

[Translated with Eugene Ostashevsky]

THE CONNECTION

Philosopher!

1. I am writing to you in answer to your letter, which you are planning to write to me in answer to my letter, which I wrote to you. 2. A violinist bought himself a magnet and was carrying it home. On the way, a bunch of hooligans ambushed the violinist and knocked his hat off. The wind picked up the hat and carried it down the street. 3. The violinist put down the magnet and ran after the hat. The hat had fallen into a puddle of nitric acid and disintegrated. 4. Meanwhile, the hooligans had grabbed the magnet and disappeared. 5. The violinist returned home without his hat and coat, because the hat had disintegrated in the nitric acid and the violinist, upset over the loss of his hat, had forgotten his coat on the tram. 6. The conductor of that tram took the coat to the flea market and exchanged it there for sour cream, grain, and tomatoes. 7. The conductor's father-in-law gorged himself on the tomatoes and died. The corpse of the father-in-law of the conductor was placed in the morgue, but then got mixed up and instead of the father-in-law they buried some old woman. 8. A white post was placed at the old woman's grave with a sign that read "Anton Sergeyevich Kondratyev." 9. Eleven years later, worms had eaten holes through the entire post and it fell to the ground. The cemetery guard sawed the post in four and burned it in his stove. And the cemetery guard's wife made cabbage soup on the fire. 10. But when the soup was ready, a clock fell from the wall right into the pot the soup was in. They took the clock out of the soup, but there had been bedbugs in the clock, and now they were in the soup. They gave the soup away to Timothy the pauper. 11. Timothy the pauper ate the soup with the bedbugs and told Nikolai the pauper of the cemetery guard's kindness. 12. The next day Nikolai the pauper came to the cemetery guard begging for alms. But the cemetery guard gave nothing to Nikolai the pauper and chased him away. 13. Nikolai the pauper became very

angry and set fire to the cemetery guard's house. 14. The fire spread from the house over to the church and the church burned down. 15. A lengthy investigation got underway but the reason for the fire was not discovered. 16. In the place where the church had stood, they built a club, and for the day of the club's opening a concert was organized at which performed the violinist who fourteen years prior had lost his coat. 17. And in the audience sat the son of one of the hooligans that had knocked the violinist's hat off fourteen years before. 18. After the concert they went home on the same tram. Yet, in the tram behind them the driver was that same conductor who had once long ago sold the violinist's coat at the flea market. 19. So here they are, riding through the city late at night: the violinist and the hooligan's son in front, and behind them the tram-driver, previously the conductor. 20. They ride along not knowing what connects them, and they will not know it until death.

September 14, 1937

I hate children, old men and old women, and reasonable older individuals.

Poisoning children is cruel. But something has to be done about them!

I respect only young, healthy, plump women. Other representatives of humanity I treat with suspicion.

Old women who go around thinking sensible thoughts should really be apprehended with bear traps.

Any face that is of reasonable fashion brings out in me the most unpleasant sensations.

What's all the fuss about flowers? It smells way better between a woman's legs. That's nature for you, and that's why no one dares find my words distasteful.

(late 1930s)

[Translated with Eugene Ostashevsky]

A TREATISE MORE OR LESS FOLLOWING EMERSON

I. On Gifts

The following kinds of gifts are imperfect gifts: for example: we give the birthday boy the lid for an inkwell. But where is the inkwell itself? Or we give the inkwell together with its lid. But where is the desk on which the inkwell must sit? If the birthday boy already has a desk, then the inkwell would be the perfect gift. Then, if the birthday boy has an inkwell, then one may give him only the lid and that would be a perfect gift, as well. Decorations of the naked body, such as rings, bracelets, necklaces, etc. are always perfect gifts (if, of course, the birthday boy is not a cripple), or such presents as a stick, for instance, to the end of which has been attached a wooden ball and to the other end a wooden cube. Such a stick can be held in the hand or, if one puts it down then it doesn't matter at all where. Such a stick is no use for anything else.

II. The Correct Way Of Surrounding Oneself With Objects

Let us suppose that one completely naked lawful resident decided to settle in and surround himself with objects. If he starts with a chair then he'll need a desk to go with the chair, and a lamp for the desk, then a bed, a blanket, bed sheets

III. The Correct Way Of Destroying Surrounding Objects

One (as usual) mediocre French writer, namely Alphonse Daudet, expounded an uninteresting thought: that objects do not attach themselves to us, rather we attach ourselves to objects. Even the most selfless person, having lost watch, raincoat and buffet, will regret these losses. But even if one quits one's attachment to objects then any person having lost bed and pillow, ceiling and floor, and even more or less comfortable stones and having become acquainted with insomnia will

begin to complain about the loss of objects and the comforts associated with them. Therefore, the negation of objects collected according to an incorrect system of surrounding them around oneself is also the incorrect method of negation of objects around oneself. But the negation of gifts around oneself which are forever perfect—of wooden spheres, celluloid lizards, etc.—will not present the more or less unselfish person with even the slightest feeling of regret. Negating correctly the objects around ourselves, we lose our taste for acquisition.

IV. On Approaching Immortality

Every person has a striving for pleasure, which always takes the form of either the satisfaction of sexual desire, or gastronomical satiation, or acquisition. But only that which does not lie on the path toward pleasure will lead us to immortality. Each and every system leading to immortality converges upon one rule: *do continually that which you don't want to do*, because every person wants continuously to either eat or to satisfy his sexual feelings or to acquire something, or all of these more or less at once. It is interesting that immortality is always connected with mortality and is interpreted by various religious systems either as eternal pleasure or eternal suffering, or as the eternal absence of pleasure and suffering.

V. On Immorality

Righteous is he to whom God has given life as a perfect gift.

Daniil Kharms

February 14, 1939

I thought about eagles for a long time
And understood a lot:
Eagles fly on heights sublime,
Disturbing people not.
I saw that eagles live on mountains hard to climb,
And make friends with spirits of the skies.
I thought about eagles for a long time,
But confused them, I think, with flies.

March 15, 1939

[Translated with Ilya Bernstein]

When I see a man, I want to smack him in the face. It's so much pleasure to pound on a man's face.

I sit in my room doing nothing.

Then—someone's come to over to see me; he's knocking on my door. I say, "Come in!" He comes in and says: "Greetings! It's great that I've caught you at home." And that's when I knock in his face, and then I let my boot fly into his crotch, too. My guest falls over from the terrible pain. And I give him a heel to the eyes! Like, don't be whoring around when you're not invited!

Or else, there's also another way: I offer my guest to take a cup of tea with me. The guest accepts, sits down at the table, drinks his tea and starts telling me some story. I make it seem like I'm listening to him with fascination—I nod my head, sigh, make my eyes with surprise, and laugh. The guest, flattered by my attentions, gets more and more animated.

I calmly pour myself a whole cup of boiling water and throw the boiling water in the guest's face. My guest springs to his feet grasping his face. Then I tell him: "There is no more benevolence in my soul. Get out!" And I push my guest out the door.

THE LECTURE

Pushkov said, "What is woman? The workbench of love." And immediately got punched in the face.

"What for?" asked Pushkov but, receiving no answer, continued:

"This is what I think: you roll up to women from below. Women love that, they only pretend they don't."

Here they socked him again.

"What's going on, comrades? Fine then, if that's the case, I won't speak!" said Pushkov but, after waiting a quarter of a minute, continued:

"Woman is arranged in such a way that she is all soft and moist."

Here they again socked Pushkov. Pushkov pretended he didn't notice and continued:

"If you olfactorate a woman . . ."

But at this point Pushkov got whacked so hard in the face that he grabbed onto his cheek and said:

"Comrades, it is completely impossible to conduct a lecture under such conditions. If it happens again, I will cease!"

Pushkov waited a quarter of a minute and continued:

"Where were we? Oh . . . yes! So: Woman loves to look at herself. She sits down in front of the mirror completely naked . . ."

As the word came out of his mouth, he got punched in the face again.

"Naked," repeated Pushkov.

"Pow!" they laid another one on him.

"Naked!" shouted Pushkov.

"Pow!" they got him yet again.

"Naked! Naked all over! Tits and ass!" Pushkov was shouting.

"Pow! Pow! Pow!" Punch after punch landed on his face.

"Tits and ass with a washtub!" Pushkov was shouting.

"Pow! Pow!" the punches rained down.

"Tits and ass with a tail!" shouted Pushkov, spinning to avoid the punches. "Bare-naked nun!"

But then they hit Pushkov with such force that he lost consciousness and fell to the floor like a mown down flower.

Saturday, August 12, 1940

[Translated with Eugene Ostashevsky]

THE INTERFERENCE

Pronin said:

"You have very pretty stockings."

Irina Mozer said:

"You like my stockings?"

Pronin said:

"O, yes. Very much." And he groped them with his hand.

Irina said:

"And why do you like my stockings?"

Pronin said:

"They are very smooth."

Irina raised her skirt up and said:

"And see how tall they are."

Pronin said:

"O, yes, yes."

Irina said:

"But right here they end. From here on up it's bare leg.

"And what a leg!" said Pronin.

"I have very fat legs," said Irina. "And I'm very wide in the hips."

"Show me," said Pronin.

"I can't," said Irina. "I don't have panties on."

Pronin went down on his knees in front of her.

Irina said:

"Why are you standing on your knees?"

Pronin kissed her leg just above the stocking and said:

"That's why."

Irina said:

"Why are you lifting up my skirt still higher? I already told you that I don't have panties on."

But Pronin lifted her skirt anyway and said:

"It's okay, it's okay."

"Just what do you mean, it's okay?" said Irina.

But just then someone knocked on the door. Irina quickly fixed her skirt and Pronin stood up and went over to the window.

"Who's there?" asked Irina through the door.

"Open the door," said a harsh voice.

Irina opened the door and a man in a long black coat and tall boots walked into the room. Two military men of low rank with rifles in their hands followed him in, and they were followed by the janitor. The lower ranks stood by the door, while the man in the black coat walked up to Irina Mozer and said:

"Your name?"

"Mozer," said Irina.

"Your name," asked the man in the black coat, addressing Pronin.

"My name is Pronin."

"Do you have any weapons?" asked the man in the black coat.

"No," said Pronin.

"Sit down over there," said the man in the black coat, pointing Pronin to a chair.

Pronin sat down.

"And you," said the man in the black coat, turning to Irina, "put on your coat. You'll have to take a ride with us."

"Where? Why?" asked Irina.

The man in the black coat did not answer.

"I have to change clothes," said Irina.

"No," said the man in the black coat.

Irina silently put on her fur coat.

"Farewell," she said to Pronin.

"Conversations are not allowed," said the man in the black coat.

"And should I go with you as well?" asked Pronin.

"Yes," said the man in the black coat. "Get dressed."

Pronin stood up, took his coat and hat off the rack, got dressed, and said:

"Well, I'm ready."

"Let's go," said the man in the black coat.

The lower ranks and the janitor rapped their soles against the floor.

Everyone went out into the hallway.

The man in the black coat locked the door to Irina's room and sealed it with two brown seals.

"Now out on the street," he said.

And everyone left the apartment, loudly slamming the outside door.

August 12, 1940

REHABILITATION

Not to toot my own horn, but when Volodya hit me in the ear and spat at my forehead I grabbed him in such a way that he won't likely forget it. Only later did I beat him with the primus stove, and it was already evening when I beat him with the clothes iron. Therefore his death was not at all sudden. The fact that I had already cut off his leg in the daytime is no evidence at all. He was still alive then. I only killed Andryusha out of inertia and I can't blame myself one bit for that. Why did Andryusha and Elizaveta Antonovna get in my way? There was no reason for them to jump out from behind the door. I am accused of being bloodthirsty. They say I drank blood. But this is not true: I did indeed lap up the spots and puddles of blood—it's a natural human urge to destroy the traces of one's crime, however petty. While we're on it, I did not rape Elizaveta Antonovna. First of all, she was not a virgin anymore and, secondly, I was dealing with a corpse, so she has no cause for complaint. What of it if she was just about to give birth? Didn't I drag out the child? It's not my fault he wasn't long for this world. It wasn't me that tore his head off—the cause of that was his skinny neck. He was created not for this life. It's true that I smeared their doggie all over the floor with my boot. But isn't it cynical to accuse me of the murder of a dog when, one could say, three human lives were annihilated. Well, alright: in all of this (I do agree) a certain cruelty on my part can be discerned. But to consider a crime the fact that I squatted and defecated on my victims—that is, if you'll excuse me, absurd. Defecation is a natural urge, and for that reason not a criminal act. Thus, I understand the apprehensions of my defense, but still have hope for a complete acquittal.

Daniil Kharms

Tuesday, June 10, 1941

NOTES

EVENTS

In the late 1930s, Kharms copied a number of short prose pieces and miniature plays into a fairly plain notebook. On the cover he wrote his name and the title, *Sluchai*, in black pen, filling in the letters with a blue pencil. Underneath the title he dedicated the collection to his wife, Marina Malich. Kharms had also written "1933-1938" on the cover, but had crossed it out so that it is barely visible. The works collected in this notebook were mostly copied (in black ink) from other notebooks and drafts, often incorporating minor edits. (The notebook itself and many of the draft versions exist in Yakov Druskin's archive at the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg.) The notebook begins with a table of contents which lists thirty-one pieces. However one of the texts in the notebook—"An Incident on the Street" (which I have included separately in the fourth section of this book)—is crossed out, leaving exactly thirty pieces. The last five pieces may have been written directly into the notebook; the last three are written in blue ink, a less consistent hand, and contain edits within the texts. Kharms signed dates (but only the year—1939) to only two pieces towards the end of the series ("An Episode from History" and "Fedya Davidovich," which is also written rather crookedly in a slightly different ink). There are no other dates written in the rest of the collection, but many of them are known, some exactly, others approximately. I provide a list of dates here, following the order of the 30 texts, in the hopes that they shed light on the deliberate nature of Kharms's method of assemblage: (1) January 6, 1937; (2) August 22, 1936; (3) 1936-1937; (4) November 12, 1935; (5) Date Unknown; (6) 1934; (7) 1934; (8) 1935; (9) January 30, 1937; (10) August 21, 1936; (11) March 15, 1936; (12) August 22, 1936; (13) April 11, 1933; (14) Date Unknown; (15) April 13, 1933; (16) Date Unknown; (17) Date Unknown; (18) Date Unknown; (19) Date Unknown; (20) 1934; (21) 1933; (22) August 19, 1936; (23) Date Unknown; (24) 1936-1938; (25) 1933; (26) 1939; (27) February 10, 1939; (28) 1939; (29) 1939; (30) 1939.

The title of the notebook and therefore the cycle—*Sluchai*—is problematic for translation, because the Russian word has a range of meanings that are not encompassed by a single English word. *Sluchai* is a plural noun that, in its singular form, can mean "case," "incident," "occurrence," "lucky opportunity," or, simply, "event," as in something that has happened. It is etymologically connected to the words for chance, accident and coincidence. The word appears in the title and the body of several Kharms texts. In those cases I have translated the word as "incident"—as in "An Incident Involving Petrakov"—fore-grounding its more apparent and everyday meaning. However, in order to emphasize the more theoretical, or even philosophical side of the word's meaning for Kharms, I have translated the title of the whole cycle as *Events*. My hope is that this choice will invoke another dimension of the meanings hidden in this simple word and suggest a less mundane reading of the unique genre Kharms invented.