

Previously in the *Dostoevsky for Parents and Children* series:

Varenka's Memoirs (from the novel Poor Folk, 1846 [1883, 1887, 1897, DPC I])

Dostoevsky for Parents and Children: (VIII) A Centenarian Scris de Dostoievski et al. Vineri, 15 Aprilie 2022 09:20

An Honest Thief (from *Stories of a Man of Experience*, 1848 [suggested by the Introduction to the 1897 anthology, DPC V]

Nellie's Story (from The Insulted and Injured, 1861 [1883, 1887, DPC VI]



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The Peasant Marey (from The Diary Of A Writer, February 1876 [1883, 1897, DPC III])

{In square brackets we indicate the original Anna Grigorievna Dostoevskaya anthologies in which each story appeared, followed by its order of posting in the present *Dostoevsky for Parents and Children*

(DPC) collection. Thus [1883, 1897, DPC II] means the story appeared in the first (1883) and third (1897), but not in the second (1887) Anna Dostoevskaya anthology, and was the second in this series of postings. Please find

here

our brief introduction to the original

Dostoevsky for Children

anthologies, and to this English online version. The accompanying illustration comes from here

, and is attributed to Vera Dostoevskaya, the author's great-great-great-granddaughter, when she was twelve years old. It was part of a family project destined to bring out a new edition of the original

Dostoevsky for Children

volume. We would love to learn what came out of it. If any of our readers know more, please share!}

Dostoevsky for Parents and Children: (VIII) A Centenarian Scris de Dostoievski et al. Vineri, 15 Aprilie 2022 09:20 --//--"The gentleman applies himself to the roots. 'Once the roots are firmly established, the Way will grow.' Might we not say that filial piety and respect for the elders constitute the root of Goodness?" (*The Analects*, Ed. Slingerland transl.)

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No, it is not quite true that Dostoevsky never wrote about normal family life! Today we read a story ever so evanescent as to be almost instantly and ubiquitously forgotten, at least by modern eyes. A tribute to filial piety, and yes, to the memory of olden family values. It is the story of a gentle centenarian's repose, in the midst of her simple, but in their small bourgeois ways endearing family folk. An almost literal retelling of an accidental morning encounter of Anna, the author's wife, is followed by what the author (in spite of the delicacy of his writing, or because of it) seems to have meant as a somehow not so easily forgettable fiction, after all (see the story's conclusion, in the light of the fragment below). With " Moujik Marey " and " A Little Boy at Christ's Christmas Tree

", "A Centenarian" is one of the three stories from the

Diary of a Writer

that he explicitly mentioned to his wife, in view a "children's book". Its meaning in

Russia

today

could

be

even less obvious than it was in Dostoevsky's already morally sagging times (as he saw them).

Or

West

of

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or

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But the ancients still give us a reading key (above), as does the author himself:

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"You must know that there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood, of home. People talk to you a great deal about your education, but some good, sacred memory, preserved from childhood, is perhaps the best education. If a man carries many such memories with him into life, he is safe to the end of his days. And if one has only one good memory left in one's heart, even that may sometime be the means of saving us."(*The Brothers Karamazov*, from "Ilusha's Funeral. The Speech At The Stone", C. Garnett transl.)

Conversely, from a Dostoevskian perspective, what might come _after_ the passing away of filial piety and the memory of good family ways? Here, here, and here are Eastern Orthodox perspectives that Fyodor Mihailovich might not have found so surprising. But then, like a repenting prodigal son left down here without a home, he might have added: "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up!

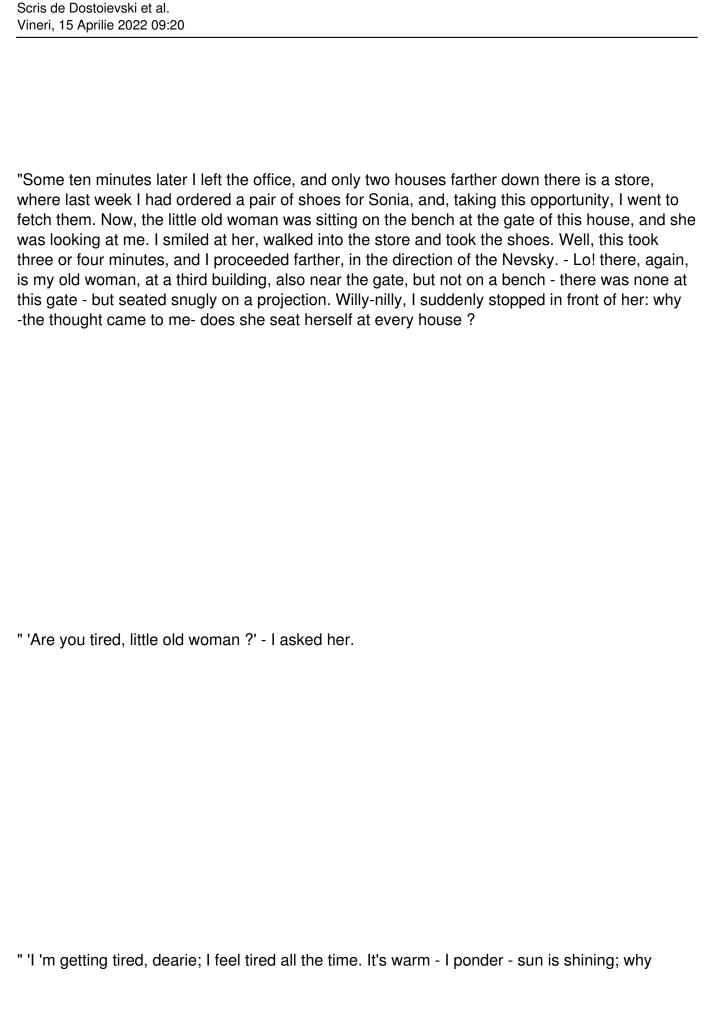
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F.M. Dostoevsky

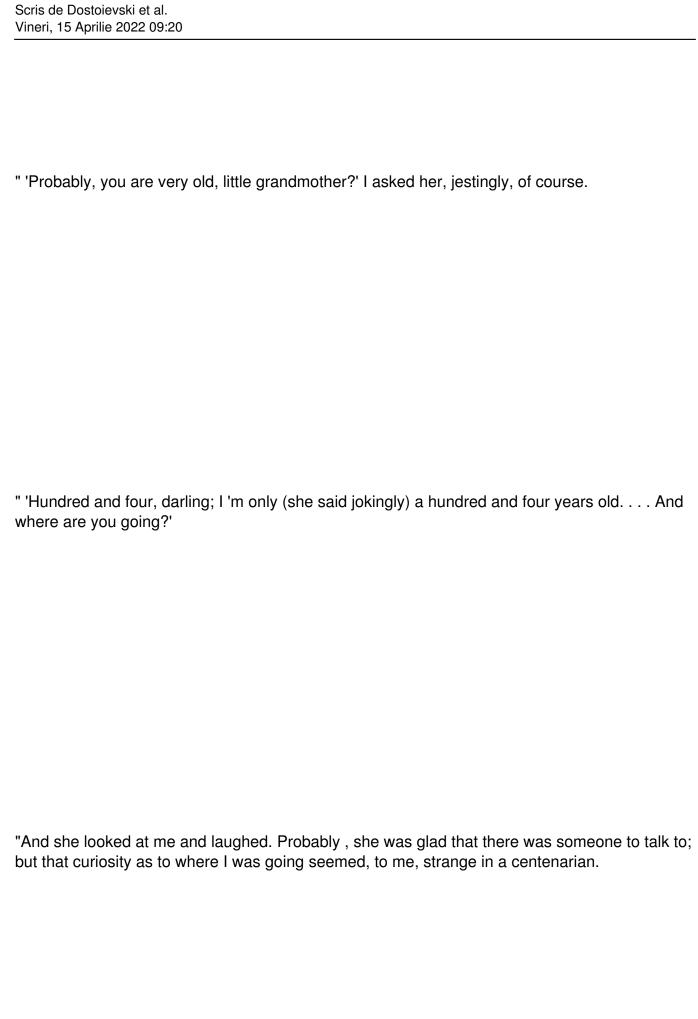
Dostoevsky for Parents and Children: (VIII) A Centenarian Scris de Dostoievski et al. Vineri, 15 Aprilie 2022 09:20 A CENTENARIAN (from *The Diary Of A Writer*, March 1876; Boris Brasol transl., 1919; Russian original here) "That morning I was much too late" - a lady was telling me the other day - "and I left home

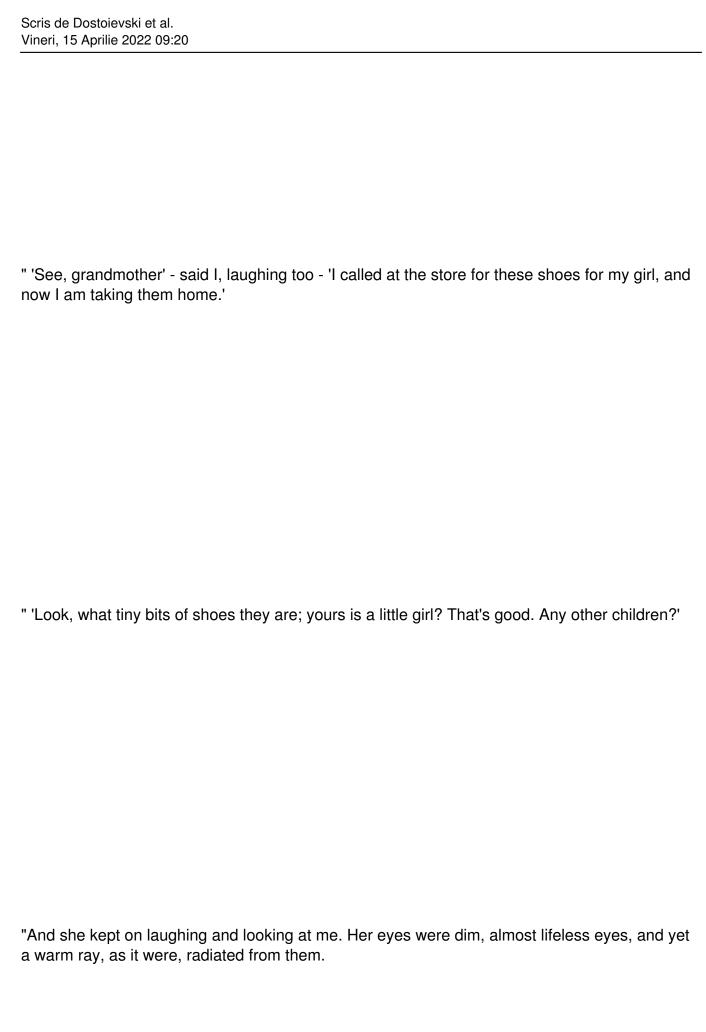
"That morning I was much too late" - a lady was telling me the other day - "and I left home almost at noon, and, as if on purpose, there was a heap of things I had to attend to. On Nikolaievskaia Street I had to make two calls, one not far from the other. First -at an office; and at the very gate of the building I met that little old woman; she seemed to me so very old and stooping, with a walking cane. Still I could not guess her age. She came up to the gate and, right there in a corner, she sat down on the porter's bench - just for a little rest. However, I walked by, merely glancing at her.

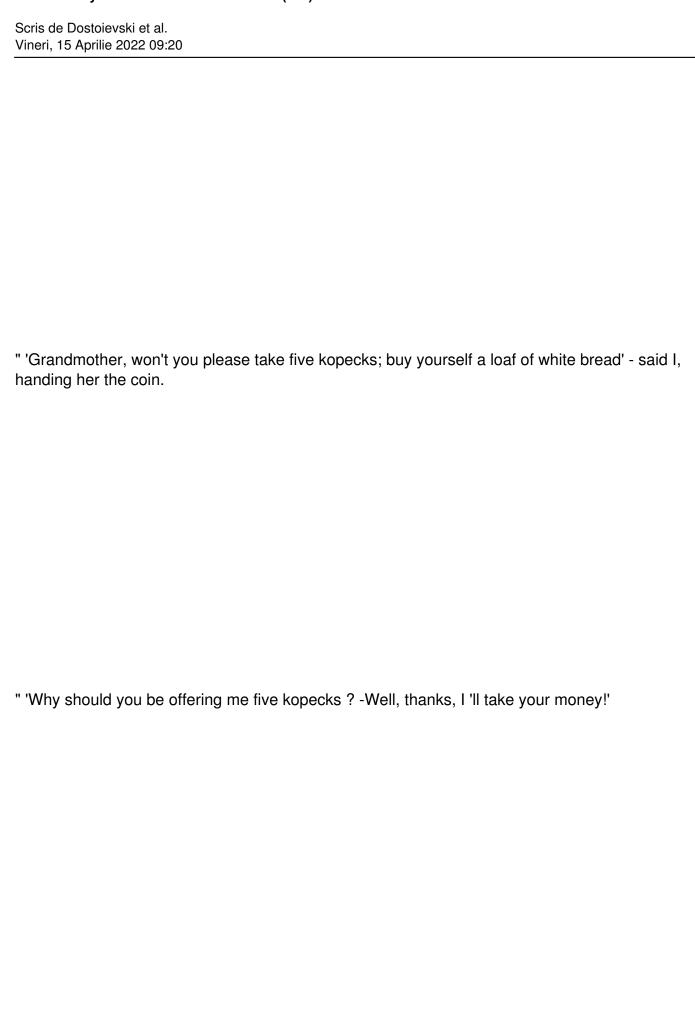








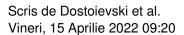




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" 'Take it, grandmother, don't mind it.' -She took it. One could see

" 'Take it, grandmother, don't mind it.' -She took it. One could see that she was not begging, that she had not been reduced to that state, and she accepted my money so gracefully -not at all as if it were charity, but somehow as from mere politeness or because of kindheartedness. However, this may have pleased her, since who would start conversing with an old woman? Whereas now someone is not only talking to her but taking tender care of her.
" 'Well, good-bye, grandmother' - I said. 'Reach your destination in good health.'
" 'I shall, dearie - I shall. And you go along to your granddaughter!' - said the old woman, losing the thread of our conversation and forgetting that I had a daughter and not a granddaughter. Apparently she must have been thinking that everybody had granddaughters.



"I started going, and turned to look at her for the last time. I saw her getting up slowly, with difficulty; she tapped her cane and crawled along the street. Perhaps, ten times more would she repose herself before she finally nached her folks 'for dinner.' And whither does she go to dine? Such a strange little old woman!"

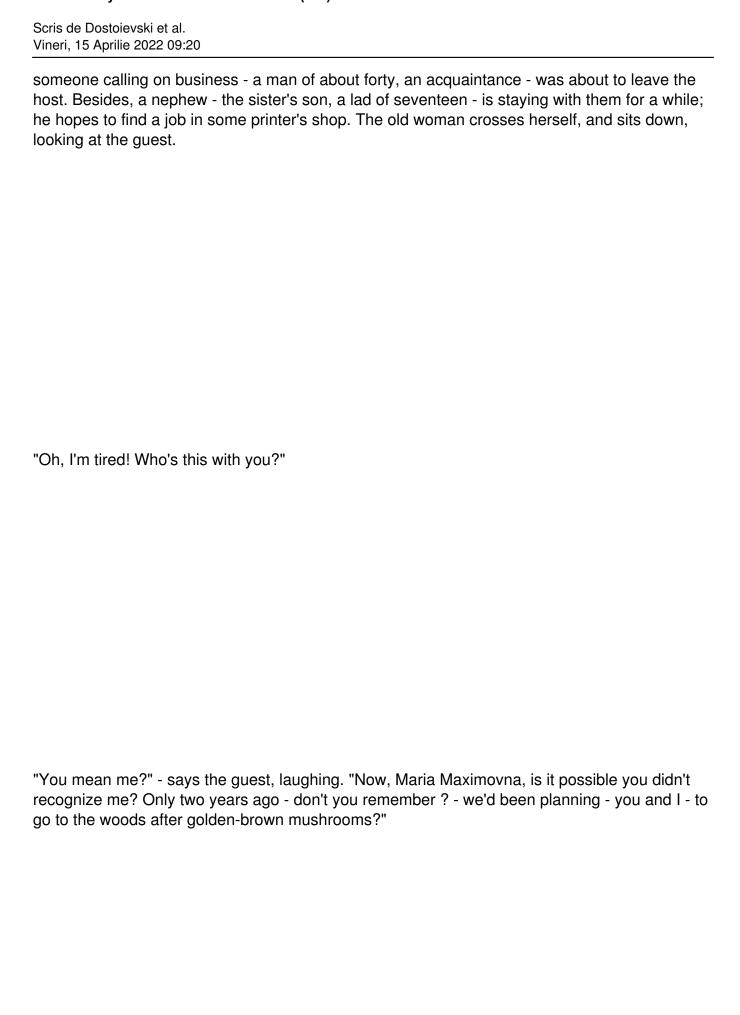
That morning I had listened to this story - why, not even a story, but some sort of an impression of meeting a centenarian (in truth, when does one meet a woman centenarian, especially a woman so full of spiritual life?) - and I forgot all about it. Only, late at night, having read a magazine article and having put aside that periodical, I suddenly recalled that old woman, and promptly put the finishing touches to the picture of how she had reached her folks for dinner. And there emerged another, maybe quite plausible little picture.

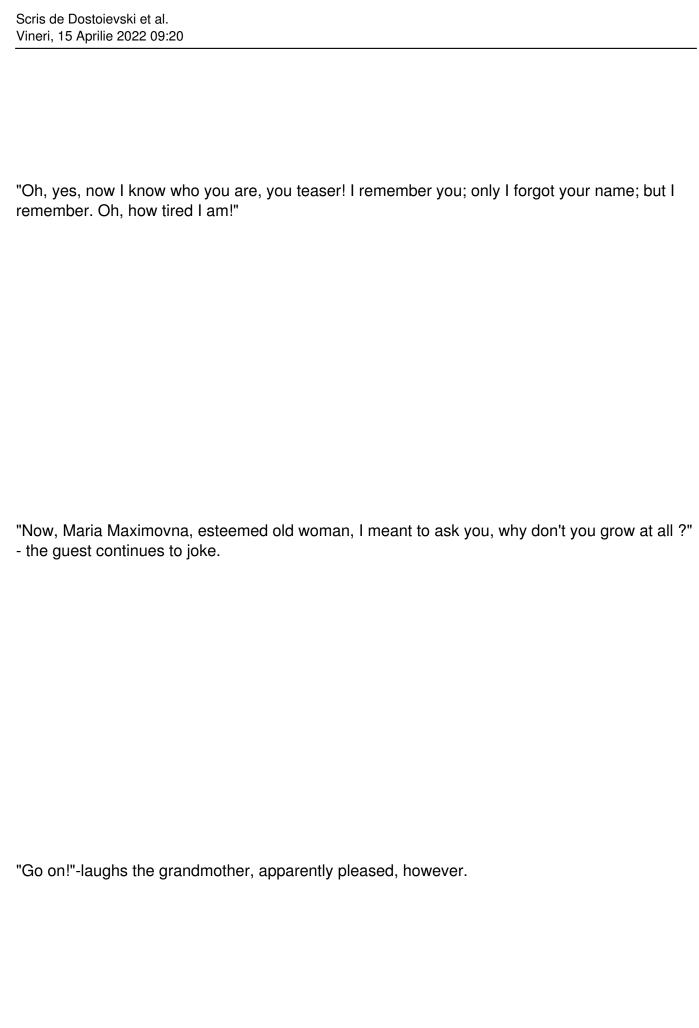
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Her granddaughters - perhaps even great-granddaughters, but all the same she called them "granddaughters" - are probably some artisans and, naturally, married women; otherwise, she would not be calling on them for dinner; they are living in a basement, or maybe renting some barber shop; they are poor people - this stands to reason -and yet they are subsisting and keeping their home in good order. She dragged herself up to them, possibly sometime after one o'clock. She wasn't expected; even so, they greeted her rather cordially.

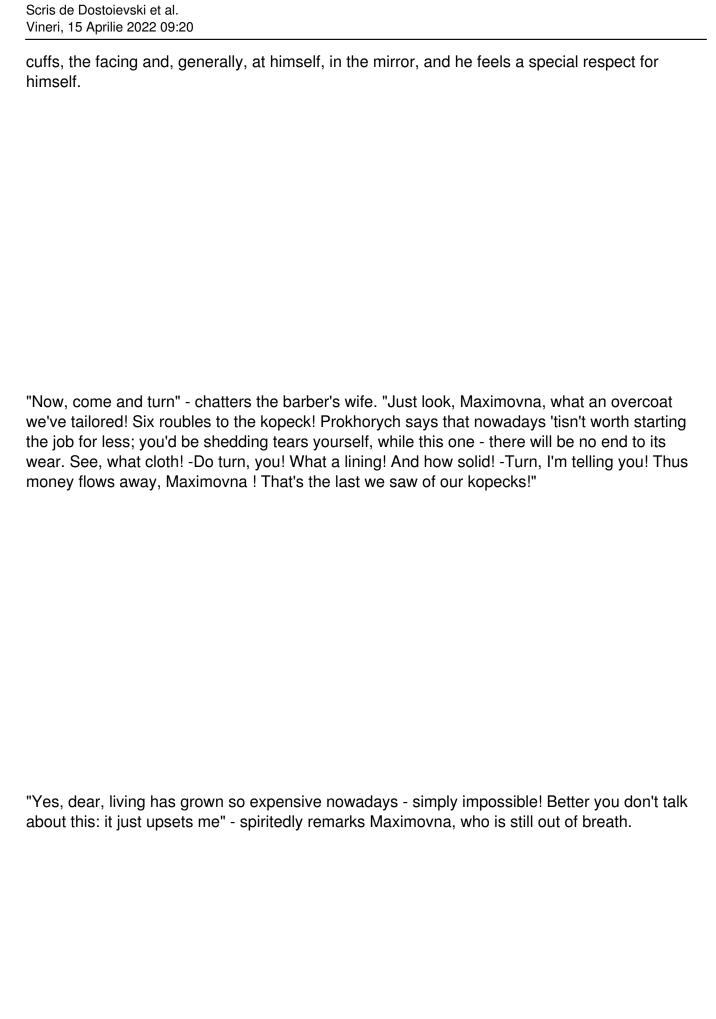
"There she is, Maria Maximovna; come in, come in; be welcome, God's servant!"

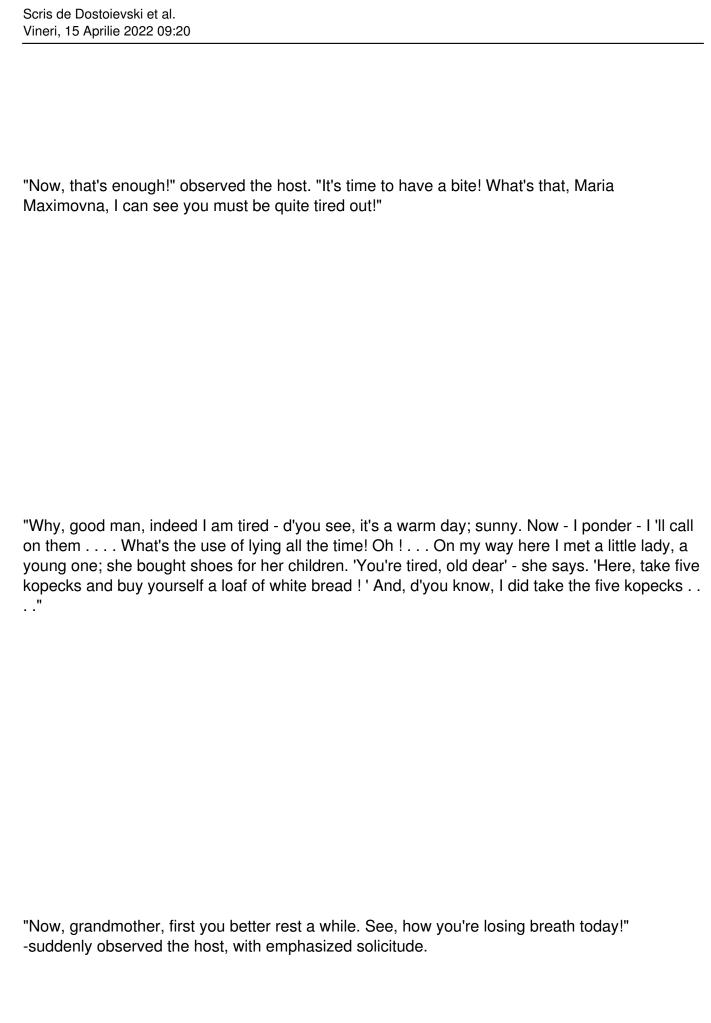
The old woman walks in, with a little laugh; the doorbell continues to ring - long, sharply, in a thin tinkle. Her granddaughter is, most probably, the wife of that barber, while he is not yet an old man - a man of thirty - five or thereabouts, as steady as his trade, even though that trade is a frivolous one; of course, he is wearing a suit as greasy as a pancake - is it because of the pomade? -I can't tell, but I have never seen "barber-surgeons" looking otherwise; and also the collars of their coats invariably look as if they had been rolled in flour. Three youngsters - a boy and two little girls - came running in a jiffy to their great-grandmother. Usually, such all too old little women are somehow on intimate terms with children; they themselves become spiritually akin to children - sometimes to the very dot. The old woman seated herself. Maybe a guest or

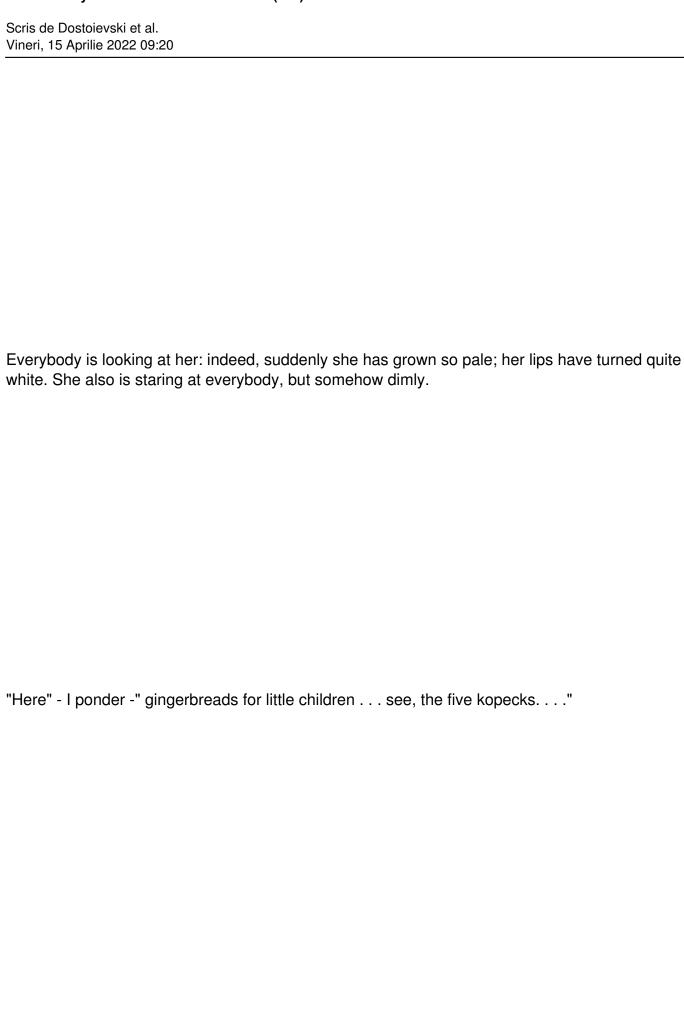




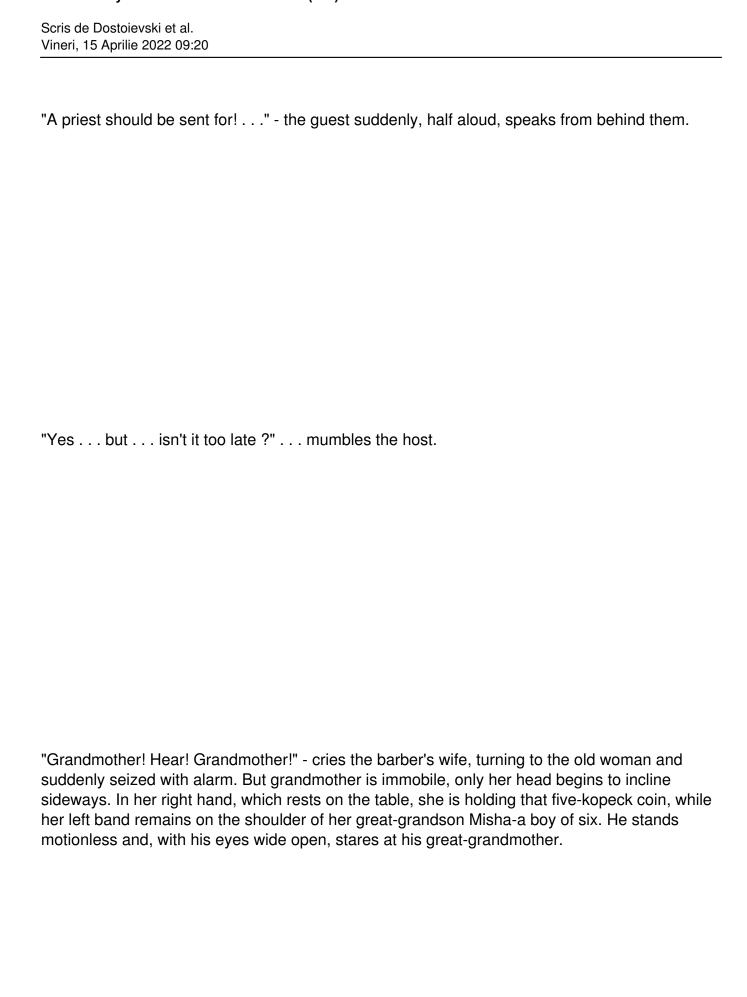


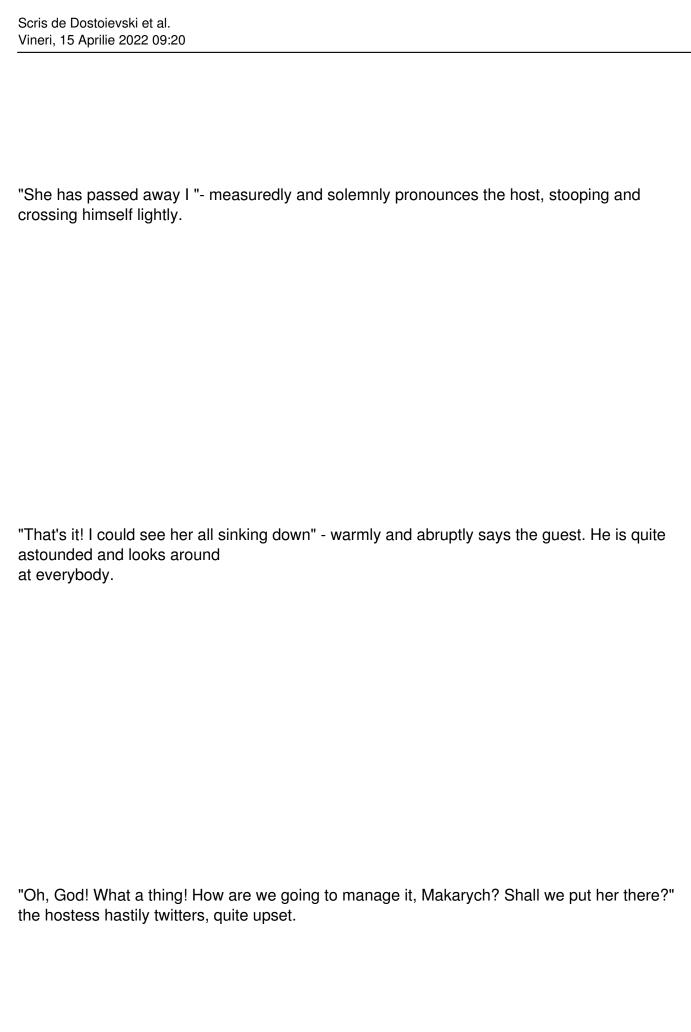


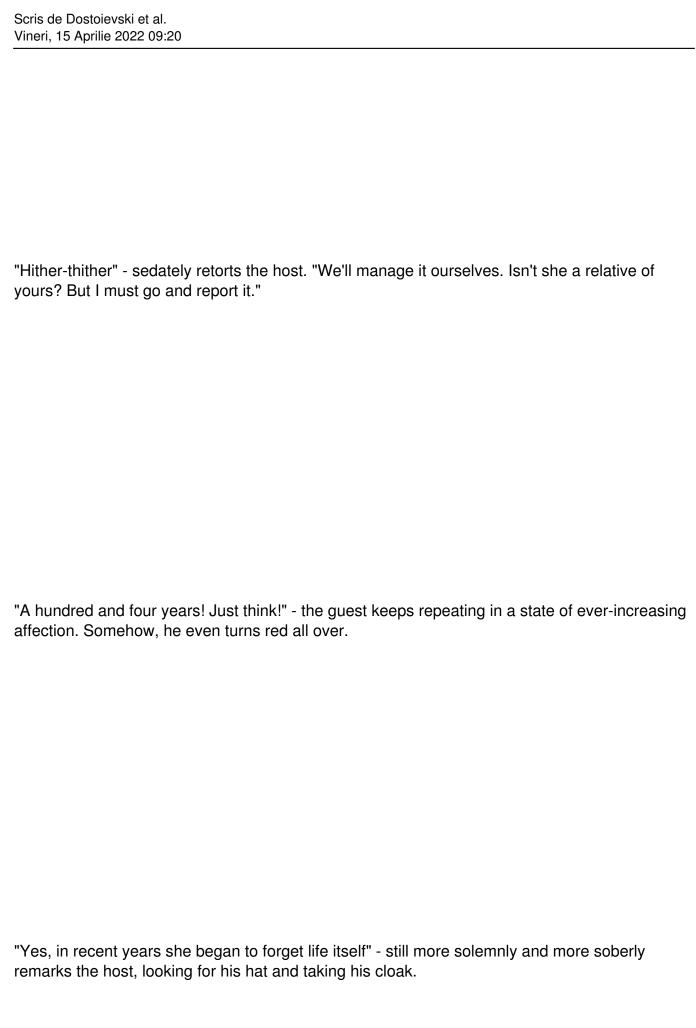














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Of course, over such a one no tears are shed. A hundred and four years - "and she passed away painlessly and unashamed." The hostess sent to the neighbors for help. The neighbor women came running in haste, listening almost with pleasure to the news, sighing and screaming.

It goes without saying that, to begin with, a samovar was brought in. Children with an astonished air, hiding in a corner, stare at the dead grandmother. No matter how long Misha may live, he will remember the little old woman - how she died, pressing her hand upon his shoulder. Well, and when he dies, no one on earth will learn that once upon a time there lived such an old woman, and that she had lived one hundred and four years - how and what for, God only knows. Thus, millions of people pass away: they live unnoticed and they die unnoticed. Only, perhaps, in the instant of death itself of these centenarians - both men and women - there is something touching, as it were, and calm, even solemn and pacifying: even in our time, one hundred years strangely affect men. God bless the lives and deaths of simple, kind folks!

However, this is but a light and themeless little scene. Truly, one intends to recount, from among the things heard in the course of the month, something more entertaining, but when one starts writing, it develops that the thing either cannot be recorded or that it is irrelevant, or else

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that "one shouldn't tell everything one knows," and, in the long run, there remain only the most pointless subjects