

The Duel by Anton Chekhov

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Layevsky: Dear Mother . . . Whether they kill me tomorrow or make a mockery of me—that is, leave me my life—I am ruined in any case. Whether this dishonored woman kills herself from shame and despair or drags out her pitiful existence, she is ruined in any case . . . I ask you in the name of a merciful God to give shelter and a little warmth and kindness to this unfortunate woman whom I have dishonored, and who is now alone and impoverished and weak; to forget and forgive everything . . . everything, and by your charity to atone, at least in part, for your son's terrible sin . . . (*Thunder is heard.*) A storm. (*He continues to write.*) It is storming now. I recall how as a child I always ran bareheaded into the garden when there was a storm, two fair-haired little girls with blue eyes chasing after me, and how we were drenched by the rain. The little girls would laugh with delight, but when there was a loud clap of thunder, they trustingly pressed close to me as I crossed myself and repeated Holy, Holy, Holy . . . Dear Mother, where have they gone, in what sea have they drowned, those early buds of fair, pure life? I no longer fear storms nor love nature; I have no God; all the trusting little girls I have ever known have been ruined by me and my contemporaries . . . In my entire life I have never planted one tree nor grown a single blade of grass in my own garden. Surrounded by living things, I have never saved so much as an insect, but have only destroyed, ruined, lied, and lied, and lied. Mother, I am not sure if you can understand all this or even if you really care . . . (*He stops writing and reading, and tears up letter on the line.*) What a fool!