



A TALE ABOUT HAPPINESS

by **Vasily Grossman**
(1934-1935)

presented by **SovLit.com**



**"The raggedy, drunk
organ grinder extended
happiness to the
seamstress."**

Four women were sitting in a room. One of them was sewing. The three others chatted about various things. They talked about prices, about lines, a girl, a neighbor who had given birth; they complained about their husbands who had now developed wandering eyes and who had to be kept on short leashes. The one who was sewing sighed. She wasn't able to keep her husband in check and now she had to sew. Sew. After all, she had two little girls, one was six, the other four. He, that eccentric, left for the ends of the earth. He had written her a letter, beckoned her and the kids to come to him. Live in a barrack! No, she didn't regret it at all.

Everyone said that she had done the right thing.

A street organ played in the courtyard. With a trembling hand, the bloated, yellow-green organ grinder extended a container full of little envelopes through the open window.

"Ladies," he wheezed, "pull one of these out for happiness."

Each woman took an envelope.

One of them received a shiny ring. A real gold wedding ring.

Another got a tiny piece of scented soap.

The third received a thimble. A brand new aluminum thimble with a top made out of precious bright green glass.

The fourth one, the one who was sewing, found a piece of paper in her envelope, on which was written in heavy black letters:

"Happiness."

Yes, the raggedy, drunk organ grinder extended happiness to the seamstress through the window. Her pale face grew pink, just the way that an apple tree grows pink in May in the light of a distant evening fire. Her tired eyes grew bright for a moment. Then she touched the paper with her fingers, angrily crumpled it up and said:

"Who needs happiness? It would have been better if I had picked the piece of soap."

And she threw the piece of paper on the floor.