

The Bet by Anton Chekhov (Adapted)

During a party at a banker's house, the guests argued whether capital punishment was more humane than life imprisonment. The banker claimed, "Life is always better. To live means to hope. Life imprisonment is more merciful." A young lawyer disagreed. "Both are wrong, but if I had to choose, I would rather live even if it meant spending years in prison."

"Done!" the banker said impulsively. "I bet you two million rubles that you cannot stay in solitary confinement for fifteen years." The young lawyer accepted the challenge.

He was kept in a small lodge in the banker's garden, cut off from all human contact. He was allowed books, music, and writing materials. The first year was filled with loneliness and depression, but gradually he threw himself into studying languages, literature, and philosophy. With time, he became calm, wise, and spiritually detached from the world.

As the fifteen years were almost over, the banker, now financially ruined, realized that paying the two million would destroy him. Desperate, he crept to the lodge intending to kill the lawyer. But instead he found him sleeping beside a letter that read:

"Tomorrow, I will walk away before my term ends. I do not want your money. I have learned that knowledge and spiritual peace are far greater than all the wealth and pleasure of the world."

The banker kissed the lawyer's head and silently left, filled with relief and deep shame. At dawn, the lawyer quietly walked out of the lodge, free — not only from confinement, but also from the temptations of worldly life.

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