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The Torrents of Spring

Ivan Turgenev · *1872* · *Constance Garnett*

An aging man remembers the summer of 1840: in Frankfort he saved a girl's brother, fell in love with Gemma, and then lost that first joy to a stronger, colder will. Turgenev frames the tale with an old ballad: years of gladness hurry away like the torrents of spring. This is Constance Garnett's English.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

How can a man who was truly loved throw that love away, and what is left when the torrents of spring have hurried on?

"Years of gladness, Days of joy, Like the torrents of spring They hurried away."

The old ballad that stands as the tale's epigraph

Sanin's memory is a night of bitter weariness, then a clear story: courage, a confectioner's shop, a duel averted, a betrothal, and the arrival of Maria Nikolaevna Polozov, who makes a game of taking him from Gemma. He goes, and the going is not forced at the point of a sword. Garnett's English is tender and exact. The hosted file also contains First Love and Mumu; this map is of The Torrents of Spring only. The frame's disgust with life is the bill for a betrayal he cannot undo.

KEY CHARACTERS

Dimitri Sanin
The remembered young man, capable of courage and of a swift, shameful desertion.

Gemma
The confectioner's daughter, candid, proud, and truly loving.

Maria Nikolaevna Polozov
The married woman who makes a conquest of him as if it were a sport.

Emilio and the Roselli household
The family that offered him a life he did not keep.

LIKE THE TORRENTS OF SPRING

> *"Years of gladness, Days of joy, Like the torrents of spring They hurried away."*
>
> The epigraph

Grades 10–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Night in the Study

THE FRAME

Late at night, a man sits exhausted after a brilliant evening and is seized by a disgust of life. He begins to remember.

- The ballad is the key: joy can be real and still pass like water.
- The frame is old age looking at a wound, not a sentimental preface.
- What follows is not a dream; it is a confession of a choice.

> *"Years of gladness, Days of joy, Like the torrents of spring They hurried away."*
>
> The epigraph

02

Frankfort, and a Shop

THE EARLY CHAPTERS

Young Sanin, coming home from Italy, enters a confectioner's shop and saves Gemma's brother. The family takes him in; a love begins.

- The rescue is almost comic and becomes a destiny.
- Gemma's candor is the first, clean happiness of the book.
- Emilio and the Italian household are a world he could have kept.

03

A Betrothal

THE MIDDLE

He fights, in a manner of speaking, for her honor, and they are promised to each other. A future in America is even sketched.

- Sanin is at his best when he is simply brave and kind.
- The promise is real; the reader is allowed to believe it.
- Money and a friend's convenience will soon test it.

04

Maria Nikolaevna

THE TURNING

To raise money, Sanin deals with the Polozovs. Maria Nikolaevna, beautiful and bored, decides to win him, and he lets himself be won.

- The betrayal is a surrender of the will, not a kidnapping.
- Gemma's letter and faith are still in the air while he falls.
- Turgenev is unsparing about how quickly a man can fail.

05

What Hurried Away

THE CLOSE AND THE FRAME AGAIN

The engagement is broken. Years later the remembered joy is only a bitterness in a quiet room. First Love and Mumu follow in this same file; they are other tales.

- The frame's weariness is now explained.
- Do not tidy the ending into a late reunion the tale does not give.
- Flag the companion stories; do not mix their plots into this map.

A Lost First Joy · Will and Weakness · Memory · Betrayal · Time Passing

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 10–12

1. The hosted text is Constance Garnett's 1897 English (Project Gutenberg #9911). Both the PG file and the site EPUB also contain two further Garnett tales, First Love and Mumu, after The Torrents of Spring. This map is of the title novella only; do not quote the companion tales as if they were this work.
2. The epigraph is exact: "Years of gladness, / Days of joy, / Like the torrents of spring / They hurried away." (From an Old Ballad.)
3. Names in this text include Gemma, Sanin, and Maria Nikolaevna. Quote Garnett, not a later English version.
4. The story is a betrayal of a betrothal, told with great tenderness and no excuse. It is suitable for older students.

Quotations are verbatim from the Constance Garnett, Project Gutenberg #9911, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/turgenev-the-torrents-of-spring/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.