

## *Conclusive Evidence*

*Vladimir Nabokov*

### CHAPTER FIVE

I have often noticed that after I had bestowed on the characters of my novels some treasured item from the past, it would pine away in the artificial world where I had so abruptly placed it. Although it lingered on in my mind, its personal warmth, its retrospective appeal had gone and, presently, it became more closely identified with my novel than with my former self, where it had seemed to be so safe from the intrusion of the artist. Houses have crumbled in my memory as soundlessly as they did in the mute films of yore, and the portrait of my old French governess, whom I once lent to a boy in one of my books, is fading fast, now that it is engulfed in the description of a childhood entirely unrelated to my own, the man in me revolts against the fictionist, and here is my desperate attempt to save what is left of poor Mademoiselle.

A large woman, a very stout woman, Mademoiselle rolled into our existence in December 1905 when I was six and my brother five. There she is. I see so plainly her abundant dark hair, brushed up high and covertly graying; the three wrinkles on her austere forehead; her beetling brows; the steely eyes behind the black-rimmed pince-nez; that vestigial mustache; that blotchy complexion, which in moments of wrath develops an additional flush in the region of the third, and amplest, chin so regally . . .

## *Other Shores Drugie berega*

*Vladimir Nabokov*

### CHAPTER FIVE

(Trans. James H. Buckingham)

In a cold room at the hands of a belletrist, Memory — she dies in his arms. Time and again I noticed, what it costs me to give to a fictional character lively trifles from my childhood, and she already begins to dim and fade in my memory. Successfully transferred into the story, whole houses will crumble inwardly completely soundlessly, like an explosion in a mute cinematograph. So interspersed in the beginning of "Luzhin's Defense" the image of my French governess dies for me in an alien environment, imposed by the writer. Here is an attempt to save what still is left of this image.

I was six years old, brother five, when, in the year 1905, Mademoiselle came to us. She seemed huge to me, and in fact she was very fat. I see her luxuriant coiffure, with unrecognized graying in her dark hair, three — and only three, but what! — wrinkles on her stern forehead, thick manlike eyebrows over gray — the color of her little steely watches — eyes behind black-rimmed pince-nez glasses; I see her thick nostrils, a rudimentary mustache and an even redness of a large face, thickening, with the influx of her wrath, to crimson, in the vicinity of the third and her widest chin which so majestically encamps directly onto her high-pitched, multigathered blouse.

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## *Speak, Memory*

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