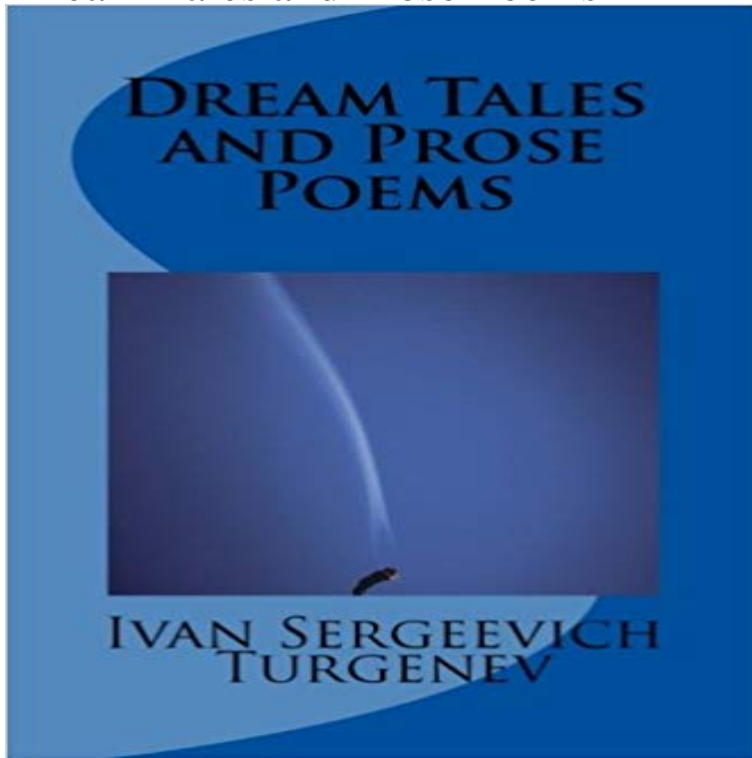


## Dream Tales and Prose Poems



In the spring of 1878 there was living in Moscow, in a small wooden house in Shabolovka, a young man of five-and-twenty, called Yakov Aratov. With him lived his father's sister, an elderly maiden lady, over fifty, Platonida Ivanovna. She took charge of his house, and looked after his household expenditure, a task for which Aratov was utterly unfit. Other relations he had none. A few years previously, his father, a provincial gentleman of small property, had moved to Moscow together with him and Platonida Ivanovna, whom he always, however, called Platosha; her nephew, too, used the same name. On leaving the country-place where they had always lived up till then, the elder Aratov settled in the old capital, with the object of putting his son to the university, for which he had himself prepared him; he bought for a trifle a little house in one of the outlying streets, and established himself in it, with all his books and scientific odds and ends. And of books and odds and ends he had many for he was a man of some considerable learning ... an out-and-out eccentric, as his neighbours said of him. He positively passed among them for a sorcerer; he had even been given the title of an insectivist. He studied chemistry, mineralogy, entomology, botany, and medicine; he doctored patients gratis with herbs and metallic powders of his own invention, after the method of Paracelsus. These same powders were the means of his bringing to the grave his pretty, young, too delicate wife, whom he passionately loved, and by whom he had an only son. With the same powders he fairly ruined his son's health too, in the hope and intention of strengthening it, as he detected anæmia and a tendency to consumption in his constitution inherited from his mother. The name of sorcerer had been given him partly because he regarded himself as a descendant not in the direct line, of course of the great Bruce, in honour of

whom he had called his son Yakov, the Russian form of James.

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