



THE DUEL

ANTON CHEKHOV

THE DUEL

ANTON CHEKHOV

translated by
CONSTANCE GARNETT



This ebook is the product of many hours of hard work by volunteers for [Standard Ebooks](#), and builds on the hard work of other literature lovers made possible by the public domain.

This particular ebook is based on a transcription from [Project Gutenberg](#) and on digital scans from [Google Books](#).

The source text and artwork in this ebook are believed to be in the United States public domain; that is, they are believed to be free of copyright restrictions in the United States. They may still be copyrighted in other countries, so users located outside of the United States must check their local laws before using this ebook. The creators of, and contributors to, this ebook dedicate their contributions to the worldwide public domain via the terms in the [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication](#). For full license information, see the [Uncopyright](#) at the end of this ebook.

Standard Ebooks is a volunteer-driven project that produces ebook editions of public domain literature using modern typography, technology, and editorial standards, and distributes them free of cost. You can download this and other ebooks carefully produced for true book lovers at standardebooks.org.

I

It was eight o'clock in the morning—the time when the officers, the local officials, and the visitors usually took their morning dip in the sea after the hot, stifling night, and then went into the pavilion to drink tea or coffee. Ivan Andreitch Laevsky, a thin, fair young man of twenty-eight, wearing the cap of a clerk in the Ministry of Finance and with slippers on his feet, coming down to bathe, found a number of acquaintances on the beach, and among them his friend Samoylenko, the army doctor.

With his big cropped head, short neck, his red face, his big nose, his shaggy black eyebrows and grey whiskers, his stout puffy figure and his hoarse military bass, this Samoylenko made on every newcomer the unpleasant impression of a gruff bully; but two or three days after making his acquaintance, one began to think his face extraordinarily good-natured, kind, and even handsome. In spite of his clumsiness and rough manner, he was a peaceable man, of infinite kindliness and goodness of heart, always ready to be of use. He was on familiar terms with everyone in the town, lent everyone money, doctored everyone, made matches, patched up quarrels, arranged picnics at which he cooked *shashlik* and an awfully good soup of grey mullets. He was always looking after other people's affairs and trying to interest someone on their behalf, and was always delighted about something. The general opinion about him was that he was without faults of character. He had only two weaknesses: he was ashamed of his own good nature, and tried to disguise it by a surly expression and an assumed gruffness; and he liked his assistants and his soldiers to call him "Your Excellency," although he was only a civil councillor.

"Answer one question for me, Alexandr Daviditch," Laevsky began, when both he and Samoylenko were in the water up to their shoulders. "Suppose you had loved a woman and had been living with her for two or three years, and then left off caring for her, as one does, and began to feel that you had nothing in common with her. How would you behave in that case?"

“It’s very simple. ‘You go where you please, madam’—and that would be the end of it.”

“It’s easy to say that! But if she has nowhere to go? A woman with no friends or relations, without a farthing, who can’t work...”

“Well? Five hundred roubles down or an allowance of twenty-five roubles a month—and nothing more. It’s very simple.”

“Even supposing you have five hundred roubles and can pay twenty-five roubles a month, the woman I am speaking of is an educated woman and proud. Could you really bring yourself to offer her money? And how would you do it?”

Samoylenko was going to answer, but at that moment a big wave covered them both, then broke on the beach and rolled back noisily over the shingle. The friends got out and began dressing.

“Of course, it is difficult to live with a woman if you don’t love her,” said Samoylenko, shaking the sand out of his boots. “But one must look at the thing humanely, Vanya. If it were my case, I should never show a sign that I did not love her, and I should go on living with her till I died.”

He was at once ashamed of his own words; he pulled himself up and said:

“But for aught I care, there might be no females at all. Let them all go to the devil!”

The friends dressed and went into the pavilion. There Samoylenko was quite at home, and even had a special cup and saucer. Every morning they brought him on a tray a cup of coffee, a tall cut glass of iced water, and a tiny glass of brandy. He would first drink the brandy, then the hot coffee, then the iced water, and this must have been very nice, for after drinking it his eyes looked moist with pleasure, he would stroke his whiskers with both hands, and say, looking at the sea:

“A wonderfully magnificent view!”

After a long night spent in cheerless, unprofitable thoughts which prevented him from sleeping, and seemed to intensify the darkness and sultriness of the night, Laevsky felt listless and shattered. He felt no better for the bathe and the coffee.

“Let us go on with our talk, Alexandr Daviditch,” he said. “I won’t make a secret of it; I’ll speak to you openly as to a friend. Things are in a bad way with Nadyezhda Fyodorovna and me... a very bad way! Forgive me for forcing my private affairs upon you, but I must speak out.”

Samoylenko, who had a misgiving of what he was going to speak about, dropped his eyes and drummed with his fingers on the table.

“I’ve lived with her for two years and have ceased to love her,” Laevsky went on; “or, rather, I realised that I never had felt any love for her. . . . These two years have been a mistake.”

It was Laevsky’s habit as he talked to gaze attentively at the pink palms of his hands, to bite his nails, or to pinch his cuffs. And he did so now.

“I know very well you can’t help me,” he said. “But I tell you, because unsuccessful and superfluous people like me find their salvation in talking. I have to generalise about everything I do. I’m bound to look for an explanation and justification of my absurd existence in somebody else’s theories, in literary types—in the idea that we, upper-class Russians, are degenerating, for instance, and so on. Last night, for example, I comforted myself by thinking all the time: ‘Ah, how true Tolstoy is, how mercilessly true!’ And that did me good. Yes, really, brother, he is a great writer, say what you like!”

Samoylenko, who had never read Tolstoy and was intending to do so every day of his life, was a little embarrassed, and said:

“Yes, all other authors write from imagination, but he writes straight from nature.”

“My God!” sighed Laevsky; “how distorted we all are by civilisation! I fell in love with a married woman and she with me. . . . To begin with, we had kisses, and calm evenings, and vows, and Spencer, and ideals, and interests in common. . . . What a deception! We really ran away from her husband, but we lied to ourselves and made out that we ran away from the emptiness of the life of the educated class. We pictured our future like this: to begin with, in the Caucasus, while we were getting to know the people and the place, I would put on the government uniform and enter the service; then at our leisure we would pick out a plot of ground, would toil in the sweat of our brow, would have a vineyard and a field, and so on. If you were in my place, or that zoologist of yours, Von Koren, you might live with Nadyezhda Fyodorovna for thirty years, perhaps, and might leave your heirs a rich vineyard and three thousand acres of maize; but I felt like a bankrupt from the first day. In the town you have insufferable heat, boredom, and no society; if you go out into the country, you fancy poisonous spiders, scorpions, or snakes lurking under every stone and behind every bush, and beyond the fields—mountains and the desert. Alien people, an alien country, a wretched form of civilisation—all that is not so easy, brother, as walking on the Nevsky Prospect in one’s fur coat, arm-in-arm with Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, dreaming of the sunny South. What is needed here is a life

and death struggle, and I'm not a fighting man. A wretched neurasthenic, an idle gentleman.... From the first day I knew that my dreams of a life of labour and of a vineyard were worthless. As for love, I ought to tell you that living with a woman who has read Spencer and has followed you to the ends of the earth is no more interesting than living with any Anfissa or Akulina. There's the same smell of ironing, of powder, and of medicines, the same curl-papers every morning, the same self-deception."

"You can't get on in the house without an iron," said Samoylenko, blushing at Laevsky's speaking to him so openly of a lady he knew. "You are out of humour today, Vanya, I notice. Nadyezhda Fyodorovna is a splendid woman, highly educated, and you are a man of the highest intellect. Of course, you are not married," Samoylenko went on, glancing round at the adjacent tables, "but that's not your fault; and besides... one ought to be above conventional prejudices and rise to the level of modern ideas. I believe in free love myself, yes.... But to my thinking, once you have settled together, you ought to go on living together all your life."

"Without love?"

"I will tell you directly," said Samoylenko. "Eight years ago there was an old fellow, an agent, here—a man of very great intelligence. Well, he used to say that the great thing in married life was patience. Do you hear, Vanya? Not love, but patience. Love cannot last long. You have lived two years in love, and now evidently your married life has reached the period when, in order to preserve equilibrium, so to speak, you ought to exercise all your patience...."

"You believe in your old agent; to me his words are meaningless. Your old man could be a hypocrite; he could exercise himself in the virtue of patience, and, as he did so, look upon a person he did not love as an object indispensable for his moral exercises; but I have not yet fallen so low. If I want to exercise myself in patience, I will buy dumbbells or a frisky horse, but I'll leave human beings alone."

Samoylenko asked for some white wine with ice. When they had drunk a glass each, Laevsky suddenly asked:

"Tell me, please, what is the meaning of softening of the brain?"

"How can I explain it to you?... It's a disease in which the brain becomes softer... as it were, dissolves."

"Is it curable?"

"Yes, if the disease is not neglected. Cold douches, blisters.... Something internal, too."

“Oh! ... Well, you see my position; I can't live with her: it is more than I can do. While I'm with you I can be philosophical about it and smile, but at home I lose heart completely; I am so utterly miserable, that if I were told, for instance, that I should have to live another month with her, I should blow out my brains. At the same time, parting with her is out of the question. She has no friends or relations; she cannot work, and neither she nor I have any money. ... What could become of her? To whom could she go? There is nothing one can think of. ... Come, tell me, what am I to do?”

“H'm! ...” growled Samoylenko, not knowing what to answer. “Does she love you?”

“Yes, she loves me in so far as at her age and with her temperament she wants a man. It would be as difficult for her to do without me as to do without her powder or her curl-papers. I am for her an indispensable, integral part of her boudoir.”

Samoylenko was embarrassed.

“You are out of humour today, Vanya,” he said. “You must have had a bad night.”

“Yes, I slept badly. ... Altogether, I feel horribly out of sorts, brother. My head feels empty; there's a sinking at my heart, a weakness. ... I must run away.”

“Run where?”

“There, to the North. To the pines and the mushrooms, to people and ideas. ... I'd give half my life to bathe now in some little stream in the province of Moscow or Tula; to feel chilly, you know, and then to stroll for three hours even with the feeblest student, and to talk and talk endlessly. ... And the scent of the hay! Do you remember it? And in the evening, when one walks in the garden, sounds of the piano float from the house; one hears the train passing. ...”

Laevsky laughed with pleasure; tears came into his eyes, and to cover them, without getting up, he stretched across the next table for the matches.

“I have not been in Russia for eighteen years,” said Samoylenko. “I've forgotten what it is like. To my mind, there is not a country more splendid than the Caucasus.”

“Vereshchagin has a picture in which some men condemned to death are languishing at the bottom of a very deep well. Your magnificent Caucasus strikes me as just like that well. If I were offered the choice of a chimney-sweep in Petersburg or a prince in the Caucasus, I should choose the job of chimney-sweep.”

Laevsky grew pensive. Looking at his stooping figure, at his eyes fixed dreamily at one spot, at his pale, perspiring face and sunken temples, at his bitten nails, at the slipper which had dropped off his heel, displaying a badly darned sock, Samoylenko was moved to pity, and probably because Laevsky reminded him of a helpless child, he asked:

“Is your mother living?”

“Yes, but we are on bad terms. She could not forgive me for this affair.”

Samoylenko was fond of his friend. He looked upon Laevsky as a good-natured fellow, a student, a man with no nonsense about him, with whom one could drink, and laugh, and talk without reserve. What he understood in him he disliked extremely. Laevsky drank a great deal and at unsuitable times; he played cards, despised his work, lived beyond his means, frequently made use of unseemly expressions in conversation, walked about the streets in his slippers, and quarrelled with Nadyezhda Fyodorovna before other people—and Samoylenko did not like this. But the fact that Laevsky had once been a student in the Faculty of Arts, subscribed to two fat reviews, often talked so cleverly that only a few people understood him, was living with a well-educated woman—all this Samoylenko did not understand, and he liked this and respected Laevsky, thinking him superior to himself.

“There is another point,” said Laevsky, shaking his head. “Only it is between ourselves. I’m concealing it from Nadyezhda Fyodorovna for the time.... Don’t let it out before her.... I got a letter the day before yesterday, telling me that her husband has died from softening of the brain.”

“The Kingdom of Heaven be his!” sighed Samoylenko. “Why are you concealing it from her?”

“To show her that letter would be equivalent to ‘Come to church to be married.’ And we should first have to make our relations clear. When she understands that we can’t go on living together, I will show her the letter. Then there will be no danger in it.”

“Do you know what, Vanya,” said Samoylenko, and a sad and imploring expression came into his face, as though he were going to ask him about something very touching and were afraid of being refused.

“Marry her, my dear boy!”

“Why?”

“Do your duty to that splendid woman! Her husband is dead, and so Providence itself shows you what to do!”

“But do understand, you queer fellow, that it is impossible. To marry without love is as base and unworthy of a man as to perform mass without believing in it.”

“But it’s your duty to.”

“Why is it my duty?” Laevsky asked irritably.

“Because you took her away from her husband and made yourself responsible for her.”

“But now I tell you in plain Russian, I don’t love her!”

“Well, if you’ve no love, show her proper respect, consider her wishes....”

“‘Show her respect, consider her wishes,’” Laevsky mimicked him.

“As though she were some Mother Superior! ... You are a poor psychologist and physiologist if you think that living with a woman one can get off with nothing but respect and consideration. What a woman thinks most of is her bedroom.”

“Vanya, Vanya!” said Samoylenko, overcome with confusion.

“You are an elderly child, a theorist, while I am an old man in spite of my years, and practical, and we shall never understand one another. We had better drop this conversation. Mustapha!” Laevsky shouted to the waiter. “What’s our bill?”

“No, no...” the doctor cried in dismay, clutching Laevsky’s arm. “It is for me to pay. I ordered it. Make it out to me,” he cried to Mustapha.

The friends got up and walked in silence along the seafront. When they reached the boulevard, they stopped and shook hands at parting.

“You are awfully spoilt, my friend!” Samoylenko sighed. “Fate has sent you a young, beautiful, cultured woman, and you refuse the gift, while if God were to give me a crooked old woman, how pleased I should be if only she were kind and affectionate! I would live with her in my vineyard and...”

Samoylenko caught himself up and said:

“And she might get the samovar ready for me there, the old hag.”

After parting with Laevsky he walked along the boulevard. When, bulky and majestic, with a stern expression on his face, he walked along the boulevard in his snow-white tunic and superbly polished boots, squaring his chest, decorated with the Vladimir cross on a ribbon, he was very much pleased with himself, and it seemed as though the whole world were looking at him with pleasure. Without turning his head, he looked to each side and thought that the boulevard was extremely well laid out; that the young cypress trees, the eucalyptuses, and the ugly,

anemic palm trees were very handsome and would in time give abundant shade; that the Circassians were an honest and hospitable people.

“It’s strange that Laevsky does not like the Caucasus,” he thought, “very strange.”

Five soldiers, carrying rifles, met him and saluted him. On the right side of the boulevard the wife of a local official was walking along the pavement with her son, a schoolboy.

“Good morning, Marya Konstantinovna,” Samoylenko shouted to her with a pleasant smile. “Have you been to bathe? Ha, ha, ha! ... My respects to Nikodim Alexandritch!”

And he went on, still smiling pleasantly, but seeing an assistant of the military hospital coming towards him, he suddenly frowned, stopped him, and asked:

“Is there anyone in the hospital?”

“No one, Your Excellency.”

“Eh?”

“No one, Your Excellency.”

“Very well, run along. ...”

Swaying majestically, he made for the lemonade stall, where sat a full-bosomed old Jewess, who gave herself out to be a Georgian, and said to her as loudly as though he were giving the word of command to a regiment:

“Be so good as to give me some soda-water!”

II

Laevsky's not loving Nadyezhda Fyodorovna showed itself chiefly in the fact that everything she said or did seemed to him a lie, or equivalent to a lie, and everything he read against women and love seemed to him to apply perfectly to himself, to Nadyezhda Fyodorovna and her husband. When he returned home, she was sitting at the window, dressed and with her hair done, and with a preoccupied face was drinking coffee and turning over the leaves of a fat magazine; and he thought the drinking of coffee was not such a remarkable event that she need put on a preoccupied expression over it, and that she had been wasting her time doing her hair in a fashionable style, as there was no one here to attract and no need to be attractive. And in the magazine he saw nothing but falsity. He thought she had dressed and done her hair so as to look handsomer, and was reading in order to seem clever.

"Will it be all right for me to go to bathe today?" she said.

"Why? There won't be an earthquake whether you go or not, I suppose...."

"No, I only ask in case the doctor should be vexed."

"Well, ask the doctor, then; I'm not a doctor."

On this occasion what displeased Laevsky most in Nadyezhda Fyodorovna was her white open neck and the little curls at the back of her head. And he remembered that when Anna Karenin got tired of her husband, what she disliked most of all was his ears, and thought: "How true it is, how true!"

Feeling weak and as though his head were perfectly empty, he went into his study, lay down on his sofa, and covered his face with a handkerchief that he might not be bothered by the flies. Despondent and oppressive thoughts always about the same thing trailed slowly across his brain like a long string of wagons on a gloomy autumn evening, and he sank into a state of drowsy oppression. It seemed to him that he had wronged Nadyezhda Fyodorovna and her husband, and that it was through his fault that her husband had died. It seemed to him that he had

sinned against his own life, which he had ruined, against the world of lofty ideas, of learning, and of work, and he conceived that wonderful world as real and possible, not on this seafront with hungry Turks and lazy mountaineers sauntering upon it, but there in the North, where there were operas, theatres, newspapers, and all kinds of intellectual activity. One could only there—not here—be honest, intelligent, lofty, and pure. He accused himself of having no ideal, no guiding principle in life, though he had a dim understanding now what it meant. Two years before, when he fell in love with Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, it seemed to him that he had only to go with her as his wife to the Caucasus, and he would be saved from vulgarity and emptiness; in the same way now, he was convinced that he had only to part from Nadyezhda Fyodorovna and to go to Petersburg, and he would get everything he wanted.

“Run away,” he muttered to himself, sitting up and biting his nails. “Run away!”

He pictured in his imagination how he would go aboard the steamer and then would have some lunch, would drink some cold beer, would talk on deck with ladies, then would get into the train at Sevastopol and set off. Hurrah for freedom! One station after another would flash by, the air would keep growing colder and keener, then the birches and the fir trees, then Kursk, Moscow.... In the restaurants cabbage soup, mutton with kasha, sturgeon, beer, no more Asiaticism, but Russia, real Russia. The passengers in the train would talk about trade, new singers, the Franco-Russian entente; on all sides there would be the feeling of keen, cultured, intellectual, eager life.... Hasten on, on! At last Nevsky Prospect, and Great Morskaya Street, and then Kovensky Place, where he used to live at one time when he was a student, the dear grey sky, the drizzling rain, the drenched cabmen....

“Ivan Andreitch!” someone called from the next room. “Are you at home?”

“I’m here,” Laevsky responded. “What do you want?”

“Papers.”

Laevsky got up languidly, feeling giddy, walked into the other room, yawning and shuffling with his slippers. There, at the open window that looked into the street, stood one of his young fellow-clerks, laying out some government documents on the windowsill.

“One minute, my dear fellow,” Laevsky said softly, and he went to look for the ink; returning to the window, he signed the papers without looking at them, and said: “It’s hot!”

“Yes. Are you coming today?”

“I don’t think so.... I’m not quite well. Tell Sheshkovsky that I will come and see him after dinner.”

The clerk went away. Laevsky lay down on his sofa again and began thinking:

“And so I must weigh all the circumstances and reflect on them. Before I go away from here I ought to pay up my debts. I owe about two thousand roubles. I have no money.... Of course, that’s not important; I shall pay part now, somehow, and I shall send the rest, later, from Petersburg. The chief point is Nadyezhda Fyodorovna.... First of all we must define our relations.... Yes.”

A little later he was considering whether it would not be better to go to Samoylenko for advice.

“I might go,” he thought, “but what use would there be in it? I shall only say something inappropriate about boudoirs, about women, about what is honest or dishonest. What’s the use of talking about what is honest or dishonest, if I must make haste to save my life, if I am suffocating in this cursed slavery and am killing myself? ... One must realise at last that to go on leading the life I do is something so base and so cruel that everything else seems petty and trivial beside it. To run away,” he muttered, sitting down, “to run away.”

The deserted seashore, the insatiable heat, and the monotony of the smoky lilac mountains, ever the same and silent, everlastingly solitary, overwhelmed him with depression, and, as it were, made him drowsy and sapped his energy. He was perhaps very clever, talented, remarkably honest; perhaps if the sea and the mountains had not closed him in on all sides, he might have become an excellent Zemstvo leader, a statesman, an orator, a political writer, a saint. Who knows? If so, was it not stupid to argue whether it were honest or dishonest when a gifted and useful man—an artist or musician, for instance—to escape from prison, breaks a wall and deceives his jailers? Anything is honest when a man is in such a position.

At two o’clock Laevsky and Nadyezhda Fyodorovna sat down to dinner. When the cook gave them rice and tomato soup, Laevsky said:

“The same thing every day. Why not have cabbage soup?”

“There are no cabbages.”

“It’s strange. Samoylenko has cabbage soup and Marya Konstantinovna has cabbage soup, and only I am obliged to eat this mawkish mess. We can’t go on like this, darling.”

As is common with the vast majority of husbands and wives, not a single dinner had in earlier days passed without scenes and faultfinding

between Nadyezhda Fyodorovna and Laevsky; but ever since Laevsky had made up his mind that he did not love her, he had tried to give way to Nadyezhda Fyodorovna in everything, spoke to her gently and politely, smiled, and called her “darling.”

“This soup tastes like liquorice,” he said, smiling; he made an effort to control himself and seem amiable, but could not refrain from saying: “Nobody looks after the housekeeping. . . . If you are too ill or busy with reading, let me look after the cooking.”

In earlier days she would have said to him, “Do by all means,” or, “I see you want to turn me into a cook”; but now she only looked at him timidly and flushed crimson.

“Well, how do you feel today?” he asked kindly.

“I am all right today. There is nothing but a little weakness.”

“You must take care of yourself, darling. I am awfully anxious about you.”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna was ill in some way. Samoylenko said she had intermittent fever, and gave her quinine; the other doctor, Ustimovitch, a tall, lean, unsociable man, who used to sit at home in the daytime, and in the evenings walk slowly up and down on the seafront coughing, with his hands folded behind him and a cane stretched along his back, was of opinion that she had a female complaint, and prescribed warm compresses. In old days, when Laevsky loved her, Nadyezhda Fyodorovna’s illness had excited his pity and terror; now he saw falsity even in her illness. Her yellow, sleepy face, her lustreless eyes, her apathetic expression, and the yawning that always followed her attacks of fever, and the fact that during them she lay under a shawl and looked more like a boy than a woman, and that it was close and stuffy in her room—all this, in his opinion, destroyed the illusion and was an argument against love and marriage.

The next dish given him was spinach with hard-boiled eggs, while Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, as an invalid, had jelly and milk. When with a preoccupied face she touched the jelly with a spoon and then began languidly eating it, sipping milk, and he heard her swallowing, he was possessed by such an overwhelming aversion that it made his head tingle. He recognised that such a feeling would be an insult even to a dog, but he was angry, not with himself but with Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, for arousing such a feeling, and he understood why lovers sometimes murder their mistresses. He would not murder her, of course, but if he had been on a jury now, he would have acquitted the murderer.

“Merci, darling,” he said after dinner, and kissed Nadyezhda Fyodorovna on the forehead.

Going back into his study, he spent five minutes in walking to and fro, looking at his boots; then he sat down on his sofa and muttered:

“Run away, run away! We must define the position and run away!”

He lay down on the sofa and recalled again that Nadyezhda Fyodorovna’s husband had died, perhaps, by his fault.

“To blame a man for loving a woman, or ceasing to love a woman, is stupid,” he persuaded himself, lying down and raising his legs in order to put on his high boots. “Love and hatred are not under our control. As for her husband, maybe I was in an indirect way one of the causes of his death; but again, is it my fault that I fell in love with his wife and she with me?”

Then he got up, and finding his cap, set off to the lodgings of his colleague, Sheshkovsky, where the government clerks met every day to play Vint and drink beer.

“My indecision reminds me of Hamlet,” thought Laevsky on the way. “How truly Shakespeare describes it! Ah, how truly!”

III

For the sake of sociability and from sympathy for the hard plight of newcomers without families, who, as there was not an hotel in the town, had nowhere to dine, Dr. Samoylenko kept a sort of table d'hôte. At this time there were only two men who habitually dined with him: a young zoologist called Von Koren, who had come for the summer to the Black Sea to study the embryology of the medusa, and a deacon called Pobyedov, who had only just left the seminary and been sent to the town to take the duty of the old deacon who had gone away for a cure. Each of them paid twelve roubles a month for their dinner and supper, and Samoylenko made them promise to turn up at two o'clock punctually.

Von Koren was usually the first to appear. He sat down in the drawing room in silence, and taking an album from the table, began attentively scrutinising the faded photographs of unknown men in full trousers and top-hats, and ladies in crinolines and caps. Samoylenko only remembered a few of them by name, and of those whom he had forgotten he said with a sigh: "A very fine fellow, remarkably intelligent!" When he had finished with the album, Von Koren took a pistol from the whatnot, and screwing up his left eye, took deliberate aim at the portrait of Prince Vorontsov, or stood still at the looking-glass and gazed a long time at his swarthy face, his big forehead, and his black hair, which curled like a negro's, and his shirt of dull-coloured cotton with big flowers on it like a Persian rug, and the broad leather belt he wore instead of a waistcoat. The contemplation of his own image seemed to afford him almost more satisfaction than looking at photographs or playing with the pistols. He was very well satisfied with his face, and his becomingly clipped beard, and the broad shoulders, which were unmistakable evidence of his excellent health and physical strength. He was satisfied, too, with his stylish getup, from the cravat, which matched the colour of his shirt, down to his brown boots.

While he was looking at the album and standing before the glass, at that moment, in the kitchen and in the passage near, Samoylenko,

without his coat and waistcoat, with his neck bare, excited and bathed in perspiration, was bustling about the tables, mixing the salad, or making some sauce, or preparing meat, cucumbers, and onion for the cold soup, while he glared fiercely at the orderly who was helping him, and brandished first a knife and then a spoon at him.

“Give me the vinegar!” he said. “That’s not the vinegar—it’s the salad oil!” he shouted, stamping. “Where are you off to, you brute?”

“To get the butter, Your Excellency,” answered the flustered orderly in a cracked voice.

“Make haste; it’s in the cupboard! And tell Daria to put some fennel in the jar with the cucumbers! Fennel! Cover the cream up, gaping laggard, or the flies will get into it!”

And the whole house seemed resounding with his shouts. When it was ten or fifteen minutes to two the deacon would come in; he was a lanky young man of twenty-two, with long hair, with no beard and a hardly perceptible moustache. Going into the drawing room, he crossed himself before the icon, smiled, and held out his hand to Von Koren.

“Good morning,” the zoologist said coldly. “Where have you been?”

“I’ve been catching sea-gudgeon in the harbour.”

“Oh, of course.... Evidently, deacon, you will never be busy with work.”

“Why not? Work is not like a bear; it doesn’t run off into the woods,” said the deacon, smiling and thrusting his hands into the very deep pockets of his white cassock.

“There’s no one to whip you!” sighed the zoologist.

Another fifteen or twenty minutes passed and they were not called to dinner, and they could still hear the orderly running into the kitchen and back again, noisily treading with his boots, and Samoylenko shouting:

“Put it on the table! Where are your wits? Wash it first.”

The famished deacon and Von Koren began tapping on the floor with their heels, expressing in this way their impatience like the audience at a theatre. At last the door opened and the harassed orderly announced that dinner was ready! In the dining room they were met by Samoylenko, crimson in the face, wrathful, perspiring from the heat of the kitchen; he looked at them furiously, and with an expression of horror, took the lid off the soup tureen and helped each of them to a plateful; and only when he was convinced that they were eating it with relish and liked it, he gave a sigh of relief and settled himself in his deep armchair. His face looked blissful and his eyes grew moist.... He deliberately poured himself out a glass of vodka and said:

“To the health of the younger generation.”

After his conversation with Laevsky, from early morning till dinner Samoylenko had been conscious of a load at his heart, although he was in the best of humours; he felt sorry for Laevsky and wanted to help him. After drinking a glass of vodka before the soup, he heaved a sigh and said:

“I saw Vanya Laevsky today. He is having a hard time of it, poor fellow! The material side of life is not encouraging for him, and the worst of it is all this psychology is too much for him. I’m sorry for the lad.”

“Well, that is a person I am not sorry for,” said Von Koren. “If that charming individual were drowning, I would push him under with a stick and say, ‘Drown, brother, drown away.’ ...”

“That’s untrue. You wouldn’t do it.”

“Why do you think that?” The zoologist shrugged his shoulders. “I’m just as capable of a good action as you are.”

“Is drowning a man a good action?” asked the deacon, and he laughed.

“Laevsky? Yes.”

“I think there is something amiss with the soup ...” said Samoylenko, anxious to change the conversation.

“Laevsky is absolutely pernicious and is as dangerous to society as the cholera microbe,” Von Koren went on. “To drown him would be a service.”

“It does not do you credit to talk like that about your neighbour. Tell us: what do you hate him for?”

“Don’t talk nonsense, doctor. To hate and despise a microbe is stupid, but to look upon everybody one meets without distinction as one’s neighbour, whatever happens—thanks very much, that is equivalent to giving up criticism, renouncing a straightforward attitude to people, washing one’s hands of responsibility, in fact! I consider your Laevsky a blackguard; I do not conceal it, and I am perfectly conscientious in treating him as such. Well, you look upon him as your neighbour—and you may kiss him if you like: you look upon him as your neighbour, and that means that your attitude to him is the same as to me and to the deacon; that is no attitude at all. You are equally indifferent to all.”

“To call a man a blackguard!” muttered Samoylenko, frowning with distaste—“that is so wrong that I can’t find words for it!”

“People are judged by their actions,” Von Koren continued. “Now you decide, deacon. ... I am going to talk to you, deacon. Mr. Laevsky’s career lies open before you, like a long Chinese puzzle, and you can read

it from beginning to end. What has he been doing these two years that he has been living here? We will reckon his doings on our fingers. First, he has taught the inhabitants of the town to play Vint: two years ago that game was unknown here; now they all play it from morning till late at night, even the women and the boys. Secondly, he has taught the residents to drink beer, which was not known here either; the inhabitants are indebted to him for the knowledge of various sorts of spirits, so that now they can distinguish Kospelov's vodka from Smirnov's No. 21, blindfold. Thirdly, in former days, people here made love to other men's wives in secret, from the same motives as thieves steal in secret and not openly; adultery was considered something they were ashamed to make a public display of. Laevsky has come as a pioneer in that line; he lives with another man's wife openly.... Fourthly..."

Von Koren hurriedly ate up his soup and gave his plate to the orderly.

"I understood Laevsky from the first month of our acquaintance," he went on, addressing the deacon. "We arrived here at the same time. Men like him are very fond of friendship, intimacy, solidarity, and all the rest of it, because they always want company for Vint, drinking, and eating; besides, they are talkative and must have listeners. We made friends—that is, he turned up every day, hindered me working, and indulged in confidences in regard to his mistress. From the first he struck me by his exceptional falsity, which simply made me sick. As a friend I pitched into him, asking him why he drank too much, why he lived beyond his means and got into debt, why he did nothing and read nothing, why he had so little culture and so little knowledge; and in answer to all my questions he used to smile bitterly, sigh, and say: 'I am a failure, a superfluous man'; or: 'What do you expect, my dear fellow, from us, the debris of the serf-owning class?' or: 'We are degenerate....' Or he would begin a long rigmarole about Onyegin, Petchorin, Byron's Cain, and Bazarov, of whom he would say: 'They are our fathers in flesh and in spirit.' So we are to understand that it was not his fault that government envelopes lay unopened in his office for weeks together, and that he drank and taught others to drink, but Onyegin, Petchorin, and Turgenev, who had invented the failure and the superfluous man, were responsible for it. The cause of his extreme dissoluteness and unseemliness lies, do you see, not in himself, but somewhere outside in space. And so—an ingenious idea!—it is not only he who is dissolute, false, and disgusting, but we... 'we men of the eighties,' 'we the spiritless, nervous offspring of the serf-owning class'; 'civilisation has crippled us'... in fact, we are to understand that such a great man as Laevsky is great even in his fall:

that his dissoluteness, his lack of culture and of moral purity, is a phenomenon of natural history, sanctified by inevitability; that the causes of it are worldwide, elemental; and that we ought to hang up a lamp before Laevsky, since he is the fated victim of the age, of influences, of heredity, and so on. All the officials and their ladies were in ecstasies when they listened to him, and I could not make out for a long time what sort of man I had to deal with, a cynic or a clever rogue. Such types as he, on the surface intellectual with a smattering of education and a great deal of talk about their own nobility, are very clever in posing as exceptionally complex natures.”

“Hold your tongue!” Samoylenko flared up. “I will not allow a splendid fellow to be spoken ill of in my presence!”

“Don’t interrupt, Alexandr Daviditch,” said Von Koren coldly; “I am just finishing. Laevsky is by no means a complex organism. Here is his moral skeleton: in the morning, slippers, a bathe, and coffee; then till dinnertime, slippers, a constitutional, and conversation; at two o’clock slippers, dinner, and wine; at five o’clock a bathe, tea and wine, then Vint and lying; at ten o’clock supper and wine; and after midnight sleep and *la femme*. His existence is confined within this narrow programme like an egg within its shell. Whether he walks or sits, is angry, writes, rejoices, it may all be reduced to wine, cards, slippers, and women. Woman plays a fatal, overwhelming part in his life. He tells us himself that at thirteen he was in love; that when he was a student in his first year he was living with a lady who had a good influence over him, and to whom he was indebted for his musical education. In his second year he bought a prostitute from a brothel and raised her to his level—that is, took her as his kept mistress, and she lived with him for six months and then ran away back to the brothel-keeper, and her flight caused him much spiritual suffering. Alas! his sufferings were so great that he had to leave the university and spend two years at home doing nothing. But this was all for the best. At home he made friends with a widow who advised him to leave the Faculty of Jurisprudence and go into the Faculty of Arts. And so he did. When he had taken his degree, he fell passionately in love with his present... what’s her name?... married lady, and was obliged to flee with her here to the Caucasus for the sake of his ideals, he would have us believe, seeing that... tomorrow, if not today, he will be tired of her and flee back again to Petersburg, and that, too, will be for the sake of his ideals.”

“How do you know?” growled Samoylenko, looking angrily at the zoologist. “You had better eat your dinner.”

The next course consisted of boiled mullet with Polish sauce. Samoylenko helped each of his companions to a whole mullet and poured out the sauce with his own hand. Two minutes passed in silence.

“Woman plays an essential part in the life of every man,” said the deacon. “You can’t help that.”

“Yes, but to what degree? For each of us woman means mother, sister, wife, friend. To Laevsky she is everything, and at the same time nothing but a mistress. She—that is, cohabitation with her—is the happiness and object of his life; he is gay, sad, bored, disenchanted—on account of woman; his life grows disagreeable—woman is to blame; the dawn of a new life begins to glow, ideals turn up—and again look for the woman. . . . He only derives enjoyment from books and pictures in which there is woman. Our age is, to his thinking, poor and inferior to the forties and the sixties only because we do not know how to abandon ourselves obviously to the passion and ecstasy of love. These voluptuaries must have in their brains a special growth of the nature of sarcoma, which stifles the brain and directs their whole psychology. Watch Laevsky when he is sitting anywhere in company. You notice: when one raises any general question in his presence, for instance, about the cell or instinct, he sits apart, and neither speaks nor listens; he looks languid and disillusioned; nothing has any interest for him, everything is vulgar and trivial. But as soon as you speak of male and female—for instance, of the fact that the female spider, after fertilisation, devours the male—his eyes glow with curiosity, his face brightens, and the man revives, in fact. All his thoughts, however noble, lofty, or neutral they may be, they all have one point of resemblance. You walk along the street with him and meet a donkey, for instance. . . . ‘Tell me, please,’ he asks, ‘what would happen if you mated a donkey with a camel?’ And his dreams! Has he told you of his dreams? It is magnificent! First, he dreams that he is married to the moon, then that he is summoned before the police and ordered to live with a guitar . . .”

The deacon burst into resounding laughter; Samoylenko frowned and wrinkled up his face angrily so as not to laugh, but could not restrain himself, and laughed.

“And it’s all nonsense!” he said, wiping his tears. “Yes, by Jove, it’s nonsense!”

IV

The deacon was very easily amused, and laughed at every trifle till he got a stitch in his side, till he was helpless. It seemed as though he only liked to be in people's company because there was a ridiculous side to them, and because they might be given ridiculous nicknames. He had nicknamed Samoylenko "the tarantula," his orderly "the drake," and was in ecstasies when on one occasion Von Koren spoke of Laevsky and Nadyezhda Fyodorovna as "Japanese monkeys." He watched people's faces greedily, listened without blinking, and it could be seen that his eyes filled with laughter and his face was tense with expectation of the moment when he could let himself go and burst into laughter.

"He is a corrupt and depraved type," the zoologist continued, while the deacon kept his eyes riveted on his face, expecting he would say something funny. "It is not often one can meet with such a nonentity. In body he is inert, feeble, prematurely old, while in intellect he differs in no respect from a fat shopkeeper's wife who does nothing but eat, drink, and sleep on a featherbed, and who keeps her coachman as a lover."

The deacon began guffawing again.

"Don't laugh, deacon," said Von Koren. "It grows stupid, at last. I should not have paid attention to his insignificance," he went on, after waiting till the deacon had left off laughing; "I should have passed him by if he were not so noxious and dangerous. His noxiousness lies first of all in the fact that he has great success with women, and so threatens to leave descendants—that is, to present the world with a dozen Laevskys as feeble and as depraved as himself. Secondly, he is in the highest degree contaminating. I have spoken to you already of Vint and beer. In another year or two he will dominate the whole Caucasian coast. You know how the mass, especially its middle stratum, believe in intellectuality, in a university education, in gentlemanly manners, and in literary language. Whatever filthy thing he did, they would all believe that it was as it should be, since he is an intellectual man, of liberal ideas and university education. What is more, he is a failure, a superfluous

man, a neurasthenic, a victim of the age, and that means he can do anything. He is a charming fellow, a regular good sort, he is so genuinely indulgent to human weaknesses; he is compliant, accommodating, easy and not proud; one can drink with him and gossip and talk evil of people.... The masses, always inclined to anthropomorphism in religion and morals, like best of all the little gods who have the same weaknesses as themselves. Only think what a wide field he has for contamination! Besides, he is not a bad actor and is a clever hypocrite, and knows very well how to twist things round. Only take his little shifts and dodges, his attitude to civilisation, for instance. He has scarcely sniffed at civilisation, yet: 'Ah, how we have been crippled by civilisation! Ah, how I envy those savages, those children of nature, who know nothing of civilisation!' We are to understand, you see, that at one time, in ancient days, he has been devoted to civilisation with his whole soul, has served it, has sounded it to its depths, but it has exhausted him, disillusioned him, deceived him; he is a Faust, do you see?—a second Tolstoy.... As for Schopenhauer and Spencer, he treats them like small boys and slaps them on the shoulder in a fatherly way: 'Well, what do you say, old Spencer?' He has not read Spencer, of course, but how charming he is when with light, careless irony he says of his lady friend: 'She has read Spencer!' And they all listen to him, and no one cares to understand that this charlatan has not the right to kiss the sole of Spencer's foot, let alone speaking about him in that tone! Sapping the foundations of civilisation, of authority, of other people's altars, spattering them with filth, winking jocosely at them only to justify and conceal one's own rottenness and moral poverty is only possible for a very vain, base, and nasty creature."

"I don't know what it is you expect of him, Kolya," said Samoylenko, looking at the zoologist, not with anger now, but with a guilty air. "He is a man the same as everyone else. Of course, he has his weaknesses, but he is abreast of modern ideas, is in the service, is of use to his country. Ten years ago there was an old fellow serving as agent here, a man of the greatest intelligence... and he used to say..."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" the zoologist interrupted. "You say he is in the service; but how does he serve? Do you mean to tell me that things have been done better because he is here, and the officials are more punctual, honest, and civil? On the contrary, he has only sanctioned their slackness by his prestige as an intellectual university man. He is only punctual on the 20th of the month, when he gets his salary; on the other days he lounges about at home in slippers and tries to look as if he were doing the government a great service by living in the Caucasus. No, Alexandr

Daviditch, don't stick up for him. You are insincere from beginning to end. If you really loved him and considered him your neighbour, you would above all not be indifferent to his weaknesses, you would not be indulgent to them, but for his own sake would try to make him innocuous."

"That is?"

"Innocuous. Since he is incorrigible, he can only be made innocuous in one way..." Von Koren passed his finger round his throat. "Or he might be drowned..." he added. "In the interests of humanity and in their own interests, such people ought to be destroyed. They certainly ought."

"What are you saying?" muttered Samoylenko, getting up and looking with amazement at the zoologist's calm, cold face. "Deacon, what is he saying? Why—are you in your senses?"

"I don't insist on the death penalty," said Von Koren. "If it is proved that it is pernicious, devise something else. If we can't destroy Laevsky, why then, isolate him, make him harmless, send him to hard labour."

"What are you saying!" said Samoylenko in horror. "With pepper, with pepper," he cried in a voice of despair, seeing that the deacon was eating stuffed aubergines without pepper. "You with your great intellect, what are you saying! Send our friend, a proud intellectual man, to penal servitude!"

"Well, if he is proud and tries to resist, put him in fetters!"

Samoylenko could not utter a word, and only twiddled his fingers; the deacon looked at his flabbergasted and really absurd face, and laughed.

"Let us leave off talking of that," said the zoologist. "Only remember one thing, Alexandr Daviditch: primitive man was preserved from such as Laevsky by the struggle for existence and by natural selection; now our civilisation has considerably weakened the struggle and the selection, and we ought to look after the destruction of the rotten and worthless for ourselves; otherwise, when the Laevskys multiply, civilisation will perish and mankind will degenerate utterly. It will be our fault."

"If it depends on drowning and hanging," said Samoylenko, "damnation take your civilisation, damnation take your humanity! Damnation take it! I tell you what: you are a very learned and intelligent man and the pride of your country, but the Germans have ruined you. Yes, the Germans! The Germans!"

Since Samoylenko had left Dorpat, where he had studied medicine, he had rarely seen a German and had not read a single German book, but, in his opinion, every harmful idea in politics or science was due to the

Germans. Where he had got this notion he could not have said himself, but he held it firmly.

“Yes, the Germans!” he repeated once more. “Come and have some tea.”

All three stood up, and putting on their hats, went out into the little garden, and sat there under the shade of the light green maples, the pear trees, and a chestnut tree. The zoologist and the deacon sat on a bench by the table, while Samoylenko sank into a deep wicker chair with a sloping back. The orderly handed them tea, jam, and a bottle of syrup.

It was very hot, thirty degrees Réaumur in the shade. The sultry air was stagnant and motionless, and a long spiderweb, stretching from the chestnut tree to the ground, hung limply and did not stir.

The deacon took up the guitar, which was constantly lying on the ground near the table, tuned it, and began singing softly in a thin voice:

“‘Gathered round the tavern were the seminary lads,’”

but instantly subsided, overcome by the heat, mopped his brow and glanced upwards at the blazing blue sky. Samoylenko grew drowsy; the sultry heat, the stillness and the delicious after-dinner languor, which quickly pervaded all his limbs, made him feel heavy and sleepy; his arms dropped at his sides, his eyes grew small, his head sank on his breast. He looked with almost tearful tenderness at Von Koren and the deacon, and muttered:

“The younger generation... A scientific star and a luminary of the Church... I shouldn’t wonder if the long-skirted alleluia will be shooting up into a bishop; I dare say I may come to kissing his hand... Well... please God...”

Soon a snore was heard. Von Koren and the deacon finished their tea and went out into the street.

“Are you going to the harbour again to catch sea-gudgeon?” asked the zoologist.

“No, it’s too hot.”

“Come and see me. You can pack up a parcel and copy something for me. By the way, we must have a talk about what you are to do. You must work, deacon. You can’t go on like this.”

“Your words are just and logical,” said the deacon. “But my laziness finds an excuse in the circumstances of my present life. You know yourself that an uncertain position has a great tendency to make people apathetic. God only knows whether I have been sent here for a time or

permanently. I am living here in uncertainty, while my wife is vegetating at her father's and is missing me. And I must confess my brain is melting with the heat."

"That's all nonsense," said the zoologist. "You can get used to the heat, and you can get used to being without the deaconess. You mustn't be slack; you must pull yourself together."

V

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna went to bathe in the morning, and her cook, Olga, followed her with a jug, a copper basin, towels, and a sponge. In the bay stood two unknown steamers with dirty white funnels, obviously foreign cargo vessels. Some men dressed in white and wearing white shoes were walking along the harbour, shouting loudly in French, and were answered from the steamers. The bells were ringing briskly in the little church of the town.

“Today is Sunday!” Nadyezhda Fyodorovna remembered with pleasure.

She felt perfectly well, and was in a gay holiday humour. In a new loose-fitting dress of coarse thick tussore silk, and a big wide-brimmed straw hat which was bent down over her ears, so that her face looked out as though from a basket, she fancied she looked very charming. She thought that in the whole town there was only one young, pretty, intellectual woman, and that was herself, and that she was the only one who knew how to dress herself cheaply, elegantly, and with taste. That dress, for example, cost only twenty-two roubles, and yet how charming it was! In the whole town she was the only one who could be attractive, while there were numbers of men, so they must all, whether they would or not, be envious of Laevsky.

She was glad that of late Laevsky had been cold to her, reserved and polite, and at times even harsh and rude; in the past she had met all his outbursts, all his contemptuous, cold or strange incomprehensible glances, with tears, reproaches, and threats to leave him or to starve herself to death; now she only blushed, looked guiltily at him, and was glad he was not affectionate to her. If he had abused her, threatened her, it would have been better and pleasanter, since she felt hopelessly guilty towards him. She felt she was to blame, in the first place, for not sympathising with the dreams of a life of hard work, for the sake of which he had given up Petersburg and had come here to the Caucasus, and she was convinced that he had been angry with her of late for

precisely that. When she was travelling to the Caucasus, it seemed that she would find here on the first day a cosy nook by the sea, a snug little garden with shade, with birds, with little brooks, where she could grow flowers and vegetables, rear ducks and hens, entertain her neighbours, doctor poor peasants and distribute little books amongst them. It had turned out that the Caucasus was nothing but bare mountains, forests, and huge valleys, where it took a long time and a great deal of effort to find anything and settle down; that there were no neighbours of any sort; that it was very hot and one might be robbed. Laevsky had been in no hurry to obtain a piece of land; she was glad of it, and they seemed to be in a tacit compact never to allude to a life of hard work. He was silent about it, she thought, because he was angry with her for being silent about it.

In the second place, she had without his knowledge during those two years bought various trifles to the value of three hundred roubles at Atchmianov's shop. She had bought the things by degrees, at one time materials, at another time silk or a parasol, and the debt had grown imperceptibly.

"I will tell him about it today..." she used to decide, but at once reflected that in Laevsky's present mood it would hardly be convenient to talk to him of debts.

Thirdly, she had on two occasions in Laevsky's absence received a visit from Kirilin, the police captain: once in the morning when Laevsky had gone to bathe, and another time at midnight when he was playing cards. Remembering this, Nadyezhda Fyodorovna flushed crimson, and looked round at the cook as though she might overhear her thoughts. The long, insufferably hot, wearisome days, beautiful languorous evenings and stifling nights, and the whole manner of living, when from morning to night one is at a loss to fill up the useless hours, and the persistent thought that she was the prettiest young woman in the town, and that her youth was passing and being wasted, and Laevsky himself, though honest and idealistic, always the same, always lounging about in his slippers, biting his nails, and wearying her with his caprices, led by degrees to her becoming possessed by desire, and as though she were mad, she thought of nothing else day and night. Breathing, looking, walking, she felt nothing but desire. The sound of the sea told her she must love; the darkness of evening—the same; the mountains—the same.... And when Kirilin began paying her attentions, she had neither the power nor the wish to resist, and surrendered to him....

Now the foreign steamers and the men in white reminded her for some reason of a huge hall; together with the shouts of French she heard the strains of a waltz, and her bosom heaved with unaccountable delight. She longed to dance and talk French.

She reflected joyfully that there was nothing terrible about her infidelity. Her soul had no part in her infidelity; she still loved Laevsky, and that was proved by the fact that she was jealous of him, was sorry for him, and missed him when he was away. Kirilin had turned out to be very mediocre, rather coarse though handsome; everything was broken off with him already and there would never be anything more. What had happened was over; it had nothing to do with anyone, and if Laevsky found it out he would not believe in it.

There was only one bathing-house for ladies on the seafront; men bathed under the open sky. Going into the bathing-house, Nadyezhda Fyodorovna found there an elderly lady, Marya Konstantinovna Bityugov, and her daughter Katya, a schoolgirl of fifteen; both of them were sitting on a bench undressing. Marya Konstantinovna was a good-natured, enthusiastic, and genteel person, who talked in a drawling and pathetic voice. She had been a governess until she was thirty-two, and then had married Bityugov, a government official—a bald little man with his hair combed on to his temples and with a very meek disposition. She was still in love with him, was jealous, blushed at the word “love,” and told everyone she was very happy.

“My dear,” she cried enthusiastically, on seeing Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, assuming an expression which all her acquaintances called “almond-oily.” “My dear, how delightful that you have come! We’ll bathe together—that’s enchanting!”

Olga quickly flung off her dress and chemise, and began undressing her mistress.

“It’s not quite so hot today as yesterday?” said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, shrinking at the coarse touch of the naked cook. “Yesterday I almost died of the heat.”

“Oh, yes, my dear; I could hardly breathe myself. Would you believe it? I bathed yesterday three times! Just imagine, my dear, three times! Nikodim Alexandritch was quite uneasy.”

“Is it possible to be so ugly?” thought Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, looking at Olga and the official’s wife; she glanced at Katya and thought: “The little girl’s not badly made.”

“Your Nikodim Alexandritch is very charming!” she said. “I’m simply in love with him.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” cried Marya Konstantinovna, with a forced laugh; “that’s quite enchanting.”

Free from her clothes, Nadyezhda Fyodorovna felt a desire to fly. And it seemed to her that if she were to wave her hands she would fly upwards. When she was undressed, she noticed that Olga looked scornfully at her white body. Olga, a young soldier’s wife, was living with her lawful husband, and so considered herself superior to her mistress. Marya Konstantinovna and Katya were afraid of her, and did not respect her. This was disagreeable, and to raise herself in their opinion, Nadyezhda Fyodorovna said:

“At home, in Petersburg, summer villa life is at its height now. My husband and I have so many friends! We ought to go and see them.”

“I believe your husband is an engineer?” said Marya Konstantinovna timidly.

“I am speaking of Laevsky. He has a great many acquaintances. But unfortunately his mother is a proud aristocrat, not very intelligent. . . .”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna threw herself into the water without finishing; Marya Konstantinovna and Katya made their way in after her.

“There are so many conventional ideas in the world,” Nadyezhda Fyodorovna went on, “and life is not so easy as it seems.”

Marya Konstantinovna, who had been a governess in aristocratic families and who was an authority on social matters, said:

“Oh yes! Would you believe me, my dear, at the Garatynskys’ I was expected to dress for lunch as well as for dinner, so that, like an actress, I received a special allowance for my wardrobe in addition to my salary.”

She stood between Nadyezhda Fyodorovna and Katya as though to screen her daughter from the water that washed the former.

Through the open doors looking out to the sea they could see someone swimming a hundred paces from their bathing-place.

“Mother, it’s our Kostya,” said Katya.

“Ach, ach!” Marya Konstantinovna cackled in her dismay. “Ach, Kostya!” she shouted, “Come back! Kostya, come back!”

Kostya, a boy of fourteen, to show off his prowess before his mother and sister, dived and swam farther, but began to be exhausted and hurried back, and from his strained and serious face it could be seen that he could not trust his own strength.

“The trouble one has with these boys, my dear!” said Marya Konstantinovna, growing calmer. “Before you can turn round, he will break his neck. Ah, my dear, how sweet it is, and yet at the same time how difficult, to be a mother! One’s afraid of everything.”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna put on her straw hat and dashed out into the open sea. She swam some thirty feet and then turned on her back. She could see the sea to the horizon, the steamers, the people on the seafront, the town; and all this, together with the sultry heat and the soft, transparent waves, excited her and whispered that she must live, live. . . . A sailing-boat darted by her rapidly and vigorously, cleaving the waves and the air; the man sitting at the helm looked at her, and she liked being looked at. . . .

After bathing, the ladies dressed and went away together.

"I have fever every alternate day, and yet I don't get thin," said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, licking her lips, which were salt from the bathe, and responding with a smile to the bows of her acquaintances. "I've always been plump, and now I believe I'm plumper than ever."

"That, my dear, is constitutional. If, like me, one has no constitutional tendency to stoutness, no diet is of any use. . . . But you've wetted your hat, my dear."

"It doesn't matter; it will dry."

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna saw again the men in white who were walking on the seafront and talking French; and again she felt a sudden thrill of joy, and had a vague memory of some big hall in which she had once danced, or of which, perhaps, she had once dreamed. And something at the bottom of her soul dimly and obscurely whispered to her that she was a pretty, common, miserable, worthless woman. . . .

Marya Konstantinovna stopped at her gate and asked her to come in and sit down for a little while.

"Come in, my dear," she said in an imploring voice, and at the same time she looked at Nadyezhda Fyodorovna with anxiety and hope; perhaps she would refuse and not come in!

"With pleasure," said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, accepting. "You know how I love being with you!"

And she went into the house. Marya Konstantinovna sat her down and gave her coffee, regaled her with milk rolls, then showed her photographs of her former pupils, the Garatynskys, who were by now married. She showed her, too, the examination reports of Kostya and Katya. The reports were very good, but to make them seem even better, she complained, with a sigh, how difficult the lessons at school were now. . . . She made much of her visitor, and was sorry for her, though at the same time she was harassed by the thought that Nadyezhda Fyodorovna might have a corrupting influence on the morals of Kostya and Katya, and was glad that her Nikodim Alexandritch was not at home.

Seeing that in her opinion all men are fond of “women like that,” Nadyezhda Fyodorovna might have a bad effect on Nikodim Alexandritch too.

As she talked to her visitor, Marya Konstantinovna kept remembering that they were to have a picnic that evening, and that Von Koren had particularly begged her to say nothing about it to the “Japanese monkeys”—that is, Laevsky and Nadyezhda Fyodorovna; but she dropped a word about it unawares, crimsoned, and said in confusion: “I hope you will come too!”

VI

It was agreed to drive about five miles out of town on the road to the south, to stop near a *duhan* at the junction of two streams—the Black River and the Yellow River—and to cook fish soup. They started out soon after five. Foremost of the party in a charabanc drove Samoylenko and Laevsky; they were followed by Marya Konstantinovna, Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, Katya and Kostya, in a coach with three horses, carrying with them the crockery and a basket with provisions. In the next carriage came the police captain, Kirilin, and the young Atchmianov, the son of the shopkeeper to whom Nadyezhda Fyodorovna owed three hundred roubles; opposite them, huddled up on the little seat with his feet tucked under him, sat Nikodim Alexandritch, a neat little man with hair combed on to his temples. Last of all came Von Koren and the deacon; at the deacon's feet stood a basket of fish.

"R-r-right!" Samoylenko shouted at the top of his voice when he met a cart or a mountaineer riding on a donkey.

"In two years' time, when I shall have the means and the people ready, I shall set off on an expedition," Von Koren was telling the deacon. "I shall go by the seacoast from Vladivostok to the Bering Straits, and then from the Straits to the mouth of the Yenisei. We shall make the map, study the fauna and the flora, and make detailed geological, anthropological, and ethnographical researches. It depends upon you to go with me or not."

"It's impossible," said the deacon.

"Why?"

"I'm a man with ties and a family."

"Your wife will let you go; we will provide for her. Better still if you were to persuade her for the public benefit to go into a nunnery; that would make it possible for you to become a monk, too, and join the expedition as a priest. I can arrange it for you."

The deacon was silent.

"Do you know your theology well?" asked the zoologist.

“No, rather badly.”

“H’m! ... I can’t give you any advice on that score, because I don’t know much about theology myself. You give me a list of books you need, and I will send them to you from Petersburg in the winter. It will be necessary for you to read the notes of religious travellers, too; among them are some good ethnologists and Oriental scholars. When you are familiar with their methods, it will be easier for you to set to work. And you needn’t waste your time till you get the books; come to me, and we will study the compass and go through a course of meteorology. All that’s indispensable.”

“To be sure ...” muttered the deacon, and he laughed. “I was trying to get a place in Central Russia, and my uncle, the head priest, promised to help me. If I go with you I shall have troubled them for nothing.”

“I don’t understand your hesitation. If you go on being an ordinary deacon, who is only obliged to hold a service on holidays, and on the other days can rest from work, you will be exactly the same as you are now in ten years’ time, and will have gained nothing but a beard and moustache; while on returning from this expedition in ten years’ time you will be a different man, you will be enriched by the consciousness that something has been done by you.”

From the ladies’ carriage came shrieks of terror and delight. The carriages were driving along a road hollowed in a literally overhanging precipitous cliff, and it seemed to everyone that they were galloping along a shelf on a steep wall, and that in a moment the carriages would drop into the abyss. On the right stretched the sea; on the left was a rough brown wall with black blotches and red veins and with climbing roots; while on the summit stood shaggy fir trees bent over, as though looking down in terror and curiosity. A minute later there were shrieks and laughter again: they had to drive under a huge overhanging rock.

“I don’t know why the devil I’m coming with you,” said Laevsky. “How stupid and vulgar it is! I want to go to the North, to run away, to escape; but here I am, for some reason, going to this stupid picnic.”

“But look, what a view!” said Samoylenko as the horses turned to the left, and the valley of the Yellow River came into sight and the stream itself gleamed in the sunlight, yellow, turbid, frantic.

“I see nothing fine in that, Sasha,” answered Laevsky. “To be in continual ecstasies over nature shows poverty of imagination. In comparison with what my imagination can give me, all these streams and rocks are trash, and nothing else.”

The carriages now were by the banks of the stream. The high mountain banks gradually grew closer, the valley shrank together and ended in a gorge; the rocky mountain round which they were driving had been piled together by nature out of huge rocks, pressing upon each other with such terrible weight, that Samoylenko could not help gasping every time he looked at them. The dark and beautiful mountain was cleft in places by narrow fissures and gorges from which came a breath of dewy moisture and mystery; through the gorges could be seen other mountains, brown, pink, lilac, smoky, or bathed in vivid sunlight. From time to time as they passed a gorge they caught the sound of water falling from the heights and splashing on the stones.

“Ach, the damned mountains!” sighed Laevsky. “How sick I am of them!”

At the place where the Black River falls into the Yellow, and the water black as ink stains the yellow and struggles with it, stood the Tatar Kerbalay’s *duhan*, with the Russian flag on the roof and with an inscription written in chalk: “The Pleasant Duhan.” Near it was a little garden, enclosed in a hurdle fence, with tables and chairs set out in it, and in the midst of a thicket of wretched thornbushes stood a single solitary cypress, dark and beautiful.

Kerbalay, a nimble little Tatar in a blue shirt and a white apron, was standing in the road, and, holding his stomach, he bowed low to welcome the carriages, and smiled, showing his glistening white teeth.

“Good evening, Kerbalay,” shouted Samoylenko. “We are driving on a little further, and you take along the samovar and chairs! Look sharp!”

Kerbalay nodded his shaven head and muttered something, and only those sitting in the last carriage could hear: “We’ve got trout, your Excellency.”

“Bring them, bring them!” said Von Koren.

Five hundred paces from the *duhan* the carriages stopped. Samoylenko selected a small meadow round which there were scattered stones convenient for sitting on, and a fallen tree blown down by the storm with roots overgrown by moss and dry yellow needles. Here there was a fragile wooden bridge over the stream, and just opposite on the other bank there was a little barn for drying maize, standing on four low piles, and looking like the hut on hen’s legs in the fairy tale; a little ladder sloped from its door.

The first impression in all was a feeling that they would never get out of that place again. On all sides wherever they looked, the mountains rose up and towered above them, and the shadows of evening were

stealing rapidly, rapidly from the *duhan* and dark cypress, making the narrow winding valley of the Black River narrower and the mountains higher. They could hear the river murmuring and the unceasing chirrup of the grasshoppers.

“Enchanting!” said Marya Konstantinovna, heaving deep sighs of ecstasy. “Children, look how fine! What peace!”

“Yes, it really is fine,” assented Laevsky, who liked the view, and for some reason felt sad as he looked at the sky and then at the blue smoke rising from the chimney of the *duhan*. “Yes, it is fine,” he repeated.

“Ivan Andreitch, describe this view,” Marya Konstantinovna said tearfully.

“Why?” asked Laevsky. “The impression is better than any description. The wealth of sights and sounds which everyone receives from nature by direct impression is ranted about by authors in a hideous and unrecognisable way.”

“Really?” Von Koren asked coldly, choosing the biggest stone by the side of the water, and trying to clamber up and sit upon it. “Really?” he repeated, looking directly at Laevsky. “What of *Romeo and Juliet*? Or, for instance, Pushkin’s ‘Night in the Ukraine’? Nature ought to come and bow down at their feet.”

“Perhaps,” said Laevsky, who was too lazy to think and oppose him. “Though what is *Romeo and Juliet* after all?” he added after a short pause. “The beauty of poetry and holiness of love are simply the roses under which they try to hide its rottenness. Romeo is just the same sort of animal as all the rest of us.”

“Whatever one talks to you about, you always bring it round to...” Von Koren glanced round at Katya and broke off.

“What do I bring it round to?” asked Laevsky.

“One tells you, for instance, how beautiful a bunch of grapes is, and you answer: ‘Yes, but how ugly it is when it is chewed and digested in one’s stomach!’ Why say that? It’s not new, and... altogether it is a queer habit.”

Laevsky knew that Von Koren did not like him, and so was afraid of him, and felt in his presence as though everyone were constrained and someone were standing behind his back. He made no answer and walked away, feeling sorry he had come.

“Gentlemen, quick march for brushwood for the fire!” commanded Samoylenko.

They all wandered off in different directions, and no one was left but Kirilin, Atchmianov, and Nikodim Alexandritch. Kerbalay brought

chairs, spread a rug on the ground, and set a few bottles of wine.

The police captain, Kirilin, a tall, good-looking man, who in all weathers wore his greatcoat over his tunic, with his haughty deportment, stately carriage, and thick, rather hoarse voice, looked like a young provincial chief of police; his expression was mournful and sleepy, as though he had just been waked against his will.

“What have you brought this for, you brute?” he asked Kerbalay, deliberately articulating each word. “I ordered you to give us *kvarel*, and what have you brought, you ugly Tatar? Eh? What?”

“We have plenty of wine of our own, Yegor Alekseitch,” Nikodim Alexandritch observed, timidly and politely.

“What? But I want us to have my wine, too; I’m taking part in the picnic and I imagine I have full right to contribute my share. I imagine so! Bring ten bottles of *kvarel*.”

“Why so many?” asked Nikodim Alexandritch, in wonder, knowing Kirilin had no money.

“Twenty bottles! Thirty!” shouted Kirilin.

“Never mind, let him,” Atchmianov whispered to Nikodim Alexandritch; “I’ll pay.”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna was in a lighthearted, mischievous mood; she wanted to skip and jump, to laugh, to shout, to tease, to flirt. In her cheap cotton dress with blue pansies on it, in her red shoes and the same straw hat, she seemed to herself, little, simple, light, ethereal as a butterfly. She ran over the rickety bridge and looked for a minute into the water, in order to feel giddy; then, shrieking and laughing, ran to the other side to the drying-shed, and she fancied that all the men were admiring her, even Kerbalay. When in the rapidly falling darkness the trees began to melt into the mountains and the horses into the carriages, and a light gleamed in the windows of the *duhan*, she climbed up the mountain by the little path which zigzagged between stones and thornbushes and sat on a stone. Down below, the campfire was burning. Near the fire, with his sleeves tucked up, the deacon was moving to and fro, and his long black shadow kept describing a circle round it; he put on wood, and with a spoon tied to a long stick he stirred the cauldron. Samoylenko, with a copper-red face, was fussing round the fire just as though he were in his own kitchen, shouting furiously:

“Where’s the salt, gentlemen? I bet you’ve forgotten it. Why are you all sitting about like lords while I do the work?”

Laevsky and Nikodim Alexandritch were sitting side by side on the fallen tree looking pensively at the fire. Marya Konstantinovna, Katya,

and Kostya were taking the cups, saucers, and plates out of the baskets. Von Koren, with his arms folded and one foot on a stone, was standing on a bank at the very edge of the water, thinking about something. Patches of red light from the fire moved together with the shadows over the ground near the dark human figures, and quivered on the mountain, on the trees, on the bridge, on the drying-shed; on the other side the steep, scooped-out bank was all lighted up and glimmering in the stream, and the rushing turbid water broke its reflection into little bits.

The deacon went for the fish which Kerbalay was cleaning and washing on the bank, but he stood still halfway and looked about him.

“My God, how nice it is!” he thought. “People, rocks, the fire, the twilight, a monstrous tree—nothing more, and yet how fine it is!”

On the further bank some unknown persons made their appearance near the drying-shed. The flickering light and the smoke from the campfire puffing in that direction made it impossible to get a full view of them all at once, but glimpses were caught now of a shaggy hat and a grey beard, now of a blue shirt, now of a figure, ragged from shoulder to knee, with a dagger across the body; then a swarthy young face with black eyebrows, as thick and bold as though they had been drawn in charcoal. Five of them sat in a circle on the ground, and the other five went into the drying-shed. One was standing at the door with his back to the fire, and with his hands behind his back was telling something, which must have been very interesting, for when Samoylenko threw on twigs and the fire flared up, and scattered sparks and threw a glaring light on the shed, two calm countenances with an expression on them of deep attention could be seen, looking out of the door, while those who were sitting in a circle turned round and began listening to the speaker. Soon after, those sitting in a circle began softly singing something slow and melodious, that sounded like Lenten Church music. . . . Listening to them, the deacon imagined how it would be with him in ten years’ time, when he would come back from the expedition: he would be a young priest and monk, an author with a name and a splendid past; he would be consecrated an archimandrite, then a bishop; and he would serve mass in the cathedral; in a golden mitre he would come out into the body of the church with the icon on his breast, and blessing the mass of the people with the triple and the double candelabra, would proclaim: “Look down from Heaven, O God, behold and visit this vineyard which Thy Hand has planted,” and the children with their angel voices would sing in response: “Holy God . . .”

“Deacon, where is that fish?” he heard Samoylenko’s voice.

As he went back to the fire, the deacon imagined the Church procession going along a dusty road on a hot July day; in front the peasants carrying the banners and the women and children the icons, then the boy choristers and the sacristan with his face tied up and a straw in his hair, then in due order himself, the deacon, and behind him the priest wearing his calotte and carrying a cross, and behind them, tramping in the dust, a crowd of peasants—men, women, and children; in the crowd his wife and the priest's wife with kerchiefs on their heads. The choristers sing, the babies cry, the corncrakes call, the lark carols.... Then they make a stand and sprinkle the herd with holy water.... They go on again, and then kneeling pray for rain. Then lunch and talk....

“And that's nice too...” thought the deacon.

VII

Kirilin and Atchmianov climbed up the mountain by the path. Atchmianov dropped behind and stopped, while Kirilin went up to Nadyezhda Fyodorovna.

“Good evening,” he said, touching his cap.

“Good evening.”

“Yes!” said Kirilin, looking at the sky and pondering.

“Why ‘yes’?” asked Nadyezhda Fyodorovna after a brief pause, noticing that Atchmianov was watching them both.

“And so it seems,” said the officer, slowly, “that our love has withered before it has blossomed, so to speak. How do you wish me to understand it? Is it a sort of coquetry on your part, or do you look upon me as a nincompoop who can be treated as you choose.”

“It was a mistake! Leave me alone!” Nadyezhda Fyodorovna said sharply, on that beautiful, marvellous evening, looking at him with terror and asking herself with bewilderment, could there really have been a moment when that man attracted her and had been near to her?

“So that’s it!” said Kirilin; he thought in silence for a few minutes and said: “Well, I’ll wait till you are in a better humour, and meanwhile I venture to assure you I am a gentleman, and I don’t allow anyone to doubt it. Adieu!”

He touched his cap again and walked off, making his way between the bushes. After a short interval Atchmianov approached hesitatingly.

“What a fine evening!” he said with a slight Armenian accent.

He was nice-looking, fashionably dressed, and behaved unaffectedly like a well-bred youth, but Nadyezhda Fyodorovna did not like him because she owed his father three hundred roubles; it was displeasing to her, too, that a shopkeeper had been asked to the picnic, and she was vexed at his coming up to her that evening when her heart felt so pure.

“The picnic is a success altogether,” he said, after a pause.

“Yes,” she agreed, and as though suddenly remembering her debt, she said carelessly: “Oh, tell them in your shop that Ivan Andreitch will

come round in a day or two and will pay three hundred roubles. . . . I don't remember exactly what it is."

"I would give another three hundred if you would not mention that debt every day. Why be prosaic?"

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna laughed; the amusing idea occurred to her that if she had been willing and sufficiently immoral she might in one minute be free from her debt. If she, for instance, were to turn the head of this handsome young fool! How amusing, absurd, wild it would be really! And she suddenly felt a longing to make him love her, to plunder him, throw him over, and then to see what would come of it.

"Allow me to give you one piece of advice," Atchmianov said timidly. "I beg you to beware of Kirilin. He says horrible things about you everywhere."

"It doesn't interest me to know what every fool says of me," Nadyezhda Fyodorovna said coldly, and the amusing thought of playing with handsome young Atchmianov suddenly lost its charm.

"We must go down," she said; "they're calling us."

The fish soup was ready by now. They were ladling it out by platefuls, and eating it with the religious solemnity with which this is only done at a picnic; and everyone thought the fish soup very good, and thought that at home they had never eaten anything so nice. As is always the case at picnics, in the mass of dinner napkins, parcels, useless greasy papers fluttering in the wind, no one knew where was his glass or where his bread. They poured the wine on the carpet and on their own knees, spilt the salt, while it was dark all round them and the fire burnt more dimly, and everyone was too lazy to get up and put wood on. They all drank wine, and even gave Kostya and Katya half a glass each. Nadyezhda Fyodorovna drank one glass and then another, got a little drunk and forgot about Kirilin.

"A splendid picnic, an enchanting evening," said Laevsky, growing lively with the wine. "But I should prefer a fine winter to all this. 'His beaver collar is silver with hoarfrost.'"

"Everyone to his taste," observed Von Koren.

Laevsky felt uncomfortable; the heat of the campfire was beating upon his back, and the hatred of Von Koren upon his breast and face: this hatred on the part of a decent, clever man, a feeling in which there probably lay hid a well-grounded reason, humiliated him and enervated him, and unable to stand up against it, he said in a propitiatory tone:

"I am passionately fond of nature, and I regret that I'm not a naturalist. I envy you."

“Well, I don’t envy you, and don’t regret it,” said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna. “I don’t understand how anyone can seriously interest himself in beetles and ladybirds while the people are suffering.”

Laevsky shared her opinion. He was absolutely ignorant of natural science, and so could never reconcile himself to the authoritative tone and the learned and profound air of the people who devoted themselves to the whiskers of ants and the claws of beetles, and he always felt vexed that these people, relying on these whiskers, claws, and something they called protoplasm (he always imagined it in the form of an oyster), should undertake to decide questions involving the origin and life of man. But in Nadyezhda Fyodorovna’s words he heard a note of falsity, and simply to contradict her he said: “The point is not the ladybirds, but the deductions made from them.”

VIII

It was late, eleven o'clock, when they began to get into the carriages to go home. They took their seats, and the only ones missing were Nadyezhda Fyodorovna and Atchmianov, who were running after one another, laughing, the other side of the stream.

"Make haste, my friends," shouted Samoylenko.

"You oughtn't to give ladies wine," said Von Koren in a low voice.

Laevsky, exhausted by the picnic, by the hatred of Von Koren, and by his own thoughts, went to meet Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, and when, gay and happy, feeling light as a feather, breathless and laughing, she took him by both hands and laid her head on his breast, he stepped back and said dryly:

"You are behaving like a... cocotte."

It sounded horribly coarse, so that he felt sorry for her at once. On his angry, exhausted face she read hatred, pity and vexation with himself, and her heart sank at once. She realised instantly that she had gone too far, had been too free and easy in her behaviour, and overcome with misery, feeling herself heavy, stout, coarse, and drunk, she got into the first empty carriage together with Atchmianov. Laevsky got in with Kirilin, the zoologist with Samoylenko, the deacon with the ladies, and the party set off.

"You see what the Japanese monkeys are like," Von Koren began, rolling himself up in his cloak and shutting his eyes. "You heard she doesn't care to take an interest in beetles and ladybirds because the people are suffering. That's how all the Japanese monkeys look upon people like us. They're a slavish, cunning race, terrified by the whip and the fist for ten generations; they tremble and burn incense only before violence; but let the monkey into a free state where there's no one to take it by the collar, and it relaxes at once and shows itself in its true colours. Look how bold they are in picture galleries, in museums, in theatres, or when they talk of science: they puff themselves out and get excited, they are abusive and critical... they are bound to criticise—it's the sign of the

slave. You listen: men of the liberal professions are more often sworn at than pickpockets—that's because three-quarters of society are made up of slaves, of just such monkeys. It never happens that a slave holds out his hand to you and sincerely says 'Thank you' to you for your work."

"I don't know what you want," said Samoylenko, yawning; "the poor thing, in the simplicity of her heart, wanted to talk to you of scientific subjects, and you draw a conclusion from that. You're cross with him for something or other, and with her, too, to keep him company. She's a splendid woman."

"Ah, nonsense! An ordinary kept woman, depraved and vulgar. Listen, Alexandr Daviditch; when you meet a simple peasant woman, who isn't living with her husband, who does nothing but giggle, you tell her to go and work. Why are you timid in this case and afraid to tell the truth? Simply because Nadyezhda Fyodorovna is kept, not by a sailor, but by an official."

"What am I to do with her?" said Samoylenko, getting angry. "Beat her or what?"

"Not flatter vice. We curse vice only behind its back, and that's like making a long nose at it round a corner. I am a zoologist or a sociologist, which is the same thing; you are a doctor; society believes in us; we ought to point out the terrible harm which threatens it and the next generation from the existence of ladies like Nadyezhda Ivanovna."

"Fyodorovna," Samoylenko corrected. "But what ought society to do?"

"Society? That's its affair. To my thinking the surest and most direct method is—compulsion. *Manu militari* she ought to be returned to her husband; and if her husband won't take her in, then she ought to be sent to penal servitude or some house of correction."

"Ouf!" sighed Samoylenko. He paused and asked quietly: "You said the other day that people like Laevsky ought to be destroyed.... Tell me, if you... if the State or society commissioned you to destroy him, could you... bring yourself to it?"

"My hand would not tremble."

IX

When they got home, Laevsky and Nadyezhda Fyodorovna went into their dark, stuffy, dull rooms. Both were silent. Laevsky lighted a candle, while Nadyezhda Fyodorovna sat down, and without taking off her cloak and hat, lifted her melancholy, guilty eyes to him.

He knew that she expected an explanation from him, but an explanation would be wearisome, useless and exhausting, and his heart was heavy because he had lost control over himself and been rude to her. He chanced to feel in his pocket the letter which he had been intending every day to read to her, and thought if he were to show her that letter now, it would turn her thoughts in another direction.

“It is time to define our relations,” he thought. “I will give it her; what is to be will be.”

He took out the letter and gave it her.

“Read it. It concerns you.”

Saying this, he went into his own room and lay down on the sofa in the dark without a pillow. Nadyezhda Fyodorovna read the letter, and it seemed to her as though the ceiling were falling and the walls were closing in on her. It seemed suddenly dark and shut in and terrible. She crossed herself quickly three times and said:

“Give him peace, O Lord... give him peace....”

And she began crying.

“Vanya,” she called. “Ivan Andreitch!”

There was no answer. Thinking that Laevsky had come in and was standing behind her chair, she sobbed like a child, and said:

“Why did you not tell me before that he was dead? I wouldn’t have gone to the picnic; I shouldn’t have laughed so horribly.... The men said horrid things to me. What a sin, what a sin! Save me, Vanya, save me.... I have been mad.... I am lost....”

Laevsky heard her sobs. He felt stifled and his heart was beating violently. In his misery he got up, stood in the middle of the room, groped his way in the dark to an easy-chair by the table, and sat down.

“This is a prison...” he thought. “I must get away... I can’t bear it.”

It was too late to go and play cards; there were no restaurants in the town. He lay down again and covered his ears that he might not hear her sobbing, and he suddenly remembered that he could go to Samoylenko. To avoid going near Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, he got out of the window into the garden, climbed over the garden fence and went along the street. It was dark. A steamer, judging by its lights, a big passenger one, had just come in. He heard the clank of the anchor chain. A red light was moving rapidly from the shore in the direction of the steamer: it was the Customs boat going out to it.

“The passengers are asleep in their cabins...” thought Laevsky, and he envied the peace of mind of other people.

The windows in Samoylenko’s house were open. Laevsky looked in at one of them, then in at another; it was dark and still in the rooms.

“Alexandr Daviditch, are you asleep?” he called. “Alexandr Daviditch!”

He heard a cough and an uneasy shout:

“Who’s there? What the devil?”

“It is I, Alexandr Daviditch; excuse me.”

A little later the door opened; there was a glow of soft light from the lamp, and Samoylenko’s huge figure appeared all in white, with a white nightcap on his head.

“What now?” he asked, scratching himself and breathing hard from sleepiness. “Wait a minute; I’ll open the door directly.”

“Don’t trouble; I’ll get in at the window...”

Laevsky climbed in at the window, and when he reached Samoylenko, seized him by the hand.

“Alexandr Daviditch,” he said in a shaking voice, “save me! I beseech you, I implore you. Understand me! My position is agonising. If it goes on for another two days I shall strangle myself like... like a dog.”

“Wait a bit... What are you talking about exactly?”

“Light a candle.”

“Oh... oh!...” sighed Samoylenko, lighting a candle. “My God! My God!... Why, it’s past one, brother.”

“Excuse me, but I can’t stay at home,” said Laevsky, feeling great comfort from the light and the presence of Samoylenko. “You are my best, my only friend, Alexandr Daviditch... You are my only hope. For God’s sake, come to my rescue, whether you want to or not. I must get away from here, come what may!... Lend me the money!”

“Oh, my God, my God!...” sighed Samoylenko, scratching himself. “I was dropping asleep and I hear the whistle of the steamer, and now you... Do you want much?”

“Three hundred roubles at least. I must leave her a hundred, and I need two hundred for the journey.... I owe you about four hundred already, but I will send it you all... all....”

Samoylenko took hold of both his whiskers in one hand, and standing with his legs wide apart, pondered.

“Yes...” he muttered, musing. “Three hundred.... Yes.... But I haven’t got so much. I shall have to borrow it from someone.”

“Borrow it, for God’s sake!” said Laevsky, seeing from Samoylenko’s face that he wanted to lend him the money and certainly would lend it.

“Borrow it, and I’ll be sure to pay you back. I will send it from Petersburg as soon as I get there. You can set your mind at rest about that. I’ll tell you what, Sasha,” he said, growing more animated; “let us have some wine.”

“Yes... we can have some wine, too.”

They both went into the dining room.

“And how about Nadyezhda Fyodorovna?” asked Samoylenko, setting three bottles and a plate of peaches on the table. “Surely she’s not remaining?”

“I will arrange it all, I will arrange it all,” said Laevsky, feeling an unexpected rush of joy. “I will send her the money afterwards and she will join me.... Then we will define our relations. To your health, friend.”

“Wait a bit,” said Samoylenko. “Drink this first.... This is from my vineyard. This bottle is from Navaridze’s vineyard and this one is from Ahatulov’s.... Try all three kinds and tell me candidly.... There seems a little acidity about mine. Eh? Don’t you taste it?”

“Yes. You have comforted me, Alexandr Daviditch. Thank you.... I feel better.”

“Is there any acidity?”

“Goodness only knows, I don’t know. But you are a splendid, wonderful man!”

Looking at his pale, excited, good-natured face, Samoylenko remembered Von Koren’s view that men like that ought to be destroyed, and Laevsky seemed to him a weak, defenceless child, whom anyone could injure and destroy.

“And when you go, make it up with your mother,” he said. “It’s not right.”

“Yes, yes; I certainly shall.”

They were silent for a while. When they had emptied the first bottle, Samoylenko said:

“You ought to make it up with Von Koren too. You are both such splendid, clever fellows, and you glare at each other like wolves.”

“Yes, he’s a fine, very intelligent fellow,” Laevsky assented, ready now to praise and forgive everyone. “He’s a remarkable man, but it’s impossible for me to get on with him. No! Our natures are too different. I’m an indolent, weak, submissive nature. Perhaps in a good minute I might hold out my hand to him, but he would turn away from me ... with contempt.”

Laevsky took a sip of wine, walked from corner to corner and went on, standing in the middle of the room:

“I understand Von Koren very well. His is a resolute, strong, despotic nature. You have heard him continually talking of ‘the expedition,’ and it’s not mere talk. He wants the wilderness, the moonlit night: all around in little tents, under the open sky, lie sleeping his sick and hungry Cossacks, guides, porters, doctor, priest, all exhausted with their weary marches, while only he is awake, sitting like Stanley on a campstool, feeling himself the monarch of the desert and the master of these men. He goes on and on and on, his men groan and die, one after another, and he goes on and on, and in the end perishes himself, but still is monarch and ruler of the desert, since the cross upon his tomb can be seen by the caravans for thirty or forty miles over the desert. I am sorry the man is not in the army. He would have made a splendid military genius. He would not have hesitated to drown his cavalry in the river and make a bridge out of dead bodies. And such hardihood is more needed in war than any kind of fortification or strategy. Oh, I understand him perfectly! Tell me: why is he wasting his substance here? What does he want here?”

“He is studying the marine fauna.”

“No, no, brother, no!” Laevsky sighed. “A scientific man who was on the steamer told me the Black Sea was poor in animal life, and that in its depths, thanks to the abundance of sulphuric hydrogen, organic life was impossible. All the serious zoologists work at the biological station at Naples or Villefranche. But Von Koren is independent and obstinate: he works on the Black Sea because nobody else is working there; he is at loggerheads with the university, does not care to know his comrades and other scientific men because he is first of all a despot and only secondly a zoologist. And you’ll see he’ll do something. He is already dreaming

that when he comes back from his expedition he will purify our universities from intrigue and mediocrity, and will make the scientific men mind their p's and q's. Despotism is just as strong in science as in the army. And he is spending his second summer in this stinking little town because he would rather be first in a village than second in a town. Here he is a king and an eagle; he keeps all the inhabitants under his thumb and oppresses them with his authority. He has appropriated everyone, he meddles in other people's affairs; everything is of use to him, and everyone is afraid of him. I am slipping out of his clutches, he feels that and hates me. Hasn't he told you that I ought to be destroyed or sent to hard labour?"

"Yes," laughed Samoylenko.

Laevsky laughed too, and drank some wine.

"His ideals are despotic too," he said, laughing, and biting a peach. "Ordinary mortals think of their neighbour—me, you, man in fact—if they work for the common weal. To Von Koren men are puppets and nonentities, too trivial to be the object of his life. He works, will go for his expedition and break his neck there, not for the sake of love for his neighbour, but for the sake of such abstractions as humanity, future generations, an ideal race of men. He exerts himself for the improvement of the human race, and we are in his eyes only slaves, food for the cannon, beasts of burden; some he would destroy or stow away in Siberia, others he would break by discipline, would, like Araktcheev, force them to get up and go to bed to the sound of the drum; would appoint eunuchs to preserve our chastity and morality, would order them to fire at anyone who steps out of the circle of our narrow conservative morality; and all this in the name of the improvement of the human race.... And what is the human race? Illusion, mirage... despots have always been illusionists. I understand him very well, brother. I appreciate him and don't deny his importance; this world rests on men like him, and if the world were left only to such men as us, for all our good-nature and good intentions, we should make as great a mess of it as the flies have of that picture. Yes."

Laevsky sat down beside Samoylenko, and said with genuine feeling: "I'm a foolish, worthless, depraved man. The air I breathe, this wine, love, life in fact—for all that, I have given nothing in exchange so far but lying, idleness, and cowardice. Till now I have deceived myself and other people; I have been miserable about it, and my misery was cheap and common. I bow my back humbly before Von Koren's hatred because at times I hate and despise myself."

Laevsky began again pacing from one end of the room to the other in excitement, and said:

“I’m glad I see my faults clearly and am conscious of them. That will help me to reform and become a different man. My dear fellow, if only you knew how passionately, with what anguish, I long for such a change. And I swear to you I’ll be a man! I will! I don’t know whether it is the wine that is speaking in me, or whether it really is so, but it seems to me that it is long since I have spent such pure and lucid moments as I have just now with you.”

“It’s time to sleep, brother,” said Samoylenko.

“Yes, yes.... Excuse me; I’ll go directly.”

Laevsky moved hurriedly about the furniture and windows, looking for his cap.

“Thank you,” he muttered, sighing. “Thank you.... Kind and friendly words are better than charity. You have given me new life.”

He found his cap, stopped, and looked guiltily at Samoylenko.

“Alexandr Daviditch,” he said in an imploring voice.

“What is it?”

“Let me stay the night with you, my dear fellow!”

“Certainly.... Why not?”

Laevsky lay down on the sofa, and went on talking to the doctor for a long time.

X

Three days after the picnic, Marya Konstantinovna unexpectedly called on Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, and without greeting her or taking off her hat, seized her by both hands, pressed them to her breast and said in great excitement:

“My dear, I am deeply touched and moved: our dear kindhearted doctor told my Nikodim Alexandritch yesterday that your husband was dead. Tell me, my dear... tell me, is it true?”

“Yes, it’s true; he is dead,” answered Nadyezhda Fyodorovna.

“That is awful, awful, my dear! But there’s no evil without some compensation; your husband was no doubt a noble, wonderful, holy man, and such are more needed in Heaven than on earth.”

Every line and feature in Marya Konstantinovna’s face began quivering as though little needles were jumping up and down under her skin; she gave an almond-oily smile and said, breathlessly, enthusiastically:

“And so you are free, my dear. You can hold your head high now, and look people boldly in the face. Henceforth God and man will bless your union with Ivan Andreitch. It’s enchanting. I am trembling with joy, I can find no words. My dear, I will give you away... Nikodim Alexandritch and I have been so fond of you, you will allow us to give our blessing to your pure, lawful union. When, when do you think of being married?”

“I haven’t thought of it,” said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, freeing her hands.

“That’s impossible, my dear. You have thought of it, you have.”

“Upon my word, I haven’t,” said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, laughing. “What should we be married for? I see no necessity for it. We’ll go on living as we have lived.”

“What are you saying!” cried Marya Konstantinovna in horror. “For God’s sake, what are you saying!”

“Our getting married won’t make things any better. On the contrary, it will make them even worse. We shall lose our freedom.”

“My dear, my dear, what are you saying!” exclaimed Marya Konstantinovna, stepping back and flinging up her hands. “You are talking wildly! Think what you are saying. You must settle down!”

“‘Settle down.’ How do you mean? I have not lived yet, and you tell me to settle down.”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna reflected that she really had not lived. She had finished her studies in a boarding-school and had been married to a man she did not love; then she had thrown in her lot with Laevsky, and had spent all her time with him on this empty, desolate coast, always expecting something better. Was that life?

“I ought to be married though,” she thought, but remembering Kirilin and Atchmianov she flushed and said:

“No, it’s impossible. Even if Ivan Andreitch begged me to on his knees—even then I would refuse.”

Marya Konstantinovna sat on the sofa for a minute in silence, grave and mournful, gazing fixedly into space; then she got up and said coldly:

“Goodbye, my dear! Forgive me for having troubled you. Though it’s not easy for me, it’s my duty to tell you that from this day all is over between us, and, in spite of my profound respect for Ivan Andreitch, the door of my house is closed to you henceforth.”

She uttered these words with great solemnity and was herself overwhelmed by her solemn tone. Her face began quivering again; it assumed a soft almond-oily expression. She held out both hands to Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, who was overcome with alarm and confusion, and said in an imploring voice:

“My dear, allow me if only for a moment to be a mother or an elder sister to you! I will be as frank with you as a mother.”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna felt in her bosom warmth, gladness, and pity for herself, as though her own mother had really risen up and were standing before her. She impulsively embraced Marya Konstantinovna and pressed her face to her shoulder. Both of them shed tears. They sat down on the sofa and for a few minutes sobbed without looking at one another or being able to utter a word.

“My dear child,” began Marya Konstantinovna, “I will tell you some harsh truths, without sparing you.”

“For God’s sake, for God’s sake, do!”

“Trust me, my dear. You remember of all the ladies here, I was the only one to receive you. You horrified me from the very first day, but I

had not the heart to treat you with disdain like all the rest. I grieved over dear, good Ivan Andreitch as though he were my son—a young man in a strange place, inexperienced, weak, with no mother; and I was worried, dreadfully worried.... My husband was opposed to our making his acquaintance, but I talked him over... persuaded him.... We began receiving Ivan Andreitch, and with him, of course, you. If we had not, he would have been insulted. I have a daughter, a son.... You understand the tender mind, the pure heart of childhood... ‘who so offendeth one of these little ones.’... I received you into my house and trembled for my children. Oh, when you become a mother, you will understand my fears. And everyone was surprised at my receiving you, excuse my saying so, as a respectable woman, and hinted to me... well, of course, slanders, suppositions.... At the bottom of my heart I blamed you, but you were unhappy, flighty, to be pitied, and my heart was wrung with pity for you.”

“But why, why?” asked Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, trembling all over. “What harm have I done anyone?”

“You are a terrible sinner. You broke the vow you made your husband at the altar. You seduced a fine young man, who perhaps had he not met you might have taken a lawful partner for life from a good family in his own circle, and would have been like everyone else now. You have ruined his youth. Don’t speak, don’t speak, my dear! I never believe that man is to blame for our sins. It is always the woman’s fault. Men are frivolous in domestic life; they are guided by their minds, and not by their hearts. There’s a great deal they don’t understand; woman understands it all. Everything depends on her. To her much is given and from her much will be required. Oh, my dear, if she had been more foolish or weaker than man on that side, God would not have entrusted her with the education of boys and girls. And then, my dear, you entered on the path of vice, forgetting all modesty; any other woman in your place would have hidden herself from people, would have sat shut up at home, and would only have been seen in the temple of God, pale, dressed all in black and weeping, and everyone would have said in genuine compassion: ‘O Lord, this erring angel is coming back again to Thee....’ But you, my dear, have forgotten all discretion; have lived openly, extravagantly; have seemed to be proud of your sin; you have been gay and laughing, and I, looking at you, shuddered with horror, and have been afraid that thunder from Heaven would strike our house while you were sitting with us. My dear, don’t speak, don’t speak,” cried Marya Konstantinovna, observing that Nadyezhda Fyodorovna wanted to

speak. "Trust me, I will not deceive you, I will not hide one truth from the eyes of your soul. Listen to me, my dear.... God marks great sinners, and you have been marked-out: only think—your costumes have always been appalling."

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, who had always had the highest opinion of her costumes, left off crying and looked at her with surprise.

"Yes, appalling," Marya Konstantinovna went on. "Anyone could judge of your behaviour from the elaboration and gaudiness of your attire. People laughed and shrugged their shoulders as they looked at you, and I grieved, I grieved.... And forgive me, my dear; you are not nice in your person! When we met in the bathing-place, you made me tremble. Your outer clothing was decent enough, but your petticoat, your chemise.... My dear, I blushed! Poor Ivan Andreitch! No one ever ties his cravat properly, and from his linen and his boots, poor fellow! one can see he has no one at home to look after him. And he is always hungry, my darling, and of course, if there is no one at home to think of the samovar and the coffee, one is forced to spend half one's salary at the pavilion. And it's simply awful, awful in your home! No one else in the town has flies, but there's no getting rid of them in your rooms: all the plates and dishes are black with them. If you look at the windows and the chairs, there's nothing but dust, dead flies, and glasses.... What do you want glasses standing about for? And, my dear, the table's not cleared till this time in the day. And one's ashamed to go into your bedroom: underclothes flung about everywhere, india-rubber tubes hanging on the walls, pails and basins standing about.... My dear! A husband ought to know nothing, and his wife ought to be as neat as a little angel in his presence. I wake up every morning before it is light, and wash my face with cold water that my Nikodim Alexandritch may not see me looking drowsy."

"That's all nonsense," Nadyezhda Fyodorovna sobbed. "If only I were happy, but I am so unhappy!"

"Yes, yes; you are very unhappy!" Marya Konstantinovna sighed, hardly able to restrain herself from weeping. "And there's terrible grief in store for you in the future! A solitary old age, ill-health; and then you will have to answer at the dread judgment seat... It's awful, awful. Now fate itself holds out to you a helping hand, and you madly thrust it from you. Be married, make haste and be married!"

"Yes, we must, we must," said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna; "but it's impossible!"

"Why?"

“It’s impossible. Oh, if only you knew!”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna had an impulse to tell her about Kirilin, and how the evening before she had met handsome young Atchmianov at the harbour, and how the mad, ridiculous idea had occurred to her of cancelling her debt for three hundred; it had amused her very much, and she returned home late in the evening feeling that she had sold herself and was irrevocably lost. She did not know herself how it had happened. And she longed to swear to Marya Konstantinovna that she would certainly pay that debt, but sobs and shame prevented her from speaking.

“I am going away,” she said. “Ivan Andreitch may stay, but I am going.”

“Where?”

“To Russia.”

“But how will you live there? Why, you have nothing.”

“I will do translation, or ... or I will open a library....”

“Don’t let your fancy run away with you, my dear. You must have money for a library. Well, I will leave you now, and you calm yourself and think things over, and tomorrow come and see me, bright and happy. That will be enchanting! Well, goodbye, my angel. Let me kiss you.”

Marya Konstantinovna kissed Nadyezhda Fyodorovna on the forehead, made the sign of the cross over her, and softly withdrew. It was getting dark, and Olga lighted up in the kitchen. Still crying, Nadyezhda Fyodorovna went into the bedroom and lay down on the bed. She began to be very feverish. She undressed without getting up, crumpled up her clothes at her feet, and curled herself up under the bedclothes. She was thirsty, and there was no one to give her something to drink.

“I’ll pay it back!” she said to herself, and it seemed to her in delirium that she was sitting beside some sick woman, and recognised her as herself. “I’ll pay it back. It would be stupid to imagine that it was for money I... I will go away and send him the money from Petersburg. At first a hundred... then another hundred... and then the third hundred....”

It was late at night when Laevsky came in.

“At first a hundred...” Nadyezhda Fyodorovna said to him, “then another hundred...”

“You ought to take some quinine,” he said, and thought, “Tomorrow is Wednesday; the steamer goes and I am not going in it. So I shall have to go on living here till Saturday.”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna knelt up in bed.

“I didn’t say anything just now, did I?” she asked, smiling and screwing up her eyes at the light.

“No, nothing. We shall have to send for the doctor tomorrow morning. Go to sleep.”

He took his pillow and went to the door. Ever since he had finally made up his mind to go away and leave Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, she had begun to raise in him pity and a sense of guilt; he felt a little ashamed in her presence, as though in the presence of a sick or old horse whom one has decided to kill. He stopped in the doorway and looked round at her.

“I was out of humour at the picnic and said something rude to you. Forgive me, for God’s sake!”

Saying this, he went off to his study, lay down, and for a long while could not get to sleep.

Next morning when Samoylenko, attired, as it was a holiday, in full dress uniform with epaulettes on his shoulders and decorations on his breast, came out of the bedroom after feeling Nadyezhda Fyodorovna’s pulse and looking at her tongue, Laevsky, who was standing in the doorway, asked him anxiously: “Well? Well?”

There was an expression of terror, of extreme uneasiness, and of hope on his face.

“Don’t worry yourself; there’s nothing dangerous,” said Samoylenko; “it’s the usual fever.”

“I don’t mean that.” Laevsky frowned impatiently. “Have you got the money?”

“My dear soul, forgive me,” he whispered, looking round at the door and overcome with confusion.

“For God’s sake, forgive me! No one has anything to spare, and I’ve only been able to collect by five- and by ten-ruble notes. . . . Only a hundred and ten in all. Today I’ll speak to someone else. Have patience.”

“But Saturday is the latest date,” whispered Laevsky, trembling with impatience. “By all that’s sacred, get it by Saturday! If I don’t get away by Saturday, nothing’s any use, nothing! I can’t understand how a doctor can be without money!”

“Lord have mercy on us!” Samoylenko whispered rapidly and intensely, and there was positively a breaking note in his throat. “I’ve been stripped of everything; I am owed seven thousand, and I’m in debt all round. Is it my fault?”

“Then you’ll get it by Saturday? Yes?”

“I’ll try.”

“I implore you, my dear fellow! So that the money may be in my hands by Friday morning!”

Samoylenko sat down and prescribed solution of quinine and kalii bromati and tincture of rhubarb, tincturæ gentianæ, aquæ foeniculi—all in one mixture, added some pink syrup to sweeten it, and went away.

XI

“You look as though you were coming to arrest me,” said Von Koren, seeing Samoylenko coming in, in his full dress uniform.

“I was passing by and thought: ‘Suppose I go in and pay my respects to zoology,’” said Samoylenko, sitting down at the big table, knocked together by the zoologist himself out of plain boards. “Good morning, holy father,” he said to the deacon, who was sitting in the window, copying something. “I’ll stay a minute and then run home to see about dinner. It’s time.... I’m not hindering you?”

“Not in the least,” answered the zoologist, laying out over the table slips of paper covered with small writing. “We are busy copying.”

“Ah!... Oh, my goodness, my goodness!...” sighed Samoylenko. He cautiously took up from the table a dusty book on which there was lying a dead dried spider, and said: “Only fancy, though; some little green beetle is going about its business, when suddenly a monster like this swoops down upon it. I can fancy its terror.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“Is poison given it to protect it from its enemies?”

“Yes, to protect it and enable it to attack.”

“To be sure, to be sure.... And everything in nature, my dear fellows, is consistent and can be explained,” sighed Samoylenko; “only I tell you what I don’t understand. You’re a man of very great intellect, so explain it to me, please. There are, you know, little beasts no bigger than rats, rather handsome to look at, but nasty and immoral in the extreme, let me tell you. Suppose such a little beast is running in the woods. He sees a bird; he catches it and devours it. He goes on and sees in the grass a nest of eggs; he does not want to eat them—he is not hungry, but yet he tastes one egg and scatters the others out of the nest with his paw. Then he meets a frog and begins to play with it; when he has tormented the frog he goes on licking himself and meets a beetle; he crushes the beetle with his paw... and so he spoils and destroys everything on his way.... He creeps into other beasts’ holes, tears up the anthills, cracks the snail’s

shell. If he meets a rat, he fights with it; if he meets a snake or a mouse, he must strangle it; and so the whole day long. Come, tell me: what is the use of a beast like that? Why was he created?"

"I don't know what animal you are talking of," said Von Koren; "most likely one of the insectivora. Well, he got hold of the bird because it was incautious; he broke the nest of eggs because the bird was not skilful, had made the nest badly and did not know how to conceal it. The frog probably had some defect in its colouring or he would not have seen it, and so on. Your little beast only destroys the weak, the unskilful, the careless—in fact, those who have defects which nature does not think fit to hand on to posterity. Only the cleverer, the stronger, the more careful and developed survive; and so your little beast, without suspecting it, is serving the great ends of perfecting creation."

"Yes, yes, yes. . . . By the way, brother," said Samoylenko carelessly, "lend me a hundred roubles."

"Very good. There are some very interesting types among the insectivorous mammals. For instance, the mole is said to be useful because he devours noxious insects. There is a story that some German sent William I a fur coat made of moleskins, and the Emperor ordered him to be reproved for having destroyed so great a number of useful animals. And yet the mole is not a bit less cruel than your little beast, and is very mischievous besides, as he spoils meadows terribly."

Von Koren opened a box and took out a hundred-rouble note.

"The mole has a powerful thorax, just like the bat," he went on, shutting the box; "the bones and muscles are tremendously developed, the mouth is extraordinarily powerfully furnished. If it had the proportions of an elephant, it would be an all-destructive, invincible animal. It is interesting when two moles meet underground; they begin at once as though by agreement digging a little platform; they need the platform in order to have a battle more conveniently. When they have made it they enter upon a ferocious struggle and fight till the weaker one falls. Take the hundred roubles," said Von Koren, dropping his voice, "but only on condition that you're not borrowing it for Laevsky."

"And if it were for Laevsky," cried Samoylenko, flaring up, "what is that to you?"

"I can't give it to you for Laevsky. I know you like lending people money. You would give it to Kerim, the brigand, if he were to ask you; but, excuse me, I can't assist you in that direction."

"Yes, it is for Laevsky I am asking it," said Samoylenko, standing up and waving his right arm. "Yes! For Laevsky! And no one, fiend or

devil, has a right to dictate to me how to dispose of my own money. It doesn't suit you to lend it me? No?"

The deacon began laughing.

"Don't get excited, but be reasonable," said the zoologist. "To shower benefits on Mr. Laevsky is, to my thinking, as senseless as to water weeds or to feed locusts."

"To my thinking, it is our duty to help our neighbours!" cried Samoylenko.

"In that case, help that hungry Turk who is lying under the fence! He is a workman and more useful and indispensable than your Laevsky. Give him that hundred-rouble note! Or subscribe a hundred roubles to my expedition!"

"Will you give me the money or not? I ask you!"

"Tell me openly: what does he want money for?"

"It's not a secret; he wants to go to Petersburg on Saturday."

"So that is it!" Von Koren drawled out. "Aha! ... We understand. And is she going with him, or how is it to be?"

"She's staying here for the time. He'll arrange his affairs in Petersburg and send her the money, and then she'll go."

"That's smart!" said the zoologist, and he gave a short tenor laugh. "Smart, well planned."

He went rapidly up to Samoylenko, and standing face to face with him, and looking him in the eyes, asked: "Tell me now honestly: is he tired of her? Yes? tell me: is he tired of her? Yes?"

"Yes," Samoylenko articulated, beginning to perspire.

"How repulsive it is!" said Von Koren, and from his face it could be seen that he felt repulsion. "One of two things, Alexandr Daviditch: either you are in the plot with him, or, excuse my saying so, you are a simpleton. Surely you must see that he is taking you in like a child in the most shameless way? Why, it's as clear as day that he wants to get rid of her and abandon her here. She'll be left a burden on you. It is as clear as day that you will have to send her to Petersburg at your expense. Surely your fine friend can't have so blinded you by his dazzling qualities that you can't see the simplest thing?"

"That's all supposition," said Samoylenko, sitting down.

"Supposition? But why is he going alone instead of taking her with him? And ask him why he doesn't send her off first. The sly beast!"

Overcome with sudden doubts and suspicions about his friend, Samoylenko weakened and took a humbler tone.

“But it’s impossible,” he said, recalling the night Laevsky had spent at his house. “He is so unhappy!”

“What of that? Thieves and incendiaries are unhappy too!”

“Even supposing you are right...” said Samoylenko, hesitating. “Let us admit it. ... Still, he’s a young man in a strange place ... a student. We have been students, too, and there is no one but us to come to his assistance.”

“To help him to do abominable things, because he and you at different times have been at universities, and neither of you did anything there! What nonsense!”

“Stop; let us talk it over coolly. I imagine it will be possible to make some arrangement. ...” Samoylenko reflected, twiddling his fingers. “I’ll give him the money, you see, but make him promise on his honour that within a week he’ll send Nadyezhda Fyodorovna the money for the journey.”

“And he’ll give you his word of honour—in fact, he’ll shed tears and believe in it himself; but what’s his word of honour worth? He won’t keep it, and when in a year or two you meet him on the Nevsky Prospect with a new mistress on his arm, he’ll excuse himself on the ground that he has been crippled by civilisation, and that he is made after the pattern of Rudin. Drop him, for God’s sake! Keep away from the filth; don’t stir it up with both hands!”

Samoylenko thought for a minute and said resolutely:

“But I shall give him the money all the same. As you please. I can’t bring myself to refuse a man simply on an assumption.”

“Very fine, too. You can kiss him if you like.”

“Give me the hundred roubles, then,” Samoylenko asked timidly.

“I won’t.”

A silence followed. Samoylenko was quite crushed; his face wore a guilty, abashed, and ingratiating expression, and it was strange to see this pitiful, childish, shamefaced countenance on a huge man wearing epaulettes and orders of merit.

“The bishop here goes the round of his diocese on horseback instead of in a carriage,” said the deacon, laying down his pen. “It’s extremely touching to see him sit on his horse. His simplicity and humility are full of Biblical grandeur.”

“Is he a good man?” asked Von Koren, who was glad to change the conversation.

“Of course! If he hadn’t been a good man, do you suppose he would have been consecrated a bishop?”

“Among the bishops are to be found good and gifted men,” said Von Koren. “The only drawback is that some of them have the weakness to imagine themselves statesmen. One busies himself with Russification, another criticises the sciences. That’s not their business. They had much better look into their consistory a little.”

“A layman cannot judge of bishops.”

“Why so, deacon? A bishop is a man just the same as you or I.”

“The same, but not the same.” The deacon was offended and took up his pen. “If you had been the same, the Divine Grace would have rested upon you, and you would have been bishop yourself; and since you are not bishop, it follows you are not the same.”

“Don’t talk nonsense, deacon,” said Samoylenko dejectedly. “Listen to what I suggest,” he said, turning to Von Koren. “Don’t give me that hundred roubles. You’ll be having your dinners with me for three months before the winter, so let me have the money beforehand for three months.”

“I won’t.”

Samoylenko blinked and turned crimson; he mechanically drew towards him the book with the spider on it and looked at it, then he got up and took his hat.

Von Koren felt sorry for him.

“What it is to have to live and do with people like this,” said the zoologist, and he kicked a paper into the corner with indignation. “You must understand that this is not kindness, it is not love, but cowardice, slackness, poison! What’s gained by reason is lost by your flabby good-for-nothing hearts! When I was ill with typhoid as a schoolboy, my aunt in her sympathy gave me pickled mushrooms to eat, and I very nearly died. You, and my aunt too, must understand that love for man is not to be found in the heart or the stomach or the bowels, but here!”

Von Koren slapped himself on the forehead.

“Take it,” he said, and thrust a hundred-rouble note into his hand.

“You’ve no need to be angry, Kolya,” said Samoylenko mildly, folding up the note. “I quite understand you, but... you must put yourself in my place.”

“You are an old woman, that’s what you are.”

The deacon burst out laughing.

“Hear my last request, Alexandr Daviditch,” said Von Koren hotly. “When you give that scoundrel the money, make it a condition that he takes his lady with him, or sends her on ahead, and don’t give it him without. There’s no need to stand on ceremony with him. Tell him so, or,

if you don't, I give you my word I'll go to his office and kick him downstairs, and I'll break off all acquaintance with you. So you'd better know it."

"Well! To go with her or send her on beforehand will be more convenient for him," said Samoylenko. "He'll be delighted indeed. Well, goodbye."

He said goodbye affectionately and went out, but before shutting the door after him, he looked round at Von Koren and, with a ferocious face, said:

"It's the Germans who have ruined you, brother! Yes! The Germans!"

XII

Next day, Thursday, Marya Konstantinovna was celebrating the birthday of her Kostya. All were invited to come at midday and eat pies, and in the evening to drink chocolate. When Laevsky and Nadyezhda Fyodorovna arrived in the evening, the zoologist, who was already sitting in the drawing room, drinking chocolate, asked Samoylenko:

“Have you talked to him?”

“Not yet.”

“Mind now, don’t stand on ceremony. I can’t understand the insolence of these people! Why, they know perfectly well the view taken by this family of their cohabitation, and yet they force themselves in here.”

“If one is to pay attention to every prejudice,” said Samoylenko, “one could go nowhere.”

“Do you mean to say that the repugnance felt by the masses for illicit love and moral laxity is a prejudice?”

“Of course it is. It’s prejudice and hate. When the soldiers see a girl of light behaviour, they laugh and whistle; but just ask them what they are themselves.”

“It’s not for nothing they whistle. The fact that girls strangle their illegitimate children and go to prison for it, and that Anna Karenin flung herself under the train, and that in the villages they smear the gates with tar, and that you and I, without knowing why, are pleased by Katya’s purity, and that every one of us feels a vague craving for pure love, though he knows there is no such love—is all that prejudice? That is the one thing, brother, which has survived intact from natural selection, and, if it were not for that obscure force regulating the relations of the sexes, the Laevskys would have it all their own way, and mankind would degenerate in two years.”

Laevsky came into the drawing room, greeted everyone, and shaking hands with Von Koren, smiled ingratiatingly. He waited for a favourable moment and said to Samoylenko:

“Excuse me, Alexandr Daviditch, I must say two words to you.”

Samoylenko got up, put his arm round Laevsky's waist, and both of them went into Nikodim Alexandritch's study.

"Tomorrow's Friday," said Laevsky, biting his nails. "Have you got what you promised?"

"I've only got two hundred. I'll get the rest today or tomorrow. Don't worry yourself."

"Thank God..." sighed Laevsky, and his hands began trembling with joy. "You are saving me, Alexandr Daviditch, and I swear to you by God, by my happiness and anything you like, I'll send you the money as soon as I arrive. And I'll send you my old debt too."

"Look here, Vanya..." said Samoylenko, turning crimson and taking him by the button. "You must forgive my meddling in your private affairs, but... why shouldn't you take Nadyezhda Fyodorovna with you?"

"You queer fellow. How is that possible? One of us must stay, or our creditors will raise an outcry. You see, I owe seven hundred or more to the shops. Only wait, and I will send them the money. I'll stop their mouths, and then she can come away."

"I see.... But why shouldn't you send her on first?"

"My goodness, as though that were possible!" Laevsky was horrified. "Why, she's a woman; what would she do there alone? What does she know about it? That would only be a loss of time and a useless waste of money."

"That's reasonable..." thought Samoylenko, but remembering his conversation with Von Koren, he looked down and said sullenly: "I can't agree with you. Either go with her or send her first; otherwise... otherwise I won't give you the money. Those are my last words..."

He staggered back, lurched backwards against the door, and went into the drawing room, crimson, and overcome with confusion.

"Friday... Friday," thought Laevsky, going back into the drawing room. "Friday..."

He was handed a cup of chocolate; he burnt his lips and tongue with the scalding chocolate and thought: "Friday... Friday..."

For some reason he could not get the word "Friday" out of his head; he could think of nothing but Friday, and the only thing that was clear to him, not in his brain but somewhere in his heart, was that he would not get off on Saturday. Before him stood Nikodim Alexandritch, very neat, with his hair combed over his temples, saying:

"Please take something to eat..."

Marya Konstantinovna showed the visitors Katya's school report and said, drawling:

"It's very, very difficult to do well at school nowadays! So much is expected..."

"Mamma!" groaned Katya, not knowing where to hide her confusion at the praises of the company.

Laevsky, too, looked at the report and praised it. Scripture, Russian language, conduct, fives and fours, danced before his eyes, and all this, mixed with the haunting refrain of "Friday," with the carefully combed locks of Nikodim Alexandritch and the red cheeks of Katya, produced on him a sensation of such immense overwhelming boredom that he almost shrieked with despair and asked himself: "Is it possible, is it possible I shall not get away?"

They put two card tables side by side and sat down to play post. Laevsky sat down too.

"Friday... Friday..." he kept thinking, as he smiled and took a pencil out of his pocket. "Friday..."

He wanted to think over his position, and was afraid to think. It was terrible to him to realise that the doctor had detected him in the deception which he had so long and carefully concealed from himself. Every time he thought of his future he would not let his thoughts have full rein. He would get into the train and set off, and thereby the problem of his life would be solved, and he did not let his thoughts go farther. Like a faraway dim light in the fields, the thought sometimes flickered in his mind that in one of the side-streets of Petersburg, in the remote future, he would have to have recourse to a tiny lie in order to get rid of Nadyezhda Fyodorovna and pay his debts; he would tell a lie only once, and then a completely new life would begin. And that was right: at the price of a small lie he would win so much truth.

Now when by his blunt refusal the doctor had crudely hinted at his deception, he began to understand that he would need deception not only in the remote future, but today, and tomorrow, and in a month's time, and perhaps up to the very end of his life. In fact, in order to get away he would have to lie to Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, to his creditors, and to his superiors in the Service; then, in order to get money in Petersburg, he would have to lie to his mother, to tell her that he had already broken with Nadyezhda Fyodorovna; and his mother would not give him more than five hundred roubles, so he had already deceived the doctor, as he would not be in a position to pay him back the money within a short time. Afterwards, when Nadyezhda Fyodorovna came to Petersburg, he

would have to resort to a regular series of deceptions, little and big, in order to get free of her; and again there would be tears, boredom, a disgusting existence, remorse, and so there would be no new life. Deception and nothing more. A whole mountain of lies rose before Laevsky's imagination. To leap over it at one bound and not to do his lying piecemeal, he would have to bring himself to stern, uncompromising action; for instance, to getting up without saying a word, putting on his hat, and at once setting off without money and without explanation. But Laevsky felt that was impossible for him.

"Friday, Friday..." he thought. "Friday...."

They wrote little notes, folded them in two, and put them in Nikodim Alexandritch's old top-hat. When there were a sufficient heap of notes, Kostya, who acted the part of postman, walked round the table and delivered them. The deacon, Katya, and Kostya, who received amusing notes and tried to write as funnily as they could, were highly delighted.

"We must have a little talk," Nadyezhda Fyodorovna read in a little note; she glanced at Marya Konstantinovna, who gave her an almond-oily smile and nodded.

"Talk of what?" thought Nadyezhda Fyodorovna. "If one can't tell the whole, it's no use talking."

Before going out for the evening she had tied Laevsky's cravat for him, and that simple action filled her soul with tenderness and sorrow. The anxiety in his face, his absentminded looks, his pallor, and the incomprehensible change that had taken place in him of late, and the fact that she had a terrible revolting secret from him, and the fact that her hands trembled when she tied his cravat—all this seemed to tell her that they had not long left to be together. She looked at him as though he were an icon, with terror and penitence, and thought: "Forgive, forgive."

Opposite her was sitting Atchmianov, and he never took his black, lovesick eyes off her. She was stirred by passion; she was ashamed of herself, and afraid that even her misery and sorrow would not prevent her from yielding to impure desire tomorrow, if not today—and that, like a drunkard, she would not have the strength to stop herself.

She made up her mind to go away that she might not continue this life, shameful for herself, and humiliating for Laevsky. She would beseech him with tears to let her go; and if he opposed her, she would go away secretly. She would not tell him what had happened; let him keep a pure memory of her.

"I love you, I love you, I love you," she read. It was from Atchmianov.

She would live in some far remote place, would work and send Laevsky, “anonymously,” money, embroidered shirts, and tobacco, and would return to him only in old age or if he were dangerously ill and needed a nurse. When in his old age he learned what were her reasons for leaving him and refusing to be his wife, he would appreciate her sacrifice and forgive.

“You’ve got a long nose.” That must be from the deacon or Kostya.

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna imagined how, parting from Laevsky, she would embrace him warmly, would kiss his hand, and would swear to love him all her life, all her life, and then, living in obscurity among strangers, she would every day think that somewhere she had a friend, someone she loved—a pure, noble, lofty man who kept a pure memory of her.

“If you don’t give me an interview today, I shall take measures, I assure you on my word of honour. You can’t treat decent people like this; you must understand that.” That was from Kirilin.

XIII

Laevsky received two notes; he opened one and read: "Don't go away, my darling."

"Who could have written that?" he thought. "Not Samoylenko, of course. And not the deacon, for he doesn't know I want to go away. Von Koren, perhaps?"

The zoologist bent over the table and drew a pyramid. Laevsky fancied that his eyes were smiling.

"Most likely Samoylenko... has been gossiping," thought Laevsky.

In the other note, in the same disguised angular handwriting with long tails to the letters, was written: "Somebody won't go away on Saturday."

"A stupid gibe," thought Laevsky. "Friday, Friday..."

Something rose in his throat. He touched his collar and coughed, but instead of a cough a laugh broke from his throat.

"Ha-ha-ha!" he laughed. "Ha-ha-ha! What am I laughing at? Ha-ha-ha!"

He tried to restrain himself, covered his mouth with his hand, but the laugh choked his chest and throat, and his hand could not cover his mouth.

"How stupid it is!" he thought, rolling with laughter. "Have I gone out of my mind?"

The laugh grew shriller and shriller, and became something like the bark of a lapdog. Laevsky tried to get up from the table, but his legs would not obey him and his right hand was strangely, without his volition, dancing on the table, convulsively clutching and crumpling up the bits of paper. He saw looks of wonder, Samoylenko's grave, frightened face, and the eyes of the zoologist full of cold irony and disgust, and realised that he was in hysterics.

"How hideous, how shameful!" he thought, feeling the warmth of tears on his face. "... Oh, oh, what a disgrace! It has never happened to me..."

They took him under his arms, and supporting his head from behind, led him away; a glass gleamed before his eyes and knocked against his teeth, and the water was spilt on his breast; he was in a little room, with two beds in the middle, side by side, covered by two snow-white quilts. He dropped on one of the beds and sobbed.

"It's nothing, it's nothing," Samoylenko kept saying; "it does happen... it does happen..."

Chill with horror, trembling all over and dreading something awful, Nadyezhda Fyodorovna stood by the bedside and kept asking:

"What is it? What is it? For God's sake, tell me."

"Can Kirilin have written him something?" she thought.

"It's nothing," said Laevsky, laughing and crying; "go away, darling."

His face expressed neither hatred nor repulsion: so he knew nothing; Nadyezhda Fyodorovna was somewhat reassured, and she went into the drawing room.

"Don't agitate yourself, my dear!" said Marya Konstantinovna, sitting down beside her and taking her hand. "It will pass. Men are just as weak as we poor sinners. You are both going through a crisis.... One can so well understand it! Well, my dear, I am waiting for an answer. Let us have a little talk."

"No, we are not going to talk," said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, listening to Laevsky's sobs. "I feel depressed.... You must allow me to go home."

"What do you mean, what do you mean, my dear?" cried Marya Konstantinovna in alarm. "Do you think I could let you go without supper? We will have something to eat, and then you may go with my blessing."

"I feel miserable..." whispered Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, and she caught at the arm of the chair with both hands to avoid falling.

"He's got a touch of hysterics," said Von Koren gaily, coming into the drawing room, but seeing Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, he was taken aback and retreated.

When the attack was over, Laevsky sat on the strange bed and thought.

"Disgraceful! I've been howling like some wretched girl! I must have been absurd and disgusting. I will go away by the back stairs.... But that would seem as though I took my hysterics too seriously. I ought to take it as a joke...."

He looked in the looking-glass, sat there for some time, and went back into the drawing room.

"Here I am," he said, smiling; he felt agonisingly ashamed, and he felt others were ashamed in his presence. "Fancy such a thing happening," he

said, sitting down. "I was sitting here, and all of a sudden, do you know, I felt a terrible piercing pain in my side ... unendurable, my nerves could not stand it, and ... and it led to this silly performance. This is the age of nerves; there is no help for it."

At supper he drank some wine, and, from time to time, with an abrupt sigh rubbed his side as though to suggest that he still felt the pain. And no one, except Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, believed him, and he saw that.

After nine o'clock they went for a walk on the boulevard. Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, afraid that Kirilin would speak to her, did her best to keep all the time beside Marya Konstantinovna and the children. She felt weak with fear and misery, and felt she was going to be feverish; she was exhausted and her legs would hardly move, but she did not go home, because she felt sure that she would be followed by Kirilin or Atchmianov or both at once. Kirilin walked behind her with Nikodim Alexandritch, and kept humming in an undertone:

"I don't al-low people to play with me! I don't al-low it."

From the boulevard they went back to the pavilion and walked along the beach, and looked for a long time at the phosphorescence on the water. Von Koren began telling them why it looked phosphorescent.

XIV

"It's time I went to my Vint.... They will be waiting for me," said Laevsky. "Goodbye, my friends."

"I'll come with you; wait a minute," said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, and she took his arm.

They said goodbye to the company and went away. Kirilin took leave too, and saying that he was going the same way, went along beside them.

"What will be, will be," thought Nadyezhda Fyodorovna. "So be it...."

And it seemed to her that all the evil memories in her head had taken shape and were walking beside her in the darkness, breathing heavily, while she, like a fly that had fallen into the inkpot, was crawling painfully along the pavement and smirching Laevsky's side and arm with blackness.

If Kirilin should do anything horrid, she thought, not he but she would be to blame for it. There was a time when no man would have talked to her as Kirilin had done, and she had torn up her security like a thread and destroyed it irrevocably—who was to blame for it? Intoxicated by her passions she had smiled at a complete stranger, probably just because he was tall and a fine figure. After two meetings she was weary of him, had thrown him over, and did not that, she thought now, give him the right to treat her as he chose?

"Here I'll say goodbye to you, darling," said Laevsky. "Ilya Mihalitch will see you home."

He nodded to Kirilin, and, quickly crossing the boulevard, walked along the street to Sheshkovsky's, where there were lights in the windows, and then they heard the gate bang as he went in.

"Allow me to have an explanation with you," said Kirilin. "I'm not a boy, not some Atchkasov or Latchkasov, Zatchkasov.... I demand serious attention."

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna's heart began beating violently. She made no reply.

“The abrupt change in your behaviour to me I put down at first to coquetry,” Kirilin went on; “now I see that you don’t know how to behave with gentlemanly people. You simply wanted to play with me, as you are playing with that wretched Armenian boy; but I’m a gentleman and I insist on being treated like a gentleman. And so I am at your service....”

“I’m miserable,” said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna beginning to cry, and to hide her tears she turned away.

“I’m miserable too,” said Kirilin, “but what of that?”

Kirilin was silent for a space, then he said distinctly and emphatically:

“I repeat, madam, that if you do not give me an interview this evening, I’ll make a scandal this very evening.”

“Let me off this evening,” said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, and she did not recognise her own voice, it was so weak and pitiful.

“I must give you a lesson.... Excuse me for the roughness of my tone, but it’s necessary to give you a lesson. Yes, I regret to say I must give you a lesson. I insist on two interviews—today and tomorrow. After tomorrow you are perfectly free and can go wherever you like with anyone you choose. Today and tomorrow.”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna went up to her gate and stopped.

“Let me go,” she murmured, trembling all over and seeing nothing before her in the darkness but his white tunic. “You’re right: I’m a horrible woman.... I’m to blame, but let me go... I beg you.” She touched his cold hand and shuddered. “I beseech you....”

“Alas!” sighed Kirilin, “alas! it’s not part of my plan to let you go; I only mean to give you a lesson and make you realise. And what’s more, madam, I’ve too little faith in women.”

“I’m miserable....”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna listened to the even splash of the sea, looked at the sky studded with stars, and longed to make haste and end it all, and get away from the cursed sensation of life, with its sea, stars, men, fever.

“Only not in my home,” she said coldly. “Take me somewhere else.”

“Come to Muridov’s. That’s better.”

“Where’s that?”

“Near the old wall.”

She walked quickly along the street and then turned into the side-street that led towards the mountains. It was dark. There were pale streaks of light here and there on the pavement, from the lighted windows, and it seemed to her that, like a fly, she kept falling into the ink and crawling

out into the light again. At one point he stumbled, almost fell down and burst out laughing.

“He’s drunk,” thought Nadyezhda Fyodorovna. “Never mind.... Never mind.... So be it.”

Atchmianov, too, soon took leave of the party and followed Nadyezhda Fyodorovna to ask her to go for a row. He went to her house and looked over the fence: the windows were wide open, there were no lights.

“Nadyezhda Fyodorovna!” he called.

A moment passed, he called again.

“Who’s there?” he heard Olga’s voice.

“Is Nadyezhda Fyodorovna at home?”

“No, she has not come in yet.”

“Strange... very strange,” thought Atchmianov, feeling very uneasy. “She went home....”

He walked along the boulevard, then along the street, and glanced in at the windows of Sheshkovsky’s. Laevsky was sitting at the table without his coat on, looking attentively at his cards.

“Strange, strange,” muttered Atchmianov, and remembering Laevsky’s hysterics, he felt ashamed. “If she is not at home, where is she?”

He went to Nadyezhda Fyodorovna’s lodgings again, and looked at the dark windows.

“It’s a cheat, a cheat...” he thought, remembering that, meeting him at midday at Marya Konstantinovna’s, she had promised to go in a boat with him that evening.

The windows of the house where Kirilin lived were dark, and there was a policeman sitting asleep on a little bench at the gate. Everything was clear to Atchmianov when he looked at the windows and the policeman. He made up his mind to go home, and set off in that direction, but somehow found himself near Nadyezhda Fyodorovna’s lodgings again. He sat down on the bench near the gate and took off his hat, feeling that his head was burning with jealousy and resentment.

The clock in the town church only struck twice in the twenty-four hours—at midday and midnight. Soon after it struck midnight he heard hurried footsteps.

“Tomorrow evening, then, again at Muridov’s,” Atchmianov heard, and he recognised Kirilin’s voice. “At eight o’clock; goodbye!”

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna made her appearance near the garden. Without noticing that Atchmianov was sitting on the bench, she passed beside him like a shadow, opened the gate, and leaving it open, went into

the house. In her own room she lighted the candle and quickly undressed, but instead of getting into bed, she sank on her knees before a chair, flung her arms round it, and rested her head on it.

It was past two when Laevsky came home.

XV

Having made up his mind to lie, not all at once but piecemeal, Laevsky went soon after one o'clock next day to Samoylenko to ask for the money that he might be sure to get off on Saturday. After his hysterical attack, which had added an acute feeling of shame to his depressed state of mind, it was unthinkable to remain in the town. If Samoylenko should insist on his conditions, he thought it would be possible to agree to them and take the money, and next day, just as he was starting, to say that Nadyezhda Fyodorovna refused to go. He would be able to persuade her that evening that the whole arrangement would be for her benefit. If Samoylenko, who was obviously under the influence of Von Koren, should refuse the money altogether or make fresh conditions, then he, Laevsky, would go off that very evening in a cargo vessel, or even in a sailing-boat, to Novy Athon or Novorossiisk, would send from there an humiliating telegram, and would stay there till his mother sent him the money for the journey.

When he went into Samoylenko's, he found Von Koren in the drawing room. The zoologist had just arrived for dinner, and, as usual, was turning over the album and scrutinising the gentlemen in top-hats and the ladies in caps.

"How very unlucky!" thought Laevsky, seeing him. "He may be in the way. Good morning."

"Good morning," answered Von Koren, without looking at him.

"Is Alexandr Daviditch at home?"

"Yes, in the kitchen."

Laevsky went into the kitchen, but seeing from the door that Samoylenko was busy over the salad, he went back into the drawing room and sat down. He always had a feeling of awkwardness in the zoologist's presence, and now he was afraid there would be talk about his attack of hysterics. There was more than a minute of silence. Von Koren suddenly raised his eyes to Laevsky and asked:

"How do you feel after yesterday?"

“Very well indeed,” said Laevsky, flushing. “It really was nothing much...”

“Until yesterday I thought it was only ladies who had hysterics, and so at first I thought you had St. Vitus’s dance.”

Laevsky smiled ingratiatingly, and thought:

“How indelicate on his part! He knows quite well how unpleasant it is for me...”

“Yes, it was a ridiculous performance,” he said, still smiling. “I’ve been laughing over it the whole morning. What’s so curious in an attack of hysterics is that you know it is absurd, and are laughing at it in your heart, and at the same time you sob. In our neurotic age we are the slaves of our nerves; they are our masters and do as they like with us. Civilisation has done us a bad turn in that way...”

As Laevsky talked, he felt it disagreeable that Von Koren listened to him gravely, and looked at him steadily and attentively as though studying him; and he was vexed with himself that in spite of his dislike of Von Koren, he could not banish the ingratiating smile from his face.

“I must admit, though,” he added, “that there were immediate causes for the attack, and quite sufficient ones too. My health has been terribly shaky of late. To which one must add boredom, constantly being hard up... the absence of people and general interests.... My position is worse than a governor’s.”

“Yes, your position is a hopeless one,” answered Von Koren.

These calm, cold words, implying something between a jeer and an uninvited prediction, offended Laevsky. He recalled the zoologist’s eyes the evening before, full of mockery and disgust. He was silent for a space and then asked, no longer smiling:

“How do you know anything of my position?”

“You were only just speaking of it yourself. Besides, your friends take such a warm interest in you, that I am hearing about you all day long.”

“What friends? Samoylenko, I suppose?”

“Yes, he too.”

“I would ask Alexandr Daviditch and my friends in general not to trouble so much about me.”

“Here is Samoylenko; you had better ask him not to trouble so much about you.”

“I don’t understand your tone,” Laevsky muttered, suddenly feeling as though he had only just realised that the zoologist hated and despised him, and was jeering at him, and was his bitterest and most inveterate enemy.

“Keep that tone for someone else,” he said softly, unable to speak aloud for the hatred with which his chest and throat were choking, as they had been the night before with laughter.

Samoylenko came in in his shirtsleeves, crimson and perspiring from the stifling kitchen.

“Ah, you here?” he said. “Good morning, my dear boy. Have you had dinner? Don’t stand on ceremony. Have you had dinner?”

“Alexandr Daviditch,” said Laevsky, standing up, “though I did appeal to you to help me in a private matter, it did not follow that I released you from the obligation of discretion and respect for other people’s private affairs.”

“What’s this?” asked Samoylenko, in astonishment.

“If you have no money,” Laevsky went on, raising his voice and shifting from one foot to the other in his excitement, “don’t give it; refuse it. But why spread abroad in every back street that my position is hopeless, and all the rest of it? I can’t endure such benevolence and friend’s assistance where there’s a shilling-worth of talk for a ha’p’orth of help! You can boast of your benevolence as much as you please, but no one has given you the right to gossip about my private affairs!”

“What private affairs?” asked Samoylenko, puzzled and beginning to be angry. “If you’ve come here to be abusive, you had better clear out. You can come again afterwards!”

He remembered the rule that when one is angry with one’s neighbour, one must begin to count a hundred, and one will grow calm again; and he began rapidly counting.

“I beg you not to trouble yourself about me,” Laevsky went on. “Don’t pay any attention to me, and whose business is it what I do and how I live? Yes, I want to go away. Yes, I get into debt, I drink, I am living with another man’s wife, I’m hysterical, I’m ordinary. I am not so profound as some people, but whose business is that? Respect other people’s privacy.”

“Excuse me, brother,” said Samoylenko, who had counted up to thirty-five, “but...”

“Respect other people’s individuality!” interrupted Laevsky. “This continual gossip about other people’s affairs, this sighing and groaning and everlasting prying, this eavesdropping, this friendly sympathy... damn it all! They lend me money and make conditions as though I were a schoolboy! I am treated as the devil knows what! I don’t want anything,” shouted Laevsky, staggering with excitement and afraid that it might end in another attack of hysterics. “I shan’t get away on Saturday,

then,” flashed through his mind. “I want nothing. All I ask of you is to spare me your protecting care. I’m not a boy, and I’m not mad, and I beg you to leave off looking after me.”

The deacon came in, and seeing Laevsky pale and gesticulating, addressing his strange speech to the portrait of Prince Vorontsov, stood still by the door as though petrified.

“This continual prying into my soul,” Laevsky went on, “is insulting to my human dignity, and I beg these volunteer detectives to give up their spying! Enough!”

“What’s that... what did you say?” said Samoylenko, who had counted up to a hundred. He turned crimson and went up to Laevsky.

“It’s enough,” said Laevsky, breathing hard and snatching up his cap.

“I’m a Russian doctor, a nobleman by birth, and a civil councillor,” said Samoylenko emphatically. “I’ve never been a spy, and I allow no one to insult me!” he shouted in a breaking voice, emphasising the last word. “Hold your tongue!”

The deacon, who had never seen the doctor so majestic, so swelling with dignity, so crimson and so ferocious, shut his mouth, ran out into the entry and there exploded with laughter.

As though through a fog, Laevsky saw Von Koren get up and, putting his hands in his trouser-pockets, stand still in an attitude of expectancy, as though waiting to see what would happen. This calm attitude struck Laevsky as insolent and insulting to the last degree.

“Kindly take back your words,” shouted Samoylenko.

Laevsky, who did not by now remember what his words were, answered:

“Leave me alone! I ask for nothing. All I ask is that you and German upstarts of Jewish origin should let me alone! Or I shall take steps to make you! I will fight you!”

“Now we understand,” said Von Koren, coming from behind the table. “Mr. Laevsky wants to amuse himself with a duel before he goes away. I can give him that pleasure. Mr. Laevsky, I accept your challenge.”

“A challenge,” said Laevsky, in a low voice, going up to the zoologist and looking with hatred at his swarthy brow and curly hair. “A challenge? By all means! I hate you! I hate you!”

“Delighted. Tomorrow morning early near Kerbalay’s. I leave all details to your taste. And now, clear out!”

“I hate you,” Laevsky said softly, breathing hard. “I have hated you a long while! A duel! Yes!”

“Get rid of him, Alexandr Daviditch, or else I’m going,” said Von Koren. “He’ll bite me.”

Von Koren’s cool tone calmed the doctor; he seemed suddenly to come to himself, to recover his reason; he put both arms round Laevsky’s waist, and, leading him away from the zoologist, muttered in a friendly voice that shook with emotion:

“My friends... dear, good... you’ve lost your tempers and that’s enough... and that’s enough, my friends.”

Hearing his soft, friendly voice, Laevsky felt that something unheard of, monstrous, had just happened to him, as though he had been nearly run over by a train; he almost burst into tears, waved his hand, and ran out of the room.

“To feel that one is hated, to expose oneself before the man who hates one, in the most pitiful, contemptible, helpless state. My God, how hard it is!” he thought a little while afterwards as he sat in the pavilion, feeling as though his body were scarred by the hatred of which he had just been the object.

“How coarse it is, my God!”

Cold water with brandy in it revived him. He vividly pictured Von Koren’s calm, haughty face; his eyes the day before, his shirt like a rug, his voice, his white hand; and heavy, passionate, hungry hatred rankled in his breast and clamoured for satisfaction. In his thoughts he felled Von Koren to the ground, and trampled him underfoot. He remembered to the minutest detail all that had happened, and wondered how he could have smiled ingratiatingly to that insignificant man, and how he could care for the opinion of wretched petty people whom nobody knew, living in a miserable little town which was not, it seemed, even on the map, and of which not one decent person in Petersburg had heard. If this wretched little town suddenly fell into ruins or caught fire, the telegram with the news would be read in Russia with no more interest than an advertisement of the sale of secondhand furniture. Whether he killed Von Koren next day or left him alive, it would be just the same, equally useless and uninteresting. Better to shoot him in the leg or hand, wound him, then laugh at him, and let him, like an insect with a broken leg lost in the grass—let him be lost with his obscure sufferings in the crowd of insignificant people like himself.

Laevsky went to Sheshkovsky, told him all about it, and asked him to be his second; then they both went to the superintendent of the postal telegraph department, and asked him, too, to be a second, and stayed to dinner with him. At dinner there was a great deal of joking and laughing.

Laevsky made jests at his own expense, saying he hardly knew how to fire off a pistol, calling himself a royal archer and William Tell.

“We must give this gentleman a lesson...” he said.

After dinner they sat down to cards. Laevsky played, drank wine, and thought that duelling was stupid and senseless, as it did not decide the question but only complicated it, but that it was sometimes impossible to get on without it. In the given case, for instance, one could not, of course, bring an action against Von Koren. And this duel was so far good in that it made it impossible for Laevsky to remain in the town afterwards. He got a little drunk and interested in the game, and felt at ease.

But when the sun had set and it grew dark, he was possessed by a feeling of uneasiness. It was not fear at the thought of death, because while he was dining and playing cards, he had for some reason a confident belief that the duel would end in nothing; it was dread at the thought of something unknown which was to happen next morning for the first time in his life, and dread of the coming night. ... He knew that the night would be long and sleepless, and that he would have to think not only of Von Koren and his hatred, but also of the mountain of lies which he had to get through, and which he had not strength or ability to dispense with. It was as though he had been taken suddenly ill; all at once he lost all interest in the cards and in people, grew restless, and began asking them to let him go home. He was eager to get into bed, to lie without moving, and to prepare his thoughts for the night. Sheshkovsky and the postal superintendent saw him home and went on to Von Koren's to arrange about the duel.

Near his lodgings Laevsky met Atchmianov. The young man was breathless and excited.

“I am looking for you, Ivan Andreitch,” he said. “I beg you to come quickly...”

“Where?”

“Someone wants to see you, someone you don't know, about very important business; he earnestly begs you to come for a minute. He wants to speak to you of something.... For him it's a question of life and death....” In his excitement Atchmianov spoke in a strong Armenian accent.

“Who is it?” asked Laevsky.

“He asked me not to tell you his name.”

“Tell him I'm busy; tomorrow, if he likes....”

“How can you!” Atchmianov was aghast. “He wants to tell you something very important for you ... very important! If you don’t come, something dreadful will happen.”

“Strange...” muttered Laevsky, unable to understand why Atchmianov was so excited and what mysteries there could be in this dull, useless little town.

“Strange,” he repeated in hesitation. “Come along, though; I don’t care.”

Atchmianov walked rapidly on ahead and Laevsky followed him. They walked down a street, then turned into an alley.

“What a bore this is!” said Laevsky.

“One minute, one minute ... it’s near.”

Near the old rampart they went down a narrow alley between two empty enclosures, then they came into a sort of large yard and went towards a small house.

“That’s Muridov’s, isn’t it?” asked Laevsky.

“Yes.”

“But why we’ve come by the back yards I don’t understand. We might have come by the street; it’s nearer....”

“Never mind, never mind....”

It struck Laevsky as strange, too, that Atchmianov led him to a back entrance, and motioned to him as though bidding him go quietly and hold his tongue.

“This way, this way...” said Atchmianov, cautiously opening the door and going into the passage on tiptoe. “Quietly, quietly, I beg you ... they may hear.”

He listened, drew a deep breath and said in a whisper:

“Open that door, and go in ... don’t be afraid.”

Laevsky, puzzled, opened the door and went into a room with a low ceiling and curtained windows.

There was a candle on the table.

“What do you want?” asked someone in the next room. “Is it you, Muridov?”

Laevsky turned into that room and saw Kirilin, and beside him Nadyezhda Fyodorovna.

He didn’t hear what was said to him; he staggered back, and did not know how he found himself in the street. His hatred for Von Koren and his uneasiness—all had vanished from his soul. As he went home he waved his right arm awkwardly and looked carefully at the ground under his feet, trying to step where it was smooth. At home in his study he

walked backwards and forwards, rubbing his hands, and awkwardly shrugging his shoulders and neck, as though his jacket and shirt were too tight; then he lighted a candle and sat down to the table....

XVI

“The ‘humane studies’ of which you speak will only satisfy human thought when, as they advance, they meet the exact sciences and progress side by side with them. Whether they will meet under a new microscope, or in the monologues of a new Hamlet, or in a new religion, I do not know, but I expect the earth will be covered with a crust of ice before it comes to pass. Of all humane learning the most durable and living is, of course, the teaching of Christ; but look how differently even that is interpreted! Some teach that we must love all our neighbours but make an exception of soldiers, criminals, and lunatics. They allow the first to be killed in war, the second to be isolated or executed, and the third they forbid to marry. Other interpreters teach that we must love all our neighbours without exception, with no distinction of *plus* or *minus*. According to their teaching, if a consumptive or a murderer or an epileptic asks your daughter in marriage, you must let him have her. If cretins go to war against the physically and mentally healthy, don’t defend yourselves. This advocacy of love for love’s sake, like art for art’s sake, if it could have power, would bring mankind in the long run to complete extinction, and so would become the vastest crime that has ever been committed upon earth. There are very many interpretations, and since there are many of them, serious thought is not satisfied by any one of them, and hastens to add its own individual interpretation to the mass. For that reason you should never put a question on a philosophical or so-called Christian basis; by so doing you only remove the question further from solution.”

The deacon listened to the zoologist attentively, thought a little, and asked:

“Have the philosophers invented the moral law which is innate in every man, or did God create it together with the body?”

“I don’t know. But that law is so universal among all peoples and all ages that I fancy we ought to recognise it as organically connected with man. It is not invented, but exists and will exist. I don’t tell you that one

day it will be seen under the microscope, but its organic connection is shown, indeed, by evidence: serious affections of the brain and all so-called mental diseases, to the best of my belief, show themselves first of all in the perversion of the moral law.”

“Good. So then, just as our stomach bids us eat, our moral sense bids us love our neighbours. Is that it? But our natural man through self-love opposes the voice of conscience and reason, and this gives rise to many brain-racking questions. To whom ought we to turn for the solution of those questions if you forbid us to put them on the philosophic basis?”

“Turn to what little exact science we have. Trust to evidence and the logic of facts. It is true it is but little, but, on the other hand, it is less fluid and shifting than philosophy. The moral law, let us suppose, demands that you love your neighbour. Well? Love ought to show itself in the removal of everything which in one way or another is injurious to men and threatens them with danger in the present or in the future. Our knowledge and the evidence tells us that the morally and physically abnormal are a menace to humanity. If so you must struggle against the abnormal; if you are not able to raise them to the normal standard you must have strength and ability to render them harmless—that is, to destroy them.”

“So love consists in the strong overcoming the weak.”

“Undoubtedly.”

“But you know the strong crucified our Lord Jesus Christ,” said the deacon hotly.

“The fact is that those who crucified Him were not the strong but the weak. Human culture weakens and strives to nullify the struggle for existence and natural selection; hence the rapid advancement of the weak and their predominance over the strong. Imagine that you succeeded in instilling into bees humanitarian ideas in their crude and elementary form. What would come of it? The drones who ought to be killed would remain alive, would devour the honey, would corrupt and stifle the bees, resulting in the predominance of the weak over the strong and the degeneration of the latter. The same process is taking place now with humanity; the weak are oppressing the strong. Among savages untouched by civilisation the strongest, cleverest, and most moral takes the lead; he is the chief and the master. But we civilised men have crucified Christ, and we go on crucifying Him, so there is something lacking in us.... And that something one ought to raise up in ourselves, or there will be no end to these errors.”

“But what criterion have you to distinguish the strong from the weak?”

“Knowledge and evidence. The tuberculous and the scrofulous are recognised by their diseases, and the insane and the immoral by their actions.”

“But mistakes may be made!”

“Yes, but it’s no use to be afraid of getting your feet wet when you are threatened with the deluge!”

“That’s philosophy,” laughed the deacon.

“Not a bit of it. You are so corrupted by your seminary philosophy that you want to see nothing but fog in everything. The abstract studies with which your youthful head is stuffed are called abstract just because they abstract your minds from what is obvious. Look the devil straight in the eye, and if he’s the devil, tell him he’s the devil, and don’t go calling to Kant or Hegel for explanations.”

The zoologist paused and went on:

“Twice two’s four, and a stone’s a stone. Here tomorrow we have a duel. You and I will say it’s stupid and absurd, that the duel is out of date, that there is no real difference between the aristocratic duel and the drunken brawl in the pothouse, and yet we shall not stop, we shall go there and fight. So there is some force stronger than our reasoning. We shout that war is plunder, robbery, atrocity, fratricide; we cannot look upon blood without fainting; but the French or the Germans have only to insult us for us to feel at once an exaltation of spirit; in the most genuine way we shout ‘Hurrah!’ and rush to attack the foe. You will invoke the blessing of God on our weapons, and our valour will arouse universal and general enthusiasm. Again it follows that there is a force, if not higher, at any rate stronger, than us and our philosophy. We can no more stop it than that cloud which is moving upwards over the sea. Don’t be hypocritical, don’t make a long nose at it on the sly; and don’t say, ‘Ah, old-fashioned, stupid! Ah, it’s inconsistent with Scripture!’ but look it straight in the face, recognise its rational lawfulness, and when, for instance, it wants to destroy a rotten, scrofulous, corrupt race, don’t hinder it with your pilules and misunderstood quotations from the Gospel. Leskov has a story of a conscientious Danila who found a leper outside the town, and fed and warmed him in the name of love and of Christ. If that Danila had really loved humanity, he would have dragged the leper as far as possible from the town, and would have flung him in a pit, and would have gone to save the healthy. Christ, I hope, taught us a rational, intelligent, practical love.”

“What a fellow you are!” laughed the deacon. “You don’t believe in Christ. Why do you mention His name so often?”

“Yes, I do believe in Him. Only, of course, in my own way, not in yours. Oh, deacon, deacon!” laughed the zoologist; he put his arm round the deacon’s waist, and said gaily: “Well? Are you coming with us to the duel tomorrow?”

“My orders don’t allow it, or else I should come.”

“What do you mean by ‘orders’?”

“I have been consecrated. I am in a state of grace.”

“Oh, deacon, deacon,” repeated Von Koren, laughing, “I love talking to you.”

“You say you have faith,” said the deacon. “What sort of faith is it? Why, I have an uncle, a priest, and he believes so that when in time of drought he goes out into the fields to pray for rain, he takes his umbrella and leather overcoat for fear of getting wet through on his way home. That’s faith! When he speaks of Christ, his face is full of radiance, and all the peasants, men and women, weep floods of tears. He would stop that cloud and put all those forces you talk about to flight. Yes... faith moves mountains.”

The deacon laughed and slapped the zoologist on the shoulder.

“Yes...” he went on; “here you are teaching all the time, fathoming the depths of the ocean, dividing the weak and the strong, writing books and challenging to duels—and everything remains as it is; but, behold! some feeble old man will mutter just one word with a holy spirit, or a new Muhammad, with a sword, will gallop from Arabia, and everything will be topsy-turvy, and in Europe not one stone will be left standing upon another.”

“Well, deacon, that’s on the knees of the gods.”

“Faith without works is dead, but works without faith are worse still—mere waste of time and nothing more.”

The doctor came into sight on the seafront. He saw the deacon and the zoologist, and went up to them.

“I believe everything is ready,” he said, breathing hard. “Govorovsky and Boyko will be the seconds. They will start at five o’clock in the morning. How it has clouded over,” he said, looking at the sky. “One can see nothing; there will be rain directly.”

“I hope you are coming with us?” said the zoologist.

“No, God preserve me; I’m worried enough as it is. Ustimovitch is going instead of me. I’ve spoken to him already.”

Far over the sea was a flash of lightning, followed by a hollow roll of thunder.

“How stifling it is before a storm!” said Von Koren. “I bet you’ve been to Laevsky already and have been weeping on his bosom.”

“Why should I go to him?” answered the doctor in confusion. “What next?”

Before sunset he had walked several times along the boulevard and the street in the hope of meeting Laevsky. He was ashamed of his hastiness and the sudden outburst of friendliness which had followed it. He wanted to apologise to Laevsky in a joking tone, to give him a good talking to, to soothe him and to tell him that the duel was a survival of medieval barbarism, but that Providence itself had brought them to the duel as a means of reconciliation; that the next day, both being splendid and highly intelligent people, they would, after exchanging shots, appreciate each other’s noble qualities and would become friends. But he could not come across Laevsky.

“What should I go and see him for?” repeated Samoylenko. “I did not insult him; he insulted me. Tell me, please, why he attacked me. What harm had I done him? I go into the drawing room, and, all of a sudden, without the least provocation: ‘Spy!’ There’s a nice thing! Tell me, how did it begin? What did you say to him?”

“I told him his position was hopeless. And I was right. It is only honest men or scoundrels who can find an escape from any position, but one who wants to be at the same time an honest man and a scoundrel—it is a hopeless position. But it’s eleven o’clock, gentlemen, and we have to be up early tomorrow.”

There was a sudden gust of wind; it blew up the dust on the seafront, whirled it round in eddies, with a howl that drowned the roar of the sea.

“A squall,” said the deacon. “We must go in, our eyes are getting full of dust.”

As they went, Samoylenko sighed and, holding his hat, said:

“I suppose I shan’t sleep tonight.”

“Don’t you agitate yourself,” laughed the zoologist. “You can set your mind at rest; the duel will end in nothing. Laevsky will magnanimously fire into the air—he can do nothing else; and I daresay I shall not fire at all. To be arrested and lose my time on Laevsky’s account—the game’s not worth the candle. By the way, what is the punishment for duelling?”

“Arrest, and in the case of the death of your opponent a maximum of three years’ imprisonment in the fortress.”

“The fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul?”

“No, in a military fortress, I believe.”

“Though this fine gentleman ought to have a lesson!”

Behind them on the sea, there was a flash of lightning, which for an instant lighted up the roofs of the houses and the mountains. The friends parted near the boulevard. When the doctor disappeared in the darkness and his steps had died away, Von Koren shouted to him:

“I only hope the weather won’t interfere with us tomorrow!”

“Very likely it will! Please God it may!”

“Good night!”

“What about the night? What do you say?”

In the roar of the wind and the sea and the crashes of thunder, it was difficult to hear.

“It’s nothing,” shouted the zoologist, and hurried home.

XVII

“Upon my mind, weighed down with woe,
Crowd thoughts, a heavy multitude:
In silence memory unfolds
Her long, long scroll before my eyes.
Loathing and shuddering I curse
And bitterly lament in vain,
And bitter though the tears I weep
I do not wash those lines away.”

Pushkin.

Whether they killed him next morning, or mocked at him—that is, left him his life—he was ruined, anyway. Whether this disgraced woman killed herself in her shame and despair, or dragged on her pitiful existence, she was ruined anyway.

So thought Laevsky as he sat at the table late in the evening, still rubbing his hands. The windows suddenly blew open with a bang; a violent gust of wind burst into the room, and the papers fluttered from the table. Laevsky closed the windows and bent down to pick up the papers. He was aware of something new in his body, a sort of awkwardness he had not felt before, and his movements were strange to him. He moved timidly, jerking with his elbows and shrugging his shoulders; and when he sat down to the table again, he again began rubbing his hands. His body had lost its suppleness.

On the eve of death one ought to write to one's nearest relation. Laevsky thought of this. He took a pen and wrote with a tremulous hand: “Mother!”

He wanted to write to beg his mother, for the sake of the merciful God in whom she believed, that she would give shelter and bring a little warmth and kindness into the life of the unhappy woman who, by his doing, had been disgraced and was in solitude, poverty, and weakness,

that she would forgive and forget everything, everything, everything, and by her sacrifice atone to some extent for her son's terrible sin. But he remembered how his mother, a stout, heavily-built old woman in a lace cap, used to go out into the garden in the morning, followed by her companion with the lapdog; how she used to shout in a peremptory way to the gardener and the servants, and how proud and haughty her face was—he remembered all this and scratched out the word he had written.

There was a vivid flash of lightning at all three windows, and it was followed by a prolonged, deafening roll of thunder, beginning with a hollow rumble and ending with a crash so violent that all the windowpanes rattled. Laevsky got up, went to the window, and pressed his forehead against the pane. There was a fierce, magnificent storm. On the horizon lightning-flashes were flung in white streams from the storm-clouds into the sea, lighting up the high, dark waves over the faraway expanse. And to right and to left, and, no doubt, over the house too, the lightning flashed.

“The storm!” whispered Laevsky; he had a longing to pray to someone or to something, if only to the lightning or the storm-clouds. “Dear storm!”

He remembered how as a boy he used to run out into the garden without a hat on when there was a storm, and how two fair-haired girls with blue eyes used to run after him, and how they got wet through with the rain; they laughed with delight, but when there was a loud peal of thunder, the girls used to nestle up to the boy confidingly, while he crossed himself and made haste to repeat: “Holy, holy, holy....” Oh, where had they vanished to! In what sea were they drowned, those dawning days of pure, fair life? He had no fear of the storm, no love of nature now; he had no God. All the confiding girls he had ever known had by now been ruined by him and those like him. All his life he had not planted one tree in his own garden, nor grown one blade of grass; and living among the living, he had not saved one fly; he had done nothing but destroy and ruin, and lie, lie....

“What in my past was not vice?” he asked himself, trying to clutch at some bright memory as a man falling down a precipice clutches at the bushes.

School? The university? But that was a sham. He had neglected his work and forgotten what he had learnt. The service of his country? That, too, was a sham, for he did nothing in the Service, took a salary for doing nothing, and it was an abominable swindling of the State for which one was not punished.

He had no craving for truth, and had not sought it; spellbound by vice and lying, his conscience had slept or been silent. Like a stranger, like an alien from another planet, he had taken no part in the common life of men, had been indifferent to their sufferings, their ideas, their religion, their sciences, their strivings, and their struggles. He had not said one good word, not written one line that was not useless and vulgar; he had not done his fellows one ha'p'orth of service, but had eaten their bread, drunk their wine, seduced their wives, lived on their thoughts, and to justify his contemptible, parasitic life in their eyes and in his own, he had always tried to assume an air of being higher and better than they. Lies, lies, lies....

He vividly remembered what he had seen that evening at Muridov's, and he was in an insufferable anguish of loathing and misery. Kirilin and Atchmianov were loathsome, but they were only continuing what he had begun; they were his accomplices and his disciples. This young weak woman had trusted him more than a brother, and he had deprived her of her husband, of her friends and of her country, and had brought her here—to the heat, to fever, and to boredom; and from day to day she was bound to reflect, like a mirror, his idleness, his viciousness and falsity—and that was all she had had to fill her weak, listless, pitiable life. Then he had grown sick of her, had begun to hate her, but had not had the pluck to abandon her, and he had tried to entangle her more and more closely in a web of lies.... These men had done the rest.

Laevsky sat at the table, then got up and went to the window; at one minute he put out the candle and then he lighted it again. He cursed himself aloud, wept and wailed, and asked forgiveness; several times he ran to the table in despair, and wrote:

“Mother!”

Except his mother, he had no relations or near friends; but how could his mother help him? And where was she? He had an impulse to run to Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, to fall at her feet, to kiss her hands and feet, to beg her forgiveness; but she was his victim, and he was afraid of her as though she were dead.

“My life is ruined,” he repeated, rubbing his hands. “Why am I still alive, my God! ...”

He had cast out of heaven his dim star; it had fallen, and its track was lost in the darkness of night. It would never return to the sky again, because life was given only once and never came a second time. If he could have turned back the days and years of the past, he would have replaced the falsity with truth, the idleness with work, the boredom with

happiness; he would have given back purity to those whom he had robbed of it. He would have found God and goodness, but that was as impossible as to put back the fallen star into the sky, and because it was impossible he was in despair.

When the storm was over, he sat by the open window and thought calmly of what was before him. Von Koren would most likely kill him. The man's clear, cold theory of life justified the destruction of the rotten and the useless; if it changed at the crucial moment, it would be the hatred and the repugnance that Laevsky inspired in him that would save him. If he missed his aim or, in mockery of his hated opponent, only wounded him, or fired in the air, what could he do then? Where could he go?

"Go to Petersburg?" Laevsky asked himself. But that would mean beginning over again the old life which he cursed. And the man who seeks salvation in change of place like a migrating bird would find nothing anywhere, for all the world is alike to him. Seek salvation in men? In whom and how? Samoylenko's kindness and generosity could no more save him than the deacon's laughter or Von Koren's hatred. He must look for salvation in himself alone, and if there were no finding it, why waste time? He must kill himself, that was all. . . .

He heard the sound of a carriage. It was getting light. The carriage passed by, turned, and crunching on the wet sand, stopped near the house. There were two men in the carriage.

"Wait a minute; I'm coming directly," Laevsky said to them out of the window. "I'm not asleep. Surely it's not time yet?"

"Yes, it's four o'clock. By the time we get there. . . ."

Laevsky put on his overcoat and cap, put some cigarettes in his pocket, and stood still hesitating. He felt as though there was something else he must do. In the street the seconds talked in low voices and the horses snorted, and this sound in the damp, early morning, when everybody was asleep and light was hardly dawning in the sky, filled Laevsky's soul with a disconsolate feeling which was like a presentiment of evil. He stood for a little, hesitating, and went into the bedroom.

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna was lying stretched out on the bed, wrapped from head to foot in a rug. She did not stir, and her whole appearance, especially her head, suggested an Egyptian mummy. Looking at her in silence, Laevsky mentally asked her forgiveness, and thought that if the heavens were not empty and there really were a God, then He would save her; if there were no God, then she had better perish—there was nothing for her to live for.

All at once she jumped up, and sat up in bed. Lifting her pale face and looking with horror at Laevsky, she asked:

“Is it you? Is the storm over?”

“Yes.”

She remembered; put both hands to her head and shuddered all over.

“How miserable I am!” she said. “If only you knew how miserable I am! I expected,” she went on, half closing her eyes, “that you would kill me or turn me out of the house into the rain and storm, but you delay... delay...”

Warmly and impulsively he put his arms round her and covered her knees and hands with kisses. Then when she muttered something and shuddered with the thought of the past, he stroked her hair, and looking into her face, realised that this unhappy, sinful woman was the one creature near and dear to him, whom no one could replace.

When he went out of the house and got into the carriage he wanted to return home alive.

XVIII

The deacon got up, dressed, took his thick, gnarled stick and slipped quietly out of the house. It was dark, and for the first minute when he went into the street, he could not even see his white stick. There was not a single star in the sky, and it looked as though there would be rain again. There was a smell of wet sand and sea.

“It’s to be hoped that the mountaineers won’t attack us,” thought the deacon, hearing the tap of the stick on the pavement, and noticing how loud and lonely the taps sounded in the stillness of the night.

When he got out of town, he began to see both the road and his stick. Here and there in the black sky there were dark cloudy patches, and soon a star peeped out and timidly blinked its one eye. The deacon walked along the high rocky coast and did not see the sea; it was slumbering below, and its unseen waves broke languidly and heavily on the shore, as though sighing “Ouf!” and how slowly! One wave broke—the deacon had time to count eight steps; then another broke, and six steps; later a third. As before, nothing could be seen, and in the darkness one could hear the languid, drowsy drone of the sea. One could hear the infinitely faraway, inconceivable time when God moved above chaos.

The deacon felt uncanny. He hoped God would not punish him for keeping company with infidels, and even going to look at their duels. The duel would be nonsensical, bloodless, absurd, but however that might be, it was a heathen spectacle, and it was altogether unseemly for an ecclesiastical person to be present at it. He stopped and wondered—should he go back? But an intense, restless curiosity triumphed over his doubts, and he went on.

“Though they are infidels they are good people, and will be saved,” he assured himself. “They are sure to be saved,” he said aloud, lighting a cigarette.

By what standard must one measure men’s qualities, to judge rightly of them? The deacon remembered his enemy, the inspector of the clerical school, who believed in God, lived in chastity, and did not fight duels;

but he used to feed the deacon on bread with sand in it, and on one occasion almost pulled off the deacon's ear. If human life was so artlessly constructed that everyone respected this cruel and dishonest inspector who stole the government flour, and his health and salvation were prayed for in the schools, was it just to shun such men as Von Koren and Laevsky, simply because they were unbelievers? The deacon was weighing this question, but he recalled how absurd Samoylenko had looked yesterday, and that broke the thread of his ideas. What fun they would have next day! The deacon imagined how he would sit under a bush and look on, and when Von Koren began boasting next day at dinner, he, the deacon, would begin laughing and telling him all the details of the duel.

"How do you know all about it?" the zoologist would ask.

"Well, there you are! I stayed at home, but I know all about it."

It would be nice to write a comic description of the duel. His father-in-law would read it and laugh. A good story, told or written, was more than meat and drink to his father-in-law.

The valley of the Yellow River opened before him. The stream was broader and fiercer for the rain, and instead of murmuring as before, it was raging. It began to get light. The grey, dingy morning, and the clouds racing towards the west to overtake the storm-clouds, the mountains girt with mist, and the wet trees, all struck the deacon as ugly and sinister. He washed at the brook, repeated his morning prayer, and felt a longing for tea and hot rolls, with sour cream, which were served every morning at his father-in-law's. He remembered his wife and the "Days past Recall," which she played on the piano. What sort of woman was she? His wife had been introduced, betrothed, and married to him all in one week: he had lived with her less than a month when he was ordered here, so that he had not had time to find out what she was like. All the same, he rather missed her.

"I must write her a nice letter..." he thought. The flag on the *duhan* hung limp, soaked by the rain, and the *duhan* itself with its wet roof seemed darker and lower than it had been before. Near the door was standing a cart; Kerbalay, with two mountaineers and a young Tatar woman in trousers—no doubt Kerbalay's wife or daughter—were bringing sacks of something out of the *duhan*, and putting them on maize straw in the cart.

Near the cart stood a pair of asses hanging their heads. When they had put in all the sacks, the mountaineers and the Tatar woman began

covering them over with straw, while Kerbalay began hurriedly harnessing the asses.

“Smuggling, perhaps,” thought the deacon.

Here was the fallen tree with the dried pine-needles, here was the blackened patch from the fire. He remembered the picnic and all its incidents, the fire, the singing of the mountaineers, his sweet dreams of becoming a bishop, and of the Church procession.... The Black River had grown blacker and broader with the rain. The deacon walked cautiously over the narrow bridge, which by now was reached by the topmost crests of the dirty water, and went up through the little copse to the drying-shed.

“A splendid head,” he thought, stretching himself on the straw, and thinking of Von Koren. “A fine head—God grant him health; only there is cruelty in him....”

Why did he hate Laevsky and Laevsky hate him? Why were they going to fight a duel? If from their childhood they had known poverty as the deacon had; if they had been brought up among ignorant, hard-hearted, grasping, coarse and ill-mannered people who grudged you a crust of bread, who spat on the floor and hiccuped at dinner and at prayers; if they had not been spoilt from childhood by the pleasant surroundings and the select circle of friends they lived in—how they would have rushed at each other, how readily they would have overlooked each other’s shortcomings and would have prized each other’s strong points! Why, how few even outwardly decent people there were in the world! It was true that Laevsky was flighty, dissipated, queer, but he did not steal, did not spit loudly on the floor; he did not abuse his wife and say, “You’ll eat till you burst, but you don’t want to work;” he would not beat a child with reins, or give his servants stinking meat to eat—surely this was reason enough to be indulgent to him? Besides, he was the chief sufferer from his failings, like a sick man from his sores. Instead of being led by boredom and some sort of misunderstanding to look for degeneracy, extinction, heredity, and other such incomprehensible things in each other, would they not do better to stoop a little lower and turn their hatred and anger where whole streets resounded with moanings from coarse ignorance, greed, scolding, impurity, swearing, the shrieks of women....

The sound of a carriage interrupted the deacon’s thoughts. He glanced out of the door and saw a carriage and in it three persons: Laevsky, Sheshkovsky, and the superintendent of the post-office.

“Stop!” said Sheshkovsky.

All three got out of the carriage and looked at one another.

“They are not here yet,” said Sheshkovsky, shaking the mud off.

“Well? Till the show begins, let us go and find a suitable spot; there’s not room to turn round here.”

They went further up the river and soon vanished from sight. The Tatar driver sat in the carriage with his head resting on his shoulder and fell asleep. After waiting ten minutes the deacon came out of the drying-shed, and taking off his black hat that he might not be noticed, he began threading his way among the bushes and strips of maize along the bank, crouching and looking about him. The grass and maize were wet, and big drops fell on his head from the trees and bushes. “Disgraceful!” he muttered, picking up his wet and muddy skirt. “Had I realised it, I would not have come.”

Soon he heard voices and caught sight of them. Laevsky was walking rapidly to and fro in the small glade with bowed back and hands thrust in his sleeves; his seconds were standing at the water’s edge, rolling cigarettes.

“Strange,” thought the deacon, not recognising Laevsky’s walk; “he looks like an old man. . . .”

“How rude it is of them!” said the superintendent of the post-office, looking at his watch. “It may be learned manners to be late, but to my thinking it’s hoggish.”

Sheshkovsky, a stout man with a black beard, listened and said:

“They’re coming!”

XIX

“It’s the first time in my life I’ve seen it! How glorious!” said Von Koren, pointing to the glade and stretching out his hands to the east. “Look: green rays!”

In the east behind the mountains rose two green streaks of light, and it really was beautiful. The sun was rising.

“Good morning!” the zoologist went on, nodding to Laevsky’s seconds. “I’m not late, am I?”

He was followed by his seconds, Boyko and Govorovsky, two very young officers of the same height, wearing white tunics, and Ustimovitch, the thin, unsociable doctor; in one hand he had a bag of some sort, and in the other hand, as usual, a cane which he held behind him. Laying the bag on the ground and greeting no one, he put the other hand, too, behind his back and began pacing up and down the glade.

Laevsky felt the exhaustion and awkwardness of a man who is soon perhaps to die, and is for that reason an object of general attention. He wanted to be killed as soon as possible or taken home. He saw the sunrise now for the first time in his life; the early morning, the green rays of light, the dampness, and the men in wet boots, seemed to him to have nothing to do with his life, to be superfluous and embarrassing. All this had no connection with the night he had been through, with his thoughts and his feeling of guilt, and so he would have gladly gone away without waiting for the duel.

Von Koren was noticeably excited and tried to conceal it, pretending that he was more interested in the green light than anything. The seconds were confused, and looked at one another as though wondering why they were here and what they were to do.

“I imagine, gentlemen, there is no need for us to go further,” said Sheshkovsky. “This place will do.”

“Yes, of course,” Von Koren agreed.

A silence followed. Ustimovitch, pacing to and fro, suddenly turned sharply to Laevsky and said in a low voice, breathing into his face:

“They have very likely not told you my terms yet. Each side is to pay me fifteen roubles, and in the case of the death of one party, the survivor is to pay thirty.”

Laevsky was already acquainted with the man, but now for the first time he had a distinct view of his lustreless eyes, his stiff moustaches, and wasted, consumptive neck; he was a moneygrubber, not a doctor; his breath had an unpleasant smell of beef.

“What people there are in the world!” thought Laevsky, and answered: “Very good.”

The doctor nodded and began pacing to and fro again, and it was evident he did not need the money at all, but simply asked for it from hatred. Everyone felt it was time to begin, or to end what had been begun, but instead of beginning or ending, they stood about, moved to and fro and smoked. The young officers, who were present at a duel for the first time in their lives, and even now hardly believed in this civilian and, to their thinking, unnecessary duel, looked critically at their tunics and stroked their sleeves. Sheshkovsky went up to them and said softly: “Gentlemen, we must use every effort to prevent this duel; they ought to be reconciled.”

He flushed crimson and added:

“Kirilin was at my rooms last night complaining that Laevsky had found him with Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, and all that sort of thing.”

“Yes, we know that too,” said Boyko.

“Well, you see, then... Laevsky’s hands are trembling and all that sort of thing... he can scarcely hold a pistol now. To fight with him is as inhuman as to fight a man who is drunk or who has typhoid. If a reconciliation cannot be arranged, we ought to put off the duel, gentlemen, or something.... It’s such a sickening business, I can’t bear to see it.”

“Talk to Von Koren.”

“I don’t know the rules of duelling, damnation take them, and I don’t want to either; perhaps he’ll imagine Laevsky funks it and has sent me to him, but he can think what he likes—I’ll speak to him.”

Sheshkovsky hesitatingly walked up to Von Koren with a slight limp, as though his leg had gone to sleep; and as he went towards him, clearing his throat, his whole figure was a picture of indolence.

“There’s something I must say to you, sir,” he began, carefully scrutinising the flowers on the zoologist’s shirt. “It’s confidential. I don’t know the rules of duelling, damnation take them, and I don’t want to,

and I look on the matter not as a second and that sort of thing, but as a man, and that's all about it."

"Yes. Well?"

"When seconds suggest reconciliation they are usually not listened to; it is looked upon as a formality. *Amour propre* and all that. But I humbly beg you to look carefully at Ivan Andreitch. He's not in a normal state, so to speak, today—not in his right mind, and a pitiable object. He has had a misfortune. I can't endure gossip...."

Sheshkovsky flushed crimson and looked round.

"But in view of the duel, I think it necessary to inform you, Laevsky found his madam last night at Muridov's with... another gentleman."

"How disgusting!" muttered the zoologist; he turned pale, frowned, and spat loudly. "Tfoo!"

His lower lip quivered, he walked away from Sheshkovsky, unwilling to hear more, and as though he had accidentally tasted something bitter, spat loudly again, and for the first time that morning looked with hatred at Laevsky. His excitement and awkwardness passed off; he tossed his head and said aloud:

"Gentlemen, what are we waiting for, I should like to know? Why don't we begin?"

Sheshkovsky glanced at the officers and shrugged his shoulders.

"Gentlemen," he said aloud, addressing no one in particular.

"Gentlemen, we propose that you should be reconciled."

"Let us make haste and get the formalities over," said Von Koren.

"Reconciliation has been discussed already. What is the next formality? Make haste, gentlemen, time won't wait for us."

"But we insist on reconciliation all the same," said Sheshkovsky in a guilty voice, as a man compelled to interfere in another man's business; he flushed, laid his hand on his heart, and went on: "Gentlemen, we see no grounds for associating the offence with the duel. There's nothing in common between duelling and offences against one another of which we are sometimes guilty through human weakness. You are university men and men of culture, and no doubt you see in the duel nothing but a foolish and out-of-date formality, and all that sort of thing. That's how we look at it ourselves, or we shouldn't have come, for we cannot allow that in our presence men should fire at one another, and all that."

Sheshkovsky wiped the perspiration off his face and went on: "Make an end to your misunderstanding, gentlemen; shake hands, and let us go home and drink to peace. Upon my honour, gentlemen!"

Von Koren did not speak. Laevsky, seeing that they were looking at him, said:

“I have nothing against Nikolay Vassilitch; if he considers I’m to blame, I’m ready to apologise to him.”

Von Koren was offended.

“It is evident, gentlemen,” he said, “you want Mr. Laevsky to return home a magnanimous and chivalrous figure, but I cannot give you and him that satisfaction. And there was no need to get up early and drive eight miles out of town simply to drink to peace, to have breakfast, and to explain to me that the duel is an out-of-date formality. A duel is a duel, and there is no need to make it more false and stupid than it is in reality. I want to fight!”

A silence followed. Boyko took a pair of pistols out of a box; one was given to Von Koren and one to Laevsky, and then there followed a difficulty which afforded a brief amusement to the zoologist and the seconds. It appeared that of all the people present not one had ever in his life been at a duel, and no one knew precisely how they ought to stand, and what the seconds ought to say and do. But then Boyko remembered and began, with a smile, to explain.

“Gentlemen, who remembers the description in Lermontov?” asked Von Koren, laughing. “In Turgenev, too, Bazarov had a duel with someone....”

“There’s no need to remember,” said Ustimovitch impatiently. “Measure the distance, that’s all.”

And he took three steps as though to show how to measure it. Boyko counted out the steps while his companion drew his sabre and scratched the earth at the extreme points to mark the barrier. In complete silence the opponents took their places.

“Moles,” the deacon thought, sitting in the bushes.

Sheshkovsky said something, Boyko explained something again, but Laevsky did not hear—or rather heard, but did not understand. He cocked his pistol when the time came to do so, and raised the cold, heavy weapon with the barrel upwards. He forgot to unbutton his overcoat, and it felt very tight over his shoulder and under his arm, and his arm rose as awkwardly as though the sleeve had been cut out of tin. He remembered the hatred he had felt the night before for the swarthy brow and curly hair, and felt that even yesterday at the moment of intense hatred and anger he could not have shot a man. Fearing that the bullet might somehow hit Von Koren by accident, he raised the pistol higher and higher, and felt that this too obvious magnanimity was indelicate and

anything but magnanimous, but he did not know how else to do and could do nothing else. Looking at the pale, ironically smiling face of Von Koren, who evidently had been convinced from the beginning that his opponent would fire in the air, Laevsky thought that, thank God, everything would be over directly, and all that he had to do was to press the trigger rather hard....

He felt a violent shock on the shoulder; there was the sound of a shot and an answering echo in the mountains: ping-ting!

Von Koren cocked his pistol and looked at Ustimovitch, who was pacing as before with his hands behind his back, taking no notice of anyone.

“Doctor,” said the zoologist, “be so good as not to move to and fro like a pendulum. You make me dizzy.”

The doctor stood still. Von Koren began to take aim at Laevsky.

“It’s all over!” thought Laevsky.

The barrel of the pistol aimed straight at his face, the expression of hatred and contempt in Von Koren’s attitude and whole figure, and the murder just about to be committed by a decent man in broad daylight, in the presence of decent men, and the stillness and the unknown force that compelled Laevsky to stand still and not to run—how mysterious it all was, how incomprehensible and terrible!

The moment while Von Koren was taking aim seemed to Laevsky longer than a night: he glanced imploringly at the seconds; they were pale and did not stir.

“Make haste and fire,” thought Laevsky, and felt that his pale, quivering, and pitiful face must arouse even greater hatred in Von Koren.

“I’ll kill him directly,” thought Von Koren, aiming at his forehead, with his finger already on the catch. “Yes, of course I’ll kill him.”

“He’ll kill him!” A despairing shout was suddenly heard somewhere very close at hand.

A shot rang out at once. Seeing that Laevsky remained standing where he was and did not fall, they all looked in the direction from which the shout had come, and saw the deacon. With pale face and wet hair sticking to his forehead and his cheeks, wet through and muddy, he was standing in the maize on the further bank, smiling rather queerly and waving his wet hat. Sheshkovsky laughed with joy, burst into tears, and moved away....

XX

A little while afterwards, Von Koren and the deacon met near the little bridge. The deacon was excited; he breathed hard, and avoided looking in people's faces. He felt ashamed both of his terror and his muddy, wet garments.

"I thought you meant to kill him..." he muttered. "How contrary to human nature it is! How utterly unnatural it is!"

"But how did you come here?" asked the zoologist.

"Don't ask," said the deacon, waving his hand. "The evil one tempted me, saying: 'Go, go....' So I went and almost died of fright in the maize. But now, thank God, thank God.... I am awfully pleased with you," muttered the deacon. "Old Grandad Tarantula will be glad.... It's funny, it's too funny! Only I beg of you most earnestly don't tell anybody I was there, or I may get into hot water with the authorities. They will say: 'The deacon was a second.'"

"Gentlemen," said Von Koren, "the deacon asks you not to tell anyone you've seen him here. He might get into trouble."

"How contrary to human nature it is!" sighed the deacon. "Excuse my saying so, but your face was so dreadful that I thought you were going to kill him."

"I was very much tempted to put an end to that scoundrel," said Von Koren, "but you shouted close by, and I missed my aim. The whole procedure is revolting to anyone who is not used to it, and it has exhausted me, deacon. I feel awfully tired. Come along...."

"No, you must let me walk back. I must get dry, for I am wet and cold."

"Well, as you like," said the zoologist, in a weary tone, feeling dispirited, and, getting into the carriage, he closed his eyes. "As you like...."

While they were moving about the carriages and taking their seats, Kerbalay stood in the road, and, laying his hands on his stomach, he bowed low, showing his teeth; he imagined that the gentry had come to

enjoy the beauties of nature and drink tea, and could not understand why they were getting into the carriages. The party set off in complete silence and only the deacon was left by the *duhan*.

“Come to the *duhan*, drink tea,” he said to Kerbalay. “Me wants to eat.”

Kerbalay spoke good Russian, but the deacon imagined that the Tatar would understand him better if he talked to him in broken Russian.

“Cook omelette, give cheese....”

“Come, come, father,” said Kerbalay, bowing. “I’ll give you everything.... I’ve cheese and wine.... Eat what you like.”

“What is ‘God’ in Tatar?” asked the deacon, going into the *duhan*.

“Your God and my God are the same,” said Kerbalay, not understanding him. “God is the same for all men, only men are different. Some are Russian, some are Turks, some are English—there are many sorts of men, but God is one.”

“Very good. If all men worship the same God, why do you Mohammedans look upon Christians as your everlasting enemies?”

“Why are you angry?” said Kerbalay, laying both hands on his stomach. “You are a priest; I am a Mussulman: you say, ‘I want to eat’—I give it you.... Only the rich man distinguishes your God from my God; for the poor man it is all the same. If you please, it is ready.”

While this theological conversation was taking place at the *duhan*, Laevsky was driving home thinking how dreadful it had been driving there at daybreak, when the roads, the rocks, and the mountains were wet and dark, and the uncertain future seemed like a terrible abyss, of which one could not see the bottom; while now the raindrops hanging on the grass and on the stones were sparkling in the sun like diamonds, nature was smiling joyfully, and the terrible future was left behind. He looked at Sheshkovsky’s sullen, tear-stained face, and at the two carriages ahead of them in which Von Koren, his seconds, and the doctor were sitting, and it seemed to him as though they were all coming back from a graveyard in which a wearisome, insufferable man who was a burden to others had just been buried.

“Everything is over,” he thought of his past, cautiously touching his neck with his fingers.

On the right side of his neck was a small swelling, of the length and breadth of his little finger, and he felt a pain, as though someone had passed a hot iron over his neck. The bullet had bruised it.

Afterwards, when he got home, a strange, long, sweet day began for him, misty as forgetfulness. Like a man released from prison or from

hospital, he stared at the long-familiar objects and wondered that the tables, the windows, the chairs, the light, and the sea stirred in him a keen, childish delight such as he had not known for long, long years. Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, pale and haggard, could not understand his gentle voice and strange movements; she made haste to tell him everything that had happened to her. . . . It seemed to her that very likely he scarcely heard and did not understand her, and that if he did know everything he would curse her and kill her, but he listened to her, stroked her face and hair, looked into her eyes and said:

“I have nobody but you. . . .”

Then they sat a long while in the garden, huddled close together, saying nothing, or dreaming aloud of their happy life in the future, in brief, broken sentences, while it seemed to him that he had never spoken at such length or so eloquently.

XXI

More than three months had passed.

The day came that Von Koren had fixed on for his departure. A cold, heavy rain had been falling from early morning, a northeast wind was blowing, and the waves were high on the sea. It was said that the steamer would hardly be able to come into the harbour in such weather. By the timetable it should have arrived at ten o'clock in the morning, but Von Koren, who had gone on to the seafront at midday and again after dinner, could see nothing through the field-glass but grey waves and rain covering the horizon.

Towards the end of the day the rain ceased and the wind began to drop perceptibly. Von Koren had already made up his mind that he would not be able to get off that day, and had settled down to play chess with Samoylenko; but after dark the orderly announced that there were lights on the sea and that a rocket had been seen.

Von Koren made haste. He put his satchel over his shoulder, and kissed Samoylenko and the deacon. Though there was not the slightest necessity, he went through the rooms again, said goodbye to the orderly and the cook, and went out into the street, feeling that he had left something behind, either at the doctor's or his lodging. In the street he walked beside Samoylenko, behind them came the deacon with a box, and last of all the orderly with two portmanteaus. Only Samoylenko and the orderly could distinguish the dim lights on the sea. The others gazed into the darkness and saw nothing. The steamer had stopped a long way from the coast.

"Make haste, make haste," Von Koren hurried them. "I am afraid it will set off."

As they passed the little house with three windows, into which Laevsky had moved soon after the duel, Von Koren could not resist peeping in at the window. Laevsky was sitting, writing, bent over the table, with his back to the window.

“I wonder at him!” said the zoologist softly. “What a screw he has put on himself!”

“Yes, one may well wonder,” said Samoylenko. “He sits from morning till night, he’s always at work. He works to pay off his debts. And he lives, brother, worse than a beggar!”

Half a minute of silence followed. The zoologist, the doctor, and the deacon stood at the window and went on looking at Laevsky.

“So he didn’t get away from here, poor fellow,” said Samoylenko. “Do you remember how hard he tried?”

“Yes, he has put a screw on himself,” Von Koren repeated. “His marriage, the way he works all day long for his daily bread, a new expression in his face, and even in his walk—it’s all so extraordinary that I don’t know what to call it.”

The zoologist took Samoylenko’s sleeve and went on with emotion in his voice:

“You tell him and his wife that when I went away I was full of admiration for them and wished them all happiness... and I beg him, if he can, not to remember evil against me. He knows me. He knows that if I could have foreseen this change, then I might have become his best friend.”

“Go in and say goodbye to him.”

“No, that wouldn’t do.”

“Why? God knows, perhaps you’ll never see him again.”

The zoologist reflected, and said:

“That’s true.”

Samoylenko tapped softly at the window. Laevsky started and looked round.

“Vanya, Nikolay Vassilitch wants to say goodbye to you,” said Samoylenko. “He is just going away.”

Laevsky got up from the table, and went into the passage to open the door. Samoylenko, the zoologist, and the deacon went into the house.

“I can only come for one minute,” began the zoologist, taking off his goloshes in the passage, and already wishing he had not given way to his feelings and come in, uninvited. “It is as though I were forcing myself on him,” he thought, “and that’s stupid.”

“Forgive me for disturbing you,” he said as he went into the room with Laevsky, “but I’m just going away, and I had an impulse to see you. God knows whether we shall ever meet again.”

“I am very glad to see you.... Please come in,” said Laevsky, and he awkwardly set chairs for his visitors as though he wanted to bar their

way, and stood in the middle of the room, rubbing his hands.

"I should have done better to have left my audience in the street," thought Von Koren, and he said firmly: "Don't remember evil against me, Ivan Andreitch. To forget the past is, of course, impossible—it is too painful, and I've not come here to apologise or to declare that I was not to blame. I acted sincerely, and I have not changed my convictions since then. . . . It is true that I see, to my great delight, that I was mistaken in regard to you, but it's easy to make a false step even on a smooth road, and, in fact, it's the natural human lot: if one is not mistaken in the main, one is mistaken in the details. Nobody knows the real truth."

"No, no one knows the truth," said Laevsky.

"Well, goodbye. . . . God give you all happiness."

Von Koren gave Laevsky his hand; the latter took it and bowed.

"Don't remember evil against me," said Von Koren. "Give my greetings to your wife, and say I am very sorry not to say goodbye to her."

"She is at home."

Laevsky went to the door of the next room, and said:

"Nadya, Nikolay Vassilitch wants to say goodbye to you."

Nadyezhda Fyodorovna came in; she stopped near the doorway and looked shyly at the visitors. There was a look of guilt and dismay on her face, and she held her hands like a schoolgirl receiving a scolding.

"I'm just going away, Nadyezhda Fyodorovna," said Von Koren, "and have come to say goodbye."

She held out her hand uncertainly, while Laevsky bowed.

"What pitiful figures they are, though!" thought Von Koren. "The life they are living does not come easy to them. I shall be in Moscow and Petersburg; can I send you anything?" he asked.

"Oh!" said Nadyezhda Fyodorovna, and she looked anxiously at her husband. "I don't think there's anything. . . ."

"No, nothing. . . ." said Laevsky, rubbing his hands. "Our greetings."

Von Koren did not know what he could or ought to say, though as he went in he thought he would say a very great deal that would be warm and good and important. He shook hands with Laevsky and his wife in silence, and left them with a depressed feeling.

"What people!" said the deacon in a low voice, as he walked behind them. "My God, what people! Of a truth, the right hand of God has planted this vine! Lord! Lord! One man vanquishes thousands and another tens of thousands. Nikolay Vassilitch," he said ecstatically, "let

me tell you that today you have conquered the greatest of man's enemies—pride.”

“Hush, deacon! Fine conquerors we are! Conquerors ought to look like eagles, while he's a pitiful figure, timid, crushed; he bows like a Chinese idol, and I, I am sad....”

They heard steps behind them. It was Laevsky, hurrying after them to see him off. The orderly was standing on the quay with the two portmanteaus, and at a little distance stood four boatmen.

“There is a wind, though.... Brrr!” said Samoylenko. “There must be a pretty stiff storm on the sea now! You are not going off at a nice time, Kolya.”

“I'm not afraid of seasickness.”

“That's not the point.... I only hope these rascals won't upset you. You ought to have crossed in the agent's sloop. Where's the agent's sloop?” he shouted to the boatmen.

“It has gone, Your Excellency.”

“And the Customs-house boat?”

“That's gone, too.”

“Why didn't you let us know,” said Samoylenko angrily. “You dolts!”

“It's all the same, don't worry yourself....” said Von Koren. “Well, goodbye. God keep you.”

Samoylenko embraced Von Koren and made the sign of the cross over him three times.

“Don't forget us, Kolya.... Write.... We shall look out for you next spring.”

“Goodbye, deacon,” said Von Koren, shaking hands with the deacon.

“Thank you for your company and for your pleasant conversation. Think about the expedition.”

“Oh Lord, yes! to the ends of the earth,” laughed the deacon. “I've nothing against it.”

Von Koren recognised Laevsky in the darkness, and held out his hand without speaking. The boatmen were by now below, holding the boat, which was beating against the piles, though the breakwater screened it from the breakers. Von Koren went down the ladder, jumped into the boat, and sat at the helm.

“Write!” Samoylenko shouted to him. “Take care of yourself.”

“No one knows the real truth,” thought Laevsky, turning up the collar of his coat and thrusting his hands into his sleeves.

The boat turned briskly out of the harbour into the open sea. It vanished in the waves, but at once from a deep hollow glided up onto a

high breaker, so that they could distinguish the men and even the oars. The boat moved three yards forward and was sucked two yards back.

“Write!” shouted Samoylenko; “it’s devilish weather for you to go in.”

“Yes, no one knows the real truth...” thought Laevsky, looking wearily at the dark, restless sea.

“It flings the boat back,” he thought; “she makes two steps forward and one step back; but the boatmen are stubborn, they work the oars unceasingly, and are not afraid of the high waves. The boat goes on and on. Now she is out of sight, but in half an hour the boatmen will see the steamer lights distinctly, and within an hour they will be by the steamer ladder. So it is in life.... In the search for truth man makes two steps forward and one step back. Suffering, mistakes, and weariness of life thrust them back, but the thirst for truth and stubborn will drive them on and on. And who knows? Perhaps they will reach the real truth at last.”

“Go-o-od-by-e,” shouted Samoylenko.

“There’s no sight or sound of them,” said the deacon. “Good luck on the journey!”

It began to spot with rain.



The Duel
was published in 1891 by
[ANTON CHEKHOV](#).
It was translated from Russian between 1916 and 1922 by
[CONSTANCE GARNETT](#).

This ebook was produced for
[STANDARD EBOOKS](#)
by
[ALEX CABAL](#),
and is based on transcriptions produced between 2004 and 2006 by
JAMES RUSK
for
[PROJECT GUTENBERG](#)
and on digital scans from
[GOOGLE BOOKS](#).

The cover page is adapted from
Eugene Onegin and Vladimir Lensky's Duel,
a painting completed in 1899 by
[ILYA REPIN](#).

The cover and title pages feature the
LEAGUE SPARTAN and SORTS MILL GOUDY
typefaces created in 2014 and 2009 by
[THE LEAGUE OF MOVEABLE TYPE](#).

This edition was released on
JUNE 30, 2026, 2:48 A.M.
and is based on
REVISION D296900.

The first edition of this ebook was released on

JUNE 8, 2015, 10:59 P.M.

You can check for updates to this ebook, view its revision history, or
download it for different ereading systems at

[STANDARDEBOOKS.ORG/EBOOKS/ANTON-CHEKHOV/THE-DUEL/CONSTANCE-
GARNETT](http://STANDARDEBOOKS.ORG/EBOOKS/ANTON-CHEKHOV/THE-DUEL/CONSTANCE-GARNETT).

The volunteer-driven Standard Ebooks project relies on readers like you
to submit typos, corrections, and other improvements. Anyone can
contribute at STANDARDEBOOKS.ORG.

UNCOPYRIGHT

May you do good and not evil.

May you find forgiveness for yourself and forgive others.

May you share freely, never taking more than you give.

Copyright pages exist to tell you that you *can't* do something. Unlike them, this Uncopyright page exists to tell you that the writing and artwork in this ebook are believed to be in the United States public domain; that is, they are believed to be free of copyright restrictions in the United States. The United States public domain represents our collective cultural heritage, and items in it are free for anyone in the United States to do almost anything at all with, without having to get permission.

Copyright laws are different all over the world, and the source text or artwork in this ebook may still be copyrighted in other countries. If you're not located in the United States, you must check your local laws before using this ebook. Standard Ebooks makes no representations regarding the copyright status of the source text or artwork in this ebook in any country other than the United States.

Non-authorship activities performed on items that are in the public domain—so-called “sweat of the brow” work—don't create a new copyright. That means that nobody can claim a new copyright on an item that is in the public domain for, among other things, work like digitization, markup, or typography. Regardless, the contributors to this ebook release their contributions under the terms in the [CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication](#), thus dedicating to the worldwide public domain all of the work they've done on this ebook, including but not limited to metadata, the titlepage, imprint, colophon, this Uncopyright, and any changes or enhancements to, or markup on, the original text and artwork. This dedication doesn't change the copyright

status of the source text or artwork. We make this dedication in the interest of enriching our global cultural heritage, to promote free and libre culture around the world, and to give back to the unrestricted culture that has given all of us so much.