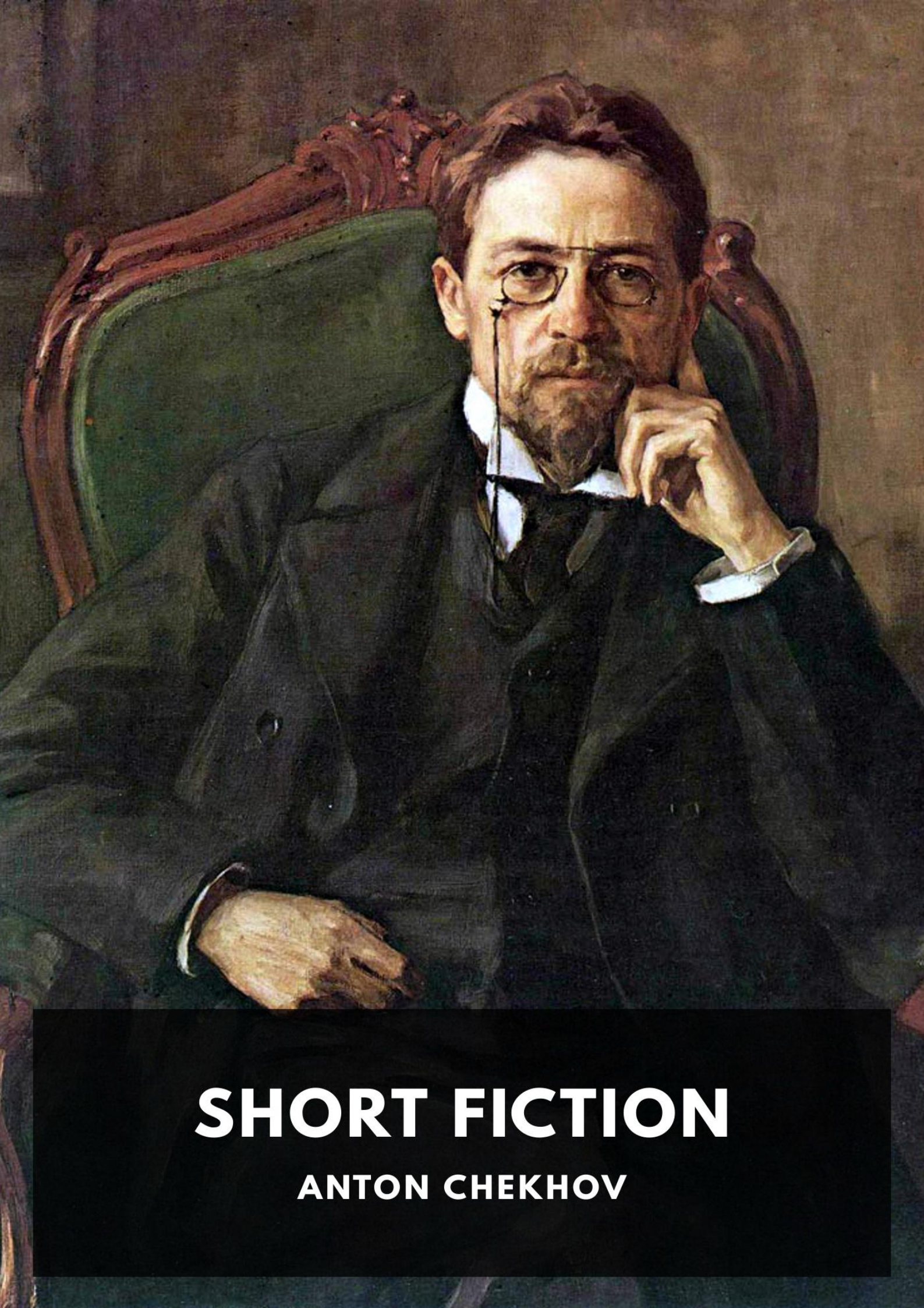


SHORT FICTION

ANTON CHEKHOV

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translated by
CONSTANCE GARNETT



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A Living Chattel

I

Groholsky embraced Liza, kept kissing one after another all her little fingers with their bitten pink nails, and laid her on the couch covered with cheap velvet. Liza crossed one foot over the other, clasped her hands behind her head, and lay down.

Groholsky sat down in a chair beside her and bent over. He was entirely absorbed in contemplation of her.

How pretty she seemed to him, lighted up by the rays of the setting sun!

There was a complete view from the window of the setting sun, golden, lightly flecked with purple.

The whole drawing room, including Liza, was bathed by it with brilliant light that did not hurt the eyes, and for a little while covered with gold.

Groholsky was lost in admiration. Liza was so incredibly beautiful. It is true her little kittenish face with its brown eyes, and turn up nose was fresh, and even piquant, her scanty hair was black as soot and curly, her little figure was graceful, well proportioned and mobile as the body of an electric eel, but on the whole.… However my taste has nothing to do with it. Groholsky who was spoilt by women, and who had been in love and out of love hundreds of times in his life, saw her as a beauty. He loved her, and blind love finds ideal beauty everywhere.

“I say,” he said, looking straight into her eyes, “I have come to talk to you, my precious. Love cannot bear anything vague or indefinite.… Indefinite relations, you know, I told you yesterday, Liza… we will try today to settle the question we raised yesterday. Come, let us decide together.…”

“What are we to do?”

Liza gave a yawn and scowling, drew her right arm from under her head.

"What are we to do?" she repeated hardly audibly after Groholsky.

"Well, yes, what are we to do? Come, decide, wise little head… I love you, and a man in love is not fond of sharing. He is more than an egoist. It is too much for me to go shares with your husband. I mentally tear him to pieces, when I remember that he loves you too. In the second place you love me.… Perfect freedom is an essential condition for love.… And are you free? Are you not tortured by the thought that that man towers forever over your soul? A man whom you do not love, whom very likely and quite naturally, you hate.… That's the second thing.… And thirdly.… What is the third thing? Oh yes.… We are deceiving him and that… is dishonourable. Truth before everything, Liza. Let us have done with lying!"

"Well, then, what are we to do?"

"You can guess.… I think it necessary, obligatory, to inform him of our relations and to leave him, to begin to live in freedom. Both must be done as quickly as possible.… This very evening, for instance.… It's time to make an end of it. Surely you must be sick of loving like a thief?"

"Tell! tell Vanya?"

"Why, yes!"

"That's impossible! I told you yesterday, Michel, that it is impossible."

"Why?"

"He will be upset. He'll make a row, do all sorts of unpleasant things.… Don't you know what he is like? God forbid! There's no need to tell him. What an idea!"

Groholsky passed his hand over his brow, and heaved a sigh.

"Yes," he said, "he will be more than upset. I am robbing him of his happiness. Does he love you?"

"He does love me. Very much."

"There's another complication! One does not know where to begin. To conceal it from him is base, telling him would kill him.… Goodness knows what's one to do. Well, how is it to be?"

Groholsky pondered. His pale face wore a frown.

"Let us go on always as we are now," said Liza. "Let him find out for himself, if he wants to."

"But you know that… is sinful, and besides the fact is you are mine, and no one has the right to think that you do not belong to me but to someone else! You are mine! I will not give way to anyone!… I am sorry

for him—God knows how sorry I am for him, Liza! It hurts me to see him! But… it can't be helped after all. You don't love him, do you? What's the good of your going on being miserable with him? We must have it out! We will have it out with him, and you will come to me. You are my wife, and not his. Let him do what he likes. He'll get over his troubles somehow.… He is not the first, and he won't be the last.… Will you run away? Eh? Make haste and tell me! Will you run away?"

Liza got up and looked inquiringly at Groholsky.

"Run away?"

"Yes.… To my estate.… Then to the Crimea.… We will tell him by letter.… We can go at night. There is a train at half past one. Well? Is that all right?"

Liza scratched the bridge of her nose, and hesitated.

"Very well," she said, and burst into tears.

Patches of red came out of her cheeks, her eyes swelled, and tears flowed down her kittenish face.…

"What is it?" cried Groholsky in a flutter. "Liza! what's the matter? Come! what are you crying for? What a girl! Come, what is it? Darling! Little woman!"

Liza held out her hands to Groholsky, and hung on his neck. There was a sound of sobbing.

"I am sorry for him…" muttered Liza. "Oh, I am so sorry for him!"

"Sorry for whom?"

"Va—Vanya.…"

"And do you suppose I'm not? But what's to be done? We are causing him suffering.… He will be unhappy, will curse us… but is it our fault that we love one another?"

As he uttered the last word, Groholsky darted away from Liza as though he had been stung and sat down in an easy chair. Liza sprang away from his neck and rapidly—in one instant—dropped on the lounge.

They both turned fearfully red, dropped their eyes, and coughed.

A tall, broad-shouldered man of thirty, in the uniform of a government clerk, had walked into the drawing room. He had walked in unnoticed. Only the bang of a chair which he knocked in the doorway had warned the lovers of his presence, and made them look round. It was the husband.

They had looked round too late.

He had seen Groholsky's arm round Liza's waist, and had seen Liza hanging on Groholsky's white and aristocratic neck.

“He saw us!” Liza and Groholsky thought at the same moment, while they did not know what to do with their heavy hands and embarrassed eyes.…

The petrified husband, rosy-faced, turned white.

An agonising, strange, soul-revolting silence lasted for three minutes. Oh, those three minutes! Groholsky remembers them to this day.

The first to move and break the silence was the husband. He stepped up to Groholsky and, screwing his face into a senseless grimace like a smile, gave him his hand. Groholsky shook the soft perspiring hand and shuddered all over as though he had crushed a cold frog in his fist.

“Good evening,” he muttered.

“How are you?” the husband brought out in a faint husky, almost inaudible voice, and he sat down opposite Groholsky, straightening his collar at the back of his neck.

Again, an agonising silence followed… but that silence was no longer so stupid.… The first step, most difficult and colourless, was over.

All that was left now was for one of the two to depart in search of matches or on some such trifling errand. Both longed intensely to get away. They sat still, not looking at one another, and pulled at their beards while they ransacked their troubled brains for some means of escape from their horribly awkward position. Both were perspiring. Both were unbearably miserable and both were devoured by hatred. They longed to begin the tussle but how were they to begin and which was to begin first? If only she would have gone out!

“I saw you yesterday at the Assembly Hall,” muttered Bugrov (that was the husband’s name).

“Yes, I was there… the ball… did you dance?”

“M’m… yes… with that… with the younger Lyukovtsky.… She dances heavily.… She dances impossibly. She is a great chatterbox.” (Pause.) “She is never tired of talking.”

“Yes.… It was slow. I saw you too…”

Groholsky accidentally glanced at Bugrov.… He caught the shifting eyes of the deceived husband and could not bear it. He got up quickly, quickly seized Bugrov’s hand, shook it, picked up his hat, and walked towards the door, conscious of his own back. He felt as though thousands of eyes were looking at his back. It is a feeling known to the actor who has been hissed and is making his exit from the stage, and to the young dandy who has received a blow on the back of the head and is being led away in charge of a policeman.

As soon as the sound of Groholsky's steps had died away and the door in the hall creaked, Bugrov leapt up, and after making two or three rounds of the drawing room, strolled up to his wife. The kittenish face puckered up and began blinking its eyes as though expecting a slap. Her husband went up to her, and with a pale, distorted face, with arms, head, and shoulders shaking, stepped on her dress and knocked her knees with his.

"If, you wretched creature," he began in a hollow, wailing voice, "you let him come here once again, I'll.… Don't let him dare to set his foot.… I'll kill you. Do you understand? A-a-ah… worthless creature, you shudder! Fil-thy woman!"

Bugrov seized her by the elbow, shook her, and flung her like an India-rubber ball towards the window.…

"Wretched, vulgar woman! you have no shame!"

She flew towards the window, hardly touching the floor with her feet, and caught at the curtains with her hands.

"Hold your tongue," shouted her husband, going up to her with flashing eyes and stamping his foot.

She did hold her tongue, she looked at the ceiling, and whimpered while her face wore the expression of a little girl in disgrace expecting to be punished.

"So that's what you are like! Eh? Carrying on with a fop! Good! And your promise before the altar? What are you? A nice wife and mother. Hold your tongue!"

And he struck her on her pretty supple shoulder. "Hold your tongue, you wretched creature. I'll give you worse than that! If that scoundrel dares to show himself here ever again, if I see you—listen!—with that blackguard ever again, don't ask for mercy! I'll kill you, if I go to Siberia for it! And him too. I shouldn't think twice about it! You can go, I don't want to see you!"

Bugrov wiped his eyes and his brow with his sleeve and strode about the drawing room, Liza sobbing more and more loudly, twitching her shoulders and her little turned up nose, became absorbed in examining the lace on the curtain.

"You are crazy," her husband shouted. "Your silly head is full of nonsense! Nothing but whims! I won't allow it, Elizaveta, my girl! You had better be careful with me! I don't like it! If you want to behave like a pig, then… then out you go, there is no place in my house for you! Out you pack if.… You are a wife, so you must forget these dandies, put them out of your silly head! It's all foolishness! Don't let it happen

again! You try defending yourself! Love your husband! You have been given to your husband, so you must love him. Yes, indeed! Is one not enough? Go away till.… Torturers!”

Bugrov paused; then shouted:

“Go away I tell you, go to the nursery! Why are you blubbering, it is your own fault, and you blubber! What a woman! Last year you were after Petka Totchkov, now you are after this devil. Lord forgive us!… Tfoo, it’s time you understood what you are! A wife! A mother! Last year there were unpleasantnesses, and now there will be unpleasantnesses.… Tfoo!”

Bugrov heaved a loud sigh, and the air was filled with the smell of sherry. He had come back from dining and was slightly drunk.…

“Don’t you know your duty? No!… you must be taught, you’ve not been taught so far! Your mamma was a gadabout, and you… you can blubber. Yes! blubber away.…”

Bugrov went up to his wife and drew the curtain out of her hands.

“Don’t stand by the window, people will see you blubbering.… Don’t let it happen again. You’ll go from embracing to worse trouble. You’ll come to grief. Do you suppose I like to be made a fool of? And you will make a fool of me if you carry on with them, the low brutes.… Come, that’s enough.… Don’t you.… Another time.… Of course I… Liza… stay.…”

Bugrov heaved a sigh and enveloped Liza in the fumes of sherry.

“You are young and silly, you don’t understand anything.… I am never at home.… And they take advantage of it. You must be sensible, prudent. They will deceive you. And then I won’t endure it.… Then I may do anything.… Of course! Then you can just lie down, and die. I… I am capable of doing anything if you deceive me, my good girl. I might beat you to death.… And… I shall turn you out of the house, and then you can go to your rascals.”

And Bugrov (*horribile dictu*) wiped the wet, tearful face of the traitress Liza with his big soft hand. He treated his twenty-year-old wife as though she were a child.

“Come, that’s enough.… I forgive you. Only God forbid it should happen again! I forgive you for the fifth time, but I shall not forgive you for the sixth, as God is holy. God does not forgive such as you for such things.”

Bugrov bent down and put out his shining lips towards Liza’s little head. But the kiss did not follow. The doors of the hall, of the dining room, of the parlour, and of the drawing room all slammed, and

Groholsky flew into the drawing room like a whirlwind. He was pale and trembling. He was flourishing his arms and crushing his expensive hat in his hands. His coat fluttered upon him as though it were on a peg. He was the incarnation of acute fever. When Bugrov saw him he moved away from his wife and began looking out of the other window. Groholsky flew up to him, and waving his arms and breathing heavily and looking at no one, he began in a shaking voice:

"Ivan Petrovitch! Let us leave off keeping up this farce with one another! We have deceived each other long enough! It's too much! I cannot stand it. You must do as you like, but I cannot! It's hateful and mean, it's revolting! Do you understand that it is revolting?"

Groholsky spluttered and gasped for breath.

"It's against my principles. And you are an honest man. I love her! I love her more than anything on earth! You have noticed it and… it's my duty to say this!"

"What am I to say to him?" Ivan Petrovitch wondered.

"We must make an end of it. This farce cannot drag on much longer! It must be settled somehow."

Groholsky drew a breath and went on:

"I cannot live without her; she feels the same. You are an educated man, you will understand that in such circumstances your family life is impossible. This woman is not yours, so… in short, I beg you to look at the matter from an indulgent humane point of view.… Ivan Petrovitch, you must understand at last that I love her—love her more than myself, more than anything in the world, and to struggle against that love is beyond my power!"

"And she?" Bugrov asked in a sullen, somewhat ironical tone.

"Ask her; come now, ask her! For her to live with a man she does not love, to live with you is… is a misery!"

"And she?" Bugrov repeated, this time not in an ironical tone.

"She… she loves me! We love each other, Ivan Petrovitch! Kill us, despise us, pursue us, do as you will, but we can no longer conceal it from you. We are standing face to face—you may judge us with all the severity of a man whom we… whom fate has robbed of happiness!"

Bugrov turned as red as a boiled crab, and looked out of one eye at Liza. He began blinking. His fingers, his lips, and his eyelids twitched. Poor fellow! The eyes of his weeping wife told him that Groholsky was right, that it was a serious matter.

"Well!" he muttered. "If you.… In these days.… You are always.…"

“As God is above,” Groholsky shrilled in his high tenor, “we understand you. Do you suppose we have no sense, no feeling? I know what agonies I am causing you, as God’s above! But be indulgent, I beseech you! We are not to blame. Love is not a crime. No will can struggle against it.… Give her up to me, Ivan Petrovitch! Let her go with me! Take from me what you will for your sufferings. Take my life, but give me Liza. I am ready to do anything.… Come, tell me how I can do something to make up in part at least! To make up for that lost happiness, I can give you other happiness. I can, Ivan Petrovitch; I am ready to do anything! It would be base on my part to leave you without satisfaction.… I understand you at this moment.”

Bugrov waved his hand as though to say, “For God’s sake, go away.” His eyes began to be dimmed by a treacherous moisture—in a moment they would see him crying like a child.

“I understand you, Ivan Petrovitch. I will give you another happiness, such as hitherto you have not known. What would you like? I have money, my father is an influential man.… Will you? Come, how much do you want?”

Bugrov’s heart suddenly began throbbing.… He clutched at the window curtains with both hands.…

“Will you have fifty thousand? Ivan Petrovitch, I entreat you.… It’s not a bribe, not a bargain.… I only want by a sacrifice on my part to atone a little for your inevitable loss. Would you like a hundred thousand? I am willing. A hundred thousand?”

My God! Two immense hammers began beating on the perspiring temples of the unhappy Ivan Petrovitch. Russian sledges with tinkling bells began racing in his ears.…

“Accept this sacrifice from me,” Groholsky went on, “I entreat you! You will take a load off my conscience.… I implore you!”

My God! A smart carriage rolled along the road wet from a May shower, passed the window through which Bugrov’s wet eyes were looking. The horses were fine, spirited, well-trained beasts. People in straw hats, with contented faces, were sitting in the carriage with long fishing-rods and bags.… A schoolboy in a white cap was holding a gun. They were driving out into the country to catch fish, to shoot, to walk about and have tea in the open air. They were driving to that region of bliss in which Bugrov as a boy—the barefoot, sunburnt, but infinitely happy son of a village deacon—had once raced about the meadows, the woods, and the river banks. Oh, how fiendishly seductive was that May! How happy those who can take off their heavy uniforms, get into a

carriage and fly off to the country where the quails are calling and there is the scent of fresh hay. Bugrov's heart ached with a sweet thrill that made him shiver. A hundred thousand! With the carriage there floated before him all the secret dreams over which he had gloated, through the long years of his life as a government clerk as he sat in the office of his department or in his wretched little study.… A river, deep, with fish, a wide garden with narrow avenues, little fountains, shade, flowers, arbours, a luxurious villa with terraces and turrets with an Aeolian harp and little silver bells (he had heard of the existence of an Aeolian harp from German romances); a cloudless blue sky; pure limpid air fragrant with the scents that recall his hungry, barefoot, crushed childhood.… To get up at five, to go to bed at nine; to spend the day catching fish, talking with the peasants.… What happiness!

"Ivan Petrovitch, do not torture me! Will you take a hundred thousand?"

"H'm… a hundred and fifty thousand!" muttered Bugrov in a hollow voice, the voice of a husky bull. He muttered it, and bowed his head, ashamed of his words, and awaiting the answer.

"Good," said Groholsky, "I agree. I thank you, Ivan Petrovitch.… In a minute.… I will not keep you waiting.…"

Groholsky jumped up, put on his hat, and staggering backwards, ran out of the drawing room.

Bugrov clutched the window curtains more tightly than ever.… He was ashamed.… There was a nasty, stupid feeling in his soul, but, on the other hand, what fair shining hopes swarmed between his throbbing temples! He was rich!

Liza, who had grasped nothing of what was happening, darted through the half-opened door trembling all over and afraid that he would come to her window and fling her away from it. She went into the nursery, laid herself down on the nurse's bed, and curled herself up. She was shivering with fever.

Bugrov was left alone. He felt stifled, and he opened the window. What glorious air breathed fragrance on his face and neck! It would be good to breathe such air lolling on the cushions of a carriage.… Out there, far beyond the town, among the villages and the summer villas, the air was sweeter still.… Bugrov actually smiled as he dreamed of the air that would be about him when he would go out on the verandah of his villa and admire the view. A long while he dreamed.… The sun had set, and still he stood and dreamed, trying his utmost to cast out of his mind the image of Liza which obstinately pursued him in all his dreams.

“I have brought it, Ivan Petrovitch!” Groholsky, reentering, whispered above his ear. “I have brought it—take it.… Here in this roll there are forty thousand.… With this cheque will you kindly get twenty the day after tomorrow from Valentinov?… Here is a bill of exchange… a cheque.… The remaining thirty thousand in a day or two.… My steward will bring it to you.”

Groholsky, pink and excited, with all his limbs in motion, laid before Bugrov a heap of rolls of notes and bundles of papers. The heap was big, and of all sorts of hues and tints. Never in the course of his life had Bugrov seen such a heap. He spread out his fat fingers and, not looking at Groholsky, fell to going through the bundles of notes and bonds.…

Groholsky spread out all the money, and moved restlessly about the room, looking for the Dulcinea who had been bought and sold.

Filling his pockets and his pocketbook, Bugrov thrust the securities into the table drawer, and, drinking off half a decanter full of water, dashed out into the street.

“Cab!” he shouted in a frantic voice.

At half-past eleven that night he drove up to the entrance of the Paris Hotel. He went noisily upstairs and knocked at the door of Groholsky’s apartments. He was admitted. Groholsky was packing his things in a portmanteau, Liza was sitting at the table trying on bracelets. They were both frightened when Bugrov went in to them. They fancied that he had come for Liza and had brought back the money which he had taken in haste without reflection. But Bugrov had not come for Liza. Ashamed of his new getup and feeling frightfully awkward in it, he bowed and stood at the door in the attitude of a flunkey. The getup was superb. Bugrov was unrecognisable. His huge person, which had never hitherto worn anything but a uniform, was clothed in a fresh, brand-new suit of fine French cloth and of the most fashionable cut. On his feet spats shone with sparkling buckles. He stood ashamed of his new getup, and with his right hand covered the watch-chain for which he had, an hour before, paid three hundred roubles.

“I have come about something,” he began. “A business agreement is beyond price. I am not going to give up Mishutka.…”

“What Mishutka?” asked Groholsky.

“My son.”

Groholsky and Liza looked at each other. Liza’s eyes bulged, her cheeks flushed, and her lips twitched.…

“Very well,” she said.

She thought of Mishutka’s warm little cot. It would be cruel to exchange that warm little cot for a chilly sofa in the hotel, and she consented.

“I shall see him,” she said.

Bugrov bowed, walked out, and flew down the stairs in his splendour, cleaving the air with his expensive cane.…

“Home,” he said to the cabman. “I am starting at five o’clock tomorrow morning.… You will come; if I am asleep, you will wake me. We are driving out of town.”

II

It was a lovely August evening. The sun, set in a golden background lightly flecked with purple, stood above the western horizon on the point of sinking behind the faraway tumuli. In the garden, shadows and half-shadows had vanished, and the air had grown damp, but the golden light was still playing on the treetops.… It was warm.… Rain had just fallen, and made the fresh, transparent fragrant air still fresher.

I am not describing the August of Petersburg or Moscow, foggy, tearful, and dark, with its cold, incredibly damp sunsets. God forbid! I am not describing our cruel northern August. I ask the reader to move with me to the Crimea, to one of its shores, not far from Feodosia, the spot where stands the villa of one of our heroes. It is a pretty, neat villa surrounded by flowerbeds and clipped bushes. A hundred paces behind it is an orchard in which its inmates walk.… Groholsky pays a high rent for that villa, a thousand roubles a year, I believe.… The villa is not worth that rent, but it is pretty.… Tall, with delicate walls and very delicate parapets, fragile, slender, painted a pale blue colour, hung with curtains, portières, draperies, it suggests a charming, fragile Chinese lady.…

On the evening described above, Groholsky and Liza were sitting on the verandah of this villa. Groholsky was reading *Novoye Vremya* and drinking milk out of a green mug. A syphon of Seltzer water was standing on the table before him. Groholsky imagined that he was suffering from catarrh of the lungs, and by the advice of Dr. Dmitriev consumed an immense quantity of grapes, milk, and Seltzer water. Liza was sitting in a soft easy chair some distance from the table. With her elbows on the parapet, and her little face propped on her little fists, she was gazing at the villa opposite.… The sun was playing upon the windows of the villa opposite, the glittering panes reflected the dazzling light.… Beyond the little garden and the few trees that surrounded the villa there was a glimpse of the sea with its waves, its dark blue colour, its immensity, its white masts.… It was so delightful! Groholsky was reading an article by Anonymous, and after every dozen lines he raised his blue eyes to Liza’s back.… The same passionate, fervent love was

shining in those eyes still.… He was infinitely happy in spite of his imaginary catarrh of the lungs.… Liza was conscious of his eyes upon her back, and was thinking of Mishutka’s brilliant future, and she felt so comfortable, so serene.…

She was not so much interested by the sea, and the glittering reflection on the windows of the villa opposite as by the wagons which were trailing up to that villa one after another.

The wagons were full of furniture and all sorts of domestic articles. Liza watched the trellis gates and big glass doors of the villa being opened and the men bustling about the furniture and wrangling incessantly. Big armchairs and a sofa covered with dark raspberry coloured velvet, tables for the hall, the drawing room and the dining room, a big double bed and a child’s cot were carried in by the glass doors; something big, wrapped up in sacking, was carried in too. A grand piano, thought Liza, and her heart throbbed.

It was long since she had heard the piano, and she was so fond of it. They had not a single musical instrument in their villa. Groholsky and she were musicians only in soul, no more. There were a great many boxes and packages with the words “with care” upon them carried in after the piano.

They were boxes of looking-glasses and crockery. A gorgeous and luxurious carriage was dragged in, at the gate, and two white horses were led in looking like swans.

“My goodness, what riches!” thought Liza, remembering her old pony which Groholsky, who did not care for riding, had bought her for a hundred roubles. Compared with those swan-like steeds, her pony seemed to her no better than a bug. Groholsky, who was afraid of riding fast, had purposely bought Liza a poor horse.

“What wealth!” Liza thought and murmured as she gazed at the noisy carriers.

The sun hid behind the tumuli, the air began to lose its dryness and limpidity, and still the furniture was being driven up and hauled into the house. At last it was so dark that Groholsky left off reading the newspaper while Liza still gazed and gazed.

“Shouldn’t we light the lamp?” said Groholsky, afraid that a fly might drop into his milk and be swallowed in the darkness.

“Liza! shouldn’t we light the lamp? Shall we sit in darkness, my angel?”

Liza did not answer. She was interested in a chaise which had driven up to the villa opposite.… What a charming little mare was in that

chaise. Of medium size, not large, but graceful.… A gentleman in a top hat was sitting in the chaise, a child about three, apparently a boy, was sitting on his knees waving his little hands.… He was waving his little hands and shouting with delight.

Liza suddenly uttered a shriek, rose from her seat and lurched forward.

"What is the matter?" asked Groholsky.

"Nothing… I only… I fancied.…"

The tall, broad-shouldered gentleman in the top hat jumped out of the chaise, lifted the boy down, and with a skip and a hop ran gaily in at the glass door. The door opened noisily and he vanished into the darkness of the villa apartments.

Two smart footmen ran up to the horse in the chaise, and most respectfully led it to the gate. Soon the villa opposite was lighted up, and the clatter of plates, knives, and forks was audible. The gentleman in the top hat was having his supper, and judging by the duration of the clatter of crockery, his supper lasted long. Liza fancied she could smell chicken soup and roast duck. After supper discordant sounds of the piano floated across from the villa. In all probability the gentleman in the top hat was trying to amuse the child in some way, and allowing it to strum on it.

Groholsky went up to Liza and put his arm round her waist.

"What wonderful weather!" he said. "What air! Do you feel it? I am very happy, Liza, very happy indeed. My happiness is so great that I am really afraid of its destruction. The greatest things are usually destroyed, and do you know, Liza, in spite of all my happiness, I am not absolutely… at peace.… One haunting thought torments me… it torments me horribly. It gives me no peace by day or by night.…"

"What thought?"

"An awful thought, my love. I am tortured by the thought of your husband. I have been silent hitherto. I have feared to trouble your inner peace, but I cannot go on being silent. Where is he? What has happened to him? What has become of him with his money? It is awful! Every night I see his face, exhausted, suffering, imploring.… Why, only think, my angel—can the money he so generously accepted make up to him for you? He loved you very much, didn't he?"

"Very much!"

"There you see! He has either taken to drink now, or… I am anxious about him! Ah, how anxious I am! Should we write to him, do you think? We ought to comfort him… a kind word, you know."

Groholsky heaved a deep sigh, shook his head, and sank into an easy chair exhausted by painful reflection. Leaning his head on his fists he fell

to musing. Judging from his face, his musings were painful.

"I am going to bed," said Liza; "it's time."

Liza went to her own room, undressed, and dived under the bedclothes. She used to go to bed at ten o'clock and get up at ten. She was fond of her comfort.

She was soon in the arms of Morpheus. Throughout the whole night she had the most fascinating dreams.… She dreamed whole romances, novels, Arabian Nights.… The hero of all these dreams was the gentleman in the top hat, who had caused her to utter a shriek that evening.

The gentleman in the top hat was carrying her off from Groholsky, was singing, was beating Groholsky and her, was flogging the boy under the window, was declaring his love, and driving her off in the chaise.… Oh, dreams! In one night, lying with one's eyes shut, one may sometimes live through more than ten years of happiness.… That night Liza lived through a great variety of experiences, and very happy ones, even in spite of the beating.

Waking up between six and seven, she flung on her clothes, hurriedly did her hair, and without even putting on her Tatar slippers with pointed toes, ran impulsively on to the verandah. Shading her eyes from the sun with one hand, and with the other holding up her slipping clothes, she gazed at the villa opposite. Her face beamed.… There could be no further doubt it was he.

On the verandah in the villa opposite there was a table in front of the glass door. A tea service was shining and glistening on the table with a silver samovar at the head. Ivan Petrovitch was sitting at the table. He had in his hand a glass in a silver holder, and was drinking tea. He was drinking it with great relish. That fact could be deduced from the smacking of his lips, the sound of which reached Liza's ears. He was wearing a brown dressing-gown with black flowers on it. Massive tassels fell down to the ground. It was the first time in her life Liza had seen her husband in a dressing-gown, and such an expensive-looking one.

Mishutka was sitting on one of his knees, and hindering him from drinking his tea. The child jumped up and down and tried to clutch his papa's shining lip. After every three or four sips the father bent down to his son and kissed him on the head. A grey cat with its tail in the air was rubbing itself against one of the table legs, and with a plaintive mew proclaiming its desire for food. Liza hid behind the verandah curtain, and fastened her eyes upon the members of her former family; her face was radiant with joy.

“Misha!” she murmured, “Misha! Are you really here, Misha? The darling! And how he loves Vanya! Heavens!”

And Liza went off into a giggle when Mishutka stirred his father’s tea with a spoon. “And how Vanya loves Misha! My darlings!”

Liza’s heart throbbed, and her head went round with joy and happiness. She sank into an armchair and went on observing them, sitting down.

“How did they come here?” she wondered as she sent airy kisses to Mishutka. “Who gave them the idea of coming here? Heavens! Can all that wealth belong to them? Can those swan-like horses that were led in at the gate belong to Ivan Petrovitch? Ah!”

When he had finished his tea, Ivan Petrovitch went into the house. Ten minutes later, he appeared on the steps and Liza was astounded.… He, who in his youth only seven years ago had been called Vanushka and Vanka and had been ready to punch a man in the face and turn the house upside down over twenty kopecks, was dressed devilishly well. He had on a broad-brimmed straw hat, exquisite brilliant boots, a piqué waistcoat.… Thousands of suns, big and little, glistened on his watch-chain. With much chic he held in his right hand his gloves and cane.

And what swagger, what style there was in his heavy figure when, with a graceful motion of his hand, he bade the footman bring the horse round.

He got into the chaise with dignity, and told the footmen standing round the chaise to give him Mishutka and the fishing tackle they had brought. Setting Mishutka beside him, and putting his left arm round him, he held the reins and drove off.

“Ge-ee up!” shouted Mishutka.

Liza, unaware of what she was doing, waved her handkerchief after them. If she had looked in the glass she would have been surprised at her flushed, laughing, and, at the same time, tear-stained face. She was vexed that she was not beside her gleeful boy, and that she could not for some reason shower kisses on him at once.

For some reason!… Away with all your petty delicacies!

“Grisha! Grisha!” Liza ran into Groholsky’s bedroom and set to work to wake him. “Get up, they have come! The darling!”

“Who has come?” asked Groholsky, waking up.

“Our people… Vanya and Misha, they have come, they are in the villa opposite.… I looked out, and there they were drinking tea.… And Misha too.… What a little angel our Misha has grown! If only you had seen him! Mother of God!”

“Seen whom? Why, you are.… Who has come? Come where?”

“Vanya and Misha.… I have been looking at the villa opposite, while they were sitting drinking tea. Misha can drink his tea by himself now.… Didn’t you see them moving in yesterday, it was they who arrived!”

Groholsky rubbed his forehead and turned pale.

“Arrived? Your husband?” he asked.

“Why, yes.”

“What for?”

“Most likely he is going to live here. They don’t know we are here. If they did, they would have looked at our villa, but they drank their tea and took no notice.”

“Where is he now? But for God’s sake do talk sense! Oh, where is he?”

“He has gone fishing with Misha in the chaise. Did you see the horses yesterday? Those are their horses… Vanya’s… Vanya drives with them. Do you know what, Grisha? We will have Misha to stay with us.… We will, won’t we? He is such a pretty boy. Such an exquisite boy!”

Groholsky pondered, while Liza went on talking and talking.

“This is an unexpected meeting,” said Groholsky, after prolonged and, as usual, harrassing reflection. “Well, who could have expected that we should meet here? Well… There it is.… So be it. It seems that it is fated. I can imagine the awkwardness of his position when he meets us.”

“Shall we have Misha to stay with us?”

“Yes, we will.… It will be awkward meeting him.… Why, what can I say to him? What can I talk of? It will be awkward for him and awkward for me.… We ought not to meet. We will carry on communications, if necessary, through the servants.… My head does ache so, Lizotchka. My arms and legs too, I ache all over. Is my head feverish?”

Liza put her hand on his forehead and found that his head was hot.

“I had dreadful dreams all night… I shan’t get up today. I shall stay in bed… I must take some quinine. Send me my breakfast here, little woman.”

Groholsky took quinine and lay in bed the whole day. He drank warm water, moaned, had the sheets and pillowcase changed, whimpered, and induced an agonising boredom in all surrounding him.

He was insupportable when he imagined he had caught a chill. Liza had continually to interrupt her inquisitive observations and run from the verandah to his room. At dinnertime she had to put on mustard plasters. How boring all this would have been, O reader, if the villa opposite had

not been at the service of my heroine! Liza watched that villa all day long and was gasping with happiness.

At ten o'clock Ivan Petrovitch and Mishutka came back from fishing and had breakfast. At two o'clock they had dinner, and at four o'clock they drove off somewhere in a carriage. The white horses bore them away with the swiftness of lightning. At seven o'clock visitors came to see them—all of them men. They were playing cards on two tables in the verandah till midnight. One of the men played superbly on the piano. The visitors played, ate, drank, and laughed. Ivan Petrovitch guffawing loudly, told them an anecdote of Armenian life at the top of his voice, so that all the villas round could hear. It was very gay and Mishutka sat up with them till midnight.

"Misha is merry, he is not crying," thought Liza, "so he does not remember his mamma. So he has forgotten me!"

And there was a horrible bitter feeling in Liza's soul. She spent the whole night crying. She was fretted by her little conscience, and by vexation and misery, and the desire to talk to Mishutka and kiss him.… In the morning she got up with a headache and tear-stained eyes. Her tears Groholsky put down to his own account.

"Do not weep, darling," he said to her, "I am all right today, my chest is a little painful, but that is nothing."

While they were having tea, lunch was being served at the villa opposite. Ivan Petrovitch was looking at his plate, and seeing nothing but a morsel of goose dripping with fat.

"I am very glad," said Groholsky, looking askance at Bugrov, "very glad that his life is so tolerable! I hope that decent surroundings anyway may help to stifle his grief. Keep out of sight, Liza! They will see you… I am not disposed to talk to him just now… God be with him! Why trouble his peace?"

But the dinner did not pass off so quietly. During dinner precisely that "awkward position" which Groholsky so dreaded occurred. Just when the partridges, Groholsky's favorite dish, had been put on the table, Liza was suddenly overcome with confusion, and Groholsky began wiping his face with his dinner napkin. On the verandah of the villa opposite they saw Bugrov. He was standing with his arms leaning on the parapet, and staring straight at them, with his eyes starting out of his head.

"Go in, Liza, go in," Groholsky whispered. "I said we must have dinner indoors! What a girl you are, really.…"

Bugrov stared and stared, and suddenly began shouting. Groholsky looked at him and saw a face full of astonishment.…

“Is that you?” bawled Ivan Petrovitch, “you! Are you here too?”

Groholsky passed his fingers from one shoulder to another, as though to say, “My chest is weak, and so I can’t shout across such a distance.” Liza’s heart began throbbing, and everything turned round before her eyes. Bugrov ran from his verandah, ran across the road, and a few seconds later was standing under the verandah on which Groholsky and Liza were dining. Alas for the partridges!

“How are you?” he began, flushing crimson, and stuffing his big hands in his pockets. “Are you here? Are you here too?”

“Yes, we are here too.…”

“How did you get here?”

“Why, how did you?”

“I? It’s a long story, a regular romance, my good friend! But don’t put yourselves out—eat your dinner! I’ve been living, you know, ever since then… in the Oryol province. I rented an estate. A splendid estate! But do eat your dinner! I stayed there from the end of May, but now I have given it up.… It was cold there, and—well, the doctor advised me to go to the Crimea.…”

“Are you ill, then?” inquired Groholsky.

“Oh, well.… There always seems, as it were… something gurgling here.…”

And at the word “here” Ivan Petrovitch passed his open hand from his neck down to the middle of his stomach.

“So you are here too.… Yes… that’s very pleasant. Have you been here long?”

“Since July.”

“Oh, and you, Liza, how are you? Quite well?”

“Quite well,” answered Liza, and was embarrassed.

“You miss Mishutka, I’ll be bound. Eh? Well, he’s here with me.… I’ll send him over to you directly with Nikifor. This is very nice. Well, goodbye! I have to go off directly.… I made the acquaintance of Prince Ter-Haimazov yesterday; delightful man, though he is an Armenian. So he has a croquet party today; we are going to play croquet.… Goodbye! The carriage is waiting.…”

Ivan Petrovitch whirled round, tossed his head, and, waving adieu to them, ran home.

“Unhappy man,” said Groholsky, heaving a deep sigh as he watched him go off.

“In what way is he unhappy?” asked Liza.

“To see you and not have the right to call you his!”

“Fool!” Liza was so bold to think. “Idiot!”

Before evening Liza was hugging and kissing Mishutka. At first the boy howled, but when he was offered jam, he was all friendly smiles.

For three days Groholsky and Liza did not see Bugrov. He had disappeared somewhere, and was only at home at night. On the fourth day he visited them again at dinnertime. He came in, shook hands with both of them, and sat down to the table. His face was serious.

“I have come to you on business,” he said. “Read this.” And he handed Groholsky a letter. “Read it! Read it aloud!”

Groholsky read as follows:

> “My beloved and consoling, never-forgotten son Ioann! I have received the respectful and loving letter in which you invite your aged father to the mild and salubrious Crimea, to breathe the fragrant air, and behold strange lands. To that letter I reply that on taking my holiday, I will come to you, but not for long. My colleague, Father Gerasim, is a frail and delicate man, and cannot be left alone for long. I am very sensible of your not forgetting your parents, your father and your mother.… You rejoice your father with your affection, and you remember your mother in your prayers, and so it is fitting to do. Meet me at Feodosia. What sort of town is Feodosia—what is it like? It will be very agreeable to see it. Your godmother, who took you from the font, is called Feodosia. You write that God has been graciously pleased that you should win two hundred thousand roubles. That is gratifying to me. But I cannot approve of your having left the service while still of a grade of little importance; even a rich man ought to be in the service. I bless you always, now and hereafter. Ilya and Seryozhka Andronov send you their greetings. You might send them ten roubles each—they are badly off!
>
> “Your loving Father,
> “Pyotr Bugrov, *Priest*.”

Groholsky read this letter aloud, and he and Liza both looked inquiringly at Bugrov.

“You see what it is,” Ivan Petrovitch began hesitatingly. “I should like to ask you, Liza, not to let him see you, to keep out of his sight while he is here. I have written to him that you are ill and gone to the Caucasus

for a cure. If you meet him… You see yourself.… It's awkward… H'm.…"

"Very well," said Liza.

"We can do that," thought Groholsky, "since he makes sacrifices, why shouldn't we?"

"Please do.… If he sees you there will be trouble.… My father is a man of strict principles. He would curse me in seven churches. Don't go out of doors, Liza, that is all. He won't be here long. Don't be afraid."

Father Pyotr did not long keep them waiting. One fine morning Ivan Petrovitch ran in and hissed in a mysterious tone:

"He has come! He is asleep now, so please be careful."

And Liza was shut up within four walls. She did not venture to go out into the yard or on to the verandah. She could only see the sky from behind the window curtain. Unluckily for her, Ivan Petrovitch's papa spent his whole time in the open air, and even slept on the verandah. Usually Father Pyotr, a little parish priest, in a brown cassock and a top hat with a curly brim, walked slowly round the villas and gazed with curiosity at the "strange lands" through his grandfatherly spectacles. Ivan Petrovitch with the Stanislav on a little ribbon accompanied him. He did not wear a decoration as a rule, but before his own people he liked to show off. In their society he always wore the Stanislav.

Liza was bored to death. Groholsky suffered too. He had to go for his walks alone without a companion. He almost shed tears, but… had to submit to his fate. And to make things worse, Bugrov would run across every morning and in a hissing whisper would give some quite unnecessary bulletin concerning the health of Father Pyotr. He bored them with those bulletins.

"He slept well," he informed them. "Yesterday he was put out because I had no salted cucumbers… He has taken to Mishutka; he keeps patting him on the head."

At last, a fortnight later, little Father Pyotr walked for the last time round the villas and, to Groholsky's immense relief, departed. He had enjoyed himself, and went off very well satisfied. Liza and Groholsky fell back into their old manner of life. Groholsky once more blessed his fate. But his happiness did not last for long. A new trouble worse than Father Pyotr followed. Ivan Petrovitch took to coming to see them every day. Ivan Petrovitch, to be frank, though a capital fellow, was a very tedious person. He came at dinnertime, dined with them and stayed a very long time. That would not have mattered. But they had to buy vodka, which Groholsky could not endure, for his dinner. He would

drink five glasses and talk the whole dinnertime. That, too, would not have mattered.… But he would sit on till two o'clock in the morning, and not let them get to bed, and, worse still, he permitted himself to talk of things about which he should have been silent. When towards two o'clock in the morning he had drunk too much vodka and champagne, he would take Mishutka in his arms, and weeping, say to him, before Groholsky and Liza:

"Mihail, my son, what am I? I… am a scoundrel. I have sold your mother! Sold her for thirty pieces of silver, may the Lord punish me! Mihail Ivanitch, little sucking pig, where is your mother? Lost! Gone! Sold into slavery! Well, I am a scoundrel."

These tears and these words turned Groholsky's soul inside out. He would look timidly at Liza's pale face and wring his hands.

"Go to bed, Ivan Petrovitch," he would say timidly.

"I am going.… Come along, Mishutka.… The Lord be our judge! I cannot think of sleep while I know that my wife is a slave.… But it is not Groholsky's fault.… The goods were mine, the money his.… Freedom for the free and Heaven for the saved."

By day Ivan Petrovitch was no less insufferable to Groholsky. To Groholsky's intense horror, he was always at Liza's side. He went fishing with her, told her stories, walked with her, and even on one occasion, taking advantage of Groholsky's having a cold, carried her off in his carriage, goodness knows where, and did not bring her back till night!

"It's outrageous, inhuman," thought Groholsky, biting his lips.

Groholsky liked to be continually kissing Liza. He could not exist without those honeyed kisses, and it was awkward to kiss her before Ivan Petrovitch. It was agony. The poor fellow felt forlorn, but fate soon had compassion on him. Ivan Petrovitch suddenly went off somewhere for a whole week. Visitors had come and carried him off with them… And Mishutka was taken too.

One fine morning Groholsky came home from a walk good-humoured and beaming.

"He has come," he said to Liza, rubbing his hands. "I am very glad he has come. Ha-ha-ha!"

"What are you laughing at?"

"There are women with him."

"What women?"

"I don't know.… It's a good thing he has got women.… A capital thing, in fact.… He is still young and fresh. Come here! Look!"

Groholsky led Liza on to the verandah, and pointed to the villa opposite. They both held their sides, and roared with laughter. It was funny. Ivan Petrovitch was standing on the verandah of the villa opposite, smiling. Two dark-haired ladies and Mishutka were standing below, under the verandah. The ladies were laughing, and loudly talking French.

"French women," observed Groholsky. "The one nearest us isn't at all bad-looking. Lively damsels, but that's no matter. There are good women to be found even among such.… But they really do go too far."

What was funny was that Ivan Petrovitch bent across the verandah, and stretching with his long arms, put them round the shoulders of one of the French girls, lifted her in the air, and set her giggling on the verandah. After lifting up both ladies on to the verandah, he lifted up Mishutka too. The ladies ran down and the proceedings were repeated.

"Powerful muscles, I must say," muttered Groholsky looking at this scene. The operation was repeated some six times, the ladies were so amiable as to show no embarrassment whatever when the boisterous wind disposed of their inflated skirts as it willed while they were being lifted. Groholsky dropped his eyes in a shamefaced way when the ladies flung their legs over the parapet as they reached the verandah. But Liza watched and laughed! What did she care? It was not a case of men misbehaving themselves, which would have put her, as a woman, to shame, but of ladies.

In the evening, Ivan Petrovitch flew over, and with some embarrassment announced that he was now a man with a household to look after.…

"You mustn't imagine they are just anybody," he said. "It is true they are French. They shout at the top of their voices, and drink… but we all know! The French are brought up to be like that! It can't be helped.… The prince," Ivan Petrovitch added, "let me have them almost for nothing.… He said: 'take them, take them.…' I must introduce you to the prince sometime. A man of culture! He's forever writing, writing.… And do you know what their names are? One is Fanny, the other Isabella.… There's Europe, ha-ha-ha!… The west! Goodbye!"

Ivan Petrovitch left Liza and Groholsky in peace, and devoted himself to his ladies. All day long sound of talk, laughter, and the clatter of crockery came from his villa.… The lights were not put out till far into the night.… Groholsky was in bliss.… At last, after a prolonged interval of agony, he felt happy and at peace again. Ivan Petrovitch with his two ladies had no such happiness as he had with one. But alas, destiny has no

heart. She plays with the Groholskys, the Lizas, the Ivans, and the Mishutkas as with pawns.… Groholsky lost his peace again.…

One morning, about ten days afterwards, on waking up late, he went out on to the verandah and saw a spectacle which shocked him, revolted him, and moved him to intense indignation. Under the verandah of the villa opposite stood the French women, and between them Liza. She was talking and looking askance at her own villa as though to see whether that tyrant, that despot were awake (so Groholsky interpreted those looks). Ivan Petrovitch standing on the verandah with his sleeves tucked up, lifted Isabella into the air, then Fanny, and then Liza. When he was lifting Liza it seemed to Groholsky that he pressed her to himself.… Liza too flung one leg over the parapet.… Oh these women! All sphinxes, every one of them!

When Liza returned home from her husband's villa and went into the bedroom on tiptoe, as though nothing had happened, Groholsky, pale, with hectic flushes on his cheeks, was lying in the attitude of a man at his last gasp and moaning.

On seeing Liza, he sprang out of bed, and began pacing about the bedroom.

"So that's what you are like, is it?" he shrieked in a high tenor. "So that's it! Very much obliged to you! It's revolting, madam! Immoral, in fact! Let me tell you that!"

Liza turned pale, and of course burst into tears. When women feel that they are in the right, they scold and shed tears; when they are conscious of being in fault, they shed tears only.

"On a level with those depraved creatures! It's… it's… it's… lower than any impropriety! Why, do you know what they are? They are kept women! Cocottes! And you a respectable woman go rushing off where they are… And he… He! What does he want? What more does he want of me? I don't understand it! I have given him half of my property—I have given him more! You know it yourself! I have given him what I have not myself.… I have given him almost all.… And he! I've put up with your calling him Vanya, though he has no right whatever to such intimacy. I have put up with your walks, kisses after dinner.… I have put up with everything, but this I will not put up with.… Either he or I! Let him go away, or I go away! I'm not equal to living like this any longer, no! You can see that for yourself!… Either he or I.… Enough! The cup is brimming over.… I have suffered a great deal as it is.… I am going to talk to him at once—this minute! What is he, after all? What has he to be

proud of? No, indeed.… He has no reason to think so much of himself.…”

Groholsky said a great many more valiant and stinging things, but did not “go at once”; he felt timid and abashed.… He went to Ivan Petrovitch three days later.

When he went into his apartment, he gaped with astonishment. He was amazed at the wealth and luxury with which Bugrov had surrounded himself. Velvet hangings, fearfully expensive chairs.… One was positively ashamed to step on the carpet. Groholsky had seen many rich men in his day, but he had never seen such frenzied luxury.… And the higgledy-piggledy muddle he saw when, with an inexplicable tremor, he walked into the drawing room—plates with bits of bread on them were lying about on the grand piano, a glass was standing on a chair, under the table there was a basket with a filthy rag in it.… Nut shells were strewn about in the windows. Bugrov himself was not quite in his usual trim when Groholsky walked in.… With a red face and uncombed locks he was pacing about the room in deshabille, talking to himself, apparently much agitated. Mishutka was sitting on the sofa there in the drawing room, and was making the air vibrate with a piercing scream.

“It’s awful, Grigory Vassilyevitch!” Bugrov began on seeing Groholsky, “such disorder… such disorder… Please sit down. You must excuse my being in the costume of Adam and Eve.… It’s of no consequence.… Horrible disorderliness! I don’t understand how people can exist here, I don’t understand it! The servants won’t do what they are told, the climate is horrible, everything is expensive.… Stop your noise,” Bugrov shouted, suddenly coming to a halt before Mishutka; “stop it, I tell you! Little beast, won’t you stop it?”

And Bugrov pulled Mishutka’s ear.

“That’s revolting, Ivan Petrovitch,” said Groholsky in a tearful voice. “How can you treat a tiny child like that? You really are…”

“Let him stop yelling then.… Be quiet—I’ll whip you!”

“Don’t cry, Misha darling.… Papa won’t touch you again. Don’t beat him, Ivan Petrovitch; why, he is hardly more than a baby.… There, there.… Would you like a little horse? I’ll send you a little horse.… You really are hard-hearted.…”

Groholsky paused, and then asked:

“And how are your ladies getting on, Ivan Petrovitch?”

“Not at all. I’ve turned them out without ceremony. I might have gone on keeping them, but it’s awkward.… The boy will grow up.… A father’s example.… If I were alone, then it would be a different thing.…

Besides, what's the use of my keeping them? Poof… it's a regular farce! I talk to them in Russian, and they answer me in French. They don't understand a thing—you can't knock anything into their heads."

"I've come to you about something, Ivan Petrovitch, to talk things over.… H'm.… It's nothing very particular. But just… two or three words.… In reality, I have a favour to ask of you."

"What's that?"

"Would you think it possible, Ivan Petrovitch, to go away? We are delighted that you are here; it's very agreeable for us, but it's inconvenient, don't you know.… You will understand me. It's awkward in a way.… Such indefinite relations, such continual awkwardness in regard to one another.… We must part.… It's essential in fact. Excuse my saying so, but… you must see for yourself, of course, that in such circumstances to be living side by side leads to… reflections… that is… not to reflections, but there is a certain awkward feeling.…"

"Yes.… That is so, I have thought of it myself. Very good, I will go away."

"We shall be very grateful to you.… Believe me, Ivan Petrovitch, we shall preserve the most flattering memory of you. The sacrifice which you…"

"Very good.… Only what am I to do with all this? I say, you buy this furniture of mine! What do you say? It's not expensive, eight thousand… ten.… The furniture, the carriage, the grand piano.…"

"Very good.… I will give you ten thousand.…"

"Well, that is capital! I will set off tomorrow. I shall go to Moscow. It's impossible to live here. Everything is so dear! Awfully dear! The money fairly flies.… You can't take a step without spending a thousand! I can't go on like that. I have a child to bring up.… Well, thank God that you will buy my furniture.… That will be a little more in hand, or I should have been regularly bankrupt.…"

Groholsky got up, took leave of Bugrov, and went home rejoicing. In the evening he sent him ten thousand roubles.

Early next morning Bugrov and Mishutka were already at Feodosia.

III

Several months had passed; spring had come. With spring, fine bright days had come too. Life was not so dull and hateful, and the earth was more fair to look upon.… There was a warm breeze from the sea and the open country.… The earth was covered with fresh grass, fresh leaves were green upon the trees. Nature had sprung into new life, and had put on new array.

It might be thought that new hopes and new desires would surge up in man when everything in nature is renewed, and young and fresh… but it is hard for man to renew life.…

Groholsky was still living in the same villa. His hopes and desires, small and unexacting, were still concentrated on the same Liza, on her alone, and on nothing else! As before, he could not take his eyes off her, and gloated over the thought: how happy I am! The poor fellow really did feel awfully happy. Liza sat as before on the verandah, and unaccountably stared with bored eyes at the villa opposite and the trees near it through which there was a peep at the dark blue sea.… As before, she spent her days for the most part in silence, often in tears and from time to time in putting mustard plasters on Groholsky. She might be congratulated on one new sensation, however. There was a worm gnawing at her vitals.… That worm was misery.… She was fearfully miserable, pining for her son, for her old, her cheerful manner of life. Her life in the past had not been particularly cheerful, but still it was livelier than her present existence. When she lived with her husband she used from time to time to go to a theatre, to an entertainment, to visit acquaintances. But here with Groholsky it was all quietness and emptiness.… Besides, here there was one man, and he with his ailments and his continual mawkish kisses, was like an old grandfather forever shedding tears of joy.

It was boring! Here she had not Mihey Sergeyitch who used to be fond of dancing the mazurka with her. She had not Spiridon Nikolaitch, the son of the editor of the *Provincial News*. Spiridon Nikolaitch sang well and recited poetry. Here she had not a table set with lunch for visitors. She had not Gerasimovna, the old nurse who used to be continually

grumbling at her for eating too much jam.… She had no one! There was simply nothing for her but to lie down and die of depression. Groholsky rejoiced in his solitude, but… he was wrong to rejoice in it. All too soon he paid for his egoism. At the beginning of May when the very air seemed to be in love and faint with happiness, Groholsky lost everything; the woman he loved and…

That year Bugrov, too, visited the Crimea. He did not take the villa opposite, but pottered about, going from one town to another with Mishutka. He spent his time eating, drinking, sleeping, and playing cards. He had lost all relish for fishing, shooting and the French women, who, between ourselves, had robbed him a bit. He had grown thin, lost his broad and beaming smiles, and had taken to dressing in canvas. Ivan Petrovitch from time to time visited Groholsky's villa. He brought Liza jam, sweets, and fruit, and seemed trying to dispel her ennui. Groholsky was not troubled by these visits, especially as they were brief and infrequent, and were apparently paid on account of Mishutka, who could not under any circumstances have been altogether deprived of the privilege of seeing his mother. Bugrov came, unpacked his presents, and after saying a few words, departed. And those few words he said not to Liza but to Groholsky.… With Liza he was silent and Groholsky's mind was at rest; but there is a Russian proverb which he would have done well to remember: "Don't fear the dog that barks, but fear the dog that's quiet.…" A fiendish proverb, but in practical life sometimes indispensable.

As he was walking in the garden one day, Groholsky heard two voices in conversation. One voice was a man's, the other was a woman's. One belonged to Bugrov, the other to Liza. Groholsky listened, and turning white as death, turned softly towards the speakers. He halted behind a lilac bush, and proceeded to watch and listen. His arms and legs turned cold. A cold sweat came out upon his brow. He clutched several branches of the lilac that he might not stagger and fall down. All was over!

Bugrov had his arm round Liza's waist, and was saying to her:

"My darling! what are we to do? It seems it was God's will.… I am a scoundrel.… I sold you. I was seduced by that Herod's money, plague take him, and what good have I had from the money? Nothing but anxiety and display! No peace, no happiness, no position.… One sits like a fat invalid at the same spot, and never a step forwarder.… Have you heard that Andrushka Markuzin has been made a head clerk? Andrushka, that fool! While I stagnate.… Good heavens! I have lost you, I have lost

my happiness. I am a scoundrel, a blackguard, how do you think I shall feel at the dread day of judgment?”

“Let us go away, Vanya,” wailed Liza. “I am dull.… I am dying of depression.”

“We cannot, the money has been taken.…”

“Well, give it back again.”

“I should be glad to, but… wait a minute. I have spent it all. We must submit, my girl. God is chastising us. Me for my covetousness and you for your frivolity. Well, let us be tortured.… It will be the better for us in the next world.”

And in an access of religious feeling, Bugrov turned up his eyes to heaven.

“But I cannot go on living here; I am miserable.”

“Well, there is no help for it. I’m miserable too. Do you suppose I am happy without you? I am pining and wasting away! And my chest has begun to be bad!… You are my lawful wife, flesh of my flesh… one flesh.… You must live and bear it! While I… will drive over… visit you.”

And bending down to Liza, Bugrov whispered, loudly enough, however, to be heard several yards away:

“I will come to you at night, Lizanka.… Don’t worry.… I am staying at Feodosia close by.… I will live here near you till I have run through everything… and I soon shall be at my last farthing! A-a-ah, what a life it is! Dreariness, ill… my chest is bad, and my stomach is bad.”

Bugrov ceased speaking, and then it was Liza’s turn.… My God, the cruelty of that woman! She began weeping, complaining, enumerating all the defects of her lover and her own sufferings. Groholsky as he listened to her, felt that he was a villain, a miscreant, a murderer.

“He makes me miserable.…” Liza said in conclusion.

After kissing Liza at parting, and going out at the garden gate, Bugrov came upon Groholsky, who was standing at the gate waiting for him.

“Ivan Petrovitch,” said Groholsky in the tone of a dying man, “I have seen and heard it all… It’s not honourable on your part, but I do not blame you.… You love her too, but you must understand that she is mine. Mine! I cannot live without her! How is it you don’t understand that? Granted that you love her, that you are miserable.… Have I not paid you, in part at least, for your sufferings? For God’s sake, go away! For God’s sake, go away! Go away from here forever, I implore you, or you will kill me.…”

“I have nowhere to go,” Bugrov said thickly.

“H’m, you have squandered everything.… You are an impulsive man. Very well.… Go to my estate in the province of Tchernigov. If you like I will make you a present of the property. It’s a small estate, but a good one.… On my honour, it’s a good one!”

Bugrov gave a broad grin. He suddenly felt himself in the seventh heaven.

“I will give it you.… This very day I will write to my steward and send him an authorisation for completing the purchase. You must tell everyone you have bought it.… Go away, I entreat you.”

“Very good, I will go. I understand.”

“Let us go to a notary… at once,” said Groholsky, greatly cheered, and he went to order the carriage.

On the following evening, when Liza was sitting on the garden seat where her rendezvous with Ivan Petrovitch usually took place, Groholsky went quietly to her. He sat down beside her, and took her hand.

“Are you dull, Lizotchka?” he said, after a brief silence. “Are you depressed? Why shouldn’t we go away somewhere? Why is it we always stay at home? We want to go about, to enjoy ourselves, to make acquaintances.… Don’t we?”

“I want nothing,” said Liza, and turned her pale, thin face towards the path by which Bugrov used to come to her.

Groholsky pondered. He knew who it was she expected, who it was she wanted.

“Let us go home, Liza,” he said, “it is damp here.…”

“You go; I’ll come directly.”

Groholsky pondered again.

“You are expecting him?” he asked, and made a wry face as though his heart had been gripped with red-hot pincers.

“Yes.… I want to give him the socks for Misha.…”

“He will not come.”

“How do you know?”

“He has gone away.…”

Liza opened her eyes wide.…

“He has gone away, gone to the Tchernigov province. I have given him my estate.…”

Liza turned fearfully pale, and caught at Groholsky’s shoulder to save herself from falling.

“I saw him off at the steamer at three o’clock.”

Liza suddenly clutched at her head, made a movement, and falling on the seat, began shaking all over.

"Vanya," she wailed, "Vanya! I will go to Vanya.… Darling!"

She had a fit of hysterics.…

And from that evening, right up to July, two shadows could be seen in the park in which the summer visitors took their walks. The shadows wandered about from morning till evening, and made the summer visitors feel dismal.… After Liza's shadow invariably walked the shadow of Groholsky.… I call them shadows because they had both lost their natural appearance. They had grown thin and pale and shrunken, and looked more like shadows than living people.… Both were pining away like fleas in the classic anecdote of the Jew who sold insect powder.

At the beginning of July, Liza ran away from Groholsky, leaving a note in which she wrote that she was going for a time to "her son"… For a time! She ran away by night when Groholsky was asleep.… After reading her letter Groholsky spent a whole week wandering round about the villa as though he were mad, and neither ate nor slept. In August, he had an attack of recurrent fever, and in September he went abroad. There he took to drink.… He hoped in drink and dissipation to find comfort.… He squandered all his fortune, but did not succeed, poor fellow, in driving out of his brain the image of the beloved woman with the kittenish face.… Men do not die of happiness, nor do they die of misery. Groholsky's hair went grey, but he did not die: he is alive to this day.… He came back from abroad to have "just a peep" at Liza.… Bugrov met him with open arms, and made him stay for an indefinite period. He is staying with Bugrov to this day.

This year I happened to be passing through Groholyovka, Bugrov's estate. I found the master and the mistress of the house having supper.… Ivan Petrovitch was highly delighted to see me, and fell to pressing good things upon me.… He had grown rather stout, and his face was a trifle puffy, though it was still rosy and looked sleek and well-nourished.… He was not bald. Liza, too, had grown fatter. Plumpness did not suit her. Her face was beginning to lose the kittenish look, and was, alas! more suggestive of the seal. Her cheeks were spreading upwards, outwards, and to both sides. The Bugrovs were living in first-rate style. They had plenty of everything. The house was overflowing with servants and edibles.…

When we had finished supper we got into conversation. Forgetting that Liza did not play, I asked her to play us something on the piano.

“She does not play,” said Bugrov; “she is no musician.… Hey, you there! Ivan! call Grigory Vassilyevitch here! What’s he doing there?” And turning to me, Bugrov added, “Our musician will come directly; he plays the guitar. We keep the piano for Mishutka—we are having him taught.…”

Five minutes later, Groholsky walked into the room—sleepy, unkempt, and unshaven.… He walked in, bowed to me, and sat down on one side.

“Why, whoever goes to bed so early?” said Bugrov, addressing him. “What a fellow you are really! He’s always asleep, always asleep… The sleepy head! Come, play us something lively.…”

Groholsky turned the guitar, touched the strings, and began singing:

“Yesterday I waited for my dear one.…”

I listened to the singing, looked at Bugrov’s well-fed countenance, and thought: “Nasty brute!” I felt like crying.… When he had finished singing, Groholsky bowed to us, and went out.

“And what am I to do with him?” Bugrov said when he had gone away. “I do have trouble with him! In the day he is always brooding and brooding.… And at night he moans.… He sleeps, but he sighs and moans in his sleep.… It is a sort of illness.… What am I to do with him, I can’t think! He won’t let us sleep.… I am afraid that he will go out of his mind. People think he is badly treated here.… In what way is he badly treated? He eats with us, and he drinks with us.… Only we won’t give him money. If we were to give him any he would spend it on drink or waste it.… That’s another trouble for me! Lord forgive me, a sinner!”

They made me stay the night. When I woke next morning, Bugrov was giving someone a lecture in the adjoining room.…

“Set a fool to say his prayers, and he will crack his skull on the floor! Why, who paints oars green! Do think, blockhead! Use your sense! Why don’t you speak?”

“I… I… made a mistake,” said a husky tenor apologetically.

The tenor belonged to Groholsky.

Groholsky saw me to the station.

“He is a despot, a tyrant,” he kept whispering to me all the way. “He is a generous man, but a tyrant! Neither heart nor brain are developed in him.… He tortures me! If it were not for that noble woman, I should have gone away long ago. I am sorry to leave her. It’s somehow easier to endure together.”

Groholsky heaved a sigh, and went on:

“She is with child.… You notice it? It is really my child.… Mine.… She soon saw her mistake, and gave herself to me again. She cannot endure him.…”

“You are a rag,” I could not refrain from saying to Groholsky.

“Yes, I am a man of weak character.… That is quite true. I was born so. Do you know how I came into the world? My late papa cruelly oppressed a certain little clerk—it was awful how he treated him! He poisoned his life. Well… and my late mama was tenderhearted. She came from the people, she was of the working class.… She took that little clerk to her heart from pity.… Well… and so I came into the world.… The son of the ill-treated clerk. How could I have a strong will? Where was I to get it from? But that’s the second bell.… Goodbye. Come and see us again, but don’t tell Ivan Petrovitch what I have said about him.”

I pressed Groholsky’s hand, and got into the train. He bowed towards the carriage, and went to the water-barrel—I suppose he was thirsty!

JOY

It was twelve o'clock at night.

Mitya Kuldarov, with excited face and ruffled hair, flew into his parents' flat, and hurriedly ran through all the rooms. His parents had already gone to bed. His sister was in bed, finishing the last page of a novel. His schoolboy brothers were asleep.

"Where have you come from?" cried his parents in amazement. "What is the matter with you?"

"Oh, don't ask! I never expected it; no, I never expected it! It's… it's positively incredible!"

Mitya laughed and sank into an armchair, so overcome by happiness that he could not stand on his legs.

"It's incredible! You can't imagine! Look!"

His sister jumped out of bed and, throwing a quilt round her, went in to her brother. The schoolboys woke up.

"What's the matter? You don't look like yourself!"

"It's because I am so delighted, Mamma! Do you know, now all Russia knows of me! All Russia! Till now only you knew that there was a registration clerk called Dmitry Kuldarov, and now all Russia knows it! Mamma! Oh, Lord!"

Mitya jumped up, ran up and down all the rooms, and then sat down again.

"Why, what has happened? Tell us sensibly!"

"You live like wild beasts, you don't read the newspapers and take no notice of what's published, and there's so much that is interesting in the papers. If anything happens it's all known at once, nothing is hidden! How happy I am! Oh, Lord! You know it's only celebrated people whose names are published in the papers, and now they have gone and published mine!"

"What do you mean? Where?"

The papa turned pale. The mamma glanced at the holy image and crossed herself. The schoolboys jumped out of bed and, just as they

were, in short nightshirts, went up to their brother.

“Yes! My name has been published! Now all Russia knows of me! Keep the paper, mamma, in memory of it! We will read it sometimes! Look!”

Mitya pulled out of his pocket a copy of the paper, gave it to his father, and pointed with his finger to a passage marked with blue pencil.

“Read it!”

The father put on his spectacles.

“Do read it!”

The mamma glanced at the holy image and crossed herself. The papa cleared his throat and began to read: “At eleven o’clock on the evening of the 29th of December, a registration clerk of the name of Dmitry Kuldarov…”

“You see, you see! Go on!”

“… a registration clerk of the name of Dmitry Kuldarov, coming from the beershop in Kozihin’s buildings in Little Bronnaia in an intoxicated condition…”

“That’s me and Semyon Petrovitch.… It’s all described exactly! Go on! Listen!”

“… intoxicated condition, slipped and fell under a horse belonging to a sledge-driver, a peasant of the village of Durikino in the Yuhnovsky district, called Ivan Drotov. The frightened horse, stepping over Kuldarov and drawing the sledge over him, together with a Moscow merchant of the second guild called Stepan Lukov, who was in it, dashed along the street and was caught by some house-porters. Kuldarov, at first in an unconscious condition, was taken to the police station and there examined by the doctor. The blow he had received on the back of his head…”

“It was from the shaft, papa. Go on! Read the rest!”

“… he had received on the back of his head turned out not to be serious. The incident was duly reported. Medical aid was given to the injured man.…”

“They told me to foment the back of my head with cold water. You have read it now? Ah! So you see. Now it’s all over Russia! Give it here!”

Mitya seized the paper, folded it up and put it into his pocket.

“I’ll run round to the Makarovs and show it to them.… I must show it to the Ivanitskys too, Natasya Ivanovna, and Anisim Vassilyitch.… I’ll run! Goodbye!”

Mitya put on his cap with its cockade and, joyful and triumphant, ran into the street.

At the Barber's

Morning. It is not yet seven o'clock, but Makar Kuzmitch Blyostken's shop is already open. The barber himself, an unwashed, greasy, but foppishly dressed youth of three and twenty, is busy clearing up; there is really nothing to be cleared away, but he is perspiring with his exertions. In one place he polishes with a rag, in another he scrapes with his finger or catches a bug and brushes it off the wall.

The barber's shop is small, narrow, and unclean. The log walls are hung with paper suggestive of a cabman's faded shirt. Between the two dingy, perspiring windows there is a thin, creaking, rickety door, above it, green from the damp, a bell which trembles and gives a sickly ring of itself without provocation. Glance into the looking-glass which hangs on one of the walls, and it distorts your countenance in all directions in the most merciless way! The shaving and haircutting is done before this looking-glass. On the little table, as greasy and unwashed as Makar Kuzmitch himself, there is everything: combs, scissors, razors, a ha'porth of wax for the moustache, a ha'porth of powder, a ha'porth of much watered eau de cologne, and indeed the whole barber's shop is not worth more than fifteen kopecks.

There is a squeaking sound from the invalid bell and an elderly man in a tanned sheepskin and high felt overboots walks into the shop. His head and neck are wrapped in a woman's shawl.

This is Erast Ivanitch Yagodov, Makar Kuzmitch's godfather. At one time he served as a watchman in the Consistory, now he lives near the Red Pond and works as a locksmith.

"Makarushka, good day, dear boy!" he says to Makar Kuzmitch, who is absorbed in tidying up.

They kiss each other. Yagodov drags his shawl off his head, crosses himself, and sits down.

"What a long way it is!" he says, sighing and clearing his throat. "It's no joke! From the Red Pond to the Kaluga gate."

"How are you?"

“In a poor way, my boy. I’ve had a fever.”

“You don’t say so! Fever!”

“Yes, I have been in bed a month; I thought I should die. I had extreme unction. Now my hair’s coming out. The doctor says I must be shaved. He says the hair will grow again strong. And so, I thought, I’ll go to Makar. Better to a relation than to anyone else. He will do it better and he won’t take anything for it. It’s rather far, that’s true, but what of it? It’s a walk.”

“I’ll do it with pleasure. Please sit down.”

With a scrape of his foot Makar Kuzmitch indicates a chair. Yagodov sits down and looks at himself in the glass and is apparently pleased with his reflection: the looking-glass displays a face awry, with Kalmuck lips, a broad, blunt nose, and eyes in the forehead. Makar Kuzmitch puts round his client’s shoulders a white sheet with yellow spots on it, and begins snipping with the scissors.

“I’ll shave you clean to the skin!” he says.

“To be sure. So that I may look like a Tartar, like a bomb. The hair will grow all the thicker.”

“How’s auntie?”

“Pretty middling. The other day she went as midwife to the major’s lady. They gave her a rouble.”

“Oh, indeed, a rouble. Hold your ear.”

“I am holding it.… Mind you don’t cut me. Oy, you hurt! You are pulling my hair.”

“That doesn’t matter. We can’t help that in our work. And how is Anna Erastovna?”

“My daughter? She is all right, she’s skipping about. Last week on the Wednesday we betrothed her to Sheikin. Why didn’t you come?”

The scissors cease snipping. Makar Kuzmitch drops his hands and asks in a fright:

“Who is betrothed?”

“Anna.”

“How’s that? To whom?”

“To Sheikin. Prokofy Petrovitch. His aunt’s a housekeeper in Zlatoustensky Lane. She is a nice woman. Naturally we are all delighted, thank God. The wedding will be in a week. Mind you come; we will have a good time.”

“But how’s this, Erast Ivanitch?” says Makar Kuzmitch, pale, astonished, and shrugging his shoulders. “It’s… it’s utterly impossible.

Why, Anna Erastovna… why I… why, I cherished sentiments for her, I had intentions. How could it happen?”

“Why, we just went and betrothed her. He’s a good fellow.”

Cold drops of perspiration come on the face of Makar Kuzmitch. He puts the scissors down on the table and begins rubbing his nose with his fist.

“I had intentions,” he says. “It’s impossible, Erast Ivanitch. I… I am in love with her and have made her the offer of my heart.… And auntie promised. I have always respected you as though you were my father.… I always cut your hair for nothing.… I have always obliged you, and when my papa died you took the sofa and ten roubles in cash and have never given them back. Do you remember?”

“Remember! of course I do. Only, what sort of a match would you be, Makar? You are nothing of a match. You’ve neither money nor position, your trade’s a paltry one.”

“And is Sheikin rich?”

“Sheikin is a member of a union. He has a thousand and a half lent on mortgage. So my boy.… It’s no good talking about it, the thing’s done. There is no altering it, Makarushka. You must look out for another bride.… The world is not so small. Come, cut away. Why are you stopping?”

Makar Kuzmitch is silent and remains motionless, then he takes a handkerchief out of his pocket and begins to cry.

“Come, what is it?” Erast Ivanitch comforts him. “Give over. Fie, he is blubbering like a woman! You finish my head and then cry. Take up the scissors!”

Makar Kuzmitch takes up the scissors, stares vacantly at them for a minute, then drops them again on the table. His hands are shaking.

“I can’t,” he says. “I can’t do it just now. I haven’t the strength! I am a miserable man! And she is miserable! We loved each other, we had given each other our promise and we have been separated by unkind people without any pity. Go away, Erast Ivanitch! I can’t bear the sight of you.”

“So I’ll come tomorrow, Makarushka. You will finish me tomorrow.”

“Right.”

“You calm yourself and I will come to you early in the morning.”

Erast Ivanitch has half his head shaven to the skin and looks like a convict. It is awkward to be left with a head like that, but there is no help for it. He wraps his head in the shawl and walks out of the barber’s shop. Left alone, Makar Kuzmitch sits down and goes on quietly weeping.

Early next morning Erast Ivanitch comes again.

“What do you want?” Makar Kuzmitch asks him coldly.

“Finish cutting my hair, Makarushka. There is half the head left to do.”

“Kindly give me the money in advance. I won’t cut it for nothing.”

Without saying a word Erast Ivanitch goes out, and to this day his hair is long on one side of the head and short on the other. He regards it as extravagance to pay for having his hair cut and is waiting for the hair to grow of itself on the shaven side.

He danced at the wedding in that condition.

An Enigmatic Nature

On the red velvet seat of a first-class railway carriage a pretty lady sits half reclining. An expensive fluffy fan trembles in her tightly closed fingers, a pince-nez keeps dropping off her pretty little nose, the brooch heaves and falls on her bosom, like a boat on the ocean. She is greatly agitated.

On the seat opposite sits the Provincial Secretary of Special Commissions, a budding young author, who from time to time publishes long stories of high life, or "Novelli" as he calls them, in the leading paper of the province. He is gazing into her face, gazing intently, with the eyes of a connoisseur. He is watching, studying, catching every shade of this exceptional, enigmatic nature. He understands it, he fathoms it. Her soul, her whole psychology lies open before him.

"Oh, I understand, I understand you to your inmost depths!" says the Secretary of Special Commissions, kissing her hand near the bracelet. "Your sensitive, responsive soul is seeking to escape from the maze of ———. Yes, the struggle is terrific, titanic. But do not lose heart, you will be triumphant! Yes!"

"Write about me, Voldemar!" says the pretty lady, with a mournful smile. "My life has been so full, so varied, so chequered. Above all, I am unhappy. I am a suffering soul in some page of Dostoevsky. Reveal my soul to the world, Voldemar. Reveal that hapless soul. You are a psychologist. We have not been in the train an hour together, and you have already fathomed my heart."

"Tell me! I beseech you, tell me!"

"Listen. My father was a poor clerk in the Service. He had a good heart and was not without intelligence; but the spirit of the age—of his environment—*vous comprenez*?—I do not blame my poor father. He drank, gambled, took bribes. My mother—but why say more? Poverty, the struggle for daily bread, the consciousness of insignificance—ah, do not force me to recall it! I had to make my own way. You know the monstrous education at a boarding-school, foolish novel-reading, the

errors of early youth, the first timid flutter of love. It was awful! The vacillation! And the agonies of losing faith in life, in oneself! Ah, you are an author. You know us women. You will understand. Unhappily I have an intense nature. I looked for happiness—and what happiness! I longed to set my soul free. Yes. In that I saw my happiness!”

“Exquisite creature!” murmured the author, kissing her hand close to the bracelet. “It’s not you I am kissing, but the suffering of humanity. Do you remember Raskolnikov and his kiss?”

“Oh, Voldemar, I longed for glory, renown, success, like every—why affect modesty?—every nature above the commonplace. I yearned for something extraordinary, above the common lot of woman! And then—and then—there crossed my path—an old general—very well off. Understand me, Voldemar! It was self-sacrifice, renunciation! You must see that! I could do nothing else. I restored the family fortunes, was able to travel, to do good. Yet how I suffered, how revolting, how loathsome to me were his embraces—though I will be fair to him—he had fought nobly in his day. There were moments—terrible moments—but I was kept up by the thought that from day to day the old man might die, that then I would begin to live as I liked, to give myself to the man I adore—be happy. There is such a man, Voldemar, indeed there is!”

The pretty lady flutters her fan more violently. Her face takes a lachrymose expression. She goes on:

“But at last the old man died. He left me something. I was free as a bird of the air. Now is the moment for me to be happy, isn’t it, Voldemar? Happiness comes tapping at my window, I had only to let it in—but—Voldemar, listen, I implore you! Now is the time for me to give myself to the man I love, to become the partner of his life, to help, to uphold his ideals, to be happy—to find rest—but—how ignoble, repulsive, and senseless all our life is! How mean it all is, Voldemar. I am wretched, wretched, wretched! Again there is an obstacle in my path! Again I feel that my happiness is far, far away! Ah, what anguish!—if only you knew what anguish!”

“But what—what stands in your way? I implore you tell me! What is it?”

“Another old general, very well off—”

The broken fan conceals the pretty little face. The author props on his fist his thought—heavy brow and ponders with the air of a master in psychology. The engine is whistling and hissing while the window curtains flush red with the glow of the setting sun.

A Classical Student

Before setting off for his examination in Greek, Vanya kissed all the holy images. His stomach felt as though it were upside down; there was a chill at his heart, while the heart itself throbbed and stood still with terror before the unknown. What would he get that day? A three or a two? Six times he went to his mother for her blessing, and, as he went out, asked his aunt to pray for him. On the way to school he gave a beggar two kopecks, in the hope that those two kopecks would atone for his ignorance, and that, please God, he would not get the numerals with those awful forties and eighties.

He came back from the high school late, between four and five. He came in, and noiselessly lay down on his bed. His thin face was pale. There were dark rings round his red eyes.

"Well, how did you get on? How were you marked?" asked his mother, going to his bedside.

Vanya blinked, twisted his mouth, and burst into tears. His mother turned pale, let her mouth fall open, and clasped her hands. The breeches she was mending dropped out of her hands.

"What are you crying for? You've failed, then?" she asked.

"I am plucked.… I got a two."

"I knew it would be so! I had a presentiment of it," said his mother. "Merciful God! How is it you have not passed? What is the reason of it? What subject have you failed in?"

"In Greek.… Mother, I… They asked me the future of *phero*, and I… instead of saying *oisomai* said *opsomai*. Then… then there isn't an accent, if the last syllable is long, and I… I got flustered.… I forgot that the alpha was long in it.… I went and put in the accent. Then Artaxerxov told me to give the list of the enclitic particles.… I did, and I accidentally mixed in a pronoun… and made a mistake… and so he gave me a two.… I am a miserable person.… I was working all night… I've been getting up at four o'clock all this week.…"

“No, it’s not you but I who am miserable, you wretched boy! It’s I that am miserable! You’ve worn me to a threadpaper, you Herod, you torment, you bane of my life! I pay for you, you good-for-nothing rubbish; I’ve bent my back toiling for you, I’m worried to death, and, I may say, I am unhappy, and what do you care? How do you work?”

“I… I do work. All night.… You’ve seen it yourself.”

“I prayed to God to take me, but He won’t take me, a sinful woman.… You torment! Other people have children like everyone else, and I’ve one only and no sense, no comfort out of him. Beat you? I’d beat you, but where am I to find the strength? Mother of God, where am I to find the strength?”

The mamma hid her face in the folds of her blouse and broke into sobs. Vanya wriggled with anguish and pressed his forehead against the wall. The aunt came in.

“So that’s how it is.… Just what I expected,” she said, at once guessing what was wrong, turning pale and clasping her hands. “I’ve been depressed all the morning.… There’s trouble coming, I thought… and here it’s come.…”

“The villain, the torment!”

“Why are you swearing at him?” cried the aunt, nervously pulling her coffee-coloured kerchief off her head and turning upon the mother. “It’s not his fault! It’s your fault! You are to blame! Why did you send him to that high school? You are a fine lady! You want to be a lady? A-a-ah! I dare say, as though you’ll turn into gentry! But if you had sent him, as I told you, into business… to an office, like my Kuzya… here is Kuzya getting five hundred a year.… Five hundred roubles is worth having, isn’t it? And you are wearing yourself out, and wearing the boy out with this studying, plague take it! He is thin, he coughs… just look at him! He’s thirteen, and he looks no more than ten.”

“No, Nastenka, no, my dear! I haven’t thrashed him enough, the torment! He ought to have been thrashed, that’s what it is! Ugh… Jesuit, Muhammad, torment!” she shook her fist at her son. “You want a flogging, but I haven’t the strength. They told me years ago when he was little, ‘Whip him, whip him!’ I didn’t heed them, sinful woman as I am. And now I am suffering for it. You wait a bit! I’ll flay you! Wait a bit.…”

The mamma shook her wet fist, and went weeping into her lodger’s room. The lodger, Yevtihy Kuzmitch Kuporossov, was sitting at his table, reading “Dancing Self-taught.” Yevtihy Kuzmitch was a man of intelligence and education. He spoke through his nose, washed with a

soap the smell of which made everyone in the house sneeze, ate meat on fast days, and was on the lookout for a bride of refined education, and so was considered the cleverest of the lodgers. He sang tenor.

“My good friend,” began the mamma, dissolving into tears. “If you would have the generosity—thrash my boy for me.… Do me the favour! He’s failed in his examination, the nuisance of a boy! Would you believe it, he’s failed! I can’t punish him, through the weakness of my ill-health.… Thrash him for me, if you would be so obliging and considerate, Yevtihy Kuzmitch! Have regard for a sick woman!”

Kuporossov frowned and heaved a deep sigh through his nose. He thought a little, drummed on the table with his fingers, and sighing once more, went to Vanya.

“You are being taught, so to say,” he began, “being educated, being given a chance, you revolting young person! Why have you done it?”

He talked for a long time, made a regular speech. He alluded to science, to light, and to darkness.

“Yes, young person.”

When he had finished his speech, he took off his belt and took Vanya by the hand.

“It’s the only way to deal with you,” he said. Vanya knelt down submissively and thrust his head between the lodger’s knees. His prominent pink ears moved up and down against the lodger’s new serge trousers, with brown stripes on the outer seams.

Vanya did not utter a single sound. At the family council in the evening, it was decided to send him into business.

The Death of a Government Clerk

One fine evening, a no less fine government clerk called Ivan Dmitritch Tchervyakov was sitting in the second row of the stalls, gazing through an opera glass at the *Cloches de Corneville*. He gazed and felt at the acme of bliss. But suddenly.… In stories one so often meets with this "But suddenly." The authors are right: life is so full of surprises! But suddenly his face puckered up, his eyes disappeared, his breathing was arrested… he took the opera glass from his eyes, bent over and… "*Aptchee!*" he sneezed as you perceive. It is not reprehensible for anyone to sneeze anywhere. Peasants sneeze and so do police superintendents, and sometimes even privy councillors. All men sneeze. Tchervyakov was not in the least confused, he wiped his face with his handkerchief, and like a polite man, looked round to see whether he had disturbed anyone by his sneezing. But then he was overcome with confusion. He saw that an old gentleman sitting in front of him in the first row of the stalls was carefully wiping his bald head and his neck with his glove and muttering something to himself. In the old gentleman, Tchervyakov recognised Brizzhalov, a civilian general serving in the Department of Transport.

"I have spattered him," thought Tchervyakov, "he is not the head of my department, but still it is awkward. I must apologise."

Tchervyakov gave a cough, bent his whole person forward, and whispered in the general's ear.

"Pardon, your Excellency, I spattered you accidentally.…"

"Never mind, never mind."

"For goodness sake excuse me, I… I did not mean to."

"Oh, please, sit down! let me listen!"

Tchervyakov was embarrassed, he smiled stupidly and fell to gazing at the stage. He gazed at it but was no longer feeling bliss. He began to be troubled by uneasiness. In the interval, he went up to Brizzhalov, walked beside him, and overcoming his shyness, muttered:

"I spattered you, your Excellency, forgive me… you see… I didn't do it to.…"

“Oh, that’s enough… I’d forgotten it, and you keep on about it!” said the general, moving his lower lip impatiently.

“He has forgotten, but there is a fiendish light in his eye,” thought Tchervyakov, looking suspiciously at the general. “And he doesn’t want to talk. I ought to explain to him… that I really didn’t intend… that it is the law of nature or else he will think I meant to spit on him. He doesn’t think so now, but he will think so later!”

On getting home, Tchervyakov told his wife of his breach of good manners. It struck him that his wife took too frivolous a view of the incident; she was a little frightened, but when she learned that Brizzhalov was in a different department, she was reassured.

“Still, you had better go and apologise,” she said, “or he will think you don’t know how to behave in public.”

“That’s just it! I did apologise, but he took it somehow queerly… he didn’t say a word of sense. There wasn’t time to talk properly.”

Next day Tchervyakov put on a new uniform, had his hair cut and went to Brizzhalov’s to explain; going into the general’s reception room he saw there a number of petitioners and among them the general himself, who was beginning to interview them. After questioning several petitioners the general raised his eyes and looked at Tchervyakov.

“Yesterday at the Arcadia, if you recollect, your Excellency,” the latter began, “I sneezed and… accidentally spattered… Exc.…”

“What nonsense.… It’s beyond anything! What can I do for you,” said the general addressing the next petitioner.

“He won’t speak,” thought Tchervyakov, turning pale; “that means that he is angry.… No, it can’t be left like this.… I will explain to him.”

When the general had finished his conversation with the last of the petitioners and was turning towards his inner apartments, Tchervyakov took a step towards him and muttered:

“Your Excellency! If I venture to trouble your Excellency, it is simply from a feeling I may say of regret!… It was not intentional if you will graciously believe me.”

The general made a lachrymose face, and waved his hand.

“Why, you are simply making fun of me, sir,” he said as he closed the door behind him.

“Where’s the making fun in it?” thought Tchervyakov, “there is nothing of the sort! He is a general, but he can’t understand. If that is how it is I am not going to apologise to that *fanfaron* any more! The devil take him. I’ll write a letter to him, but I won’t go. By Jove, I won’t.”

So thought Tchervyakov as he walked home; he did not write a letter to the general, he pondered and pondered and could not make up that letter. He had to go next day to explain in person.

“I ventured to disturb your Excellency yesterday,” he muttered, when the general lifted enquiring eyes upon him, “not to make fun as you were pleased to say. I was apologising for having spattered you in sneezing.… And I did not dream of making fun of you. Should I dare to make fun of you, if we should take to making fun, then there would be no respect for persons, there would be.…”

“Be off!” yelled the general, turning suddenly purple, and shaking all over.

“What?” asked Tchervyakov, in a whisper turning numb with horror.

“Be off!” repeated the general, stamping.

Something seemed to give way in Tchervyakov’s stomach. Seeing nothing and hearing nothing he reeled to the door, went out into the street, and went staggering along.… Reaching home mechanically, without taking off his uniform, he lay down on the sofa and died.

A Daughter of Albion

A fine carriage with rubber tyres, a fat coachman, and velvet on the seats, rolled up to the house of a landowner called Gryabov. Fyodor Andreitch Otsov, the district Marshal of Nobility, jumped out of the carriage. A drowsy footman met him in the hall.

"Are the family at home?" asked the Marshal.

"No, sir. The mistress and the children are gone out paying visits, while the master and mademoiselle are catching fish. Fishing all the morning, sir."

Otsov stood a little, thought a little, and then went to the river to look for Gryabov. Going down to the river he found him a mile and a half from the house. Looking down from the steep bank and catching sight of Gryabov, Otsov gushed with laughter.… Gryabov, a large stout man, with a very big head, was sitting on the sand, angling, with his legs tucked under him like a Turk. His hat was on the back of his head and his cravat had slipped on one side. Beside him stood a tall thin Englishwoman, with prominent eyes like a crab's, and a big birdlike nose more like a hook than a nose. She was dressed in a white muslin gown through which her scraggy yellow shoulders were very distinctly apparent. On her gold belt hung a little gold watch. She too was angling. The stillness of the grave reigned about them both. Both were motionless, as the river upon which their floats were swimming.

"A desperate passion, but deadly dull!" laughed Otsov. "Good day, Ivan Kuzmitch."

"Ah… is that you?" asked Gryabov, not taking his eyes off the water. "Have you come?"

"As you see.… And you are still taken up with your crazy nonsense! Not given it up yet?"

"The devil's in it.… I begin in the morning and fish all day.… The fishing is not up to much today. I've caught nothing and this dummy hasn't either. We sit on and on and not a devil of a fish! I could scream!"

"Well, chuck it up then. Let's go and have some vodka!"

“Wait a little, maybe we shall catch something. Towards evening the fish bite better.… I’ve been sitting here, my boy, ever since the morning! I can’t tell you how fearfully boring it is. It was the devil drove me to take to this fishing! I know that it is rotten idiocy for me to sit here. I sit here like some scoundrel, like a convict, and I stare at the water like a fool. I ought to go to the haymaking, but here I sit catching fish. Yesterday His Holiness held a service at Haponyevo, but I didn’t go. I spent the day here with this… with this she-devil.”

“But… have you taken leave of your senses?” asked Otsov, glancing in embarrassment at the Englishwoman. “Using such language before a lady and she.…”

“Oh, confound her, it doesn’t matter, she doesn’t understand a syllable of Russian, whether you praise her or blame her, it is all the same to her! Just look at her nose! Her nose alone is enough to make one faint. We sit here for whole days together and not a single word! She stands like a stuffed image and rolls the whites of her eyes at the water.”

The Englishwoman gave a yawn, put a new worm on, and dropped the hook into the water.

“I wonder at her not a little,” Gryabov went on, “the great stupid has been living in Russia for ten years and not a word of Russian!… Any little aristocrat among us goes to them and learns to babble away in their lingo, while they… there’s no making them out. Just look at her nose, do look at her nose!”

“Come, drop it… it’s uncomfortable. Why attack a woman?”

“She’s not a woman, but a maiden lady.… I bet she’s dreaming of suitors. The ugly doll. And she smells of something decaying.… I’ve got a loathing for her, my boy! I can’t look at her with indifference. When she turns her ugly eyes on me it sends a twinge all through me as though I had knocked my elbow on the parapet. She likes fishing too. Watch her: she fishes as though it were a holy rite! She looks upon everything with disdain.… She stands there, the wretch, and is conscious that she is a human being, and that therefore she is the monarch of nature. And do you know what her name is? Wilka Charlesovna Fyce! Tfoo! There is no getting it out!”

The Englishwoman, hearing her name, deliberately turned her nose in Gryabov’s direction and scanned him with a disdainful glance; she raised her eyes from Gryabov to Otsov and steeped him in disdain. And all this in silence, with dignity and deliberation.

“Did you see?” said Gryabov chuckling. “As though to say ‘take that.’ Ah, you monster! It’s only for the children’s sake that I keep that triton.

If it weren't for the children, I wouldn't let her come within ten miles of my estate.… She has got a nose like a hawk's… and her figure! That doll makes me think of a long nail, so I could take her, and knock her into the ground, you know. Stay, I believe I have got a bite.…"

Gryabov jumped up and raised his rod. The line drew taut.… Gryabov tugged again, but could not pull out the hook.

"It has caught," he said, frowning, "on a stone I expect… damnation take it.…"

There was a look of distress on Gryabov's face. Sighing, moving uneasily, and muttering oaths, he began tugging at the line.

"What a pity; I shall have to go into the water."

"Oh, chuck it!"

"I can't.… There's always good fishing in the evening.… What a nuisance. Lord, forgive us, I shall have to wade into the water, I must! And if only you knew, I have no inclination to undress. I shall have to get rid of the Englishwoman.… It's awkward to undress before her. After all, she is a lady, you know!"

Gryabov flung off his hat, and his cravat.

"Meess… er, er…" he said, addressing the Englishwoman, "Meess Fyce, je voo pree…? Well, what am I to say to her? How am I to tell you so that you can understand? I say… over there! Go away over there! Do you hear?"

Miss Fyce enveloped Gryabov in disdain, and uttered a nasal sound.

"What? Don't you understand? Go away from here, I tell you! I must undress, you devil's doll! Go over there! Over there!"

Gryabov pulled the lady by her sleeve, pointed her towards the bushes, and made as though he would sit down, as much as to say: Go behind the bushes and hide yourself there.… The Englishwoman, moving her eyebrows vigorously, uttered rapidly a long sentence in English. The gentlemen gushed with laughter.

"It's the first time in my life I've heard her voice. There's no denying, it is a voice! She does not understand! Well, what am I to do with her?"

"Chuck it, let's go and have a drink of vodka!"

"I can't. Now's the time to fish, the evening.… It's evening.… Come, what would you have me do? It is a nuisance! I shall have to undress before her.…"

Gryabov flung off his coat and his waistcoat and sat on the sand to take off his boots.

"I say, Ivan Kuzmitch," said the marshal, chuckling behind his hand. "It's really outrageous, an insult."

“Nobody asks her not to understand! It’s a lesson for these foreigners!”

Gryabov took off his boots and his trousers, flung off his undergarments and remained in the costume of Adam. Otsov held his sides, he turned crimson both from laughter and embarrassment. The Englishwoman twitched her brows and blinked.… A haughty, disdainful smile passed over her yellow face.

“I must cool off,” said Gryabov, slapping himself on the ribs. “Tell me if you please, Fyodor Andreitch, why I have a rash on my chest every summer.”

“Oh, do get into the water quickly or cover yourself with something, you beast.”

“And if only she were confused, the nasty thing,” said Gryabov, crossing himself as he waded into the water. “Brrrr… the water’s cold.… Look how she moves her eyebrows! She doesn’t go away… she is far above the crowd! He, he, he… and she doesn’t reckon us as human beings.”

Wading knee deep in the water and drawing his huge figure up to its full height, he gave a wink and said:

“This isn’t England, you see!”

Miss Fyce coolly put on another worm, gave a yawn, and dropped the hook in. Otsov turned away, Gryabov released his hook, ducked into the water and, spluttering, waded out. Two minutes later he was sitting on the sand and angling as before.

THE TROUSSEAU

I have seen a great many houses in my time, little and big, new and old, built of stone and of wood, but of one house I have kept a very vivid memory. It was, properly speaking, rather a cottage than a house—a tiny cottage of one story, with three windows, looking extraordinarily like a little old hunchback woman with a cap on. Its white stucco walls, its tiled roof, and dilapidated chimney, were all drowned in a perfect sea of green. The cottage was lost to sight among the mulberry trees, acacias, and poplars planted by the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of its present occupants. And yet it is a town house. Its wide courtyard stands in a row with other similar green courtyards, and forms part of a street. Nothing ever drives down that street, and very few persons are ever seen walking through it.

The shutters of the little house are always closed; its occupants do not care for sunlight—the light is no use to them. The windows are never opened, for they are not fond of fresh air. People who spend their lives in the midst of acacias, mulberries, and nettles have no passion for nature. It is only to the summer visitor that God has vouchsafed an eye for the beauties of nature. The rest of mankind remain steeped in profound ignorance of the existence of such beauties. People never prize what they have always had in abundance. “What we have, we do not treasure,” and what’s more we do not even love it.

The little house stands in an earthly paradise of green trees with happy birds nesting in them. But inside… alas…! In summer, it is close and stifling within; in winter, hot as a Turkish bath, not one breath of air, and the dreariness!…

The first time I visited the little house was many years ago on business. I brought a message from the Colonel who was the owner of the house to his wife and daughter. That first visit I remember very distinctly. It would be impossible, indeed, to forget it.

Imagine a limp little woman of forty, gazing at you with alarm and astonishment while you walk from the passage into the parlour. You are a

stranger, a visitor, “a young man”; that’s enough to reduce her to a state of terror and bewilderment. Though you have no dagger, axe, or revolver in your hand, and though you smile affably, you are met with alarm.

“Whom have I the honour and pleasure of addressing?” the little lady asks in a trembling voice.

I introduced myself and explained why I had come. The alarm and amazement were at once succeeded by a shrill, joyful “Ach!” and she turned her eyes upwards to the ceiling. This “Ach!” was caught up like an echo and repeated from the hall to the parlour, from the parlour to the kitchen, and so on down to the cellar. Soon the whole house was resounding with “Ach!” in various voices.

Five minutes later I was sitting on a big, soft, warm lounge in the drawing room listening to the “Ach!” echoing all down the street. There was a smell of moth powder, and of goatskin shoes, a pair of which lay on a chair beside me wrapped in a handkerchief. In the windows were geraniums, and muslin curtains, and on the curtains were torpid flies. On the wall hung the portrait of some bishop, painted in oils, with the glass broken at one corner, and next to the bishop a row of ancestors with lemon-coloured faces of a gipsy type. On the table lay a thimble, a reel of cotton, and a half-knitted stocking, and paper patterns and a black blouse, tacked together, were lying on the floor. In the next room two alarmed and fluttered old women were hurriedly picking up similar patterns and pieces of tailor’s chalk from the floor.

“You must, please, excuse us; we are dreadfully untidy,” said the little lady.

While she talked to me, she stole embarrassed glances towards the other room where the patterns were still being picked up. The door, too, seemed embarrassed, opening an inch or two and then shutting again.

“What’s the matter?” said the little lady, addressing the door.

“*Où est mon cravatte lequel mon père m’avait envoyé de Koursk?*” asked a female voice at the door.

“*Ah, est-ce que, Marie… que…* Really, it’s impossible.… *Nous avons donc chez nous un homme peu connu de nous.* Ask Lukerya.”

“How well we speak French, though!” I read in the eyes of the little lady, who was flushing with pleasure.

Soon afterwards the door opened and I saw a tall, thin girl of nineteen, in a long muslin dress with a gilt belt from which, I remember, hung a mother-of-pearl fan. She came in, dropped a curtsy, and flushed crimson. Her long nose, which was slightly pitted with smallpox, turned red first, and then the flush passed up to her eyes and her forehead.

“My daughter,” chanted the little lady, “and, Manetchka, this is a young gentleman who has come,” etc.

I was introduced, and expressed my surprise at the number of paper patterns. Mother and daughter dropped their eyes.

“We had a fair here at Ascension,” said the mother; “we always buy materials at the fair, and then it keeps us busy with sewing till the next year’s fair comes around again. We never put things out to be made. My husband’s pay is not very ample, and we are not able to permit ourselves luxuries. So we have to make up everything ourselves.”

“But who will ever wear such a number of things? There are only two of you?”

“Oh… as though we were thinking of wearing them! They are not to be worn; they are for the trousseau!”

“Ah, *mamam*, what are you saying?” said the daughter, and she crimsoned again. “Our visitor might suppose it was true. I don’t intend to be married. Never!”

She said this, but at the very word “married” her eyes glowed.

Tea, biscuits, butter, and jam were brought in, followed by raspberries and cream. At seven o’clock, we had supper, consisting of six courses, and while we were at supper I heard a loud yawn from the next room. I looked with surprise towards the door: it was a yawn that could only come from a man.

“That’s my husband’s brother, Yegor Semyonitch,” the little lady explained, noticing my surprise. “He’s been living with us for the last year. Please excuse him; he cannot come in to see you. He is such an unsociable person, he is shy with strangers. He is going into a monastery. He was unfairly treated in the service, and the disappointment has preyed on his mind.”

After supper the little lady showed the vestment which Yegor Semyonitch was embroidering with his own hands as an offering for the Church. Manetchka threw off her shyness for a moment and showed me the tobacco-pouch she was embroidering for her father. When I pretended to be greatly struck by her work, she flushed crimson and whispered something in her mother’s ear. The latter beamed all over, and invited me to go with her to the storeroom. There I was shown five large trunks, and a number of smaller trunks and boxes.

“This is her trousseau,” her mother whispered; “we made it all ourselves.”

After looking at these forbidding trunks I took leave of my hospitable hostesses. They made me promise to come and see them again some day.

It happened that I was able to keep this promise. Seven years after my first visit, I was sent down to the little town to give expert evidence in a case that was being tried there.

As I entered the little house I heard the same "Ach!" echo through it. They recognised me at once.… Well they might! My first visit had been an event in their lives, and when events are few they are long remembered.

I walked into the drawing room: the mother, who had grown stouter and was already getting grey, was creeping about on the floor, cutting out some blue material. The daughter was sitting on the sofa, embroidering.

There was the same smell of moth powder; there were the same patterns, the same portrait with the broken glass. But yet there was a change. Beside the portrait of the bishop hung a portrait of the Colonel, and the ladies were in mourning. The Colonel's death had occurred a week after his promotion to be a general.

Reminiscences began.… The widow shed tears.

"We have had a terrible loss," she said. "My husband, you know, is dead. We are alone in the world now, and have no one but ourselves to look to. Yegor Semyonitch is alive, but I have no good news to tell of him. They would not have him in the monastery on account of—of intoxicating beverages. And now in his disappointment he drinks more than ever. I am thinking of going to the Marshal of Nobility to lodge a complaint. Would you believe it, he has more than once broken open the trunks and… taken Manetchka's trousseau and given it to beggars. He has taken everything out of two of the trunks! If he goes on like this, my Manetchka will be left without a trousseau at all."

"What are you saying, *mamam*?" said Manetchka, embarrassed. "Our visitor might suppose… there's no knowing what he might suppose.… I shall never—never marry."

Manetchka cast her eyes up to the ceiling with a look of hope and aspiration, evidently not for a moment believing what she said.

A little bald-headed masculine figure in a brown coat and goloshes instead of boots darted like a mouse across the passage and disappeared. "Yegor Semyonitch, I suppose," I thought.

I looked at the mother and daughter together. They both looked much older and terribly changed. The mother's hair was silvered, but the daughter was so faded and withered that her mother might have been taken for her elder sister, not more than five years her senior.

"I have made up my mind to go to the Marshal," the mother said to me, forgetting she had told me this already. "I mean to make a complaint.

Yegor Semyonitch lays his hands on everything we make, and offers it up for the sake of his soul. My Manetchka is left without a trousseau."

Manetchka flushed again, but this time she said nothing.

"We have to make them all over again. And God knows we are not so well off. We are all alone in the world now."

"We are alone in the world," repeated Manetchka.

A year ago fate brought me once more to the little house.

Walking into the drawing room, I saw the old lady. Dressed all in black with heavy crape *pleureuses*, she was sitting on the sofa sewing. Beside her sat the little old man in the brown coat and the goloshes instead of boots. On seeing me, he jumped up and ran out of the room.

In response to my greeting, the old lady smiled and said:

"*Je suis charmée de vous revoir, monsieur.*"

"What are you making?" I asked, a little later.

"It's a blouse. When it's finished I shall take it to the priest's to be put away, or else Yegor Semyonitch would carry it off. I store everything at the priest's now," she added in a whisper.

And looking at the portrait of her daughter which stood before her on the table, she sighed and said:

"We are all alone in the world."

And where was the daughter? Where was Manetchka? I did not ask. I did not dare to ask the old mother dressed in her new deep mourning. And while I was in the room, and when I got up to go, no Manetchka came out to greet me. I did not hear her voice, nor her soft, timid footstep.…

I understood, and my heart was heavy.

An Inquiry

It was midday. Voldyrev, a tall, thickset country gentleman with a cropped head and prominent eyes, took off his overcoat, mopped his brow with his silk handkerchief, and somewhat diffidently went into the government office. There they were scratching away.…

"Where can I make an inquiry here?" he said, addressing a porter who was bringing a trayful of glasses from the furthest recesses of the office. "I have to make an inquiry here and to take a copy of a resolution of the Council."

"That way please! To that one sitting near the window!" said the porter, indicating with the tray the furthest window. Voldyrev coughed and went towards the window; there, at a green table spotted like typhus, was sitting a young man with his hair standing up in four tufts on his head, with a long pimply nose, and a long faded uniform. He was writing, thrusting his long nose into the papers. A fly was walking about near his right nostril, and he was continually stretching out his lower lip and blowing under his nose, which gave his face an extremely careworn expression.

"May I make an inquiry about my case here… of you? My name is Voldyrev, and, by the way, I have to take a copy of the resolution of the Council of the second of March."

The clerk dipped his pen in the ink and looked to see if he had got too much on it. Having satisfied himself that the pen would not make a blot, he began scribbling away. His lip was thrust out, but it was no longer necessary to blow: the fly had settled on his ear.

"Can I make an inquiry here?" Voldyrev repeated a minute later, "my name is Voldyrev, I am a landowner.…"

"Ivan Alexeitch!" the clerk shouted into the air as though he had not observed Voldyrev, "will you tell the merchant Yalikov when he comes to sign the copy of the complaint lodged with the police! I've told him a thousand times!"

“I have come in reference to my lawsuit with the heirs of Princess Gugulin,” muttered Voldyrev. “The case is well known. I earnestly beg you to attend to me.”

Still failing to observe Voldyrev, the clerk caught the fly on his lip, looked at it attentively and flung it away. The country gentleman coughed and blew his nose loudly on his checked pocket handkerchief. But this was no use either. He was still unheard. The silence lasted for two minutes. Voldyrev took a rouble note from his pocket and laid it on an open book before the clerk. The clerk wrinkled up his forehead, drew the book towards him with an anxious air and closed it.

“A little inquiry.… I want only to find out on what grounds the heirs of Princess Gugulin.… May I trouble you?”

The clerk, absorbed in his own thoughts, got up and, scratching his elbow, went to a cupboard for something. Returning a minute later to his table he became absorbed in the book again: another rouble note was lying upon it.

“I will trouble you for one minute only.… I have only to make an inquiry.”

The clerk did not hear, he had begun copying something.

Voldyrev frowned and looked hopelessly at the whole scribbling brotherhood.

“They write!” he thought, sighing. “They write, the devil take them entirely!”

He walked away from the table and stopped in the middle of the room, his hands hanging hopelessly at his sides. The porter, passing again with glasses, probably noticed the helpless expression of his face, for he went close up to him and asked him in a low voice:

“Well? Have you inquired?”

“I’ve inquired, but he wouldn’t speak to me.”

“You give him three roubles,” whispered the porter.

“I’ve given him two already.”

“Give him another.”

Voldyrev went back to the table and laid a green note on the open book.

The clerk drew the book towards him again and began turning over the leaves, and all at once, as though by chance, lifted his eyes to Voldyrev. His nose began to shine, turned red, and wrinkled up in a grin.

“Ah… what do you want?” he asked.

“I want to make an inquiry in reference to my case.… My name is Voldyrev.”

“With pleasure! The Gugulin case, isn’t it? Very good. What is it then exactly?”

Voldyrev explained his business.

The clerk became as lively as though he were whirled round by a hurricane. He gave the necessary information, arranged for a copy to be made, gave the petitioner a chair, and all in one instant. He even spoke about the weather and asked after the harvest. And when Voldyrev went away he accompanied him down the stairs, smiling affably and respectfully, and looking as though he were ready any minute to fall on his face before the gentleman. Voldyrev for some reason felt uncomfortable, and in obedience to some inward impulse he took a rouble out of his pocket and gave it to the clerk. And the latter kept bowing and smiling, and took the rouble like a conjuror, so that it seemed to flash through the air.

“Well, what people!” thought the country gentleman as he went out into the street, and he stopped and mopped his brow with his handkerchief.

Fat and Thin

Two friends—one a fat man and the other a thin man—met at the Nikolaevsky station. The fat man had just dined in the station and his greasy lips shone like ripe cherries. He smelt of sherry and *fleur d'orange*. The thin man had just slipped out of the train and was laden with portmanteaus, bundles, and bandboxes. He smelt of ham and coffee grounds. A thin woman with a long chin, his wife, and a tall schoolboy with one eye screwed up came into view behind his back.

"Porfiry," cried the fat man on seeing the thin man. "Is it you? My dear fellow! How many summers, how many winters!"

"Holy saints!" cried the thin man in amazement. "Misha! The friend of my childhood! Where have you dropped from?"

The friends kissed each other three times, and gazed at each other with eyes full of tears. Both were agreeably astounded.

"My dear boy!" began the thin man after the kissing. "This is unexpected! This is a surprise! Come have a good look at me! Just as handsome as I used to be! Just as great a darling and a dandy! Good gracious me! Well, and how are you? Made your fortune? Married? I am married as you see.… This is my wife Luise, her maiden name was Vantsenbach… of the Lutheran persuasion.… And this is my son Nafanail, a schoolboy in the third class. This is the friend of my childhood, Nafanya. We were boys at school together!"

Nafanail thought a little and took off his cap.

"We were boys at school together," the thin man went on. "Do you remember how they used to tease you? You were nicknamed 'Herostratus' because you burned a hole in a schoolbook with a cigarette, and I was nicknamed 'Ephialtes' because I was fond of telling tales. Ho—ho!… we were children!… Don't be shy, Nafanya. Go nearer to him. And this is my wife, her maiden name was Vantsenbach, of the Lutheran persuasion.…"

Nafanail thought a little and took refuge behind his father's back.

“Well, how are you doing my friend?” the fat man asked, looking enthusiastically at his friend. “Are you in the service? What grade have you reached?”

“I am, dear boy! I have been a collegiate assessor for the last two years and I have the Stanislav. The salary is poor, but that’s no great matter! The wife gives music lessons, and I go in for carving wooden cigarette cases in a private way. Capital cigarette cases! I sell them for a rouble each. If anyone takes ten or more I make a reduction of course. We get along somehow. I served as a clerk, you know, and now I have been transferred here as a head clerk in the same department. I am going to serve here. And what about you? I bet you are a civil councillor by now? Eh?”

“No dear boy, go higher than that,” said the fat man. “I have risen to privy councillor already… I have two stars.”

The thin man turned pale and rigid all at once, but soon his face twisted in all directions in the broadest smile; it seemed as though sparks were flashing from his face and eyes. He squirmed, he doubled together, crumpled up.… His portmanteaus, bundles and cardboard boxes seemed to shrink and crumple up too.… His wife’s long chin grew longer still; Nafanail drew himself up to attention and fastened all the buttons of his uniform.

“Your Excellency, I… delighted! The friend, one may say, of childhood and to have turned into such a great man! He—he!”

“Come, come!” the fat man frowned. “What’s this tone for? You and I were friends as boys, and there is no need of this official obsequiousness!”

“Merciful heavens, your Excellency! What are you saying…?” sniggered the thin man, wriggling more than ever. “Your Excellency’s gracious attention is like refreshing manna.… This, your Excellency, is my son Nafanail,… my wife Luise, a Lutheran in a certain sense.”

The fat man was about to make some protest, but the face of the thin man wore an expression of such reverence, sugariness, and mawkish respectfulness that the privy councillor was sickened. He turned away from the thin man, giving him his hand at parting.

The thin man pressed three fingers, bowed his whole body and sniggered like a Chinaman: “He—he—he!” His wife smiled. Nafanail scraped with his foot and dropped his cap. All three were agreeably overwhelmed.

A Tragic Actor

It was the benefit night of Fenogenov, the tragic actor. They were acting *Prince Serebryany*. The tragedian himself was playing Vyazemsky; Limonadov, the stage manager, was playing Morozov; Madame Beobahtov, Elena. The performance was a grand success. The tragedian accomplished wonders indeed. When he was carrying off Elena, he held her in one hand above his head as he dashed across the stage. He shouted, hissed, banged with his feet, tore his coat across his chest. When he refused to fight Morozov, he trembled all over as nobody ever trembles in reality, and gasped loudly. The theatre shook with applause. There were endless calls. Fenogenov was presented with a silver cigarette-case and a bouquet tied with long ribbons. The ladies waved their handkerchiefs and urged their men to applaud, many shed tears.… But the one who was the most enthusiastic and most excited was Masha, daughter of Sidoretsky the police captain. She was sitting in the first row of the stalls beside her papa; she was ecstatic and could not take her eyes off the stage even between the acts. Her delicate little hands and feet were quivering, her eyes were full of tears, her cheeks turned paler and paler. And no wonder—she was at the theatre for the first time in her life.

"How well they act! how splendidly!" she said to her papa the police captain, every time the curtain fell. "How good Fenogenov is!"

And if her papa had been capable of reading faces he would have read on his daughter's pale little countenance a rapture that was almost anguish. She was overcome by the acting, by the play, by the surroundings. When the regimental band began playing between the acts, she closed her eyes, exhausted.

"Papa!" she said to the police captain during the last interval, "go behind the scenes and ask them all to dinner tomorrow!"

The police captain went behind the scenes, praised them for all their fine acting, and complimented Madame Beobahtov.

"Your lovely face demands a canvas, and I only wish I could wield the brush!"

And with a scrape, he thereupon invited the company to dinner.

"All except the fair sex," he whispered. "I don't want the actresses, for I have a daughter."

Next day the actors dined at the police captain's. Only three turned up, the manager Limonadov, the tragedian Fenogenov, and the comic man Vodolazov; the others sent excuses. The dinner was a dull affair. Limonadov kept telling the police captain how much he respected him, and how highly he thought of all persons in authority; Vodolazov mimicked drunken merchants and Armenians; and Fenogenov (on his passport his name was Knish), a tall, stout Little Russian with black eyes and frowning brow, declaimed "At the portals of the great," and "To be or not to be." Limonadov, with tears in his eyes, described his interview with the former Governor, General Kanyutchin. The police captain listened, was bored, and smiled affably. He was well satisfied, although Limonadov smelt strongly of burnt feathers, and Fenogenov was wearing a hired dress coat and boots trodden down at heel. They pleased his daughter and made her lively, and that was enough for him. And Masha never took her eyes off the actors. She had never before seen such clever, exceptional people!

In the evening the police captain and Masha were at the theatre again. A week later the actors dined at the police captain's again, and after that came almost every day either to dinner or supper. Masha became more and more devoted to the theatre, and went there every evening.

She fell in love with the tragedian. One fine morning, when the police captain had gone to meet the bishop, Masha ran away with Limonadov's company and married her hero on the way. After celebrating the wedding, the actors composed a long and touching letter and sent it to the police captain.

It was the work of their combined efforts.

"Bring out the motive, the motive!" Limonadov kept saying as he dictated to the comic man. "Lay on the respect.… These official chaps like it. Add something of a sort… to draw a tear."

The answer to this letter was most discomforting. The police captain disowned his daughter for marrying, as he said, "a stupid, idle Little Russian with no fixed home or occupation."

And the day after this answer was received Masha was writing to her father.

"Papa, he beats me! Forgive us!"

He had beaten her, beaten her behind the scenes, in the presence of Limonadov, the washerwoman, and two lighting men. He remembered

how, four days before the wedding, he was sitting in the London Tavern with the whole company, and all were talking about Masha. The company were advising him to “chance it,” and Limonadov, with tears in his eyes urged: “It would be stupid and irrational to let slip such an opportunity! Why, for a sum like that one would go to Siberia, let alone getting married! When you marry and have a theatre of your own, take me into your company. I shan’t be master then, you’ll be master.”

Fenogenov remembered it, and muttered with clenched fists:

“If he doesn’t send money I’ll smash her! I won’t let myself be made a fool of, damn my soul!”

At one provincial town the company tried to give Masha the slip, but Masha found out, ran to the station, and got there when the second bell had rung and the actors had all taken their seats.

“I’ve been shamefully treated by your father,” said the tragedian; “all is over between us!”

And though the carriage was full of people, she went down on her knees and held out her hands, imploring him:

“I love you! Don’t drive me away, Kondraty Ivanovitch,” she besought him. “I can’t live without you!”

They listened to her entreaties, and after consulting together, took her into the company as a “countess”—the name they used for the minor actresses who usually came on to the stage in crowds or in dumb parts. To begin with Masha used to play maidservants and pages, but when Madame Beobahtov, the flower of Limonadov’s company, eloped, they made her ingénue. She acted badly, lisped, and was nervous. She soon grew used to it, however, and began to be liked by the audience. Fenogenov was much displeased.

“To call her an actress!” he used to say. “She has no figure, no deportment, nothing whatever but silliness.”

In one provincial town the company acted Schiller’s *Robbers*. Fenogenov played Franz, Masha, Amalie. The tragedian shouted and quivered. Masha repeated her part like a well-learnt lesson, and the play would have gone off as they generally did had it not been for a trifling mishap. Everything went well up to the point where Franz declares his love for Amalie and she seizes his sword. The tragedian shouted, hissed, quivered, and squeezed Masha in his iron embrace. And Masha, instead of repulsing him and crying “Hence!” trembled in his arms like a bird and did not move,… she seemed petrified.

“Have pity on me!” she whispered in his ear. “Oh, have pity on me! I am so miserable!”

“You don’t know your part! Listen to the prompter!” hissed the tragedian, and he thrust his sword into her hand.

After the performance, Limonadov and Fenogenov were sitting in the ticket box-office engaged in conversation.

“Your wife does not learn her part, you are right there,” the manager was saying. “She doesn’t know her line.… Every man has his own line,… but she doesn’t know hers.…”

Fenogenov listened, sighed, and scowled and scowled.

Next morning, Masha was sitting in a little general shop writing:

“Papa, he beats me! Forgive us! Send us some money!”

A Slander

Sergei Kapitonich Ahineev, the writing master, was marrying his daughter to the teacher of history and geography. The wedding festivities were going off most successfully. In the drawing room there was singing, playing, and dancing. Waiters hired from the club were flitting distractedly about the rooms, dressed in black swallowtails and dirty white ties. There was a continual hubbub and din of conversation. Sitting side by side on the sofa, the teacher of mathematics, Tarantulov, the French teacher, Pasdequoi, and the junior assessor of taxes, Mzda, were talking hurriedly and interrupting one another as they described to the guests cases of persons being buried alive, and gave their opinions on spiritualism. None of them believed in spiritualism, but all admitted that there were many things in this world which would always be beyond the mind of man. In the next room the literature master, Dodonsky, was explaining to the visitors the cases in which a sentry has the right to fire on passersby. The subjects, as you perceive, were alarming, but very agreeable. Persons whose social position precluded them from entering were looking in at the windows from the yard.

Just at midnight the master of the house went into the kitchen to see whether everything was ready for supper. The kitchen from floor to ceiling was filled with fumes composed of goose, duck, and many other odours. On two tables the accessories, the drinks and light refreshments, were set out in artistic disorder. The cook, Marfa, a red-faced woman whose figure was like a barrel with a belt around it, was bustling about the tables.

“Show me the sturgeon, Marfa,” said Ahineev, rubbing his hands and licking his lips. “What a perfume! I could eat up the whole kitchen. Come, show me the sturgeon.”

Marfa went up to one of the benches and cautiously lifted a piece of greasy newspaper. Under the paper on an immense dish there reposed a huge sturgeon, masked in jelly and decorated with capers, olives, and carrots. Ahineev gazed at the sturgeon and gasped. His face beamed, he

turned his eyes up. He bent down and with his lips emitted the sound of an ungreased wheel. After standing a moment he snapped his fingers with delight and once more smacked his lips.

“Ah-ah! the sound of a passionate kiss.… Who is it you’re kissing out there, little Marfa?” came a voice from the next room, and in the doorway there appeared the cropped head of the assistant usher, Vankin. “Who is it? A-a-h!… Delighted to meet you! Sergei Kapitonich! You’re a fine grandfather, I must say! Tête-à-tête with the fair sex—tette!”

“I’m not kissing,” said Ahineev in confusion. “Who told you so, you fool? I was only… I smacked my lips… in reference to… as an indication of… pleasure… at the sight of the fish.”

“Tell that to the marines!” The intrusive face vanished, wearing a broad grin.

Ahineev flushed.

“Hang it!” he thought, “the beast will go now and talk scandal. He’ll disgrace me to all the town, the brute.”

Ahineev went timidly into the drawing room and looked stealthily round for Vankin. Vankin was standing by the piano, and, bending down with a jaunty air, was whispering something to the inspector’s sister-in-law, who was laughing.

“Talking about me!” thought Ahineev. “About me, blast him! And she believes it… believes it! She laughs! Mercy on us! No, I can’t let it pass… I can’t. I must do something to prevent his being believed.… I’ll speak to them all, and he’ll be shown up for a fool and a gossip.”

Ahineev scratched his head, and still overcome with embarrassment, went up to Pasdequoi.

“I’ve just been in the kitchen to see after the supper,” he said to the Frenchman. “I know you are fond of fish, and I’ve a sturgeon, my dear fellow, beyond everything! A yard and a half long! Ha, ha, ha! And, by the way… I was just forgetting.… In the kitchen just now, with that sturgeon… quite a little story! I went into the kitchen just now and wanted to look at the supper dishes. I looked at the sturgeon and I smacked my lips with relish… at the piquancy of it. And at the very moment that fool Vankin came in and said:… ‘Ha, ha, ha!… So you’re kissing here!’ Kissing Marfa, the cook! What a thing to imagine, silly fool! The woman is a perfect fright, like all the beasts put together, and he talks about kissing! Queer fish!”

“Who’s a queer fish?” asked Tarantulov, coming up.

“Why he, over there—Vankin! I went into the kitchen…”

And he told the story of Vankin. "… He amused me, queer fish! I'd rather kiss a dog than Marfa, if you ask me," added Ahineev. He looked round and saw behind him Mzda.

"We were talking of Vankin," he said. "Queer fish, he is! He went into the kitchen, saw me beside Marfa, and began inventing all sorts of silly stories. 'Why are you kissing?' he says. He must have had a drop too much. 'And I'd rather kiss a turkeycock than Marfa,' I said, 'And I've a wife of my own, you fool,' said I. He did amuse me!"

"Who amused you?" asked the priest who taught Scripture in the school, going up to Ahineev.

"Vankin. I was standing in the kitchen, you know, looking at the sturgeon.…"

And so on. Within half an hour or so all the guests knew the incident of the sturgeon and Vankin.

"Let him tell away now!" thought Ahineev, rubbing his hands. "Let him! He'll begin telling his story and they'll say to him at once, 'Enough of your improbable nonsense, you fool, we know all about it!' "

And Ahineev was so relieved that in his joy he drank four glasses too many. After escorting the young people to their room, he went to bed and slept like an innocent babe, and next day he thought no more of the incident with the sturgeon. But, alas! man proposes, but God disposes. An evil tongue did its evil work, and Ahineev's strategy was of no avail. Just a week later—to be precise, on Wednesday after the third lesson—when Ahineev was standing in the middle of the teacher's room, holding forth on the vicious propensities of a boy called Visekin, the head master went up to him and drew him aside:

"Look here, Sergei Kapitonich," said the head master, "you must excuse me.… It's not my business; but all the same I must make you realize.… It's my duty. You see, there are rumors that you are romancing with that… cook.… It's nothing to do with me, but… flirt with her, kiss her… as you please, but don't let it be so public, please. I entreat you! Don't forget that you're a schoolmaster."

Ahineev turned cold and faint. He went home like a man stung by a whole swarm of bees, like a man scalded with boiling water. As he walked home, it seemed to him that the whole town was looking at him as though he were smeared with pitch. At home fresh trouble awaited him.

"Why aren't you gobbling up your food as usual?" his wife asked him at dinner. "What are you so pensive about? Brooding over your amours?

Pining for your Marfa? I know all about it, Mohammedan! Kind friends have opened my eyes! O-o-o!… you savage!”

And she slapped him in the face. He got up from the table, not feeling the earth under his feet, and without his hat or coat, made his way to Vankin. He found him at home.

“You scoundrel!” he addressed him. “Why have you covered me with mud before all the town? Why did you set this slander going about me?”

“What slander? What are you talking about?”

“Who was it gossiped of my kissing Marfa? Wasn’t it you? Tell me that. Wasn’t it you, you brigand?”

Vankin blinked and twitched in every fibre of his battered countenance, raised his eyes to the icon and articulated, “God blast me! Strike me blind and lay me out, if I said a single word about you! May I be left without house and home, may I be stricken with worse than cholera!”

Vankin’s sincerity did not admit of doubt. It was evidently not he who was the author of the slander.

“But who, then, who?” Ahineev wondered, going over all his acquaintances in his mind and beating himself on the breast. “Who, then?”

Who, then? We, too, ask the reader.

The Bird Market

There is a small square near the monastery of the Holy Birth which is called Trubnoy, or simply Truboy; there is a market there on Sundays. Hundreds of sheepskins, wadded coats, fur caps, and chimneypot hats swarm there, like crabs in a sieve. There is the sound of the twitter of birds in all sorts of keys, recalling the spring. If the sun is shining, and there are no clouds in the sky, the singing of the birds and the smell of hay make a more vivid impression, and this reminder of spring sets one thinking and carries one's fancy far, far away. Along one side of the square there stands a string of wagons. The wagons are loaded, not with hay, not with cabbages, nor with beans, but with goldfinches, siskins, larks, blackbirds and thrushes, bluetits, bullfinches. All of them are hopping about in rough, homemade cages, twittering and looking with envy at the free sparrows. The goldfinches cost five kopecks, the siskins are rather more expensive, while the value of the other birds is quite indeterminate.

"How much is a lark?"

The seller himself does not know the value of a lark. He scratches his head and asks whatever comes into it, a rouble, or three kopecks, according to the purchaser. There are expensive birds too. A faded old blackbird, with most of its feathers plucked out of its tail, sits on a dirty perch. He is dignified, grave, and motionless as a retired general. He has waved his claw in resignation to his captivity long ago, and looks at the blue sky with indifference. Probably, owing to this indifference, he is considered a sagacious bird. He is not to be bought for less than forty kopecks. Schoolboys, workmen, young men in stylish greatcoats, and bird-fanciers in incredibly shabby caps, in ragged trousers that are turned up at the ankles, and look as though they had been gnawed by mice, crowd round the birds, splashing through the mud. The young people and the workmen are sold hens for cocks, young birds for old ones.… They know very little about birds. But there is no deceiving the bird-fancier. He sees and understands his bird from a distance.

“There is no relying on that bird,” a fancier will say, looking into a siskin’s beak, and counting the feathers on its tail. “He sings now, it’s true, but what of that? I sing in company too. No, my boy, shout, sing to me without company; sing in solitude, if you can.… You give me that one yonder that sits and holds its tongue! Give me the quiet one! That one says nothing, so he thinks the more.…”

Among the wagons of birds there are some full of other live creatures. Here you see hares, rabbits, hedgehogs, guinea-pigs, polecats. A hare sits sorrowfully nibbling the straw. The guinea-pigs shiver with cold, while the hedgehogs look out with curiosity from under their prickles at the public.

“I have read somewhere,” says a post-office official in a faded overcoat, looking lovingly at the hare, and addressing no one in particular, “I have read that some learned man had a cat and a mouse and a falcon and a sparrow, who all ate out of one bowl.”

“That’s very possible, sir. The cat must have been beaten, and the falcon, I dare say, had all its tail pulled out. There’s no great cleverness in that, sir. A friend of mine had a cat who, saving your presence, used to eat his cucumbers. He thrashed her with a big whip for a fortnight, till he taught her not to. A hare can learn to light matches if you beat it. Does that surprise you? It’s very simple! It takes the match in its mouth and strikes it. An animal is like a man. A man’s made wiser by beating, and it’s the same with a beast.”

Men in long, full-skirted coats move backwards and forwards in the crowd with cocks and ducks under their arms. The fowls are all lean and hungry. Chickens poke their ugly, mangy-looking heads out of their cages and peck at something in the mud. Boys with pigeons stare into your face and try to detect in you a pigeon-fancier.

“Yes, indeed! It’s no use talking to you,” someone shouts angrily. “You should look before you speak! Do you call this a pigeon? It is an eagle, not a pigeon!”

A tall thin man, with a shaven upper lip and side whiskers, who looks like a sick and drunken footman, is selling a snow-white lapdog. The old lapdog whines.

“She told me to sell the nasty thing,” says the footman, with a contemptuous snigger. “She is bankrupt in her old age, has nothing to eat, and here now is selling her dogs and cats. She cries, and kisses them on their filthy snouts. And then she is so hard up that she sells them. ’Pon my soul, it is a fact! Buy it, gentlemen! The money is wanted for coffee.”

But no one laughs. A boy who is standing by screws up one eye and looks at him gravely with compassion.

The most interesting of all is the fish section. Some dozen peasants are sitting in a row. Before each of them is a pail, and in each pail there is a veritable little hell. There, in the thick, greenish water are swarms of little carp, eels, small fry, water-snails, frogs, and newts. Big water-beetles with broken legs scurry over the small surface, clambering on the carp, and jumping over the frogs. The creatures have a strong hold on life. The frogs climb on the beetles, the newts on the frogs. The dark green tench, as more expensive fish, enjoy an exceptional position; they are kept in a special jar where they can't swim, but still they are not so cramped.…

"The carp is a grand fish! The carp's the fish to keep, your honour, plague take him! You can keep him for a year in a pail and he'll live! It's a week since I caught these very fish. I caught them, sir, in Pererva, and have come from there on foot. The carp are two kopecks each, the eels are three, and the minnows are ten kopecks the dozen, plague take them! Five kopecks' worth of minnows, sir? Won't you take some worms?"

The seller thrusts his coarse rough fingers into the pail and pulls out of it a soft minnow, or a little carp, the size of a nail. Fishing lines, hooks, and tackle are laid out near the pails, and pond-worms glow with a crimson light in the sun.

An old fancier in a fur cap, iron-rimmed spectacles, and goloshes that look like two dreadnoughts, walks about by the wagons of birds and pails of fish. He is, as they call him here, "a type." He hasn't a farthing to bless himself with, but in spite of that he haggles, gets excited, and pesters purchasers with advice. He has thoroughly examined all the hares, pigeons, and fish; examined them in every detail, fixed the kind, the age, and the price of each one of them a good hour ago. He is as interested as a child in the goldfinches, the carp, and the minnows. Talk to him, for instance, about thrushes, and the queer old fellow will tell you things you could not find in any book. He will tell you them with enthusiasm, with passion, and will scold you too for your ignorance. Of goldfinches and bullfinches he is ready to talk endlessly, opening his eyes wide and gesticulating violently with his hands. He is only to be met here at the market in the cold weather; in the summer he is somewhere in the country, catching quails with a bird-call and angling for fish.

And here is another "type," a very tall, very thin, close-shaven gentleman in dark spectacles, wearing a cap with a cockade, and looking

like a scrivener of bygone days. He is a fancier; he is a man of decent position, a teacher in a high school, and that is well known to the *habitués* of the market, and they treat him with respect, greet him with bows, and have even invented for him a special title: “Your Scholarship.” At Suharev market he rummages among the books, and at Trubnoy looks out for good pigeons.

“Please, sir!” the pigeon-sellers shout to him, “Mr. Schoolmaster, your Scholarship, take notice of my tumblers! your Scholarship!”

“Your Scholarship!” is shouted at him from every side.

“Your Scholarship!” an urchin repeats somewhere on the boulevard.

And his “Scholarship,” apparently quite accustomed to his title, grave and severe, takes a pigeon in both hands, and lifting it above his head, begins examining it, and as he does so frowns and looks graver than ever, like a conspirator.

And Trubnoy Square, that little bit of Moscow where animals are so tenderly loved, and where they are so tortured, lives its little life, grows noisy and excited, and the businesslike or pious people who pass by along the boulevard cannot make out what has brought this crowd of people, this medley of caps, fur hats, and chimneypots together; what they are talking about there, what they are buying and selling.

CHORISTERS

The Justice of the Peace, who had received a letter from Petersburg, had set the news going that the owner of Yefremovo, Count Vladimir Ivanovitch, would soon be arriving. When he would arrive—there was no saying.

"Like a thief in the night," said Father Kuzma, a grey-headed little priest in a lilac cassock. "And when he does come the place will be crowded with the nobility and other high gentry. All the neighbours will flock here. Mind now, do your best, Alexey Alexeitch.… I beg you most earnestly."

"You need not trouble about me," said Alexey Alexeitch, frowning. "I know my business. If only my enemy intones the litany in the right key. He may… out of sheer spite.…"

"There, there.… I'll persuade the deacon… I'll persuade him."

Alexey Alexeitch was the sacristan of the Yefremovo church. He also taught the schoolboys church and secular singing, for which he received sixty roubles a year from the revenues of the Count's estate. The schoolboys were bound to sing in church in return for their teaching. Alexey Alexeitch was a tall, thickset man of dignified deportment, with a fat, clean-shaven face that reminded one of a cow's udder. His imposing figure and double chin made him look like a man occupying an important position in the secular hierarchy rather than a sacristan. It was strange to see him, so dignified and imposing, flop to the ground before the bishop and, on one occasion, after too loud a squabble with the deacon Yevlampy Avdiessov, remain on his knees for two hours by order of the head priest of the district. Grandeur was more in keeping with his figure than humiliation.

On account of the rumours of the Count's approaching visit he had a choir practice every day, morning and evening. The choir practice was held at the school. It did not interfere much with the school work. During the practice the schoolmaster, Sergey Makaritch, set the children writing copies while he joined the tenors as an amateur.

This is how the choir practice was conducted. Alexey Alexeitch would come into the schoolroom, slamming the door and blowing his nose. The trebles and altos extricated themselves noisily from the school-tables. The tenors and basses, who had been waiting for some time in the yard, came in, tramping like horses. They all took their places. Alexey Alexeitch drew himself up, made a sign to enforce silence, and struck a note with the tuning fork.

"To-to-li-to-tom… Do-mi-sol-do!"

"Adagio, adagio.… Once more."

After the "Amen" there followed "Lord have mercy upon us" from the Great Litany. All this had been learned long ago, sung a thousand times and thoroughly digested, and it was gone through simply as a formality. It was sung indolently, unconsciously. Alexey Alexeitch waved his arms calmly and chimed in now in a tenor, now in a bass voice. It was all slow, there was nothing interesting.… But before the "Cherubim" hymn the whole choir suddenly began blowing their noses, coughing and zealously turning the pages of their music. The sacristan turned his back on the choir and with a mysterious expression on his face began tuning his violin. The preparations lasted a couple of minutes.

"Take your places. Look at your music carefully.… Basses, don't overdo it… rather softly."

Bortnyansky's "Cherubim" hymn, No. 7, was selected. At a given signal silence prevailed. All eyes were fastened on the music, the trebles opened their mouths. Alexey Alexeitch softly lowered his arm.

"Piano… piano.… You see 'piano' is written there.… More lightly, more lightly."

When they had to sing "piano" an expression of benevolence and amiability overspread Alexey Alexeitch's face, as though he was dreaming of a dainty morsel.

"Forte… forte! Hold it!"

And when they had to sing "forte" the sacristan's fat face expressed alarm and even horror.

The "Cherubim" hymn was sung well, so well that the schoolchildren abandoned their copies and fell to watching the movements of Alexey Alexeitch. People stood under the windows. The schoolwatchman, Vassily, came in wearing an apron and carrying a dinner-knife in his hand and stood listening. Father Kuzma, with an anxious face appeared suddenly as though he had sprung from out of the earth.… After "Let us lay aside all earthly cares" Alexey Alexeitch wiped the sweat off his brow and went up to Father Kuzma in excitement.

“It puzzles me, Father Kuzma,” he said, shrugging his shoulders, “why is it that the Russian people have no understanding? It puzzles me, may the Lord chastise me! Such an uncultured people that you really cannot tell whether they have a windpipe in their throats or some other sort of internal arrangement. Were you choking, or what?” he asked, addressing the bass Gennady Semitchov, the innkeeper’s brother.

“Why?”

“What is your voice like? It rattles like a saucepan. I bet you were boozing yesterday! That’s what it is! Your breath smells like a tavern.… E-ech! You are a clodhopper, brother! You are a lout! How can you be a chorister if you keep company with peasants in the tavern? Ech, you are an ass, brother!”

“It’s a sin, it’s a sin, brother,” muttered Father Kuzma. “God sees everything… through and through.…”

“That’s why you have no idea of singing—because you care more for vodka than for godliness, you fool.”

“Don’t work yourself up,” said Father Kuzma. “Don’t be cross.… I will persuade him.”

Father Kuzma went up to Gennady Semitchov and began “persuading” him: “What do you do it for? Try and put your mind to it. A man who sings ought to restrain himself, because his throat is… er… tender.”

Gennady scratched his neck and looked sideways towards the window as though the words did not apply to him.

After the “Cherubim” hymn they sang the Creed, then “It is meet and right”; they sang smoothly and with feeling, and so right on to “Our Father.”

“To my mind, Father Kuzma,” said the sacristan, “the old ‘Our Father’ is better than the modern. That’s what we ought to sing before the Count.”

“No, no.… Sing the modern one. For the Count hears nothing but modern music when he goes to Mass in Petersburg or Moscow.… In the churches there, I imagine… there’s very different sort of music there, brother!”

After “Our Father” there was again a great blowing of noses, coughing and turning over of pages. The most difficult part of the performance came next: the “concert.” Alexey Alexeitch was practising two pieces, “Who is the God of glory” and “Universal Praise.” Whichever the choir learned best would be sung before the Count. During the “concert” the

sacristan rose to a pitch of enthusiasm. The expression of benevolence was continually alternating with one of alarm.

"Forte!" he muttered. "Andante! let yourselves go! Sing, you image! Tenors, you don't bring it off! To-to-ti-to-tom.… Sol… si… sol, I tell you, you blockhead! Glory! Basses, glo… o… ry."

His bow travelled over the heads and shoulders of the erring trebles and altos. His left hand was continually pulling the ears of the young singers. On one occasion, carried away by his feelings he flipped the bass Gennady under the chin with his bent thumb. But the choristers were not moved to tears or to anger at his blows: they realised the full gravity of their task.

After the "concert" came a minute of silence. Alexey Alexeitch, red, perspiring and exhausted, sat down on the windowsill, and turned upon the company lustreless, wearied, but triumphant eyes. In the listening crowd he observed to his immense annoyance the deacon Avdiessov. The deacon, a tall thickset man with a red pockmarked face, and straw in his hair, stood leaning against the stove and grinning contemptuously.

"That's right, sing away! Perform your music!" he muttered in a deep bass. "Much the Count will care for your singing! He doesn't care whether you sing with music or without.… For he is an atheist."

Father Kuzma looked round in a scared way and twiddled his fingers.

"Come, come," he muttered. "Hush, deacon, I beg."

After the "concert" they sang "May our lips be filled with praise," and the choir practice was over. The choir broke up to reassemble in the evening for another practice. And so it went on every day.

One month passed and then a second.… The steward, too, had by then received a notice that the Count would soon be coming. At last the dusty sunblinds were taken off the windows of the big house, and Yefremovo heard the strains of the broken-down, out-of-tune piano. Father Kuzma was pining, though he could not himself have said why, or whether it was from delight or alarm.… The deacon went about grinning.

The following Saturday evening Father Kuzma went to the sacristan's lodgings. His face was pale, his shoulders drooped, the lilac of his cassock looked faded.

"I have just been at his Excellency's," he said to the sacristan, stammering. "He is a cultivated gentleman with refined ideas. But… er… it's mortifying, brother.… 'At what o'clock, your Excellency, do you desire us to ring for Mass tomorrow?' And he said: 'As you think best. Only, couldn't it be as short and quick as possible without a choir.' Without a choir! Er… do you understand, without, without a choir.…"

Alexey Alexeitch turned crimson. He would rather have spent two hours on his knees again than have heard those words! He did not sleep all night. He was not so much mortified at the waste of his labours as at the fact that the deacon would give him no peace now with his jeers. The deacon was delighted at his discomfiture. Next day all through the service he was casting disdainful glances towards the choir where Alexey Alexeitch was booming responses in solitude. When he passed by the choir with the censer he muttered:

"Perform your music! Do your utmost! The Count will give a ten-rouble note to the choir!"

After the service the sacristan went home, crushed and ill with mortification. At the gate he was overtaken by the red-faced deacon.

"Stop a minute, Alyosha!" said the deacon. "Stop a minute, silly, don't be cross! You are not the only one, I am in for it too! Immediately after the Mass Father Kuzma went up to the Count and asked: 'And what did you think of the deacon's voice, your Excellency. He has a deep bass, hasn't he?' And the Count—do you know what he answered by way of compliment? 'Anyone can bawl,' he said. 'A man's voice is not as important as his brains.' A learned gentleman from Petersburg! An atheist is an atheist, and that's all about it! Come, brother in misfortune, let us go and have a drop to drown our troubles!"

And the enemies went out of the gate arm-in-arm.

The Album

Kraterov, the titular councillor, as thin and slender as the Admiralty spire, stepped forward and, addressing Zhmyhov, said:

"Your Excellency! Moved and touched to the bottom of our hearts by the way you have ruled us during long years, and by your fatherly care.…"

"During the course of more than ten years…" Zakusin prompted.

"During the course of more than ten years, we, your subordinates, on this so memorable for us… er… day, beg your Excellency to accept in token of our respect and profound gratitude this album with our portraits in it, and express our hope that for the duration of your distinguished life, that for long, long years to come, to your dying day you may not abandon us.…"

"With your fatherly guidance in the path of justice and progress…" added Zakusin, wiping from his brow the perspiration that had suddenly appeared on it; he was evidently longing to speak, and in all probability had a speech ready. "And," he wound up, "may your standard fly for long, long years in the career of genius, industry, and social self-consciousness."

A tear trickled down the wrinkled left cheek of Zhmyhov.

"Gentlemen!" he said in a shaking voice, "I did not expect, I had no idea that you were going to celebrate my modest jubilee.… I am touched indeed… very much so.… I shall not forget this moment to my dying day, and believe me… believe me, friends, that no one is so desirous of your welfare as I am… and if there has been anything… it was for your benefit."

Zhmyhov, the actual civil councillor, kissed the titular councillor Kraterov, who had not expected such an honour, and turned pale with delight. Then the chief made a gesture that signified that he could not speak for emotion, and shed tears as though an expensive album had not been presented to him, but on the contrary, taken from him.… Then when he had a little recovered and said a few more words full of feeling

and given everyone his hand to shake, he went downstairs amid loud and joyful cheers, got into his carriage and drove off, followed by their blessings. As he sat in his carriage he was aware of a flood of joyous feelings such as he had never known before, and once more he shed tears.

At home new delights awaited him. There his family, his friends, and acquaintances had prepared him such an ovation that it seemed to him that he really had been of very great service to his country, and that if he had never existed his country would perhaps have been in a very bad way. The jubilee dinner was made up of toasts, speeches, and tears. In short, Zhmyhov had never expected that his merits would be so warmly appreciated.

“Gentlemen!” he said before the dessert, “two hours ago I was recompensed for all the sufferings a man has to undergo who is the servant, so to say, not of routine, not of the letter, but of duty! Through the whole duration of my service I have constantly adhered to the principle;—the public does not exist for us, but we for the public, and today I received the highest reward! My subordinates presented me with an album… see! I was touched.”

Festive faces bent over the album and began examining it.

“It’s a pretty album,” said Zhmyhov’s daughter Olya, “it must have cost fifty roubles, I do believe. Oh, it’s charming! You must give me the album, papa, do you hear? I’ll take care of it, it’s so pretty.”

After dinner Olya carried off the album to her room and shut it up in her table drawer. Next day she took the clerks out of it, flung them on the floor, and put her school friends in their place. The government uniforms made way for white pelerines. Kolya, his Excellency’s little son, picked up the clerks and painted their clothes red. Those who had no moustaches he presented with green moustaches and added brown beards to the beardless. When there was nothing left to paint he cut the little men out of the cardboard, pricked their eyes with a pin, and began playing soldiers with them. After cutting out the titular councillor Kraterov, he fixed him on a matchbox and carried him in that state to his father’s study.

“Papa, a monument, look!”

Zhmyhov burst out laughing, lurched forward, and, looking tenderly at the child, gave him a warm kiss on the cheek.

“There, you rogue, go and show mamma; let mamma look too.”

Minds in Ferment

(From the Annals of a Town)

The earth was like an oven. The afternoon sun blazed with such energy that even the thermometer hanging in the excise officer's room lost its head: it ran up to 112.5 and stopped there, irresolute. The inhabitants streamed with perspiration like overdriven horses, and were too lazy to mop their faces.

Two of the inhabitants were walking along the marketplace in front of the closely shuttered houses. One was Potcheshihin, the local treasury clerk, and the other was Optimov, the agent, for many years a correspondent of the *Son of the Fatherland* newspaper. They walked in silence, speechless from the heat. Optimov felt tempted to find fault with the local authorities for the dust and disorder of the marketplace, but, aware of the peace-loving disposition and moderate views of his companion, he said nothing.

In the middle of the marketplace Potcheshihin suddenly halted and began gazing into the sky.

"What are you looking at?"

"Those starlings that flew up. I wonder where they have settled. Clouds and clouds of them.… If one were to go and take a shot at them, and if one were to pick them up… and if… They have settled in the Father Prebendary's garden!"

"Oh no! They are not in the Father Prebendary's, they are in the Father Deacon's. If you did have a shot at them from here you wouldn't kill anything. Fine shot won't carry so far; it loses its force. And why should you kill them, anyway? They're birds destructive of the fruit, that's true; still, they're fowls of the air, works of the Lord. The starling sings, you know.… And what does it sing, pray? A song of praise.… 'All ye fowls of the air, praise ye the Lord.' No. I do believe they have settled in the Father Prebendary's garden."

Three old pilgrim women, wearing bark shoes and carrying wallets, passed noiselessly by the speakers. Looking enquiringly at the gentlemen who were for some unknown reason staring at the Father Prebendary's house, they slackened their pace, and when they were a few yards off

stopped, glanced at the friends once more, and then fell to gazing at the house themselves.

“Yes, you were right; they have settled in the Father Prebendary’s,” said Optimov. “His cherries are ripe now, so they have gone there to peck them.”

From the garden gate emerged the Father Prebendary himself, accompanied by the sexton. Seeing the attention directed upon his abode and wondering what people were staring at, he stopped, and he, too, as well as the sexton, began looking upwards to find out.

“The father is going to a service somewhere, I suppose,” said Potcheshihin. “The Lord be his succour!”

Some workmen from Purov’s factory, who had been bathing in the river, passed between the friends and the priest. Seeing the latter absorbed in contemplation of the heavens and the pilgrim women, too, standing motionless with their eyes turned upwards, they stood still and stared in the same direction.

A small boy leading a blind beggar and a peasant, carrying a tub of stinking fish to throw into the marketplace, did the same.

“There must be something the matter, I should think,” said Potcheshihin, “a fire or something. But there’s no sign of smoke anywhere. Hey! Kuzma!” he shouted to the peasant, “what’s the matter?”

The peasant made some reply, but Potcheshihin and Optimov did not catch it. Sleepy-looking shopmen made their appearance at the doors of all the shops. Some plasterers at work on a warehouse near left their ladders and joined the workmen.

The fireman, who was describing circles with his bare feet, on the watchtower, halted, and, after looking steadily at them for a few minutes, came down. The watchtower was left deserted. This seemed suspicious.

“There must be a fire somewhere. Don’t shove me! You damned swine!”

“Where do you see the fire? What fire? Pass on, gentlemen! I ask you civilly!”

“It must be a fire indoors!”

“Asks us civilly and keeps poking with his elbows. Keep your hands to yourself! Though you are a head constable, you have no sort of right to make free with your fists!”

“He’s trodden on my corn! Ah! I’ll crush you!”

“Crushed? Who’s crushed? Lads! a man’s been crushed!”

“What’s the meaning of this crowd? What do you want?”

“A man’s been crushed, please your honour!”

“Where? Pass on! I ask you civilly! I ask you civilly, you blockheads!”

“You may shove a peasant, but you daren’t touch a gentleman! Hands off!”

“Did you ever know such people? There’s no doing anything with them by fair words, the devils! Sidorov, run for Akim Danilitch! Look sharp! It’ll be the worse for you, gentlemen! Akim Danilitch is coming, and he’ll give it to you! You here, Parfen? A blind man, and at his age too! Can’t see, but he must be like other people and won’t do what he’s told. Smirnov, put his name down!”

“Yes, sir! And shall I write down the men from Purov’s? That man there with the swollen cheek, he’s from Purov’s works.”

“Don’t put down the men from Purov’s. It’s Purov’s birthday tomorrow.”

The starlings rose in a black cloud from the Father Prebendary’s garden, but Potcheshihin and Optimov did not notice them. They stood staring into the air, wondering what could have attracted such a crowd, and what it was looking at.

Akim Danilitch appeared. Still munching and wiping his lips, he cut his way into the crowd, bellowing:

“Firemen, be ready! Disperse! Mr. Optimov, disperse, or it’ll be the worse for you! Instead of writing all kinds of things about decent people in the papers, you had better try to behave yourself more conformably! No good ever comes of reading the papers!”

“Kindly refrain from reflections upon literature!” cried Optimov hotly. “I am a literary man, and I will allow no one to make reflections upon literature! though, as is the duty of a citizen, I respect you as a father and benefactor!”

“Firemen, turn the hose on them!”

“There’s no water, please your honour!”

“Don’t answer me! Go and get some! Look sharp!”

“We’ve nothing to get it in, your honour. The major has taken the fire-brigade horses to drive his aunt to the station.”

“Disperse! Stand back, damnation take you! Is that to your taste? Put him down, the devil!”

“I’ve lost my pencil, please your honour!”

The crowd grew larger and larger. There is no telling what proportions it might have reached if the new organ just arrived from Moscow had not fortunately begun playing in the tavern close by. Hearing their favourite tune, the crowd gasped and rushed off to the tavern. So nobody ever

knew why the crowd had assembled, and Potcheshihin and Optimov had by now forgotten the existence of the starlings who were innocently responsible for the proceedings.

An hour later the town was still and silent again, and only a solitary figure was to be seen—the fireman pacing round and round on the watchtower.

The same evening Akim Danilitch sat in the grocer's shop drinking *limonade gaseuse* and brandy, and writing:

"In addition to the official report, I venture, your Excellency, to append a few supplementary observations of my own. Father and benefactor! In very truth, but for the prayers of your virtuous spouse in her salubrious villa near our town, there's no knowing what might not have come to pass. What I have been through today I can find no words to express. The efficiency of Krushensky and of the major of the fire brigade are beyond all praise! I am proud of such devoted servants of our country! As for me, I did all that a weak man could do, whose only desire is the welfare of his neighbour; and sitting now in the bosom of my family, with tears in my eyes I thank Him Who spared us bloodshed! In absence of evidence, the guilty parties remain in custody, but I propose to release them in a week or so. It was their ignorance that led them astray!"

A Chameleon

The police superintendent Otchumyelov is walking across the market square wearing a new overcoat and carrying a parcel under his arm. A red-haired policeman strides after him with a sieve full of confiscated gooseberries in his hands. There is silence all around. Not a soul in the square.… The open doors of the shops and taverns look out upon God's world disconsolately, like hungry mouths; there is not even a beggar near them.

"So you bite, you damned brute?" Otchumyelov hears suddenly. "Lads, don't let him go! Biting is prohibited nowadays! Hold him! ah… ah!"

There is the sound of a dog yelping. Otchumyelov looks in the direction of the sound and sees a dog, hopping on three legs and looking about her, run out of Pitchugin's timber-yard. A man in a starched cotton shirt, with his waistcoat unbuttoned, is chasing her. He runs after her, and throwing his body forward falls down and seizes the dog by her hind legs. Once more there is a yelping and a shout of "Don't let go!" Sleepy countenances are protruded from the shops, and soon a crowd, which seems to have sprung out of the earth, is gathered round the timber-yard.

"It looks like a row, your honour…" says the policeman.

Otchumyelov makes a half turn to the left and strides towards the crowd.

He sees the aforementioned man in the unbuttoned waistcoat standing close by the gate of the timber-yard, holding his right hand in the air and displaying a bleeding finger to the crowd. On his half-drunken face there is plainly written: "I'll pay you out, you rogue!" and indeed the very finger has the look of a flag of victory. In this man Otchumyelov recognises Hryukin, the goldsmith. The culprit who has caused the sensation, a white borzoy puppy with a sharp muzzle and a yellow patch on her back, is sitting on the ground with her forepaws outstretched in the middle of the crowd, trembling all over. There is an expression of misery and terror in her tearful eyes.

“What’s it all about?” Otchumyelov inquires, pushing his way through the crowd. “What are you here for? Why are you waving your finger…? Who was it shouted?”

“I was walking along here, not interfering with anyone, your honour,” Hryukin begins, coughing into his fist. “I was talking about firewood to Mitry Mitritch, when this low brute for no rhyme or reason bit my finger.… You must excuse me, I am a working man.… Mine is fine work. I must have damages, for I shan’t be able to use this finger for a week, may be.… It’s not even the law, your honour, that one should put up with it from a beast.… If everyone is going to be bitten, life won’t be worth living.…”

“H’m. Very good,” says Otchumyelov sternly, coughing and raising his eyebrows. “Very good. Whose dog is it? I won’t let this pass! I’ll teach them to let their dogs run all over the place! It’s time these gentry were looked after, if they won’t obey the regulations! When he’s fined, the blackguard, I’ll teach him what it means to keep dogs and such stray cattle! I’ll give him a lesson!… Yeldyrin,” cries the superintendent, addressing the policeman, “find out whose dog this is and draw up a report! And the dog must be strangled. Without delay! It’s sure to be mad.… Whose dog is it, I ask?”

“I fancy it’s General Zhigalov’s,” says someone in the crowd.

“General Zhigalov’s, h’m.… Help me off with my coat, Yeldyrin… it’s frightfully hot! It must be a sign of rain.… There’s one thing I can’t make out, how it came to bite you?” Otchumyelov turns to Hryukin. “Surely it couldn’t reach your finger. It’s a little dog, and you are a great hulking fellow! You must have scratched your finger with a nail, and then the idea struck you to get damages for it. We all know… your sort! I know you devils!”

“He put a cigarette in her face, your honour, for a joke, and she had the sense to snap at him.… He is a nonsensical fellow, your honour!”

“That’s a lie, Squinteye! You didn’t see, so why tell lies about it? His honour is a wise gentleman, and will see who is telling lies and who is telling the truth, as in God’s sight.… And if I am lying let the court decide. It’s written in the law.… We are all equal nowadays. My own brother is in the gendarmes… let me tell you.…”

“Don’t argue!”

“No, that’s not the General’s dog,” says the policeman, with profound conviction, “the General hasn’t got one like that. His are mostly setters.”

“Do you know that for a fact?”

“Yes, your honour.”

“I know it, too. The General has valuable dogs, thoroughbred, and this is goodness knows what! No coat, no shape.… A low creature. And to keep a dog like that!… where’s the sense of it. If a dog like that were to turn up in Petersburg or Moscow, do you know what would happen? They would not worry about the law, they would strangle it in a twinkling! You’ve been injured, Hryukin, and we can’t let the matter drop.… We must give them a lesson! It is high time.…!”

“Yet maybe it is the General’s,” says the policeman, thinking aloud. “It’s not written on its face.… I saw one like it the other day in his yard.”

“It is the General’s, that’s certain!” says a voice in the crowd.

“H’m, help me on with my overcoat, Yeldyrin, my lad… the wind’s getting up.… I am cold.… You take it to the General’s, and inquire there. Say I found it and sent it. And tell them not to let it out into the street.… It may be a valuable dog, and if every swine goes sticking a cigar in its mouth, it will soon be ruined. A dog is a delicate animal.… And you put your hand down, you blockhead. It’s no use your displaying your fool of a finger. It’s your own fault.…”

“Here comes the General’s cook, ask him… Hi, Prohor! Come here, my dear man! Look at this dog.… Is it one of yours?”

“What an idea! We have never had one like that!”

“There’s no need to waste time asking,” says Otchumyelov. “It’s a stray dog! There’s no need to waste time talking about it.… Since he says it’s a stray dog, a stray dog it is.… It must be destroyed, that’s all about it.”

“It is not our dog,” Prohor goes on. “It belongs to the General’s brother, who arrived the other day. Our master does not care for hounds. But his honour is fond of them.…”

“You don’t say his Excellency’s brother is here? Vladimir Ivanitch?” inquires Otchumyelov, and his whole face beams with an ecstatic smile. “Well, I never! And I didn’t know! Has he come on a visit?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I never.… He couldn’t stay away from his brother.… And there I didn’t know! So this is his honour’s dog? Delighted to hear it.… Take it. It’s not a bad pup.… A lively creature.… Snapped at this fellow’s finger! Ha-ha-ha.… Come, why are you shivering? Rrr… Rrrr.… The rogue’s angry… a nice little pup.”

Prohor calls the dog, and walks away from the timber-yard with her. The crowd laughs at Hryukin.

“I’ll make you smart yet!” Otchumyelov threatens him, and wrapping himself in his greatcoat, goes on his way across the square.

In the Graveyard

“The wind has got up, friends, and it is beginning to get dark. Hadn’t we better take ourselves off before it gets worse?”

The wind was frolicking among the yellow leaves of the old birch trees, and a shower of thick drops fell upon us from the leaves. One of our party slipped on the clayey soil, and clutched at a big grey cross to save himself from falling.

“Yegor Gryaznorukov, titular councillor and cavalier…” he read. “I knew that gentleman. He was fond of his wife, he wore the Stanislav ribbon, and read nothing.… His digestion worked well… life was all right, wasn’t it? One would have thought he had no reason to die, but alas! fate had its eye on him.… The poor fellow fell a victim to his habits of observation. On one occasion, when he was listening at a keyhole, he got such a bang on the head from the door that he sustained concussion of the brain (he had a brain), and died. And here, under this tombstone, lies a man who from his cradle detested verses and epigrams.… As though to mock him his whole tombstone is adorned with verses.… There is someone coming!”

A man in a shabby overcoat, with a shaven, bluish-crimson countenance, overtook us. He had a bottle under his arm and a parcel of sausage was sticking out of his pocket.

“Where is the grave of Mushkin, the actor?” he asked us in a husky voice.

We conducted him towards the grave of Mushkin, the actor, who had died two years before.

“You are a government clerk, I suppose?” we asked him.

“No, an actor. Nowadays it is difficult to distinguish actors from clerks of the Consistory. No doubt you have noticed that.… That’s typical, but it’s not very flattering for the government clerk.”

It was with difficulty that we found the actor’s grave. It had sunken, was overgrown with weeds, and had lost all appearance of a grave. A cheap, little cross that had begun to rot, and was covered with green

moss blackened by the frost, had an air of aged dejection and looked, as it were, ailing.

"… forgotten friend Mushkin…" we read.

Time had erased the *never*, and corrected the falsehood of man.

"A subscription for a monument to him was got up among actors and journalists, but they drank up the money, the dear fellows…" sighed the actor, bowing down to the ground and touching the wet earth with his knees and his cap.

"How do you mean, drank it?"

"That's very simple. They collected the money, published a paragraph about it in the newspaper, and spent it on drink.… I don't say it to blame them.… I hope it did them good, dear things! Good health to them, and eternal memory to him."

"Drinking means bad health, and eternal memory nothing but sadness. God give us remembrance for a time, but eternal memory—what next!"

"You are right there. Mushkin was a well-known man, you see; there were a dozen wreaths on the coffin, and he is already forgotten. Those to whom he was dear have forgotten him, but those to whom he did harm remember him. I, for instance, shall never, never forget him, for I got nothing but harm from him. I have no love for the deceased."

"What harm did he do you?"

"Great harm," sighed the actor, and an expression of bitter resentment overspread his face. "To me he was a villain and a scoundrel—the Kingdom of Heaven be his! It was through looking at him and listening to him that I became an actor. By his art he lured me from the parental home, he enticed me with the excitements of an actor's life, promised me all sorts of things—and brought tears and sorrow.… An actor's lot is a bitter one! I have lost youth, sobriety, and the divine semblance.… I haven't a halfpenny to bless myself with, my shoes are down at heel, my breeches are frayed and patched, and my face looks as if it had been gnawed by dogs.… My head's full of freethinking and nonsense.… He robbed me of my faith—my evil genius! It would have been something if I had had talent, but as it is, I am ruined for nothing.… It's cold, honoured friends.… Won't you have some? There is enough for all.… B-r-r-r.… Let us drink to the rest of his soul! Though I don't like him and though he's dead, he was the only one I had in the world, the only one. It's the last time I shall visit him.… The doctors say I shall soon die of drink, so here I have come to say goodbye. One must forgive one's enemies."

We left the actor to converse with the dead Mushkin and went on. It began drizzling a fine cold rain.

At the turning into the principal avenue strewn with gravel, we met a funeral procession. Four bearers, wearing white calico sashes and muddy high boots with leaves sticking on them, carried the brown coffin. It was getting dark and they hastened, stumbling and shaking their burden.…

“We’ve only been walking here for a couple of hours and that is the third brought in already.… Shall we go home, friends?”

OYSTERS

I need no great effort of memory to recall, in every detail, the rainy autumn evening when I stood with my father in one of the more frequented streets of Moscow, and felt that I was gradually being overcome by a strange illness. I had no pain at all, but my legs were giving way under me, the words stuck in my throat, my head slipped weakly on one side… It seemed as though, in a moment, I must fall down and lose consciousness.

If I had been taken into a hospital at that minute, the doctors would have had to write over my bed: *Fames*, a disease which is not in the manuals of medicine.

Beside me on the pavement stood my father in a shabby summer overcoat and a serge cap, from which a bit of white wadding was sticking out. On his feet he had big heavy goloshes. Afraid, vain man, that people would see that his feet were bare under his goloshes, he had drawn the tops of some old boots up round the calves of his legs.

This poor, foolish, queer creature, whom I loved the more warmly the more ragged and dirty his smart summer overcoat became, had come to Moscow, five months before, to look for a job as copying-clerk. For those five months he had been trudging about Moscow looking for work, and it was only on that day that he had brought himself to go into the street to beg for alms.

Before us was a big house of three storeys, adorned with a blue signboard with the word “Restaurant” on it. My head was drooping feebly backwards and on one side, and I could not help looking upwards at the lighted windows of the restaurant. Human figures were flitting about at the windows. I could see the right side of the orchestrion, two oleographs, hanging lamps.… Staring into one window, I saw a patch of white. The patch was motionless, and its rectangular outlines stood out sharply against the dark, brown background. I looked intently and made out of the patch a white placard on the wall. Something was written on it, but what it was, I could not see…

For half an hour I kept my eyes on the placard. Its white attracted my eyes, and, as it were, hypnotised my brain. I tried to read it, but my efforts were in vain.

At last the strange disease got the upper hand.

The rumble of the carriages began to seem like thunder, in the stench of the street I distinguished a thousand smells. The restaurant lights and the lamps dazzled my eyes like lightning. My five senses were overstrained and sensitive beyond the normal. I began to see what I had not seen before.

“Oysters…” I made out on the placard.

A strange word! I had lived in the world eight years and three months, but had never come across that word. What did it mean? Surely it was not the name of the restaurant-keeper? But signboards with names on them always hang outside, not on the walls indoors!

“Papa, what does ‘oysters’ mean?” I asked in a husky voice, making an effort to turn my face towards my father.

My father did not hear. He was keeping a watch on the movements of the crowd, and following every passerby with his eyes.… From his eyes I saw that he wanted to say something to the passersby, but the fatal word hung like a heavy weight on his trembling lips and could not be flung off. He even took a step after one passerby and touched him on the sleeve, but when he turned round, he said, “I beg your pardon,” was overcome with confusion, and staggered back.

“Papa, what does ‘oysters’ mean?” I repeated.

“It is an animal… that lives in the sea.”

I instantly pictured to myself this unknown marine animal.… I thought it must be something midway between a fish and a crab. As it was from the sea they made of it, of course, a very nice hot fish soup with savoury pepper and laurel leaves, or broth with vinegar and fricassee of fish and cabbage, or crayfish sauce, or served it cold with horseradish.… I vividly imagined it being brought from the market, quickly cleaned, quickly put in the pot, quickly, quickly, for everyone was hungry… awfully hungry! From the kitchen rose the smell of hot fish and crayfish soup.

I felt that this smell was tickling my palate and nostrils, that it was gradually taking possession of my whole body.… The restaurant, my father, the white placard, my sleeves were all smelling of it, smelling so strongly that I began to chew. I moved my jaws and swallowed as though I really had a piece of this marine animal in my mouth…

My legs gave way from the blissful sensation I was feeling, and I clutched at my father's arm to keep myself from falling, and leant against his wet summer overcoat. My father was trembling and shivering. He was cold…

"Papa, are oysters a Lenten dish?" I asked.

"They are eaten alive…" said my father. "They are in shells like tortoises, but… in two halves."

The delicious smell instantly left off affecting me, and the illusion vanished.… Now I understood it all!

"How nasty," I whispered, "how nasty!"

So that's what "oysters" meant! I imagined to myself a creature like a frog. A frog sitting in a shell, peeping out from it with big, glittering eyes, and moving its revolting jaws. I imagined this creature in a shell with claws, glittering eyes, and a slimy skin, being brought from the market.… The children would all hide while the cook, frowning with an air of disgust, would take the creature by its claw, put it on a plate, and carry it into the dining room. The grownups would take it and eat it, eat it alive with its eyes, its teeth, its legs! While it squeaked and tried to bite their lips.…

I frowned, but… but why did my teeth move as though I were munching? The creature was loathsome, disgusting, terrible, but I ate it, ate it greedily, afraid of distinguishing its taste or smell. As soon as I had eaten one, I saw the glittering eyes of a second, a third… I ate them too.… At last I ate the table-napkin, the plate, my father's goloshes, the white placard… I ate everything that caught my eye, because I felt that nothing but eating would take away my illness. The oysters had a terrible look in their eyes and were loathsome. I shuddered at the thought of them, but I wanted to eat! To eat!

"Oysters! Give me some oysters!" was the cry that broke from me and I stretched out my hand.

"Help us, gentlemen!" I heard at that moment my father say, in a hollow and shaking voice. "I am ashamed to ask but—my God!—I can bear no more!"

"Oysters!" I cried, pulling my father by the skirts of his coat.

"Do you mean to say you eat oysters? A little chap like you!" I heard laughter close to me.

Two gentlemen in top hats were standing before us, looking into my face and laughing.

"Do you really eat oysters, youngster? That's interesting! How do you eat them?"

I remember that a strong hand dragged me into the lighted restaurant. A minute later there was a crowd round me, watching me with curiosity and amusement. I sat at a table and ate something slimy, salt with a flavour of dampness and mouldiness. I ate greedily without chewing, without looking and trying to discover what I was eating. I fancied that if I opened my eyes I should see glittering eyes, claws, and sharp teeth.

All at once I began biting something hard, there was a sound of a scrunching.

"Ha, ha! He is eating the shells," laughed the crowd. "Little silly, do you suppose you can eat that?"

After that I remember a terrible thirst. I was lying in my bed, and could not sleep for heartburn and the strange taste in my parched mouth. My father was walking up and down, gesticulating with his hands.

"I believe I have caught cold," he was muttering. "I've a feeling in my head as though someone were sitting on it.… Perhaps it is because I have not… er… eaten anything today.… I really am a queer, stupid creature.… I saw those gentlemen pay ten roubles for the oysters. Why didn't I go up to them and ask them… to lend me something? They would have given something."

Towards morning, I fell asleep and dreamt of a frog sitting in a shell, moving its eyes. At midday I was awakened by thirst, and looked for my father: he was still walking up and down and gesticulating.

THE SWEDISH MATCH

(THE STORY OF A CRIME)

I

On the morning of October 6, 1885, a well-dressed young man presented himself at the office of the police superintendent of the 2nd division of the S—— district, and announced that his employer, a retired cornet of the guards, called Mark Ivanovitch Klyauzov, had been murdered. The young man was pale and extremely agitated as he made this announcement. His hands trembled and there was a look of horror in his eyes.

"To whom have I the honour of speaking?" the superintendent asked him.

"Psyekov, Klyauzov's steward. Agricultural and engineering expert."

The police superintendent, on reaching the spot with Psyekov and the necessary witnesses, found the position as follows.

Masses of people were crowding about the lodge in which Klyauzov lived. The news of the event had flown round the neighbourhood with the rapidity of lightning, and, thanks to its being a holiday, the people were flocking to the lodge from all the neighbouring villages. There was a regular hubbub of talk. Pale and tearful faces were to be seen here and there. The door into Klyauzov's bedroom was found to be locked. The key was in the lock on the inside.

"Evidently the criminals made their way in by the window," Psyekov observed, as they examined the door.

They went into the garden into which the bedroom window looked. The window had a gloomy, ominous air. It was covered by a faded green curtain. One corner of the curtain was slightly turned back, which made it possible to peep into the bedroom.

"Has any one of you looked in at the window?" inquired the superintendent.

“No, your honour,” said Yefrem, the gardener, a little, grey-haired old man with the face of a veteran noncommissioned officer. “No one feels like looking when they are shaking in every limb!”

“Ech, Mark Ivanitch! Mark Ivanitch!” sighed the superintendent, as he looked at the window. “I told you that you would come to a bad end! I told you, poor dear—you wouldn’t listen! Dissipation leads to no good!”

“It’s thanks to Yefrem,” said Psyekov. “We should never have guessed it but for him. It was he who first thought that something was wrong. He came to me this morning and said: ‘Why is it our master hasn’t waked up for so long? He hasn’t been out of his bedroom for a whole week!’ When he said that to me I was struck all of a heap.… The thought flashed through my mind at once. He hasn’t made an appearance since Saturday of last week, and today’s Sunday. Seven days is no joke!”

“Yes, poor man,” the superintendent sighed again. “A clever fellow, well-educated, and so good-hearted. There was no one like him, one may say, in company. But a rake; the kingdom of heaven be his! I’m not surprised at anything with him! Stepan,” he said, addressing one of the witnesses, “ride off this minute to my house and send Andryushka to the police captain’s, let him report to him. Say Mark Ivanitch has been murdered! Yes, and run to the inspector—why should he sit in comfort doing nothing? Let him come here. And you go yourself as fast as you can to the examining magistrate, Nikolay Yermolaitch, and tell him to come here. Wait a bit, I will write him a note.”

The police superintendent stationed watchmen round the lodge, and went off to the steward’s to have tea. Ten minutes later he was sitting on a stool, carefully nibbling lumps of sugar, and sipping tea as hot as a red-hot coal.

“There it is!…” he said to Psyekov, “there it is!… a gentleman, and a well-to-do one, too… a favourite of the gods, one may say, to use Pushkin’s expression, and what has he made of it? Nothing! He gave himself up to drinking and debauchery, and… here now… he has been murdered!”

Two hours later the examining magistrate drove up. Nikolay Yermolaitch Tchubikov (that was the magistrate’s name), a tall, thickset old man of sixty, had been hard at work for a quarter of a century. He was known to the whole district as an honest, intelligent, energetic man, devoted to his work. His invariable companion, assistant, and secretary, a tall young man of six and twenty, called Dyukovsky, arrived on the scene of action with him.

“Is it possible, gentlemen?” Tchubikov began, going into Psyekov’s room and rapidly shaking hands with everyone. “Is it possible? Mark Ivanitch? Murdered? No, it’s impossible! Imposs-i-ble!”

“There it is,” sighed the superintendent.

“Merciful heavens! Why I saw him only last Friday. At the fair at Tarabankovo! Saving your presence, I drank a glass of vodka with him!”

“There it is,” the superintendent sighed once more.

They heaved sighs, expressed their horror, drank a glass of tea each, and went to the lodge.

“Make way!” the police inspector shouted to the crowd.

On going into the lodge the examining magistrate first of all set to work to inspect the door into the bedroom. The door turned out to be made of deal, painted yellow, and not to have been tampered with. No special traces that might have served as evidence could be found. They proceeded to break open the door.

“I beg you, gentlemen, who are not concerned, to retire,” said the examining magistrate, when, after long banging and cracking, the door yielded to the axe and the chisel. “I ask this in the interests of the investigation.… Inspector, admit no one!”

Tchubikov, his assistant, and the police superintendent opened the door and hesitatingly, one after the other, walked into the room. The following spectacle met their eyes. In the solitary window stood a big wooden bedstead with an immense feather bed on it. On the rumpled feather bed lay a creased and crumpled quilt. A pillow, in a cotton pillow case—also much creased, was on the floor. On a little table beside the bed lay a silver watch, and silver coins to the value of twenty kopecks. Some sulphur matches lay there too. Except the bed, the table, and a solitary chair, there was no furniture in the room. Looking under the bed, the superintendent saw two dozen empty bottles, an old straw hat, and a jar of vodka. Under the table lay one boot, covered with dust. Taking a look round the room, Tchubikov frowned and flushed crimson.

“The blackguards!” he muttered, clenching his fists.

“And where is Mark Ivanitch?” Dyukovsky asked quietly.

“I beg you not to put your spoke in,” Tchubikov answered roughly. “Kindly examine the floor. This is the second case in my experience, Yevgraf Kuzmitch,” he added to the police superintendent, dropping his voice. “In 1870 I had a similar case. But no doubt you remember it.… The murder of the merchant Portretov. It was just the same. The blackguards murdered him, and dragged the dead body out of the window.”

Tchubikov went to the window, drew the curtain aside, and cautiously pushed the window. The window opened.

"It opens, so it was not fastened.… H'm… there are traces on the windowsill. Do you see? Here is the trace of a knee.… Someone climbed out.… We shall have to inspect the window thoroughly."

"There is nothing special to be observed on the floor," said Dyukovsky. "No stains, nor scratches. The only thing I have found is a used Swedish match. Here it is. As far as I remember, Mark Ivanitch didn't smoke; in a general way he used sulphur ones, never Swedish matches. This match may serve as a clue.…"

"Oh, hold your tongue, please!" cried Tchubikov, with a wave of his hand. "He keeps on about his match! I can't stand these excitable people! Instead of looking for matches, you had better examine the bed!"

On inspecting the bed, Dyukovsky reported:

"There are no stains of blood or of anything else.… Nor are there any fresh rents. On the pillow there are traces of teeth. A liquid, having the smell of beer and also the taste of it, has been spilt on the quilt.… The general appearance of the bed gives grounds for supposing there has been a struggle."

"I know there was a struggle without your telling me! No one asked you whether there was a struggle. Instead of looking out for a struggle you had better be…"

"One boot is here, the other one is not on the scene."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, they must have strangled him while he was taking off his boots. He hadn't time to take the second boot off when.…"

"He's off again!… And how do you know that he was strangled?"

"There are marks of teeth on the pillow. The pillow itself is very much crumpled, and has been flung to a distance of six feet from the bed."

"He argues, the chatterbox! We had better go into the garden. You had better look in the garden instead of rummaging about here.… I can do that without your help."

When they went out into the garden their first task was the inspection of the grass. The grass had been trampled down under the windows. The clump of burdock against the wall under the window turned out to have been trodden on too. Dyukovsky succeeded in finding on it some broken shoots, and a little bit of wadding. On the topmost burrs, some fine threads of dark blue wool were found.

"What was the colour of his last suit?" Dyukovsky asked Psyekov.

"It was yellow, made of canvas."

“Capital! Then it was they who were in dark blue.…”

Some of the burrs were cut off and carefully wrapped up in paper. At that moment Artsybashev-Svistakovsky, the police captain, and Tyutyuev, the doctor, arrived. The police captain greeted the others, and at once proceeded to satisfy his curiosity; the doctor, a tall and extremely lean man with sunken eyes, a long nose, and a sharp chin, greeting no one and asking no questions, sat down on a stump, heaved a sigh and said:

“The Serbians are in a turmoil again! I can’t make out what they want! Ah, Austria, Austria! It’s your doing!”

The inspection of the window from outside yielded absolutely no result; the inspection of the grass and surrounding bushes furnished many valuable clues. Dyukovsky succeeded, for instance, in detecting a long, dark streak in the grass, consisting of stains, and stretching from the window for a good many yards into the garden. The streak ended under one of the lilac bushes in a big, brownish stain. Under the same bush was found a boot, which turned out to be the fellow to the one found in the bedroom.

“This is an old stain of blood,” said Dyukovsky, examining the stain.

At the word “blood,” the doctor got up and lazily took a cursory glance at the stain.

“Yes, it’s blood,” he muttered.

“Then he wasn’t strangled since there’s blood,” said Tchubikov, looking malignantly at Dyukovsky.

“He was strangled in the bedroom, and here, afraid he would come to, they stabbed him with something sharp. The stain under the bush shows that he lay there for a comparatively long time, while they were trying to find some way of carrying him, or something to carry him on out of the garden.”

“Well, and the boot?”

“That boot bears out my contention that he was murdered while he was taking off his boots before going to bed. He had taken off one boot, the other, that is, this boot he had only managed to get half off. While he was being dragged and shaken the boot that was only half on came off of itself.…”

“What powers of deduction! Just look at him!” Tchubikov jeered. “He brings it all out so pat! And when will you learn not to put your theories forward? You had better take a little of the grass for analysis instead of arguing!”

After making the inspection and taking a plan of the locality they went off to the steward's to write a report and have lunch. At lunch they talked.

"Watch, money, and everything else… are untouched," Tchubikov began the conversation. "It is as clear as twice two makes four that the murder was committed not for mercenary motives."

"It was committed by a man of the educated class," Dyukovsky put in.

"From what do you draw that conclusion?"

"I base it on the Swedish match which the peasants about here have not learned to use yet. Such matches are only used by landowners and not by all of them. He was murdered, by the way, not by one but by three, at least: two held him while the third strangled him. Klyauzov was strong and the murderers must have known that."

"What use would his strength be to him, supposing he were asleep?"

"The murderers came upon him as he was taking off his boots. He was taking off his boots, so he was not asleep."

"It's no good making things up! You had better eat your lunch!"

"To my thinking, your honour," said Yefrem, the gardener, as he set the samovar on the table, "this vile deed was the work of no other than Nikolashka."

"Quite possible," said Psyekov.

"Who's this Nikolashka?"

"The master's valet, your honour," answered Yefrem. "Who else should it be if not he? He's a ruffian, your honour! A drunkard, and such a dissipated fellow! May the Queen of Heaven never bring the like again! He always used to fetch vodka for the master, he always used to put the master to bed.… Who should it be if not he? And what's more, I venture to bring to your notice, your honour, he boasted once in a tavern, the rascal, that he would murder his master. It's all on account of Akulka, on account of a woman.… He had a soldier's wife.… The master took a fancy to her and got intimate with her, and he… was angered by it, to be sure. He's lolling about in the kitchen now, drunk. He's crying… making out he is grieving over the master.…"

"And anyone might be angry over Akulka, certainly," said Psyekov. "She is a soldier's wife, a peasant woman, but… Mark Ivanitch might well call her Nana. There is something in her that does suggest Nana… fascinating…"

"I have seen her… I know…" said the examining magistrate, blowing his nose in a red handkerchief.

Dyukovsky blushed and dropped his eyes. The police superintendent drummed on his saucer with his fingers. The police captain coughed and rummaged in his portfolio for something. On the doctor alone the mention of Akulka and Nana appeared to produce no impression. Tchubikov ordered Nikolashka to be fetched. Nikolashka, a lanky young man with a long pockmarked nose and a hollow chest, wearing a reefer jacket that had been his master's, came into Psyekov's room and bowed down to the ground before Tchubikov. His face looked sleepy and showed traces of tears. He was drunk and could hardly stand up.

"Where is your master?" Tchubikov asked him.

"He's murdered, your honour."

As he said this Nikolashka blinked and began to cry.

"We know that he is murdered. But where is he now? Where is his body?"

"They say it was dragged out of window and buried in the garden."

"H'm… the results of the investigation are already known in the kitchen then.… That's bad. My good fellow, where were you on the night when your master was killed? On Saturday, that is?"

Nikolashka raised his head, craned his neck, and pondered.

"I can't say, your honour," he said. "I was drunk and I don't remember."

"An alibi!" whispered Dyukovsky, grinning and rubbing his hands.

"Ah! And why is it there's blood under your master's window!"

Nikolashka flung up his head and pondered.

"Think a little quicker," said the police captain.

"In a minute. That blood's from a trifling matter, your honour. I killed a hen; I cut her throat very simply in the usual way, and she fluttered out of my hands and took and ran off.… That's what the blood's from."

Yefrem testified that Nikolashka really did kill a hen every evening and killed it in all sorts of places, and no one had seen the half-killed hen running about the garden, though of course it could not be positively denied that it had done so.

"An alibi," laughed Dyukovsky, "and what an idiotic alibi."

"Have you had relations with Akulka?"

"Yes, I have sinned."

"And your master carried her off from you?"

"No, not at all. It was this gentleman here, Mr. Psyekov, Ivan Mihalitch, who enticed her from me, and the master took her from Ivan Mihalitch. That's how it was."

Psyekov looked confused and began rubbing his left eye. Dyukovsky fastened his eyes upon him, detected his confusion, and started. He saw on the steward's legs dark blue trousers which he had not previously noticed. The trousers reminded him of the blue threads found on the burdock. Tchubikov in his turn glanced suspiciously at Psyekov.

"You can go!" he said to Nikolashka. "And now allow me to put one question to you, Mr. Psyekov. You were here, of course, on the Saturday of last week?"

"Yes, at ten o'clock I had supper with Mark Ivanitch."

"And afterwards?"

Psyekov was confused, and got up from the table.

"Afterwards… afterwards… I really don't remember," he muttered. "I had drunk a good deal on that occasion.… I can't remember where and when I went to bed.… Why do you all look at me like that? As though I had murdered him!"

"Where did you wake up?"

"I woke up in the servants' kitchen on the stove.… They can all confirm that. How I got on to the stove I can't say.…"

"Don't disturb yourself… Do you know Akulina?"

"Oh well, not particularly."

"Did she leave you for Klyauzov?"

"Yes.… Yefrem, bring some more mushrooms! Will you have some tea, Yevgraf Kuzmitch?"

There followed an oppressive, painful silence that lasted for some five minutes. Dyukovsky held his tongue, and kept his piercing eyes on Psyekov's face, which gradually turned pale. The silence was broken by Tchubikov.

"We must go to the big house," he said, "and speak to the deceased's sister, Marya Ivanovna. She may give us some evidence."

Tchubikov and his assistant thanked Psyekov for the lunch, then went off to the big house. They found Klyauzov's sister, a maiden lady of five and forty, on her knees before a high family shrine of icons. When she saw portfolios and caps adorned with cockades in her visitors' hands, she turned pale.

"First of all, I must offer an apology for disturbing your devotions, so to say," the gallant Tchubikov began with a scrape. "We have come to you with a request. You have heard, of course, already.… There is a suspicion that your brother has somehow been murdered. God's will, you know.… Death no one can escape, neither Tsar nor ploughman. Can you not assist us with some fact, something that will throw light?"

“Oh, do not ask me!” said Marya Ivanovna, turning whiter still, and hiding her face in her hands. “I can tell you nothing! Nothing! I implore you! I can say nothing… What can I do? Oh, no, no… not a word… of my brother! I would rather die than speak!”

Marya Ivanovna burst into tears and went away into another room. The officials looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and beat a retreat.

“A devil of a woman!” said Dyukovsky, swearing as they went out of the big house. “Apparently she knows something and is concealing it. And there is something peculiar in the maidservant’s expression too.… You wait a bit, you devils! We will get to the bottom of it all!”

In the evening, Tchubikov and his assistant were driving home by the light of a pale-faced moon; they sat in their wagonette, summing up in their minds the incidents of the day. Both were exhausted and sat silent. Tchubikov never liked talking on the road. In spite of his talkativeness, Dyukovsky held his tongue in deference to the old man. Towards the end of the journey, however, the young man could endure the silence no longer, and began:

“That Nikolashka has had a hand in the business,” he said, “*non dubitandum est.* One can see from his mug too what sort of a chap he is.… His alibi gives him away hand and foot. There is no doubt either that he was not the instigator of the crime. He was only the stupid hired tool. Do you agree? The discreet Psyekov plays a not unimportant part in the affair too. His blue trousers, his embarrassment, his lying on the stove from fright after the murder, his alibi, and Akulka.”

“Keep it up, you’re in your glory! According to you, if a man knows Akulka he is the murderer. Ah, you hothead! You ought to be sucking your bottle instead of investigating cases! You used to be running after Akulka too, does that mean that you had a hand in this business?”

“Akulka was a cook in your house for a month, too, but… I don’t say anything. On that Saturday night I was playing cards with you, I saw you, or I should be after you too. The woman is not the point, my good sir. The point is the nasty, disgusting, mean feeling.… The discreet young man did not like to be cut out, do you see. Vanity, do you see.… He longed to be revenged. Then… His thick lips are a strong indication of sensuality. Do you remember how he smacked his lips when he compared Akulka to Nana? That he is burning with passion, the scoundrel, is beyond doubt! And so you have wounded vanity and unsatisfied passion. That’s enough to lead to murder. Two of them are in our hands, but who is the third? Nikolashka and Psyekov held him. Who

was it smothered him? Psyekov is timid, easily embarrassed, altogether a coward. People like Nikolashka are not equal to smothering with a pillow, they set to work with an axe or a mallet.… Some third person must have smothered him, but who?”

Dyukovsky pulled his cap over his eyes, and pondered. He was silent till the wagonette had driven up to the examining magistrate’s house.

“Eureka!” he said, as he went into the house, and took off his overcoat. “Eureka, Nikolay Yermolaitch! I can’t understand how it is it didn’t occur to me before. Do you know who the third is?”

“Do leave off, please! There’s supper ready. Sit down to supper!”

Tchubikov and Dyukovsky sat down to supper. Dyukovsky poured himself out a wineglassful of vodka, got up, stretched, and with sparkling eyes, said:

“Let me tell you then that the third person who collaborated with the scoundrel Psyekov and smothered him was a woman! Yes! I am speaking of the murdered man’s sister, Marya Ivanovna!”

Tchubikov coughed over his vodka and fastened his eyes on Dyukovsky.

“Are you… not quite right? Is your head… not quite right? Does it ache?”

“I am quite well. Very good, suppose I have gone out of my mind, but how do you explain her confusion on our arrival? How do you explain her refusal to give information? Admitting that that is trivial—very good! All right!—but think of the terms they were on! She detested her brother! She is an Old Believer, he was a profligate, a godless fellow… that is what has bred hatred between them! They say he succeeded in persuading her that he was an angel of Satan! He used to practise spiritualism in her presence!”

“Well, what then?”

“Don’t you understand? She’s an Old Believer, she murdered him through fanaticism! She has not merely slain a wicked man, a profligate, she has freed the world from Antichrist—and that she fancies is her merit, her religious achievement! Ah, you don’t know these old maids, these Old Believers! You should read Dostoevsky! And what does Lyeskov say… and Petchersky! It’s she, it’s she, I’ll stake my life on it. She smothered him! Oh, the fiendish woman! Wasn’t she, perhaps, standing before the icons when we went in to put us off the scent? ‘I’ll stand up and say my prayers,’ she said to herself, ‘they will think I am calm and don’t expect them.’ That’s the method of all novices in crime. Dear Nikolay Yermolaitch! My dear man! Do hand this case over to me!

Let me go through with it to the end! My dear fellow! I have begun it, and I will carry it through to the end."

Tchubikov shook his head and frowned.

"I am equal to sifting difficult cases myself," he said. "And it's your place not to put yourself forward. Write what is dictated to you, that is your business!"

Dyukovsky flushed crimson, walked out, and slammed the door.

"A clever fellow, the rogue," Tchubikov muttered, looking after him. "Ve-ery clever! Only inappropriately hasty. I shall have to buy him a cigar-case at the fair for a present."

Next morning a lad with a big head and a hare lip came from Klyauzovka. He gave his name as the shepherd Danilko, and furnished a very interesting piece of information.

"I had had a drop," said he. "I stayed on till midnight at my crony's. As I was going home, being drunk, I got into the river for a bathe. I was bathing and what do I see! Two men coming along the dam carrying something black. 'Tyoo!' I shouted at them. They were scared, and cut along as fast as they could go into the Makarev kitchen-gardens. Strike me dead, if it wasn't the master they were carrying!"

Towards evening of the same day Psyekov and Nikolashka were arrested and taken under guard to the district town. In the town they were put in the prison tower.

II

Twelve days passed.

It was morning. The examining magistrate, Nikolay Yermolaitch, was sitting at a green table at home, looking through the papers, relating to the “Klyauzov case”; Dyukovsky was pacing up and down the room restlessly, like a wolf in a cage.

“You are convinced of the guilt of Nikolashka and Psyekov,” he said, nervously pulling at his youthful beard. “Why is it you refuse to be convinced of the guilt of Marya Ivanovna? Haven’t you evidence enough?”

“I don’t say that I don’t believe in it. I am convinced of it, but somehow I can’t believe it.… There is no real evidence. It’s all theoretical, as it were.… Fanaticism and one thing and another.…”

“And you must have an axe and bloodstained sheets!… You lawyers! Well, I will prove it to you then! Do give up your slipshod attitude to the psychological aspect of the case. Your Marya Ivanovna ought to be in Siberia! I’ll prove it. If theoretical proof is not enough for you, I have something material.… It will show you how right my theory is! Only let me go about a little!”

“What are you talking about?”

“The Swedish match! Have you forgotten? I haven’t forgotten it! I’ll find out who struck it in the murdered man’s room! It was not struck by Nikolashka, nor by Psyekov, neither of whom turned out to have matches when searched, but a third person, that is Marya Ivanovna. And I will prove it!… Only let me drive about the district, make some inquiries.…”

“Oh, very well, sit down.… Let us proceed to the examination.”

Dyukovsky sat down to the table, and thrust his long nose into the papers.

“Bring in Nikolay Tetchov!” cried the examining magistrate.

Nikolashka was brought in. He was pale and thin as a chip. He was trembling.

“Tetchov!” began Tchubikov. “In 1879 you were convicted of theft and condemned to a term of imprisonment. In 1882 you were condemned

for theft a second time, and a second time sent to prison… We know all about it.…”

A look of surprise came up into Nikolashka’s face. The examining magistrate’s omniscience amazed him, but soon wonder was replaced by an expression of extreme distress. He broke into sobs, and asked leave to go to wash, and calm himself. He was led out.

“Bring in Psyekov!” said the examining magistrate.

Psyekov was led in. The young man’s face had greatly changed during those twelve days. He was thin, pale, and wasted. There was a look of apathy in his eyes.

“Sit down, Psyekov,” said Tchubikov. “I hope that today you will be sensible and not persist in lying as on other occasions. All this time you have denied your participation in the murder of Klyauzov, in spite of the mass of evidence against you. It is senseless. Confession is some mitigation of guilt. Today I am talking to you for the last time. If you don’t confess today, tomorrow it will be too late. Come, tell us.…”

“I know nothing, and I don’t know your evidence,” whispered Psyekov.

“That’s useless! Well then, allow me to tell you how it happened. On Saturday evening, you were sitting in Klyauzov’s bedroom drinking vodka and beer with him.” (Dyukovsky riveted his eyes on Psyekov’s face, and did not remove them during the whole monologue.) “Nikolay was waiting upon you. Between twelve and one Mark Ivanitch told you he wanted to go to bed. He always did go to bed at that time. While he was taking off his boots and giving you some instructions regarding the estate, Nikolay and you at a given signal seized your intoxicated master and flung him back upon the bed. One of you sat on his feet, the other on his head. At that moment the lady, you know who, in a black dress, who had arranged with you beforehand the part she would take in the crime, came in from the passage. She picked up the pillow, and proceeded to smother him with it. During the struggle, the light went out. The woman took a box of Swedish matches out of her pocket and lighted the candle. Isn’t that right? I see from your face that what I say is true. Well, to proceed.… Having smothered him, and being convinced that he had ceased to breathe, Nikolay and you dragged him out of window and put him down near the burdocks. Afraid that he might regain consciousness, you struck him with something sharp. Then you carried him, and laid him for some time under a lilac bush. After resting and considering a little, you carried him… lifted him over the hurdle.… Then went along

the road… Then comes the dam; near the dam you were frightened by a peasant. But what is the matter with you?”

Psyekov, white as a sheet, got up, staggering.

“I am suffocating!” he said. “Very well.… So be it.… Only I must go.… Please.”

Psyekov was led out.

“At last he has admitted it!” said Tchubikov, stretching at his ease. “He has given himself away! How neatly I caught him there.”

“And he didn’t deny the woman in black!” said Dyukovsky, laughing. “I am awfully worried over that Swedish match, though! I can’t endure it any longer. Goodbye! I am going!”

Dyukovsky put on his cap and went off. Tchubikov began interrogating Akulka.

Akulka declared that she knew nothing about it.…

“I have lived with you and with nobody else!” she said.

At six o’clock in the evening Dyukovsky returned. He was more excited than ever. His hands trembled so much that he could not unbutton his overcoat. His cheeks were burning. It was evident that he had not come back without news.

“*Veni, vidi, vici!*” he cried, dashing into Tchubikov’s room and sinking into an armchair. “I vow on my honour, I begin to believe in my own genius. Listen, damnation take us! Listen and wonder, old friend! It’s comic and it’s sad. You have three in your grasp already… haven’t you? I have found a fourth murderer, or rather murderess, for it is a woman! And what a woman! I would have given ten years of my life merely to touch her shoulders. But… listen. I drove to Klyauzovka and proceeded to describe a spiral round it. On the way I visited all the shopkeepers and innkeepers, asking for Swedish matches. Everywhere I was told ‘No.’ I have been on my round up to now. Twenty times I lost hope, and as many times regained it. I have been on the go all day long, and only an hour ago came upon what I was looking for. A couple of miles from here they gave me a packet of a dozen boxes of matches. One box was missing… I asked at once: ‘Who bought that box?’ ‘So-and-so. She took a fancy to them… They crackle.’ My dear fellow! Nikolay Yermolaitch! What can sometimes be done by a man who has been expelled from a seminary and studied Gaboriau is beyond all conception! From today I shall began to respect myself!… Ough.… Well, let us go!”

“Go where?”

“To her, to the fourth.… We must make haste, or… I shall explode with impatience! Do you know who she is? You will never guess. The

young wife of our old police superintendent, Yevgraf Kuzmitch, Olga Petrovna; that's who it is! She bought that box of matches!"

"You… you.… Are you out of your mind?"

"It's very natural! In the first place she smokes, and in the second she was head over ears in love with Klyauzov. He rejected her love for the sake of an Akulka. Revenge. I remember now, I once came upon them behind the screen in the kitchen. She was cursing him, while he was smoking her cigarette and puffing the smoke into her face. But do come along; make haste, for it is getting dark already.… Let us go!"

"I have not gone so completely crazy yet as to disturb a respectable, honourable woman at night for the sake of a wretched boy!"

"Honourable, respectable.… You are a rag then, not an examining magistrate! I have never ventured to abuse you, but now you force me to it! You rag! you old fogey! Come, dear Nikolay Yermolaitch, I entreat you!"

The examining magistrate waved his hand in refusal and spat in disgust.

"I beg you! I beg you, not for my own sake, but in the interests of justice! I beseech you, indeed! Do me a favour, if only for once in your life!"

Dyukovsky fell on his knees.

"Nikolay Yermolaitch, do be so good! Call me a scoundrel, a worthless wretch if I am in error about that woman! It is such a case, you know! It is a case! More like a novel than a case. The fame of it will be all over Russia. They will make you examining magistrate for particularly important cases! Do understand, you unreasonable old man!"

The examining magistrate frowned and irresolutely put out his hand towards his hat.

"Well, the devil take you!" he said, "let us go."

It was already dark when the examining magistrate's wagonette rolled up to the police superintendent's door.

"What brutes we are!" said Tchubikov, as he reached for the bell. "We are disturbing people."

"Never mind, never mind, don't be frightened. We will say that one of the springs has broken."

Tchubikov and Dyukovsky were met in the doorway by a tall, plump woman of three and twenty, with eyebrows as black as pitch and full red lips. It was Olga Petrovna herself.

"Ah, how very nice," she said, smiling all over her face. "You are just in time for supper. My Yevgraf Kuzmitch is not at home.… He is staying

at the priest's. But we can get on without him. Sit down. Have you come from an inquiry?"

"Yes.… We have broken one of our springs, you know," began Tchubikov, going into the drawing room and sitting down in an easy-chair.

"Take her by surprise at once and overwhelm her," Dyukovsky whispered to him.

"A spring… er… yes.… We just drove up.…"

"Overwhelm her, I tell you! She will guess if you go drawing it out."

"Oh, do as you like, but spare me," muttered Tchubikov, getting up and walking to the window. "I can't! You cooked the mess, you eat it!"

"Yes, the spring," Dyukovsky began, going up to the superintendent's wife and wrinkling his long nose. "We have not come in to… er-er-er… supper, nor to see Yevgraf Kuzmitch. We have come to ask you, madam, where is Mark Ivanovitch whom you have murdered?"

"What? What Mark Ivanovitch?" faltered the superintendent's wife, and her full face was suddenly in one instant suffused with crimson. "I… don't understand."

"I ask you in the name of the law! Where is Klyauzov? We know all about it!"

"Through whom?" the superintendent's wife asked slowly, unable to face Dyukovsky's eyes.

"Kindly inform us where he is!"

"But how did you find out? Who told you?"

"We know all about it. I insist in the name of the law."

The examining magistrate, encouraged by the lady's confusion, went up to her.

"Tell us and we will go away. Otherwise we…"

"What do you want with him?"

"What is the object of such questions, madam? We ask you for information. You are trembling, confused.… Yes, he has been murdered, and if you will have it, murdered by you! Your accomplices have betrayed you!"

The police superintendent's wife turned pale.

"Come along," she said quietly, wringing her hands. "He is hidden in the bathhouse. Only for God's sake, don't tell my husband! I implore you! It would be too much for him."

The superintendent's wife took a big key from the wall, and led her visitors through the kitchen and the passage into the yard. It was dark in the yard. There was a drizzle of fine rain. The superintendent's wife went

on ahead. Tchubikov and Dyukovsky strode after her through the long grass, breathing in the smell of wild hemp and slops, which made a squelching sound under their feet. It was a big yard. Soon there were no more pools of slops, and their feet felt ploughed land. In the darkness they saw the silhouette of trees, and among the trees a little house with a crooked chimney.

“This is the bathhouse,” said the superintendent’s wife, “but, I implore you, do not tell anyone.”

Going up to the bathhouse, Tchubikov and Dyukovsky saw a large padlock on the door.

“Get ready your candle-end and matches,” Tchubikov whispered to his assistant.

The superintendent’s wife unlocked the padlock and let the visitors into the bathhouse. Dyukovsky struck a match and lighted up the entry. In the middle of it stood a table. On the table, beside a podgy little samovar, was a soup tureen with some cold cabbage-soup in it, and a dish with traces of some sauce on it.

“Go on!”

They went into the next room, the bathroom. There, too, was a table. On the table there stood a big dish of ham, a bottle of vodka, plates, knives and forks.

“But where is he… where’s the murdered man?”

“He is on the top shelf,” whispered the superintendent’s wife, turning paler than ever and trembling.

Dyukovsky took the candle-end in his hand and climbed up to the upper shelf. There he saw a long, human body, lying motionless on a big feather bed. The body emitted a faint snore.…

“They have made fools of us, damn it all!” Dyukovsky cried. “This is not he! It is some living blockhead lying here. Hi! who are you, damnation take you!”

The body drew in its breath with a whistling sound and moved. Dyukovsky prodded it with his elbow. It lifted up its arms, stretched, and raised its head.

“Who is that poking?” a hoarse, ponderous bass voice inquired. “What do you want?”

Dyukovsky held the candle-end to the face of the unknown and uttered a shriek. In the crimson nose, in the ruffled, uncombed hair, in the pitch-black moustaches of which one was jauntily twisted and pointed insolently towards the ceiling, he recognised Cornet Klyauzov.

“You.… Mark… Ivanitch! Impossible!”

The examining magistrate looked up and was dumbfounded.

"It is I, yes.… And it's you, Dyukovsky! What the devil do you want here? And whose ugly mug is that down there? Holy Saints, it's the examining magistrate! How in the world did you come here?"

Klyauzov hurriedly got down and embraced Tchubikov. Olga Petrovna whisked out of the door.

"However did you come? Let's have a drink!—dash it all! Tra-ta-ti-to-tom.… Let's have a drink! Who brought you here, though? How did you get to know I was here? It doesn't matter, though! Have a drink!"

Klyauzov lighted the lamp and poured out three glasses of vodka.

"The fact is, I don't understand you," said the examining magistrate, throwing out his hands. "Is it you, or not you?"

"Stop that.… Do you want to give me a sermon? Don't trouble yourself! Dyukovsky boy, drink up your vodka! Friends, let us pass the… What are you staring at…? Drink!"

"All the same, I can't understand," said the examining magistrate, mechanically drinking his vodka. "Why are you here?"

"Why shouldn't I be here, if I am comfortable here?"

Klyauzov sipped his vodka and ate some ham.

"I am staying with the superintendent's wife, as you see. In the wilds among the ruins, like some house goblin. Drink! I felt sorry for her, you know, old man! I took pity on her, and, well, I am living here in the deserted bathhouse, like a hermit.… I am well fed. Next week I am thinking of moving on.… I've had enough of it.…"

"Inconceivable!" said Dyukovsky.

"What is there inconceivable in it?"

"Inconceivable! For God's sake, how did your boot get into the garden?"

"What boot?"

"We found one of your boots in the bedroom and the other in the garden."

"And what do you want to know that for? It is not your business. But do drink, dash it all. Since you have waked me up, you may as well drink! There's an interesting tale about that boot, my boy. I didn't want to come to Olga's. I didn't feel inclined, you know, I'd had a drop too much.… She came under the window and began scolding me.… You know how women… as a rule. Being drunk, I up and flung my boot at her. Ha-ha!… 'Don't scold,' I said. She clambered in at the window, lighted the lamp, and gave me a good drubbing, as I was drunk. I have

plenty to eat here.… Love, vodka, and good things! But where are you off to? Tchubikov, where are you off to?”

The examining magistrate spat on the floor and walked out of the bathhouse. Dyukovsky followed him with his head hanging. Both got into the wagonette in silence and drove off. Never had the road seemed so long and dreary. Both were silent. Tchubikov was shaking with anger all the way. Dyukovsky hid his face in his collar as though he were afraid the darkness and the drizzling rain might read his shame on his face.

On getting home the examining magistrate found the doctor, Tyutyuev, there. The doctor was sitting at the table and heaving deep sighs as he turned over the pages of the *Neva*.

“The things that are going on in the world,” he said, greeting the examining magistrate with a melancholy smile. “Austria is at it again… and Gladstone, too, in a way.…”

Tchubikov flung his hat under the table and began to tremble.

“You devil of a skeleton! Don’t bother me! I’ve told you a thousand times over, don’t bother me with your politics! It’s not the time for politics! And as for you,” he turned upon Dyukovsky and shook his fist at him, “as for you.… I’ll never forget it, as long as I live!”

“But the Swedish match, you know! How could I tell.…”

“Choke yourself with your match! Go away and don’t irritate me, or goodness knows what I shall do to you. Don’t let me set eyes on you.”

Dyukovsky heaved a sigh, took his hat, and went out.

“I’ll go and get drunk!” he decided, as he went out of the gate, and he sauntered dejectedly towards the tavern.

When the superintendent’s wife got home from the bathhouse she found her husband in the drawing room.

“What did the examining magistrate come about?” asked her husband.

“He came to say that they had found Klyauzov. Only fancy, they found him staying with another man’s wife.”

“Ah, Mark Ivanitch, Mark Ivanitch!” sighed the police superintendent, turning up his eyes. “I told you that dissipation would lead to no good! I told you so—you wouldn’t heed me!”

THE MARSHAL'S WIDOW

On the first of February every year, St. Trifon's day, there is an extraordinary commotion on the estate of Madame Zavzyatov, the widow of Trifon Lvovitch, the late marshal of the district. On that day, the name-day of the deceased marshal, the widow Lyubov Petrovna has a requiem service celebrated in his memory, and after the requiem a thanksgiving to the Lord. The whole district assembles for the service. There you will see Hrumov the present marshal, Marfutkin, the president of the Zemstvo, Potrashkov, the permanent member of the Rural Board, the two justices of the peace of the district, the police captain, Krinolinov, two police-superintendents, the district doctor, Dvornyagin, smelling of iodoform, all the landowners, great and small, and so on. There are about fifty people assembled in all.

Precisely at twelve o'clock, the visitors, with long faces, make their way from all the rooms to the big hall. There are carpets on the floor and their steps are noiseless, but the solemnity of the occasion makes them instinctively walk on tiptoe, holding out their hands to balance themselves. In the hall everything is already prepared. Father Yevmeny, a little old man in a high faded cap, puts on his black vestments. Konkordiev, the deacon, already in his vestments, and as red as a crab, is noiselessly turning over the leaves of his missal and putting slips of paper in it. At the door leading to the vestibule, Luka, the sacristan, puffing out his cheeks and making round eyes, blows up the censer. The hall is gradually filled with bluish transparent smoke and the smell of incense.

Gelikonsky, the elementary schoolmaster, a young man with big pimples on his frightened face, wearing a new greatcoat like a sack, carries round wax candles on a silver-plated tray. The hostess, Lyubov Petrovna, stands in the front by a little table with a dish of funeral rice on it, and holds her handkerchief in readiness to her face. There is a profound stillness, broken from time to time by sighs. Everybody has a long, solemn face.…

The requiem service begins. The blue smoke curls up from the censer and plays in the slanting sunbeams, the lighted candles faintly splutter. The singing, at first harsh and deafening, soon becomes quiet and musical as the choir gradually adapt themselves to the acoustic conditions of the rooms.… The tunes are all mournful and sad.… The guests are gradually brought to a melancholy mood and grow pensive. Thoughts of the brevity of human life, of mutability, of worldly vanity stray through their brains.… They recall the deceased Zavzyatov, a thickset, red-cheeked man who used to drink off a bottle of champagne at one gulp and smash looking-glasses with his forehead. And when they sing "With Thy Saints, O Lord," and the sobs of their hostess are audible, the guests shift uneasily from one foot to the other. The more emotional begin to feel a tickling in their throat and about their eyelids. Marfutkin, the president of the Zemstvo, to stifle the unpleasant feeling, bends down to the police captain's ear and whispers:

"I was at Ivan Fyodoritch's yesterday.… Pyotr Petrovitch and I took all the tricks, playing no trumps.… Yes, indeed.… Olga Andreyevna was so exasperated that her false tooth fell out of her mouth."

But at last the "Eternal Memory" is sung. Gelikonsky respectfully takes away the candles, and the memorial service is over. Thereupon there follows a momentary commotion; there is a changing of vestments and a thanksgiving service. After the thanksgiving, while Father Yevmeny is disrobing, the visitors rub their hands and cough, while their hostess tells some anecdote of the good-heartedness of the deceased Trifon Lvovitch.

"Pray come to lunch, friends," she says, concluding her story with a sigh.

The visitors, trying not to push or tread on each other's feet, hasten into the dining room.… There the luncheon is awaiting them. The repast is so magnificent that the deacon Konkordiev thinks it his duty every year to fling up his hands as he looks at it and, shaking his head in amazement, say:

"Supernatural! It's not so much like human fare, Father Yevmeny, as offerings to the gods."

The lunch is certainly exceptional. Everything that the flora and fauna of the country can furnish is on the table, but the only thing supernatural about it, perhaps, is that on the table there is everything except… alcoholic beverages. Lyubov Petrovna has taken a vow never to have in her house cards or spirituous liquors—the two sources of her husband's ruin. And the only bottles contain oil and vinegar, as though in mockery

and chastisement of the guests who are to a man desperately fond of the bottle, and given to tippling.

“Please help yourselves, gentlemen!” the marshal’s widow presses them. “Only you must excuse me, I have no vodka.… I have none in the house.”

The guests approach the table and hesitatingly attack the pie. But the progress with eating is slow. In the plying of forks, in the cutting up and munching, there is a certain sloth and apathy.… Evidently something is wanting.

“I feel as though I had lost something,” one of the justices of the peace whispers to the other. “I feel as I did when my wife ran away with the engineer.… I can’t eat.”

Marfutkin, before beginning to eat, fumbles for a long time in his pocket and looks for his handkerchief.

“Oh, my handkerchief must be in my greatcoat,” he recalls in a loud voice, “and here I am looking for it,” and he goes into the vestibule where the fur coats are hanging up.

He returns from the vestibule with glistening eyes, and at once attacks the pie with relish.

“I say, it’s horrid munching away with a dry mouth, isn’t it?” he whispers to Father Yevmeny. “Go into the vestibule, Father. There’s a bottle there in my fur coat.… Only mind you are careful; don’t make a clatter with the bottle.”

Father Yevmeny recollects that he has some direction to give to Luka, and trips off to the vestibule.

“Father, a couple of words in confidence,” says Dvornyagin, overtaking him.

“You should see the fur coat I’ve bought myself, gentlemen,” Hrumov boasts. “It’s worth a thousand, and I gave… you won’t believe it… two hundred and fifty! Not a farthing more.”

At any other time the guests would have greeted this information with indifference, but now they display surprise and incredulity. In the end they all troop out into the vestibule to look at the fur coat, and go on looking at it till the doctor’s man Mikeshka carries five empty bottles out on the sly. When the steamed sturgeon is served, Marfutkin remembers that he has left his cigar case in his sledge and goes to the stable. That he may not be lonely on this expedition, he takes with him the deacon, who appropriately feels it necessary to have a look at his horse.…

On the evening of the same day, Lyubov Petrovna is sitting in her study, writing a letter to an old friend in Petersburg:

“Today, as in past years,” she writes among other things, “I had a memorial service for my dear husband. All my neighbours came to the service. They are a simple, rough set, but what hearts! I gave them a splendid lunch, but of course, as in previous years, without a drop of alcoholic liquor. Ever since he died from excessive drinking I have vowed to establish temperance in this district and thereby to expiate his sins. I have begun the campaign for temperance at my own house. Father Yevmeny is delighted with my efforts, and helps me both in word and deed. Oh, *ma chère*, if you knew how fond my bears are of me! The president of the Zemstvo, Marfutkin, kissed my hand after lunch, held it a long while to his lips, and, wagging his head in an absurd way, burst into tears: so much feeling but no words! Father Yevmeny, that delightful little old man, sat down by me, and looking tearfully at me kept babbling something like a child. I did not understand what he said, but I know how to understand true feeling. The police captain, the handsome man of whom I wrote to you, went down on his knees to me, tried to read me some verses of his own composition (he is a poet), but… his feelings were too much for him, he lurched and fell over… that huge giant went into hysterics, you can imagine my delight! The day did not pass without a hitch, however. Poor Alalykin, the president of the judges’ assembly, a stout and apoplectic man, was overcome by illness and lay on the sofa in a state of unconsciousness for two hours. We had to pour water on him.… I am thankful to Doctor Dvornyagin: he had brought a bottle of brandy from his dispensary and he moistened the patient’s temples, which quickly revived him, and he was able to be moved.…”

Small Fry

“Honored Sir, Father and Benefactor!” a petty clerk called Nevyrazimov was writing a rough copy of an Easter congratulatory letter. “I trust that you may spend this Holy Day even as many more to come, in good health and prosperity. And to your family also I…”

The lamp, in which the kerosene was getting low, was smoking and smelling. A stray cockroach was running about the table in alarm near Nevyrazimov’s writing hand. Two rooms away from the office Paramon the porter was for the third time cleaning his best boots, and with such energy that the sound of the blacking-brush and of his expectorations was audible in all the rooms.

“What else can I write to him, the rascal?” Nevyrazimov wondered, raising his eyes to the smutty ceiling.

On the ceiling he saw a dark circle—the shadow of the lampshade. Below it was the dusty cornice, and lower still the wall, which had once been painted a bluish muddy color. And the office seemed to him such a place of desolation that he felt sorry, not only for himself, but even for the cockroach.

“When I am off duty I shall go away, but he’ll be on duty here all his cockroach-life,” he thought, stretching. “I am bored! Shall I clean my boots?”

And stretching once more, Nevyrazimov slouched lazily to the porter’s room. Paramon had finished cleaning his boots. Crossing himself with one hand and holding the brush in the other, he was standing at the open windowpane, listening.

“They’re ringing,” he whispered to Nevyrazimov, looking at him with eyes intent and wide open. “Already!”

Nevyrazimov put his ear to the open pane and listened. The Easter chimes floated into the room with a whiff of fresh spring air. The booming of the bells mingled with the rumble of carriages, and above the chaos of sounds rose the brisk tenor tones of the nearest church and a loud shrill laugh.

“What a lot of people!” sighed Nevyrazimov, looking down into the street, where shadows of men flitted one after another by the illumination lamps. “They’re all hurrying to the midnight service.… Our fellows have had a drink by now, you may be sure, and are strolling about the town. What a lot of laughter, what a lot of talk! I’m the only unlucky one, to have to sit here on such a day: And I have to do it every year!”

“Well, nobody forces you to take the job. It’s not your turn to be on duty today, but Zastupov hired you to take his place. When other folks are enjoying themselves you hire yourself out. It’s greediness!”

“Devil a bit of it! Not much to be greedy over—two roubles is all he gives me; a necktie as an extra.… It’s poverty, not greediness. And it would be jolly, now, you know, to be going with a party to the service, and then to break the fast.… To drink and to have a bit of supper and tumble off to sleep.… One sits down to the table, there’s an Easter cake and the samovar hissing, and some charming little thing beside you.… You drink a glass and chuck her under the chin, and it’s first-rate.… You feel you’re somebody.… Ech-h-h!… I’ve made a mess of things! Look at that hussy driving by in her carriage, while I have to sit here and brood.”

“We each have our lot in life, Ivan Danilitch. Please God, you’ll be promoted and drive about in your carriage one day.”

“I? No, brother, not likely. I shan’t get beyond a ‘titular,’ not if I try till I burst. I’m not an educated man.”

“Our General has no education either, but…”

“Well, but the General stole a hundred thousand before he got his position. And he’s got very different manners and deportment from me, brother. With my manners and deportment one can’t get far! And such a scoundrelly surname, Nevyrazimov! It’s a hopeless position, in fact. One may go on as one is, or one may hang oneself…”

He moved away from the window and walked wearily about the rooms. The din of the bells grew louder and louder.… There was no need to stand by the window to hear it. And the better he could hear the bells and the louder the roar of the carriages, the darker seemed the muddy walls and the smutty cornice and the more the lamp smoked.

“Shall I hook it and leave the office?” thought Nevyrazimov.

But such a flight promised nothing worth having.… After coming out of the office and wandering about the town, Nevyrazimov would have gone home to his lodging, and in his lodging it was even grayer and more depressing than in the office.… Even supposing he were to spend

that day pleasantly and with comfort, what had he beyond? Nothing but the same gray walls, the same stopgap duty and complimentary letters.…

Nevyrazimov stood still in the middle of the office and sank into thought. The yearning for a new, better life gnawed at his heart with an intolerable ache. He had a passionate longing to find himself suddenly in the street, to mingle with the living crowd, to take part in the solemn festivity for the sake of which all those bells were clashing and those carriages were rumbling. He longed for what he had known in childhood—the family circle, the festive faces of his own people, the white cloth, light, warmth…! He thought of the carriage in which the lady had just driven by, the overcoat in which the head clerk was so smart, the gold chain that adorned the secretary's chest.… He thought of a warm bed, of the Stanislav order, of new boots, of a uniform without holes in the elbows.… He thought of all those things because he had none of them.

"Shall I steal?" he thought. "Even if stealing is an easy matter, hiding is what's difficult. Men run away to America, they say, with what they've stolen, but the devil knows where that blessed America is. One must have education even to steal, it seems."

The bells died down. He heard only a distant noise of carriages and Paramon's cough, while his depression and anger grew more and more intense and unbearable. The clock in the office struck half-past twelve.

"Shall I write a secret report? Proshkin did, and he rose rapidly."

Nevyrazimov sat down at his table and pondered. The lamp in which the kerosene had quite run dry was smoking violently and threatening to go out. The stray cockroach was still running about the table and had found no resting-place.

"One can always send in a secret report, but how is one to make it up? I should want to make all sorts of innuendoes and insinuations, like Proshkin, and I can't do it. If I made up anything I should be the first to get into trouble for it. I'm an ass, damn my soul!"

And Nevyrazimov, racking his brain for a means of escape from his hopeless position, stared at the rough copy he had written. The letter was written to a man whom he feared and hated with his whole soul, and from whom he had for the last ten years been trying to wring a post worth eighteen roubles a month, instead of the one he had at sixteen roubles.

"Ah, I'll teach you to run here, you devil!" He viciously slapped the palm of his hand on the cockroach, who had the misfortune to catch his eye. "Nasty thing!"

The cockroach fell on its back and wriggled its legs in despair. Nevyrazimov took it by one leg and threw it into the lamp. The lamp flared up and spluttered.

And Nevyrazimov felt better.

In an Hotel

"Let me tell you, my good man," began Madame Nashatyrin, the colonel's lady at No. 47, crimson and spluttering, as she pounced on the hotelkeeper. "Either give me other apartments, or I shall leave your confounded hotel altogether! It's a sink of iniquity! Mercy on us, I have grown-up daughters and one hears nothing but abominations day and night! It's beyond everything! Day and night! Sometimes he fires off such things that it simply makes one's ears blush! Positively like a cabman. It's a good thing that my poor girls don't understand or I should have to fly out into the street with them… He's saying something now! You listen!"

"I know a thing better than that, my boy," a husky bass floated in from the next room. "Do you remember Lieutenant Druzhkov? Well, that same Druzhkov was one day making a drive with the yellow into the pocket and as he usually did, you know, flung up his leg.… All at once something went crrr-ack! At first they thought he had torn the cloth of the billiard table, but when they looked, my dear fellow, his United States had split at every seam! He had made such a high kick, the beast, that not a seam was left.… Ha-ha-ha, and there were ladies present, too… among others the wife of that drivelling Lieutenant Okurin.… Okurin was furious.… 'How dare the fellow,' said he, 'behave with impropriety in the presence of my wife?' One thing led to another… you know our fellows!… Okurin sent seconds to Druzhkov, and Druzhkov said 'don't be a fool'… ha-ha-ha, 'but tell him he had better send seconds not to me but to the tailor who made me those breeches; it is his fault, you know.' Ha-ha-ha! Ha-ha-ha.…"

Lilya and Mila, the colonel's daughters, who were sitting in the window with their round cheeks propped on their fists, flushed crimson and dropped their eyes that looked buried in their plump faces.

"Now you have heard him, haven't you?" Madame Nashatyrin went on, addressing the hotelkeeper. "And that, you consider, of no consequence, I suppose? I am the wife of a colonel, sir! My husband is a

commanding officer. I will not permit some cabman to utter such infamies almost in my presence!”

“He is not a cabman, madam, but the staff-captain Kikin.… A gentleman born.”

“If he has so far forgotten his station as to express himself like a cabman, then he is even more deserving of contempt! In short, don’t answer me, but kindly take steps!”

“But what can I do, madam? You are not the only one to complain, everybody’s complaining, but what am I to do with him? One goes to his room and begins putting him to shame, saying: ‘Hannibal Ivanitch, have some fear of God! It’s shameful! and he’ll punch you in the face with his fists and say all sorts of things: ‘there, put that in your pipe and smoke it,’ and suchlike. It’s a disgrace! He wakes up in the morning and sets to walking about the corridor in nothing, saving your presence, but his underclothes. And when he has had a drop he will pick up a revolver and set to putting bullets into the wall. By day he is swilling liquor and at night he plays cards like mad, and after cards it is fighting.… I am ashamed for the other lodgers to see it!”

“Why don’t you get rid of the scoundrel?”

“Why, there’s no getting him out! He owes me for three months, but we don’t ask for our money, we simply ask him to get out as a favour.… The magistrate has given him an order to clear out of the rooms, but he’s taking it from one court to another, and so it drags on.… He’s a perfect nuisance, that’s what he is. And, good Lord, such a man, too! Young, good-looking and intellectual.… When he hasn’t had a drop you couldn’t wish to see a nicer gentleman. The other day he wasn’t drunk and he spent the whole day writing letters to his father and mother.”

“Poor father and mother!” sighed the colonel’s lady.

“They are to be pitied, to be sure! There’s no comfort in having such a scamp! He’s sworn at and turned out of his lodgings, and not a day passes but he is in trouble over some scandal. It’s sad!”

“His poor unhappy wife!” sighed the lady.

“He has no wife, madam. A likely idea! She would have to thank God if her head were not broken.…”

The lady walked up and down the room.

“He is not married, you say?”

“Certainly not, madam.”

The lady walked up and down the room again and mused a little.

“H’m, not married…” she pronounced meditatively. “H’m. Lilya and Mila, don’t sit at the window, there’s a draught! What a pity! A young

man and to let himself sink to this! And all owing to what? The lack of good influence! There is no mother who would.… Not married? Well… there it is.… Please be so good," the lady continued suavely after a moment's thought, "as to go to him and ask him in my name to… refrain from using expressions.… Tell him that Madame Nashatyrin begs him.… Tell him she is staying with her daughters in No. 47… that she has come up from her estate in the country.…"

"Certainly."

"Tell him, a colonel's lady and her daughters. He might even come and apologize.… We are always at home after dinner. Oh, Mila, shut the window!"

"Why, what do you want with that… black sheep, mamma?" drawled Lilya when the hotelkeeper had retired. "A queer person to invite! A drunken, rowdy rascal!"

"Oh, don't say so, *ma chère*! You always talk like that; and there… sit down! Why, whatever he may be, we ought not to despise him.… There's something good in everyone. Who knows," sighed the colonel's lady, looking her daughters up and down anxiously, "perhaps your fate is here. Change your dresses anyway.…"

Boots

A piano-tuner called Murkin, a close-shaven man with a yellow face, with a nose stained with snuff, and cotton-wool in his ears, came out of his hotel room into the passage, and in a cracked voice cried: “Semyon! Waiter!”

And looking at his frightened face one might have supposed that the ceiling had fallen in on him or that he had just seen a ghost in his room.

“Upon my word, Semyon!” he cried, seeing the attendant running towards him. “What is the meaning of it? I am a rheumatic, delicate man and you make me go barefoot! Why is it you don’t give me my boots all this time? Where are they?”

Semyon went into Murkin’s room, looked at the place where he was in the habit of putting the boots he had cleaned, and scratched his head: the boots were not there.

“Where can they be, the damned things?” Semyon brought out. “I fancy I cleaned them in the evening and put them here.… H’m!… Yesterday, I must own, I had a drop.… I must have put them in another room, I suppose. That must be it, Afanasy Yegoritch, they are in another room! There are lots of boots, and how the devil is one to know them apart when one is drunk and does not know what one is doing?… I must have taken them in to the lady that’s next door… the actress.…”

“And now, if you please, I am to go in to a lady and disturb her all through you! Here, if you please, through this foolishness I am to wake up a respectable woman.”

Sighing and coughing, Murkin went to the door of the next room and cautiously tapped.

“Who’s there?” he heard a woman’s voice a minute later.

“It’s I!” Murkin began in a plaintive voice, standing in the attitude of a cavalier addressing a lady of the highest society. “Pardon my disturbing you, madam, but I am a man in delicate health, rheumatic.… The doctors, madam, have ordered me to keep my feet warm, especially as I

have to go at once to tune the piano at Madame la Générale Shevelitsyn’s. I can’t go to her barefoot.”

“But what do you want? What piano?”

“Not a piano, madam; it is in reference to boots! Semyon, stupid fellow, cleaned my boots and put them by mistake in your room. Be so extremely kind, madam, as to give me my boots!”

There was a sound of rustling, of jumping off the bed and the flapping of slippers, after which the door opened slightly and a plump feminine hand flung at Murkin’s feet a pair of boots. The piano-tuner thanked her and went into his own room.

“Odd…” he muttered, putting on the boots, “it seems as though this is not the right boot. Why, here are two left boots! Both are for the left foot! I say, Semyon, these are not my boots! My boots have red tags and no patches on them, and these are in holes and have no tags.”

Semyon picked up the boots, turned them over several times before his eyes, and frowned.

“Those are Pavel Alexandritch’s boots,” he grumbled, squinting at them. He squinted with the left eye.

“What Pavel Alexandritch?”

“The actor; he comes here every Tuesday.… He must have put on yours instead of his own.… So I must have put both pairs in her room, his and yours. Here’s a go!”

“Then go and change them!”

“That’s all right!” sniggered Semyon, “go and change them.… Where am I to find him now? He went off an hour ago.… Go and look for the wind in the fields!”

“Where does he live then?”

“Who can tell? He comes here every Tuesday, and where he lives I don’t know. He comes and stays the night, and then you may wait till next Tuesday.…”

“There, do you see, you brute, what you have done? Why, what am I to do now? It is time I was at Madame la Générale Shevelitsyn’s, you anathema! My feet are frozen!”

“You can change the boots before long. Put on these boots, go about in them till the evening, and in the evening go to the theatre.… Ask there for Blistanov, the actor.… If you don’t care to go to the theatre, you will have to wait till next Tuesday; he only comes here on Tuesdays.…”

“But why are there two boots for the left foot?” asked the piano-tuner, picking up the boots with an air of disgust.

“What God has sent him, that he wears. Through poverty… where is an actor to get boots? I said to him ‘What boots, Pavel Alexandritch! They are a positive disgrace!’ and he said: ‘Hold your peace,’ says he, ‘and turn pale! In those very boots,’ says he, ‘I have played counts and princes.’ A queer lot! Artists, that’s the only word for them! If I were the governor or anyone in command, I would get all these actors together and clap them all in prison.”

Continually sighing and groaning and knitting his brows, Murkin drew the two left boots on to his feet, and set off, limping, to Madame la Générale Shevelitsyn’s. He went about the town all day long tuning pianos, and all day long it seemed to him that everyone was looking at his feet and seeing his patched boots with heels worn down at the sides! Apart from his moral agonies he had to suffer physically also; the boots gave him a corn.

In the evening he was at the theatre. There was a performance of *Bluebeard*. It was only just before the last act, and then only thanks to the good offices of a man he knew who played a flute in the orchestra, that he gained admittance behind the scenes. Going to the men’s dressing room, he found there all the male performers. Some were changing their clothes, others were painting their faces, others were smoking. Bluebeard was standing with King Bobesh, showing him a revolver.

“You had better buy it,” said Bluebeard. “I bought it at Kursk, a bargain, for eight roubles, but, there! I will let you have it for six.… A wonderfully good one!”

“Steady.… It’s loaded, you know!”

“Can I see Mr. Blistanov?” the piano-tuner asked as he went in.

“I am he!” said Bluebeard, turning to him. “What do you want?”

“Excuse my troubling you, sir,” began the piano-tuner in an imploring voice, “but, believe me, I am a man in delicate health, rheumatic. The doctors have ordered me to keep my feet warm…”

“But, speaking plainly, what do you want?”

“You see,” said the piano-tuner, addressing Bluebeard. “Er… you stayed last night at Buhteyev’s furnished apartments… No. 64…”

“What’s this nonsense?” said King Bobesh with a grin. “My wife is at No. 64.”

“Your wife, sir? Delighted.…” Murkin smiled. “It was she, your good lady, who gave me this gentleman’s boots.… After this gentleman—” the piano-tuner indicated Blistanov—“had gone away I missed my boots.… I called the waiter, you know, and he said: ‘I left your boots in the next room!’ By mistake, being in a state of intoxication, he left my

boots as well as yours at 64," said Murkin, turning to Blistanov, "and when you left this gentleman's lady you put on mine."

"What are you talking about?" said Blistanov, and he scowled. "Have you come here to libel me?"

"Not at all, sir—God forbid! You misunderstand me. What am I talking about? About boots! You did stay the night at No. 64, didn't you?"

"When?"

"Last night!"

"Why, did you see me there?"

"No, sir, I didn't see you," said Murkin in great confusion, sitting down and taking off the boots. "I did not see you, but this gentleman's lady threw out your boots here to me… instead of mine."

"What right have you, sir, to make such assertions? I say nothing about myself, but you are slandering a woman, and in the presence of her husband, too!"

A fearful hubbub arose behind the scenes. King Bobesh, the injured husband, suddenly turned crimson and brought his fist down upon the table with such violence that two actresses in the next dressing room felt faint.

"And you believe it?" cried Bluebeard. "You believe this worthless rascal? O-oh! Would you like me to kill him like a dog? Would you like it? I will turn him into a beefsteak! I'll blow his brains out!"

And all the persons who were promenading that evening in the town park by the Summer theatre describe to this day how just before the fourth act they saw a man with bare feet, a yellow face, and terror-stricken eyes dart out of the theatre and dash along the principal avenue. He was pursued by a man in the costume of Bluebeard, armed with a revolver. What happened later no one saw. All that is known is that Murkin was confined to his bed for a fortnight after his acquaintance with Blistanov, and that to the words "I am a man in delicate health, rheumatic" he took to adding, "I am a wounded man.…"

NERVES

Dmitri Osipovitch Vaxin, the architect, returned from town to his holiday cottage greatly impressed by the spiritualistic séance at which he had been present. As he undressed and got into his solitary bed (Madame Vaxin had gone to an all-night service) he could not help remembering all he had seen and heard. It had not, properly speaking, been a séance at all, but the whole evening had been spent in terrifying conversation. A young lady had begun it by talking, apropos of nothing, about thought-reading. From thought-reading they had passed imperceptibly to spirits, and from spirits to ghosts, from ghosts to people buried alive.… A gentleman had read a horrible story of a corpse turning round in the coffin. Vaxin himself had asked for a saucer and shown the young ladies how to converse with spirits. He had called up among others the spirit of his deceased uncle, Klavdy Mironitch, and had mentally asked him:

"Has not the time come for me to transfer the ownership of our house to my wife?"

To which his uncle's spirit had replied:

"All things are good in their season."

"There is a great deal in nature that is mysterious and… terrible…" thought Vaxin, as he got into bed. "It's not the dead but the unknown that's so horrible."

It struck one o'clock. Vaxin turned over on the other side and peeped out from beneath the bedclothes at the blue light of the lamp burning before the holy icon. The flame flickered and cast a faint light on the icon-stand and the big portrait of Uncle Klavdy that hung facing his bed.

"And what if the ghost of Uncle Klavdy should appear this minute?" flashed through Vaxin's mind. "But, of course, that's impossible."

Ghosts are, we all know, a superstition, the offspring of undeveloped intelligence, but Vaxin, nevertheless, pulled the bedclothes over his head, and shut his eyes very tight. The corpse that turned round in its coffin came back to his mind, and the figures of his deceased mother-in-law, of a colleague who had hanged himself, and of a girl who had drowned

herself, rose before his imagination.… Vaxin began trying to dispel these gloomy ideas, but the more he tried to drive them away the more haunting the figures and fearful fancies became. He began to feel frightened.

"Hang it all!" he thought. "Here I am afraid in the dark like a child! Idiotic!"

Tick… tick… tick… he heard the clock in the next room. The church-bell chimed the hour in the churchyard close by. The bell tolled slowly, depressingly, mournfully.… A cold chill ran down Vaxin's neck and spine. He fancied he heard someone breathing heavily over his head, as though Uncle Klavdy had stepped out of his frame and was bending over his nephew.… Vaxin felt unbearably frightened. He clenched his teeth and held his breath in terror.

At last, when a cockchafer flew in at the open window and began buzzing over his bed, he could bear it no longer and gave a violent tug at the bellrope.

"Dmitri Osipitch, *was wollen Sie*?" he heard the voice of the German governess at his door a moment later.

"Ah, it's you, Rosalia Karlovna!" Vaxin cried, delighted. "Why do you trouble? Gavrila might just…"

"Yourself Gavrila to the town sent. And Glafira is somewhere all the evening gone.… There's nobody in the house.… *Was wollen Sie doch*?"

"Well, what I wanted… it's… but, please, come in… you needn't mind!… it's dark."

Rosalia Karlovna, a stout red-cheeked person, came in to the bedroom and stood in an expectant attitude at the door.

"Sit down, please… you see, it's like this.… What on earth am I to ask her for?" he wondered, stealing a glance at Uncle Klavdy's portrait and feeling his soul gradually returning to tranquility.

"What I really wanted to ask you was… Oh, when the man goes to town, don't forget to tell him to… er… er… to get some cigarette-papers.… But do, please sit down."

"Cigarette-papers? good.… *Was wollen Sie noch*?"

"*Ich will*… there's nothing I will, but… But do sit down! I shall think of something else in a minute."

"It is shocking for a maiden in a man's room to remain.… Mr. Vaxin, you are, I see, a naughty man.… I understand.… To order cigarette-papers one does not a person wake.… I understand you.…"

Rosalia Karlovna turned and went out of the room.

Somewhat reassured by his conversation with her and ashamed of his cowardice, Vaxin pulled the bedclothes over his head and shut his eyes. For about ten minutes he felt fairly comfortable, then the same nonsense came creeping back into his mind.… He swore to himself, felt for the matches, and without opening his eyes lighted a candle.

But even the light was no use. To Vaxin's excited imagination it seemed as though someone were peeping round the corner and that his uncle's eyes were moving.

"I'll ring her up again… damn the woman!" he decided. "I'll tell her I'm unwell and ask for some drops."

Vaxin rang. There was no response. He rang again, and as though answering his ring, he heard the church-bell toll the hour.

Overcome with terror, cold all over, he jumped out of bed, ran headlong out of his bedroom, and making the sign of the cross and cursing himself for his cowardice, he fled barefoot in his nightshirt to the governess's room.

"Rosalia Karlovna!" he began in a shaking voice as he knocked at her door, "Rosalia Karlovna!… Are you asleep?… I feel… so… er… er… unwell.… Drops!…"

There was no answer. Silence reigned.

"I beg you… do you understand? I beg you! Why this squeamishness, I can't understand… especially when a man… is ill… How absurdly *zierlich manierlich* you are really… at your age.…"

"I to your wife shall tell.… Will not leave an honest maiden in peace.… When I was at Baron Anzig's, and the baron try to come to me for matches, I understand at once what his matches mean and tell to the baroness.… I am an honest maiden."

"Hang your honesty! I am ill I tell you… and asking you for drops. Do you understand? I'm ill!"

"Your wife is an honest, good woman, and you ought her to love! *Ja!* She is noble!… I will not be her foe!"

"You are a fool! simply a fool! Do you understand, a fool?"

Vaxin leaned against the doorpost, folded his arms and waited for his panic to pass off. To return to his room where the lamp flickered and his uncle stared at him from his frame was more than he could face, and to stand at the governess's door in nothing but his nightshirt was inconvenient from every point of view. What could he do?

It struck two o'clock and his terror had not left him. There was no light in the passage and something dark seemed to be peeping out from every corner. Vaxin turned so as to face the doorpost, but at that instant it

seemed as though somebody tweaked his nightshirt from behind and touched him on the shoulder.

“Damnation!… Rosalia Karlovna!”

No answer. Vaxin hesitatingly opened the door and peeped into the room. The virtuous German was sweetly slumbering. The tiny flame of a night-light threw her solid buxom person into relief. Vaxin stepped into the room and sat down on a wickerwork trunk near the door. He felt better in the presence of a living creature, even though that creature was asleep.

“Let the German idiot sleep,” he thought, “I’ll sit here, and when it gets light I’ll go back.… It’s daylight early now.”

Vaxin curled up on the trunk and put his arm under his head to await the coming of dawn.

“What a thing it is to have nerves!” he reflected. “An educated, intelligent man!… Hang it all!… It’s a perfect disgrace!”

As he listened to the gentle, even breathing of Rosalia Karlovna, he soon recovered himself completely.

At six o’clock, Vaxin’s wife returned from the all-night service, and not finding her husband in their bedroom, went to the governess to ask her for some change for the cabman.

On entering the German’s room, a strange sight met her eyes.

On the bed lay stretched Rosalia Karlovna fast asleep, and a couple of yards from her was her husband curled up on the trunk sleeping the sleep of the just and snoring loudly.

What she said to her husband, and how he looked when he woke, I leave to others to describe. It is beyond my powers.

A Country Cottage

Two young people who had not long been married were walking up and down the platform of a little country station. His arm was round her waist, her head was almost on his shoulder, and both were happy.

The moon peeped up from the drifting cloudlets and frowned, as it seemed, envying their happiness and regretting her tedious and utterly superfluous virginity. The still air was heavy with the fragrance of lilac and wild cherry. Somewhere in the distance beyond the line a corncrake was calling.

“How beautiful it is, Sasha, how beautiful!” murmured the young wife. “It all seems like a dream. See, how sweet and inviting that little copse looks! How nice those solid, silent telegraph posts are! They add a special note to the landscape, suggesting humanity, civilization in the distance.… Don’t you think it’s lovely when the wind brings the rushing sound of a train?”

“Yes.… But what hot little hands you’ve got… That’s because you’re excited, Varya.… What have you got for our supper tonight?”

“Chicken and salad.… It’s a chicken just big enough for two.… Then there is the salmon and sardines that were sent from town.”

The moon as though she had taken a pinch of snuff hid her face behind a cloud. Human happiness reminded her of her own loneliness, of her solitary couch beyond the hills and dales.

“The train is coming!” said Varya, “how jolly!”

Three eyes of fire could be seen in the distance. The stationmaster came out on the platform. Signal lights flashed here and there on the line.

“Let’s see the train in and go home,” said Sasha, yawning. “What a splendid time we are having together, Varya, it’s so splendid, one can hardly believe it’s true!”

The dark monster crept noiselessly alongside the platform and came to a standstill. They caught glimpses of sleepy faces, of hats and shoulders at the dimly lighted windows.

“Look! look!” they heard from one of the carriages. “Varya and Sasha have come to meet us! There they are!… Varya!… Varya.… Look!”

Two little girls skipped out of the train and hung on Varya’s neck. They were followed by a stout, middle-aged lady, and a tall, lanky gentleman with grey whiskers; behind them came two schoolboys, laden with bags, and after the schoolboys, the governess, after the governess the grandmother.

“Here we are, here we are, dear boy!” began the whiskered gentleman, squeezing Sasha’s hand. “Sick of waiting for us, I expect! You have been pitching into your old uncle for not coming down all this time, I daresay! Kolya, Kostya, Nina, Fifa… children! Kiss your cousin Sasha! We’re all here, the whole troop of us, just for three or four days.… I hope we shan’t be too many for you? You mustn’t let us put you out!”

At the sight of their uncle and his family, the young couple were horror-stricken. While his uncle talked and kissed them, Sasha had a vision of their little cottage: he and Varya giving up their three little rooms, all the pillows and bedding to their guests; the salmon, the sardines, the chicken all devoured in a single instant; the cousins plucking the flowers in their little garden, spilling the ink, filled the cottage with noise and confusion; his aunt talking continually about her ailments and her papa’s having been Baron von Fintich.…

And Sasha looked almost with hatred at his young wife, and whispered:

“It’s you they’ve come to see!… Damn them!”

“No, it’s you,” answered Varya, pale with anger. “They’re your relations! they’re not mine!”

And turning to her visitors, she said with a smile of welcome: “Welcome to the cottage!”

The moon came out again. She seemed to smile, as though she were glad she had no relations. Sasha, turning his head away to hide his angry despairing face, struggled to give a note of cordial welcome to his voice as he said:

“It is jolly of you! Welcome to the cottage!”

MALINGERERS

Marfa Petrovna Petchonkin, the General's widow, who has been practising for ten years as a homeopathic doctor, is seeing patients in her study on one of the Tuesdays in May. On the table before her lie a chest of homeopathic drugs, a book on homeopathy, and bills from a homeopathic chemist. On the wall the letters from some Petersburg homeopath, in Marfa Petrovna's opinion a very celebrated and great man, hang under glass in a gilt frame, and there also is a portrait of Father Aristark, to whom the lady owes her salvation—that is, the renunciation of pernicious allopathy and the knowledge of the truth. In the vestibule patients are sitting waiting, for the most part peasants. All but two or three of them are barefoot, as the lady has given orders that their ill-smelling boots are to be left in the yard.

Marfa Petrovna has already seen ten patients when she calls the eleventh: "Gavrila Gruzd!"

The door opens and instead of Gavrila Gruzd, Zamuhrishen, a neighbouring landowner who has sunk into poverty, a little old man with sour eyes, and with a gentleman's cap under his arm, walks into the room. He puts down his stick in the corner, goes up to the lady, and without a word drops on one knee before her.

"What are you about, Kuzma Kuzmitch?" cries the lady in horror, flushing crimson. "For goodness sake!"

"While I live I will not rise," says Zamuhrishen, bending over her hand. "Let all the world see my homage on my knees, our guardian angel, benefactress of the human race! Let them! Before the good fairy who has given me life, guided me into the path of truth, and enlightened my scepticism I am ready not merely to kneel but to pass through fire, our miraculous healer, mother of the orphan and the widowed! I have recovered. I am a new man, enchantress!"

"I… I am very glad…" mutters the lady, flushing with pleasure. "It's so pleasant to hear that… Sit down please! Why, you were so seriously ill that Tuesday."

“Yes indeed, how ill I was! It’s awful to recall it,” says Zamuhrishen, taking a seat. “I had rheumatism in every part and every organ. I have been in misery for eight years, I’ve had no rest from it… by day or by night, my benefactress. I have consulted doctors, and I went to professors at Kazan; I have tried all sorts of mud-baths, and drunk waters, and goodness knows what I haven’t tried! I have wasted all my substance on doctors, my beautiful lady. The doctors did me nothing but harm. They drove the disease inwards. Drive in, that they did, but to drive out was beyond their science. All they care about is their fees, the brigands; but as for the benefit of humanity—for that they don’t care a straw. They prescribe some quackery, and you have to drink it. Assassins, that’s the only word for them. If it hadn’t been for you, our angel, I should have been in the grave by now! I went home from you that Tuesday, looked at the pilules that you gave me then, and wondered what good there could be in them. Was it possible that those little grains, scarcely visible, could cure my immense, longstanding disease? That’s what I thought—unbeliever that I was!—and I smiled; but when I took the pilule—it was instantaneous! It was as though I had not been ill, or as though it had been lifted off me. My wife looked at me with her eyes starting out of her head and couldn’t believe it. ‘Why, is it you, Kolya?’ ‘Yes, it is I,’ I said. And we knelt down together before the icon, and fell to praying for our angel: ‘Send her, O Lord, all that we are feeling!’ ”

Zamuhrishen wipes his eyes with his sleeve gets up from his chair, and shows a disposition to drop on one knee again; but the lady checks him and makes him sit down.

“It’s not me you must thank,” she says, blushing with excitement and looking enthusiastically at the portrait of Father Aristark. “It’s not my doing.… I am only the obedient instrument… It’s really a miracle. Rheumatism of eight years’ standing by one pilule of scrofuloso!”

“Excuse me, you were so kind as to give me three pilules. One I took at dinner and the effect was instantaneous! Another in the evening, and the third next day; and since then not a touch! Not a twinge anywhere! And you know I thought I was dying, I had written to Moscow for my son to come! The Lord has given you wisdom, our lady of healing! Now I am walking, and feel as though I were in Paradise. The Tuesday I came to you I was hobbling, and now I am ready to run after a hare.… I could live for a hundred years. There’s only one trouble, our lack of means. I’m well now, but what’s the use of health if there’s nothing to live on? Poverty weighs on me worse than illness.… For example, take this… It’s the time to sow oats, and how is one to sow it if one has no seed? I

ought to buy it, but the money… everyone knows how we are off for money.…”

“I will give you oats, Kuzma Kuzmitch.… Sit down, sit down. You have so delighted me, you have given me so much pleasure that it’s not you but I that should say thank you!”

“You are our joy! That the Lord should create such goodness! Rejoice, Madam, looking at your good deeds!… While we sinners have no cause for rejoicing in ourselves.… We are paltry, poor-spirited, useless people… a mean lot.… We are only gentry in name, but in a material sense we are the same as peasants, only worse.… We live in stone houses, but it’s a mere make-believe… for the roof leaks. And there is no money to buy wood to mend it with.”

“I’ll give you the wood, Kuzma Kuzmitch.”

Zamuhrishen asks for and gets a cow too, a letter of recommendation for his daughter whom he wants to send to a boarding school, and… touched by the lady’s liberality he whimpers with excess of feeling, twists his mouth, and feels in his pocket for his handkerchief.…

Marfa Petrovna sees a red paper slip out of his pocket with his handkerchief and fall noiselessly to the floor.

“I shall never forget it to all eternity…” he mutters, “and I shall make my children and my grandchildren remember it… from generation to generation. ‘See, children,’ I shall say, ‘who has saved me from the grave, who…’”

When she has seen her patient out, the lady looks for a minute at Father Aristark with eyes full of tears, then turns her caressing, reverent gaze on the drug chest, the books, the bills, the armchair in which the man she had saved from death has just been sitting, and her eyes fall on the paper just dropped by her patient. She picks up the paper, unfolds it, and sees in it three pilules—the very pilules she had given Zamuhrishen the previous Tuesday.

“They are the very ones,” she thinks puzzled. “… The paper is the same.… He hasn’t even unwrapped them! What has he taken then? Strange.… Surely he wouldn’t try to deceive me!”

And for the first time in her ten years of practice a doubt creeps into Marfa Petrovna’s mind.… She summons the other patients, and while talking to them of their complaints notices what has hitherto slipped by her ears unnoticed. The patients, every one of them as though they were in a conspiracy, first belaud her for their miraculous cure, go into raptures over her medical skill, and abuse allopath doctors, then when she is flushed with excitement, begin holding forth on their needs. One

asks for a bit of land to plough, another for wood, a third for permission to shoot in her forests, and so on. She looks at the broad, benevolent countenance of Father Aristark who has revealed the truth to her, and a new truth begins gnawing at her heart. An evil oppressive truth.…

The deceitfulness of man!

The Fish

A summer morning. The air is still; there is no sound but the churring of a grasshopper on the river bank, and somewhere the timid cooing of a turtledove. Feathery clouds stand motionless in the sky, looking like snow scattered about.… Gerassim, the carpenter, a tall gaunt peasant, with a curly red head and a face overgrown with hair, is floundering about in the water under the green willow branches near an unfinished bathing shed.… He puffs and pants and, blinking furiously, is trying to get hold of something under the roots of the willows. His face is covered with perspiration. A couple of yards from him, Lubim, the carpenter, a young hunchback with a triangular face and narrow Chinese-looking eyes, is standing up to his neck in water. Both Gerassim and Lubim are in shirts and linen breeches. Both are blue with cold, for they have been more than an hour already in the water.

"But why do you keep poking with your hand?" cries the hunchback Lubim, shivering as though in a fever. "You blockhead! Hold him, hold him, or else he'll get away, the anathema! Hold him, I tell you!"

"He won't get away.… Where can he get to? He's under a root," says Gerassim in a hoarse, hollow bass, which seems to come not from his throat, but from the depths of his stomach. "He's slippery, the beggar, and there's nothing to catch hold of."

"Get him by the gills, by the gills!"

"There's no seeing his gills.… Stay, I've got hold of something.… I've got him by the lip… He's biting, the brute!"

"Don't pull him out by the lip, don't—or you'll let him go! Take him by the gills, take him by the gills.… You've begun poking with your hand again! You are a senseless man, the Queen of Heaven forgive me! Catch hold!"

"Catch hold!" Gerassim mimics him. "You're a fine one to give orders.… You'd better come and catch hold of him yourself, you hunchback devil.… What are you standing there for?"

“I would catch hold of him if it were possible. But can I stand by the bank, and me as short as I am? It’s deep there.”

“It doesn’t matter if it is deep.… You must swim.”

The hunchback waves his arms, swims up to Gerassim, and catches hold of the twigs. At the first attempt to stand up, he goes into the water over his head and begins blowing up bubbles.

“I told you it was deep,” he says, rolling his eyes angrily. “Am I to sit on your neck or what?”

“Stand on a root… there are a lot of roots like a ladder.” The hunchback gropes for a root with his heel, and tightly gripping several twigs, stands on it.… Having got his balance, and established himself in his new position, he bends down, and trying not to get the water into his mouth, begins fumbling with his right hand among the roots. Getting entangled among the weeds and slipping on the mossy roots he finds his hand in contact with the sharp pincers of a crayfish.

“As though we wanted to see you, you demon!” says Lubim, and he angrily flings the crayfish on the bank.

At last his hand feels Gerassim’s arm, and groping its way along it comes to something cold and slimy.

“Here he is!” says Lubim with a grin. “A fine fellow! Move your fingers, I’ll get him directly… by the gills. Stop, don’t prod me with your elbow.… I’ll have him in a minute, in a minute, only let me get hold of him.… The beggar has got a long way under the roots, there is nothing to get hold of.… One can’t get to the head… one can only feel its belly… kill that gnat on my neck—it’s stinging! I’ll get him by the gills, directly.… Come to one side and give him a push! Poke him with your finger!”

The hunchback puffs out his cheeks, holds his breath, opens his eyes wide, and apparently has already got his fingers in the gills, but at that moment the twigs to which he is holding on with his left hand break, and losing his balance he plops into the water! Eddies race away from the bank as though frightened, and little bubbles come up from the spot where he has fallen in. The hunchback swims out and, snorting, clutches at the twigs.

“You’ll be drowned next, you stupid, and I shall have to answer for you,” wheezes Gerassim. “Clamber out, the devil take you! I’ll get him out myself.”

High words follow.… The sun is baking hot. The shadows begin to grow shorter and to draw in on themselves, like the horns of a snail.… The high grass warmed by the sun begins to give out a strong, heavy

smell of honey. It will soon be midday, and Gerassim and Lubim are still floundering under the willow tree. The husky bass and the shrill, frozen tenor persistently disturb the stillness of the summer day.

"Pull him out by the gills, pull him out! Stay, I'll push him out! Where are you shoving your great ugly fist? Poke him with your finger—you pig's face! Get round by the side! get to the left, to the left, there's a big hole on the right! You'll be a supper for the water-devil! Pull it by the lip!"

There is the sound of the flick of a whip.… A herd of cattle, driven by Yefim, the shepherd, saunter lazily down the sloping bank to drink. The shepherd, a decrepit old man, with one eye and a crooked mouth, walks with his head bowed, looking at his feet. The first to reach the water are the sheep, then come the horses, and last of all the cows.

"Push him from below!" he hears Lubim's voice. "Stick your finger in! Are you deaf, fellow, or what? Tfoo!"

"What are you after, lads?" shouts Yefim.

"An eelpout! We can't get him out! He's hidden under the roots. Get round to the side! To the side!"

For a minute Yefim screws up his eye at the fishermen, then he takes off his bark shoes, throws his sack off his shoulders, and takes off his shirt. He has not the patience to take off his breeches, but, making the sign of the cross, he steps into the water, holding out his thin dark arms to balance himself.… For fifty paces he walks along the slimy bottom, then he takes to swimming.

"Wait a minute, lads!" he shouts. "Wait! Don't be in a hurry to pull him out, you'll lose him. You must do it properly!"

Yefim joins the carpenters and all three, shoving each other with their knees and their elbows, puffing and swearing at one another, bustle about the same spot. Lubim, the hunchback, gets a mouthful of water, and the air rings with his hard spasmodic coughing.

"Where's the shepherd?" comes a shout from the bank. "Yefim! Shepherd! Where are you? The cattle are in the garden! Drive them out, drive them out of the garden! Where is he, the old brigand?"

First men's voices are heard, then a woman's. The master himself, Andrey Andreitch, wearing a dressing-gown made of a Persian shawl and carrying a newspaper in his hand, appears from behind the garden fence. He looks inquiringly towards the shouts which come from the river, and then trips rapidly towards the bathing shed.

"What's this? Who's shouting?" he asks sternly, seeing through the branches of the willow the three wet heads of the fishermen. "What are

you so busy about there?”

“Catching a fish,” mutters Yefim, without raising his head.

“I’ll give it to you! The beasts are in the garden and he is fishing!… When will that bathing shed be done, you devils? You’ve been at work two days, and what is there to show for it?”

“It… will soon be done,” grunts Gerassim; “summer is long, you’ll have plenty of time to wash, your honour.… Pfrrr!… We can’t manage this eelpout here anyhow.… He’s got under a root and sits there as if he were in a hole and won’t budge one way or another.…”

“An eelpout?” says the master, and his eyes begin to glisten. “Get him out quickly then.”

“You’ll give us half a rouble for it presently if we oblige you.… A huge eelpout, as fat as a merchant’s wife.… It’s worth half a rouble, your honour, for the trouble.… Don’t squeeze him, Lubim, don’t squeeze him, you’ll spoil him! Push him up from below! Pull the root upwards, my good man… what’s your name? Upwards, not downwards, you brute! Don’t swing your legs!”

Five minutes pass, ten.… The master loses all patience.

“Vassily!” he shouts, turning towards the garden. “Vaska! Call Vassily to me!”

The coachman Vassily runs up. He is chewing something and breathing hard.

“Go into the water,” the master orders him. “Help them to pull out that eelpout. They can’t get him out.”

Vassily rapidly undresses and gets into the water.

“In a minute.… I’ll get him in a minute,” he mutters. “Where’s the eelpout? We’ll have him out in a trice! You’d better go, Yefim. An old man like you ought to be minding his own business instead of being here. Where’s that eelpout? I’ll have him in a minute.… Here he is! Let go.”

“What’s the good of saying that? We know all about that! You get it out!”

“But there is no getting it out like this! One must get hold of it by the head.”

“And the head is under the root! We know that, you fool!”

“Now then, don’t talk or you’ll catch it! You dirty cur!”

“Before the master to use such language,” mutters Yefim. “You won’t get him out, lads! He’s fixed himself much too cleverly!”

“Wait a minute, I’ll come directly,” says the master, and he begins hurriedly undressing. “Four fools, and can’t get an eelpout!”

When he is undressed, Andrey Andreitch gives himself time to cool and gets into the water. But even his interference leads to nothing.

“We must chop the root off,” Lubim decides at last. “Gerassim, go and get an axe! Give me an axe!”

“Don’t chop your fingers off,” says the master, when the blows of the axe on the root under water are heard. “Yefim, get out of this! Stay, I’ll get the eelpout.… You’ll never do it.”

The root is hacked a little. They partly break it off, and Andrey Andreitch, to his immense satisfaction, feels his fingers under the gills of the fish.

“I’m pulling him out, lads! Don’t crowd round… stand still.… I am pulling him out!”

The head of a big eelpout, and behind it its long black body, nearly a yard long, appears on the surface of the water. The fish flaps its tail heavily and tries to tear itself away.

“None of your nonsense, my boy! Fiddlesticks! I’ve got you! Aha!”

A honied smile overspreads all the faces. A minute passes in silent contemplation.

“A famous eelpout,” mutters Yefim, scratching under his shoulder-blades. “I’ll be bound it weighs ten pounds.”

“Mm!… Yes,” the master assents. “The liver is fairly swollen! It seems to stand out! A-ach!”

The fish makes a sudden, unexpected upward movement with its tail and the fishermen hear a loud splash… they all put out their hands, but it is too late; they have seen the last of the eelpout.

Gone Astray

A country village wrapped in the darkness of night. One o’clock strikes from the belfry. Two lawyers, called Kozyavkin and Laev, both in the best of spirits and a little unsteady on their legs, come out of the wood and turn towards the cottages.

“Well, thank God, we’ve arrived,” says Kozyavkin, drawing a deep breath. “Tramping four miles from the station in our condition is a feat. I am fearfully done up! And, as ill-luck would have it, not a fly to be seen.”

“Petya, my dear fellow.… I can’t.… I feel like dying if I’m not in bed in five minutes.”

“In bed! Don’t you think it, my boy! First we’ll have supper and a glass of red wine, and then you can go to bed. Verotchka and I will wake you up.… Ah, my dear fellow, it’s a fine thing to be married! You don’t understand it, you cold-hearted wretch! I shall be home in a minute, worn out and exhausted.… A loving wife will welcome me, give me some tea and something to eat, and repay me for my hard work and my love with such a fond and loving look out of her darling black eyes that I shall forget how tired I am, and forget the burglary and the law courts and the appeal division.… It’s glorious!”

“Yes—I say, I feel as though my legs were dropping off, I can scarcely get along.… I am frightfully thirsty.…”

“Well, here we are at home.”

The friends go up to one of the cottages, and stand still under the nearest window.

“It’s a jolly cottage,” said Kozyavkin. “You will see tomorrow what views we have! There’s no light in the windows. Verotchka must have gone to bed, then; she must have got tired of sitting up. She’s in bed, and must be worrying at my not having turned up.” (He pushes the window with his stick, and it opens.) “Plucky girl! She goes to bed without bolting the window.” (He takes off his cape and flings it with his portfolio in at the window.) “I am hot! Let us strike up a serenade and

make her laugh!” (He sings.) “The moon floats in the midnight sky.… Faintly stir the tender breezes.… Faintly rustle in the treetops.… Sing, sing, Alyosha! Verotchka, shall we sing you Schubert’s Serenade?” (He sings.)

His performance is cut short by a sudden fit of coughing. “Tphoo! Verotchka, tell Aksinya to unlock the gate for us!” (A pause.) “Verotchka! don’t be lazy, get up, darling!” (He stands on a stone and looks in at the window.) “Verotchka, my dumpling; Verotchka, my poppet… my little angel, my wife beyond compare, get up and tell Aksinya to unlock the gate for us! You are not asleep, you know. Little wife, we are really so done up and exhausted that we’re not in the mood for jokes. We’ve trudged all the way from the station! Don’t you hear? Ah, hang it all!” (He makes an effort to climb up to the window and falls down.) “You know this isn’t a nice trick to play on a visitor! I see you are just as great a schoolgirl as ever, Vera, you are always up to mischief!”

“Perhaps Vera Stepanovna is asleep,” says Laev.

“She isn’t asleep! I bet she wants me to make an outcry and wake up the whole neighbourhood. I’m beginning to get cross, Vera! Ach, damn it all! Give me a leg up, Alyosha; I’ll get in. You are a naughty girl, nothing but a regular schoolgirl… Give me a hoist.”

Puffing and panting, Laev gives him a leg up, and Kozyavkin climbs in at the window and vanishes into the darkness within.

“Vera!” Laev hears a minute later, “where are you?… D—damnation! Tphoo! I’ve put my hand into something! Tphoo!”

There is a rustling sound, a flapping of wings, and the desperate cackling of a fowl.

“A nice state of things,” Laev hears. “Vera, where on earth did these chickens come from? Why, the devil, there’s no end of them! There’s a basket with a turkey in it.… It pecks, the nasty creature.”

Two hens fly out of the window, and cackling at the top of their voices, flutter down the village street.

“Alyosha, we’ve made a mistake!” says Kozyavkin in a lachrymose voice. “There are a lot of hens here.… I must have mistaken the house. Confound you, you are all over the place, you cursed brutes!”

“Well, then, make haste and come down. Do you hear? I am dying of thirst!”

“In a minute.… I am looking for my cape and portfolio.”

“Light a match.”

“The matches are in the cape.… I was a crazy idiot to get into this place. The cottages are exactly alike; the devil himself couldn’t tell them apart in the dark. Aie, the turkey’s pecked my cheek, nasty creature!”

“Make haste and get out or they’ll think we are stealing the chickens.”

“In a minute.… I can’t find my cape anywhere.… There are lots of old rags here, and I can’t tell where the cape is. Throw me a match.”

“I haven’t any.”

“We are in a hole, I must say! What am I to do? I can’t go without my cape and my portfolio. I must find them.”

“I can’t understand a man’s not knowing his own cottage,” says Laev indignantly. “Drunken beast.… If I’d known I was in for this sort of thing I would never have come with you. I should have been at home and fast asleep by now, and a nice fix I’m in here.… I’m fearfully done up and thirsty, and my head is going round.”

“In a minute, in a minute.… You won’t expire.”

A big cock flies crowing over Laev’s head. Laev heaves a deep sigh, and with a hopeless gesture sits down on a stone. He is beset with a burning thirst, his eyes are closing, his head drops forward.… Five minutes pass, ten, twenty, and Kozyavkin is still busy among the hens.

“Petya, will you be long?”

“A minute. I found the portfolio, but I have lost it again.”

Laev lays his head on his fists, and closes his eyes. The cackling of the fowls grows louder and louder. The inhabitants of the empty cottage fly out of the window and flutter round in circles, he fancies, like owls over his head. His ears ring with their cackle, he is overwhelmed with terror.

“The beast!” he thinks. “He invited me to stay, promising me wine and junket, and then he makes me walk from the station and listen to these hens.…”

In the midst of his indignation his chin sinks into his collar, he lays his head on his portfolio, and gradually subsides. Weariness gets the upper hand and he begins to doze.

“I’ve found the portfolio!” he hears Kozyavkin cry triumphantly. “I shall find the cape in a minute and then off we go!”

Then through his sleep he hears the barking of dogs. First one dog barks, then a second, and a third.… And the barking of the dogs blends with the cackling of the fowls into a sort of savage music. Someone comes up to Laev and asks him something. Then he hears someone climb over his head into the window, then a knocking and a shouting.… A woman in a red apron stands beside him with a lantern in her hand and asks him something.

“You’ve no right to say so,” he hears Kozyavkin’s voice. “I am a lawyer, a bachelor of laws—Kozyavkin—here’s my visiting card.”

“What do I want with your card?” says someone in a husky bass. “You’ve disturbed all my fowls, you’ve smashed the eggs! Look what you’ve done. The turkey poults were to have come out today or tomorrow, and you’ve smashed them. What’s the use of your giving me your card, sir?”

“How dare you interfere with me! No! I won’t have it!”

“I am thirsty,” thinks Laev, trying to open his eyes, and he feels somebody climb down from the window over his head.

“My name is Kozyavkin! I have a cottage here. Everyone knows me.”

“We don’t know anyone called Kozyavkin.”

“What are you saying? Call the elder. He knows me.”

“Don’t get excited, the constable will be here directly.… We know all the summer visitors here, but I’ve never seen you in my life.”

“I’ve had a cottage in Rottendale for five years.”

“Whew! Do you take this for the Dale? This is Sicklystead, but Rottendale is farther to the right, beyond the match factory. It’s three miles from here.”

“Bless my soul! Then I’ve taken the wrong turning!”

The cries of men and fowls mingle with the barking of dogs, and the voice of Kozyavkin rises above the chaos of confused sounds:

“You shut up! I’ll pay. I’ll show you whom you have to deal with!”

Little by little the voices die down. Laev feels himself being shaken by the shoulder.…

THE HUNTSMAN

A sultry, stifling midday. Not a cloudlet in the sky.… The sunbaked grass had a disconsolate, hopeless look: even if there were rain it could never be green again.… The forest stood silent, motionless, as though it were looking at something with its treetops or expecting something.

At the edge of the clearing a tall, narrow-shouldered man of forty in a red shirt, in patched trousers that had been a gentleman's, and in high boots, was slouching along with a lazy, shambling step. He was sauntering along the road. On the right was the green of the clearing, on the left a golden sea of ripe rye stretched to the very horizon. He was red and perspiring, a white cap with a straight jockey peak, evidently a gift from some openhanded young gentleman, perched jauntily on his handsome flaxen head. Across his shoulder hung a game-bag with a blackcock lying in it. The man held a double-barrelled gun cocked in his hand, and screwed up his eyes in the direction of his lean old dog who was running on ahead sniffing the bushes. There was stillness all round, not a sound… everything living was hiding away from the heat.

"Yegor Vlassitch!" the huntsman suddenly heard a soft voice.

He started and, looking round, scowled. Beside him, as though she had sprung out of the earth, stood a pale-faced woman of thirty with a sickle in her hand. She was trying to look into his face, and was smiling diffidently.

"Oh, it is you, Pelagea!" said the huntsman, stopping and deliberately uncocking the gun. "H'm!… How have you come here?"

"The women from our village are working here, so I have come with them.… As a labourer, Yegor Vlassitch."

"Oh…" growled Yegor Vlassitch, and slowly walked on.

Pelagea followed him. They walked in silence for twenty paces.

"I have not seen you for a long time, Yegor Vlassitch…" said Pelagea looking tenderly at the huntsman's moving shoulders. "I have not seen you since you came into our hut at Easter for a drink of water… you came in at Easter for a minute and then God knows how… drunk… you

scolded and beat me and went away… I have been waiting and waiting… I've tired my eyes out looking for you. Ah, Yegor Vlassitch, Yegor Vlassitch! you might look in just once!"

"What is there for me to do there?"

"Of course there is nothing for you to do… though to be sure… there is the place to look after.… To see how things are going.… You are the master.… I say, you have shot a blackcock, Yegor Vlassitch! You ought to sit down and rest!"

As she said all this Pelagea laughed like a silly girl and looked up at Yegor's face. Her face was simply radiant with happiness.

"Sit down? If you like…" said Yegor in a tone of indifference, and he chose a spot between two fir trees. "Why are you standing? You sit down too."

Pelagea sat a little way off in the sun and, ashamed of her joy, put her hand over her smiling mouth. Two minutes passed in silence.

"You might come for once," said Pelagea.

"What for?" sighed Yegor, taking off his cap and wiping his red forehead with his hand. "There is no object in my coming. To go for an hour or two is only waste of time, it's simply upsetting you, and to live continually in the village my soul could not endure.… You know yourself I am a pampered man.… I want a bed to sleep in, good tea to drink, and refined conversation.… I want all the niceties, while you live in poverty and dirt in the village.… I couldn't stand it for a day. Suppose there were an edict that I must live with you, I should either set fire to the hut or lay hands on myself. From a boy I've had this love for ease; there is no help for it."

"Where are you living now?"

"With the gentleman here, Dmitry Ivanitch, as a huntsman. I furnish his table with game, but he keeps me… more for his pleasure than anything."

"That's not proper work you're doing, Yegor Vlassitch.… For other people it's a pastime, but with you it's like a trade… like real work."

"You don't understand, you silly," said Yegor, gazing gloomily at the sky. "You have never understood, and as long as you live you will never understand what sort of man I am.… You think of me as a foolish man, gone to the bad, but to anyone who understands I am the best shot there is in the whole district. The gentry feel that, and they have even printed things about me in a magazine. There isn't a man to be compared with me as a sportsman.… And it is not because I am pampered and proud that I look down upon your village work. From my childhood, you know,

I have never had any calling apart from guns and dogs. If they took away my gun, I used to go out with the fishing-hook, if they took the hook I caught things with my hands. And I went in for horse-dealing too, I used to go to the fairs when I had the money, and you know that if a peasant goes in for being a sportsman, or a horse-dealer, it's goodbye to the plough. Once the spirit of freedom has taken a man you will never root it out of him. In the same way, if a gentleman goes in for being an actor or for any other art, he will never make an official or a landowner. You are a woman, and you do not understand, but one must understand that."

"I understand, Yegor Vlassitch."

"You don't understand if you are going to cry.…"

"I… I'm not crying," said Pelagea, turning away. "It's a sin, Yegor Vlassitch! You might stay a day with luckless me, anyway. It's twelve years since I was married to you, and… and… there has never once been love between us!… I… I am not crying."

"Love…" muttered Yegor, scratching his hand. "There can't be any love. It's only in name we are husband and wife; we aren't really. In your eyes I am a wild man, and in mine you are a simple peasant woman with no understanding. Are we well matched? I am a free, pampered, profligate man, while you are a working woman, going in bark shoes and never straightening your back. The way I think of myself is that I am the foremost man in every kind of sport, and you look at me with pity.… Is that being well matched?"

"But we are married, you know, Yegor Vlassitch," sobbed Pelagea.

"Not married of our free will.… Have you forgotten? You have to thank Count Sergey Pavlovitch and yourself. Out of envy, because I shot better than he did, the Count kept giving me wine for a whole month, and when a man's drunk you could make him change his religion, let alone getting married. To pay me out he married me to you when I was drunk.… A huntsman to a herd-girl! You saw I was drunk, why did you marry me? You were not a serf, you know; you could have resisted. Of course it was a bit of luck for a herd-girl to marry a huntsman, but you ought to have thought about it. Well, now be miserable, cry. It's a joke for the Count, but a crying matter for you.… Beat yourself against the wall."

A silence followed. Three wild ducks flew over the clearing. Yegor followed them with his eyes till, transformed into three scarcely visible dots, they sank down far beyond the forest.

"How do you live?" he asked, moving his eyes from the ducks to Pelagea.

“Now I am going out to work, and in the winter I take a child from the Foundling Hospital and bring it up on the bottle. They give me a rouble and a half a month.”

“Oh.…”

Again a silence. From the strip that had been reaped floated a soft song which broke off at the very beginning. It was too hot to sing.

“They say you have put up a new hut for Akulina,” said Pelagea.

Yegor did not speak.

“So she is dear to you.…”

“It’s your luck, it’s fate!” said the huntsman, stretching. “You must put up with it, poor thing. But goodbye, I’ve been chattering long enough.… I must be at Boltovo by the evening.”

Yegor rose, stretched himself, and slung his gun over his shoulder; Pelagea got up.

“And when are you coming to the village?” she asked softly.

“I have no reason to, I shall never come sober, and you have little to gain from me drunk; I am spiteful when I am drunk. Goodbye!”

“Goodbye, Yegor Vlassitch.”

Yegor put his cap on the back of his head and, clicking to his dog, went on his way. Pelagea stood still looking after him.… She saw his moving shoulder-blades, his jaunty cap, his lazy, careless step, and her eyes were full of sadness and tender affection.… Her gaze flitted over her husband’s tall, lean figure and caressed and fondled it.… He, as though he felt that gaze, stopped and looked round.… He did not speak, but from his face, from his shrugged shoulders, Pelagea could see that he wanted to say something to her. She went up to him timidly and looked at him with imploring eyes.

“Take it,” he said, turning round.

He gave her a crumpled rouble note and walked quickly away.

“Goodbye, Yegor Vlassitch,” she said, mechanically taking the rouble.

He walked by a long road, straight as a taut strap. She, pale and motionless as a statue, stood, her eyes seizing every step he took. But the red of his shirt melted into the dark colour of his trousers, his step could not be seen, and the dog could not be distinguished from the boots. Nothing could be seen but the cap, and… suddenly Yegor turned off sharply into the clearing and the cap vanished in the greenness.

“Goodbye, Yegor Vlassitch,” whispered Pelagea, and she stood on tiptoe to see the white cap once more.

A Malefactor

An exceedingly lean little peasant, in a striped hempen shirt and patched drawers, stands facing the investigating magistrate. His face overgrown with hair and pitted with smallpox, and his eyes scarcely visible under thick, overhanging eyebrows have an expression of sullen moroseness. On his head there is a perfect mop of tangled, unkempt hair, which gives him an even more spider-like air of moroseness. He is barefooted.

"Denis Grigoryev!" the magistrate begins. "Come nearer, and answer my questions. On the seventh of this July the railway watchman, Ivan Semyonovitch Akinfov, going along the line in the morning, found you at the hundred-and-forty-first mile engaged in unscrewing a nut by which the rails are made fast to the sleepers. Here it is, the nut! … With the aforesaid nut he detained you. Was that so?"

"Wha-at?"

"Was this all as Akinfov states?"

"To be sure, it was."

"Very good; well, what were you unscrewing the nut for?"

"Wha-at?"

"Drop that 'wha-at' and answer the question; what were you unscrewing the nut for?"

"If I hadn't wanted it I shouldn't have unscrewed it," croaks Denis, looking at the ceiling.

"What did you want that nut for?"

"The nut? We make weights out of those nuts for our lines."

"Who is 'we'?"

"We, people.… The Klimovo peasants, that is."

"Listen, my man; don't play the idiot to me, but speak sensibly. It's no use telling lies here about weights!"

"I've never been a liar from a child, and now I'm telling lies…" mutters Denis, blinking. "But can you do without a weight, your honour? If you put live bait or maggots on a hook, would it go to the bottom without a weight?… I am telling lies," grins Denis.… "What the devil is

the use of the worm if it swims on the surface! The perch and the pike and the eelpout always go to the bottom, and a bait on the surface is only taken by a shillisper, not very often then, and there are no shillispers in our river.… That fish likes plenty of room."

"Why are you telling me about shillispers?"

"Wha-at? Why, you asked me yourself! The gentry catch fish that way too in our parts. The silliest little boy would not try to catch a fish without a weight. Of course anyone who did not understand might go to fish without a weight. There is no rule for a fool."

"So you say you unscrewed this nut to make a weight for your fishing line out of it?"

"What else for? It wasn't to play knuckle-bones with!"

"But you might have taken lead, a bullet… a nail of some sort.…"

"You don't pick up lead in the road, you have to buy it, and a nail's no good. You can't find anything better than a nut.… It's heavy, and there's a hole in it."

"He keeps pretending to be a fool! as though he'd been born yesterday or dropped from heaven! Don't you understand, you blockhead, what unscrewing these nuts leads to? If the watchman had not noticed it the train might have run off the rails, people would have been killed—you would have killed people."

"God forbid, your honour! What should I kill them for? Are we heathens or wicked people? Thank God, good gentlemen, we have lived all our lives without ever dreaming of such a thing.… Save, and have mercy on us, Queen of Heaven!… What are you saying?"

"And what do you suppose railway accidents do come from? Unscrew two or three nuts and you have an accident."

Denis grins, and screws up his eye at the magistrate incredulously.

"Why! how many years have we all in the village been unscrewing nuts, and the Lord has been merciful; and you talk of accidents, killing people. If I had carried away a rail or put a log across the line, say, then maybe it might have upset the train, but… pouf! a nut!"

"But you must understand that the nut holds the rail fast to the sleepers!"

"We understand that.… We don't unscrew them all… we leave some.… We don't do it thoughtlessly… we understand.…"

Denis yawns and makes the sign of the cross over his mouth.

"Last year the train went off the rails here," says the magistrate. "Now I see why!"

"What do you say, your honour?"

“I am telling you that now I see why the train went off the rails last year.… I understand!”

“That’s what you are educated people for, to understand, you kind gentlemen. The Lord knows to whom to give understanding.… Here you have reasoned how and what, but the watchman, a peasant like ourselves, with no understanding at all, catches one by the collar and hauls one along.… You should reason first and then haul me off. It’s a saying that a peasant has a peasant’s wit.… Write down, too, your honour, that he hit me twice—in the jaw and in the chest.”

“When your hut was searched they found another nut.… At what spot did you unscrew that, and when?”

“You mean the nut which lay under the red box?”

“I don’t know where it was lying, only it was found. When did you unscrew it?”

“I didn’t unscrew it; Ignashka, the son of one-eyed Semyon, gave it me. I mean the one which was under the box, but the one which was in the sledge in the yard Mitrofan and I unscrewed together.”

“What Mitrofan?”

“Mitrofan Petrov.… Haven’t you heard of him? He makes nets in our village and sells them to the gentry. He needs a lot of those nuts. Reckon a matter of ten for each net.”

“Listen. Article 1081 of the Penal Code lays down that every wilful damage of the railway line committed when it can expose the traffic on that line to danger, and the guilty party knows that an accident must be caused by it… (Do you understand? Knows! And you could not help knowing what this unscrewing would lead to…) is liable to penal servitude.”

“Of course, you know best.… We are ignorant people.… What do we understand?”

“You understand all about it! You are lying, shamming!”

“What should I lie for? Ask in the village if you don’t believe me. Only a bleak is caught without a weight, and there is no fish worse than a gudgeon, yet even that won’t bite without a weight.”

“You’d better tell me about the shillisper next,” said the magistrate, smiling.

“There are no shillispers in our parts.… We cast our line without a weight on the top of the water with a butterfly; a mullet may be caught that way, though that is not often.”

“Come, hold your tongue.”

A silence follows. Denis shifts from one foot to the other, looks at the table with the green cloth on it, and blinks his eyes violently as though what was before him was not the cloth but the sun. The magistrate writes rapidly.

“Can I go?” asks Denis after a long silence.

“No. I must take you under guard and send you to prison.”

Denis leaves off blinking and, raising his thick eyebrows, looks inquiringly at the magistrate.

“How do you mean, to prison? Your honour! I have no time to spare, I must go to the fair; I must get three roubles from Yegor for some tallow!…”

“Hold your tongue; don’t interrupt.”

“To prison.… If there was something to go for, I’d go; but just to go for nothing! What for? I haven’t stolen anything, I believe, and I’ve not been fighting.… If you are in doubt about the arrears, your honour, don’t believe the elder.… You ask the agent… he’s a regular heathen, the elder, you know.”

“Hold your tongue.”

“I am holding my tongue, as it is,” mutters Denis; “but that the elder has lied over the account, I’ll take my oath for it.… There are three of us brothers: Kuzma Grigoryev, then Yegor Grigoryev, and me, Denis Grigoryev.”

“You are hindering me.… Hey, Semyon,” cries the magistrate, “take him away!”

“There are three of us brothers,” mutters Denis, as two stalwart soldiers take him and lead him out of the room. “A brother is not responsible for a brother. Kuzma does not pay, so you, Denis, must answer for it.… Judges indeed! Our master the general is dead—the Kingdom of Heaven be his—or he would have shown you judges.… You ought to judge sensibly, not at random.… Flog if you like, but flog someone who deserves it, flog with conscience.”

A Dead Body

A still August night. A mist is rising slowly from the fields and casting an opaque veil over everything within eyesight. Lighted up by the moon, the mist gives the impression at one moment of a calm, boundless sea, at the next of an immense white wall. The air is damp and chilly. Morning is still far off. A step from the byroad which runs along the edge of the forest a little fire is gleaming. A dead body, covered from head to foot with new white linen, is lying under a young oak tree. A wooden icon is lying on its breast. Beside the corpse almost on the road sits the "watch"—two peasants performing one of the most disagreeable and uninviting of peasants' duties. One, a tall young fellow with a scarcely perceptible moustache and thick black eyebrows, in a tattered sheepskin and bark shoes, is sitting on the wet grass, his feet stuck out straight in front of him, and is trying to while away the time with work. He bends his long neck, and breathing loudly through his nose, makes a spoon out of a big crooked bit of wood; the other—a little scraggy, pockmarked peasant with an aged face, a scanty moustache, and a little goat's beard—sits with his hands dangling loose on his knees, and without moving gazes listlessly at the light. A small campfire is lazily burning down between them, throwing a red glow on their faces. There is perfect stillness. The only sounds are the scrape of the knife on the wood and the crackling of damp sticks in the fire.

"Don't you go to sleep, Syoma…" says the young man.

"I… I am not asleep…" stammers the goat-beard.

"That's all right.… It would be dreadful to sit here alone, one would be frightened. You might tell me something, Syoma."

"You are a queer fellow, Syomushka! Other people will laugh and tell a story and sing a song, but you—there is no making you out. You sit like a scarecrow in the garden and roll your eyes at the fire. You can't say anything properly… when you speak you seem frightened. I dare say you are fifty, but you have less sense than a child. Aren't you sorry that you are a simpleton?"

“I am sorry,” the goat-beard answers gloomily.

“And we are sorry to see your foolishness, you may be sure. You are a good-natured, sober peasant, and the only trouble is that you have no sense in your head. You should have picked up some sense for yourself if the Lord has afflicted you and given you no understanding. You must make an effort, Syoma.… You should listen hard when anything good’s being said, note it well, and keep thinking and thinking.… If there is any word you don’t understand, you should make an effort and think over in your head in what meaning the word is used. Do you see? Make an effort! If you don’t gain some sense for yourself you’ll be a simpleton and of no account at all to your dying day.”

All at once a long drawn-out, moaning sound is heard in the forest. Something rustles in the leaves as though torn from the very top of the tree and falls to the ground. All this is faintly repeated by the echo. The young man shudders and looks enquiringly at his companion.

“It’s an owl at the little birds,” says Syoma, gloomily.

“Why, Syoma, it’s time for the birds to fly to the warm countries!”

“To be sure, it is time.”

“It is chilly at dawn now. It is co-old. The crane is a chilly creature, it is tender. Such cold is death to it. I am not a crane, but I am frozen.… Put some more wood on!”

Syoma gets up and disappears in the dark undergrowth. While he is busy among the bushes, breaking dry twigs, his companion puts his hand over his eyes and starts at every sound. Syoma brings an armful of wood and lays it on the fire. The flame irresolutely licks the black twigs with its little tongues, then suddenly, as though at the word of command, catches them and throws a crimson light on the faces, the road, the white linen with its prominences where the hands and feet of the corpse raise it, the icon. The “watch” is silent. The young man bends his neck still lower and sets to work with still more nervous haste. The goat-beard sits motionless as before and keeps his eyes fixed on the fire.…

“Ye that love not Zion… shall be put to shame by the Lord.” A falsetto voice is suddenly heard singing in the stillness of the night, then slow footsteps are audible, and the dark figure of a man in a short monkish cassock and a broad-brimmed hat, with a wallet on his shoulders, comes into sight on the road in the crimson firelight.

“Thy will be done, O Lord! Holy Mother!” the figure says in a husky falsetto. “I saw the fire in the outer darkness and my soul leapt for joy.… At first I thought it was men grazing a drove of horses, then I thought it can’t be that, since no horses were to be seen. ‘Aren’t they thieves,’ I

wondered, ‘aren’t they robbers lying in wait for a rich Lazarus? Aren’t they the gypsy people offering sacrifices to idols?’ And my soul leapt for joy. ‘Go, Feodosy, servant of God,’ I said to myself, ‘and win a martyr’s crown!’ And I flew to the fire like a light-winged moth. Now I stand before you, and from your outer aspect I judge of your souls: you are not thieves and you are not heathens. Peace be to you!”

“Good evening.”

“Good orthodox people, do you know how to reach the Makuhinsky Brickyards from here?”

“It’s close here. You go straight along the road; when you have gone a mile and a half there will be Ananova, our village. From the village, father, you turn to the right by the riverbank, and so you will get to the brickyards. It’s two miles from Ananova.”

“God give you health. And why are you sitting here?”

“We are sitting here watching. You see, there is a dead body.…”

“What? what body? Holy Mother!”

The pilgrim sees the white linen with the icon on it, and starts so violently that his legs give a little skip. This unexpected sight has an overpowering effect upon him. He huddles together and stands as though rooted to the spot, with wide-open mouth and staring eyes. For three minutes he is silent as though he could not believe his eyes, then begins muttering:

“O Lord! Holy Mother! I was going along not meddling with anyone, and all at once such an affliction.”

“What may you be?” enquires the young man. “Of the clergy?”

“No… no.… I go from one monastery to another.… Do you know Mi… Mihail Polikarpitch, the foreman of the brickyard? Well, I am his nephew.… Thy will be done, O Lord! Why are you here?”

“We are watching… we are told to.”

“Yes, yes…” mutters the man in the cassock, passing his hand over his eyes. “And where did the deceased come from?”

“He was a stranger.”

“Such is life! But I’ll… er… be getting on, brothers.… I feel flustered. I am more afraid of the dead than of anything, my dear souls! And only fancy! while this man was alive he wasn’t noticed, while now when he is dead and given over to corruption we tremble before him as before some famous general or a bishop.… Such is life; was he murdered, or what?”

“The Lord knows! Maybe he was murdered, or maybe he died of himself.”

“Yes, yes.… Who knows, brothers? Maybe his soul is now tasting the joys of Paradise.”

“His soul is still hovering here, near his body,” says the young man. “It does not depart from the body for three days.”

“H’m, yes!… How chilly the nights are now! It sets one’s teeth chattering.… So then I am to go straight on and on?…”

“Till you get to the village, and then you turn to the right by the riverbank.”

“By the riverbank.… To be sure.… Why am I standing still? I must go on. Farewell, brothers.”

The man in the cassock takes five steps along the road and stops.

“I’ve forgotten to put a kopeck for the burying,” he says. “Good orthodox friends, can I give the money?”

“You ought to know best, you go the round of the monasteries. If he died a natural death it would go for the good of his soul; if it’s a suicide it’s a sin.”

“That’s true.… And maybe it really was a suicide! So I had better keep my money. Oh, sins, sins! Give me a thousand roubles and I would not consent to sit here.… Farewell, brothers.”

The cassock slowly moves away and stops again.

“I can’t make up my mind what I am to do,” he mutters. “To stay here by the fire and wait till daybreak.… I am frightened; to go on is dreadful, too. The dead man will haunt me all the way in the darkness.… The Lord has chastised me indeed! Over three hundred miles I have come on foot and nothing happened, and now I am near home and there’s trouble. I can’t go on.…”

“It is dreadful, that is true.”

“I am not afraid of wolves, of thieves, or of darkness, but I am afraid of the dead. I am afraid of them, and that is all about it. Good orthodox brothers, I entreat you on my knees, see me to the village.”

“We’ve been told not to go away from the body.”

“No one will see, brothers. Upon my soul, no one will see! The Lord will reward you a hundredfold! Old man, come with me, I beg! Old man! Why are you silent?”

“He is a bit simple,” says the young man.

“You come with me, friend; I will give you five kopecks.”

“For five kopecks I might,” says the young man, scratching his head, “but I was told not to. If Syoma here, our simpleton, will stay alone, I will take you. Syoma, will you stay here alone?”

“I’ll stay,” the simpleton consents.

“Well, that’s all right, then. Come along!” The young man gets up, and goes with the cassock. A minute later the sound of their steps and their talk dies away. Syoma shuts his eyes and gently dozes. The fire begins to grow dim, and a big black shadow falls on the dead body.

THE COOK'S WEDDING

Grisha, a fat, solemn little person of seven, was standing by the kitchen door listening and peeping through the keyhole. In the kitchen something extraordinary, and in his opinion never seen before, was taking place. A big, thickset, red-haired peasant, with a beard, and a drop of perspiration on his nose, wearing a cabman's full coat, was sitting at the kitchen table on which they chopped the meat and sliced the onions. He was balancing a saucer on the five fingers of his right hand and drinking tea out of it, and crunching sugar so loudly that it sent a shiver down Grisha's back. Aksinya Stepanovna, the old nurse, was sitting on the dirty stool facing him, and she, too, was drinking tea. Her face was grave, though at the same time it beamed with a kind of triumph. Pelageya, the cook, was busy at the stove, and was apparently trying to hide her face. And on her face Grisha saw a regular illumination: it was burning and shifting through every shade of colour, beginning with a crimson purple and ending with a deathly white. She was continually catching hold of knives, forks, bits of wood, and rags with trembling hands, moving, grumbling to herself, making a clatter, but in reality doing nothing. She did not once glance at the table at which they were drinking tea, and to the questions put to her by the nurse she gave jerky, sullen answers without turning her face.

"Help yourself, Danilo Semyonitch," the nurse urged him hospitably. "Why do you keep on with tea and nothing but tea? You should have a drop of vodka!"

And nurse put before the visitor a bottle of vodka and a wineglass, while her face wore a very wily expression.

"I never touch it.… No…" said the cabman, declining. "Don't press me, Aksinya Stepanovna."

"What a man!… A cabman and not drink!… A bachelor can't get on without drinking. Help yourself!"

The cabman looked askance at the bottle, then at nurse's wily face, and his own face assumed an expression no less cunning, as much as to

say, “You won’t catch me, you old witch!”

“I don’t drink; please excuse me. Such a weakness does not do in our calling. A man who works at a trade may drink, for he sits at home, but we cabmen are always in view of the public. Aren’t we? If one goes into a pothouse one finds one’s horse gone; if one takes a drop too much it is worse still; before you know where you are you will fall asleep or slip off the box. That’s where it is.”

“And how much do you make a day, Danilo Semyonitch?”

“That’s according. One day you will have a fare for three roubles, and another day you will come back to the yard without a farthing. The days are very different. Nowadays our business is no good. There are lots and lots of cabmen as you know, hay is dear, and folks are paltry nowadays and always contriving to go by tram. And yet, thank God, I have nothing to complain of. I have plenty to eat and good clothes to wear, and… we could even provide well for another…” (the cabman stole a glance at Pelageya) “if it were to their liking.…”

Grisha did not hear what was said further. His mamma came to the door and sent him to the nursery to learn his lessons.

“Go and learn your lesson. It’s not your business to listen here!”

When Grisha reached the nursery, he put *My Own Book* in front of him, but he did not get on with his reading. All that he had just seen and heard aroused a multitude of questions in his mind.

“The cook’s going to be married,” he thought. “Strange—I don’t understand what people get married for. Mamma was married to papa, Cousin Verotchka to Pavel Andreyitch. But one might be married to papa and Pavel Andreyitch after all: they have gold watch-chains and nice suits, their boots are always polished; but to marry that dreadful cabman with a red nose and felt boots.… Fi! And why is it nurse wants poor Pelageya to be married?”

When the visitor had gone out of the kitchen, Pelageya appeared and began clearing away. Her agitation still persisted. Her face was red and looked scared. She scarcely touched the floor with the broom, and swept every corner five times over. She lingered for a long time in the room where mamma was sitting. She was evidently oppressed by her isolation, and she was longing to express herself, to share her impressions with someone, to open her heart.

“He’s gone,” she muttered, seeing that mamma would not begin the conversation.

“One can see he is a good man,” said mamma, not taking her eyes off her sewing. “Sober and steady.”

“I declare I won’t marry him, mistress!” Pelageya cried suddenly, flushing crimson. “I declare I won’t!”

“Don’t be silly; you are not a child. It’s a serious step; you must think it over thoroughly, it’s no use talking nonsense. Do you like him?”

“What an idea, mistress!” cried Pelageya, abashed. “They say such things that… my goodness….”

“She should say she doesn’t like him!” thought Grisha.

“What an affected creature you are…. Do you like him?”

“But he is old, mistress!”

“Think of something else,” nurse flew out at her from the next room. “He has not reached his fortieth year; and what do you want a young man for? Handsome is as handsome does…. Marry him and that’s all about it!”

“I swear I won’t,” squealed Pelageya.

“You are talking nonsense. What sort of rascal do you want? Anyone else would have bowed down to his feet, and you declare you won’t marry him. You want to be always winking at the postmen and tutors. That tutor that used to come to Grishenka, mistress… she was never tired of making eyes at him. O-o, the shameless hussy!”

“Have you seen this Danilo before?” mamma asked Pelageya.

“How could I have seen him? I set eyes on him today for the first time. Aksinya picked him up and brought him along… the accursed devil…. And where has he come from for my undoing!”

At dinner, when Pelageya was handing the dishes, everyone looked into her face and teased her about the cabman. She turned fearfully red, and went off into a forced giggle.

“It must be shameful to get married,” thought Grisha. “Terribly shameful.”

All the dishes were too salt, and blood oozed from the half-raw chickens, and, to cap it all, plates and knives kept dropping out of Pelageya’s hands during dinner, as though from a shelf that had given way; but no one said a word of blame to her, as they all understood the state of her feelings. Only once papa flicked his table-napkin angrily and said to mamma:

“What do you want to be getting them all married for? What business is it of yours? Let them get married of themselves if they want to.”

After dinner, neighbouring cooks and maidservants kept flitting into the kitchen, and there was the sound of whispering till late evening. How they had scented out the matchmaking, God knows. When Grisha woke in the night he heard his nurse and the cook whispering together in the

nursery. Nurse was talking persuasively, while the cook alternately sobbed and giggled. When he fell asleep after this, Grisha dreamed of Pelageya being carried off by Tchernomor and a witch.

Next day there was a calm. The life of the kitchen went on its accustomed way as though the cabman did not exist. Only from time to time nurse put on her new shawl, assumed a solemn and austere air, and went off somewhere for an hour or two, obviously to conduct negotiations.… Pelageya did not see the cabman, and when his name was mentioned she flushed up and cried:

"May he be thrice damned! As though I should be thinking of him! Tfoo!"

In the evening mamma went into the kitchen, while nurse and Pelageya were zealously mincing something, and said:

"You can marry him, of course—that's your business—but I must tell you, Pelageya, that he cannot live here.… You know I don't like to have anyone sitting in the kitchen. Mind now, remember.… And I can't let you sleep out."

"Goodness knows! What an idea, mistress!" shrieked the cook. "Why do you keep throwing him up at me? Plague take him! He's a regular curse, confound him!…"

Glancing one Sunday morning into the kitchen, Grisha was struck dumb with amazement. The kitchen was crammed full of people. Here were cooks from the whole courtyard, the porter, two policemen, a noncommissioned officer with good-conduct stripes, and the boy Filka.… This Filka was generally hanging about the laundry playing with the dogs; now he was combed and washed, and was holding an icon in a tinfoil setting. Pelageya was standing in the middle of the kitchen in a new cotton dress, with a flower on her head. Beside her stood the cabman. The happy pair were red in the face and perspiring and blinking with embarrassment.

"Well… I fancy it is time," said the noncommissioned officer, after a prolonged silence.

Pelageya's face worked all over and she began blubbering.…

The soldier took a big loaf from the table, stood beside nurse, and began blessing the couple. The cabman went up to the soldier, flopped down on his knees, and gave a smacking kiss on his hand. He did the same before nurse. Pelageya followed him mechanically, and she too bowed down to the ground. At last the outer door was opened, there was a whiff of white mist, and the whole party flocked noisily out of the kitchen into the yard.

“Poor thing, poor thing,” thought Grisha, hearing the sobs of the cook. “Where have they taken her? Why don’t papa and mamma protect her?”

After the wedding there was singing and concertina-playing in the laundry till late evening. Mamma was cross all the evening because nurse smelt of vodka, and owing to the wedding there was no one to heat the samovar. Pelageya had not come back by the time Grisha went to bed.

“The poor thing is crying somewhere in the dark!” he thought. “While the cabman is saying to her ‘shut up!’ ”

Next morning the cook was in the kitchen again. The cabman came in for a minute. He thanked mamma, and glancing sternly at Pelageya, said:

“Will you look after her, madam? Be a father and a mother to her. And you, too, Aksinya Stepanovna, do not forsake her, see that everything is as it should be… without any nonsense.… And also, madam, if you would kindly advance me five roubles of her wages. I have got to buy a new horse-collar.”

Again a problem for Grisha: Pelageya was living in freedom, doing as she liked, and not having to account to anyone for her actions, and all at once, for no sort of reason, a stranger turns up, who has somehow acquired rights over her conduct and her property! Grisha was distressed. He longed passionately, almost to tears, to comfort this victim, as he supposed, of man’s injustice. Picking out the very biggest apple in the storeroom he stole into the kitchen, slipped it into Pelageya’s hand, and darted headlong away.

In a Strange Land

Sunday, midday. A landowner, called Kamyshev, is sitting in his dining room, deliberately eating his lunch at a luxuriously furnished table. Monsieur Champoun, a clean, neat, smoothly-shaven, old Frenchman, is sharing the meal with him. This Champoun had once been a tutor in Kamyshev's household, had taught his children good manners, the correct pronunciation of French, and dancing: afterwards when Kamyshev's children had grown up and become lieutenants, Champoun had become something like a *bonne* of the male sex. The duties of the former tutor were not complicated. He had to be properly dressed, to smell of scent, to listen to Kamyshev's idle babble, to eat and drink and sleep—and apparently that was all. For this he received a room, his board, and an indefinite salary.

Kamyshev eats and as usual babbles at random.

"Damnation!" he says, wiping away the tears that have come into his eyes after a mouthful of ham thickly smeared with mustard. "Ough! It has shot into my head and all my joints. Your French mustard would not do that, you know, if you ate the whole potful."

"Some like the French, some prefer the Russian…" Champoun assents mildly.

"No one likes French mustard except Frenchmen. And a Frenchman will eat anything, whatever you give him—frogs and rats and black beetles… brrr! You don't like that ham, for instance, because it is Russian, but if one were to give you a bit of baked glass and tell you it was French, you would eat it and smack your lips.… To your thinking everything Russian is nasty."

"I don't say that."

"Everything Russian is nasty, but if it's French—o say tray zholee! To your thinking there is no country better than France, but to my mind… Why, what is France, to tell the truth about it? A little bit of land. Our police captain was sent out there, but in a month he asked to be transferred: there was nowhere to turn round! One can drive round the

whole of your France in one day, while here when you drive out of the gate—you can see no end to the land, you can ride on and on…”

“Yes, monsieur, Russia is an immense country.”

“To be sure it is! To your thinking there are no better people than the French. Well-educated, clever people! Civilization! I agree, the French are all well-educated with elegant manners… that is true.… A Frenchman never allows himself to be rude: he hands a lady a chair at the right minute, he doesn’t eat crayfish with his fork, he doesn’t spit on the floor, but… there’s not the same spirit in him! not the spirit in him! I don’t know how to explain it to you but, however one is to express it, there’s nothing in a Frenchman of… something… (the speaker flourishes his fingers)… of something… fanatical. I remember I have read somewhere that all of you have intelligence acquired from books, while we Russians have innate intelligence. If a Russian studies the sciences properly, none of your French professors is a match for him.”

“Perhaps,” says Champoun, as it were reluctantly.

“No, not perhaps, but certainly! It’s no use your frowning, it’s the truth I am speaking. The Russian intelligence is an inventive intelligence. Only of course he is not given a free outlet for it, and he is no hand at boasting. He will invent something—and break it or give it to the children to play with, while your Frenchman will invent some nonsensical thing and make an uproar for all the world to hear it. The other day Iona the coachman carved a little man out of wood, if you pull the little man by a thread he plays unseemly antics. But Iona does not brag of it.… I don’t like Frenchmen as a rule. I am not referring to you, but speaking generally.… They are an immoral people! Outwardly they look like men, but they live like dogs. Take marriage for instance. With us, once you are married, you stick to your wife, and there is no talk about it, but goodness knows how it is with you. The husband is sitting all day long in a café, while his wife fills the house with Frenchmen, and sets to dancing the cancan with them.”

“That’s not true!” Champoun protests, flaring up and unable to restrain himself. “The principle of the family is highly esteemed in France.”

“We know all about that principle! You ought to be ashamed to defend it: one ought to be impartial: a pig is always a pig.… We must thank the Germans for having beaten them.… Yes indeed, God bless them for it.”

“In that case, monsieur, I don’t understand…” says the Frenchman leaping up with flashing eyes, “if you hate the French why do you keep me?”

“What am I to do with you?”

“Let me go, and I will go back to France.”

“Wha-at? But do you suppose they would let you into France now? Why, you are a traitor to your country! At one time Napoleon’s your great man, at another Gambetta.… Who the devil can make you out?”

“Monsieur,” says Champoun in French, spluttering and crushing up his table napkin in his hands, “my worst enemy could not have thought of a greater insult than the outrage you have just done to my feelings! All is over!”

And with a tragic wave of his arm the Frenchman flings his dinner napkin on the table majestically, and walks out of the room with dignity.

Three hours later the table is laid again, and the servants bring in the dinner. Kamyshev sits alone at the table. After the preliminary glass he feels a craving to babble. He wants to chatter, but he has no listener.

“What is Alphonse Ludovikovitch doing?” he asks the footman.

“He is packing his trunk, sir.”

“What a noodle! Lord forgive us!” says Kamyshev, and goes in to the Frenchman.

Champoun is sitting on the floor in his room, and with trembling hands is packing in his trunk his linen, scent bottles, prayer-books, braces, ties.… All his correct figure, his trunk, his bedstead and the table—all have an air of elegance and effeminacy. Great tears are dropping from his big blue eyes into the trunk.

“Where are you off to?” asks Kamyshev, after standing still for a little.

The Frenchman says nothing.

“Do you want to go away?” Kamyshev goes on. “Well, you know, but… I won’t venture to detain you. But what is queer is, how are you going to travel without a passport? I wonder! You know I have lost your passport. I thrust it in somewhere between some papers, and it is lost.… And they are strict about passports among us. Before you have gone three or four miles they pounce upon you.”

Champoun raises his head and looks mistrustfully at Kamyshev.

“Yes.… You will see! They will see from your face you haven’t a passport, and ask at once: Who is that? Alphonse Champoun. We know that Alphonse Champoun. Wouldn’t you like to go under police escort somewhere nearer home!”

“Are you joking?”

“What motive have I for joking? Why should I? Only mind now; it’s a compact, don’t you begin whining then and writing letters. I won’t stir a finger when they lead you by in fetters!”

Champoun jumps up and, pale and wide-eyed, begins pacing up and down the room.

“What are you doing to me?” he says in despair, clutching at his head. “My God! accursed be that hour when the fatal thought of leaving my country entered my head! …”

“Come, come, come… I was joking!” says Kamyshev in a lower tone. “Queer fish he is; he doesn’t understand a joke. One can’t say a word!”

“My dear friend!” shrieks Champoun, reassured by Kamyshev’s tone. “I swear I am devoted to Russia, to you and your children.… To leave you is as bitter to me as death itself! But every word you utter stabs me to the heart!”

“Ah, you queer fish! If I do abuse the French, what reason have you to take offence? You are a queer fish really! You should follow the example of Lazar Isaakitch, my tenant. I call him one thing and another, a Jew, and a scurvy rascal, and I make a pig’s ear out of my coat tail, and catch him by his Jewish curls. He doesn’t take offence.”

“But he is a slave! For a kopeck he is ready to put up with any insult!”

“Come, come, come… that’s enough! Peace and concord!”

Champoun powders his tear-stained face and goes with Kamyshev to the dining room. The first course is eaten in silence, after the second the same performance begins over again, and so Champoun’s sufferings have no end.

Overdoing It

Glyeb Gavrilovitch Smirnov, a land surveyor, arrived at the station of Gnilushki. He had another twenty or thirty miles to drive before he would reach the estate which he had been summoned to survey. (If the driver were not drunk and the horses were not bad, it would hardly be twenty miles, but if the driver had had a drop and his steeds were worn out it would mount up to a good forty.)

"Tell me, please, where can I get post-horses here?" the surveyor asked of the station gendarme.

"What? Post-horses? There's no finding a decent dog for seventy miles round, let alone post-horses.… But where do you want to go?"

"To Dyevkino, General Hohotov's estate."

"Well," yawned the gendarme, "go outside the station, there are sometimes peasants in the yard there, they will take passengers."

The surveyor heaved a sigh and made his way out of the station.

There, after prolonged enquiries, conversations, and hesitations, he found a very sturdy, sullen-looking pockmarked peasant, wearing a tattered grey smock and bark-shoes.

"You have got a queer sort of cart!" said the surveyor, frowning as he clambered into the cart. "There is no making out which is the back and which is the front."

"What is there to make out? Where the horse's tail is, there's the front, and where your honour's sitting, there's the back."

The little mare was young, but thin, with legs planted wide apart and frayed ears. When the driver stood up and lashed her with a whip made of cord, she merely shook her head; when he swore at her and lashed her once more, the cart squeaked and shivered as though in a fever. After the third lash the cart gave a lurch, after the fourth, it moved forward.

"Are we going to drive like this all the way?" asked the surveyor, violently jolted and marvelling at the capacity of Russian drivers for combining a slow tortoise-like pace with a jolting that turns the soul inside out.

“We shall ge-et there!” the peasant reassured him. “The mare is young and frisky.… Only let her get running and then there is no stopping her.… No-ow, cur-sed brute!”

It was dusk by the time the cart drove out of the station. On the surveyor’s right hand stretched a dark frozen plain, endless and boundless. If you drove over it you would certainly get to the other side of beyond. On the horizon, where it vanished and melted into the sky, there was the languid glow of a cold autumn sunset.… On the left of the road, mounds of some sort, that might be last year’s stacks or might be a village, rose up in the gathering darkness. The surveyor could not see what was in front as his whole field of vision on that side was covered by the broad clumsy back of the driver. The air was still, but it was cold and frosty.

“What a wilderness it is here,” thought the surveyor, trying to cover his ears with the collar of his overcoat. “Neither post nor paddock. If, by ill-luck, one were attacked and robbed no one would hear you, whatever uproar you made.… And the driver is not one you could depend on.… Ugh, what a huge back! A child of nature like that has only to move a finger and it would be all up with one! And his ugly face is suspicious and brutal-looking.”

“Hey, my good man!” said the surveyor, “What is your name?”

“Mine? Klim.”

“Well, Klim, what is it like in your parts here? Not dangerous? Any robbers on the road?”

“It is all right, the Lord has spared us.… Who should go robbing on the road?”

“It’s a good thing there are no robbers. But to be ready for anything I have got three revolvers with me,” said the surveyor untruthfully. “And it doesn’t do to trifle with a revolver, you know. One can manage a dozen robbers.…”

It had become quite dark. The cart suddenly began creaking, squeaking, shaking, and, as though unwillingly, turned sharply to the left.

“Where is he taking me to?” the surveyor wondered. “He has been driving straight and now all at once to the left. I shouldn’t wonder if he’ll take me, the rascal, to some den of thieves… and.… Things like that do happen.”

“I say,” he said, addressing the driver, “so you tell me it’s not dangerous here? That’s a pity… I like a fight with robbers.… I am thin and sickly-looking, but I have the strength of a bull.… Once three robbers attacked me and what do you think? I gave one such a dressing

that… that he gave up his soul to God, you understand, and the other two were sent to penal servitude in Siberia. And where I got the strength I can't say.… One grips a strapping fellow of your sort with one hand and… wipes him out."

Klim looked round at the surveyor, wrinkled up his whole face, and lashed his horse.

"Yes…" the surveyor went on. "God forbid anyone should tackle me. The robber would have his bones broken, and, what's more, he would have to answer for it in the police court too.… I know all the judges and the police captains, I am a man in the government, a man of importance. Here I am travelling and the authorities know… they keep a regular watch over me to see no one does me a mischief. There are policemen and village constables stuck behind bushes all along the road.… Sto… sto… stop!" the surveyor bawled suddenly. "Where have you got to? Where are you taking me to?"

"Why, don't you see? It's a forest!"

"It certainly is a forest," thought the surveyor. "I was frightened! But it won't do to betray my feelings.… He has noticed already that I am in a funk. Why is it he has taken to looking round at me so often? He is plotting something for certain.… At first he drove like a snail and now how he is dashing along!"

"I say, Klim, why are you making the horse go like that?"

"I am not making her go. She is racing along of herself.… Once she gets into a run there is no means of stopping her. It's no pleasure to her that her legs are like that."

"You are lying, my man, I see that you are lying. Only I advise you not to drive so fast. Hold your horse in a bit.… Do you hear? Hold her in!"

"What for?"

"Why… why, because four comrades were to drive after me from the station. We must let them catch us up.… They promised to overtake us in this forest. It will be more cheerful in their company.… They are a strong, sturdy set of fellows.… And each of them has got a pistol. Why do you keep looking round and fidgeting as though you were sitting on thorns? eh? I, my good fellow, er… my good fellow… there is no need to look around at me… there is nothing interesting about me.… Except perhaps the revolvers. Well, if you like I will take them out and show you.…"

The surveyor made a pretence of feeling in his pockets and at that moment something happened which he could not have expected with all

his cowardice. Klim suddenly rolled off the cart and ran as fast as he could go into the forest.

“Help!” he roared. “Help! Take the horse and the cart, you devil, only don’t take my life. Help!”

There was the sound of footsteps hurriedly retreating, of twigs snapping—and all was still.… The surveyor had not expected such a denouement. He first stopped the horse and then settled himself more comfortably in the cart and fell to thinking.

“He has run off… he was scared, the fool. Well, what’s to be done now? I can’t go on alone because I don’t know the way; besides they may think I have stolen his horse.… What’s to be done?”

“Klim! Klim,” he cried.

“Klim,” answered the echo.

At the thought that he would have to sit through the whole night in the cold and dark forest and hear nothing but the wolves, the echo, and the snorting of the scraggy mare, the surveyor began to have twinges down his spine as though it were being rasped with a cold file.

“Klimushka,” he shouted. “Dear fellow! Where are you, Klimushka?”

For two hours the surveyor shouted, and it was only after he was quite husky and had resigned himself to spending the night in the forest that a faint breeze wafted the sound of a moan to him.

“Klim, is it you, dear fellow? Let us go on.”

“You’ll mu-ur-der me!”

“But I was joking, my dear man! I swear to God I was joking! As though I had revolvers! I told a lie because I was frightened. For goodness sake let us go on, I am freezing!”

Klim, probably reflecting that a real robber would have vanished long ago with the horse and cart, came out of the forest and went hesitatingly up to his passenger.

“Well, what were you frightened of, stupid? I… I was joking and you were frightened. Get in!”

“God be with you, sir,” Klim muttered as he clambered into the cart, “if I had known I wouldn’t have taken you for a hundred roubles. I almost died of fright.…”

Klim lashed at the little mare. The cart swayed. Klim lashed once more and the cart gave a lurch. After the fourth stroke of the whip when the cart moved forward, the surveyor hid his ears in his collar and sank into thought.

The road and Klim no longer seemed dangerous to him.

Old Age

Uzelkov, an architect with the rank of civil councillor, arrived in his native town, to which he had been invited to restore the church in the cemetery. He had been born in the town, had been at school, had grown up and married in it. But when he got out of the train he scarcely recognized it. Everything was changed.… Eighteen years ago when he had moved to Petersburg the street-boys used to catch marmots, for instance, on the spot where now the station was standing; now when one drove into the chief street, a hotel of four storeys stood facing one; in old days there was an ugly grey fence just there; but nothing—neither fences nor houses—had changed as much as the people. From his enquiries of the hotel waiter Uzelkov learned that more than half of the people he remembered were dead, reduced to poverty, forgotten.

"And do you remember Uzelkov?" he asked the old waiter about himself. "Uzelkov the architect who divorced his wife? He used to have a house in Svirebeyevsky Street… you must remember."

"I don't remember, sir."

"How is it you don't remember? The case made a lot of noise, even the cabmen all knew about it. Think, now! Shapkin the attorney managed my divorce for me, the rascal… the notorious cardsharper, the fellow who got a thrashing at the club.…"

"Ivan Nikolaitch?"

"Yes, yes.… Well, is he alive? Is he dead?"

"Alive, sir, thank God. He is a notary now and has an office. He is very well off. He has two houses in Kirpitchny Street.… His daughter was married the other day."

Uzelkov paced up and down the room, thought a bit, and in his boredom made up his mind to go and see Shapkin at his office. When he walked out of the hotel and sauntered slowly towards Kirpitchny Street it was midday. He found Shapkin at his office and scarcely recognized him. From the once well-made, adroit attorney with a mobile, insolent, and

always drunken face Shapkin had changed into a modest, grey-headed, decrepit old man.

"You don't recognize me, you have forgotten me," began Uzelkov. "I am your old client, Uzelkov."

"Uzelkov, what Uzelkov? Ah!" Shapkin remembered, recognized, and was struck all of a heap. There followed a shower of exclamations, questions, recollections.

"This is a surprise! This is unexpected!" cackled Shapkin. "What can I offer you? Do you care for champagne? Perhaps you would like oysters? My dear fellow, I have had so much from you in my time that I can't offer you anything equal to the occasion.…"

"Please don't put yourself out…" said Uzelkov. "I have no time to spare. I must go at once to the cemetery and examine the church; I have undertaken the restoration of it."

"That's capital! We'll have a snack and a drink and drive together. I have capital horses. I'll take you there and introduce you to the churchwarden; I will arrange it all.… But why is it, my angel, you seem to be afraid of me and hold me at arm's length? Sit a little nearer! There is no need for you to be afraid of me nowadays. He-he!… At one time, it is true, I was a cunning blade, a dog of a fellow… no one dared approach me; but now I am stiller than water and humbler than the grass. I have grown old, I am a family man, I have children. It's time I was dead."

The friends had lunch, had a drink, and with a pair of horses drove out of the town to the cemetery.

"Yes, those were times!" Shapkin recalled as he sat in the sledge. "When you remember them you simply can't believe in them. Do you remember how you divorced your wife? It's nearly twenty years ago, and I dare say you have forgotten it all; but I remember it as though I'd divorced you yesterday. Good Lord, what a lot of worry I had over it! I was a sharp fellow, tricky and cunning, a desperate character.… Sometimes I was burning to tackle some ticklish business, especially if the fee were a good one, as, for instance, in your case. What did you pay me then? Five or six thousand! That was worth taking trouble for, wasn't it? You went off to Petersburg and left the whole thing in my hands to do the best I could, and, though Sofya Mihailovna, your wife, came only of a merchant family, she was proud and dignified. To bribe her to take the guilt on herself was difficult, awfully difficult! I would go to negotiate with her, and as soon as she saw me she called to her maid: 'Masha, didn't I tell you not to admit that scoundrel?' Well, I tried one thing and another.… I wrote her letters and contrived to meet her accidentally—it

was no use! I had to act through a third person. I had a lot of trouble with her for a long time, and she only gave in when you agreed to give her ten thousand.… She couldn't resist ten thousand, she couldn't hold out.… She cried, she spat in my face, but she consented, she took the guilt on herself!"

"I thought it was fifteen thousand she had from me, not ten," said Uzelkov.

"Yes, yes… fifteen—I made a mistake," said Shapkin in confusion. "It's all over and done with, though, it's no use concealing it. I gave her ten and the other five I collared for myself. I deceived you both.… It's all over and done with, it's no use to be ashamed. And indeed, judge for yourself, Boris Petrovitch, weren't you the very person for me to get money out of?… You were a wealthy man and had everything you wanted.… Your marriage was an idle whim, and so was your divorce. You were making a lot of money.… I remember you made a scoop of twenty thousand over one contract. Whom should I have fleeced if not you? And I must own I envied you. If you grabbed anything they took off their caps to you, while they would thrash me for a rouble and slap me in the face at the club.… But there, why recall it? It is high time to forget it."

"Tell me, please, how did Sofya Mihailovna get on afterwards?"

"With her ten thousand? Very badly. God knows what it was—she lost her head, perhaps, or maybe her pride and her conscience tormented her at having sold her honour, or perhaps she loved you; but, do you know, she took to drink.… As soon as she got her money she was off driving about with officers. It was drunkenness, dissipation, debauchery.… When she went to a restaurant with officers she was not content with port or anything light, she must have strong brandy, fiery stuff to stupefy her."

"Yes, she was eccentric.… I had a lot to put up with from her… sometimes she would take offence at something and begin being hysterical.… And what happened afterwards?"

"One week passed and then another.… I was sitting at home, writing something. All at once the door opened and she walked in… drunk. 'Take back your cursed money,' she said, and flung a roll of notes in my face.… So she could not keep it up. I picked up the notes and counted them. It was five hundred short of the ten thousand, so she had only managed to get through five hundred."

"Where did you put the money?"

“It’s all ancient history… there’s no reason to conceal it now.… In my pocket, of course. Why do you look at me like that? Wait a bit for what will come later.… It’s a regular novel, a pathological study. A couple of months later I was going home one night in a nasty drunken condition.… I lighted a candle, and lo and behold! Sofya Mihailovna was sitting on my sofa, and she was drunk, too, and in a frantic state—as wild as though she had run out of Bedlam. ‘Give me back my money,’ she said, ‘I have changed my mind; if I must go to ruin I won’t do it by halves, I’ll have my fling! Be quick, you scoundrel, give me my money!’ A disgraceful scene!”

“And you… gave it her?”

“I gave her, I remember, ten roubles.”

“Oh! How could you?” cried Uzelkov, frowning. “If you couldn’t or wouldn’t have given it her, you might have written to me.… And I didn’t know! I didn’t know!”

“My dear fellow, what use would it have been for me to write, considering that she wrote to you herself when she was lying in the hospital afterwards?”

“Yes, but I was so taken up then with my second marriage. I was in such a whirl that I had no thoughts to spare for letters.… But you were an outsider, you had no antipathy for Sofya… why didn’t you give her a helping hand?…”

“You can’t judge by the standards of today, Boris Petrovitch; that’s how we look at it now, but at the time we thought very differently.… Now maybe I’d give her a thousand roubles, but then even that ten-rouble note I did not give her for nothing. It was a bad business!… We must forget it.… But here we are.…”

The sledge stopped at the cemetery gates. Uzelkov and Shapkin got out of the sledge, went in at the gate, and walked up a long, broad avenue. The bare cherry trees and acacias, the grey crosses and tombstones, were silvered with hoarfrost, every little grain of snow reflected the bright, sunny day. There was the smell there always is in cemeteries, the smell of incense and freshly dug earth.…

“Our cemetery is a pretty one,” said Uzelkov, “quite a garden!”

“Yes, but it is a pity thieves steal the tombstones.… And over there, beyond that iron monument on the right, Sofya Mihailovna is buried. Would you like to see?”

The friends turned to the right and walked through the deep snow to the iron monument.

“Here it is,” said Shapkin, pointing to a little slab of white marble. “A lieutenant put the stone on her grave.”

Uzelkov slowly took off his cap and exposed his bald head to the sun. Shapkin, looking at him, took off his cap too, and another bald patch gleamed in the sunlight. There was the stillness of the tomb all around as though the air, too, were dead. The friends looked at the grave, pondered, and said nothing.

“She sleeps in peace,” said Shapkin, breaking the silence. “It’s nothing to her now that she took the blame on herself and drank brandy. You must own, Boris Petrovitch.…”

“Own what?” Uzelkov asked gloomily.

“Why.… However hateful the past, it was better than this.”

And Shapkin pointed to his grey head.

“I used not to think of the hour of death.… I fancied I could have given death points and won the game if we had had an encounter; but now.… But what’s the good of talking!”

Uzelkov was overcome with melancholy. He suddenly had a passionate longing to weep, as once he had longed for love, and he felt those tears would have tasted sweet and refreshing. A moisture came into his eyes and there was a lump in his throat, but… Shapkin was standing beside him and Uzelkov was ashamed to show weakness before a witness. He turned back abruptly and went into the church.

Only two hours later, after talking to the churchwarden and looking over the church, he seized a moment when Shapkin was in conversation with the priest and hastened away to weep.… He stole up to the grave secretly, furtively, looking round him every minute. The little white slab looked at him pensively, mournfully, and innocently as though a little girl lay under it instead of a dissolute, divorced wife.

“To weep, to weep!” thought Uzelkov.

But the moment for tears had been missed; though the old man blinked his eyes, though he worked up his feelings, the tears did not flow nor the lump come in his throat. After standing for ten minutes, with a gesture of despair, Uzelkov went to look for Shapkin.

SORROW

The turner, Grigory Petrov, who had been known for years past as a splendid craftsman, and at the same time as the most senseless peasant in the Galtchinskoy district, was taking his old woman to the hospital. He had to drive over twenty miles, and it was an awful road. A government post driver could hardly have coped with it, much less an incompetent sluggard like Grigory. A cutting cold wind was blowing straight in his face. Clouds of snowflakes were whirling round and round in all directions, so that one could not tell whether the snow was falling from the sky or rising from the earth. The fields, the telegraph posts, and the forest could not be seen for the fog of snow. And when a particularly violent gust of wind swooped down on Grigory, even the yoke above the horse's head could not be seen. The wretched, feeble little nag crawled slowly along. It took all its strength to drag its legs out of the snow and to tug with its head. The turner was in a hurry. He kept restlessly hopping up and down on the front seat and lashing the horse's back.

"Don't cry, Matryona,…" he muttered. "Have a little patience. Please God we shall reach the hospital, and in a trice it will be the right thing for you.… Pavel Ivanitch will give you some little drops, or tell them to bleed you; or maybe his honor will be pleased to rub you with some sort of spirit—it'll… draw it out of your side. Pavel Ivanitch will do his best. He will shout and stamp about, but he will do his best.… He is a nice gentleman, affable, God give him health! As soon as we get there he will dart out of his room and will begin calling me names. 'How? Why so?' he will cry. 'Why did you not come at the right time? I am not a dog to be hanging about waiting on you devils all day. Why did you not come in the morning? Go away! Get out of my sight. Come again tomorrow.' And I shall say: 'Mr. Doctor! Pavel Ivanitch! Your honor!' Get on, do! plague take you, you devil! Get on!"

The turner lashed his nag, and without looking at the old woman went on muttering to himself:

“‘Your honor! It’s true as before God.… Here’s the Cross for you, I set off almost before it was light. How could I be here in time if the Lord.… The Mother of God… is wroth, and has sent such a snowstorm? Kindly look for yourself.… Even a first-rate horse could not do it, while mine—you can see for yourself—is not a horse but a disgrace.’ And Pavel Ivanitch will frown and shout: ‘We know you! You always find some excuse! Especially you, Grishka; I know you of old! I’ll be bound you have stopped at half a dozen taverns!’ And I shall say: ‘Your honor! am I a criminal or a heathen? My old woman is giving up her soul to God, she is dying, and am I going to run from tavern to tavern! What an idea, upon my word! Plague take them, the taverns!’ Then Pavel Ivanitch will order you to be taken into the hospital, and I shall fall at his feet.… ‘Pavel Ivanitch! Your honor, we thank you most humbly! Forgive us fools and anathemas, don’t be hard on us peasants! We deserve a good kicking, while you graciously put yourself out and mess your feet in the snow!’ And Pavel Ivanitch will give me a look as though he would like to hit me, and will say: ‘You’d much better not be swilling vodka, you fool, but taking pity on your old woman instead of falling at my feet. You want a thrashing!’ ‘You are right there—a thrashing, Pavel Ivanitch, strike me God! But how can we help bowing down at your feet if you are our benefactor, and a real father to us? Your honor! I give you my word,… here as before God,… you may spit in my face if I deceive you: as soon as my Matryona, this same here, is well again and restored to her natural condition, I’ll make anything for your honor that you would like to order! A cigarette-case, if you like, of the best birchwood,… balls for croquet, skittles of the most foreign pattern I can turn.… I will make anything for you! I won’t take a farthing from you. In Moscow they would charge you four roubles for such a cigarette-case, but I won’t take a farthing.’ The doctor will laugh and say: ‘Oh, all right, all right.… I see! But it’s a pity you are a drunkard.…’ I know how to manage the gentry, old girl. There isn’t a gentleman I couldn’t talk to. Only God grant we don’t get off the road. Oh, how it is blowing! One’s eyes are full of snow.”

And the turner went on muttering endlessly. He prattled on mechanically to get a little relief from his depressing feelings. He had plenty of words on his tongue, but the thoughts and questions in his brain were even more numerous. Sorrow had come upon the turner unawares, unlooked-for, and unexpected, and now he could not get over it, could not recover himself. He had lived hitherto in unruffled calm, as though in drunken half-consciousness, knowing neither grief nor joy, and now he

was suddenly aware of a dreadful pain in his heart. The careless idler and drunkard found himself quite suddenly in the position of a busy man, weighed down by anxieties and haste, and even struggling with nature.

The turner remembered that his trouble had begun the evening before. When he had come home yesterday evening, a little drunk as usual, and from long-established habit had begun swearing and shaking his fists, his old woman had looked at her rowdy spouse as she had never looked at him before. Usually, the expression in her aged eyes was that of a martyr, meek like that of a dog frequently beaten and badly fed; this time she had looked at him sternly and immovably, as saints in the holy pictures or dying people look. From that strange, evil look in her eyes the trouble had begun. The turner, stupefied with amazement, borrowed a horse from a neighbor, and now was taking his old woman to the hospital in the hope that, by means of powders and ointments, Pavel Ivanitch would bring back his old woman's habitual expression.

"I say, Matryona,…" the turner muttered, "if Pavel Ivanitch asks you whether I beat you, say, 'Never!' and I never will beat you again. I swear it. And did I ever beat you out of spite? I just beat you without thinking. I am sorry for you. Some men wouldn't trouble, but here I am taking you.… I am doing my best. And the way it snows, the way it snows! Thy Will be done, O Lord! God grant we don't get off the road.… Does your side ache, Matryona, that you don't speak? I ask you, does your side ache?"

It struck him as strange that the snow on his old woman's face was not melting; it was queer that the face itself looked somehow drawn, and had turned a pale gray, dingy waxen hue and had grown grave and solemn.

"You are a fool!" muttered the turner.… "I tell you on my conscience, before God,… and you go and… Well, you are a fool! I have a good mind not to take you to Pavel Ivanitch!"

The turner let the reins go and began thinking. He could not bring himself to look round at his old woman: he was frightened. He was afraid, too, of asking her a question and not getting an answer. At last, to make an end of uncertainty, without looking round he felt his old woman's cold hand. The lifted hand fell like a log.

"She is dead, then! What a business!"

And the turner cried. He was not so much sorry as annoyed. He thought how quickly everything passes in this world! His trouble had hardly begun when the final catastrophe had happened. He had not had time to live with his old woman, to show her he was sorry for her before she died. He had lived with her for forty years, but those forty years had

passed by as it were in a fog. What with drunkenness, quarreling, and poverty, there had been no feeling of life. And, as though to spite him, his old woman died at the very time when he felt he was sorry for her, that he could not live without her, and that he had behaved dreadfully badly to her.

"Why, she used to go the round of the village," he remembered. "I sent her out myself to beg for bread. What a business! She ought to have lived another ten years, the silly thing; as it is I'll be bound she thinks I really was that sort of man.… Holy Mother! but where the devil am I driving? There's no need for a doctor now, but a burial. Turn back!"

Grigory turned back and lashed the horse with all his might. The road grew worse and worse every hour. Now he could not see the yoke at all. Now and then the sledge ran into a young fir tree, a dark object scratched the turner's hands and flashed before his eyes, and the field of vision was white and whirling again.

"To live over again," thought the turner.

He remembered that forty years ago Matryona had been young, handsome, merry, that she had come of a well-to-do family. They had married her to him because they had been attracted by his handicraft. All the essentials for a happy life had been there, but the trouble was that, just as he had got drunk after the wedding and lay sprawling on the stove, so he had gone on without waking up till now. His wedding he remembered, but of what happened after the wedding—for the life of him he could remember nothing, except perhaps that he had drunk, lain on the stove, and quarreled. Forty years had been wasted like that.

The white clouds of snow were beginning little by little to turn gray. It was getting dusk.

"Where am I going?" the turner suddenly bethought him with a start. "I ought to be thinking of the burial, and I am on the way to the hospital.… It as is though I had gone crazy."

Grigory turned round again, and again lashed his horse. The little nag strained its utmost and, with a snort, fell into a little trot. The turner lashed it on the back time after time.… A knocking was audible behind him, and though he did not look round, he knew it was the dead woman's head knocking against the sledge. And the snow kept turning darker and darker, the wind grew colder and more cutting.…

"To live over again!" thought the turner. "I should get a new lathe, take orders,… give the money to my old woman.…"

And then he dropped the reins. He looked for them, tried to pick them up, but could not—his hands would not work.…

“It does not matter,” he thought, “the horse will go of itself, it knows the way. I might have a little sleep now.… Before the funeral or the requiem it would be as well to get a little rest.…”

The turner closed his eyes and dozed. A little later he heard the horse stop; he opened his eyes and saw before him something dark like a hut or a haystack.…

He would have got out of the sledge and found out what it was, but he felt overcome by such inertia that it seemed better to freeze than move, and he sank into a peaceful sleep.

He woke up in a big room with painted walls. Bright sunlight was streaming in at the windows. The turner saw people facing him, and his first feeling was a desire to show himself a respectable man who knew how things should be done.

“A requiem, brothers, for my old woman,” he said. “The priest should be told.…”

“Oh, all right, all right; lie down,” a voice cut him short.

“Pavel Ivanitch!” the turner cried in surprise, seeing the doctor before him. “Your honor, benefactor!”

He wanted to leap up and fall on his knees before the doctor, but felt that his arms and legs would not obey him.

“Your honor, where are my legs, where are my arms!”

“Say goodbye to your arms and legs.… They’ve been frozen off. Come, come!… What are you crying for? You’ve lived your life, and thank God for it! I suppose you have had sixty years of it—that’s enough for you!…”

“I am grieving.… Graciously forgive me! If I could have another five or six years!…”

“What for?”

“The horse isn’t mine, I must give it back.… I must bury my old woman.… How quickly it is all ended in this world! Your honor, Pavel Ivanitch! A cigarette-case of birchwood of the best! I’ll turn you croquet balls.…”

The doctor went out of the ward with a wave of his hand. It was all over with the turner.

Oh! The Public

“Here goes, I’ve done with drinking! Nothing… n-o-thing shall tempt me to it. It’s time to take myself in hand; I must buck up and work… You’re glad to get your salary, so you must do your work honestly, heartily, conscientiously, regardless of sleep and comfort. Chuck taking it easy. You’ve got into the way of taking a salary for nothing, my boy—that’s not the right thing… not the right thing at all.…”

After administering to himself several such lectures Podtyagin, the head ticket collector, begins to feel an irresistible impulse to get to work. It is past one o’clock at night, but in spite of that he wakes the ticket collectors and with them goes up and down the railway carriages, inspecting the tickets.

“T-t-t-ickets… P-p-p-please!” he keeps shouting, briskly snapping the clippers.

Sleepy figures, shrouded in the twilight of the railway carriages, start, shake their heads, and produce their tickets.

“T-t-t-tickets, please!” Podtyagin addresses a second-class passenger, a lean, scraggy-looking man, wrapped up in a fur coat and a rug and surrounded with pillows. “Tickets, please!”

The scraggy-looking man makes no reply. He is buried in sleep. The head ticket-collector touches him on the shoulder and repeats impatiently: “T-t-tickets, p-p-please!”

The passenger starts, opens his eyes, and gazes in alarm at Podtyagin.

“What?… Who?… Eh?”

“You’re asked in plain language: t-t-tickets, p-p-please! If you please!”

“My God!” moans the scraggy-looking man, pulling a woebegone face. “Good Heavens! I’m suffering from rheumatism.… I haven’t slept for three nights! I’ve just taken morphia on purpose to get to sleep, and you… with your tickets! It’s merciless, it’s inhuman! If you knew how hard it is for me to sleep you wouldn’t disturb me for such nonsense.…

It’s cruel, it’s absurd! And what do you want with my ticket! It’s positively stupid!”

Podtyagin considers whether to take offence or not—and decides to take offence.

“Don’t shout here! This is not a tavern!”

“No, in a tavern people are more humane…” coughs the passenger. “Perhaps you’ll let me go to sleep another time! It’s extraordinary: I’ve travelled abroad, all over the place, and no one asked for my ticket there, but here you’re at it again and again, as though the devil were after you.…”

“Well, you’d better go abroad again since you like it so much.”

“It’s stupid, sir! Yes! As though it’s not enough killing the passengers with fumes and stuffiness and draughts, they want to strangle us with red tape, too, damn it all! He must have the ticket! My goodness, what zeal! If it were of any use to the company—but half the passengers are travelling without a ticket!”

“Listen, sir!” cries Podtyagin, flaring up. “If you don’t leave off shouting and disturbing the public, I shall be obliged to put you out at the next station and to draw up a report on the incident!”

“This is revolting!” exclaims “the public,” growing indignant. “Persecuting an invalid! Listen, and have some consideration!”

“But the gentleman himself was abusive!” says Podtyagin, a little scared. “Very well.… I won’t take the ticket… as you like.… Only, of course, as you know very well, it’s my duty to do so.… If it were not my duty, then, of course… You can ask the stationmaster… ask anyone you like.…”

Podtyagin shrugs his shoulders and walks away from the invalid. At first he feels aggrieved and somewhat injured, then, after passing through two or three carriages, he begins to feel a certain uneasiness not unlike the pricking of conscience in his ticket-collector’s bosom.

“There certainly was no need to wake the invalid,” he thinks, “though it was not my fault.… They imagine I did it wantonly, idly. They don’t know that I’m bound in duty… if they don’t believe it, I can bring the stationmaster to them.” A station. The train stops five minutes. Before the third bell, Podtyagin enters the same second-class carriage. Behind him stalks the stationmaster in a red cap.

“This gentleman here,” Podtyagin begins, “declares that I have no right to ask for his ticket and… and is offended at it. I ask you, Mr. Stationmaster, to explain to him.… Do I ask for tickets according to regulation or to please myself? Sir,” Podtyagin addresses the scraggy-

looking man, “sir! you can ask the stationmaster here if you don’t believe me.”

The invalid starts as though he had been stung, opens his eyes, and with a woebegone face sinks back in his seat.

“My God! I have taken another powder and only just dozed off when here he is again… again! I beseech you have some pity on me!”

“You can ask the stationmaster… whether I have the right to demand your ticket or not.”

“This is insufferable! Take your ticket… take it! I’ll pay for five extra if you’ll only let me die in peace! Have you never been ill yourself? Heartless people!”

“This is simply persecution!” A gentleman in military uniform grows indignant. “I can see no other explanation of this persistence.”

“Drop it…” says the stationmaster, frowning and pulling Podtyagin by the sleeve.

Podtyagin shrugs his shoulders and slowly walks after the stationmaster.

“There’s no pleasing them!” he thinks, bewildered. “It was for his sake I brought the stationmaster, that he might understand and be pacified, and he… swears!”

Another station. The train stops ten minutes. Before the second bell, while Podtyagin is standing at the refreshment bar, drinking seltzer water, two gentlemen go up to him, one in the uniform of an engineer, and the other in a military overcoat.

“Look here, ticket-collector!” the engineer begins, addressing Podtyagin. “Your behaviour to that invalid passenger has revolted all who witnessed it. My name is Puzitsky; I am an engineer, and this gentleman is a colonel. If you do not apologize to the passenger, we shall make a complaint to the traffic manager, who is a friend of ours.”

“Gentlemen! Why of course I… why of course you…” Podtyagin is panic-stricken.

“We don’t want explanations. But we warn you, if you don’t apologize, we shall see justice done to him.”

“Certainly I… I’ll apologize, of course… To be sure….”

Half an hour later, Podtyagin having thought of an apologetic phrase which would satisfy the passenger without lowering his own dignity, walks into the carriage. “Sir,” he addresses the invalid. “Listen, sir….”

The invalid starts and leaps up: “What?”

“I… what was it?… You mustn’t be offended….”

“Och! Water…” gasps the invalid, clutching at his heart. “I’d just taken a third dose of morphia, dropped asleep, and… again! Good God! when will this torture cease!”

“I only… you must excuse…”

“Oh!… Put me out at the next station! I can’t stand any more.… I… I am dying.…”

“This is mean, disgusting!” cry the “public,” revolted. “Go away! You shall pay for such persecution. Get away!”

Podtyagin waves his hand in despair, sighs, and walks out of the carriage. He goes to the attendants’ compartment, sits down at the table, exhausted, and complains:

“Oh, the public! There’s no satisfying them! It’s no use working and doing one’s best! One’s driven to drinking and cursing it all.… If you do nothing—they’re angry; if you begin doing your duty, they’re angry too. There’s nothing for it but drink!”

Podtyagin empties a bottle straight off and thinks no more of work, duty, and honesty!

MARI D'ELLE

It was a free night. Natalya Andreyevna Bronin (her married name was Nikitin), the opera singer, is lying in her bedroom, her whole being abandoned to repose. She lies, deliciously drowsy, thinking of her little daughter who lives somewhere far away with her grandmother or aunt.… The child is more precious to her than the public, bouquets, notices in the papers, adorers… and she would be glad to think about her till morning. She is happy, at peace, and all she longs for is not to be prevented from lying undisturbed, dozing and dreaming of her little girl.

All at once the singer starts, and opens her eyes wide: there is a harsh abrupt ring in the entry. Before ten seconds have passed the bell tinkles a second time and a third time. The door is opened noisily and someone walks into the entry stamping his feet like a horse, snorting and puffing with the cold.

"Damn it all, nowhere to hang one's coat!" the singer hears a husky bass voice. "Celebrated singer, look at that! Makes five thousand a year, and can't get a decent hatstand!"

"My husband!" thinks the singer, frowning. "And I believe he has brought one of his friends to stay the night too.… Hateful!"

No more peace. When the loud noise of someone blowing his nose and putting off his goloshes dies away, the singer hears cautious footsteps in her bedroom.… It is her husband, *mari d'elle*, Denis Petrovitch Nikitin. He brings a whiff of cold air and a smell of brandy. For a long while he walks about the bedroom, breathing heavily, and, stumbling against the chairs in the dark, seems to be looking for something.…

"What do you want?" his wife moans, when she is sick of his fussing about. "You have woken me."

"I am looking for the matches, my love. You… you are not asleep then? I have brought you a message.… Greetings from that… what's-his-name?… redheaded fellow who is always sending you bouquets.… Zagvozdkin.… I have just been to see him."

“What did you go to him for?”

“Oh, nothing particular.… We sat and talked and had a drink. Say what you like, Nathalie, I dislike that individual—I dislike him awfully! He is a rare blockhead. He is a wealthy man, a capitalist; he has six hundred thousand, and you would never guess it. Money is no more use to him than a radish to a dog. He does not eat it himself nor give it to others. Money ought to circulate, but he keeps tight hold of it, is afraid to part with it.… What’s the good of capital lying idle? Capital lying idle is no better than grass.”

Mari d’elle gropes his way to the edge of the bed and, puffing, sits down at his wife’s feet.

“Capital lying idle is pernicious,” he goes on. “Why has business gone downhill in Russia? Because there is so much capital lying idle among us; they are afraid to invest it. It’s very different in England.… There are no such queer fish as Zagvozdkin in England, my girl.… There every farthing is in circulation.… Yes.… They don’t keep it locked up in chests there.…”

“Well, that’s all right. I am sleepy.”

“Directly.… Whatever was it I was talking about? Yes.… In these hard times hanging is too good for Zagvozdkin.… He is a fool and a scoundrel.… No better than a fool. If I asked him for a loan without security—why, a child could see that he runs no risk whatever. He doesn’t understand, the ass! For ten thousand he would have got a hundred. In a year he would have another hundred thousand. I asked, I talked… but he wouldn’t give it me, the blockhead.”

“I hope you did not ask him for a loan in my name.”

“H’m.… A queer question.…” *Mari d’elle* is offended. “Anyway he would sooner give me ten thousand than you. You are a woman, and I am a man anyway, a businesslike person. And what a scheme I propose to him! Not a bubble, not some chimera, but a sound thing, substantial! If one could hit on a man who would understand, one might get twenty thousand for the idea alone! Even you would understand if I were to tell you about it. Only you… don’t chatter about it… not a word… but I fancy I have talked to you about it already. Have I talked to you about sausage-skins?”

“M’m… by and by.”

“I believe I have.… Do you see the point of it? Now the provision shops and the sausage-makers get their sausage-skins locally, and pay a high price for them. Well, but if one were to bring sausage-skins from the Caucasus where they are worth nothing, and where they are thrown

away, then… where do you suppose the sausage-makers would buy their skins, here in the slaughterhouses or from me? From me, of course! Why, I shall sell them ten times as cheap! Now let us look at it like this: every year in Petersburg and Moscow and in other centres these same skins would be bought to the… to the sum of five hundred thousand, let us suppose. That's the minimum. Well, and if.…"

"You can tell me tomorrow… later on.…"

"Yes, that's true. You are sleepy, *pardon*, I am just going… say what you like, but with capital you can do good business everywhere, wherever you go.… With capital even out of cigarette ends one may make a million.… Take your theatrical business now. Why, for example, did Lentovsky come to grief? It's very simple. He did not go the right way to work from the very first. He had no capital and he went headlong to the dogs.… He ought first to have secured his capital, and then to have gone slowly and cautiously.… Nowadays, one can easily make money by a theatre, whether it is a private one or a people's one.… If one produces the right plays, charges a low price for admission, and hits the public fancy, one may put a hundred thousand in one's pocket the first year.… You don't understand, but I am talking sense.… You see you are fond of hoarding capital; you are no better than that fool Zagvozdkin, you heap it up and don't know what for.… You won't listen, you don't want to.… If you were to put it into circulation, you wouldn't have to be rushing all over the place.… You see for a private theatre, five thousand would be enough for a beginning.… Not like Lentovsky, of course, but on a modest scale in a small way. I have got a manager already, I have looked at a suitable building.… It's only the money I haven't got.… If only you understood things you would have parted with your five percents… your Preference shares.…"

"No, *merci*.… You have fleeced me enough already.… Let me alone, I have been punished already.…"

"If you are going to argue like a woman, then of course…" sighs Nikitin, getting up. "Of course.…"

"Let me alone.… Come, go away and don't keep me awake.… I am sick of listening to your nonsense."

"H'm.… To be sure… of course! Fleeced… plundered.… What we give we remember, but we don't remember what we take."

"I have never taken anything from you."

"Is that so? But when we weren't a celebrated singer, at whose expense did we live then? And who, allow me to ask, lifted you out of beggary and secured your happiness? Don't you remember that?"

“Come, go to bed. Go along and sleep it off.”

“Do you mean to say you think I am drunk?… if I am so low in the eyes of such a grand lady… I can go away altogether.”

“Do. A good thing too.”

“I will, too. I have humbled myself enough. And I will go.”

“Oh, my God! Oh, do go, then! I shall be delighted!”

“Very well, we shall see.”

Nikitin mutters something to himself, and, stumbling over the chairs, goes out of the bedroom. Then sounds reach her from the entry of whispering, the shuffling of goloshes and a door being shut. *Mari d’elle* has taken offence in earnest and gone out.

“Thank God, he has gone!” thinks the singer. “Now I can sleep.”

And as she falls asleep she thinks of her *mari d’elle*, what sort of a man he is, and how this affliction has come upon her. At one time he used to live at Tchernigov, and had a situation there as a bookkeeper. As an ordinary obscure individual and not the *mari d’elle*, he had been quite endurable: he used to go to his work and take his salary, and all his whims and projects went no further than a new guitar, fashionable trousers, and an amber cigarette-holder. Since he had become “the husband of a celebrity” he was completely transformed. The singer remembered that when first she told him she was going on the stage he had made a fuss, been indignant, complained to her parents, turned her out of the house. She had been obliged to go on the stage without his permission. Afterwards, when he learned from the papers and from various people that she was earning big sums, he had “forgiven her,” abandoned bookkeeping, and become her hanger-on. The singer was overcome with amazement when she looked at her hanger-on: when and where had he managed to pick up new tastes, polish, and airs and graces? Where had he learned the taste of oysters and of different Burgundies? Who had taught him to dress and do his hair in the fashion and call her “Nathalie” instead of Natasha?

“It’s strange,” thinks the singer. “In old days he used to get his salary and put it away, but now a hundred roubles a day is not enough for him. In old days he was afraid to talk before schoolboys for fear of saying something silly, and now he is overfamiliar even with princes… wretched, contemptible little creature!”

But then the singer starts again; again there is the clang of the bell in the entry. The housemaid, scolding and angrily flopping with her slippers, goes to open the door. Again someone comes in and stamps like a horse.

“He has come back!” thinks the singer. “When shall I be left in peace? It’s revolting!” She is overcome by fury.

“Wait a bit.… I’ll teach you to get up these farces! You shall go away. I’ll make you go away!”

The singer leaps up and runs barefoot into the little drawing room where her *mari* usually sleeps. She comes at the moment when he is undressing, and carefully folding his clothes on a chair.

“You went away!” she says, looking at him with bright eyes full of hatred. “What did you come back for?”

Nikitin remains silent, and merely sniffs.

“You went away! Kindly take yourself off this very minute! This very minute! Do you hear?”

Mari d’elle coughs and, without looking at his wife, takes off his braces.

“If you don’t go away, you insolent creature, I shall go,” the singer goes on, stamping her bare foot, and looking at him with flashing eyes. “I shall go! Do you hear, insolent… worthless wretch, flunkey, out you go!”

“You might have some shame before outsiders,” mutters her husband.…

The singer looks round and only then sees an unfamiliar countenance that looks like an actor’s.… The countenance, seeing the singer’s uncovered shoulders and bare feet, shows signs of embarrassment, and looks ready to sink through the floor.

“Let me introduce…” mutters Nikitin, “Bezbozhnikov, a provincial manager.”

The singer utters a shriek, and runs off into her bedroom.

“There, you see…” says *mari d’elle*, as he stretches himself on the sofa, “it was all honey just now… my love, my dear, my darling, kisses and embraces… but as soon as money is touched upon, then.… As you see… money is the great thing.… Good night!”

A minute later there is a snore.

THE LOOKING-GLASS

New Year’s Eve. Nellie, the daughter of a landowner and general, a young and pretty girl, dreaming day and night of being married, was sitting in her room, gazing with exhausted, half-closed eyes into the looking-glass. She was pale, tense, and as motionless as the looking-glass.

The nonexistent but apparent vista of a long, narrow corridor with endless rows of candles, the reflection of her face, her hands, of the frame—all this was already clouded in mist and merged into a boundless grey sea. The sea was undulating, gleaming and now and then flaring crimson.…

Looking at Nellie’s motionless eyes and parted lips, one could hardly say whether she was asleep or awake, but nevertheless she was seeing. At first she saw only the smile and soft, charming expression of someone’s eyes, then against the shifting grey background there gradually appeared the outlines of a head, a face, eyebrows, beard. It was he, the destined one, the object of long dreams and hopes. The destined one was for Nellie everything, the significance of life, personal happiness, career, fate. Outside him, as on the grey background of the looking-glass, all was dark, empty, meaningless. And so it was not strange that, seeing before her a handsome, gently smiling face, she was conscious of bliss, of an unutterably sweet dream that could not be expressed in speech or on paper. Then she heard his voice, saw herself living under the same roof with him, her life merged into his. Months and years flew by against the grey background. And Nellie saw her future distinctly in all its details.

Picture followed picture against the grey background. Now Nellie saw herself one winter night knocking at the door of Stepan Lukitch, the district doctor. The old dog hoarsely and lazily barked behind the gate. The doctor’s windows were in darkness. All was silence.

“For God’s sake, for God’s sake!” whispered Nellie.

But at last the garden gate creaked and Nellie saw the doctor’s cook.

“Is the doctor at home?”

“His honour’s asleep,” whispered the cook into her sleeve, as though afraid of waking her master.

“He’s only just got home from his fever patients, and gave orders he was not to be waked.”

But Nellie scarcely heard the cook. Thrusting her aside, she rushed headlong into the doctor’s house. Running through some dark and stuffy rooms, upsetting two or three chairs, she at last reached the doctor’s bedroom. Stepan Lukitch was lying on his bed, dressed, but without his coat, and with pouting lips was breathing into his open hand. A little night-light glimmered faintly beside him. Without uttering a word Nellie sat down and began to cry. She wept bitterly, shaking all over.

“My husband is ill!” she sobbed out. Stepan Lukitch was silent. He slowly sat up, propped his head on his hand, and looked at his visitor with fixed, sleepy eyes. “My husband is ill!” Nellie continued, restraining her sobs. “For mercy’s sake come quickly. Make haste.… Make haste!”

“Eh?” growled the doctor, blowing into his hand.

“Come! Come this very minute! Or… it’s terrible to think! For mercy’s sake!”

And pale, exhausted Nellie, gasping and swallowing her tears, began describing to the doctor her husband’s illness, her unutterable terror. Her sufferings would have touched the heart of a stone, but the doctor looked at her, blew into his open hand, and—not a movement.

“I’ll come tomorrow!” he muttered.

“That’s impossible!” cried Nellie. “I know my husband has typhus! At once… this very minute you are needed!”

“I… er… have only just come in,” muttered the doctor. “For the last three days I’ve been away, seeing typhus patients, and I’m exhausted and ill myself.… I simply can’t! Absolutely! I’ve caught it myself! There!”

And the doctor thrust before her eyes a clinical thermometer.

“My temperature is nearly forty.… I absolutely can’t. I can scarcely sit up. Excuse me. I’ll lie down.…”

The doctor lay down.

“But I implore you, doctor,” Nellie moaned in despair. “I beseech you! Help me, for mercy’s sake! Make a great effort and come! I will repay you, doctor!”

“Oh, dear!… Why, I have told you already. Ah!”

Nellie leapt up and walked nervously up and down the bedroom. She longed to explain to the doctor, to bring him to reason.… She thought if

only he knew how dear her husband was to her and how unhappy she was, he would forget his exhaustion and his illness. But how could she be eloquent enough?

"Go to the Zemstvo doctor," she heard Stepan Lukitch's voice.

"That's impossible! He lives more than twenty miles from here, and time is precious. And the horses can't stand it. It is thirty miles from us to you, and as much from here to the Zemstvo doctor. No, it's impossible! Come along, Stepan Lukitch. I ask of you an heroic deed. Come, perform that heroic deed! Have pity on us!"

"It's beyond everything.… I'm in a fever… my head's in a whirl… and she won't understand! Leave me alone!"

"But you are in duty bound to come! You cannot refuse to come! It's egoism! A man is bound to sacrifice his life for his neighbour, and you… you refuse to come! I will summon you before the Court."

Nellie felt that she was uttering a false and undeserved insult, but for her husband's sake she was capable of forgetting logic, tact, sympathy for others.… In reply to her threats, the doctor greedily gulped a glass of cold water. Nellie fell to entreating and imploring like the very lowest beggar.… At last the doctor gave way. He slowly got up, puffing and panting, looking for his coat.

"Here it is!" cried Nellie, helping him. "Let me put it on to you. Come along! I will repay you.… All my life I shall be grateful to you.…"

But what agony! After putting on his coat the doctor lay down again. Nellie got him up and dragged him to the hall. Then there was an agonizing to-do over his goloshes, his overcoat.… His cap was lost.… But at last Nellie was in the carriage with the doctor. Now they had only to drive thirty miles and her husband would have a doctor's help. The earth was wrapped in darkness. One could not see one's hand before one's face.… A cold winter wind was blowing. There were frozen lumps under their wheels. The coachman was continually stopping and wondering which road to take.

Nellie and the doctor sat silent all the way. It was fearfully jolting, but they felt neither the cold nor the jolts.

"Get on, get on!" Nellie implored the driver.

At five in the morning the exhausted horses drove into the yard. Nellie saw the familiar gates, the well with the crane, the long row of stables and barns. At last she was at home.

"Wait a moment, I will be back directly," she said to Stepan Lukitch, making him sit down on the sofa in the dining room. "Sit still and wait a little, and I'll see how he is going on."

On her return from her husband, Nellie found the doctor lying down. He was lying on the sofa and muttering.

"Doctor, please!… doctor!"

"Eh? Ask Domna!" muttered Stepan Lukitch.

"What?"

"They said at the meeting… Vlassov said… Who?… what?"

And to her horror Nellie saw that the doctor was as delirious as her husband. What was to be done?

"I must go for the Zemstvo doctor," she decided.

Then again there followed darkness, a cutting cold wind, lumps of frozen earth. She was suffering in body and in soul, and delusive nature has no arts, no deceptions to compensate these sufferings.…

Then she saw against the grey background how her husband every spring was in straits for money to pay the interest for the mortgage to the bank. He could not sleep, she could not sleep, and both racked their brains till their heads ached, thinking how to avoid being visited by the clerk of the Court.

She saw her children: the everlasting apprehension of colds, scarlet fever, diphtheria, bad marks at school, separation. Out of a brood of five or six one was sure to die.

The grey background was not untouched by death. That might well be. A husband and wife cannot die simultaneously. Whatever happened one must bury the other. And Nellie saw her husband dying. This terrible event presented itself to her in every detail. She saw the coffin, the candles, the deacon, and even the footmarks in the hall made by the undertaker.

"Why is it, what is it for?" she asked, looking blankly at her husband's face.

And all the previous life with her husband seemed to her a stupid prelude to this.

Something fell from Nellie's hand and knocked on the floor. She started, jumped up, and opened her eyes wide. One looking-glass she saw lying at her feet. The other was standing as before on the table.

She looked into the looking-glass and saw a pale, tear-stained face. There was no grey background now.

"I must have fallen asleep," she thought with a sigh of relief.

ART

A gloomy winter morning.

On the smooth and glittering surface of the river Bystryanka, sprinkled here and there with snow, stand two peasants, scrubby little Seryozhka and the church beadle, Matvey. Seryozhka, a short-legged, ragged, mangy-looking fellow of thirty, stares angrily at the ice. Tufts of wool hang from his shaggy sheepskin like a mangy dog. In his hands he holds a compass made of two pointed sticks. Matvey, a fine-looking old man in a new sheepskin and high felt boots, looks with mild blue eyes upwards where on the high sloping bank a village nestles picturesquely. In his hands there is a heavy crowbar.

"Well, are we going to stand like this till evening with our arms folded?" says Seryozhka, breaking the silence and turning his angry eyes on Matvey. "Have you come here to stand about, old fool, or to work?"

"Well, you… er… show me…" Matvey mutters, blinking mildly.

"Show you.… It's always me: me to show you, and me to do it. They have no sense of their own! Mark it out with the compasses, that's what's wanted! You can't break the ice without marking it out. Mark it! Take the compass."

Matvey takes the compasses from Seryozhka's hands, and, shuffling heavily on the same spot and jerking with his elbows in all directions, he begins awkwardly trying to describe a circle on the ice. Seryozhka screws up his eyes contemptuously and obviously enjoys his awkwardness and incompetence.

"Eh-eh-eh!" he mutters angrily. "Even that you can't do! The fact is you are a stupid peasant, a wooden-head! You ought to be grazing geese and not making a Jordan! Give the compasses here! Give them here, I say!"

Seryozhka snatches the compasses out of the hands of the perspiring Matvey, and in an instant, jauntily twirling round on one heel, he describes a circle on the ice. The outline of the new Jordan is ready now, all that is left to do is to break the ice…

But before proceeding to the work Seryozhka spends a long time in airs and graces, whims and reproaches…

"I am not obliged to work for you! You are employed in the church, you do it!"

He obviously enjoys the peculiar position in which he has been placed by the fate that has bestowed on him the rare talent of surprising the whole parish once a year by his art. Poor mild Matvey has to listen to many venomous and contemptuous words from him. Seryozhka sets to work with vexation, with anger. He is lazy. He has hardly described the circle when he is already itching to go up to the village to drink tea, lounge about, and babble…

"I'll be back directly," he says, lighting his cigarette, "and meanwhile you had better bring something to sit on and sweep up, instead of standing there counting the crows."

Matvey is left alone. The air is grey and harsh but still. The white church peeps out genially from behind the huts scattered on the river bank. Jackdaws are incessantly circling round its golden crosses. On one side of the village where the river bank breaks off and is steep a hobbled horse is standing at the very edge, motionless as a stone, probably asleep or deep in thought.

Matvey, too, stands motionless as a statue, waiting patiently. The dreamily brooding look of the river, the circling of the jackdaws, and the sight of the horse make him drowsy. One hour passes, a second, and still Seryozhka does not come. The river has long been swept and a box brought to sit on, but the drunken fellow does not appear. Matvey waits and merely yawns. The feeling of boredom is one of which he knows nothing. If he were told to stand on the river for a day, a month, or a year he would stand there.

At last Seryozhka comes into sight from behind the huts. He walks with a lurching gait, scarcely moving. He is too lazy to go the long way round, and he comes not by the road, but prefers a shortcut in a straight line down the bank, and sticks in the snow, hangs on to the bushes, slides on his back as he comes—and all this slowly, with pauses.

"What are you about?" he cries, falling on Matvey at once. "Why are you standing there doing nothing! When are you going to break the ice?"

Matvey crosses himself, takes the crowbar in both hands, and begins breaking the ice, carefully keeping to the circle that has been drawn. Seryozhka sits down on the box and watches the heavy clumsy movements of his assistant.

“Easy at the edges! Easy there!” he commands. “If you can’t do it properly, you shouldn’t undertake it, once you have undertaken it you should do it. You!”

A crowd collects on the top of the bank. At the sight of the spectators Seryozhka becomes even more excited.

“I declare I am not going to do it…” he says, lighting a stinking cigarette and spitting on the ground. “I should like to see how you get on without me. Last year at Kostyukovo, Styopka Gulkov undertook to make a Jordan as I do. And what did it amount to—it was a laughingstock. The Kostyukovo folks came to ours—crowds and crowds of them! The people flocked from all the villages.”

“Because except for ours there is nowhere a proper Jordan…”

“Work, there is no time for talking.… Yes, old man… you won’t find another Jordan like it in the whole province. The soldiers say you would look in vain, they are not so good even in the towns. Easy, easy!”

Matvey puffs and groans. The work is not easy. The ice is firm and thick; and he has to break it and at once take the pieces away that the open space may not be blocked up.

But, hard as the work is and senseless as Seryozhka’s commands are, by three o’clock there is a large circle of dark water in the Bystryanka.

“It was better last year,” says Seryozhka angrily. “You can’t do even that! Ah, dummy! To keep such fools in the temple of God! Go and bring a board to make the pegs! Bring the ring, you crow! And er… get some bread somewhere… and some cucumbers, or something.”

Matvey goes off and soon afterwards comes back, carrying on his shoulders an immense wooden ring which had been painted in previous years in patterns of various colours. In the centre of the ring is a red cross, at the circumference holes for the pegs. Seryozhka takes the ring and covers the hole in the ice with it.

“Just right… it fits.… We have only to renew the paint and it will be first-rate.… Come, why are you standing still? Make the lectern. Or—er—go and get logs to make the cross…”

Matvey, who has not tasted food or drink all day, trudges up the hill again. Lazy as Seryozhka is, he makes the pegs with his own hands. He knows that those pegs have a miraculous power: whoever gets hold of a peg after the blessing of the water will be lucky for the whole year. Such work is really worth doing.

But the real work begins the following day. Then Seryozhka displays himself before the ignorant Matvey in all the greatness of his talent. There is no end to his babble, his faultfinding, his whims and fancies. If

Matvey nails two big pieces of wood to make a cross, he is dissatisfied and tells him to do it again. If Matvey stands still, Seryozhka asks him angrily why he does not go; if he moves, Seryozhka shouts to him not to go away but to do his work. He is not satisfied with his tools, with the weather, or with his own talent; nothing pleases him.

Matvey saws out a great piece of ice for a lectern.

"Why have you broken off the corner?" cries Seryozhka, and glares at him furiously. "Why have you broken off the corner? I ask you."

"Forgive me, for Christ's sake."

"Do it over again!"

Matvey saws again… and there is no end to his sufferings. A lectern is to stand by the hole in the ice that is covered by the painted ring; on the lectern is to be carved the cross and the open gospel. But that is not all. Behind the lectern there is to be a high cross to be seen by all the crowd and to glitter in the sun as though sprinkled with diamonds and rubies. On the cross is to be a dove carved out of ice. The path from the church to the Jordan is to be strewn with branches of fir and juniper. All this is their task.

First of all Seryozhka sets to work on the lectern. He works with a file, a chisel, and an awl. He is perfectly successful in the cross on the lectern, the gospel, and the drapery that hangs down from the lectern. Then he begins on the dove. While he is trying to carve an expression of meekness and humility on the face of the dove, Matvey, lumbering about like a bear, is coating with ice the cross he has made of wood. He takes the cross and dips it in the hole. Waiting till the water has frozen on the cross he dips it in a second time, and so on till the cross is covered with a thick layer of ice. It is a difficult job, calling for a great deal of strength and patience.

But now the delicate work is finished. Seryozhka races about the village like one possessed. He swears and vows he will go at once to the river and smash all his work. He is looking for suitable paints.

His pockets are full of ochre, dark blue, red lead, and verdigris; without paying a farthing he rushes headlong from one shop to another. The shop is next door to the tavern. Here he has a drink; with a wave of his hand he darts off without paying. At one hut he gets beetroot leaves, at another an onion skin, out of which he makes a yellow colour. He swears, shoves, threatens, and not a soul murmurs! They all smile at him, they sympathise with him, call him Sergey Nikititch; they all feel that his art is not his personal affair but something that concerns them all, the whole people. One creates, the others help him. Seryozhka in himself is a

nonentity, a sluggard, a drunkard, and a wastrel, but when he has his red lead or compasses in his hand he is at once something higher, a servant of God.

Epiphany morning comes. The precincts of the church and both banks of the river for a long distance are swarming with people. Everything that makes up the Jordan is scrupulously concealed under new mats. Seryozhka is meekly moving about near the mats, trying to control his emotion. He sees thousands of people. There are many here from other parishes; these people have come many a mile on foot through the frost and the snow merely to see his celebrated Jordan. Matvey, who had finished his coarse, rough work, is by now back in the church, there is no sight, no sound of him; he is already forgotten.… The weather is lovely.… There is not a cloud in the sky. The sunshine is dazzling.

The church bells ring out on the hill… Thousands of heads are bared, thousands of hands are moving, there are thousands of signs of the cross!

And Seryozhka does not know what to do with himself for impatience. But now they are ringing the bells for the Sacrament; then half an hour later a certain agitation is perceptible in the belfry and among the people. Banners are borne out of the church one after the other, while the bells peal in joyous haste. Seryozhka, trembling, pulls away the mat… and the people behold something extraordinary. The lectern, the wooden ring, the pegs, and the cross in the ice are iridescent with thousands of colors. The cross and the dove glitter so dazzlingly that it hurts the eyes to look at them. Merciful God, how fine it is! A murmur of wonder and delight runs through the crowd; the bells peal more loudly still, the day grows brighter; the banners oscillate and move over the crowd as over the waves. The procession, glittering with the settings of the icons and the vestments of the clergy, comes slowly down the road and turns towards the Jordan. Hands are waved to the belfry for the ringing to cease, and the blessing of the water begins. The priests conduct the service slowly, deliberately, evidently trying to prolong the ceremony and the joy of praying all gathered together. There is perfect stillness.

But now they plunge the cross in, and the air echoes with an extraordinary din. Guns are fired, the bells peal furiously, loud exclamations of delight, shouts, and a rush to get the pegs. Seryozhka listens to this uproar, sees thousands of eyes fixed upon him, and the lazy fellow’s soul is filled with a sense of glory and triumph.

A Blunder

Ilya Sergeitch Peplov and his wife Kleopatra Petrovna were standing at the door, listening greedily. On the other side in the little drawing room a love scene was apparently taking place between two persons: their daughter Natashenka and a teacher of the district school, called Shchupkin.

“He’s rising!” whispered Peplov, quivering with impatience and rubbing his hands. “Now, Kleopatra, mind; as soon as they begin talking of their feelings, take down the icon from the wall and we’ll go in and bless them.… We’ll catch him.… A blessing with an icon is sacred and binding… He couldn’t get out of it, if he brought it into court.”

On the other side of the door this was the conversation:

“Don’t go on like that!” said Shchupkin, striking a match against his checked trousers. “I never wrote you any letters!”

“I like that! As though I didn’t know your writing!” giggled the girl with an affected shriek, continually peeping at herself in the glass. “I knew it at once! And what a queer man you are! You are a writing master, and you write like a spider! How can you teach writing if you write so badly yourself?”

“H’m!… That means nothing. The great thing in writing lessons is not the hand one writes, but keeping the boys in order. You hit one on the head with a ruler, make another kneel down.… Besides, there’s nothing in handwriting! Nekrassov was an author, but his handwriting’s a disgrace, there’s a specimen of it in his collected works.”

“You are not Nekrassov.…” (A sigh). “I should love to marry an author. He’d always be writing poems to me.”

“I can write you a poem, too, if you like.”

“What can you write about?”

“Love—passion—your eyes. You’ll be crazy when you read it. It would draw a tear from a stone! And if I write you a real poem, will you let me kiss your hand?”

“That’s nothing much! You can kiss it now if you like.”

Shchupkin jumped up, and making sheepish eyes, bent over the fat little hand that smelt of egg soap.

“Take down the icon,” Peplov whispered in a fluster, pale with excitement, and buttoning his coat as he prodded his wife with his elbow. “Come along, now!”

And without a second’s delay Peplov flung open the door.

“Children,” he muttered, lifting up his arms and blinking tearfully, “the Lord bless you, my children. May you live—be fruitful—and multiply.”

“And—and I bless you, too,” the mamma brought out, crying with happiness. “May you be happy, my dear ones! Oh, you are taking from me my only treasure!” she said to Shchupkin. “Love my girl, be good to her.…”

Shchupkin’s mouth fell open with amazement and alarm. The parents’ attack was so bold and unexpected that he could not utter a single word.

“I’m in for it! I’m spliced!” he thought, going limp with horror. “It’s all over with you now, my boy! There’s no escape!”

And he bowed his head submissively, as though to say, “Take me, I’m vanquished.”

“Ble-blessings on you,” the papa went on, and he, too, shed tears. “Natashenka, my daughter, stand by his side. Kleopatra, give me the icon.”

But at this point the father suddenly left off weeping, and his face was contorted with anger.

“You ninny!” he said angrily to his wife. “You are an idiot! Is that the icon?”

“Ach, saints alive!”

What had happened? The writing master raised himself and saw that he was saved; in her flutter the mamma had snatched from the wall the portrait of Lazhetchnikov, the author, in mistake for the icon. Old Peplov and his wife stood disconcerted in the middle of the room, holding the portrait aloft, not knowing what to do or what to say. The writing master took advantage of the general confusion and slipped away.

CHILDREN

Papa and mamma and Aunt Nadya are not at home. They have gone to a christening party at the house of that old officer who rides on a little grey horse. While waiting for them to come home, Grisha, Anya, Alyosha, Sonya, and the cook's son, Andrey, are sitting at the table in the dining room, playing at loto. To tell the truth, it is bedtime, but how can one go to sleep without hearing from mamma what the baby was like at the christening, and what they had for supper? The table, lighted by a hanging lamp, is dotted with numbers, nutshells, scraps of paper, and little bits of glass. Two cards lie in front of each player, and a heap of bits of glass for covering the numbers. In the middle of the table is a white saucer with five kopecks in it. Beside the saucer, a half-eaten apple, a pair of scissors, and a plate on which they have been told to put their nutshells. The children are playing for money. The stake is a kopeck. The rule is: if anyone cheats, he is turned out at once. There is no one in the dining room but the players, and nurse, Agafya Ivanovna, is in the kitchen, showing the cook how to cut a pattern, while their elder brother, Vasya, a schoolboy in the fifth class, is lying on the sofa in the drawing room, feeling bored.

They are playing with zest. The greatest excitement is expressed on the face of Grisha. He is a small boy of nine, with a head cropped so that the bare skin shows through, chubby cheeks, and thick lips like a negro's. He is already in the preparatory class, and so is regarded as grown up, and the cleverest. He is playing entirely for the sake of the money. If there had been no kopecks in the saucer, he would have been asleep long ago. His brown eyes stray uneasily and jealously over the other players' cards. The fear that he may not win, envy, and the financial combinations of which his cropped head is full, will not let him sit still and concentrate his mind. He fidgets as though he were sitting on thorns. When he wins, he snatches up the money greedily, and instantly puts it in his pocket. His sister, Anya, a girl of eight, with a sharp chin and clever shining eyes, is also afraid that someone else may win. She

flushes and turns pale, and watches the players keenly. The kopecks do not interest her. Success in the game is for her a question of vanity. The other sister, Sonya, a child of six with a curly head, and a complexion such as is seen only in very healthy children, expensive dolls, and the faces on bonbon boxes, is playing loto for the process of the game itself. There is bliss all over her face. Whoever wins, she laughs and claps her hands. Alyosha, a chubby, spherical little figure, gasps, breathes hard through his nose, and stares open-eyed at the cards. He is moved neither by covetousness nor vanity. So long as he is not driven out of the room, or sent to bed, he is thankful. He looks phlegmatic, but at heart he is rather a little beast. He is not there so much for the sake of the loto, as for the sake of the misunderstandings which are inevitable in the game. He is greatly delighted if one hits another, or calls him names. He ought to have run off somewhere long ago, but he won't leave the table for a minute, for fear they should steal his counters or his kopecks. As he can only count the units and numbers which end in nought, Anya covers his numbers for him. The fifth player, the cook's son, Andrey, a dark-skinned and sickly looking boy in a cotton shirt, with a copper cross on his breast, stands motionless, looking dreamily at the numbers. He takes no interest in winning, or in the success of the others, because he is entirely engrossed by the arithmetic of the game, and its far from complex theory; "How many numbers there are in the world," he is thinking, "and how is it they don't get mixed up?"

They all shout out the numbers in turn, except Sonya and Alyosha. To vary the monotony, they have invented in the course of time a number of synonyms and comic nicknames. Seven, for instance, is called the "ovenrake," eleven the "sticks," seventy-seven "Semyon Semyonitch," ninety "grandfather," and so on. The game is going merrily.

"Thirty-two," cries Grisha, drawing the little yellow cylinders out of his father's cap. "Seventeen! Ovenrake! Twenty-eight! Lay them straight.…"

Anya sees that Andrey has let twenty-eight slip. At any other time she would have pointed it out to him, but now when her vanity lies in the saucer with the kopecks, she is triumphant.

"Twenty-three!" Grisha goes on, "Semyon Semyonitch! Nine!"

"A beetle, a beetle," cries Sonya, pointing to a beetle running across the table. "Aie!"

"Don't kill it," says Alyosha, in his deep bass, "perhaps it's got children.…"

Sonya follows the black beetle with her eyes and wonders about its children: what tiny little beetles they must be!

“Forty-three! One!” Grisha goes on, unhappy at the thought that Anya has already made two fours. “Six!”

“Game! I have got the game!” cries Sonya, rolling her eyes coquettishly and giggling.

The players’ countenances lengthen.

“Must make sure!” says Grisha, looking with hatred at Sonya.

Exercising his rights as a big boy, and the cleverest, Grisha takes upon himself to decide. What he wants, that they do. Sonya’s reckoning is slowly and carefully verified, and to the great regret of her fellow players, it appears that she has not cheated. Another game is begun.

“I did see something yesterday!” says Anya, as though to herself. “Filipp Filippitch turned his eyelids inside out somehow and his eyes looked red and dreadful, like an evil spirit’s.”

“I saw it too,” says Grisha. “Eight! And a boy at our school can move his ears. Twenty-seven!”

Andrey looks up at Grisha, meditates, and says:

“I can move my ears too….”

“Well then, move them.”

Andrey moves his eyes, his lips, and his fingers, and fancies that his ears are moving too. Everyone laughs.

“He is a horrid man, that Filipp Filippitch,” sighs Sonya. “He came into our nursery yesterday, and I had nothing on but my chemise… And I felt so improper!”

“Game!” Grisha cries suddenly, snatching the money from the saucer. “I’ve got the game! You can look and see if you like.”

The cook’s son looks up and turns pale.

“Then I can’t go on playing any more,” he whispers.

“Why not?”

“Because… because I have got no more money.”

“You can’t play without money,” says Grisha.

Andrey ransacks his pockets once more to make sure. Finding nothing in them but crumbs and a bitten pencil, he drops the corners of his mouth and begins blinking miserably. He is on the point of crying….

“I’ll put it down for you!” says Sonya, unable to endure his look of agony. “Only mind you must pay me back afterwards.”

The money is brought and the game goes on.

“I believe they are ringing somewhere,” says Anya, opening her eyes wide.

They all leave off playing and gaze open-mouthed at the dark window. The reflection of the lamp glimmers in the darkness.

“It was your fancy.”

“At night they only ring in the cemetery,” says Andrey.

“And what do they ring there for?”

“To prevent robbers from breaking into the church. They are afraid of the bells.”

“And what do robbers break into the church for?” asks Sonya.

“Everyone knows what for: to kill the watchmen.”

A minute passes in silence. They all look at one another, shudder, and go on playing. This time Andrey wins.

“He has cheated,” Alyosha booms out, apropos of nothing.

“What a lie, I haven’t cheated.”

Andrey turns pale, his mouth works, and he gives Alyosha a slap on the head! Alyosha glares angrily, jumps up, and with one knee on the table, slaps Andrey on the cheek! Each gives the other a second blow, and both howl. Sonya, feeling such horrors too much for her, begins crying too, and the dining room resounds with lamentations on various notes. But do not imagine that that is the end of the game. Before five minutes are over, the children are laughing and talking peaceably again. Their faces are tear-stained, but that does not prevent them from smiling; Alyosha is positively blissful, there has been a squabble!

Vasya, the fifth form schoolboy, walks into the dining room. He looks sleepy and disillusioned.

“This is revolting!” he thinks, seeing Grisha feel in his pockets in which the kopecks are jingling. “How can they give children money? And how can they let them play games of chance? A nice way to bring them up, I must say! It’s revolting!”

But the children’s play is so tempting that he feels an inclination to join them and to try his luck.

“Wait a minute and I’ll sit down to a game,” he says.

“Put down a kopeck!”

“In a minute,” he says, fumbling in his pockets. “I haven’t a kopeck, but here is a rouble. I’ll stake a rouble.”

“No, no, no.… You must put down a kopeck.”

“You stupids. A rouble is worth more than a kopeck anyway,” the schoolboy explains. “Whoever wins can give me change.”

“No, please! Go away!”

The fifth form schoolboy shrugs his shoulders, and goes into the kitchen to get change from the servants. It appears there is not a single

kopeck in the kitchen.

“In that case, you give me change,” he urges Grisha, coming back from the kitchen. “I’ll pay you for the change. Won’t you? Come, give me ten kopecks for a rouble.”

Grisha looks suspiciously at Vasya, wondering whether it isn’t some trick, a swindle.

“I won’t,” he says, holding his pockets.

Vasya begins to get cross, and abuses them, calling them idiots and blockheads.

“I’ll put down a stake for you, Vasya!” says Sonya. “Sit down.” He sits down and lays two cards before him. Anya begins counting the numbers.

“I’ve dropped a kopeck!” Grisha announces suddenly, in an agitated voice. “Wait!”

He takes the lamp, and creeps under the table to look for the kopeck. They clutch at nutshells and all sorts of nastiness, knock their heads together, but do not find the kopeck. They begin looking again, and look till Vasya takes the lamp out of Grisha’s hands and puts it in its place. Grisha goes on looking in the dark. But at last the kopeck is found. The players sit down at the table and mean to go on playing.

“Sonya is asleep!” Alyosha announces.

Sonya, with her curly head lying on her arms, is in a sweet, sound, tranquil sleep, as though she had been asleep for an hour. She has fallen asleep by accident, while the others were looking for the kopeck.

“Come along, lie on mamma’s bed!” says Anya, leading her away from the table. “Come along!”

They all troop out with her, and five minutes later mamma’s bed presents a curious spectacle. Sonya is asleep. Alyosha is snoring beside her. With their heads to the others’ feet, sleep Grisha and Anya. The cook’s son, Andrey too, has managed to snuggle in beside them. Near them lie the kopecks, that have lost their power till the next game. Good night!

Misery

"To Whom Shall I Tell My Grief?"

The twilight of evening. Big flakes of wet snow are whirling lazily about the street lamps, which have just been lighted, and lying in a thin soft layer on roofs, horses' backs, shoulders, caps. Iona Potapov, the sledge-driver, is all white like a ghost. He sits on the box without stirring, bent as double as the living body can be bent. If a regular snowdrift fell on him it seems as though even then he would not think it necessary to shake it off.… His little mare is white and motionless too. Her stillness, the angularity of her lines, and the stick-like straightness of her legs make her look like a halfpenny gingerbread horse. She is probably lost in thought. Anyone who has been torn away from the plough, from the familiar gray landscapes, and cast into this slough, full of monstrous lights, of unceasing uproar and hurrying people, is bound to think.

It is a long time since Iona and his nag have budged. They came out of the yard before dinnertime and not a single fare yet. But now the shades of evening are falling on the town. The pale light of the street lamps changes to a vivid color, and the bustle of the street grows noisier.

"Sledge to Vyborgskaya!" Iona hears. "Sledge!"

Iona starts, and through his snow-plastered eyelashes sees an officer in a military overcoat with a hood over his head.

"To Vyborgskaya," repeats the officer. "Are you asleep? To Vyborgskaya!"

In token of assent Iona gives a tug at the reins which sends cakes of snow flying from the horse's back and shoulders. The officer gets into the sledge. The sledge-driver clicks to the horse, cranes his neck like a swan, rises in his seat, and more from habit than necessity brandishes his whip. The mare cranes her neck, too, crooks her stick-like legs, and hesitatingly sets of.…

"Where are you shoving, you devil?" Iona immediately hears shouts from the dark mass shifting to and fro before him. "Where the devil are you going? Keep to the r-right!"

"You don't know how to drive! Keep to the right," says the officer angrily.

A coachman driving a carriage swears at him; a pedestrian crossing the road and brushing the horse's nose with his shoulder looks at him angrily and shakes the snow off his sleeve. Iona fidgets on the box as though he were sitting on thorns, jerks his elbows, and turns his eyes about like one possessed as though he did not know where he was or why he was there.

"What rascals they all are!" says the officer jocosely. "They are simply doing their best to run up against you or fall under the horse's feet. They must be doing it on purpose."

Iona looks as his fare and moves his lips.… Apparently he means to say something, but nothing comes but a sniff.

"What?" inquires the officer.

Iona gives a wry smile, and straining his throat, brings out huskily: "My son… er… my son died this week, sir."

"H'm! What did he die of?"

Iona turns his whole body round to his fare, and says:

"Who can tell! It must have been from fever.… He lay three days in the hospital and then he died.… God's will."

"Turn round, you devil!" comes out of the darkness. "Have you gone cracked, you old dog? Look where you are going!"

"Drive on! drive on!…" says the officer. "We shan't get there till tomorrow going on like this. Hurry up!"

The sledge-driver cranes his neck again, rises in his seat, and with heavy grace swings his whip. Several times he looks round at the officer, but the latter keeps his eyes shut and is apparently disinclined to listen. Putting his fare down at Vyborgskaya, Iona stops by a restaurant, and again sits huddled up on the box.… Again the wet snow paints him and his horse white. One hour passes, and then another.…

Three young men, two tall and thin, one short and hunchbacked, come up, railing at each other and loudly stamping on the pavement with their goloshes.

"Cabby, to the Police Bridge!" the hunchback cries in a cracked voice. "The three of us,… twenty kopecks!"

Iona tugs at the reins and clicks to his horse. Twenty kopecks is not a fair price, but he has no thoughts for that. Whether it is a rouble or whether it is five kopecks does not matter to him now so long as he has a fare.… The three young men, shoving each other and using bad language, go up to the sledge, and all three try to sit down at once. The question remains to be settled: Which are to sit down and which one is to

stand? After a long altercation, ill-temper, and abuse, they come to the conclusion that the hunchback must stand because he is the shortest.

"Well, drive on," says the hunchback in his cracked voice, settling himself and breathing down Iona's neck. "Cut along! What a cap you've got, my friend! You wouldn't find a worse one in all Petersburg.…"

"He-he!… he-he!…" laughs Iona. "It's nothing to boast of!"

"Well, then, nothing to boast of, drive on! Are you going to drive like this all the way? Eh? Shall I give you one in the neck?"

"My head aches," says one of the tall ones. "At the Dukmasovs' yesterday Vaska and I drank four bottles of brandy between us."

"I can't make out why you talk such stuff," says the other tall one angrily. "You lie like a brute."

"Strike me dead, it's the truth!…"

"It's about as true as that a louse coughs."

"He-he!" grins Iona. "Me-er-ry gentlemen!"

"Tfoo! the devil take you!" cries the hunchback indignantly. "Will you get on, you old plague, or won't you? Is that the way to drive? Give her one with the whip. Hang it all, give it her well."

Iona feels behind his back the jolting person and quivering voice of the hunchback. He hears abuse addressed to him, he sees people, and the feeling of loneliness begins little by little to be less heavy on his heart. The hunchback swears at him, till he chokes over some elaborately whimsical string of epithets and is overpowered by his cough. His tall companions begin talking of a certain Nadyezhda Petrovna. Iona looks round at them. Waiting till there is a brief pause, he looks round once more and says:

"This week… er… my… er… son died!"

"We shall all die,…" says the hunchback with a sigh, wiping his lips after coughing. "Come, drive on! drive on! My friends, I simply cannot stand crawling like this! When will he get us there?"

"Well, you give him a little encouragement… one in the neck!"

"Do you hear, you old plague? I'll make you smart. If one stands on ceremony with fellows like you one may as well walk. Do you hear, you old dragon? Or don't you care a hang what we say?"

And Iona hears rather than feels a slap on the back of his neck.

"He-he!…" he laughs. "Merry gentlemen.… God give you health!"

"Cabman, are you married?" asks one of the tall ones.

"I? He he! Me-er-ry gentlemen. The only wife for me now is the damp earth.… He-ho-ho!… The grave that is!… Here my son's dead and I am

alive.… It’s a strange thing, death has come in at the wrong door.… Instead of coming for me it went for my son.…”

And Iona turns round to tell them how his son died, but at that point the hunchback gives a faint sigh and announces that, thank God! they have arrived at last. After taking his twenty kopecks, Iona gazes for a long while after the revelers, who disappear into a dark entry. Again he is alone and again there is silence for him.… The misery which has been for a brief space eased comes back again and tears his heart more cruelly than ever. With a look of anxiety and suffering Iona’s eyes stray restlessly among the crowds moving to and fro on both sides of the street: can he not find among those thousands someone who will listen to him? But the crowds flit by heedless of him and his misery.… His misery is immense, beyond all bounds. If Iona’s heart were to burst and his misery to flow out, it would flood the whole world, it seems, but yet it is not seen. It has found a hiding-place in such an insignificant shell that one would not have found it with a candle by daylight.…

Iona sees a house-porter with a parcel and makes up his mind to address him.

“What time will it be, friend?” he asks.

“Going on for ten.… Why have you stopped here? Drive on!”

Iona drives a few paces away, bends himself double, and gives himself up to his misery. He feels it is no good to appeal to people. But before five minutes have passed he draws himself up, shakes his head as though he feels a sharp pain, and tugs at the reins.… He can bear it no longer.

“Back to the yard!” he thinks. “To the yard!”

And his little mare, as though she knew his thoughts, falls to trotting. An hour and a half later Iona is sitting by a big dirty stove. On the stove, on the floor, and on the benches are people snoring. The air is full of smells and stuffiness. Iona looks at the sleeping figures, scratches himself, and regrets that he has come home so early.…

“I have not earned enough to pay for the oats, even,” he thinks. “That’s why I am so miserable. A man who knows how to do his work,… who has had enough to eat, and whose horse has had enough to eat, is always at ease.…”

In one of the corners a young cabman gets up, clears his throat sleepily, and makes for the water-bucket.

“Want a drink?” Iona asks him.

“Seems so.”

“May it do you good.… But my son is dead, mate.… Do you hear? This week in the hospital.… It’s a queer business.…”

Iona looks to see the effect produced by his words, but he sees nothing. The young man has covered his head over and is already asleep. The old man sighs and scratches himself.… Just as the young man had been thirsty for water, he thirsts for speech. His son will soon have been dead a week, and he has not really talked to anybody yet.… He wants to talk of it properly, with deliberation.… He wants to tell how his son was taken ill, how he suffered, what he said before he died, how he died.… He wants to describe the funeral, and how he went to the hospital to get his son's clothes. He still has his daughter Anisya in the country.… And he wants to talk about her too.… Yes, he has plenty to talk about now. His listener ought to sigh and exclaim and lament.… It would be even better to talk to women. Though they are silly creatures, they blubber at the first word.

"Let's go out and have a look at the mare," Iona thinks. "There is always time for sleep.… You'll have sleep enough, no fear.…"

He puts on his coat and goes into the stables where his mare is standing. He thinks about oats, about hay, about the weather.… He cannot think about his son when he is alone.… To talk about him with someone is possible, but to think of him and picture him is insufferable anguish.…

"Are you munching?" Iona asks his mare, seeing her shining eyes. "There, munch away, munch away.… Since we have not earned enough for oats, we will eat hay.… Yes,… I have grown too old to drive.… My son ought to be driving, not I.… He was a real cabman.… He ought to have lived.…"

Iona is silent for a while, and then he goes on:

"That's how it is, old girl.… Kuzma Ionitch is gone.… He said goodbye to me.… He went and died for no reason.… Now, suppose you had a little colt, and you were own mother to that little colt.… And all at once that same little colt went and died.… You'd be sorry, wouldn't you?…"

The little mare munches, listens, and breathes on her master's hands. Iona is carried away and tells her all about it.

An Actor's End

Shtchiptsov, the "heavy father" and "good-hearted simpleton," a tall and thickset old man, not so much distinguished by his talents as an actor as by his exceptional physical strength, had a desperate quarrel with the manager during the performance, and just when the storm of words was at its height felt as though something had snapped in his chest. Zhukov, the manager, as a rule began at the end of every heated discussion to laugh hysterically and to fall into a swoon; on this occasion, however, Shtchiptsov did not remain for this climax, but hurried home. The high words and the sensation of something ruptured in his chest so agitated him as he left the theatre that he forgot to wash off his paint, and did nothing but take off his beard.

When he reached his hotel room, Shtchiptsov spent a long time pacing up and down, then sat down on the bed, propped his head on his fists, and sank into thought. He sat like that without stirring or uttering a sound till two o'clock the next afternoon, when Sigaev, the comic man, walked into his room.

"Why is it you did not come to the rehearsal, Booby Ivanitch?" the comic man began, panting and filling the room with fumes of vodka. "Where have you been?"

Shtchiptsov made no answer, but simply stared at the comic man with lustreless eyes, under which there were smudges of paint.

"You might at least have washed your phiz!" Sigaev went on. "You are a disgraceful sight! Have you been boozing, or… are you ill, or what? But why don't you speak? I am asking you: are you ill?"

Shtchiptsov did not speak. In spite of the paint on his face, the comic man could not help noticing his striking pallor, the drops of sweat on his forehead, and the twitching of his lips. His hands and feet were trembling too, and the whole huge figure of the "good-natured simpleton" looked somehow crushed and flattened. The comic man took a rapid glance round the room, but saw neither bottle nor flask nor any other suspicious vessel.

“I say, Mishutka, you know you are ill!” he said in a flutter. “Strike me dead, you are ill! You don’t look yourself!”

Shtchiptsov remained silent and stared disconsolately at the floor.

“You must have caught cold,” said Sigaev, taking him by the hand. “Oh, dear, how hot your hands are! What’s the trouble?”

“I wa-ant to go home,” muttered Shtchiptsov.

“But you are at home now, aren’t you?”

“No.… To Vyazma.…”

“Oh, my, anywhere else! It would take you three years to get to your Vyazma.… What? do you want to go and see your daddy and mummy? I’ll be bound, they’ve kicked the bucket years ago, and you won’t find their graves.…”

“My ho-ome’s there.”

“Come, it’s no good giving way to the dismal dumps. These neurotic feelings are the limit, old man. You must get well, for you have to play Mitka in *The Terrible Tsar* tomorrow. There is nobody else to do it. Drink something hot and take some castor-oil? Have you got the money for some castor-oil? Or, stay, I’ll run and buy some.”

The comic man fumbled in his pockets, found a fifteen-kopeck piece, and ran to the chemist’s. A quarter of an hour later he came back.

“Come, drink it,” he said, holding the bottle to the “heavy father’s” mouth. “Drink it straight out of the bottle.… All at a go! That’s the way.… Now nibble at a clove that your very soul mayn’t stink of the filthy stuff.”

The comic man sat a little longer with his sick friend, then kissed him tenderly, and went away. Towards evening the *jeune premier*, Brama-Glinsky, ran in to see Shtchiptsov. The gifted actor was wearing a pair of prunella boots, had a glove on his left hand, was smoking a cigar, and even smelt of heliotrope, yet nevertheless he strongly suggested a traveller cast away in some land in which there were neither baths nor laundresses nor tailors.…

“I hear you are ill?” he said to Shtchiptsov, twirling round on his heel. “What’s wrong with you? What’s wrong with you, really?…”

Shtchiptsov did not speak nor stir.

“Why don’t you speak? Do you feel giddy? Oh well, don’t talk, I won’t pester you… don’t talk.…”

Brama-Glinsky (that was his stage name, in his passport he was called Guskov) walked away to the window, put his hands in his pockets, and fell to gazing into the street. Before his eyes stretched an immense waste, bounded by a grey fence beside which ran a perfect forest of last year’s

burdocks. Beyond the waste ground was a dark, deserted factory, with windows boarded up. A belated jackdaw was flying round the chimney. This dreary, lifeless scene was beginning to be veiled in the dusk of evening.

"I must go home!" the *jeune premier* heard.

"Where is home?"

"To Vyazma… to my home.…"

"It is a thousand miles to Vyazma… my boy," sighed Brama-Glinsky, drumming on the windowpane. "And what do you want to go to Vyazma for?"

"I want to die there."

"What next! Now he's dying! He has fallen ill for the first time in his life, and already he fancies that his last hour is come.… No, my boy, no cholera will carry off a buffalo like you. You'll live to be a hundred.… Where's the pain?"

"There's no pain, but I… feel…"

"You don't feel anything, it all comes from being too healthy. Your surplus energy upsets you. You ought to get jolly tight—drink, you know, till your whole inside is topsy-turvy. Getting drunk is wonderfully restoring.… Do you remember how screwed you were at Rostov on the Don? Good Lord, the very thought of it is alarming! Sashka and I together could only just carry in the barrel, and you emptied it alone, and even sent for rum afterwards.… You got so drunk you were catching devils in a sack and pulled a lamppost up by the roots. Do you remember? Then you went off to beat the Greeks.…"

Under the influence of these agreeable reminiscences Shtchiptsov's face brightened a little and his eyes began to shine.

"And do you remember how I beat Savoikin the manager?" he muttered, raising his head. "But there! I've beaten thirty-three managers in my time, and I can't remember how many smaller fry. And what managers they were! Men who would not permit the very winds to touch them! I've beaten two celebrated authors and one painter!"

"What are you crying for?"

"At Kherson I killed a horse with my fists. And at Taganrog some roughs fell upon me at night, fifteen of them. I took off their caps and they followed me, begging: 'Uncle, give us back our caps.' That's how I used to go on."

"What are you crying for, then, you silly?"

"But now it's all over… I feel it. If only I could go to Vyazma!"

A pause followed. After a silence Shtchiptsov suddenly jumped up and seized his cap. He looked distraught.

"Goodbye! I am going to Vyazma!" he articulated, staggering.

"And the money for the journey?"

"H'm!… I shall go on foot!"

"You are crazy.…"

The two men looked at each other, probably because the same thought—of the boundless plains, the unending forests and swamps—struck both of them at once.

"Well, I see you have gone off your head," the *jeune premier* commented. "I'll tell you what, old man.… First thing, go to bed, then drink some brandy and tea to put you into a sweat. And some castor-oil, of course. Stay, where am I to get some brandy?"

Brama-Glinsky thought a minute, then made up his mind to go to a shopkeeper called Madame Tsitrinnikov to try and get it from her on tick: who knows? perhaps the woman would feel for them and let them have it. The *jeune premier* went off, and half an hour later returned with a bottle of brandy and some castor-oil. Shtchiptsov was sitting motionless, as before, on the bed, gazing dumbly at the floor. He drank the castor-oil offered him by his friend like an automaton, with no consciousness of what he was doing. Like an automaton he sat afterwards at the table, and drank tea and brandy; mechanically he emptied the whole bottle and let the *jeune premier* put him to bed. The latter covered him up with a quilt and an overcoat, advised him to get into a perspiration, and went away.

The night came on; Shtchiptsov had drunk a great deal of brandy, but he did not sleep. He lay motionless under the quilt and stared at the dark ceiling; then, seeing the moon looking in at the window, he turned his eyes from the ceiling towards the companion of the earth, and lay so with open eyes till the morning. At nine o'clock in the morning Zhukov, the manager, ran in.

"What has put it into your head to be ill, my angel?" he cackled, wrinkling up his nose. "Aie, aie! A man with your physique has no business to be ill! For shame, for shame! Do you know, I was quite frightened. 'Can our conversation have had such an effect on him?' I wondered. My dear soul, I hope it's not through me you've fallen ill! You know you gave me as good… er… And, besides, comrades can never get on without words. You called me all sorts of names… and have gone at me with your fists too, and yet I am fond of you! Upon my soul, I am. I respect you and am fond of you! Explain, my angel, why I am so

fond of you. You are neither kith nor kin nor wife, but as soon as I heard you had fallen ill it cut me to the heart."

Zhukov spent a long time declaring his affection, then fell to kissing the invalid, and finally was so overcome by his feelings that he began laughing hysterically, and was even meaning to fall into a swoon, but, probably remembering that he was not at home nor at the theatre, put off the swoon to a more convenient opportunity and went away.

Soon after him Adabashev, the tragic actor, a dingy, shortsighted individual who talked through his nose, made his appearance.… For a long while he looked at Shtchiptsov, for a long while he pondered, and at last he made a discovery.

"Do you know what, Mifa?" he said, pronouncing through his nose *f* instead of *sh*, and assuming a mysterious expression. "Do you know what? You ought to have a dose of castor-oil!"

Shtchiptsov was silent. He remained silent, too, a little later as the tragic actor poured the loathsome oil into his mouth. Two hours later Yevlampy, or, as the actors for some reason called him, Rigoletto, the hairdresser of the company, came into the room. He too, like the tragic man, stared at Shtchiptsov for a long time, then sighed like a steam-engine, and slowly and deliberately began untying a parcel he had brought with him. In it there were twenty cups and several little flasks.

"You should have sent for me and I would have cupped you long ago," he said, tenderly baring Shtchiptsov's chest. "It is easy to neglect illness."

Thereupon Rigoletto stroked the broad chest of the "heavy father" and covered it all over with suction cups.

"Yes…" he said, as after this operation he packed up his paraphernalia, crimson with Shtchiptsov's blood. "You should have sent for me, and I would have come.… You needn't trouble about payment.… I do it from sympathy. Where are you to get the money if that idol won't pay you? Now, please take these drops. They are nice drops! And now you must have a dose of this castor-oil. It's the real thing. That's right! I hope it will do you good. Well, now, goodbye.…"

Rigoletto took his parcel and withdrew, pleased that he had been of assistance to a fellow-creature.

The next morning Sigaev, the comic man, going in to see Shtchiptsov, found him in a terrible condition. He was lying under his coat, breathing in gasps, while his eyes strayed over the ceiling. In his hands he was crushing convulsively the crumpled quilt.

“To Vyazma!” he whispered, when he saw the comic man. “To Vyazma.”

“Come, I don’t like that, old man!” said the comic man, flinging up his hands. “You see… you see… you see, old man, that’s not the thing! Excuse me, but… it’s positively stupid.…”

“To go to Vyazma! My God, to Vyazma!”

“I… I did not expect it of you,” the comic man muttered, utterly distracted. “What the deuce do you want to collapse like this for? Aie… aie… aie!… that’s not the thing. A giant as tall as a watchtower, and crying. Is it the thing for actors to cry?”

“No wife nor children,” muttered Shtchiptsov. “I ought not to have gone for an actor, but have stayed at Vyazma. My life has been wasted, Semyon! Oh, to be in Vyazma!”

“Aie… aie… aie!… that’s not the thing! You see, it’s stupid… contemptible indeed!”

Recovering his composure and setting his feelings in order, Sigaev began comforting Shtchiptsov, telling him untruly that his comrades had decided to send him to the Crimea at their expense, and so on, but the sick man did not listen and kept muttering about Vyazma.… At last, with a wave of his hand, the comic man began talking about Vyazma himself to comfort the invalid.

“It’s a fine town,” he said soothingly, “a capital town, old man! It’s famous for its cakes. The cakes are classical, but—between ourselves—h’m!—they are a bit groggy. For a whole week after eating them I was… h’m!… But what is fine there is the merchants! They are something like merchants. When they treat you they do treat you!”

The comic man talked while Shtchiptsov listened in silence and nodded his head approvingly.

Towards evening he died.

THE REQUIEM

In the village church of Verhny Zaprudy mass was just over. The people had begun moving and were trooping out of church. The only one who did not move was Andrey Andreyitch, a shopkeeper and old inhabitant of Verhny Zaprudy. He stood waiting, with his elbows on the railing of the right choir. His fat and shaven face, covered with indentations left by pimples, expressed on this occasion two contradictory feelings: resignation in the face of inevitable destiny, and stupid, unbounded disdain for the smocks and striped kerchiefs passing by him. As it was Sunday, he was dressed like a dandy. He wore a long cloth overcoat with yellow bone buttons, blue trousers not thrust into his boots, and sturdy goloshes—the huge clumsy goloshes only seen on the feet of practical and prudent persons of firm religious convictions.

His torpid eyes, sunk in fat, were fixed upon the icon stand. He saw the long familiar figures of the saints, the verger Matvey puffing out his cheeks and blowing out the candles, the darkened candle stands, the threadbare carpet, the sacristan Lopuhov running impulsively from the altar and carrying the holy bread to the churchwarden.… All these things he had seen for years, and seen over and over again like the five fingers of his hand.… There was only one thing, however, that was somewhat strange and unusual. Father Grigory, still in his vestments, was standing at the north door, twitching his thick eyebrows angrily.

“Who is it he is winking at? God bless him!” thought the shopkeeper. “And he is beckoning with his finger! And he stamped his foot! What next! What’s the matter, Holy Queen and Mother! Whom does he mean it for?”

Andrey Andreyitch looked round and saw the church completely deserted. There were some ten people standing at the door, but they had their backs to the altar.

“Do come when you are called! Why do you stand like a graven image?” he heard Father Grigory’s angry voice. “I am calling you.”

The shopkeeper looked at Father Grigory's red and wrathful face, and only then realized that the twitching eyebrows and beckoning finger might refer to him. He started, left the railing, and hesitatingly walked towards the altar, tramping with his heavy goloshes.

"Andrey Andreyitch, was it you asked for prayers for the rest of Mariya's soul?" asked the priest, his eyes angrily transfixing the shopkeeper's fat, perspiring face.

"Yes, Father."

"Then it was you wrote this? You?" And Father Grigory angrily thrust before his eyes the little note.

And on this little note, handed in by Andrey Andreyitch before mass, was written in big, as it were staggering, letters:

"For the rest of the soul of the servant of God, the harlot Mariya."

"Yes, certainly I wrote it,…" answered the shopkeeper.

"How dared you write it?" whispered the priest, and in his husky whisper there was a note of wrath and alarm.

The shopkeeper looked at him in blank amazement; he was perplexed, and he, too, was alarmed. Father Grigory had never in his life spoken in such a tone to a leading resident of Verhny Zaprudy. Both were silent for a minute, staring into each other's face. The shopkeeper's amazement was so great that his fat face spread in all directions like spilt dough.

"How dared you?" repeated the priest.

"Wha… what?" asked Andrey Andreyitch in bewilderment.

"You don't understand?" whispered Father Grigory, stepping back in astonishment and clasping his hands. "What have you got on your shoulders, a head or some other object? You send a note up to the altar, and write a word in it which it would be unseemly even to utter in the street! Why are you rolling your eyes? Surely you know the meaning of the word?"

"Are you referring to the word harlot?" muttered the shopkeeper, flushing crimson and blinking. "But you know, the Lord in His mercy… forgave this very thing,… forgave a harlot.… He has prepared a place for her, and indeed from the life of the holy saint, Mariya of Egypt, one may see in what sense the word is used—excuse me…"

The shopkeeper wanted to bring forward some other argument in his justification, but took fright and wiped his lips with his sleeve.

"So that's what you make of it!" cried Father Grigory, clasping his hands. "But you see God has forgiven her—do you understand? He has forgiven, but you judge her, you slander her, call her by an unseemly name, and whom! Your own deceased daughter! Not only in Holy

Scripture, but even in worldly literature you won't read of such a sin! I tell you again, Andrey, you mustn't be oversubtle! No, no, you mustn't be oversubtle, brother! If God has given you an inquiring mind, and if you cannot direct it, better not go into things.… Don't go into things, and hold your peace!"

"But you know, she,… excuse my mentioning it, was an actress!" articulated Andrey Andreyitch, overwhelmed.

"An actress! But whatever she was, you ought to forget it all now she is dead, instead of writing it on the note."

"Just so,…" the shopkeeper assented.

"You ought to do penance," boomed the deacon from the depths of the altar, looking contemptuously at Andrey Andreyitch's embarrassed face, "that would teach you to leave off being so clever! Your daughter was a well-known actress. There were even notices of her death in the newspapers.… Philosopher!"

"To be sure,… certainly," muttered the shopkeeper, "the word is not a seemly one; but I did not say it to judge her, Father Grigory, I only meant to speak spiritually,… that it might be clearer to you for whom you were praying. They write in the memorial notes the various callings, such as the infant John, the drowned woman Pelagea, the warrior Yegor, the murdered Pavel, and so on.… I meant to do the same."

"It was foolish, Andrey! God will forgive you, but beware another time. Above all, don't be subtle, but think like other people. Make ten bows and go your way."

"I obey," said the shopkeeper, relieved that the lecture was over, and allowing his face to resume its expression of importance and dignity. "Ten bows? Very good, I understand. But now, Father, allow me to ask you a favor.… Seeing that I am, anyway, her father,… you know yourself, whatever she was, she was still my daughter, so I was,… excuse me, meaning to ask you to sing the requiem today. And allow me to ask you, Father Deacon!"

"Well, that's good," said Father Grigory, taking off his vestments. "That I commend. I can approve of that! Well, go your way. We will come out immediately."

Andrey Andreyitch walked with dignity from the altar, and with a solemn, requiem-like expression on his red face took his stand in the middle of the church. The verger Matvey set before him a little table with the memorial food upon it, and a little later the requiem service began.

There was perfect stillness in the church. Nothing could be heard but the metallic click of the censer and slow singing.… Near Andrey Andreyitch stood the verger Matvey, the midwife Makaryevna, and her one-armed son Mitka. There was no one else. The sacristan sang badly in an unpleasant, hollow bass, but the tune and the words were so mournful that the shopkeeper little by little lost the expression of dignity and was plunged in sadness. He thought of his Mashutka,… he remembered she had been born when he was still a lackey in the service of the owner of Verhny Zaprudy. In his busy life as a lackey he had not noticed how his girl had grown up. That long period during which she was being shaped into a graceful creature, with a little flaxen head and dreamy eyes as big as kopeck-pieces passed unnoticed by him. She had been brought up like all the children of favorite lackeys, in ease and comfort in the company of the young ladies. The gentry, to fill up their idle time, had taught her to read, to write, to dance; he had had no hand in her bringing up. Only from time to time casually meeting her at the gate or on the landing of the stairs, he would remember that she was his daughter, and would, so far as he had leisure for it, begin teaching her the prayers and the scripture. Oh, even then he had the reputation of an authority on the church rules and the holy scriptures! Forbidding and stolid as her father's face was, yet the girl listened readily. She repeated the prayers after him yawning, but on the other hand, when he, hesitating and trying to express himself elaborately, began telling her stories, she was all attention. Esau's pottage, the punishment of Sodom, and the troubles of the boy Joseph made her turn pale and open her blue eyes wide.

Afterwards when he gave up being a lackey, and with the money he had saved opened a shop in the village, Mashutka had gone away to Moscow with his master's family.…

Three years before her death she had come to see her father. He had scarcely recognized her. She was a graceful young woman with the manners of a young lady, and dressed like one. She talked cleverly, as though from a book, smoked, and slept till midday. When Andrey Andreyitch asked her what she was doing, she had announced, looking him boldly straight in the face: "I am an actress." Such frankness struck the former flunkey as the acme of cynicism. Mashutka had begun boasting of her successes and her stage life; but seeing that her father only turned crimson and threw up his hands, she ceased. And they spent a fortnight together without speaking or looking at one another till the day she went away. Before she went away she asked her father to come for a walk on the bank of the river. Painful as it was for him to walk in

the light of day, in the sight of all honest people, with a daughter who was an actress, he yielded to her request.

"What a lovely place you live in!" she said enthusiastically. "What ravines and marshes! Good heavens, how lovely my native place is!"

And she had burst into tears.

"The place is simply taking up room,…" Andrey Andreyvitch had thought, looking blankly at the ravines, not understanding his daughter's enthusiasm. "There is no more profit from them than milk from a billy-goat."

And she had cried and cried, drawing her breath greedily with her whole chest, as though she felt she had not a long time left to breathe.

Andrey Andreyitch shook his head like a horse that has been bitten, and to stifle painful memories began rapidly crossing himself.…

"Be mindful, O Lord," he muttered, "of Thy departed servant, the harlot Mariya, and forgive her sins, voluntary or involuntary.…"

The unseemly word dropped from his lips again, but he did not notice it: what is firmly imbedded in the consciousness cannot be driven out by Father Grigory's exhortations or even knocked out by a nail. Makaryevna sighed and whispered something, drawing in a deep breath, while one-armed Mitka was brooding over something.…

"Where there is no sickness, nor grief, nor sighing," droned the sacristan, covering his right cheek with his hand.

Bluish smoke coiled up from the censer and bathed in the broad, slanting patch of sunshine which cut across the gloomy, lifeless emptiness of the church. And it seemed as though the soul of the dead woman were soaring into the sunlight together with the smoke. The coils of smoke like a child's curls eddied round and round, floating upwards to the window and, as it were, holding aloof from the woes and tribulations of which that poor soul was full.

ANYUTA

In the cheapest room of a big block of furnished apartments Stepan Klotchkov, a medical student in his third year, was walking to and fro, zealously conning his anatomy. His mouth was dry and his forehead perspiring from the unceasing effort to learn it by heart.

In the window, covered by patterns of frost, sat on a stool the girl who shared his room—Anyuta, a thin little brunette of five-and-twenty, very pale with mild grey eyes. Sitting with bent back she was busy embroidering with red thread the collar of a man's shirt. She was working against time.… The clock in the passage struck two drowsily, yet the little room had not been put to rights for the morning. Crumpled bedclothes, pillows thrown about, books, clothes, a big filthy slop-pail filled with soapsuds in which cigarette ends were swimming, and the litter on the floor—all seemed as though purposely jumbled together in one confusion.…

"The right lung consists of three parts…" Klotchkov repeated. "Boundaries! Upper part on anterior wall of thorax reaches the fourth or fifth rib, on the lateral surface, the fourth rib… behind to the *spina scapulae*…"

Klotchkov raised his eyes to the ceiling, striving to visualise what he had just read. Unable to form a clear picture of it, he began feeling his upper ribs through his waistcoat.

"These ribs are like the keys of a piano," he said. "One must familiarise oneself with them somehow, if one is not to get muddled over them. One must study them in the skeleton and the living body.… I say, Anyuta, let me pick them out."

Anyuta put down her sewing, took off her blouse, and straightened herself up. Klotchkov sat down facing her, frowned, and began counting her ribs.

"H'm!… One can't feel the first rib; it's behind the shoulder-blade.… This must be the second rib.… Yes… this is the third… this is the fourth.… H'm!… yes.… Why are you wriggling?"

“Your fingers are cold!”

“Come, come… it won’t kill you. Don’t twist about. That must be the third rib, then… this is the fourth.… You look such a skinny thing, and yet one can hardly feel your ribs. That’s the second… that’s the third.… Oh, this is muddling, and one can’t see it clearly.… I must draw it.… Where’s my crayon?”

Klotchkov took his crayon and drew on Anyuta’s chest several parallel lines corresponding with the ribs.

“First-rate. That’s all straightforward.… Well, now I can sound you. Stand up!”

Anyuta stood up and raised her chin. Klotchkov began sounding her, and was so absorbed in this occupation that he did not notice how Anyuta’s lips, nose, and fingers turned blue with cold. Anyuta shivered, and was afraid the student, noticing it, would leave off drawing and sounding her, and then, perhaps, might fail in his exam.

“Now it’s all clear,” said Klotchkov when he had finished. “You sit like that and don’t rub off the crayon, and meanwhile I’ll learn up a little more.”

And the student again began walking to and fro, repeating to himself. Anyuta, with black stripes across her chest, looking as though she had been tattooed, sat thinking, huddled up and shivering with cold. She said very little as a rule; she was always silent, thinking and thinking.…

In the six or seven years of her wanderings from one furnished room to another, she had known five students like Klotchkov. Now they had all finished their studies, had gone out into the world, and, of course, like respectable people, had long ago forgotten her. One of them was living in Paris, two were doctors, the fourth was an artist, and the fifth was said to be already a professor. Klotchkov was the sixth.… Soon he, too, would finish his studies and go out into the world. There was a fine future before him, no doubt, and Klotchkov probably would become a great man, but the present was anything but bright; Klotchkov had no tobacco and no tea, and there were only four lumps of sugar left. She must make haste and finish her embroidery, take it to the woman who had ordered it, and with the quarter rouble she would get for it, buy tea and tobacco.

“Can I come in?” asked a voice at the door.

Anyuta quickly threw a woollen shawl over her shoulders. Fetisov, the artist, walked in.

“I have come to ask you a favour,” he began, addressing Klotchkov, and glaring like a wild beast from under the long locks that hung over his brow. “Do me a favour; lend me your young lady just for a couple of

hours! I'm painting a picture, you see, and I can't get on without a model."

"Oh, with pleasure," Klotchkov agreed. "Go along, Anyuta."

"The things I've had to put up with there," Anyuta murmured softly.

"Rubbish! The man's asking you for the sake of art, and not for any sort of nonsense. Why not help him if you can?"

Anyuta began dressing.

"And what are you painting?" asked Klotchkov.

"Psyche; it's a fine subject. But it won't go, somehow. I have to keep painting from different models. Yesterday I was painting one with blue legs. 'Why are your legs blue?' I asked her. 'It's my stockings stain them,' she said. And you're still grinding! Lucky fellow! You have patience."

"Medicine's a job one can't get on with without grinding."

"H'm!… Excuse me, Klotchkov, but you do live like a pig! It's awful the way you live!"

"How do you mean? I can't help it.… I only get twelve roubles a month from my father, and it's hard to live decently on that."

"Yes… yes…" said the artist, frowning with an air of disgust; "but, still, you might live better.… An educated man is in duty bound to have taste, isn't he? And goodness knows what it's like here! The bed not made, the slops, the dirt… yesterday's porridge in the plates… Tfoo!"

"That's true," said the student in confusion; "but Anyuta has had no time today to tidy up; she's been busy all the while."

When Anyuta and the artist had gone out Klotchkov lay down on the sofa and began learning, lying down; then he accidentally dropped asleep, and waking up an hour later, propped his head on his fists and sank into gloomy reflection. He recalled the artist's words that an educated man was in duty bound to have taste, and his surroundings actually struck him now as loathsome and revolting. He saw, as it were in his mind's eye, his own future, when he would see his patients in his consulting room, drink tea in a large dining room in the company of his wife, a real lady. And now that slop-pail in which the cigarette ends were swimming looked incredibly disgusting. Anyuta, too, rose before his imagination—a plain, slovenly, pitiful figure… and he made up his mind to part with her at once, at all costs.

When, on coming back from the artist's, she took off her coat, he got up and said to her seriously:

"Look here, my good girl… sit down and listen. We must part! The fact is, I don't want to live with you any longer."

Anyuta had come back from the artist's worn out and exhausted. Standing so long as a model had made her face look thin and sunken, and her chin sharper than ever. She said nothing in answer to the student's words, only her lips began to tremble.

"You know we should have to part sooner or later, anyway," said the student. "You're a nice, good girl, and not a fool; you'll understand.…"

Anyuta put on her coat again, in silence wrapped up her embroidery in paper, gathered together her needles and thread: she found the screw of paper with the four lumps of sugar in the window, and laid it on the table by the books.

"That's… your sugar…" she said softly, and turned away to conceal her tears.

"Why are you crying?" asked Klotchkov.

He walked about the room in confusion, and said:

"You are a strange girl, really.… Why, you know we shall have to part. We can't stay together forever."

She had gathered together all her belongings, and turned to say goodbye to him, and he felt sorry for her.

"Shall I let her stay on here another week?" he thought. "She really may as well stay, and I'll tell her to go in a week;" and vexed at his own weakness, he shouted to her roughly:

"Come, why are you standing there? If you are going, go; and if you don't want to, take off your coat and stay! You can stay!"

Anyuta took off her coat, silently, stealthily, then blew her nose also stealthily, sighed, and noiselessly returned to her invariable position on her stool by the window.

The student drew his textbook to him and began again pacing from corner to corner. "The right lung consists of three parts," he repeated; "the upper part, on anterior wall of thorax, reaches the fourth or fifth rib.…"

In the passage someone shouted at the top of his voice: "Grigory! The samovar!"

IVAN MATVEYITCH

Between five and six in the evening. A fairly well-known man of learning—we will call him simply the man of learning—is sitting in his study nervously biting his nails.

"It's positively revolting," he says, continually looking at his watch. "It shows the utmost disrespect for another man's time and work. In England such a person would not earn a farthing, he would die of hunger. You wait a minute, when you do come.…"

And feeling a craving to vent his wrath and impatience upon someone, the man of learning goes to the door leading to his wife's room and knocks.

"Listen, Katya," he says in an indignant voice. "If you see Pyotr Danilitch, tell him that decent people don't do such things. It's abominable! He recommends a secretary, and does not know the sort of man he is recommending! The wretched boy is two or three hours late with unfailing regularity every day. Do you call that a secretary? Those two or three hours are more precious to me than two or three years to other people. When he does come I will swear at him like a dog, and won't pay him and will kick him out. It's no use standing on ceremony with people like that!"

"You say that every day, and yet he goes on coming and coming."

"But today I have made up my mind. I have lost enough through him. You must excuse me, but I shall swear at him like a cabman."

At last a ring is heard. The man of learning makes a grave face; drawing himself up, and, throwing back his head, he goes into the entry. There his amanuensis Ivan Matveyitch, a young man of eighteen, with a face oval as an egg and no moustache, wearing a shabby, mangy overcoat and no goloshes, is already standing by the hatstand. He is in breathless haste, and scrupulously wipes his huge clumsy boots on the doormat, trying as he does so to conceal from the maidservant a hole in his boot through which a white sock is peeping. Seeing the man of

learning he smiles with that broad, prolonged, somewhat foolish smile which is seen only on the faces of children or very good-natured people.

“Ah, good evening!” he says, holding out a big wet hand. “Has your sore throat gone?”

“Ivan Matveyitch,” says the man of learning in a shaking voice, stepping back and clasping his hands together. “Ivan Matveyitch.”

Then he dashes up to the amanuensis, clutches him by the shoulders, and begins feebly shaking him.

“What a way to treat me!” he says with despair in his voice. “You dreadful, horrid fellow, what a way to treat me! Are you laughing at me, are you jeering at me? Eh?”

Judging from the smile which still lingered on his face Ivan Matveyitch had expected a very different reception, and so, seeing the man of learning’s countenance eloquent of indignation, his oval face grows longer than ever, and he opens his mouth in amazement.

“What is… what is it?” he asks.

“And you ask that?” the man of learning clasps his hands. “You know how precious time is to me, and you are so late. You are two hours late!… Have you no fear of God?”

“I haven’t come straight from home,” mutters Ivan Matveyitch, untying his scarf irresolutely. “I have been at my aunt’s name-day party, and my aunt lives five miles away.… If I had come straight from home, then it would have been a different thing.”

“Come, reflect, Ivan Matveyitch, is there any logic in your conduct? Here you have work to do, work at a fixed time, and you go flying off after name-day parties and aunts! But do make haste and undo your wretched scarf! It’s beyond endurance, really!”

The man of learning dashes up to the amanuensis again and helps him to disentangle his scarf.

“You are done up like a peasant woman,… Come along,… Please make haste!”

Blowing his nose in a dirty, crumpled-up handkerchief and pulling down his grey reefer jacket, Ivan Matveyitch goes through the hall and the drawing room to the study. There a place and paper and even cigarettes had been put ready for him long ago.

“Sit down, sit down,” the man of learning urges him on, rubbing his hands impatiently. “You are an unsufferable person.… You know the work has to be finished by a certain time, and then you are so late. One is forced to scold you. Come, write,… Where did we stop?”

Ivan Matveyitch smooths his bristling cropped hair and takes up his pen. The man of learning walks up and down the room, concentrates himself, and begins to dictate:

"The fact is… comma… that so to speak fundamental forms… have you written it?… forms are conditioned entirely by the essential nature of those principles… comma… which find in them their expression and can only be embodied in them.… New line,… There's a stop there, of course.… More independence is found… is found… by the forms which have not so much a political… comma… as a social character…"

"The high school boys have a different uniform now… a grey one," said Ivan Matveyitch, "when I was at school it was better: they used to wear regular uniforms."

"Oh dear, write please!" says the man of learning wrathfully. "Character… have you written it? Speaking of the forms relating to the organization… of administrative functions, and not to the regulation of the life of the people… comma… it cannot be said that they are marked by the nationalism of their forms… the last three words in inverted commas.… Aie, aie… tut, tut… so what did you want to say about the high school?"

"That they used to wear a different uniform in my time."

"Aha!… indeed,… Is it long since you left the high school?"

"But I told you that yesterday. It is three years since I left school.… I left in the fourth class."

"And why did you give up high school?" asks the man of learning, looking at Ivan Matveyitch's writing.

"Oh, through family circumstances."

"Must I speak to you again, Ivan Matveyitch? When will you get over your habit of dragging out the lines? There ought not to be less than forty letters in a line."

"What, do you suppose I do it on purpose?" says Ivan Matveyitch, offended. "There are more than forty letters in some of the other lines.… You count them. And if you think I don't put enough in the line, you can take something off my pay."

"Oh dear, that's not the point. You have no delicacy, really.… At the least thing you drag in money. The great thing is to be exact, Ivan Matveyitch, to be exact is the great thing. You ought to train yourself to be exact."

The maidservant brings in a tray with two glasses of tea on it, and a basket of rusks.… Ivan Matveyitch takes his glass awkwardly with both hands, and at once begins drinking it. The tea is too hot. To avoid

burning his mouth Ivan Matveyitch tries to take a tiny sip. He eats one rusk, then a second, then a third, and, looking sideways, with embarrassment, at the man of learning, timidly stretches after a fourth.… The noise he makes in swallowing, the relish with which he smacks his lips, and the expression of hungry greed in his raised eyebrows irritate the man of learning.

"Make haste and finish, time is precious."

"You dictate, I can drink and write at the same time.… I must confess I was hungry."

"I should think so after your walk!"

"Yes, and what wretched weather! In our parts there is a scent of spring by now.… There are puddles everywhere; the snow is melting."

"You are a southerner, I suppose?"

"From the Don region.… It's quite spring with us by March. Here it is frosty, everyone's in a fur coat,… but there you can see the grass… it's dry everywhere, and one can even catch tarantulas."

"And what do you catch tarantulas for?"

"Oh!… to pass the time…" says Ivan Matveyitch, and he sighs. "It's fun catching them. You fix a bit of pitch on a thread, let it down into their hole and begin hitting the tarantula on the back with the pitch, and the brute gets cross, catches hold of the pitch with his claws, and gets stuck.… And what we used to do with them! We used to put a basinful of them together and drop a bihorka in with them."

"What is a bihorka?"

"That's another spider, very much the same as a tarantula. In a fight one of them can kill a hundred tarantulas."

"H'm!… But we must write,… Where did we stop?"

The man of learning dictates another twenty lines, then sits plunged in meditation.

Ivan Matveyitch, waiting while the other cogitates, sits and, craning his neck, puts the collar of his shirt to rights. His tie will not set properly, the stud has come out, and the collar keeps coming apart.

"H'm!…" says the man of learning. "Well, haven't you found a job yet, Ivan Matveyitch?"

"No. And how is one to find one? I am thinking, you know, of volunteering for the army. But my father advises my going into a chemist's."

"H'm!… But it would be better for you to go into the university. The examination is difficult, but with patience and hard work you could get through. Study, read more.… Do you read much?"

“Not much, I must own…” says Ivan Matveyitch, lighting a cigarette.

“Have you read Turgenev?”

“N-no.…”

“And Gogol?”

“Gogol. H’m!… Gogol.… No, I haven’t read him!”

“Ivan Matveyitch! Aren’t you ashamed? Aie! aie! You are such a nice fellow, so much that is original in you… you haven’t even read Gogol! You must read him! I will give you his works! It’s essential to read him! We shall quarrel if you don’t!”

Again a silence follows. The man of learning meditates, half reclining on a soft lounge, and Ivan Matveyitch, leaving his collar in peace, concentrates his whole attention on his boots. He has not till then noticed that two big puddles have been made by the snow melting off his boots on the floor. He is ashamed.

“I can’t get on today…” mutters the man of learning. “I suppose you are fond of catching birds, too, Ivan Matveyitch?”

“That’s in autumn,… I don’t catch them here, but there at home I always did.”

“To be sure… very good. But we must write, though.”

The man of learning gets up resolutely and begins dictating, but after ten lines sits down on the lounge again.

“No.… Perhaps we had better put it off till tomorrow morning,” he says. “Come tomorrow morning, only come early, at nine o’clock. God preserve you from being late!”

Ivan Matveyitch lays down his pen, gets up from the table and sits in another chair. Five minutes pass in silence, and he begins to feel it is time for him to go, that he is in the way; but in the man of learning’s study it is so snug and light and warm, and the impression of the nice rusks and sweet tea is still so fresh that there is a pang at his heart at the mere thought of home. At home there is poverty, hunger, cold, his grumbling father, scoldings, and here it is so quiet and unruffled, and interest even is taken in his tarantulas and birds.

The man of learning looks at his watch and takes up a book.

“So you will give me Gogol?” says Ivan Matveyitch, getting up.

“Yes, yes! But why are you in such a hurry, my dear boy? Sit down and tell me something…”

Ivan Matveyitch sits down and smiles broadly. Almost every evening he sits in this study and always feels something extraordinarily soft, attracting him, as it were akin, in the voice and the glance of the man of learning. There are moments when he even fancies that the man of

learning is becoming attached to him, used to him, and that if he scolds him for being late, it’s simply because he misses his chatter about tarantulas and how they catch goldfinches on the Don.

THE WITCH

It was approaching nightfall. The sexton, Savely Gykin, was lying in his huge bed in the hut adjoining the church. He was not asleep, though it was his habit to go to sleep at the same time as the hens. His coarse red hair peeped from under one end of the greasy patchwork quilt, made up of coloured rags, while his big unwashed feet stuck out from the other. He was listening. His hut adjoined the wall that encircled the church and the solitary window in it looked out upon the open country. And out there a regular battle was going on. It was hard to say who was being wiped off the face of the earth, and for the sake of whose destruction nature was being churned up into such a ferment; but, judging from the unceasing malignant roar, someone was getting it very hot. A victorious force was in full chase over the fields, storming in the forest and on the church roof, battering spitefully with its fists upon the windows, raging and tearing, while something vanquished was howling and wailing.… A plaintive lament sobbed at the window, on the roof, or in the stove. It sounded not like a call for help, but like a cry of misery, a consciousness that it was too late, that there was no salvation. The snowdrifts were covered with a thin coating of ice; tears quivered on them and on the trees; a dark slush of mud and melting snow flowed along the roads and paths. In short, it was thawing, but through the dark night the heavens failed to see it, and flung flakes of fresh snow upon the melting earth at a terrific rate. And the wind staggered like a drunkard. It would not let the snow settle on the ground, and whirled it round in the darkness at random.

Savely listened to all this din and frowned. The fact was that he knew, or at any rate suspected, what all this racket outside the window was tending to and whose handiwork it was.

“I know!” he muttered, shaking his finger menacingly under the bedclothes; “I know all about it.”

On a stool by the window sat the sexton’s wife, Raissa Nilovna. A tin lamp standing on another stool, as though timid and distrustful of its

powers, shed a dim and flickering light on her broad shoulders, on the handsome, tempting-looking contours of her person, and on her thick plait, which reached to the floor. She was making sacks out of coarse hempen stuff. Her hands moved nimbly, while her whole body, her eyes, her eyebrows, her full lips, her white neck were as still as though they were asleep, absorbed in the monotonous, mechanical toil. Only from time to time she raised her head to rest her weary neck, glanced for a moment towards the window, beyond which the snowstorm was raging, and bent again over her sacking. No desire, no joy, no grief, nothing was expressed by her handsome face with its turned-up nose and its dimples. So a beautiful fountain expresses nothing when it is not playing.

But at last she had finished a sack. She flung it aside, and, stretching luxuriously, rested her motionless, lacklustre eyes on the window. The panes were swimming with drops like tears, and white with short-lived snowflakes which fell on the window, glanced at Raissa, and melted.…

"Come to bed!" growled the sexton. Raissa remained mute. But suddenly her eyelashes flickered and there was a gleam of attention in her eye. Savely, all the time watching her expression from under the quilt, put out his head and asked:

"What is it?"

"Nothing.… I fancy someone's coming," she answered quietly.

The sexton flung the quilt off with his arms and legs, knelt up in bed, and looked blankly at his wife. The timid light of the lamp illuminated his hirsute, pockmarked countenance and glided over his rough matted hair.

"Do you hear?" asked his wife.

Through the monotonous roar of the storm he caught a scarcely audible thin and jingling monotone like the shrill note of a gnat when it wants to settle on one's cheek and is angry at being prevented.

"It's the post," muttered Savely, squatting on his heels.

Two miles from the church ran the posting road. In windy weather, when the wind was blowing from the road to the church, the inmates of the hut caught the sound of bells.

"Lord! fancy people wanting to drive about in such weather," sighed Raissa.

"It's government work. You've to go whether you like or not."

The murmur hung in the air and died away.

"It has driven by," said Savely, getting into bed.

But before he had time to cover himself up with the bedclothes he heard a distinct sound of the bell. The sexton looked anxiously at his

wife, leapt out of bed and walked, waddling, to and fro by the stove. The bell went on ringing for a little, then died away again as though it had ceased.

“I don’t hear it,” said the sexton, stopping and looking at his wife with his eyes screwed up.

But at that moment the wind rapped on the window and with it floated a shrill jingling note. Savely turned pale, cleared his throat, and flopped about the floor with his bare feet again.

“The postman is lost in the storm,” he wheezed out glancing malignantly at his wife. “Do you hear? The postman has lost his way!… I… I know! Do you suppose I… don’t understand?” he muttered. “I know all about it, curse you!”

“What do you know?” Raissa asked quietly, keeping her eyes fixed on the window.

“I know that it’s all your doing, you she-devil! Your doing, damn you! This snowstorm and the post going wrong, you’ve done it all—you!”

“You’re mad, you silly,” his wife answered calmly.

“I’ve been watching you for a long time past and I’ve seen it. From the first day I married you I noticed that you’d bitch’s blood in you!”

“Tfoo!” said Raissa, surprised, shrugging her shoulders and crossing herself. “Cross yourself, you fool!”

“A witch is a witch,” Savely pronounced in a hollow, tearful voice, hurriedly blowing his nose on the hem of his shirt; “though you are my wife, though you are of a clerical family, I’d say what you are even at confession.… Why, God have mercy upon us! Last year on the Eve of the Prophet Daniel and the Three Young Men there was a snowstorm, and what happened then? The mechanic came in to warm himself. Then on St. Alexey’s Day the ice broke on the river and the district policeman turned up, and he was chatting with you all night… the damned brute! And when he came out in the morning and I looked at him, he had rings under his eyes and his cheeks were hollow! Eh? During the August fast there were two storms and each time the huntsman turned up. I saw it all, damn him! Oh, she is redder than a crab now, aha!”

“You didn’t see anything.”

“Didn’t I! And this winter before Christmas on the Day of the Ten Martyrs of Crete, when the storm lasted for a whole day and night—do you remember?—the marshal’s clerk was lost, and turned up here, the hound.… Tfoo! To be tempted by the clerk! It was worth upsetting God’s weather for him! A drivelling scribbler, not a foot from the

ground, pimples all over his mug and his neck awry! If he were good-looking, anyway—but he, tfoo! he is as ugly as Satan!”

The sexton took breath, wiped his lips and listened. The bell was not to be heard, but the wind banged on the roof, and again there came a tinkle in the darkness.

“And it’s the same thing now!” Savely went on. “It’s not for nothing the postman is lost! Blast my eyes if the postman isn’t looking for you! Oh, the devil is a good hand at his work; he is a fine one to help! He will turn him round and round and bring him here. I know, I see! You can’t conceal it, you devil’s bauble, you heathen wanton! As soon as the storm began I knew what you were up to.”

“Here’s a fool!” smiled his wife. “Why, do you suppose, you thickhead, that I make the storm?”

“H’m!… Grin away! Whether it’s your doing or not, I only know that when your blood’s on fire there’s sure to be bad weather, and when there’s bad weather there’s bound to be some crazy fellow turning up here. It happens so every time! So it must be you!”

To be more impressive the sexton put his finger to his forehead, closed his left eye, and said in a singsong voice:

“Oh, the madness! oh, the unclean Judas! If you really are a human being and not a witch, you ought to think what if he is not the mechanic, or the clerk, or the huntsman, but the devil in their form! Ah! You’d better think of that!”

“Why, you are stupid, Savely,” said his wife, looking at him compassionately. “When father was alive and living here, all sorts of people used to come to him to be cured of the ague: from the village, and the hamlets, and the Armenian settlement. They came almost every day, and no one called them devils. But if anyone once a year comes in bad weather to warm himself, you wonder at it, you silly, and take all sorts of notions into your head at once.”

His wife’s logic touched Savely. He stood with his bare feet wide apart, bent his head, and pondered. He was not firmly convinced yet of the truth of his suspicions, and his wife’s genuine and unconcerned tone quite disconcerted him. Yet after a moment’s thought he wagged his head and said:

“It’s not as though they were old men or bandy-legged cripples; it’s always young men who want to come for the night.… Why is that? And if they only wanted to warm themselves—But they are up to mischief. No, woman; there’s no creature in this world as cunning as your female sort! Of real brains you’ve not an ounce, less than a starling, but for

devilish slyness—oo-oo-oo! The Queen of Heaven protect us! There is the postman's bell! When the storm was only beginning I knew all that was in your mind. That's your witchery, you spider!"

"Why do you keep on at me, you heathen?" His wife lost her patience at last. "Why do you keep sticking to it like pitch?"

"I stick to it because if anything—God forbid—happens tonight… do you hear?… if anything happens tonight, I'll go straight off tomorrow morning to Father Nikodim and tell him all about it. 'Father Nikodim,' I shall say, 'graciously excuse me, but she is a witch.' 'Why so?' 'H'm! do you want to know why?' 'Certainly.…' And I shall tell him. And woe to you, woman! Not only at the dread Seat of Judgment, but in your earthly life you'll be punished, too! It's not for nothing there are prayers in the breviary against your kind!"

Suddenly there was a knock at the window, so loud and unusual that Savely turned pale and almost dropped backwards with fright. His wife jumped up, and she, too, turned pale.

"For God's sake, let us come in and get warm!" they heard in a trembling deep bass. "Who lives here? For mercy's sake! We've lost our way."

"Who are you?" asked Raissa, afraid to look at the window.

"The post," answered a second voice.

"You've succeeded with your devil's tricks," said Savely with a wave of his hand. "No mistake; I am right! Well, you'd better look out!"

The sexton jumped on to the bed in two skips, stretched himself on the feather mattress, and sniffing angrily, turned with his face to the wall. Soon he felt a draught of cold air on his back. The door creaked and the tall figure of a man, plastered over with snow from head to foot, appeared in the doorway. Behind him could be seen a second figure as white.

"Am I to bring in the bags?" asked the second in a hoarse bass voice.

"You can't leave them there." Saying this, the first figure began untying his hood, but gave it up, and pulling it off impatiently with his cap, angrily flung it near the stove. Then taking off his greatcoat, he threw that down beside it, and, without saying good evening, began pacing up and down the hut.

He was a fair-haired, young postman wearing a shabby uniform and black rusty-looking high boots. After warming himself by walking to and fro, he sat down at the table, stretched out his muddy feet towards the sacks and leaned his chin on his fist. His pale face, reddened in places by the cold, still bore vivid traces of the pain and terror he had just been

through. Though distorted by anger and bearing traces of recent suffering, physical and moral, it was handsome in spite of the melting snow on the eyebrows, moustaches, and short beard.

"It's a dog's life!" muttered the postman, looking round the walls and seeming hardly able to believe that he was in the warmth. "We were nearly lost! If it had not been for your light, I don't know what would have happened. Goodness only knows when it will all be over! There's no end to this dog's life! Where have we come?" he asked, dropping his voice and raising his eyes to the sexton's wife.

"To the Gulyaevsky Hill on General Kalinovsky's estate," she answered, startled and blushing.

"Do you hear, Stepan?" The postman turned to the driver, who was wedged in the doorway with a huge mailbag on his shoulders. "We've got to Gulyaevsky Hill."

"Yes… we're a long way out." Jerking out these words like a hoarse sigh, the driver went out and soon after returned with another bag, then went out once more and this time brought the postman's sword on a big belt, of the pattern of that long flat blade with which Judith is portrayed by the bedside of Holofernes in cheap woodcuts. Laying the bags along the wall, he went out into the outer room, sat down there and lighted his pipe.

"Perhaps you'd like some tea after your journey?" Raissa inquired.

"How can we sit drinking tea?" said the postman, frowning. "We must make haste and get warm, and then set off, or we shall be late for the mail train. We'll stay ten minutes and then get on our way. Only be so good as to show us the way."

"What an infliction it is, this weather!" sighed Raissa.

"H'm, yes.… Who may you be?"

"We? We live here, by the church.… We belong to the clergy.… There lies my husband. Savely, get up and say good evening! This used to be a separate parish till eighteen months ago. Of course, when the gentry lived here there were more people, and it was worth while to have the services. But now the gentry have gone, and I need not tell you there's nothing for the clergy to live on. The nearest village is Markovka, and that's over three miles away. Savely is on the retired list now, and has got the watchman's job; he has to look after the church.…"

And the postman was immediately informed that if Savely were to go to the General's lady and ask her for a letter to the bishop, he would be given a good berth. "But he doesn't go to the General's lady because he

is lazy and afraid of people. We belong to the clergy all the same…" added Raissa.

"What do you live on?" asked the postman.

"There's a kitchen garden and a meadow belonging to the church. Only we don't get much from that," sighed Raissa. "The old skinflint, Father Nikodim, from the next village celebrates here on St. Nicolas' Day in the winter and on St. Nicolas' Day in the summer, and for that he takes almost all the crops for himself. There's no one to stick up for us!"

"You are lying," Savely growled hoarsely. "Father Nikodim is a saintly soul, a luminary of the Church; and if he does take it, it's the regulation!"

"You've a cross one!" said the postman, with a grin. "Have you been married long?"

"It was three years ago the last Sunday before Lent. My father was sexton here in the old days, and when the time came for him to die, he went to the Consistory and asked them to send some unmarried man to marry me that I might keep the place. So I married him."

"Aha, so you killed two birds with one stone!" said the postman, looking at Savely's back. "Got wife and job together."

Savely wriggled his leg impatiently and moved closer to the wall. The postman moved away from the table, stretched, and sat down on the mailbag. After a moment's thought he squeezed the bags with his hands, shifted his sword to the other side, and lay down with one foot touching the floor.

"It's a dog's life," he muttered, putting his hands behind his head and closing his eyes. "I wouldn't wish a wild Tatar such a life."

Soon everything was still. Nothing was audible except the sniffing of Savely and the slow, even breathing of the sleeping postman, who uttered a deep prolonged "h-h-h" at every breath. From time to time there was a sound like a creaking wheel in his throat, and his twitching foot rustled against the bag.

Savely fidgeted under the quilt and looked round slowly. His wife was sitting on the stool, and with her hands pressed against her cheeks was gazing at the postman's face. Her face was immovable, like the face of someone frightened and astonished.

"Well, what are you gaping at?" Savely whispered angrily.

"What is it to you? Lie down!" answered his wife without taking her eyes off the flaxen head.

Savely angrily puffed all the air out of his chest and turned abruptly to the wall. Three minutes later he turned over restlessly again, knelt up on

the bed, and with his hands on the pillow looked askance at his wife. She was still sitting motionless, staring at the visitor. Her cheeks were pale and her eyes were glowing with a strange fire. The sexton cleared his throat, crawled on his stomach off the bed, and going up to the postman, put a handkerchief over his face.

"What's that for?" asked his wife.

"To keep the light out of his eyes."

"Then put out the light!"

Savely looked distrustfully at his wife, put out his lips towards the lamp, but at once thought better of it and clasped his hands.

"Isn't that devilish cunning?" he exclaimed. "Ah! Is there any creature slyer than womenkind?"

"Ah, you long-skirted devil!" hissed his wife, frowning with vexation. "You wait a bit!"

And settling herself more comfortably, she stared at the postman again.

It did not matter to her that his face was covered. She was not so much interested in his face as in his whole appearance, in the novelty of this man. His chest was broad and powerful, his hands were slender and well formed, and his graceful, muscular legs were much comelier than Savely's stumps. There could be no comparison, in fact.

"Though I am a long-skirted devil," Savely said after a brief interval, "they've no business to sleep here.… It's government work; we shall have to answer for keeping them. If you carry the letters, carry them, you can't go to sleep.… Hey! you!" Savely shouted into the outer room. "You, driver. What's your name? Shall I show you the way? Get up; postmen mustn't sleep!"

And Savely, thoroughly roused, ran up to the postman and tugged him by the sleeve.

"Hey, your honour, if you must go, go; and if you don't, it's not the thing.… Sleeping won't do."

The postman jumped up, sat down, looked with blank eyes round the hut, and lay down again.

"But when are you going?" Savely pattered away. "That's what the post is for—to get there in good time, do you hear? I'll take you."

The postman opened his eyes. Warmed and relaxed by his first sweet sleep, and not yet quite awake, he saw as through a mist the white neck and the immovable, alluring eyes of the sexton's wife. He closed his eyes and smiled as though he had been dreaming it all.

“Come, how can you go in such weather!” he heard a soft feminine voice; “you ought to have a sound sleep and it would do you good!”

“And what about the post?” said Savely anxiously. “Who’s going to take the post? Are you going to take it, pray, you?”

The postman opened his eyes again, looked at the play of the dimples on Raissa’s face, remembered where he was, and understood Savely. The thought that he had to go out into the cold darkness sent a chill shudder all down him, and he winced.

“I might sleep another five minutes,” he said, yawning. “I shall be late, anyway.…”

“We might be just in time,” came a voice from the outer room. “All days are not alike; the train may be late for a bit of luck.”

The postman got up, and stretching lazily began putting on his coat.

Savely positively neighed with delight when he saw his visitors were getting ready to go.

“Give us a hand,” the driver shouted to him as he lifted up a mailbag.

The sexton ran out and helped him drag the postbags into the yard. The postman began undoing the knot in his hood. The sexton’s wife gazed into his eyes, and seemed trying to look right into his soul.

“You ought to have a cup of tea…” she said.

“I wouldn’t say no… but, you see, they’re getting ready,” he assented. “We are late, anyway.”

“Do stay,” she whispered, dropping her eyes and touching him by the sleeve.

The postman got the knot undone at last and flung the hood over his elbow, hesitating. He felt it comfortable standing by Raissa.

“What a… neck you’ve got!…” And he touched her neck with two fingers. Seeing that she did not resist, he stroked her neck and shoulders.

“I say, you are…”

“You’d better stay… have some tea.”

“Where are you putting it?” The driver’s voice could be heard outside. “Lay it crossways.”

“You’d better stay.… Hark how the wind howls.”

And the postman, not yet quite awake, not yet quite able to shake off the intoxicating sleep of youth and fatigue, was suddenly overwhelmed by a desire for the sake of which mailbags, postal trains… and all things in the world, are forgotten. He glanced at the door in a frightened way, as though he wanted to escape or hide himself, seized Raissa round the waist, and was just bending over the lamp to put out the light, when he heard the tramp of boots in the outer room, and the driver appeared in the

doorway. Savely peeped in over his shoulder. The postman dropped his hands quickly and stood still as though irresolute.

"It's all ready," said the driver. The postman stood still for a moment, resolutely threw up his head as though waking up completely, and followed the driver out. Raissa was left alone.

"Come, get in and show us the way!" she heard.

One bell sounded languidly, then another, and the jingling notes in a long delicate chain floated away from the hut.

When little by little they had died away, Raissa got up and nervously paced to and fro. At first she was pale, then she flushed all over. Her face was contorted with hate, her breathing was tremulous, her eyes gleamed with wild, savage anger, and, pacing up and down as in a cage, she looked like a tigress menaced with red-hot iron. For a moment she stood still and looked at her abode. Almost half of the room was filled up by the bed, which stretched the length of the whole wall and consisted of a dirty featherbed, coarse grey pillows, a quilt, and nameless rags of various sorts. The bed was a shapeless ugly mass which suggested the shock of hair that always stood up on Savely's head whenever it occurred to him to oil it. From the bed to the door that led into the cold outer room stretched the dark stove surrounded by pots and hanging clouts. Everything, including the absent Savely himself, was dirty, greasy, and smutty to the last degree, so that it was strange to see a woman's white neck and delicate skin in such surroundings.

Raissa ran up to the bed, stretched out her hands as though she wanted to fling it all about, stamp it underfoot, and tear it to shreds. But then, as though frightened by contact with the dirt, she leapt back and began pacing up and down again.

When Savely returned two hours later, worn out and covered with snow, she was undressed and in bed. Her eyes were closed, but from the slight tremor that ran over her face he guessed that she was not asleep. On his way home he had vowed inwardly to wait till next day and not to touch her, but he could not resist a biting taunt at her.

"Your witchery was all in vain: he's gone off," he said, grinning with malignant joy.

His wife remained mute, but her chin quivered. Savely undressed slowly, clambered over his wife, and lay down next to the wall.

"Tomorrow I'll let Father Nikodim know what sort of wife you are!" he muttered, curling himself up.

Raissa turned her face to him and her eyes gleamed.

“The job’s enough for you, and you can look for a wife in the forest, blast you!” she said. “I am no wife for you, a clumsy lout, a slug-a-bed, God forgive me!”

“Come, come… go to sleep!”

“How miserable I am!” sobbed his wife. “If it weren’t for you, I might have married a merchant or some gentleman! If it weren’t for you, I should love my husband now! And you haven’t been buried in the snow, you haven’t been frozen on the high road, you Herod!”

Raissa cried for a long time. At last she drew a deep sigh and was still. The storm still raged without. Something wailed in the stove, in the chimney, outside the walls, and it seemed to Savely that the wailing was within him, in his ears. This evening had completely confirmed him in his suspicions about his wife. He no longer doubted that his wife, with the aid of the Evil One, controlled the winds and the post sledges. But to add to his grief, this mysteriousness, this supernatural, weird power gave the woman beside him a peculiar, incomprehensible charm of which he had not been conscious before. The fact that in his stupidity he unconsciously threw a poetic glamour over her made her seem, as it were, whiter, sleeker, more unapproachable.

“Witch!” he muttered indignantly. “Tfoo, horrid creature!”

Yet, waiting till she was quiet and began breathing evenly, he touched her head with his finger… held her thick plait in his hand for a minute. She did not feel it. Then he grew bolder and stroked her neck.

“Leave off!” she shouted, and prodded him on the nose with her elbow with such violence that he saw stars before his eyes.

The pain in his nose was soon over, but the torture in his heart remained.

A Story Without an End

Soon after two o'clock one night, long ago, the cook, pale and agitated, rushed unexpectedly into my study and informed me that Madame Mimotih, the old woman who owned the house next door, was sitting in her kitchen.

"She begs you to go in to her, sir…" said the cook, panting. "Something bad has happened about her lodger.… He has shot himself or hanged himself.…"

"What can I do?" said I. "Let her go for the doctor or for the police!"

"How is she to look for a doctor! She can hardly breathe, and she has huddled under the stove, she is so frightened.… You had better go round, sir."

I put on my coat and hat and went to Madame Mimotih's house. The gate towards which I directed my steps was open. After pausing beside it, uncertain what to do, I went into the yard without feeling for the porter's bell. In the dark and dilapidated porch the door was not locked. I opened it and walked into the entry. Here there was not a glimmer of light, it was pitch dark, and, moreover, there was a marked smell of incense. Groping my way out of the entry I knocked my elbow against something made of iron, and in the darkness stumbled against a board of some sort which almost fell to the floor. At last the door covered with torn baize was found, and I went into a little hall.

I am not at the moment writing a fairy tale, and am far from intending to alarm the reader, but the picture I saw from the passage was fantastic and could only have been drawn by death. Straight before me was a door leading to a little drawing room. Three five-kopeck wax candles, standing in a row, threw a scanty light on the faded slate-coloured wallpaper. A coffin was standing on two tables in the middle of the little room. The two candles served only to light up a swarthy yellow face with a half-open mouth and sharp nose. Billows of muslin were mingled in disorder from the face to the tips of the two shoes, and from among the billows peeped out two pale motionless hands, holding a wax cross.

The dark gloomy corners of the little drawing room, the icons behind the coffin, the coffin itself, everything except the softly glimmering lights, were still as death, as the tomb itself.

"How strange!" I thought, dumbfounded by the unexpected panorama of death. "Why this haste? The lodger has hardly had time to hang himself, or shoot himself, and here is the coffin already!"

I looked round. On the left there was a door with a glass panel; on the right a lame hatstand with a shabby fur coat on it.…

"Water.…" I heard a moan.

The moan came from the left, beyond the door with the glass panel. I opened the door and walked into a little dark room with a solitary window, through which there came a faint light from a street lamp outside.

"Is anyone here?" I asked.

And without waiting for an answer I struck a match. This is what I saw while it was burning. A man was sitting on the bloodstained floor at my very feet. If my step had been a longer one I should have trodden on him. With his legs thrust forward and his hands pressed on the floor, he was making an effort to raise his handsome face, which was deathly pale against his pitch-black beard. In the big eyes which he lifted upon me, I read unutterable terror, pain, and entreaty. A cold sweat trickled in big drops down his face. That sweat, the expression of his face, the trembling of the hands he leaned upon, his hard breathing and his clenched teeth, showed that he was suffering beyond endurance. Near his right hand in a pool of blood lay a revolver.

"Don't go away," I heard a faint voice when the match had gone out. "There's a candle on the table."

I lighted the candle and stood still in the middle of the room not knowing what to do next. I stood and looked at the man on the floor, and it seemed to me that I had seen him before.

"The pain is insufferable," he whispered, "and I haven't the strength to shoot myself again. Incomprehensible lack of will."

I flung off my overcoat and attended to the sick man. Lifting him from the floor like a baby, I laid him on the American-leather covered sofa and carefully undressed him. He was shivering and cold when I took off his clothes; the wound which I saw was not in keeping either with his shivering nor the expression on his face. It was a trifling one. The bullet had passed between the fifth and sixth ribs on the left side, only piercing the skin and the flesh. I found the bullet itself in the folds of the coat-lining near the back pocket. Stopping the bleeding as best I could and

making a temporary bandage of a pillowcase, a towel, and two handkerchiefs, I gave the wounded man some water and covered him with a fur coat that was hanging in the passage. We neither of us said a word while the bandaging was being done. I did my work while he lay motionless looking at me with his eyes screwed up as though he were ashamed of his unsuccessful shot and the trouble he was giving me.

“Now I must trouble you to lie still,” I said, when I had finished the bandaging, “while I run to the chemist and get something.”

“No need!” he muttered, clutching me by the sleeve and opening his eyes wide.

I read terror in his eyes. He was afraid of my going away.

“No need! Stay another five minutes… ten. If it doesn’t disgust you, do stay, I entreat you.”

As he begged me he was trembling and his teeth were chattering. I obeyed, and sat down on the edge of the sofa. Ten minutes passed in silence. I sat silent, looking about the room into which fate had brought me so unexpectedly. What poverty! This man who was the possessor of a handsome, effeminate face and a luxuriant well-tended beard, had surroundings which a humble working man would not have envied. A sofa with its American-leather torn and peeling, a humble greasy-looking chair, a table covered with a little of paper, and a wretched oleograph on the wall, that was all I saw. Damp, gloomy, and grey.

“What a wind!” said the sick man, without opening his eyes, “How it whistles!”

“Yes,” I said. “I say, I fancy I know you. Didn’t you take part in some private theatricals in General Luhatchev’s villa last year?”

“What of it?” he asked, quickly opening his eyes.

A cloud seemed to pass over his face.

“I certainly saw you there. Isn’t your name Vassilyev?”

“If it is, what of it? It makes it no better that you should know me.”

“No, but I just asked you.”

Vassilyev closed his eyes and, as though offended, turned his face to the back of the sofa.

“I don’t understand your curiosity,” he muttered. “You’ll be asking me next what it was drove me to commit suicide!”

Before a minute had passed, he turned round towards me again, opened his eyes and said in a tearful voice:

“Excuse me for taking such a tone, but you’ll admit I’m right! To ask a convict how he got into prison, or a suicide why he shot himself is not

generous… and indelicate. To think of gratifying idle curiosity at the expense of another man's nerves!"

"There is no need to excite yourself.… It never occurred to me to question you about your motives."

"You would have asked.… It's what people always do. Though it would be no use to ask. If I told you, you would not believe or understand.… I must own I don't understand it myself.… There are phrases used in the police reports and newspapers such as: 'unrequited love,' and 'hopeless poverty,' but the reasons are not known.… They are not known to me, nor to you, nor to your newspaper offices, where they have the impudence to write 'The diary of a suicide.' God alone understands the state of a man's soul when he takes his own life; but men know nothing about it."

"That is all very nice," I said, "but you oughtn't to talk.…"

But my suicide could not be stopped, he leaned his head on his fist, and went on in the tone of some great professor:

"Man will never understand the psychological subtleties of suicide! How can one speak of reasons? Today the reason makes one snatch up a revolver, while tomorrow the same reason seems not worth a rotten egg. It all depends most likely on the particular condition of the individual at the given moment.… Take me for instance. Half an hour ago, I had a passionate desire for death, now when the candle is lighted, and you are sitting by me, I don't even think of the hour of death. Explain that change if you can! Am I better off, or has my wife risen from the dead? Is it the influence of the light on me, or the presence of an outsider?"

"The light certainly has an influence…" I muttered for the sake of saying something. "The influence of light on the organism.…"

"The influence of light.… We admit it! But you know men do shoot themselves by candlelight! And it would be ignominious indeed for the heroes of your novels if such a trifling thing as a candle were to change the course of the drama so abruptly. All this nonsense can be explained perhaps, but not by us. It's useless to ask questions or give explanations of what one does not understand.…"

"Forgive me," I said, "but… judging by the expression of your face, it seems to me that at this moment you… are posing."

"Yes," Vassilyev said, startled. "It's very possible! I am naturally vain and fatuous. Well, explain it, if you believe in your power of reading faces! Half an hour ago I shot myself, and just now I am posing.… Explain that if you can."

These last words Vassilyev pronounced in a faint, failing voice. He was exhausted, and sank into silence. A pause followed. I began scrutinising his face. It was as pale as a dead man's. It seemed as though life were almost extinct in him, and only the signs of the suffering that the "vain and fatuous" man was feeling betrayed that it was still alive. It was painful to look at that face, but what must it have been for Vassilyev himself who yet had the strength to argue and, if I were not mistaken, to pose?

"You here—are you here?" he asked suddenly, raising himself on his elbow. "My God, just listen!"

I began listening. The rain was pattering angrily on the dark window, never ceasing for a minute. The wind howled plaintively and lugubriously.

"'And I shall be whiter than snow, and my ears will hear gladness and rejoicing.'" Madame Mimotih, who had returned, was reading in the drawing room in a languid, weary voice, neither raising nor dropping the monotonous dreary key.

"It is cheerful, isn't it?" whispered Vassilyev, turning his frightened eyes towards me. "My God, the things a man has to see and hear! If only one could set this chaos to music! As Hamlet says, 'it would—'"

> "Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed,
> The very faculties of eyes and ears."

"How well I should have understood that music then! How I should have felt it! What time is it?"

"Five minutes to three."

"Morning is still far off. And in the morning there's the funeral. A lovely prospect! One follows the coffin through the mud and rain. One walks along, seeing nothing but the cloudy sky and the wretched scenery. The muddy mutes, taverns, woodstacks.… One's trousers drenched to the knees. The never-ending streets. The time dragging out like eternity, the coarse people. And on the heart a stone, a stone!"

After a brief pause he suddenly asked: "Is it long since you saw General Luhatchev?"

"I haven't seen him since last summer."

"He likes to be cock of the walk, but he is a nice little old chap. And are you still writing?"

"Yes, a little."

“Ah.… Do you remember how I pranced about like a needle, like an enthusiastic ass at those private theatricals when I was courting Zina? It was stupid, but it was good, it was fun.… The very memory of it brings back a whiff of spring.… And now! What a cruel change of scene! There is a subject for you! Only don’t you go in for writing ‘the diary of a suicide.’ That’s vulgar and conventional. You make something humorous of it.”

“Again you are… posing,” I said. “There’s nothing humorous in your position.”

“Nothing laughable? You say nothing laughable?” Vassilyev sat up, and tears glistened in his eyes. An expression of bitter distress came into his pale face. His chin quivered.

“You laugh at the deceit of cheating clerks and faithless wives,” he said, “but no clerk, no faithless wife has cheated as my fate has cheated me! I have been deceived as no bank depositor, no duped husband has ever been deceived! Only realise what an absurd fool I have been made! Last year before your eyes I did not know what to do with myself for happiness. And now before your eyes.…”

Vassilyev’s head sank on the pillow and he laughed.

“Nothing more absurd and stupid than such a change could possibly be imagined. Chapter one: spring, love, honeymoon… honey, in fact; chapter two: looking for a job, the pawnshop, pallor, the chemist’s shop, and… tomorrow’s splashing through the mud to the graveyard.”

He laughed again. I felt acutely uncomfortable and made up my mind to go.

“I tell you what,” I said, “you lie down, and I will go to the chemist’s.”

He made no answer. I put on my greatcoat and went out of his room. As I crossed the passage I glanced at the coffin and Madame Mimotih reading over it. I strained my eyes in vain, I could not recognise in the swarthy, yellow face Zina, the lively, pretty ingénue of Luhatchev’s company.

“*Sic transit*,” I thought.

With that I went out, not forgetting to take the revolver, and made my way to the chemist’s. But I ought not to have gone away. When I came back from the chemist’s, Vassilyev lay on the sofa fainting. The bandages had been roughly torn off, and blood was flowing from the reopened wound. It was daylight before I succeeded in restoring him to consciousness. He was raving in delirium, shivering, and looking with unseeing eyes about the room till morning had come, and we heard the booming voice of the priest as he read the service over the dead.

When Vassilyev's rooms were crowded with old women and mutes, when the coffin had been moved and carried out of the yard, I advised him to remain at home. But he would not obey me, in spite of the pain and the grey, rainy morning. He walked bareheaded and in silence behind the coffin all the way to the cemetery, hardly able to move one leg after the other, and from time to time clutching convulsively at his wounded side. His face expressed complete apathy. Only once when I roused him from his lethargy by some insignificant question he shifted his eyes over the pavement and the grey fence, and for a moment there was a gleam of gloomy anger in them.

"'Weelright,'" he read on a signboard. "Ignorant, illiterate people, devil take them!"

I led him home from the cemetery.

Only one year has passed since that night, and Vassilyev has hardly had time to wear out the boots in which he tramped through the mud behind his wife's coffin.

At the present time as I finish this story, he is sitting in my drawing room and, playing on the piano, is showing the ladies how provincial misses sing sentimental songs. The ladies are laughing, and he is laughing too. He is enjoying himself.

I call him into my study. Evidently not pleased at my taking him from agreeable company, he comes to me and stands before me in the attitude of a man who has no time to spare. I give him this story, and ask him to read it. Always condescending about my authorship, he stifles a sigh, the sigh of a lazy reader, sits down in an armchair and begins upon it.

"Hang it all, what horrors," he mutters with a smile.

But the further he gets into the reading, the graver his face becomes. At last, under the stress of painful memories, he turns terribly pale, he gets up and goes on reading as he stands. When he has finished he begins pacing from corner to corner.

"How does it end?" I ask him.

"How does it end? H'm.…"

He looks at the room, at me, at himself.… He sees his new fashionable suit, hears the ladies laughing and… sinking on a chair, begins laughing as he laughed on that night.

"Wasn't I right when I told you it was all absurd? My God! I have had burdens to bear that would have broken an elephant's back; the devil

knows what I have suffered—no one could have suffered more, I think, and where are the traces? It's astonishing. One would have thought the imprint made on a man by his agonies would have been everlasting, never to be effaced or eradicated. And yet that imprint wears out as easily as a pair of cheap boots. There is nothing left, not a scrap. It's as though I hadn't been suffering then, but had been dancing a mazurka. Everything in the world is transitory, and that transitoriness is absurd! A wide field for humorists! Tack on a humorous end, my friend!"

"Pyotr Nikolaevitch, are you coming soon?" The impatient ladies call my hero.

"This minute," answers the "vain and fatuous" man, setting his tie straight. "It's absurd and pitiful, my friend, pitiful and absurd, but what's to be done? *Homo sum.*… And I praise Mother Nature all the same for her transmutation of substances. If we retained an agonising memory of toothache and of all the terrors which every one of us has had to experience, if all that were everlasting, we poor mortals would have a bad time of it in this life."

I look at his smiling face and I remember the despair and the horror with which his eyes were filled a year ago when he looked at the dark window. I see him, entering into his habitual role of intellectual chatterer, prepare to show off his idle theories, such as the transmutation of substances before me, and at the same time I recall him sitting on the floor in a pool of blood with his sick imploring eyes.

"How will it end?" I ask myself aloud.

Vassilyev, whistling and straightening his tie, walks off into the drawing room, and I look after him, and feel vexed. For some reason I regret his past sufferings, I regret all that I felt myself on that man's account on that terrible night. It is as though I had lost something.…

A Joke

It was a bright winter midday.… There was a sharp snapping frost and the curls on Nadenka's temples and the down on her upper lip were covered with silvery frost. She was holding my arm and we were standing on a high hill. From where we stood to the ground below there stretched a smooth sloping descent in which the sun was reflected as in a looking-glass. Beside us was a little sledge lined with bright red cloth.

"Let us go down, Nadyezhda Petrovna!" I besought her. "Only once! I assure you we shall be all right and not hurt."

But Nadenka was afraid. The slope from her little goloshes to the bottom of the ice hill seemed to her a terrible, immensely deep abyss. Her spirit failed her, and she held her breath as she looked down, when I merely suggested her getting into the sledge, but what would it be if she were to risk flying into the abyss! She would die, she would go out of her mind.

"I entreat you!" I said. "You mustn't be afraid! You know it's poor-spirited, it's cowardly!"

Nadenka gave way at last, and from her face I saw that she gave way in mortal dread. I sat her in the sledge, pale and trembling, put my arm round her and with her cast myself down the precipice.

The sledge flew like a bullet. The air cleft by our flight beat in our faces, roared, whistled in our ears, tore at us, nipped us cruelly in its anger, tried to tear our heads off our shoulders. We had hardly strength to breathe from the pressure of the wind. It seemed as though the devil himself had caught us in his claws and was dragging us with a roar to hell. Surrounding objects melted into one long furiously racing streak… another moment and it seemed we should perish.

"I love you, Nadya!" I said in a low voice.

The sledge began moving more and more slowly, the roar of the wind and the whirr of the runners was no longer so terrible, it was easier to breathe, and at last we were at the bottom. Nadenka was more dead than alive. She was pale and scarcely breathing.… I helped her to get up.

“Nothing would induce me to go again,” she said, looking at me with wide eyes full of horror. “Nothing in the world! I almost died!”

A little later she recovered herself and looked enquiringly into my eyes, wondering had I really uttered those four words or had she fancied them in the roar of the hurricane. And I stood beside her smoking and looking attentively at my glove.

She took my arm and we spent a long while walking near the ice-hill. The riddle evidently would not let her rest.… Had those words been uttered or not?… Yes or no? Yes or no? It was the question of pride, or honour, of life—a very important question, the most important question in the world. Nadenka kept impatiently, sorrowfully looking into my face with a penetrating glance; she answered at random, waiting to see whether I would not speak. Oh, the play of feeling on that sweet face! I saw that she was struggling with herself, that she wanted to say something, to ask some question, but she could not find the words; she felt awkward and frightened and troubled by her joy.…

“Do you know what,” she said without looking at me.

“Well?” I asked.

“Let us… slide down again.”

We clambered up the ice-hill by the steps again. I sat Nadenka, pale and trembling, in the sledge; again we flew into the terrible abyss, again the wind roared and the runners whirred, and again when the flight of our sledge was at its swiftest and noisiest, I said in a low voice:

“I love you, Nadenka!”

When the sledge stopped, Nadenka flung a glance at the hill down which we had both slid, then bent a long look upon my face, listened to my voice which was unconcerned and passionless, and the whole of her little figure, every bit of it, even her muff and her hood expressed the utmost bewilderment, and on her face was written: “What does it mean? Who uttered *those* words? Did he, or did I only fancy it?”

The uncertainty worried her and drove her out of all patience. The poor girl did not answer my questions, frowned, and was on the point of tears.

“Hadn’t we better go home?” I asked.

“Well, I… I like this tobogganning,” she said, flushing. “Shall we go down once more?”

She “liked” the tobogganning, and yet as she got into the sledge she was, as both times before, pale, trembling, hardly able to breathe for terror.

We went down for the third time, and I saw she was looking at my face and watching my lips. But I put my handkerchief to my lips, coughed, and when we reached the middle of the hill I succeeded in bringing out:

“I love you, Nadya!”

And the mystery remained a mystery! Nadenka was silent, pondering on something.… I saw her home, she tried to walk slowly, slackened her pace and kept waiting to see whether I would not say those words to her, and I saw how her soul was suffering, what effort she was making not to say to herself:

“It cannot be that the wind said them! And I don’t want it to be the wind that said them!”

Next morning I got a little note:

“If you are tobogganning today, come for me. —N.”

And from that time I began going every day tobogganning with Nadenka, and as we flew down in the sledge, every time I pronounced in a low voice the same words: “I love you, Nadya!”

Soon Nadenka grew used to that phrase as to alcohol or morphia. She could not live without it. It is true that flying down the ice-hill terrified her as before, but now the terror and danger gave a peculiar fascination to words of love—words which as before were a mystery and tantalized the soul. The same two—the wind and I were still suspected.… Which of the two was making love to her she did not know, but apparently by now she did not care; from which goblet one drinks matters little if only the beverage is intoxicating.

It happened I went to the skating-ground alone at midday; mingling with the crowd I saw Nadenka go up to the ice-hill and look about for me… then she timidly mounted the steps.… She was frightened of going alone—oh, how frightened! She was white as the snow, she was trembling, she went as though to the scaffold, but she went, she went without looking back, resolutely. She had evidently determined to put it to the test at last: would those sweet amazing words be heard when I was not there? I saw her, pale, her lips parted with horror, get into the sledge, shut her eyes and saying goodbye forever to the earth, set off.… “Whrrr!” whirred the runners. Whether Nadenka heard those words I do not know. I only saw her getting up from the sledge looking faint and exhausted. And one could tell from her face that she could not tell herself whether she had heard anything or not. Her terror while she had been flying down had deprived of her all power of hearing, of discriminating sounds, of understanding.

But then the month of March arrived… the spring sunshine was more kindly.… Our ice-hill turned dark, lost its brilliance and finally melted. We gave up tobogganning. There was nowhere now where poor Nadenka could hear those words, and indeed no one to utter them, since there was no wind and I was going to Petersburg—for long, perhaps forever.

It happened two days before my departure I was sitting in the dusk in the little garden which was separated from the yard of Nadenka's house by a high fence with nails in it.… It was still pretty cold, there was still snow by the manure heap, the trees looked dead but there was already the scent of spring and the rooks were cawing loudly as they settled for their night's rest. I went up to the fence and stood for a long while peeping through a chink. I saw Nadenka come out into the porch and fix a mournful yearning gaze on the sky.… The spring wind was blowing straight into her pale dejected face.… It reminded her of the wind which roared at us on the ice-hill when she heard those four words, and her face became very, very sorrowful, a tear trickled down her cheek, and the poor child held out both arms as though begging the wind to bring her those words once more. And waiting for the wind I said in a low voice:

"I love you, Nadya!"

Mercy! The change that came over Nadenka! She uttered a cry, smiled all over her face and looking joyful, happy and beautiful, held out her arms to meet the wind.

And I went off to pack up.…

That was long ago. Now Nadenka is married; she married—whether of her own choice or not does not matter—a secretary of the Nobility Wardenship and now she has three children. That we once went tobogganning together, and that the wind brought her the words "I love you, Nadenka," is not forgotten; it is for her now the happiest, most touching, and beautiful memory in her life.…

But now that I am older I cannot understand why I uttered those words, what was my motive in that joke.…

AGAFYA

During my stay in the district of S—— I often used to go to see the watchman Savva Stukatch, or simply Savka, in the kitchen gardens of Dubovo. These kitchen gardens were my favorite resort for so-called "mixed" fishing, when one goes out without knowing what day or hour one may return, taking with one every sort of fishing tackle as well as a store of provisions. To tell the truth, it was not so much the fishing that attracted me as the peaceful stroll, the meals at no set time, the talk with Savka, and being for so long face to face with the calm summer nights. Savka was a young man of five-and-twenty, well grown and handsome, and as strong as a flint. He had the reputation of being a sensible and reasonable fellow. He could read and write, and very rarely drank, but as a workman this strong and healthy young man was not worth a farthing. A sluggish, overpowering sloth was mingled with the strength in his muscles, which were strong as cords. Like everyone else in his village, he lived in his own hut, and had his share of land, but neither tilled it nor sowed it, and did not work at any sort of trade. His old mother begged alms at people's windows and he himself lived like a bird of the air; he did not know in the morning what he would eat at midday. It was not that he was lacking in will, or energy, or feeling for his mother; it was simply that he felt no inclination for work and did not recognize the advantage of it. His whole figure suggested unruffled serenity, an innate, almost artistic passion for living carelessly, never with his sleeves tucked up. When Savka's young, healthy body had a physical craving for muscular work, the young man abandoned himself completely for a brief interval to some free but nonsensical pursuit, such as sharpening skates not wanted for any special purpose, or racing about after the peasant women. His favorite attitude was one of concentrated immobility. He was capable of standing for hours at a stretch in the same place with his eyes fixed on the same spot without stirring. He never moved except on impulse, and then only when an occasion presented itself for some rapid and abrupt action: catching a running dog by the tail, pulling off a woman's

kerchief, or jumping over a big hole. It need hardly be said that with such parsimony of movement Savka was as poor as a mouse and lived worse than any homeless outcast. As time went on, I suppose he accumulated arrears of taxes and, young and sturdy as he was, he was sent by the commune to do an old man's job—to be watchman and scarecrow in the kitchen gardens. However much they laughed at him for his premature senility he did not object to it. This position, quiet and convenient for motionless contemplation, exactly fitted his temperament.

It happened I was with this Savka one fine May evening. I remember I was lying on a torn and dirty sackcloth cover close to the shanty from which came a heavy, fragrant scent of hay. Clasping my hands under my head I looked before me. At my feet was lying a wooden fork. Behind it Savka's dog Kutka stood out like a black patch, and not a dozen feet from Kutka the ground ended abruptly in the steep bank of the little river. Lying down I could not see the river; I could only see the tops of the young willows growing thickly on the nearer bank, and the twisting, as it were gnawed away, edges of the opposite bank. At a distance beyond the bank on the dark hillside the huts of the village in which Savka lived lay huddling together like frightened young partridges. Beyond the hill the afterglow of sunset still lingered in the sky. One pale crimson streak was all that was left, and even that began to be covered by little clouds as a fire with ash.

A copse with alder trees, softly whispering, and from time to time shuddering in the fitful breeze, lay, a dark blur, on the right of the kitchen gardens; on the left stretched the immense plain. In the distance, where the eye could not distinguish between the sky and the plain, there was a bright gleam of light. A little way off from me sat Savka. With his legs tucked under him like a Turk and his head hanging, he looked pensively at Kutka. Our hooks with live bait on them had long been in the river, and we had nothing left to do but to abandon ourselves to repose, which Savka, who was never exhausted and always rested, loved so much. The glow had not yet quite died away, but the summer night was already enfolding nature in its caressing, soothing embrace.

Everything was sinking into its first deep sleep except some night bird unfamiliar to me, which indolently uttered a long, protracted cry in several distinct notes like the phrase, "Have you seen Ni-ki-ta?" and immediately answered itself, "Seen him, seen him, seen him!"

"Why is it the nightingales aren't singing tonight?" I asked Savka.

He turned slowly towards me. His features were large, but his face was open, soft, and expressive as a woman's. Then he gazed with his

mild, dreamy eyes at the copse, at the willows, slowly pulled a whistle out of his pocket, put it in his mouth and whistled the note of a hen-nightingale. And at once, as though in answer to his call, a landrail called on the opposite bank.

"There's a nightingale for you…" laughed Savka. "Drag-drag! drag-drag! just like pulling at a hook, and yet I bet he thinks he is singing, too."

"I like that bird," I said. "Do you know, when the birds are migrating the landrail does not fly, but runs along the ground? It only flies over the rivers and the sea, but all the rest it does on foot."

"Upon my word, the dog…" muttered Savka, looking with respect in the direction of the calling landrail.

Knowing how fond Savka was of listening, I told him all I had learned about the landrail from sportsman's books. From the landrail I passed imperceptibly to the migration of the birds. Savka listened attentively, looking at me without blinking, and smiling all the while with pleasure.

"And which country is most the bird's home? Ours or those foreign parts?" he asked.

"Ours, of course. The bird itself is hatched here, and it hatches out its little ones here in its native country, and they only fly off there to escape being frozen."

"It's interesting," said Savka. "Whatever one talks about it is always interesting. Take a bird now, or a man… or take this little stone; there's something to learn about all of them.… Ah, sir, if I had known you were coming I wouldn't have told a woman to come here this evening.… She asked to come today."

"Oh, please don't let me be in your way," I said. "I can lie down in the wood.…"

"What next! She wouldn't have died if she hadn't come till tomorrow.… If only she would sit quiet and listen, but she always wants to be slobbering.… You can't have a good talk when she's here."

"Are you expecting Darya?" I asked, after a pause.

"No… a new one has asked to come this evening… Agafya, the signalman's wife."

Savka said this in his usual passionless, somewhat hollow voice, as though he were talking of tobacco or porridge, while I started with surprise. I knew Agafya.… She was quite a young peasant woman of nineteen or twenty, who had been married not more than a year before to a railway signalman, a fine young fellow. She lived in the village, and her husband came home there from the line every night.

“Your goings on with the women will lead to trouble, my boy,” said I.

“Well, may be.…”

And after a moment’s thought Savka added:

“I’ve said so to the women; they won’t heed me.… They don’t trouble about it, the silly things!”

Silence followed.… Meanwhile the darkness was growing thicker and thicker, and objects began to lose their contours. The streak behind the hill had completely died away, and the stars were growing brighter and more luminous.… The mournfully monotonous chirping of the grasshoppers, the call of the landrail, and the cry of the quail did not destroy the stillness of the night, but, on the contrary, gave it an added monotony. It seemed as though the soft sounds that enchanted the ear came, not from birds or insects, but from the stars looking down upon us from the sky.…

Savka was the first to break the silence. He slowly turned his eyes from black Kutka and said:

“I see you are dull, sir. Let’s have supper.”

And without waiting for my consent he crept on his stomach into the shanty, rummaged about there, making the whole edifice tremble like a leaf; then he crawled back and set before me my vodka and an earthenware bowl; in the bowl there were baked eggs, lard scones made of rye, pieces of black bread, and something else.… We had a drink from a little crooked glass that wouldn’t stand, and then we fell upon the food.… Coarse grey salt, dirty, greasy cakes, eggs tough as india-rubber, but how nice it all was!

“You live all alone, but what lots of good things you have,” I said, pointing to the bowl. “Where do you get them from?”

“The women bring them,” mumbled Savka.

“What do they bring them to you for?”

“Oh… from pity.”

Not only Savka’s menu, but his clothing, too, bore traces of feminine “pity.” Thus I noticed that he had on, that evening, a new woven belt and a crimson ribbon on which a copper cross hung round his dirty neck. I knew of the weakness of the fair sex for Savka, and I knew that he did not like talking about it, and so I did not carry my inquiries any further. Besides there was not time to talk.… Kutka, who had been fidgeting about near us and patiently waiting for scraps, suddenly pricked up his ears and growled. We heard in the distance repeated splashing of water.

“Someone is coming by the ford,” said Savka.

Three minutes later Kutka growled again and made a sound like a cough.

“Shsh!” his master shouted at him.

In the darkness there was a muffled thud of timid footsteps, and the silhouette of a woman appeared out of the copse. I recognized her, although it was dark—it was Agafya. She came up to us diffidently and stopped, breathing hard. She was breathless, probably not so much from walking as from fear and the unpleasant sensation everyone experiences in wading across a river at night. Seeing near the shanty not one but two persons, she uttered a faint cry and fell back a step.

“Ah… that is you!” said Savka, stuffing a scone into his mouth.

“Ye-es… I,” she muttered, dropping on the ground a bundle of some sort and looking sideways at me. “Yakov sent his greetings to you and told me to give you… something here.…”

“Come, why tell stories? Yakov!” laughed Savka. “There is no need for lying; the gentleman knows why you have come! Sit down; you shall have supper with us.”

Agafya looked sideways at me and sat down irresolutely.

“I thought you weren’t coming this evening,” Savka said, after a prolonged silence. “Why sit like that? Eat! Or shall I give you a drop of vodka?”

“What an idea!” laughed Agafya; “do you think you have got hold of a drunkard?…”

“Oh, drink it up.… Your heart will feel warmer.… There!”

Savka gave Agafya the crooked glass. She slowly drank the vodka, ate nothing with it, but drew a deep breath when she had finished.

“You’ve brought something,” said Savka, untying the bundle and throwing a condescending, jesting shade into his voice. “Women can never come without bringing something. Ah, pie and potatoes.… They live well,” he sighed, turning to me. “They are the only ones in the whole village who have got potatoes left from the winter!”

In the darkness I did not see Agafya’s face, but from the movement of her shoulders and head it seemed to me that she could not take her eyes off Savka’s face. To avoid being the third person at this tryst, I decided to go for a walk and got up. But at that moment a nightingale in the wood suddenly uttered two low contralto notes. Half a minute later it gave a tiny high trill and then, having thus tried its voice, began singing. Savka jumped up and listened.

“It’s the same one as yesterday,” he said. “Wait a minute.”

And, getting up, he went noiselessly to the wood.

“Why, what do you want with it?” I shouted out after him, “Stop!”

Savka shook his hand as much as to say, “Don’t shout,” and vanished into the darkness. Savka was an excellent sportsman and fisherman when he liked, but his talents in this direction were as completely thrown away as his strength. He was too slothful to do things in the routine way, and vented his passion for sport in useless tricks. For instance, he would catch nightingales only with his hands, would shoot pike with a fowling piece, he would spend whole hours by the river trying to catch little fish with a big hook.

Left alone with me, Agafya coughed and passed her hand several times over her forehead.… She began to feel a little drunk from the vodka.

“How are you getting on, Agasha?” I asked her, after a long silence, when it began to be awkward to remain mute any longer.

“Very well, thank God.… Don’t tell anyone, sir, will you?” she added suddenly in a whisper.

“That’s all right,” I reassured her. “But how reckless you are, Agasha!… What if Yakov finds out?”

“He won’t find out.”

“But what if he does?”

“No… I shall be at home before he is. He is on the line now, and he will come back when the mail train brings him, and from here I can hear when the train’s coming.…”

Agafya once more passed her hand over her forehead and looked away in the direction in which Savka had vanished. The nightingale was singing. Some night bird flew low down close to the ground and, noticing us, was startled, fluttered its wings and flew across to the other side of the river.

Soon the nightingale was silent, but Savka did not come back. Agafya got up, took a few steps uneasily, and sat down again.

“What is he doing?” she could not refrain from saying. “The train’s not coming in tomorrow! I shall have to go away directly.”

“Savka,” I shouted. “Savka.”

I was not answered even by an echo. Agafya moved uneasily and sat down again.

“It’s time I was going,” she said in an agitated voice. “The train will be here directly! I know when the trains come in.”

The poor woman was not mistaken. Before a quarter of an hour had passed a sound was heard in the distance.

Agafya kept her eyes fixed on the copse for a long time and moved her hands impatiently.

"Why, where can he be?" she said, laughing nervously. "Where has the devil carried him? I am going! I really must be going."

Meanwhile the noise was growing more and more distinct. By now one could distinguish the rumble of the wheels from the heavy gasps of the engine. Then we heard the whistle, the train crossed the bridge with a hollow rumble… another minute and all was still.

"I'll wait one minute more," said Agafya, sitting down resolutely. "So be it, I'll wait."

At last Savka appeared in the darkness. He walked noiselessly on the crumbling earth of the kitchen gardens and hummed something softly to himself.

"Here's a bit of luck; what do you say to that now?" he said gaily. "As soon as I got up to the bush and began taking aim with my hand it left off singing! Ah, the bald dog! I waited and waited to see when it would begin again, but I had to give it up."

Savka flopped clumsily down to the ground beside Agafya and, to keep his balance, clutched at her waist with both hands.

"Why do you look cross, as though your aunt were your mother?" he asked.

With all his softheartedness and good-nature, Savka despised women. He behaved carelessly, condescendingly with them, and even stooped to scornful laughter of their feelings for himself. God knows, perhaps this careless, contemptuous manner was one of the causes of his irresistible attraction for the village Dulcineas. He was handsome and well-built; in his eyes there was always a soft friendliness, even when he was looking at the women he so despised, but the fascination was not to be explained by merely external qualities. Apart from his happy exterior and original manner, one must suppose that the touching position of Savka as an acknowledged failure and an unhappy exile from his own hut to the kitchen gardens also had an influence upon the women.

"Tell the gentleman what you have come here for!" Savka went on, still holding Agafya by the waist. "Come, tell him, you good married woman! Ho-ho! Shall we have another drop of vodka, friend Agasha?"

I got up and, threading my way between the plots, I walked the length of the kitchen garden. The dark beds looked like flattened-out graves. They smelt of dug earth and the tender dampness of plants beginning to be covered with dew.… A red light was still gleaming on the left. It winked genially and seemed to smile.

I heard a happy laugh. It was Agafya laughing.

"And the train?" I thought. "The train has come in long ago."

Waiting a little longer, I went back to the shanty. Savka was sitting motionless, his legs crossed like a Turk, and was softly, scarcely audibly humming a song consisting of words of one syllable something like: "Out on you, fie on you… I and you." Agafya, intoxicated by the vodka, by Savka's scornful caresses, and by the stifling warmth of the night, was lying on the earth beside him, pressing her face convulsively to his knees. She was so carried away by her feelings that she did not even notice my arrival.

"Agasha, the train has been in a long time," I said.

"It's time—it's time you were gone," Savka, tossing his head, took up my thought. "What are you sprawling here for? You shameless hussy!"

Agafya started, took her head from his knees, glanced at me, and sank down beside him again.

"You ought to have gone long ago," I said.

Agafya turned round and got up on one knee.… She was unhappy.… For half a minute her whole figure, as far as I could distinguish it through the darkness, expressed conflict and hesitation. There was an instant when, seeming to come to herself, she drew herself up to get upon her feet, but then some invincible and implacable force seemed to push her whole body, and she sank down beside Savka again.

"Bother him!" she said, with a wild, guttural laugh, and reckless determination, impotence, and pain could be heard in that laugh.

I strolled quietly away to the copse, and from there down to the river, where our fishing lines were set. The river slept. Some soft, fluffy-petalled flower on a tall stalk touched my cheek tenderly like a child who wants to let one know it's awake. To pass the time I felt for one of the lines and pulled at it. It yielded easily and hung limply—nothing had been caught.… The further bank and the village could not be seen. A light gleamed in one hut, but soon went out. I felt my way along the bank, found a hollow place which I had noticed in the daylight, and sat down in it as in an armchair. I sat there a long time.… I saw the stars begin to grow misty and lose their brightness; a cool breath passed over the earth like a faint sigh and touched the leaves of the slumbering osiers.…

"A-ga-fya!" a hollow voice called from the village. "Agafya!"

It was the husband, who had returned home, and in alarm was looking for his wife in the village. At that moment there came the sound of unrestrained laughter: the wife, forgetful of everything, sought in her

intoxication to make up by a few hours of happiness for the misery awaiting her next day.

I dropped asleep.

When I woke up Savka was sitting beside me and lightly shaking my shoulder. The river, the copse, both banks, green and washed, trees and fields—all were bathed in bright morning light. Through the slim trunks of the trees the rays of the newly risen sun beat upon my back.

“So that’s how you catch fish?” laughed Savka. “Get up!”

I got up, gave a luxurious stretch, and began greedily drinking in the damp and fragrant air.

“Has Agasha gone?” I asked.

“There she is,” said Savka, pointing in the direction of the ford.

I glanced and saw Agafya. Dishevelled, with her kerchief dropping off her head, she was crossing the river, holding up her skirt. Her legs were scarcely moving.…

“The cat knows whose meat it has eaten,” muttered Savka, screwing up his eyes as he looked at her. “She goes with her tail hanging down.… They are sly as cats, these women, and timid as hares.… She didn’t go, silly thing, in the evening when we told her to! Now she will catch it, and they’ll flog me again at the peasant court… all on account of the women.…”

Agafya stepped upon the bank and went across the fields to the village. At first she walked fairly boldly, but soon terror and excitement got the upper hand; she turned round fearfully, stopped and took breath.

“Yes, you are frightened!” Savka laughed mournfully, looking at the bright green streak left by Agafya in the dewy grass. “She doesn’t want to go! Her husband’s been standing waiting for her for a good hour.… Did you see him?”

Savka said the last words with a smile, but they sent a chill to my heart. In the village, near the furthest hut, Yakov was standing in the road, gazing fixedly at his returning wife. He stood without stirring, and was as motionless as a post. What was he thinking as he looked at her? What words was he preparing to greet her with? Agafya stood still a little while, looked round once more as though expecting help from us, and went on. I have never seen anyone, drunk or sober, move as she did. Agafya seemed to be shrivelled up by her husband’s eyes. At one time she moved in zigzags, then she moved her feet up and down without going forward, bending her knees and stretching out her hands, then she staggered back. When she had gone another hundred paces she looked round once more and sat down.

“You ought at least to hide behind a bush…” I said to Savka. “If the husband sees you…”

“He knows, anyway, who it is Agafya has come from.… The women don’t go to the kitchen garden at night for cabbages—we all know that.”

I glanced at Savka’s face. It was pale and puckered up with a look of fastidious pity such as one sees in the faces of people watching tortured animals.

“What’s fun for the cat is tears for the mouse…” he muttered.

Agafya suddenly jumped up, shook her head, and with a bold step went towards her husband. She had evidently plucked up her courage and made up her mind.

A Nightmare

Kunin, a young man of thirty, who was a permanent member of the Rural Board, on returning from Petersburg to his district, Borisovo, immediately sent a mounted messenger to Sinkino, for the priest there, Father Yakov Smirnov.

Five hours later Father Yakov appeared.

“Very glad to make your acquaintance,” said Kunin, meeting him in the entry. “I’ve been living and serving here for a year; it seems as though we ought to have been acquainted before. You are very welcome! But… how young you are!” Kunin added in surprise. “What is your age?”

“Twenty-eight,…” said Father Yakov, faintly pressing Kunin’s outstretched hand, and for some reason turning crimson.

Kunin led his visitor into his study and began looking at him more attentively.

“What an uncouth womanish face!” he thought.

There certainly was a good deal that was womanish in Father Yakov’s face: the turned-up nose, the bright red cheeks, and the large grey-blue eyes with scanty, scarcely perceptible eyebrows. His long reddish hair, smooth and dry, hung down in straight tails on to his shoulders. The hair on his upper lip was only just beginning to form into a real masculine moustache, while his little beard belonged to that class of good-for-nothing beards which among divinity students are for some reason called “ticklers.” It was scanty and extremely transparent; it could not have been stroked or combed, it could only have been pinched.… All these scanty decorations were put on unevenly in tufts, as though Father Yakov, thinking to dress up as a priest and beginning to gum on the beard, had been interrupted halfway through. He had on a cassock, the colour of weak coffee with chicory in it, with big patches on both elbows.

“A queer type,” thought Kunin, looking at his muddy skirts. “Comes to the house for the first time and can’t dress decently.

“Sit down, Father,” he began more carelessly than cordially, as he moved an easy-chair to the table. “Sit down, I beg you.”

Father Yakov coughed into his fist, sank awkwardly on to the edge of the chair, and laid his open hands on his knees. With his short figure, his narrow chest, his red and perspiring face, he made from the first moment a most unpleasant impression on Kunin. The latter could never have imagined that there were such undignified and pitiful-looking priests in Russia; and in Father Yakov’s attitude, in the way he held his hands on his knees and sat on the very edge of his chair, he saw a lack of dignity and even a shade of servility.

“I have invited you on business, Father.…” Kunin began, sinking back in his low chair. “It has fallen to my lot to perform the agreeable duty of helping you in one of your useful undertakings.… On coming back from Petersburg, I found on my table a letter from the Marshal of Nobility. Yegor Dmitrevitch suggests that I should take under my supervision the church parish school which is being opened in Sinkino. I shall be very glad to, Father, with all my heart.… More than that, I accept the proposition with enthusiasm.”

Kunin got up and walked about the study.

“Of course, both Yegor Dmitrevitch and probably you, too, are aware that I have not great funds at my disposal. My estate is mortgaged, and I live exclusively on my salary as the permanent member. So that you cannot reckon on very much assistance, but I will do all that is in my power.… And when are you thinking of opening the school Father?”

“When we have the money,…” answered Father Yakov.

“You have some funds at your disposal already?”

“Scarcely any.… The peasants settled at their meeting that they would pay, every man of them, thirty kopecks a year; but that’s only a promise, you know! And for the first beginning we should need at least two hundred roubles.…”

“M’yes.… Unhappily, I have not that sum now,” said Kunin with a sigh. “I spent all I had on my tour and got into debt, too. Let us try and think of some plan together.”

Kunin began planning aloud. He explained his views and watched Father Yakov’s face, seeking signs of agreement or approval in it. But the face was apathetic and immobile, and expressed nothing but constrained shyness and uneasiness. Looking at it, one might have supposed that Kunin was talking of matters so abstruse that Father Yakov did not understand and only listened from good manners, and was at the same time afraid of being detected in his failure to understand.

“The fellow is not one of the brightest, that’s evident…” thought Kunin. “He’s rather shy and much too stupid.”

Father Yakov revived somewhat and even smiled only when the footman came into the study bringing in two glasses of tea on a tray and a cake-basket full of biscuits. He took his glass and began drinking at once.

“Shouldn’t we write at once to the bishop?” Kunin went on, meditating aloud. “To be precise, you know, it is not we, not the Zemstvo, but the higher ecclesiastical authorities, who have raised the question of the church parish schools. They ought really to apportion the funds. I remember I read that a sum of money had been set aside for the purpose. Do you know nothing about it?”

Father Yakov was so absorbed in drinking tea that he did not answer this question at once. He lifted his grey-blue eyes to Kunin, thought a moment, and as though recalling his question, he shook his head in the negative. An expression of pleasure and of the most ordinary prosaic appetite overspread his face from ear to ear. He drank and smacked his lips over every gulp. When he had drunk it to the very last drop, he put his glass on the table, then took his glass back again, looked at the bottom of it, then put it back again. The expression of pleasure faded from his face.… Then Kunin saw his visitor take a biscuit from the cake-basket, nibble a little bit off it, then turn it over in his hand and hurriedly stick it in his pocket.

“Well, that’s not at all clerical!” thought Kunin, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously. “What is it, priestly greed or childishness?”

After giving his visitor another glass of tea and seeing him to the entry, Kunin lay down on the sofa and abandoned himself to the unpleasant feeling induced in him by the visit of Father Yakov.

“What a strange wild creature!” he thought. “Dirty, untidy, coarse, stupid, and probably he drinks.… My God, and that’s a priest, a spiritual father! That’s a teacher of the people! I can fancy the irony there must be in the deacon’s face when before every mass he booms out: ‘Thy blessing, Reverend Father!’ A fine reverend Father! A reverend Father without a grain of dignity or breeding, hiding biscuits in his pocket like a schoolboy.… Fie! Good Lord, where were the bishop’s eyes when he ordained a man like that? What can he think of the people if he gives them a teacher like that? One wants people here who…”

And Kunin thought what Russian priests ought to be like.

“If I were a priest, for instance.… An educated priest fond of his work might do a great deal.… I should have had the school opened long ago.

And the sermons? If the priest is sincere and is inspired by love for his work, what wonderful rousing sermons he might give!”

Kunin shut his eyes and began mentally composing a sermon. A little later he sat down to the table and rapidly began writing.

“I’ll give it to that red-haired fellow, let him read it in church,…” he thought.

The following Sunday Kunin drove over to Sinkino in the morning to settle the question of the school, and while he was there to make acquaintance with the church of which he was a parishioner. In spite of the awful state of the roads, it was a glorious morning. The sun was shining brightly and cleaving with its rays the layers of white snow still lingering here and there. The snow as it took leave of the earth glittered with such diamonds that it hurt the eyes to look, while the young winter corn was hastily thrusting up its green beside it. The rooks floated with dignity over the fields. A rook would fly, drop to earth, and give several hops before standing firmly on its feet.…

The wooden church up to which Kunin drove was old and grey; the columns of the porch had once been painted white, but the colour had now completely peeled off, and they looked like two ungainly shafts. The icon over the door looked like a dark smudged blur. But its poverty touched and softened Kunin. Modestly dropping his eyes, he went into the church and stood by the door. The service had only just begun. An old sacristan, bent into a bow, was reading the “Hours” in a hollow indistinct tenor. Father Yakov, who conducted the service without a deacon, was walking about the church, burning incense. Had it not been for the softened mood in which Kunin found himself on entering the poverty-stricken church, he certainly would have smiled at the sight of Father Yakov. The short priest was wearing a crumpled and extremely long robe of some shabby yellow material; the hem of the robe trailed on the ground.

The church was not full. Looking at the parishioners, Kunin was struck at the first glance by one strange circumstance: he saw nothing but old people and children.… Where were the men of working age? Where was the youth and manhood? But after he had stood there a little and looked more attentively at the aged-looking faces, Kunin saw that he had mistaken young people for old. He did not, however, attach any significance to this little optical illusion.

The church was as cold and grey inside as outside. There was not one spot on the icons nor on the dark brown walls which was not begrimed

and defaced by time. There were many windows, but the general effect of colour was grey, and so it was twilight in the church.

"Anyone pure in soul can pray here very well," thought Kunin. "Just as in St. Peter's in Rome one is impressed by grandeur, here one is touched by the lowliness and simplicity."

But his devout mood vanished like smoke as soon as Father Yakov went up to the altar and began mass. Being still young and having come straight from the seminary bench to the priesthood, Father Yakov had not yet formed a set manner of celebrating the service. As he read he seemed to be vacillating between a high tenor and a thin bass; he bowed clumsily, walked quickly, and opened and shut the gates abruptly.… The old sacristan, evidently deaf and ailing, did not hear the prayers very distinctly, and this very often led to slight misunderstandings. Before Father Yakov had time to finish what he had to say, the sacristan began chanting his response, or else long after Father Yakov had finished the old man would be straining his ears, listening in the direction of the altar and saying nothing till his skirt was pulled. The old man had a sickly hollow voice and an asthmatic quavering lisp.… The complete lack of dignity and decorum was emphasized by a very small boy who seconded the sacristan and whose head was hardly visible over the railing of the choir. The boy sang in a shrill falsetto and seemed to be trying to avoid singing in tune. Kunin stayed a little while, listened and went out for a smoke. He was disappointed, and looked at the grey church almost with dislike.

"They complain of the decline of religious feeling among the people…" he sighed. "I should rather think so! They'd better foist a few more priests like this one on them!"

Kunin went back into the church three times, and each time he felt a great temptation to get out into the open air again. Waiting till the end of the mass, he went to Father Yakov's. The priest's house did not differ outwardly from the peasants' huts, but the thatch lay more smoothly on the roof and there were little white curtains in the windows. Father Yakov led Kunin into a light little room with a clay floor and walls covered with cheap paper; in spite of some painful efforts towards luxury in the way of photographs in frames and a clock with a pair of scissors hanging on the weight the furnishing of the room impressed him by its scantiness. Looking at the furniture, one might have supposed that Father Yakov had gone from house to house and collected it in bits; in one place they had given him a round three-legged table, in another a stool, in a third a chair with a back bent violently backwards; in a fourth a chair

with an upright back, but the seat smashed in; while in a fifth they had been liberal and given him a semblance of a sofa with a flat back and a latticework seat. This semblance had been painted dark red and smelt strongly of paint. Kunin meant at first to sit down on one of the chairs, but on second thoughts he sat down on the stool.

"This is the first time you have been to our church?" asked Father Yakov, hanging his hat on a huge misshapen nail.

"Yes it is. I tell you what, Father, before we begin on business, will you give me some tea? My soul is parched."

Father Yakov blinked, gasped, and went behind the partition wall. There was a sound of whispering.

"With his wife, I suppose," thought Kunin; "it would be interesting to see what the redheaded fellow's wife is like."

A little later Father Yakov came back, red and perspiring and with an effort to smile, sat down on the edge of the sofa.

"They will heat the samovar directly," he said, without looking at his visitor.

"My goodness, they have not heated the samovar yet!" Kunin thought with horror. "A nice time we shall have to wait."

"I have brought you," he said, "the rough draft of the letter I have written to the bishop. I'll read it after tea; perhaps you may find something to add.…"

"Very well."

A silence followed. Father Yakov threw furtive glances at the partition wall, smoothed his hair, and blew his nose.

"It's wonderful weather,…" he said.

"Yes. I read an interesting thing yesterday… the Volsky Zemstvo have decided to give their schools to the clergy, that's typical."

Kunin got up, and pacing up and down the clay floor, began to give expression to his reflections.

"That would be all right," he said, "if only the clergy were equal to their high calling and recognized their tasks. I am so unfortunate as to know priests whose standard of culture and whose moral qualities make them hardly fit to be army secretaries, much less priests. You will agree that a bad teacher does far less harm than a bad priest."

Kunin glanced at Father Yakov; he was sitting bent up, thinking intently about something and apparently not listening to his visitor.

"Yasha, come here!" a woman's voice called from behind the partition. Father Yakov started and went out. Again a whispering began.

Kunin felt a pang of longing for tea.

“No; it’s no use my waiting for tea here,” he thought, looking at his watch. “Besides I fancy I am not altogether a welcome visitor. My host has not deigned to say one word to me; he simply sits and blinks.”

Kunin took up his hat, waited for Father Yakov to return, and said goodbye to him.

“I have simply wasted the morning,” he thought wrathfully on the way home. “The blockhead! The dummy! He cares no more about the school than I about last year’s snow.… No, I shall never get anything done with him! We are bound to fail! If the Marshal knew what the priest here was like, he wouldn’t be in such a hurry to talk about a school. We ought first to try and get a decent priest, and then think about the school.”

By now Kunin almost hated Father Yakov. The man, his pitiful, grotesque figure in the long crumpled robe, his womanish face, his manner of officiating, his way of life and his formal restrained respectfulness, wounded the tiny relic of religious feeling which was stored away in a warm corner of Kunin’s heart together with his nurse’s other fairy tales. The coldness and lack of attention with which Father Yakov had met Kunin’s warm and sincere interest in what was the priest’s own work was hard for the former’s vanity to endure.…

On the evening of the same day Kunin spent a long time walking about his rooms and thinking. Then he sat down to the table resolutely and wrote a letter to the bishop. After asking for money and a blessing for the school, he set forth genuinely, like a son, his opinion of the priest at Sinkino.

“He is young,” he wrote, “insufficiently educated, leads, I fancy, an intemperate life, and altogether fails to satisfy the ideals which the Russian people have in the course of centuries formed of what a pastor should be.”

After writing this letter Kunin heaved a deep sigh, and went to bed with the consciousness that he had done a good deed.

On Monday morning, while he was still in bed, he was informed that Father Yakov had arrived. He did not want to get up, and instructed the servant to say he was not at home. On Tuesday he went away to a sitting of the Board, and when he returned on Saturday he was told by the servants that Father Yakov had called every day in his absence.

“He liked my biscuits, it seems,” he thought.

Towards evening on Sunday Father Yakov arrived. This time not only his skirts, but even his hat, was bespattered with mud. Just as on his first visit, he was hot and perspiring, and sat down on the edge of his chair as

he had done then. Kunin determined not to talk about the school—not to cast pearls.

"I have brought you a list of books for the school, Pavel Mihailovitch,…" Father Yakov began.

"Thank you."

But everything showed that Father Yakov had come for something else besides the list. Has whole figure was expressive of extreme embarrassment, and at the same time there was a look of determination upon his face, as on the face of a man suddenly inspired by an idea. He struggled to say something important, absolutely necessary, and strove to overcome his timidity.

"Why is he dumb?" Kunin thought wrathfully. "He's settled himself comfortably! I haven't time to be bothered with him."

To smooth over the awkwardness of his silence and to conceal the struggle going on within him, the priest began to smile constrainedly, and this slow smile, wrung out on his red perspiring face, and out of keeping with the fixed look in his grey-blue eyes, made Kunin turn away. He felt moved to repulsion.

"Excuse me, Father, I have to go out," he said.

Father Yakov started like a man asleep who has been struck a blow, and, still smiling, began in his confusion wrapping round him the skirts of his cassock. In spite of his repulsion for the man, Kunin felt suddenly sorry for him, and he wanted to soften his cruelty.

"Please come another time, Father," he said, "and before we part I want to ask you a favour. I was somehow inspired to write two sermons the other day.… I will give them to you to look at. If they are suitable, use them."

"Very good," said Father Yakov, laying his open hand on Kunin's sermons which were lying on the table. "I will take them."

After standing a little, hesitating and still wrapping his cassock round him, he suddenly gave up the effort to smile and lifted his head resolutely.

"Pavel Mihailovitch," he said, evidently trying to speak loudly and distinctly.

"What can I do for you?"

"I have heard that you… er… have dismissed your secretary, and… and are looking for a new one.…"

"Yes, I am.… Why, have you someone to recommend?"

"I… er… you see… I… Could you not give the post to me?"

"Why, are you giving up the Church?" said Kunin in amazement.

“No, no,” Father Yakov brought out quickly, for some reason turning pale and trembling all over. “God forbid! If you feel doubtful, then never mind, never mind. You see, I could do the work between whiles,… so as to increase my income.… Never mind, don’t disturb yourself!”

“H’m!… your income.… But you know, I only pay my secretary twenty roubles a month.”

“Good heavens! I would take ten,” whispered Father Yakov, looking about him. “Ten would be enough! You… you are astonished, and everyone is astonished. The greedy priest, the grasping priest, what does he do with his money? I feel myself I am greedy,… and I blame myself, I condemn myself.… I am ashamed to look people in the face.… I tell you on my conscience, Pavel Mihailovitch.… I call the God of truth to witness.…”

Father Yakov took breath and went on:

“On the way here I prepared a regular confession to make you, but… I’ve forgotten it all; I cannot find a word now. I get a hundred and fifty roubles a year from my parish, and everyone wonders what I do with the money.… But I’ll explain it all truly.… I pay forty roubles a year to the clerical school for my brother Pyotr. He has everything found there, except that I have to provide pens and paper.”

“Oh, I believe you; I believe you! But what’s the object of all this?” said Kunin, with a wave of the hand, feeling terribly oppressed by this outburst of confidence on the part of his visitor, and not knowing how to get away from the tearful gleam in his eyes.

“Then I have not yet paid up all that I owe to the consistory for my place here. They charged me two hundred roubles for the living, and I was to pay ten roubles a month.… You can judge what is left! And, besides, I must allow Father Avraamy at least three roubles a month.”

“What Father Avraamy?”

“Father Avraamy who was priest at Sinkino before I came. He was deprived of the living on account of… his failing, but you know, he is still living at Sinkino! He has nowhere to go. There is no one to keep him. Though he is old, he must have a corner, and food and clothing—I can’t let him go begging on the roads in his position! It would be on my conscience if anything happened! It would be my fault! He is… in debt all round; but, you see, I am to blame for not paying for him.”

Father Yakov started up from his seat and, looking frantically at the floor, strode up and down the room.

“My God, my God!” he muttered, raising his hands and dropping them again. “Lord, save us and have mercy upon us! Why did you take such a

calling on yourself if you have so little faith and no strength? There is no end to my despair! Save me, Queen of Heaven!”

“Calm yourself, Father,” said Kunin.

“I am worn out with hunger, Pavel Mihailovitch,” Father Yakov went on. “Generously forgive me, but I am at the end of my strength.… I know if I were to beg and to bow down, everyone would help, but… I cannot! I am ashamed. How can I beg of the peasants? You are on the Board here, so you know.… How can one beg of a beggar? And to beg of richer people, of landowners, I cannot! I have pride! I am ashamed!”

Father Yakov waved his hand, and nervously scratched his head with both hands.

“I am ashamed! My God, I am ashamed! I am proud and can’t bear people to see my poverty! When you visited me, Pavel Mihailovitch, I had no tea in the house! There wasn’t a pinch of it, and you know it was pride prevented me from telling you! I am ashamed of my clothes, of these patches here.… I am ashamed of my vestments, of being hungry.… And is it seemly for a priest to be proud?”

Father Yakov stood still in the middle of the study, and, as though he did not notice Kunin’s presence, began reasoning with himself.

“Well, supposing I endure hunger and disgrace—but, my God, I have a wife! I took her from a good home! She is not used to hard work; she is soft; she is used to tea and white bread and sheets on her bed.… At home she used to play the piano.… She is young, not twenty yet.… She would like, to be sure, to be smart, to have fun, go out to see people.… And she is worse off with me than any cook; she is ashamed to show herself in the street. My God, my God! Her only treat is when I bring an apple or some biscuit from a visit.…”

Father Yakov scratched his head again with both hands.

“And it makes us feel not love but pity for each other.… I cannot look at her without compassion! And the things that happen in this life, O Lord! Such things that people would not believe them if they saw them in the newspaper.… And when will there be an end to it all!”

“Hush, Father!” Kunin almost shouted, frightened at his tone. “Why take such a gloomy view of life?”

“Generously forgive me, Pavel Mihailovitch…” muttered Father Yakov as though he were drunk, “Forgive me, all this… doesn’t matter, and don’t take any notice of it.… Only I do blame myself, and always shall blame myself… always.”

Father Yakov looked about him and began whispering:

“One morning early I was going from Sinkino to Lutchkovo; I saw a woman standing on the river bank, doing something.… I went up close and could not believe my eyes.… It was horrible! The wife of the doctor, Ivan Sergeitch, was sitting there washing her linen.… A doctor’s wife, brought up at a select boarding-school! She had got up you see, early and gone half a mile from the village that people should not see her.… She couldn’t get over her pride! When she saw that I was near her and noticed her poverty, she turned red all over.… I was flustered—I was frightened, and ran up to help her, but she hid her linen from me; she was afraid I should see her ragged chemises.…”

“All this is positively incredible,” said Kunin, sitting down and looking almost with horror at Father Yakov’s pale face.

“Incredible it is! It’s a thing that has never been! Pavel Mihailovitch, that a doctor’s wife should be rinsing the linen in the river! Such a thing does not happen in any country! As her pastor and spiritual father, I ought not to allow it, but what can I do? What? Why, I am always trying to get treated by her husband for nothing myself! It is true that, as you say, it is all incredible! One can hardly believe one’s eyes. During Mass, you know, when I look out from the altar and see my congregation, Avraamy starving, and my wife, and think of the doctor’s wife—how blue her hands were from the cold water—would you believe it, I forget myself and stand senseless like a fool, until the sacristan calls to me.… It’s awful!”

Father Yakov began walking about again.

“Lord Jesus!” he said, waving his hands, “holy Saints! I can’t officiate properly.… Here you talk to me about the school, and I sit like a dummy and don’t understand a word, and think of nothing but food.… Even before the altar.… But… what am I doing?” Father Yakov pulled himself up suddenly. “You want to go out. Forgive me, I meant nothing.… Excuse…”

Kunin shook hands with Father Yakov without speaking, saw him into the hall, and going back into his study, stood at the window. He saw Father Yakov go out of the house, pull his wide-brimmed rusty-looking hat over his eyes, and slowly, bowing his head, as though ashamed of his outburst, walk along the road.

“I don’t see his horse,” thought Kunin.

Kunin did not dare to think that the priest had come on foot every day to see him; it was five or six miles to Sinkino, and the mud on the road was impassable. Further on he saw the coachman Andrey and the boy Paramon, jumping over the puddles and splashing Father Yakov with

mud, run up to him for his blessing. Father Yakov took off his hat and slowly blessed Andrey, then blessed the boy and stroked his head.

Kunin passed his hand over his eyes, and it seemed to him that his hand was moist. He walked away from the window and with dim eyes looked round the room in which he still seemed to hear the timid droning voice. He glanced at the table. Luckily, Father Yakov, in his haste, had forgotten to take the sermons. Kunin rushed up to them, tore them into pieces, and with loathing thrust them under the table.

"And I did not know!" he moaned, sinking on to the sofa. "After being here over a year as member of the Rural Board, Honorary Justice of the Peace, member of the School Committee! Blind puppet, egregious idiot! I must make haste and help them, I must make haste!"

He turned from side to side uneasily, pressed his temples and racked his brains.

"On the twentieth I shall get my salary, two hundred roubles.… On some good pretext I will give him some, and some to the doctor's wife.… I will ask them to perform a special service here, and will get up an illness for the doctor.… In that way I shan't wound their pride. And I'll help Father Avraamy too.…"

He reckoned his money on his fingers, and was afraid to own to himself that those two hundred roubles would hardly be enough for him to pay his steward, his servants, the peasant who brought the meat.… He could not help remembering the recent past when he was senselessly squandering his father's fortune, when as a puppy of twenty he had given expensive fans to prostitutes, had paid ten roubles a day to Kuzma, his cabdriver, and in his vanity had made presents to actresses. Oh, how useful those wasted rouble, three-rouble, ten-rouble notes would have been now!

"Father Avraamy lives on three roubles a month!" thought Kunin. "For a rouble the priest's wife could get herself a chemise, and the doctor's wife could hire a washerwoman. But I'll help them, anyway! I must help them."

Here Kunin suddenly recalled the private information he had sent to the bishop, and he writhed as from a sudden draught of cold air. This remembrance filled him with overwhelming shame before his inner self and before the unseen truth.

So had begun and had ended a sincere effort to be of public service on the part of a well-intentioned but unreflecting and over-comfortable person.

GRISHA

Grisha, a chubby little boy, born two years and eight months ago, is walking on the boulevard with his nurse. He is wearing a long, wadded pelisse, a scarf, a big cap with a fluffy pom-pom, and warm overboots. He feels hot and stifled, and now, too, the rollicking April sunshine is beating straight in his face, and making his eyelids tingle.

The whole of his clumsy, timidly and uncertainly stepping little figure expresses the utmost bewilderment.

Hitherto Grisha has known only a rectangular world, where in one corner stands his bed, in the other nurse's trunk, in the third a chair, while in the fourth there is a little lamp burning. If one looks under the bed, one sees a doll with a broken arm and a drum; and behind nurse's trunk, there are a great many things of all sorts: cotton reels, boxes without lids, and a broken Jack-a-dandy. In that world, besides nurse and Grisha, there are often mamma and the cat. Mamma is like a doll, and puss is like papa's fur-coat, only the coat hasn't got eyes and a tail. From the world which is called the nursery a door leads to a great expanse where they have dinner and tea. There stands Grisha's chair on high legs, and on the wall hangs a clock which exists to swing its pendulum and chime. From the dining room, one can go into a room where there are red armchairs. Here, there is a dark patch on the carpet, concerning which fingers are still shaken at Grisha. Beyond that room is still another, to which one is not admitted, and where one sees glimpses of papa—an extremely enigmatical person! Nurse and mamma are comprehensible: they dress Grisha, feed him, and put him to bed, but what papa exists for is unknown. There is another enigmatical person, auntie, who presented Grisha with a drum. She appears and disappears. Where does she disappear to? Grisha has more than once looked under the bed, behind the trunk, and under the sofa, but she was not there.

In this new world, where the sun hurts one's eyes, there are so many papas and mammas and aunties, that there is no knowing to whom to run. But what is stranger and more absurd than anything is the horses.

Grisha gazes at their moving legs, and can make nothing of it. He looks at his nurse for her to solve the mystery, but she does not speak.

All at once he hears a fearful tramping.… A crowd of soldiers, with red faces and bath brooms under their arms, move in step along the boulevard straight upon him. Grisha turns cold all over with terror, and looks inquiringly at nurse to know whether it is dangerous. But nurse neither weeps nor runs away, so there is no danger. Grisha looks after the soldiers, and begins to move his feet in step with them himself.

Two big cats with long faces run after each other across the boulevard, with their tongues out, and their tails in the air. Grisha thinks that he must run too, and runs after the cats.

“Stop!” cries nurse, seizing him roughly by the shoulder. “Where are you off to? Haven’t you been told not to be naughty?”

Here there is a nurse sitting holding a tray of oranges. Grisha passes by her, and, without saying anything, takes an orange.

“What are you doing that for?” cries the companion of his travels, slapping his hand and snatching away the orange. “Silly!”

Now Grisha would have liked to pick up a bit of glass that was lying at his feet and gleaming like a lamp, but he is afraid that his hand will be slapped again.

“My respects to you!” Grisha hears suddenly, almost above his ear, a loud thick voice, and he sees a tall man with bright buttons.

To his great delight, this man gives nurse his hand, stops, and begins talking to her. The brightness of the sun, the noise of the carriages, the horses, the bright buttons are all so impressively new and not dreadful, that Grisha’s soul is filled with a feeling of enjoyment and he begins to laugh.

“Come along! Come along!” he cries to the man with the bright buttons, tugging at his coattails.

“Come along where?” asks the man.

“Come along!” Grisha insists.

He wants to say that it would be just as well to take with them papa, mamma, and the cat, but his tongue does not say what he wants to.

A little later, nurse turns out of the boulevard, and leads Grisha into a big courtyard where there is still snow; and the man with the bright buttons comes with them too. They carefully avoid the lumps of snow and the puddles, then, by a dark and dirty staircase, they go into a room. Here there is a great deal of smoke, there is a smell of roast meat, and a woman is standing by the stove frying cutlets. The cook and the nurse kiss each other, and sit down on the bench together with the man, and

begin talking in a low voice. Grisha, wrapped up as he is, feels insufferably hot and stifled.

"Why is this?" he wonders, looking about him.

He sees the dark ceiling, the oven fork with two horns, the stove which looks like a great black hole.

"Mam-ma," he drawls.

"Come, come, come!" cries the nurse. "Wait a bit!"

The cook puts a bottle on the table, two wineglasses, and a pie. The two women and the man with the bright buttons clink glasses and empty them several times, and, the man puts his arm round first the cook and then the nurse. And then all three begin singing in an undertone.

Grisha stretches out his hand towards the pie, and they give him a piece of it. He eats it and watches nurse drinking.… He wants to drink too.

"Give me some, nurse!" he begs.

The cook gives him a sip out of her glass. He rolls his eyes, blinks, coughs, and waves his hands for a long time afterwards, while the cook looks at him and laughs.

When he gets home Grisha begins to tell mamma, the walls, and the bed where he has been, and what he has seen. He talks not so much with his tongue, as with his face and his hands. He shows how the sun shines, how the horses run, how the terrible stove looks, and how the cook drinks.…

In the evening he cannot get to sleep. The soldiers with the brooms, the big cats, the horses, the bit of glass, the tray of oranges, the bright buttons, all gathered together, weigh on his brain. He tosses from side to side, babbles, and, at last, unable to endure his excitement, begins crying.

"You are feverish," says mamma, putting her open hand on his forehead. "What can have caused it?"

"Stove!" wails Grisha. "Go away, stove!"

"He must have eaten too much…" mamma decides.

And Grisha, shattered by the impressions of the new life he has just experienced, receives a spoonful of castor-oil from mamma.

LOVE

“Three o’clock in the morning. The soft April night is looking in at my windows and caressingly winking at me with its stars. I can’t sleep, I am so happy!

“My whole being from head to heels is bursting with a strange, incomprehensible feeling. I can’t analyse it just now—I haven’t the time, I’m too lazy, and there—hang analysis! Why, is a man likely to interpret his sensations when he is flying head foremost from a belfry, or has just learned that he has won two hundred thousand? Is he in a state to do it?”

This was more or less how I began my love-letter to Sasha, a girl of nineteen with whom I had fallen in love. I began it five times, and as often tore up the sheets, scratched out whole pages, and copied it all over again. I spent as long over the letter as if it had been a novel I had to write to order. And it was not because I tried to make it longer, more elaborate, and more fervent, but because I wanted endlessly to prolong the process of this writing, when one sits in the stillness of one’s study and communes with one’s own daydreams while the spring night looks in at one’s window. Between the lines I saw a beloved image, and it seemed to me that there were, sitting at the same table writing with me, spirits as naively happy, as foolish, and as blissfully smiling as I. I wrote continually, looking at my hand, which still ached deliciously where hers had lately pressed it, and if I turned my eyes away I had a vision of the green trellis of the little gate. Through that trellis Sasha gazed at me after I had said goodbye to her. When I was saying goodbye to Sasha I was thinking of nothing and was simply admiring her figure as every decent man admires a pretty woman; when I saw through the trellis two big eyes, I suddenly, as though by inspiration, knew that I was in love, that it was all settled between us, and fully decided already, that I had nothing left to do but to carry out certain formalities.

It is a great delight also to seal up a love-letter, and, slowly putting on one’s hat and coat, to go softly out of the house and to carry the treasure to the post. There are no stars in the sky now: in their place there is a

long whitish streak in the east, broken here and there by clouds above the roofs of the dingy houses; from that streak the whole sky is flooded with pale light. The town is asleep, but already the water-carts have come out, and somewhere in a faraway factory a whistle sounds to wake up the workpeople. Beside the postbox, slightly moist with dew, you are sure to see the clumsy figure of a house porter, wearing a bell-shaped sheepskin and carrying a stick. He is in a condition akin to catalepsy: he is not asleep or awake, but something between.

If the boxes knew how often people resort to them for the decision of their fate, they would not have such a humble air. I, anyway, almost kissed my postbox, and as I gazed at it I reflected that the post is the greatest of blessings.

I beg anyone who has ever been in love to remember how one usually hurries home after dropping the letter in the box, rapidly gets into bed and pulls up the quilt in the full conviction that as soon as one wakes up in the morning one will be overwhelmed with memories of the previous day and look with rapture at the window, where the daylight will be eagerly making its way through the folds of the curtain.

Well, to facts.… Next morning at midday, Sasha's maid brought me the following answer: "I am delited be sure to come to us to day please I shall expect you. Your S."

Not a single comma. This lack of punctuation, and the misspelling of the word "delighted," the whole letter, and even the long, narrow envelope in which it was put filled my heart with tenderness. In the sprawling but diffident handwriting I recognised Sasha's walk, her way of raising her eyebrows when she laughed, the movement of her lips.… But the contents of the letter did not satisfy me. In the first place, poetical letters are not answered in that way, and in the second, why should I go to Sasha's house to wait till it should occur to her stout mamma, her brothers, and poor relations to leave us alone together? It would never enter their heads, and nothing is more hateful than to have to restrain one's raptures simply because of the intrusion of some animate trumpery in the shape of a half-deaf old woman or little girl pestering one with questions. I sent an answer by the maid asking Sasha to select some park or boulevard for a rendezvous. My suggestion was readily accepted. I had struck the right chord, as the saying is.

Between four and five o'clock in the afternoon I made my way to the furthest and most overgrown part of the park. There was not a soul in the park, and the tryst might have taken place somewhere nearer in one of the avenues or arbours, but women don't like doing it by halves in

romantic affairs; in for a penny, in for a pound—if you are in for a tryst, let it be in the furthest and most impenetrable thicket, where one runs the risk of stumbling upon some rough or drunken man. When I went up to Sasha she was standing with her back to me, and in that back I could read a devilish lot of mystery. It seemed as though that back and the nape of her neck, and the black spots on her dress were saying: Hush! … The girl was wearing a simple cotton dress over which she had thrown a light cape. To add to the air of mysterious secrecy, her face was covered with a white veil. Not to spoil the effect, I had to approach on tiptoe and speak in a half whisper.

From what I remember now, I was not so much the essential point of the rendezvous as a detail of it. Sasha was not so much absorbed in the interview itself as in its romantic mysteriousness, my kisses, the silence of the gloomy trees, my vows.… There was not a minute in which she forgot herself, was overcome, or let the mysterious expression drop from her face, and really if there had been any Ivan Sidoritch or Sidor Ivanitch in my place she would have felt just as happy. How is one to make out in such circumstances whether one is loved or not? Whether the love is “the real thing” or not?

From the park I took Sasha home with me. The presence of the beloved woman in one’s bachelor quarters affects one like wine and music. Usually one begins to speak of the future, and the confidence and self-reliance with which one does so is beyond bounds. You make plans and projects, talk fervently of the rank of general though you have not yet reached the rank of a lieutenant, and altogether you fire off such high-flown nonsense that your listener must have a great deal of love and ignorance of life to assent to it. Fortunately for men, women in love are always blinded by their feelings and never know anything of life. Far from not assenting, they actually turn pale with holy awe, are full of reverence and hang greedily on the maniac’s words. Sasha listened to me with attention, but I soon detected an absentminded expression on her face, she did not understand me. The future of which I talked interested her only in its external aspect and I was wasting time in displaying my plans and projects before her. She was keenly interested in knowing which would be her room, what paper she would have in the room, why I had an upright piano instead of a grand piano, and so on. She examined carefully all the little things on my table, looked at the photographs, sniffed at the bottles, peeled the old stamps off the envelopes, saying she wanted them for something.

“Please collect old stamps for me!” she said, making a grave face. “Please do.”

Then she found a nut in the window, noisily cracked it and ate it.

“Why don’t you stick little labels on the backs of your books?” she asked, taking a look at the bookcase.

“What for?”

“Oh, so that each book should have its number. And where am I to put my books? I’ve got books too, you know.”

“What books have you got?” I asked.

Sasha raised her eyebrows, thought a moment and said:

“All sorts.”

And if it had entered my head to ask her what thoughts, what convictions, what aims she had, she would no doubt have raised her eyebrows, thought a minute, and have said in the same way: “All sorts.”

Later I saw Sasha home and left her house regularly, officially engaged, and was so reckoned till our wedding. If the reader will allow me to judge merely from my personal experience, I maintain that to be engaged is very dreary, far more so than to be a husband or nothing at all. An engaged man is neither one thing nor the other, he has left one side of the river and not reached the other, he is not married and yet he can’t be said to be a bachelor, but is in something not unlike the condition of the porter whom I have mentioned above.

Every day as soon as I had a free moment I hastened to my fiancée. As I went I usually bore within me a multitude of hopes, desires, intentions, suggestions, phrases. I always fancied that as soon as the maid opened the door I should, from feeling oppressed and stifled, plunge at once up to my neck into a sea of refreshing happiness. But it always turned out otherwise in fact. Every time I went to see my fiancée I found all her family and other members of the household busy over the silly trousseau. (And by the way, they were hard at work sewing for two months and then they had less than a hundred roubles’ worth of things). There was a smell of irons, candle grease and fumes. Bugles scrunched under one’s feet. The two most important rooms were piled up with billows of linen, calico, and muslin and from among the billows peeped out Sasha’s little head with a thread between her teeth. All the sewing party welcomed me with cries of delight but at once led me off into the dining room where I could not hinder them nor see what only husbands are permitted to behold. In spite of my feelings, I had to sit in the dining room and converse with Pimenovna, one of the poor relations. Sasha, looking

worried and excited, kept running by me with a thimble, a skein of wool or some other boring object.

“Wait, wait, I shan’t be a minute,” she would say when I raised imploring eyes to her. “Only fancy that wretch Stepanida has spoilt the bodice of the barège dress!”

And after waiting in vain for this grace, I lost my temper, went out of the house and walked about the streets in the company of the new cane I had bought. Or I would want to go for a walk or a drive with my fiancée, would go round and find her already standing in the hall with her mother, dressed to go out and playing with her parasol.

“Oh, we are going to the Arcade,” she would say. “We have got to buy some more cashmere and change the hat.”

My outing is knocked on the head. I join the ladies and go with them to the Arcade. It is revoltingly dull to listen to women shopping, haggling and trying to outdo the sharp shopman. I felt ashamed when Sasha, after turning over masses of material and knocking down the prices to a minimum, walked out of the shop without buying anything, or else told the shopman to cut her some half rouble’s worth.

When they came out of the shop, Sasha and her mamma with scared and worried faces would discuss at length having made a mistake, having bought the wrong thing, the flowers in the chintz being too dark, and so on.

Yes, it is a bore to be engaged! I’m glad it’s over.

Now I am married. It is evening. I am sitting in my study reading. Behind me on the sofa Sasha is sitting munching something noisily. I want a glass of beer.

“Sasha, look for the corkscrew.…” I say. “It’s lying about somewhere.”

Sasha leaps up, rummages in a disorderly way among two or three heaps of papers, drops the matches, and without finding the corkscrew, sits down in silence.… Five minutes pass—ten… I begin to be fretted both by thirst and vexation.

“Sasha, do look for the corkscrew,” I say.

Sasha leaps up again and rummages among the papers near me. Her munching and rustling of the papers affects me like the sound of sharpening knives against each other.… I get up and begin looking for the corkscrew myself. At last it is found and the beer is uncorked. Sasha remains by the table and begins telling me something at great length.

“You’d better read something, Sasha,” I say.

She takes up a book, sits down facing me and begins moving her lips.… I look at her little forehead, moving lips, and sink into thought.

“She is getting on for twenty.…” I reflect. “If one takes a boy of the educated class and of that age and compares them, what a difference! The boy would have knowledge and convictions and some intelligence.”

But I forgive that difference just as the low forehead and moving lips are forgiven. I remember in my old Lovelace days I have cast off women for a stain on their stockings, or for one foolish word, or for not cleaning their teeth, and now I forgive everything: the munching, the muddling about after the corkscrew, the slovenliness, the long talking about nothing that matters; I forgive it all almost unconsciously, with no effort of will, as though Sasha’s mistakes were my mistakes, and many things which would have made me wince in old days move me to tenderness and even rapture. The explanation of this forgiveness of everything lies in my love for Sasha, but what is the explanation of the love itself, I really don’t know.

Easter Eve

I was standing on the bank of the River Goltva, waiting for the ferryboat from the other side. At ordinary times the Goltva is a humble stream of moderate size, silent and pensive, gently glimmering from behind thick reeds; but now a regular lake lay stretched out before me. The waters of spring, running riot, had overflowed both banks and flooded both sides of the river for a long distance, submerging vegetable gardens, hayfields and marshes, so that it was no unusual thing to meet poplars and bushes sticking out above the surface of the water and looking in the darkness like grim solitary crags.

The weather seemed to me magnificent. It was dark, yet I could see the trees, the water and the people.… The world was lighted by the stars, which were scattered thickly all over the sky. I don't remember ever seeing so many stars. Literally one could not have put a finger in between them. There were some as big as a goose's egg, others tiny as hempseed.… They had come out for the festival procession, every one of them, little and big, washed, renewed and joyful, and every one of them was softly twinkling its beams. The sky was reflected in the water; the stars were bathing in its dark depths and trembling with the quivering eddies. The air was warm and still.… Here and there, far away on the further bank in the impenetrable darkness, several bright red lights were gleaming.…

A couple of paces from me I saw the dark silhouette of a peasant in a high hat, with a thick knotted stick in his hand.

"How long the ferryboat is in coming!" I said.

"It is time it was here," the silhouette answered.

"You are waiting for the ferryboat, too?"

"No I am not," yawned the peasant—"I am waiting for the illumination. I should have gone, but to tell you the truth, I haven't the five kopecks for the ferry."

"I'll give you the five kopecks."

“No; I humbly thank you.… With that five kopecks put up a candle for me over there in the monastery.… That will be more interesting, and I will stand here. What can it mean, no ferryboat, as though it had sunk in the water!”

The peasant went up to the water’s edge, took the rope in his hands, and shouted; “Ieronim! Ieron—im!”

As though in answer to his shout, the slow peal of a great bell floated across from the further bank. The note was deep and low, as from the thickest string of a double bass; it seemed as though the darkness itself had hoarsely uttered it. At once there was the sound of a cannon shot. It rolled away in the darkness and ended somewhere in the far distance behind me. The peasant took off his hat and crossed himself.

“Christ is risen,” he said.

Before the vibrations of the first peal of the bell had time to die away in the air a second sounded, after it at once a third, and the darkness was filled with an unbroken quivering clamour. Near the red lights fresh lights flashed, and all began moving together and twinkling restlessly.

“Ieron—im!” we heard a hollow prolonged shout.

“They are shouting from the other bank,” said the peasant, “so there is no ferry there either. Our Ieronim has gone to sleep.”

The lights and the velvety chimes of the bell drew one towards them.… I was already beginning to lose patience and grow anxious, but behold at last, staring into the dark distance, I saw the outline of something very much like a gibbet. It was the long-expected ferry. It moved towards us with such deliberation that if it had not been that its lines grew gradually more definite, one might have supposed that it was standing still or moving to the other bank.

“Make haste! Ieronim!” shouted my peasant. “The gentleman’s tired of waiting!”

The ferry crawled to the bank, gave a lurch and stopped with a creak. A tall man in a monk’s cassock and a conical cap stood on it, holding the rope.

“Why have you been so long?” I asked jumping upon the ferry.

“Forgive me, for Christ’s sake,” Ieronim answered gently. “Is there no one else?”

“No one.…”

Ieronim took hold of the rope in both hands, bent himself to the figure of a mark of interrogation, and gasped. The ferryboat creaked and gave a lurch. The outline of the peasant in the high hat began slowly retreating from me—so the ferry was moving off. Ieronim soon drew himself up

and began working with one hand only. We were silent, gazing towards the bank to which we were floating. There the illumination for which the peasant was waiting had begun. At the water's edge barrels of tar were flaring like huge camp fires. Their reflections, crimson as the rising moon, crept to meet us in long broad streaks. The burning barrels lighted up their own smoke and the long shadows of men flitting about the fire; but further to one side and behind them from where the velvety chime floated there was still the same unbroken black gloom. All at once, cleaving the darkness, a rocket zigzagged in a golden ribbon up the sky; it described an arc and, as though broken to pieces against the sky, was scattered crackling into sparks. There was a roar from the bank like a faraway hurrah.

"How beautiful!" I said.

"Beautiful beyond words!" sighed Ieronim. "Such a night, sir! Another time one would pay no attention to the fireworks, but today one rejoices in every vanity. Where do you come from?"

I told him where I came from.

"To be sure… a joyful day today.…" Ieronim went on in a weak sighing tenor like the voice of a convalescent. "The sky is rejoicing and the earth and what is under the earth. All the creatures are keeping holiday. Only tell me kind sir, why, even in the time of great rejoicing, a man cannot forget his sorrows?"

I fancied that this unexpected question was to draw me into one of those endless religious conversations which bored and idle monks are so fond of. I was not disposed to talk much, and so I only asked:

"What sorrows have you, father?"

"As a rule only the same as all men, kind sir, but today a special sorrow has happened in the monastery: at mass, during the reading of the Bible, the monk and deacon Nikolay died."

"Well, it's God's will!" I said, falling into the monastic tone. "We must all die. To my mind, you ought to rejoice indeed.… They say if anyone dies at Easter he goes straight to the kingdom of heaven."

"That's true."

We sank into silence. The figure of the peasant in the high hat melted into the lines of the bank. The tar barrels were flaring up more and more.

"The Holy Scripture points clearly to the vanity of sorrow and so does reflection," said Ieronim, breaking the silence, "but why does the heart grieve and refuse to listen to reason? Why does one want to weep bitterly?"

Ieronim shrugged his shoulders, turned to me and said quickly:

“If I died, or anyone else, it would not be worth notice perhaps; but, you see, Nikolay is dead! No one else but Nikolay! Indeed, it’s hard to believe that he is no more! I stand here on my ferryboat and every minute I keep fancying that he will lift up his voice from the bank. He always used to come to the bank and call to me that I might not be afraid on the ferry. He used to get up from his bed at night on purpose for that. He was a kind soul. My God! how kindly and gracious! Many a mother is not so good to her child as Nikolay was to me! Lord, save his soul!”

Ieronim took hold of the rope, but turned to me again at once.

“And such a lofty intelligence, your honour,” he said in a vibrating voice. “Such a sweet and harmonious tongue! Just as they will sing immediately at early matins: ‘Oh lovely! oh sweet is Thy Voice!’ Besides all other human qualities, he had, too, an extraordinary gift!”

“What gift?” I asked.

The monk scrutinized me, and as though he had convinced himself that he could trust me with a secret, he laughed good-humouredly.

“He had a gift for writing hymns of praise,” he said. “It was a marvel, sir; you couldn’t call it anything else! You would be amazed if I tell you about it. Our Father Archimandrite comes from Moscow, the Father Sub-Prior studied at the Kazan academy, we have wise monks and elders, but, would you believe it, no one could write them; while Nikolay, a simple monk, a deacon, had not studied anywhere, and had not even any outer appearance of it, but he wrote them! A marvel! A real marvel!” Ieronim clasped his hands and, completely forgetting the rope, went on eagerly:

“The Father Sub-Prior has great difficulty in composing sermons; when he wrote the history of the monastery he worried all the brotherhood and drove a dozen times to town, while Nikolay wrote canticles! Hymns of praise! That’s a very different thing from a sermon or a history!”

“Is it difficult to write them?” I asked.

“There’s great difficulty!” Ieronim wagged his head. “You can do nothing by wisdom and holiness if God has not given you the gift. The monks who don’t understand argue that you only need to know the life of the saint for whom you are writing the hymn, and to make it harmonize with the other hymns of praise. But that’s a mistake, sir. Of course, anyone who writes canticles must know the life of the saint to perfection, to the least trivial detail. To be sure, one must make them harmonize with the other canticles and know where to begin and what to write about. To give you an instance, the first response begins everywhere with ‘the chosen’ or ‘the elect.’ … The first line must always begin with the

‘angel.’ In the canticle of praise to Jesus the Most Sweet, if you are interested in the subject, it begins like this: ‘Of angels Creator and Lord of all powers!’ In the canticle to the Holy Mother of God: ‘Of angels the foremost sent down from on high,’ to Nikolay, the Wonder-worker—‘An angel in semblance, though in substance a man,’ and so on. Everywhere you begin with the angel. Of course, it would be impossible without making them harmonize, but the lives of the saints and conformity with the others is not what matters; what matters is the beauty and sweetness of it. Everything must be harmonious, brief and complete. There must be in every line softness, graciousness and tenderness; not one word should be harsh or rough or unsuitable. It must be written so that the worshipper may rejoice at heart and weep, while his mind is stirred and he is thrown into a tremor. In the canticle to the Holy Mother are the words: ‘Rejoice, O Thou too high for human thought to reach! Rejoice, O Thou too deep for angels’ eyes to fathom!’ In another place in the same canticle: ‘Rejoice, O tree that bearest the fair fruit of light that is the food of the faithful! Rejoice, O tree of gracious spreading shade, under which there is shelter for multitudes!’ ”

Ieronim hid his face in his hands, as though frightened at something or overcome with shame, and shook his head.

“Tree that bearest the fair fruit of light… tree of gracious spreading shade.…” he muttered. “To think that a man should find words like those! Such a power is a gift from God! For brevity he packs many thoughts into one phrase, and how smooth and complete it all is! ‘Light-radiating torch to all that be…’ comes in the canticle to Jesus the Most Sweet. ‘Light-radiating!’ There is no such word in conversation or in books, but you see he invented it, he found it in his mind! Apart from the smoothness and grandeur of language, sir, every line must be beautified in every way, there must be flowers and lightning and wind and sun and all the objects of the visible world. And every exclamation ought to be put so as to be smooth and easy for the ear. ‘Rejoice, thou flower of heavenly growth!’ comes in the hymn to Nikolay the Wonder-worker. It’s not simply ‘heavenly flower,’ but ‘flower of heavenly growth.’ It’s smoother so and sweet to the ear. That was just as Nikolay wrote it! Exactly like that! I can’t tell you how he used to write!”

“Well, in that case it is a pity he is dead,” I said; “but let us get on, father, or we shall be late.”

Ieronim started and ran to the rope; they were beginning to peal all the bells. Probably the procession was already going on near the monastery,

for all the dark space behind the tar barrels was now dotted with moving lights.

"Did Nikolay print his hymns?" I asked Ieronim.

"How could he print them?" he sighed. "And indeed, it would be strange to print them. What would be the object? No one in the monastery takes any interest in them. They don't like them. They knew Nikolay wrote them, but they let it pass unnoticed. No one esteems new writings nowadays, sir!"

"Were they prejudiced against him?"

"Yes, indeed. If Nikolay had been an elder perhaps the brethren would have been interested, but he wasn't forty, you know. There were some who laughed and even thought his writing a sin."

"What did he write them for?"

"Chiefly for his own comfort. Of all the brotherhood, I was the only one who read his hymns. I used to go to him in secret, that no one else might know of it, and he was glad that I took an interest in them. He would embrace me, stroke my head, speak to me in caressing words as to a little child. He would shut his cell, make me sit down beside him, and begin to read.…"

Ieronim left the rope and came up to me.

"We were dear friends in a way," he whispered, looking at me with shining eyes. "Where he went I would go. If I were not there he would miss me. And he cared more for me than for anyone, and all because I used to weep over his hymns. It makes me sad to remember. Now I feel just like an orphan or a widow. You know, in our monastery they are all good people, kind and pious, but… there is no one with softness and refinement, they are just like peasants. They all speak loudly, and tramp heavily when they walk; they are noisy, they clear their throats, but Nikolay always talked softly, caressingly, and if he noticed that anyone was asleep or praying he would slip by like a fly or a gnat. His face was tender, compassionate.…"

Ieronim heaved a deep sigh and took hold of the rope again. We were by now approaching the bank. We floated straight out of the darkness and stillness of the river into an enchanted realm, full of stifling smoke, crackling lights and uproar. By now one could distinctly see people moving near the tar barrels. The flickering of the lights gave a strange, almost fantastic, expression to their figures and red faces. From time to time one caught among the heads and faces a glimpse of a horse's head motionless as though cast in copper.

“They’ll begin singing the Easter hymn directly,…” said Ieronim, “and Nikolay is gone; there is no one to appreciate it.… There was nothing written dearer to him than that hymn. He used to take in every word! You’ll be there, sir, so notice what is sung; it takes your breath away!”

“Won’t you be in church, then?”

“I can’t;… I have to work the ferry.…”

“But won’t they relieve you?”

“I don’t know.… I ought to have been relieved at eight; but, as you see, they don’t come!… And I must own I should have liked to be in the church.…”

“Are you a monk?”

“Yes… that is, I am a lay-brother.”

The ferry ran into the bank and stopped. I thrust a five-kopeck piece into Ieronim’s hand for taking me across and jumped on land. Immediately a cart with a boy and a sleeping woman in it drove creaking onto the ferry. Ieronim, with a faint glow from the lights on his figure, pressed on the rope, bent down to it, and started the ferry back.…

I took a few steps through mud, but a little farther walked on a soft freshly trodden path. This path led to the dark monastery gates, that looked like a cavern through a cloud of smoke, through a disorderly crowd of people, unharnessed horses, carts and chaises. All this crowd was rattling, snorting, laughing, and the crimson light and wavering shadows from the smoke flickered over it all.… A perfect chaos! And in this hubbub the people yet found room to load a little cannon and to sell cakes. There was no less commotion on the other side of the wall in the monastery precincts, but there was more regard for decorum and order. Here there was a smell of juniper and incense. They talked loudly, but there was no sound of laughter or snorting. Near the tombstones and crosses people pressed close to one another with Easter cakes and bundles in their arms. Apparently many had come from a long distance for their cakes to be blessed and now were exhausted. Young lay brothers, making a metallic sound with their boots, ran busily along the iron slabs that paved the way from the monastery gates to the church door. They were busy and shouting on the belfry, too.

“What a restless night!” I thought. “How nice!”

One was tempted to see the same unrest and sleeplessness in all nature, from the night darkness to the iron slabs, the crosses on the tombs and the trees under which the people were moving to and fro. But nowhere was the excitement and restlessness so marked as in the church.

An unceasing struggle was going on in the entrance between the inflowing stream and the outflowing stream. Some were going in, others going out and soon coming back again to stand still for a little and begin moving again. People were scurrying from place to place, lounging about as though they were looking for something. The stream flowed from the entrance all round the church, disturbing even the front rows, where persons of weight and dignity were standing. There could be no thought of concentrated prayer. There were no prayers at all, but a sort of continuous, childishly irresponsible joy, seeking a pretext to break out and vent itself in some movement, even in senseless jostling and shoving.

The same unaccustomed movement is striking in the Easter service itself. The altar gates are flung wide open, thick clouds of incense float in the air near the candelabra; wherever one looks there are lights, the gleam and splutter of candles.… There is no reading; restless and lighthearted singing goes on to the end without ceasing. After each hymn the clergy change their vestments and come out to burn the incense, which is repeated every ten minutes.

I had no sooner taken a place, when a wave rushed from in front and forced me back. A tall thickset deacon walked before me with a long red candle; the grey-headed archimandrite in his golden mitre hurried after him with the censer. When they had vanished from sight the crowd squeezed me back to my former position. But ten minutes had not passed before a new wave burst on me, and again the deacon appeared. This time he was followed by the Father Sub-Prior, the man who, as Ieronim had told me, was writing the history of the monastery.

As I mingled with the crowd and caught the infection of the universal joyful excitement, I felt unbearably sore on Ieronim’s account. Why did they not send someone to relieve him? Why could not someone of less feeling and less susceptibility go on the ferry? “Lift up thine eyes, O Sion, and look around,” they sang in the choir, “for thy children have come to thee as to a beacon of divine light from north and south, and from east and from the sea.…”

I looked at the faces; they all had a lively expression of triumph, but not one was listening to what was being sung and taking it in, and not one was “holding his breath.” Why was not Ieronim released? I could fancy Ieronim standing meekly somewhere by the wall, bending forward and hungrily drinking in the beauty of the holy phrase. All this that glided by the ears of the people standing by me he would have eagerly drunk in with his delicately sensitive soul, and would have been

spellbound to ecstasy, to holding his breath, and there would not have been a man happier than he in all the church. Now he was plying to and fro over the dark river and grieving for his dead friend and brother.

The wave surged back. A stout smiling monk, playing with his rosary and looking round behind him, squeezed sideways by me, making way for a lady in a hat and velvet cloak. A monastery servant hurried after the lady, holding a chair over our heads.

I came out of the church. I wanted to have a look at the dead Nikolay, the unknown canticle writer. I walked about the monastery wall, where there was a row of cells, peeped into several windows, and, seeing nothing, came back again. I do not regret now that I did not see Nikolay; God knows, perhaps if I had seen him I should have lost the picture my imagination paints for me now. I imagine the lovable poetical figure solitary and not understood, who went out at nights to call to Ieronim over the water, and filled his hymns with flowers, stars and sunbeams, as a pale timid man with soft mild melancholy features. His eyes must have shone, not only with intelligence, but with kindly tenderness and that hardly restrained childlike enthusiasm which I could hear in Ieronim's voice when he quoted to me passages from the hymns.

When we came out of church after mass it was no longer night. The morning was beginning. The stars had gone out and the sky was a morose greyish blue. The iron slabs, the tombstones and the buds on the trees were covered with dew. There was a sharp freshness in the air. Outside the precincts I did not find the same animated scene as I had beheld in the night. Horses and men looked exhausted, drowsy, scarcely moved, while nothing was left of the tar barrels but heaps of black ash. When anyone is exhausted and sleepy he fancies that nature, too, is in the same condition. It seemed to me that the trees and the young grass were asleep. It seemed as though even the bells were not pealing so loudly and gaily as at night. The restlessness was over, and of the excitement nothing was left but a pleasant weariness, a longing for sleep and warmth.

Now I could see both banks of the river; a faint mist hovered over it in shifting masses. There was a harsh cold breath from the water. When I jumped on to the ferry, a chaise and some two dozen men and women were standing on it already. The rope, wet and as I fancied drowsy, stretched far away across the broad river and in places disappeared in the white mist.

"Christ is risen! Is there no one else?" asked a soft voice.

I recognized the voice of Ieronim. There was no darkness now to hinder me from seeing the monk. He was a tall narrow-shouldered man of five-and-thirty, with large rounded features, with half-closed listless-looking eyes and an unkempt wedge-shaped beard. He had an extraordinarily sad and exhausted look.

“They have not relieved you yet?” I asked in surprise.

“Me?” he answered, turning to me his chilled and dewy face with a smile. “There is no one to take my place now till morning. They’ll all be going to the Father Archimandrite’s to break the fast directly.”

With the help of a little peasant in a hat of reddish fur that looked like the little wooden tubs in which honey is sold, he threw his weight on the rope; they gasped simultaneously, and the ferry started.

We floated across, disturbing on the way the lazily rising mist. Everyone was silent. Ieronim worked mechanically with one hand. He slowly passed his mild lustreless eyes over us; then his glance rested on the rosy face of a young merchant’s wife with black eyebrows, who was standing on the ferry beside me silently shrinking from the mist that wrapped her about. He did not take his eyes off her face all the way.

There was little that was masculine in that prolonged gaze. It seemed to me that Ieronim was looking in the woman’s face for the soft and tender features of his dead friend.

LADIES

Fyodor Petrovitch the Director of Elementary Schools in the N—— District, who considered himself a just and generous man, was one day interviewing in his office a schoolmaster called Vremensky.

"No, Mr. Vremensky," he was saying, "your retirement is inevitable. You cannot continue your work as a schoolmaster with a voice like that! How did you come to lose it?"

"I drank cold beer when I was in a perspiration…" hissed the schoolmaster.

"What a pity! After a man has served fourteen years, such a calamity all at once! The idea of a career being ruined by such a trivial thing. What are you intending to do now?"

The schoolmaster made no answer.

"Are you a family man?" asked the director.

"A wife and two children, your Excellency…" hissed the schoolmaster.

A silence followed. The director got up from the table and walked to and fro in perturbation.

"I cannot think what I am going to do with you!" he said. "A teacher you cannot be, and you are not yet entitled to a pension.… To abandon you to your fate, and leave you to do the best you can, is rather awkward. We look on you as one of our men, you have served fourteen years, so it is our business to help you.… But how are we to help you? What can I do for you? Put yourself in my place: what can I do for you?"

A silence followed; the director walked up and down, still thinking, and Vremensky, overwhelmed by his trouble, sat on the edge of his chair, and he, too, thought. All at once the director began beaming, and even snapped his fingers.

"I wonder I did not think of it before!" he began rapidly. "Listen, this is what I can offer you. Next week our secretary at the Home is retiring. If you like, you can have his place! There you are!"

Vremensky, not expecting such good fortune, beamed too.

“That’s capital,” said the director. “Write the application today.”

Dismissing Vremensky, Fyodor Petrovitch felt relieved and even gratified: the bent figure of the hissing schoolmaster was no longer confronting him, and it was agreeable to recognize that in offering a vacant post to Vremensky he had acted fairly and conscientiously, like a good-hearted and thoroughly decent person. But this agreeable state of mind did not last long. When he went home and sat down to dinner his wife, Nastasya Ivanovna, said suddenly:

“Oh yes, I was almost forgetting! Nina Sergeyevna came to see me yesterday and begged for your interest on behalf of a young man. I am told there is a vacancy in our Home.…”

“Yes, but the post has already been promised to someone else,” said the director, and he frowned. “And you know my rule: I never give posts through patronage.”

“I know, but for Nina Sergeyevna, I imagine, you might make an exception. She loves us as though we were relations, and we have never done anything for her. And don’t think of refusing, Fedya! You will wound both her and me with your whims.”

“Who is it that she is recommending?”

“Polzuhin!”

“What Polzuhin? Is it that fellow who played Tchatsky at the party on New Year’s Day? Is it that gentleman? Not on any account!”

The director left off eating.

“Not on any account!” he repeated. “Heaven preserve us!”

“But why not?”

“Understand, my dear, that if a young man does not set to work directly, but through women, he must be good for nothing! Why doesn’t he come to me himself?”

After dinner the director lay on the sofa in his study and began reading the letters and newspapers he had received.

“Dear Fyodor Petrovitch,” wrote the wife of the Mayor of the town. “You once said that I knew the human heart and understood people. Now you have an opportunity of verifying this in practice. K. N. Polzuhin, whom I know to be an excellent young man, will call upon you in a day or two to ask you for the post of secretary at our Home. He is a very nice youth. If you take an interest in him you will be convinced of it.” And so on.

“On no account!” was the director’s comment. “Heaven preserve me!”

After that, not a day passed without the director’s receiving letters recommending Polzuhin. One fine morning Polzuhin himself, a stout

young man with a close-shaven face like a jockey's, in a new black suit, made his appearance.…

"I see people on business not here but at the office," said the director drily, on hearing his request.

"Forgive me, your Excellency, but our common acquaintances advised me to come here."

"H'm!" growled the director, looking with hatred at the pointed toes of the young man's shoes. "To the best of my belief your father is a man of property and you are not in want," he said. "What induces you to ask for this post? The salary is very trifling!"

"It's not for the sake of the salary.… It's a government post, anyway…"

"H'm.… It strikes me that within a month you will be sick of the job and you will give it up, and meanwhile there are candidates for whom it would be a career for life. There are poor men for whom…"

"I shan't get sick of it, your Excellency," Polzuhin interposed. "Honour bright, I will do my best!"

It was too much for the director.

"Tell me," he said, smiling contemptuously, "why was it you didn't apply to me direct but thought fitting instead to trouble ladies as a preliminary?"

"I didn't know that it would be disagreeable to you," Polzuhin answered, and he was embarrassed. "But, your Excellency, if you attach no significance to letters of recommendation, I can give you a testimonial.…"

He drew from his pocket a letter and handed it to the director. At the bottom of the testimonial, which was written in official language and handwriting, stood the signature of the Governor. Everything pointed to the Governor's having signed it unread, simply to get rid of some importunate lady.

"There's nothing for it, I bow to his authority… I obey…" said the director, reading the testimonial, and he heaved a sigh.

"Send in your application tomorrow.… There's nothing to be done.…"

And when Polzuhin had gone out, the director abandoned himself to a feeling of repulsion.

"Sneak!" he hissed, pacing from one corner to the other. "He has got what he wanted, one way or the other, the good-for-nothing toady! Making up to the ladies! Reptile! Creature!"

The director spat loudly in the direction of the door by which Polzuhin had departed, and was immediately overcome with embarrassment, for at that moment a lady, the wife of the Superintendent of the Provincial Treasury, walked in at the door.

"I've come for a tiny minute… a tiny minute…" began the lady. "Sit down, friend, and listen to me attentively.… Well, I've been told you have a post vacant.… Today or tomorrow you will receive a visit from a young man called Polzuhin.…"

The lady chattered on, while the director gazed at her with lustreless, stupefied eyes like a man on the point of fainting, gazed and smiled from politeness.

And the next day when Vremensky came to his office it was a long time before the director could bring himself to tell the truth. He hesitated, was incoherent, and could not think how to begin or what to say. He wanted to apologize to the schoolmaster, to tell him the whole truth, but his tongue halted like a drunkard's, his ears burned, and he was suddenly overwhelmed with vexation and resentment that he should have to play such an absurd part—in his own office, before his subordinate. He suddenly brought his fist down on the table, leaped up, and shouted angrily:

"I have no post for you! I have not, and that's all about it! Leave me in peace! Don't worry me! Be so good as to leave me alone!"

And he walked out of the office.

Strong Impressions

It happened not so long ago in the Moscow circuit court. The jurymen, left in the court for the night, before lying down to sleep fell into conversation about strong impressions. They were led to this discussion by recalling a witness who, by his own account, had begun to stammer and had gone grey owing to a terrible moment. The jurymen decided that before going to sleep, each one of them should ransack among his memories and tell something that had happened to him. Man's life is brief, but yet there is no man who cannot boast that there have been terrible moments in his past.

One juryman told the story of how he was nearly drowned; another described how, in a place where there were neither doctors nor chemists, he had one night poisoned his own son through giving him zinc vitriol by mistake for soda. The child did not die, but the father nearly went out of his mind. A third, a man not old but in bad health, told how he had twice attempted to commit suicide: the first time by shooting himself and the second time by throwing himself before a train.

The fourth, a foppishly dressed, fat little man, told us the following story:

"I was not more than twenty-two or twenty-three when I fell head over ears in love with my present wife and made her an offer. Now I could with pleasure thrash myself for my early marriage, but at the time, I don't know what would have become of me if Natasha had refused me. My love was absolutely the real thing, just as it is described in novels—frantic, passionate, and so on. My happiness overwhelmed me and I did not know how to get away from it, and I bored my father and my friends and the servants, continually talking about the fervour of my passion. Happy people are the most sickening bores. I was a fearful bore; I feel ashamed of it even now.…

"Among my friends there was in those days a young man who was beginning his career as a lawyer. Now he is a lawyer known all over Russia; in those days he was only just beginning to gain recognition and

was not rich and famous enough to be entitled to cut an old friend when he met him. I used to go and see him once or twice a week. We used to loll on sofas and begin discussing philosophy.

"One day I was lying on his sofa, arguing that there was no more ungrateful profession than that of a lawyer. I tried to prove that as soon as the examination of witnesses is over the court can easily dispense with both the counsels for the prosecution and for the defence, because they are neither of them necessary and are only in the way. If a grown-up juryman, morally and mentally sane, is convinced that the ceiling is white, or that Ivanov is guilty, to struggle with that conviction and to vanquish it is beyond the power of any Demosthenes. Who can convince me that I have a red moustache when I know that it is black? As I listen to an orator I may perhaps grow sentimental and weep, but my fundamental conviction, based for the most part on unmistakable evidence and fact, is not changed in the least. My lawyer maintained that I was young and foolish and that I was talking childish nonsense. In his opinion, for one thing, an obvious fact becomes still more obvious through light being thrown upon it by conscientious, well-informed people; for another, talent is an elemental force, a hurricane capable of turning even stones to dust, let alone such trifles as the convictions of artisans and merchants of the second guild. It is as hard for human weakness to struggle against talent as to look at the sun without winking, or to stop the wind. One simple mortal by the power of the word turns thousands of convinced savages to Christianity; Odysseus was a man of the firmest convictions, but he succumbed to the Syrens, and so on. All history consists of similar examples, and in life they are met with at every turn; and so it is bound to be, or the intelligent and talented man would have no superiority over the stupid and incompetent.

"I stuck to my point, and went on maintaining that convictions are stronger than any talent, though, frankly speaking, I could not have defined exactly what I meant by conviction or what I meant by talent. Most likely I simply talked for the sake of talking.

"'Take you, for example,' said the lawyer. 'You are convinced at this moment that your fiancée is an angel and that there is not a man in the whole town happier than you. But I tell you: ten or twenty minutes would be enough for me to make you sit down to this table and write to your fiancée, breaking off your engagement.'

"I laughed.

"'Don't laugh, I am speaking seriously,' said my friend. 'If I choose, in twenty minutes you will be happy at the thought that you need not get

married. Goodness knows what talent I have, but you are not one of the strong sort.’

“‘Well, try it on!’ said I.

“‘No, what for? I am only telling you this. You are a good boy and it would be cruel to subject you to such an experiment. And besides I am not in good form today.’

“We sat down to supper. The wine and the thought of Natasha, my beloved, flooded my whole being with youth and happiness. My happiness was so boundless that the lawyer sitting opposite to me with his green eyes seemed to me an unhappy man, so small, so grey.…

“‘Do try!’ I persisted. ‘Come, I entreat you!’

“The lawyer shook his head and frowned. Evidently I was beginning to bore him.

“‘I know,’ he said, ‘after my experiment you will say, thank you, and will call me your saviour; but you see I must think of your fiancée too. She loves you; your jilting her would make her suffer. And what a charming creature she is! I envy you.’

“The lawyer sighed, sipped his wine, and began talking of how charming my Natasha was. He had an extraordinary gift of description. He could knock you off a regular string of words about a woman’s eyelashes or her little finger. I listened to him with relish.

“‘I have seen a great many women in my day,’ he said, ‘but I give you my word of honour, I speak as a friend, your Natasha Andreyevna is a pearl, a rare girl. Of course she has her defects—many of them, in fact, if you like—but still she is fascinating.’

“And the lawyer began talking of my fiancée’s defects. Now I understand very well that he was talking of women in general, of their weak points in general, but at the time it seemed to me that he was talking only of Natasha. He went into ecstasies over her turn-up nose, her shrieks, her shrill laugh, her airs and graces, precisely all the things I so disliked in her. All that was, to his thinking, infinitely sweet, graceful, and feminine.

“Without my noticing it, he quickly passed from his enthusiastic tone to one of fatherly admonition, and then to a light and derisive one.… There was no presiding judge and no one to check the diffusiveness of the lawyer. I had not time to open my mouth, besides, what could I say? What my friend said was not new, it was what everyone has known for ages, and the whole venom lay not in what he said, but in the damnable form he put it in. It really was beyond anything!

“As I listened to him then I learned that the same word has thousands of shades of meaning according to the tone in which it is pronounced, and the form which is given to the sentence. Of course I cannot reproduce the tone or the form; I can only say that as I listened to my friend and walked up and down the room, I was moved to resentment, indignation, and contempt together with him. I even believed him when with tears in his eyes he informed me that I was a great man, that I was worthy of a better fate, that I was destined to achieve something in the future which marriage would hinder!

“‘My friend!’ he exclaimed, pressing my hand. ‘I beseech you, I adjure you: stop before it is too late. Stop! May Heaven preserve you from this strange, cruel mistake! My friend, do not ruin your youth!’

“Believe me or not, as you choose, but the long and the short of it was that I sat down to the table and wrote to my fiancée, breaking off the engagement. As I wrote I felt relieved that it was not yet too late to rectify my mistake. Sealing the letter, I hastened out into the street to post it. The lawyer himself came with me.

“‘Excellent! Capital!’ he applauded me as my letter to Natasha disappeared into the darkness of the box. ‘I congratulate you with all my heart. I am glad for you.’

“After walking a dozen paces with me the lawyer went on:

“‘Of course, marriage has its good points. I, for instance, belong to the class of people to whom marriage and home life is everything.’

“And he proceeded to describe his life, and lay before me all the hideousness of a solitary bachelor existence.

“He spoke with enthusiasm of his future wife, of the sweets of ordinary family life, and was so eloquent, so sincere in his ecstasies that by the time we had reached his door, I was in despair.

“‘What are you doing to me, you horrible man?’ I said, gasping. ‘You have ruined me! Why did you make me write that cursed letter? I love her, I love her!’

“And I protested my love. I was horrified at my conduct which now seemed to me wild and senseless. It is impossible, gentlemen, to imagine a more violent emotion than I experienced at that moment. Oh, what I went through, what I suffered! If some kind person had thrust a revolver into my hand at that moment, I should have put a bullet through my brains with pleasure.

“‘Come, come…’ said the lawyer, slapping me on the shoulder, and he laughed. ‘Give over crying. The letter won’t reach your fiancée. It was not you who wrote the address but I, and I muddled it so they won’t

be able to make it out at the post-office. It will be a lesson to you not to argue about what you don't understand.'

"Now, gentlemen, I leave it to the next to speak."

The fifth juryman settled himself more comfortably, and had just opened his mouth to begin his story when we heard the clock strike on Spassky Tower.

"Twelve…" one of the jurymen counted. "And into which class, gentlemen, would you put the emotions that are being experienced now by the man we are trying? He, that murderer, is spending the night in a convict cell here in the court, sitting or lying down and of course not sleeping, and throughout the whole sleepless night listening to that chime. What is he thinking of? What visions are haunting him?"

And the jurymen all suddenly forgot about strong impressions; what their companion who had once written a letter to his Natasha had suffered seemed unimportant, even not amusing; and no one said anything more; they began quietly and in silence lying down to sleep.

A Gentleman Friend

The charming Vanda, or, as she was described in her passport, the "Honourable Citizen Nastasya Kanavkin," found herself, on leaving the hospital, in a position she had never been in before: without a home to go to or a farthing in her pocket. What was she to do?

The first thing she did was to visit a pawnbroker's and pawn her turquoise ring, her one piece of jewellery. They gave her a rouble for the ring… but what can you get for a rouble? You can't buy for that sum a fashionable short jacket, nor a big hat, nor a pair of bronze shoes, and without those things she had a feeling of being, as it were, undressed. She felt as though the very horses and dogs were staring and laughing at the plainness of her dress. And clothes were all she thought about: the question what she should eat and where she should sleep did not trouble her in the least.

"If only I could meet a gentleman friend," she thought to herself, "I could get some money.… There isn't one who would refuse me, I know…"

But no gentleman she knew came her way. It would be easy enough to meet them in the evening at the Renaissance, but they wouldn't let her in at the Renaissance in that shabby dress and with no hat. What was she to do?

After long hesitation, when she was sick of walking and sitting and thinking, Vanda made up her mind to fall back on her last resource: to go straight to the lodgings of some gentleman friend and ask for money.

She pondered which to go to. "Misha is out of the question; he's a married man.… The old chap with the red hair will be at his office at this time…"

Vanda remembered a dentist, called Finkel, a converted Jew, who six months ago had given her a bracelet, and on whose head she had once emptied a glass of beer at the supper at the German Club. She was awfully pleased at the thought of Finkel.

“He’ll be sure to give it me, if only I find him at home,” she thought, as she walked in his direction. “If he doesn’t, I’ll smash all the lamps in the house.”

Before she reached the dentist’s door she thought out her plan of action: she would run laughing up the stairs, dash into the dentist’s room and demand twenty-five roubles. But as she touched the bell, this plan seemed to vanish from her mind of itself. Vanda began suddenly feeling frightened and nervous, which was not at all her way. She was bold and saucy enough at drinking parties, but now, dressed in everyday clothes, feeling herself in the position of an ordinary person asking a favour, who might be refused admittance, she felt suddenly timid and humiliated. She was ashamed and frightened.

“Perhaps he has forgotten me by now,” she thought, hardly daring to pull the bell. “And how can I go up to him in such a dress, looking like a beggar or some working girl?”

And she rang the bell irresolutely.

She heard steps coming: it was the porter.

“Is the doctor at home?” she asked.

She would have been glad now if the porter had said “No,” but the latter, instead of answering ushered her into the hall, and helped her off with her coat. The staircase impressed her as luxurious, and magnificent, but of all its splendours what caught her eye most was an immense looking-glass, in which she saw a ragged figure without a fashionable jacket, without a big hat, and without bronze shoes. And it seemed strange to Vanda that, now that she was humbly dressed and looked like a laundress or sewing girl, she felt ashamed, and no trace of her usual boldness and sauciness remained, and in her own mind she no longer thought of herself as Vanda, but as the Nastasya Kanavkin she used to be in the old days.…

“Walk in, please,” said a maidservant, showing her into the consulting room. “The doctor will be here in a minute. Sit down.”

Vanda sank into a soft armchair.

“I’ll ask him to lend it me,” she thought; “that will be quite proper, for, after all, I do know him. If only that servant would go. I don’t like to ask before her. What does she want to stand there for?”

Five minutes later the door opened and Finkel came in. He was a tall, dark Jew, with fat cheeks and bulging eyes. His cheeks, his eyes, his chest, his body, all of him was so well fed, so loathsome and repellent! At the Renaissance and the German Club he had usually been rather tipsy, and would spend his money freely on women, and be very long-

suffering and patient with their pranks (when Vanda, for instance, poured the beer over his head, he simply smiled and shook his finger at her): now he had a cross, sleepy expression and looked solemn and frigid like a police captain, and he kept chewing something.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, without looking at Vanda.

Vanda looked at the serious countenance of the maid and the smug figure of Finkel, who apparently did not recognize her, and she turned red.

"What can I do for you?" repeated the dentist a little irritably.

"I've got toothache," murmured Vanda.

"Aha!… Which is the tooth? Where?"

Vanda remembered she had a hole in one of her teeth.

"At the bottom… on the right…" she said.

"Hm!… Open your mouth."

Finkel frowned and, holding his breath, began examining the tooth.

"Does it hurt?" he asked, digging into it with a steel instrument.

"Yes," Vanda replied, untruthfully.

"Shall I remind him?" she was wondering. "He would be sure to remember me. But that servant! Why will she stand there?"

Finkel suddenly snorted like a steam-engine right into her mouth, and said:

"I don't advise you to have it stopped. That tooth will never be worth keeping anyhow."

After probing the tooth a little more and soiling Vanda's lips and gums with his tobacco-stained fingers, he held his breath again, and put something cold into her mouth. Vanda suddenly felt a sharp pain, cried out, and clutched at Finkel's hand.

"It's all right, it's all right," he muttered; "don't you be frightened! That tooth would have been no use to you, anyway… you must be brave…"

And his tobacco-stained fingers, smeared with blood, held up the tooth to her eyes, while the maid approached and put a basin to her mouth.

"You wash out your mouth with cold water when you get home, and that will stop the bleeding," said Finkel.

He stood before her with the air of a man expecting her to go, waiting to be left in peace.

"Good day," she said, turning towards the door.

"Hm!… and how about my fee?" enquired Finkel, in a jesting tone.

"Oh, yes!" Vanda remembered, blushing, and she handed the Jew the rouble that had been given her for her ring.

When she got out into the street she felt more overwhelmed with shame than before, but now it was not her poverty she was ashamed of. She was unconscious now of not having a big hat and a fashionable jacket. She walked along the street, spitting blood, and brooding on her life, her ugly, wretched life, and the insults she had endured, and would have to endure tomorrow, and next week, and all her life, up to the very day of her death.

"Oh! how awful it is! My God, how fearful!"

Next day, however, she was back at the Renaissance, and dancing there. She had on an enormous new red hat, a new fashionable jacket, and bronze shoes. And she was taken out to supper by a young merchant up from Kazan.

A Happy Man

The passenger train is just starting from Bologoe, the junction on the Petersburg–Moscow line. In a second-class smoking compartment five passengers sit dozing, shrouded in the twilight of the carriage. They had just had a meal, and now, snugly ensconced in their seats, they are trying to go to sleep. Stillness.

The door opens and in there walks a tall, lanky figure straight as a poker, with a ginger-coloured hat and a smart overcoat, wonderfully suggestive of a journalist in Jules Verne or on the comic stage.

The figure stands still in the middle of the compartment for a long while, breathing heavily, screwing up his eyes and peering at the seats.

“No, wrong again!” he mutters. “What the deuce! It’s positively revolting! No, the wrong one again!”

One of the passengers stares at the figure and utters a shout of joy:

“Ivan Alexyevitch! what brings you here? Is it you?”

The poker-like gentleman starts, stares blankly at the passenger, and recognizing him claps his hands with delight.

“Ha! Pyotr Petrovitch,” he says. “How many summers, how many winters! I didn’t know you were in this train.”

“How are you getting on?”

“I am all right; the only thing is, my dear fellow, I’ve lost my compartment and I simply can’t find it. What an idiot I am! I ought to be thrashed!”

The poker-like gentleman sways a little unsteadily and sniggers.

“Queer things do happen!” he continues. “I stepped out just after the second bell to get a glass of brandy. I got it, of course. Well, I thought, since it’s a long way to the next station, it would be as well to have a second glass. While I was thinking about it and drinking it the third bell rang.… I ran like mad and jumped into the first carriage. I am an idiot! I am the son of a hen!”

“But you seem in very good spirits,” observes Pyotr Petrovitch. “Come and sit down! There’s room and a welcome.”

“No, no.… I’m off to look for my carriage. Goodbye!”

“You’ll fall between the carriages in the dark if you don’t look out! Sit down, and when we get to a station you’ll find your own compartment. Sit down!”

Ivan Alexyevitch heaves a sigh and irresolutely sits down facing Pyotr Petrovitch. He is visibly excited, and fidgets as though he were sitting on thorns.

“Where are you travelling to?” Pyotr Petrovitch enquires.

“I? Into space. There is such a turmoil in my head that I couldn’t tell where I am going myself. I go where fate takes me. Ha-ha! My dear fellow, have you ever seen a happy fool? No? Well, then, take a look at one. You behold the happiest of mortals! Yes! Don’t you see something from my face?”

“Well, one can see you’re a bit… a tiny bit so-so.”

“I dare say I look awfully stupid just now. Ach! it’s a pity I haven’t a looking-glass, I should like to look at my countinghouse. My dear fellow, I feel I am turning into an idiot, honour bright. Ha-ha! Would you believe it, I’m on my honeymoon. Am I not the son of a hen?”

“You? Do you mean to say you are married?”

“Today, my dear boy. We came away straight after the wedding.”

Congratulations and the usual questions follow. “Well, you are a fellow!” laughs Pyotr Petrovitch. “That’s why you are rigged out such a dandy.”

“Yes, indeed.… To complete the illusion, I’ve even sprinkled myself with scent. I am over my ears in vanity! No care, no thought, nothing but a sensation of something or other… deuce knows what to call it… beatitude or something? I’ve never felt so grand in my life!”

Ivan Alexyevitch shuts his eyes and waggles his head.

“I’m revoltingly happy,” he says. “Just think; in a minute I shall go to my compartment. There on the seat near the window is sitting a being who is, so to say, devoted to you with her whole being. A little blonde with a little nose… little fingers.… My little darling! My angel! My little poppet! Phylloxera of my soul! And her little foot! Good God! A little foot not like our beetle-crushers, but something miniature, fairylike, allegorical. I could pick it up and eat it, that little foot! Oh, but you don’t understand! You’re a materialist, of course, you begin analyzing at once, and one thing and another. You are cold-hearted bachelors, that’s what you are! When you get married you’ll think of me. ‘Where’s Ivan Alexyevitch now?’ you’ll say. Yes; so in a minute I’m going to my compartment. There she is waiting for me with impatience… in joyful

anticipation of my appearance. She'll have a smile to greet me. I sit down beside her and take her chin with my two fingers."

Ivan Alexyevitch waggles his head and goes off into a chuckle of delight.

"Then I lay my noddle on her shoulder and put my arm round her waist. Around all is silence, you know… poetic twilight. I could embrace the whole world at such a moment. Pyotr Petrovitch, allow me to embrace you!"

"Delighted, I'm sure." The two friends embrace while the passengers laugh in chorus. And the happy bridegroom continues:

"And to complete the idiocy, or, as the novelists say, to complete the illusion, one goes to the refreshment room and tosses off two or three glasses. And then something happens in your head and your heart, finer than you can read of in a fairy tale. I am a man of no importance, but I feel as though I were limitless: I embrace the whole world!"

The passengers, looking at the tipsy and blissful bridegroom, are infected by his cheerfulness and no longer feel sleepy. Instead of one listener, Ivan Alexyevitch has now an audience of five. He wriggles and splutters, gesticulates, and prattles on without ceasing. He laughs and they all laugh.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, don't think so much! Damn all this analysis! If you want a drink, drink, no need to philosophize as to whether it's bad for you or not.… Damn all this philosophy and psychology!"

The guard walks through the compartment.

"My dear fellow," the bridegroom addresses him, "when you pass through the carriage No. 209 look out for a lady in a grey hat with a white bird and tell her I'm here!"

"Yes, sir. Only there isn't a No. 209 in this train; there's 219!"

"Well, 219, then! It's all the same. Tell that lady, then, that her husband is all right!"

Ivan Alexyevitch suddenly clutches his head and groans:

"Husband.… Lady.… All in a minute! Husband.… Ha-ha! I am a puppy that needs thrashing, and here I am a husband! Ach, idiot! But think of her!… Yesterday she was a little girl, a midget… it's simply incredible!"

"Nowadays it really seems strange to see a happy man," observes one of the passengers; "one as soon expects to see a white elephant."

"Yes, and whose fault is it?" says Ivan Alexyevitch, stretching his long legs and thrusting out his feet with their very pointed toes. "If you are not happy it's your own fault! Yes, what else do you suppose it is? Man

is the creator of his own happiness. If you want to be happy you will be, but you don't want to be! You obstinately turn away from happiness."

"Why, what next! How do you make that out?"

"Very simply. Nature has ordained that at a certain stage in his life man should love. When that time comes you should love like a house on fire, but you won't heed the dictates of nature, you keep waiting for something. What's more, it's laid down by law that the normal man should enter upon matrimony. There's no happiness without marriage. When the propitious moment has come, get married. There's no use in shilly-shallying.… But you don't get married, you keep waiting for something! Then the Scriptures tell us that 'wine maketh glad the heart of man.' … If you feel happy and you want to feel better still, then go to the refreshment bar and have a drink. The great thing is not to be too clever, but to follow the beaten track! The beaten track is a grand thing!"

"You say that man is the creator of his own happiness. How the devil is he the creator of it when a toothache or an ill-natured mother-in-law is enough to scatter his happiness to the winds? Everything depends on chance. If we had an accident at this moment you'd sing a different tune."

"Stuff and nonsense!" retorts the bridegroom. "Railway accidents only happen once a year. I'm not afraid of an accident, for there is no reason for one. Accidents are exceptional! Confound them! I don't want to talk of them! Oh, I believe we're stopping at a station."

"Where are you going now?" asks Pyotr Petrovitch. "To Moscow or somewhere further south?"

"Why, bless you! How could I go somewhere further south, when I'm on my way to the north?"

"But Moscow isn't in the north."

"I know that, but we're on our way to Petersburg," says Ivan Alexyevitch.

"We are going to Moscow, mercy on us!"

"To Moscow? What do you mean?" says the bridegroom in amazement.

"It's queer.… For what station did you take your ticket?"

"For Petersburg."

"In that case I congratulate you. You've got into the wrong train."

There follows a minute of silence. The bridegroom gets up and looks blankly round the company.

"Yes, yes," Pyotr Petrovitch explains. "You must have jumped into the wrong train at Bologoe.… After your glass of brandy you succeeded in

getting into the down-train.”

Ivan Alexyevitch turns pale, clutches his head, and begins pacing rapidly about the carriage.

“Ach, idiot that I am!” he says in indignation. “Scoundrel! The devil devour me! Whatever am I to do now? Why, my wife is in that train! She’s there all alone, expecting me, consumed by anxiety. Ach, I’m a motley fool!”

The bridegroom falls on the seat and writhes as though someone had trodden on his corns.

“I am un-unhappy man!” he moans. “What am I to do, what am I to do?”

“There, there!” the passengers try to console him. “It’s all right.… You must telegraph to your wife and try to change into the Petersburg express. In that way you’ll overtake her.”

“The Petersburg express!” weeps the bridegroom, the creator of his own happiness. “And how am I to get a ticket for the Petersburg express? All my money is with my wife.”

The passengers, laughing and whispering together, make a collection and furnish the happy man with funds.

THE PRIVY COUNCILLOR

At the beginning of April in 1870 my mother, Klavdia Arhipovna, the widow of a lieutenant, received from her brother Ivan, a privy councillor in Petersburg, a letter in which, among other things, this passage occurred: “My liver trouble forces me to spend every summer abroad, and as I have not at the moment the money in hand for a trip to Marienbad, it is very possible, dear sister, that I may spend this summer with you at Kotchuevko.…”

On reading the letter my mother turned pale and began trembling all over; then an expression of mingled tears and laughter came into her face. She began crying and laughing. This conflict of tears and laughter always reminds me of the flickering and spluttering of a brightly burning candle when one sprinkles it with water. Reading the letter once more, mother called together all the household, and in a voice broken with emotion began explaining to us that there had been four Gundasov brothers: one Gundasov had died as a baby; another had gone to the war, and he, too, was dead; the third, without offence to him be it said, was an actor; the fourth…

“The fourth has risen far above us,” my mother brought out tearfully. “My own brother, we grew up together; and I am all of a tremble, all of a tremble!… A privy councillor with the rank of a general! How shall I meet him, my angel brother? What can I, a foolish, uneducated woman, talk to him about? It’s fifteen years since I’ve seen him! Andryushenka,” my mother turned to me, “you must rejoice, little stupid! It’s a piece of luck for you that God is sending him to us!”

After we had heard a detailed history of the Gundasovs, there followed a fuss and bustle in the place such as I had been accustomed to see only before Christmas and Easter. The sky above and the water in the river were all that escaped; everything else was subjected to a merciless cleansing, scrubbing, painting. If the sky had been lower and smaller and the river had not flowed so swiftly, they would have scoured them, too, with bath-brick and rubbed them, too, with tow. Our walls were as white

as snow, but they were whitewashed; the floors were bright and shining, but they were washed every day. The cat Bobtail (as a small child I had cut off a good quarter of his tail with the knife used for chopping the sugar, and that was why he was called Bobtail) was carried off to the kitchen and put in charge of Anisya; Fedka was told that if any of the dogs came near the front-door "God would punish him." But no one was so badly treated as the poor sofas, easy-chairs, and rugs! They had never, before been so violently beaten as on this occasion in preparation for our visitor. My pigeons took fright at the loud thud of the sticks, and were continually flying up into the sky.

The tailor Spiridon, the only tailor in the whole district who ventured to make for the gentry, came over from Novostroevka. He was a hardworking capable man who did not drink and was not without a certain fancy and feeling for form, but yet he was an atrocious tailor. His work was ruined by hesitation.… The idea that his cut was not fashionable enough made him alter everything half a dozen times, walk all the way to the town simply to study the dandies, and in the end dress us in suits that even a caricaturist would have called outré and grotesque. We cut a dash in impossibly narrow trousers and in such short jackets that we always felt quite abashed in the presence of young ladies.

This Spiridon spent a long time taking my measure. He measured me all over lengthways and crossways, as though he meant to put hoops round me like a barrel; then he spent a long time noting down my measurements with a thick pencil on a bit of paper, and ticked off all the measurements with triangular signs. When he had finished with me he set to work on my tutor, Yegor Alexyevitch Pobyedimsky. My beloved tutor was then at the stage when young men watch the growth of their moustache and are critical of their clothes, and so you can imagine the devout awe with which Spiridon approached him. Yegor Alexyevitch had to throw back his head, to straddle his legs like an inverted V, first lift up his arms, then let them fall. Spiridon measured him several times, walking round him during the process like a lovesick pigeon round its mate, going down on one knee, bending double.… My mother, weary, exhausted by her exertions and heated by ironing, watched these lengthy proceedings, and said:

"Mind now, Spiridon, you will have to answer for it to God if you spoil the cloth! And it will be the worse for you if you don't make them fit!"

Mother's words threw Spiridon first into a fever, then into a perspiration, for he was convinced that he would not make them fit. He

received one rouble twenty kopecks for making my suit, and for Pobyedimsky's two roubles, but we provided the cloth, the lining, and the buttons. The price cannot be considered excessive, as Novostroevka was about seven miles from us, and the tailor came to fit us four times. When he came to try the things on and we squeezed ourselves into the tight trousers and jackets adorned with basting threads, mother always frowned contemptuously and expressed her surprise:

"Goodness knows what the fashions are coming to nowadays! I am positively ashamed to look at them. If brother were not used to Petersburg I would not get you fashionable clothes!"

Spiridon, relieved that the blame was thrown on the fashion and not on him, shrugged his shoulders and sighed, as though to say:

"There's no help for it; it's the spirit of the age!"

The excitement with which we awaited the arrival of our guest can only be compared with the strained suspense with which spiritualists wait from minute to minute the appearance of a ghost. Mother went about with a sick headache, and was continually melting into tears. I lost my appetite, slept badly, and did not learn my lessons. Even in my dreams I was haunted by an impatient longing to see a general—that is, a man with epaulettes and an embroidered collar sticking up to his ears, and with a naked sword in his hands, exactly like the one who hung over the sofa in the drawing room and glared with terrible black eyes at everybody who dared to look at him. Pobyedimsky was the only one who felt himself in his element. He was neither terrified nor delighted, and merely from time to time, when he heard the history of the Gundasov family, said:

"Yes, it will be pleasant to have someone fresh to talk to."

My tutor was looked upon among us as an exceptional nature. He was a young man of twenty, with a pimply face, shaggy locks, a low forehead, and an unusually long nose. His nose was so big that when he wanted to look close at anything he had to put his head on one side like a bird. To our thinking, there was not a man in the province cleverer, more cultivated, or more stylish. He had left the high school in the class next to the top, and had then entered a veterinary college, from which he was expelled before the end of the first half-year. The reason of his expulsion he carefully concealed, which enabled anyone who wished to do so to look upon my instructor as an injured and to some extent a mysterious person. He spoke little, and only of intellectual subjects; he ate meat during the fasts, and looked with contempt and condescension on the life going on around him, which did not prevent him, however, from taking

presents, such as suits of clothes, from my mother, and drawing funny faces with red teeth on my kites. Mother disliked him for his “pride,” but stood in awe of his cleverness.

Our visitor did not keep us long waiting. At the beginning of May two wagonloads of big boxes arrived from the station. These boxes looked so majestic that the drivers instinctively took off their hats as they lifted them down.

“There must be uniforms and gunpowder in those boxes,” I thought.

Why “gunpowder”? Probably the conception of a general was closely connected in my mind with cannons and gunpowder.

When I woke up on the morning of the tenth of May, nurse told me in a whisper that “my uncle had come.” I dressed rapidly, and, washing after a fashion, flew out of my bedroom without saying my prayers. In the vestibule I came upon a tall, solid gentleman with fashionable whiskers and a foppish-looking overcoat. Half dead with devout awe, I went up to him and, remembering the ceremonial mother had impressed upon me, I scraped my foot before him, made a very low bow, and craned forward to kiss his hand; but the gentleman did not allow me to kiss his hand: he informed me that he was not my uncle, but my uncle’s footman, Pyotr. The appearance of this Pyotr, far better dressed than Pobyedimsky or me, excited in me the utmost astonishment, which, to tell the truth, has lasted to this day. Can such dignified, respectable people with stern and intellectual faces really be footmen? And what for?

Pyotr told me that my uncle was in the garden with my mother. I rushed into the garden.

Nature, knowing nothing of the history of the Gundasov family and the rank of my uncle, felt far more at ease and unconstrained than I. There was a clamour going on in the garden such as one only bears at fairs. Masses of starlings flitting through the air and hopping about the walks were noisily chattering as they hunted for cockchafers. There were swarms of sparrows in the lilac-bushes, which threw their tender, fragrant blossoms straight in one’s face. Wherever one turned, from every direction came the note of the golden oriole and the shrill cry of the hoopoe and the red-legged falcon. At any other time I should have begun chasing dragonflies or throwing stones at a crow which was sitting on a low mound under an aspen tree, with his blunt beak turned away; but at that moment I was in no mood for mischief. My heart was throbbing, and I felt a cold sinking at my stomach; I was preparing myself to confront a gentleman with epaulettes, with a naked sword, and with terrible eyes!

But imagine my disappointment! A dapper little foppish gentleman in white silk trousers, with a white cap on his head, was walking beside my mother in the garden. With his hands behind him and his head thrown back, every now and then running on ahead of mother, he looked quite young. There was so much life and movement in his whole figure that I could only detect the treachery of age when I came close up behind and saw beneath his cap a fringe of close-cropped silver hair. Instead of the staid dignity and stolidity of a general, I saw an almost schoolboyish nimbleness; instead of a collar sticking up to his ears, an ordinary light blue necktie. Mother and my uncle were walking in the avenue talking together. I went softly up to them from behind, and waited for one of them to look round.

"What a delightful place you have here, Klavdia!" said my uncle. "How charming and lovely it is! Had I known before that you had such a charming place, nothing would have induced me to go abroad all these years."

My uncle stooped down rapidly and sniffed at a tulip. Everything he saw moved him to rapture and excitement, as though he had never been in a garden on a sunny day before. The queer man moved about as though he were on springs, and chattered incessantly, without allowing mother to utter a single word. All of a sudden Pobyedimsky came into sight from behind an elder tree at the turn of the avenue. His appearance was so unexpected that my uncle positively started and stepped back a pace. On this occasion my tutor was attired in his best Inverness cape with sleeves, in which, especially back-view, he looked remarkably like a windmill. He had a solemn and majestic air. Pressing his hat to his bosom in Spanish style, he took a step towards my uncle and made a bow such as a marquis makes in a melodrama, bending forward, a little to one side.

"I have the honour to present myself to your high excellency," he said aloud: "the teacher and instructor of your nephew, formerly a pupil of the veterinary institute, and a nobleman by birth, Pobyedimsky!"

This politeness on the part of my tutor pleased my mother very much. She gave a smile, and waited in thrilled suspense to hear what clever thing he would say next; but my tutor, expecting his dignified address to be answered with equal dignity—that is, that my uncle would say "H'm!" like a general and hold out two fingers—was greatly confused and abashed when the latter laughed genially and shook hands with him. He muttered something incoherent, cleared his throat, and walked away.

“Come! isn’t that charming?” laughed my uncle. “Just look! he has made his little flourish and thinks he’s a very clever fellow! I do like that—upon my soul I do! What youthful aplomb, what life in that foolish flourish! And what boy is this?” he asked, suddenly turning and looking at me.

“That is my Andryushenka,” my mother introduced me, flushing crimson. “My consolation…”

I made a scrape with my foot on the sand and dropped a low bow.

“A fine fellow… a fine fellow…” muttered my uncle, taking his hand from my lips and stroking me on the head. “So your name is Andrusha? Yes, yes.… H’m!… upon my soul!… Do you learn lessons?”

My mother, exaggerating and embellishing as all mothers do, began to describe my achievements in the sciences and the excellence of my behaviour, and I walked round my uncle and, following the ceremonial laid down for me, I continued making low bows. Then my mother began throwing out hints that with my remarkable abilities it would not be amiss for me to get a government nomination to the cadet school; but at the point when I was to have burst into tears and begged for my uncle’s protection, my uncle suddenly stopped and flung up his hands in amazement.

“My goo-oodness! What’s that?” he asked.

Tatyana Ivanovna, the wife of our bailiff, Fyodor Petrovna, was coming towards us. She was carrying a starched white petticoat and a long ironing-board. As she passed us she looked shyly at the visitor through her eyelashes and flushed crimson.

“Wonders will never cease…” my uncle filtered through his teeth, looking after her with friendly interest. “You have a fresh surprise at every step, sister… upon my soul!”

“She’s a beauty…” said mother. “They chose her as a bride for Fyodor, though she lived over seventy miles from here.…”

Not everyone would have called Tatyana a beauty. She was a plump little woman of twenty, with black eyebrows and a graceful figure, always rosy and attractive-looking, but in her face and in her whole person there was not one striking feature, not one bold line to catch the eye, as though nature had lacked inspiration and confidence when creating her. Tatyana Ivanovna was shy, bashful, and modest in her behaviour; she moved softly and smoothly, said little, seldom laughed, and her whole life was as regular as her face and as flat as her smooth, tidy hair. My uncle screwed up his eyes looking after her, and smiled. Mother looked intently at his smiling face and grew serious.

“And so, brother, you’ve never married!” she sighed.

“No; I’ve not married.”

“Why not?” asked mother softly.

“How can I tell you? It has happened so. In my youth I was too hard at work, I had no time to live, and when I longed to live—I looked round—and there I had fifty years on my back already. I was too late! However, talking about it… is depressing.”

My mother and my uncle both sighed at once and walked on, and I left them and flew off to find my tutor, that I might share my impressions with him. Pobyedimsky was standing in the middle of the yard, looking majestically at the heavens.

“One can see he is a man of culture!” he said, twisting his head round. “I hope we shall get on together.”

An hour later mother came to us.

“I am in trouble, my dears!” she began, sighing. “You see brother has brought a valet with him, and the valet, God bless him, is not one you can put in the kitchen or in the hall; we must give him a room apart. I can’t think what I am to do! I tell you what, children, couldn’t you move out somewhere—to Fyodor’s lodge, for instance—and give your room to the valet? What do you say?”

We gave our ready consent, for living in the lodge was a great deal more free than in the house, under mother’s eye.

“It’s a nuisance, and that’s a fact!” said mother. “Brother says he won’t have dinner in the middle of the day, but between six and seven, as they do in Petersburg. I am simply distracted with worry! By seven o’clock the dinner will be done to rags in the oven. Really, men don’t understand anything about housekeeping, though they have so much intellect. Oh, dear! we shall have to cook two dinners every day! You will have dinner at midday as before, children, while your poor old mother has to wait till seven, for the sake of her brother.”

Then my mother heaved a deep sigh, bade me try and please my uncle, whose coming was a piece of luck for me for which we must thank God, and hurried off to the kitchen. Pobyedimsky and I moved into the lodge the same day. We were installed in a room which formed the passage from the entry to the bailiff’s bedroom.

Contrary to my expectations, life went on just as before, drearily and monotonously, in spite of my uncle’s arrival and our move into new quarters. We were excused lessons “on account of the visitor.” Pobyedimsky, who never read anything or occupied himself in any way, spent most of his time sitting on his bed, with his long nose thrust into

the air, thinking. Sometimes he would get up, try on his new suit, and sit down again to relapse into contemplation and silence. Only one thing worried him, the flies, which he used mercilessly to squash between his hands. After dinner he usually “rested,” and his snores were a cause of annoyance to the whole household. I ran about the garden from morning to night, or sat in the lodge sticking my kites together. For the first two or three weeks we did not see my uncle often. For days together he sat in his own room working, in spite of the flies and the heat. His extraordinary capacity for sitting as though glued to his table produced upon us the effect of an inexplicable conjuring trick. To us idlers, knowing nothing of systematic work, his industry seemed simply miraculous. Getting up at nine, he sat down to his table, and did not leave it till dinnertime; after dinner he set to work again, and went on till late at night. Whenever I peeped through the keyhole I invariably saw the same thing: my uncle sitting at the table working. The work consisted in his writing with one hand while he turned over the leaves of a book with the other, and, strange to say, he kept moving all over—swinging his leg as though it were a pendulum, whistling, and nodding his head in time. He had an extremely careless and frivolous expression all the while, as though he were not working, but playing at noughts and crosses. I always saw him wearing a smart short jacket and a jauntily tied cravat, and he always smelt, even through the keyhole, of delicate feminine perfumery. He only left his room for dinner, but he ate little.

“I can’t make brother out!” mother complained of him. “Every day we kill a turkey and pigeons on purpose for him, I make a compote with my own hands, and he eats a plateful of broth and a bit of meat the size of a finger and gets up from the table. I begin begging him to eat; he comes back and drinks a glass of milk. And what is there in that, in a glass of milk? It’s no better than washing up water! You may die of a diet like that.… If I try to persuade him, he laughs and makes a joke of it.… No; he does not care for our fare, poor dear!”

We spent the evenings far more gaily than the days. As a rule, by the time the sun was setting and long shadows were lying across the yard, we—that is, Tatyana Ivanovna, Pobyedimsky, and I—were sitting on the steps of the lodge. We did not talk till it grew quite dusk. And, indeed, what is one to talk of when every subject has been talked over already? There was only one thing new, my uncle’s arrival, and even that subject was soon exhausted. My tutor never took his eyes off Tatyana Ivanovna’s face, and frequently heaved deep sighs.… At the time I did not

understand those sighs, and did not try to fathom their significance; now they explain a great deal to me.

When the shadows merged into one thick mass of shade, the bailiff Fyodor would come in from shooting or from the field. This Fyodor gave me the impression of being a fierce and even a terrible man. The son of a Russianized gipsy from Izyumskoe, swarthy-faced and curly-headed, with big black eyes and a matted beard, he was never called among our Kotchuevko peasants by any name but “The Devil.” And, indeed, there was a great deal of the gipsy about him apart from his appearance. He could not, for instance, stay at home, and went off for days together into the country or into the woods to shoot. He was gloomy, ill-humoured, taciturn, was afraid of nobody, and refused to recognize any authority. He was rude to mother, addressed me familiarly, and was contemptuous of Pobyedimsky’s learning. All this we forgave him, looking upon him as a hot-tempered and nervous man; mother liked him because, in spite of his gipsy nature, he was ideally honest and industrious. He loved his Tatyana Ivanovna passionately, like a gipsy, but this love took in him a gloomy form, as though it cost him suffering. He was never affectionate to his wife in our presence, but simply rolled his eyes angrily at her and twisted his mouth.

When he came in from the fields he would noisily and angrily put down his gun, would come out to us on the steps, and sit down beside his wife. After resting a little, he would ask his wife a few questions about household matters, and then sink into silence.

“Let us sing,” I would suggest.

My tutor would tune his guitar, and in a deep deacon’s bass strike up “In the midst of the valley.” We would begin singing. My tutor took the bass, Fyodor sang in a hardly audible tenor, while I sang soprano in unison with Tatyana Ivanovna.

When the whole sky was covered with stars and the frogs had left off croaking, they would bring in our supper from the kitchen. We went into the lodge and sat down to the meal. My tutor and the gipsy ate greedily, with such a sound that it was hard to tell whether it was the bones crunching or their jaws, and Tatyana Ivanovna and I scarcely succeeded in getting our share. After supper the lodge was plunged in deep sleep.

One evening, it was at the end of May, we were sitting on the steps, waiting for supper. A shadow suddenly fell across us, and Gundasov stood before us as though he had sprung out of the earth. He looked at us for a long time, then clasped his hands and laughed gaily.

“An idyll!” he said. “They sing and dream in the moonlight! It’s charming, upon my soul! May I sit down and dream with you?”

We looked at one another and said nothing. My uncle sat down on the bottom step, yawned, and looked at the sky. A silence followed. Pobyedimsky, who had for a long time been wanting to talk to somebody fresh, was delighted at the opportunity, and was the first to break the silence. He had only one subject for intellectual conversation, the epizootic diseases. It sometimes happens that after one has been in an immense crowd, only some one countenance of the thousands remains long imprinted on the memory; in the same way, of all that Pobyedimsky had heard, during his six months at the veterinary institute, he remembered only one passage:

“The epizootics do immense damage to the stock of the country. It is the duty of society to work hand in hand with the government in waging war upon them.”

Before saying this to Gundasov, my tutor cleared his throat three times, and several times, in his excitement, wrapped himself up in his Inverness. On hearing about the epizootics, my uncle looked intently at my tutor and made a sound between a snort and a laugh.

“Upon my soul, that’s charming!” he said, scrutinizing us as though we were mannequins. “This is actually life.… This is really what reality is bound to be. Why are you silent, Pelagea Ivanovna?” he said, addressing Tatyana Ivanovna.

She coughed, overcome with confusion.

“Talk, my friends, sing… play!… Don’t lose time. You know, time, the rascal, runs away and waits for no man! Upon my soul, before you have time to look round, old age is upon you.… Then it is too late to live! That’s how it is, Pelagea Ivanovna.… We mustn’t sit still and be silent.…”

At that point supper was brought out from the kitchen. Uncle went into the lodge with us, and to keep us company ate five curd fritters and the wing of a duck. He ate and looked at us. He was touched and delighted by us all. Whatever silly nonsense my precious tutor talked, and whatever Tatyana Ivanovna did, he thought charming and delightful. When after supper Tatyana Ivanovna sat quietly down and took up her knitting, he kept his eyes fixed on her fingers and chatted away without ceasing.

“Make all the haste you can to live, my friends…” he said. “God forbid you should sacrifice the present for the future! There is youth,

health, fire in the present; the future is smoke and deception! As soon as you are twenty begin to live."

Tatyana Ivanovna dropped a knitting-needle. My uncle jumped up, picked up the needle, and handed it to Tatyana Ivanovna with a bow, and for the first time in my life I learnt that there were people in the world more refined than Pobyedimsky.

"Yes…" my uncle went on, "love, marry, do silly things. Foolishness is a great deal more living and healthy than our straining and striving after rational life."

My uncle talked a great deal, so much that he bored us; I sat on a box listening to him and dropping to sleep. It distressed me that he did not once all the evening pay attention to me. He left the lodge at two o'clock, when, overcome with drowsiness, I was sound asleep.

From that time forth my uncle took to coming to the lodge every evening. He sang with us, had supper with us, and always stayed on till two o'clock in the morning, chatting incessantly, always about the same subject. His evening and night work was given up, and by the end of June, when the privy councillor had learned to eat mother's turkey and compote, his work by day was abandoned too. My uncle tore himself away from his table and plunged into "life." In the daytime he walked up and down the garden, he whistled to the workmen and hindered them from working, making them tell him their various histories. When his eye fell on Tatyana Ivanovna he ran up to her, and, if she were carrying anything, offered his assistance, which embarrassed her dreadfully.

As the summer advanced my uncle grew more and more frivolous, volatile, and careless. Pobyedimsky was completely disillusioned in regard to him.

"He is too one-sided," he said. "There is nothing to show that he is in the very foremost ranks of the service. And he doesn't even know how to talk. At every word it's 'upon my soul.' No, I don't like him!"

From the time that my uncle began visiting the lodge there was a noticeable change both in Fyodor and my tutor. Fyodor gave up going out shooting, came home early, sat more taciturn than ever, and stared with particular ill-humour at his wife. In my uncle's presence my tutor gave up talking about epizootics, frowned, and even laughed sarcastically.

"Here comes our little bantam cock!" he growled on one occasion when my uncle was coming into the lodge.

I put down this change in them both to their being offended with my uncle. My absentminded uncle mixed up their names, and to the very day

of his departure failed to distinguish which was my tutor and which was Tatyana Ivanovna's husband. Tatyana Ivanovna herself he sometimes called Nastasya, sometimes Pelagea, and sometimes Yevdokia. Touched and delighted by us, he laughed and behaved exactly as though in the company of small children.… All this, of course, might well offend young men. It was not a case of offended pride, however, but, as I realize now, subtler feelings.

I remember one evening I was sitting on the box struggling with sleep. My eyelids felt glued together and my body, tired out by running about all day, drooped sideways. But I struggled against sleep and tried to look on. It was about midnight. Tatyana Ivanovna, rosy and unassuming as always, was sitting at a little table sewing at her husband's shirt. Fyodor, sullen and gloomy, was staring at her from one corner, and in the other sat Pobyedimsky, snorting angrily and retreating into the high collar of his shirt. My uncle was walking up and down the room thinking. Silence reigned; nothing was to be heard but the rustling of the linen in Tatyana Ivanovna's hands. Suddenly my uncle stood still before Tatyana Ivanovna, and said:

"You are all so young, so fresh, so nice, you live so peacefully in this quiet place, that I envy you. I have become attached to your way of life here; my heart aches when I remember I have to go away.… You may believe in my sincerity!"

Sleep closed my eyes and I lost myself. When some sound waked me, my uncle was standing before Tatyana Ivanovna, looking at her with a softened expression. His cheeks were flushed.

"My life has been wasted," he said. "I have not lived! Your young face makes me think of my own lost youth, and I should be ready to sit here watching you to the day of my death. It would be a pleasure to me to take you with me to Petersburg."

"What for?" Fyodor asked in a husky voice.

"I should put her under a glass case on my worktable. I should admire her and show her to other people. You know, Pelagea Ivanovna, we have no women like you there. Among us there is wealth, distinction, sometimes beauty, but we have not this true sort of life, this healthy serenity.…"

My uncle sat down facing Tatyana Ivanovna and took her by the hand.

"So you won't come with me to Petersburg?" he laughed. "In that case give me your little hand.… A charming little hand!… You won't give it? Come, you miser! let me kiss it, anyway.…"

At that moment there was the scrape of a chair. Fyodor jumped up, and with heavy, measured steps went up to his wife. His face was pale, grey, and quivering. He brought his fist down on the table with a bang, and said in a hollow voice:

"I won't allow it!"

At the same moment Pobyedimsky jumped up from his chair. He, too, pale and angry, went up to Tatyana Ivanovna, and he, too, struck the table with his fist.

"I… I won't allow it!" he said.

"What, what's the matter?" asked my uncle in surprise.

"I won't allow it!" repeated Fyodor, banging on the table.

My uncle jumped up and blinked nervously. He tried to speak, but in his amazement and alarm could not utter a word; with an embarrassed smile, he shuffled out of the lodge with the hurried step of an old man, leaving his hat behind. When, a little later, my mother ran into the lodge, Fyodor and Pobyedimsky were still hammering on the table like blacksmiths and repeating, "I won't allow it!"

"What has happened here?" asked mother. "Why has my brother been taken ill? What's the matter?"

Looking at Tatyana's pale, frightened face and at her infuriated husband, mother probably guessed what was the matter. She sighed and shook her head.

"Come! give over banging on the table!" she said. "Leave off, Fyodor! And why are you thumping, Yegor Alexyevitch? What have you got to do with it?"

Pobyedimsky was startled and confused. Fyodor looked intently at him, then at his wife, and began walking about the room. When mother had gone out of the lodge, I saw what for long afterwards I looked upon as a dream. I saw Fyodor seize my tutor, lift him up in the air, and thrust him out of the door.

When I woke up in the morning my tutor's bed was empty. To my question where he was nurse told me in a whisper that he had been taken off early in the morning to the hospital, as his arm was broken. Distressed at this intelligence and remembering the scene of the previous evening, I went out of doors. It was a grey day. The sky was covered with storm-clouds and there was a wind blowing dust, bits of paper, and feathers along the ground.… It felt as though rain were coming. There was a look of boredom in the servants and in the animals. When I went into the house I was told not to make such a noise with my feet, as mother was ill and in bed with a migraine. What was I to do? I went

outside the gate, sat down on the little bench there, and fell to trying to discover the meaning of what I had seen and heard the day before. From our gate there was a road which, passing the forge and the pool which never dried up, ran into the main road. I looked at the telegraph-posts, about which clouds of dust were whirling, and at the sleepy birds sitting on the wires, and I suddenly felt so dreary that I began to cry.

A dusty wagonette crammed full of townspeople, probably going to visit the shrine, drove by along the main road. The wagonette was hardly out of sight when a light chaise with a pair of horses came into view. In it was Akim Nikititch, the police inspector, standing up and holding on to the coachman's belt. To my great surprise, the chaise turned into our road and flew by me in at the gate. While I was puzzling why the police inspector had come to see us, I heard a noise, and a carriage with three horses came into sight on the road. In the carriage stood the police captain, directing his coachman towards our gate.

"And why is he coming?" I thought, looking at the dusty police captain. "Most probably Pobyedimsky has complained of Fyodor to him, and they have come to take him to prison."

But the mystery was not so easily solved. The police inspector and the police captain were only the first instalment, for five minutes had scarcely passed when a coach drove in at our gate. It dashed by me so swiftly that I could only get a glimpse of a red beard.

Lost in conjecture and full of misgivings, I ran to the house. In the passage first of all I saw mother; she was pale and looking with horror towards the door, from which came the sounds of men's voices. The visitors had taken her by surprise in the very throes of migraine.

"Who has come, mother?" I asked.

"Sister," I heard my uncle's voice, "will you send in something to eat for the governor and me?"

"It is easy to say 'something to eat,'" whispered my mother, numb with horror. "What have I time to get ready now? I am put to shame in my old age!"

Mother clutched at her head and ran into the kitchen. The governor's sudden visit stirred and overwhelmed the whole household. A ferocious slaughter followed. A dozen fowls, five turkeys, eight ducks, were killed, and in the fluster the old gander, the progenitor of our whole flock of geese and a great favourite of mother's, was beheaded. The coachmen and the cook seemed frenzied, and slaughtered birds at random, without distinction of age or breed. For the sake of some wretched sauce a pair of valuable pigeons, as dear to me as the gander was to mother, were

sacrificed. It was a long while before I could forgive the governor their death.

In the evening, when the governor and his suite, after a sumptuous dinner, had got into their carriages and driven away, I went into the house to look at the remains of the feast. Glancing into the drawing room from the passage, I saw my uncle and my mother. My uncle, with his hands behind his back, was walking nervously up and down close to the wall, shrugging his shoulders. Mother, exhausted and looking much thinner, was sitting on the sofa and watching his movements with heavy eyes.

"Excuse me, sister, but this won't do at all," my uncle grumbled, wrinkling up his face. "I introduced the governor to you, and you didn't offer to shake hands. You covered him with confusion, poor fellow! No, that won't do.… Simplicity is a very good thing, but there must be limits to it.… Upon my soul! And then that dinner! How can one give people such things? What was that mess, for instance, that they served for the fourth course?"

"That was duck with sweet sauce…" mother answered softly.

"Duck! Forgive me, sister, but… but here I've got heartburn! I am ill!"

My uncle made a sour, tearful face, and went on:

"It was the devil sent that governor! As though I wanted his visit! Pff!… heartburn! I can't work or sleep… I am completely out of sorts.… And I can't understand how you can live here without anything to do… in this boredom! Here I've got a pain coming under my shoulder-blade!…"

My uncle frowned, and walked about more rapidly than ever.

"Brother," my mother inquired softly, "what would it cost to go abroad?"

"At least three thousand…" my uncle answered in a tearful voice. "I would go, but where am I to get it? I haven't a farthing. Pff!… heartburn!"

My uncle stopped to look dejectedly at the grey, overcast prospect from the window, and began pacing to and fro again.

A silence followed.… Mother looked a long while at the icon, pondering something, then she began crying, and said:

"I'll give you the three thousand, brother.…"

Three days later the majestic boxes went off to the station, and the privy councillor drove off after them. As he said goodbye to mother he shed tears, and it was a long time before he took his lips from her hands,

but when he got into his carriage his face beamed with childlike pleasure.… Radiant and happy, he settled himself comfortably, kissed his hand to my mother, who was crying, and all at once his eye was caught by me. A look of the utmost astonishment came into his face.

“What boy is this?” he asked.

My mother, who had declared my uncle’s coming was a piece of luck for which I must thank God, was bitterly mortified at this question. I was in no mood for questions. I looked at my uncle’s happy face, and for some reason I felt fearfully sorry for him. I could not resist jumping up to the carriage and hugging that frivolous man, weak as all men are. Looking into his face and wanting to say something pleasant, I asked:

“Uncle, have you ever been in a battle?”

“Ah, the dear boy…” laughed my uncle, kissing me. “A charming boy, upon my soul! How natural, how living it all is, upon my soul!…”

The carriage set off.… I looked after him, and long afterwards that farewell “upon my soul” was ringing in my ears.

A Day in the Country

Between eight and nine o'clock in the morning.

A dark leaden-coloured mass is creeping over the sky towards the sun. Red zigzags of lightning gleam here and there across it. There is a sound of faraway rumbling. A warm wind frolics over the grass, bends the trees, and stirs up the dust. In a minute there will be a spurt of May rain and a real storm will begin.

Fyokla, a little beggar-girl of six, is running through the village, looking for Terenty the cobbler. The white-haired, barefoot child is pale. Her eyes are wide-open, her lips are trembling.

"Uncle, where is Terenty?" she asks everyone she meets. No one answers. They are all preoccupied with the approaching storm and take refuge in their huts. At last she meets Silanty Silitch, the sacristan, Terenty's bosom friend. He is coming along, staggering from the wind.

"Uncle, where is Terenty?"

"At the kitchen-gardens," answers Silanty.

The beggar-girl runs behind the huts to the kitchen-gardens and there finds Terenty; the tall old man with a thin, pockmarked face, very long legs, and bare feet, dressed in a woman's tattered jacket, is standing near the vegetable plots, looking with drowsy, drunken eyes at the dark storm-cloud. On his long crane-like legs he sways in the wind like a starling-cote.

"Uncle Terenty!" the white-headed beggar-girl addresses him. "Uncle, darling!"

Terenty bends down to Fyokla, and his grim, drunken face is overspread with a smile, such as come into people's faces when they look at something little, foolish, and absurd, but warmly loved.

"Ah! servant of God, Fyokia," he says, lisping tenderly, "where have you come from?"

"Uncle Terenty," says Fyokia, with a sob, tugging at the lapel of the cobbler's coat. "Brother Danilka has had an accident! Come along!"

“What sort of accident? Ough, what thunder! Holy, holy, holy.… What sort of accident?”

“In the count’s copse Danilka stuck his hand into a hole in a tree, and he can’t get it out. Come along, uncle, do be kind and pull his hand out!”

“How was it he put his hand in? What for?”

“He wanted to get a cuckoo’s egg out of the hole for me.”

“The day has hardly begun and already you are in trouble.…” Terenty shook his head and spat deliberately. “Well, what am I to do with you now? I must come… I must, may the wolf gobble you up, you naughty children! Come, little orphan!”

Terenty comes out of the kitchen-garden and, lifting high his long legs, begins striding down the village street. He walks quickly without stopping or looking from side to side, as though he were shoved from behind or afraid of pursuit. Fyokla can hardly keep up with him.

They come out of the village and turn along the dusty road towards the count’s copse that lies dark blue in the distance. It is about a mile and a half away. The clouds have by now covered the sun, and soon afterwards there is not a speck of blue left in the sky. It grows dark.

“Holy, holy, holy…” whispers Fyokla, hurrying after Terenty. The first raindrops, big and heavy, lie, dark dots on the dusty road. A big drop falls on Fyokla’s cheek and glides like a tear down her chin.

“The rain has begun,” mutters the cobbler, kicking up the dust with his bare, bony feet. “That’s fine, Fyokla, old girl. The grass and the trees are fed by the rain, as we are by bread. And as for the thunder, don’t you be frightened, little orphan. Why should it kill a little thing like you?”

As soon as the rain begins, the wind drops. The only sound is the patter of rain dropping like fine shot on the young rye and the parched road.

“We shall get soaked, Fyolka,” mutters Terenty. “There won’t be a dry spot left on us.… Ho-ho, my girl! It’s run down my neck! But don’t be frightened, silly.… The grass will be dry again, the earth will be dry again, and we shall be dry again. There is the same sun for us all.”

A flash of lightning, some fourteen feet long, gleams above their heads. There is a loud peal of thunder, and it seems to Fyokla that something big, heavy, and round is rolling over the sky and tearing it open, exactly over her head.

“Holy, holy, holy…” says Terenty, crossing himself. “Don’t be afraid, little orphan! It is not from spite that it thunders.”

Terenty’s and Fyokla’s feet are covered with lumps of heavy, wet clay. It is slippery and difficult to walk, but Terenty strides on more and more

rapidly. The weak little beggar-girl is breathless and ready to drop.

But at last they go into the count's copse. The washed trees, stirred by a gust of wind, drop a perfect waterfall upon them. Terenty stumbles over stumps and begins to slacken his pace.

"Whereabouts is Danilka?" he asks. "Lead me to him."

Fyokla leads him into a thicket, and, after going a quarter of a mile, points to Danilka. Her brother, a little fellow of eight, with hair as red as ochre and a pale sickly face, stands leaning against a tree, and, with his head on one side, looking sideways at the sky. In one hand he holds his shabby old cap, the other is hidden in an old lime tree. The boy is gazing at the stormy sky, and apparently not thinking of his trouble. Hearing footsteps and seeing the cobbler he gives a sickly smile and says:

"A terrible lot of thunder, Terenty.… I've never heard so much thunder in all my life."

"And where is your hand?"

"In the hole.… Pull it out, please, Terenty!"

The wood had broken at the edge of the hole and jammed Danilka's hand: he could push it farther in, but could not pull it out. Terenty snaps off the broken piece, and the boy's hand, red and crushed, is released.

"It's terrible how it's thundering," the boy says again, rubbing his hand. "What makes it thunder, Terenty?"

"One cloud runs against the other," answers the cobbler. The party come out of the copse, and walk along the edge of it towards the darkened road. The thunder gradually abates, and its rumbling is heard far away beyond the village.

"The ducks flew by here the other day, Terenty," says Danilka, still rubbing his hand. "They must be nesting in the Gniliya Zaimishtcha marshes.… Fyolka, would you like me to show you a nightingale's nest?"

"Don't touch it, you might disturb them," says Terenty, wringing the water out of his cap. "The nightingale is a singing-bird, without sin. He has had a voice given him in his throat, to praise God and gladden the heart of man. It's a sin to disturb him."

"What about the sparrow?"

"The sparrow doesn't matter, he's a bad, spiteful bird. He is like a pickpocket in his ways. He doesn't like man to be happy. When Christ was crucified it was the sparrow brought nails to the Jews, and called 'alive! alive!'"

A bright patch of blue appears in the sky.

“Look!” says Terenty. “An ant-heap burst open by the rain! They’ve been flooded, the rogues!”

They bend over the ant-heap. The downpour has damaged it; the insects are scurrying to and fro in the mud, agitated, and busily trying to carry away their drowned companions.

“You needn’t be in such a taking, you won’t die of it!” says Terenty, grinning. “As soon as the sun warms you, you’ll come to your senses again.… It’s a lesson to you, you stupids. You won’t settle on low ground another time.”

They go on.

“And here are some bees,” cries Danilka, pointing to the branch of a young oak tree.

The drenched and chilled bees are huddled together on the branch. There are so many of them that neither bark nor leaf can be seen. Many of them are settled on one another.

“That’s a swarm of bees,” Terenty informs them. “They were flying looking for a home, and when the rain came down upon them they settled. If a swarm is flying, you need only sprinkle water on them to make them settle. Now if, say, you wanted to take the swarm, you would bend the branch with them into a sack and shake it, and they all fall in.”

Little Fyokla suddenly frowns and rubs her neck vigorously. Her brother looks at her neck, and sees a big swelling on it.

“Hey-hey!” laughs the cobbler. “Do you know where you got that from Fyokia, old girl? There are Spanish flies on some tree in the wood. The rain has trickled off them, and a drop has fallen on your neck—that’s what has made the swelling.”

The sun appears from behind the clouds and floods the wood, the fields, and the three friends with its warm light. The dark menacing cloud has gone far away and taken the storm with it. The air is warm and fragrant. There is a scent of bird-cherry, meadowsweet, and lilies-of-the-valley.

“That herb is given when your nose bleeds,” says Terenty, pointing to a woolly-looking flower. “It does good.”

They hear a whistle and a rumble, but not such a rumble as the storm-clouds carried away. A goods train races by before the eyes of Terenty, Danilka, and Fyokla. The engine, panting and puffing out black smoke, drags more than twenty vans after it. Its power is tremendous. The children are interested to know how an engine, not alive and without the help of horses, can move and drag such weights, and Terenty undertakes to explain it to them:

“It’s all the steam’s doing, children.… The steam does the work.… You see, it shoves under that thing near the wheels, and it… you see… it works.…”

They cross the railway line, and, going down from the embankment, walk towards the river. They walk not with any object, but just at random, and talk all the way.… Danilka asks questions, Terenty answers them.…

Terenty answers all his questions, and there is no secret in Nature which baffles him. He knows everything. Thus, for example, he knows the names of all the wild flowers, animals, and stones. He knows what herbs cure diseases, he has no difficulty in telling the age of a horse or a cow. Looking at the sunset, at the moon, or the birds, he can tell what sort of weather it will be next day. And indeed, it is not only Terenty who is so wise. Silanty Silitch, the innkeeper, the market-gardener, the shepherd, and all the villagers, generally speaking, know as much as he does. These people have learned not from books, but in the fields, in the wood, on the river bank. Their teachers have been the birds themselves, when they sang to them, the sun when it left a glow of crimson behind it at setting, the very trees, and wild herbs.

Danilka looks at Terenty and greedily drinks in every word. In spring, before one is weary of the warmth and the monotonous green of the fields, when everything is fresh and full of fragrance, who would not want to hear about the golden may-beetles, about the cranes, about the gurgling streams, and the corn mounting into ear?

The two of them, the cobbler and the orphan, walk about the fields, talk unceasingly, and are not weary. They could wander about the world endlessly. They walk, and in their talk of the beauty of the earth do not notice the frail little beggar-girl tripping after them. She is breathless and moves with a lagging step. There are tears in her eyes; she would be glad to stop these inexhaustible wanderers, but to whom and where can she go? She has no home or people of her own; whether she likes it or not, she must walk and listen to their talk.

Towards midday, all three sit down on the river bank. Danilka takes out of his bag a piece of bread, soaked and reduced to a mash, and they begin to eat. Terenty says a prayer when he has eaten the bread, then stretches himself on the sandy bank and falls asleep. While he is asleep, the boy gazes at the water, pondering. He has many different things to think of. He has just seen the storm, the bees, the ants, the train. Now, before his eyes, fishes are whisking about. Some are two inches long and

more, others are no bigger than one’s nail. A viper, with its head held high, is swimming from one bank to the other.

Only towards the evening our wanderers return to the village. The children go for the night to a deserted barn, where the corn of the commune used to be kept, while Terenty, leaving them, goes to the tavern. The children lie huddled together on the straw, dozing.

The boy does not sleep. He gazes into the darkness, and it seems to him that he is seeing all that he has seen in the day: the storm-clouds, the bright sunshine, the birds, the fish, lanky Terenty. The number of his impressions, together with exhaustion and hunger, are too much for him; he is as hot as though he were on fire, and tosses from, side to side. He longs to tell someone all that is haunting him now in the darkness and agitating his soul, but there is no one to tell. Fyokla is too little and could not understand.

“I’ll tell Terenty tomorrow,” thinks the boy.

The children fall asleep thinking of the homeless cobbler, and, in the night, Terenty comes to them, makes the sign of the cross over them, and puts bread under their heads. And no one sees his love. It is seen only by the moon which floats in the sky and peeps caressingly through the holes in the wall of the deserted barn.

At a Summer Villa

"I love you. You are my life, my happiness—everything to me! Forgive the avowal, but I have not the strength to suffer and be silent. I ask not for love in return, but for sympathy. Be at the old arbour at eight o'clock this evening.… To sign my name is unnecessary I think, but do not be uneasy at my being anonymous. I am young, nice-looking… what more do you want?"

When Pavel Ivanitch Vyhodtsev, a practical married man who was spending his holidays at a summer villa, read this letter, he shrugged his shoulders and scratched his forehead in perplexity.

"What devilry is this?" he thought. "I'm a married man, and to send me such a queer… silly letter! Who wrote it?"

Pavel Ivanitch turned the letter over and over before his eyes, read it through again, and spat with disgust.

"'I love you'"… he said jeeringly. "A nice boy she has pitched on! So I'm to run off to meet you in the arbour!… I got over all such romances and *fleurs d'amour* years ago, my girl.… Hm! She must be some reckless, immoral creature.… Well, these women are a set! What a whirligig—God forgive us!—she must be to write a letter like that to a stranger, and a married man, too! It's real demoralisation!"

In the course of his eight years of married life Pavel Ivanitch had completely got over all sentimental feeling, and he had received no letters from ladies except letters of congratulation, and so, although he tried to carry it off with disdain, the letter quoted above greatly intrigued and agitated him.

An hour after receiving it, he was lying on his sofa, thinking:

"Of course I am not a silly boy, and I am not going to rush off to this idiotic rendezvous; but yet it would be interesting to know who wrote it! Hm.… It is certainly a woman's writing.… The letter is written with genuine feeling, and so it can hardly be a joke.… Most likely it's some neurotic girl, or perhaps a widow… widows are frivolous and eccentric as a rule. Hm.… Who could it be?"

What made it the more difficult to decide the question was that Pavel Ivanitch had not one feminine acquaintance among all the summer visitors, except his wife.

"It is queer…" he mused. "'I love you!'… When did she manage to fall in love? Amazing woman! To fall in love like this, apropos of nothing, without making any acquaintance and finding out what sort of man I am.… She must be extremely young and romantic if she is capable of falling in love after two or three looks at me.… But… who is she?"

Pavel Ivanitch suddenly recalled that when he had been walking among the summer villas the day before, and the day before that, he had several times been met by a fair young lady with a light blue hat and a turn-up nose. The fair charmer had kept looking at him, and when he sat down on a seat she had sat down beside him.…

"Can it be she?" Vyhodtsev wondered. "It can't be! Could a delicate ephemeral creature like that fall in love with a worn-out old eel like me? No, it's impossible!"

At dinner Pavel Ivanitch looked blankly at his wife while he meditated:

"She writes that she is young and nice-looking.… So she's not old.… Hm.… To tell the truth, honestly I am not so old and plain that no one could fall in love with me. My wife loves me! Besides, love is blind, we all know.…"

"What are you thinking about?" his wife asked him.

"Oh… my head aches a little…" Pavel Ivanitch said, quite untruly.

He made up his mind that it was stupid to pay attention to such a nonsensical thing as a love-letter, and laughed at it and at its authoress, but—alas!—powerful is the enemy of mankind! After dinner, Pavel Ivanitch lay down on his bed, and instead of going to sleep, reflected:

"But there, I daresay she is expecting me to come! What a silly! I can just imagine what a nervous fidget she'll be in and how her *tournure* will quiver when she does not find me in the arbour! I shan't go, though.… Bother her!"

But, I repeat, powerful is the enemy of mankind.

"Though I might, perhaps, just out of curiosity…" he was musing, half an hour later. "I might go and look from a distance what sort of a creature she is.… It would be interesting to have a look at her! It would be fun, and that's all! After all, why shouldn't I have a little fun since such a chance has turned up?"

Pavel Ivanitch got up from his bed and began dressing. “What are you getting yourself up so smartly for?” his wife asked, noticing that he was putting on a clean shirt and a fashionable tie.

“Oh, nothing.… I must have a walk.… My head aches.… Hm.”

Pavel Ivanitch dressed in his best, and waiting till eight o’clock, went out of the house. When the figures of gaily dressed summer visitors of both sexes began passing before his eyes against the bright green background, his heart throbbed.

“Which of them is it?…” he wondered, advancing irresolutely. “Come, what am I afraid of? Why, I am not going to the rendezvous! What… a fool! Go forward boldly! And what if I go into the arbour? Well, well… there is no reason I should.”

Pavel Ivanitch’s heart beat still more violently.… Involuntarily, with no desire to do so, he suddenly pictured to himself the half-darkness of the arbour.… A graceful fair girl with a little blue hat and a turn-up nose rose before his imagination. He saw her, abashed by her love and trembling all over, timidly approach him, breathing excitedly, and… suddenly clasping him in her arms.

“If I weren’t married it would be all right…” he mused, driving sinful ideas out of his head. “Though… for once in my life, it would do no harm to have the experience, or else one will die without knowing what.… And my wife, what will it matter to her? Thank God, for eight years I’ve never moved one step away from her.… Eight years of irreproachable duty! Enough of her.… It’s positively vexatious.… I’m ready to go to spite her!”

Trembling all over and holding his breath, Pavel Ivanitch went up to the arbour, wreathed with ivy and wild vine, and peeped into it.… A smell of dampness and mildew reached him.…

“I believe there’s nobody…” he thought, going into the arbour, and at once saw a human silhouette in the corner.

The silhouette was that of a man.… Looking more closely, Pavel Ivanitch recognised his wife’s brother, Mitya, a student, who was staying with them at the villa.

“Oh, it’s you…” he growled discontentedly, as he took off his hat and sat down.

“Yes, it’s I…” answered Mitya.

Two minutes passed in silence.

“Excuse me, Pavel Ivanitch,” began Mitya: “but might I ask you to leave me alone?… I am thinking over the dissertation for my degree and… and the presence of anybody else prevents my thinking.”

“You had better go somewhere in a dark avenue…” Pavel Ivanitch observed mildly. “It’s easier to think in the open air, and, besides,… er… I should like to have a little sleep here on this seat… It’s not so hot here.…”

“You want to sleep, but it’s a question of my dissertation…” Mitya grumbled. “The dissertation is more important.”

Again there was a silence. Pavel Ivanitch, who had given the rein to his imagination and was continually hearing footsteps, suddenly leaped up and said in a plaintive voice:

“Come, I beg you, Mitya! You are younger and ought to consider me.… I am unwell and… I need sleep.… Go away!”

“That’s egoism.… Why must you be here and not I? I won’t go as a matter of principle.”

“Come, I ask you to! Suppose I am an egoist, a despot and a fool… but I ask you to go! For once in my life I ask you a favour! Show some consideration!”

Mitya shook his head.

“What a beast!…” thought Pavel Ivanitch. “That can’t be a rendezvous with him here! It’s impossible with him here!”

“I say, Mitya,” he said, “I ask you for the last time.… Show that you are a sensible, humane, and cultivated man!”

“I don’t know why you keep on so!”… said Mitya, shrugging his shoulders. “I’ve said I won’t go, and I won’t. I shall stay here as a matter of principle.…”

At that moment a woman’s face with a turn-up nose peeped into the arbour.…

Seeing Mitya and Pavel Ivanitch, it frowned and vanished.

“She is gone!” thought Pavel Ivanitch, looking angrily at Mitya. “She saw that blackguard and fled! It’s all spoilt!”

After waiting a little longer, he got up, put on his hat and said:

“You’re a beast, a low brute and a blackguard! Yes! A beast! It’s mean… and silly! Everything is at an end between us!”

“Delighted to hear it!” muttered Mitya, also getting up and putting on his hat. “Let me tell you that by being here just now you’ve played me such a dirty trick that I’ll never forgive you as long as I live.”

Pavel Ivanitch went out of the arbour, and beside himself with rage, strode rapidly to his villa. Even the sight of the table laid for supper did not soothe him.

“Once in a lifetime such a chance has turned up,” he thought in agitation; “and then it’s been prevented! Now she is offended…

crushed!”

At supper Pavel Ivanitch and Mitya kept their eyes on their plates and maintained a sullen silence.… They were hating each other from the bottom of their hearts.

“What are you smiling at?” asked Pavel Ivanitch, pouncing on his wife. “It’s only silly fools who laugh for nothing!”

His wife looked at her husband’s angry face, and went off into a peal of laughter.

“What was that letter you got this morning?” she asked.

“I?… I didn’t get one.…” Pavel Ivanitch was overcome with confusion. “You are inventing… imagination.”

“Oh, come, tell us! Own up, you did! Why, it was I sent you that letter! Honour bright, I did! Ha ha!”

Pavel Ivanitch turned crimson and bent over his plate. “Silly jokes,” he growled.

“But what could I do? Tell me that.… We had to scrub the rooms out this evening, and how could we get you out of the house? There was no other way of getting you out.… But don’t be angry, stupid.… I didn’t want you to be dull in the arbour, so I sent the same letter to Mitya too! Mitya, have you been to the arbour?”

Mitya grinned and left off glaring with hatred at his rival.

Panic Fears

During all the years I have been living in this world I have only three times been terrified.

The first real terror, which made my hair stand on end and made shivers run all over me, was caused by a trivial but strange phenomenon. It happened that, having nothing to do one July evening, I drove to the station for the newspapers. It was a still, warm, almost sultry evening, like all those monotonous evenings in July which, when once they have set in, go on for a week, a fortnight, or sometimes longer, in regular unbroken succession, and are suddenly cut short by a violent thunderstorm and a lavish downpour of rain that refreshes everything for a long time.

The sun had set some time before, and an unbroken gray dusk lay all over the land. The mawkishly sweet scents of the grass and flowers were heavy in the motionless, stagnant air.

I was driving in a rough trolley. Behind my back the gardener's son Pashka, a boy of eight years old, whom I had taken with me to look after the horse in case of necessity, was gently snoring, with his head on a sack of oats. Our way lay along a narrow byroad, straight as a ruler, which lay hid like a great snake in the tall thick rye. There was a pale light from the afterglow of sunset; a streak of light cut its way through a narrow, uncouth-looking cloud, which seemed sometimes like a boat and sometimes like a man wrapped in a quilt.…

I had driven a mile and a half, or two miles, when against the pale background of the evening glow there came into sight one after another some graceful tall poplars; a river glimmered beyond them, and a gorgeous picture suddenly, as though by magic, lay stretched before me. I had to stop the horse, for our straight road broke off abruptly and ran down a steep incline overgrown with bushes. We were standing on the hillside and beneath us at the bottom lay a huge hole full of twilight, of fantastic shapes, and of space. At the bottom of this hole, in a wide plain guarded by the poplars and caressed by the gleaming river, nestled a

village. It was now sleeping.… Its huts, its church with the belfry, its trees, stood out against the gray twilight and were reflected darkly in the smooth surface of the river.

I waked Pashka for fear he should fall out and began cautiously going down.

“Have we got to Lukovo?” asked Pashka, lifting his head lazily.

“Yes. Hold the reins!…”

I led the horse down the hill and looked at the village. At the first glance one strange circumstance caught my attention: at the very top of the belfry, in the tiny window between the cupola and the bells, a light was twinkling. This light was like that of a smoldering lamp, at one moment dying down, at another flickering up. What could it come from?

Its source was beyond my comprehension. It could not be burning at the window, for there were neither icons nor lamps in the top turret of the belfry; there was nothing there, as I knew, but beams, dust, and spiders’ webs. It was hard to climb up into that turret, for the passage to it from the belfry was closely blocked up.

It was more likely than anything else to be the reflection of some outside light, but though I strained my eyes to the utmost, I could not see one other speck of light in the vast expanse that lay before me. There was no moon. The pale and, by now, quite dim streak of the afterglow could not have been reflected, for the window looked not to the west, but to the east. These and other similar considerations were straying through my mind all the while that I was going down the slope with the horse. At the bottom I sat down by the roadside and looked again at the light. As before it was glimmering and flaring up.

“Strange,” I thought, lost in conjecture. “Very strange.”

And little by little I was overcome by an unpleasant feeling. At first I thought that this was vexation at not being able to explain a simple phenomenon; but afterwards, when I suddenly turned away from the light in horror and caught hold of Pashka with one hand, it became clear that I was overcome with terror.…

I was seized with a feeling of loneliness, misery, and horror, as though I had been flung down against my will into this great hole full of shadows, where I was standing all alone with the belfry looking at me with its red eye.

“Pashka!” I cried, closing my eyes in horror.

“Well?”

“Pashka, what’s that gleaming on the belfry?”

Pashka looked over my shoulder at the belfry and gave a yawn.

“Who can tell?”

This brief conversation with the boy reassured me for a little, but not for long. Pashka, seeing my uneasiness, fastened his big eyes upon the light, looked at me again, then again at the light.…

“I am frightened,” he whispered.

At this point, beside myself with terror, I clutched the boy with one hand, huddled up to him, and gave the horse a violent lash.

“It’s stupid!” I said to myself. “That phenomenon is only terrible because I don’t understand it; everything we don’t understand is mysterious.”

I tried to persuade myself, but at the same time I did not leave off lashing the horse. When we reached the posting station I purposely stayed for a full hour chatting with the overseer, and read through two or three newspapers, but the feeling of uneasiness did not leave me. On the way back the light was not to be seen, but on the other hand the silhouettes of the huts, of the poplars, and of the hill up which I had to drive, seemed to me as though animated. And why the light was there I don’t know to this day.

The second terror I experienced was excited by a circumstance no less trivial.… I was returning from a romantic interview. It was one o’clock at night, the time when nature is buried in the soundest, sweetest sleep before the dawn. That time nature was not sleeping, and one could not call the night a still one. Corncrakes, quails, nightingales, and woodcocks were calling, crickets and grasshoppers were chirruping. There was a light mist over the grass, and clouds were scurrying straight ahead across the sky near the moon. Nature was awake, as though afraid of missing the best moments of her life.

I walked along a narrow path at the very edge of a railway embankment. The moonlight glided over the lines which were already covered with dew. Great shadows from the clouds kept flitting over the embankment. Far ahead, a dim green light was glimmering peacefully.

“So everything is well,” I thought, looking at them.

I had a quiet, peaceful, comfortable feeling in my heart. I was returning from a tryst, I had no need to hurry; I was not sleepy, and I was conscious of youth and health in every sigh, every step I took, rousing a dull echo in the monotonous hum of the night. I don’t know what I was feeling then, but I remember I was happy, very happy.

I had gone not more than three-quarters of a mile when I suddenly heard behind me a monotonous sound, a rumbling, rather like the roar of a great stream. It grew louder and louder every second, and sounded

nearer and nearer. I looked round; a hundred paces from me was the dark copse from which I had only just come; there the embankment turned to the right in a graceful curve and vanished among the trees. I stood still in perplexity and waited. A huge black body appeared at once at the turn, noisily darted towards me, and with the swiftness of a bird flew past me along the rails. Less than half a minute passed and the blur had vanished, the rumble melted away into the noise of the night.

It was an ordinary goods truck. There was nothing peculiar about it in itself, but its appearance without an engine and in the night puzzled me. Where could it have come from and what force sent it flying so rapidly along the rails? Where did it come from and where was it flying to?

If I had been superstitious I should have made up my mind it was a party of demons and witches journeying to a devils' sabbath, and should have gone on my way; but as it was, the phenomenon was absolutely inexplicable to me. I did not believe my eyes, and was entangled in conjectures like a fly in a spider's web.…

I suddenly realized that I was utterly alone on the whole vast plain; that the night, which by now seemed inhospitable, was peeping into my face and dogging my footsteps; all the sounds, the cries of the birds, the whisperings of the trees, seemed sinister, and existing simply to alarm my imagination. I dashed on like a madman, and without realizing what I was doing I ran, trying to run faster and faster. And at once I heard something to which I had paid no attention before: that is, the plaintive whining of the telegraph wires.

"This is beyond everything," I said, trying to shame myself. "It's cowardice! it's silly!"

But cowardice was stronger than common sense. I only slackened my pace when I reached the green light, where I saw a dark signal-box, and near it on the embankment the figure of a man, probably the signalman.

"Did you see it?" I asked breathlessly.

"See whom? What?"

"Why, a truck ran by."

"I saw it,…" the peasant said reluctantly. "It broke away from the goods train. There is an incline at the ninetieth mile…; the train is dragged uphill. The coupling on the last truck gave way, so it broke off and ran back.… There is no catching it now!…"

The strange phenomenon was explained and its fantastic character vanished. My panic was over and I was able to go on my way.

My third fright came upon me as I was going home from stand shooting in early spring. It was in the dusk of evening. The forest road

was covered with pools from a recent shower of rain, and the earth squelched under one's feet. The crimson glow of sunset flooded the whole forest, coloring the white stems of the birches and the young leaves. I was exhausted and could hardly move.

Four or five miles from home, walking along the forest road, I suddenly met a big black dog of the water spaniel breed. As he ran by, the dog looked intently at me, straight in my face, and ran on.

"A nice dog!" I thought. "Whose is it?"

I looked round. The dog was standing ten paces off with his eyes fixed on me. For a minute we scanned each other in silence, then the dog, probably flattered by my attention, came slowly up to me and wagged his tail.

I walked on, the dog following me.

"Whose dog can it be?" I kept asking myself. "Where does he come from?"

I knew all the country gentry for twenty or thirty miles round, and knew all their dogs. Not one of them had a spaniel like that. How did he come to be in the depths of the forest, on a track used for nothing but carting timber? He could hardly have dropped behind someone passing through, for there was nowhere for the gentry to drive to along that road.

I sat down on a stump to rest, and began scrutinizing my companion. He, too, sat down, raised his head, and fastened upon me an intent stare. He gazed at me without blinking. I don't know whether it was the influence of the stillness, the shadows and sounds of the forest, or perhaps a result of exhaustion, but I suddenly felt uneasy under the steady gaze of his ordinary doggy eyes. I thought of Faust and his bulldog, and of the fact that nervous people sometimes when exhausted have hallucinations. That was enough to make me get up hurriedly and hurriedly walk on. The dog followed me.

"Go away!" I shouted.

The dog probably liked my voice, for he gave a gleeful jump and ran about in front of me.

"Go away!" I shouted again.

The dog looked round, stared at me intently, and wagged his tail good-humoredly. Evidently my threatening tone amused him. I ought to have patted him, but I could not get Faust's dog out of my head, and the feeling of panic grew more and more acute… Darkness was coming on, which completed my confusion, and every time the dog ran up to me and hit me with his tail, like a coward I shut my eyes. The same thing

happened as with the light in the belfry and the truck on the railway: I could not stand it and rushed away.

At home I found a visitor, an old friend, who, after greeting me, began to complain that as he was driving to me he had lost his way in the forest, and a splendid valuable dog of his had dropped behind.

The Chemist's Wife

The little town of B——, consisting of two or three crooked streets, was sound asleep. There was a complete stillness in the motionless air. Nothing could be heard but far away, outside the town no doubt, the barking of a dog in a thin, hoarse tenor. It was close upon daybreak.

Everything had long been asleep. The only person not asleep was the young wife of Tchernomordik, a qualified dispenser who kept a chemist's shop at B——. She had gone to bed and got up again three times, but could not sleep, she did not know why. She sat at the open window in her nightdress and looked into the street. She felt bored, depressed, vexed… so vexed that she felt quite inclined to cry—again she did not know why. There seemed to be a lump in her chest that kept rising into her throat.… A few paces behind her Tchernomordik lay curled up close to the wall, snoring sweetly. A greedy flea was stabbing the bridge of his nose, but he did not feel it, and was positively smiling, for he was dreaming that everyone in the town had a cough, and was buying from him the King of Denmark's cough-drops. He could not have been wakened now by pinpricks or by cannon or by caresses.

The chemist's shop was almost at the extreme end of the town, so that the chemist's wife could see far into the fields. She could see the eastern horizon growing pale by degrees, then turning crimson as though from a great fire. A big broad-faced moon peeped out unexpectedly from behind bushes in the distance. It was red (as a rule when the moon emerges from behind bushes it appears to be blushing).

Suddenly in the stillness of the night there came the sounds of footsteps and a jingle of spurs. She could hear voices.

"That must be the officers going home to the camp from the Police Captain's," thought the chemist's wife.

Soon afterwards two figures wearing officers' white tunics came into sight: one big and tall, the other thinner and shorter.… They slouched along by the fence, dragging one leg after the other and talking loudly

together. As they passed the chemist's shop, they walked more slowly than ever, and glanced up at the windows.

"It smells like a chemist's," said the thin one. "And so it is! Ah, I remember.… I came here last week to buy some castor-oil. There's a chemist here with a sour face and the jawbone of an ass! Such a jawbone, my dear fellow! It must have been a jawbone like that Samson killed the Philistines with."

"M'yes," said the big one in a bass voice. "The pharmacist is asleep. And his wife is asleep too. She is a pretty woman, Obtyosov."

"I saw her. I liked her very much.… Tell me, doctor, can she possibly love that jawbone of an ass? Can she?"

"No, most likely she does not love him," sighed the doctor, speaking as though he were sorry for the chemist. "The little woman is asleep behind the window, Obtyosov, what? Tossing with the heat, her little mouth half open… and one little foot hanging out of bed. I bet that fool the chemist doesn't realise what a lucky fellow he is.… No doubt he sees no difference between a woman and a bottle of carbolic!"

"I say, doctor," said the officer, stopping. "Let us go into the shop and buy something. Perhaps we shall see her."

"What an idea—in the night!"

"What of it? They are obliged to serve one even at night. My dear fellow, let us go in!"

"If you like.…"

The chemist's wife, hiding behind the curtain, heard a muffled ring. Looking round at her husband, who was smiling and snoring sweetly as before, she threw on her dress, slid her bare feet into her slippers, and ran to the shop.

On the other side of the glass door she could see two shadows. The chemist's wife turned up the lamp and hurried to the door to open it, and now she felt neither vexed nor bored nor inclined to cry, though her heart was thumping. The big doctor and the slender Obtyosov walked in. Now she could get a view of them. The doctor was corpulent and swarthy; he wore a beard and was slow in his movements. At the slightest motion his tunic seemed as though it would crack, and perspiration came on to his face. The officer was rosy, clean-shaven, feminine-looking, and as supple as an English whip.

"What may I give you?" asked the chemist's wife, holding her dress across her bosom.

"Give us… er—er… four pennyworth of peppermint lozenges!"

Without haste the chemist's wife took down a jar from a shelf and began weighing out lozenges. The customers stared fixedly at her back; the doctor screwed up his eyes like a well-fed cat, while the lieutenant was very grave.

"It's the first time I've seen a lady serving in a chemist's shop," observed the doctor.

"There's nothing out of the way in it," replied the chemist's wife, looking out of the corner of her eye at the rosy-cheeked officer. "My husband has no assistant, and I always help him."

"To be sure.… You have a charming little shop! What a number of different… jars! And you are not afraid of moving about among the poisons? Brrr!"

The chemist's wife sealed up the parcel and handed it to the doctor. Obtyosov gave her the money. Half a minute of silence followed.… The men exchanged glances, took a step towards the door, then looked at one another again.

"Will you give me two pennyworth of soda?" said the doctor.

Again the chemist's wife slowly and languidly raised her hand to the shelf.

"Haven't you in the shop anything… such as…" muttered Obtyosov, moving his fingers, "something, so to say, allegorical… revivifying… seltzer water, for instance. Have you any seltzer water?"

"Yes," answered the chemist's wife.

"Bravo! You're a fairy, not a woman! Give us three bottles!"

The chemist's wife hurriedly sealed up the soda and vanished through the door into the darkness.

"A peach!" said the doctor, with a wink. "You wouldn't find a pineapple like that in the island of Madeira! Eh? What do you say? Do you hear the snoring, though? That's his worship the chemist enjoying sweet repose."

A minute later the chemist's wife came back and set five bottles on the counter. She had just been in the cellar, and so was flushed and rather excited.

"Sh-sh!… quietly!" said Obtyosov when, after uncorking the bottles, she dropped the corkscrew. "Don't make such a noise; you'll wake your husband."

"Well, what if I do wake him?"

"He is sleeping so sweetly… he must be dreaming of you.… To your health!"

“Besides,” boomed the doctor, hiccupping after the seltzer water, “husbands are such a dull business that it would be very nice of them to be always asleep. How good a drop of red wine would be in this water!”

“What an idea!” laughed the chemist’s wife.

“That would be splendid. What a pity they don’t sell spirits in chemist’s shops! Though you ought to sell wine as a medicine. Have you any *vinum gallicum rubrum*?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then, give us some! Bring it here, damn it!”

“How much do you want?”

“*Quantum satis.*… Give us an ounce each in the water, and afterwards we’ll see.… Obtyosov, what do you say? First with water and afterwards per se.…”

The doctor and Obtyosov sat down to the counter, took off their caps, and began drinking the wine.

“The wine, one must admit, is wretched stuff! *Vinum nastissimum!* Though in the presence of… er… it tastes like nectar. You are enchanting, madam! In imagination I kiss your hand.”

“I would give a great deal to do so not in imagination,” said Obtyosov. “On my honour, I’d give my life.”

“That’s enough,” said Madame Tchernomordik, flushing and assuming a serious expression.

“What a flirt you are, though!” the doctor laughed softly, looking slyly at her from under his brows. “Your eyes seem to be firing shot: piff-paff! I congratulate you: you’ve conquered! We are vanquished!”

The chemist’s wife looked at their ruddy faces, listened to their chatter, and soon she, too, grew quite lively. Oh, she felt so gay! She entered into the conversation, she laughed, flirted, and even, after repeated requests from the customers, drank two ounces of wine.

“You officers ought to come in oftener from the camp,” she said; “it’s awful how dreary it is here. I’m simply dying of it.”

“I should think so!” said the doctor indignantly. “Such a peach, a miracle of nature, thrown away in the wilds! How well Griboyedov said, ‘Into the wilds, to Saratov’! It’s time for us to be off, though. Delighted to have made your acquaintance… very. How much do we owe you?”

The chemist’s wife raised her eyes to the ceiling and her lips moved for some time.

“Twelve roubles forty-eight kopecks,” she said.

Obtyosov took out of his pocket a fat pocketbook, and after fumbling for some time among the notes, paid.

“Your husband’s sleeping sweetly… he must be dreaming,” he muttered, pressing her hand at parting.

“I don’t like to hear silly remarks.…”

“What silly remarks? On the contrary, it’s not silly at all… even Shakespeare said: ‘Happy is he who in his youth is young.’”

“Let go of my hand.”

At last after much talk and after kissing the lady’s hand at parting, the customers went out of the shop irresolutely, as though they were wondering whether they had not forgotten something.

She ran quickly into the bedroom and sat down in the same place. She saw the doctor and the officer, on coming out of the shop, walk lazily away a distance of twenty paces; then they stopped and began whispering together. What about? Her heart throbbed, there was a pulsing in her temples, and why she did not know.… Her heart beat violently as though those two whispering outside were deciding her fate.

Five minutes later the doctor parted from Obtyosov and walked on, while Obtyosov came back. He walked past the shop once and a second time.… He would stop near the door and then take a few steps again. At last the bell tinkled discreetly.

“What? Who is there?” the chemist’s wife heard her husband’s voice suddenly. “There’s a ring at the bell, and you don’t hear it,” he said severely. “Is that the way to do things?”

He got up, put on his dressing-gown, and staggering, half asleep, flopped in his slippers to the shop.

“What… is it?” he asked Obtyosov.

“Give me… give me four pennyworth of peppermint lozenges.”

Sniffing continually, yawning, dropping asleep as he moved, and knocking his knees against the counter, the chemist went to the shelf and reached down the jar.

Two minutes later the chemist’s wife saw Obtyosov go out of the shop, and, after he had gone some steps, she saw him throw the packet of peppermints on the dusty road. The doctor came from behind a corner to meet him.… They met and, gesticulating, vanished in the morning mist.

“How unhappy I am!” said the chemist’s wife, looking angrily at her husband, who was undressing quickly to get into bed again. “Oh, how unhappy I am!” she repeated, suddenly melting into bitter tears. “And nobody knows, nobody knows.…”

“I forgot fourpence on the counter,” muttered the chemist, pulling the quilt over him. “Put it away in the till, please.…”

And at once he fell asleep again.

Not Wanted

Between six and seven o'clock on a July evening, a crowd of summer visitors—mostly fathers of families—burdened with parcels, portfolios, and ladies' hatboxes, was trailing along from the little station of Helkovo, in the direction of the summer villas. They all looked exhausted, hungry, and ill-humoured, as though the sun were not shining and the grass were not green for them.

Trudging along among the others was Pavel Matveyitch Zaikin, a member of the Circuit Court, a tall, stooping man, in a cheap cotton dust-coat and with a cockade on his faded cap. He was perspiring, red in the face, and gloomy.…

"Do you come out to your holiday home every day?" said a summer visitor, in ginger-coloured trousers, addressing him.

"No, not every day," Zaikin answered sullenly. "My wife and son are staying here all the while, and I come down two or three times a week. I haven't time to come every day; besides, it is expensive."

"You're right there; it is expensive," sighed he of the ginger trousers. "In town you can't walk to the station, you have to take a cab; and then, the ticket costs forty-two kopecks; you buy a paper for the journey; one is tempted to drink a glass of vodka. It's all petty expenditure not worth considering, but, mind you, in the course of the summer it will run up to some two hundred roubles. Of course, to be in the lap of Nature is worth any money—I don't dispute it… idyllic and all the rest of it; but of course, with the salary an official gets, as you know yourself, every farthing has to be considered. If you waste a halfpenny you lie awake all night.… Yes… I receive, my dear sir—I haven't the honour of knowing your name—I receive a salary of very nearly two thousand roubles a year. I am a civil councillor, I smoke second-rate tobacco, and I haven't a rouble to spare to buy Vichy water, prescribed me by the doctor for gallstones."

"It's altogether abominable," said Zaikin after a brief silence. "I maintain, sir, that summer holidays are the invention of the devil and of

woman. The devil was actuated in the present instance by malice, woman by excessive frivolity. Mercy on us, it is not life at all; it is hard labour, it is hell! It's hot and stifling, you can hardly breathe, and you wander about like a lost soul and can find no refuge. In town there is no furniture, no servants… everything has been carried off to the villa: you eat what you can get; you go without your tea because there is no one to heat the samovar; you can't wash yourself; and when you come down here into this 'lap of Nature' you have to walk, if you please, through the dust and heat.… Phew! Are you married?"

"Yes… three children," sighs Ginger Trousers.

"It's abominable altogether.… It's a wonder we are still alive."

At last the summer visitors reached their destination. Zaikin said goodbye to Ginger Trousers and went into his villa. He found a deathlike silence in the house. He could hear nothing but the buzzing of the gnats, and the prayer for help of a fly destined for the dinner of a spider. The windows were hung with muslin curtains, through which the faded flowers of the geraniums showed red. On the unpainted wooden walls near the oleographs flies were slumbering. There was not a soul in the passage, the kitchen, or the dining room. In the room which was called indifferently the parlour or the drawing room, Zaikin found his son Petya, a little boy of six. Petya was sitting at the table, and breathing loudly with his lower lip stuck out, was engaged in cutting out the figure of a knave of diamonds from a card.

"Oh, that's you, father!" he said, without turning round. "Good evening."

"Good evening.… And where is mother?"

"Mother? She is gone with Olga Kirillovna to a rehearsal of the play. The day after tomorrow they will have a performance. And they will take me, too.… And will you go?"

"H'm!… When is she coming back?"

"She said she would be back in the evening."

"And where is Natalya?"

"Mamma took Natalya with her to help her dress for the performance, and Akulina has gone to the wood to get mushrooms. Father, why is it that when gnats bite you their stomachs get red?"

"I don't know.… Because they suck blood. So there is no one in the house, then?"

"No one; I am all alone in the house."

Zaikin sat down in an easy-chair, and for a moment gazed blankly at the window.

“Who is going to get our dinner?” he asked.

“They haven’t cooked any dinner today, father. Mamma thought you were not coming today, and did not order any dinner. She is going to have dinner with Olga Kirillovna at the rehearsal.”

“Oh, thank you very much; and you, what have you to eat?”

“I’ve had some milk. They bought me six kopecks’ worth of milk. And, father, why do gnats suck blood?”

Zaikin suddenly felt as though something heavy were rolling down on his liver and beginning to gnaw it. He felt so vexed, so aggrieved, and so bitter, that he was choking and tremulous; he wanted to jump up, to bang something on the floor, and to burst into loud abuse; but then he remembered that his doctor had absolutely forbidden him all excitement, so he got up, and making an effort to control himself, began whistling a tune from *Les Huguenots*.

“Father, can you act in plays?” he heard Petya’s voice.

“Oh, don’t worry me with stupid questions!” said Zaikin, getting angry. “He sticks to one like a leaf in the bath! Here you are, six years old, and just as silly as you were three years ago.… Stupid, neglected child! Why are you spoiling those cards, for instance? How dare you spoil them?”

“These cards aren’t yours,” said Petya, turning round. “Natalya gave them me.”

“You are telling fibs, you are telling fibs, you horrid boy!” said Zaikin, growing more and more irritated. “You are always telling fibs! You want a whipping, you horrid little pig! I will pull your ears!”

Petya leapt up, and craning his neck, stared fixedly at his father’s red and wrathful face. His big eyes first began blinking, then were dimmed with moisture, and the boy’s face began working.

“But why are you scolding?” squealed Petya. “Why do you attack me, you stupid? I am not interfering with anybody; I am not naughty; I do what I am told, and yet… you are cross! Why are you scolding me?”

The boy spoke with conviction, and wept so bitterly that Zaikin felt conscience-stricken.

“Yes, really, why am I falling foul of him?” he thought. “Come, come,” he said, touching the boy on the shoulder. “I am sorry, Petya… forgive me. You are my good boy, my nice boy, I love you.”

Petya wiped his eyes with his sleeve, sat down, with a sigh, in the same place and began cutting out the queen. Zaikin went off to his own room. He stretched himself on the sofa, and putting his hands behind his head, sank into thought. The boy’s tears had softened his anger, and by

degrees the oppression on his liver grew less. He felt nothing but exhaustion and hunger.

“Father,” he heard on the other side of the door, “shall I show you my collection of insects?”

“Yes, show me.”

Petya came into the study and handed his father a long green box. Before raising it to his ear Zaikin could hear a despairing buzz and the scratching of claws on the sides of the box. Opening the lid, he saw a number of butterflies, beetles, grasshoppers, and flies fastened to the bottom of the box with pins. All except two or three butterflies were still alive and moving.

“Why, the grasshopper is still alive!” said Petya in surprise. “I caught him yesterday morning, and he is still alive!”

“Who taught you to pin them in this way?”

“Olga Kirillovna.”

“Olga Kirillovna ought to be pinned down like that herself!” said Zaikin with repulsion. “Take them away! It’s shameful to torture animals.”

“My God! How horribly he is being brought up!” he thought, as Petya went out.

Pavel Matveyitch forgot his exhaustion and hunger, and thought of nothing but his boy’s future. Meanwhile, outside the light was gradually fading.… He could hear the summer visitors trooping back from the evening bathe. Someone was stopping near the open dining room window and shouting: “Do you want any mushrooms?” And getting no answer, shuffled on with bare feet.… But at last, when the dusk was so thick that the outlines of the geraniums behind the muslin curtain were lost, and whiffs of the freshness of evening were coming in at the window, the door of the passage was thrown open noisily, and there came a sound of rapid footsteps, talk, and laughter.…

“Mamma!” shrieked Petya.

Zaikin peeped out of his study and saw his wife, Nadyezhda Stepanovna, healthy and rosy as ever; with her he saw Olga Kirillovna, a spare woman with fair hair and heavy freckles, and two unknown men: one a lanky young man with curly red hair and a big Adam’s apple; the other, a short stubby man with a shaven face like an actor’s and a bluish crooked chin.

“Natalya, set the samovar,” cried Nadyezhda Stepanovna, with a loud rustle of her skirts. “I hear Pavel Matveyitch is come. Pavel, where are you? Good evening, Pavel!” she said, running into the study breathlessly.

“So you’ve come. I am so glad.… Two of our amateurs have come with me.… Come, I’ll introduce you.… Here, the taller one is Koromyslov… he sings splendidly; and the other, the little one… is called Smerkalov: he is a real actor… he recites magnificently. Oh, how tired I am! We have just had a rehearsal.… It goes splendidly. We are acting *The Lodger with the Trombone* and *Waiting for Him*.… The performance is the day after tomorrow.…”

“Why did you bring them?” asked Zaikin.

“I couldn’t help it, Poppet; after tea we must rehearse our parts and sing something.… I am to sing a duet with Koromyslov.… Oh, yes, I was almost forgetting! Darling, send Natalya to get some sardines, vodka, cheese, and something else. They will most likely stay to supper.… Oh, how tired I am!”

“H’m! I’ve no money.”

“You must, Poppet! It would be awkward! Don’t make me blush.”

Half an hour later Natalya was sent for vodka and savouries; Zaikin, after drinking tea and eating a whole French loaf, went to his bedroom and lay down on the bed, while Nadyezhda Stepanovna and her visitors, with much noise and laughter, set to work to rehearse their parts. For a long time Pavel Matveyitch heard Koromyslov’s nasal reciting and Smerkalov’s theatrical exclamations.… The rehearsal was followed by a long conversation, interrupted by the shrill laughter of Olga Kirillovna. Smerkalov, as a real actor, explained the parts with aplomb and heat.…

Then followed the duet, and after the duet there was the clatter of crockery.… Through his drowsiness Zaikin heard them persuading Smerkalov to read “The Woman who was a Sinner,” and heard him, after affecting to refuse, begin to recite. He hissed, beat himself on the breast, wept, laughed in a husky bass.… Zaikin scowled and hid his head under the quilt.

“It’s a long way for you to go, and it’s dark,” he heard Nadyezhda Stepanovna’s voice an hour later. “Why shouldn’t you stay the night here? Koromyslov can sleep here in the drawing room on the sofa, and you, Smerkalov, in Petya’s bed.… I can put Petya in my husband’s study.… Do stay, really!”

At last when the clock was striking two, all was hushed, the bedroom door opened, and Nadyezhda Stepanovna appeared.

“Pavel, are you asleep?” she whispered.

“No; why?”

“Go into your study, darling, and lie on the sofa. I am going to put Olga Kirillovna here, in your bed. Do go, dear! I would put her to sleep

in the study, but she is afraid to sleep alone.… Do get up!”

Zaikin got up, threw on his dressing gown, and taking his pillow, crept wearily to the study.… Feeling his way to his sofa, he lighted a match, and saw Petya lying on the sofa. The boy was not asleep, and, looking at the match with wide-open eyes:

“Father, why is it gnats don’t go to sleep at night?” he asked.

“Because… because… you and I are not wanted.… We have nowhere to sleep even.”

“Father, and why is it Olga Kirillovna has freckles on her face?”

“Oh, shut up! I am tired of you.”

After a moment’s thought, Zaikin dressed and went out into the street for a breath of air.… He looked at the grey morning sky, at the motionless clouds, heard the lazy call of the drowsy corncrake, and began dreaming of the next day, when he would go to town, and coming back from the court would tumble into bed.… Suddenly the figure of a man appeared round the corner.

“A watchman, no doubt,” thought Zaikin. But going nearer and looking more closely he recognized in the figure the summer visitor in the ginger trousers.

“You’re not asleep?” he asked.

“No, I can’t sleep,” sighed Ginger Trousers. “I am enjoying Nature.… A welcome visitor, my wife’s mother, arrived by the night train, you know. She brought with her our nieces… splendid girls! I was delighted to see them, although… it’s very damp! And you, too, are enjoying Nature?”

“Yes,” grunted Zaikin, “I am enjoying it, too.… Do you know whether there is any sort of tavern or restaurant in the neighbourhood?”

Ginger Trousers raised his eyes to heaven and meditated profoundly.

THE CHORUS GIRL

One day when she was younger and better-looking, and when her voice was stronger, Nikolay Petrovitch Kolpakov, her adorer, was sitting in the outer room in her summer villa. It was intolerably hot and stifling. Kolpakov, who had just dined and drunk a whole bottle of inferior port, felt ill-humoured and out of sorts. Both were bored and waiting for the heat of the day to be over in order to go for a walk.

All at once there was a sudden ring at the door. Kolpakov, who was sitting with his coat off, in his slippers, jumped up and looked inquiringly at Pasha.

"It must be the postman or one of the girls," said the singer.

Kolpakov did not mind being found by the postman or Pasha's lady friends, but by way of precaution gathered up his clothes and went into the next room, while Pasha ran to open the door. To her great surprise in the doorway stood, not the postman and not a girl friend, but an unknown woman, young and beautiful, who was dressed like a lady, and from all outward signs was one.

The stranger was pale and was breathing heavily as though she had been running up a steep flight of stairs.

"What is it?" asked Pasha.

The lady did not at once answer. She took a step forward, slowly looked about the room, and sat down in a way that suggested that from fatigue, or perhaps illness, she could not stand; then for a long time her pale lips quivered as she tried in vain to speak.

"Is my husband here?" she asked at last, raising to Pasha her big eyes with their red tear-stained lids.

"Husband?" whispered Pasha, and was suddenly so frightened that her hands and feet turned cold. "What husband?" she repeated, beginning to tremble.

"My husband,… Nikolay Petrovitch Kolpakov."

"N… no, madam.… I… I don't know any husband."

A minute passed in silence. The stranger several times passed her handkerchief over her pale lips and held her breath to stop her inward trembling, while Pasha stood before her motionless, like a post, and looked at her with astonishment and terror.

"So you say he is not here?" the lady asked, this time speaking with a firm voice and smiling oddly.

"I… I don't know who it is you are asking about."

"You are horrid, mean, vile…" the stranger muttered, scanning Pasha with hatred and repulsion. "Yes, yes… you are horrid. I am very, very glad that at last I can tell you so!"

Pasha felt that on this lady in black with the angry eyes and white slender fingers she produced the impression of something horrid and unseemly, and she felt ashamed of her chubby red cheeks, the pockmark on her nose, and the fringe on her forehead, which never could be combed back. And it seemed to her that if she had been thin, and had had no powder on her face and no fringe on her forehead, then she could have disguised the fact that she was not "respectable," and she would not have felt so frightened and ashamed to stand facing this unknown, mysterious lady.

"Where is my husband?" the lady went on. "Though I don't care whether he is here or not, but I ought to tell you that the money has been missed, and they are looking for Nikolay Petrovitch.… They mean to arrest him. That's your doing!"

The lady got up and walked about the room in great excitement. Pasha looked at her and was so frightened that she could not understand.

"He'll be found and arrested today," said the lady, and she gave a sob, and in that sound could be heard her resentment and vexation. "I know who has brought him to this awful position! Low, horrid creature! Loathsome, mercenary hussy!" The lady's lips worked and her nose wrinkled up with disgust. "I am helpless, do you hear, you low woman?… I am helpless; you are stronger than I am, but there is One to defend me and my children! God sees all! He is just! He will punish you for every tear I have shed, for all my sleepless nights! The time will come; you will think of me!…"

Silence followed again. The lady walked about the room and wrung her hands, while Pasha still gazed blankly at her in amazement, not understanding and expecting something terrible.

"I know nothing about it, madam," she said, and suddenly burst into tears.

“You are lying!” cried the lady, and her eyes flashed angrily at her. “I know all about it! I’ve known you a long time. I know that for the last month he has been spending every day with you!”

“Yes. What then? What of it? I have a great many visitors, but I don’t force anyone to come. He is free to do as he likes.”

“I tell you they have discovered that money is missing! He has embezzled money at the office! For the sake of such a… creature as you, for your sake he has actually committed a crime. Listen,” said the lady in a resolute voice, stopping short, facing Pasha. “You can have no principles; you live simply to do harm—that’s your object; but one can’t imagine you have fallen so low that you have no trace of human feeling left! He has a wife, children.… If he is condemned and sent into exile we shall starve, the children and I.… Understand that! And yet there is a chance of saving him and us from destitution and disgrace. If I take them nine hundred roubles today they will let him alone. Only nine hundred roubles!”

“What nine hundred roubles?” Pasha asked softly. “I… I don’t know.… I haven’t taken it.”

“I am not asking you for nine hundred roubles.… You have no money, and I don’t want your money. I ask you for something else.… Men usually give expensive things to women like you. Only give me back the things my husband has given you!”

“Madam, he has never made me a present of anything!” Pasha wailed, beginning to understand.

“Where is the money? He has squandered his own and mine and other people’s.… What has become of it all? Listen, I beg you! I was carried away by indignation and have said a lot of nasty things to you, but I apologize. You must hate me, I know, but if you are capable of sympathy, put yourself in my position! I implore you to give me back the things!”

“H’m!” said Pasha, and she shrugged her shoulders. “I would with pleasure, but God is my witness, he never made me a present of anything. Believe me, on my conscience. However, you are right, though,” said the singer in confusion, “he did bring me two little things. Certainly I will give them back, if you wish it.”

Pasha pulled out one of the drawers in the toilet-table and took out of it a hollow gold bracelet and a thin ring with a ruby in it.

“Here, madam!” she said, handing the visitor these articles.

The lady flushed and her face quivered. She was offended.

“What are you giving me?” she said. “I am not asking for charity, but for what does not belong to you… what you have taken advantage of your position to squeeze out of my husband… that weak, unhappy man.… On Thursday, when I saw you with my husband at the harbour you were wearing expensive brooches and bracelets. So it’s no use your playing the innocent lamb to me! I ask you for the last time: will you give me the things, or not?”

“You are a queer one, upon my word,” said Pasha, beginning to feel offended. “I assure you that, except the bracelet and this little ring, I’ve never seen a thing from your Nikolay Petrovitch. He brings me nothing but sweet cakes.”

“Sweet cakes!” laughed the stranger. “At home the children have nothing to eat, and here you have sweet cakes. You absolutely refuse to restore the presents?”

Receiving no answer, the lady sat, down and stared into space, pondering.

“What’s to be done now?” she said. “If I don’t get nine hundred roubles, he is ruined, and the children and I am ruined, too. Shall I kill this low woman or go down on my knees to her?”

The lady pressed her handkerchief to her face and broke into sobs.

“I beg you!” Pasha heard through the stranger’s sobs. “You see you have plundered and ruined my husband. Save him.… You have no feeling for him, but the children… the children… What have the children done?”

Pasha imagined little children standing in the street, crying with hunger, and she, too, sobbed.

“What can I do, madam?” she said. “You say that I am a low woman and that I have ruined Nikolay Petrovitch, and I assure you… before God Almighty, I have had nothing from him whatever.… There is only one girl in our chorus who has a rich admirer; all the rest of us live from hand to mouth on bread and kvass. Nikolay Petrovitch is a highly educated, refined gentleman, so I’ve made him welcome. We are bound to make gentlemen welcome.”

“I ask you for the things! Give me the things! I am crying.… I am humiliating myself.… If you like I will go down on my knees! If you wish it!”

Pasha shrieked with horror and waved her hands. She felt that this pale, beautiful lady who expressed herself so grandly, as though she were on the stage, really might go down on her knees to her, simply from pride, from grandeur, to exalt herself and humiliate the chorus girl.

“Very well, I will give you things!” said Pasha, wiping her eyes and bustling about. “By all means. Only they are not from Nikolay Petrovitch.… I got these from other gentlemen. As you please.…”

Pasha pulled out the upper drawer of the chest, took out a diamond brooch, a coral necklace, some rings and bracelets, and gave them all to the lady.

“Take them if you like, only I’ve never had anything from your husband. Take them and grow rich,” Pasha went on, offended at the threat to go down on her knees. “And if you are a lady… his lawful wife, you should keep him to yourself. I should think so! I did not ask him to come; he came of himself.”

Through her tears the lady scrutinized the articles given her and said:

“This isn’t everything.… There won’t be five hundred roubles’ worth here.”

Pasha impulsively flung out of the chest a gold watch, a cigar-case and studs, and said, flinging up her hands:

“I’ve nothing else left.… You can search!”

The visitor gave a sigh, with trembling hands twisted the things up in her handkerchief, and went out without uttering a word, without even nodding her head.

The door from the next room opened and Kolpakov walked in. He was pale and kept shaking his head nervously, as though he had swallowed something very bitter; tears were glistening in his eyes.

“What presents did you make me?” Pasha asked, pouncing upon him. “When did you, allow me to ask you?”

“Presents… that’s no matter!” said Kolpakov, and he tossed his head. “My God! She cried before you, she humbled herself.…”

“I am asking you, what presents did you make me?” Pasha cried.

“My God! She, a lady, so proud, so pure.… She was ready to go down on her knees to… to this wench! And I’ve brought her to this! I’ve allowed it!”

He clutched his head in his hands and moaned.

“No, I shall never forgive myself for this! I shall never forgive myself! Get away from me… you low creature!” he cried with repulsion, backing away from Pasha, and thrusting her off with trembling hands. “She would have gone down on her knees, and… and to you! Oh, my God!”

He rapidly dressed, and pushing Pasha aside contemptuously, made for the door and went out.

Pasha lay down and began wailing aloud. She was already regretting her things which she had given away so impulsively, and her feelings were hurt. She remembered how three years ago a merchant had beaten her for no sort of reason, and she wailed more loudly than ever.

THE SCHOOLMASTER

Fyodor Lukitch Sysoev, the master of the factory school maintained at the expense of the firm of Kulikin, was getting ready for the annual dinner. Every year after the school examination the board of managers gave a dinner at which the inspector of elementary schools, all who had conducted the examinations, and all the managers and foremen of the factory were present. In spite of their official character, these dinners were always good and lively, and the guests sat a long time over them; forgetting distinctions of rank and recalling only their meritorious labours, they ate till they were full, drank amicably, chattered till they were all hoarse and parted late in the evening, deafening the whole factory settlement with their singing and the sound of their kisses. Of such dinners Sysoev had taken part in thirteen, as he had been that number of years master of the factory school.

Now, getting ready for the fourteenth, he was trying to make himself look as festive and correct as possible. He had spent a whole hour brushing his new black suit, and spent almost as long in front of a looking-glass while he put on a fashionable shirt; the studs would not go into the buttonholes, and this circumstance called forth a perfect storm of complaints, threats, and reproaches addressed to his wife.

His poor wife, bustling round him, wore herself out with her efforts. And indeed he, too, was exhausted in the end. When his polished boots were brought him from the kitchen he had not strength to pull them on. He had to lie down and have a drink of water.

“How weak you have grown!” sighed his wife. “You ought not to go to this dinner at all.”

“No advice, please!” the schoolmaster cut her short angrily.

He was in a very bad temper, for he had been much displeased with the recent examinations. The examinations had gone off splendidly; all the boys of the senior division had gained certificates and prizes; both the managers of the factory and the government officials were pleased with the results; but that was not enough for the schoolmaster. He was

vexed that Babkin, a boy who never made a mistake in writing, had made three mistakes in the dictation; Sergeyev, another boy, had been so excited that he could not remember seventeen times thirteen; the inspector, a young and inexperienced man, had chosen a difficult article for dictation, and Lyapunov, the master of a neighbouring school, whom the inspector had asked to dictate, had not behaved like “a good comrade”; but in dictating had, as it were, swallowed the words and had not pronounced them as written.

After pulling on his boots with the assistance of his wife, and looking at himself once more in the looking-glass, the schoolmaster took his gnarled stick and set off for the dinner. Just before the factory manager’s house, where the festivity was to take place, he had a little mishap. He was taken with a violent fit of coughing.… He was so shaken by it that the cap flew off his head and the stick dropped out of his hand; and when the school inspector and the teachers, hearing his cough, ran out of the house, he was sitting on the bottom step, bathed in perspiration.

“Fyodor Lukitch, is that you?” said the inspector, surprised. “You… have come?”

“Why not?”

“You ought to be at home, my dear fellow. You are not at all well today.…”

“I am just the same today as I was yesterday. And if my presence is not agreeable to you, I can go back.”

“Oh, Fyodor Lukitch, you must not talk like that! Please come in. Why, the function is really in your honour, not ours. And we are delighted to see you. Of course we are!…”

Within, everything was ready for the banquet. In the big dining room adorned with German oleographs and smelling of geraniums and varnish there were two tables, a larger one for the dinner and a smaller one for the hors-d’oeuvres. The hot light of midday faintly percolated through the lowered blinds.… The twilight of the room, the Swiss views on the blinds, the geraniums, the thin slices of sausage on the plates, all had a naive, girlishly-sentimental air, and it was all in keeping with the master of the house, a good-natured little German with a round little stomach and affectionate, oily little eyes. Adolf Andreyitch Bruni (that was his name) was bustling round the table of hors-d’oeuvres as zealously as though it were a house on fire, filling up the wineglasses, loading the plates, and trying in every way to please, to amuse, and to show his friendly feelings. He clapped people on the shoulder, looked into their

eyes, chuckled, rubbed his hands, in fact was as ingratiating as a friendly dog.

“Whom do I behold? Fyodor Lukitch!” he said in a jerky voice, on seeing Sysoev. “How delightful! You have come in spite of your illness. Gentlemen, let me congratulate you, Fyodor Lukitch has come!”

The schoolteachers were already crowding round the table and eating the hors-d’oeuvres. Sysoev frowned; he was displeased that his colleagues had begun to eat and drink without waiting for him. He noticed among them Lyapunov, the man who had dictated at the examination, and going up to him, began:

“It was not acting like a comrade! No, indeed! Gentlemanly people don’t dictate like that!”

“Good Lord, you are still harping on it!” said Lyapunov, and he frowned. “Aren’t you sick of it?”

“Yes, still harping on it! My Babkin has never made mistakes! I know why you dictated like that. You simply wanted my pupils to be floored, so that your school might seem better than mine. I know all about it! …”

“Why are you trying to get up a quarrel?” Lyapunov snarled. “Why the devil do you pester me?”

“Come, gentlemen,” interposed the inspector, making a woebegone face. “Is it worth while to get so heated over a trifle? Three mistakes… not one mistake… does it matter?”

“Yes, it does matter. Babkin has never made mistakes.”

“He won’t leave off,” Lyapunov went on, snorting angrily. “He takes advantage of his position as an invalid and worries us all to death. Well, sir, I am not going to consider your being ill.”

“Let my illness alone!” cried Sysoev, angrily. “What is it to do with you? They all keep repeating it at me: illness! illness! illness!… As though I need your sympathy! Besides, where have you picked up the notion that I am ill? I was ill before the examinations, that’s true, but now I have completely recovered, there is nothing left of it but weakness.”

“You have regained your health, well, thank God,” said the scripture teacher, Father Nikolay, a young priest in a foppish cinnamon-coloured cassock and trousers outside his boots. “You ought to rejoice, but you are irritable and so on.”

“You are a nice one, too,” Sysoev interrupted him. “Questions ought to be straightforward, clear, but you kept asking riddles. That’s not the thing to do!”

By combined efforts they succeeded in soothing him and making him sit down to the table. He was a long time making up his mind what to drink, and pulling a wry face drank a wineglass of some green liqueur; then he drew a bit of pie towards him, and sulkily picked out of the inside an egg with onion on it. At the first mouthful it seemed to him that there was no salt in it. He sprinkled salt on it and at once pushed it away as the pie was too salt.

At dinner Sysoev was seated between the inspector and Bruni. After the first course the toasts began, according to the old-established custom.

"I consider it my agreeable duty," the inspector began, "to propose a vote of thanks to the absent school wardens, Daniel Petrovitch and… and… and…"

"And Ivan Petrovitch," Bruni prompted him.

"And Ivan Petrovitch Kulikin, who grudge no expense for the school, and I propose to drink their health.…"

"For my part," said Bruni, jumping up as though he had been stung, "I propose a toast to the health of the honoured inspector of elementary schools, Pavel Gennadievitch Nadarov!"

Chairs were pushed back, faces beamed with smiles, and the usual clinking of glasses began.

The third toast always fell to Sysoev. And on this occasion, too, he got up and began to speak. Looking grave and clearing his throat, he first of all announced that he had not the gift of eloquence and that he was not prepared to make a speech. Further he said that during the fourteen years that he had been schoolmaster there had been many intrigues, many underhand attacks, and even secret reports on him to the authorities, and that he knew his enemies and those who had informed against him, and he would not mention their names, "for fear of spoiling somebody's appetite"; that in spite of these intrigues the Kulikin school held the foremost place in the whole province not only from a moral, but also from a material point of view.

"Everywhere else," he said, "schoolmasters get two hundred or three hundred roubles, while I get five hundred, and moreover my house has been redecorated and even furnished at the expense of the firm. And this year all the walls have been repapered.…"

Further the schoolmaster enlarged on the liberality with which the pupils were provided with writing materials in the factory schools as compared with the Zemstvo and government schools. And for all this the school was indebted, in his opinion, not to the heads of the firm, who

lived abroad and scarcely knew of its existence, but to a man who, in spite of his German origin and Lutheran faith, was a Russian at heart.

Sysoev spoke at length, with pauses to get his breath and with pretensions to rhetoric, and his speech was boring and unpleasant. He several times referred to certain enemies of his, tried to drop hints, repeated himself, coughed, and flourished his fingers unbecomingly. At last he was exhausted and in a perspiration and he began talking jerkily, in a low voice as though to himself, and finished his speech not quite coherently: “And so I propose the health of Bruni, that is Adolf Andreyitch, who is here, among us… generally speaking… you understand…”

When he finished everyone gave a faint sigh, as though someone had sprinkled cold water and cleared the air. Bruni alone apparently had no unpleasant feeling. Beaming and rolling his sentimental eyes, the German shook Sysoev’s hand with feeling and was again as friendly as a dog.

“Oh, I thank you,” he said, with an emphasis on the *oh*, laying his left hand on his heart. “I am very happy that you understand me! I, with my whole heart, wish you all things good. But I ought only to observe; you exaggerate my importance. The school owes its flourishing condition only to you, my honoured friend, Fyodor Lukitch. But for you it would be in no way distinguished from other schools! You think the German is paying a compliment, the German is saying something polite. Ha-ha! No, my dear Fyodor Lukitch, I am an honest man and never make complimentary speeches. If we pay you five hundred roubles a year it is because you are valued by us. Isn’t that so? Gentlemen, what I say is true, isn’t it? We should not pay anyone else so much.… Why, a good school is an honour to the factory!”

“I must sincerely own that your school is really exceptional,” said the inspector. “Don’t think this is flattery. Anyway, I have never come across another like it in my life. As I sat at the examination I was full of admiration.… Wonderful children! They know a great deal and answer brightly, and at the same time they are somehow special, unconstrained, sincere.… One can see that they love you, Fyodor Lukitch. You are a schoolmaster to the marrow of your bones. You must have been born a teacher. You have all the gifts—innate vocation, long experience, and love for your work.… It’s simply amazing, considering the weak state of your health, what energy, what understanding… what perseverance, do you understand, what confidence you have! Someone in the school

committee said truly that you were a poet in your work.… Yes, a poet you are!”

And all present at the dinner began as one man talking of Sysoev’s extraordinary talent. And as though a dam had been burst, there followed a flood of sincere, enthusiastic words such as men do not utter when they are restrained by prudent and cautious sobriety. Sysoev’s speech and his intolerable temper and the horrid, spiteful expression on his face were all forgotten. Everyone talked freely, even the shy and silent new teachers, poverty-stricken, downtrodden youths who never spoke to the inspector without addressing him as “your honour.” It was clear that in his own circle Sysoev was a person of consequence.

Having been accustomed to success and praise for the fourteen years that he had been schoolmaster, he listened with indifference to the noisy enthusiasm of his admirers.

It was Bruni who drank in the praise instead of the schoolmaster. The German caught every word, beamed, clapped his hands, and flushed modestly as though the praise referred not to the schoolmaster but to him.

“Bravo! bravo!” he shouted. “That’s true! You have grasped my meaning!… Excellent!…” He looked into the schoolmaster’s eyes as though he wanted to share his bliss with him. At last he could restrain himself no longer; he leapt up, and, overpowering all the other voices with his shrill little tenor, shouted:

“Gentlemen! Allow me to speak! Sh-h! To all you say I can make only one reply: the management of the factory will not be forgetful of what it owes to Fyodor Lukitch!…”

All were silent. Sysoev raised his eyes to the German’s rosy face.

“We know how to appreciate it,” Bruni went on, dropping his voice. “In response to your words I ought to tell you that… Fyodor Lukitch’s family will be provided for and that a sum of money was placed in the bank a month ago for that object.”

Sysoev looked enquiringly at the German, at his colleagues, as though unable to understand why his family should be provided for and not he himself. And at once on all the faces, in all the motionless eyes bent upon him, he read not the sympathy, not the commiseration which he could not endure, but something else, something soft, tender, but at the same time intensely sinister, like a terrible truth, something which in one instant turned him cold all over and filled his soul with unutterable despair. With a pale, distorted face he suddenly jumped up and clutched at his head. For a quarter of a minute he stood like that, stared with

horror at a fixed point before him as though he saw the swiftly coming death of which Bruni was speaking, then sat down and burst into tears.

"Come, come!… What is it?" he heard agitated voices saying. "Water! drink a little water!"

A short time passed and the schoolmaster grew calmer, but the party did not recover their previous liveliness. The dinner ended in gloomy silence, and much earlier than on previous occasions.

When he got home Sysoev first of all looked at himself in the glass.

"Of course there was no need for me to blubber like that!" he thought, looking at his sunken cheeks and his eyes with dark rings under them. "My face is a much better colour today than yesterday. I am suffering from anemia and catarrh of the stomach, and my cough is only a stomach cough."

Reassured, he slowly began undressing, and spent a long time brushing his new black suit, then carefully folded it up and put it in the chest of drawers.

Then he went up to the table where there lay a pile of his pupils' exercise-books, and picking out Babkin's, sat down and fell to contemplating the beautiful childish handwriting.…

And meantime, while he was examining the exercise-books, the district doctor was sitting in the next room and telling his wife in a whisper that a man ought not to have been allowed to go out to dinner who had not in all probability more than a week to live.

A Troublesome Visitor

In the low-pitched, crooked little hut of Artyom, the forester, two men were sitting under the big dark icon—Artyom himself, a short and lean peasant with a wrinkled, aged-looking face and a little beard that grew out of his neck, and a well-grown young man in a new crimson shirt and big wading boots, who had been out hunting and come in for the night. They were sitting on a bench at a little three-legged table on which a tallow candle stuck into a bottle was lazily burning.

Outside the window the darkness of the night was full of the noisy uproar into which nature usually breaks out before a thunderstorm. The wind howled angrily and the bowed trees moaned miserably. One pane of the window had been pasted up with paper, and leaves torn off by the wind could be heard pattering against the paper.

"I tell you what, good Christian," said Artyom in a hoarse little tenor half-whisper, staring with unblinking, scared-looking eyes at the hunter. "I am not afraid of wolves or bears, or wild beasts of any sort, but I am afraid of man. You can save yourself from beasts with a gun or some other weapon, but you have no means of saving yourself from a wicked man."

"To be sure, you can fire at a beast, but if you shoot at a robber you will have to answer for it: you will go to Siberia."

"I've been forester, my lad, for thirty years, and I couldn't tell you what I have had to put up with from wicked men. There have been lots and lots of them here. The hut's on a track, it's a cart-road, and that brings them, the devils. Every sort of ruffian turns up, and without taking off his cap or making the sign of the cross, bursts straight in upon one with: 'Give us some bread, you old so-and-so.' And where am I to get bread for him? What claim has he? Am I a millionaire to feed every drunkard that passes? They are half-blind with spite.… They have no cross on them, the devils.… They'll give you a clout on the ear and not think twice about it: 'Give us bread!' Well, one gives it.… One is not going to fight with them, the idols! Some of them are two yards across

the shoulders, and a great fist as big as your boot, and you see the sort of figure I am. One of them could smash me with his little finger.… Well, one gives him bread and he gobbles it up, and stretches out full length across the hut with not a word of thanks. And there are some that ask for money. ‘Tell me, where is your money?’ As though I had money! How should I come by it?”

“A forester and no money!” laughed the hunter. “You get wages every month, and I’ll be bound you sell timber on the sly.”

Artyom took a timid sideway glance at his visitor and twitched his beard as a magpie twitches her tail.

“You are still young to say a thing like that to me,” he said. “You will have to answer to God for those words. Whom may your people be? Where do you come from?”

“I am from Vyazovka. I am the son of Nefed the village elder.”

“You have gone out for sport with your gun. I used to like sport, too, when I was young. H’m! Ah, our sins are grievous,” said Artyom, with a yawn. “It’s a sad thing! There are few good folks, but villains and murderers no end—God have mercy upon us.”

“You seem to be frightened of me, too.…”

“Come, what next! What should I be afraid of you for? I see.… I understand.… You came in, and not just anyhow, but you made the sign of the cross, you bowed, all decent and proper.… I understand.… One can give you bread.… I am a widower, I don’t heat the stove, I sold the samovar.… I am too poor to keep meat or anything else, but bread you are welcome to.”

At that moment something began growling under the bench: the growl was followed by a hiss. Artyom started, drew up his legs, and looked enquiringly at the hunter.

“It’s my dog worrying your cat,” said the hunter. “You devils!” he shouted under the bench. “Lie down. You’ll be beaten. I say, your cat’s thin, mate! She is nothing but skin and bone.”

“She is old, it is time she was dead.… So you say you are from Vyazovka?”

“I see you don’t feed her. Though she’s a cat she’s a creature… every breathing thing. You should have pity on her!”

“You are a queer lot in Vyazovka,” Artyom went on, as though not listening. “The church has been robbed twice in one year… To think that there are such wicked men! So they fear neither man nor God! To steal what is the Lord’s! Hanging’s too good for them! In old days the governors used to have such rogues flogged.”

“However you punish, whether it is with flogging or anything else, it will be no good, you will not knock the wickedness out of a wicked man.”

“Save and preserve us, Queen of Heaven!” The forester sighed abruptly. “Save us from all enemies and evildoers. Last week at Volovy Zaimishtchy, a mower struck another on the chest with his scythe… he killed him outright! And what was it all about, God bless me! One mower came out of the tavern… drunk. The other met him, drunk too.”

The young man, who had been listening attentively, suddenly started, and his face grew tense as he listened.

“Stay,” he said, interrupting the forester. “I fancy someone is shouting.”

The hunter and the forester fell to listening with their eyes fixed on the window. Through the noise of the forest they could hear sounds such as the strained ear can always distinguish in every storm, so that it was difficult to make out whether people were calling for help or whether the wind was wailing in the chimney. But the wind tore at the roof, tapped at the paper on the window, and brought a distinct shout of “Help!”

“Talk of your murderers,” said the hunter, turning pale and getting up. “Someone is being robbed!”

“Lord have mercy on us,” whispered the forester, and he, too, turned pale and got up.

The hunter looked aimlessly out of window and walked up and down the hut.

“What a night, what a night!” he muttered. “You can’t see your hand before your face! The very time for a robbery. Do you hear? There is a shout again.”

The forester looked at the icon and from the icon turned his eyes upon the hunter, and sank on to the bench, collapsing like a man terrified by sudden bad news.

“Good Christian,” he said in a tearful voice, “you might go into the passage and bolt the door. And we must put out the light.”

“What for?”

“By ill-luck they may find their way here.… Oh, our sins!”

“We ought to be going, and you talk of bolting the door! You are a clever one! Are you coming?”

The hunter threw his gun over his shoulder and picked up his cap.

“Get ready, take your gun. Hey, Flerka, here,” he called to his dog. “Flerka!”

A dog with long frayed ears, a mongrel between a setter and a house-dog, came out from under the bench. He stretched himself by his master’s feet and wagged his tail.

“Why are you sitting there?” cried the hunter to the forester. “You mean to say you are not going?”

“Where?”

“To help!”

“How can I?” said the forester with a wave of his hand, shuddering all over. “I can’t bother about it!”

“Why won’t you come?”

“After talking of such dreadful things I won’t stir a step into the darkness. Bless them! And what should I go for?”

“What are you afraid of? Haven’t you got a gun? Let us go, please do. It’s scaring to go alone; it will be more cheerful, the two of us. Do you hear? There was a shout again. Get up!”

“Whatever do you think of me, lad?” wailed the forester. “Do you think I am such a fool to go straight to my undoing?”

“So you are not coming?”

The forester did not answer. The dog, probably hearing a human cry, gave a plaintive whine.

“Are you coming, I ask you?” cried the hunter, rolling his eyes angrily.

“You do keep on, upon my word,” said the forester with annoyance. “Go yourself.”

“Ugh!… low cur,” growled the hunter, turning towards the door. “Flerka, here!”

He went out and left the door open. The wind flew into the hut. The flame of the candle flickered uneasily, flared up, and went out.

As he bolted the door after the hunter, the forester saw the puddles in the track, the nearest pine trees, and the retreating figure of his guest lighted up by a flash of lightning. Far away he heard the rumble of thunder.

“Holy, holy, holy,” whispered the forester, making haste to thrust the thick bolt into the great iron rings. “What weather the Lord has sent us!”

Going back into the room, he felt his way to the stove, lay down, and covered himself from head to foot. Lying under the sheepskin and listening intently, he could no longer hear the human cry, but the peals of thunder kept growing louder and more prolonged. He could hear the big wind-lashed raindrops pattering angrily on the panes and on the paper of the window.

“He’s gone on a fool’s errand,” he thought, picturing the hunter soaked with rain and stumbling over the tree-stumps. “I bet his teeth are chattering with terror!”

Not more than ten minutes later there was a sound of footsteps, followed by a loud knock at the door.

“Who’s there?” cried the forester.

“It’s I,” he heard the young man’s voice. “Unfasten the door.”

The forester clambered down from the stove, felt for the candle, and, lighting it, went to the door. The hunter and his dog were drenched to the skin. They had come in for the heaviest of the downpour, and now the water ran from them as from washed clothes before they have been wrung out.

“What was it?” asked the forester.

“A peasant woman driving in a cart; she had got off the road…” answered the young man, struggling with his breathlessness. “She was caught in a thicket.”

“Ah, the silly thing! She was frightened, then.… Well, did you put her on the road?”

“I don’t care to talk to a scoundrel like you.”

The young man flung his wet cap on the bench and went on:

“I know now that you are a scoundrel and the lowest of men. And you a keeper, too, getting a salary! You blackguard!”

The forester slunk with a guilty step to the stove, cleared his throat, and lay down. The young man sat on the bench, thought a little, and lay down on it full length. Not long afterwards he got up, put out the candle, and lay down again. During a particularly loud clap of thunder he turned over, spat on the floor, and growled out:

“He’s afraid.… And what if the woman were being murdered? Whose business is it to defend her? And he an old man, too, and a Christian.… He’s a pig and nothing else.”

The forester cleared his throat and heaved a deep sigh. Somewhere in the darkness Flerka shook his wet coat vigorously, which sent drops of water flying about all over the room.

“So you wouldn’t care if the woman were murdered?” the hunter went on. “Well—strike me, God—I had no notion you were that sort of man.…”

A silence followed. The thunderstorm was by now over and the thunder came from far away, but it was still raining.

“And suppose it hadn’t been a woman but you shouting ‘Help!’?” said the hunter, breaking the silence. “How would you feel, you beast, if no

one ran to your aid? You have upset me with your meanness, plague take you!”

After another long interval the hunter said:

“You must have money to be afraid of people! A man who is poor is not likely to be afraid.…”

“For those words you will answer before God,” Artyom said hoarsely from the stove. “I have no money.”

“I dare say! Scoundrels always have money.… Why are you afraid of people, then? So you must have! I’d like to take and rob you for spite, to teach you a lesson!…”

Artyom slipped noiselessly from the stove, lighted a candle, and sat down under the holy image. He was pale and did not take his eyes off the hunter.

“Here, I’ll rob you,” said the hunter, getting up. “What do you think about it? Fellows like you want a lesson. Tell me, where is your money hidden?”

Artyom drew his legs up under him and blinked. “What are you wriggling for? Where is your money hidden? Have you lost your tongue, you fool? Why don’t you answer?”

The young man jumped up and went up to the forester.

“He is blinking like an owl! Well? Give me your money, or I will shoot you with my gun.”

“Why do you keep on at me?” squealed the forester, and big tears rolled from his eyes. “What’s the reason of it? God sees all! You will have to answer, for every word you say, to God. You have no right whatever to ask for my money.”

The young man looked at Artyom’s tearful face, frowned, and walked up and down the hut, then angrily clapped his cap on his head and picked up his gun.

“Ugh!… ugh!… it makes me sick to look at you,” he filtered through his teeth. “I can’t bear the sight of you. I won’t sleep in your house, anyway. Goodbye! Hey, Flerka!”

The door slammed and the troublesome visitor went out with his dog.… Artyom bolted the door after him, crossed himself, and lay down.

A Misfortune

Sofya Petrovna, the wife of Lubyantsev the notary, a handsome young woman of five-and-twenty, was walking slowly along a track that had been cleared in the wood, with Ilyin, a lawyer who was spending the summer in the neighbourhood. It was five o'clock in the evening. Feathery-white masses of cloud stood overhead; patches of bright blue sky peeped out between them. The clouds stood motionless, as though they had caught in the tops of the tall old pine trees. It was still and sultry.

Farther on, the track was crossed by a low railway embankment on which a sentinel with a gun was for some reason pacing up and down. Just beyond the embankment there was a large white church with six domes and a rusty roof.

"I did not expect to meet you here," said Sofya Petrovna, looking at the ground and prodding at the last year's leaves with the tip of her parasol, "and now I am glad we have met. I want to speak to you seriously and once for all. I beg you, Ivan Mihalovitch, if you really love and respect me, please make an end of this pursuit of me! You follow me about like a shadow, you are continually looking at me not in a nice way, making love to me, writing me strange letters, and… and I don't know where it's all going to end! Why, what can come of it?"

Ilyin said nothing. Sofya Petrovna walked on a few steps and continued:

"And this complete transformation in you all came about in the course of two or three weeks, after five years' friendship. I don't know you, Ivan Mihalovitch!"

Sofya Petrovna stole a glance at her companion. Screwing up his eyes, he was looking intently at the fluffy clouds. His face looked angry, ill-humoured, and preoccupied, like that of a man in pain forced to listen to nonsense.

"I wonder you don't see it yourself," Madame Lubyantsev went on, shrugging her shoulders. "You ought to realize that it's not a very nice

part you are playing. I am married; I love and respect my husband.… I have a daughter.… Can you think all that means nothing? Besides, as an old friend you know my attitude to family life and my views as to the sanctity of marriage."

Ilyin cleared his throat angrily and heaved a sigh.

"Sanctity of marriage…" he muttered. "Oh, Lord!"

"Yes, yes.… I love my husband, I respect him; and in any case I value the peace of my home. I would rather let myself be killed than be a cause of unhappiness to Andrey and his daughter.… And I beg you, Ivan Mihalovitch, for God's sake, leave me in peace! Let us be as good, true friends as we used to be, and give up these sighs and groans, which really don't suit you. It's settled and over! Not a word more about it. Let us talk of something else."

Sofya Petrovna again stole a glance at Ilyin's face. Ilyin was looking up; he was pale, and was angrily biting his quivering lips. She could not understand why he was angry and why he was indignant, but his pallor touched her.

"Don't be angry; let us be friends," she said affectionately. "Agreed? Here's my hand."

Ilyin took her plump little hand in both of his, squeezed it, and slowly raised it to his lips.

"I am not a schoolboy," he muttered. "I am not in the least tempted by friendship with the woman I love."

"Enough, enough! It's settled and done with. We have reached the seat; let us sit down."

Sofya Petrovna's soul was filled with a sweet sense of relief: the most difficult and delicate thing had been said, the painful question was settled and done with. Now she could breathe freely and look Ilyin straight in the face. She looked at him, and the egoistic feeling of the superiority of the woman over the man who loves her, agreeably flattered her. It pleased her to see this huge, strong man, with his manly, angry face and his big black beard—clever, cultivated, and, people said, talented—sit down obediently beside her and bow his head dejectedly. For two or three minutes they sat without speaking.

"Nothing is settled or done with," began Ilyin. "You repeat copybook maxims to me. 'I love and respect my husband… the sanctity of marriage.…' I know all that without your help, and I could tell you more, too. I tell you truthfully and honestly that I consider the way I am behaving as criminal and immoral. What more can one say than that? But what's the good of saying what everybody knows? Instead of

feeding nightingales with paltry words, you had much better tell me what I am to do."

"I've told you already—go away."

"As you know perfectly well, I have gone away five times, and every time I turned back on the way. I can show you my through tickets—I've kept them all. I have not will enough to run away from you! I am struggling. I am struggling horribly; but what the devil am I good for if I have no backbone, if I am weak, cowardly! I can't struggle with Nature! Do you understand? I cannot! I run away from here, and she holds on to me and pulls me back. Contemptible, loathsome weakness!"

Ilyin flushed crimson, got up, and walked up and down by the seat.

"I feel as cross as a dog," he muttered, clenching his fists. "I hate and despise myself! My God! like some depraved schoolboy, I am making love to another man's wife, writing idiotic letters, degrading myself… ugh!"

Ilyin clutched at his head, grunted, and sat down. "And then your insincerity!" he went on bitterly. "If you do dislike my disgusting behaviour, why have you come here? What drew you here? In my letters I only ask you for a direct, definite answer—yes or no; but instead of a direct answer, you contrive every day these 'chance' meetings with me and regale me with copybook maxims!"

Madame Lubyantsev was frightened and flushed. She suddenly felt the awkwardness which a decent woman feels when she is accidentally discovered undressed.

"You seem to suspect I am playing with you," she muttered. "I have always given you a direct answer, and… only today I've begged you…"

"Ough! as though one begged in such cases! If you were to say straight out 'Get away,' I should have been gone long ago; but you've never said that. You've never once given me a direct answer. Strange indecision! Yes, indeed; either you are playing with me, or else…"

Ilyin leaned his head on his fists without finishing. Sofya Petrovna began going over in her own mind the way she had behaved from beginning to end. She remembered that not only in her actions, but even in her secret thoughts, she had always been opposed to Ilyin's lovemaking; but yet she felt there was a grain of truth in the lawyer's words. But not knowing exactly what the truth was, she could not find answers to make to Ilyin's complaint, however hard she thought. It was awkward to be silent, and, shrugging her shoulders, she said:

"So I am to blame, it appears."

“I don’t blame you for your insincerity,” sighed Ilyin. “I did not mean that when I spoke of it.… Your insincerity is natural and in the order of things. If people agreed together and suddenly became sincere, everything would go to the devil.”

Sofya Petrovna was in no mood for philosophical reflections, but she was glad of a chance to change the conversation, and asked:

“But why?”

“Because only savage women and animals are sincere. Once civilization has introduced a demand for such comforts as, for instance, feminine virtue, sincerity is out of place.…”

Ilyin jabbed his stick angrily into the sand. Madame Lubyantsev listened to him and liked his conversation, though a great deal of it she did not understand. What gratified her most was that she, an ordinary woman, was talked to by a talented man on “intellectual” subjects; it afforded her great pleasure, too, to watch the working of his mobile, young face, which was still pale and angry. She failed to understand a great deal that he said, but what was clear to her in his words was the attractive boldness with which the modern man without hesitation or doubt decides great questions and draws conclusive deductions.

She suddenly realized that she was admiring him, and was alarmed.

“Forgive me, but I don’t understand,” she said hurriedly. “What makes you talk of insincerity? I repeat my request again: be my good, true friend; let me alone! I beg you most earnestly!”

“Very good; I’ll try again,” sighed Ilyin. “Glad to do my best.… Only I doubt whether anything will come of my efforts. Either I shall put a bullet through my brains or take to drink in an idiotic way. I shall come to a bad end! There’s a limit to everything—to struggles with Nature, too. Tell me, how can one struggle against madness? If you drink wine, how are you to struggle against intoxication? What am I to do if your image has grown into my soul, and day and night stands persistently before my eyes, like that pine there at this moment? Come, tell me, what hard and difficult thing can I do to get free from this abominable, miserable condition, in which all my thoughts, desires, and dreams are no longer my own, but belong to some demon who has taken possession of me? I love you, love you so much that I am completely thrown out of gear; I’ve given up my work and all who are dear to me; I’ve forgotten my God! I’ve never been in love like this in my life.”

Sofya Petrovna, who had not expected such a turn to their conversation, drew away from Ilyin and looked into his face in dismay.

Tears came into his eyes, his lips were quivering, and there was an imploring, hungry expression in his face.

"I love you!" he muttered, bringing his eyes near her big, frightened eyes. "You are so beautiful! I am in agony now, but I swear I would sit here all my life, suffering and looking in your eyes. But… be silent, I implore you!"

Sofya Petrovna, feeling utterly disconcerted, tried to think as quickly as possible of something to say to stop him. "I'll go away," she decided, but before she had time to make a movement to get up, Ilyin was on his knees before her.… He was clasping her knees, gazing into her face and speaking passionately, hotly, eloquently. In her terror and confusion she did not hear his words; for some reason now, at this dangerous moment, while her knees were being agreeably squeezed and felt as though they were in a warm bath, she was trying, with a sort of angry spite, to interpret her own sensations. She was angry that instead of brimming over with protesting virtue, she was entirely overwhelmed with weakness, apathy, and emptiness, like a drunken man utterly reckless; only at the bottom of her soul a remote bit of herself was malignantly taunting her: "Why don't you go? Is this as it should be? Yes?"

Seeking for some explanation, she could not understand how it was she did not pull away the hand to which Ilyin was clinging like a leech, and why, like Ilyin, she hastily glanced to right and to left to see whether anyone was looking. The clouds and the pines stood motionless, looking at them severely, like old ushers seeing mischief, but bribed not to tell the school authorities. The sentry stood like a post on the embankment and seemed to be looking at the seat.

"Let him look," thought Sofya Petrovna.

"But… but listen," she said at last, with despair in her voice. "What can come of this? What will be the end of this?"

"I don't know, I don't know," he whispered, waving off the disagreeable questions.

They heard the hoarse, discordant whistle of the train. This cold, irrelevant sound from the everyday world of prose made Sofya Petrovna rouse herself.

"I can't stay… it's time I was at home," she said, getting up quickly. "The train is coming in… Andrey is coming by it! He will want his dinner."

Sofya Petrovna turned towards the embankment with a burning face. The engine slowly crawled by, then came the carriages. It was not the local train, as she had supposed, but a goods train. The trucks filed by

against the background of the white church in a long string like the days of a man's life, and it seemed as though it would never end.

But at last the train passed, and the last carriage with the guard and a light in it had disappeared behind the trees. Sofya Petrovna turned round sharply, and without looking at Ilyin, walked rapidly back along the track. She had regained her self-possession. Crimson with shame, humiliated not by Ilyin—no, but by her own cowardice, by the shamelessness with which she, a chaste and high-principled woman, had allowed a man, not her husband, to hug her knees—she had only one thought now: to get home as quickly as possible to her villa, to her family. The lawyer could hardly keep pace with her. Turning from the clearing into a narrow path, she turned round and glanced at him so quickly that she saw nothing but the sand on his knees, and waved to him to drop behind.

Reaching home, Sofya Petrovna stood in the middle of her room for five minutes without moving, and looked first at the window and then at her writing-table.

"You low creature!" she said, upbraiding herself. "You low creature!"

To spite herself, she recalled in precise detail, keeping nothing back—she recalled that though all this time she had been opposed to Ilyin's lovemaking, something had impelled her to seek an interview with him; and what was more, when he was at her feet she had enjoyed it enormously. She recalled it all without sparing herself, and now, breathless with shame, she would have liked to slap herself in the face.

"Poor Andrey!" she said to herself, trying as she thought of her husband to put into her face as tender an expression as she could. "Varya, my poor little girl, doesn't know what a mother she has! Forgive me, my dear ones! I love you so much… so much!"

And anxious to prove to herself that she was still a good wife and mother, and that corruption had not yet touched that "sanctity of marriage" of which she had spoken to Ilyin, Sofya Petrovna ran to the kitchen and abused the cook for not having yet laid the table for Andrey Ilyitch. She tried to picture her husband's hungry and exhausted appearance, commiserated him aloud, and laid the table for him with her own hands, which she had never done before. Then she found her daughter Varya, picked her up in her arms and hugged her warmly; the child seemed to her cold and heavy, but she was unwilling to acknowledge this to herself, and she began explaining to the child how good, kind, and honourable her papa was.

But when Andrey Ilyitch arrived soon afterwards she hardly greeted him. The rush of false feeling had already passed off without proving anything to her, only irritating and exasperating her by its falsity. She was sitting by the window, feeling miserable and cross. It is only by being in trouble that people can understand how far from easy it is to be the master of one's feelings and thoughts. Sofya Petrovna said afterwards that there was a tangle within her which it was as difficult to unravel as to count a flock of sparrows rapidly flying by. From the fact that she was not overjoyed to see her husband, that she did not like his manner at dinner, she concluded all of a sudden that she was beginning to hate her husband.

Andrey Ilyitch, languid with hunger and exhaustion, fell upon the sausage while waiting for the soup to be brought in, and ate it greedily, munching noisily and moving his temples.

"My goodness!" thought Sofya Petrovna. "I love and respect him, but… why does he munch so repulsively?"

The disorder in her thoughts was no less than the disorder in her feelings. Like all persons inexperienced in combating unpleasant ideas, Madame Lubyantsev did her utmost not to think of her trouble, and the harder she tried the more vividly Ilyin, the sand on his knees, the fluffy clouds, the train, stood out in her imagination.

"And why did I go there this afternoon like a fool?" she thought, tormenting herself. "And am I really so weak that I cannot depend upon myself?"

Fear magnifies danger. By the time Andrey Ilyitch was finishing the last course, she had firmly made up her mind to tell her husband everything and to flee from danger!

"I've something serious to say to you, Andrey," she began after dinner while her husband was taking off his coat and boots to lie down for a nap.

"Well?"

"Let us leave this place!"

"H'm!… Where shall we go? It's too soon to go back to town."

"No; for a tour or something of that sort."

"For a tour…" repeated the notary, stretching. "I dream of that myself, but where are we to get the money, and to whom am I to leave the office?"

And thinking a little he added:

"Of course, you must be bored. Go by yourself if you like."

Sofya Petrovna agreed, but at once reflected that Ilyin would be delighted with the opportunity, and would go with her in the same train, in the same compartment.… She thought and looked at her husband, now satisfied but still languid. For some reason her eyes rested on his feet—miniature, almost feminine feet, clad in striped socks; there was a thread standing out at the tip of each sock.

Behind the blind a bumblebee was beating itself against the windowpane and buzzing. Sofya Petrovna looked at the threads on the socks, listened to the bee, and pictured how she would set off.… Vis-à-vis Ilyin would sit, day and night, never taking his eyes off her, wrathful at his own weakness and pale with spiritual agony. He would call himself an immoral schoolboy, would abuse her, tear his hair, but when darkness came on and the passengers were asleep or got out at a station, he would seize the opportunity to kneel before her and embrace her knees as he had at the seat in the wood.…

She caught herself indulging in this daydream.

“Listen. I won’t go alone,” she said. “You must come with me.”

“Nonsense, Sofotchka!” sighed Lubyantsev. “One must be sensible and not want the impossible.”

“You will come when you know all about it,” thought Sofya Petrovna.

Making up her mind to go at all costs, she felt that she was out of danger. Little by little her ideas grew clearer; her spirits rose and she allowed herself to think about it all, feeling that however much she thought, however much she dreamed, she would go away. While her husband was asleep, the evening gradually came on. She sat in the drawing room and played the piano. The greater liveliness out of doors, the sound of music, but above all the thought that she was a sensible person, that she had surmounted her difficulties, completely restored her spirits. Other women, her appeased conscience told her, would probably have been carried off their feet in her position, and would have lost their balance, while she had almost died of shame, had been miserable, and was now running out of the danger which perhaps did not exist! She was so touched by her own virtue and determination that she even looked at herself two or three times in the looking-glass.

When it got dark, visitors arrived. The men sat down in the dining room to play cards; the ladies remained in the drawing room and the verandah. The last to arrive was Ilyin. He was gloomy, morose, and looked ill. He sat down in the corner of the sofa and did not move the whole evening. Usually good-humoured and talkative, this time he remained silent, frowned, and rubbed his eyebrows. When he had to

answer some question, he gave a forced smile with his upper lip only, and answered jerkily and irritably. Four or five times he made some jest, but his jests sounded harsh and cutting. It seemed to Sofya Petrovna that he was on the verge of hysterics. Only now, sitting at the piano, she recognized fully for the first time that this unhappy man was in deadly earnest, that his soul was sick, and that he could find no rest. For her sake he was wasting the best days of his youth and his career, spending the last of his money on a summer villa, abandoning his mother and sisters, and, worst of all, wearing himself out in an agonizing struggle with himself. From mere common humanity he ought to be treated seriously.

She recognized all this clearly till it made her heart ache, and if at that moment she had gone up to him and said to him, “No,” there would have been a force in her voice hard to disobey. But she did not go up to him and did not speak—indeed, never thought of doing so. The pettiness and egoism of youth had never been more patent in her than that evening. She realized that Ilyin was unhappy, and that he was sitting on the sofa as though he were on hot coals; she felt sorry for him, but at the same time the presence of a man who loved her to distraction, filled her soul with triumph and a sense of her own power. She felt her youth, her beauty, and her unassailable virtue, and, since she had decided to go away, gave herself full licence for that evening. She flirted, laughed incessantly, sang with peculiar feeling and gusto. Everything delighted and amused her. She was amused at the memory of what had happened at the seat in the wood, of the sentinel who had looked on. She was amused by her guests, by Ilyin’s cutting jests, by the pin in his cravat, which she had never noticed before. There was a red snake with diamond eyes on the pin; this snake struck her as so amusing that she could have kissed it on the spot.

Sofya Petrovna sang nervously, with defiant recklessness as though half intoxicated, and she chose sad, mournful songs which dealt with wasted hopes, the past, old age, as though in mockery of another’s grief. “‘And old age comes nearer and nearer’ …” she sang. And what was old age to her?

“It seems as though there is something going wrong with me,” she thought from time to time through her laughter and singing.

The party broke up at twelve o’clock. Ilyin was the last to leave. Sofya Petrovna was still reckless enough to accompany him to the bottom step of the verandah. She wanted to tell him that she was going away with her husband, and to watch the effect this news would produce on him.

The moon was hidden behind the clouds, but it was light enough for Sofya Petrovna to see how the wind played with the skirts of his overcoat and with the awning of the verandah. She could see, too, how white Ilyin was, and how he twisted his upper lip in the effort to smile.

"Sonia, Sonitchka… my darling woman!" he muttered, preventing her from speaking. "My dear! my sweet!"

In a rush of tenderness, with tears in his voice, he showered caressing words upon her, that grew tenderer and tenderer, and even called her "thou," as though she were his wife or mistress. Quite unexpectedly he put one arm round her waist and with the other hand took hold of her elbow.

"My precious! my delight!" he whispered, kissing the nape of her neck; "be sincere; come to me at once!"

She slipped out of his arms and raised her head to give vent to her indignation and anger, but the indignation did not come off, and all her vaunted virtue and chastity was only sufficient to enable her to utter the phrase used by all ordinary women on such occasions:

"You must be mad."

"Come, let us go," Ilyin continued. "I felt just now, as well as at the seat in the wood, that you are as helpless as I am, Sonia.… You are in the same plight! You love me and are fruitlessly trying to appease your conscience.…"

Seeing that she was moving away, he caught her by her lace cuff and said rapidly:

"If not today, then tomorrow you will have to give in! Why, then, this waste of time? My precious, darling Sonia, the sentence is passed; why put off the execution? Why deceive yourself?"

Sofya Petrovna tore herself from him and darted in at the door. Returning to the drawing room, she mechanically shut the piano, looked for a long time at the music-stand, and sat down. She could not stand up nor think. All that was left of her excitement and recklessness was a fearful weakness, apathy, and dreariness. Her conscience whispered to her that she had behaved badly, foolishly, that evening, like some madcap girl—that she had just been embraced on the verandah, and still had an uneasy feeling in her waist and her elbow. There was not a soul in the drawing room; there was only one candle burning. Madame Lubyantsev sat on the round stool before the piano, motionless, as though expecting something. And as though taking advantage of the darkness and her extreme lassitude, an oppressive, overpowering desire began to assail her. Like a boa-constrictor it gripped her limbs and her

soul, and grew stronger every second, and no longer menaced her as it had done, but stood clear before her in all its nakedness.

She sat for half an hour without stirring, not restraining herself from thinking of Ilyin, then she got up languidly and dragged herself to her bedroom. Andrey Ilyitch was already in bed. She sat down by the open window and gave herself up to desire. There was no "tangle" now in her head; all her thoughts and feelings were bent with one accord upon a single aim. She tried to struggle against it, but instantly gave it up.… She understood now how strong and relentless was the foe. Strength and fortitude were needed to combat him, and her birth, her education, and her life had given her nothing to fall back upon.

"Immoral wretch! Low creature!" she nagged at herself for her weakness. "So that's what you're like!"

Her outraged sense of propriety was moved to such indignation by this weakness that she lavished upon herself every term of abuse she knew, and told herself many offensive and humiliating truths. So, for instance, she told herself that she never had been moral, that she had not come to grief before simply because she had had no opportunity, that her inward conflict during that day had all been a farce.…

"And even if I have struggled," she thought, "what sort of struggle was it? Even the woman who sells herself struggles before she brings herself to it, and yet she sells herself. A fine struggle! Like milk, I've turned in a day! In one day!"

She convicted herself of being tempted, not by feeling, not by Ilyin personally, but by sensations which awaited her… an idle lady, having her fling in the summer holidays, like so many!

"'Like an unfledged bird when the mother has been slain,'" sang a husky tenor outside the window.

"If I am to go, it's time," thought Sofya Petrovna. Her heart suddenly began beating violently.

"Andrey!" she almost shrieked. "Listen! we… we are going? Yes?"

"Yes, I've told you already: you go alone."

"But listen," she began. "If you don't go with me, you are in danger of losing me. I believe I am… in love already."

"With whom?" asked Andrey Ilyitch.

"It can't make any difference to you who it is!" cried Sofya Petrovna.

Andrey Ilyitch sat up with his feet out of bed and looked wonderingly at his wife's dark figure.

"It's a fancy!" he yawned.

He did not believe her, but yet he was frightened. After thinking a little and asking his wife several unimportant questions, he delivered himself of his opinions on the family, on infidelity… spoke listlessly for about ten minutes and got into bed again. His moralizing produced no effect. There are a great many opinions in the world, and a good half of them are held by people who have never been in trouble!

In spite of the late hour, summer visitors were still walking outside. Sofya Petrovna put on a light cape, stood a little, thought a little.… She still had resolution enough to say to her sleeping husband:

“Are you asleep? I am going for a walk.… Will you come with me?”

That was her last hope. Receiving no answer, she went out.… It was fresh and windy. She was conscious neither of the wind nor the darkness, but went on and on.… An overmastering force drove her on, and it seemed as though, if she had stopped, it would have pushed her in the back.

“Immoral creature!” she muttered mechanically. “Low wretch!”

She was breathless, hot with shame, did not feel her legs under her, but what drove her on was stronger than shame, reason, or fear.

A Pink Stocking

A dull, rainy day. The sky is completely covered with heavy clouds, and there is no prospect of the rain ceasing. Outside sleet, puddles, and drenched jackdaws. Indoors it is half dark, and so cold that one wants the stove heated.

Pavel Petrovitch Somov is pacing up and down his study, grumbling at the weather. The tears of rain on the windows and the darkness of the room make him depressed. He is insufferably bored and has nothing to do.… The newspapers have not been brought yet; shooting is out of the question, and it is not nearly dinnertime.…

Somov is not alone in his study. Madame Somov, a pretty little lady in a light blouse and pink stockings, is sitting at his writing table. She is eagerly scribbling a letter. Every time he passes her as he strides up and down, Ivan Petrovitch looks over her shoulder at what she is writing. He sees big sprawling letters, thin and narrow, with all sorts of tails and flourishes. There are numbers of blots, smears, and fingermarks. Madame Somov does not like ruled paper, and every line runs downhill with horrid wriggles as it reaches the margin.…

“Lidotchka, who is it you are writing such a lot to?” Somov inquires, seeing that his wife is just beginning to scribble the sixth page.

“To sister Varya.”

“Hm… it’s a long letter! I’m so bored—let me read it!”

“Here, you may read it, but there’s nothing interesting in it.”

Somov takes the written pages and, still pacing up and down, begins reading. Lidotchka leans her elbows on the back of her chair and watches the expression of his face.… After the first page his face lengthens and an expression of something almost like panic comes into it.… At the third page Somov frowns and scratches the back of his head. At the fourth he pauses, looks with a scared face at his wife, and seems to ponder. After thinking a little, he takes up the letter again with a sigh.… His face betrays perplexity and even alarm.…

“Well, this is beyond anything!” he mutters, as he finishes reading the letter and flings the sheets on the table, “It’s positively incredible!”

“What’s the matter?” asks Lidotchka, flustered.

“What’s the matter! You’ve covered six pages, wasted a good two hours scribbling, and there’s nothing in it at all! If there were one tiny idea! One reads on and on, and one’s brain is as muddled as though one were deciphering the Chinese wriggles on tea chests! Ough!”

“Yes, that’s true, Vanya,…” says Lidotchka, reddening. “I wrote it carelessly.…”

“Queer sort of carelessness! In a careless letter there is some meaning and style—there is sense in it—while yours… excuse me, but I don’t know what to call it! It’s absolute twaddle! There are words and sentences, but not the slightest sense in them. Your whole letter is exactly like the conversation of two boys: ‘We had pancakes today! And we had a soldier come to see us!’ You say the same thing over and over again! You drag it out, repeat yourself.… The wretched ideas dance about like devils: there’s no making out where anything begins, where anything ends.… How can you write like that?”

“If I had been writing carefully,” Lidotchka says in self defence, “then there would not have been mistakes.…”

“Oh, I’m not talking about mistakes! The awful grammatical howlers! There’s not a line that’s not a personal insult to grammar! No stops nor commas—and the spelling… brrr! ‘Earth’ has an *a* in it! And the writing! It’s desperate! I’m not joking, Lida.… I’m surprised and appalled at your letter.… You mustn’t be angry, darling, but, really, I had no idea you were such a duffer at grammar.… And yet you belong to a cultivated, well-educated circle: you are the wife of a University man, and the daughter of a general! Tell me, did you ever go to school?”

“What next! I finished at the Von Mebke’s boarding school.…”

Somov shrugs his shoulders and continues to pace up and down, sighing. Lidotchka, conscious of her ignorance and ashamed of it, sighs too and casts down her eyes.… Ten minutes pass in silence.

“You know, Lidotchka, it really is awful!” says Somov, suddenly halting in front of her and looking into her face with horror. “You are a mother… do you understand? A mother! How can you teach your children if you know nothing yourself? You have a good brain, but what’s the use of it if you have never mastered the very rudiments of knowledge? There—never mind about knowledge… the children will get that at school, but, you know, you are very shaky on the moral side too! You sometimes use such language that it makes my ears tingle!”

Somov shrugs his shoulders again, wraps himself in the folds of his dressing-gown and continues his pacing.… He feels vexed and injured, and at the same time sorry for Lidotchka, who does not protest, but merely blinks.… Both feel oppressed and miserable.… Absorbed in their woes, they do not notice how time is passing and the dinner hour is approaching.

Sitting down to dinner, Somov, who is fond of good eating and of eating in peace, drinks a large glass of vodka and begins talking about something else. Lidotchka listens and assents, but suddenly over the soup her eyes fill with tears and she begins whimpering.

"It's all mother's fault!" she says, wiping away her tears with her dinner napkin. "Everyone advised her to send me to the high school, and from the high school I should have been sure to go on to the University!"

"University… high school," mutters Somov. "That's running to extremes, my girl! What's the good of being a blue stocking! A blue stocking is the very deuce! Neither man nor woman, but just something midway: neither one thing nor another… I hate blue stockings! I would never have married a learned woman.…"

"There's no making you out…" says Lidotchka. "You are angry because I am not learned, and at the same time you hate learned women; you are annoyed because I have no ideas in my letter, and yet you yourself are opposed to my studying.…"

"You do catch me up at a word, my dear," yawns Somov, pouring out a second glass of vodka in his boredom.

Under the influence of vodka and a good dinner, Somov grows more good-humoured, lively, and soft.… He watches his pretty wife making the salad with an anxious face and a rush of affection for her, of indulgence and forgiveness comes over him.

"It was stupid of me to depress her, poor girl…," he thought. "Why did I say such a lot of dreadful things? She is silly, that's true, uncivilised and narrow; but… there are two sides to the question, and *audiatur et altera pars*.… Perhaps people are perfectly right when they say that woman's shallowness rests on her very vocation. Granted that it is her vocation to love her husband, to bear children, and to mix salad, what the devil does she want with learning? No, indeed!"

At that point he remembers that learned women are usually tedious, that they are exacting, strict, and unyielding; and, on the other hand, how easy it is to get on with silly Lidotchka, who never pokes her nose into anything, does not understand so much, and never obtrudes her criticism.

There is peace and comfort with Lidotchka, and no risk of being interfered with.

“Confound them, those clever and learned women! It’s better and easier to live with simple ones,” he thinks, as he takes a plate of chicken from Lidotchka.

He recollects that a civilised man sometimes feels a desire to talk and share his thoughts with a clever and well-educated woman. “What of it?” thinks Somov. “If I want to talk of intellectual subjects, I’ll go to Natalya Andreyevna… or to Marya Frantsovna.… It’s very simple! But no, I shan’t go. One can discuss intellectual subjects with men,” he finally decides.

MARTYRS

Lizotchka Kudrinsky, a young married lady who had many admirers, was suddenly taken ill, and so seriously that her husband did not go to his office, and a telegram was sent to her mamma at Tver. This is how she told the story of her illness:

"I went to Lyesnoe to auntie's. I stayed there a week and then I went with all the rest to cousin Varya's. Varya's husband is a surly brute and a despot (I'd shoot a husband like that), but we had a very jolly time there. To begin with I took part in some private theatricals. It was *A Scandal in a Respectable Family*. Hrustalev acted marvellously! Between the acts I drank some cold, awfully cold, lemon squash, with the tiniest nip of brandy in it. Lemon squash with brandy in it is very much like champagne.… I drank it and I felt nothing. Next day after the performance I rode out on horseback with that Adolf Ivanitch. It was rather damp and there was a strong wind. It was most likely then that I caught cold. Three days later I came home to see how my dear, good Vassya was getting on, and while here to get my silk dress, the one that has little flowers on it. Vassya, of course, I did not find at home. I went into the kitchen to tell Praskovya to set the samovar, and there I saw on the table some pretty little carrots and turnips like playthings. I ate one little carrot and well, a turnip too. I ate very little, but only fancy, I began having a sharp pain at once—spasms… spasms… spasms… ah, I am dying. Vassya runs from the office. Naturally he clutches at his hair and turns white. They run for the doctor.… Do you understand, I am dying, dying."

The spasms began at midday, before three o'clock the doctor came, and at six Lizotchka fell asleep and slept soundly till two o'clock in the morning.

It strikes two.… The light of the little night lamp filters scantily through the pale blue shade. Lizotchka is lying in bed, her white lace cap stands out sharply against the dark background of the red cushion. Shadows from the blue lampshade lie in patterns on her pale face and her

round plump shoulders. Vassily Stepanovitch is sitting at her feet. The poor fellow is happy that his wife is at home at last, and at the same time he is terribly alarmed by her illness.

"Well, how do you feel, Lizotchka?" he asks in a whisper, noticing that she is awake.

"I am better," moans Lizotchka. "I don't feel the spasms now, but there is no sleeping.… I can't get to sleep!"

"Isn't it time to change the compress, my angel?"

Lizotchka sits up slowly with the expression of a martyr and gracefully turns her head on one side. Vassily Stepanovitch with reverent awe, scarcely touching her hot body with his fingers, changes the compress. Lizotchka shrinks, laughs at the cold water which tickles her, and lies down again.

"You are getting no sleep, poor boy!" she moans.

"As though I could sleep!"

"It's my nerves, Vassya, I am a very nervous woman. The doctor has prescribed for stomach trouble, but I feel that he doesn't understand my illness. It's nerves and not the stomach, I swear that it is my nerves. There is only one thing I am afraid of, that my illness may take a bad turn."

"No, Lizotchka, no, tomorrow you will be all right!"

"Hardly likely! I am not afraid for myself.… I don't care, indeed, I shall be glad to die, but I am sorry for you! You'll be a widower and left all alone."

Vassitchka rarely enjoys his wife's society, and has long been used to solitude, but Lizotchka's words agitate him.

"Goodness knows what you are saying, little woman! Why these gloomy thoughts?"

"Well, you will cry and grieve, and then you will get used to it. You'll even get married again."

The husband clutches his head.

"There, there, I won't!" Lizotchka soothes him, "only you ought to be prepared for anything."

"And all of a sudden I shall die," she thinks, shutting her eyes.

And Lizotchka draws a mental picture of her own death, how her mother, her husband, her cousin Varya with her husband, her relations, the admirers of her "talent" press round her death bed, as she whispers her last farewell. All are weeping. Then when she is dead they dress her, interestingly pale and dark-haired, in a pink dress (it suits her) and lay her in a very expensive coffin on gold legs, full of flowers. There is a

smell of incense, the candles splutter. Her husband never leaves the coffin, while the admirers of her talent cannot take their eyes off her, and say: “As though living! She is lovely in her coffin!” The whole town is talking of the life cut short so prematurely. But now they are carrying her to the church. The bearers are Ivan Petrovitch, Adolf Ivanitch, Varya’s husband, Nikolay Semyonitch, and the black-eyed student who had taught her to drink lemon squash with brandy. It’s only a pity there’s no music playing. After the burial service comes the leave-taking. The church is full of sobs, they bring the lid with tassels, and… Lizotchka is shut off from the light of day forever, there is the sound of hammering nails. Knock, knock, knock.

Lizotchka shudders and opens her eyes.

“Vassya, are you here?” she asks. “I have such gloomy thoughts. Goodness, why am I so unlucky as not to sleep. Vassya, have pity, do tell me something!”

“What shall I tell you?”

“Something about love,” Lizotchka says languidly. “Or some anecdote about Jews….”

Vassily Stepanovitch, ready for anything if only his wife will be cheerful and not talk about death, combs locks of hair over his ears, makes an absurd face, and goes up to Lizotchka.

“Does your vatch vant mending?” he asks.

“It does, it does,” giggles Lizotchka, and hands him her gold watch from the little table. “Mend it.”

Vassya takes the watch, examines the mechanism for a long time, and wriggling and shrugging, says: “She can not be mended… in vun veel two cogs are vanting….”

This is the whole performance. Lizotchka laughs and claps her hands.

“Capital,” she exclaims. “Wonderful. Do you know, Vassya, it’s awfully stupid of you not to take part in amateur theatricals! You have a remarkable talent! You are much better than Sysunov. There was an amateur called Sysunov who played with us in *It’s My Birthday*. A first-class comic talent, only fancy: a nose as thick as a parsnip, green eyes, and he walks like a crane…. We all roared; stay, I will show you how he walks.”

Lizotchka springs out of bed and begins pacing about the floor, barefooted and without her cap.

“A very good day to you!” she says in a bass, imitating a man’s voice. “Anything pretty? Anything new under the moon? Ha, ha, ha!” she laughs.

“Ha, ha, ha!” Vassya seconds her. And the young pair, roaring with laughter, forgetting the illness, chase one another about the room. The race ends in Vassya’s catching his wife by her nightgown and eagerly showering kisses upon her. After one particularly passionate embrace Lizotchka suddenly remembers that she is seriously ill.…

“What silliness!” she says, making a serious face and covering herself with the quilt. “I suppose you have forgotten that I am ill! Clever, I must say!”

“Sorry…” falters her husband in confusion.

“If my illness takes a bad turn it will be your fault. Not kind! not good!”

Lizotchka closes her eyes and is silent. Her former languor and expression of martyrdom return again, there is a sound of gentle moans. Vassya changes the compress, and glad that his wife is at home and not gadding off to her aunt’s, sits meekly at her feet. He does not sleep all night. At ten o’clock the doctor comes.

“Well, how are we feeling?” he asks as he takes her pulse. “Have you slept?”

“Badly,” Lizotchka’s husband answers for her, “very badly.”

The doctor walks away to the window and stares at a passing chimney-sweep.

“Doctor, may I have coffee today?” asks Lizotchka.

“You may.”

“And may I get up?”

“You might, perhaps, but… you had better lie in bed another day.”

“She is awfully depressed,” Vassya whispers in his ear, “such gloomy thoughts, such pessimism. I am dreadfully uneasy about her.”

The doctor sits down to the little table, and rubbing his forehead, prescribes bromide of potassium for Lizotchka, then makes his bow, and promising to look in again in the evening, departs. Vassya does not go to the office, but sits all day at his wife’s feet.

At midday the admirers of her talent arrive in a crowd. They are agitated and alarmed, they bring masses of flowers and French novels. Lizotchka, in a snow-white cap and a light dressing jacket, lies in bed with an enigmatic look, as though she did not believe in her own recovery. The admirers of her talent see her husband, but readily forgive his presence: they and he are united by one calamity at that bedside!

At six o’clock in the evening Lizotchka falls asleep, and again sleeps till two o’clock in the morning. Vassya as before sits at her feet, struggles with drowsiness, changes her compress, plays at being a Jew, and in the

morning after a second night of suffering, Liza is prinking before the looking-glass and putting on her hat.

“Wherever are you going, my dear?” asks Vassya, with an imploring look at her.

“What?” says Lizotchka in wonder, assuming a scared expression, “don’t you know that there is a rehearsal today at Marya Lvovna’s?”

After escorting her there, Vassya having nothing to do to while away his boredom, takes his portfolio and goes to the office. His head aches so violently from his sleepless nights that his left eye shuts of itself and refuses to open.…

“What’s the matter with you, my good sir?” his chief asks him. “What is it?”

Vassy a waves his hand and sits down.

“Don’t ask me, your Excellency,” he says with a sigh. “What I have suffered in these two days, what I have suffered! Liza has been ill!”

“Good heavens,” cried his chief in alarm. “Lizaveta Pavlovna, what is wrong with her?”

Vassily Stepanovitch merely throws up his hands and raises his eyes to the ceiling, as though he would say: “It’s the will of Providence.”

“Ah, my boy, I can sympathise with you with all my heart!” sighs his chief, rolling his eyes. “I’ve lost my wife, my dear, I understand. That is a loss, it is a loss! It’s awful, awful! I hope Lizaveta Pavlovna is better now! What doctor is attending her?”

“Von Schterk.”

“Von Schterk! But you would have been better to have called in Magnus or Semandritsky. But how very pale your face is. You are ill yourself! This is awful!”

“Yes, your Excellency, I haven’t slept. What I have suffered, what I have been through!”

“And yet you came! Why you came I can’t understand? One can’t force oneself like that! One mustn’t do oneself harm like that. Go home and stay there till you are well again! Go home, I command you! Zeal is a very fine thing in a young official, but you mustn’t forget as the Romans used to say: ‘*mens sana in corpore sano*,’ that is, a healthy brain in a healthy body.”

Vassya agrees, puts his papers back in his portfolio, and, taking leave of his chief, goes home to bed.

The First-Class Passenger

A first-class passenger who had just dined at the station and drunk a little too much lay down on the velvet-covered seat, stretched himself out luxuriously, and sank into a doze. After a nap of no more than five minutes, he looked with oily eyes at his vis-à-vis, gave a smirk, and said:

"My father of blessed memory used to like to have his heels tickled by peasant women after dinner. I am just like him, with this difference, that after dinner I always like my tongue and my brains gently stimulated. Sinful man as I am, I like empty talk on a full stomach. Will you allow me to have a chat with you?"

"I shall be delighted," answered the vis-à-vis.

"After a good dinner the most trifling subject is sufficient to arouse devilishly great thoughts in my brain. For instance, we saw just now near the refreshment bar two young men, and you heard one congratulate the other on being celebrated. 'I congratulate you,' he said; 'you are already a celebrity and are beginning to win fame.' Evidently actors or journalists of microscopic dimensions. But they are not the point. The question that is occupying my mind at the moment, sir, is exactly what is to be understood by the word *fame* or *charity*. What do you think? Pushkin called fame a bright patch on a ragged garment; we all understand it as Pushkin does—that is, more or less subjectively—but no one has yet given a clear, logical definition of the word.… I would give a good deal for such a definition!"

"Why do you feel such a need for it?"

"You see, if we knew what fame is, the means of attaining it might also perhaps be known to us," said the first-class passenger, after a moment's thought. "I must tell you, sir, that when I was younger I strove after celebrity with every fiber of my being. To be popular was my craze, so to speak. For the sake of it I studied, worked, sat up at night, neglected my meals. And I fancy, as far as I can judge without partiality, I had all the natural gifts for attaining it. To begin with, I am an engineer by profession. In the course of my life I have built in Russia some two

dozen magnificent bridges, I have laid aqueducts for three towns; I have worked in Russia, in England, in Belgium.… Secondly, I am the author of several special treatises in my own line. And thirdly, my dear sir, I have from a boy had a weakness for chemistry. Studying that science in my leisure hours, I discovered methods of obtaining certain organic acids, so that you will find my name in all the foreign manuals of chemistry. I have always been in the service, I have risen to the grade of actual civil councilor, and I have an unblemished record. I will not fatigue your attention by enumerating my works and my merits, I will only say that I have done far more than some celebrities. And yet here I am in my old age, I am getting ready for my coffin, so to say, and I am as celebrated as that black dog yonder running on the embankment."

"How can you tell? Perhaps you are celebrated."

"H'm! Well, we will test it at once. Tell me, have you ever heard the name Krikunov?"

The vis-à-vis raised his eyes to the ceiling, thought a minute, and laughed.

"No, I haven't heard it,…" he said.

"That is my surname. You, a man of education, getting on in years, have never heard of me—a convincing proof! It is evident that in my efforts to gain fame I have not done the right thing at all: I did not know the right way to set to work, and, trying to catch fame by the tail, got on the wrong side of her."

"What is the right way to set to work?"

"Well, the devil only knows! Talent, you say? Genius? Originality? Not a bit of it, sir!… People have lived and made a career side by side with me who were worthless, trivial, and even contemptible compared with me. They did not do one-tenth of the work I did, did not put themselves out, were not distinguished for their talents, and did not make an effort to be celebrated, but just look at them! Their names are continually in the newspapers and on men's lips! If you are not tired of listening I will illustrate it by an example. Some years ago I built a bridge in the town of K——. I must tell you that the dullness of that scurvy little town was terrible. If it had not been for women and cards I believe I should have gone out of my mind. Well, it's an old story: I was so bored that I got into an affair with a singer. Everyone was enthusiastic about her, the devil only knows why; to my thinking she was—what shall I say?—an ordinary, commonplace creature, like lots of others. The hussy was empty-headed, ill-tempered, greedy, and what's more, she was a fool.

“She ate and drank a vast amount, slept till five o’clock in the afternoon—and I fancy did nothing else. She was looked upon as a cocotte, and that was indeed her profession; but when people wanted to refer to her in a literary fashion, they called her an actress and a singer. I used to be devoted to the theatre, and therefore this fraudulent pretense of being an actress made me furiously indignant. My young lady had not the slightest right to call herself an actress or a singer. She was a creature entirely devoid of talent, devoid of feeling—a pitiful creature one may say. As far as I can judge she sang disgustingly. The whole charm of her ‘art’ lay in her kicking up her legs on every suitable occasion, and not being embarrassed when people walked into her dressing room. She usually selected translated vaudevilles, with singing in them, and opportunities for disporting herself in male attire, in tights. In fact it was—ough! Well, I ask your attention. As I remember now, a public ceremony took place to celebrate the opening of the newly constructed bridge. There was a religious service, there were speeches, telegrams, and so on. I hung about my cherished creation, you know, all the while afraid that my heart would burst with the excitement of an author. Its an old story and there’s no need for false modesty, and so I will tell you that my bridge was a magnificent work! It was not a bridge but a picture, a perfect delight! And who would not have been excited when the whole town came to the opening? ‘Oh,’ I thought, ‘now the eyes of all the public will be on me! Where shall I hide myself?’ Well, I need not have worried myself, sir—alas! Except the official personages, no one took the slightest notice of me. They stood in a crowd on the riverbank, gazed like sheep at the bridge, and did not concern themselves to know who had built it. And it was from that time, by the way, that I began to hate our estimable public—damnation take them! Well, to continue. All at once the public became agitated; a whisper ran through the crowd,… a smile came on their faces, their shoulders began to move. ‘They must have seen me,’ I thought. A likely idea! I looked, and my singer, with a train of young scamps, was making her way through the crowd. The eyes of the crowd were hurriedly following this procession. A whisper began in a thousand voices: ‘That’s so-and-so.… Charming! Bewitching!’ Then it was they noticed me.… A couple of young milksops, local amateurs of the scenic art, I presume, looked at me, exchanged glances, and whispered: ‘That’s her lover!’ How do you like that? And an unprepossessing individual in a top-hat, with a chin that badly needed shaving, hung round me, shifting from one foot to the other, then turned to me with the words:

“‘Do you know who that lady is, walking on the other bank? That’s so-and-so.… Her voice is beneath all criticism, but she has a most perfect mastery of it!…’

“‘Can you tell me,’ I asked the unprepossessing individual, ‘who built this bridge?’

“‘I really don’t know,’ answered the individual; some engineer, I expect.’

“‘And who built the cathedral in your town?’ I asked again.

“‘I really can’t tell you.’

“Then I asked him who was considered the best teacher in K——, who the best architect, and to all my questions the unprepossessing individual answered that he did not know.

“‘And tell me, please,’ I asked in conclusion, with whom is that singer living?’

“‘With some engineer called Krikunov.’

“Well, how do you like that, sir? But to proceed. There are no minnesingers or bards nowadays, and celebrity is created almost exclusively by the newspapers. The day after the dedication of the bridge, I greedily snatched up the local *Messenger*, and looked for myself in it. I spent a long time running my eyes over all the four pages, and at last there it was—hurrah! I began reading: ‘Yesterday in beautiful weather, before a vast concourse of people, in the presence of His Excellency the Governor of the province, so-and-so, and other dignitaries, the ceremony of the dedication of the newly constructed bridge took place,’ and so on.… Towards the end: Our talented actress so-and-so, the favorite of the K—— public, was present at the dedication looking very beautiful. I need not say that her arrival created a sensation. The star was wearing…’ and so on. They might have given me one word! Half a word. Petty as it seems, I actually cried with vexation!

“I consoled myself with the reflection that the provinces are stupid, and one could expect nothing of them and for celebrity one must go to the intellectual centers—to Petersburg and to Moscow. And as it happened, at that very time there was a work of mine in Petersburg which I had sent in for a competition. The date on which the result was to be declared was at hand.

“I took leave of K—— and went to Petersburg. It is a long journey from K—— to Petersburg, and that I might not be bored on the journey I took a reserved compartment and—well—of course, I took my singer. We set off, and all the way we were eating, drinking champagne, and—tra-la-la! But behold, at last we reach the intellectual center. I arrived on

the very day the result was declared, and had the satisfaction, my dear sir, of celebrating my own success: my work received the first prize. Hurrah! Next day I went out along the Nevsky and spent seventy kopecks on various newspapers. I hastened to my hotel room, lay down on the sofa, and, controlling a quiver of excitement, made haste to read. I ran through one newspaper—nothing. I ran through a second—nothing either; my God! At last, in the fourth, I lighted upon the following paragraph: 'Yesterday the well-known provincial actress so-and-so arrived by express in Petersburg. We note with pleasure that the climate of the South has had a beneficial effect on our fair friend; her charming stage appearance…' and I don't remember the rest! Much lower down than that paragraph I found, printed in the smallest type: first prize in the competition was adjudged to an engineer called so-and-so.' That was all! And to make things better, they even misspelt my name: instead of Krikunov it was Kirkutlov. So much for your intellectual center! But that was not all.… By the time I left Petersburg, a month later, all the newspapers were vying with one another in discussing our incomparable, divine, highly talented actress, and my mistress was referred to, not by her surname, but by her Christian name and her father's.…

"Some years later I was in Moscow. I was summoned there by a letter, in the mayor's own handwriting, to undertake a work for which Moscow, in its newspapers, had been clamoring for over a hundred years. In the intervals of my work I delivered five public lectures, with a philanthropic object, in one of the museums there. One would have thought that was enough to make one known to the whole town for three days at least, wouldn't one? But, alas! not a single Moscow gazette said a word about me. There was something about houses on fire, about an operetta, sleeping town councilors, drunken shop keepers—about everything; but about my work, my plans, my lectures—mum. And a nice set they are in Moscow! I got into a tram.… It was packed full; there were ladies and military men and students of both sexes, creatures of all sorts in couples.

"'I am told the town council has sent for an engineer to plan such and such a work!' I said to my neighbor, so loudly that all the tram could hear. 'Do you know the name of the engineer?'

"My neighbor shook his head. The rest of the public took a cursory glance at me, and in all their eyes I read: 'I don't know.'

"'I am told that there is someone giving lectures in such and such a museum?' I persisted, trying to get up a conversation. 'I hear it is interesting.'

“No one even nodded. Evidently they had not all of them heard of the lectures, and the ladies were not even aware of the existence of the museum. All that would not have mattered, but imagine, my dear sir, the people suddenly leaped to their feet and struggled to the windows. What was it? What was the matter?

“‘Look, look!’ my neighbor nudged me. ‘Do you see that dark man getting into that cab? That’s the famous runner, King!’

“And the whole tram began talking breathlessly of the runner who was then absorbing the brains of Moscow.

“I could give you ever so many other examples, but I think that is enough. Now let us assume that I am mistaken about myself, that I am a wretchedly boastful and incompetent person; but apart from myself I might point to many of my contemporaries, men remarkable for their talent and industry, who have nevertheless died unrecognized. Are Russian navigators, chemists, physicists, mechanicians, and agriculturists popular with the public? Do our cultivated masses know anything of Russian artists, sculptors, and literary men? Some old literary hack, hardworking and talented, will wear away the doorstep of the publishers’ offices for thirty-three years, cover reams of paper, be had up for libel twenty times, and yet not step beyond his ant-heap. Can you mention to me a single representative of our literature who would have become celebrated if the rumor had not been spread over the earth that he had been killed in a duel, gone out of his mind, been sent into exile, or had cheated at cards?”

The first-class passenger was so excited that he dropped his cigar out of his mouth and got up.

“Yes,” he went on fiercely, “and side by side with these people I can quote you hundreds of all sorts of singers, acrobats, buffoons, whose names are known to every baby. Yes!”

The door creaked, there was a draught, and an individual of forbidding aspect, wearing an Inverness coat, a top-hat, and blue spectacles, walked into the carriage. The individual looked round at the seats, frowned, and went on further.

“Do you know who that is?” there came a timid whisper from the furthest corner of the compartment.

“That is N. N., the famous Tula cardsharper who was had up in connection with the Y—— bank affair.”

“There you are!” laughed the first-class passenger. “He knows a Tula cardsharper, but ask him whether he knows Semiradsky, Tchaykovsky, or Solovyov the philosopher—he’ll shake his head.… It swinish!”

Three minutes passed in silence.

“Allow me in my turn to ask you a question,” said the vis-à-vis timidly, clearing his throat. “Do you know the name of Pushkov?”

“Pushkov? H’m! Pushkov.… No, I don’t know it!”

“That is my name,…” said the vis-à-vis, overcome with embarrassment. “Then you don’t know it? And yet I have been a professor at one of the Russian universities for thirty-five years,… a member of the Academy of Sciences,… have published more than one work.…”

The first-class passenger and the vis-à-vis looked at each other and burst out laughing.

TALENT

An artist called Yegor Savvitch, who was spending his summer holidays at the house of an officer's widow, was sitting on his bed, given up to the depression of morning. It was beginning to look like autumn out of doors. Heavy, clumsy clouds covered the sky in thick layers; there was a cold, piercing wind, and with a plaintive wail the trees were all bending on one side. He could see the yellow leaves whirling round in the air and on the earth. Farewell, summer! This melancholy of nature is beautiful and poetical in its own way, when it is looked at with the eyes of an artist, but Yegor Savvitch was in no humour to see beauty. He was devoured by ennui and his only consolation was the thought that by tomorrow he would not be there. The bed, the chairs, the tables, the floor, were all heaped up with cushions, crumpled bedclothes, boxes. The floor had not been swept, the cotton curtains had been taken down from the windows. Next day he was moving, to town.

His landlady, the widow, was out. She had gone off somewhere to hire horses and carts to move next day to town. Profiting by the absence of her severe mamma, her daughter Katya, aged twenty, had for a long time been sitting in the young man's room. Next day the painter was going away, and she had a great deal to say to him. She kept talking, talking, and yet she felt that she had not said a tenth of what she wanted to say. With her eyes full of tears, she gazed at his shaggy head, gazed at it with rapture and sadness. And Yegor Savvitch was shaggy to a hideous extent, so that he looked like a wild animal. His hair hung down to his shoulder-blades, his beard grew from his neck, from his nostrils, from his ears; his eyes were lost under his thick overhanging brows. It was all so thick, so matted, that if a fly or a beetle had been caught in his hair, it would never have found its way out of this enchanted thicket. Yegor Savvitch listened to Katya, yawning. He was tired. When Katya began whimpering, he looked severely at her from his overhanging eyebrows, frowned, and said in a heavy, deep bass:

"I cannot marry."

“Why not?” Katya asked softly.

“Because for a painter, and in fact any man who lives for art, marriage is out of the question. An artist must be free.”

“But in what way should I hinder you, Yegor Savvitch?”

“I am not speaking of myself, I am speaking in general.… Famous authors and painters have never married.”

“And you, too, will be famous—I understand that perfectly. But put yourself in my place. I am afraid of my mother. She is stern and irritable. When she knows that you won’t marry me, and that it’s all nothing… she’ll begin to give it to me. Oh, how wretched I am! And you haven’t paid for your rooms, either!…”

“Damn her! I’ll pay.”

Yegor Savvitch got up and began walking to and fro.

“I ought to be abroad!” he said. And the artist told her that nothing was easier than to go abroad. One need do nothing but paint a picture and sell it.

“Of course!” Katya assented. “Why haven’t you painted one in the summer?”

“Do you suppose I can work in a barn like this?” the artist said ill-humouredly. “And where should I get models?”

Someone banged the door viciously in the storey below. Katya, who was expecting her mother’s return from minute to minute, jumped up and ran away. The artist was left alone. For a long time he walked to and fro, threading his way between the chairs and the piles of untidy objects of all sorts. He heard the widow rattling the crockery and loudly abusing the peasants who had asked her two roubles for each cart. In his disgust Yegor Savvitch stopped before the cupboard and stared for a long while, frowning at the decanter of vodka.

“Ah, blast you!” he heard the widow railing at Katya. “Damnation take you!”

The artist drank a glass of vodka, and the dark cloud in his soul gradually disappeared, and he felt as though all his inside was smiling within him. He began dreaming.… His fancy pictured how he would become great. He could not imagine his future works but he could see distinctly how the papers would talk of him, how the shops would sell his photographs, with what envy his friends would look after him. He tried to picture himself in a magnificent drawing room surrounded by pretty and adoring women; but the picture was misty, vague, as he had never in his life seen a drawing room. The pretty and adoring women were not a success either, for, except Katya, he knew no adoring woman,

not even one respectable girl. People who know nothing about life usually picture life from books, but Yegor Savvitch knew no books either. He had tried to read Gogol, but had fallen asleep on the second page.

"It won't burn, drat the thing!" the widow bawled down below, as she set the samovar. "Katya, give me some charcoal!"

The dreamy artist felt a longing to share his hopes and dreams with someone. He went downstairs into the kitchen, where the stout widow and Katya were busy about a dirty stove in the midst of charcoal fumes from the samovar. There he sat down on a bench close to a big pot and began:

"It's a fine thing to be an artist! I can go just where I like, do what I like. One has not to work in an office or in the fields. I've no superiors or officers over me.… I'm my own superior. And with all that I'm doing good to humanity!"

And after dinner he composed himself for a "rest." He usually slept till the twilight of evening. But this time soon after dinner he felt that someone was pulling at his leg. Someone kept laughing and shouting his name. He opened his eyes and saw his friend Ukleikin, the landscape painter, who had been away all the summer in the Kostroma district.

"Bah!" he cried, delighted. "What do I see?"

There followed handshakes, questions.

"Well, have you brought anything? I suppose you've knocked off hundreds of sketches?" said Yegor Savvitch, watching Ukleikin taking his belongings out of his trunk.

"H'm!… Yes. I have done something. And how are you getting on? Have you been painting anything?"

Yegor Savvitch dived behind the bed, and crimson in the face, extracted a canvas in a frame covered with dust and spider webs.

"See here.… A girl at the window after parting from her betrothed. In three sittings. Not nearly finished yet."

The picture represented Katya faintly outlined sitting at an open window, from which could be seen a garden and lilac distance. Ukleikin did not like the picture.

"H'm!… There is air and… and there is expression," he said. "There's a feeling of distance, but… but that bush is screaming… screaming horribly!"

The decanter was brought on to the scene.

Towards evening Kostyliov, also a promising beginner, an historical painter, came in to see Yegor Savvitch. He was a friend staying at the

next villa, and was a man of five-and-thirty. He had long hair, and wore a blouse with a Shakespeare collar, and had a dignified manner. Seeing the vodka, he frowned, complained of his chest, but yielding to his friends' entreaties, drank a glass.

"I've thought of a subject, my friends," he began, getting drunk. "I want to paint some new… Herod or Clepentian, or some blackguard of that description, you understand, and to contrast with him the idea of Christianity. On the one side Rome, you understand, and on the other Christianity.… I want to represent the spirit, you understand? The spirit!"

And the widow downstairs shouted continually:

"Katya, give me the cucumbers! Go to Sidorov's and get some kvass, you jade!"

Like wolves in a cage, the three friends kept pacing to and fro from one end of the room to the other. They talked without ceasing, talked, hotly and genuinely; all three were excited, carried away. To listen to them it would seem they had the future, fame, money, in their hands. And it never occurred to either of them that time was passing, that every day life was nearing its close, that they had lived at other people's expense a great deal and nothing yet was accomplished; that they were all bound by the inexorable law by which of a hundred promising beginners only two or three rise to any position and all the others draw blanks in the lottery, perish playing the part of flesh for the cannon.… They were gay and happy, and looked the future boldly in the face!

At one o'clock in the morning Kostyliov said goodbye, and smoothing out his Shakespeare collar, went home. The landscape painter remained to sleep at Yegor Savvitch's. Before going to bed, Yegor Savvitch took a candle and made his way into the kitchen to get a drink of water. In the dark, narrow passage Katya was sitting, on a box, and, with her hands clasped on her knees, was looking upwards. A blissful smile was straying on her pale, exhausted face, and her eyes were beaming.

"Is that you? What are you thinking about?" Yegor Savvitch asked her.

"I am thinking of how you'll be famous," she said in a half-whisper. "I keep fancying how you'll become a famous man.… I overheard all your talk.… I keep dreaming and dreaming.…"

Katya went off into a happy laugh, cried, and laid her hands reverently on her idol's shoulders.

The Dependents

Mihail Petrovitch Zotov, a decrepit and solitary old man of seventy, belonging to the artisan class, was awakened by the cold and the aching in his old limbs. It was dark in his room, but the little lamp before the icon was no longer burning. Zotov raised the curtain and looked out of the window. The clouds that shrouded the sky were beginning to show white here and there, and the air was becoming transparent, so it must have been nearly five, not more.

Zotov cleared his throat, coughed, and shrinking from the cold, got out of bed. In accordance with years of habit, he stood for a long time before the icon, saying his prayers. He repeated "Our Father," "Hail Mary," the Creed, and mentioned a long string of names. To whom those names belonged he had forgotten years ago, and he only repeated them from habit. From habit, too, he swept his room and entry, and set his fat little four-legged copper samovar. If Zotov had not had these habits he would not have known how to occupy his old age.

The little samovar slowly began to get hot, and all at once, unexpectedly, broke into a tremulous bass hum.

"Oh, you've started humming!" grumbled Zotov. "Hum away then, and bad luck to you!"

At that point the old man appropriately recalled that, in the preceding night, he had dreamed of a stove, and to dream of a stove is a sign of sorrow.

Dreams and omens were the only things left that could rouse him to reflection; and on this occasion he plunged with a special zest into the considerations of the questions: What the samovar was humming for? and what sorrow was foretold by the stove? The dream seemed to come true from the first. Zotov rinsed out his teapot and was about to make his tea, when he found there was not one teaspoonful left in the box.

"What an existence!" he grumbled, rolling crumbs of black bread round in his mouth. "It's a dog's life. No tea! And it isn't as though I were a simple peasant: I'm an artisan and a houseowner. The disgrace!"

Grumbling and talking to himself, Zotov put on his overcoat, which was like a crinoline, and, thrusting his feet into huge clumsy golosh-boots (made in the year 1867 by a bootmaker called Prohoritch), went out into the yard. The air was grey, cold, and sullenly still. The big yard, full of tufts of burdock and strewn with yellow leaves, was faintly silvered with autumn frost. Not a breath of wind nor a sound. The old man sat down on the steps of his slanting porch, and at once there happened what happened regularly every morning: his dog Lyska, a big, mangy, decrepit-looking, white yard-dog, with black patches, came up to him with its right eye shut. Lyska came up timidly, wriggling in a frightened way, as though her paws were not touching the earth but a hot stove, and the whole of her wretched figure was expressive of abjectness. Zotov pretended not to notice her, but when she faintly wagged her tail, and, wriggling as before, licked his golosh, he stamped his foot angrily.

"Be off! The plague take you!" he cried. "Con-found-ed bea-east!"

Lyska moved aside, sat down, and fixed her solitary eye upon her master.

"You devils!" he went on. "You are the last straw on my back, you Herods."

And he looked with hatred at his shed with its crooked, overgrown roof; there from the door of the shed a big horse's head was looking out at him. Probably flattered by its master's attention, the head moved, pushed forward, and there emerged from the shed the whole horse, as decrepit as Lyska, as timid and as crushed, with spindly legs, grey hair, a pinched stomach, and a bony spine. He came out of the shed and stood still, hesitating as though overcome with embarrassment.

"Plague take you," Zotov went on. "Shall I ever see the last of you, you jailbird Pharaohs!… I wager you want your breakfast!" he jeered, twisting his angry face into a contemptuous smile. "By all means, this minute! A priceless steed like you must have your fill of the best oats! Pray begin! This minute! And I have something to give to the magnificent, valuable dog! If a precious dog like you does not care for bread, you can have meat."

Zotov grumbled for half an hour, growing more and more irritated. In the end, unable to control the anger that boiled up in him, he jumped up, stamped with his goloshes, and growled out to be heard all over the yard:

"I am not obliged to feed you, you loafers! I am not some millionaire for you to eat me out of house and home! I have nothing to eat myself, you cursed carcases, the cholera take you! I get no pleasure or profit out of you; nothing but trouble and ruin, Why don't you give up the ghost?

Are you such personages that even death won't take you? You can live, damn you! but I don't want to feed you! I have had enough of you! I don't want to!"

Zotov grew wrathful and indignant, and the horse and the dog listened. Whether these two dependents understood that they were being reproached for living at his expense, I don't know, but their stomachs looked more pinched than ever, and their whole figures shrivelled up, grew gloomier and more abject than before.… Their submissive air exasperated Zotov more than ever.

"Get away!" he shouted, overcome by a sort of inspiration. "Out of my house! Don't let me set eyes on you again! I am not obliged to keep all sorts of rubbish in my yard! Get away!"

The old man moved with little hurried steps to the gate, opened it, and picking up a stick from the ground, began driving out his dependents. The horse shook its head, moved its shoulder-blades, and limped to the gate; the dog followed him. Both of them went out into the street, and, after walking some twenty paces, stopped at the fence.

"I'll give it you!" Zotov threatened them.

When he had driven out his dependents he felt calmer, and began sweeping the yard. From time to time he peeped out into the street: the horse and the dog were standing like posts by the fence, looking dejectedly towards the gate.

"Try how you can do without me," muttered the old man, feeling as though a weight of anger were being lifted from his heart. "Let somebody else look after you now! I am stingy and ill-tempered.… It's nasty living with me, so you try living with other people.… Yes.…"

After enjoying the crushed expression of his dependents, and grumbling to his heart's content, Zotov went out of the yard, and, assuming a ferocious air, shouted:

"Well, why are you standing there? Whom are you waiting for? Standing right across the middle of the road and preventing the public from passing! Go into the yard!"

The horse and the dog with drooping heads and a guilty air turned towards the gate. Lyska, probably feeling she did not deserve forgiveness, whined piteously.

"Stay you can, but as for food, you'll get nothing from me! You may die, for all I care!"

Meanwhile the sun began to break through the morning mist; its slanting rays gilded over the autumn frost. There was a sound of steps and voices. Zotov put back the broom in its place, and went out of the

yard to see his crony and neighbour, Mark Ivanitch, who kept a little general shop. On reaching his friend's shop, he sat down on a folding-stool, sighed sedately, stroked his beard, and began about the weather. From the weather the friends passed to the new deacon, from the deacon to the choristers; and the conversation lengthened out. They did not notice as they talked how time was passing, and when the shopboy brought in a big teapot of boiling water, and the friends proceeded to drink tea, the time flew as quickly as a bird. Zotov got warm and felt more cheerful.

"I have a favour to ask of you, Mark Ivanitch," he began, after the sixth glass, drumming on the counter with his fingers. "If you would just be so kind as to give me a gallon of oats again today.…"

From behind the big tea-chest behind which Mark Ivanitch was sitting came the sound of a deep sigh.

"Do be so good," Zotov went on; "never mind tea—don't give it me today, but let me have some oats.… I am ashamed to ask you, I have wearied you with my poverty, but the horse is hungry."

"I can give it you," sighed the friend—"why not? But why the devil do you keep those carcases?—tfoo!—Tell me that, please. It would be all right if it were a useful horse, but—tfoo!—one is ashamed to look at it.… And the dog's nothing but a skeleton! Why the devil do you keep them?"

"What am I to do with them?"

"You know. Take them to Ignat the slaughterer—that is all there is to do. They ought to have been there long ago. It's the proper place for them."

"To be sure, that is so!… I dare say!…"

"You live like a beggar and keep animals," the friend went on. "I don't grudge the oats.… God bless you. But as to the future, brother… I can't afford to give regularly every day! There is no end to your poverty! One gives and gives, and one doesn't know when there will be an end to it all."

The friend sighed and stroked his red face.

"If you were dead that would settle it," he said. "You go on living, and you don't know what for.… Yes, indeed! But if it is not the Lord's will for you to die, you had better go somewhere into an almshouse or a refuge."

"What for? I have relations. I have a great-niece.…"

And Zotov began telling at great length of his great-niece Glasha, daughter of his niece Katerina, who lived somewhere on a farm.

“She is bound to keep me!” he said. “My house will be left to her, so let her keep me; I’ll go to her. It’s Glasha, you know… Katya’s daughter; and Katya, you know, was my brother Panteley’s stepdaughter.… You understand? The house will come to her.… Let her keep me!”

“To be sure; rather than live, as you do, a beggar, I should have gone to her long ago.”

“I will go! As God’s above, I will go. It’s her duty.”

When an hour later the old friends were drinking a glass of vodka, Zotov stood in the middle of the shop and said with enthusiasm:

“I have been meaning to go to her for a long time; I will go this very day.”

“To be sure; rather than hanging about and dying of hunger, you ought to have gone to the farm long ago.”

“I’ll go at once! When I get there, I shall say: Take my house, but keep me and treat me with respect. It’s your duty! If you don’t care to, then there is neither my house, nor my blessing for you! Goodbye, Ivanitch!”

Zotov drank another glass, and, inspired by the new idea, hurried home. The vodka had upset him and his head was reeling, but instead of lying down, he put all his clothes together in a bundle, said a prayer, took his stick, and went out. Muttering and tapping on the stones with his stick, he walked the whole length of the street without looking back, and found himself in the open country. It was eight or nine miles to the farm. He walked along the dry road, looked at the town herd lazily munching the yellow grass, and pondered on the abrupt change in his life which he had only just brought about so resolutely. He thought, too, about his dependents. When he went out of the house, he had not locked the gate, and so had left them free to go whither they would.

He had not gone a mile into the country when he heard steps behind him. He looked round and angrily clasped his hands. The horse and Lyska, with their heads drooping and their tails between their legs, were quietly walking after him.

“Go back!” he waved to them.

They stopped, looked at one another, looked at him. He went on, they followed him. Then he stopped and began ruminating. It was impossible to go to his great-niece Glasha, whom he hardly knew, with these creatures; he did not want to go back and shut them up, and, indeed, he could not shut them up, because the gate was no use.

“To die of hunger in the shed,” thought Zotov. “Hadn’t I really better take them to Ignat?”

Ignat’s hut stood on the town pasture-ground, a hundred paces from the flagstaff. Though he had not quite made up his mind, and did not know what to do, he turned towards it. His head was giddy and there was a darkness before his eyes.…

He remembers little of what happened in the slaughterer’s yard. He has a memory of a sickening, heavy smell of hides and the savoury steam of the cabbage-soup Ignat was sipping when he went in to him. As in a dream he saw Ignat, who made him wait two hours, slowly preparing something, changing his clothes, talking to some women about corrosive sublimate; he remembered the horse was put into a stand, after which there was the sound of two dull thuds, one of a blow on the skull, the other of the fall of a heavy body. When Lyska, seeing the death of her friend, flew at Ignat, barking shrilly, there was the sound of a third blow that cut short the bark abruptly. Further, Zotov remembers that in his drunken foolishness, seeing the two corpses, he went up to the stand, and put his own forehead ready for a blow.

And all that day his eyes were dimmed by a haze, and he could not even see his own fingers.

THE JEUNE PREMIER

Yevgeny Alexeyitch Podzharov, the *jeune premier*, a graceful, elegant young man with an oval face and little bags under his eyes, had come for the season to one of the southern towns of Russia, and tried at once to make the acquaintance of a few of the leading families of the place. "Yes, signor," he would often say, gracefully swinging his foot and displaying his red socks, "an artist ought to act upon the masses, both directly and indirectly; the first aim is attained by his work on the stage, the second by an acquaintance with the local inhabitants. On my honour, *parole d'honneur*, I don't understand why it is we actors avoid making acquaintance with local families. Why is it? To say nothing of dinners, name-day parties, feasts, *soirées fixes*, to say nothing of these entertainments, think of the moral influence we may have on society! Is it not agreeable to feel one has dropped a spark in some thick skull? The types one meets! The women! *Mon Dieu*, what women! they turn one's head! One penetrates into some huge merchant's house, into the sacred retreats, and picks out some fresh and rosy little peach—it's heaven, *parole d'honneur*!"

In the southern town, among other estimable families he made the acquaintance of that of a manufacturer called Zybaev. Whenever he remembers that acquaintance now he frowns contemptuously, screws up his eyes, and nervously plays with his watch-chain.

One day—it was at a name-day party at Zybaev's—the actor was sitting in his new friends' drawing room and holding forth as usual. Around him "types" were sitting in armchairs and on the sofa, listening affably; from the next room came feminine laughter and the sounds of evening tea.… Crossing his legs, after each phrase sipping tea with rum in it, and trying to assume an expression of careless boredom, he talked of his stage triumphs.

"I am a provincial actor principally," he said, smiling condescendingly, "but I have played in Petersburg and Moscow too.… By the way, I will describe an incident which illustrates pretty well the

state of mind of today. At my benefit in Moscow the young people brought me such a mass of laurel wreaths that I swear by all I hold sacred I did not know where to put them! *Parole d'honneur!* Later on, at a moment when funds were short, I took the laurel wreaths to the shop, and… guess what they weighed. Eighty pounds altogether. Ha, ha! you can't think how useful the money was. Artists, indeed, are often hard up. Today I have hundreds, thousands, tomorrow nothing.… Today I haven't a crust of bread, tomorrow I have oysters and anchovies, hang it all!"

The local inhabitants sipped their glasses decorously and listened. The well-pleased host, not knowing how to make enough of his cultured and interesting visitor, presented to him a distant relative who had just arrived, one Pavel Ignatyevitch Klimov, a bulky gentleman about forty, wearing a long frock-coat and very full trousers.

"You ought to know each other," said Zybaev as he presented Klimov; "he loves theatres, and at one time used to act himself. He has an estate in the Tula province."

Podzharov and Klimov got into conversation. It appeared, to the great satisfaction of both, that the Tula landowner lived in the very town in which the jeune premier had acted for two seasons in succession. Enquiries followed about the town, about common acquaintances, and about the theatre.…

"Do you know, I like that town awfully," said the jeune premier, displaying his red socks. "What streets, what a charming park, and what society! Delightful society!"

"Yes, delightful society," the landowner assented.

"A commercial town, but extremely cultured.… For instance, er-er-er… the head master of the high school, the public prosecutor… the officers.… The police captain, too, was not bad, a man, as the French say, *enchanté*, and the women, Allah, what women!"

"Yes, the women… certainly.…"

"Perhaps I am partial; the fact is that in your town, I don't know why, I was devilishly lucky with the fair sex! I could write a dozen novels. To take this episode, for instance.… I was staying in Yegoryevsky Street, in the very house where the Treasury is.…"

"The red house without stucco?"

"Yes, yes… without stucco.… Close by, as I remember now, lived a local beauty, Varenka.…"

"Not Varvara Nikolayevna?" asked Klimov, and he beamed with satisfaction. "She really is a beauty… the most beautiful girl in the town."

“The most beautiful girl in the town! A classic profile, great black eyes… and hair to her waist! She saw me in *Hamlet*, she wrote me a letter à la Pushkin’s *Tatyana*.… I answered, as you may guess.…”

Podzharov looked round, and having satisfied himself that there were no ladies in the room, rolled his eyes, smiled mournfully, and heaved a sigh.

“I came home one evening after a performance,” he whispered, “and there she was, sitting on my sofa. There followed tears, protestations of love, kisses.… Oh, that was a marvellous, that was a divine night! Our romance lasted two months, but that night was never repeated. It was a night, *parole d’honneur*!”

“Excuse me, what’s that?” muttered Klimov, turning crimson and gazing open-eyed at the actor. “I know Varvara Nikolayevna well: she’s my niece.”

Podzharov was embarrassed, and he, too, opened his eyes wide.

“How’s this?” Klimov went on, throwing up his hands. “I know the girl, and… and… I am surprised.…”

“I am very sorry this has come up,” muttered the actor, getting up and rubbing something out of his left eye with his little finger. “Though, of course… of course, you as her uncle…”

The other guests, who had hitherto been listening to the actor with pleasure and rewarding him with smiles, were embarrassed and dropped their eyes.

“Please, do be so good… take your words back…” said Klimov in extreme embarrassment. “I beg you to do so!”

“If… er-er-er… it offends you, certainly,” answered the actor, with an undefined movement of his hand.

“And confess you have told a falsehood.”

“I, no… er-er-er.… It was not a lie, but I greatly regret having spoken too freely.… And, in fact… I don’t understand your tone!”

Klimov walked up and down the room in silence, as though in uncertainty and hesitation. His fleshy face grew more and more crimson, and the veins in his neck swelled up. After walking up and down for about two minutes he went up to the actor and said in a tearful voice:

“No, do be so good as to confess that you told a lie about Varenka! Have the goodness to do so!”

“It’s queer,” said the actor, with a strained smile, shrugging his shoulders and swinging his leg. “This is positively insulting!”

“So you will not confess it?”

“I do-on’t understand!”

“You will not? In that case, excuse me… I shall have to resort to unpleasant measures. Either, sir, I shall insult you at once on the spot, or… if you are an honourable man, you will kindly accept my challenge to a duel.… We will fight!”

“Certainly!” rapped out the jeune premier, with a contemptuous gesture. “Certainly.”

Extremely perturbed, the guests and the host, not knowing what to do, drew Klimov aside and began begging him not to get up a scandal. Astonished feminine countenances appeared in the doorway.… The jeune premier turned round, said a few words, and with an air of being unable to remain in a house where he was insulted, took his cap and made off without saying goodbye.

On his way home the jeune premier smiled contemptuously and shrugged his shoulders, but when he reached his hotel room and stretched himself on his sofa he felt exceedingly uneasy.

“The devil take him!” he thought. “A duel does not matter, he won’t kill me, but the trouble is the other fellows will hear of it, and they know perfectly well it was a yarn. It’s abominable! I shall be disgraced all over Russia.…”

Podzharov thought a little, smoked, and to calm himself went out into the street.

“I ought to talk to this bully, ram into his stupid noddle that he is a blockhead and a fool, and that I am not in the least afraid of him.…”

The jeune premier stopped before Zybaev’s house and looked at the windows. Lights were still burning behind the muslin curtains and figures were moving about.

“I’ll wait for him!” the actor decided.

It was dark and cold. A hateful autumn rain was drizzling as though through a sieve. Podzharov leaned his elbow on a lamppost and abandoned himself to a feeling of uneasiness.

He was wet through and exhausted.

At two o’clock in the night the guests began coming out of Zybaev’s house. The landowner from Tula was the last to make his appearance. He heaved a sigh that could be heard by the whole street and scraped the pavement with his heavy overboots.

“Excuse me!” said the jeune premier, overtaking him. “One minute.”

Klimov stopped. The actor gave a smile, hesitated, and began, stammering: “I… I confess… I told a lie.”

“No, sir, you will please confess that publicly,” said Klimov, and he turned crimson again. “I can’t leave it like that.…”

“But you see I am apologizing! I beg you… don’t you understand? I beg you because you will admit a duel will make talk, and I am in a position.… My fellow-actors… goodness knows what they may think.…”

The jeune premier tried to appear unconcerned, to smile, to stand erect, but his body would not obey him, his voice trembled, his eyes blinked guiltily, and his head drooped. For a good while he went on muttering something. Klimov listened to him, thought a little, and heaved a sigh.

“Well, so be it,” he said. “May God forgive you. Only don’t lie in future, young man. Nothing degrades a man like lying… yes, indeed! You are a young man, you have had a good education.…”

The landowner from Tula, in a benignant, fatherly way, gave him a lecture, while the jeune premier listened and smiled meekly.… When it was over he smirked, bowed, and with a guilty step and a crestfallen air set off for his hotel.

As he went to bed half an hour later he felt that he was out of danger and was already in excellent spirits. Serene and satisfied that the misunderstanding had ended so satisfactorily, he wrapped himself in the bedclothes, soon fell asleep, and slept soundly till ten o’clock next morning.

In the Dark

A fly of medium size made its way into the nose of the assistant procurator, Gagin. It may have been impelled by curiosity, or have got there through frivolity or accident in the dark; anyway, the nose resented the presence of a foreign body and gave the signal for a sneeze. Gagin sneezed, sneezed impressively and so shrilly and loudly that the bed shook and the springs creaked. Gagin's wife, Marya Mihalovna, a full, plump, fair woman, started, too, and woke up. She gazed into the darkness, sighed, and turned over on the other side. Five minutes afterwards she turned over again and shut her eyes more firmly but she could not get to sleep again. After sighing and tossing from side to side for a time, she got up, crept over her husband, and putting on her slippers, went to the window.

It was dark outside. She could see nothing but the outlines of the trees and the roof of the stables. There was a faint pallor in the east, but this pallor was beginning to be clouded over. There was perfect stillness in the air wrapped in slumber and darkness. Even the watchman, paid to disturb the stillness of night, was silent; even the corncrake—the only wild creature of the feathered tribe that does not shun the proximity of summer visitors—was silent.

The stillness was broken by Marya Mihalovna herself. Standing at the window and gazing into the yard, she suddenly uttered a cry. She fancied that from the flower garden with the gaunt, clipped poplar, a dark figure was creeping towards the house. For the first minute she thought it was a cow or a horse, then, rubbing her eyes, she distinguished clearly the outlines of a man.

Then she fancied the dark figure approached the window of the kitchen and, standing still a moment, apparently undecided, put one foot on the window ledge and disappeared into the darkness of the window.

"A burglar!" flashed into her mind and a deathly pallor overspread her face.

And in one instant her imagination had drawn the picture so dreaded by lady visitors in country places—a burglar creeps into the kitchen, from the kitchen into the dining room… the silver in the cupboard… next into the bedroom… an axe… the face of a brigand… jewelry.… Her knees gave way under her and a shiver ran down her back.

"Vassya!" she said, shaking her husband, "Basile! Vassily Prokovitch! Ah! mercy on us, he might be dead! Wake up, Basile, I beseech you!"

"W-well?" grunted the assistant procurator, with a deep inward breath and a munching sound.

"For God's sake, wake up! A burglar has got into the kitchen! I was standing at the window looking out and someone got in at the window. He will get into the dining room next… the spoons are in the cupboard! Basile! They broke into Mavra Yegorovna's last year."

"Wha—what's the matter?"

"Heavens! he does not understand. Do listen, you stupid! I tell you I've just seen a man getting in at the kitchen window! Pelagea will be frightened and… and the silver is in the cupboard!"

"Stuff and nonsense!"

"Basile, this is unbearable! I tell you of a real danger and you sleep and grunt! What would you have? Would you have us robbed and murdered?"

The assistant procurator slowly got up and sat on the bed, filling the air with loud yawns.

"Goodness knows what creatures women are!" he muttered. "Can't leave one in peace even at night! To wake a man for such nonsense!"

"But, Basile, I swear I saw a man getting in at the window!"

"Well, what of it? Let him get in.… That's pretty sure to be Pelagea's sweetheart, the fireman."

"What! what did you say?"

"I say it's Pelagea's fireman come to see her."

"Worse than ever!" shrieked Marya Mihalovna. "That's worse than a burglar! I won't put up with cynicism in my house!"

"Hoity-toity! We are virtuous!… Won't put up with cynicism? As though it were cynicism! What's the use of firing off those foreign words? My dear girl, it's a thing that has happened ever since the world began, sanctified by tradition. What's a fireman for if not to make love to the cook?"

"No, Basile! It seems you don't know me! I cannot face the idea of such a… such a… in my house. You must go this minute into the kitchen and tell him to go away! This very minute! And tomorrow I'll tell

Pelagea that she must not dare to demean herself by such proceedings! When I am dead you may allow immorality in your house, but you shan't do it now!… Please go!"

"Damn it," grumbled Gagin, annoyed. "Consider with your microscopic female brain, what am I to go for?"

"Basile, I shall faint!…"

Gagin cursed, put on his slippers, cursed again, and set off to the kitchen. It was as dark as the inside of a barrel, and the assistant procurator had to feel his way. He groped his way to the door of the nursery and waked the nurse.

"Vassilissa," he said, "you took my dressing-gown to brush last night—where is it?"

"I gave it to Pelagea to brush, sir."

"What carelessness! You take it away and don't put it back—now I've to go without a dressing-gown!"

On reaching the kitchen, he made his way to the corner in which on a box under a shelf of saucepans the cook slept.

"Pelagea," he said, feeling her shoulder and giving it a shake, "Pelagea! Why are you pretending? You are not asleep! Who was it got in at your window just now?"

"Mm… m… good morning! Got in at the window? Who could get in?"

"Oh come, it's no use your trying to keep it up! You'd better tell your scamp to clear out while he can! Do you hear? He's no business to be here!"

"Are you out of your senses, sir, bless you? Do you think I'd be such a fool? Here one's running about all day long, never a minute to sit down and then spoken to like this at night! Four roubles a month… and to find my own tea and sugar and this is all the credit I get for it! I used to live in a tradesman's house, and never met with such insult there!"

"Come, come—no need to go over your grievances! This very minute your grenadier must turn out! Do you understand?"

"You ought to be ashamed, sir," said Pelagea, and he could hear the tears in her voice. "Gentlefolks… educated, and yet not a notion that with our hard lot… in our life of toil"—she burst into tears. "It's easy to insult us. There's no one to stand up for us."

"Come, come… I don't mind! Your mistress sent me. You may let a devil in at the window for all I care!"

There was nothing left for the assistant procurator but to acknowledge himself in the wrong and go back to his spouse.

“I say, Pelagea,” he said, “you had my dressing-gown to brush. Where is it?”

“Oh, I am so sorry, sir; I forgot to put it on your chair. It’s hanging on a peg near the stove.”

Gagin felt for the dressing-gown by the stove, put it on, and went quietly back to his room.

When her husband went out Marya Mihalovna got into bed and waited. For the first three minutes her mind was at rest, but after that she began to feel uneasy.

“What a long time he’s gone,” she thought. “It’s all right if he is there… that immoral man… but if it’s a burglar?”

And again her imagination drew a picture of her husband going into the dark kitchen… a blow with an axe… dying without uttering a single sound… a pool of blood!…

Five minutes passed… five and a half… at last six.… A cold sweat came out on her forehead.

“Basile!” she shrieked, “Basile!”

“What are you shouting for? I am here.” She heard her husband’s voice and steps. “Are you being murdered?”

The assistant procurator went up to the bedstead and sat down on the edge of it.

“There’s nobody there at all,” he said. “It was your fancy, you queer creature.… You can sleep easy, your fool of a Pelagea is as virtuous as her mistress. What a coward you are! What a.…”

And the deputy procurator began teasing his wife. He was wide awake now and did not want to go to sleep again.

“You are a coward!” he laughed. “You’d better go to the doctor tomorrow and tell him about your hallucinations. You are a neurotic!”

“What a smell of tar,” said his wife—“tar or something… onion… cabbage soup!”

“Y-yes! There is a smell… I am not sleepy. I say, I’ll light the candle.… Where are the matches? And, by the way, I’ll show you the photograph of the procurator of the Palace of Justice. He gave us all a photograph when he said goodbye to us yesterday, with his autograph.”

Gagin struck a match against the wall and lighted a candle. But before he had moved a step from the bed to fetch the photographs he heard behind him a piercing, heartrending shriek. Looking round, he saw his wife’s large eyes fastened upon him, full of amazement, horror, and wrath.…

“You took your dressing-gown off in the kitchen?” she said, turning pale.

“Why?”

“Look at yourself!”

The deputy procurator looked down at himself, and gasped.

Flung over his shoulders was not his dressing-gown, but the fireman’s overcoat. How had it come on his shoulders? While he was settling that question, his wife’s imagination was drawing another picture, awful and impossible: darkness, stillness, whispering, and so on, and so on.

A Trivial Incident

It was a sunny August midday as, in company with a Russian prince who had come down in the world, I drove into the immense so-called Shabelsky pine-forest where we were intending to look for woodcocks. In virtue of the part he plays in this story my poor prince deserves a detailed description. He was a tall, dark man, still youngish, though already somewhat battered by life; with long moustaches like a police captain's; with prominent black eyes, and with the manners of a retired army man. He was a man of Oriental type, not very intelligent, but straightforward and honest, not a bully, not a fop, and not a rake—virtues which, in the eyes of the general public, are equivalent to a certificate of being a nonentity and a poor creature. People generally did not like him (he was never spoken of in the district, except as "the illustrious duffer"). I personally found the poor prince extremely nice with his misfortunes and failures, which made up indeed his whole life. First of all he was poor. He did not play cards, did not drink, had no occupation, did not poke his nose into anything, and maintained a perpetual silence but yet he had somehow succeeded in getting through thirty to forty thousand roubles left him at his father's death. God only knows what had become of the money. All that I can say is that owing to lack of supervision a great deal was stolen by stewards, bailiffs, and even footmen; a great deal went on lending money, giving bail, and standing security. There were few landowners in the district who did not owe him money. He gave to all who asked, and not so much from good nature or confidence in people as from exaggerated gentlemanliness as though he would say: "Take it and feel how *comme il faut* I am!" By the time I made his acquaintance he had got into debt himself, had learned what it was like to have a second mortgage on his land, and had sunk so deeply into difficulties that there was no chance of his ever getting out of them again. There were days when he had no dinner, and went about with an empty cigar-holder, but he was always seen clean and fashionably dressed, and always smelt strongly of ylang-ylang.

The prince's second misfortune was his absolute solitariness. He was not married, he had no friends nor relations. His silent and reserved character and his *comme il faut* deportment, which became the more conspicuous the more anxious he was to conceal his poverty, prevented him from becoming intimate with people. For love affairs he was too heavy, spiritless, and cold, and so rarely got on with women.…

When we reached the forest this prince and I got out of the chaise and walked along a narrow woodland path which was hidden among huge ferns. But before we had gone a hundred paces a tall, lank figure with a long oval face, wearing a shabby reefer jacket, a straw hat, and patent leather boots, rose up from behind a young fir tree some three feet high, as though he had sprung out of the ground. The stranger held in one hand a basket of mushrooms, with the other he playfully fingered a cheap watch-chain on his waistcoat. On seeing us he was taken aback, smoothed his waistcoat, coughed politely, and gave an agreeable smile, as though he were delighted to see such nice people as us. Then, to our complete surprise, he came up to us, scraping with his long feet on the grass, bending his whole person, and, still smiling agreeably, lifted his hat and pronounced in a sugary voice with the intonations of a whining dog:

"Aie, aie… gentlemen, painful as it is, it is my duty to warn you that shooting is forbidden in this wood. Pardon me for venturing to disturb you, though unacquainted, but… allow me to present myself. I am Grontovsky, the head clerk on Madame Kandurin's estate."

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, but why can't we shoot?"

"Such is the wish of the owner of this forest!"

The prince and I exchanged glances. A moment passed in silence. The prince stood looking pensively at a big fly agaric at his feet, which he had crushed with his stick. Grontovsky went on smiling agreeably. His whole face was twitching, exuding honey, and even the watch-chain on his waistcoat seemed to be smiling and trying to impress us all with its refinement. A shade of embarrassment passed over us like an angel passing; all three of us felt awkward.

"Nonsense!" I said. "Only last week I was shooting here!"

"Very possible!" Grontovsky sniggered through his teeth. "As a matter of fact everyone shoots here regardless of the prohibition. But once I have met you, it is my duty… my sacred duty to warn you. I am a man in a dependent position. If the forest were mine, on the word of honour of a Grontovsky, I should not oppose your agreeable pleasure. But whose fault is it that I am in a dependent position?"

The lanky individual sighed and shrugged his shoulders. I began arguing, getting hot and protesting, but the more loudly and impressively I spoke the more mawkish and sugary Grontovsky's face became. Evidently the consciousness of a certain power over us afforded him the greatest gratification. He was enjoying his condescending tone, his politeness, his manners, and with peculiar relish pronounced his sonorous surname, of which he was probably very fond. Standing before us he felt more than at ease, but judging from the confused sideway glances he cast from time to time at his basket, only one thing was spoiling his satisfaction—the mushrooms, womanish, peasantish, prose, derogatory to his dignity.

"We can't go back!" I said. "We have come over ten miles!"

"What's to be done?" sighed Grontovsky. "If you had come not ten but a hundred thousand miles, if the king even had come from America or from some other distant land, even then I should think it my duty… sacred, so to say, obligation…"

"Does the forest belong to Nadyezhda Lvovna?" asked the prince.

"Yes, Nadyezhda Lvovna…"

"Is she at home now?"

"Yes… I tell you what, you go to her, it is not more than half a mile from here; if she gives you a note, then I.… I needn't say! Ha—ha… he—he—!"

"By all means," I agreed. "It's much nearer than to go back.… You go to her, Sergey Ivanitch," I said, addressing the prince. "You know her."

The prince, who had been gazing the whole time at the crushed agaric, raised his eyes to me, thought a minute, and said:

"I used to know her at one time, but… it's rather awkward for me to go to her. Besides, I am in shabby clothes.… You go, you don't know her.… It's more suitable for you to go."

I agreed. We got into our chaise and, followed by Grontovsky's smiles, drove along the edge of the forest to the manor house. I was not acquainted with Nadyezhda Lvovna Kandurin, née Shabelsky. I had never seen her at close quarters, and knew her only by hearsay. I knew that she was incredibly wealthy, richer than anyone else in the province. After the death of her father, Shabelsky, who was a landowner with no other children, she was left with several estates, a stud farm, and a lot of money. I had heard that, though she was only twenty-five or twenty-six, she was ugly, uninteresting, and as insignificant as anybody, and was only distinguished from the ordinary ladies of the district by her immense wealth.

It has always seemed to me that wealth is felt, and that the rich must have special feelings unknown to the poor. Often as I passed by Nadyezhda Lvovna's big fruit garden, in which stood the large, heavy house with its windows always curtained, I thought: "What is she thinking at this moment? Is there happiness behind those blinds?" and so on. Once I saw her from a distance in a fine light cabriolet, driving a handsome white horse, and, sinful man that I am, I not only envied her, but even thought that in her poses, in her movements, there was something special, not to be found in people who are not rich, just as persons of a servile nature succeed in discovering "good family" at the first glance in people of the most ordinary exterior, if they are a little more distinguished than themselves. Nadyezhda Lvovna's inner life was only known to me by scandal. It was said in the district that five or six years ago, before she was married, during her father's lifetime, she had been passionately in love with Prince Sergey Ivanitch, who was now beside me in the chaise. The prince had been fond of visiting her father, and used to spend whole days in his billiard room, where he played pyramids indefatigably till his arms and legs ached. Six months before the old man's death he had suddenly given up visiting the Shabelskys. The gossip of the district having no positive facts to go upon explained this abrupt change in their relations in various ways. Some said that the prince, having observed the plain daughter's feeling for him and being unable to reciprocate it, considered it the duty of a gentleman to cut short his visits. Others maintained that old Shabelsky had discovered why his daughter was pining away, and had proposed to the poverty-stricken prince that he should marry her; the prince, imagining in his narrow-minded way that they were trying to buy him together with his title, was indignant, said foolish things, and quarrelled with them. What was true and what was false in this nonsense was difficult to say. But that there was a portion of truth in it was evident, from the fact that the prince always avoided conversation about Nadyezhda Lvovna.

I knew that soon after her father's death Nadyezhda Lvovna had married one Kandurin, a bachelor of law, not wealthy, but adroit, who had come on a visit to the neighbourhood. She married him not from love, but because she was touched by the love of the legal gentleman who, so it was said, had cleverly played the lovesick swain. At the time I am describing, Kandurin was for some reason living in Cairo, and writing thence to his friend, the marshal of the district, "Notes of Travel," while she sat languishing behind lowered blinds, surrounded by idle parasites, and whiled away her dreary days in petty philanthropy.

On the way to the house the prince fell to talking.

"It's three days since I have been at home," he said in a half whisper, with a sidelong glance at the driver. "I am not a child, nor a silly woman, and I have no prejudices, but I can't stand the bailiffs. When I see a bailiff in my house I turn pale and tremble, and even have a twitching in the calves of my legs. Do you know Rogozhin refused to honour my note?"

The prince did not, as a rule, like to complain of his straitened circumstances; where poverty was concerned he was reserved and exceedingly proud and sensitive, and so this announcement surprised me. He stared a long time at the yellow clearing, warmed by the sun, watched a long string of cranes float in the azure sky, and turned facing me.

"And by the sixth of September I must have the money ready for the bank… the interest for my estate," he said aloud, by now regardless of the coachman. "And where am I to get it? Altogether, old man, I am in a tight fix! An awfully tight fix!"

The prince examined the cock of his gun, blew on it for some reason, and began looking for the cranes which by now were out of sight.

"Sergey Ivanitch," I asked, after a minute's silence, "imagine if they sell your Shatilovka, what will you do?"

"I? I don't know! Shatilovka can't be saved, that's clear as daylight, but I cannot imagine such a calamity. I can't imagine myself without my daily bread secure. What can I do? I have had hardly any education; I have not tried working yet; for government service it is late to begin,… Besides, where could I serve? Where could I be of use? Admitting that no great cleverness is needed for serving in our Zemstvo, for example, yet I suffer from… the devil knows what, a sort of faintheartedness, I haven't a ha'p'orth of pluck. If I went into the Service I should always feel I was not in my right place. I am not an idealist; I am not a Utopian; I haven't any special principles; but am simply, I suppose, stupid and thoroughly incompetent, a neurotic and a coward. Altogether not like other people. All other people are like other people, only I seem to be something… a poor thing.… I met Naryagin last Wednesday—you know him?—drunken, slovenly… doesn't pay his debts, stupid" (the prince frowned and tossed his head)… "a horrible person! He said to me, staggering: 'I'm being balloted for as a justice of the peace!' Of course, they won't elect him, but, you see, he believes he is fit to be a justice of the peace and considers that position within his capacity. He has boldness and self-confidence. I went to see our investigating magistrate too. The man gets two hundred and fifty roubles a month, and does

scarcely anything. All he can do is to stride backwards and forwards for days together in nothing but his underclothes, but, ask him, he is convinced he is doing his work and honourably performing his duty. I couldn't go on like that! I should be ashamed to look the clerk in the face."

At that moment Grontovsky, on a chestnut horse, galloped by us with a flourish. On his left arm the basket bobbed up and down with the mushrooms dancing in it. As he passed us he grinned and waved his hand, as though we were old friends.

"Blockhead!" the prince filtered through his teeth, looking after him. "It's wonderful how disgusting it sometimes is to see satisfied faces. A stupid, animal feeling due to hunger, I expect.… What was I saying? Oh, yes, about going into the Service,… I should be ashamed to take the salary, and yet, to tell the truth, it is stupid. If one looks at it from a broader point of view, more seriously, I am eating what isn't mine now. Am I not? But why am I not ashamed of that.… It is a case of habit, I suppose… and not being able to realize one's true position.… But that position is most likely awful…"

I looked at him, wondering if the prince were showing off. But his face was mild and his eyes were mournfully following the movements of the chestnut horse racing away, as though his happiness were racing away with it.

Apparently he was in that mood of irritation and sadness when women weep quietly for no reason, and men feel a craving to complain of themselves, of life, of God.…

When I got out of the chaise at the gates of the house the prince said to me:

"A man once said, wanting to annoy me, that I have the face of a cardsharper. I have noticed that cardsharpers are usually dark. Do you know, it seems that if I really had been born a cardsharper I should have remained a decent person to the day of my death, for I should never have had the boldness to do wrong. I tell you frankly I have had the chance once in my life of getting rich if I had told a lie, a lie to myself and one woman… and one other person whom I know would have forgiven me for lying; I should have put into my pocket a million. But I could not. I hadn't the pluck!"

From the gates we had to go to the house through the copse by a long road, level as a ruler, and planted on each side with thick, lopped lilacs. The house looked somewhat heavy, tasteless, like a façade on the stage. It rose clumsily out of a mass of greenery, and caught the eye like a great

stone thrown on the velvety turf. At the chief entrance I was met by a fat old footman in a green swallowtail coat and big silver-rimmed spectacles; without making any announcement, only looking contemptuously at my dusty figure, he showed me in. As I mounted the soft carpeted stairs there was, for some reason, a strong smell of india-rubber. At the top I was enveloped in an atmosphere found only in museums, in signorial mansions and old-fashioned merchant houses; it seemed like the smell of something long past, which had once lived and died and had left its soul in the rooms. I passed through three or four rooms on my way from the entry to the drawing room. I remember bright yellow, shining floors, lustres wrapped in stiff muslin, narrow, striped rugs which stretched not straight from door to door, as they usually do, but along the walls, so that not venturing to touch the bright floor with my muddy boots I had to describe a rectangle in each room. In the drawing room, where the footman left me, stood old-fashioned ancestral furniture in white covers, shrouded in twilight. It looked surly and elderly, and, as though out of respect for its repose, not a sound was audible.

Even the clock was silent… it seemed as though the Princess Tarakanov had fallen asleep in the golden frame, and the water and the rats were still and motionless through magic. The daylight, afraid of disturbing the universal tranquillity, scarcely pierced through the lowered blinds, and lay on the soft rugs in pale, slumbering streaks.

Three minutes passed and a big, elderly woman in black, with her cheek bandaged up, walked noiselessly into the drawing room. She bowed to me and pulled up the blinds. At once, enveloped in the bright sunlight, the rats and water in the picture came to life and movement, Princess Tarakanov was awakened, and the old chairs frowned gloomily.

“Her honour will be here in a minute, sir…” sighed the old lady, frowning too.

A few more minutes of waiting and I saw Nadyezhda Lvovna. What struck me first of all was that she certainly was ugly, short, scraggy, and round-shouldered. Her thick, chestnut hair was magnificent; her face, pure and with a look of culture in it, was aglow with youth; there was a clear and intelligent expression in her eyes; but the whole charm of her head was lost through the thickness of her lips and the over-acute facial angle.

I mentioned my name, and announced the object of my visit.

“I really don’t know what I am to say!” she said, in hesitation, dropping her eyes and smiling. “I don’t like to refuse, and at the same

time.…”

“Do, please,” I begged.

Nadyezhda Lvovna looked at me and laughed. I laughed too. She was probably amused by what Grontovsky had so enjoyed—that is, the right of giving or withholding permission; my visit suddenly struck me as queer and strange.

“I don’t like to break the long-established rules,” said Madame Kandurin. “Shooting has been forbidden on our estate for the last six years. No!” she shook her head resolutely. “Excuse me, I must refuse you. If I allow you I must allow others. I don’t like unfairness. Either let all or no one.”

“I am sorry!” I sighed. “It’s all the sadder because we have come more than ten miles. I am not alone,” I added. “Prince Sergey Ivanitch is with me.”

I uttered the prince’s name with no *arrière pensée*, not prompted by any special motive or aim; I simply blurted it out without thinking, in the simplicity of my heart. Hearing the familiar name Madame Kandurin started, and bent a prolonged gaze upon me. I noticed her nose turn pale.

“That makes no difference…” she said, dropping her eyes.

As I talked to her I stood at the window that looked out on the shrubbery. I could see the whole shrubbery with the avenues and the ponds and the road by which I had come. At the end of the road, beyond the gates, the back of our chaise made a dark patch. Near the gate, with his back to the house, the prince was standing with his legs apart, talking to the lanky Grontovsky.

Madame Kandurin had been standing all the time at the other window. She looked from time to time towards the shrubbery, and from the moment I mentioned the prince’s name she did not turn away from the window.

“Excuse me,” she said, screwing up her eyes as she looked towards the road and the gate, “but it would be unfair to allow you only to shoot.… And, besides, what pleasure is there in shooting birds? What’s it for? Are they in your way?”

A solitary life, immured within four walls, with its indoor twilight and heavy smell of decaying furniture, disposes people to sentimentality. Madame Kandurin’s idea did her credit, but I could not resist saying:

“If one takes that line one ought to go barefoot. Boots are made out of the leather of slaughtered animals.”

“One must distinguish between a necessity and a caprice,” Madame Kandurin answered in a toneless voice.

She had by now recognized the prince, and did not take her eyes off his figure. It is hard to describe the delight and the suffering with which her ugly face was radiant! Her eyes were smiling and shining, her lips were quivering and laughing, while her face craned closer to the panes. Keeping hold of a flowerpot with both hands, with bated breath and with one foot slightly lifted, she reminded me of a dog pointing and waiting with passionate impatience for “Fetch it!”

I looked at her and at the prince who could not tell a lie once in his life, and I felt angry and bitter against truth and falsehood, which play such an elemental part in the personal happiness of men.

The prince started suddenly, took aim and fired. A hawk, flying over him, fluttered its wings and flew like an arrow far away.

“He aimed too high!” I said. “And so, Nadyezhda Lvovna,” I sighed, moving away from the window, “you will not permit…”—Madame Kandurin was silent.

“I have the honour to take my leave,” I said, “and I beg you to forgive my disturbing you…”

Madame Kandurin would have turned facing me, and had already moved through a quarter of the angle, when she suddenly hid her face behind the hangings, as though she felt tears in her eyes that she wanted to conceal.

“Goodbye.… Forgive me…” she said softly.

I bowed to her back, and strode away across the bright yellow floors, no longer keeping to the carpet. I was glad to get away from this little domain of gilded boredom and sadness, and I hastened as though anxious to shake off a heavy, fantastic dream with its twilight, its enchanted princess, its lustres.…

At the front door a maidservant overtook me and thrust a note into my hand: “Shooting is permitted on showing this. N. K.,” I read.

A Tripping Tongue

Natalya Mihalovna, a young married lady who had arrived in the morning from Yalta, was having her dinner, and in a never-ceasing flow of babble was telling her husband of all the charms of the Crimea. Her husband, delighted, gazed tenderly at her enthusiastic face, listened, and from time to time put in a question.

"But they say living is dreadfully expensive there?" he asked, among other things.

"Well, what shall I say? To my thinking this talk of its being so expensive is exaggerated, hubby. The devil is not as black as he is painted. Yulia Petrovna and I, for instance, had very decent and comfortable rooms for twenty roubles a day. Everything depends on knowing how to do things, my dear. Of course if you want to go up into the mountains… to Aie-Petri for instance… if you take a horse, a guide, then of course it does come to something. It's awful what it comes to! But, Vassitchka, the mountains there! Imagine high, high mountains, a thousand times higher than the church.… At the top—mist, mist, mist.… At the bottom—enormous stones, stones, stones.… And pines.… Ah, I can't bear to think of it!"

"By the way, I read about those Tatar guides there, in some magazine while you were away… such abominable stories! Tell me is there really anything out of the way about them?"

Natalya Mihalovna made a little disdainful grimace and shook her head.

"Just ordinary Tatars, nothing special…" she said, "though indeed I only had a glimpse of them in the distance. They were pointed out to me, but I did not take much notice of them. You know, hubby, I always had a prejudice against all such Circassians, Greeks… Moors!"

"They are said to be terrible Don Juans."

"Perhaps! There are shameless creatures who.…"

Natalya Mihalovna suddenly jumped up from her chair, as though she had thought of something dreadful; for half a minute she looked with

frightened eyes at her husband and said, accentuating each word:

"Vassitchka, I say, the im-mo-ral women there are in the world! Ah, how immoral! And it's not as though they were working-class or middle-class people, but aristocratic ladies, priding themselves on their *bon-ton*! It was simply awful, I could not believe my own eyes! I shall remember it as long as I live! To think that people can forget themselves to such a point as… ach, Vassitchka, I don't like to speak of it! Take my companion, Yulia Petrovna, for example.… Such a good husband, two children… she moves in a decent circle, always poses as a saint—and all at once, would you believe it.… Only, hubby, of course this is *entre nous*.… Give me your word of honour you won't tell a soul?"

"What next! Of course I won't tell."

"Honour bright? Mind now! I trust you.…"

The little lady put down her fork, assumed a mysterious air, and whispered:

"Imagine a thing like this.… That Yulia Petrovna rode up into the mountains.… It was glorious weather! She rode on ahead with her guide, I was a little behind. We had ridden two or three miles, all at once, only fancy, Vassitchka, Yulia cried out and clutched at her bosom. Her Tatar put his arm round her waist or she would have fallen off the saddle.… I rode up to her with my guide.… 'What is it? What is the matter?' 'Oh,' she cried, 'I am dying! I feel faint! I can't go any further' Fancy my alarm! 'Let us go back then,' I said. 'No, *Natalie*,' she said, 'I can't go back! I shall die of pain if I move another step! I have spasms.' And she prayed and besought my Suleiman and me to ride back to the town and fetch her some of her drops which always do her good."

"Stay.… I don't quite understand you," muttered the husband, scratching his forehead. "You said just now that you had only seen those Tatars from a distance, and now you are talking of some Suleiman."

"There, you are finding fault again," the lady pouted, not in the least disconcerted. "I can't endure suspiciousness! I can't endure it! It's stupid, stupid!"

"I am not finding fault, but… why say what is not true? If you rode about with Tatars, so be it, God bless you, but… why shuffle about it?"

"H'm!… you are a queer one!" cried the lady, revolted. "He is jealous of Suleiman! as though one could ride up into the mountains without a guide! I should like to see you do it! If you don't know the ways there, if you don't understand, you had better hold your tongue! Yes, hold your tongue. You can't take a step there without a guide."

"So it seems!"

“None of your silly grins, if you please! I am not a Yulia.… I don’t justify her but I…! Though I don’t pose as a saint, I don’t forget myself to that degree. My Suleiman never overstepped the limits.… No-o! Mametkul used to be sitting at Yulia’s all day long, but in my room as soon as it struck eleven: ‘Suleiman, march! Off you go!’ And my foolish Tatar boy would depart. I made him mind his p’s and q’s, hubby! As soon as he began grumbling about money or anything, I would say ‘How? Wha-at? Wha-a-a-t?’ And his heart would be in his mouth directly.… Ha-ha-ha! His eyes, you know, Vassitchka, were as black, as black, like coals, such an amusing little Tatar face, so funny and silly! I kept him in order, didn’t I just!”

“I can fancy…” mumbled her husband, rolling up pellets of bread.

“That’s stupid, Vassitchka! I know what is in your mind! I know what you are thinking… But I assure you even when we were on our expeditions I never let him overstep the limits. For instance, if we rode to the mountains or to the U-Chan-Su waterfall, I would always say to him, ‘Suleiman, ride behind! Do you hear!’ And he always rode behind, poor boy.… Even when we… even at the most dramatic moments I would say to him, ‘Still, you must not forget that you are only a Tatar and I am the wife of a civil councillor!’ Ha-ha.…”

The little lady laughed, then, looking round her quickly and assuming an alarmed expression, whispered:

“But Yulia! Oh, that Yulia! I quite see, Vassitchka, there is no reason why one shouldn’t have a little fun, a little rest from the emptiness of conventional life! That’s all right, have your fling by all means—no one will blame you, but to take the thing seriously, to get up scenes… no, say what you like, I cannot understand that! Just fancy, she was jealous! Wasn’t that silly? One day Mametkul, her *grande passion*, came to see her… she was not at home.… Well, I asked him into my room… there was conversation, one thing and another… they’re awfully amusing, you know! The evening passed without our noticing it.… All at once Yulia rushed in.… She flew at me and at Mametkul—made such a scene… fi! I can’t understand that sort of thing, Vassitchka.”

Vassitchka cleared his throat, frowned, and walked up and down the room.

“You had a gay time there, I must say,” he growled with a disdainful smile.

“How stu-upid that is!” cried Natalya Mihalovna, offended. “I know what you are thinking about! You always have such horrid ideas! I won’t tell you anything! No, I won’t!”

The lady pouted and said no more.

A Trifle from Life

A well-fed, red-cheeked young man called Nikolay Ilyitch Belyaev, of thirty-two, who was an owner of house property in Petersburg, and a devotee of the racecourse, went one evening to see Olga Ivanovna Irnin, with whom he was living, or, to use his own expression, was dragging out a long, wearisome romance. And, indeed, the first interesting and enthusiastic pages of this romance had long been perused; now the pages dragged on, and still dragged on, without presenting anything new or of interest.

Not finding Olga Ivanovna at home, my hero lay down on the lounge chair and proceeded to wait for her in the drawing room.

"Good evening, Nikolay Ilyitch!" he heard a child's voice. "Mother will be here directly. She has gone with Sonia to the dressmaker's."

Olga Ivanovna's son, Alyosha—a boy of eight who looked graceful and very well cared for, who was dressed like a picture, in a black velvet jacket and long black stockings—was lying on the sofa in the same room. He was lying on a satin cushion and, evidently imitating an acrobat he had lately seen at the circus, stuck up in the air first one leg and then the other. When his elegant legs were exhausted, he brought his arms into play or jumped up impulsively and went on all fours, trying to stand with his legs in the air. All this he was doing with the utmost gravity, gasping and groaning painfully as though he regretted that God had given him such a restless body.

"Ah, good evening, my boy," said Belyaev. "It's you! I did not notice you. Is your mother well?"

Alyosha, taking hold of the tip of his left toe with his right hand and falling into the most unnatural attitude, turned over, jumped up, and peeped at Belyaev from behind the big fluffy lampshade.

"What shall I say?" he said, shrugging his shoulders. "In reality mother's never well. You see, she is a woman, and women, Nikolay Ilyitch, have always something the matter with them."

Belyaev, having nothing better to do, began watching Alyosha's face. He had never before during the whole of his intimacy with Olga Ivanovna paid any attention to the boy, and had completely ignored his existence; the boy had been before his eyes, but he had not cared to think why he was there and what part he was playing.

In the twilight of the evening, Alyosha's face, with his white forehead and black, unblinking eyes, unexpectedly reminded Belyaev of Olga Ivanovna as she had been during the first pages of their romance. And he felt disposed to be friendly to the boy.

"Come here, insect," he said; "let me have a closer look at you."

The boy jumped off the sofa and skipped up to Belyaev.

"Well," began Nikolay Ilyitch, putting a hand on the boy's thin shoulder. "How are you getting on?"

"How shall I say! We used to get on a great deal better."

"Why?"

"It's very simple. Sonia and I used only to learn music and reading, and now they give us French poetry to learn. Have you been shaved lately?"

"Yes."

"Yes, I see you have. Your beard is shorter. Let me touch it.… Does that hurt?"

"No."

"Why is it that if you pull one hair it hurts, but if you pull a lot at once it doesn't hurt a bit? Ha, ha! And, you know, it's a pity you don't have whiskers. Here ought to be shaved… but here at the sides the hair ought to be left.…"

The boy nestled up to Belyaev and began playing with his watch-chain.

"When I go to the high school," he said, "mother is going to buy me a watch. I shall ask her to buy me a watch-chain like this.… Wh-at a locket! Father's got a locket like that, only yours has little bars on it and his has letters.… There's mother's portrait in the middle of his. Father has a different sort of chain now, not made with rings, but like ribbon.…"

"How do you know? Do you see your father?"

"I? M'm… no… I…"

Alyosha blushed, and in great confusion, feeling caught in a lie, began zealously scratching the locket with his nail.… Belyaev looked steadily into his face and asked:

"Do you see your father?"

“N-no!”

“Come, speak frankly, on your honour.… I see from your face you are telling a fib. Once you’ve let a thing slip out it’s no good wriggling about it. Tell me, do you see him? Come, as a friend.”

Alyosha hesitated.

“You won’t tell mother?” he said.

“As though I should!”

“On your honour?”

“On my honour.”

“Do you swear?”

“Ah, you provoking boy! What do you take me for?”

Alyosha looked round him, then with wide-open eyes, whispered to him:

“Only, for goodness’ sake, don’t tell mother.… Don’t tell anyone at all, for it is a secret. I hope to goodness mother won’t find out, or we should all catch it—Sonia, and I, and Pelagea.… Well, listen… Sonia and I see father every Tuesday and Friday. When Pelagea takes us for a walk before dinner we go to the Apfel Restaurant, and there is father waiting for us.… He is always sitting in a room apart, where you know there’s a marble table and an ashtray in the shape of a goose without a back.…”

“What do you do there?”

“Nothing! First we say how-do-you-do, then we all sit round the table, and father treats us with coffee and pies. You know Sonia eats the meat pies, but I can’t endure meat pies! I like the pies made of cabbage and eggs. We eat such a lot that we have to try hard to eat as much as we can at dinner, for fear mother should notice.”

“What do you talk about?”

“With father? About anything. He kisses us, he hugs us, tells us all sorts of amusing jokes. Do you know, he says when we are grown up he is going to take us to live with him. Sonia does not want to go, but I agree. Of course, I should miss mother; but, then, I should write her letters! It’s a queer idea, but we could come and visit her on holidays—couldn’t we? Father says, too, that he will buy me a horse. He’s an awfully kind man! I can’t understand why mother does not ask him to come and live with us, and why she forbids us to see him. You know he loves mother very much. He is always asking us how she is and what she is doing. When she was ill he clutched his head like this, and… and kept running about. He always tells us to be obedient and respectful to her. Listen. Is it true that we are unfortunate?”

“H’m!… Why?”

“That’s what father says. ‘You are unhappy children,’ he says. It’s strange to hear him, really. ‘You are unhappy,’ he says, ‘I am unhappy, and mother’s unhappy. You must pray to God,’ he says; ‘for yourselves and for her.’ ”

Alyosha let his eyes rest on a stuffed bird and sank into thought.

“So…” growled Belyaev. “So that’s how you are going on. You arrange meetings at restaurants. And mother does not know?”

“No-o.… How should she know? Pelagea would not tell her for anything, you know. The day before yesterday he gave us some pears. As sweet as jam! I ate two.”

“H’m!… Well, and I say.… Listen. Did father say anything about me?”

“About you? What shall I say?”

Alyosha looked searchingly into Belyaev’s face and shrugged his shoulders.

“He didn’t say anything particular.”

“For instance, what did he say?”

“You won’t be offended?”

“What next? Why, does he abuse me?”

“He doesn’t abuse you, but you know he is angry with you. He says mother’s unhappy owing to you… and that you have ruined mother. You know he is so queer! I explain to him that you are kind, that you never scold mother; but he only shakes his head.”

“So he says I have ruined her?”

“Yes; you mustn’t be offended, Nikolay Ilyitch.”

Belyaev got up, stood still a moment, and walked up and down the drawing room.

“That’s strange and… ridiculous!” he muttered, shrugging his shoulders and smiling sarcastically. “He’s entirely to blame, and I have ruined her, eh? An innocent lamb, I must say. So he told you I ruined your mother?”

“Yes, but… you said you would not be offended, you know.”

“I am not offended, and… and it’s not your business. Why, it’s… why, it’s positively ridiculous! I have been thrust into it like a chicken in the broth, and now it seems I’m to blame!”

A ring was heard. The boy sprang up from his place and ran out. A minute later a lady came into the room with a little girl; this was Olga Ivanovna, Alyosha’s mother. Alyosha followed them in, skipping and

jumping, humming aloud and waving his hands. Belyaev nodded, and went on walking up and down.

“Of course, whose fault is it if not mine?” he muttered with a snort. “He is right! He is an injured husband.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Olga Ivanovna.

“What about?… Why, just listen to the tales your lawful spouse is spreading now! It appears that I am a scoundrel and a villain, that I have ruined you and the children. All of you are unhappy, and I am the only happy one! Wonderfully, wonderfully happy!”

“I don’t understand, Nikolay. What’s the matter?”

“Why, listen to this young gentleman!” said Belyaev, pointing to Alyosha.

Alyosha flushed crimson, then turned pale, and his whole face began working with terror.

“Nikolay Ilyitch,” he said in a loud whisper. “Sh-sh!”

Olga Ivanovna looked in surprise at Alyosha, then at Belyaev, then at Alyosha again.

“Just ask him,” Belyaev went on. “Your Pelagea, like a regular fool, takes them about to restaurants and arranges meetings with their papa. But that’s not the point: the point is that their dear papa is a victim, while I’m a wretch who has broken up both your lives…”

“Nikolay Ilyitch,” moaned Alyosha. “Why, you promised on your word of honour!”

“Oh, get away!” said Belyaev, waving him off. “This is more important than any word of honour. It’s the hypocrisy revolts me, the lying!…”

“I don’t understand it,” said Olga Ivanovna, and tears glistened in her eyes. “Tell me, Alyosha,” she turned to her son. “Do you see your father?”

Alyosha did not hear her; he was looking with horror at Belyaev.

“It’s impossible,” said his mother; “I will go and question Pelagea.”

Olga Ivanovna went out.

“I say, you promised on your word of honour!” said Alyosha, trembling all over.

Belyaev dismissed him with a wave of his hand, and went on walking up and down. He was absorbed in his grievance and was oblivious of the boy’s presence, as he always had been. He, a grown-up, serious person, had no thought to spare for boys. And Alyosha sat down in the corner and told Sonia with horror how he had been deceived. He was trembling, stammering, and crying. It was the first time in his life that he had been

brought into such coarse contact with lying; till then he had not known that there are in the world, besides sweet pears, pies, and expensive watches, a great many things for which the language of children has no expression.

Difficult People

Yevgraf Ivanovitch Shiryaev, a small farmer, whose father, a parish priest, now deceased, had received a gift of three hundred acres of land from Madame Kuvshinnikov, a general's widow, was standing in a corner before a copper washing-stand, washing his hands. As usual, his face looked anxious and ill-humoured, and his beard was uncombed.

"What weather!" he said. "It's not weather, but a curse laid upon us. It's raining again!"

He grumbled on, while his family sat waiting at table for him to have finished washing his hands before beginning dinner. Fedosya Semyonovna, his wife, his son Pyotr, a student, his eldest daughter Varvara, and three small boys, had been sitting waiting a long time. The boys—Kolka, Vanka, and Arhipka—grubby, snub-nosed little fellows with chubby faces and tousled hair that wanted cutting, moved their chairs impatiently, while their elders sat without stirring, and apparently did not care whether they ate their dinner or waited.…

As though trying their patience, Shiryaev deliberately dried his hands, deliberately said his prayer, and sat down to the table without hurrying himself. Cabbage-soup was served immediately. The sound of carpenters' axes (Shiryaev was having a new barn built) and the laughter of Fomka, their labourer, teasing the turkey, floated in from the courtyard.

Big, sparse drops of rain pattered on the window.

Pyotr, a round-shouldered student in spectacles, kept exchanging glances with his mother as he ate his dinner. Several times he laid down his spoon and cleared his throat, meaning to begin to speak, but after an intent look at his father he fell to eating again. At last, when the porridge had been served, he cleared his throat resolutely and said:

"I ought to go tonight by the evening train. I out to have gone before; I have missed a fortnight as it is. The lectures begin on the first of September."

“Well, go,” Shiryaev assented; “why are you lingering on here? Pack up and go, and good luck to you.”

A minute passed in silence.

“He must have money for the journey, Yevgraf Ivanovitch,” the mother observed in a low voice.

“Money? To be sure, you can’t go without money. Take it at once, since you need it. You could have had it long ago!”

The student heaved a faint sigh and looked with relief at his mother. Deliberately Shiryaev took a pocketbook out of his coat-pocket and put on his spectacles.

“How much do you want?” he asked.

“The fare to Moscow is eleven roubles forty-two kopecks.…”

“Ah, money, money!” sighed the father. (He always sighed when he saw money, even when he was receiving it.) “Here are twelve roubles for you. You will have change out of that which will be of use to you on the journey.”

“Thank you.”

After waiting a little, the student said:

“I did not get lessons quite at first last year. I don’t know how it will be this year; most likely it will take me a little time to find work. I ought to ask you for fifteen roubles for my lodging and dinner.”

Shiryaev thought a little and heaved a sigh.

“You will have to make ten do,” he said. “Here, take it.”

The student thanked him. He ought to have asked him for something more, for clothes, for lecture fees, for books, but after an intent look at his father he decided not to pester him further.

The mother, lacking in diplomacy and prudence, like all mothers, could not restrain herself, and said:

“You ought to give him another six roubles, Yevgraf Ivanovitch, for a pair of boots. Why, just see, how can he go to Moscow in such wrecks?”

“Let him take my old ones; they are still quite good.”

“He must have trousers, anyway; he is a disgrace to look at.”

And immediately after that a storm-signal showed itself, at the sight of which all the family trembled.

Shiryaev’s short, fat neck turned suddenly red as a beetroot. The colour mounted slowly to his ears, from his ears to his temples, and by degrees suffused his whole face. Yevgraf Ivanovitch shifted in his chair and unbuttoned his shirt-collar to save himself from choking. He was evidently struggling with the feeling that was mastering him. A deathlike silence followed. The children held their breath. Fedosya Semyonovna,

as though she did not grasp what was happening to her husband, went on:

"He is not a little boy now, you know; he is ashamed to go about without clothes."

Shiryaev suddenly jumped up, and with all his might flung down his fat pocketbook in the middle of the table, so that a hunk of bread flew off a plate. A revolting expression of anger, resentment, avarice—all mixed together—flamed on his face.

"Take everything!" he shouted in an unnatural voice; "plunder me! Take it all! Strangle me!"

He jumped up from the table, clutched at his head, and ran staggering about the room.

"Strip me to the last thread!" he shouted in a shrill voice. "Squeeze out the last drop! Rob me! Wring my neck!"

The student flushed and dropped his eyes. He could not go on eating. Fedosya Semyonovna, who had not after twenty-five years grown used to her husband's difficult character, shrank into herself and muttered something in self-defence. An expression of amazement and dull terror came into her wasted and birdlike face, which at all times looked dull and scared. The little boys and the elder daughter Varvara, a girl in her teens, with a pale ugly face, laid down their spoons and sat mute.

Shiryaev, growing more and more ferocious, uttering words each more terrible than the one before, dashed up to the table and began shaking the notes out of his pocketbook.

"Take them!" he muttered, shaking all over. "You've eaten and drunk your fill, so here's money for you too! I need nothing! Order yourself new boots and uniforms!"

The student turned pale and got up.

"Listen, papa," he began, gasping for breath. "I… I beg you to end this, for…"

"Hold your tongue!" the father shouted at him, and so loudly that the spectacles fell off his nose; "hold your tongue!"

"I used… I used to be able to put up with such scenes, but… but now I have got out of the way of it. Do you understand? I have got out of the way of it!"

"Hold your tongue!" cried the father, and he stamped with his feet. "You must listen to what I say! I shall say what I like, and you hold your tongue. At your age I was earning my living, while you… Do you know what you cost me, you scoundrel? I'll turn you out! Wastrel!"

“Yevgraf Ivanovitch,” muttered Fedosya Semyonovna, moving her fingers nervously; “you know he… you know Petya…!”

“Hold your tongue!” Shiryaev shouted out to her, and tears actually came into his eyes from anger. “It is you who have spoilt them—you! It’s all your fault! He has no respect for us, does not say his prayers, and earns nothing! I am only one against the ten of you! I’ll turn you out of the house!”

The daughter Varvara gazed fixedly at her mother with her mouth open, moved her vacant-looking eyes to the window, turned pale, and, uttering a loud shriek, fell back in her chair. The father, with a curse and a wave of the hand, ran out into the yard.

This was how domestic scenes usually ended at the Shiryaevs’. But on this occasion, unfortunately, Pyotr the student was carried away by overmastering anger. He was just as hasty and ill-tempered as his father and his grandfather the priest, who used to beat his parishioners about the head with a stick. Pale and clenching his fists, he went up to his mother and shouted in the very highest tenor note his voice could reach:

“These reproaches are loathsome! sickening to me! I want nothing from you! Nothing! I would rather die of hunger than eat another mouthful at your expense! Take your nasty money back! take it!”

The mother huddled against the wall and waved her hands, as though it were not her son, but some phantom before her. “What have I done?” she wailed. “What?”

Like his father, the boy waved his hands and ran into the yard. Shiryaev’s house stood alone on a ravine which ran like a furrow for four miles along the steppe. Its sides were overgrown with oak saplings and alders, and a stream ran at the bottom. On one side the house looked towards the ravine, on the other towards the open country, there were no fences nor hurdles. Instead there were farm-buildings of all sorts close to one another, shutting in a small space in front of the house which was regarded as the yard, and in which hens, ducks, and pigs ran about.

Going out of the house, the student walked along the muddy road towards the open country. The air was full of a penetrating autumn dampness. The road was muddy, puddles gleamed here and there, and in the yellow fields autumn itself seemed looking out from the grass, dismal, decaying, dark. On the right-hand side of the road was a vegetable-garden cleared of its crops and gloomy-looking, with here and there sunflowers standing up in it with hanging heads already black.

Pyotr thought it would not be a bad thing to walk to Moscow on foot; to walk just as he was, with holes in his boots, without a cap, and without

a farthing of money. When he had gone eighty miles his father, frightened and aghast, would overtake him, would begin begging him to turn back or take the money, but he would not even look at him, but would go on and on.… Bare forests would be followed by desolate fields, fields by forests again; soon the earth would be white with the first snow, and the streams would be coated with ice.… Somewhere near Kursk or near Serpuhovo, exhausted and dying of hunger, he would sink down and die. His corpse would be found, and there would be a paragraph in all the papers saying that a student called Shiryaev had died of hunger.…

A white dog with a muddy tail who was wandering about the vegetable-garden looking for something gazed at him and sauntered after him.

He walked along the road and thought of death, of the grief of his family, of the moral sufferings of his father, and then pictured all sorts of adventures on the road, each more marvellous than the one before—picturesque places, terrible nights, chance encounters. He imagined a string of pilgrims, a hut in the forest with one little window shining in the darkness; he stands before the window, begs for a night's lodging.… They let him in, and suddenly he sees that they are robbers. Or, better still, he is taken into a big manor-house, where, learning who he is, they give him food and drink, play to him on the piano, listen to his complaints, and the daughter of the house, a beauty, falls in love with him.

Absorbed in his bitterness and such thoughts, young Shiryaev walked on and on. Far, far ahead he saw the inn, a dark patch against the grey background of cloud. Beyond the inn, on the very horizon, he could see a little hillock; this was the railway-station. That hillock reminded him of the connection existing between the place where he was now standing and Moscow, where streetlamps were burning and carriages were rattling in the streets, where lectures were being given. And he almost wept with depression and impatience. The solemn landscape, with its order and beauty, the deathlike stillness all around, revolted him and moved him to despair and hatred!

"Look out!" He heard behind him a loud voice.

An old lady of his acquaintance, a landowner of the neighbourhood, drove past him in a light, elegant landau. He bowed to her, and smiled all over his face. And at once he caught himself in that smile, which was so out of keeping with his gloomy mood. Where did it come from if his whole heart was full of vexation and misery? And he thought nature

itself had given man this capacity for lying, that even in difficult moments of spiritual strain he might be able to hide the secrets of his nest as the fox and the wild duck do. Every family has its joys and its horrors, but however great they may be, it's hard for an outsider's eye to see them; they are a secret. The father of the old lady who had just driven by, for instance, had for some offence lain for half his lifetime under the ban of the wrath of Tsar Nicolas I; her husband had been a gambler; of her four sons, not one had turned out well. One could imagine how many terrible scenes there must have been in her life, how many tears must have been shed. And yet the old lady seemed happy and satisfied, and she had answered his smile by smiling too. The student thought of his comrades, who did not like talking about their families; he thought of his mother, who almost always lied when she had to speak of her husband and children.…

Pyotr walked about the roads far from home till dusk, abandoning himself to dreary thoughts. When it began to drizzle with rain he turned homewards. As he walked back he made up his mind at all costs to talk to his father, to explain to him, once and for all, that it was dreadful and oppressive to live with him.

He found perfect stillness in the house. His sister Varvara was lying behind a screen with a headache, moaning faintly. His mother, with a look of amazement and guilt upon her face, was sitting beside her on a box, mending Arhipka's trousers. Yevgraf Ivanovitch was pacing from one window to another, scowling at the weather. From his walk, from the way he cleared his throat, and even from the back of his head, it was evident he felt himself to blame.

"I suppose you have changed your mind about going today?" he asked.

The student felt sorry for him, but immediately suppressing that feeling, he said:

"Listen… I must speak to you seriously… yes, seriously. I have always respected you, and… and have never brought myself to speak to you in such a tone, but your behaviour… your last action…"

The father looked out of the window and did not speak. The student, as though considering his words, rubbed his forehead and went on in great excitement:

"Not a dinner or tea passes without your making an uproar. Your bread sticks in our throat… nothing is more bitter, more humiliating, than bread that sticks in one's throat.… Though you are my father, no one, neither God nor nature, has given you the right to insult and humiliate us

so horribly, to vent your ill-humour on the weak. You have worn my mother out and made a slave of her, my sister is hopelessly crushed, while I…”

“It’s not your business to teach me,” said his father.

“Yes, it is my business! You can quarrel with me as much as you like, but leave my mother in peace! I will not allow you to torment my mother!” the student went on, with flashing eyes. “You are spoilt because no one has yet dared to oppose you. They tremble and are mute towards you, but now that is over! Coarse, ill-bred man! You are coarse… do you understand? You are coarse, ill-humoured, unfeeling. And the peasants can’t endure you!”

The student had by now lost his thread, and was not so much speaking as firing off detached words. Yevgraf Ivanovitch listened in silence, as though stunned; but suddenly his neck turned crimson, the colour crept up his face, and he made a movement.

“Hold your tongue!” he shouted.

“That’s right!” the son persisted; “you don’t like to hear the truth! Excellent! Very good! begin shouting! Excellent!”

“Hold your tongue, I tell you!” roared Yevgraf Ivanovitch.

Fedosya Semyonovna appeared in the doorway, very pale, with an astonished face; she tried to say something, but she could not, and could only move her fingers.

“It’s all your fault!” Shiryaev shouted at her. “You have brought him up like this!”

“I don’t want to go on living in this house!” shouted the student, crying, and looking angrily at his mother. “I don’t want to live with you!”

Varvara uttered a shriek behind the screen and broke into loud sobs. With a wave of his hand, Shiryaev ran out of the house.

The student went to his own room and quietly lay down. He lay till midnight without moving or opening his eyes. He felt neither anger nor shame, but a vague ache in his soul. He neither blamed his father nor pitied his mother, nor was he tormented by stings of conscience; he realized that everyone in the house was feeling the same ache, and God only knew which was most to blame, which was suffering most.…

At midnight he woke the labourer, and told him to have the horse ready at five o’clock in the morning for him to drive to the station; he undressed and got into bed, but could not get to sleep. He heard how his father, still awake, paced slowly from window to window, sighing, till early morning. No one was asleep; they spoke rarely, and only in

whispers. Twice his mother came to him behind the screen. Always with the same look of vacant wonder, she slowly made the cross over him, shaking nervously.

At five o'clock in the morning he said goodbye to them all affectionately, and even shed tears. As he passed his father's room, he glanced in at the door. Yevgraf Ivanovitch, who had not taken off his clothes or gone to bed, was standing by the window, drumming on the panes.

"Goodbye; I am going," said his son.

"Goodbye… the money is on the round table…" his father answered, without turning round.

A cold, hateful rain was falling as the labourer drove him to the station. The sunflowers were drooping their heads still lower, and the grass seemed darker than ever.

In the Court

At the district town of N—— in the cinnamon-coloured government house in which the Zemstvo, the sessional meetings of the justices of the peace, the Rural Board, the Liquor Board, the Military Board, and many others sit by turns, the Circuit Court was in session on one of the dull days of autumn. Of the above-mentioned cinnamon-coloured house a local official had wittily observed:

"Here is Justitia, here is Policia, here is Militia—a regular boarding school of highborn young ladies."

But, as the saying is, "Too many cooks spoil the broth," and probably that is why the house strikes, oppresses, and overwhelms a fresh unofficial visitor with its dismal barrack-like appearance, its decrepit condition, and the complete absence of any kind of comfort, external or internal. Even on the brightest spring days it seems wrapped in a dense shade, and on clear moonlight nights, when the trees and the little dwelling-houses merged in one blur of shadow seem plunged in quiet slumber, it alone absurdly and inappropriately towers, an oppressive mass of stone, above the modest landscape, spoils the general harmony, and keeps sleepless vigil as though it could not escape from burdensome memories of past unforgiven sins. Inside it is like a barn and extremely unattractive. It is strange to see how readily these elegant lawyers, members of committees, and marshals of nobility, who in their own homes will make a scene over the slightest fume from the stove, or stain on the floor, resign themselves here to whirring ventilation wheels, the disgusting smell of fumigating candles, and the filthy, forever perspiring walls.

The sitting of the circuit court began between nine and ten. The programme of the day was promptly entered upon, with noticeable haste. The cases came on one after another and ended quickly, like a church service without a choir, so that no mind could form a complete picture of all this parti-coloured mass of faces, movements, words, misfortunes, true sayings and lies, all racing by like a river in flood.… By two o'clock

a great deal had been done: two prisoners had been sentenced to service in convict battalions, one of the privileged class had been sentenced to deprivation of rights and imprisonment, one had been acquitted, one case had been adjourned.

At precisely two o'clock the presiding judge announced that the case "of the peasant Nikolay Harlamov, charged with the murder of his wife," would next be heard. The composition of the court remained the same as it had been for the preceding case, except that the place of the defending counsel was filled by a new personage, a beardless young graduate in a coat with bright buttons. The president gave the order—"Bring in the prisoner!"

But the prisoner, who had been got ready beforehand, was already walking to his bench. He was a tall, thickset peasant of about fifty-five, completely bald, with an apathetic, hairy face and a big red beard. He was followed by a frail-looking little soldier with a gun.

Just as he was reaching the bench the escort had a trifling mishap. He stumbled and dropped the gun out of his hands, but caught it at once before it touched the ground, knocking his knee violently against the butt end as he did so. A faint laugh was audible in the audience. Either from the pain or perhaps from shame at his awkwardness the soldier flushed a dark red.

After the customary questions to the prisoner, the shuffling of the jury, the calling over and swearing in of the witnesses, the reading of the charge began. The narrow-chested, pale-faced secretary, far too thin for his uniform, and with sticking plaster on his cheek, read it in a low, thick bass, rapidly like a sacristan, without raising or dropping his voice, as though afraid of exerting his lungs; he was seconded by the ventilation wheel whirring indefatigably behind the judge's table, and the result was a sound that gave a drowsy, narcotic character to the stillness of the hall.

The president, a shortsighted man, not old but with an extremely exhausted face, sat in his armchair without stirring and held his open hand near his brow as though screening his eyes from the sun. To the droning of the ventilation wheel and the secretary he meditated. When the secretary paused for an instant to take breath on beginning a new page, he suddenly started and looked round at the court with lustreless eyes, then bent down to the ear of the judge next to him and asked with a sigh:

"Are you putting up at Demyanov's, Matvey Petrovitch?"

"Yes, at Demyanov's," answered the other, starting too.

“Next time I shall probably put up there too. It’s really impossible to put up at Tipyakov’s! There’s noise and uproar all night! Knocking, coughing, children crying.… It’s impossible!”

The assistant prosecutor, a fat, well-nourished, dark man with gold spectacles, with a handsome, well-groomed beard, sat motionless as a statue, with his cheek propped on his fist, reading Byron’s *Cain*. His eyes were full of eager attention and his eyebrows rose higher and higher with wonder.… From time to time he dropped back in his chair, gazed without interest straight before him for a minute, and then buried himself in his reading again. The council for the defence moved the blunt end of his pencil about the table and mused with his head on one side.… His youthful face expressed nothing but the frigid, immovable boredom which is commonly seen on the face of schoolboys and men on duty who are forced from day to day to sit in the same place, to see the same faces, the same walls. He felt no excitement about the speech he was to make, and indeed what did that speech amount to? On instructions from his superiors in accordance with long-established routine he would fire it off before the jurymen, without passion or ardour, feeling that it was colourless and boring, and then—gallop through the mud and the rain to the station, thence to the town, shortly to receive instructions to go off again to some district to deliver another speech.… It was a bore!

At first the prisoner turned pale and coughed nervously into his sleeve, but soon the stillness, the general monotony and boredom infected him too. He looked with dull-witted respectfulness at the judges’ uniforms, at the weary faces of the jurymen, and blinked calmly. The surroundings and procedure of the court, the expectation of which had so weighed on his soul while he was awaiting them in prison, now had the most soothing effect on him. What he met here was not at all what he could have expected. The charge of murder hung over him, and yet here he met with neither threatening faces nor indignant looks nor loud phrases about retribution nor sympathy for his extraordinary fate; not one of those who were judging him looked at him with interest or for long.… The dingy windows and walls, the voice of the secretary, the attitude of the prosecutor were all saturated with official indifference and produced an atmosphere of frigidity, as though the murderer were simply an official property, or as though he were not being judged by living men, but by some unseen machine, set going, goodness knows how or by whom.…

The peasant, reassured, did not understand that the men here were as accustomed to the dramas and tragedies of life and were as blunted by the sight of them as hospital attendants are at the sight of death, and that

the whole horror and hopelessness of his position lay just in this mechanical indifference. It seemed that if he were not to sit quietly but to get up and begin beseeching, appealing with tears for their mercy, bitterly repenting, that if he were to die of despair—it would all be shattered against blunted nerves and the callousness of custom, like waves against a rock.

When the secretary finished, the president for some reason passed his hands over the table before him, looked for some time with his eyes screwed up towards the prisoner, and then asked, speaking languidly:

"Prisoner at the bar, do you plead guilty to having murdered your wife on the evening of the ninth of June?"

"No, sir," answered the prisoner, getting up and holding his gown over his chest.

After this the court proceeded hurriedly to the examination of witnesses. Two peasant women and five men and the village policeman who had made the enquiry were questioned. All of them, mud-bespattered, exhausted with their long walk and waiting in the witnesses' room, gloomy and dispirited, gave the same evidence. They testified that Harlamov lived "well" with his old woman, like anyone else; that he never beat her except when he had had a drop; that on the ninth of June when the sun was setting the old woman had been found in the porch with her skull broken; that beside her in a pool of blood lay an axe. When they looked for Nikolay to tell him of the calamity he was not in his hut or in the streets. They ran all over the village, looking for him. They went to all the pothouses and huts, but could not find him. He had disappeared, and two days later came of his own accord to the police office, pale, with his clothes torn, trembling all over. He was bound and put in the lockup.

"Prisoner," said the president, addressing Harlamov, "cannot you explain to the court where you were during the three days following the murder?"

"I was wandering about the fields.… Neither eating nor drinking.…"

"Why did you hide yourself, if it was not you that committed the murder?"

"I was frightened.… I was afraid I might be judged guilty.…"

"Aha!… Good, sit down!"

The last to be examined was the district doctor who had made a postmortem on the old woman. He told the court all that he remembered of his report at the postmortem and all that he had succeeded in thinking of on his way to the court that morning. The president screwed up his

eyes at his new glossy black suit, at his foppish cravat, at his moving lips; he listened and in his mind the languid thought seemed to spring up of itself:

"Everyone wears a short jacket nowadays, why has he had his made long? Why long and not short?"

The circumspect creak of boots was audible behind the president's back. It was the assistant prosecutor going up to the table to take some papers.

"Mihail Vladimirovitch," said the assistant prosecutor, bending down to the president's ear, "amazingly slovenly the way that Koreisky conducted the investigation. The prisoner's brother was not examined, the village elder was not examined, there's no making anything out of his description of the hut.…"

"It can't be helped, it can't be helped," said the president, sinking back in his chair. "He's a wreck… dropping to bits!"

"By the way," whispered the assistant prosecutor, "look at the audience, in the front row, the third from the right… a face like an actor's… that's the local Croesus. He has a fortune of something like fifty thousand."

"Really? You wouldn't guess it from his appearance.… Well, dear boy, shouldn't we have a break?"

"We will finish the case for the prosecution, and then.…"

"As you think best.… Well?" the president raised his eyes to the doctor. "So you consider that death was instantaneous?"

"Yes, in consequence of the extent of the injury to the brain substance.…"

When the doctor had finished, the president gazed into the space between the prosecutor and the counsel for the defence and suggested:

"Have you any questions to ask?"

The assistant prosecutor shook his head negatively, without lifting his eyes from *Cain*; the counsel for the defence unexpectedly stirred and, clearing his throat, asked:

"Tell me, doctor, can you from the dimensions of the wound form any theory as to… as to the mental condition of the criminal? That is, I mean, does the extent of the injury justify the supposition that the accused was suffering from temporary aberration?"

The president raised his drowsy indifferent eyes to the counsel for the defence. The assistant prosecutor tore himself from *Cain*, and looked at the president. They merely looked, but there was no smile, no surprise, no perplexity-their faces expressed nothing.

“Perhaps,” the doctor hesitated, “if one considers the force with which… er—er—er… the criminal strikes the blow.… However, excuse me, I don’t quite understand your question.…”

The counsel for the defence did not get an answer to his question, and indeed he did not feel the necessity of one. It was clear even to himself that that question had strayed into his mind and found utterance simply through the effect of the stillness, the boredom, the whirring ventilator wheels.

When they had got rid of the doctor the court rose to examine the “material evidences.” The first thing examined was the full-skirted coat, upon the sleeve of which there was a dark brownish stain of blood. Harlamov on being questioned as to the origin of the stain stated:

“Three days before my old woman’s death Penkov bled his horse. I was there; I was helping to be sure, and… and got smeared with it.…”

“But Penkov has just given evidence that he does not remember that you were present at the bleeding.…”

“I can’t tell about that.”

“Sit down.”

They proceeded to examine the axe with which the old woman had been murdered.

“That’s not my axe,” the prisoner declared.

“Whose is it, then?”

“I can’t tell… I hadn’t an axe.…”

“A peasant can’t get on for a day without an axe. And your neighbour Ivan Timofeyitch, with whom you mended a sledge, has given evidence that it is your axe.…”

“I can’t say about that, but I swear before God (Harlamov held out his hand before him and spread out the fingers), before the living God. And I don’t remember how long it is since I did have an axe of my own. I did have one like that only a bit smaller, but my son Prohor lost it. Two years before he went into the army, he drove off to fetch wood, got drinking with the fellows, and lost it.…”

“Good, sit down.”

This systematic distrust and disinclination to hear him probably irritated and offended Harlamov. He blinked and red patches came out on his cheekbones.

“I swear in the sight of God,” he went on, craning his neck forward. “If you don’t believe me, be pleased to ask my son Prohor. Proshka, what did you do with the axe?” he suddenly asked in a rough voice, turning abruptly to the soldier escorting him. “Where is it?”

It was a painful moment! Everyone seemed to wince and as it were shrink together. The same fearful, incredible thought flashed like lightning through every head in the court, the thought of possibly fatal coincidence, and not one person in the court dared to look at the soldier's face. Everyone refused to trust his thought and believed that he had heard wrong.

"Prisoner, conversation with the guards is forbidden…" the president made haste to say.

No one saw the escort's face, and horror passed over the hall unseen as in a mask. The usher of the court got up quietly from his place and tiptoeing with his hand held out to balance himself went out of the court. Half a minute later there came the muffled sounds and footsteps that accompany the change of guard.

All raised their heads and, trying to look as though nothing had happened, went on with their work.…

A Peculiar Man

Between twelve and one at night a tall gentleman, wearing a top-hat and a coat with a hood, stops before the door of Marya Petrovna Koshkin, a midwife and an old maid. Neither face nor hand can be distinguished in the autumn darkness, but in the very manner of his coughing and the ringing of the bell a certain solidity, positiveness, and even impressiveness can be discerned. After the third ring the door opens and Marya Petrovna herself appears. She has a man's overcoat flung on over her white petticoat. The little lamp with the green shade which she holds in her hand throws a greenish light over her sleepy, freckled face, her scraggy neck, and the lank, reddish hair that strays from under her cap.

"Can I see the midwife?" asks the gentleman.

"I am the midwife. What do you want?"

The gentleman walks into the entry and Marya Petrovna sees facing her a tall, well-made man, no longer young, but with a handsome, severe face and bushy whiskers.

"I am a collegiate assessor, my name is Kiryakov," he says. "I came to fetch you to my wife. Only please make haste."

"Very good…" the midwife assents. "I'll dress at once, and I must trouble you to wait for me in the parlour."

Kiryakov takes off his overcoat and goes into the parlour. The greenish light of the lamp lies sparsely on the cheap furniture in patched white covers, on the pitiful flowers and the posts on which ivy is trained.… There is a smell of geranium and carbolic. The little clock on the wall ticks timidly, as though abashed at the presence of a strange man.

"I am ready," says Marya Petrovna, coming into the room five minutes later, dressed, washed, and ready for action. "Let us go."

"Yes, you must make haste," says Kiryakov. "And, by the way, it is not out of place to enquire—what do you ask for your services?"

"I really don't know…" says Marya Petrovna with an embarrassed smile. "As much as you will give."

“No, I don’t like that,” says Kiryakov, looking coldly and steadily at the midwife. “An arrangement beforehand is best. I don’t want to take advantage of you and you don’t want to take advantage of me. To avoid misunderstandings it is more sensible for us to make an arrangement beforehand.”

“I really don’t know—there is no fixed price.”

“I work myself and am accustomed to respect the work of others. I don’t like injustice. It will be equally unpleasant to me if I pay you too little, or if you demand from me too much, and so I insist on your naming your charge.”

“Well, there are such different charges.”

“H’m. In view of your hesitation, which I fail to understand, I am constrained to fix the sum myself. I can give you two roubles.”

“Good gracious!… Upon my word!…” says Marya Petrovna, turning crimson and stepping back. “I am really ashamed. Rather than take two roubles I will come for nothing.… Five roubles, if you like.”

“Two roubles, not a kopeck more. I don’t want to take advantage of you, but I do not intend to be overcharged.”

“As you please, but I am not coming for two roubles.…”

“But by law you have not the right to refuse.”

“Very well, I will come for nothing.”

“I won’t have you for nothing. All work ought to receive remuneration. I work myself and I understand that.…”

“I won’t come for two roubles,” Marya Petrovna answers mildly. “I’ll come for nothing if you like.”

“In that case I regret that I have troubled you for nothing.… I have the honour to wish you goodbye.”

“Well, you are a man!” says Marya Petrovna, seeing him into the entry. “I will come for three roubles if that will satisfy you.”

Kiryakov frowns and ponders for two full minutes, looking with concentration on the floor, then he says resolutely, “No,” and goes out into the street. The astonished and disconcerted midwife fastens the door after him and goes back into her bedroom.

“He’s good-looking, respectable, but how queer, God bless the man!…” she thinks as she gets into bed.

But in less than half an hour she hears another ring; she gets up and sees the same Kiryakov again.

“Extraordinary the way things are mismanaged. Neither the chemist, nor the police, nor the house-porters can give me the address of a midwife, and so I am under the necessity of assenting to your terms. I

will give you three roubles, but… I warn you beforehand that when I engage servants or receive any kind of services, I make an arrangement beforehand in order that when I pay there may be no talk of extras, tips, or anything of the sort. Everyone ought to receive what is his due."

Marya Petrovna has not listened to Kiryakov for long, but already she feels that she is bored and repelled by him, that his even, measured speech lies like a weight on her soul. She dresses and goes out into the street with him. The air is still but cold, and the sky is so overcast that the light of the street lamps is hardly visible. The sloshy snow squelches under their feet. The midwife looks intently but does not see a cab.

"I suppose it is not far?" she asks.

"No, not far," Kiryakov answers grimly.

They walk down one turning, a second, a third.… Kiryakov strides along, and even in his step his respectability and positiveness is apparent.

"What awful weather!" the midwife observes to him.

But he preserves a dignified silence, and it is noticeable that he tries to step on the smooth stones to avoid spoiling his goloshes. At last after a long walk the midwife steps into the entry; from which she can see a big decently furnished drawing room. There is not a soul in the rooms, even in the bedroom where the woman is lying in labour.… The old women and relations who flock in crowds to every confinement are not to be seen. The cook rushes about alone, with a scared and vacant face. There is a sound of loud groans.

Three hours pass. Marya Petrovna sits by the mother's bedside and whispers to her. The two women have already had time to make friends, they have got to know each other, they gossip, they sigh together.…

"You mustn't talk," says the midwife anxiously, and at the same time she showers questions on her.

Then the door opens and Kiryakov himself comes quietly and stolidly into the room. He sits down in the chair and strokes his whiskers. Silence reigns. Marya Petrovna looks timidly at his handsome, passionless, wooden face and waits for him to begin to talk, but he remains absolutely silent and absorbed in thought. After waiting in vain, the midwife makes up her mind to begin herself, and utters a phrase commonly used at confinements.

"Well now, thank God, there is one human being more in the world!"

"Yes, that's agreeable," said Kiryakov, preserving the wooden expression of his face, "though indeed, on the other hand, to have more children you must have more money. The baby is not born fed and clothed."

A guilty expression comes into the mother’s face, as though she had brought a creature into the world without permission or through idle caprice. Kiryakov gets up with a sigh and walks with solid dignity out of the room.

“What a man, bless him!” says the midwife to the mother. “He’s so stern and does not smile.”

The mother tells her that *he* is always like that.… He is honest, fair, prudent, sensibly economical, but all that to such an exceptional degree that simple mortals feel suffocated by it. His relations have parted from him, the servants will not stay more than a month; they have no friends; his wife and children are always on tenterhooks from terror over every step they take. He does not shout at them nor beat them, his virtues are far more numerous than his defects, but when he goes out of the house they all feel better, and more at ease. Why it is so the woman herself cannot say.

“The basins must be properly washed and put away in the store cupboard,” says Kiryakov, coming into the bedroom. “These bottles must be put away too: they may come in handy.”

What he says is very simple and ordinary, but the midwife for some reason feels flustered. She begins to be afraid of the man and shudders every time she hears his footsteps. In the morning as she is preparing to depart she sees Kiryakov’s little son, a pale, close-cropped schoolboy, in the dining room drinking his tea.… Kiryakov is standing opposite him, saying in his flat, even voice:

“You know how to eat, you must know how to work too. You have just swallowed a mouthful but have not probably reflected that that mouthful costs money and money is obtained by work. You must eat and reflect.…”

The midwife looks at the boy’s dull face, and it seems to her as though the very air is heavy, that a little more and the very walls will fall, unable to endure the crushing presence of the peculiar man. Beside herself with terror, and by now feeling a violent hatred for the man, Marya Petrovna gathers up her bundles and hurriedly departs.

Halfway home she remembers that she has forgotten to ask for her three roubles, but after stopping and thinking for a minute, with a wave of her hand, she goes on.

MIRE

I

Gracefully swaying in the saddle, a young man wearing the snow-white tunic of an officer rode into the great yard of the vodka distillery belonging to the heirs of M. E. Rothstein. The sun smiled carelessly on the lieutenant's little stars, on the white trunks of the birch trees, on the heaps of broken glass scattered here and there in the yard. The radiant, vigorous beauty of a summer day lay over everything, and nothing hindered the snappy young green leaves from dancing gaily and winking at the clear blue sky. Even the dirty and soot-begrimed appearance of the bricksheds and the stifling fumes of the distillery did not spoil the general good impression. The lieutenant sprang gaily out of the saddle, handed over his horse to a man who ran up, and stroking with his finger his delicate black moustaches, went in at the front door. On the top step of the old but light and softly carpeted staircase he was met by a maidservant with a haughty, not very youthful face. The lieutenant gave her his card without speaking.

As she went through the rooms with the card, the maid could see on it the name "Alexandr Grigoryevitch Sokolsky." A minute later she came back and told the lieutenant that her mistress could not see him, as she was not feeling quite well. Sokolsky looked at the ceiling and thrust out his lower lip.

"How vexatious!" he said. "Listen, my dear," he said eagerly. "Go and tell Susanna Moiseyevna, that it is very necessary for me to speak to her—very. I will only keep her one minute. Ask her to excuse me."

The maid shrugged one shoulder and went off languidly to her mistress.

"Very well!" she sighed, returning after a brief interval. "Please walk in!"

The lieutenant went with her through five or six large, luxuriously furnished rooms and a corridor, and finally found himself in a large and lofty square room, in which from the first step he was impressed by the abundance of flowers and plants and the sweet, almost revoltingly heavy fragrance of jasmine. Flowers were trained to trellis-work along the walls, screening the windows, hung from the ceiling, and were wreathed over the corners, so that the room was more like a greenhouse than a place to live in. Tits, canaries, and goldfinches chirruped among the green leaves and fluttered against the windowpanes.

"Forgive me for receiving you here," the lieutenant heard in a mellow feminine voice with a burr on the letter *r* which was not without charm. "Yesterday I had a sick headache, and I'm trying to keep still to prevent its coming on again. What do you want?"

Exactly opposite the entrance, he saw sitting in a big low chair, such as old men use, a woman in an expensive Chinese dressing-gown, with her head wrapped up, leaning back on a pillow. Nothing could be seen behind the woollen shawl in which she was muffled but a pale, long, pointed, somewhat aquiline nose, and one large dark eye. Her ample dressing-gown concealed her figure, but judging from her beautiful hand, from her voice, her nose, and her eye, she might be twenty-six or twenty-eight.

"Forgive me for being so persistent…" began the lieutenant, clinking his spurs. "Allow me to introduce myself: Sokolsky! I come with a message from my cousin, your neighbour, Alexey Ivanovitch Kryukov, who…"

"I know!" interposed Susanna Moiseyevna. "I know Kryukov. Sit down; I don't like anything big standing before me."

"My cousin charges me to ask you a favour," the lieutenant went on, clinking his spurs once more and sitting down. "The fact is, your late father made a purchase of oats from my cousin last winter, and a small sum was left owing. The payment only becomes due next week, but my cousin begs you most particularly to pay him—if possible, today."

As the lieutenant talked, he stole side-glances about him.

"Surely I'm not in her bedroom?" he thought.

In one corner of the room, where the foliage was thickest and tallest, under a pink awning like a funeral canopy, stood a bed not yet made, with the bedclothes still in disorder. Close by on two armchairs lay heaps of crumpled feminine garments. Petticoats and sleeves with rumpled lace and flounces were trailing on the carpet, on which here and there lay bits of white tape, cigarette-ends, and the papers of caramels.… Under the

bed the toes, pointed and square, of slippers of all kinds peeped out in a long row. And it seemed to the lieutenant that the scent of the jasmine came not from the flowers, but from the bed and the slippers.

"And what is the sum owing?" asked Susanna Moiseyevna.

"Two thousand three hundred."

"Oho!" said the Jewess, showing another large black eye. "And you call that—a small sum! However, it's just the same paying it today or paying it in a week, but I've had so many payments to make in the last two months since my father's death.… Such a lot of stupid business, it makes my head go round! A nice idea! I want to go abroad, and they keep forcing me to attend to these silly things. Vodka, oats…" she muttered, half closing her eyes, "oats, bills, percentages, or, as my head-clerk says, 'percentage.' … It's awful. Yesterday I simply turned the excise officer out. He pesters me with his Tralles. I said to him: 'Go to the devil with your Tralles! I can't see anyone!' He kissed my hand and went away. I tell you what: can't your cousin wait two or three months?"

"A cruel question!" laughed the lieutenant. "My cousin can wait a year, but it's I who cannot wait! You see, it's on my own account I'm acting, I ought to tell you. At all costs I must have money, and by ill-luck my cousin hasn't a rouble to spare. I'm forced to ride about and collect debts. I've just been to see a peasant, our tenant; here I'm now calling on you; from here I shall go on to somewhere else, and keep on like that until I get together five thousand roubles. I need money awfully!"

"Nonsense! What does a young man want with money? Whims, mischief. Why, have you been going in for dissipation? Or losing at cards? Or are you getting married?"

"You've guessed!" laughed the lieutenant, and rising slightly from his seat, he clinked his spurs. "I really am going to be married."

Susanna Moiseyevna looked intently at her visitor, made a wry face, and sighed.

"I can't make out what possesses people to get married!" she said, looking about her for her pocket-handkerchief. "Life is so short, one has so little freedom, and they must put chains on themselves!"

"Everyone has his own way of looking at things.…"

"Yes, yes, of course; everyone has his own way of looking at things.… But, I say, are you really going to marry someone poor? Are you passionately in love? And why must you have five thousand? Why won't four do, or three?"

"What a tongue she has!" thought the lieutenant, and answered: "The difficulty is that an officer is not allowed by law to marry till he is

twenty-eight; if you choose to marry, you have to leave the Service or else pay a deposit of five thousand."

"Ah, now I understand. Listen. You said just now that everyone has his own way of looking at things.… Perhaps your fiancée is someone special and remarkable, but… but I am utterly unable to understand how any decent man can live with a woman. I can't for the life of me understand it. I have lived, thank the Lord, twenty-seven years, and I have never yet seen an endurable woman. They're all affected minxes, immoral, liars.… The only ones I can put up with are cooks and housemaids, but so-called ladies I won't let come within shooting distance of me. But, thank God, they hate me and don't force themselves on me! If one of them wants money she sends her husband, but nothing will induce her to come herself, not from pride—no, but from cowardice; she's afraid of my making a scene. Oh, I understand their hatred very well! Rather! I openly display what they do their very utmost to conceal from God and man. How can they help hating me? No doubt you've heard bushels of scandal about me already.…"

"I only arrived here so lately…"

"Tut, tut, tut!… I see from your eyes! But your brother's wife, surely she primed you for this expedition? Think of letting a young man come to see such an awful woman without warning him—how could she? Ha, ha!… But tell me, how is your brother? He's a fine fellow, such a handsome man!… I've seen him several times at mass. Why do you look at me like that? I very often go to church! We all have the same God. To an educated person externals matter less than the idea.… That's so, isn't it?"

"Yes, of course…" smiled the lieutenant.

"Yes, the idea.… But you are not a bit like your brother. You are handsome, too, but your brother is a great deal better-looking. There's wonderfully little likeness!"

"That's quite natural; he's not my brother, but my cousin."

"Ah, to be sure! So you must have the money today? Why today?"

"My furlough is over in a few days."

"Well, what's to be done with you!" sighed Susanna Moiseyevna. "So be it. I'll give you the money, though I know you'll abuse me for it afterwards. You'll quarrel with your wife after you are married, and say: 'If that mangy Jewess hadn't given me the money, I should perhaps have been as free as a bird today!' Is your fiancée pretty?"

"Oh yes.…"

“H’m!… Anyway, better something, if it’s only beauty, than nothing. Though however beautiful a woman is, it can never make up to her husband for her silliness.”

“That’s original!” laughed the lieutenant. “You are a woman yourself, and such a woman-hater!”

“A woman…” smiled Susanna. “It’s not my fault that God has cast me into this mould, is it? I’m no more to blame for it than you are for having moustaches. The violin is not responsible for the choice of its case. I am very fond of myself, but when anyone reminds me that I am a woman, I begin to hate myself. Well, you can go away, and I’ll dress. Wait for me in the drawing room.”

The lieutenant went out, and the first thing he did was to draw a deep breath, to get rid of the heavy scent of jasmine, which had begun to irritate his throat and to make him feel giddy.

“What a strange woman!” he thought, looking about him. “She talks fluently, but… far too much, and too freely. She must be neurotic.”

The drawing room, in which he was standing now, was richly furnished, and had pretensions to luxury and style. There were dark bronze dishes with patterns in relief, views of Nice and the Rhine on the tables, old-fashioned sconces, Japanese statuettes, but all this striving after luxury and style only emphasised the lack of taste which was glaringly apparent in the gilt cornices, the gaudy wallpaper, the bright velvet tablecloths, the common oleographs in heavy frames. The bad taste of the general effect was the more complete from the lack of finish and the overcrowding of the room, which gave one a feeling that something was lacking, and that a great deal should have been thrown away. It was evident that the furniture had not been bought all at once, but had been picked up at auctions and other favourable opportunities.

Heaven knows what taste the lieutenant could boast of, but even he noticed one characteristic peculiarity about the whole place, which no luxury or style could efface—a complete absence of all trace of womanly, careful hands, which, as we all know, give a warmth, poetry, and snugness to the furnishing of a room. There was a chilliness about it such as one finds in waiting rooms at stations, in clubs, and foyers at the theatres.

There was scarcely anything in the room definitely Jewish, except, perhaps, a big picture of the meeting of Jacob and Esau. The lieutenant looked round about him, and, shrugging his shoulders, thought of his strange, new acquaintance, of her free-and-easy manners, and her way of talking. But then the door opened, and in the doorway appeared the lady

herself, in a long black dress, so slim and tightly laced that her figure looked as though it had been turned in a lathe. Now the lieutenant saw not only the nose and eyes, but also a thin white face, a head black and as curly as lamb's-wool. She did not attract him, though she did not strike him as ugly. He had a prejudice against un-Russian faces in general, and he considered, too, that the lady's white face, the whiteness of which for some reason suggested the cloying scent of jasmine, did not go well with her little black curls and thick eyebrows; that her nose and ears were astoundingly white, as though they belonged to a corpse, or had been moulded out of transparent wax. When she smiled she showed pale gums as well as her teeth, and he did not like that either.

"Anæmic debility…" he thought; "she's probably as nervous as a turkey."

"Here I am! Come along!" she said, going on rapidly ahead of him and pulling off the yellow leaves from the plants as she passed.

"I'll give you the money directly, and if you like I'll give you some lunch. Two thousand three hundred roubles! After such a good stroke of business you'll have an appetite for your lunch. Do you like my rooms? The ladies about here declare that my rooms always smell of garlic. With that culinary gibe their stock of wit is exhausted. I hasten to assure you that I've no garlic even in the cellar. And one day when a doctor came to see me who smelt of garlic, I asked him to take his hat and go and spread his fragrance elsewhere. There is no smell of garlic here, but the place does smell of drugs. My father lay paralyzed for a year and a half, and the whole house smelt of medicine. A year and a half! I was sorry to lose him, but I'm glad he's dead: he suffered so!"

She led the officer through two rooms similar to the drawing room, through a large reception hall, and came to a stop in her study, where there was a lady's writing-table covered with little knickknacks. On the carpet near it several books lay strewn about, opened and folded back. Through a small door leading from the study he saw a table laid for lunch.

Still chatting, Susanna took out of her pocket a bunch of little keys and unlocked an ingeniously made cupboard with a curved, sloping lid. When the lid was raised the cupboard emitted a plaintive note which made the lieutenant think of an Æolian harp. Susanna picked out another key and clicked another lock.

"I have underground passages here and secret doors," she said, taking out a small morocco portfolio. "It's a funny cupboard, isn't it? And in

this portfolio I have a quarter of my fortune. Look how podgy it is! You won't strangle me, will you?"

Susanna raised her eyes to the lieutenant and laughed good-naturedly. The lieutenant laughed too.

"She's rather jolly," he thought, watching the keys flashing between her fingers.

"Here it is," she said, picking out the key of the portfolio. "Now, Mr. Creditor, trot out the I.O.U. What a silly thing money is really! How paltry it is, and yet how women love it! I am a Jewess, you know, to the marrow of my bones. I am passionately fond of Shmuls and Yankels, but how I loathe that passion for gain in our Semitic blood. They hoard and they don't know what they are hoarding for. One ought to live and enjoy oneself, but they're afraid of spending an extra farthing. In that way I am more like an hussar than a Shmul. I don't like money to be kept long in one place. And altogether I fancy I'm not much like a Jewess. Does my accent give me away much, eh?"

"What shall I say?" mumbled the lieutenant. "You speak good Russian, but you do roll your *r*'s."

Susanna laughed and put the little key in the lock of the portfolio. The lieutenant took out of his pocket a little roll of I.O.U.s and laid them with a notebook on the table.

"Nothing betrays a Jew as much as his accent," Susanna went on, looking gaily at the lieutenant. "However much he twists himself into a Russian or a Frenchman, ask him to say 'feather' and he will say 'fedder'… but I pronounce it correctly: 'Feather! feather! feather!'"

Both laughed.

"By Jove, she's very jolly!" thought Sokolsky.

Susanna put the portfolio on a chair, took a step towards the lieutenant, and bringing her face close to his, went on gaily:

"Next to the Jews I love no people so much as the Russian and the French. I did not do much at school and I know no history, but it seems to me that the fate of the world lies in the hands of those two nations. I lived a long time abroad.… I spent six months in Madrid.… I've gazed my fill at the public, and the conclusion I've come to is that there are no decent peoples except the Russian and the French. Take the languages, for instance.… The German language is like the neighing of horses; as for the English… you can't imagine anything stupider. Fight—feet—foot! Italian is only pleasant when they speak it slowly. If you listen to Italians gabbling, you get the effect of the Jewish jargon. And the Poles? Mercy on us! There's no language so disgusting! 'Nie pieprz, Pietrze,

pieprzem wieprza bo mozeoz przepieprzyé wieprza pieprzem.’ That means: ‘Don’t pepper a sucking pig with pepper, Pyotr, or perhaps you’ll over-pepper the sucking pig with pepper.’ Ha, ha, ha!”

Susanna Moiseyevna rolled her eyes and broke into such a pleasant, infectious laugh that the lieutenant, looking at her, went off into a loud and merry peal of laughter. She took the visitor by the button, and went on:

“You don’t like Jews, of course… they’ve many faults, like all nations. I don’t dispute that. But are the Jews to blame for it? No, it’s not the Jews who are to blame, but the Jewish women! They are narrow-minded, greedy; there’s no sort of poetry about them, they’re dull.… You have never lived with a Jewess, so you don’t know how charming it is!” Susanna Moiseyevna pronounced the last words with deliberate emphasis and with no eagerness or laughter. She paused as though frightened at her own openness, and her face was suddenly distorted in a strange, unaccountable way. Her eyes stared at the lieutenant without blinking, her lips parted and showed clenched teeth. Her whole face, her throat, and even her bosom, seemed quivering with a spiteful, catlike expression. Still keeping her eyes fixed on her visitor, she rapidly bent to one side, and swiftly, like a cat, snatched something from the table. All this was the work of a few seconds. Watching her movements, the lieutenant saw five fingers crumple up his I.O.U.s and caught a glimpse of the white rustling paper as it disappeared in her clenched fist. Such an extraordinary transition from good-natured laughter to crime so appalled him that he turned pale and stepped back.…

And she, still keeping her frightened, searching eyes upon him, felt along her hip with her clenched fist for her pocket. Her fist struggled convulsively for the pocket, like a fish in the net, and could not find the opening. In another moment the I.O.U.s would have vanished in the recesses of her feminine garments, but at that point the lieutenant uttered a faint cry, and, moved more by instinct than reflection, seized the Jewess by her arm above the clenched fist. Showing her teeth more than ever, she struggled with all her might and pulled her hand away. Then Sokolsky put his right arm firmly round her waist, and the other round her chest and a struggle followed. Afraid of outraging her sex or hurting her, he tried only to prevent her moving, and to get hold of the fist with the I.O.U.s; but she wriggled like an eel in his arms with her supple, flexible body, struck him in the chest with her elbows, and scratched him, so that he could not help touching her all over, and was forced to hurt her and disregard her modesty.

“How unusual this is! How strange!” he thought, utterly amazed, hardly able to believe his senses, and feeling rather sick from the scent of jasmine.

In silence, breathing heavily, stumbling against the furniture, they moved about the room. Susanna was carried away by the struggle. She flushed, closed her eyes, and forgetting herself, once even pressed her face against the face of the lieutenant, so that there was a sweetish taste left on his lips. At last he caught hold of her clenched hand.… Forcing it open, and not finding the papers in it, he let go the Jewess. With flushed faces and dishevelled hair, they looked at one another, breathing hard. The spiteful, catlike expression on the Jewess’s face was gradually replaced by a good-natured smile. She burst out laughing, and turning on one foot, went towards the room where lunch was ready. The lieutenant moved slowly after her. She sat down to the table, and, still flushed and breathing hard, tossed off half a glass of port.

“Listen”—the lieutenant broke the silence—“I hope you are joking?”

“Not a bit of it,” she answered, thrusting a piece of bread into her mouth.

“H’m!… How do you wish me to take all this?”

“As you choose. Sit down and have lunch!”

“But… it’s dishonest!”

“Perhaps. But don’t trouble to give me a sermon; I have my own way of looking at things.”

“Won’t you give them back?”

“Of course not! If you were a poor unfortunate man, with nothing to eat, then it would be a different matter. But—he wants to get married!”

“It’s not my money, you know; it’s my cousin’s!”

“And what does your cousin want with money? To get fashionable clothes for his wife? But I really don’t care whether your *belle-soeur* has dresses or not.”

The lieutenant had ceased to remember that he was in a strange house with an unknown lady, and did not trouble himself with decorum. He strode up and down the room, scowled and nervously fingered his waistcoat. The fact that the Jewess had lowered herself in his eyes by her dishonest action, made him feel bolder and more free-and-easy.

“The devil knows what to make of it!” he muttered. “Listen. I shan’t go away from here until I get the I.O.U.s!”

“Ah, so much the better,” laughed Susanna. “If you stay here for good, it will make it livelier for me.”

Excited by the struggle, the lieutenant looked at Susanna's laughing, insolent face, at her munching mouth, at her heaving bosom, and grew bolder and more audacious. Instead of thinking about the I.O.U. he began for some reason recalling with a sort of relish his cousin's stories of the Jewess's romantic adventures, of her free way of life, and these reminiscences only provoked him to greater audacity. Impulsively he sat down beside the Jewess and thinking no more of the I.O.U.s began to eat.…

"Will you have vodka or wine?" Susanna asked with a laugh. "So you will stay till you get the I.O.U.s? Poor fellow! How many days and nights you will have to spend with me, waiting for those I.O.U.s! Won't your fiancée have something to say about it?"

II

Five hours had passed. The lieutenant's cousin, Alexey Ivanovitch Kryukov was walking about the rooms of his country-house in his dressing-gown and slippers, and looking impatiently out of window. He was a tall, sturdy man, with a large black beard and a manly face; and as the Jewess had truly said, he was handsome, though he had reached the age when men are apt to grow too stout, puffy, and bald. By mind and temperament he was one of those natures in which the Russian intellectual classes are so rich: warmhearted, good-natured, well-bred, having some knowledge of the arts and sciences, some faith, and the most chivalrous notions about honour, but indolent and lacking in depth. He was fond of good eating and drinking, was an ideal whist-player, was a connoisseur in women and horses, but in other things he was apathetic and sluggish as a seal, and to rouse him from his lethargy something extraordinary and quite revolting was needed, and then he would forget everything in the world and display intense activity; he would fume and talk of a duel, write a petition of seven pages to a Minister, gallop at breakneck speed about the district, call someone publicly "a scoundrel," would go to law, and so on.

"How is it our Sasha's not back yet?" he kept asking his wife, glancing out of window. "Why, it's dinnertime!"

After waiting for the lieutenant till six o'clock, they sat down to dinner. When suppertime came, however, Alexey Ivanovitch was listening to every footstep, to every sound of the door, and kept shrugging his shoulders.

"Strange!" he said. "The rascally dandy must have stayed on at the tenant's."

As he went to bed after supper, Kryukov made up his mind that the lieutenant was being entertained at the tenant's, where after a festive evening he was staying the night.

Alexandr Grigoryevitch only returned next morning. He looked extremely crumpled and confused.

"I want to speak to you alone…" he said mysteriously to his cousin.

They went into the study. The lieutenant shut the door, and he paced for a long time up and down before he began to speak.

"Something's happened, my dear fellow," he began, "that I don't know how to tell you about. You wouldn't believe it…"

And blushing, faltering, not looking at his cousin, he told what had happened with the I.O.U.s. Kryukov, standing with his feet wide apart and his head bent, listened and frowned.

"Are you joking?" he asked.

"How the devil could I be joking? It's no joking matter!"

"I don't understand!" muttered Kryukov, turning crimson and flinging up his hands. "It's positively… immoral on your part. Before your very eyes a hussy is up to the devil knows what, a serious crime, plays a nasty trick, and you go and kiss her!"

"But I can't understand myself how it happened!" whispered the lieutenant, blinking guiltily. "Upon my honour, I don't understand it! It's the first time in my life I've come across such a monster! It's not her beauty that does for you, not her mind, but that… you understand… insolence, cynicism.…"

"Insolence, cynicism… it's unclean! If you've such a longing for insolence and cynicism, you might have picked a sow out of the mire and have devoured her alive. It would have been cheaper, anyway! Instead of two thousand three hundred!"

"You do express yourself elegantly!" said the lieutenant, frowning. "I'll pay you back the two thousand three hundred!"

"I know you'll pay it back, but it's not a question of money! Damn the money! What revolts me is your being such a limp rag… such filthy feebleness! And engaged! With a fiancée!"

"Don't speak of it…" said the lieutenant, blushing. "I loathe myself as it is. I should like to sink into the earth. It's sickening and vexatious that I shall have to bother my aunt for that five thousand.…"

Kryukov continued for some time longer expressing his indignation and grumbling, then, as he grew calmer, he sat down on the sofa and began to jeer at his cousin.

"You young officers!" he said with contemptuous irony. "Nice bridegrooms."

Suddenly he leapt up as though he had been stung, stamped his foot, and ran about the study.

"No, I'm not going to leave it like that!" he said, shaking his fist. "I will have those I.O.U.s, I will! I'll give it her! One doesn't beat women, but I'll break every bone in her body.… I'll pound her to a jelly! I'm not

a lieutenant! You won't touch me with insolence or cynicism! No-o-o, damn her! Mishka!" he shouted, "run and tell them to get the racing droshky out for me!"

Kryukov dressed rapidly, and, without heeding the agitated lieutenant, got into the droshky, and with a wave of his hand resolutely raced off to Susanna Moiseyevna. For a long time the lieutenant gazed out of window at the clouds of dust that rolled after his cousin's droshky, stretched, yawned, and went to his own room. A quarter of an hour later he was sound asleep.

At six o'clock he was waked up and summoned to dinner.

"How nice this is of Alexey!" his cousin's wife greeted him in the dining room. "He keeps us waiting for dinner."

"Do you mean to say he's not come back yet?" yawned the lieutenant. "H'm!… he's probably gone round to see the tenant."

But Alexey Ivanovitch was not back by supper either. His wife and Sokolsky decided that he was playing cards at the tenant's and would most likely stay the night there. What had happened was not what they had supposed, however.

Kryukov returned next morning, and without greeting anyone, without a word, dashed into his study.

"Well?" whispered the lieutenant, gazing at him round-eyed.

Kryukov waved his hand and gave a snort.

"Why, what's the matter? What are you laughing at?"

Kryukov flopped on the sofa, thrust his head in the pillow, and shook with suppressed laughter. A minute later he got up, and looking at the surprised lieutenant, with his eyes full of tears from laughing, said:

"Close the door. Well… she *is* a fe-e-male, I beg to inform you!"

"Did you get the I.O.U.s?"

Kryukov waved his hand and went off into a peal of laughter again.

"Well! she is a female!" he went on. "*Merci* for the acquaintance, my boy! She's a devil in petticoats. I arrived; I walked in like such an avenging Jove, you know, that I felt almost afraid of myself.… I frowned, I scowled, even clenched my fists to be more awe-inspiring.… 'Jokes don't pay with me, madam!' said I, and more in that style. And I threatened her with the law and with the Governor. To begin with she burst into tears, said she'd been joking with you, and even took me to the cupboard to give me the money. Then she began arguing that the future of Europe lies in the hands of the French, and the Russians, swore at women.… Like you, I listened, fascinated, ass that I was.… She kept singing the praises of my beauty, patted me on the arm near the shoulder,

to see how strong I was, and… and as you see, I've only just got away from her! Ha, ha! She's enthusiastic about you!"

"You're a nice fellow!" laughed the lieutenant. "A married man! highly respected.… Well, aren't you ashamed? Disgusted? Joking apart though, old man, you've got your Queen Tamara in your own neighbourhood.…"

"In my own neighbourhood! Why, you wouldn't find another such chameleon in the whole of Russia! I've never seen anything like it in my life, though I know a good bit about women, too. I have known regular devils in my time, but I never met anything like this. It is, as you say, by insolence and cynicism she gets over you. What is so attractive in her is the diabolical suddenness, the quick transitions, the swift shifting hues.… Brrr! And the I.O.U.—phew! Write it off for lost. We are both great sinners, we'll go halves in our sin. I shall put down to you not two thousand three hundred, but half of it. Mind, tell my wife I was at the tenant's."

Kryukov and the lieutenant buried their heads in the pillows, and broke into laughter; they raised their heads, glanced at one another, and again subsided into their pillows.

"Engaged! A lieutenant!" Kryukov jeered.

"Married!" retorted Sokolsky. "Highly respected! Father of a family!"

At dinner they talked in veiled allusions, winked at one another, and, to the surprise of the others, were continually gushing with laughter into their dinner-napkins. After dinner, still in the best of spirits, they dressed up as Turks, and, running after one another with guns, played at soldiers with the children. In the evening they had a long argument. The lieutenant maintained that it was mean and contemptible to accept a dowry with your wife, even when there was passionate love on both sides. Kryukov thumped the table with his fists and declared that this was absurd, and that a husband who did not like his wife to have property of her own was an egoist and a despot. Both shouted, boiled over, did not understand each other, drank a good deal, and in the end, picking up the skirts of their dressing-gowns, went to their bedrooms. They soon fell asleep and slept soundly.

Life went on as before, even, sluggish and free from sorrow. The shadows lay on the earth, thunder pealed from the clouds, from time to time the wind moaned plaintively, as though to prove that nature, too, could lament, but nothing troubled the habitual tranquillity of these people. Of Susanna Moiseyevna and the I.O.U.s they said nothing. Both of them felt, somehow, ashamed to speak of the incident aloud. Yet they

remembered it and thought of it with pleasure, as of a curious farce, which life had unexpectedly and casually played upon them, and which it would be pleasant to recall in old age.

On the sixth or seventh day after his visit to the Jewess, Kryukov was sitting in his study in the morning writing a congratulatory letter to his aunt. Alexandr Grigoryevitch was walking to and fro near the table in silence. The lieutenant had slept badly that night; he woke up depressed, and now he felt bored. He paced up and down, thinking of the end of his furlough, of his fiancée, who was expecting him, of how people could live all their lives in the country without feeling bored. Standing at the window, for a long time he stared at the trees, smoked three cigarettes one after another, and suddenly turned to his cousin.

"I have a favour to ask you, Alyosha," he said. "Let me have a saddle-horse for the day.…"

Kryukov looked searchingly at him and continued his writing with a frown.

"You will, then?" asked the lieutenant.

Kryukov looked at him again, then deliberately drew out a drawer in the table, and taking out a thick roll of notes, gave it to his cousin.

"Here's five thousand…" he said. "Though it's not my money, yet, God bless you, it's all the same. I advise you to send for post-horses at once and go away. Yes, really!"

The lieutenant in his turn looked searchingly at Kryukov and laughed.

"You've guessed right, Alyosha," he said, reddening. "It was to her I meant to ride. Yesterday evening when the washerwoman gave me that damned tunic, the one I was wearing then, and it smelt of jasmine, why… I felt I must go!"

"You must go away."

"Yes, certainly. And my furlough's just over. I really will go today! Yes, by Jove! However long one stays, one has to go in the end.… I'm going!"

The post-horses were brought after dinner the same day; the lieutenant said goodbye to the Kryukovs and set off, followed by their good wishes.

Another week passed. It was a dull but hot and heavy day. From early morning Kryukov walked aimlessly about the house, looking out of window, or turning over the leaves of albums, though he was sick of the sight of them already. When he came across his wife or children, he began grumbling crossly. It seemed to him, for some reason that day, that his children's manners were revolting, that his wife did not know how to

look after the servants, that their expenditure was quite disproportionate to their income. All this meant that “the master” was out of humour.

After dinner, Kryukov, feeling dissatisfied with the soup and the roast meat he had eaten, ordered out his racing droshky. He drove slowly out of the courtyard, drove at a walking pace for a quarter of a mile, and stopped.

“Shall I… drive to her… that devil?” he thought, looking at the leaden sky.

And Kryukov positively laughed, as though it were the first time that day he had asked himself that question. At once the load of boredom was lifted from his heart, and there rose a gleam of pleasure in his lazy eyes. He lashed the horse….

All the way his imagination was picturing how surprised the Jewess would be to see him, how he would laugh and chat, and come home feeling refreshed….

“Once a month one needs something to brighten one up… something out of the common round,” he thought, “something that would give the stagnant organism a good shaking up, a reaction… whether it’s a drinking bout, or… Susanna. One can’t get on without it.”

It was getting dark when he drove into the yard of the vodka distillery. From the open windows of the owner’s house came sounds of laughter and singing:

“‘Brighter than lightning, more burning than flame….’”

sang a powerful, mellow, bass voice.

“Aha! she has visitors,” thought Kryukov.

And he was annoyed that she had visitors.

“Shall I go back?” he thought with his hand on the bell, but he rang all the same, and went up the familiar staircase. From the entry he glanced into the reception hall. There were about five men there—all landowners and officials of his acquaintance; one, a tall, thin gentleman, was sitting at the piano, singing, and striking the keys with his long, thin fingers. The others were listening and grinning with enjoyment. Kryukov looked himself up and down in the looking-glass, and was about to go into the hall, when Susanna Moiseyevna herself darted into the entry, in high spirits and wearing the same black dress…. Seeing Kryukov, she was petrified for an instant, then she uttered a little scream and beamed with delight.

“Is it you?” she said, clutching his hand. “What a surprise!”

“Here she is!” smiled Kryukov, putting his arm round her waist. “Well! Does the destiny of Europe still lie in the hands of the French and the Russians?”

“I’m so glad,” laughed the Jewess, cautiously removing his arm. “Come, go into the hall; they’re all friends there.… I’ll go and tell them to bring you some tea. Your name’s Alexey, isn’t it? Well, go in, I’ll come directly.…”

She blew him a kiss and ran out of the entry, leaving behind her the same sickly smell of jasmine. Kryukov raised his head and walked into the hall. He was on terms of friendly intimacy with all the men in the room, but scarcely nodded to them; they, too, scarcely responded, as though the places in which they met were not quite decent, and as though they were in tacit agreement with one another that it was more suitable for them not to recognise one another.

From the hall Kryukov walked into the drawing room, and from it into a second drawing room. On the way he met three or four other guests, also men whom he knew, though they barely recognised him. Their faces were flushed with drink and merriment. Alexey Ivanovitch glanced furtively at them and marvelled that these men, respectable heads of families, who had known sorrow and privation, could demean themselves to such pitiful, cheap gaiety! He shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and walked on.

“There are places,” he reflected, “where a sober man feels sick, and a drunken man rejoices. I remember I never could go to the operetta or the gipsies when I was sober: wine makes a man more good-natured and reconciles him with vice.…”

Suddenly he stood still, petrified, and caught hold of the doorpost with both hands. At the writing-table in Susanna’s study was sitting Lieutenant Alexandr Grigoryevitch. He was discussing something in an undertone with a fat, flabby-looking Jew, and seeing his cousin, flushed crimson and looked down at an album.

The sense of decency was stirred in Kryukov and the blood rushed to his head. Overwhelmed with amazement, shame, and anger, he walked up to the table without a word. Sokolsky’s head sank lower than ever. His face worked with an expression of agonising shame.

“Ah, it’s you, Alyosha!” he articulated, making a desperate effort to raise his eyes and to smile. “I called here to say goodbye, and, as you see.… But tomorrow I am certainly going.”

“What can I say to him? What?” thought Alexey Ivanovitch. “How can I judge him since I’m here myself?”

And clearing his throat without uttering a word, he went out slowly.

“‘Call her not heavenly, and leave her on earth.…’”

The bass was singing in the hall. A little while after, Kryukov’s racing droshky was bumping along the dusty road.

DREAMS

Two peasant constables—one a stubby, black-bearded individual with such exceptionally short legs that if you looked at him from behind it seemed as though his legs began much lower down than in other people; the other, long, thin, and straight as a stick, with a scanty beard of dark reddish colour—were escorting to the district town a tramp who refused to remember his name. The first waddled along, looking from side to side, chewing now a straw, now his own sleeve, slapping himself on the haunches and humming, and altogether had a careless and frivolous air; the other, in spite of his lean face and narrow shoulders, looked solid, grave, and substantial; in the lines and expression of his whole figure he was like the priests among the Old Believers, or the warriors who are painted on old-fashioned icons. “For his wisdom God had added to his forehead”—that is, he was bald—which increased the resemblance referred to. The first was called Andrey Ptaha, the second Nikandr Sapozhnikov.

The man they were escorting did not in the least correspond with the conception everyone has of a tramp. He was a frail little man, weak and sickly-looking, with small, colourless, and extremely indefinite features. His eyebrows were scanty, his expression mild and submissive; he had scarcely a trace of a moustache, though he was over thirty. He walked along timidly, bent forward, with his hands thrust into his sleeves. The collar of his shabby cloth overcoat, which did not look like a peasant’s, was turned up to the very brim of his cap, so that only his little red nose ventured to peep out into the light of day. He spoke in an ingratiating tenor, continually coughing. It was very, very difficult to believe that he was a tramp concealing his surname. He was more like an unsuccessful priest’s son, stricken by God and reduced to beggary; a clerk discharged for drunkenness; a merchant’s son or nephew who had tried his feeble powers in a theatrical career, and was now going home to play the last act in the parable of the prodigal son; perhaps, judging by the dull patience with which he struggled with the hopeless autumn mud, he

might have been a fanatical monk, wandering from one Russian monastery to another, continually seeking “a peaceful life, free from sin,” and not finding it.…

The travellers had been a long while on their way, but they seemed to be always on the same small patch of ground. In front of them there stretched thirty feet of muddy black-brown mud, behind them the same, and wherever one looked further, an impenetrable wall of white fog. They went on and on, but the ground remained the same, the wall was no nearer, and the patch on which they walked seemed still the same patch. They got a glimpse of a white, clumsy-looking stone, a small ravine, or a bundle of hay dropped by a passerby, the brief glimmer of a great muddy puddle, or, suddenly, a shadow with vague outlines would come into view ahead of them; the nearer they got to it the smaller and darker it became; nearer still, and there stood up before the wayfarers a slanting milestone with the number rubbed off, or a wretched birch tree drenched and bare like a wayside beggar. The birch tree would whisper something with what remained of its yellow leaves, one leaf would break off and float lazily to the ground.… And then again fog, mud, the brown grass at the edges of the road. On the grass hung dingy, unfriendly tears. They were not the tears of soft joy such as the earth weeps at welcoming the summer sun and parting from it, and such as she gives to drink at dawn to the corncrakes, quails, and graceful, long-beaked crested snipes. The travellers’ feet stuck in the heavy, clinging mud. Every step cost an effort.

Andrey Ptaha was somewhat excited. He kept looking round at the tramp and trying to understand how a live, sober man could fail to remember his name.

“You are an orthodox Christian, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Yes,” the tramp answered mildly.

“H’m… then you’ve been christened?”

“Why, to be sure! I’m not a Turk. I go to church and to the sacrament, and do not eat meat when it is forbidden. And I observe my religious duties punctually.…”

“Well, what are you called, then?”

“Call me what you like, good man.”

Ptaha shrugged his shoulders and slapped himself on the haunches in extreme perplexity. The other constable, Nikandr Sapozhnikov, maintained a staid silence. He was not so naive as Ptaha, and apparently knew very well the reasons which might induce an orthodox Christian to conceal his name from other people. His expressive face was cold and

stern. He walked apart and did not condescend to idle chatter with his companions, but, as it were, tried to show everyone, even the fog, his sedateness and discretion.

“God knows what to make of you,” Ptaha persisted in addressing the tramp. “Peasant you are not, and gentleman you are not, but some sort of a thing between.… The other day I was washing a sieve in the pond and caught a reptile—see, as long as a finger, with gills and a tail. The first minute I thought it was a fish, then I looked—and, blow it! if it hadn’t paws. It was not a fish, it was a viper, and the deuce only knows what it was.… So that’s like you.… What’s your calling?”

“I am a peasant and of peasant family,” sighed the tramp. “My mamma was a house serf. I don’t look like a peasant, that’s true, for such has been my lot, good man. My mamma was a nurse with the gentry, and had every comfort, and as I was of her flesh and blood, I lived with her in the master’s house. She petted and spoiled me, and did her best to take me out of my humble class and make a gentleman of me. I slept in a bed, every day I ate a real dinner, I wore breeches and shoes like a gentleman’s child. What my mamma ate I was fed on, too; they gave her stuffs as a present, and she dressed me up in them.… We lived well! I ate so many sweets and cakes in my childish years that if they could be sold now it would be enough to buy a good horse. Mamma taught me to read and write, she instilled the fear of God in me from my earliest years, and she so trained me that now I can’t bring myself to utter an unrefined peasant word. And I don’t drink vodka, my lad, and am neat in my dress, and know how to behave with decorum in good society. If she is still living, God give her health; and if she is dead, then, O Lord, give her soul peace in Thy Kingdom, wherein the just are at rest.”

The tramp bared his head with the scanty hair standing up like a brush on it, turned his eyes upward and crossed himself twice.

“Grant her, O Lord, a verdant and peaceful resting-place,” he said in a drawling voice, more like an old woman’s than a man’s. “Teach Thy servant Xenia Thy justifications, O Lord! If it had not been for my beloved mamma I should have been a peasant with no sort of understanding! Now, young man, ask me about anything and I understand it all: the holy Scriptures and profane writings, and every prayer and catechism. I live according to the Scriptures.… I don’t injure anyone, I keep my flesh in purity and continence, I observe the fasts, I eat at fitting times. Another man will take no pleasure in anything but vodka and lewd talk, but when I have time I sit in a corner and read a book. I read and I weep and weep.”

“What do you weep for?”

“They write so pathetically! For some books one gives but a five-kopeck piece, and yet one weeps and sighs exceedingly over it.”

“Is your father dead?” asked Ptaha.

“I don’t know, good man. I don’t know my parent; it is no use concealing it. I judge that I was mamma’s illegitimate son. My mamma lived all her life with the gentry, and did not want to marry a simple peasant.…”

“And so she fell into the master’s hands,” laughed Ptaha.

“She did transgress, that’s true. She was pious, God-fearing, but she did not keep her maiden purity. It is a sin, of course, a great sin, there’s no doubt about it, but to make up for it there is, maybe, noble blood in me. Maybe I am only a peasant by class, but in nature a noble gentleman.”

The “noble gentleman” uttered all this in a soft, sugary tenor, wrinkling up his narrow forehead and emitting creaking sounds from his red, frozen little nose. Ptaha listened and looked askance at him in wonder, continually shrugging his shoulders.

After going nearly five miles the constables and the tramp sat down on a mound to rest.

“Even a dog knows his name,” Ptaha muttered. “My name is Andryushka, his is Nikandr; every man has his holy name, and it can’t be forgotten. Nohow.”

“Who has any need to know my name?” sighed the tramp, leaning his cheek on his fist. “And what advantage would it be to me if they did know it? If I were allowed to go where I would—but it would only make things worse. I know the law, Christian brothers. Now I am a tramp who doesn’t remember his name, and it’s the very most if they send me to Eastern Siberia and give me thirty or forty lashes; but if I were to tell them my real name and description they would send me back to hard labour, I know!”

“Why, have you been a convict?”

“I have, dear friend. For four years I went about with my head shaved and fetters on my legs.”

“What for?”

“For murder, my good man! When I was still a boy of eighteen or so, my mamma accidentally poured arsenic instead of soda and acid into my master’s glass. There were boxes of all sorts in the storeroom, numbers of them; it was easy to make a mistake over them.”

The tramp sighed, shook his head, and said:

“She was a pious woman, but, who knows? another man’s soul is a slumbering forest! It may have been an accident, or maybe she could not endure the affront of seeing the master prefer another servant.… Perhaps she put it in on purpose, God knows! I was young then, and did not understand it all… now I remember that our master had taken another mistress and mamma was greatly disturbed. Our trial lasted nearly two years.… Mamma was condemned to penal servitude for twenty years, and I, on account of my youth, only to seven.”

“And why were you sentenced?”

“As an accomplice. I handed the glass to the master. That was always the custom. Mamma prepared the soda and I handed it to him. Only I tell you all this as a Christian, brothers, as I would say it before God. Don’t you tell anybody.…”

“Oh, nobody’s going to ask us,” said Ptaha. “So you’ve run away from prison, have you?”

“I have, dear friend. Fourteen of us ran away. Some folks, God bless them! ran away and took me with them. Now you tell me, on your conscience, good man, what reason have I to disclose my name? They will send me back to penal servitude, you know! And I am not fit for penal servitude! I am a refined man in delicate health. I like to sleep and eat in cleanliness. When I pray to God I like to light a little lamp or a candle, and not to have a noise around me. When I bow down to the ground I like the floor not to be dirty or spat upon. And I bow down forty times every morning and evening, praying for mamma.”

The tramp took off his cap and crossed himself.

“And let them send me to Eastern Siberia,” he said; “I am not afraid of that.”

“Surely that’s no better?”

“It is quite a different thing. In penal servitude you are like a crab in a basket: crowding, crushing, jostling, there’s no room to breathe; it’s downright hell—such hell, may the Queen of Heaven keep us from it! You are a robber and treated like a robber—worse than any dog. You can’t sleep, you can’t eat or even say your prayers. But it’s not like that in a settlement. In a settlement I shall be a member of a commune like other people. The authorities are bound by law to give me my share… ye-es! They say the land costs nothing, no more than snow; you can take what you like! They will give me corn land and building land and garden.… I shall plough my fields like other people, sow seed. I shall have cattle and stock of all sorts, bees, sheep, and dogs.… A Siberian cat, that rats and mice may not devour my goods.… I will put up a

house, I shall buy icons.… Please God, I'll get married, I shall have children.…"

The tramp muttered and looked, not at his listeners, but away into the distance. Naive as his dreams were, they were uttered in such a genuine and heartfelt tone that it was difficult not to believe in them. The tramp's little mouth was screwed up in a smile. His eyes and little nose and his whole face were fixed and blank with blissful anticipation of happiness in the distant future. The constables listened and looked at him gravely, not without sympathy. They, too, believed in his dreams.

"I am not afraid of Siberia," the tramp went on muttering. "Siberia is just as much Russia and has the same God and Tsar as here. They are just as orthodox Christians as you and I. Only there is more freedom there and people are better off. Everything is better there. Take the rivers there, for instance; they are far better than those here. There's no end of fish; and all sorts of wild fowl. And my greatest pleasure, brothers, is fishing. Give me no bread to eat, but let me sit with a fishhook. Yes, indeed! I fish with a hook and with a wire line, and set creels, and when the ice comes I catch with a net. I am not strong to draw up the net, so I shall hire a man for five kopecks. And, Lord, what a pleasure it is! You catch an eelpout or a roach of some sort and are as pleased as though you had met your own brother. And would you believe it, there's a special art for every fish: you catch one with a live bait, you catch another with a grub, the third with a frog or a grasshopper. One has to understand all that, of course! For example, take the eelpout. It is not a delicate fish—it will take a perch; and a pike loves a gudgeon, the *shilishper* likes a butterfly. If you fish for a roach in a rapid stream there is no greater pleasure. You throw the line of seventy feet without lead, with a butterfly or a beetle, so that the bait floats on the surface; you stand in the water without your trousers and let it go with the current, and tug! the roach pulls at it! Only you have got to be artful that he doesn't carry off the bait, the damned rascal. As soon as he tugs at your line you must whip it up; it's no good waiting. It's wonderful what a lot of fish I've caught in my time. When we were running away the other convicts would sleep in the forest; I could not sleep, but I was off to the river. The rivers there are wide and rapid, the banks are steep—awfully! It's all slumbering forests on the bank. The trees are so tall that if you look to the top it makes you dizzy. Every pine would be worth ten roubles by the prices here."

In the overwhelming rush of his fancies, of artistic images of the past and sweet presentiments of happiness in the future, the poor wretch sank into silence, merely moving his lips as though whispering to himself.

The vacant, blissful smile never left his lips. The constables were silent. They were pondering with bent heads. In the autumn stillness, when the cold, sullen mist that rises from the earth lies like a weight on the heart, when it stands like a prison wall before the eyes, and reminds man of the limitation of his freedom, it is sweet to think of the broad, rapid rivers, with steep banks wild and luxuriant, of the impenetrable forests, of the boundless steppes. Slowly and quietly the fancy pictures how early in the morning, before the flush of dawn has left the sky, a man makes his way along the steep deserted bank like a tiny speck: the ancient, mast-like pines rise up in terraces on both sides of the torrent, gaze sternly at the free man and murmur menacingly; rocks, huge stones, and thorny bushes bar his way, but he is strong in body and bold in spirit, and has no fear of the pine trees, nor stones, nor of his solitude, nor of the reverberating echo which repeats the sound of every footstep that he takes.

The peasants called up a picture of a free life such as they had never lived; whether they vaguely recalled the images of stories heard long ago or whether notions of a free life had been handed down to them with their flesh and blood from far-off free ancestors, God knows!

The first to break the silence was Nikandr Sapozhnikov, who had not till then let fall a single word. Whether he envied the tramp's transparent happiness, or whether he felt in his heart that dreams of happiness were out of keeping with the grey fog and the dirty brown mud—anyway, he looked sternly at the tramp and said:

"It's all very well, to be sure, only you won't reach those plenteous regions, brother. How could you? Before you'd gone two hundred miles you'd give up your soul to God. Just look what a weakling you are! Here you've hardly gone five miles and you can't get your breath."

The tramp turned slowly toward Nikandr, and the blissful smile vanished from his face. He looked with a scared and guilty air at the peasant's staid face, apparently remembered something, and bent his head. A silence followed again.… All three were pondering. The peasants were racking their brains in the effort to grasp in their imagination what can be grasped by none but God—that is, the vast expanse dividing them from the land of freedom. Into the tramp's mind thronged clear and distinct pictures more terrible than that expanse. Before him rose vividly the picture of the long legal delays and procrastinations, the temporary and permanent prisons, the convict boats, the wearisome stoppages on the way, the frozen winters, illnesses, deaths of companions.…

The tramp blinked guiltily, wiped the tiny drops of sweat from his forehead with his sleeve, drew a deep breath as though he had just leapt out of a very hot bath, then wiped his forehead with the other sleeve and looked round fearfully.

“That’s true; you won’t get there!” Ptaha agreed. “You are not much of a walker! Look at you—nothing but skin and bone! You’ll die, brother!”

“Of course he’ll die! What could he do?” said Nikandr. “He’s fit for the hospital now.… For sure!”

The man who had forgotten his name looked at the stern, unconcerned faces of his sinister companions, and without taking off his cap, hurriedly crossed himself, staring with wide-open eyes.… He trembled, his head shook, and he began twitching all over, like a caterpillar when it is stepped upon.…

“Well, it’s time to go,” said Nikandr, getting up; “we’ve had a rest.”

A minute later they were stepping along the muddy road. The tramp was more bent than ever, and he thrust his hands further up his sleeves. Ptaha was silent.

HUSH!

Ivan Yegoritch Krasnyhin, a fourth-rate journalist, returns home late at night, grave and careworn, with a peculiar air of concentration. He looks like a man expecting a police-raid or contemplating suicide. Pacing about his rooms he halts abruptly, ruffles up his hair, and says in the tone in which Laertes announces his intention of avenging his sister:

"Shattered, soul-weary, a sick load of misery on the heart… and then to sit down and write. And this is called life! How is it nobody has described the agonizing discord in the soul of a writer who has to amuse the crowd when his heart is heavy or to shed tears at the word of command when his heart is light? I must be playful, coldly unconcerned, witty, but what if I am weighed down with misery, what if I am ill, or my child is dying or my wife in anguish!"

He says this, brandishing his fists and rolling his eyes.… Then he goes into the bedroom and wakes his wife.

"Nadya," he says, "I am sitting down to write.… Please don't let anyone interrupt me. I can't write with children crying or cooks snoring.… See, too, that there's tea and… steak or something.… You know that I can't write without tea.… Tea is the one thing that gives me the energy for my work."

Returning to his room he takes off his coat, waistcoat, and boots. He does this very slowly; then, assuming an expression of injured innocence, he sits down to his table.

There is nothing casual, nothing ordinary on his writing-table, down to the veriest trifle everything bears the stamp of a stern, deliberately planned programme. Little busts and photographs of distinguished writers, heaps of rough manuscripts, a volume of Byelinsky with a page turned down, part of a skull by way of an ashtray, a sheet of newspaper folded carelessly, but so that a passage is uppermost, boldly marked in blue pencil with the word "disgraceful." There are a dozen sharply-pointed pencils and several penholders fitted with new nibs, put in

readiness that no accidental breaking of a pen may for a single second interrupt the flight of his creative fancy.

Ivan Yegoritch throws himself back in his chair, and closing his eyes concentrates himself on his subject. He hears his wife shuffling about in her slippers and splitting shavings to heat the samovar. She is hardly awake, that is apparent from the way the knife and the lid of the samovar keep dropping from her hands. Soon the hissing of the samovar and the spluttering of the frying meat reaches him. His wife is still splitting shavings and rattling with the doors and blowers of the stove.

All at once Ivan Yegoritch starts, opens frightened eyes, and begins to sniff the air.

"Heavens! the stove is smoking!" he groans, grimacing with a face of agony. "Smoking! That insufferable woman makes a point of trying to poison me! How, in God's Name, am I to write in such surroundings, kindly tell me that?"

He rushes into the kitchen and breaks into a theatrical wail. When a little later, his wife, stepping cautiously on tiptoe, brings him in a glass of tea, he is sitting in an easy chair as before with his eyes closed, absorbed in his article. He does not stir, drums lightly on his forehead with two fingers, and pretends he is not aware of his wife's presence.… His face wears an expression of injured innocence.

Like a girl who has been presented with a costly fan, he spends a long time coquetting, grimacing, and posing to himself before he writes the title.… He presses his temples, he wriggles, and draws his legs up under his chair as though he were in pain, or half closes his eyes languidly like a cat on the sofa. At last, not without hesitation, he stretches out his hand towards the inkstand, and with an expression as though he were signing a death-warrant, writes the title.…

"Mammy, give me some water!" he hears his son's voice.

"Hush!" says his mother. "Daddy's writing! Hush!"

Daddy writes very, very quickly, without corrections or pauses, he has scarcely time to turn over the pages. The busts and portraits of celebrated authors look at his swiftly racing pen and, keeping stock still, seem to be thinking: "Oh my, how you are going it!"

"Sh!" squeaks the pen.

"Sh!" whisper the authors, when his knee jolts the table and they are set trembling.

All at once Krasnyhin draws himself up, lays down his pen and listens.… He hears an even monotonous whispering.… It is Foma Nikolaevitch, the lodger in the next room, saying his prayers.

“I say!” cries Krasnyhin. “Couldn’t you, please, say your prayers more quietly? You prevent me from writing!”

“Very sorry.…” Foma Nikolaevitch answers timidly.

After covering five pages, Krasnyhin stretches and looks at his watch.

“Goodness, three o’clock already,” he moans. “Other people are asleep while I… I alone must work!”

Shattered and exhausted he goes, with his head on one side, to the bedroom to wake his wife, and says in a languid voice:

“Nadya, get me some more tea! I… feel weak.”

He writes till four o’clock and would readily have written till six if his subject had not been exhausted. Coquetting and posing to himself and the inanimate objects about him, far from any indiscreet, critical eye, tyrannizing and domineering over the little anthill that fate has put in his power are the honey and the salt of his existence. And how different is this despot here at home from the humble, meek, dull-witted little man we are accustomed to see in the editor’s offices!

“I am so exhausted that I am afraid I shan’t sleep…” he says as he gets into bed. “Our work, this cursed, ungrateful hard labour, exhausts the soul even more than the body.… I had better take some bromide.… God knows, if it were not for my family I’d throw up the work.… To write to order! It is awful.”

He sleeps till twelve or one o’clock in the day, sleeps a sound, healthy sleep.… Ah! how he would sleep, what dreams he would have, how he would spread himself if he were to become a well-known writer, an editor, or even a subeditor!

“He has been writing all night,” whispers his wife with a scared expression on her face. “Sh!”

No one dares to speak or move or make a sound. His sleep is something sacred, and the culprit who offends against it will pay dearly for his fault.

“Hush!” floats over the flat. “Hush!”

Excellent People

Once upon a time there lived in Moscow a man called Vladimir Semyonitch Liadovsky. He took his degree at the university in the faculty of law and had a post on the board of management of some railway; but if you had asked him what his work was, he would look candidly and openly at you with his large bright eyes through his gold pince-nez, and would answer in a soft, velvety, lisping baritone:

"My work is literature."

After completing his course at the university, Vladimir Semyonitch had had a paragraph of theatrical criticism accepted by a newspaper. From this paragraph he passed on to reviewing, and a year later he had advanced to writing a weekly article on literary matters for the same paper. But it does not follow from these facts that he was an amateur, that his literary work was of an ephemeral, haphazard character. Whenever I saw his neat spare figure, his high forehead and long mane of hair, when I listened to his speeches, it always seemed to me that his writing, quite apart from what and how he wrote, was something organically part of him, like the beating of his heart, and that his whole literary programme must have been an integral part of his brain while he was a baby in his mother's womb. Even in his walk, his gestures, his manner of shaking off the ash from his cigarette, I could read this whole programme from A to Z, with all its claptrap, dullness, and honourable sentiments. He was a literary man all over when with an inspired face he laid a wreath on the coffin of some celebrity, or with a grave and solemn face collected signatures for some address; his passion for making the acquaintance of distinguished literary men, his faculty for finding talent even where it was absent, his perpetual enthusiasm, his pulse that went at one hundred and twenty a minute, his ignorance of life, the genuinely feminine flutter with which he threw himself into concerts and literary evenings for the benefit of destitute students, the way in which he gravitated towards the young—all this would have created for him the reputation of a writer even if he had not written his articles.

He was one of those writers to whom phrases like, “We are but few,” or “What would life be without strife? Forward!” were preeminently becoming, though he never strove with anyone and never did go forward. It did not even sound mawkish when he fell to discoursing of ideals. Every anniversary of the university, on St. Tatiana’s Day, he got drunk, chanted “Gaudeamus” out of tune, and his beaming and perspiring countenance seemed to say: “See, I’m drunk; I’m keeping it up!” But even that suited him.

Vladimir Semyonitch had genuine faith in his literary vocation and his whole programme. He had no doubts, and was evidently very well pleased with himself. Only one thing grieved him—the paper for which he worked had a limited circulation and was not very influential. But Vladimir Semyonitch believed that sooner or later he would succeed in getting on to a solid magazine where he would have scope and could display himself—and what little distress he felt on this score was pale beside the brilliance of his hopes.

Visiting this charming man, I made the acquaintance of his sister, Vera Semyonovna, a woman doctor. At first sight, what struck me about this woman was her look of exhaustion and extreme ill-health. She was young, with a good figure and regular, rather large features, but in comparison with her agile, elegant, and talkative brother she seemed angular, listless, slovenly, and sullen. There was something strained, cold, apathetic in her movements, smiles, and words; she was not liked, and was thought proud and not very intelligent.

In reality, I fancy, she was resting.

“My dear friend,” her brother would often say to me, sighing and flinging back his hair in his picturesque literary way, “one must never judge by appearances! Look at this book: it has long ago been read. It is warped, tattered, and lies in the dust uncared for; but open it, and it will make you weep and turn pale. My sister is like that book. Lift the cover and peep into her soul, and you will be horror-stricken. Vera passed in some three months through experiences that would have been ample for a whole lifetime!”

Vladimir Semyonitch looked round him, took me by the sleeve, and began to whisper:

“You know, after taking her degree she married, for love, an architect. It’s a complete tragedy! They had hardly been married a month when—whew—her husband died of typhus. But that was not all. She caught typhus from him, and when, on her recovery, she learnt that her Ivan was dead, she took a good dose of morphia. If it had not been for vigorous

measures taken by her friends, my Vera would have been by now in Paradise. Tell me, isn't it a tragedy? And is not my sister like an ingénue, who has played already all the five acts of her life? The audience may stay for the farce, but the ingénue must go home to rest."

After three months of misery Vera Semyonovna had come to live with her brother. She was not fitted for the practice of medicine, which exhausted her and did not satisfy her; she did not give one the impression of knowing her subject, and I never once heard her say anything referring to her medical studies.

She gave up medicine, and, silent and unoccupied, as though she were a prisoner, spent the remainder of her youth in colourless apathy, with bowed head and hanging hands. The only thing to which she was not completely indifferent, and which brought some brightness into the twilight of her life, was the presence of her brother, whom she loved. She loved him himself and his programme, she was full of reverence for his articles; and when she was asked what her brother was doing, she would answer in a subdued voice as though afraid of waking or distracting him: "He is writing.…" Usually when he was at his work she used to sit beside him, her eyes fixed on his writing hand. She used at such moments to look like a sick animal warming itself in the sun.…

One winter evening Vladimir Semyonitch was sitting at his table writing a critical article for his newspaper: Vera Semyonovna was sitting beside him, staring as usual at his writing hand. The critic wrote rapidly, without erasures or corrections. The pen scratched and squeaked. On the table near the writing hand there lay open a freshly-cut volume of a thick magazine, containing a story of peasant life, signed with two initials. Vladimir Semyonitch was enthusiastic; he thought the author was admirable in his handling of the subject, suggested Turgenev in his descriptions of nature, was truthful, and had an excellent knowledge of the life of the peasantry. The critic himself knew nothing of peasant life except from books and hearsay, but his feelings and his inner convictions forced him to believe the story. He foretold a brilliant future for the author, assured him he should await the conclusion of the story with great impatience, and so on.

"Fine story!" he said, flinging himself back in his chair and closing his eyes with pleasure. "The tone is extremely good."

Vera Semyonovna looked at him, yawned aloud, and suddenly asked an unexpected question. In the evening she had a habit of yawning nervously and asking short, abrupt questions, not always relevant.

"Volodya," she asked, "what is the meaning of nonresistance to evil?"

“Nonresistance to evil!” repeated her brother, opening his eyes.

“Yes. What do you understand by it?”

“You see, my dear, imagine that thieves or brigands attack you, and you, instead of…”

“No, give me a logical definition.”

“A logical definition? Um! Well.” Vladimir Semyonitch pondered. “Nonresistance to evil means an attitude of noninterference with regard to all that in the sphere of mortality is called evil.”

Saying this, Vladimir Semyonitch bent over the table and took up a novel. This novel, written by a woman, dealt with the painfulness of the irregular position of a society lady who was living under the same roof with her lover and her illegitimate child. Vladimir Semyonitch was pleased with the excellent tendency of the story, the plot and the presentation of it. Making a brief summary of the novel, he selected the best passages and added to them in his account: “How true to reality, how living, how picturesque! The author is not merely an artist; he is also a subtle psychologist who can see into the hearts of his characters. Take, for example, this vivid description of the emotions of the heroine on meeting her husband,” and so on.

“Volodya,” Vera Semyonovna interrupted his critical effusions, “I’ve been haunted by a strange idea since yesterday. I keep wondering where we should all be if human life were ordered on the basis of nonresistance to evil?”

“In all probability, nowhere. Nonresistance to evil would give the full rein to the criminal will, and, to say nothing of civilisation, this would leave not one stone standing upon another anywhere on earth.”

“What would be left?”

“Bashi-Bazouke and brothels. In my next article I’ll talk about that perhaps. Thank you for reminding me.”

And a week later my friend kept his promise. That was just at the period—in the eighties—when people were beginning to talk and write of nonresistance, of the right to judge, to punish, to make war; when some people in our set were beginning to do without servants, to retire into the country, to work on the land, and to renounce animal food and carnal love.

After reading her brother’s article, Vera Semyonovna pondered and hardly perceptibly shrugged her shoulders.

“Very nice!” she said. “But still there’s a great deal I don’t understand. For instance, in Leskov’s story *Belonging to the Cathedral* there is a

queer gardener who sows for the benefit of all—for customers, for beggars, and any who care to steal. Did he behave sensibly?”

From his sister’s tone and expression Vladimir Semyonitch saw that she did not like his article, and, almost for the first time in his life, his vanity as an author sustained a shock. With a shade of irritation he answered:

“Theft is immoral. To sow for thieves is to recognise the right of thieves to existence. What would you think if I were to establish a newspaper and, dividing it into sections, provide for blackmailing as well as for liberal ideas? Following the example of that gardener, I ought, logically, to provide a section for blackmailers, the intellectual scoundrels? Yes.”

Vera Semyonovna made no answer. She got up from the table, moved languidly to the sofa and lay down.

“I don’t know, I know nothing about it,” she said musingly. “You are probably right, but it seems to me, I feel somehow, that there’s something false in our resistance to evil, as though there were something concealed or unsaid. God knows, perhaps our methods of resisting evil belong to the category of prejudices which have become so deeply rooted in us, that we are incapable of parting with them, and therefore cannot form a correct judgment of them.”

“How do you mean?”

“I don’t know how to explain to you. Perhaps man is mistaken in thinking that he is obliged to resist evil and has a right to do so, just as he is mistaken in thinking, for instance, that the heart looks like an ace of hearts. It is very possible in resisting evil we ought not to use force, but to use what is the very opposite of force—if you, for instance, don’t want this picture stolen from you, you ought to give it away rather than lock it up.…”

“That’s clever, very clever! If I want to marry a rich, vulgar woman, she ought to prevent me from such a shabby action by hastening to make me an offer herself!”

The brother and sister talked till midnight without understanding each other. If any outsider had overheard them he would hardly have been able to make out what either of them was driving at.

They usually spent the evening at home. There were no friends’ houses to which they could go, and they felt no need for friends; they only went to the theatre when there was a new play—such was the custom in literary circles—they did not go to concerts, for they did not care for music.

“You may think what you like,” Vera Semyonovna began again the next day, “but for me the question is to a great extent settled. I am firmly convinced that I have no grounds for resisting evil directed against me personally. If they want to kill me, let them. My defending myself will not make the murderer better. All I have now to decide is the second half of the question: how I ought to behave to evil directed against my neighbours?”

“Vera, mind you don’t become rabid!” said Vladimir Semyonitch, laughing. “I see nonresistance is becoming your *idée fixe*!”

He wanted to turn off these tedious conversations with a jest, but somehow it was beyond a jest; his smile was artificial and sour. His sister gave up sitting beside his table and gazing reverently at his writing hand, and he felt every evening that behind him on the sofa lay a person who did not agree with him. And his back grew stiff and numb, and there was a chill in his soul. An author’s vanity is vindictive, implacable, incapable of forgiveness, and his sister was the first and only person who had laid bare and disturbed that uneasy feeling, which is like a big box of crockery, easy to unpack but impossible to pack up again as it was before.

Weeks and months passed by, and his sister clung to her ideas, and did not sit down by the table. One spring evening Vladimir Semyonitch was sitting at his table writing an article. He was reviewing a novel which described how a village schoolmistress refused the man whom she loved and who loved her, a man both wealthy and intellectual, simply because marriage made her work as a schoolmistress impossible. Vera Semyonovna lay on the sofa and brooded.

“My God, how slow it is!” she said, stretching. “How insipid and empty life is! I don’t know what to do with myself, and you are wasting your best years in goodness knows what. Like some alchemist, you are rummaging in old rubbish that nobody wants. My God!”

Vladimir Semyonitch dropped his pen and slowly looked round at his sister.

“It’s depressing to look at you!” said his sister. “Wagner in *Faust* dug up worms, but he was looking for a treasure, anyway, and you are looking for worms for the sake of the worms.”

“That’s vague!”

“Yes, Volodya; all these days I’ve been thinking, I’ve been thinking painfully for a long time, and I have come to the conclusion that you are hopelessly reactionary and conventional. Come, ask yourself what is the object of your zealous, conscientious work? Tell me, what is it? Why,

everything has long ago been extracted that can be extracted from that rubbish in which you are always rummaging. You may pound water in a mortar and analyse it as long as you like, you'll make nothing more of it than the chemists have made already.…"

"Indeed!" drawled Vladimir Semyonitch, getting up. "Yes, all this is old rubbish because these ideas are eternal; but what do you consider new, then?"

"You undertake to work in the domain of thought; it is for you to think of something new. It's not for me to teach you."

"Me—an alchemist!" the critic cried in wonder and indignation, screwing up his eyes ironically. "Art, progress—all that is alchemy?"

"You see, Volodya, it seems to me that if all you thinking people had set yourselves to solving great problems, all these little questions that you fuss about now would solve themselves by the way. If you go up in a balloon to see a town, you will incidentally, without any effort, see the fields and the villages and the rivers as well. When stearine is manufactured, you get glycerine as a byproduct. It seems to me that contemporary thought has settled on one spot and stuck to it. It is prejudiced, apathetic, timid, afraid to take a wide titanic flight, just as you and I are afraid to climb on a high mountain; it is conservative."

Such conversations could not but leave traces. The relations of the brother and sister grew more and more strained every day. The brother became unable to work in his sister's presence, and grew irritable when he knew his sister was lying on the sofa, looking at his back; while the sister frowned nervously and stretched when, trying to bring back the past, he attempted to share his enthusiasms with her. Every evening she complained of being bored, and talked about independence of mind and those who are in the rut of tradition. Carried away by her new ideas, Vera Semyonovna proved that the work that her brother was so engrossed in was conventional, that it was a vain effort of conservative minds to preserve what had already served its turn and was vanishing from the scene of action. She made no end of comparisons. She compared her brother at one time to an alchemist, then to a musty old Believer who would sooner die than listen to reason. By degrees there was a perceptible change in her manner of life, too. She was capable of lying on the sofa all day long doing nothing but think, while her face wore a cold, dry expression such as one sees in one-sided people of strong faith. She began to refuse the attentions of the servants, swept and tidied her own room, cleaned her own boots and brushed her own clothes. Her brother could not help looking with irritation and even hatred at her cold

face when she went about her menial work. In that work, which was always performed with a certain solemnity, he saw something strained and false, he saw something both pharisaical and affected. And knowing he could not touch her by persuasion, he carped at her and teased her like a schoolboy.

"You won't resist evil, but you resist my having servants!" he taunted her. "If servants are an evil, why do you oppose it? That's inconsistent!"

He suffered, was indignant and even ashamed. He felt ashamed when his sister began doing odd things before strangers.

"It's awful, my dear fellow," he said to me in private, waving his hands in despair. "It seems that our ingénue has remained to play a part in the farce, too. She's become morbid to the marrow of her bones! I've washed my hands of her, let her think as she likes; but why does she talk, why does she excite me? She ought to think what it means for me to listen to her. What I feel when in my presence she has the effrontery to support her errors by blasphemously quoting the teaching of Christ! It chokes me! It makes me hot all over to hear my sister propounding her doctrines and trying to distort the Gospel to suit her, when she purposely refrains from mentioning how the moneychangers were driven out of the Temple. That's, my dear fellow, what comes of being half educated, undeveloped! That's what comes of medical studies which provide no general culture!"

One day on coming home from the office, Vladimir Semyonitch found his sister crying. She was sitting on the sofa with her head bowed, wringing her hands, and tears were flowing freely down her cheeks. The critic's good heart throbbed with pain. Tears fell from his eyes, too, and he longed to pet his sister, to forgive her, to beg her forgiveness, and to live as they used to before.… He knelt down and kissed her head, her hands, her shoulders.… She smiled, smiled bitterly, unaccountably, while he with a cry of joy jumped up, seized the magazine from the table and said warmly:

"Hurrah! We'll live as we used to, Verotchka! With God's blessing! And I've such a surprise for you here! Instead of celebrating the occasion with champagne, let us read it together! A splendid, wonderful thing!"

"Oh, no, no!" cried Vera Semyonovna, pushing away the book in alarm. "I've read it already! I don't want it, I don't want it!"

"When did you read it?"

"A year… two years ago… I read it long ago, and I know it, I know it!"

“H’m!… You’re a fanatic!” her brother said coldly, flinging the magazine on to the table.

“No, you are a fanatic, not I! You!” And Vera Semyonovna dissolved into tears again. Her brother stood before her, looked at her quivering shoulders, and thought. He thought, not of the agonies of loneliness endured by anyone who begins to think in a new way of their own, not of the inevitable sufferings of a genuine spiritual revolution, but of the outrage of his programme, the outrage to his author’s vanity.

From this time he treated his sister coldly, with careless irony, and he endured her presence in the room as one endures the presence of old women that are dependent on one. For her part, she left off disputing with him and met all his arguments, jeers, and attacks with a condescending silence which irritated him more than ever.

One summer morning Vera Semyonovna, dressed for travelling with a satchel over her shoulder, went in to her brother and coldly kissed him on the forehead.

“Where are you going?” he asked with surprise.

“To the province of N—— to do vaccination work.” Her brother went out into the street with her.

“So that’s what you’ve decided upon, you queer girl,” he muttered. “Don’t you want some money?”

“No, thank you. Goodbye.”

The sister shook her brother’s hand and set off.

“Why don’t you have a cab?” cried Vladimir Semyonitch.

She did not answer. Her brother gazed after her, watched her rusty-looking waterproof, the swaying of her figure as she slouched along, forced himself to sigh, but did not succeed in rousing a feeling of regret. His sister had become a stranger to him. And he was a stranger to her. Anyway, she did not once look round.

Going back to his room, Vladimir Semyonitch at once sat down to the table and began to work at his article.

I never saw Vera Semyonovna again. Where she is now I do not know. And Vladimir Semyonitch went on writing his articles, laying wreaths on coffins, singing “Gaudeamus,” busying himself over the Mutual Aid Society of Moscow Journalists.

He fell ill with inflammation of the lungs; he was ill in bed for three months—at first at home, and afterwards in the Golitsyn Hospital. An abscess developed in his knee. People said he ought to be sent to the Crimea, and began getting up a collection for him. But he did not go to

the Crimea—he died. We buried him in the Vagankovsky Cemetery, on the left side, where artists and literary men are buried.

One day we writers were sitting in the Tatars' restaurant. I mentioned that I had lately been in the Vagankovsky Cemetery and had seen Vladimir Semyonitch's grave there. It was utterly neglected and almost indistinguishable from the rest of the ground, the cross had fallen; it was necessary to collect a few roubles to put it in order.

But they listened to what I said unconcernedly, made no answer, and I could not collect a farthing. No one remembered Vladimir Semyonitch. He was utterly forgotten.

An Incident

Morning. Brilliant sunshine is piercing through the frozen lacework on the windowpanes into the nursery. Vanya, a boy of six, with a cropped head and a nose like a button, and his sister Nina, a short, chubby, curly-headed girl of four, wake up and look crossly at each other through the bars of their cots.

"Oo-oo-oo! naughty children!" grumbles their nurse. "Good people have had their breakfast already, while you can't get your eyes open."

The sunbeams frolic over the rugs, the walls, and nurse's skirts, and seem inviting the children to join in their play, but they take no notice. They have woken up in a bad humour. Nina pouts, makes a grimace, and begins to whine:

"Brea-eakfast, nurse, breakfast!"

Vanya knits his brows and ponders what to pitch upon to howl over. He has already begun screwing up his eyes and opening his mouth, but at that instant the voice of mamma reaches them from the drawing room, saying: "Don't forget to give the cat her milk, she has a family now!"

The children's puckered countenances grow smooth again as they look at each other in astonishment. Then both at once begin shouting, jump out of their cots, and filling the air with piercing shrieks, run barefoot, in their nightgowns, to the kitchen.

"The cat has puppies!" they cry. "The cat has got puppies!"

Under the bench in the kitchen there stands a small box, the one in which Stepan brings coal when he lights the fire. The cat is peeping out of the box. There is an expression of extreme exhaustion on her grey face; her green eyes, with their narrow black pupils, have a languid, sentimental look. From her face it is clear that the only thing lacking to complete her happiness is the presence in the box of "him," the father of her children, to whom she had abandoned herself so recklessly! She wants to mew, and opens her mouth wide, but nothing but a hiss comes from her throat; the squealing of the kittens is audible.

The children squat on their heels before the box, and, motionless, holding their breath, gaze at the cat.… They are surprised, impressed, and do not hear nurse grumbling as she pursues them. The most genuine delight shines in the eyes of both.

Domestic animals play a scarcely noticed but undoubtedly beneficial part in the education and life of children. Which of us does not remember powerful but magnanimous dogs, lazy lapdogs, birds dying in captivity, dull-witted but haughty turkeys, mild old tabby cats, who forgave us when we trod on their tails for fun and caused them agonising pain? I even fancy, sometimes, that the patience, the fidelity, the readiness to forgive, and the sincerity which are characteristic of our domestic animals have a far stronger and more definite effect on the mind of a child than the long exhortations of some dry, pale Karl Karlovitch, or the misty expositions of a governess, trying to prove to children that water is made up of hydrogen and oxygen.

“What little things!” says Nina, opening her eyes wide and going off into a joyous laugh. “They are like mice!”

“One, two, three,” Vanya counts. “Three kittens. So there is one for you, one for me, and one for somebody else, too.”

“Murrm… murrm…” purrs the mother, flattered by their attention. “Murrm.”

After gazing at the kittens, the children take them from under the cat, and begin squeezing them in their hands, then, not satisfied with this, they put them in the skirts of their nightgowns, and run into the other rooms.

“Mamma, the cat has got pups!” they shout.

Mamma is sitting in the drawing room with some unknown gentleman. Seeing the children unwashed, undressed, with their nightgowns held up high, she is embarrassed, and looks at them severely.

“Let your nightgowns down, disgraceful children,” she says. “Go out of the room, or I will punish you.”

But the children do not notice either mamma’s threats or the presence of a stranger. They put the kittens down on the carpet, and go off into deafening squeals. The mother walks round them, mewing imploringly. When, a little afterwards, the children are dragged off to the nursery, dressed, made to say their prayers, and given their breakfast, they are full of a passionate desire to get away from these prosaic duties as quickly as possible, and to run to the kitchen again.

Their habitual pursuits and games are thrown completely into the background.

The kittens throw everything into the shade by making their appearance in the world, and supply the great sensation of the day. If Nina or Vanya had been offered forty pounds of sweets or ten thousand kopecks for each kitten, they would have rejected such a barter without the slightest hesitation. In spite of the heated protests of the nurse and the cook, the children persist in sitting by the cat's box in the kitchen, busy with the kittens till dinnertime. Their faces are earnest and concentrated and express anxiety. They are worried not so much by the present as by the future of the kittens. They decide that one kitten shall remain at home with the old cat to be a comfort to her mother, while the second shall go to their summer villa, and the third shall live in the cellar, where there are ever so many rats.

"But why don't they look at us?" Nina wondered. "Their eyes are blind like the beggars'."

Vanya, too, is perturbed by this question. He tries to open one kitten's eyes, and spends a long time puffing and breathing hard over it, but his operation is unsuccessful. They are a good deal troubled, too, by the circumstance that the kittens obstinately refuse the milk and the meat that is offered to them. Everything that is put before their little noses is eaten by their grey mamma.

"Let's build the kittens little houses," Vanya suggests. "They shall live in different houses, and the cat shall come and pay them visits.…"

Cardboard hatboxes are put in the different corners of the kitchen and the kittens are installed in them. But this division turns out to be premature; the cat, still wearing an imploring and sentimental expression on her face, goes the round of all the hatboxes, and carries off her children to their original position.

"The cat's their mother," observed Vanya, "but who is their father?"

"Yes, who is their father?" repeats Nina.

"They must have a father."

Vanya and Nina are a long time deciding who is to be the kittens' father, and, in the end, their choice falls on a big dark-red horse without a tail, which is lying in the store-cupboard under the stairs, together with other relics of toys that have outlived their day. They drag him up out of the store-cupboard and stand him by the box.

"Mind now!" they admonish him, "stand here and see they behave themselves properly."

All this is said and done in the gravest way, with an expression of anxiety on their faces. Vanya and Nina refuse to recognise the existence

of any world but the box of kittens. Their joy knows no bounds. But they have to pass through bitter, agonising moments, too.

Just before dinner, Vanya is sitting in his father's study, gazing dreamily at the table. A kitten is moving about by the lamp, on stamped note paper. Vanya is watching its movements, and thrusting first a pencil, then a match into its little mouth.… All at once, as though he has sprung out of the floor, his father is beside the table.

"What's this?" Vanya hears, in an angry voice.

"It's… it's the kitty, papa.…"

"I'll give it you; look what you have done, you naughty boy! You've dirtied all my paper!"

To Vanya's great surprise his papa does not share his partiality for the kittens, and, instead of being moved to enthusiasm and delight, he pulls Vanya's ear and shouts:

"Stepan, take away this horrid thing."

At dinner, too, there is a scene.… During the second course there is suddenly the sound of a shrill mew. They begin to investigate its origin, and discover a kitten under Nina's pinafore.

"Nina, leave the table!" cries her father angrily. "Throw the kittens in the cesspool! I won't have the nasty things in the house!…"

Vanya and Nina are horrified. Death in the cesspool, apart from its cruelty, threatens to rob the cat and the wooden horse of their children, to lay waste the cat's box, to destroy their plans for the future, that fair future in which one cat will be a comfort to its old mother, another will live in the country, while the third will catch rats in the cellar. The children begin to cry and entreat that the kittens may be spared. Their father consents, but on the condition that the children do not go into the kitchen and touch the kittens.

After dinner, Vanya and Nina slouch about the rooms, feeling depressed. The prohibition of visits to the kitchen has reduced them to dejection. They refuse sweets, are naughty, and are rude to their mother. When their uncle Petrusha comes in the evening, they draw him aside, and complain to him of their father, who wanted to throw the kittens into the cesspool.

"Uncle Petrusha, tell mamma to have the kittens taken to the nursery," the children beg their uncle, "do-o tell her."

"There, there… very well," says their uncle, waving them off. "All right."

Uncle Petrusha does not usually come alone. He is accompanied by Nero, a big black dog of Danish breed, with drooping ears, and a tail as

hard as a stick. The dog is silent, morose, and full of a sense of his own dignity. He takes not the slightest notice of the children, and when he passes them hits them with his tail as though they were chairs. The children hate him from the bottom of their hearts, but on this occasion, practical considerations override sentiment.

"I say, Nina," says Vanya, opening his eyes wide. "Let Nero be their father, instead of the horse! The horse is dead and he is alive, you see."

They are waiting the whole evening for the moment when papa will sit down to his cards and it will be possible to take Nero to the kitchen without being observed.… At last, papa sits down to cards, mamma is busy with the samovar and not noticing the children.…

The happy moment arrives.

"Come along!" Vanya whispers to his sister.

But, at that moment, Stepan comes in and, with a snigger, announces:

"Nero has eaten the kittens, madam."

Nina and Vanya turn pale and look at Stepan with horror.

"He really has…" laughs the footman, "he went to the box and gobbled them up."

The children expect that all the people in the house will be aghast and fall upon the miscreant Nero. But they all sit calmly in their seats, and only express surprise at the appetite of the huge dog. Papa and mamma laugh. Nero walks about by the table, wags his tail, and licks his lips complacently… the cat is the only one who is uneasy. With her tail in the air she walks about the rooms, looking suspiciously at people and mewing plaintively.

"Children, it's past nine," cries mamma, "it's bedtime."

Vanya and Nina go to bed, shed tears, and spend a long time thinking about the injured cat, and the cruel, insolent, and unpunished Nero.

The Orator

One fine morning the collegiate assessor, Kirill Ivanovitch Babilonov, who had died of the two afflictions so widely spread in our country, a bad wife and alcoholism, was being buried. As the funeral procession set off from the church to the cemetery, one of the deceased's colleagues, called Poplavsky, got into a cab and galloped off to find a friend, one Grigory Petrovitch Zapoikin, a man who though still young had acquired considerable popularity. Zapoikin, as many of my readers are aware, possesses a rare talent for impromptu speechifying at weddings, jubilees, and funerals. He can speak whenever he likes: in his sleep, on an empty stomach, dead drunk or in a high fever. His words flow smoothly and evenly, like water out of a pipe, and in abundance; there are far more moving words in his oratorical dictionary than there are beetles in any restaurant. He always speaks eloquently and at great length, so much so that on some occasions, particularly at merchants' weddings, they have to resort to assistance from the police to stop him.

"I have come for you, old man!" began Poplavsky, finding him at home. "Put on your hat and coat this minute and come along. One of our fellows is dead, we are just sending him off to the other world, so you must do a bit of palavering by way of farewell to him.… You are our only hope. If it had been one of the smaller fry it would not have been worth troubling you, but you see it's the secretary… a pillar of the office, in a sense. It's awkward for such a whopper to be buried without a speech."

"Oh, the secretary!" yawned Zapoikin. "You mean the drunken one?"

"Yes. There will be pancakes, a lunch… you'll get your cab-fare. Come along, dear chap. You spout out some rigmarole like a regular Cicero at the grave and what gratitude you will earn!"

Zapoikin readily agreed. He ruffled up his hair, cast a shade of melancholy over his face, and went out into the street with Poplavsky.

"I know your secretary," he said, as he got into the cab. "A cunning rogue and a beast—the kingdom of heaven be his—such as you don't

often come across."

"Come, Grisha, it is not the thing to abuse the dead."

"Of course not, *aut mortuis nihil bene*, but still he was a rascal."

The friends overtook the funeral procession and joined it. The coffin was borne along slowly so that before they reached the cemetery they were able three times to drop into a tavern and imbibe a little to the health of the departed.

In the cemetery came the service by the graveside. The mother-in-law, the wife, and the sister-in-law in obedience to custom shed many tears. When the coffin was being lowered into the grave the wife even shrieked, "Let me go with him!" but did not follow her husband into the grave probably recollecting her pension. Waiting till everything was quiet again Zapoikin stepped forward, turned his eyes on all present, and began:

"Can I believe my eyes and ears? Is it not a terrible dream this grave, these tear-stained faces, these moans and lamentations? Alas, it is not a dream and our eyes do not deceive us! He whom we have only so lately seen, so full of courage, so youthfully fresh and pure, who so lately before our eyes like an unwearying bee bore his honey to the common hive of the welfare of the state, he who… he is turned now to dust, to inanimate mirage. Inexorable death has laid his bony hand upon him at the time when, in spite of his bowed age, he was still full of the bloom of strength and radiant hopes. An irremediable loss! Who will fill his place for us? Good government servants we have many, but Prokofy Osipitch was unique. To the depths of his soul he was devoted to his honest duty; he did not spare his strength but worked late at night, and was disinterested, impervious to bribes.… How he despised those who to the detriment of the public interest sought to corrupt him, who by the seductive goods of this life strove to draw him to betray his duty! Yes, before our eyes Prokofy Osipitch would divide his small salary between his poorer colleagues, and you have just heard yourselves the lamentations of the widows and orphans who lived upon his alms. Devoted to good works and his official duty, he gave up the joys of this life and even renounced the happiness of domestic existence; as you are aware, to the end of his days he was a bachelor. And who will replace him as a comrade? I can see now the kindly, shaven face turned to us with a gentle smile, I can hear now his soft friendly voice. Peace to thine ashes, Prokofy Osipitch! Rest, honest, noble toiler!"

Zapoikin continued while his listeners began whispering together. His speech pleased everyone and drew some tears, but a good many things in

it seemed strange. In the first place they could not make out why the orator called the deceased Prokofy Osipitch when his name was Kirill Ivanovitch. In the second, everyone knew that the deceased had spent his whole life quarelling with his lawful wife, and so consequently could not be called a bachelor; in the third, he had a thick red beard and had never been known to shave, and so no one could understand why the orator spoke of his shaven face. The listeners were perplexed; they glanced at each other and shrugged their shoulders.

"Prokofy Osipitch," continued the orator, looking with an air of inspiration into the grave, "your face was plain, even hideous, you were morose and austere, but we all know that under that outer husk there beat an honest, friendly heart!"

Soon the listeners began to observe something strange in the orator himself. He gazed at one point, shifted about uneasily and began to shrug his shoulders too. All at once he ceased speaking, and gaping with astonishment, turned to Poplavsky.

"I say! he's alive," he said, staring with horror.

"Who's alive?"

"Why, Prokofy Osipitch, there he stands, by that tombstone!"

"He never died! It's Kirill Ivanovitch who's dead."

"But you told me yourself your secretary was dead."

"Kirill Ivanovitch was our secretary. You've muddled it, you queer fish. Prokofy Osipitch was our secretary before, that's true, but two years ago he was transferred to the second division as head clerk."

"How the devil is one to tell?"

"Why are you stopping? Go on, it's awkward."

Zapoikin turned to the grave, and with the same eloquence continued his interrupted speech. Prokofy Osipitch, an old clerk with a clean-shaven face, was in fact standing by a tombstone. He looked at the orator and frowned angrily.

"Well, you have put your foot into it, haven't you!" laughed his fellow-clerks as they returned from the funeral with Zapoikin. "Burying a man alive!"

"It's unpleasant, young man," grumbled Prokofy Osipitch. "Your speech may be all right for a dead man, but in reference to a living one it is nothing but sarcasm! Upon my soul what have you been saying? Disinterested, incorruptible, won't take bribes! Such things can only be said of the living in sarcasm. And no one asked you, sir, to expatiate on my face. Plain, hideous, so be it, but why exhibit my countenance in that public way! It's insulting."

A Work of Art

Sasha Smirnov, the only son of his mother, holding under his arm, something wrapped up in No. 223 of the *Financial News*, assumed a sentimental expression, and went into Dr. Koshelkov's consulting room.

"Ah, dear lad!" was how the doctor greeted him. "Well! how are we feeling? What good news have you for me?"

Sasha blinked, laid his hand on his heart and said in an agitated voice: "Mamma sends her greetings to you, Ivan Nikolaevitch, and told me to thank you.… I am the only son of my mother and you have saved my life… you have brought me through a dangerous illness and… we do not know how to thank you."

"Nonsense, lad!" said the doctor, highly delighted. "I only did what anyone else would have done in my place."

"I am the only son of my mother… we are poor people and cannot of course repay you, and we are quite ashamed, doctor, although, however, mamma and I… the only son of my mother, earnestly beg you to accept in token of our gratitude… this object, which… An object of great value, an antique bronze.… A rare work of art."

"You shouldn't!" said the doctor, frowning. "What's this for!"

"No, please do not refuse," Sasha went on muttering as he unpacked the parcel. "You will wound mamma and me by refusing.… It's a fine thing… an antique bronze.… It was left us by my deceased father and we have kept it as a precious souvenir. My father used to buy antique bronzes and sell them to connoisseurs… Mamma and I keep on the business now."

Sasha undid the object and put it solemnly on the table. It was a not very tall candelabra of old bronze and artistic workmanship. It consisted of a group: on the pedestal stood two female figures in the costume of Eve and in attitudes for the description of which I have neither the courage nor the fitting temperament. The figures were smiling coquettishly and altogether looked as though, had it not been for the necessity of supporting the candlestick, they would have skipped off the

pedestal and have indulged in an orgy such as is improper for the reader even to imagine.

Looking at the present, the doctor slowly scratched behind his ear, cleared his throat and blew his nose irresolutely.

"Yes, it certainly is a fine thing," he muttered, "but… how shall I express it?… it's… h'm… it's not quite for family reading. It's not simply décolleté but beyond anything, dash it all.…"

"How do you mean?"

"The serpent-tempter himself could not have invented anything worse.… Why, to put such a phantasmagoria on the table would be defiling the whole flat."

"What a strange way of looking at art, doctor!" said Sasha, offended. "Why, it is an artistic thing, look at it! There is so much beauty and elegance that it fills one's soul with a feeling of reverence and brings a lump into one's throat! When one sees anything so beautiful one forgets everything earthly.… Only look, how much movement, what an atmosphere, what expression!"

"I understand all that very well, my dear boy," the doctor interposed, "but you know I am a family man, my children run in here, ladies come in."

"Of course if you look at it from the point of view of the crowd," said Sasha, "then this exquisitely artistic work may appear in a certain light.… But, doctor, rise superior to the crowd, especially as you will wound mamma and me by refusing it. I am the only son of my mother, you have saved my life.… We are giving you the thing most precious to us and… and I only regret that I have not the pair to present to you.…"

"Thank you, my dear fellow, I am very grateful… Give my respects to your mother but really consider, my children run in here, ladies come.… However, let it remain! I see there's no arguing with you."

"And there is nothing to argue about," said Sasha, relieved. "Put the candlestick here, by this vase. What a pity we have not the pair to it! It is a pity! Well, goodbye, doctor."

After Sasha's departure the doctor looked for a long time at the candelabra, scratched behind his ear and meditated.

"It's a superb thing, there's no denying it," he thought, "and it would be a pity to throw it away.… But it's impossible for me to keep it.… H'm!… Here's a problem! To whom can I make a present of it, or to what charity can I give it?"

After long meditation he thought of his good friend, the lawyer Uhov, to whom he was indebted for the management of legal business.

“Excellent,” the doctor decided, “it would be awkward for him as a friend to take money from me, and it will be very suitable for me to present him with this. I will take him the devilish thing! Luckily he is a bachelor and easygoing.”

Without further procrastination the doctor put on his hat and coat, took the candelabra and went off to Uhov’s.

“How are you, friend!” he said, finding the lawyer at home. “I’ve come to see you… to thank you for your efforts.… You won’t take money so you must at least accept this thing here.… See, my dear fellow.… The thing is magnificent!”

On seeing the bronze the lawyer was moved to indescribable delight.

“What a specimen!” he chuckled. “Ah, deuce take it, to think of them imagining such a thing, the devils! Exquisite! Ravishing! Where did you get hold of such a delightful thing?”

After pouring out his ecstasies the lawyer looked timidly towards the door and said: “Only you must carry off your present, my boy.… I can’t take it.…”

“Why?” cried the doctor, disconcerted.

“Why… because my mother is here at times, my clients… besides I should be ashamed for my servants to see it.”

“Nonsense! Nonsense! Don’t you dare to refuse!” said the doctor, gesticulating. “It’s piggish of you! It’s a work of art!… What movement… what expression! I won’t even talk of it! You will offend me!”

“If one could plaster it over or stick on fig-leaves…”

But the doctor gesticulated more violently than before, and dashing out of the flat went home, glad that he had succeeded in getting the present off his hands.

When he had gone away the lawyer examined the candelabra, fingered it all over, and then, like the doctor, racked his brains over the question what to do with the present.

“It’s a fine thing,” he mused, “and it would be a pity to throw it away and improper to keep it. The very best thing would be to make a present of it to someone.… I know what! I’ll take it this evening to Shashkin, the comedian. The rascal is fond of such things, and by the way it is his benefit tonight.”

No sooner said than done. In the evening the candelabra, carefully wrapped up, was duly carried to Shashkin’s. The whole evening the comic actor’s dressing room was besieged by men coming to admire the present; the dressing room was filled with the hum of enthusiasm and

laughter like the neighing of horses. If one of the actresses approached the door and asked: “May I come in?” the comedian’s husky voice was heard at once: “No, no, my dear, I am not dressed!”

After the performance the comedian shrugged his shoulders, flung up his hands and said: “Well what am I to do with the horrid thing? Why, I live in a private flat! Actresses come and see me! It’s not a photograph that you can put in a drawer!”

“You had better sell it, sir,” the hairdresser who was disrobing the actor advised him. “There’s an old woman living about here who buys antique bronzes. Go and enquire for Madame Smirnov… everyone knows her.”

The actor followed his advice.… Two days later the doctor was sitting in his consulting room, and with his finger to his brow was meditating on the acids of the bile. All at once the door opened and Sasha Smirnov flew into the room. He was smiling, beaming, and his whole figure was radiant with happiness. In his hands he held something wrapped up in newspaper.

“Doctor!” he began breathlessly, “imagine my delight! Happily for you we have succeeded in picking up the pair to your candelabra! Mamma is so happy.… I am the only son of my mother, you saved my life.…”

And Sasha, all of a tremor with gratitude, set the candelabra before the doctor. The doctor opened his mouth, tried to say something, but said nothing: he could not speak.

Who Was to Blame?

As my uncle Pyotr Demyanitch, a lean, bilious collegiate councillor, exceedingly like a stale smoked fish with a stick through it, was getting ready to go to the high school, where he taught Latin, he noticed that the corner of his grammar was nibbled by mice.

"I say, Praskovya," he said, going into the kitchen and addressing the cook, "how is it we have got mice here? Upon my word! yesterday my top hat was nibbled, today they have disfigured my Latin grammar.… At this rate they will soon begin eating my clothes!"

"What can I do? I did not bring them in!" answered Praskovya.

"We must do something! You had better get a cat, hadn't you?"

"I've got a cat, but what good is it?"

And Praskovya pointed to the corner where a white kitten, thin as a match, lay curled up asleep beside a broom.

"Why is it no good?" asked Pyotr Demyanitch.

"It's young yet, and foolish. It's not two months old yet."

"H'm.… Then it must be trained. It had much better be learning instead of lying there."

Saying this, Pyotr Demyanitch sighed with a careworn air and went out of the kitchen. The kitten raised his head, looked lazily after him, and shut his eyes again.

The kitten lay awake thinking. Of what? Unacquainted with real life, having no store of accumulated impressions, his mental processes could only be instinctive, and he could but picture life in accordance with the conceptions that he had inherited, together with his flesh and blood, from his ancestors, the tigers (*vide* Darwin). His thoughts were of the nature of daydreams. His feline imagination pictured something like the Arabian desert, over which flitted shadows closely resembling Praskovya, the stove, the broom. In the midst of the shadows there suddenly appeared a saucer of milk; the saucer began to grow paws, it began moving and displayed a tendency to run; the kitten made a bound, and with a thrill of bloodthirsty sensuality thrust his claws into it.

When the saucer had vanished into obscurity a piece of meat appeared, dropped by Praskovya; the meat ran away with a cowardly squeak, but the kitten made a bound and got his claws into it.… Everything that rose before the imagination of the young dreamer had for its starting-point leaps, claws, and teeth… The soul of another is darkness, and a cat's soul more than most, but how near the visions just described are to the truth may be seen from the following fact: under the influence of his daydreams the kitten suddenly leaped up, looked with flashing eyes at Praskovya, ruffled up his coat, and making one bound, thrust his claws into the cook's skirt. Obviously he was born a mouse catcher, a worthy son of his bloodthirsty ancestors. Fate had destined him to be the terror of cellars, storerooms and cornbins, and had it not been for education… we will not anticipate, however.

On his way home from the high school, Pyotr Demyanitch went into a general shop and bought a mousetrap for fifteen kopecks. At dinner he fixed a little bit of his rissole on the hook, and set the trap under the sofa, where there were heaps of the pupils' old exercise-books, which Praskovya used for various domestic purposes. At six o'clock in the evening, when the worthy Latin master was sitting at the table correcting his pupils' exercises, there was a sudden "klop!" so loud that my uncle started and dropped his pen. He went at once to the sofa and took out the trap. A neat little mouse, the size of a thimble, was sniffing the wires and trembling with fear.

"Aha," muttered Pyotr Demyanitch, and he looked at the mouse malignantly, as though he were about to give him a bad mark. "You are cau—aught, wretch! Wait a bit! I'll teach you to eat my grammar!"

Having gloated over his victim, Poytr Demyanitch put the mousetrap on the floor and called:

"Praskovya, there's a mouse caught! Bring the kitten here!"

"I'm coming," responded Praskovya, and a minute later she came in with the descendant of tigers in her arms.

"Capital!" said Pyotr Demyanitch, rubbing his hands. "We will give him a lesson.… Put him down opposite the mousetrap… that's it.… Let him sniff it and look at it.… That's it.…"

The kitten looked wonderingly at my uncle, at his armchair, sniffed the mousetrap in bewilderment, then, frightened probably by the glaring lamplight and the attention directed to him, made a dash and ran in terror to the door.

"Stop!" shouted my uncle, seizing him by the tail, "stop, you rascal! He's afraid of a mouse, the idiot! Look! It's a mouse! Look! Well? Look,

I tell you!”

Pyotr Demyanitch took the kitten by the scruff of the neck and pushed him with his nose against the mousetrap.

“Look, you carrion! Take him and hold him, Praskovya.… Hold him opposite the door of the trap.… When I let the mouse out, you let him go instantly.… Do you hear?… Instantly let go! Now!”

My uncle assumed a mysterious expression and lifted the door of the trap.… The mouse came out irresolutely, sniffed the air, and flew like an arrow under the sofa.… The kitten on being released darted under the table with his tail in the air.

“It has got away! got away!” cried Pyotr Demyanitch, looking ferocious. “Where is he, the scoundrel? Under the table? You wait…”

My uncle dragged the kitten from under the table and shook him in the air.

“Wretched little beast,” he muttered, smacking him on the ear. “Take that, take that! Will you shirk it next time? Wr-r-r-etch.…”

Next day Praskovya heard again the summons.

“Praskovya, there is a mouse caught! Bring the kitten here!”

After the outrage of the previous day the kitten had taken refuge under the stove and had not come out all night. When Praskovya pulled him out and, carrying him by the scruff of the neck into the study, set him down before the mousetrap, he trembled all over and mewed piteously.

“Come, let him feel at home first,” Pyotr Demyanitch commanded. “Let him look and sniff. Look and learn! Stop, plague take you!” he shouted, noticing that the kitten was backing away from the mousetrap. “I’ll thrash you! Hold him by the ear! That’s it.… Well now, set him down before the trap.…”

My uncle slowly lifted the door of the trap… the mouse whisked under the very nose of the kitten, flung itself against Praskovya’s hand and fled under the cupboard; the kitten, feeling himself free, took a desperate bound and retreated under the sofa.

“He’s let another mouse go!” bawled Pyotr Demyanitch. “Do you call that a cat? Nasty little beast! Thrash him! thrash him by the mousetrap!”

When the third mouse had been caught, the kitten shivered all over at the sight of the mousetrap and its inmate, and scratched Praskovya’s hand.… After the fourth mouse my uncle flew into a rage, kicked the kitten, and said:

“Take the nasty thing away! Get rid of it! Chuck it away! It’s no earthly use!”

A year passed, the thin, frail kitten had turned into a solid and sagacious tomcat. One day he was on his way by the back yards to an amatory interview. He had just reached his destination when he suddenly heard a rustle, and thereupon caught sight of a mouse which ran from a water-trough towards a stable; my hero’s hair stood on end, he arched his back, hissed, and trembling all over, took to ignominious flight.

Alas! sometimes I feel myself in the ludicrous position of the flying cat. Like the kitten, I had in my day the honour of being taught Latin by my uncle. Now, whenever I chance to see some work of classical antiquity, instead of being moved to eager enthusiasm, I begin recalling, *ut consecutivum*, the irregular verbs, the sallow grey face of my uncle, the ablative absolute.… I turn pale, my hair stands up on my head, and, like the cat, I take to ignominious flight.

On the Road

"Upon the breast of a gigantic crag,
A golden cloudlet rested for one night."

Lermontov

In the room which the tavern keeper, the Cossack Semyon Tchistopluy, called the "Travellers' Room," that is kept exclusively for travellers, a tall, broad-shouldered man of forty was sitting at the big unpainted table. He was asleep with his elbows on the table and his head leaning on his fist. An end of tallow candle, stuck into an old pomatum pot, lighted up his light brown beard, his thick, broad nose, his sunburnt cheeks, and the thick, black eyebrows overhanging his closed eyes.… The nose and the cheeks and the eyebrows, all the features, each taken separately, were coarse and heavy, like the furniture and the stove in the Travellers' Room, but taken all together they gave the effect of something harmonious and even beautiful. Such is the lucky star, as it is called, of the Russian face: the coarser and harsher its features the softer and more good-natured it looks. The man was dressed in a gentleman's reefer jacket, shabby, but bound with wide new braid, a plush waistcoat, and full black trousers thrust into big high boots.

On one of the benches, which stood in a continuous row along the wall, a girl of eight, in a brown dress and long black stockings, lay asleep on a coat lined with fox. Her face was pale, her hair was flaxen, her shoulders were narrow, her whole body was thin and frail, but her nose stood out as thick and ugly a lump as the man's. She was sound asleep, and unconscious that her semicircular comb had fallen off her head and was cutting her cheek.

The Travellers' Room had a festive appearance. The air was full of the smell of freshly scrubbed floors, there were no rags hanging as usual on the line that ran diagonally across the room, and a little lamp was burning in the corner over the table, casting a patch of red light on the

icon of St. George the Victorious. From the icon stretched on each side of the corner a row of cheap oleographs, which maintained a strict and careful gradation in the transition from the sacred to the profane. In the dim light of the candle end and the red icon lamp the pictures looked like one continuous stripe, covered with blurs of black. When the tiled stove, trying to sing in unison with the weather, drew in the air with a howl, while the logs, as though waking up, burst into bright flame and hissed angrily, red patches began dancing on the log walls, and over the head of the sleeping man could be seen first the Elder Seraphim, then the Shah Nasir-ed-Din, then a fat, brown baby with goggle eyes, whispering in the ear of a young girl with an extraordinarily blank, and indifferent face….

Outside a storm was raging. Something frantic and wrathful, but profoundly unhappy, seemed to be flinging itself about the tavern with the ferocity of a wild beast and trying to break in. Banging at the doors, knocking at the windows and on the roof, scratching at the walls, it alternately threatened and besought, then subsided for a brief interval, and then with a gleeful, treacherous howl burst into the chimney, but the wood flared up, and the fire, like a chained dog, flew wrathfully to meet its foe, a battle began, and after it—sobs, shrieks, howls of wrath. In all of this there was the sound of angry misery and unsatisfied hate, and the mortified impatience of something accustomed to triumph.

Bewitched by this wild, inhuman music the Travellers' Room seemed spellbound forever, but all at once the door creaked and the potboy, in a new print shirt, came in. Limping on one leg, and blinking his sleepy eyes, he snuffed the candle with his fingers, put some more wood on the fire and went out. At once from the church, which was three hundred paces from the tavern, the clock struck midnight. The wind played with the chimes as with the snowflakes; chasing the sounds of the clock it whirled them round and round over a vast space, so that some strokes were cut short or drawn out in long, vibrating notes, while others were completely lost in the general uproar. One stroke sounded as distinctly in the room as though it had chimed just under the window. The child, sleeping on the fox-skin, started and raised her head. For a minute she stared blankly at the dark window, at Nasir-ed-Din over whom a crimson glow from the fire flickered at that moment, then she turned her eyes upon the sleeping man.

"Daddy," she said.

But the man did not move. The little girl knitted her brow angrily, lay down, and curled up her legs. Someone in the tavern gave a loud, prolonged yawn. Soon afterwards there was the squeak of the swing door

and the sound of indistinct voices. Someone came in, shaking the snow off, and stamping in felt boots which made a muffled thud.

"What is it?" a woman's voice asked languidly.

"Mademoiselle Ilovaisky has come,…" answered a bass voice.

Again there was the squeak of the swing door. Then came the roar of the wind rushing in. Someone, probably the lame boy, ran to the door leading to the Travellers' Room, coughed deferentially, and lifted the latch.

"This way, lady, please," said a woman's voice in dulcet tones. "It's clean in here, my beauty.…"

The door was opened wide and a peasant with a beard appeared in the doorway, in the long coat of a coachman, plastered all over with snow from head to foot, and carrying a big trunk on his shoulder. He was followed into the room by a feminine figure, scarcely half his height, with no face and no arms, muffled and wrapped up like a bundle and also covered with snow. A damp chill, as from a cellar, seemed to come to the child from the coachman and the bundle, and the fire and the candles flickered.

"What nonsense!" said the bundle angrily, "We could go perfectly well. We have only nine more miles to go, mostly by the forest, and we should not get lost.…"

"As for getting lost, we shouldn't, but the horses can't go on, lady!" answered the coachman. "And it is Thy Will, O Lord! As though I had done it on purpose!"

"God knows where you have brought me.… Well, be quiet.… There are people asleep here, it seems. You can go.…"

The coachman put the portmanteau on the floor, and as he did so, a great lump of snow fell off his shoulders. He gave a sniff and went out.

Then the little girl saw two little hands come out from the middle of the bundle, stretch upwards and begin angrily disentangling the network of shawls, kerchiefs, and scarves. First a big shawl fell on the ground, then a hood, then a white knitted kerchief. After freeing her head, the traveller took off her pelisse and at once shrank to half the size. Now she was in a long, grey coat with big buttons and bulging pockets. From one pocket she pulled out a paper parcel, from the other a bunch of big, heavy keys, which she put down so carelessly that the sleeping man started and opened his eyes. For some time he looked blankly round him as though he didn't know where he was, then he shook his head, went to the corner and sat down.… The newcomer took off her great coat, which

made her shrink to half her size again, she took off her big felt boots, and sat down, too.

By now she no longer resembled a bundle: she was a thin little brunette of twenty, as slim as a snake, with a long white face and curly hair. Her nose was long and sharp, her chin, too, was long and sharp, her eyelashes were long, the corners of her mouth were sharp, and, thanks to this general sharpness, the expression of her face was biting. Swathed in a closely fitting black dress with a mass of lace at her neck and sleeves, with sharp elbows and long pink fingers, she recalled the portraits of medieval English ladies. The grave concentration of her face increased this likeness.

The lady looked round at the room, glanced sideways at the man and the little girl, shrugged her shoulders, and moved to the window. The dark windows were shaking from the damp west wind. Big flakes of snow glistening in their whiteness, lay on the window frame, but at once disappeared, borne away by the wind. The savage music grew louder and louder.…

After a long silence the little girl suddenly turned over, and said angrily, emphasizing each word:

“Oh, goodness, goodness, how unhappy I am! Unhappier than anyone!”

The man got up and moved with little steps to the child with a guilty air, which was utterly out of keeping with his huge figure and big beard.

“You are not asleep, dearie?” he said, in an apologetic voice. “What do you want?”

“I don’t want anything, my shoulder aches! You are a wicked man, Daddy, and God will punish you! You’ll see He will punish you.”

“My darling, I know your shoulder aches, but what can I do, dearie?” said the man, in the tone in which men who have been drinking excuse themselves to their stern spouses. “It’s the journey has made your shoulder ache, Sasha. Tomorrow we shall get there and rest, and the pain will go away.…”

“Tomorrow, tomorrow.… Every day you say tomorrow. We shall be going on another twenty days.”

“But we shall arrive tomorrow, dearie, on your father’s word of honour. I never tell a lie, but if we are detained by the snowstorm it is not my fault.”

“I can’t bear any more, I can’t, I can’t!”

Sasha jerked her leg abruptly and filled the room with an unpleasant wailing. Her father made a despairing gesture, and looked hopelessly

towards the young lady. The latter shrugged her shoulders, and hesitatingly went up to Sasha.

"Listen, my dear," she said, "it is no use crying. It's really naughty; if your shoulder aches it can't be helped."

"You see, Madam," said the man quickly, as though defending himself, "we have not slept for two nights, and have been travelling in a revolting conveyance. Well, of course, it is natural she should be ill and miserable,… and then, you know, we had a drunken driver, our portmanteau has been stolen… the snowstorm all the time, but what's the use of crying, Madam? I am exhausted, though, by sleeping in a sitting position, and I feel as though I were drunk. Oh, dear! Sasha, and I feel sick as it is, and then you cry!"

The man shook his head, and with a gesture of despair sat down.

"Of course you mustn't cry," said the young lady. "It's only little babies cry. If you are ill, dear, you must undress and go to sleep.… Let us take off your things!"

When the child had been undressed and pacified a silence reigned again. The young lady seated herself at the window, and looked round wonderingly at the room of the inn, at the icon, at the stove.… Apparently the room and the little girl with the thick nose, in her short boy's nightgown, and the child's father, all seemed strange to her. This strange man was sitting in a corner; he kept looking about him helplessly, as though he were drunk, and rubbing his face with the palm of his hand. He sat silent, blinking, and judging from his guilty-looking figure it was difficult to imagine that he would soon begin to speak. Yet he was the first to begin. Stroking his knees, he gave a cough, laughed, and said:

"It's a comedy, it really is.… I look and I cannot believe my eyes: for what devilry has destiny driven us to this accursed inn? What did she want to show by it? Life sometimes performs such '*salto mortale*,' one can only stare and blink in amazement. Have you come from far, Madam?"

"No, not from far," answered the young lady. "I am going from our estate, fifteen miles from here, to our farm, to my father and brother. My name is Ilovaisky, and the farm is called Ilovaiskoe. It's nine miles away. What unpleasant weather!"

"It couldn't be worse."

The lame boy came in and stuck a new candle in the pomatum pot.

"You might bring us the samovar, boy," said the man, addressing him.

“Who drinks tea now?” laughed the boy. “It is a sin to drink tea before mass.…”

“Never mind boy, you won’t burn in hell if we do.…”

Over the tea the new acquaintances got into conversation.

Mlle. Ilovaisky learned that her companion was called Grigory Petrovitch Liharev, that he was the brother of the Liharev who was Marshal of Nobility in one of the neighbouring districts, and he himself had once been a landowner, but had “run through everything in his time.” Liharev learned that her name was Marya Mihailovna, that her father had a huge estate, but that she was the only one to look after it as her father and brother looked at life through their fingers, were irresponsible, and were too fond of harriers.

“My father and brother are all alone at the farm,” she told him, brandishing her fingers (she had the habit of moving her fingers before her pointed face as she talked, and after every sentence moistened her lips with her sharp little tongue). “They, I mean men, are an irresponsible lot, and don’t stir a finger for themselves. I can fancy there will be no one to give them a meal after the fast! We have no mother, and we have such servants that they can’t lay the tablecloth properly when I am away. You can imagine their condition now! They will be left with nothing to break their fast, while I have to stay here all night. How strange it all is.”

She shrugged her shoulders, took a sip from her cup, and said:

“There are festivals that have a special fragrance: at Easter, Trinity and Christmas there is a peculiar scent in the air. Even unbelievers are fond of those festivals. My brother, for instance, argues that there is no God, but he is the first to hurry to Matins at Easter.”

Liharev raised his eyes to Mlle. Ilovaisky and laughed.

“They argue that there is no God,” she went on, laughing too, “but why is it, tell me, all the celebrated writers, the learned men, clever people generally, in fact, believe towards the end of their life?”

“If a man does not know how to believe when he is young, Madam, he won’t believe in his old age if he is ever so much of a writer.”

Judging from Liharev’s cough he had a bass voice, but, probably from being afraid to speak aloud, or from exaggerated shyness, he spoke in a tenor. After a brief pause he heaved a sign and said:

“The way I look at it is that faith is a faculty of the spirit. It is just the same as a talent, one must be born with it. So far as I can judge by myself, by the people I have seen in my time, and by all that is done around us, this faculty is present in Russians in its highest degree. Russian life presents us with an uninterrupted succession of convictions

and aspirations, and if you care to know, it has not yet the faintest notion of lack of faith or scepticism. If a Russian does not believe in God, it means he believes in something else."

Liharev took a cup of tea from Mlle. Ilovaisky, drank off half in one gulp, and went on:

"I will tell you about myself. Nature has implanted in my breast an extraordinary faculty for belief. Whisper it not to the night, but half my life I was in the ranks of the Atheists and Nihilists, but there was not one hour in my life in which I ceased to believe. All talents, as a rule, show themselves in early childhood, and so my faculty showed itself when I could still walk upright under the table. My mother liked her children to eat a great deal, and when she gave me food she used to say: 'Eat! Soup is the great thing in life!' I believed, and ate the soup ten times a day, ate like a shark, ate till I was disgusted and stupefied. My nurse used to tell me fairy tales, and I believed in house-spirits, in wood-elves, and in goblins of all kinds. I used sometimes to steal corrosive sublimate from my father, sprinkle it on cakes, and carry them up to the attic that the house-spirits, you see, might eat them and be killed. And when I was taught to read and understand what I read, then there was a fine to-do. I ran away to America and went off to join the brigands, and wanted to go into a monastery, and hired boys to torture me for being a Christian. And note that my faith was always active, never dead. If I was running away to America I was not alone, but seduced someone else, as great a fool as I was, to go with me, and was delighted when I was nearly frozen outside the town gates and when I was thrashed; if I went to join the brigands I always came back with my face battered. A most restless childhood, I assure you! And when they sent me to the high school and pelted me with all sorts of truths—that is, that the earth goes round the sun, or that white light is not white, but is made up of seven colours—my poor little head began to go round! Everything was thrown into a whirl in me: Navin who made the sun stand still, and my mother who in the name of the Prophet Elijah disapproved of lightning conductors, and my father who was indifferent to the truths I had learned. My enlightenment inspired me. I wandered about the house and stables like one possessed, preaching my truths, was horrified by ignorance, glowed with hatred for anyone who saw in white light nothing but white light.… But all that's nonsense and childishness. Serious, so to speak, manly enthusiasms began only at the university. You have, no doubt, Madam, taken your degree somewhere?"

"I studied at Novotcherkask at the Don Institute."

“Then you have not been to a university? So you don’t know what science means. All the sciences in the world have the same passport, without which they regard themselves as meaningless… the striving towards truth! Every one of them, even pharmacology, has for its aim not utility, not the alleviation of life, but truth. It’s remarkable! When you set to work to study any science, what strikes you first of all is its beginning. I assure you there is nothing more attractive and grander, nothing is so staggering, nothing takes a man’s breath away like the beginning of any science. From the first five or six lectures you are soaring on wings of the brightest hopes, you already seem to yourself to be welcoming truth with open arms. And I gave myself up to science, heart and soul, passionately, as to the woman one loves. I was its slave; I found it the sun of my existence, and asked for no other. I studied day and night without rest, ruined myself over books, wept when before my eyes men exploited science for their own personal ends. But my enthusiasm did not last long. The trouble is that every science has a beginning but not an end, like a recurring decimal. Zoology has discovered 35,000 kinds of insects, chemistry reckons sixty elements. If in time tens of noughts can be written after these figures. Zoology and chemistry will be just as far from their end as now, and all contemporary scientific work consists in increasing these numbers. I saw through this trick when I discovered the 35,001st and felt no satisfaction. Well, I had no time to suffer from disillusionment, as I was soon possessed by a new faith. I plunged into Nihilism, with its manifestoes, its ‘black divisions,’ and all the rest of it. I ‘went to the people,’ worked in factories, worked as an oiler, as a barge hauler. Afterwards, when wandering over Russia, I had a taste of Russian life, I turned into a fervent devotee of that life. I loved the Russian people with poignant intensity; I loved their God and believed in Him, and in their language, their creative genius.… And so on, and so on.… I have been a Slavophile in my time, I used to pester Aksakov with letters, and I was a Ukrainophile, and an archæologist, and a collector of specimens of peasant art.… I was enthusiastic over ideas, people, events, places… my enthusiasm was endless! Five years ago I was working for the abolition of private property; my last creed was nonresistance to evil.”

Sasha gave an abrupt sigh and began moving. Liharev got up and went to her.

“Won’t you have some tea, dearie?” he asked tenderly.

“Drink it yourself,” the child answered rudely. Liharev was disconcerted, and went back to the table with a guilty step.

“Then you have had a lively time,” said Mlle. Ilovaisky; “you have something to remember.”

“Well, yes, it’s all very lively when one sits over tea and chatters to a kind listener, but you should ask what that liveliness has cost me! What price have I paid for the variety of my life? You see, Madam, I have not held my convictions like a German doctor of philosophy, *zierlichmännerlich*, I have not lived in solitude, but every conviction I have had has bound my back to the yoke, has torn my body to pieces. Judge, for yourself. I was wealthy like my brothers, but now I am a beggar. In the delirium of my enthusiasm I smashed up my own fortune and my wife’s—a heap of other people’s money. Now I am forty-two, old age is close upon me, and I am homeless, like a dog that has dropped behind its wagon at night. All my life I have not known what peace meant, my soul has been in continual agitation, distressed even by its hopes… I have been wearied out with heavy irregular work, have endured privation, have five times been in prison, have dragged myself across the provinces of Archangel and of Tobolsk… it’s painful to think of it! I have lived, but in my fever I have not even been conscious of the process of life itself. Would you believe it, I don’t remember a single spring, I never noticed how my wife loved me, how my children were born. What more can I tell you? I have been a misfortune to all who have loved me.… My mother has worn mourning for me all these fifteen years, while my proud brothers, who have had to wince, to blush, to bow their heads, to waste their money on my account, have come in the end to hate me like poison.”

Liharev got up and sat down again.

“If I were simply unhappy I should thank God,” he went on without looking at his listener. “My personal unhappiness sinks into the background when I remember how often in my enthusiasms I have been absurd, far from the truth, unjust, cruel, dangerous! How often I have hated and despised those whom I ought to have loved, and vice versa, I have changed a thousand times. One day I believe, fall down and worship, the next I flee like a coward from the gods and friends of yesterday, and swallow in silence the ‘scoundrel!’ they hurl after me. God alone has seen how often I have wept and bitten my pillow in shame for my enthusiasms. Never once in my life have I intentionally lied or done evil, but my conscience is not clear! I cannot even boast, Madam, that I have no one’s life upon my conscience, for my wife died before my eyes, worn out by my reckless activity. Yes, my wife! I tell you they have two ways of treating women nowadays. Some measure women’s skulls

to prove woman is inferior to man, pick out her defects to mock at her, to look original in her eyes, and to justify their sensuality. Others do their utmost to raise women to their level, that is, force them to learn by heart the 35,000 species, to speak and write the same foolish things as they speak and write themselves."

Liharev's face darkened.

"I tell you that woman has been and always will be the slave of man," he said in a bass voice, striking his fist on the table. "She is the soft, tender wax which a man always moulds into anything he likes.… My God! for the sake of some trumpery masculine enthusiasm she will cut off her hair, abandon her family, die among strangers!… among the ideas for which she has sacrificed herself there is not a single feminine one.… An unquestioning, devoted slave! I have not measured skulls, but I say this from hard, bitter experience: the proudest, most independent women, if I have succeeded in communicating to them my enthusiasm, have followed me without criticism, without question, and done anything I chose; I have turned a nun into a Nihilist who, as I heard afterwards, shot a gendarme; my wife never left me for a minute in my wanderings, and like a weathercock changed her faith in step with my changing enthusiasms."

Liharev jumped up and walked up and down the room.

"A noble, sublime slavery!" he said, clasping his hands. "It is just in it that the highest meaning of woman's life lies! Of all the fearful medley of thoughts and impressions accumulated in my brain from my association with women my memory, like a filter, has retained no ideas, no clever saying, no philosophy, nothing but that extraordinary, resignation to fate, that wonderful mercifulness, forgiveness of everything."

Liharev clenched his fists, stared at a fixed point, and with a sort of passionate intensity, as though he were savouring each word as he uttered it, hissed through his clenched teeth:

"That… that greathearted fortitude, faithfulness unto death, poetry of the heart.… The meaning of life lies in just that unrepining martyrdom, in the tears which would soften a stone, in the boundless, all-forgiving love which brings light and warmth into the chaos of life.…"

Mlle. Ilovaisky got up slowly, took a step towards Liharev, and fixed her eyes upon his face. From the tears that glittered on his eyelashes, from his quivering, passionate voice, from the flush on his cheeks, it was clear to her that women were not a chance, not a simple subject of conversation. They were the object of his new enthusiasm, or, as he said

himself, his new faith! For the first time in her life she saw a man carried away, fervently believing. With his gesticulations, with his flashing eyes he seemed to her mad, frantic, but there was a feeling of such beauty in the fire of his eyes, in his words, in all the movements of his huge body, that without noticing what she was doing she stood facing him as though rooted to the spot, and gazed into his face with delight.

"Take my mother," he said, stretching out his hand to her with an imploring expression on his face, "I poisoned her existence, according to her ideas disgraced the name of Liharev, did her as much harm as the most malignant enemy, and what do you think? My brothers give her little sums for holy bread and church services, and outraging her religious feelings, she saves that money and sends it in secret to her erring Grigory. This trifle alone elevates and ennobles the soul far more than all the theories, all the clever sayings and the 35,000 species. I can give you thousands of instances. Take you, even, for instance! With tempest and darkness outside you are going to your father and your brother to cheer them with your affection in the holiday, though very likely they have forgotten and are not thinking of you. And, wait a bit, and you will love a man and follow him to the North Pole. You would, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, if I loved him."

"There, you see," cried Liharev delighted, and he even stamped with his foot. "Oh dear! How glad I am that I have met you! Fate is kind to me, I am always meeting splendid people. Not a day passes but one makes acquaintance with somebody one would give one's soul for. There are ever so many more good people than bad in this world. Here, see, for instance, how openly and from our hearts we have been talking as though we had known each other a hundred years. Sometimes, I assure you, one restrains oneself for ten years and holds one's tongue, is reserved with one's friends and one's wife, and meets some cadet in a train and babbles one's whole soul out to him. It is the first time I have the honour of seeing you, and yet I have confessed to you as I have never confessed in my life. Why is it?"

Rubbing his hands and smiling good-humouredly Liharev walked up and down the room, and fell to talking about women again. Meanwhile they began ringing for matins.

"Goodness," wailed Sasha. "He won't let me sleep with his talking!"

"Oh, yes!" said Liharev, startled. "I am sorry, darling, sleep, sleep.… I have two boys besides her," he whispered. "They are living with their uncle, Madam, but this one can't exist a day without her father. She's

wretched, she complains, but she sticks to me like a fly to honey. I have been chattering too much, Madam, and it would do you no harm to sleep. Wouldn't you like me to make up a bed for you?"

Without waiting for permission he shook the wet pelisse, stretched it on a bench, fur side upwards, collected various shawls and scarves, put the overcoat folded up into a roll for a pillow, and all this he did in silence with a look of devout reverence, as though he were not handling a woman's rags, but the fragments of holy vessels. There was something apologetic, embarrassed about his whole figure, as though in the presence of a weak creature he felt ashamed of his height and strength.…

When Mlle. Ilovaisky had lain down, he put out the candle and sat down on a stool by the stove.

"So, Madam," he whispered, lighting a fat cigarette and puffing the smoke into the stove. "Nature has put into the Russian an extraordinary faculty for belief, a searching intelligence, and the gift of speculation, but all that is reduced to ashes by irresponsibility, laziness, and dreamy frivolity.… Yes.…"

She gazed wonderingly into the darkness, and saw only a spot of red on the icon and the flicker of the light of the stove on Liharev's face. The darkness, the chime of the bells, the roar of the storm, the lame boy, Sasha with her fretfulness, unhappy Liharev and his sayings—all this was mingled together, and seemed to grow into one huge impression, and God's world seemed to her fantastic, full of marvels and magical forces. All that she had heard was ringing in her ears, and human life presented itself to her as a beautiful poetic fairytale without an end.

The immense impression grew and grew, clouded consciousness, and turned into a sweet dream. She was asleep, though she saw the little icon lamp and a big nose with the light playing on it.

She heard the sound of weeping.

"Daddy, darling," a child's voice was tenderly entreating, "let's go back to uncle! There is a Christmas tree there! Styopa and Kolya are there!"

"My darling, what can I do?" a man's bass persuaded softly. "Understand me! Come, understand!"

And the man's weeping blended with the child's. This voice of human sorrow, in the midst of the howling of the storm, touched the girl's ear with such sweet human music that she could not bear the delight of it, and wept too. She was conscious afterwards of a big, black shadow coming softly up to her, picking up a shawl that had dropped on to the floor and carefully wrapping it round her feet.

Mlle. Ilovaisky was awakened by a strange uproar. She jumped up and looked about her in astonishment. The deep blue dawn was looking in at the window half-covered with snow. In the room there was a grey twilight, through which the stove and the sleeping child and Nasir-ed-Din stood out distinctly. The stove and the lamp were both out. Through the wide-open door she could see the big tavern room with a counter and chairs. A man, with a stupid, gipsy face and astonished eyes, was standing in the middle of the room in a puddle of melting snow, holding a big red star on a stick. He was surrounded by a group of boys, motionless as statues, and plastered over with snow. The light shone through the red paper of the star, throwing a glow of red on their wet faces. The crowd was shouting in disorder, and from its uproar Mlle. Ilovaisky could make out only one couplet:

"Hi, you Little Russian lad,
Bring your sharp knife,
We will kill the Jew, we will kill him,
The son of tribulation…"

Liharev was standing near the counter, looking feelingly at the singers and tapping his feet in time. Seeing Mlle. Ilovaisky, he smiled all over his face and came up to her. She smiled too.

"A happy Christmas!" he said. "I saw you slept well."

She looked at him, said nothing, and went on smiling.

After the conversation in the night he seemed to her not tall and broad shouldered, but little, just as the biggest steamer seems to us a little thing when we hear that it has crossed the ocean.

"Well, it is time for me to set off," she said. "I must put on my things. Tell me where you are going now?"

"I? To the station of Klinushki, from there to Sergievo, and from Sergievo, with horses, thirty miles to the coal mines that belong to a horrid man, a general called Shashkovsky. My brothers have got me the post of superintendent there.… I am going to be a coal miner."

"Stay, I know those mines. Shashkovsky is my uncle, you know. But… what are you going there for?" asked Mlle. Ilovaisky, looking at Liharev in surprise.

"As superintendent. To superintend the coal mines."

"I don't understand!" she shrugged her shoulders. "You are going to the mines. But you know, it's the bare steppe, a desert, so dreary that you

couldn’t exist a day there! It’s horrible coal, no one will buy it, and my uncle’s a maniac, a despot, a bankrupt.… You won’t get your salary!”

“No matter,” said Liharev, unconcernedly, “I am thankful even for coal mines.”

She shrugged her shoulders, and walked about the room in agitation.

“I don’t understand, I don’t understand,” she said, moving her fingers before her face. “It’s impossible, and… and irrational! You must understand that it’s… it’s worse than exile. It is a living tomb! O Heavens!” she said hotly, going up to Liharev and moving her fingers before his smiling face; her upper lip was quivering, and her sharp face turned pale, “Come, picture it, the bare steppe, solitude. There is no one to say a word to there, and you… are enthusiastic over women! Coal mines… and women!”

Mlle. Ilovaisky was suddenly ashamed of her heat and, turning away from Liharev, walked to the window.

“No, no, you can’t go there,” she said, moving her fingers rapidly over the pane.

Not only in her heart, but even in her spine she felt that behind her stood an infinitely unhappy man, lost and outcast, while he, as though he were unaware of his unhappiness, as though he had not shed tears in the night, was looking at her with a kindly smile. Better he should go on weeping! She walked up and down the room several times in agitation, then stopped short in a corner and sank into thought. Liharev was saying something, but she did not hear him. Turning her back on him she took out of her purse a money note, stood for a long time crumpling it in her hand, and looking round at Liharev, blushed and put it in her pocket.

The coachman’s voice was heard through the door. With a stern, concentrated face she began putting on her things in silence. Liharev wrapped her up, chatting gaily, but every word he said lay on her heart like a weight. It is not cheering to hear the unhappy or the dying jest.

When the transformation of a live person into a shapeless bundle had been completed, Mlle. Ilovaisky looked for the last time round the Travellers’ Room, stood a moment in silence, and slowly walked out. Liharev went to see her off.…

Outside, God alone knows why, the winter was raging still. Whole clouds of big soft snowflakes were whirling restlessly over the earth, unable to find a resting-place. The horses, the sledge, the trees, a bull tied to a post, all were white and seemed soft and fluffy.

“Well, God help you,” muttered Liharev, tucking her into the sledge. “Don’t remember evil against me.…”

She was silent. When the sledge started, and had to go round a huge snowdrift, she looked back at Liharev with an expression as though she wanted to say something to him. He ran up to her, but she did not say a word to him, she only looked at him through her long eyelashes with little specks of snow on them.

Whether his finely intuitive soul were really able to read that look, or whether his imagination deceived him, it suddenly began to seem to him that with another touch or two that girl would have forgiven him his failures, his age, his desolate position, and would have followed him without question or reasonings. He stood a long while as though rooted to the spot, gazing at the tracks left by the sledge runners. The snowflakes greedily settled on his hair, his beard, his shoulders.… Soon the track of the runners had vanished, and he himself covered with snow, began to look like a white rock, but still his eyes kept seeking something in the clouds of snow.

VANKA

Vanka Zhukov, a boy of nine, who had been for three months apprenticed to Alyahin the shoemaker, was sitting up on Christmas Eve. Waiting till his master and mistress and their workmen had gone to the midnight service, he took out of his master's cupboard a bottle of ink and a pen with a rusty nib, and, spreading out a crumpled sheet of paper in front of him, began writing. Before forming the first letter he several times looked round fearfully at the door and the windows, stole a glance at the dark icon, on both sides of which stretched shelves full of lasts, and heaved a broken sigh. The paper lay on the bench while he knelt before it.

"Dear grandfather, Konstantin Makaritch," he wrote, "I am writing you a letter. I wish you a happy Christmas, and all blessings from God Almighty. I have neither father nor mother, you are the only one left me."

Vanka raised his eyes to the dark icon on which the light of his candle was reflected, and vividly recalled his grandfather, Konstantin Makaritch, who was night watchman to a family called Zhivarev. He was a thin but extraordinarily nimble and lively little old man of sixty-five, with an everlastingly laughing face and drunken eyes. By day he slept in the servants' kitchen, or made jokes with the cooks; at night, wrapped in an ample sheepskin, he walked round the grounds and tapped with his little mallet. Old Kashtanka and Eel, so-called on account of his dark colour and his long body like a weasel's, followed him with hanging heads. This Eel was exceptionally polite and affectionate, and looked with equal kindness on strangers and his own masters, but had not a very good reputation. Under his politeness and meekness was hidden the most Jesuitical cunning. No one knew better how to creep up on occasion and snap at one's legs, to slip into the storeroom, or steal a hen from a peasant. His hind legs had been nearly pulled off more than once, twice he had been hanged, every week he was thrashed till he was half dead, but he always revived.

At this moment grandfather was, no doubt, standing at the gate, screwing up his eyes at the red windows of the church, stamping with his high felt boots, and joking with the servants. His little mallet was hanging on his belt. He was clasping his hands, shrugging with the cold, and, with an aged chuckle, pinching first the housemaid, then the cook.

"How about a pinch of snuff?" he was saying, offering the women his snuffbox.

The women would take a sniff and sneeze. Grandfather would be indescribably delighted, go off into a merry chuckle, and cry:

"Tear it off, it has frozen on!"

They give the dogs a sniff of snuff too. Kashtanka sneezes, wriggles her head, and walks away offended. Eel does not sneeze, from politeness, but wags his tail. And the weather is glorious. The air is still, fresh, and transparent. The night is dark, but one can see the whole village with its white roofs and coils of smoke coming from the chimneys, the trees silvered with hoar frost, the snowdrifts. The whole sky spangled with gay twinkling stars, and the Milky Way is as distinct as though it had been washed and rubbed with snow for a holiday.…

Vanka sighed, dipped his pen, and went on writing:

"And yesterday I had a wigging. The master pulled me out into the yard by my hair, and whacked me with a boot-stretcher because I accidentally fell asleep while I was rocking their brat in the cradle. And a week ago the mistress told me to clean a herring, and I began from the tail end, and she took the herring and thrust its head in my face. The workmen laugh at me and send me to the tavern for vodka, and tell me to steal the master's cucumbers for them, and the master beats me with anything that comes to hand. And there is nothing to eat. In the morning they give me bread, for dinner, porridge, and in the evening, bread again; but as for tea, or soup, the master and mistress gobble it all up themselves. And I am put to sleep in the passage, and when their wretched brat cries I get no sleep at all, but have to rock the cradle. Dear grandfather, show the Divine Mercy, take me away from here, home to the village. It's more than I can bear. I bow down to your feet, and will pray to God for you forever, take me away from here or I shall die."

Vanka's mouth worked, he rubbed his eyes with his black fist, and gave a sob.

"I will powder your snuff for you," he went on. "I will pray for you, and if I do anything you can thrash me like Sidor's goat. And if you think I've no job, then I will beg the steward for Christ's sake to let me clean his boots, or I'll go for a shepherd-boy instead of Fedka. Dear

grandfather, it is more than I can bear, it's simply no life at all. I wanted to run away to the village, but I have no boots, and I am afraid of the frost. When I grow up big I will take care of you for this, and not let anyone annoy you, and when you die I will pray for the rest of your soul, just as for my mammy's."

"Moscow is a big town. It's all gentlemen's houses, and there are lots of horses, but there are no sheep, and the dogs are not spiteful. The lads here don't go out with the star, and they don't let anyone go into the choir, and once I saw in a shop window fishing-hooks for sale, fitted ready with the line and for all sorts of fish, awfully good ones, there was even one hook that would hold a forty-pound sheatfish. And I have seen shops where there are guns of all sorts, after the pattern of the master's guns at home, so that I shouldn't wonder if they are a hundred roubles each.… And in the butchers' shops there are grouse and woodcocks and fish and hares, but the shopmen don't say where they shoot them."

"Dear grandfather, when they have the Christmas tree at the big house, get me a gilt walnut, and put it away in the green trunk. Ask the young lady Olga Ignatyevna, say it's for Vanka."

Vanka gave a tremulous sigh, and again stared at the window. He remembered how his grandfather always went into the forest to get the Christmas tree for his master's family, and took his grandson with him. It was a merry time! Grandfather made a noise in his throat, the forest crackled with the frost, and looking at them Vanka chortled too. Before chopping down the Christmas tree, grandfather would smoke a pipe, slowly take a pinch of snuff, and laugh at frozen Vanka.… The young fir trees, covered with hoar frost, stood motionless, waiting to see which of them was to die. Wherever one looked, a hare flew like an arrow over the snowdrifts.… Grandfather could not refrain from shouting: "Hold him, hold him… hold him! Ah, the bobtailed devil!"

When he had cut down the Christmas tree, grandfather used to drag it to the big house, and there set to work to decorate it.… The young lady, who was Vanka's favourite, Olga Ignatyevna, was the busiest of all. When Vanka's mother Pelageya was alive, and a servant in the big house, Olga Ignatyevna used to give him goodies, and having nothing better to do, taught him to read and write, to count up to a hundred, and even to dance a quadrille. When Pelageya died, Vanka had been transferred to the servants' kitchen to be with his grandfather, and from the kitchen to the shoemaker's in Moscow.

"Do come, dear grandfather," Vanka went on with his letter. "For Christ's sake, I beg you, take me away. Have pity on an unhappy orphan

like me; here everyone knocks me about, and I am fearfully hungry; I can’t tell you what misery it is, I am always crying. And the other day the master hit me on the head with a last, so that I fell down. My life is wretched, worse than any dog’s.… I send greetings to Alyona, one-eyed Yegorka, and the coachman, and don’t give my concertina to anyone. I remain, your grandson, Ivan Zhukov. Dear grandfather, do come.”

Vanka folded the sheet of writing-paper twice, and put it into an envelope he had bought the day before for a kopeck.… After thinking a little, he dipped the pen and wrote the address:

To grandfather in the village.

Then he scratched his head, thought a little, and added: *Konstantin Makaritch.* Glad that he had not been prevented from writing, he put on his cap and, without putting on his little greatcoat, ran out into the street as he was in his shirt.…

The shopmen at the butcher’s, whom he had questioned the day before, told him that letters were put in postboxes, and from the boxes were carried about all over the earth in mailcarts with drunken drivers and ringing bells. Vanka ran to the nearest postbox, and thrust the precious letter in the slit.…

An hour later, lulled by sweet hopes, he was sound asleep.… He dreamed of the stove. On the stove was sitting his grandfather, swinging his bare legs, and reading the letter to the cooks.…

By the stove was Eel, wagging his tail.

CHAMPAGNE

A WAYFARER'S STORY

In the year in which my story begins I had a job at a little station on one of our southwestern railways. Whether I had a gay or a dull life at the station you can judge from the fact that for fifteen miles round there was not one human habitation, not one woman, not one decent tavern; and in those days I was young, strong, hotheaded, giddy, and foolish. The only distraction I could possibly find was in the windows of the passenger trains, and in the vile vodka which the Jews drugged with thorn-apple. Sometimes there would be a glimpse of a woman's head at a carriage window, and one would stand like a statue without breathing and stare at it until the train turned into an almost invisible speck; or one would drink all one could of the loathsome vodka till one was stupefied and did not feel the passing of the long hours and days. Upon me, a native of the north, the steppe produced the effect of a deserted Tatar cemetery. In the summer the steppe with its solemn calm, the monotonous chur of the grasshoppers, the transparent moonlight from which one could not hide, reduced me to listless melancholy; and in the winter the irreproachable whiteness of the steppe, its cold distance, long nights, and howling wolves oppressed me like a heavy nightmare. There were several people living at the station: my wife and I, a deaf and scrofulous telegraph clerk, and three watchmen. My assistant, a young man who was in consumption, used to go for treatment to the town, where he stayed for months at a time, leaving his duties to me together with the right of pocketing his salary. I had no children, no cake would have tempted visitors to come and see me, and I could only visit other officials on the line, and that no oftener than once a month.

I remember my wife and I saw the New Year in. We sat at table, chewed lazily, and heard the deaf telegraph clerk monotonously tapping on his apparatus in the next room. I had already drunk five glasses of drugged vodka, and, propping my heavy head on my fist, thought of my overpowering boredom from which there was no escape, while my wife sat beside me and did not take her eyes off me. She looked at me as no one can look but a woman who has nothing in this world but a handsome

husband. She loved me madly, slavishly, and not merely my good looks, or my soul, but my sins, my ill-humor and boredom, and even my cruelty when, in drunken fury, not knowing how to vent my ill-humor, I tormented her with reproaches.

In spite of the boredom which was consuming me, we were preparing to see the New Year in with exceptional festiveness, and were awaiting midnight with some impatience. The fact is, we had in reserve two bottles of champagne, the real thing, with the label of Veuve Clicquot; this treasure I had won the previous autumn in a bet with the stationmaster of D—— when I was drinking with him at a christening. It sometimes happens during a lesson in mathematics, when the very air is still with boredom, a butterfly flutters into the classroom; the boys toss their heads and begin watching its flight with interest, as though they saw before them not a butterfly but something new and strange; in the same way ordinary champagne, chancing to come into our dreary station, roused us. We sat in silence looking alternately at the clock and at the bottles.

When the hands pointed to five minutes to twelve I slowly began uncorking a bottle. I don't know whether I was affected by the vodka, or whether the bottle was wet, but all I remember is that when the cork flew up to the ceiling with a bang, my bottle slipped out of my hands and fell on the floor. Not more than a glass of the wine was spilt, as I managed to catch the bottle and put my thumb over the foaming neck.

"Well, may the New Year bring you happiness!" I said, filling two glasses. "Drink!"

My wife took her glass and fixed her frightened eyes on me. Her face was pale and wore a look of horror.

"Did you drop the bottle?" she asked.

"Yes. But what of that?"

"It's unlucky," she said, putting down her glass and turning paler still. "It's a bad omen. It means that some misfortune will happen to us this year."

"What a silly thing you are," I sighed. "You are a clever woman, and yet you talk as much nonsense as an old nurse. Drink."

"God grant it is nonsense, but… something is sure to happen! You'll see."

She did not even sip her glass, she moved away and sank into thought. I uttered a few stale commonplaces about superstition, drank half a bottle, paced up and down, and then went out of the room.

Outside there was the still frosty night in all its cold, inhospitable beauty. The moon and two white fluffy clouds beside it hung just over the station, motionless as though glued to the spot, and looked as though waiting for something. A faint transparent light came from them and touched the white earth softly, as though afraid of wounding her modesty, and lighted up everything—the snowdrifts, the embankment.… It was still.

I walked along the railway embankment.

"Silly woman," I thought, looking at the sky spangled with brilliant stars. "Even if one admits that omens sometimes tell the truth, what evil can happen to us? The misfortunes we have endured already, and which are facing us now, are so great that it is difficult to imagine anything worse. What further harm can you do a fish which has been caught and fried and served up with sauce?"

A poplar covered with hoar frost looked in the bluish darkness like a giant wrapt in a shroud. It looked at me sullenly and dejectedly, as though like me it realized its loneliness. I stood a long while looking at it.

"My youth is thrown away for nothing, like a useless cigarette end," I went on musing. "My parents died when I was a little child; I was expelled from the high school, I was born of a noble family, but I have received neither education nor breeding, and I have no more knowledge than the humblest mechanic. I have no refuge, no relations, no friends, no work I like. I am not fitted for anything, and in the prime of my powers I am good for nothing but to be stuffed into this little station; I have known nothing but trouble and failure all my life. What can happen worse?"

Red lights came into sight in the distance. A train was moving towards me. The slumbering steppe listened to the sound of it. My thoughts were so bitter that it seemed to me that I was thinking aloud and that the moan of the telegraph wire and the rumble of the train were expressing my thoughts.

"What can happen worse? The loss of my wife?" I wondered. "Even that is not terrible. It's no good hiding it from my conscience: I don't love my wife. I married her when I was only a wretched boy; now I am young and vigorous, and she has gone off and grown older and sillier, stuffed from her head to her heels with conventional ideas. What charm is there in her maudlin love, in her hollow chest, in her lusterless eyes? I put up with her, but I don't love her. What can happen? My youth is being wasted, as the saying is, for a pinch of snuff. Women flit before my

eyes only in the carriage windows, like falling stars. Love I never had and have not. My manhood, my courage, my power of feeling are going to ruin.… Everything is being thrown away like dirt, and all my wealth here in the steppe is not worth a farthing."

The train rushed past me with a roar and indifferently cast the glow of its red lights upon me. I saw it stop by the green lights of the station, stop for a minute and rumble off again. After walking a mile and a half I went back. Melancholy thoughts haunted me still. Painful as it was to me, yet I remember I tried as it were to make my thoughts still gloomier and more melancholy. You know people who are vain and not very clever have moments when the consciousness that they are miserable affords them positive satisfaction, and they even coquet with their misery for their own entertainment. There was a great deal of truth in what I thought, but there was also a great deal that was absurd and conceited, and there was something boyishly defiant in my question: "What could happen worse?"

"And what is there to happen?" I asked myself. "I think I have endured everything. I've been ill, I've lost money, I get reprimanded by my superiors every day, and I go hungry, and a mad wolf has run into the station yard. What more is there? I have been insulted, humiliated,… and I have insulted others in my time. I have not been a criminal, it is true, but I don't think I am capable of crime—I am not afraid of being hauled up for it."

The two little clouds had moved away from the moon and stood at a little distance, looking as though they were whispering about something which the moon must not know. A light breeze was racing across the steppe, bringing the faint rumble of the retreating train.

My wife met me at the doorway. Her eyes were laughing gaily and her whole face was beaming with good-humor.

"There is news for you!" she whispered. "Make haste, go to your room and put on your new coat; we have a visitor."

"What visitor?"

"Aunt Natalya Petrovna has just come by the train."

"What Natalya Petrovna?"

"The wife of my uncle Semyon Fyodoritch. You don't know her. She is a very nice, good woman."

Probably I frowned, for my wife looked grave and whispered rapidly:

"Of course it is queer her having come, but don't be cross, Nikolay, and don't be hard on her. She is unhappy, you know; Uncle Semyon Fyodoritch really is ill-natured and tyrannical, it is difficult to live with

him. She says she will only stay three days with us, only till she gets a letter from her brother."

My wife whispered a great deal more nonsense to me about her despotic uncle; about the weakness of mankind in general and of young wives in particular; about its being our duty to give shelter to all, even great sinners, and so on. Unable to make head or tail of it, I put on my new coat and went to make acquaintance with my "aunt."

A little woman with large black eyes was sitting at the table. My table, the gray walls, my roughly-made sofa, everything to the tiniest grain of dust seemed to have grown younger and more cheerful in the presence of this new, young, beautiful, and dissolute creature, who had a most subtle perfume about her. And that our visitor was a lady of easy virtue I could see from her smile, from her scent, from the peculiar way in which she glanced and made play with her eyelashes, from the tone in which she talked with my wife—a respectable woman. There was no need to tell me she had run away from her husband, that her husband was old and despotic, that she was good-natured and lively; I took it all in at the first glance. Indeed, it is doubtful whether there is a man in all Europe who cannot spot at the first glance a woman of a certain temperament.

"I did not know I had such a big nephew!" said my aunt, holding out her hand to me and smiling.

"And I did not know I had such a pretty aunt," I answered.

Supper began over again. The cork flew with a bang out of the second bottle, and my aunt swallowed half a glassful at a gulp, and when my wife went out of the room for a moment my aunt did not scruple to drain a full glass. I was drunk both with the wine and with the presence of a woman. Do you remember the song?

> "Eyes black as pitch, eyes full of passion,
> Eyes burning bright and beautiful,
> How I love you, How I fear you!"

I don't remember what happened next. Anyone who wants to know how love begins may read novels and long stories; I will put it shortly and in the words of the same silly song:

> "It was an evil hour
> When first I met you."

Everything went head over heels to the devil. I remember a fearful, frantic whirlwind which sent me flying round like a feather. It lasted a long while, and swept from the face of the earth my wife and my aunt herself and my strength. From the little station in the steppe it has flung me, as you see, into this dark street.

Now tell me what further evil can happen to me?

Frost

A “popular” fête with a philanthropic object had been arranged on the Feast of Epiphany in the provincial town of N——. They had selected a broad part of the river between the market and the bishop’s palace, fenced it round with a rope, with fir trees and with flags, and provided everything necessary for skating, sledging, and tobogganing. The festivity was organized on the grandest scale possible. The notices that were distributed were of huge size and promised a number of delights: skating, a military band, a lottery with no blank tickets, an electric sun, and so on. But the whole scheme almost came to nothing owing to the hard frost. From the eve of Epiphany there were twenty-eight degrees of frost with a strong wind; it was proposed to put off the fête, and this was not done only because the public, which for a long while had been looking forward to the fête impatiently, would not consent to any postponement.

“Only think, what do you expect in winter but a frost!” said the ladies persuading the governor, who tried to insist that the fête should be postponed. “If anyone is cold he can go and warm himself.”

The trees, the horses, the men’s beards were white with frost; it even seemed that the air itself crackled, as though unable to endure the cold; but in spite of that the frozen public were skating. Immediately after the blessing of the waters and precisely at one o’clock the military band began playing.

Between three and four o’clock in the afternoon, when the festivity was at its height, the select society of the place gathered together to warm themselves in the governor’s pavilion, which had been put up on the riverbank. The old governor and his wife, the bishop, the president of the local court, the head master of the high school, and many others, were there. The ladies were sitting in armchairs, while the men crowded round the wide glass door, looking at the skating.

“Holy Saints!” said the bishop in surprise; “what flourishes they execute with their legs! Upon my soul, many a singer couldn’t do a twirl

with his voice as those cutthroats do with their legs. Aie! he'll kill himself!"

"That's Smirnov.… That's Gruzdev…" said the head master, mentioning the names of the schoolboys who flew by the pavilion.

"Bah! he's all alive—oh!" laughed the governor. "Look, gentlemen, our mayor is coming.… He is coming this way.… That's a nuisance, he will talk our heads off now."

A little thin old man, wearing a big cap and a fur-lined coat hanging open, came from the opposite bank towards the pavilion, avoiding the skaters. This was the mayor of the town, a merchant, Eremeyev by name, a millionaire and an old inhabitant of N——. Flinging wide his arms and shrugging at the cold, he skipped along, knocking one golosh against the other, evidently in haste to get out of the wind. Halfway he suddenly bent down, stole up to some lady, and plucked at her sleeve from behind. When she looked round he skipped away, and probably delighted at having succeeded in frightening her, went off into a loud, aged laugh.

"Lively old fellow," said the governor. "It's a wonder he's not skating."

As he got near the pavilion the mayor fell into a little tripping trot, waved his hands, and, taking a run, slid along the ice in his huge golosh boots up to the very door.

"Yegor Ivanitch, you ought to get yourself some skates!" the governor greeted him.

"That's just what I am thinking," he answered in a squeaky, somewhat nasal tenor, taking off his cap. "I wish you good health, your Excellency! Your Holiness! Long life to all the other gentlemen and ladies! Here's a frost! Yes, it is a frost, bother it! It's deadly!"

Winking with his red, frozen eyes, Yegor Ivanitch stamped on the floor with his golosh boots and swung his arms together like a frozen cabman.

"Such a damnable frost, worse than any dog!" he went on talking, smiling all over his face. "It's a real affliction!"

"It's healthy," said the governor; "frost strengthens a man and makes him vigorous.…"

"Though it may be healthy, it would be better without it at all," said the mayor, wiping his wedge-shaped beard with a red handkerchief. "It would be a good riddance! To my thinking, your Excellency, the Lord sends it us as a punishment—the frost, I mean. We sin in the summer and are punished in the winter.… Yes!"

Yegor Ivanitch looked round him quickly and flung up his hands.

“Why, where’s the needful… to warm us up?” he asked, looking in alarm first at the governor and then at the bishop. “Your Excellency! Your Holiness! I’ll be bound, the ladies are frozen too! We must have something, this won’t do!”

Everyone began gesticulating and declaring that they had not come to the skating to warm themselves, but the mayor, heeding no one, opened the door and beckoned to someone with his crooked finger. A workman and a fireman ran up to him.

“Here, run off to Savatin,” he muttered, “and tell him to make haste and send here… what do you call it?… What’s it to be? Tell him to send a dozen glasses… a dozen glasses of mulled wine, the very hottest, or punch, perhaps.…”

There was laughter in the pavilion.

“A nice thing to treat us to!”

“Never mind, we will drink it,” muttered the mayor; “a dozen glasses, then… and some Benedictine, perhaps… and tell them to warm two bottles of red wine.… Oh, and what for the ladies? Well, you tell them to bring cakes, nuts… sweets of some sort, perhaps.… There, run along, look sharp!”

The mayor was silent for a minute and then began again abusing the frost, banging his arms across his chest and thumping with his golosh boots.

“No, Yegor Ivanitch,” said the governor persuasively, “don’t be unfair, the Russian frost has its charms. I was reading lately that many of the good qualities of the Russian people are due to the vast expanse of their land and to the climate, the cruel struggle for existence… that’s perfectly true!”

“It may be true, your Excellency, but it would be better without it. The frost did drive out the French, of course, and one can freeze all sorts of dishes, and the children can go skating—that’s all true! For the man who is well fed and well clothed the frost is only a pleasure, but for the working man, the beggar, the pilgrim, the crazy wanderer, it’s the greatest evil and misfortune. It’s misery, your Holiness! In a frost like this poverty is twice as hard, and the thief is more cunning and evildoers more violent. There’s no gainsaying it! I am turned seventy, I’ve a fur coat now, and at home I have a stove and rums and punches of all sorts. The frost means nothing to me now; I take no notice of it, I don’t care to know of it, but how it used to be in old days, Holy Mother! It’s dreadful to recall it! My memory is failing me with years and I have forgotten everything; my enemies, and my sins and troubles of all sorts—I forget

them all, but the frost—ough! How I remember it! When my mother died I was left a little devil—this high—a homeless orphan… no kith nor kin, wretched, ragged, little clothes, hungry, nowhere to sleep—in fact, ‘we have here no abiding city, but seek the one to come.’ In those days I used to lead an old blind woman about the town for five kopecks a day… the frosts were cruel, wicked. One would go out with the old woman and begin suffering torments. My Creator! First of all you would be shivering as in a fever, shrugging and dancing about. Then your ears, your fingers, your feet, would begin aching. They would ache as though someone were squeezing them with pincers. But all that would have been nothing, a trivial matter, of no great consequence. The trouble was when your whole body was chilled. One would walk for three blessed hours in the frost, your Holiness, and lose all human semblance. Your legs are drawn up, there is a weight on your chest, your stomach is pinched; above all, there is a pain in your heart that is worse than anything. Your heart aches beyond all endurance, and there is a wretchedness all over your body as though you were leading Death by the hand instead of an old woman. You are numb all over, turned to stone like a statue; you go on and feel as though it were not you walking, but someone else moving your legs instead of you. When your soul is frozen you don’t know what you are doing: you are ready to leave the old woman with no one to guide her, or to pull a hot roll from off a hawker’s tray, or to fight with someone. And when you come to your night’s lodging into the warmth after the frost, there is not much joy in that either! You lie awake till midnight, crying, and don’t know yourself what you are crying for.…”

“We must walk about the skating-ground before it gets dark,” said the governor’s wife, who was bored with listening. “Who’s coming with me?”

The governor’s wife went out and the whole company trooped out of the pavilion after her. Only the governor, the bishop, and the mayor remained.

“Queen of Heaven! and what I went through when I was a shopboy in a fish-shop!” Yegor Ivanitch went on, flinging up his arms so that his fox-lined coat fell open. “One would go out to the shop almost before it was light… by eight o’clock I was completely frozen, my face was blue, my fingers were stiff so that I could not fasten my buttons nor count the money. One would stand in the cold, turn numb, and think, ‘Lord, I shall have to stand like this right on till evening!’ By dinnertime my stomach was pinched and my heart was aching.… Yes! And I was not much better afterwards when I had a shop of my own. The frost was intense

and the shop was like a mousetrap with draughts blowing in all directions; the coat I had on was, pardon me, mangy, as thin as paper, threadbare.… One would be chilled through and through, half dazed, and turn as cruel as the frost oneself: I would pull one by the ear so that I nearly pulled the ear off; I would smack another on the back of the head; I'd glare at a customer like a ruffian, a wild beast, and be ready to fleece him; and when I got home in the evening and ought to have gone to bed, I'd be ill-humoured and set upon my family, throwing it in their teeth that they were living upon me; I would make a row and carry on so that half a dozen policemen couldn't have managed me. The frost makes one spiteful and drives one to drink."

Yegor Ivanitch clasped his hands and went on:

"And when we were taking fish to Moscow in the winter, Holy Mother!" And spluttering as he talked, he began describing the horrors he endured with his shopmen when he was taking fish to Moscow.…

"Yes," sighed the governor, "it is wonderful what a man can endure! You used to take wagonloads of fish to Moscow, Yegor Ivanitch, while I in my time was at the war. I remember one extraordinary instance.…"

And the governor described how, during the last Russo-Turkish War, one frosty night the division in which he was had stood in the snow without moving for thirteen hours in a piercing wind; from fear of being observed the division did not light a fire, nor make a sound or a movement; they were forbidden to smoke.…

Reminiscences followed. The governor and the mayor grew lively and good-humoured, and, interrupting each other, began recalling their experiences. And the bishop told them how, when he was serving in Siberia, he had travelled in a sledge drawn by dogs; how one day, being drowsy, in a time of sharp frost he had fallen out of the sledge and been nearly frozen; when the Tunguses turned back and found him he was barely alive. Then, as by common agreement, the old men suddenly sank into silence, sat side by side, and mused.

"Ech!" whispered the mayor; "you'd think it would be time to forget, but when you look at the water-carriers, at the schoolboys, at the convicts in their wretched gowns, it brings it all back! Why, only take those musicians who are playing now. I'll be bound, there is a pain in their hearts; a pinch at their stomachs, and their trumpets are freezing to their lips.… They play and think: 'Holy Mother! we have another three hours to sit here in the cold.'"

The old men sank into thought. They thought of that in man which is higher than good birth, higher than rank and wealth and learning, of that

which brings the lowest beggar near to God: of the helplessness of man, of his sufferings and his patience.…

Meanwhile the air was turning blue… the door opened and two waiters from Savatin's walked in, carrying trays and a big muffled teapot. When the glasses had been filled and there was a strong smell of cinnamon and clove in the air, the door opened again, and there came into the pavilion a beardless young policeman whose nose was crimson, and who was covered all over with frost; he went up to the governor, and, saluting, said: "Her Excellency told me to inform you that she has gone home."

Looking at the way the policeman put his stiff, frozen fingers to his cap, looking at his nose, his lustreless eyes, and his hood covered with white frost near the mouth, they all for some reason felt that this policeman's heart must be aching, that his stomach must feel pinched, and his soul numb.…

"I say," said the governor hesitatingly, "have a drink of mulled wine!"

"It's all right… it's all right! Drink it up!" the mayor urged him, gesticulating; "don't be shy!"

The policeman took the glass in both hands, moved aside, and, trying to drink without making any sound, began discreetly sipping from the glass. He drank and was overwhelmed with embarrassment while the old men looked at him in silence, and they all fancied that the pain was leaving the young policeman's heart, and that his soul was thawing. The governor heaved a sigh.

"It's time we were at home," he said, getting up. "Goodbye! I say," he added, addressing the policeman, "tell the musicians there to… leave off playing, and ask Pavel Semyonovitch from me to see they are given… beer or vodka."

The governor and the bishop said goodbye to the mayor and went out of the pavilion.

Yegor Ivanitch attacked the mulled wine, and before the policeman had finished his glass succeeded in telling him a great many interesting things. He could not be silent.

THE BEGGAR

“Kind sir, be so good as to notice a poor, hungry man. I have not tasted food for three days. I have not a five-kopeck piece for a night’s lodging. I swear by God! For five years I was a village schoolmaster and lost my post through the intrigues of the Zemstvo. I was the victim of false witness. I have been out of a place for a year now.”

Skvortsov, a Petersburg lawyer, looked at the speaker’s tattered dark blue overcoat, at his muddy, drunken eyes, at the red patches on his cheeks, and it seemed to him that he had seen the man before.

“And now I am offered a post in the Kaluga province,” the beggar continued, “but I have not the means for the journey there. Graciously help me! I am ashamed to ask, but… I am compelled by circumstances.”

Skvortsov looked at his goloshes, of which one was shallow like a shoe, while the other came high up the leg like a boot, and suddenly remembered.

“Listen, the day before yesterday I met you in Sadovoy Street,” he said, “and then you told me, not that you were a village schoolmaster, but that you were a student who had been expelled. Do you remember?”

“N-o. No, that cannot be so!” the beggar muttered in confusion. “I am a village schoolmaster, and if you wish it I can show you documents to prove it.”

“That’s enough lies! You called yourself a student, and even told me what you were expelled for. Do you remember?”

Skvortsov flushed, and with a look of disgust on his face turned away from the ragged figure.

“It’s contemptible, sir!” he cried angrily. “It’s a swindle! I’ll hand you over to the police, damn you! You are poor and hungry, but that does not give you the right to lie so shamelessly!”

The ragged figure took hold of the door-handle and, like a bird in a snare, looked round the hall desperately.

“I… I am not lying,” he muttered. “I can show documents.”

“Who can believe you?” Skvortsov went on, still indignant. “To exploit the sympathy of the public for village schoolmasters and students—it’s so low, so mean, so dirty! It’s revolting!”

Skvortsov flew into a rage and gave the beggar a merciless scolding. The ragged fellow’s insolent lying aroused his disgust and aversion, was an offence against what he, Skvortsov, loved and prized in himself: kindliness, a feeling heart, sympathy for the unhappy. By his lying, by his treacherous assault upon compassion, the individual had, as it were, defiled the charity which he liked to give to the poor with no misgivings in his heart. The beggar at first defended himself, protested with oaths, then he sank into silence and hung his head, overcome with shame.

“Sir!” he said, laying his hand on his heart, “I really was… lying! I am not a student and not a village schoolmaster. All that’s mere invention! I used to be in the Russian choir, and I was turned out of it for drunkenness. But what can I do? Believe me, in God’s name, I can’t get on without lying—when I tell the truth no one will give me anything. With the truth one may die of hunger and freeze without a night’s lodging! What you say is true, I understand that, but… what am I to do?”

“What are you to do? You ask what are you to do?” cried Skvortsov, going close up to him. “Work—that’s what you must do! You must work!”

“Work.… I know that myself, but where can I get work?”

“Nonsense. You are young, strong, and healthy, and could always find work if you wanted to. But you know you are lazy, pampered, drunken! You reek of vodka like a pothouse! You have become false and corrupt to the marrow of your bones and fit for nothing but begging and lying! If you do graciously condescend to take work, you must have a job in an office, in the Russian choir, or as a billiard-marker, where you will have a salary and have nothing to do! But how would you like to undertake manual labour? I’ll be bound, you wouldn’t be a house porter or a factory hand! You are too genteel for that!”

“What things you say, really…” said the beggar, and he gave a bitter smile. “How can I get manual work? It’s rather late for me to be a shopman, for in trade one has to begin from a boy; no one would take me as a house porter, because I am not of that class.… And I could not get work in a factory; one must know a trade, and I know nothing.”

“Nonsense! You always find some justification! Wouldn’t you like to chop wood?”

“I would not refuse to, but the regular woodchoppers are out of work now.”

“Oh, all idlers argue like that! As soon as you are offered anything you refuse it. Would you care to chop wood for me?”

“Certainly I will…”

“Very good, we shall see.… Excellent. We’ll see!” Skvortsov, in nervous haste; and not without malignant pleasure, rubbing his hands, summoned his cook from the kitchen.

“Here, Olga,” he said to her, “take this gentleman to the shed and let him chop some wood.”

The beggar shrugged his shoulders as though puzzled, and irresolutely followed the cook. It was evident from his demeanour that he had consented to go and chop wood, not because he was hungry and wanted to earn money, but simply from shame and *amour propre*, because he had been taken at his word. It was clear, too, that he was suffering from the effects of vodka, that he was unwell, and felt not the faintest inclination to work.

Skvortsov hurried into the dining room. There from the window which looked out into the yard he could see the woodshed and everything that happened in the yard. Standing at the window, Skvortsov saw the cook and the beggar come by the back way into the yard and go through the muddy snow to the woodshed. Olga scrutinized her companion angrily, and jerking her elbow unlocked the woodshed and angrily banged the door open.

“Most likely we interrupted the woman drinking her coffee,” thought Skvortsov. “What a cross creature she is!”

Then he saw the pseudo-schoolmaster and pseudo-student seat himself on a block of wood, and, leaning his red cheeks upon his fists, sink into thought. The cook flung an axe at his feet, spat angrily on the ground, and, judging by the expression of her lips, began abusing him. The beggar drew a log of wood towards him irresolutely, set it up between his feet, and diffidently drew the axe across it. The log toppled and fell over. The beggar drew it towards him, breathed on his frozen hands, and again drew the axe along it as cautiously as though he were afraid of its hitting his golosh or chopping off his fingers. The log fell over again.

Skvortsov’s wrath had passed off by now, he felt sore and ashamed at the thought that he had forced a pampered, drunken, and perhaps sick man to do hard, rough work in the cold.

“Never mind, let him go on…” he thought, going from the dining room into his study. “I am doing it for his good!”

An hour later Olga appeared and announced that the wood had been chopped up.

“Here, give him half a rouble,” said Skvortsov. “If he likes, let him come and chop wood on the first of every month.… There will always be work for him.”

On the first of the month the beggar turned up and again earned half a rouble, though he could hardly stand. From that time forward he took to turning up frequently, and work was always found for him: sometimes he would sweep the snow into heaps, or clear up the shed, at another he used to beat the rugs and the mattresses. He always received thirty to forty kopecks for his work, and on one occasion an old pair of trousers was sent out to him.

When he moved, Skvortsov engaged him to assist in packing and moving the furniture. On this occasion the beggar was sober, gloomy, and silent; he scarcely touched the furniture, walked with hanging head behind the furniture vans, and did not even try to appear busy; he merely shivered with the cold, and was overcome with confusion when the men with the vans laughed at his idleness, feebleness, and ragged coat that had once been a gentleman’s. After the removal Skvortsov sent for him.

“Well, I see my words have had an effect upon you,” he said, giving him a rouble. “This is for your work. I see that you are sober and not disinclined to work. What is your name?”

“Lushkov.”

“I can offer you better work, not so rough, Lushkov. Can you write?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then go with this note tomorrow to my colleague and he will give you some copying to do. Work, don’t drink, and don’t forget what I said to you. Goodbye.”

Skvortsov, pleased that he had put a man in the path of rectitude, patted Lushkov genially on the shoulder, and even shook hands with him at parting.

Lushkov took the letter, departed, and from that time forward did not come to the backyard for work.

Two years passed. One day as Skvortsov was standing at the ticket-office of a theatre, paying for his ticket, he saw beside him a little man with a lambskin collar and a shabby cat’s-skin cap. The man timidly asked the clerk for a gallery ticket and paid for it with kopecks.

“Lushkov, is it you?” asked Skvortsov, recognizing in the little man his former woodchopper. “Well, what are you doing? Are you getting on all right?”

“Pretty well.… I am in a notary’s office now. I earn thirty-five roubles.”

“Well, thank God, that’s capital. I rejoice for you. I am very, very glad, Lushkov. You know, in a way, you are my godson. It was I who shoved you into the right way. Do you remember what a scolding I gave you, eh? You almost sank through the floor that time. Well, thank you, my dear fellow, for remembering my words.”

“Thank you too,” said Lushkov. “If I had not come to you that day, maybe I should be calling myself a schoolmaster or a student still. Yes, in your house I was saved, and climbed out of the pit.”

“I am very, very glad.”

“Thank you for your kind words and deeds. What you said that day was excellent. I am grateful to you and to your cook, God bless that kind, noble-hearted woman. What you said that day was excellent; I am indebted to you as long as I live, of course, but it was your cook, Olga, who really saved me.”

“How was that?”

“Why, it was like this. I used to come to you to chop wood and she would begin: ‘Ah, you drunkard! You Godforsaken man! And yet death does not take you!’ and then she would sit opposite me, lamenting, looking into my face and wailing: ‘You unlucky fellow! You have no gladness in this world, and in the next you will burn in hell, poor drunkard! You poor sorrowful creature!’ and she always went on in that style, you know. How often she upset herself, and how many tears she shed over me I can’t tell you. But what affected me most—she chopped the wood for me! Do you know, sir, I never chopped a single log for you—she did it all! How it was she saved me, how it was I changed, looking at her, and gave up drinking, I can’t explain. I only know that what she said and the noble way she behaved brought about a change in my soul, and I shall never forget it. It’s time to go up, though, they are just going to ring the bell.”

Lushkov bowed and went off to the gallery.

ENEMIES

Between nine and ten on a dark September evening the only son of the district doctor, Kirilov, a child of six, called Andrey, died of diphtheria. Just as the doctor's wife sank on her knees by the dead child's bedside and was overwhelmed by the first rush of despair there came a sharp ring at the bell in the entry.

All the servants had been sent out of the house that morning on account of the diphtheria. Kirilov went to open the door just as he was, without his coat on, with his waistcoat unbuttoned, without wiping his wet face or his hands which were scalded with carbolic. It was dark in the entry and nothing could be distinguished in the man who came in but medium height, a white scarf, and a large, extremely pale face, so pale that its entrance seemed to make the passage lighter.

"Is the doctor at home?" the newcomer asked quickly.

"I am at home," answered Kirilov. "What do you want?"

"Oh, it's you? I am very glad," said the stranger in a tone of relief, and he began feeling in the dark for the doctor's hand, found it and squeezed it tightly in his own. "I am very… very glad! We are acquainted. My name is Abogin, and I had the honour of meeting you in the summer at Gnutchev's. I am very glad I have found you at home. For God's sake don't refuse to come back with me at once.… My wife has been taken dangerously ill.… And the carriage is waiting.…"

From the voice and gestures of the speaker it could be seen that he was in a state of great excitement. Like a man terrified by a house on fire or a mad dog, he could hardly restrain his rapid breathing and spoke quickly in a shaking voice, and there was a note of unaffected sincerity and childish alarm in his voice. As people always do who are frightened and overwhelmed, he spoke in brief, jerky sentences and uttered a great many unnecessary, irrelevant words.

"I was afraid I might not find you in," he went on. "I was in a perfect agony as I drove here. Put on your things and let us go, for God's sake.… This is how it happened. Alexandr Semyonovitch Paptchinsky,

whom you know, came to see me.… We talked a little and then we sat down to tea; suddenly my wife cried out, clutched at her heart, and fell back on her chair. We carried her to bed and… and I rubbed her forehead with ammonia and sprinkled her with water… she lay as though she were dead.… I am afraid it is aneurism.… Come along… her father died of aneurism."

Kirilov listened and said nothing, as though he did not understand Russian.

When Abogin mentioned again Paptchinsky and his wife's father and once more began feeling in the dark for his hand the doctor shook his head and said apathetically, dragging out each word:

"Excuse me, I cannot come… my son died… five minutes ago!"

"Is it possible!" whispered Abogin, stepping back a pace. "My God, at what an unlucky moment I have come! A wonderfully unhappy day… wonderfully. What a coincidence.… It's as though it were on purpose!"

Abogin took hold of the door-handle and bowed his head. He was evidently hesitating and did not know what to do—whether to go away or to continue entreating the doctor.

"Listen," he said fervently, catching hold of Kirilov's sleeve. "I well understand your position! God is my witness that I am ashamed of attempting at such a moment to intrude on your attention, but what am I to do? Only think, to whom can I go? There is no other doctor here, you know. For God's sake come! I am not asking you for myself.… I am not the patient!"

A silence followed. Kirilov turned his back on Abogin, stood still a moment, and slowly walked into the drawing room. Judging from his unsteady, mechanical step, from the attention with which he set straight the fluffy shade on the unlighted lamp in the drawing room and glanced into a thick book lying on the table, at that instant he had no intention, no desire, was thinking of nothing and most likely did not remember that there was a stranger in the entry. The twilight and stillness of the drawing room seemed to increase his numbness. Going out of the drawing room into his study he raised his right foot higher than was necessary, and felt for the doorposts with his hands, and as he did so there was an air of perplexity about his whole figure as though he were in somebody else's house, or were drunk for the first time in his life and were now abandoning himself with surprise to the new sensation. A broad streak of light stretched across the bookcase on one wall of the study; this light came together with the close, heavy smell of carbolic and ether from the door into the bedroom, which stood a little way open.… The doctor sank

into a low chair in front of the table; for a minute he stared drowsily at his books, which lay with the light on them, then got up and went into the bedroom.

Here in the bedroom reigned a dead silence. Everything to the smallest detail was eloquent of the storm that had been passed through, of exhaustion, and everything was at rest. A candle standing among a crowd of bottles, boxes, and pots on a stool and a big lamp on the chest of drawers threw a brilliant light over all the room. On the bed under the window lay a boy with open eyes and a look of wonder on his face. He did not move, but his open eyes seemed every moment growing darker and sinking further into his head. The mother was kneeling by the bed with her arms on his body and her head hidden in the bedclothes. Like the child, she did not stir; but what throbbing life was suggested in the curves of her body and in her arms! She leaned against the bed with all her being, pressing against it greedily with all her might, as though she were afraid of disturbing the peaceful and comfortable attitude she had found at last for her exhausted body. The bedclothes, the rags and bowls, the splashes of water on the floor, the little paintbrushes and spoons thrown down here and there, the white bottle of lime water, the very air, heavy and stifling—were all hushed and seemed plunged in repose.

The doctor stopped close to his wife, thrust his hands in his trouser pockets, and slanting his head on one side fixed his eyes on his son. His face bore an expression of indifference, and only from the drops that glittered on his beard it could be seen that he had just been crying.

That repellent horror which is thought of when we speak of death was absent from the room. In the numbness of everything, in the mother’s attitude, in the indifference on the doctor’s face there was something that attracted and touched the heart, that subtle, almost elusive beauty of human sorrow which men will not for a long time learn to understand and describe, and which it seems only music can convey. There was a feeling of beauty, too, in the austere stillness. Kirilov and his wife were silent and not weeping, as though besides the bitterness of their loss they were conscious, too, of all the tragedy of their position; just as once their youth had passed away, so now together with this boy their right to have children had gone forever to all eternity! The doctor was forty-four, his hair was grey and he looked like an old man; his faded and invalid wife was thirty-five. Andrey was not merely the only child, but also the last child.

In contrast to his wife the doctor belonged to the class of people who at times of spiritual suffering feel a craving for movement. After

standing for five minutes by his wife, he walked, raising his right foot high, from the bedroom into a little room which was half filled up by a big sofa; from there he went into the kitchen. After wandering by the stove and the cook's bed he bent down and went by a little door into the passage.

There he saw again the white scarf and the white face.

"At last," sighed Abogin, reaching towards the door-handle. "Let us go, please."

The doctor started, glanced at him, and remembered.…

"Why, I have told you already that I can't go!" he said, growing more animated. "How strange!"

"Doctor, I am not a stone, I fully understand your position… I feel for you," Abogin said in an imploring voice, laying his hand on his scarf. "But I am not asking you for myself. My wife is dying. If you had heard that cry, if you had seen her face, you would understand my pertinacity. My God, I thought you had gone to get ready! Doctor, time is precious. Let us go, I entreat you."

"I cannot go," said Kirilov emphatically and he took a step into the drawing room.

Abogin followed him and caught hold of his sleeve.

"You are in sorrow, I understand. But I'm not asking you to a case of toothache, or to a consultation, but to save a human life!" he went on entreating like a beggar. "Life comes before any personal sorrow! Come, I ask for courage, for heroism! For the love of humanity!"

"Humanity—that cuts both ways," Kirilov said irritably. "In the name of humanity I beg you not to take me. And how queer it is, really! I can hardly stand and you talk to me about humanity! I am fit for nothing just now.… Nothing will induce me to go, and I can't leave my wife alone. No, no…"

Kirilov waved his hands and staggered back.

"And… and don't ask me," he went on in a tone of alarm. "Excuse me. By No. XIII of the regulations I am obliged to go and you have the right to drag me by my collar… drag me if you like, but… I am not fit… I can't even speak… excuse me."

"There is no need to take that tone to me, doctor!" said Abogin, again taking the doctor by his sleeve. "What do I care about No. XIII! To force you against your will I have no right whatever. If you will, come; if you will not—God forgive you; but I am not appealing to your will, but to your feelings. A young woman is dying. You were just speaking of the death of your son. Who should understand my horror if not you?"

Abogin’s voice quivered with emotion; that quiver and his tone were far more persuasive than his words. Abogin was sincere, but it was remarkable that whatever he said his words sounded stilted, soulless, and inappropriately flowery, and even seemed an outrage on the atmosphere of the doctor’s home and on the woman who was somewhere dying. He felt this himself, and so, afraid of not being understood, did his utmost to put softness and tenderness into his voice so that the sincerity of his tone might prevail if his words did not. As a rule, however fine and deep a phrase may be, it only affects the indifferent, and cannot fully satisfy those who are happy or unhappy; that is why dumbness is most often the highest expression of happiness or unhappiness; lovers understand each other better when they are silent, and a fervent, passionate speech delivered by the grave only touches outsiders, while to the widow and children of the dead man it seems cold and trivial.

Kirilov stood in silence. When Abogin uttered a few more phrases concerning the noble calling of a doctor, self-sacrifice, and so on, the doctor asked sullenly: “Is it far?”

“Something like eight or nine miles. I have capital horses, doctor! I give you my word of honour that I will get you there and back in an hour. Only one hour.”

These words had more effect on Kirilov than the appeals to humanity or the noble calling of the doctor. He thought a moment and said with a sigh: “Very well, let us go!”

He went rapidly with a more certain step to his study, and afterwards came back in a long frock-coat. Abogin, greatly relieved, fidgeted round him and scraped with his feet as he helped him on with his overcoat, and went out of the house with him.

It was dark out of doors, though lighter than in the entry. The tall, stooping figure of the doctor, with his long, narrow beard and aquiline nose, stood out distinctly in the darkness. Abogin’s big head and the little student’s cap that barely covered it could be seen now as well as his pale face. The scarf showed white only in front, behind it was hidden by his long hair.

“Believe me, I know how to appreciate your generosity,” Abogin muttered as he helped the doctor into the carriage. “We shall get there quickly. Drive as fast as you can, Luka, there’s a good fellow! Please!”

The coachman drove rapidly. At first there was a row of indistinct buildings that stretched alongside the hospital yard; it was dark everywhere except for a bright light from a window that gleamed through the fence into the furthest part of the yard while three windows

of the upper storey of the hospital looked paler than the surrounding air. Then the carriage drove into dense shadow; here there was the smell of dampness and mushrooms, and the sound of rustling trees; the crows, awakened by the noise of the wheels, stirred among the foliage and uttered prolonged plaintive cries as though they knew the doctor's son was dead and that Abogin's wife was ill. Then came glimpses of separate trees, of bushes; a pond, on which great black shadows were slumbering, gleamed with a sullen light—and the carriage rolled over a smooth level ground. The clamour of the crows sounded dimly far away and soon ceased altogether.

Kirilov and Abogin were silent almost all the way. Only once Abogin heaved a deep sigh and muttered:

"It's an agonizing state! One never loves those who are near one so much as when one is in danger of losing them."

And when the carriage slowly drove over the river, Kirilov started all at once as though the splash of the water had frightened him, and made a movement.

"Listen—let me go," he said miserably. "I'll come to you later. I must just send my assistant to my wife. She is alone, you know!"

Abogin did not speak. The carriage swaying from side to side and crunching over the stones drove up the sandy bank and rolled on its way. Kirilov moved restlessly and looked about him in misery. Behind them in the dim light of the stars the road could be seen and the riverside willows vanishing into the darkness. On the right lay a plain as uniform and as boundless as the sky; here and there in the distance, probably on the peat marshes, dim lights were glimmering. On the left, parallel with the road, ran a hill tufted with small bushes, and above the hill stood motionless a big, red half-moon, slightly veiled with mist and encircled by tiny clouds, which seemed to be looking round at it from all sides and watching that it did not go away.

In all nature there seemed to be a feeling of hopelessness and pain. The earth, like a ruined woman sitting alone in a dark room and trying not to think of the past, was brooding over memories of spring and summer and apathetically waiting for the inevitable winter. Wherever one looked, on all sides, nature seemed like a dark, infinitely deep, cold pit from which neither Kirilov nor Abogin nor the red half-moon could escape.…

The nearer the carriage got to its goal the more impatient Abogin became. He kept moving, leaping up, looking over the coachman's shoulder. And when at last the carriage stopped before the entrance,

which was elegantly curtained with striped linen, and when he looked at the lighted windows of the second storey there was an audible catch in his breath.

"If anything happens… I shall not survive it," he said, going into the hall with the doctor, and rubbing his hands in agitation. "But there is no commotion, so everything must be going well so far," he added, listening in the stillness.

There was no sound in the hall of steps or voices and all the house seemed asleep in spite of the lighted windows. Now the doctor and Abogin, who till then had been in darkness, could see each other clearly. The doctor was tall and stooped, was untidily dressed and not good-looking. There was an unpleasantly harsh, morose, and unfriendly look about his lips, thick as a negro's, his aquiline nose, and listless, apathetic eyes. His unkempt head and sunken temples, the premature greyness of his long, narrow beard through which his chin was visible, the pale grey hue of his skin and his careless, uncouth manners—the harshness of all this was suggestive of years of poverty, of ill fortune, of weariness with life and with men. Looking at his frigid figure one could hardly believe that this man had a wife, that he was capable of weeping over his child. Abogin presented a very different appearance. He was a thickset, sturdy-looking, fair man with a big head and large, soft features; he was elegantly dressed in the very latest fashion. In his carriage, his closely buttoned coat, his long hair, and his face there was a suggestion of something generous, leonine; he walked with his head erect and his chest squared, he spoke in an agreeable baritone, and there was a shade of refined almost feminine elegance in the manner in which he took off his scarf and smoothed his hair. Even his paleness and the childlike terror with which he looked up at the stairs as he took off his coat did not detract from his dignity nor diminish the air of sleekness, health, and aplomb which characterized his whole figure.

"There is nobody and no sound," he said going up the stairs. "There is no commotion. God grant all is well."

He led the doctor through the hall into a big drawing room where there was a black piano and a chandelier in a white cover; from there they both went into a very snug, pretty little drawing room full of an agreeable, rosy twilight.

"Well, sit down here, doctor, and I… will be back directly. I will go and have a look and prepare them."

Kirilov was left alone. The luxury of the drawing room, the agreeably subdued light and his own presence in the stranger's unfamiliar house,

which had something of the character of an adventure, did not apparently affect him. He sat in a low chair and scrutinized his hands, which were burnt with carbolic. He only caught a passing glimpse of the bright red lampshade and the violoncello case, and glancing in the direction where the clock was ticking he noticed a stuffed wolf as substantial and sleek-looking as Abogin himself.

It was quiet.… Somewhere far away in the adjoining rooms someone uttered a loud exclamation:

"Ah!" There was a clang of a glass door, probably of a cupboard, and again all was still. After waiting five minutes Kirilov left off scrutinizing his hands and raised his eyes to the door by which Abogin had vanished.

In the doorway stood Abogin, but he was not the same as when he had gone out. The look of sleekness and refined elegance had disappeared—his face, his hands, his attitude were contorted by a revolting expression of something between horror and agonizing physical pain. His nose, his lips, his moustache, all his features were moving and seemed trying to tear themselves from his face, his eyes looked as though they were laughing with agony.…

Abogin took a heavy stride into the drawing room, bent forward, moaned, and shook his fists.

"She has deceived me," he cried, with a strong emphasis on the second syllable of the verb. "Deceived me, gone away. She fell ill and sent me for the doctor only to run away with that clown Paptchinsky! My God!"

Abogin took a heavy step towards the doctor, held out his soft white fists in his face, and shaking them went on yelling:

"Gone away! Deceived me! But why this deception? My God! My God! What need of this dirty, scoundrelly trick, this diabolical, snakish farce? What have I done to her? Gone away!"

Tears gushed from his eyes. He turned on one foot and began pacing up and down the drawing room. Now in his short coat, his fashionable narrow trousers which made his legs look disproportionately slim, with his big head and long mane he was extremely like a lion. A gleam of curiosity came into the apathetic face of the doctor. He got up and looked at Abogin.

"Excuse me, where is the patient?" he said.

"The patient! The patient!" cried Abogin, laughing, crying, and still brandishing his fists. "She is not ill, but accursed! The baseness! The vileness! The devil himself could not have imagined anything more loathsome! She sent me off that she might run away with a buffoon, a

dull-witted clown, an Alphonse! Oh God, better she had died! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!”

The doctor drew himself up. His eyes blinked and filled with tears, his narrow beard began moving to right and to left together with his jaw.

“Allow me to ask what’s the meaning of this?” he asked, looking round him with curiosity. “My child is dead, my wife is in grief alone in the whole house.… I myself can scarcely stand up, I have not slept for three nights.… And here I am forced to play a part in some vulgar farce, to play the part of a stage property! I don’t… don’t understand it!”

Abogin unclenched one fist, flung a crumpled note on the floor, and stamped on it as though it were an insect he wanted to crush.

“And I didn’t see, didn’t understand,” he said through his clenched teeth, brandishing one fist before his face with an expression as though someone had trodden on his corns. “I did not notice that he came every day! I did not notice that he came today in a closed carriage! What did he come in a closed carriage for? And I did not see it! Noodle!”

“I don’t understand…” muttered the doctor. “Why, what’s the meaning of it? Why, it’s an outrage on personal dignity, a mockery of human suffering! It’s incredible.… It’s the first time in my life I have had such an experience!”

With the dull surprise of a man who has only just realized that he has been bitterly insulted the doctor shrugged his shoulders, flung wide his arms, and not knowing what to do or to say sank helplessly into a chair.

“If you have ceased to love me and love another—so be it; but why this deceit, why this vulgar, treacherous trick?” Abogin said in a tearful voice. “What is the object of it? And what is there to justify it? And what have I done to you? Listen, doctor,” he said hotly, going up to Kirilov. “You have been the involuntary witness of my misfortune and I am not going to conceal the truth from you. I swear that I loved the woman, loved her devotedly, like a slave! I have sacrificed everything for her; I have quarrelled with my own people, I have given up the service and music, I have forgiven her what I could not have forgiven my own mother or sister… I have never looked askance at her.… I have never gainsaid her in anything. Why this deception? I do not demand love, but why this loathsome duplicity? If she did not love me, why did she not say so openly, honestly, especially as she knows my views on the subject?…”

With tears in his eyes, trembling all over, Abogin opened his heart to the doctor with perfect sincerity. He spoke warmly, pressing both hands on his heart, exposing the secrets of his private life without the faintest

hesitation, and even seemed to be glad that at last these secrets were no longer pent up in his breast. If he had talked in this way for an hour or two, and opened his heart, he would undoubtedly have felt better. Who knows, if the doctor had listened to him and had sympathized with him like a friend, he might perhaps, as often happens, have reconciled himself to his trouble without protest, without doing anything needless and absurd.… But what happened was quite different. While Abogin was speaking the outraged doctor perceptibly changed. The indifference and wonder on his face gradually gave way to an expression of bitter resentment, indignation, and anger. The features of his face became even harsher, coarser, and more unpleasant. When Abogin held out before his eyes the photograph of a young woman with a handsome face as cold and expressionless as a nun's and asked him whether, looking at that face, one could conceive that it was capable of duplicity, the doctor suddenly flew out, and with flashing eyes said, rudely rapping out each word:

"What are you telling me all this for? I have no desire to hear it! I have no desire to!" he shouted and brought his fist down on the table. "I don't want your vulgar secrets! Damnation take them! Don't dare to tell me of such vulgar doings! Do you consider that I have not been insulted enough already? That I am a flunkey whom you can insult without restraint? Is that it?"

Abogin staggered back from Kirilov and stared at him in amazement.

"Why did you bring me here?" the doctor went on, his beard quivering. "If you are so puffed up with good living that you go and get married and then act a farce like this, how do I come in? What have I to do with your love affairs? Leave me in peace! Go on squeezing money out of the poor in your gentlemanly way. Make a display of humane ideas, play (the doctor looked sideways at the violoncello case) play the bassoon and the trombone, grow as fat as capons, but don't dare to insult personal dignity! If you cannot respect it, you might at least spare it your attention!"

"Excuse me, what does all this mean?" Abogin asked, flushing red.

"It means that it's base and low to play with people like this! I am a doctor; you look upon doctors and people generally who work and don't stink of perfume and prostitution as your menials and *mauvais ton*; well, you may look upon them so, but no one has given you the right to treat a man who is suffering as a stage property!"

"How dare you say that to me!" Abogin said quietly, and his face began working again, and this time unmistakably from anger.

“No, how dared you, knowing of my sorrow, bring me here to listen to these vulgarities!” shouted the doctor, and he again banged on the table with his fist. “Who has given you the right to make a mockery of another man’s sorrow?”

“You have taken leave of your senses,” shouted Abogin. “It is ungenerous. I am intensely unhappy myself and… and…”

“Unhappy!” said the doctor, with a smile of contempt. “Don’t utter that word, it does not concern you. The spendthrift who cannot raise a loan calls himself unhappy, too. The capon, sluggish from overfeeding, is unhappy, too. Worthless people!”

“Sir, you forget yourself,” shrieked Abogin. “For saying things like that… people are thrashed! Do you understand?”

Abogin hurriedly felt in his side pocket, pulled out a pocketbook, and extracting two notes flung them on the table.

“Here is the fee for your visit,” he said, his nostrils dilating. “You are paid.”

“How dare you offer me money?” shouted the doctor and he brushed the notes off the table on to the floor. “An insult cannot be paid for in money!”

Abogin and the doctor stood face to face, and in their wrath continued flinging undeserved insults at each other. I believe that never in their lives, even in delirium, had they uttered so much that was unjust, cruel, and absurd. The egoism of the unhappy was conspicuous in both. The unhappy are egoistic, spiteful, unjust, cruel, and less capable of understanding each other than fools. Unhappiness does not bring people together but draws them apart, and even where one would fancy people should be united by the similarity of their sorrow, far more injustice and cruelty is generated than in comparatively placid surroundings.

“Kindly let me go home!” shouted the doctor, breathing hard.

Abogin rang the bell sharply. When no one came to answer the bell he rang again and angrily flung the bell on the floor; it fell on the carpet with a muffled sound, and uttered a plaintive note as though at the point of death. A footman came in.

“Where have you been hiding yourself, the devil take you?” His master flew at him, clenching his fists. “Where were you just now? Go and tell them to bring the victoria round for this gentleman, and order the closed carriage to be got ready for me. Stay,” he cried as the footman turned to go out. “I won’t have a single traitor in the house by tomorrow! Away with you all! I will engage fresh servants! Reptiles!”

Abogin and the doctor remained in silence waiting for the carriage. The first regained his expression of sleekness and his refined elegance. He paced up and down the room, tossed his head elegantly, and was evidently meditating on something. His anger had not cooled, but he tried to appear not to notice his enemy.… The doctor stood, leaning with one hand on the edge of the table, and looked at Abogin with that profound and somewhat cynical, ugly contempt only to be found in the eyes of sorrow and indigence when they are confronted with well-nourished comfort and elegance.

When a little later the doctor got into the victoria and drove off there was still a look of contempt in his eyes. It was dark, much darker than it had been an hour before. The red half-moon had sunk behind the hill and the clouds that had been guarding it lay in dark patches near the stars. The carriage with red lamps rattled along the road and soon overtook the doctor. It was Abogin driving off to protest, to do absurd things.…

All the way home the doctor thought not of his wife, nor of his Andrey, but of Abogin and the people in the house he had just left. His thoughts were unjust and inhumanly cruel. He condemned Abogin and his wife and Paptchinsky and all who lived in rosy, subdued light among sweet perfumes, and all the way home he hated and despised them till his head ached. And a firm conviction concerning those people took shape in his mind.

Time will pass and Kirilov’s sorrow will pass, but that conviction, unjust and unworthy of the human heart, will not pass, but will remain in the doctor’s mind to the grave.

DARKNESS

A young peasant, with white eyebrows and eyelashes and broad cheekbones, in a torn sheepskin and big black felt overboots, waited till the Zemstvo doctor had finished seeing his patients and came out to go home from the hospital; then he went up to him, diffidently.

"Please, your honour," he said.

"What do you want?"

The young man passed the palm of his hand up and over his nose, looked at the sky, and then answered:

"Please, your honour.… You've got my brother Vaska the blacksmith from Varvarino in the convict ward here, your honour.…"

"Yes, what then?"

"I am Vaska's brother, you see.… Father has the two of us: him, Vaska, and me, Kirila; besides us there are three sisters, and Vaska's a married man with a little one.… There are a lot of us and no one to work.… In the smithy it's nearly two years now since the forge has been heated. I am at the cotton factory, I can't do smith's work, and how can father work? Let alone work, he can't eat properly, he can't lift the spoon to his mouth."

"What do you want from me?"

"Be merciful! Let Vaska go!"

The doctor looked wonderingly at Kirila, and without saying a word walked on. The young peasant ran on in front and flung himself in a heap at his feet.

"Doctor, kind gentleman!" he besought him, blinking and again passing his open hand over his nose. "Show heavenly mercy; let Vaska go home! We shall remember you in our prayers forever! Your honour, let him go! They are all starving! Mother's wailing day in, day out, Vaska's wife's wailing… it's worse than death! I don't care to look upon the light of day. Be merciful; let him go, kind gentleman!"

"Are you stupid or out of your senses?" asked the doctor angrily. "How can I let him go? Why, he is a convict."

Kirila began crying. “Let him go!”

“Tfoo, queer fellow! What right have I? Am I a gaoler or what? They brought him to the hospital for me to treat him, but I have as much right to let him out as I have to put you in prison, silly fellow!”

“But they have shut him up for nothing! He was in prison a year before the trial, and now there is no saying what he is there for. It would have been a different thing if he had murdered someone, let us say, or stolen horses; but as it is, what is it all about?”

“Very likely, but how do I come in?”

“They shut a man up and they don’t know themselves what for. He was drunk, your honour, did not know what he was doing, and even hit father on the ear and scratched his own cheek on a branch, and two of our fellows—they wanted some Turkish tobacco, you see—began telling him to go with them and break into the Armenian’s shop at night for tobacco. Being drunk, he obeyed them, the fool. They broke the lock, you know, got in, and did no end of mischief; they turned everything upside down, broke the windows, and scattered the flour about. They were drunk, that is all one can say! Well, the constable turned up… and with one thing and another they took them off to the magistrate. They have been a whole year in prison, and a week ago, on the Wednesday, they were all three tried in the town. A soldier stood behind them with a gun… people were sworn in. Vaska was less to blame than any, but the gentry decided that he was the ringleader. The other two lads were sent to prison, but Vaska to a convict battalion for three years. And what for? One should judge like a Christian!”

“I have nothing to do with it, I tell you again. Go to the authorities.”

“I have been already! I’ve been to the court; I have tried to send in a petition—they wouldn’t take a petition; I have been to the police captain, and I have been to the examining magistrate, and everyone says, ‘It is not my business!’ Whose business is it, then? But there is no one above you here in the hospital; you do what you like, your honour.”

“You simpleton,” sighed the doctor, “once the jury have found him guilty, not the governor, not even the minister, could do anything, let alone the police captain. It’s no good your trying to do anything!”

“And who judged him, then?”

“The gentlemen of the jury.…”

“They weren’t gentlemen, they were our peasants! Andrey Guryev was one; Aloshka Huk was one.”

“Well, I am cold talking to you.…”

The doctor waved his hand and walked quickly to his own door. Kirila was on the point of following him, but, seeing the door slam, he stopped.

For ten minutes he stood motionless in the middle of the hospital yard, and without putting on his cap stared at the doctor's house, then he heaved a deep sigh, slowly scratched himself, and walked towards the gate.

"To whom am I to go?" he muttered as he came out on to the road. "One says it is not his business, another says it is not his business. Whose business is it, then? No, till you grease their hands you will get nothing out of them. The doctor says that, but he keeps looking all the while at my fist to see whether I am going to give him a blue note. Well, brother, I'll go, if it has to be to the governor."

Shifting from one foot to the other and continually looking round him in an objectless way, he trudged lazily along the road and was apparently wondering where to go.… It was not cold and the snow faintly crunched under his feet. Not more than half a mile in front of him the wretched little district town in which his brother had just been tried lay outstretched on the hill. On the right was the dark prison with its red roof and sentry-boxes at the corners; on the left was the big town copse, now covered with hoarfrost. It was still; only an old man, wearing a woman's short jacket and a huge cap, was walking ahead, coughing and shouting to a cow which he was driving to the town.

"Good day, grandfather," said Kirila, overtaking him.

"Good day.…"

"Are you driving it to the market?"

"No," the old man answered lazily.

"Are you a townsman?"

They got into conversation; Kirila told him what he had come to the hospital for, and what he had been talking about to the doctor.

"The doctor does not know anything about such matters, that is a sure thing," the old man said to him as they were both entering the town; "though he is a gentleman, he is only taught to cure by every means, but to give you real advice, or, let us say, write out a petition for you—that he cannot do. There are special authorities to do that. You have been to the justice of the peace and to the police captain—they are no good for your business either."

"Where am I to go?"

"The permanent member of the rural board is the chief person for peasants' affairs. Go to him, Mr. Sineokov."

"The one who is at Zolotovo?"

“Why, yes, at Zolotovo. He is your chief man. If it is anything that has to do with you peasants even the police captain has no authority against him.”

“It’s a long way to go, old man.… I dare say it’s twelve miles and may be more.”

“One who needs something will go seventy.”

“That is so.… Should I send in a petition to him, or what?”

“You will find out there. If you should have a petition the clerk will write you one quick enough. The permanent member has a clerk.”

After parting from the old man Kirila stood still in the middle of the square, thought a little, and walked back out of the town. He made up his mind to go to Zolotovo.

Five days later, as the doctor was on his way home after seeing his patients, he caught sight of Kirila again in his yard. This time the young peasant was not alone, but with a gaunt, very pale old man who nodded his head without ceasing, like a pendulum, and mumbled with his lips.

“Your honour, I have come again to ask your gracious mercy,” began Kirila. “Here I have come with my father. Be merciful, let Vaska go! The permanent member would not talk to me. He said: ‘Go away!’”

“Your honour,” the old man hissed in his throat, raising his twitching eyebrows, “be merciful! We are poor people, we cannot repay your honour, but if you graciously please, Kiryushka or Vaska can repay you in work. Let them work.”

“We will pay with work,” said Kirila, and he raised his hand above his head as though he would take an oath. “Let him go! They are starving, they are crying day and night, your honour!”

The young peasant bent a rapid glance on his father, pulled him by the sleeve, and both of them, as at the word of command, fell at the doctor’s feet. The latter waved his hand in despair, and, without looking round, walked quickly in at his door.

POLINKA

It is one o’clock in the afternoon. Shopping is at its height at the Nouveautés de Paris, a drapery establishment in one of the Arcades. There is a monotonous hum of shopmen’s voices, the hum one hears at school when the teacher sets the boys to learn something by heart. This regular sound is not interrupted by the laughter of lady customers nor the slam of the glass door, nor the scurrying of the boys.

Polinka, a thin fair little person whose mother is the head of a dressmaking establishment, is standing in the middle of the shop looking about for someone. A dark-browed boy runs up to her and asks, looking at her very gravely:

“What is your pleasure, madam?”

“Nikolay Timofeitch always takes my order,” answers Polinka.

Nikolay Timofeitch, a graceful dark young man, fashionably dressed, with frizzled hair and a big pin in his cravat, has already cleared a place on the counter and is craning forward, looking at Polinka with a smile.

“Morning, Pelagea Sergeevna!” he cries in a pleasant, hearty baritone voice. “What can I do for you?”

“Good morning!” says Polinka, going up to him. “You see, I’m back again.… Show me some gimp, please.”

“Gimp—for what purpose?”

“For a bodice trimming—to trim a whole dress, in fact.”

“Certainly.”

Nickolay Timofeitch lays several kinds of gimp before Polinka; she looks at the trimmings languidly and begins bargaining over them.

“Oh, come, a rouble’s not dear,” says the shopman persuasively, with a condescending smile. “It’s a French trimming, pure silk.… We have a commoner sort, if you like, heavier. That’s forty-five kopecks a yard; of course, it’s nothing like the same quality.”

“I want a bead corselet, too, with gimp buttons,” says Polinka, bending over the gimp and sighing for some reason. “And have you any bead motifs to match?”

“Yes.”

Polinka bends still lower over the counter and asks softly:

“And why did you leave us so early on Thursday, Nikolay Timofeitch?”

“Hm! It’s queer you noticed it,” says the shopman, with a smirk. “You were so taken up with that fine student that… it’s queer you noticed it!”

Polinka flushes crimson and remains mute. With a nervous quiver in his fingers the shopman closes the boxes, and for no sort of object piles them one on the top of another. A moment of silence follows.

“I want some bead lace, too,” says Polinka, lifting her eyes guiltily to the shopman.

“What sort? Black or coloured? Bead lace on tulle is the most fashionable trimming.”

“And how much is it?”

“The black’s from eighty kopecks and the coloured from two and a half roubles. I shall never come and see you again,” Nikolay Timofeitch adds in an undertone.

“Why?”

“Why? It’s very simple. You must understand that yourself. Why should I distress myself? It’s a queer business! Do you suppose it’s a pleasure to me to see that student carrying on with you? I see it all and I understand. Ever since autumn he’s been hanging about you and you go for a walk with him almost every day; and when he is with you, you gaze at him as though he were an angel. You are in love with him; there’s no one to beat him in your eyes. Well, all right, then, it’s no good talking.”

Polinka remains dumb and moves her finger on the counter in embarrassment.

“I see it all,” the shopman goes on. “What inducement have I to come and see you? I’ve got some pride. It’s not everyone likes to play gooseberry. What was it you asked for?”

“Mamma told me to get a lot of things, but I’ve forgotten. I want some feather trimming too.”

“What kind would you like?”

“The best, something fashionable.”

“The most fashionable now are real bird feathers. If you want the most fashionable colour, it’s heliotrope or *kanak*—that is, claret with a yellow shade in it. We have an immense choice. And what all this affair is going to lead to, I really don’t understand. Here you are in love, and how is it to end?”

Patches of red come into Nikolay Timofeitch's face round his eyes. He crushes the soft feather trimming in his hand and goes on muttering:

"Do you imagine he'll marry you—is that it? You'd better drop any such fancies. Students are forbidden to marry. And do you suppose he comes to see you with honourable intentions? A likely idea! Why, these fine students don't look on us as human beings… they only go to see shopkeepers and dressmakers to laugh at their ignorance and to drink. They're ashamed to drink at home and in good houses, but with simple uneducated people like us they don't care what anyone thinks; they'd be ready to stand on their heads. Yes! Well, which feather trimming will you take? And if he hangs about and carries on with you, we know what he is after.… When he's a doctor or a lawyer he'll remember you: 'Ah,' he'll say, 'I used to have a pretty fair little thing! I wonder where she is now?' Even now I bet you he boasts among his friends that he's got his eye on a little dressmaker."

Polinka sits down and gazes pensively at the pile of white boxes.

"No, I won't take the feather trimming," she sighs. "Mamma had better choose it for herself; I may get the wrong one. I want six yards of fringe for an overcoat, at forty kopecks the yard. For the same coat I want coconut buttons, perforated, so they can be sown on firmly.…"

Nikolay Timofeitch wraps up the fringe and the buttons. She looks at him guiltily and evidently expects him to go on talking, but he remains sullenly silent while he tidies up the feather trimming.

"I mustn't forget some buttons for a dressing-gown…" she says after an interval of silence, wiping her pale lips with a handkerchief.

"What kind?"

"It's for a shopkeeper's wife, so give me something rather striking."

"Yes, if it's for a shopkeeper's wife, you'd better have something bright. Here are some buttons. A combination of colours—red, blue, and the fashionable gold shade. Very glaring. The more refined prefer dull black with a bright border. But I don't understand. Can't you see for yourself? What can these… walks lead to?"

"I don't know," whispers Polinka, and she bends over the buttons; "I don't know myself what's come to me, Nikolay Timofeitch."

A solid shopman with whiskers forces his way behind Nikolay Timofeitch's back, squeezing him to the counter, and beaming with the choicest gallantry, shouts:

"Be so kind, madam, as to step into this department. We have three kinds of jerseys: plain, braided, and trimmed with beads! Which may I have the pleasure of showing you?"

At the same time a stout lady passes by Polinka, pronouncing in a rich, deep voice, almost a bass:

“They must be seamless, with the trade mark stamped in them, please.”

“Pretend to be looking at the things,” Nikolay Timofeitch whispers, bending down to Polinka with a forced smile. “Dear me, you do look pale and ill; you are quite changed. He’ll throw you over, Pelagea Sergeevna! Or if he does marry you, it won’t be for love but from hunger; he’ll be tempted by your money. He’ll furnish himself a nice home with your dowry, and then be ashamed of you. He’ll keep you out of sight of his friends and visitors, because you’re uneducated. He’ll call you ‘my dummy of a wife.’ You wouldn’t know how to behave in a doctor’s or lawyer’s circle. To them you’re a dressmaker, an ignorant creature.”

“Nikolay Timofeitch!” somebody shouts from the other end of the shop. “The young lady here wants three yards of ribbon with a metal stripe. Have we any?”

Nikolay Timofeitch turns in that direction, smirks and shouts:

“Yes, we have! Ribbon with a metal stripe, ottoman with a satin stripe, and satin with a moiré stripe!”

“Oh, by the way, I mustn’t forget, Olga asked me to get her a pair of stays!” says Polinka.

“There are tears in your eyes,” says Nikolay Timofeitch in dismay. “What’s that for? Come to the corset department, I’ll screen you—it looks awkward.”

With a forced smile and exaggeratedly free and easy manner, the shopman rapidly conducts Polinka to the corset department and conceals her from the public eye behind a high pyramid of boxes.

“What sort of corset may I show you?” he asks aloud, whispering immediately: “Wipe your eyes!”

“I want… I want… size forty-eight centimetres. Only she wanted one, lined… with real whalebone… I must talk to you, Nikolay Timofeitch. Come today!”

“Talk? What about? There’s nothing to talk about.”

“You are the only person who… cares about me, and I’ve no one to talk to but you.”

“These are not reed or steel, but real whalebone.… What is there for us to talk about? It’s no use talking.… You are going for a walk with him today, I suppose?”

“Yes; I… I am.”

“Then what’s the use of talking? Talk won’t help.… You are in love, aren’t you?”

“Yes…” Polinka whispers hesitatingly, and big tears gush from her eyes.

“What is there to say?” mutters Nikolay Timofeitch, shrugging his shoulders nervously and turning pale. “There’s no need of talk.… Wipe your eyes, that’s all. I… I ask for nothing.”

At that moment a tall, lanky shopman comes up to the pyramid of boxes, and says to his customer:

“Let me show you some good elastic garters that do not impede the circulation, certified by medical authority…”

Nikolay Timofeitch screens Polinka, and, trying to conceal her emotion and his own, wrinkles his face into a smile and says aloud:

“There are two kinds of lace, madam: cotton and silk! Oriental, English, Valenciennes, crochet, torchon, are cotton. And rococo, soutache, Cambray, are silk.… For God’s sake, wipe your eyes! They’re coming this way!”

And seeing that her tears are still gushing he goes on louder than ever:

“Spanish, Rococo, soutache, Cambray… stockings, thread, cotton, silk…”

Drunk

A manufacturer called Frolov, a handsome dark man with a round beard, and a soft, velvety expression in his eyes, and Almer, his lawyer, an elderly man with a big rough head, were drinking in one of the public rooms of a restaurant on the outskirts of the town. They had both come to the restaurant straight from a ball and so were wearing dress coats and white ties. Except them and the waiters at the door there was not a soul in the room; by Frolov's orders no one else was admitted.

They began by drinking a big wineglass of vodka and eating oysters.

"Good!" said Almer. "It was I brought oysters into fashion for the first course, my boy. The vodka burns and stings your throat and you have a voluptuous sensation in your throat when you swallow an oyster. Don't you?"

A dignified waiter with a shaven upper lip and grey whiskers put a sauceboat on the table.

"What's that you are serving?" asked Frolov.

"Sauce Provençale for the herring, sir.…"

"What! is that the way to serve it?" shouted Frolov, not looking into the sauceboat. "Do you call that sauce? You don't know how to wait, you blockhead!"

Frolov's velvety eyes flashed. He twisted a corner of the tablecloth round his finger, made a slight movement, and the dishes, the candlesticks, and the bottles, all jingling and clattering, fell with a crash on the floor.

The waiters, long accustomed to pothouse catastrophes, ran up to the table and began picking up the fragments with grave and unconcerned faces, like surgeons at an operation.

"How well you know how to manage them!" said Almer, and he laughed. "But… move a little away from the table or you will step in the caviar."

"Call the engineer here!" cried Frolov.

This was the name given to a decrepit, doleful old man who really had once been an engineer and very well off; he had squandered all his property and towards the end of his life had got into a restaurant where he looked after the waiters and singers and carried out various commissions relating to the fair sex. Appearing at the summons, he put his head on one side respectfully.

"Listen, my good man," Frolov said, addressing him. "What's the meaning of this disorder? How queerly you fellows wait! Don't you know that I don't like it? Devil take you, I shall give up coming to you!"

"I beg you graciously to excuse it, Alexey Semyonitch!" said the engineer, laying his hand on his heart. "I will take steps immediately, and your slightest wishes shall be carried out in the best and speediest way."

"Well, that'll do, you can go.…"

The engineer bowed, staggered back, still doubled up, and disappeared through the doorway with a final flash of the false diamonds on his shirtfront and fingers.

The table was laid again. Almer drank red wine and ate with relish some sort of bird served with truffles, and ordered a matelote of eelpouts and a sterlet with its tail in its mouth. Frolov only drank vodka and ate nothing but bread. He rubbed his face with his open hands, scowled, and was evidently out of humour. Both were silent. There was a stillness. Two electric lights in opaque shades flickered and hissed as though they were angry. The gypsy girls passed the door, softly humming.

"One drinks and is none the merrier," said Frolov. "The more I pour into myself, the more sober I become. Other people grow festive with vodka, but I suffer from anger, disgusting thoughts, sleeplessness. Why is it, old man, that people don't invent some other pleasure besides drunkenness and debauchery? It's really horrible!"

"You had better send for the gypsy girls."

"Confound them!"

The head of an old gypsy woman appeared in the door from the passage.

"Alexey Semyonitch, the gypsies are asking for tea and brandy," said the old woman. "May we order it?"

"Yes," answered Frolov. "You know they get a percentage from the restaurant keeper for asking the visitors to treat them. Nowadays you can't even believe a man when he asks for vodka. The people are all mean, vile, spoilt. Take these waiters, for instance. They have countenances like professors, and grey heads; they get two hundred roubles a month, they live in houses of their own and send their girls to

the high school, but you may swear at them and give yourself airs as much as you please. For a rouble the engineer will gulp down a whole pot of mustard and crow like a cock. On my honour, if one of them would take offence I would make him a present of a thousand roubles."

"What's the matter with you?" said Almer, looking at him with surprise. "Whence this melancholy? You are red in the face, you look like a wild animal.… What's the matter with you?"

"It's horrid. There's one thing I can't get out of my head. It seems as though it is nailed there and it won't come out."

A round little old man, buried in fat and completely bald, wearing a short reefer jacket and lilac waistcoat and carrying a guitar, walked into the room. He made an idiotic face, drew himself up, and saluted like a soldier.

"Ah, the parasite!" said Frolov, "let me introduce him, he has made his fortune by grunting like a pig. Come here!" He poured vodka, wine, and brandy into a glass, sprinkled pepper and salt into it, mixed it all up and gave it to the parasite. The latter tossed it off and smacked his lips with gusto.

"He's accustomed to drink a mess so that pure wine makes him sick," said Frolov. "Come, parasite, sit down and sing."

The old man sat down, touched the strings with his fat fingers, and began singing:

"Neetka, neetka, Margareetka.…"

After drinking champagne Frolov was drunk. He thumped with his fist on the table and said:

"Yes, there's something that sticks in my head! It won't give me a minute's peace!"

"Why, what is it?"

"I can't tell you. It's a secret. It's something so private that I could only speak of it in my prayers. But if you like… as a sign of friendship, between ourselves… only mind, to no one, no, no, no,… I'll tell you, it will ease my heart, but for God's sake… listen and forget it.…"

Frolov bent down to Almer and for a minute breathed in his ear.

"I hate my wife!" he brought out.

The lawyer looked at him with surprise.

"Yes, yes, my wife, Marya Mihalovna," Frolov muttered, flushing red. "I hate her and that's all about it."

"What for?"

"I don't know myself! I've only been married two years. I married as you know for love, and now I hate her like a mortal enemy, like this

parasite here, saving your presence. And there is no cause, no sort of cause! When she sits by me, eats, or says anything, my whole soul boils, I can scarcely restrain myself from being rude to her. It's something one can't describe. To leave her or tell her the truth is utterly impossible because it would be a scandal, and living with her is worse than hell for me. I can't stay at home! I spend my days at business and in the restaurants and spend my nights in dissipation. Come, how is one to explain this hatred? She is not an ordinary woman, but handsome, clever, quiet."

The old man stamped his foot and began singing:

"I went a walk with a captain bold,
And in his ear my secrets told."

"I must own I always thought that Marya Mihalovna was not at all the right person for you," said Almer after a brief silence, and he heaved a sigh.

"Do you mean she is too well educated?… I took the gold medal at the commercial school myself, I have been to Paris three times. I am not cleverer than you, of course, but I am no more foolish than my wife. No, brother, education is not the sore point. Let me tell you how all the trouble began. It began with my suddenly fancying that she had married me not from love, but for the sake of my money. This idea took possession of my brain. I have done all I could think of, but the cursed thing sticks! And to make it worse my wife was overtaken with a passion for luxury. Getting into a sack of gold after poverty, she took to flinging it in all directions. She went quite off her head, and was so carried away that she used to get through twenty thousand every month. And I am a distrustful man. I don't believe in anyone, I suspect everybody. And the more friendly you are to me the greater my torment. I keep fancying I am being flattered for my money. I trust no one! I am a difficult man, my boy, very difficult!"

Frolov emptied his glass at one gulp and went on.

"But that's all nonsense," he said. "One never ought to speak of it. It's stupid. I am tipsy and I have been chattering, and now you are looking at me with lawyer's eyes—glad you know someone else's secret. Well, well!… Let us drop this conversation. Let us drink! I say," he said, addressing a waiter, "is Mustafa here? Fetch him in!"

Shortly afterwards there walked into the room a little Tatar boy, aged about twelve, wearing a dress coat and white gloves.

“Come here!” Frolov said to him. “Explain to us the following fact: there was a time when you Tatars conquered us and took tribute from us, but now you serve us as waiters and sell dressing-gowns. How do you explain such a change?”

Mustafa raised his eyebrows and said in a shrill voice, with a singsong intonation: “The mutability of destiny!”

Almer looked at his grave face and went off into peals of laughter.

“Well, give him a rouble!” said Frolov. “He is making his fortune out of the mutability of destiny. He is only kept here for the sake of those two words. Drink, Mustafa! You will make a gre-eat rascal! I mean it is awful how many of your sort are toadies hanging about rich men. The number of these peaceful bandits and robbers is beyond all reckoning! Shouldn’t we send for the gypsies now? Eh? Fetch the gypsies along!”

The gypsies, who had been hanging about wearily in the corridors for a long time, burst with whoops into the room, and a wild orgy began.

“Drink!” Frolov shouted to them. “Drink! Seed of Pharaoh! Sing! A-a-ah!”

“In the winter time… o-o-ho!… the sledge was flying…”

The gypsies sang, whistled, danced. In the frenzy which sometimes takes possession of spoilt and very wealthy men, “broad natures,” Frolov began to play the fool. He ordered supper and champagne for the gypsies, broke the shade of the electric light, shied bottles at the pictures and looking-glasses, and did it all apparently without the slightest enjoyment, scowling and shouting irritably, with contempt for the people, with an expression of hatred in his eyes and his manners. He made the engineer sing a solo, made the bass singers drink a mixture of wine, vodka, and oil.

At six o’clock they handed him the bill.

“Nine hundred and twenty-five roubles, forty kopecks,” said Almer, and shrugged his shoulders. “What’s it for? No, wait, we must go into it!”

“Stop!” muttered Frolov, pulling out his pocketbook. “Well!… let them rob me. That’s what I’m rich for, to be robbed!… You can’t get on without parasites!… You are my lawyer. You get six thousand a year out of me and what for? But excuse me,… I don’t know what I am saying.”

As he was returning home with Almer, Frolov murmured:

“Going home is awful to me! Yes!… There isn’t a human being I can open my soul to.… They are all robbers… traitors.… Oh, why did I tell you my secret? Yes… why? Tell me why?”

At the entrance to his house, he craned forward towards Almer and, staggering, kissed him on the lips, having the old Moscow habit of kissing indiscriminately on every occasion.

"Goodbye… I am a difficult, hateful man," he said. "A horrid, drunken, shameless life. You are a well-educated, clever man, but you only laugh and drink with me… there's no help from any of you.… But if you were a friend to me, if you were an honest man, in reality you ought to have said to me: 'Ugh, you vile, hateful man! You reptile!'"

"Come, come," Almer muttered, "go to bed."

"There is no help from you; the only hope is that, when I am in the country in the summer, I may go out into the fields and a storm come on and the thunder may strike me dead on the spot.… Goodbye."

Frolov kissed Almer once more and muttering and dropping asleep as he walked, began mounting the stairs, supported by two footmen.

An Inadvertence

Pyotr Petrovitch Strizhin, the nephew of Madame Ivanov, the colonel's widow—the man whose new goloshes were stolen last year—came home from a christening party at two o'clock in the morning. To avoid waking the household he took off his things in the lobby, made his way on tiptoe to his room, holding his breath, and began getting ready for bed without lighting a candle.

Strizhin leads a sober and regular life. He has a sanctimonious expression of face, he reads nothing but religious and edifying books, but at the christening party, in his delight that Lyubov Spiridonovna had passed through her confinement successfully, he had permitted himself to drink four glasses of vodka and a glass of wine, the taste of which suggested something midway between vinegar and castor oil. Spirituous liquors are like seawater and glory: the more you imbibe of them the greater your thirst. And now as he undressed, Strizhin was aware of an overwhelming craving for drink.

"I believe Dashenka has some vodka in the cupboard in the right-hand corner," he thought. "If I drink one wineglassful, she won't notice it."

After some hesitation, overcoming his fears, Strizhin went to the cupboard. Cautiously opening the door he felt in the right-hand corner for a bottle and poured out a wineglassful, put the bottle back in its place, then, making the sign of the cross, drank it off. And immediately something like a miracle took place. Strizhin was flung back from the cupboard to the chest with fearful force like a bomb. There were flashes before his eyes, he felt as though he could not breathe, and all over his body he had a sensation as though he had fallen into a marsh full of leeches. It seemed to him as though, instead of vodka, he had swallowed dynamite, which blew up his body, the house, and the whole street.… His head, his arms, his legs—all seemed to be torn off and to be flying away somewhere to the devil, into space.

For some three minutes he lay on the chest, not moving and scarcely breathing, then he got up and asked himself:

“Where am I?”

The first thing of which he was clearly conscious on coming to himself was the pronounced smell of paraffin.

“Holy saints,” he thought in horror, “it’s paraffin I have drunk instead of vodka.”

The thought that he had poisoned himself threw him into a cold shiver, then into a fever. That it was really poison that he had taken was proved not only by the smell in the room but also by the burning taste in his mouth, the flashes before his eyes, the ringing in his head, and the colicky pain in his stomach. Feeling the approach of death and not buoying himself up with false hopes, he wanted to say goodbye to those nearest to him, and made his way to Dashenka’s bedroom (being a widower he had his sister-in-law called Dashenka, an old maid, living in the flat to keep house for him).

“Dashenka,” he said in a tearful voice as he went into the bedroom, “dear Dashenka!”

Something grumbled in the darkness and uttered a deep sigh.

“Dashenka.”

“Eh? What?” A woman’s voice articulated rapidly. “Is that you, Pyotr Petrovitch? Are you back already? Well, what is it? What has the baby been christened? Who was godmother?”

“The godmother was Natalya Andreyevna Velikosvyetsky, and the godfather Pavel Ivanitch Bezsonnitsin.… I… I believe, Dashenka, I am dying. And the baby has been christened Olimpiada, in honour of their kind patroness.… I… I have just drunk paraffin, Dashenka!”

“What next! You don’t say they gave you paraffin there?”

“I must own I wanted to get a drink of vodka without asking you, and… and the Lord chastised me: by accident in the dark I took paraffin.… What am I to do?”

Dashenka, hearing that the cupboard had been opened without her permission, grew more wide-awake.… She quickly lighted a candle, jumped out of bed, and in her nightgown, a freckled, bony figure in curl-papers, padded with bare feet to the cupboard.

“Who told you you might?” she asked sternly, as she scrutinized the inside of the cupboard. “Was the vodka put there for you?”

“I… I haven’t drunk vodka but paraffin, Dashenka…” muttered Strizhin, mopping the cold sweat on his brow.

“And what did you want to touch the paraffin for? That’s nothing to do with you, is it? Is it put there for you? Or do you suppose paraffin costs nothing? Eh? Do you know what paraffin is now? Do you know?”

“Dear Dashenka,” moaned Strizhin, “it’s a question of life and death, and you talk about money!”

“He’s drunk himself tipsy and now he pokes his nose into the cupboard!” cried Dashenka, angrily slamming the cupboard door. “Oh, the monsters, the tormentors! I’m a martyr, a miserable woman, no peace day or night! Vipers, basilisks, accursed Herods, may you suffer the same in the world to come! I am going tomorrow! I am a maiden lady and I won’t allow you to stand before me in your underclothes! How dare you look at me when I am not dressed!”

And she went on and on.… Knowing that when Dashenka was enraged there was no moving her with prayers or vows or even by firing a cannon, Strizhin waved his hand in despair, dressed, and made up his mind to go to the doctor. But a doctor is only readily found when he is not wanted. After running through three streets and ringing five times at Dr. Tchepharyants’s, and seven times at Dr. Bultyhin’s, Strizhin raced off to a chemist’s shop, thinking possibly the chemist could help him. There, after a long interval, a little dark and curly-headed chemist came out to him in his dressing gown, with drowsy eyes, and such a wise and serious face that it was positively terrifying.

“What do you want?” he asked in a tone in which only very wise and dignified chemists of Jewish persuasion can speak.

“For God’s sake… I entreat you…” said Strizhin breathlessly, “give me something. I have just accidentally drunk paraffin, I am dying!”

“I beg you not to excite yourself and to answer the questions I am about to put to you. The very fact that you are excited prevents me from understanding you. You have drunk paraffin. Yes?”

“Yes, paraffin! Please save me!”

The chemist went coolly and gravely to the desk, opened a book, became absorbed in reading it. After reading a couple of pages he shrugged one shoulder and then the other, made a contemptuous grimace and, after thinking for a minute, went into the adjoining room. The clock struck four, and when it pointed to ten minutes past the chemist came back with another book and again plunged into reading.

“H’m,” he said as though puzzled, “the very fact that you feel unwell shows you ought to apply to a doctor, not a chemist.”

“But I have been to the doctors already. I could not ring them up.”

“H’m… you don’t regard us chemists as human beings, and disturb our rest even at four o’clock at night, though every dog, every cat, can rest in peace.… You don’t try to understand anything, and to your thinking we are not people and our nerves are like cords.”

Strizhin listened to the chemist, heaved a sigh, and went home.

“So I am fated to die,” he thought.

And in his mouth was a burning and a taste of paraffin, there were twinges in his stomach, and a sound of boom, boom, boom in his ears. Every moment it seemed to him that his end was near, that his heart was no longer beating.

Returning home he made haste to write: “Let no one be blamed for my death,” then he said his prayers, lay down and pulled the bedclothes over his head. He lay awake till morning expecting death, and all the time he kept fancying how his grave would be covered with fresh green grass and how the birds would twitter over it.…

And in the morning he was sitting on his bed, saying with a smile to Dashenka:

“One who leads a steady and regular life, dear sister, is unaffected by any poison. Take me, for example. I have been on the verge of death. I was dying and in agony, yet now I am all right. There is only a burning in my mouth and a soreness in my throat, but I am all right all over, thank God.… And why? It’s because of my regular life.”

“No, it’s because it’s inferior paraffin!” sighed Dashenka, thinking of the household expenses and gazing into space. “The man at the shop could not have given me the best quality, but that at three farthings. I am a martyr, I am a miserable woman. You monsters! May you suffer the same, in the world to come, accursed Herods.…”

And she went on and on.…

VEROTCHKA

Ivan Alexeyitch Ognev remembers how on that August evening he opened the glass door with a rattle and went out on to the verandah. He was wearing a light Inverness cape and a wide-brimmed straw hat, the very one that was lying with his top-boots in the dust under his bed. In one hand he had a big bundle of books and notebooks, in the other a thick knotted stick.

Behind the door, holding the lamp to show the way, stood the master of the house, Kuznetsov, a bald old man with a long grey beard, in a snow-white piqué jacket. The old man was smiling cordially and nodding his head.

"Goodbye, old fellow!" said Ognev.

Kuznetsov put the lamp on a little table and went out to the verandah. Two long narrow shadows moved down the steps towards the flowerbeds, swayed to and fro, and leaned their heads on the trunks of the lime trees.

"Goodbye and once more thank you, my dear fellow!" said Ivan Alexeyitch. "Thank you for your welcome, for your kindness, for your affection.… I shall never forget your hospitality as long as I live. You are so good, and your daughter is so good, and everyone here is so kind, so good-humoured and friendly… Such a splendid set of people that I don't know how to say what I feel!"

From excess of feeling and under the influence of the homemade wine he had just drunk, Ognev talked in a singing voice like a divinity student, and was so touched that he expressed his feelings not so much by words as by the blinking of his eyes and the twitching of his shoulders. Kuznetsov, who had also drunk a good deal and was touched, craned forward to the young man and kissed him.

"I've grown as fond of you as if I were your dog," Ognev went on. "I've been turning up here almost every day; I've stayed the night a dozen times. It's dreadful to think of all the homemade wine I've drunk. And thank you most of all for your cooperation and help. Without you I

should have been busy here over my statistics till October. I shall put in my preface: ‘I think it my duty to express my gratitude to the President of the District Zemstvo of N——, Kuznetsov, for his kind cooperation.’ There is a brilliant future before statistics! My humble respects to Vera Gavrilovna, and tell the doctors, both the lawyers and your secretary, that I shall never forget their help! And now, old fellow, let us embrace one another and kiss for the last time!”

Ognev, limp with emotion, kissed the old man once more and began going down the steps. On the last step he looked round and asked: “Shall we meet again some day?”

“God knows!” said the old man. “Most likely not!”

“Yes, that’s true! Nothing will tempt you to Petersburg and I am never likely to turn up in this district again. Well, goodbye!”

“You had better leave the books behind!” Kuznetsov called after him. “You don’t want to drag such a weight with you. I would send them by a servant tomorrow!”

But Ognev was rapidly walking away from the house and was not listening. His heart, warmed by the wine, was brimming over with good-humour, friendliness, and sadness. He walked along thinking how frequently one met with good people, and what a pity it was that nothing was left of those meetings but memories. At times one catches a glimpse of cranes on the horizon, and a faint gust of wind brings their plaintive, ecstatic cry, and a minute later, however greedily one scans the blue distance, one cannot see a speck nor catch a sound; and like that, people with their faces and their words flit through our lives and are drowned in the past, leaving nothing except faint traces in the memory. Having been in the N—— District from the early spring, and having been almost every day at the friendly Kuznetsovs’, Ivan Alexeyitch had become as much at home with the old man, his daughter, and the servants as though they were his own people; he had grown familiar with the whole house to the smallest detail, with the cosy verandah, the windings of the avenues, the silhouettes of the trees over the kitchen and the bathhouse; but as soon as he was out of the gate all this would be changed to memory and would lose its meaning as reality forever, and in a year or two all these dear images would grow as dim in his consciousness as stories he had read or things he had imagined.

“Nothing in life is so precious as people!” Ognev thought in his emotion, as he strode along the avenue to the gate. “Nothing!”

It was warm and still in the garden. There was a scent of the mignonette, of the tobacco-plants, and of the heliotrope, which were not

yet over in the flowerbeds. The spaces between the bushes and the tree-trunks were filled with a fine soft mist soaked through and through with moonlight, and, as Ognev long remembered, coils of mist that looked like phantoms slowly but perceptibly followed one another across the avenue. The moon stood high above the garden, and below it transparent patches of mist were floating eastward. The whole world seemed to consist of nothing but black silhouettes and wandering white shadows. Ognev, seeing the mist on a moonlight August evening almost for the first time in his life, imagined he was seeing, not nature, but a stage effect in which unskilful workmen, trying to light up the garden with white Bengal fire, hid behind the bushes and let off clouds of white smoke together with the light.

When Ognev reached the garden gate a dark shadow moved away from the low fence and came towards him.

"Vera Gavrilovna!" he said, delighted. "You here? And I have been looking everywhere for you; wanted to say goodbye.… Goodbye; I am going away!"

"So early? Why, it's only eleven o'clock."

"Yes, it's time I was off. I have a four-mile walk and then my packing. I must be up early tomorrow."

Before Ognev stood Kuznetsov's daughter Vera, a girl of one-and-twenty, as usual melancholy, carelessly dressed, and attractive. Girls who are dreamy and spend whole days lying down, lazily reading whatever they come across, who are bored and melancholy, are usually careless in their dress. To those of them who have been endowed by nature with taste and an instinct of beauty, the slight carelessness adds a special charm. When Ognev later on remembered her, he could not picture pretty Verotchka except in a full blouse which was crumpled in deep folds at the belt and yet did not touch her waist; without her hair done up high and a curl that had come loose from it on her forehead; without the knitted red shawl with ball fringe at the edge which hung disconsolately on Vera's shoulders in the evenings, like a flag on a windless day, and in the daytime lay about, crushed up, in the hall near the men's hats or on a box in the dining room, where the old cat did not hesitate to sleep on it. This shawl and the folds of her blouse suggested a feeling of freedom and laziness, of good-nature and sitting at home. Perhaps because Vera attracted Ognev he saw in every frill and button something warm, naive, cosy, something nice and poetical, just what is lacking in cold, insincere women that have no instinct for beauty.

Verotchka had a good figure, a regular profile, and beautiful curly hair. Ognev, who had seen few women in his life, thought her a beauty.

"I am going away," he said as he took leave of her at the gate. "Don't remember evil against me! Thank you for everything!"

In the same singing divinity student's voice in which he had talked to her father, with the same blinking and twitching of his shoulders, he began thanking Vera for her hospitality, kindness, and friendliness.

"I've written about you in every letter to my mother," he said. "If everyone were like you and your dad, what a jolly place the world would be! You are such a splendid set of people! All such genuine, friendly people with no nonsense about you."

"Where are you going to now?" asked Vera.

"I am going now to my mother's at Oryol; I shall be a fortnight with her, and then back to Petersburg and work."

"And then?"

"And then? I shall work all the winter and in the spring go somewhere into the provinces again to collect material. Well, be happy, live a hundred years… don't remember evil against me. We shall not see each other again."

Ognev stooped down and kissed Vera's hand. Then, in silent emotion, he straightened his cape, shifted his bundle of books to a more comfortable position, paused, and said:

"What a lot of mist!"

"Yes. Have you left anything behind?"

"No, I don't think so…."

For some seconds Ognev stood in silence, then he moved clumsily towards the gate and went out of the garden.

"Stay; I'll see you as far as our wood," said Vera, following him out.

They walked along the road. Now the trees did not obscure the view, and one could see the sky and the distance. As though covered with a veil all nature was hidden in a transparent, colourless haze through which her beauty peeped gaily; where the mist was thicker and whiter it lay heaped unevenly about the stones, stalks, and bushes or drifted in coils over the road, clung close to the earth and seemed trying not to conceal the view. Through the haze they could see all the road as far as the wood, with dark ditches at the sides and tiny bushes which grew in the ditches and caught the straying wisps of mist. Half a mile from the gate they saw the dark patch of Kuznetsov's wood.

"Why has she come with me? I shall have to see her back," thought Ognev, but looking at her profile he gave a friendly smile and said: "One

doesn’t want to go away in such lovely weather. It’s quite a romantic evening, with the moon, the stillness, and all the etceteras. Do you know, Vera Gavrilovna, here I have lived twenty-nine years in the world and never had a romance. No romantic episode in my whole life, so that I only know by hearsay of rendezvous, ‘avenues of sighs,’ and kisses. It’s not normal! In town, when one sits in one’s lodgings, one does not notice the blank, but here in the fresh air one feels it.… One resents it!”

“Why is it?”

“I don’t know. I suppose I’ve never had time, or perhaps it was I have never met women who.… In fact, I have very few acquaintances and never go anywhere.”

For some three hundred paces the young people walked on in silence. Ognev kept glancing at Verotchka’s bare head and shawl, and days of spring and summer rose to his mind one after another. It had been a period when far from his grey Petersburg lodgings, enjoying the friendly warmth of kind people, nature, and the work he loved, he had not had time to notice how the sunsets followed the glow of dawn, and how, one after another foretelling the end of summer, first the nightingale ceased singing, then the quail, then a little later the landrail. The days slipped by unnoticed, so that life must have been happy and easy. He began calling aloud how reluctantly he, poor and unaccustomed to change of scene and society, had come at the end of April to the N—— District, where he had expected dreariness, loneliness, and indifference to statistics, which he considered was now the foremost among the sciences. When he arrived on an April morning at the little town of N—— he had put up at the inn kept by Ryabuhin, the Old Believer, where for twenty kopecks a day they had given him a light, clean room on condition that he should not smoke indoors. After resting and finding who was the president of the District Zemstvo, he had set off at once on foot to Kuznetsov. He had to walk three miles through lush meadows and young copses. Larks were hovering in the clouds, filling the air with silvery notes, and rooks flapping their wings with sedate dignity floated over the green cornland.

“Good heavens!” Ognev had thought in wonder; “can it be that there’s always air like this to breathe here, or is this scent only today, in honour of my coming?”

Expecting a cold businesslike reception, he went in to Kuznetsov’s diffidently, looking up from under his eyebrows and shyly pulling his beard. At first Kuznetsov wrinkled up his brows and could not understand what use the Zemstvo could be to the young man and his statistics; but when the latter explained at length what was material for

statistics and how such material was collected, Kuznetsov brightened, smiled, and with childish curiosity began looking at his notebooks. On the evening of the same day Ivan Alexeyitch was already sitting at supper with the Kuznetsovs, was rapidly becoming exhilarated by their strong homemade wine, and looking at the calm faces and lazy movements of his new acquaintances, felt all over that sweet, drowsy indolence which makes one want to sleep and stretch and smile; while his new acquaintances looked at him good-naturedly and asked him whether his father and mother were living, how much he earned a month, how often he went to the theatre….

Ognev recalled his expeditions about the neighbourhood, the picnics, the fishing parties, the visit of the whole party to the convent to see the Mother Superior Marfa, who had given each of the visitors a bead purse; he recalled the hot, endless typically Russian arguments in which the opponents, spluttering and banging the table with their fists, misunderstand and interrupt one another, unconsciously contradict themselves at every phrase, continually change the subject, and after arguing for two or three hours, laugh and say: “Goodness knows what we have been arguing about! Beginning with one thing and going on to another!”

“And do you remember how the doctor and you and I rode to Shestovo?” said Ivan Alexeyitch to Vera as they reached the copse. “It was there that the crazy saint met us: I gave him a five-kopeck piece, and he crossed himself three times and flung it into the rye. Good heavens! I am carrying away such a mass of memories that if I could gather them together into a whole it would make a good nugget of gold! I don’t understand why clever, perceptive people crowd into Petersburg and Moscow and don’t come here. Is there more truth and freedom in the Nevsky and in the big damp houses than here? Really, the idea of artists, scientific men, and journalists all living crowded together in furnished rooms has always seemed to me a mistake.”

Twenty paces from the copse the road was crossed by a small narrow bridge with posts at the corners, which had always served as a resting-place for the Kuznetsovs and their guests on their evening walks. From there those who liked could mimic the forest echo, and one could see the road vanish in the dark woodland track.

“Well, here is the bridge!” said Ognev. “Here you must turn back.”

Vera stopped and drew a breath.

“Let us sit down,” she said, sitting down on one of the posts. “People generally sit down when they say goodbye before starting on a journey.”

Ognev settled himself beside her on his bundle of books and went on talking. She was breathless from the walk, and was looking, not at Ivan Alexeyitch, but away into the distance so that he could not see her face.

"And what if we meet in ten years' time?" he said. "What shall we be like then? You will be by then the respectable mother of a family, and I shall be the author of some weighty statistical work of no use to anyone, as thick as forty thousand such works. We shall meet and think of old days.… Now we are conscious of the present; it absorbs and excites us, but when we meet we shall not remember the day, nor the month, nor even the year in which we saw each other for the last time on this bridge. You will be changed, perhaps.… Tell me, will you be different?"

Vera started and turned her face towards him.

"What?" she asked.

"I asked you just now.…"

"Excuse me, I did not hear what you were saying."

Only then Ognev noticed a change in Vera. She was pale, breathing fast, and the tremor in her breathing affected her hands and lips and head, and not one curl as usual, but two, came loose and fell on her forehead.… Evidently she avoided looking him in the face, and, trying to mask her emotion, at one moment fingered her collar, which seemed to be rasping her neck, at another pulled her red shawl from one shoulder to the other.

"I am afraid you are cold," said Ognev. "It's not at all wise to sit in the mist. Let me see you back *nach-haus*."

Vera sat mute.

"What is the matter?" asked Ognev, with a smile. "You sit silent and don't answer my questions. Are you cross, or don't you feel well?"

Vera pressed the palm of her hand to the cheek nearest to Ognev, and then abruptly jerked it away.

"An awful position!" she murmured, with a look of pain on her face. "Awful!"

"How is it awful?" asked Ognev, shrugging his shoulders and not concealing his surprise. "What's the matter?"

Still breathing hard and twitching her shoulders, Vera turned her back to him, looked at the sky for half a minute, and said:

"There is something I must say to you, Ivan Alexeyitch.…"

"I am listening."

"It may seem strange to you.… You will be surprised, but I don't care.…"

Ognev shrugged his shoulders once more and prepared himself to listen.

"You see…" Verotchka began, bowing her head and fingering a ball on the fringe of her shawl. "You see… this is what I wanted to tell you.… You'll think it strange… and silly, but I… can't bear it any longer."

Vera's words died away in an indistinct mutter and were suddenly cut short by tears. The girl hid her face in her handkerchief, bent lower than ever, and wept bitterly. Ivan Alexeyitch cleared his throat in confusion and looked about him hopelessly, at his wits' end, not knowing what to say or do. Being unused to the sight of tears, he felt his own eyes, too, beginning to smart.

"Well, what next!" he muttered helplessly. "Vera Gavrilovna, what's this for, I should like to know? My dear girl, are you… are you ill? Or has someone been nasty to you? Tell me, perhaps I could, so to say… help you.…"

When, trying to console her, he ventured cautiously to remove her hands from her face, she smiled at him through her tears and said:

"I… love you!"

These words, so simple and ordinary, were uttered in ordinary human language, but Ognev, in acute embarrassment, turned away from Vera, and got up, while his confusion was followed by terror.

The sad, warm, sentimental mood induced by leave-taking and the homemade wine suddenly vanished, and gave place to an acute and unpleasant feeling of awkwardness. He felt an inward revulsion; he looked askance at Vera, and now that by declaring her love for him she had cast off the aloofness which so adds to a woman's charm, she seemed to him, as it were, shorter, plainer, more ordinary.

"What's the meaning of it?" he thought with horror. "But I… do I love her or not? That's the question!"

And she breathed easily and freely now that the worst and most difficult thing was said. She, too, got up, and looking Ivan Alexeyitch straight in the face, began talking rapidly, warmly, irrepressibly.

As a man suddenly panic-stricken cannot afterwards remember the succession of sounds accompanying the catastrophe that overwhelmed him, so Ognev cannot remember Vera's words and phrases. He can only recall the meaning of what she said, and the sensation her words evoked in him. He remembers her voice, which seemed stifled and husky with emotion, and the extraordinary music and passion of her intonation. Laughing, crying with tears glistening on her eyelashes, she told him that

from the first day of their acquaintance he had struck her by his originality, his intelligence, his kind intelligent eyes, by his work and objects in life; that she loved him passionately, deeply, madly; that when coming into the house from the garden in the summer she saw his cape in the hall or heard his voice in the distance, she felt a cold shudder at her heart, a foreboding of happiness; even his slightest jokes had made her laugh; in every figure in his notebooks she saw something extraordinarily wise and grand; his knotted stick seemed to her more beautiful than the trees.

The copse and the wisps of mist and the black ditches at the side of the road seemed hushed listening to her, whilst something strange and unpleasant was passing in Ognev's heart.… Telling him of her love, Vera was enchantingly beautiful; she spoke eloquently and passionately, but he felt neither pleasure nor gladness, as he would have liked to; he felt nothing but compassion for Vera, pity and regret that a good girl should be distressed on his account. Whether he was affected by generalizations from reading or by the insuperable habit of looking at things objectively, which so often hinders people from living, but Vera's ecstasies and suffering struck him as affected, not to be taken seriously, and at the same time rebellious feeling whispered to him that all he was hearing and seeing now, from the point of view of nature and personal happiness, was more important than any statistics and books and truths.… And he raged and blamed himself, though he did not understand exactly where he was in fault.

To complete his embarrassment, he was absolutely at a loss what to say, and yet something he must say. To say bluntly, "I don't love you," was beyond him, and he could not bring himself to say "Yes," because however much he rummaged in his heart he could not find one spark of feeling in it.…

He was silent, and she meanwhile was saying that for her there was no greater happiness than to see him, to follow him wherever he liked this very moment, to be his wife and helper, and that if he went away from her she would die of misery.

"I cannot stay here!" she said, wringing her hands. "I am sick of the house and this wood and the air. I cannot bear the everlasting peace and aimless life, I can't endure our colourless, pale people, who are all as like one another as two drops of water! They are all good-natured and warmhearted because they are all well-fed and know nothing of struggle or suffering,… I want to be in those big damp houses where people suffer, embittered by work and need…"

And this, too, seemed to Ognev affected and not to be taken seriously. When Vera had finished he still did not know what to say, but it was impossible to be silent, and he muttered:

"Vera Gavrilovna, I am very grateful to you, though I feel I've done nothing to deserve such… feeling… on your part. Besides, as an honest man I ought to tell you that… happiness depends on equality—that is, when both parties are… equally in love.…"

But he was immediately ashamed of his mutterings and ceased. He felt that his face at that moment looked stupid, guilty, blank, that it was strained and affected.… Vera must have been able to read the truth on his countenance, for she suddenly became grave, turned pale, and bent her head.

"You must forgive me," Ognev muttered, not able to endure the silence. "I respect you so much that… it pains me.…"

Vera turned sharply and walked rapidly homewards. Ognev followed her.

"No, don't!" said Vera, with a wave of her hand. "Don't come; I can go alone."

"Oh, yes… I must see you home anyway."

Whatever Ognev said, it all to the last word struck him as loathsome and flat. The feeling of guilt grew greater at every step. He raged inwardly, clenched his fists, and cursed his coldness and his stupidity with women. Trying to stir his feelings, he looked at Verotchka's beautiful figure, at her hair and the traces of her little feet on the dusty road; he remembered her words and her tears, but all that only touched his heart and did not quicken his pulse.

"Ach! one can't force oneself to love," he assured himself, and at the same time he thought, "But shall I ever fall in love without? I am nearly thirty! I have never met anyone better than Vera and I never shall.… Oh, this premature old age! Old age at thirty!"

Vera walked on in front more and more rapidly, without looking back at him or raising her head. It seemed to him that sorrow had made her thinner and narrower in the shoulders.

"I can imagine what's going on in her heart now!" he thought, looking at her back. "She must be ready to die with shame and mortification! My God, there's so much life, poetry, and meaning in it that it would move a stone, and I… I am stupid and absurd!"

At the gate Vera stole a glance at him, and, shrugging and wrapping her shawl round her walked rapidly away down the avenue.

Ivan Alexeyitch was left alone. Going back to the copse, he walked slowly, continually standing still and looking round at the gate with an expression in his whole figure that suggested that he could not believe his own memory. He looked for Vera's footprints on the road, and could not believe that the girl who had so attracted him had just declared her love, and that he had so clumsily and bluntly "refused" her. For the first time in his life it was his lot to learn by experience how little that a man does depends on his own will, and to suffer in his own person the feelings of a decent kindly man who has against his will caused his neighbour cruel, undeserved anguish.

His conscience tormented him, and when Vera disappeared he felt as though he had lost something very precious, something very near and dear which he could never find again. He felt that with Vera a part of his youth had slipped away from him, and that the moments which he had passed through so fruitlessly would never be repeated.

When he reached the bridge he stopped and sank into thought. He wanted to discover the reason of his strange coldness. That it was due to something within him and not outside himself was clear to him. He frankly acknowledged to himself that it was not the intellectual coldness of which clever people so often boast, not the coldness of a conceited fool, but simply impotence of soul, incapacity for being moved by beauty, premature old age brought on by education, his casual existence, struggling for a livelihood, his homeless life in lodgings. From the bridge he walked slowly, as it were reluctantly, into the wood. Here, where in the dense black darkness glaring patches of moonlight gleamed here and there, where he felt nothing except his thoughts, he longed passionately to regain what he had lost.

And Ivan Alexeyitch remembers that he went back again. Urging himself on with his memories, forcing himself to picture Vera, he strode rapidly towards the garden. There was no mist by then along the road or in the garden, and the bright moon looked down from the sky as though it had just been washed; only the eastern sky was dark and misty.… Ognev remembers his cautious steps, the dark windows, the heavy scent of heliotrope and mignonette. His old friend Karo, wagging his tail amicably, came up to him and sniffed his hand. This was the one living creature who saw him walk two or three times round the house, stand near Vera's dark window, and with a deep sigh and a wave of his hand walk out of the garden.

An hour later he was in the town, and, worn out and exhausted, leaned his body and hot face against the gatepost of the inn as he knocked at the

gate. Somewhere in the town a dog barked sleepily, and as though in response to his knock, someone clanged the hour on an iron plate near the church.

“You prowl about at night,” grumbled his host, the Old Believer, opening the door to him, in a long nightgown like a woman’s. “You had better be saying your prayers instead of prowling about.”

When Ivan Alexeyitch reached his room he sank on the bed and gazed a long, long time at the light. Then he tossed his head and began packing.

SHROVE TUESDAY

“Pavel Vassilitch!” cries Pelageya Ivanovna, waking her husband. “Pavel Vassilitch! You might go and help Styopa with his lessons, he is sitting crying over his book. He can’t understand something again!”

Pavel Vassilitch gets up, makes the sign of the cross over his mouth as he yawns, and says softly: “In a minute, my love!”

The cat who has been asleep beside him gets up too, straightens out its tail, arches its spine, and half-shuts its eyes. There is stillness.… Mice can be heard scurrying behind the wallpaper. Putting on his boots and his dressing-gown, Pavel Vassilitch, crumpled and frowning from sleepiness, comes out of his bedroom into the dining room; on his entrance another cat, engaged in sniffing a marinade of fish in the window, jumps down to the floor, and hides behind the cupboard.

“Who asked you to sniff that!” he says angrily, covering the fish with a sheet of newspaper. “You are a pig to do that, not a cat.…”

From the dining room there is a door leading into the nursery. There, at a table covered with stains and deep scratches, sits Styopa, a high school boy in the second class, with a peevish expression of face and tear-stained eyes. With his knees raised almost to his chin, and his hands clasped round them, he is swaying to and fro like a Chinese idol and looking crossly at a sum book.

“Are you working?” asks Pavel Vassilitch, sitting down to the table and yawning. “Yes, my boy.… We have enjoyed ourselves, slept, and eaten pancakes, and tomorrow comes Lenten fare, repentance, and going to work. Every period of time has its limits. Why are your eyes so red? Are you sick of learning your lessons? To be sure, after pancakes, lessons are nasty to swallow. That’s about it.”

“What are you laughing at the child for?” Pelageya Ivanovna calls from the next room. “You had better show him instead of laughing at him. He’ll get a one again tomorrow, and make me miserable.”

“What is it you don’t understand?” Pavel Vassilitch asks Styopa.

“Why this… division of fractions,” the boy answers crossly. “The division of fractions by fractions.…”

“H’m… queer boy! What is there in it? There’s nothing to understand in it. Learn the rules, and that’s all.… To divide a fraction by a fraction you must multiply the numerator of the first fraction by the denominator of the second, and that will be the numerator of the quotient.… In this case, the numerator of the first fraction.…”

“I know that without your telling me,” Styopa interrupts him, flicking a walnut shell off the table. “Show me the proof.”

“The proof? Very well, give me a pencil. Listen.… Suppose we want to divide seven eighths by two fifths. Well, the point of it is, my boy, that it’s required to divide these fractions by each other.… Have they set the samovar?”

“I don’t know.”

“It’s time for tea.… It’s past seven. Well, now listen. We will look at it like this.… Suppose we want to divide seven eighths not by two fifths but by two, that is, by the numerator only. We divide it, what do we get?”

“Seven sixteenths.”

“Right. Bravo! Well, the trick of it is, my boy, that if we… so if we have divided it by two then.… Wait a bit, I am getting muddled. I remember when I was at school, the teacher of arithmetic was called Sigismund Urbanitch, a Pole. He used to get into a muddle over every lesson. He would begin explaining some theory, get in a tangle, and turn crimson all over and race up and down the classroom as though someone were sticking an awl in his back, then he would blow his nose half a dozen times and begin to cry. But you know we were magnanimous to him, we pretended not to see it. ‘What is it, Sigismund Urbanitch?’ we used to ask him. ‘Have you got toothache?’ And what a set of young ruffians, regular cutthroats, we were, but yet we were magnanimous, you know! There weren’t any boys like you in my day, they were all great hulking fellows, great strapping louts, one taller than another. For instance, in our third class, there was Mamahin. My goodness, he was a solid chap! You know, a regular maypole, seven feet high. When he moved, the floor shook; when he brought his great fist down on your back, he would knock the breath out of your body! Not only we boys, but even the teachers were afraid of him. So this Mamahin used to…”

Pelageya Ivanovna’s footsteps are heard through the door. Pavel Vassilitch winks towards the door and says:

“There’s mother coming. Let’s get to work. Well, so you see, my boy,” he says, raising his voice. “This fraction has to be multiplied by that one.

Well, and to do that you have to take the numerator of the first fraction…”

“Come to tea!” cries Pelageya Ivanovna. Pavel Vassilitch and his son abandon arithmetic and go in to tea. Pelageya Ivanovna is already sitting at the table with an aunt who never speaks, another aunt who is deaf and dumb, and Granny Markovna, a midwife who had helped Styopa into the world. The samovar is hissing and puffing out steam which throws flickering shadows on the ceiling. The cats come in from the entry sleepy and melancholy with their tails in the air.…

“Have some jam with your tea, Markovna,” says Pelageya Ivanovna, addressing the midwife. “Tomorrow the great fast begins. Eat well today.”

Markovna takes a heaped spoonful of jam hesitatingly as though it were a powder, raises it to her lips, and with a sidelong look at Pavel Vassilitch, eats it; at once her face is overspread with a sweet smile, as sweet as the jam itself.

“The jam is particularly good,” she says. “Did you make it yourself, Pelageya Ivanovna, ma’am?”

“Yes. Who else is there to do it? I do everything myself. Styopotchka, have I given you your tea too weak? Ah, you have drunk it already. Pass your cup, my angel; let me give you some more.”

“So this Mamahin, my boy, could not bear the French master,” Pavel Vassilitch goes on, addressing his son. “‘I am a nobleman,’ he used to shout, ‘and I won’t allow a Frenchman to lord it over me! We beat the French in 1812!’ Well, of course they used to thrash him for it… thrash him dre-ead-fully, and sometimes when he saw they were meaning to thrash him, he would jump out of window, and off he would go! Then for five or six days afterwards he would not show himself at the school. His mother would come to the headmaster and beg him for God’s sake: ‘Be so kind, sir, as to find my Mishka, and flog him, the rascal!’ And the headmaster would say to her: ‘Upon my word, madam, our five porters aren’t a match for him!’”

“Good heavens, to think of such ruffians being born,” whispers Pelageya Ivanovna, looking at her husband in horror. “What a trial for the poor mother!”

A silence follows. Styopa yawns loudly, and scrutinises the Chinaman on the tea-caddy whom he has seen a thousand times already. Markovna and the two aunts sip tea carefully out of their saucers. The air is still and stifling from the stove.… Faces and gestures betray the sloth and repletion that comes when the stomach is full, and yet one must go on

eating. The samovar, the cups, and the tablecloth are cleared away, but still the family sits on at the table.… Pelageya Ivanovna is continually jumping up and, with an expression of alarm on her face, running off into the kitchen, to talk to the cook about the supper. The two aunts go on sitting in the same position immovably, with their arms folded across their bosoms and doze, staring with their pewtery little eyes at the lamp. Markovna hiccups every minute and asks:

"Why is it I have the hiccups? I don't think I have eaten anything to account for it… nor drunk anything either.… Hic!"

Pavel Vassilitch and Styopa sit side by side, with their heads touching, and, bending over the table, examine a volume of the *Neva* for 1878.

"'The monument of Leonardo da Vinci, facing the gallery of Victor Emmanuel at Milan.' I say!… After the style of a triumphal arch.… A cavalier with his lady.… And there are little men in the distance.…"

"That little man is like a schoolfellow of mine called Niskubin," says Styopa.

"Turn over.… 'The proboscis of the common housefly seen under the microscope.' So that's a proboscis! I say—a fly. Whatever would a bug look like under a microscope, my boy? Wouldn't it be horrid!"

The old-fashioned clock in the drawing room does not strike, but coughs ten times huskily as though it had a cold. The cook, Anna, comes into the dining room, and plumps down at the master's feet.

"Forgive me, for Christ's sake, Pavel Vassilitch!" she says, getting up, flushed all over.

"You forgive me, too, for Christ's sake," Pavel Vassilitch responds unconcernedly.

In the same manner, Anna goes up to the other members of the family, plumps down at their feet, and begs forgiveness. She only misses out Markovna to whom, not being one of the gentry, she does not feel it necessary to bow down.

Another half-hour passes in stillness and tranquillity. The *Neva* is by now lying on the sofa, and Pavel Vassilitch, holding up his finger, repeats by heart some Latin verses he has learned in his childhood. Styopa stares at the finger with the wedding ring, listens to the unintelligible words, and dozes; he rubs his eyelids with his fists, and they shut all the tighter.

"I am going to bed…" he says, stretching and yawning.

"What, to bed?" says Pelageya Ivanovna. "What about supper before the fast?"

"I don't want any."

“Are you crazy?” says his mother in alarm. “How can you go without your supper before the fast? You’ll have nothing but Lenten food all through the fast!”

Pavel Vassilitch is scared too.

“Yes, yes, my boy,” he says. “For seven weeks mother will give you nothing but Lenten food. You can’t miss the last supper before the fast.”

“Oh dear, I am sleepy,” says Styopa peevishly.

“Since that is how it is, lay the supper quickly,” Pavel Vassilitch cries in a fluster. “Anna, why are you sitting there, silly? Make haste and lay the table.”

Pelageya Ivanovna clasps her hands and runs into the kitchen with an expression as though the house were on fire.

“Make haste, make haste,” is heard all over the house. “Styopotchka is sleepy. Anna! Oh dear me, what is one to do? Make haste.”

Five minutes later the table is laid. Again the cats, arching their spines, and stretching themselves with their tails in the air, come into the dining room.… The family begin supper.… No one is hungry, everyone’s stomach is overfull, but yet they must eat.

A Defenceless Creature

In spite of a violent attack of gout in the night and the nervous exhaustion left by it, Kistunov went in the morning to his office and began punctually seeing the clients of the bank and persons who had come with petitions. He looked languid and exhausted, and spoke in a faint voice hardly above a whisper, as though he were dying.

"What can I do for you?" he asked a lady in an antediluvian mantle, whose back view was extremely suggestive of a huge dung-beetle.

"You see, your Excellency," the petitioner in question began, speaking rapidly, "my husband Shtchukin, a collegiate assessor, was ill for five months, and while he, if you will excuse my saying so, was laid up at home, he was for no sort of reason dismissed, your Excellency; and when I went for his salary they deducted, if you please, your Excellency, twenty-four roubles thirty-six kopecks from his salary. 'What for?' I asked. 'He borrowed from the club fund,' they told me, 'and the other clerks had stood security for him.' How was that? How could he have borrowed it without my consent? It's impossible, your Excellency. What's the reason of it? I am a poor woman, I earn my bread by taking in lodgers. I am a weak, defenceless woman… I have to put up with ill-usage from everyone and never hear a kind word…"

The petitioner was blinking, and dived into her mantle for her handkerchief. Kistunov took her petition from her and began reading it.

"Excuse me, what's this?" he asked, shrugging his shoulders. "I can make nothing of it. Evidently you have come to the wrong place, madam. Your petition has nothing to do with us at all. You will have to apply to the department in which your husband was employed."

"Why, my dear sir, I have been to five places already, and they would not even take the petition anywhere," said Madame Shtchukin. "I'd quite lost my head, but, thank goodness—God bless him for it—my son-in-law, Boris Matveyitch, advised me to come to you. 'You go to Mr. Kistunov, mamma: he is an influential man, he can do anything for you.…' Help me, your Excellency!"

“We can do nothing for you, Madame Shtchukin. You must understand: your husband served in the Army Medical Department, and our establishment is a purely private commercial undertaking, a bank. Surely you must understand that!”

Kistunov shrugged his shoulders again and turned to a gentleman in a military uniform, with a swollen face.

“Your Excellency,” piped Madame Shtchukin in a pitiful voice, “I have the doctor’s certificate that my husband was ill! Here it is, if you will kindly look at it.”

“Very good, I believe you,” Kistunov said irritably, “but I repeat it has nothing to do with us. It’s queer and positively absurd! Surely your husband must know where you are to apply?”

“He knows nothing, your Excellency. He keeps on: ‘It’s not your business! Get away!’—that’s all I can get out of him.… Whose business is it, then? It’s I have to keep them all!”

Kistunov again turned to Madame Shtchukin and began explaining to her the difference between the Army Medical Department and a private bank. She listened attentively, nodded in token of assent, and said:

“Yes… yes… yes… I understand, sir. In that case, your Excellency, tell them to pay me fifteen roubles at least! I agree to take part on account!”

“Ough!” sighed Kistunov, letting his head drop back. “There’s no making you see reason. Do understand that to apply to us with such a petition is as strange as to send in a petition concerning divorce, for instance, to a chemist’s or to the Assaying Board. You have not been paid your due, but what have we to do with it?”

“Your Excellency, make me remember you in my prayers for the rest of my days, have pity on a lone, lorn woman,” wailed Madame Shtchukin; “I am a weak, defenceless woman.… I am worried to death, I’ve to settle with the lodgers and see to my husband’s affairs and fly round looking after the house, and I am going to church every day this week, and my son-in-law is out of a job.… I might as well not eat or drink.… I can scarcely keep on my feet.… I haven’t slept all night.…”

Kistunov was conscious of the palpitation of his heart. With a face of anguish, pressing his hand on his heart, he began explaining to Madame Shtchukin again, but his voice failed him.

“No, excuse me, I cannot talk to you,” he said with a wave of his hand. “My head’s going round. You are hindering us and wasting your time. Ough! Alexey Nikolaitch,” he said, addressing one of his clerks, “please will you explain to Madame Shtchukin?”

Kistunov, passing by all the petitioners, went to his private room and signed about a dozen papers while Alexey Nikolaitch was still engaged with Madame Shtchukin. As he sat in his room Kistunov heard two voices: the monotonous, restrained bass of Alexey Nikolaitch and the shrill, wailing voice of Madame Shtchukin.

“I am a weak, defenceless woman, I am a woman in delicate health,” said Madame Shtchukin. “I look strong, but if you were to overhaul me there is not one healthy fibre in me. I can scarcely keep on my feet, and my appetite is gone.… I drank my cup of coffee this morning without the slightest relish.…”

Alexey Nikolaitch explained to her the difference between the departments and the complicated system of sending in papers. He was soon exhausted, and his place was taken by the accountant.

“A wonderfully disagreeable woman!” said Kistunov, revolted, nervously cracking his fingers and continually going to the decanter of water. “She’s a perfect idiot! She’s worn me out and she’ll exhaust them, the nasty creature! Ough!… my heart is throbbing.”

Half an hour later he rang his bell. Alexey Nikolaitch made his appearance.

“How are things going?” Kistunov asked languidly.

“We can’t make her see anything, Pyotr Alexandritch! We are simply done. We talk of one thing and she talks of something else.”

“I… I can’t stand the sound of her voice.… I am ill.… I can’t bear it.”

“Send for the porter, Pyotr Alexandritch, let him put her out.”

“No, no,” cried Kistunov in alarm. “She will set up a squeal, and there are lots of flats in this building, and goodness knows what they would think of us.… Do try and explain to her, my dear fellow.…”

A minute later the deep drone of Alexey Nikolaitch’s voice was audible again. A quarter of an hour passed, and instead of his bass there was the murmur of the accountant’s powerful tenor.

“Re-mark-ably nasty woman,” Kistunov thought indignantly, nervously shrugging his shoulders. “No more brains than a sheep. I believe that’s a twinge of the gout again.… My migraine is coming back.…”

In the next room Alexey Nikolaitch, at the end of his resources, at last tapped his finger on the table and then on his own forehead.

“The fact of the matter is you haven’t a head on your shoulders,” he said, “but this.”

“Come, come,” said the old lady, offended. “Talk to your own wife like that.… You screw!… Don’t be too free with your hands.”

And looking at her with fury, with exasperation, as though he would devour her, Alexey Nikolaitch said in a quiet, stifled voice:

"Clear out."

"Wha-at?" squealed Madame Shtchukin. "How dare you? I am a weak, defenceless woman; I won't endure it. My husband is a collegiate assessor. You screw!… I will go to Dmitri Karlitch, the lawyer, and there will be nothing left of you! I've had the law of three lodgers, and I will make you flop down at my feet for your saucy words! I'll go to your general. Your Excellency, your Excellency!"

"Be off, you pest," hissed Alexey Nikolaitch.

Kistunov opened his door and looked into the office.

"What is it?" he asked in a tearful voice.

Madame Shtchukin, as red as a crab, was standing in the middle of the room, rolling her eyes and prodding the air with her fingers. The bank clerks were standing round red in the face too, and, evidently harassed, were looking at each other distractedly.

"Your Excellency," cried Madame Shtchukin, pouncing upon Kistunov. "Here, this man, he here… this man…" (she pointed to Alexey Nikolaitch) "tapped himself on the forehead and then tapped the table.… You told him to go into my case, and he's jeering at me! I am a weak, defenceless woman.… My husband is a collegiate assessor, and I am a major's daughter myself!"

"Very good, madam," moaned Kistunov. "I will go into it… I will take steps.… Go away… later!"

"And when shall I get the money, your Excellency? I need it today!"

Kistunov passed his trembling hand over his forehead, heaved a sigh, and began explaining again.

"Madam, I have told you already this is a bank, a private commercial establishment.… What do you want of us? And do understand that you are hindering us."

Madame Shtchukin listened to him and sighed.

"To be sure, to be sure," she assented. "Only, your Excellency, do me the kindness, make me pray for you for the rest of my life, be a father, protect me! If a medical certificate is not enough I can produce an affidavit from the police.… Tell them to give me the money."

Everything began swimming before Kistunov's eyes. He breathed out all the air in his lungs in a prolonged sigh and sank helpless on a chair.

"How much do you want?" he asked in a weak voice.

"Twenty-four roubles and thirty-six kopecks."

Kistunov took his pocketbook out of his pocket, extracted a twenty-five rouble note and gave it to Madame Shtchukin.

“Take it and… and go away!”

Madame Shtchukin wrapped the money up in her handkerchief, put it away, and pursing up her face into a sweet, mincing, even coquettish smile, asked:

“Your Excellency, and would it be possible for my husband to get a post again?”

“I am going… I am ill…” said Kistunov in a weary voice. “I have dreadful palpitations.”

When he had driven home Alexey Nikolaitch sent Nikita for some laurel drops, and, after taking twenty drops each, all the clerks set to work, while Madame Shtchukin stayed another two hours in the vestibule, talking to the porter and waiting for Kistunov to return.…

She came again next day.

A Bad Business

“Who goes there?”

No answer. The watchman sees nothing, but through the roar of the wind and the trees distinctly hears someone walking along the avenue ahead of him. A March night, cloudy and foggy, envelopes the earth, and it seems to the watchman that the earth, the sky, and he himself with his thoughts are all merged together into something vast and impenetrably black. He can only grope his way.

“Who goes there?” the watchman repeats, and he begins to fancy that he hears whispering and smothered laughter. “Who’s there?”

“It’s I, friend…” answers an old man’s voice.

“But who are you?”

“I… a traveller.”

“What sort of traveller?” the watchman cries angrily, trying to disguise his terror by shouting. “What the devil do you want here? You go prowling about the graveyard at night, you ruffian!”

“You don’t say it’s a graveyard here?”

“Why, what else? Of course it’s the graveyard! Don’t you see it is?”

“O-o-oh… Queen of Heaven!” there is a sound of an old man sighing. “I see nothing, my good soul, nothing. Oh the darkness, the darkness! You can’t see your hand before your face, it is dark, friend. O-o-oh…”

“But who are you?”

“I am a pilgrim, friend, a wandering man.”

“The devils, the nightbirds.… Nice sort of pilgrims! They are drunkards…” mutters the watchman, reassured by the tone and sighs of the stranger. “One’s tempted to sin by you. They drink the day away and prowl about at night. But I fancy I heard you were not alone; it sounded like two or three of you.”

“I am alone, friend, alone. Quite alone. O-o-oh our sins.…”

The watchman stumbles up against the man and stops.

“How did you get here?” he asks.

“I have lost my way, good man. I was walking to the Mitrievsky Mill and I lost my way.”

“Whew! Is this the road to Mitrievsky Mill? You sheepshead! For the Mitrievsky Mill you must keep much more to the left, straight out of the town along the high road. You have been drinking and have gone a couple of miles out of your way. You must have had a drop in the town.”

“I did, friend… Truly I did; I won’t hide my sins. But how am I to go now?”

“Go straight on and on along this avenue till you can go no farther, and then turn at once to the left and go till you have crossed the whole graveyard right to the gate. There will be a gate there.… Open it and go with God’s blessing. Mind you don’t fall into the ditch. And when you are out of the graveyard you go all the way by the fields till you come out on the main road.”

“God give you health, friend. May the Queen of Heaven save you and have mercy on you. You might take me along, good man! Be merciful! Lead me to the gate.”

“As though I had the time to waste! Go by yourself!”

“Be merciful! I’ll pray for you. I can’t see anything; one can’t see one’s hand before one’s face, friend.… It’s so dark, so dark! Show me the way, sir!”

“As though I had the time to take you about; if I were to play the nurse to everyone I should never have done.”

“For Christ’s sake, take me! I can’t see, and I am afraid to go alone through the graveyard. It’s terrifying, friend, it’s terrifying; I am afraid, good man.”

“There’s no getting rid of you,” sighs the watchman. “All right then, come along.”

The watchman and the traveller go on together. They walk shoulder to shoulder in silence. A damp, cutting wind blows straight into their faces and the unseen trees murmuring and rustling scatter big drops upon them.… The path is almost entirely covered with puddles.

“There is one thing passes my understanding,” says the watchman after a prolonged silence—“how you got here. The gate’s locked. Did you climb over the wall? If you did climb over the wall, that’s the last thing you would expect of an old man.”

“I don’t know, friend, I don’t know. I can’t say myself how I got here. It’s a visitation. A chastisement of the Lord. Truly a visitation, the evil one confounded me. So you are a watchman here, friend?”

“Yes.”

“The only one for the whole graveyard?”

There is such a violent gust of wind that both stop for a minute. Waiting till the violence of the wind abates, the watchman answers:

“There are three of us, but one is lying ill in a fever and the other’s asleep. He and I take turns about.”

“Ah, to be sure, friend. What a wind! The dead must hear it! It howls like a wild beast! O-o-oh.”

“And where do you come from?”

“From a distance, friend. I am from Vologda, a long way off. I go from one holy place to another and pray for people. Save me and have mercy upon me, O Lord.”

The watchman stops for a minute to light his pipe. He stoops down behind the traveller’s back and lights several matches. The gleam of the first match lights up for one instant a bit of the avenue on the right, a white tombstone with an angel, and a dark cross; the light of the second match, flaring up brightly and extinguished by the wind, flashes like lightning on the left side, and from the darkness nothing stands out but the angle of some sort of trellis; the third match throws light to right and to left, revealing the white tombstone, the dark cross, and the trellis round a child’s grave.

“The departed sleep; the dear ones sleep!” the stranger mutters, sighing loudly. “They all sleep alike, rich and poor, wise and foolish, good and wicked. They are of the same value now. And they will sleep till the last trump. The Kingdom of Heaven and peace eternal be theirs.”

“Here we are walking along now, but the time will come when we shall be lying here ourselves,” says the watchman.

“To be sure, to be sure, we shall all. There is no man who will not die. O-o-oh. Our doings are wicked, our thoughts are deceitful! Sins, sins! My soul accursed, ever covetous, my belly greedy and lustful! I have angered the Lord and there is no salvation for me in this world and the next. I am deep in sins like a worm in the earth.”

“Yes, and you have to die.”

“You are right there.”

“Death is easier for a pilgrim than for fellows like us,” says the watchman.

“There are pilgrims of different sorts. There are the real ones who are God-fearing men and watch over their own souls, and there are such as stray about the graveyard at night and are a delight to the devils… Ye-es! There’s one who is a pilgrim could give you a crack on the pate with an axe if he liked and knock the breath out of you.”

“What are you talking like that for?”

“Oh, nothing… Why, I fancy here’s the gate. Yes, it is. Open it, good man.”

The watchman, feeling his way, opens the gate, leads the pilgrim out by the sleeve, and says:

“Here’s the end of the graveyard. Now you must keep on through the open fields till you get to the main road. Only close here there will be the boundary ditch—don’t fall in.… And when you come out on to the road, turn to the right, and keep on till you reach the mill.…”

“O-o-oh!” sighs the pilgrim after a pause, “and now I am thinking that I have no cause to go to Mitrievsky Mill.… Why the devil should I go there? I had better stay a bit with you here, sir.…”

“What do you want to stay with me for?”

“Oh… it’s merrier with you!…”

“So you’ve found a merry companion, have you? You, pilgrim, are fond of a joke I see.…”

“To be sure I am,” says the stranger, with a hoarse chuckle. “Ah, my dear good man, I bet you will remember the pilgrim many a long year!”

“Why should I remember you?”

“Why I’ve got round you so smartly.… Am I a pilgrim? I am not a pilgrim at all.”

“What are you then?”

“A dead man.… I’ve only just got out of my coffin.… Do you remember Gubaryev, the locksmith, who hanged himself in carnival week? Well, I am Gubaryev himself!…”

“Tell us something else!”

The watchman does not believe him, but he feels all over such a cold, oppressive terror that he starts off and begins hurriedly feeling for the gate.

“Stop, where are you off to?” says the stranger, clutching him by the arm. “Aie, aie, aie… what a fellow you are! How can you leave me all alone?”

“Let go!” cries the watchman, trying to pull his arm away.

“Sto-op! I bid you stop and you stop. Don’t struggle, you dirty dog! If you want to stay among the living, stop and hold your tongue till I tell you. It’s only that I don’t care to spill blood or you would have been a dead man long ago, you scurvy rascal.… Stop!”

The watchman’s knees give way under him. In his terror he shuts his eyes, and trembling all over huddles close to the wall. He would like to call out, but he knows his cries would not reach any living thing. The

stranger stands beside him and holds him by the arm.… Three minutes pass in silence.

“One’s in a fever, another’s asleep, and the third is seeing pilgrims on their way,” mutters the stranger. “Capital watchmen, they are worth their salary! Ye-es, brother, thieves have always been cleverer than watchmen! Stand still, don’t stir.…”

Five minutes, ten minutes pass in silence. All at once the wind brings the sound of a whistle.

“Well, now you can go,” says the stranger, releasing the watchman’s arm. “Go and thank God you are alive!”

The stranger gives a whistle too, runs away from the gate, and the watchman hears him leap over the ditch.

With a foreboding of something very dreadful in his heart, the watchman, still trembling with terror, opens the gate irresolutely and runs back with his eyes shut.

At the turning into the main avenue he hears hurried footsteps, and someone asks him, in a hissing voice: “Is that you, Timofey? Where is Mitka?”

And after running the whole length of the main avenue he notices a little dim light in the darkness. The nearer he gets to the light the more frightened he is and the stronger his foreboding of evil.

“It looks as though the light were in the church,” he thinks. “And how can it have come there? Save me and have mercy on me, Queen of Heaven! And that it is.”

The watchman stands for a minute before the broken window and looks with horror towards the altar.… A little wax candle which the thieves had forgotten to put out flickers in the wind that bursts in at the window and throws dim red patches of light on the vestments flung about and a cupboard overturned on the floor, on numerous footprints near the high altar and the altar of offerings.

A little time passes and the howling wind sends floating over the churchyard the hurried uneven clangs of the alarm-bell.…

HOME

“Someone came from the Grigoryevs’ to fetch a book, but I said you were not at home. The postman brought the newspaper and two letters. By the way, Yevgeny Petrovitch, I should like to ask you to speak to Seryozha. Today, and the day before yesterday, I have noticed that he is smoking. When I began to expostulate with him, he put his fingers in his ears as usual, and sang loudly to drown my voice.”

Yevgeny Petrovitch Bykovsky, the prosecutor of the circuit court, who had just come back from a session and was taking off his gloves in his study, looked at the governess as she made her report, and laughed.

“Seryozha smoking…” he said, shrugging his shoulders. “I can picture the little cherub with a cigarette in his mouth! Why, how old is he?”

“Seven. You think it is not important, but at his age smoking is a bad and pernicious habit, and bad habits ought to be eradicated in the beginning.”

“Perfectly true. And where does he get the tobacco?”

“He takes it from the drawer in your table.”

“Yes? In that case, send him to me.”

When the governess had gone out, Bykovsky sat down in an armchair before his writing-table, shut his eyes, and fell to thinking. He pictured his Seryozha with a huge cigar, a yard long, in the midst of clouds of tobacco smoke, and this caricature made him smile; at the same time, the grave, troubled face of the governess called up memories of the long past, half-forgotten time when smoking aroused in his teachers and parents a strange, not quite intelligible horror. It really was horror. Children were mercilessly flogged and expelled from school, and their lives were made a misery on account of smoking, though not a single teacher or father knew exactly what was the harm or sinfulness of smoking. Even very intelligent people did not scruple to wage war on a vice which they did not understand. Yevgeny Petrovitch remembered the headmaster of the high school, a very cultured and good-natured old man, who was so appalled when he found a high school boy with a

cigarette in his mouth that he turned pale, immediately summoned an emergency committee of the teachers, and sentenced the sinner to expulsion. This was probably a law of social life: the less an evil was understood, the more fiercely and coarsely it was attacked.

The prosecutor remembered two or three boys who had been expelled and their subsequent life, and could not help thinking that very often the punishment did a great deal more harm than the crime itself. The living organism has the power of rapidly adapting itself, growing accustomed and inured to any atmosphere whatever, otherwise man would be bound to feel at every moment what an irrational basis there often is underlying his rational activity, and how little of established truth and certainty there is even in work so responsible and so terrible in its effects as that of the teacher, of the lawyer, of the writer.…

And such light and discursive thoughts as visit the brain only when it is weary and resting began straying through Yevgeny Petrovitch's head; there is no telling whence and why they come, they do not remain long in the mind, but seem to glide over its surface without sinking deeply into it. For people who are forced for whole hours, and even days, to think by routine in one direction, such free private thinking affords a kind of comfort, an agreeable solace.

It was between eight and nine o'clock in the evening. Overhead, on the second storey, someone was walking up and down, and on the floor above that four hands were playing scales. The pacing of the man overhead who, to judge from his nervous step, was thinking of something harassing, or was suffering from toothache, and the monotonous scales gave the stillness of the evening a drowsiness that disposed to lazy reveries. In the nursery, two rooms away, the governess and Seryozha were talking.

"Pa-pa has come!" carolled the child. "Papa has co-ome. Pa! Pa! Pa!"

"*Votre père vous appelle, allez vite!*" cried the governess, shrill as a frightened bird. "I am speaking to you!"

"What am I to say to him, though?" Yevgeny Petrovitch wondered.

But before he had time to think of anything whatever his son Seryozha, a boy of seven, walked into the study.

He was a child whose sex could only have been guessed from his dress: weakly, white-faced, and fragile. He was limp like a hothouse plant, and everything about him seemed extraordinarily soft and tender: his movements, his curly hair, the look in his eyes, his velvet jacket.

"Good evening, papa!" he said, in a soft voice, clambering on to his father's knee and giving him a rapid kiss on his neck. "Did you send for

me?”

“Excuse me, Sergey Yevgenitch,” answered the prosecutor, removing him from his knee. “Before kissing we must have a talk, and a serious talk… I am angry with you, and don’t love you any more. I tell you, my boy, I don’t love you, and you are no son of mine.…”

Seryozha looked intently at his father, then shifted his eyes to the table, and shrugged his shoulders.

“What have I done to you?” he asked in perplexity, blinking. “I haven’t been in your study all day, and I haven’t touched anything.”

“Natalya Semyonovna has just been complaining to me that you have been smoking.… Is it true? Have you been smoking?”

“Yes, I did smoke once.… That’s true.…”

“Now you see you are lying as well,” said the prosecutor, frowning to disguise a smile. “Natalya Semyonovna has seen you smoking twice. So you see you have been detected in three misdeeds: smoking, taking someone else’s tobacco, and lying. Three faults.”

“Oh yes,” Seryozha recollected, and his eyes smiled. “That’s true, that’s true; I smoked twice: today and before.”

“So you see it was not once, but twice.… I am very, very much displeased with you! You used to be a good boy, but now I see you are spoilt and have become a bad one.”

Yevgeny Petrovitch smoothed down Seryozha’s collar and thought:

“What more am I to say to him!”

“Yes, it’s not right,” he continued. “I did not expect it of you. In the first place, you ought not to take tobacco that does not belong to you. Every person has only the right to make use of his own property; if he takes anyone else’s… he is a bad man!” (“I am not saying the right thing!” thought Yevgeny Petrovitch.) “For instance, Natalya Semyonovna has a box with her clothes in it. That’s her box, and we—that is, you and I—dare not touch it, as it is not ours. That’s right, isn’t it? You’ve got toy horses and pictures.… I don’t take them, do I? Perhaps I might like to take them, but… they are not mine, but yours!”

“Take them if you like!” said Seryozha, raising his eyebrows. “Please don’t hesitate, papa, take them! That yellow dog on your table is mine, but I don’t mind.… Let it stay.”

“You don’t understand me,” said Bykovsky. “You have given me the dog, it is mine now and I can do what I like with it; but I didn’t give you the tobacco! The tobacco is mine.” (“I am not explaining properly!” thought the prosecutor. “It’s wrong! Quite wrong!”) “If I want to smoke someone else’s tobacco, I must first of all ask his permission.…”

Languidly linking one phrase on to another and imitating the language of the nursery, Bykovsky tried to explain to his son the meaning of property. Seryozha gazed at his chest and listened attentively (he liked talking to his father in the evening), then he leaned his elbow on the edge of the table and began screwing up his shortsighted eyes at the papers and the inkstand. His eyes strayed over the table and rested on the gum-bottle.

"Papa, what is gum made of?" he asked suddenly, putting the bottle to his eyes.

Bykovsky took the bottle out of his hands and set it in its place and went on:

"Secondly, you smoke.… That's very bad. Though I smoke it does not follow that you may. I smoke and know that it is stupid, I blame myself and don't like myself for it." ("A clever teacher, I am!" he thought.) "Tobacco is very bad for the health, and anyone who smokes dies earlier than he should. It's particularly bad for boys like you to smoke. Your chest is weak, you haven't reached your full strength yet, and smoking leads to consumption and other illness in weak people. Uncle Ignat died of consumption, you know. If he hadn't smoked, perhaps he would have lived till now."

Seryozha looked pensively at the lamp, touched the lampshade with his finger, and heaved a sigh.

"Uncle Ignat played the violin splendidly!" he said. "His violin is at the Grigoryevs' now."

Seryozha leaned his elbows on the edge of the table again, and sank into thought. His white face wore a fixed expression, as though he were listening or following a train of thought of his own; distress and something like fear came into his big staring eyes. He was most likely thinking now of death, which had so lately carried off his mother and Uncle Ignat. Death carries mothers and uncles off to the other world, while their children and violins remain upon the earth. The dead live somewhere in the sky beside the stars, and look down from there upon the earth. Can they endure the parting?

"What am I to say to him?" thought Yevgeny Petrovitch. "He's not listening to me. Obviously he does not regard either his misdoings or my arguments as serious. How am I to drive it home?"

The prosecutor got up and walked about the study.

"Formerly, in my time, these questions were very simply settled," he reflected. "Every urchin who was caught smoking was thrashed. The cowardly and fainthearted did actually give up smoking, any who were

somewhat more plucky and intelligent, after the thrashing took to carrying tobacco in the legs of their boots, and smoking in the barn. When they were caught in the barn and thrashed again, they would go away to smoke by the river… and so on, till the boy grew up. My mother used to give me money and sweets not to smoke. Now that method is looked upon as worthless and immoral. The modern teacher, taking his stand on logic, tries to make the child form good principles, not from fear, nor from desire for distinction or reward, but consciously."

While he was walking about, thinking, Seryozha climbed up with his legs on a chair sideways to the table, and began drawing. That he might not spoil official paper nor touch the ink, a heap of half-sheets, cut on purpose for him, lay on the table together with a blue pencil.

"Cook was chopping up cabbage today and she cut her finger," he said, drawing a little house and moving his eyebrows. "She gave such a scream that we were all frightened and ran into the kitchen. Stupid thing! Natalya Semyonovna told her to dip her finger in cold water, but she sucked it… And how could she put a dirty finger in her mouth! That's not proper, you know, papa!"

Then he went on to describe how, while they were having dinner, a man with a hurdy-gurdy had come into the yard with a little girl, who had danced and sung to the music.

"He has his own train of thought!" thought the prosecutor. "He has a little world of his own in his head, and he has his own ideas of what is important and unimportant. To gain possession of his attention, it's not enough to imitate his language, one must also be able to think in the way he does. He would understand me perfectly if I really were sorry for the loss of the tobacco, if I felt injured and cried.… That's why no one can take the place of a mother in bringing up a child, because she can feel, cry, and laugh together with the child. One can do nothing by logic and morality. What more shall I say to him? What?"

And it struck Yevgeny Petrovitch as strange and absurd that he, an experienced advocate, who spent half his life in the practice of reducing people to silence, forestalling what they had to say, and punishing them, was completely at a loss and did not know what to say to the boy.

"I say, give me your word of honour that you won't smoke again," he said.

"Word of hon-nour!" carolled Seryozha, pressing hard on the pencil and bending over the drawing. "Word of hon-nour!"

"Does he know what is meant by 'word of honour'?" Bykovsky asked himself. "No, I am a poor teacher of morality! If some schoolmaster or

one of our legal fellows could peep into my brain at this moment he would call me a poor stick, and would very likely suspect me of unnecessary subtlety.… But in school and in court, of course, all these wretched questions are far more simply settled than at home; here one has to do with people whom one loves beyond everything, and love is exacting and complicates the question. If this boy were not my son, but my pupil, or a prisoner on his trial, I should not be so cowardly, and my thoughts would not be racing all over the place!”

Yevgeny Petrovitch sat down to the table and pulled one of Seryozha’s drawings to him. In it there was a house with a crooked roof, and smoke which came out of the chimney like a flash of lightning in zigzags up to the very edge of the paper; beside the house stood a soldier with dots for eyes and a bayonet that looked like the figure 4.

“A man can’t be taller than a house,” said the prosecutor.

Seryozha got on his knee, and moved about for some time to get comfortably settled there.

“No, papa!” he said, looking at his drawing. “If you were to draw the soldier small you would not see his eyes.”

Ought he to argue with him? From daily observation of his son the prosecutor had become convinced that children, like savages, have their own artistic standpoints and requirements peculiar to them, beyond the grasp of grown-up people. Had he been attentively observed, Seryozha might have struck a grown-up person as abnormal. He thought it possible and reasonable to draw men taller than houses, and to represent in pencil, not only objects, but even his sensations. Thus he would depict the sounds of an orchestra in the form of smoke like spherical blurs, a whistle in the form of a spiral thread.… To his mind sound was closely connected with form and colour, so that when he painted letters he invariably painted the letter *L* yellow, *M* red, *A* black, and so on.

Abandoning his drawing, Seryozha shifted about once more, got into a comfortable attitude, and busied himself with his father’s beard. First he carefully smoothed it, then he parted it and began combing it into the shape of whiskers.

“Now you are like Ivan Stepanovitch,” he said, “and in a minute you will be like our porter. Papa, why is it porters stand by doors? Is it to prevent thieves getting in?”

The prosecutor felt the child’s breathing on his face, he was continually touching his hair with his cheek, and there was a warm soft feeling in his soul, as soft as though not only his hands but his whole soul were lying on the velvet of Seryozha’s jacket.

He looked at the boy's big dark eyes, and it seemed to him as though from those wide pupils there looked out at him his mother and his wife and everything that he had ever loved.

"To think of thrashing him…" he mused. "A nice task to devise a punishment for him! How can we undertake to bring up the young? In old days people were simpler and thought less, and so settled problems boldly. But we think too much, we are eaten up by logic.… The more developed a man is, the more he reflects and gives himself up to subtleties, the more undecided and scrupulous he becomes, and the more timidity he shows in taking action. How much courage and self-confidence it needs, when one comes to look into it closely, to undertake to teach, to judge, to write a thick book.…"

It struck ten.

"Come, boy, it's bedtime," said the prosecutor. "Say good night and go."

"No, papa," said Seryozha, "I will stay a little longer. Tell me something! Tell me a story.…"

"Very well, only after the story you must go to bed at once."

Yevgeny Petrovitch on his free evenings was in the habit of telling Seryozha stories. Like most people engaged in practical affairs, he did not know a single poem by heart, and could not remember a single fairy tale, so he had to improvise. As a rule he began with the stereotyped: "In a certain country, in a certain kingdom," then he heaped up all kinds of innocent nonsense and had no notion as he told the beginning how the story would go on, and how it would end. Scenes, characters, and situations were taken at random, impromptu, and the plot and the moral came of itself as it were, with no plan on the part of the storyteller. Seryozha was very fond of this improvisation, and the prosecutor noticed that the simpler and the less ingenious the plot, the stronger the impression it made on the child.

"Listen," he said, raising his eyes to the ceiling. "Once upon a time, in a certain country, in a certain kingdom, there lived an old, very old emperor with a long grey beard, and… and with great grey moustaches like this. Well, he lived in a glass palace which sparkled and glittered in the sun, like a great piece of clear ice. The palace, my boy, stood in a huge garden, in which there grew oranges, you know… bergamots, cherries… tulips, roses, and lilies-of-the-valley were in flower in it, and birds of different colours sang there.… Yes.… On the trees there hung little glass bells, and, when the wind blew, they rang so sweetly that one was never tired of hearing them. Glass gives a softer, tenderer note than

metals.… Well, what next? There were fountains in the garden.… Do you remember you saw a fountain at Auntie Sonya’s summer villa? Well, there were fountains just like that in the emperor’s garden, only ever so much bigger, and the jets of water reached to the top of the highest poplar.”

Yevgeny Petrovitch thought a moment, and went on:

“The old emperor had an only son and heir of his kingdom—a boy as little as you. He was a good boy. He was never naughty, he went to bed early, he never touched anything on the table, and altogether he was a sensible boy. He had only one fault, he used to smoke.…”

Seryozha listened attentively, and looked into his father’s eyes without blinking. The prosecutor went on, thinking: “What next?” He spun out a long rigmarole, and ended like this:

“The emperor’s son fell ill with consumption through smoking, and died when he was twenty. His infirm and sick old father was left without anyone to help him. There was no one to govern the kingdom and defend the palace. Enemies came, killed the old man, and destroyed the palace, and now there are neither cherries, nor birds, nor little bells in the garden.… That’s what happened.”

This ending struck Yevgeny Petrovitch as absurd and naive, but the whole story made an intense impression on Seryozha. Again his eyes were clouded by mournfulness and something like fear; for a minute he looked pensively at the dark window, shuddered, and said, in a sinking voice:

“I am not going to smoke any more.…”

When he had said good night and gone away his father walked up and down the room and smiled to himself.

“They would tell me it was the influence of beauty, artistic form,” he meditated. “It may be so, but that’s no comfort. It’s not the right way, all the same.… Why must morality and truth never be offered in their crude form, but only with embellishments, sweetened and gilded like pills? It’s not normal.… It’s falsification… deception… tricks.…”

He thought of the jurymen to whom it was absolutely necessary to make a “speech,” of the general public who absorb history only from legends and historical novels, and of himself and how he had gathered an understanding of life not from sermons and laws, but from fables, novels, poems.

“Medicine should be sweet, truth beautiful, and man has had this foolish habit since the days of Adam… though, indeed, perhaps it is all

natural, and ought to be so.… There are many deceptions and delusions in nature that serve a purpose.”

He set to work, but lazy, intimate thoughts still strayed through his mind for a good while. Overhead the scales could no longer be heard, but the inhabitant of the second storey was still pacing from one end of the room to another.

The Lottery Ticket

Ivan Dmitritch, a middle-class man who lived with his family on an income of twelve hundred a year and was very well satisfied with his lot, sat down on the sofa after supper and began reading the newspaper.

"I forgot to look at the newspaper today," his wife said to him as she cleared the table. "Look and see whether the list of drawings is there."

"Yes, it is," said Ivan Dmitritch; "but hasn't your ticket lapsed?"

"No; I took the interest on Tuesday."

"What is the number?"

"Series 9,499, number 26."

"All right… we will look… 9,499 and 26."

Ivan Dmitritch had no faith in lottery luck, and would not, as a rule, have consented to look at the lists of winning numbers, but now, as he had nothing else to do and as the newspaper was before his eyes, he passed his finger downwards along the column of numbers. And immediately, as though in mockery of his scepticism, no further than the second line from the top, his eye was caught by the figure 9,499! Unable to believe his eyes, he hurriedly dropped the paper on his knees without looking to see the number of the ticket, and, just as though someone had given him a douche of cold water, he felt an agreeable chill in the pit of the stomach; tingling and terrible and sweet!

"Masha, 9,499 is there!" he said in a hollow voice.

His wife looked at his astonished and panic-stricken face, and realized that he was not joking.

"9,499?" she asked, turning pale and dropping the folded tablecloth on the table.

"Yes, yes… it really is there!"

"And the number of the ticket?"

"Oh, yes! There's the number of the ticket too. But stay… wait! No, I say! Anyway, the number of our series is there! Anyway, you understand.…"

Looking at his wife, Ivan Dmitritch gave a broad, senseless smile, like a baby when a bright object is shown it. His wife smiled too; it was as pleasant to her as to him that he only mentioned the series, and did not try to find out the number of the winning ticket. To torment and tantalize oneself with hopes of possible fortune is so sweet, so thrilling!

"It is our series," said Ivan Dmitritch, after a long silence. "So there is a probability that we have won. It's only a probability, but there it is!"

"Well, now look!"

"Wait a little. We have plenty of time to be disappointed. It's on the second line from the top, so the prize is seventy-five thousand. That's not money, but power, capital! And in a minute I shall look at the list, and there—26! Eh? I say, what if we really have won?"

The husband and wife began laughing and staring at one another in silence. The possibility of winning bewildered them; they could not have said, could not have dreamed, what they both needed that seventy-five thousand for, what they would buy, where they would go. They thought only of the figures 9,499 and 75,000 and pictured them in their imagination, while somehow they could not think of the happiness itself which was so possible.

Ivan Dmitritch, holding the paper in his hand, walked several times from corner to corner, and only when he had recovered from the first impression began dreaming a little.

"And if we have won," he said—"why, it will be a new life, it will be a transformation! The ticket is yours, but if it were mine I should, first of all, of course, spend twenty-five thousand on real property in the shape of an estate; ten thousand on immediate expenses, new furnishing… travelling… paying debts, and so on.… The other forty thousand I would put in the bank and get interest on it."

"Yes, an estate, that would be nice," said his wife, sitting down and dropping her hands in her lap.

"Somewhere in the Tula or Oryol provinces.… In the first place we shouldn't need a summer villa, and besides, it would always bring in an income."

And pictures came crowding on his imagination, each more gracious and poetical than the last. And in all these pictures he saw himself well-fed, serene, healthy, felt warm, even hot! Here, after eating a summer soup, cold as ice, he lay on his back on the burning sand close to a stream or in the garden under a lime tree.… It is hot.… His little boy and girl are crawling about near him, digging in the sand or catching ladybirds in the grass. He dozes sweetly, thinking of nothing, and feeling

all over that he need not go to the office today, tomorrow, or the day after. Or, tired of lying still, he goes to the hayfield, or to the forest for mushrooms, or watches the peasants catching fish with a net. When the sun sets he takes a towel and soap and saunters to the bathing-shed, where he undresses at his leisure, slowly rubs his bare chest with his hands, and goes into the water. And in the water, near the opaque soapy circles, little fish flit to and fro and green water-weeds nod their heads. After bathing there is tea with cream and milk rolls.… In the evening a walk or vint with the neighbours.

"Yes, it would be nice to buy an estate," said his wife, also dreaming, and from her face it was evident that she was enchanted by her thoughts.

Ivan Dmitritch pictured to himself autumn with its rains, its cold evenings, and its St. Martin's summer. At that season he would have to take longer walks about the garden and beside the river, so as to get thoroughly chilled, and then drink a big glass of vodka and eat a salted mushroom or a soused cucumber, and then—drink another.… The children would come running from the kitchen-garden, bringing a carrot and a radish smelling of fresh earth.… And then, he would lie stretched full length on the sofa, and in leisurely fashion turn over the pages of some illustrated magazine, or, covering his face with it and unbuttoning his waistcoat, give himself up to slumber.

The St. Martin's summer is followed by cloudy, gloomy weather. It rains day and night, the bare trees weep, the wind is damp and cold. The dogs, the horses, the fowls—all are wet, depressed, downcast. There is nowhere to walk; one can't go out for days together; one has to pace up and down the room, looking despondently at the grey window. It is dreary!

Ivan Dmitritch stopped and looked at his wife.

"I should go abroad, you know, Masha," he said.

And he began thinking how nice it would be in late autumn to go abroad somewhere to the South of France… to Italy… to India!

"I should certainly go abroad too," his wife said. "But look at the number of the ticket!"

"Wait, wait!…"

He walked about the room and went on thinking. It occurred to him: what if his wife really did go abroad? It is pleasant to travel alone, or in the society of light, careless women who live in the present, and not such as think and talk all the journey about nothing but their children, sigh, and tremble with dismay over every farthing. Ivan Dmitritch imagined his wife in the train with a multitude of parcels, baskets, and bags; she

would be sighing over something, complaining that the train made her head ache, that she had spent so much money.… At the stations he would continually be having to run for boiling water, bread and butter.… She wouldn't have dinner because of its being too dear.…

"She would begrudge me every farthing," he thought, with a glance at his wife. "The lottery ticket is hers, not mine! Besides, what is the use of her going abroad? What does she want there? She would shut herself up in the hotel, and not let me out of her sight.… I know!"

And for the first time in his life his mind dwelt on the fact that his wife had grown elderly and plain, and that she was saturated through and through with the smell of cooking, while he was still young, fresh, and healthy, and might well have got married again.

"Of course, all that is silly nonsense," he thought; "but… why should she go abroad? What would she make of it? And yet she would go, of course.… I can fancy… In reality it is all one to her, whether it is Naples or Klin. She would only be in my way. I should be dependent upon her. I can fancy how, like a regular woman, she will lock the money up as soon as she gets it.… She will hide it from me.… She will look after her relations and grudge me every farthing."

Ivan Dmitritch thought of her relations. All those wretched brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles would come crawling about as soon as they heard of the winning ticket, would begin whining like beggars, and fawning upon them with oily, hypocritical smiles. Wretched, detestable people! If they were given anything, they would ask for more; while if they were refused, they would swear at them, slander them, and wish them every kind of misfortune.

Ivan Dmitritch remembered his own relations, and their faces, at which he had looked impartially in the past, struck him now as repulsive and hateful.

"They are such reptiles!" he thought.

And his wife's face, too, struck him as repulsive and hateful. Anger surged up in his heart against her, and he thought malignantly:

"She knows nothing about money, and so she is stingy. If she won it she would give me a hundred roubles, and put the rest away under lock and key."

And he looked at his wife, not with a smile now, but with hatred. She glanced at him too, and also with hatred and anger. She had her own daydreams, her own plans, her own reflections; she understood perfectly well what her husband's dreams were. She knew who would be the first to try and grab her winnings.

“It’s very nice making daydreams at other people’s expense!” is what her eyes expressed. “No, don’t you dare!”

Her husband understood her look; hatred began stirring again in his breast, and in order to annoy his wife he glanced quickly, to spite her at the fourth page on the newspaper and read out triumphantly:

“Series 9,499, number 46! Not 26!”

Hatred and hope both disappeared at once, and it began immediately to seem to Ivan Dmitritch and his wife that their rooms were dark and small and low-pitched, that the supper they had been eating was not doing them good, but lying heavy on their stomachs, that the evenings were long and wearisome.…

“What the devil’s the meaning of it?” said Ivan Dmitritch, beginning to be ill-humoured. “Wherever one steps there are bits of paper under one’s feet, crumbs, husks. The rooms are never swept! One is simply forced to go out. Damnation take my soul entirely! I shall go and hang myself on the first aspen tree!”

Too Early!

The bells are ringing for service in the village of Shalmovo. The sun is already kissing the earth on the horizon; it has turned crimson and will soon disappear. In Semyon's pothouse, which has lately changed its name and become a restaurant—a title quite out of keeping with the wretched little hut with its thatch torn off its roof, and its couple of dingy windows—two peasant sportsmen are sitting. One of them is called Filimon Slyunka; he is an old man of sixty, formerly a house-serf, belonging to the Counts Zavalin, by trade a carpenter. He has at one time been employed in a nail factory, has been turned off for drunkenness and idleness, and now lives upon his old wife, who begs for alms. He is thin and weak, with a mangy-looking little beard, speaks with a hissing sound, and after every word twitches the right side of his face and jerkily shrugs his right shoulder. The other, Ignat Ryabov, a sturdy, broad-shouldered peasant who never does anything and is everlastingly silent, is sitting in the corner under a big string of bread rings. The door, opening inwards, throws a thick shadow upon him, so that Slyunka and Semyon the publican can see nothing but his patched knees, his long fleshy nose, and a big tuft of hair which has escaped from the thick uncombed tangle covering his head. Semyon, a sickly little man, with a pale face and a long sinewy neck, stands behind his counter, looks mournfully at the string of bread rings, and coughs meekly.

"You think it over now, if you have any sense," Slyunka says to him, twitching his cheek. "You have the thing lying by unused and get no sort of benefit from it. While we need it. A sportsman without a gun is like a sacristan without a voice. You ought to understand that, but I see you don't understand it, so you can have no real sense.… Hand it over!"

"You left the gun in pledge, you know!" says Semyon in a thin womanish little voice, sighing deeply, and not taking his eyes off the string of bread rings. "Hand over the rouble you borrowed, and then take your gun."

“I haven’t got a rouble. I swear to you, Semyon Mitritch, as God sees me: you give me the gun and I will go today with Ignashka and bring it you back again. I’ll bring it back, strike me dead. May I have happiness neither in this world nor the next, if I don’t.”

“Semyon Mitritch, do give it,” Ignat Ryabov says in his bass, and his voice betrays a passionate desire to get what he asks for.

“But what do you want the gun for?” sighs Semyon, sadly shaking his head. “What sort of shooting is there now? It’s still winter outside, and no game at all but crows and jackdaws.”

“Winter, indeed,” says Slyunka, hooing the ash out of his pipe with his finger, “it is early yet of course, but you never can tell with the snipe. The snipe’s a bird that wants watching. If you are unlucky, you may sit waiting at home, and miss his flying over, and then you must wait till autumn.… It is a business! The snipe is not a rook.… Last year he was flying the week before Easter, while the year before we had to wait till the week after Easter! Come, do us a favour, Semyon Mitritch, give us the gun. Make us pray for you forever. As ill-luck would have it, Ignashka has pledged his gun for drink too. Ah, when you drink you feel nothing, but now… ah, I wish I had never looked at it, the cursed vodka! Truly it is the blood of Satan! Give it us, Semyon Mitritch!”

“I won’t give it you,” says Semyon, clasping his yellow hands on his breast as though he were going to pray. “You must act fairly, Filimonushka.… A thing is not taken out of pawn just anyhow; you must pay the money.… Besides, what do you want to kill birds for? What’s the use? It’s Lent now—you are not going to eat them.”

Slyunka exchanges glances with Ryabov in embarrassment, sighs, and says: “We would only go stand-shooting.”

“And what for? It’s all foolishness. You are not the sort of man to spend your time in foolishness.… Ignashka, to be sure, is a man of no understanding, God has afflicted him, but you, thank the Lord, are an old man. It’s time to prepare for your end. Here, you ought to go to the midnight service.”

The allusion to his age visibly stings Slyunka. He clears his throat, wrinkles up his forehead, and remains silent for a full minute.

“I say, Semyon Mitritch,” he says hotly, getting up and twitching not only in his right cheek but all over his face. “It’s God’s truth.… May the Almighty strike me dead, after Easter I shall get something from Stepan Kuzmitch for an axle, and I will pay you not one rouble but two! May the Lord chastise me! Before the holy image, I tell you, only give me the gun!”

“Gi-ive it,” Ryabov says in his growling bass; they can hear him breathing hard, and it seems that he would like to say a great deal, but cannot find the words. “Gi-ive it.”

“No, brothers, and don’t ask,” sighs Semyon, shaking his head mournfully. “Don’t lead me into sin. I won’t give you the gun. It’s not the fashion for a thing to be taken out of pawn and no money paid. Besides—why this indulgence? Go your way and God bless you!”

Slyunka rubs his perspiring face with his sleeve and begins hotly swearing and entreating. He crosses himself, holds out his hands to the icon, calls his deceased father and mother to bear witness, but Semyon sighs and meekly looks as before at the string of bread rings. In the end Ignashka Ryabov, hitherto motionless, gets up impulsively and bows down to the ground before the innkeeper, but even that has no effect on him.

“May you choke with my gun, you devil,” says Slyunka, with his face twitching, and his shoulders, shrugging. “May you choke, you plague, you scoundrelly soul.”

Swearing and shaking his fists, he goes out of the tavern with Ryabov and stands still in the middle of the road.

“He won’t give it, the damned brute,” he says, in a weeping voice, looking into Ryabov’s face with an injured air.

“He won’t give it,” booms Ryabov.

The windows of the furthest huts, the starling cote on the tavern, the tops of the poplars, and the cross on the church are all gleaming with a bright golden flame. Now they can see only half of the sun, which, as it goes to its night’s rest, is winking, shedding a crimson light, and seems laughing gleefully. Slyunka and Ryabov can see the forest lying, a dark blur, to the right of the sun, a mile and a half from the village, and tiny clouds flitting over the clear sky, and they feel that the evening will be fine and still.

“Now is just the time,” says Slyunka, with his face twitching. “It would be nice to stand for an hour or two. He won’t give it us, the damned brute. May he…”

“For stand-shooting, now is the very time…” Ryabov articulated, as though with an effort, stammering.

After standing still for a little they walk out of the village, without saying a word to each other, and look towards the dark streak of the forest. The whole sky above the forest is studded with moving black spots, the rooks flying home to roost. The snow, lying white here and

there on the dark brown plough-land, is lightly flecked with gold by the sun.

"This time last year I went stand-shooting in Zhivki," says Slyunka, after a long silence. "I brought back three snipe."

Again there follows a silence. Both stand a long time and look towards the forest, and then lazily move and walk along the muddy road from the village.

"It's most likely the snipe haven't come yet," says Slyunka, "but may be they are here."

"Kostka says they are not here yet."

"Maybe they are not, who can tell; one year is not like another. But what mud!"

"But we ought to stand."

"To be sure we ought—why not?"

"We can stand and watch; it wouldn't be amiss to go to the forest and have a look. If they are there we will tell Kostka, or maybe get a gun ourselves and come tomorrow. What a misfortune, God forgive me. It was the devil put it in my mind to take my gun to the pothouse! I am more sorry than I can tell you, Ignashka."

Conversing thus, the sportsmen approach the forest. The sun has set and left behind it a red streak like the glow of a fire, scattered here and there with clouds; there is no catching the colours of those clouds: their edges are red, but they themselves are one minute grey, at the next lilac, at the next ashen.

In the forest, among the thick branches of fir trees and under the birch bushes, it is dark, and only the outermost twigs on the side of the sun, with their fat buds and shining bark, stand out clearly in the air. There is a smell of thawing snow and rotting leaves. It is still; nothing stirs. From the distance comes the subsiding caw of the rooks.

"We ought to be standing in Zhivki now," whispers Slyunka, looking with awe at Ryabov; "there's good stand-shooting there."

Ryabov too looks with awe at Slyunka, with unblinking eyes and open mouth.

"A lovely time," Slyunka says in a trembling whisper. "The Lord is sending a fine spring… and I should think the snipe are here by now.… Why not? The days are warm now.… The cranes were flying in the morning, lots and lots of them."

Slyunka and Ryabov, splashing cautiously through the melting snow and sticking in the mud, walk two hundred paces along the edge of the forest and there halt. Their faces wear a look of alarm and expectation of

something terrible and extraordinary. They stand like posts, do not speak nor stir, and their hands gradually fall into an attitude as though they were holding a gun at the cock.…

A big shadow creeps from the left and envelops the earth. The dusk of evening comes on. If one looks to the right, through the bushes and tree trunks, there can be seen crimson patches of the afterglow. It is still and damp.…

“There’s no sound of them,” whispers Slyunka, shrugging with the cold and sniffing with his chilly nose.

But frightened by his own whisper, he holds his finger up at someone, opens his eyes wide, and purses up his lips. There is a sound of a light snapping. The sportsmen look at each other significantly, and tell each other with their eyes that it is nothing. It is the snapping of a dry twig or a bit of bark. The shadows of evening keep growing and growing, the patches of crimson gradually grow dim, and the dampness becomes unpleasant.

The sportsmen remain standing a long time, but they see and hear nothing. Every instant they expect to see a delicate leaf float through the air, to hear a hurried call like the husky cough of a child, and the flutter of wings.

“No, not a sound,” Slyunka says aloud, dropping his hands and beginning to blink. “So they have not come yet.”

“It’s early!”

“You are right there.”

The sportsmen cannot see each other’s faces, it is getting rapidly dark.

“We must wait another five days,” says Slyunka, as he comes out from behind a bush with Ryabov. “It’s too early!”

They go homewards, and are silent all the way.

TYPHUS

A young lieutenant called Klimov was travelling from Petersburg to Moscow in a smoking carriage of the mail train. Opposite him was sitting an elderly man with a shaven face like a sea captain's, by all appearances a well-to-do Finn or Swede. He pulled at his pipe the whole journey and kept talking about the same subject:

"Ha, you are an officer! I have a brother an officer too, only he is a naval officer.… He is a naval officer, and he is stationed at Kronstadt. Why are you going to Moscow?"

"I am serving there."

"Ha! And are you a family man?"

"No, I live with my sister and aunt."

"My brother's an officer, only he is a naval officer; he has a wife and three children. Ha!"

The Finn seemed continually surprised at something, and gave a broad idiotic grin when he exclaimed "Ha!" and continually puffed at his stinking pipe. Klimov, who for some reason did not feel well, and found it burdensome to answer questions, hated him with all his heart. He dreamed of how nice it would be to snatch the wheezing pipe out of his hand and fling it under the seat, and drive the Finn himself into another compartment.

"Detestable people these Finns and… Greeks," he thought. "Absolutely superfluous, useless, detestable people. They simply fill up space on the earthly globe. What are they for?"

And the thought of Finns and Greeks produced a feeling akin to sickness all over his body. For the sake of comparison he tried to think of the French, of the Italians, but his efforts to think of these people evoked in his mind, for some reason, nothing but images of organ-grinders, naked women, and the foreign oleographs which hung over the chest of drawers at home, at his aunt's.

Altogether the officer felt in an abnormal state. He could not arrange his arms and legs comfortably on the seat, though he had the whole seat

to himself. His mouth felt dry and sticky; there was a heavy fog in his brain; his thoughts seemed to be straying, not only within his head, but outside his skull, among the seats and the people that were shrouded in the darkness of night. Through the mist in his brain, as through a dream, he heard the murmur of voices, the rumble of wheels, the slamming of doors. The sounds of the bells, the whistles, the guards, the running to and fro of passengers on the platforms, seemed more frequent than usual. The time flew by rapidly, imperceptibly, and so it seemed as though the train were stopping at stations every minute, and metallic voices crying continually:

"Is the mail ready?"

"Yes!" was repeatedly coming from outside.

It seemed as though the man in charge of the heating came in too often to look at the thermometer, that the noise of trains going in the opposite direction and the rumble of the wheels over the bridges was incessant. The noise, the whistles, the Finn, the tobacco smoke—all this mingling with the menace and flickering of the misty images in his brain, the shape and character of which a man in health can never recall, weighed upon Klimov like an unbearable nightmare. In horrible misery he lifted his heavy head, looked at the lamp in the rays of which shadows and misty blurs seemed to be dancing. He wanted to ask for water, but his parched tongue would hardly move, and he scarcely had strength to answer the Finn's questions. He tried to lie down more comfortably and go to sleep, but he could not succeed. The Finn several times fell asleep, woke up again, lighted his pipe, addressed him with his "Ha!" and went to sleep again; and still the lieutenant's legs could not get into a comfortable position, and still the menacing images stood facing him.

At Spirovo he went out into the station for a drink of water. He saw people sitting at the table and hurriedly eating.

"And how can they eat!" he thought, trying not to sniff the air, that smelt of roast meat, and not to look at the munching mouths—they both seemed to him sickeningly disgusting.

A good-looking lady was conversing loudly with a military man in a red cap, and showing magnificent white teeth as she smiled; and the smile, and the teeth, and the lady herself made on Klimov the same revolting impression as the ham and the rissoles. He could not understand how it was the military man in the red cap was not ill at ease, sitting beside her and looking at her healthy, smiling face.

When after drinking some water he went back to his carriage, the Finn was sitting smoking; his pipe was wheezing and squelching like a golosh

with holes in it in wet weather.

"Ha!" he said, surprised; "what station is this?"

"I don't know," answered Klimov, lying down and shutting his mouth that he might not breathe the acrid tobacco smoke.

"And when shall we reach Tver?"

"I don't know. Excuse me, I… I can't answer. I am ill. I caught cold today."

The Finn knocked his pipe against the window-frame and began talking of his brother, the naval officer. Klimov no longer heard him; he was thinking miserably of his soft, comfortable bed, of a bottle of cold water, of his sister Katya, who was so good at making one comfortable, soothing, giving one water. He even smiled when the vision of his orderly Pavel, taking off his heavy stifling boots and putting water on the little table, flitted through his imagination. He fancied that if he could only get into his bed, have a drink of water, his nightmare would give place to sound healthy sleep.

"Is the mail ready?" a hollow voice reached him from the distance.

"Yes," answered a bass voice almost at the window.

It was already the second or third station from Spirovo.

The time was flying rapidly in leaps and bounds, and it seemed as though the bells, whistles, and stoppings would never end. In despair Klimov buried his face in the corner of the seat, clutched his head in his hands, and began again thinking of his sister Katya and his orderly Pavel, but his sister and his orderly were mixed up with the misty images in his brain, whirled round, and disappeared. His burning breath, reflected from the back of the seat, seemed to scald his face; his legs were uncomfortable; there was a draught from the window on his back; but, however wretched he was, he did not want to change his position.… A heavy nightmarish lethargy gradually gained possession of him and fettered his limbs.

When he brought himself to raise his head, it was already light in the carriage. The passengers were putting on their fur coats and moving about. The train was stopping. Porters in white aprons and with discs on their breasts were bustling among the passengers and snatching up their boxes. Klimov put on his greatcoat, mechanically followed the other passengers out of the carriage, and it seemed to him that not he, but someone else was moving, and he felt that his fever, his thirst, and the menacing images which had not let him sleep all night, came out of the carriage with him. Mechanically he took his luggage and engaged a sledge-driver. The man asked him for a rouble and a quarter to drive to

Povarsky Street, but he did not haggle, and without protest got submissively into the sledge. He still understood the difference of numbers, but money had ceased to have any value to him.

At home Klimov was met by his aunt and his sister Katya, a girl of eighteen. When Katya greeted him she had a pencil and exercise book in her hand, and he remembered that she was preparing for an examination as a teacher. Gasping with fever, he walked aimlessly through all the rooms without answering their questions or greetings, and when he reached his bed he sank down on the pillow. The Finn, the red cap, the lady with the white teeth, the smell of roast meat, the flickering blurs, filled his consciousness, and by now he did not know where he was and did not hear the agitated voices.

When he recovered consciousness he found himself in bed, undressed, saw a bottle of water and Pavel, but it was no cooler, nor softer, nor more comfortable for that. His arms and legs, as before, refused to lie comfortably; his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, and he heard the wheezing of the Finn's pipe.… A stalwart, black-bearded doctor was busy doing something beside the bed, brushing against Pavel with his broad back.

"It's all right, it's all right, young man," he muttered. "Excellent, excellent… goo-od, goo-od…!"

The doctor called Klimov "young man," said "goo-od" instead of "good" and "so-o" instead of "so."

"So-o… so-o… so-o," he murmured. "Goo-od, goo-od…! Excellent, young man. You mustn't lose heart!"

The doctor's rapid, careless talk, his well-fed countenance, and condescending "young man," irritated Klimov.

"Why do you call me 'young man'?" he moaned. "What familiarity! Damn it all!"

And he was frightened by his own voice. The voice was so dried up, so weak and peevish, that he would not have known it.

"Excellent, excellent!" muttered the doctor, not in the least offended.… "You mustn't get angry, so-o, so-o, so-o.…"

And the time flew by at home with the same startling swiftness as in the railway carriage. The daylight was continually being replaced by the dusk of evening. The doctor seemed never to leave his bedside, and he heard at every moment his "so-o, so-o, so-o." A continual succession of people was incessantly crossing the bedroom. Among them were: Pavel, the Finn, Captain Yaroshevitch, Lance-Corporal Maximenko, the red cap, the lady with the white teeth, the doctor. They were all talking and

waving their arms, smoking and eating. Once by daylight Klimov saw the chaplain of the regiment, Father Alexandr, who was standing before the bed, wearing a stole and with a prayerbook in his hand. He was muttering something with a grave face such as Klimov had never seen in him before. The lieutenant remembered that Father Alexandr used in a friendly way to call all the Catholic officers “Poles,” and wanting to amuse him, he cried:

“Father, Yaroshevitch the Pole has climbed up a pole!”

But Father Alexandr, a lighthearted man who loved a joke, did not smile, but became graver than ever, and made the sign of the cross over Klimov. At nighttime by turn two shadows came noiselessly in and out; they were his aunt and sister. His sister’s shadow knelt down and prayed; she bowed down to the icon, and her grey shadow on the wall bowed down too, so that two shadows were praying. The whole time there was a smell of roast meat and the Finn’s pipe, but once Klimov smelt the strong smell of incense. He felt so sick he could not lie still, and began shouting:

“The incense! Take away the incense!”

There was no answer. He could only hear the subdued singing of the priest somewhere and someone running upstairs.

When Klimov came to himself there was not a soul in his bedroom. The morning sun was streaming in at the window through the lower blind, and a quivering sunbeam, bright and keen as the sword’s edge, was flashing on the glass bottle. He heard the rattle of wheels—so there was no snow now in the street. The lieutenant looked at the ray, at the familiar furniture, at the door, and the first thing he did was to laugh. His chest and stomach heaved with delicious, happy, tickling laughter. His whole body from head to foot was overcome by a sensation of infinite happiness and joy in life, such as the first man must have felt when he was created and first saw the world. Klimov felt a passionate desire for movement, people, talk. His body lay a motionless block; only his hands stirred, but that he hardly noticed, and his whole attention was concentrated on trifles. He rejoiced in his breathing, in his laughter, rejoiced in the existence of the water bottle, the ceiling, the sunshine, the tape on the curtains. God’s world, even in the narrow space of his bedroom, seemed beautiful, varied, grand. When the doctor made his appearance, the lieutenant was thinking what a delicious thing medicine was, how charming and pleasant the doctor was, and how nice and interesting people were in general.

“So-o, so, so… Excellent, excellent!… Now we are well again.… Goo-od, goo-od!” the doctor pattered.

The lieutenant listened and laughed joyously; he remembered the Finn, the lady with the white teeth, the train, and he longed to smoke, to eat.

“Doctor,” he said, “tell them to give me a crust of rye bread and salt, and… and sardines.”

The doctor refused; Pavel did not obey the order, and did not go for the bread. The lieutenant could not bear this and began crying like a naughty child.

“Baby!” laughed the doctor. “Mammy, bye-bye!”

Klimov laughed, too, and when the doctor went away he fell into a sound sleep. He woke up with the same joyfulness and sensation of happiness. His aunt was sitting near the bed.

“Well, aunt,” he said joyfully. “What has been the matter?”

“Spotted typhus.”

“Really. But now I am well, quite well! Where is Katya?”

“She is not at home. I suppose she has gone somewhere from her examination.”

The old lady said this and looked at her stocking; her lips began quivering, she turned away, and suddenly broke into sobs. Forgetting the doctor’s prohibition in her despair, she said:

“Ah, Katya, Katya! Our angel is gone! Is gone!”

She dropped her stocking and bent down to it, and as she did so her cap fell off her head. Looking at her grey head and understanding nothing, Klimov was frightened for Katya, and asked:

“Where is she, aunt?”

The old woman, who had forgotten Klimov and was thinking only of her sorrow, said:

“She caught typhus from you, and is dead. She was buried the day before yesterday.”

This terrible, unexpected news was fully grasped by Klimov’s consciousness; but terrible and startling as it was, it could not overcome the animal joy that filled the convalescent. He cried and laughed, and soon began scolding because they would not let him eat.

Only a week later when, leaning on Pavel, he went in his dressing gown to the window, looked at the overcast spring sky and listened to the unpleasant clang of the old iron rails which were being carted by, his heart ached, he burst into tears, and leaned his forehead against the window-frame.

“How miserable I am!” he muttered. “My God, how miserable!”

And joy gave way to the boredom of everyday life and the feeling of his irrevocable loss.

In Passion Week

“Go along, they are ringing already; and mind, don’t be naughty in church or God will punish you.”

My mother thrusts a few copper coins upon me, and, instantly forgetting about me, runs into the kitchen with an iron that needs reheating. I know well that after confession I shall not be allowed to eat or drink, and so, before leaving the house, I force myself to eat a crust of white bread, and to drink two glasses of water. It is quite spring in the street. The roads are all covered with brownish slush, in which future paths are already beginning to show; the roofs and sidewalks are dry; the fresh young green is piercing through the rotting grass of last year, under the fences. In the gutters there is the merry gurgling and foaming of dirty water, in which the sunbeams do not disdain to bathe. Chips, straws, the husks of sunflower seeds are carried rapidly along in the water, whirling round and sticking in the dirty foam. Where, where are those chips swimming to? It may well be that from the gutter they may pass into the river, from the river into the sea, and from the sea into the ocean. I try to imagine to myself that long terrible journey, but my fancy stops short before reaching the sea.

A cabman drives by. He clicks to his horse, tugs at the reins, and does not see that two street urchins are hanging on the back of his cab. I should like to join them, but think of confession, and the street urchins begin to seem to me great sinners.

“They will be asked on the day of judgment: ‘Why did you play pranks and deceive the poor cabman?’ ” I think. “They will begin to defend themselves, but evil spirits will seize them, and drag them to fire everlasting. But if they obey their parents, and give the beggars a kopeck each, or a roll, God will have pity on them, and will let them into Paradise.”

The church porch is dry and bathed in sunshine. There is not a soul in it. I open the door irresolutely and go into the church. Here, in the twilight which seems to me thick and gloomy as at no other time, I am

overcome by the sense of sinfulness and insignificance. What strikes the eye first of all is a huge crucifix, and on one side of it the Mother of God, and on the other, St. John the Divine. The candelabra and the candlestands are draped in black mourning covers, the lamps glimmer dimly and faintly, and the sun seems intentionally to pass by the church windows. The Mother of God and the beloved disciple of Jesus Christ, depicted in profile, gaze in silence at the insufferable agony and do not observe my presence; I feel that to them I am alien, superfluous, unnoticed, that I can be no help to them by word or deed, that I am a loathsome, dishonest boy, only capable of mischief, rudeness, and talebearing. I think of all the people I know, and they all seem to me petty, stupid, and wicked, and incapable of bringing one drop of relief to that intolerable sorrow which I now behold.

The twilight of the church grows darker and more gloomy. And the Mother of God and St. John look lonely and forlorn to me.

Prokofy Ignatitch, a veteran soldier, the church verger's assistant, is standing behind the candle cupboard. Raising his eyebrows and stroking his beard he explains in a half-whisper to an old woman: "Matins will be in the evening today, directly after vespers. And they will ring for the 'hours' tomorrow between seven and eight. Do you understand? Between seven and eight."

Between the two broad columns on the right, where the chapel of Varvara the Martyr begins, those who are going to confess stand beside the screen, awaiting their turn. And Mitka is there too—a ragged boy with his head hideously cropped, with ears that jut out, and little spiteful eyes. He is the son of Nastasya the charwoman, and is a bully and a ruffian who snatches apples from the women's baskets, and has more than once carried off my knuckle-bones. He looks at me angrily, and I fancy takes a spiteful pleasure in the fact that he, not I, will first go behind the screen. I feel boiling over with resentment, I try not to look at him, and, at the bottom of my heart, I am vexed that this wretched boy's sins will soon be forgiven.

In front of him stands a grandly dressed, beautiful lady, wearing a hat with a white feather. She is noticeably agitated, is waiting in strained suspense, and one of her cheeks is flushed red with excitement.

I wait for five minutes, for ten.… A well-dressed young man with a long thin neck, and rubber goloshes, comes out from behind the screen. I begin dreaming how, when I am grown up, I will buy goloshes exactly like them. I certainly will! The lady shudders and goes behind the screen. It is her turn.

In the crack, between the two panels of the screen, I can see the lady go up to the lectern and bow down to the ground, then get up, and, without looking at the priest, bow her head in anticipation. The priest stands with his back to the screen, and so I can only see his grey curly head, the chain of the cross on his chest, and his broad back. His face is not visible. Heaving a sigh, and not looking at the lady, he begins speaking rapidly, shaking his head, alternately raising and dropping his whispering voice. The lady listens meekly as though conscious of guilt, answers meekly, and looks at the floor.

"In what way can she be sinful?" I wonder, looking reverently at her gentle, beautiful face. "God forgive her sins, God send her happiness." But now the priest covers her head with the stole. "And I, unworthy priest…" I hear his voice, "… by His power given unto me, do forgive and absolve thee from all thy sins.…"

The lady bows down to the ground, kisses the cross, and comes back. Both her cheeks are flushed now, but her face is calm and serene and cheerful.

"She is happy now," I think to myself, looking first at her and then at the priest who had forgiven her sins. "But how happy the man must be who has the right to forgive sins!"

Now it is Mitka's turn, but a feeling of hatred for that young ruffian suddenly boils up in me. I want to go behind the screen before him, I want to be the first. Noticing my movement he hits me on the head with his candle, I respond by doing the same, and, for half a minute, there is a sound of panting, and, as it were, of someone breaking candles.… We are separated. My foe goes timidly up to the lectern, and bows down to the floor without bending his knees, but I do not see what happens after that; the thought that my turn is coming after Mitka's makes everything grow blurred and confused before my eyes; Mitka's protruding ears grow large, and melt into his dark head, the priest sways, the floor seems to be undulating.…

The priest's voice is audible: "And I, unworthy priest…"

Now I too move behind the screen. I do not feel the ground under my feet, it is as though I were walking on air.… I go up to the lectern which is taller than I am. For a minute I have a glimpse of the indifferent, exhausted face of the priest. But after that I see nothing but his sleeve with its blue lining, the cross, and the edge of the lectern. I am conscious of the close proximity of the priest, the smell of his cassock; I hear his stern voice, and my cheek turned towards him begins to burn.… I am so troubled that I miss a great deal that he says, but I answer his questions

sincerely in an unnatural voice, not my own. I think of the forlorn figures of the Holy Mother and St. John the Divine, the crucifix, my mother, and I want to cry and beg forgiveness.

"What is your name?" the priest asks me, covering my head with the soft stole.

How lighthearted I am now, with joy in my soul!

I have no sins now, I am holy, I have the right to enter Paradise! I fancy that I already smell like the cassock. I go from behind the screen to the deacon to enter my name, and sniff at my sleeves. The dusk of the church no longer seems gloomy, and I look indifferently, without malice, at Mitka.

"What is your name?" the deacon asks.

"Fedya."

"And your name from your father?"

"I don't know."

"What is your papa's name?"

"Ivan Petrovitch."

"And your surname?"

I make no answer.

"How old are you?"

"Nearly nine."

When I get home I go to bed quickly, that I may not see them eating supper; and, shutting my eyes, dream of how fine it would be to endure martyrdom at the hands of some Herod or Dioskorus, to live in the desert, and, like St. Serafim, feed the bears, live in a cell, and eat nothing but holy bread, give my property to the poor, go on a pilgrimage to Kiev. I hear them laying the table in the dining room—they are going to have supper, they will eat salad, cabbage pies, fried and baked fish. How hungry I am! I would consent to endure any martyrdom, to live in the desert without my mother, to feed bears out of my own hands, if only I might first eat just one cabbage pie!

"Lord, purify me a sinner," I pray, covering my head over. "Guardian angel, save me from the unclean spirit."

The next day, Thursday, I wake up with my heart as pure and clean as a fine spring day. I go gaily and boldly into the church, feeling that I am a communicant, that I have a splendid and expensive shirt on, made out of a silk dress left by my grandmother. In the church everything has an air of joy, happiness, and spring. The faces of the Mother of God and St. John the Divine are not so sorrowful as yesterday. The faces of the communicants are radiant with hope, and it seems as though all the past

is forgotten, all is forgiven. Mitka, too, has combed his hair, and is dressed in his best. I look gaily at his protruding ears, and to show that I have nothing against him, I say:

“You look nice today, and if your hair did not stand up so, and you weren’t so poorly dressed, everybody would think that your mother was not a washerwoman but a lady. Come to me at Easter, we will play knuckle-bones.”

Mitka looks at me mistrustfully, and shakes his fist at me on the sly.

And the lady I saw yesterday looks lovely. She is wearing a light blue dress, and a big sparkling brooch in the shape of a horseshoe. I admire her, and think that, when I am grownup, I will certainly marry a woman like that, but remembering that getting married is shameful, I leave off thinking about it, and go into the choir where the deacon is already reading the “hours.”

A Mystery

On the evening of Easter Sunday the actual Civil Councillor, Navagin, on his return from paying calls, picked up the sheet of paper on which visitors had inscribed their names in the hall, and went with it into his study. After taking off his outer garments and drinking some seltzer water, he settled himself comfortably on a couch and began reading the signatures in the list. When his eyes reached the middle of the long list of signatures, he started, gave an ejaculation of astonishment and snapped his fingers, while his face expressed the utmost perplexity.

"Again!" he said, slapping his knee. "It's extraordinary! Again! Again there is the signature of that fellow, goodness knows who he is! Fedyukov! Again!"

Among the numerous signatures on the paper was the signature of a certain Fedyukov. Who the devil this Fedyukov was, Navagin had not a notion. He went over in his memory all his acquaintances, relations and subordinates in the service, recalled his remote past but could recollect no name like Fedyukov. What was so strange was that this incognito Fedyukov, had signed his name regularly every Christmas and Easter for the last thirteen years. Neither Navagin, his wife, nor his house porter knew who he was, where he came from or what he was like.

"It's extraordinary!" Navagin thought in perplexity, as he paced about the study. "It's strange and incomprehensible! It's like sorcery!"

"Call the porter here!" he shouted.

"It's devilish queer! But I will find out who he is!"

"I say, Grigory," he said, addressing the porter as he entered, "that Fedyukov has signed his name again! Did you see him?"

"No, your Excellency."

"Upon my word, but he has signed his name! So he must have been in the hall. Has he been?"

"No, he hasn't, your Excellency."

"How could he have signed his name without being there?"

"I can't tell."

“Who is to tell, then? You sit gaping there in the hall. Try and remember, perhaps someone you didn’t know came in? Think a minute!”

“No, your Excellency, there has been no one I didn’t know. Our clerks have been, the baroness came to see her Excellency, the priests have been with the Cross, and there has been no one else.…”

“Why, he was invisible when he signed his name, then, was he?”

“I can’t say: but there has been no Fedyukov here. That I will swear before the holy image.…”

“It’s queer! It’s incomprehensible! It’s extraordinary!” mused Navagin. “It’s positively ludicrous. A man has been signing his name here for thirteen years and you can’t find out who he is. Perhaps it’s a joke? Perhaps some clerk writes that name as well as his own for fun.”

And Navagin began examining Fedyukov’s signature.

The bold, florid signature in the old-fashioned style with twirls and flourishes was utterly unlike the handwriting of the other signatures. It was next below the signature of Shtutchkin, the provincial secretary, a scared, timorous little man who would certainly have died of fright if he had ventured upon such an impudent joke.

“The mysterious Fedyukov has signed his name again!” said Navagin, going in to see his wife. “Again I fail to find out who he is.”

Madame Navagin was a spiritualist, and so for all phenomena in nature, comprehensible or incomprehensible, she had a very simple explanation.

“There’s nothing extraordinary about it,” she said. “You don’t believe it, of course, but I have said it already and I say it again: there is a great deal in the world that is supernatural, which our feeble intellect can never grasp. I am convinced that this Fedyukov is a spirit who has a sympathy for you… If I were you, I would call him up and ask him what he wants.”

“Nonsense, nonsense!”

Navagin was free from superstitions, but the phenomenon which interested him was so mysterious that all sorts of uncanny devilry intruded into his mind against his will. All the evening he was imagining that the incognito Fedyukov was the spirit of some long-dead clerk, who had been discharged from the service by Navagin’s ancestors and was now revenging himself on their descendant; or perhaps it was the kinsman of some petty official dismissed by Navagin himself, or of a girl seduced by him.…

All night Navagin dreamed of a gaunt old clerk in a shabby uniform, with a face as yellow as a lemon, hair that stood up like a brush, and

pewtery eyes; the clerk said something in a sepulchral voice and shook a bony finger at him. And Navagin almost had an attack of inflammation of the brain.

For a fortnight he was silent and gloomy and kept walking up and down and thinking. In the end he overcame his sceptical vanity, and going into his wife's room he said in a hollow voice:

"Zina, call up Fedyukov!"

The spiritualistic lady was delighted; she sent for a sheet of cardboard and a saucer, made her husband sit down beside her, and began upon the magic rites.

Fedyukov did not keep them waiting long.…

"What do you want?" asked Navagin.

"Repent," answered the saucer.

"What were you on earth?"

"A sinner.…"

"There, you see!" whispered his wife, "and you did not believe!"

Navagin conversed for a long time with Fedyukov, and then called up Napoleon, Hannibal, Askotchensky, his aunt Klavdya Zaharovna, and they all gave him brief but correct answers full of deep significance. He was busy with the saucer for four hours, and fell asleep soothed and happy that he had become acquainted with a mysterious world that was new to him. After that he studied spiritualism every day, and at the office, informed the clerks that there was a great deal in nature that was supernatural and marvellous to which our men of science ought to have turned their attention long ago.

Hypnotism, mediumism, bishopism, spiritualism, the fourth dimension, and other misty notions took complete possession of him, so that for whole days at a time, to the great delight of his wife, he read books on spiritualism or devoted himself to the saucer, table-turning, and discussions of supernatural phenomena. At his instigation all his clerks took up spiritualism, too, and with such ardour that the old managing clerk went out of his mind and one day sent a telegram: "Hell. Government House. I feel that I am turning into an evil spirit. What's to be done? Reply paid. Vassily Krinolinsky."

After reading several hundreds of treatises on spiritualism Navagin had a strong desire to write something himself. For five months he sat composing, and in the end had written a huge monograph, entitled: *My Opinion*. When he had finished this essay he determined to send it to a spiritualist journal.

The day on which it was intended to despatch it to the journal was a very memorable one for him. Navagin remembers that on that never-to-be-forgotten day the secretary who had made a fair copy of his article and the sacristan of the parish who had been sent for on business were in his study. Nayagin's face was beaming. He looked lovingly at his creation, felt between his fingers how thick it was, and with a happy smile said to the secretary:

"I propose, Filipp Sergeyitch, to send it registered. It will be safer.…" And raising his eyes to the sacristan, he said: "I have sent for you on business, my good man. I am putting my youngest son to the high school and I must have a certificate of baptism; only could you let me have it quickly?"

"Very good, your Excellency!" said the sacristan, bowing. "Very good, I understand.…"

"Can you let me have it by tomorrow?"

"Very well, your Excellency, set your mind at rest! Tomorrow it shall be ready! Will you send someone to the church tomorrow before evening service? I shall be there. Bid him ask for Fedyukov. I am always there.…"

"What!" cried the general, turning pale.

"Fedyukov."

"You,… you are Fedyukov?" asked Navagin, looking at him with wide-open eyes.

"Just so, Fedyukov."

"You… you signed your name in my hall?"

"Yes…" the sacristan admitted, and was overcome with confusion. "When we come with the Cross, your Excellency, to grand gentlemen's houses I always sign my name.… I like doing it.… Excuse me, but when I see the list of names in the hall I feel an impulse to sign mine.…"

In dumb stupefaction, understanding nothing, hearing nothing, Navagin paced about his study. He touched the curtain over the door, three times waved his hands like a *jeune premier* in a ballet when he sees *her*, gave a whistle and a meaningless smile, and pointed with his finger into space.

"So I will send off the article at once, your Excellency," said the secretary.

These words roused Navagin from his stupour. He looked blankly at the secretary and the sacristan, remembered, and stamping, his foot irritably, screamed in a high, breaking tenor:

“Leave me in peace! Lea-eave me in peace, I tell you! What you want of me I don’t understand.”

The secretary and the sacristan went out of the study and reached the street while he was still stamping and shouting:

“Leave me in peace! What you want of me I don’t understand. Lea-eave me in peace!”

THE COSSACK

Maxim Tortchakov, a farmer in southern Russia, was driving home from church with his young wife and bringing back an Easter cake which had just been blessed. The sun had not yet risen, but the east was all tinged with red and gold and had dissipated the haze which usually, in the early morning, screens the blue of the sky from the eyes. It was quiet.… The birds were hardly yet awake.… The corncrake uttered its clear note, and far away above a little tumulus, a sleepy kite floated, heavily flapping its wings, and no other living creature could be seen all over the steppe.

Tortchakov drove on and thought that there was no better nor happier holiday than the Feast of Christ's Resurrection. He had only lately been married, and was now keeping his first Easter with his wife. Whatever he looked at, whatever he thought about, it all seemed to him bright, joyous, and happy. He thought about his farming, and thought that it was all going well, that the furnishing of his house was all the heart could desire—there was enough of everything and all of it good; he looked at his wife, and she seemed to him lovely, kind, and gentle. He was delighted by the glow in the east, and the young grass, and his squeaking chaise, and the kite.… And when on the way, he ran into a tavern to light his cigarette and drank a glass, he felt happier still.

"It is said, 'Great is the day,'" he chattered. "Yes, it is great! Wait a bit, Lizaveta, the sun will begin to dance. It dances every Easter. So it rejoices too!"

"It is not alive," said his wife.

"But there are people on it!" exclaimed Tortchakov, "there are really! Ivan Stepanitch told me that there are people on all the planets—on the sun, and on the moon! Truly… but maybe the learned men tell lies—the devil only knows! Stay, surely that's not a horse? Yes, it is!"

At the Crooked Ravine, which was just halfway on the journey home, Tortchakov and his wife saw a saddled horse standing motionless, and sniffing last year's dry grass. On a hillock beside the roadside a red-haired Cossack was sitting doubled up, looking at his feet.

“Christ is risen!” Maxim shouted to him. “Wo-o-o!”

“Truly He is risen,” answered the Cossack, without raising his head.

“Where are you going?”

“Home on leave.”

“Why are you sitting here, then?”

“Why… I have fallen ill… I haven’t the strength to go on.”

“What is wrong?”

“I ache all over.”

“H’m. What a misfortune! People are keeping holiday, and you fall sick! But you should ride on to a village or an inn, what’s the use of sitting here!”

The Cossack raised his head, and with big, exhausted eyes, scanned Maxim, his wife, and the horse.

“Have you come from church?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“The holiday found me on the high road. It was not God’s will for me to reach home. I’d get on my horse at once and ride off, but I haven’t the strength.… You might, good Christians, give a wayfarer some Easter cake to break his fast!”

“Easter cake?” Tortchakov repeated, “That we can, to be sure.… Stay, I’ll.…”

Maxim fumbled quickly in his pockets, glanced at his wife, and said:

“I haven’t a knife, nothing to cut it with. And I don’t like to break it, it would spoil the whole cake. There’s a problem! You look and see if you haven’t a knife?”

The Cossack got up groaning, and went to his saddle to get a knife.

“What an idea,” said Tortchakov’s wife angrily. “I won’t let you slice up the Easter cake! What should I look like, taking it home already cut! Ride on to the peasants in the village, and break your fast there!”

The wife took the napkin with the Easter cake in it out of her husband’s hands and said:

“I won’t allow it! One must do things properly; it’s not a loaf, but a holy Easter cake. And it’s a sin to cut it just anyhow.”

“Well, Cossack, don’t be angry,” laughed Tortchakov. “The wife forbids it! Goodbye. Good luck on your journey!”

Maxim shook the reins, clicked to his horse, and the chaise rolled on squeaking. For some time his wife went on grumbling, and declaring that to cut the Easter cake before reaching home was a sin and not the proper thing. In the east the first rays of the rising sun shone out, cutting their way through the feathery clouds, and the song of the lark was heard in

the sky. Now not one but three kites were hovering over the steppe at a respectful distance from one another. Grasshoppers began churring in the young grass.

When they had driven three-quarters of a mile from the Crooked Ravine, Tortchakov looked round and stared intently into the distance.

"I can't see the Cossack," he said. "Poor, dear fellow, to take it into his head to fall ill on the road. There couldn't be a worse misfortune, to have to travel and not have the strength.… I shouldn't wonder if he dies by the roadside. We didn't give him any Easter cake, Lizaveta, and we ought to have given it. I'll be bound he wants to break his fast too."

The sun had risen, but whether it was dancing or not Tortchakov did not see. He remained silent all the way home, thinking and keeping his eyes fixed on the horse's black tail. For some unknown reason he felt overcome by depression, and not a trace of the holiday gladness was left in his heart. When he had arrived home and said, "Christ is risen" to his workmen, he grew cheerful again and began talking, but when he had sat down to break the fast and had taken a bite from his piece of Easter cake, he looked regretfully at his wife, and said:

"It wasn't right of us, Lizaveta, not to give that Cossack something to eat."

"You are a queer one, upon my word," said Lizaveta, shrugging her shoulders in surprise. "Where did you pick up such a fashion as giving away the holy Easter cake on the high road? Is it an ordinary loaf? Now that it is cut and lying on the table, let anyone eat it that likes—your Cossack too! Do you suppose I grudge it?"

"That's all right, but we ought to have given the Cossack some.… Why, he was worse off than a beggar or an orphan. On the road, and far from home, and sick too."

Tortchakov drank half a glass of tea, and neither ate nor drank anything more. He had no appetite, the tea seemed to choke him, and he felt depressed again. After breaking their fast, his wife and he lay down to sleep. When Lizaveta woke two hours later, he was standing by the window, looking into the yard.

"Are you up already?" asked his wife.

"I somehow can't sleep.… Ah, Lizaveta," he sighed. "We were unkind, you and I, to that Cossack!"

"Talking about that Cossack again!" yawned his wife. "You have got him on the brain."

"He has served his Tsar, shed his blood maybe, and we treated him as though he were a pig. We ought to have brought the sick man home and

fed him, and we did not even give him a morsel of bread."

"Catch me letting you spoil the Easter cake for nothing! And one that has been blessed too! You would have cut it on the road, and shouldn't I have looked a fool when I got home?"

Without saying anything to his wife, Maxim went into the kitchen, wrapped a piece of cake up in a napkin, together with half a dozen eggs, and went to the labourers in the barn.

"Kuzma, put down your concertina," he said to one of them. "Saddle the bay, or Ivantchik, and ride briskly to the Crooked Ravine. There you will see a sick Cossack with a horse, so give him this. Maybe he hasn't ridden away yet."

Maxim felt cheerful again, but after waiting for Kuzma for some hours, he could bear it no longer, so he saddled a horse and went off to meet him. He met him just at the Ravine.

"Well, have you seen the Cossack?"

"I can't find him anywhere, he must have ridden on."

"H'm… a queer business."

Tortchakov took the bundle from Kuzma, and galloped on farther. When he reached Shustrovo he asked the peasants:

"Friends, have you seen a sick Cossack with a horse? Didn't he ride by here? A redheaded fellow on a bay horse."

The peasants looked at one another, and said they had not seen the Cossack.

"The returning postman drove by, it's true, but as for a Cossack or anyone else, there has been no such."

Maxim got home at dinner time.

"I can't get that Cossack out of my head, do what you will!" he said to his wife. "He gives me no peace. I keep thinking: what if God meant to try us, and sent some saint or angel in the form of a Cossack? It does happen, you know. It's bad, Lizaveta; we were unkind to the man!"

"What do you keep pestering me with that Cossack for?" cried Lizaveta, losing patience at last. "You stick to it like tar!"

"You are not kind, you know…" said Maxim, looking into his wife's face.

And for the first time since his marriage he perceived that his wife was not kind.

"I may be unkind," cried Lizaveta, tapping angrily with her spoon, "but I am not going to give away the holy Easter cake to every drunken man in the road."

"The Cossack wasn't drunk!"

“He was drunk!”

“Well, you are a fool then!”

Maxim got up from the table and began reproaching his young wife for hard-heartedness and stupidity. She, getting angry too, answered his reproaches with reproaches, burst into tears, and went away into their bedroom, declaring she would go home to her father’s. This was the first matrimonial squabble that had happened in the Tortchakov’s married life. He walked about the yard till the evening, picturing his wife’s face, and it seemed to him now spiteful and ugly. And as though to torment him the Cossack haunted his brain, and Maxim seemed to see now his sick eyes, now his unsteady walk.

“Ah, we were unkind to the man,” he muttered.

When it got dark, he was overcome by an insufferable depression such as he had never felt before. Feeling so dreary, and being angry with his wife, he got drunk, as he had sometimes done before he was married. In his drunkenness he used bad language and shouted to his wife that she had a spiteful, ugly face, and that next day he would send her packing to her father’s. On the morning of Easter Monday, he drank some more to sober himself, and got drunk again.

And with that his downfall began.

His horses, cows, sheep, and hives disappeared one by one from the yard; Maxim was more and more often drunk, debts mounted up, he felt an aversion for his wife. Maxim put down all his misfortunes to the fact that he had an unkind wife, and above all, that God was angry with him on account of the sick Cossack.

Lizaveta saw their ruin, but who was to blame for it she did not understand.

The Letter

The clerical superintendent of the district, his Reverence Father Fyodor Orlov, a handsome, well-nourished man of fifty, grave and important as he always was, with an habitual expression of dignity that never left his face, was walking to and fro in his little drawing room, extremely exhausted, and thinking intensely about the same thing: “When would his visitor go?” The thought worried him and did not leave him for a minute. The visitor, Father Anastasy, the priest of one of the villages near the town, had come to him three hours before on some very unpleasant and dreary business of his own, had stayed on and on, was now sitting in the corner at a little round table with his elbow on a thick account book, and apparently had no thought of going, though it was getting on for nine o’clock in the evening.

Not everyone knows when to be silent and when to go. It not infrequently happens that even diplomatic persons of good worldly breeding fail to observe that their presence is arousing a feeling akin to hatred in their exhausted or busy host, and that this feeling is being concealed with an effort and disguised with a lie. But Father Anastasy perceived it clearly, and realized that his presence was burdensome and inappropriate, that his Reverence, who had taken an early morning service in the night and a long mass at midday, was exhausted and longing for repose; every minute he was meaning to get up and go, but he did not get up, he sat on as though he were waiting for something. He was an old man of sixty-five, prematurely aged, with a bent and bony figure, with a sunken face and the dark skin of old age, with red eyelids and a long narrow back like a fish’s; he was dressed in a smart cassock of a light lilac colour, but too big for him (presented to him by the widow of a young priest lately deceased), a full cloth coat with a broad leather belt, and clumsy high boots the size and hue of which showed clearly that Father Anastasy dispensed with goloshes. In spite of his position and his venerable age, there was something pitiful, crushed and humiliated in his lustreless red eyes, in the strands of grey hair with a shade of green in

it on the nape of his neck, and in the big shoulder-blades on his lean back.… He sat without speaking or moving, and coughed with circumspection, as though afraid that the sound of his coughing might make his presence more noticeable.

The old man had come to see his Reverence on business. Two months before he had been prohibited from officiating till further notice, and his case was being inquired into. His shortcomings were numerous. He was intemperate in his habits, fell out with the other clergy and the commune, kept the church records and accounts carelessly—these were the formal charges against him; but besides all that, there had been rumours for a long time past that he celebrated unlawful marriages for money and sold certificates of having fasted and taken the sacrament to officials and officers who came to him from the town. These rumours were maintained the more persistently that he was poor and had nine children to keep, who were as incompetent and unsuccessful as himself. The sons were spoilt and uneducated, and stayed at home doing nothing, while the daughters were ugly and did not get married.

Not having the moral force to be open, his Reverence walked up and down the room and said nothing or spoke in hints.

“So you are not going home tonight?” he asked, stopping near the dark window and poking with his little finger into the cage where a canary was asleep with its feathers puffed out.

Father Anastasy started, coughed cautiously and said rapidly:

“Home? I don’t care to, Fyodor Ilyitch. I cannot officiate, as you know, so what am I to do there? I came away on purpose that I might not have to look the people in the face. One is ashamed not to officiate, as you know. Besides, I have business here, Fyodor Ilyitch. Tomorrow after breaking the fast I want to talk things over thoroughly with the Father charged with the inquiry.”

“Ah!…” yawned his Reverence, “and where are you staying?”

“At Zyavkin’s.”

Father Anastasy suddenly remembered that within two hours his Reverence had to take the Easter-night service, and he felt so ashamed of his unwelcome burdensome presence that he made up his mind to go away at once and let the exhausted man rest. And the old man got up to go. But before he began saying goodbye he stood clearing his throat for a minute and looking searchingly at his Reverence’s back, still with the same expression of vague expectation in his whole figure; his face was working with shame, timidity, and a pitiful forced laugh such as one sees

in people who do not respect themselves. Waving his hand as it were resolutely, he said with a husky quavering laugh:

"Father Fyodor, do me one more kindness: bid them give me at leave-taking… one little glass of vodka."

"It's not the time to drink vodka now," said his Reverence sternly. "One must have some regard for decency."

Father Anastasy was still more overwhelmed by confusion; he laughed, and, forgetting his resolution to go away, he dropped back on his chair. His Reverence looked at his helpless, embarrassed face and his bent figure and he felt sorry for the old man.

"Please God, we will have a drink tomorrow," he said, wishing to soften his stern refusal. "Everything is good in due season."

His Reverence believed in people's reforming, but now when a feeling of pity had been kindled in him it seemed to him that this disgraced, worn-out old man, entangled in a network of sins and weaknesses, was hopelessly wrecked, that there was no power on earth that could straighten out his spine, give brightness to his eyes and restrain the unpleasant timid laugh which he laughed on purpose to smooth over to some slight extent the repulsive impression he made on people.

The old man seemed now to Father Fyodor not guilty and not vicious, but humiliated, insulted, unfortunate; his Reverence thought of his wife, his nine children, the dirty beggarly shelter at Zyavkin's; he thought for some reason of the people who are glad to see priests drunk and persons in authority detected in crimes; and thought that the very best thing Father Anastasy could do now would be to die as soon as possible and to depart from this world forever.

There were a sound of footsteps.

"Father Fyodor, you are not resting?" a bass voice asked from the passage.

"No, deacon; come in."

Orlov's colleague, the deacon Liubimov, an elderly man with a big bald patch on the top of his head, though his hair was still black and he was still vigorous-looking, with thick black eyebrows like a Georgian's, walked in. He bowed to Father Anastasy and sat down.

"What good news have you?" asked his Reverence.

"What good news?" answered the deacon, and after a pause he went on with a smile: "When your children are little, your trouble is small; when your children are big, your trouble is great. Such goings on, Father Fyodor, that I don't know what to think of it. It's a regular farce, that's what it is."

He paused again for a little, smiled still more broadly and said:

“Nikolay Matveyitch came back from Harkov today. He has been telling me about my Pyotr. He has been to see him twice, he tells me.”

“What has he been telling you, then?”

“He has upset me, God bless him. He meant to please me but when I came to think it over, it seems there is not much to be pleased at. I ought to grieve rather than be pleased… ‘Your Petrushka,’ said he, ‘lives in fine style. He is far above us now,’ said he. ‘Well thank God for that,’ said I. ‘I dined with him,’ said he, ‘and saw his whole manner of life. He lives like a gentleman,’ he said; ‘you couldn’t wish to live better.’ I was naturally interested and I asked, ‘And what did you have for dinner?’ ‘First,’ he said, ‘a fish course something like fish soup, then tongue and peas,’ and then he said, ‘roast turkey.’ ‘Turkey in Lent? that is something to please me,’ said I. ‘Turkey in Lent? Eh?’”

“Nothing marvellous in that,” said his Reverence, screwing up his eyes ironically. And sticking both thumbs in his belt, he drew himself up and said in the tone in which he usually delivered discourses or gave his Scripture lessons to the pupils in the district school: “People who do not keep the fasts are divided into two different categories: some do not keep them through laxity, others through infidelity. Your Pyotr does not keep them through infidelity. Yes.”

The deacon looked timidly at Father Fyodor’s stern face and said:

“There is worse to follow.… We talked and discussed one thing and another, and it turned out that my infidel of a son is living with some madame, another man’s wife. She takes the place of wife and hostess in his flat, pours out the tea, receives visitors and all the rest of it, as though she were his lawful wife. For over two years he has been keeping up this dance with this viper. It’s a regular farce. They have been living together for three years and no children.”

“I suppose they have been living in chastity!” chuckled Father Anastasy, coughing huskily. “There are children, Father Deacon—there are, but they don’t keep them at home! They send them to the Foundling! He-he-he!…” Anastasy went on coughing till he choked.

“Don’t interfere, Father Anastasy,” said his Reverence sternly.

“Nikolay Matveyitch asked him, ‘What madame is this helping the soup at your table?’” the deacon went on, gloomily scanning Anastasy’s bent figure. “‘That is my wife,’ said he. ‘When was your wedding?’ Nikolay Matveyitch asked him, and Pyotr answered, ‘We were married at Kulikov’s restaurant.’”

His Reverence's eyes flashed wrathfully and the colour came into his temples. Apart from his sinfulness, Pyotr was not a person he liked. Father Fyodor had, as they say, a grudge against him. He remembered him a boy at school—he remembered him distinctly, because even then the boy had seemed to him not normal. As a schoolboy, Petrushka had been ashamed to serve at the altar, had been offended at being addressed without ceremony, had not crossed himself on entering the room, and what was still more noteworthy, was fond of talking a great deal and with heat—and, in Father Fyodor's opinion, much talking was unseemly in children and pernicious to them; moreover Petrushka had taken up a contemptuous and critical attitude to fishing, a pursuit to which both his Reverence and the deacon were greatly addicted. As a student Pyotr had not gone to church at all, had slept till midday, had looked down on people, and had been given to raising delicate and insoluble questions with a peculiarly provoking zest.

"What would you have?" his Reverence asked, going up to the deacon and looking at him angrily. "What would you have? This was to be expected! I always knew and was convinced that nothing good would come of your Pyotr! I told you so, and I tell you so now. What you have sown, that now you must reap! Reap it!"

"But what have I sown, Father Fyodor?" the deacon asked softly, looking up at his Reverence.

"Why, who is to blame if not you? You're his father, he is your offspring! You ought to have admonished him, have instilled the fear of God into him. A child must be taught! You have brought him into the world, but you haven't trained him up in the right way. It's a sin! It's wrong! It's a shame!"

His Reverence forgot his exhaustion, paced to and fro and went on talking. Drops of perspiration came out on the deacon's bald head and forehead. He raised his eyes to his Reverence with a look of guilt, and said:

"But didn't I train him, Father Fyodor? Lord have mercy on us, haven't I been a father to my children? You know yourself I spared nothing for his good; I have prayed and done my best all my life to give him a thorough education. He went to the high school and I got him tutors, and he took his degree at the University. And as to my not being able to influence his mind, Father Fyodor, why, you can judge for yourself that I am not qualified to do so! Sometimes when he used to come here as a student, I would begin admonishing him in my way, and he wouldn't heed me. I'd say to him, 'Go to church,' and he would

answer, ‘What for?’ I would begin explaining, and he would say, ‘Why? what for?’ Or he would slap me on the shoulder and say, ‘Everything in this world is relative, approximate and conditional. I don’t know anything, and you don’t know anything either, dad.’ ”

Father Anastasy laughed huskily, cleared his throat and waved his fingers in the air as though preparing to say something. His Reverence glanced at him and said sternly:

“Don’t interfere, Father Anastasy.”

The old man laughed, beamed, and evidently listened with pleasure to the deacon as though he were glad there were other sinful persons in this world besides himself. The deacon spoke sincerely, with an aching heart, and tears actually came into his eyes. Father Fyodor felt sorry for him.

“You are to blame, deacon, you are to blame,” he said, but not so sternly and heatedly as before. “If you could beget him, you ought to know how to instruct him. You ought to have trained him in his childhood; it’s no good trying to correct a student.”

A silence followed; the deacon clasped his hands and said with a sigh:

“But you know I shall have to answer for him!”

“To be sure you will!”

After a brief silence his Reverence yawned and sighed at the same moment and asked:

“Who is reading the Acts?”

“Yevstrat. Yevstrat always reads them.”

The deacon got up and, looking imploringly at his Reverence, asked:

“Father Fyodor, what am I to do now?”

“Do as you please; you are his father, not I. You ought to know best.”

“I don’t know anything, Father Fyodor! Tell me what to do, for goodness’ sake! Would you believe it, I am sick at heart! I can’t sleep now, nor keep quiet, and the holiday will be no holiday to me. Tell me what to do, Father Fyodor!”

“Write him a letter.”

“What am I to write to him?”

“Write that he mustn’t go on like that. Write shortly, but sternly and circumstantially, without softening or smoothing away his guilt. It is your parental duty; if you write, you will have done your duty and will be at peace.”

“That’s true. But what am I to write to him, to what effect? If I write to him, he will answer, ‘Why? what for? Why is it a sin?’ ”

Father Anastasy laughed hoarsely again, and brandished his fingers.

“Why? what for? why is it a sin?” he began shrilly. “I was once confessing a gentleman, and I told him that excessive confidence in the Divine Mercy is a sin; and he asked, ‘Why?’ I tried to answer him, but—” Anastasy slapped himself on the forehead. “I had nothing here. He-he-he-he!…”

Anastasy’s words, his hoarse jangling laugh at what was not laughable, had an unpleasant effect on his Reverence and on the deacon. The former was on the point of saying, “Don’t interfere” again, but he did not say it, he only frowned.

“I can’t write to him,” sighed the deacon.

“If you can’t, who can?”

“Father Fyodor!” said the deacon, putting his head on one side and pressing his hand to his heart. “I am an uneducated slow-witted man, while the Lord has vouchsafed you judgment and wisdom. You know everything and understand everything. You can master anything, while I don’t know how to put my words together sensibly. Be generous. Instruct me how to write the letter. Teach me what to say and how to say it.…”

“What is there to teach? There is nothing to teach. Sit down and write.”

“Oh, do me the favour, Father Fyodor! I beseech you! I know he will be frightened and will attend to your letter, because, you see, you are a cultivated man too. Do be so good! I’ll sit down, and you’ll dictate to me. It will be a sin to write tomorrow, but now would be the very time; my mind would be set at rest.”

His Reverence looked at the deacon’s imploring face, thought of the disagreeable Pyotr, and consented to dictate. He made the deacon sit down to his table and began.

“Well, write… ‘Christ is risen, dear son…’ exclamation mark. ‘Rumours have reached me, your father,’ then in parenthesis, ‘from what source is no concern of yours…’ close the parenthesis.… Have you written it? ‘That you are leading a life inconsistent with the laws both of God and of man. Neither the luxurious comfort, nor the worldly splendour, nor the culture with which you seek outwardly to disguise it, can hide your heathen manner of life. In name you are a Christian, but in your real nature a heathen as pitiful and wretched as all other heathens—more wretched, indeed, seeing that those heathens who know not Christ are lost from ignorance, while you are lost in that, possessing a treasure, you neglect it. I will not enumerate here your vices, which you know well enough; I will say that I see the cause of your ruin in your infidelity. You imagine yourself to be wise, boast of your knowledge of science,

but refuse to see that science without faith, far from elevating a man, actually degrades him to the level of a lower animal, inasmuch as…’” The whole letter was in this strain.

When he had finished writing it the deacon read it aloud, beamed all over and jumped up.

“It’s a gift, it’s really a gift!” he said, clasping his hands and looking enthusiastically at his Reverence. “To think of the Lord’s bestowing a gift like that! Eh? Holy Mother! I do believe I couldn’t write a letter like that in a hundred years. Lord save you!”

Father Anastasy was enthusiastic too.

“One couldn’t write like that without a gift,” he said, getting up and wagging his fingers—“that one couldn’t! His rhetoric would trip any philosopher and shut him up. Intellect. Brilliant intellect! If you weren’t married, Father Fyodor, you would have been a bishop long ago, you would really!”

Having vented his wrath in a letter, his Reverence felt relieved; his fatigue and exhaustion came back to him. The deacon was an old friend, and his Reverence did not hesitate to say to him:

“Well deacon, go, and God bless you. I’ll have half an hour’s nap on the sofa; I must rest.”

The deacon went away and took Anastasy with him. As is always the case on Easter Eve, it was dark in the street, but the whole sky was sparkling with bright luminous stars. There was a scent of spring and holiday in the soft still air.

“How long was he dictating?” the deacon said admiringly. “Ten minutes, not more! It would have taken someone else a month to compose such a letter. Eh! What a mind! Such a mind that I don’t know what to call it! It’s a marvel! It’s really a marvel!”

“Education!” sighed Anastasy as he crossed the muddy street; holding up his cassock to his waist. “It’s not for us to compare ourselves with him. We come of the sacristan class, while he has had a learned education. Yes, he’s a real man, there is no denying that.”

“And you listen how he’ll read the Gospel in Latin at mass today! He knows Latin and he knows Greek.… Ah Petrushka, Petrushka!” the deacon said, suddenly remembering. “Now that will make him scratch his head! That will shut his mouth, that will bring it home to him! Now he won’t ask ‘Why.’ It is a case of one wit to outwit another! Haha-ha!”

The deacon laughed gaily and loudly. Since the letter had been written to Pyotr he had become serene and more cheerful. The consciousness of

having performed his duty as a father and his faith in the power of the letter had brought back his mirthfulness and good-humour.

“Pyotr means a stone,” said he, as he went into his house. “My Pyotr is not a stone, but a rag. A viper has fastened upon him and he pampers her, and hasn’t the pluck to kick her out. Tfoo! To think there should be women like that, God forgive me! Eh? Has she no shame? She has fastened upon the lad, sticking to him, and keeps him tied to her apron strings.… Fie upon her!”

“Perhaps it’s not she keeps hold of him, but he of her?”

“She is a shameless one anyway! Not that I am defending Pyotr.… He’ll catch it. He’ll read the letter and scratch his head! He’ll burn with shame!”

“It’s a splendid letter, only you know I wouldn’t send it, Father Deacon. Let him alone.”

“What?” said the deacon, disconcerted.

“Why.… Don’t send it, deacon! What’s the sense of it? Suppose you send it; he reads it, and… and what then? You’ll only upset him. Forgive him. Let him alone!”

The deacon looked in surprise at Anastasy’s dark face, at his unbuttoned cassock, which looked in the dusk like wings, and shrugged his shoulders.

“How can I forgive him like that?” he asked. “Why I shall have to answer for him to God!”

“Even so, forgive him all the same. Really! And God will forgive you for your kindness to him.”

“But he is my son, isn’t he? Ought I not to teach him?”

“Teach him? Of course—why not? You can teach him, but why call him a heathen? It will hurt his feelings, you know, deacon.…”

The deacon was a widower, and lived in a little house with three windows. His elder sister, an old maid, looked after his house for him, though she had three years before lost the use of her legs and was confined to her bed; he was afraid of her, obeyed her, and did nothing without her advice. Father Anastasy went in with him. Seeing his table already laid with Easter cakes and red eggs, he began weeping for some reason, probably thinking of his own home, and to turn these tears into a jest, he at once laughed huskily.

“Yes, we shall soon be breaking the fast,” he said. “Yes… it wouldn’t come amiss, deacon, to have a little glass now. Can we? I’ll drink it so that the old lady does not hear,” he whispered, glancing sideways towards the door.

Without a word the deacon moved a decanter and wineglass towards him. He unfolded the letter and began reading it aloud. And now the letter pleased him just as much as when his Reverence had dictated it to him. He beamed with pleasure and wagged his head, as though he had been tasting something very sweet.

"A-ah, what a letter!" he said. "Petrushka has never dreamt of such a letter. It's just what he wants, something to throw him into a fever…"

"Do you know, deacon, don't send it!" said Anastasy, pouring himself out a second glass of vodka as though unconsciously. "Forgive him, let him alone! I am telling you… what I really think. If his own father can't forgive him, who will forgive him? And so he'll live without forgiveness. Think, deacon: there will be plenty to chastise him without you, but you should look out for some who will show mercy to your son! I'll… I'll… have just one more. The last, old man.… Just sit down and write straight off to him, 'I forgive you Pyotr!' He will under-sta-and! He will fe-el it! I understand it from myself, you see old man… deacon, I mean. When I lived like other people, I hadn't much to trouble about, but now since I lost the image and semblance, there is only one thing I care about, that good people should forgive me. And remember, too, it's not the righteous but sinners we must forgive. Why should you forgive your old woman if she is not sinful? No, you must forgive a man when he is a sad sight to look at… yes!"

Anastasy leaned his head on his fist and sank into thought.

"It's a terrible thing, deacon," he sighed, evidently struggling with the desire to take another glass—"a terrible thing! In sin my mother bore me, in sin I have lived, in sin I shall die.… God forgive me, a sinner! I have gone astray, deacon! There is no salvation for me! And it's not as though I had gone astray in my life, but in old age—at death's door… I…"

The old man, with a hopeless gesture, drank off another glass, then got up and moved to another seat. The deacon, still keeping the letter in his hand, was walking up and down the room. He was thinking of his son. Displeasure, distress and anxiety no longer troubled him; all that had gone into the letter. Now he was simply picturing Pyotr; he imagined his face, he thought of the past years when his son used to come to stay with him for the holidays. His thoughts were only of what was good, warm, touching, of which one might think for a whole lifetime without wearying. Longing for his son, he read the letter through once more and looked questioningly at Anastasy.

"Don't send it," said the latter, with a wave of his hand.

“No, I must send it anyway; I must… bring him to his senses a little, all the same. It’s just as well.…”

The deacon took an envelope from the table, but before putting the letter into it he sat down to the table, smiled and added on his own account at the bottom of the letter:

“They have sent us a new inspector. He’s much friskier than the old one. He’s a great one for dancing and talking, and there’s nothing he can’t do, so that all the Govorovsky girls are crazy over him. Our military chief, Kostyrev, will soon get the sack too, they say. High time he did!” And very well pleased, without the faintest idea that with this postscript he had completely spoiled the stern letter, the deacon addressed the envelope and laid it in the most conspicuous place on the table.

An Adventure
(A Driver's Story)

It was in that wood yonder, behind the creek, that it happened, sir. My father, the kingdom of Heaven be his, was taking five hundred roubles to the master; in those days our fellows and the Shepelevsky peasants used to rent land from the master, so father was taking money for the half-year. He was a God-fearing man, he used to read the scriptures, and as for cheating or wronging anyone, or defrauding—God forbid, and the peasants honoured him greatly, and when someone had to be sent to the town about taxes or suchlike, or with money, they used to send him. He was a man above the ordinary, but, not that I'd speak ill of him, he had a weakness. He was fond of a drop. There was no getting him past a tavern: he would go in, drink a glass, and be completely done for! He was aware of this weakness in himself, and when he was carrying public money, that he might not fall asleep or lose it by some chance, he always took me or my sister Anyutka with him.

To tell the truth, all our family have a great taste for vodka. I can read and write, I served for six years at a tobacconist's in the town, and I can talk to any educated gentleman, and can use very fine language, but, it is perfectly true, sir, as I read in a book, that vodka is the blood of Satan. Through vodka my face has darkened. And there is nothing seemly about me, and here, as you may see, sir, I am a cabdriver like an ignorant, uneducated peasant.

And so, as I was telling you, father was taking the money to the master, Anyutka was going with him, and at that time Anyutka was seven or maybe eight—a silly chit, not that high. He got as far as Kalantchiko successfully, he was sober, but when he reached Kalantchiko and went into Moiseika's tavern, this same weakness of his came upon him. He drank three glasses and set to bragging before people:

"I am a plain humble man," he says, "but I have five hundred roubles in my pocket; if I like," says he, "I could buy up the tavern and all the crockery and Moiseika and his Jewess and his little Jews. I can buy it all out and out," he said. That was his way of joking, to be sure, but then he

began complaining: “It’s a worry, good Christian people,” said he, “to be a rich man, a merchant, or anything of that kind. If you have no money you have no care, if you have money you must watch over your pocket the whole time that wicked men may not rob you. It’s a terror to live in the world for a man who has a lot of money.”

The drunken people listened of course, took it in, and made a note of it. And in those days they were making a railway line at Kalantchiko, and there were swarms and swarms of tramps and vagabonds of all sorts like locusts. Father pulled himself up afterwards, but it was too late. A word is not a sparrow, if it flies out you can’t catch it. They drove, sir, by the wood, and all at once there was someone galloping on horseback behind them. Father was not of the chickenhearted brigade—that I couldn’t say—but he felt uneasy; there was no regular road through the wood, nothing went that way but hay and timber, and there was no cause for anyone to be galloping there, particularly in working hours. One wouldn’t be galloping after any good.

“It seems as though they are after someone,” said father to Anyutka, “they are galloping so furiously. I ought to have kept quiet in the tavern, a plague on my tongue. Oy, little daughter, my heart misgives me, there is something wrong!”

He did not spend long in hesitation about his dangerous position, and he said to my sister Anyutka:

“Things don’t look very bright, they really are in pursuit. Anyway, Anyutka dear, you take the money, put it away in your skirts, and go and hide behind a bush. If by ill-luck they attack me, you run back to mother, and give her the money. Let her take it to the village elder. Only mind you don’t let anyone see you; keep to the wood and by the creek, that no one may see you. Run your best and call on the merciful God. Christ be with you!”

Father thrust the parcel of notes on Anyutka, and she looked out the thickest of the bushes and hid herself. Soon after, three men on horseback galloped up to father. One a stalwart, big-jawed fellow, in a crimson shirt and high boots, and the other two, ragged, shabby fellows, navvies from the line. As my father feared, so it really turned out, sir. The one in the crimson shirt, the sturdy, strong fellow, a man above the ordinary, left his horse, and all three made for my father.

“Halt you, so-and-so! Where’s the money!”

“What money? Go to the devil!”

“Oh, the money you are taking the master for the rent. Hand it over, you bald devil, or we will throttle you, and you’ll die in your sins.”

And they began to practise their villainy on father, and, instead of beseeching them, weeping, or anything of the sort, father got angry and began to reprove them with the greatest severity.

“What are you pestering me for?” said he. “You are a dirty lot. There is no fear of God in you, plague take you! It’s not money you want, but a beating, to make your backs smart for three years after. Be off, blockheads, or I shall defend myself. I have a revolver that takes six bullets, it’s in my bosom!”

But his words did not deter the robbers, and they began beating him with anything they could lay their hands on.

They looked through everything in the cart, searched my father thoroughly, even taking off his boots; when they found that beating father only made him swear at them the more, they began torturing him in all sorts of ways. All the time Anyutka was sitting behind the bush, and she saw it all, poor dear. When she saw father lying on the ground and gasping, she started off and ran her hardest through the thicket and the creek towards home. She was only a little girl, with no understanding; she did not know the way, just ran on not knowing where she was going. It was some six miles to our home. Anyone else might have run there in an hour, but a little child, as we all know, takes two steps back for one forwards, and indeed it is not everyone who can run barefoot through the prickly bushes; you want to be used to it, too, and our girls used always to be crowding together on the stove or in the yard, and were afraid to run in the forest.

Towards evening Anyutka somehow reached a habitation, she looked, it was a hut. It was the forester’s hut, in the Crown forest; some merchants were renting it at the time and burning charcoal. She knocked. A woman, the forester’s wife, came out to her. Anyutka, first of all, burst out crying, and told her everything just as it was, and even told her about the money. The forester’s wife was full of pity for her.

“My poor little dear! Poor mite, God has preserved you, poor little one! My precious! Come into the hut, and I will give you something to eat.”

She began to make up to Anyutka, gave her food and drink, and even wept with her, and was so attentive to her that the girl, only think, gave her the parcel of notes.

“I will put it away, darling, and tomorrow morning I will give it you back and take you home, dearie.”

The woman took the money, and put Anyutka to sleep on the stove where at the time the brooms were drying. And on the same stove, on the

brooms, the forester’s daughter, a girl as small as our Anyutka, was asleep. And Anyutka used to tell us afterwards that there was such a scent from the brooms, they smelt of honey! Anyutka lay down, but she could not get to sleep, she kept crying quietly; she was sorry for father, and terrified. But, sir, an hour or two passed, and she saw those very three robbers who had tortured father walk into the hut; and the one in the crimson shirt, with big jaws, their leader, went up to the woman and said:

“Well, wife, we have simply murdered a man for nothing. Today we killed a man at dinnertime, we killed him all right, but not a farthing did we find.”

So this fellow in the crimson shirt turned out to be the forester, the woman’s husband.

“The man’s dead for nothing,” said his ragged companions. “In vain we have taken a sin on our souls.”

The forester’s wife looked at all three and laughed.

“What are you laughing at, silly?”

“I am laughing because I haven’t murdered anyone, and I have not taken any sin on my soul, but I have found the money.”

“What money? What nonsense are you talking!”

“Here, look whether I am talking nonsense.”

The forester’s wife untied the parcel and, wicked woman, showed them the money. Then she described how Anyutka had come, what she had said, and so on. The murderers were delighted and began to divide the money between them, they almost quarrelled, then they sat down to the table, you know, to drink. And Anyutka lay there, poor child, hearing every word and shaking like a Jew in a frying pan. What was she to do? And from their words she learned that father was dead and lying across the road, and she fancied, in her foolishness, that the wolves and the dogs would eat father, and that our horse had gone far away into the forest, and would be eaten by wolves too, and that she, Anyutka herself, would be put in prison and beaten, because she had not taken care of the money. The robbers got drunk and sent the woman for vodka. They gave her five roubles for vodka and sweet wine. They set to singing and drinking on other people’s money. They drank and drank, the dogs, and sent the woman off again that they might drink beyond all bounds.

“We will keep it up till morning,” they cried. “We have plenty of money now, there is no need to spare! Drink, and don’t drink away your wits.”

And so at midnight, when they were all fairly fuddled, the woman ran off for vodka the third time, and the forester strode twice up and down the cottage, and he was staggering.

“Look here, lads,” he said, “we must make away with the girl, too! If we leave her, she will be the first to bear witness against us.”

They talked it over and discussed it, and decided that Anyutka must not be left alive, that she must be killed. Of course, to murder an innocent child’s a fearful thing, even a man drunken or crazy would not take such a job on himself. They were quarrelling for maybe an hour which was to kill her, one tried to put it on the other, they almost fought again, and no one would agree to do it; then they cast lots. It fell to the forester. He drank another full glass, cleared his throat, and went to the outer room for an axe.

But Anyutka was a sharp wench. For all she was so simple, she thought of something that, I must say, not many an educated man would have thought of. Maybe the Lord had compassion on her, and gave her sense for the moment, or perhaps it was the fright sharpened her wits, anyway when it came to the test it turned out that she was cleverer than anyone. She got up stealthily, prayed to God, took the little sheepskin, the one the forester’s wife had put over her, and, you understand, the forester’s little daughter, a girl of the same age as herself, was lying on the stove beside her. She covered this girl with the sheepskin, and took the woman’s jacket off her and threw it over herself. Disguised herself, in fact. She put it over her head, and so walked across the hut by the drunken men, and they thought it was the forester’s daughter, and did not even look at her. Luckily for her the woman was not in the hut, she had gone for vodka, or maybe she would not have escaped the axe, for a woman’s eyes are as farseeing as a buzzard’s. A woman’s eyes are sharp.

Anyutka came out of the hut, and ran as fast as her legs could carry her. All night she was lost in the forest, but towards morning she came out to the edge and ran along the road. By the mercy of God she met the clerk Yegor Danilitch, the kingdom of Heaven be his. He was going along with his hooks to catch fish. Anyutka told him all about it. He went back quicker than he came—thought no more of the fish—gathered the peasants together in the village, and off they went to the forester’s.

They got there, and all the murderers were lying side by side, dead drunk, each where he had fallen; the woman, too, was drunk. First thing they searched them; they took the money and then looked on the stove—the Holy Cross be with us! The forester’s child was lying on the brooms, under the sheepskin, and her head was in a pool of blood, chopped off by

the axe. They roused the peasants and the woman, tied their hands behind them, and took them to the district court; the woman howled, but the forester only shook his head and asked:

“You might give me a drop, lads! My head aches!”

Afterwards they were tried in the town in due course, and punished with the utmost rigour of the law.

So that’s what happened, sir, beyond the forest there, that lies behind the creek. Now you can scarcely see it, the sun is setting red behind it. I have been talking to you, and the horses have stopped, as though they were listening too. Hey there, my beauties! Move more briskly, the good gentleman will give us something extra. Hey, you darlings!

The Examining Magistrate

A district doctor and an examining magistrate were driving one fine spring day to an inquest. The examining magistrate, a man of five and thirty, looked dreamily at the horses and said:

"There is a great deal that is enigmatic and obscure in nature; and even in everyday life, doctor, one must often come upon phenomena which are absolutely incapable of explanation. I know, for instance, of several strange, mysterious deaths, the cause of which only spiritualists and mystics will undertake to explain; a clearheaded man can only lift up his hands in perplexity. For example, I know of a highly cultured lady who foretold her own death and died without any apparent reason on the very day she had predicted. She said that she would die on a certain day, and she did die."

"There's no effect without a cause," said the doctor. "If there's a death there must be a cause for it. But as for predicting it there's nothing very marvellous in that. All our ladies—all our females, in fact—have a turn for prophecies and presentiments."

"Just so, but my lady, doctor, was quite a special case. There was nothing like the ladies' or other females' presentiments about her prediction and her death. She was a young woman, healthy and clever, with no superstitions of any sort. She had such clear, intelligent, honest eyes; an open, sensible face with a faint, typically Russian look of mockery in her eyes and on her lips. There was nothing of the fine lady or of the female about her, except—if you like—her beauty! She was graceful, elegant as that birch tree; she had wonderful hair. That she may be intelligible to you, I will add, too, that she was a person of the most infectious gaiety and carelessness and that intelligent, good sort of frivolity which is only found in good-natured, lighthearted people with brains. Can one talk of mysticism, spiritualism, a turn for presentiment, or anything of that sort, in this case? She used to laugh at all that."

The doctor's chaise stopped by a well. The examining magistrate and the doctor drank some water, stretched, and waited for the coachman to

finish watering the horses.

"Well, what did the lady die of?" asked the doctor when the chaise was rolling along the road again.

"She died in a strange way. One fine day her husband went in to her and said that it wouldn't be amiss to sell their old coach before the spring and to buy something rather newer and lighter instead, and that it might be as well to change the left trace horse and to put Bobtchinsky (that was the name of one of her husband's horses) in the shafts.

"His wife listened to him and said:

"'Do as you think best, but it makes no difference to me now. Before the summer I shall be in the cemetery.'

"Her husband, of course, shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"'I am not joking,' she said. 'I tell you in earnest that I shall soon be dead.'

"'What do you mean by soon?'

"'Directly after my confinement. I shall bear my child and die.'

"The husband attached no significance to these words. He did not believe in presentiments of any sort, and he knew that ladies in an interesting condition are apt to be fanciful and to give way to gloomy ideas generally. A day later his wife spoke to him again of dying immediately after her confinement, and then every day she spoke of it and he laughed and called her a silly woman, a fortune-teller, a crazy creature. Her approaching death became an *idée fixe* with his wife. When her husband would not listen to her she would go into the kitchen and talk of her death to the nurse and the cook.

"'I haven't long to live now, nurse,' she would say. 'As soon as my confinement is over I shall die. I did not want to die so early, but it seems it's my fate.'

"The nurse and the cook were in tears, of course. Sometimes the priest's wife or some lady from a neighbouring estate would come and see her and she would take them aside and open her soul to them, always harping on the same subject, her approaching death. She spoke gravely with an unpleasant smile, even with an angry face which would not allow any contradiction. She had been smart and fashionable in her dress, but now in view of her approaching death she became slovenly; she did not read, she did not laugh, she did not dream aloud. What was more she drove with her aunt to the cemetery and selected a spot for her tomb. Five days before her confinement she made her will. And all this, bear in mind, was done in the best of health, without the faintest hint of illness or danger. A confinement is a difficult affair and sometimes fatal,

but in the case of which I am telling you every indication was favourable, and there was absolutely nothing to be afraid of. Her husband was sick of the whole business at last. He lost his temper one day at dinner and asked her:

"'Listen, Natasha, when is there going to be an end of this silliness?'

"'It's not silliness, I am in earnest.'

"'Nonsense, I advise you to give over being silly that you may not feel ashamed of it afterwards.'

"Well, the confinement came. The husband got the very best midwife from the town. It was his wife's first confinement, but it could not have gone better. When it was all over she asked to look at her baby. She looked at it and said:

"'Well, now I can die.'

"She said goodbye, shut her eyes, and half an hour later gave up her soul to God. She was fully conscious up to the last moment. Anyway when they gave her milk instead of water she whispered softly:

"'Why are you giving me milk instead of water?'

"So that is what happened. She died as she predicted."

The examining magistrate paused, gave a sigh and said:

"Come, explain why she died. I assure you on my honour, this is not invented, it's a fact."

The doctor looked at the sky meditatively.

"You ought to have had an inquest on her," he said.

"Why?"

"Why, to find out the cause of her death. She didn't die because she had predicted it. She poisoned herself most probably."

The examining magistrate turned quickly, facing the doctor, and screwing up his eyes, asked:

"And from what do you conclude that she poisoned herself?"

"I don't conclude it, but I assume it. Was she on good terms with her husband?"

"H'm, not altogether. There had been misunderstandings soon after their marriage. There were unfortunate circumstances. She had found her husband on one occasion with a lady. She soon forgave him however."

"And which came first, her husband's infidelity or her idea of dying?"

The examining magistrate looked attentively at the doctor as though he were trying to imagine why he put that question.

"Excuse me," he said, not quite immediately. "Let me try and remember." The examining magistrate took off his hat and rubbed his

forehead. “Yes, yes… it was very shortly after that incident that she began talking of death. Yes, yes.”

“Well, there, do you see?… In all probability it was at that time that she made up her mind to poison herself, but, as most likely she did not want to kill her child also, she put it off till after her confinement.”

“Not likely, not likely!… it’s impossible. She forgave him at the time.”

“That she forgave it quickly means that she had something bad in her mind. Young wives do not forgive quickly.”

The examining magistrate gave a forced smile, and, to conceal his too noticeable agitation, began lighting a cigarette.

“Not likely, not likely,” he went on. “No notion of anything of the sort being possible ever entered into my head.… And besides… he was not so much to blame as it seems.… He was unfaithful to her in rather a queer way, with no desire to be; he came home at night somewhat elevated, wanted to make love to somebody, his wife was in an interesting condition… then he came across a lady who had come to stay for three days—damnation take her—an empty-headed creature, silly and not good-looking. It couldn’t be reckoned as an infidelity. His wife looked at it in that way herself and soon… forgave it. Nothing more was said about it.…”

“People don’t die without a reason,” said the doctor.

“That is so, of course, but all the same… I cannot admit that she poisoned herself. But it is strange that the idea has never struck me before! And no one thought of it! Everyone was astonished that her prediction had come to pass, and the idea… of such a death was far from their mind. And indeed, it cannot be that she poisoned herself! No!”

The examining magistrate pondered. The thought of the woman who had died so strangely haunted him all through the inquest. As he noted down what the doctor dictated to him he moved his eyebrows gloomily and rubbed his forehead.

“And are there really poisons that kill one in a quarter of an hour, gradually, without any pain?” he asked the doctor while the latter was opening the skull.

“Yes, there are. Morphia for instance.”

“H’m, strange. I remember she used to keep something of the sort.… But it could hardly be.”

On the way back the examining magistrate looked exhausted, he kept nervously biting his moustache, and was unwilling to talk.

“Let us go a little way on foot,” he said to the doctor. “I am tired of sitting.”

After walking about a hundred paces, the examining magistrate seemed to the doctor to be overcome with fatigue, as though he had been climbing up a high mountain. He stopped and, looking at the doctor with a strange look in his eyes, as though he were drunk, said:

“My God, if your theory is correct, why it’s… it was cruel, inhuman! She poisoned herself to punish someone else! Why, was the sin so great? Oh, my God! And why did you make me a present of this damnable idea, doctor!”

The examining magistrate clutched at his head in despair, and went on:

“What I have told you was about my own wife, about myself. Oh, my God! I was to blame, I wounded her, but can it have been easier to die than to forgive? That’s typical feminine logic—cruel, merciless logic. Oh, even then when she was living she was cruel! I recall it all now! It’s all clear to me now!”

As the examining magistrate talked he shrugged his shoulders, then clutched at his head. He got back into the carriage, then walked again. The new idea the doctor had imparted to him seemed to have overwhelmed him, to have poisoned him; he was distracted, shattered in body and soul, and when he got back to the town he said goodbye to the doctor, declining to stay to dinner though he had promised the doctor the evening before to dine with him.

ABORIGINES

Between nine and ten in the morning. Ivan Lyashkevsky, a lieutenant of Polish origin, who has at some time or other been wounded in the head, and now lives on his pension in a town in one of the southern provinces, is sitting in his lodgings at the open window talking to Franz Stepanitch Finks, the town architect, who has come in to see him for a minute. Both have thrust their heads out of the window, and are looking in the direction of the gate near which Lyashkevsky's landlord, a plump little native with pendulous perspiring cheeks, in full, blue trousers, is sitting on a bench with his waistcoat unbuttoned. The native is plunged in deep thought, and is absentmindedly prodding the toe of his boot with a stick.

"Extraordinary people, I tell you," grumbled Lyashkevsky, looking angrily at the native, "here he has sat down on the bench, and so he will sit, damn the fellow, with his hands folded till evening. They do absolutely nothing. The wastrels and loafers! It would be all right, you scoundrel, if you had money lying in the bank, or had a farm of your own where others would be working for you, but here you have not a penny to your name, you eat the bread of others, you are in debt all round, and you starve your family—devil take you! You wouldn't believe me, Franz Stepanitch, sometimes it makes me so cross that I could jump out of the window and give the low fellow a good horsewhipping. Come, why don't you work? What are you sitting there for?"

The native looks indifferently at Lyashkevsky, tries to say something but cannot; sloth and the sultry heat have paralysed his conversational faculties.… Yawning lazily, he makes the sign of the cross over his mouth, and turns his eyes up towards the sky where pigeons fly, bathing in the hot air.

"You must not be too severe in your judgments, honoured friend," sighs Finks, mopping his big bald head with his handkerchief. "Put yourself in their place: business is slack now, there's unemployment all round, a bad harvest, stagnation in trade."

“Good gracious, how you talk!” cries Lyashkevsky in indignation, angrily wrapping his dressing gown round him. “Supposing he has no job and no trade, why doesn’t he work in his own home, the devil flay him! I say! Is there no work for you at home? Just look, you brute! Your steps have come to pieces, the plankway is falling into the ditch, the fence is rotten; you had better set to and mend it all, or if you don’t know how, go into the kitchen and help your wife. Your wife is running out every minute to fetch water or carry out the slops. Why shouldn’t you run instead, you rascal? And then you must remember, Franz Stepanitch, that he has six acres of garden, that he has pigsties and poultry houses, but it is all wasted and no use. The flower garden is overgrown with weeds and almost baked dry, while the boys play ball in the kitchen garden. Isn’t he a lazy brute? I assure you, though I have only the use of an acre and a half with my lodgings, you will always find radishes, and salad, and fennel, and onions, while that blackguard buys everything at the market.”

“He is a Russian, there is no doing anything with him,” said Finks with a condescending smile; “it’s in the Russian blood.… They are a very lazy people! If all property were given to Germans or Poles, in a year’s time you would not recognise the town.”

The native in the blue trousers beckons a girl with a sieve, buys a kopeck’s worth of sunflower seeds from her and begins cracking them.

“A race of curs!” says Lyashkevsky angrily. “That’s their only occupation, they crack sunflower seeds and they talk politics! The devil take them!”

Staring wrathfully at the blue trousers, Lyashkevsky is gradually roused to fury, and gets so excited that he actually foams at the mouth. He speaks with a Polish accent, rapping out each syllable venomously, till at last the little bags under his eyes swell, and he abandons the Russian “scoundrels, blackguards, and rascals,” and rolling his eyes, begins pouring out a shower of Polish oaths, coughing from his efforts. “Lazy dogs, race of curs. May the devil take them!”

The native hears this abuse distinctly, but, judging from the appearance of his crumpled little figure, it does not affect him. Apparently he has long ago grown as used to it as to the buzzing of the flies, and feels it superfluous to protest. At every visit Finks has to listen to a tirade on the subject of the lazy good-for-nothing aborigines, and every time exactly the same one.

“But… I must be going,” he says, remembering that he has no time to spare. “Goodbye!”

“Where are you off to?”

“I only looked in on you for a minute. The wall of the cellar has cracked in the girls’ high school, so they asked me to go round at once to look at it. I must go.”

“H’m.… I have told Varvara to get the samovar,” says Lyashkevsky, surprised. “Stay a little, we will have some tea; then you shall go.”

Finks obediently puts down his hat on the table and remains to drink tea. Over their tea Lyashkevsky maintains that the natives are hopelessly ruined, that there is only one thing to do, to take them all indiscriminately and send them under strict escort to hard labour.

“Why, upon my word,” he says, getting hot, “you may ask what does that goose sitting there live upon! He lets me lodgings in his house for seven roubles a month, and he goes to name-day parties, that’s all that he has to live on, the knave, may the devil take him! He has neither earnings nor an income. They are not merely sluggards and wastrels, they are swindlers too, they are continually borrowing money from the town bank, and what do they do with it? They plunge into some scheme such as sending bulls to Moscow, or building oil presses on a new system; but to send bulls to Moscow or to press oil you want to have a head on your shoulders, and these rascals have pumpkins on theirs! Of course all their schemes end in smoke.… They waste their money, get into a mess, and then snap their fingers at the bank. What can you get out of them? Their houses are mortgaged over and over again, they have no other property—it’s all been drunk and eaten up long ago. Nine-tenths of them are swindlers, the scoundrels! To borrow money and not return it is their rule. Thanks to them the town bank is going smash!”

“I was at Yegorov’s yesterday,” Finks interrupts the Pole, anxious to change the conversation, “and only fancy, I won six roubles and a half from him at picquet.”

“I believe I still owe you something at picquet,” Lyashkevsky recollects, “I ought to win it back. Wouldn’t you like one game?”

“Perhaps just one,” Finks assents. “I must make haste to the high school, you know.”

Lyashkevsky and Finks sit down at the open window and begin a game of picquet. The native in the blue trousers stretches with relish, and husks of sunflower seeds fall in showers from all over him on to the ground. At that moment from the gate opposite appears another native with a long beard, wearing a crumpled yellowish-grey cotton coat. He screws up his eyes affectionately at the blue trousers and shouts:

“Good morning, Semyon Nikolaitch, I have the honour to congratulate you on the Thursday.”

“And the same to you, Kapiton Petrovitch!”

“Come to my seat! It’s cool here!”

The blue trousers, with much sighing and groaning and waddling from side to side like a duck, cross the street.

“Tierce major…” mutters Lyashkevsky, “from the queen.… Five and fifteen.… The rascals are talking of politics.… Do you hear? They have begun about England. I have six hearts.”

“I have the seven spades. My point.”

“Yes, it’s yours. Do you hear? They are abusing Beaconsfield. They don’t know, the swine, that Beaconsfield has been dead for ever so long. So I have twenty-nine.… Your lead.”

“Eight… nine… ten.… Yes, amazing people, these Russians! Eleven… twelve.… The Russian inertia is unique on the terrestrial globe.”

“Thirty… Thirty-one.… One ought to take a good whip, you know. Go out and give them Beaconsfield. I say, how their tongues are wagging! It’s easier to babble than to work. I suppose you threw away the queen of clubs and I didn’t realise it.”

“Thirteen… Fourteen.… It’s unbearably hot! One must be made of iron to sit in such heat on a seat in the full sun! Fifteen.”

The first game is followed by a second, the second by a third.… Finks loses, and by degrees works himself up into a gambling fever and forgets all about the cracking walls of the high school cellar. As Lyashkevsky plays he keeps looking at the aborigines. He sees them, entertaining each other with conversation, go to the open gate, cross the filthy yard and sit down on a scanty patch of shade under an aspen tree. Between twelve and one o’clock the fat cook with brown legs spreads before them something like a baby’s sheet with brown stains upon it, and gives them their dinner. They eat with wooden spoons, keep brushing away the flies, and go on talking.

“The devil, it is beyond everything,” cries Lyashkevsky, revolted. “I am very glad I have not a gun or a revolver or I should have a shot at those cattle. I have four knaves—fourteen.… Your point.… It really gives me a twitching in my legs. I can’t see those ruffians without being upset.”

“Don’t excite yourself, it is bad for you.”

“But upon my word, it is enough to try the patience of a stone!”

When he has finished dinner the native in blue trousers, worn out and exhausted, staggering with laziness and repletion, crosses the street to his own house and sinks feebly on to his bench. He is struggling with drowsiness and the gnats, and is looking about him as dejectedly as though he were every minute expecting his end. His helpless air drives Lyashkevsky out of all patience. The Pole pokes his head out of the window and shouts at him, spluttering:

"Been gorging? Ah, the old woman! The sweet darling. He has been stuffing himself, and now he doesn't know what to do with his tummy! Get out of my sight, you confounded fellow! Plague take you!"

The native looks sourly at him, and merely twiddles his fingers instead of answering. A schoolboy of his acquaintance passes by him with his satchel on his back. Stopping him the native ponders a long time what to say to him, and asks:

"Well, what now?"

"Nothing."

"How, nothing?"

"Why, just nothing."

"H'm.… And which subject is the hardest?"

"That's according." The schoolboy shrugs his shoulders.

"I see—er… What is the Latin for tree?"

"*Arbor.*"

"Aha.… And so one has to know all that," sighs the blue trousers. "You have to go into it all.… It's hard work, hard work.… Is your dear Mamma well?"

"She is all right, thank you."

"Ah.… Well, run along."

After losing two roubles Finks remembers the high school and is horrified.

"Holy Saints, why it's three o'clock already. How I have been staying on. Goodbye, I must run.…"

"Have dinner with me, and then go," says Lyashkevsky. "You have plenty of time."

Finks stays, but only on condition that dinner shall last no more than ten minutes. After dining he sits for some five minutes on the sofa and thinks of the cracked wall, then resolutely lays his head on the cushion and fills the room with a shrill whistling through his nose. While he is asleep, Lyashkevsky, who does not approve of an afternoon nap, sits at the window, stares at the dozing native, and grumbles:

“Race of curs! I wonder you don’t choke with laziness. No work, no intellectual or moral interests, nothing but vegetating… disgusting. Tfoo!”

At six o’clock Finks wakes up.

“It’s too late to go to the high school now,” he says, stretching. “I shall have to go tomorrow, and now.… How about my revenge? Let’s have one more game.…”

After seeing his visitor off, between nine and ten, Lyashkevsky looks after him for some time, and says:

“Damn the fellow, staying here the whole day and doing absolutely nothing.… Simply get their salary and do no work; the devil take them!… The German pig.…”

He looks out of the window, but the native is no longer there. He has gone to bed. There is no one to grumble at, and for the first time in the day he keeps his mouth shut, but ten minutes passes and he cannot restrain the depression that overpowers him, and begins to grumble, shoving the old shabby armchair:

“You only take up room, rubbishly old thing! You ought to have been burnt long ago, but I keep forgetting to tell them to chop you up. It’s a disgrace!”

And as he gets into bed he presses his hand on a spring of the mattress, frowns and says peevishly:

“The con—found—ed spring! It will cut my side all night. I will tell them to rip up the mattress tomorrow and get you out, you useless thing.”

He falls asleep at midnight, and dreams that he is pouring boiling water over the natives, Finks, and the old armchair.

HAPPINESS

A flock of sheep was spending the night on the broad steppe road that is called the great highway. Two shepherds were guarding it. One, a toothless old man of eighty, with a tremulous face, was lying on his stomach at the very edge of the road, leaning his elbows on the dusty leaves of a plantain; the other, a young fellow with thick black eyebrows and no moustache, dressed in the coarse canvas of which cheap sacks are made, was lying on his back, with his arms under his head, looking upwards at the sky, where the stars were slumbering and the Milky Way lay stretched exactly above his face.

The shepherds were not alone. A couple of yards from them in the dusk that shrouded the road a horse made a patch of darkness, and, beside it, leaning against the saddle, stood a man in high boots and a short full-skirted jacket who looked like an overseer on some big estate. Judging from his upright and motionless figure, from his manners, and his behaviour to the shepherds and to his horse, he was a serious, reasonable man who knew his own value; even in the darkness signs could be detected in him of military carriage and of the majestically condescending expression gained by frequent intercourse with the gentry and their stewards.

The sheep were asleep. Against the grey background of the dawn, already beginning to cover the eastern part of the sky, the silhouettes of sheep that were not asleep could be seen here and there; they stood with drooping heads, thinking. Their thoughts, tedious and oppressive, called forth by images of nothing but the broad steppe and the sky, the days and the nights, probably weighed upon them themselves, crushing them into apathy; and, standing there as though rooted to the earth, they noticed neither the presence of a stranger nor the uneasiness of the dogs.

The drowsy, stagnant air was full of the monotonous noise inseparable from a summer night on the steppes; the grasshoppers chirruped incessantly; the quails called, and the young nightingales trilled

languidly half a mile away in a ravine where a stream flowed and willows grew.

The overseer had halted to ask the shepherds for a light for his pipe. He lighted it in silence and smoked the whole pipe; then, still without uttering a word, stood with his elbow on the saddle, plunged in thought. The young shepherd took no notice of him, he still lay gazing at the sky while the old man slowly looked the overseer up and down and then asked:

"Why, aren't you Panteley from Makarov's estate?"

"That's myself," answered the overseer.

"To be sure, I see it is. I didn't know you—that is a sign you will be rich. Where has God brought you from?"

"From the Kovylyevsky fields."

"That's a good way. Are you letting the land on the part-crop system?"

"Part of it. Some like that, and some we are letting on lease, and some for raising melons and cucumbers. I have just come from the mill."

A big shaggy old sheepdog of a dirty white colour with woolly tufts about its nose and eyes walked three times quietly round the horse, trying to seem unconcerned in the presence of strangers, then all at once dashed suddenly from behind at the overseer with an angry aged growl; the other dogs could not refrain from leaping up too.

"Lie down, you damned brute," cried the old man, raising himself on his elbow; "blast you, you devil's creature."

When the dogs were quiet again, the old man resumed his former attitude and said quietly:

"It was at Kovyli on Ascension Day that Yefim Zhmenya died. Don't speak of it in the dark, it is a sin to mention such people. He was a wicked old man. I dare say you have heard."

"No, I haven't."

"Yefim Zhmenya, the uncle of Styopka, the blacksmith. The whole district round knew him. Aye, he was a cursed old man, he was! I knew him for sixty years, ever since Tsar Alexander who beat the French was brought from Taganrog to Moscow. We went together to meet the dead Tsar, and in those days the great highway did not run to Bahmut, but from Esaulovka to Gorodishtche, and where Kovyli is now, there were bustards' nests—there was a bustard's nest at every step. Even then I had noticed that Yefim had given his soul to damnation, and that the Evil One was in him. I have observed that if any man of the peasant class is apt to be silent, takes up with old women's jobs, and tries to live in solitude, there is no good in it, and Yefim from his youth up was always

one to hold his tongue and look at you sideways, he always seemed to be sulky and bristling like a cock before a hen. To go to church or to the tavern or to lark in the street with the lads was not his fashion, he would rather sit alone or be whispering with old women. When he was still young he took jobs to look after the bees and the market gardens. Good folks would come to his market garden sometimes and his melons were whistling. One day he caught a pike, when folks were looking on, and it laughed aloud, 'Ho-ho-ho-ho!'"

"It does happen," said Panteley.

The young shepherd turned on his side and, lifting his black eyebrows, stared intently at the old man.

"Did you hear the melons whistling?" he asked.

"Hear them I didn't, the Lord spared me," sighed the old man, "but folks told me so. It is no great wonder… the Evil One will begin whistling in a stone if he wants to. Before the Day of Freedom a rock was humming for three days and three nights in our parts. I heard it myself. The pike laughed because Yefim caught a devil instead of a pike."

The old man remembered something. He got up quickly on to his knees and, shrinking as though from the cold, nervously thrusting his hands into his sleeves, he muttered in a rapid womanish gabble:

"Lord save us and have mercy upon us! I was walking along the river bank one day to Novopavlovka. A storm was gathering, such a tempest it was, preserve us Holy Mother, Queen of Heaven.… I was hurrying on as best I could, I looked, and beside the path between the thorn bushes—the thorn was in flower at the time—there was a white bullock coming along. I wondered whose bullock it was, and what the devil had sent it there for. It was coming along and swinging its tail and moo-oo-oo! but would you believe it, friends, I overtake it, I come up close—and it's not a bullock, but Yefim—holy, holy, holy! I make the sign of the cross while he stares at me and mutters, showing the whites of his eyes; wasn't I frightened! We came alongside, I was afraid to say a word to him—the thunder was crashing, the sky was streaked with lightning, the willows were bent right down to the water—all at once, my friends, God strike me dead that I die impenitent, a hare ran across the path… it ran and stopped, and said like a man: 'Good evening, peasants.' Lie down, you brute!" the old man cried to the shaggy dog, who was moving round the horse again. "Plague take you!"

"It does happen," said the overseer, still leaning on the saddle and not stirring; he said this in the hollow, toneless voice in which men speak

when they are plunged in thought.

“It does happen,” he repeated, in a tone of profundity and conviction.

“Ugh, he was a nasty old fellow,” the old shepherd went on with somewhat less fervour. “Five years after the Freedom he was flogged by the commune at the office, so to show his spite he took and sent the throat illness upon all Kovyli. Folks died out of number, lots and lots of them, just as in cholera.…”

“How did he send the illness?” asked the young shepherd after a brief silence.

“We all know how, there is no great cleverness needed where there is a will to it. Yefim murdered people with viper’s fat. That is such a poison that folks will die from the mere smell of it, let alone the fat.”

“That’s true,” Panteley agreed.

“The lads wanted to kill him at the time, but the old people would not let them. It would never have done to kill him; he knew the place where the treasure is hidden, and not another soul did know. The treasures about here are charmed so that you may find them and not see them, but he did see them. At times he would walk along the river bank or in the forest, and under the bushes and under the rocks there would be little flames, little flames… little flames as though from brimstone. I have seen them myself. Everyone expected that Yefim would show people the places or dig the treasure up himself, but he—as the saying is, like a dog in the manger—so he died without digging it up himself or showing other people.”

The overseer lit a pipe, and for an instant lighted up his big moustaches and his sharp, stern-looking, and dignified nose. Little circles of light danced from his hands to his cap, raced over the saddle along the horse’s back, and vanished in its mane near its ears.

“There are lots of hidden treasures in these parts,” he said.

And slowly stretching, he looked round him, resting his eyes on the whitening east and added:

“There must be treasures.”

“To be sure,” sighed the old man, “one can see from every sign there are treasures, only there is no one to dig them, brother. No one knows the real places; besides, nowadays, you must remember, all the treasures are under a charm. To find them and see them you must have a talisman, and without a talisman you can do nothing, lad. Yefim had talismans, but there was no getting anything out of him, the bald devil. He kept them, so that no one could get them.”

The young shepherd crept two paces nearer to the old man and, propping his head on his fists, fastened his fixed stare upon him. A childish expression of terror and curiosity gleamed in his dark eyes, and seemed in the twilight to stretch and flatten out the large features of his coarse young face. He was listening intently.

"It is even written in the Scriptures that there are lots of treasures hidden here," the old man went on; "it is so for sure… and no mistake about it. An old soldier of Novopavlovka was shown at Ivanovka a writing, and in this writing it was printed about the place of the treasure and even how many pounds of gold was in it and the sort of vessel it was in; they would have found the treasures long ago by that writing, only the treasure is under a spell, you can't get at it."

"Why can't you get at it, grandfather?" asked the young man.

"I suppose there is some reason, the soldier didn't say. It is under a spell… you need a talisman."

The old man spoke with warmth, as though he were pouring out his soul before the overseer. He talked through his nose and, being unaccustomed to talk much and rapidly, stuttered; and, conscious of his defects, he tried to adorn his speech with gesticulations of the hands and head and thin shoulders, and at every movement his hempen shirt crumpled into folds, slipped upwards and displayed his back, black with age and sunburn. He kept pulling it down, but it slipped up again at once. At last, as though driven out of all patience by the rebellious shirt, the old man leaped up and said bitterly:

"There is fortune, but what is the good of it if it is buried in the earth? It is just riches wasted with no profit to anyone, like chaff or sheep's dung, and yet there are riches there, lad, fortune enough for all the country round, but not a soul sees it! It will come to this, that the gentry will dig it up or the government will take it away. The gentry have begun digging the barrows.… They scented something! They are envious of the peasants' luck! The government, too, is looking after itself. It is written in the law that if any peasant finds the treasure he is to take it to the authorities! I dare say, wait till you get it! There is a brew but not for you!"

The old man laughed contemptuously and sat down on the ground. The overseer listened with attention and agreed, but from his silence and the expression of his figure it was evident that what the old man told him was not new to him, that he had thought it all over long ago, and knew much more than was known to the old shepherd.

“In my day, I must own, I did seek for fortune a dozen times,” said the old man, scratching himself nervously. “I looked in the right places, but I must have come on treasures under a charm. My father looked for it, too, and my brother, too—but not a thing did they find, so they died without luck. A monk revealed to my brother Ilya—the Kingdom of Heaven be his—that in one place in the fortress of Taganrog there was a treasure under three stones, and that that treasure was under a charm, and in those days—it was, I remember, in the year ’38—an Armenian used to live at Matvyeev Barrow who sold talismans. Ilya bought a talisman, took two other fellows with him, and went to Taganrog. Only when he got to the place in the fortress, brother, there was a soldier with a gun, standing at the very spot.…”

A sound suddenly broke on the still air, and floated in all directions over the steppe. Something in the distance gave a menacing bang, crashed against stone, and raced over the steppe, uttering, “Tah! tah! tah! tah!” When the sound had died away the old man looked inquiringly at Panteley, who stood motionless and unconcerned.

“It’s a bucket broken away at the pits,” said the young shepherd after a moment’s thought.

It was by now getting light. The Milky Way had turned pale and gradually melted like snow, losing its outlines; the sky was becoming dull and dingy so that you could not make out whether it was clear or covered thickly with clouds, and only from the bright leaden streak in the east and from the stars that lingered here and there could one tell what was coming.

The first noiseless breeze of morning, cautiously stirring the spurges and the brown stalks of last year’s grass, fluttered along the road.

The overseer roused himself from his thoughts and tossed his head. With both hands he shook the saddle, touched the girth and, as though he could not make up his mind to mount the horse, stood still again, hesitating.

“Yes,” he said, “your elbow is near, but you can’t bite it. There is fortune, but there is not the wit to find it.”

And he turned facing the shepherds. His stern face looked sad and mocking, as though he were a disappointed man.

“Yes, so one dies without knowing what happiness is like…” he said emphatically, lifting his left leg into the stirrup. “A younger man may live to see it, but it is time for us to lay aside all thought of it.”

Stroking his long moustaches covered with dew, he seated himself heavily on the horse and screwed up his eyes, looking into the distance,

as though he had forgotten something or left something unsaid. In the bluish distance where the furthest visible hillock melted into the mist nothing was stirring; the ancient barrows, once watch-mounds and tombs, which rose here and there above the horizon and the boundless steppe had a sullen and deathlike look; there was a feeling of endless time and utter indifference to man in their immobility and silence; another thousand years would pass, myriads of men would die, while they would still stand as they had stood, with no regret for the dead nor interest in the living, and no soul would ever know why they stood there, and what secret of the steppes was hidden under them.

The rooks awakening, flew one after another in silence over the earth. No meaning was to be seen in the languid flight of those long-lived birds, nor in the morning which is repeated punctually every twenty-four hours, nor in the boundless expanse of the steppe.

The overseer smiled and said:

"What space, Lord have mercy upon us! You would have a hunt to find treasure in it! Here," he went on, dropping his voice and making a serious face, "here there are two treasures buried for a certainty. The gentry don't know of them, but the old peasants, particularly the soldiers, know all about them. Here, somewhere on that ridge" (the overseer pointed with his whip) "robbers one time attacked a caravan of gold; the gold was being taken from Petersburg to the Emperor Peter who was building a fleet at the time at Voronezh. The robbers killed the men with the caravan and buried the gold, but did not find it again afterwards. Another treasure was buried by our Cossacks of the Don. In the year '12 they carried off lots of plunder of all sorts from the French, goods and gold and silver. When they were going homewards they heard on the way that the government wanted to take away all the gold and silver from them. Rather than give up their plunder like that to the government for nothing, the brave fellows took and buried it, so that their children, anyway, might get it; but where they buried it no one knows."

"I have heard of those treasures," the old man muttered grimly.

"Yes…" Panteley pondered again. "So it is.…"

A silence followed. The overseer looked dreamily into the distance, gave a laugh and pulled the rein, still with the same expression as though he had forgotten something or left something unsaid. The horse reluctantly started at a walking pace. After riding a hundred paces Panteley shook his head resolutely, roused himself from his thoughts and, lashing his horse, set off at a trot.

The shepherds were left alone.

“That was Panteley from Makarov’s estate,” said the old man. “He gets a hundred and fifty a year and provisions found, too. He is a man of education.…”

The sheep, waking up—there were about three thousand of them—began without zest to while away the time, nipping at the low, half-trampled grass. The sun had not yet risen, but by now all the barrows could be seen and, like a cloud in the distance, Saur’s Grave with its peaked top. If one clambered up on that tomb one could see the plain from it, level and boundless as the sky, one could see villages, manor-houses, the settlements of the Germans and of the Molokani, and a long-sighted Kalmuck could even see the town and the railway-station. Only from there could one see that there was something else in the world besides the silent steppe and the ancient barrows, that there was another life that had nothing to do with buried treasure and the thoughts of sheep.

The old man felt beside him for his crook—a long stick with a hook at the upper end—and got up. He was silent and thoughtful. The young shepherd’s face had not lost the look of childish terror and curiosity. He was still under the influence of what he had heard in the night, and impatiently awaiting fresh stories.

“Grandfather,” he asked, getting up and taking his crook, “what did your brother Ilya do with the soldier?”

The old man did not hear the question. He looked absentmindedly at the young man, and answered, mumbling with his lips:

“I keep thinking, Sanka, about that writing that was shown to that soldier at Ivanovka. I didn’t tell Panteley—God be with him—but you know in that writing the place was marked out so that even a woman could find it. Do you know where it is? At Bogata Bylotchka at the spot, you know, where the ravine parts like a goose’s foot into three little ravines; it is the middle one.”

“Well, will you dig?”

“I will try my luck…”

“And, grandfather, what will you do with the treasure when you find it?”

“Do with it?” laughed the old man. “H’m!… If only I could find it then.… I would show them all.… H’m!… I should know what to do.…”

And the old man could not answer what he would do with the treasure if he found it. That question had presented itself to him that morning probably for the first time in his life, and judging from the expression of his face, indifferent and uncritical, it did not seem to him important and deserving of consideration. In Sanka’s brain another puzzled question

was stirring: why was it only old men searched for hidden treasure, and what was the use of earthly happiness to people who might die any day of old age? But Sanka could not put this perplexity into words, and the old man could scarcely have found an answer to it.

An immense crimson sun came into view surrounded by a faint haze. Broad streaks of light, still cold, bathing in the dewy grass, lengthening out with a joyous air as though to prove they were not weary of their task, began spreading over the earth. The silvery wormwood, the blue flowers of the pig's onion, the yellow mustard, the cornflowers—all burst into gay colours, taking the sunlight for their own smile.

The old shepherd and Sanka parted and stood at the further sides of the flock. Both stood like posts, without moving, staring at the ground and thinking. The former was haunted by thoughts of fortune, the latter was pondering on what had been said in the night; what interested him was not the fortune itself, which he did not want and could not imagine, but the fantastic, fairytale character of human happiness.

A hundred sheep started and, in some inexplicable panic as at a signal, dashed away from the flock; and as though the thoughts of the sheep—tedious and oppressive—had for a moment infected Sanka also, he, too, dashed aside in the same inexplicable animal panic, but at once he recovered himself and shouted:

"You crazy creatures! You've gone mad, plague take you!"

When the sun, promising long hours of overwhelming heat, began to bake the earth, all living things that in the night had moved and uttered sounds were sunk in drowsiness. The old shepherd and Sanka stood with their crooks on opposite sides of the flock, stood without stirring, like fakirs at their prayers, absorbed in thought. They did not heed each other; each of them was living in his own life. The sheep were pondering, too.

Bad Weather

Big raindrops were pattering on the dark windows. It was one of those disgusting summer holiday rains which, when they have begun, last a long time—for weeks, till the frozen holiday maker grows used to it, and sinks into complete apathy. It was cold; there was a feeling of raw, unpleasant dampness. The mother-in-law of a lawyer, called Kvashin, and his wife, Nadyezhda Filippovna, dressed in waterproofs and shawls, were sitting over the dinner table in the dining room. It was written on the countenance of the elder lady that she was, thank God, well-fed, well-clothed and in good health, that she had married her only daughter to a good man, and now could play her game of patience with an easy conscience; her daughter, a rather short, plump, fair young woman of twenty, with a gentle anæmic face, was reading a book with her elbows on the table; judging from her eyes she was not so much reading as thinking her own thoughts, which were not in the book. Neither of them spoke. There was the sound of the pattering rain, and from the kitchen they could hear the prolonged yawns of the cook.

Kvashin himself was not at home. On rainy days he did not come to the summer villa, but stayed in town; damp, rainy weather affected his bronchitis and prevented him from working. He was of the opinion that the sight of the grey sky and the tears of rain on the windows deprived one of energy and induced the spleen. In the town, where there was greater comfort, bad weather was scarcely noticed.

After two games of patience, the old lady shuffled the cards and took a glance at her daughter.

“I have been trying with the cards whether it will be fine tomorrow, and whether our Alexey Stepanovitch will come,” she said. “It is five days since he was here.… The weather is a chastisement from God.”

Nadyezhda Filippovna looked indifferently at her mother, got up, and began walking up and down the room.

“The barometer was rising yesterday,” she said doubtfully, “but they say it is falling again today.”

The old lady laid out the cards in three long rows and shook her head.

“Do you miss him?” she asked, glancing at her daughter.

“Of course.”

“I see you do. I should think so. He hasn’t been here for five days. In May the utmost was two, or at most three days, and now it is serious, five days! I am not his wife, and yet I miss him. And yesterday, when I heard the barometer was rising, I ordered them to kill a chicken and prepare a carp for Alexey Stepanovitch. He likes them. Your poor father couldn’t bear fish, but he likes it. He always eats it with relish.”

“My heart aches for him,” said the daughter. “We are dull, but it is duller still for him, you know, mamma.”

“I should think so! In the law-courts day in and day out, and in the empty flat at night alone like an owl.”

“And what is so awful, mamma, he is alone there without servants; there is no one to set the samovar or bring him water. Why didn’t he engage a valet for the summer months? And what use is the summer villa at all if he does not care for it? I told him there was no need to have it, but no, ‘It is for the sake of your health,’ he said, and what is wrong with my health? It makes me ill that he should have to put up with so much on my account.”

Looking over her mother’s shoulder, the daughter noticed a mistake in the patience, bent down to the table and began correcting it. A silence followed. Both looked at the cards and imagined how their Alexey Stepanovitch, utterly forlorn, was sitting now in the town in his gloomy, empty study and working, hungry, exhausted, yearning for his family.…

“Do you know what, mamma?” said Nadyezhda Filippovna suddenly, and her eyes began to shine. “If the weather is the same tomorrow I’ll go by the first train and see him in town! Anyway, I shall find out how he is, have a look at him, and pour out his tea.”

And both of them began to wonder how it was that this idea, so simple and easy to carry out, had not occurred to them before. It was only half an hour in the train to the town, and then twenty minutes in a cab. They said a little more, and went off to bed in the same room, feeling more contented.

“Oho-ho-ho.… Lord, forgive us sinners!” sighed the old lady when the clock in the hall struck two. “There is no sleeping.”

“You are not asleep, mamma?” the daughter asked in a whisper. “I keep thinking of Alyosha. I only hope he won’t ruin his health in town. Goodness knows where he dines and lunches. In restaurants and taverns.”

“I have thought of that myself,” sighed the old lady. “The Heavenly Mother save and preserve him. But the rain, the rain!”

In the morning the rain was not pattering on the panes, but the sky was still grey. The trees stood looking mournful, and at every gust of wind they scattered drops. The footprints on the muddy path, the ditches and the ruts were full of water. Nadyezhda Filippovna made up her mind to go.

“Give him my love,” said the old lady, wrapping her daughter up. “Tell him not to think too much about his cases.… And he must rest. Let him wrap his throat up when he goes out: the weather—God help us! And take him the chicken; food from home, even if cold, is better than at a restaurant.”

The daughter went away, saying that she would come back by an evening train or else next morning.

But she came back long before dinnertime, when the old lady was sitting on her trunk in her bedroom and drowsily thinking what to cook for her son-in-law’s supper.

Going into the room her daughter, pale and agitated, sank on the bed without uttering a word or taking off her hat, and pressed her head into the pillow.

“But what is the matter,” said the old lady in surprise, “why back so soon? Where is Alexey Stepanovitch?”

Nadyezhda Filippovna raised her head and gazed at her mother with dry, imploring eyes.

“He is deceiving us, mamma,” she said.

“What are you saying? Christ be with you!” cried the old lady in alarm, and her cap slipped off her head. “Who is going to deceive us? Lord, have mercy on us!”

“He is deceiving us, mamma!” repeated her daughter, and her chin began to quiver.

“How do you know?” cried the old lady, turning pale.

“Our flat is locked up. The porter tells me that Alyosha has not been home once for these five days. He is not living at home! He is not at home, not at home!”

She waved her hands and burst into loud weeping, uttering nothing but: “Not at home! Not at home!”

She began to be hysterical.

“What’s the meaning of it?” muttered the old woman in horror. “Why, he wrote the day before yesterday that he never leaves the flat! Where is he sleeping? Holy Saints!”

Nadyezhda Filippovna felt so faint that she could not take off her hat. She looked about her blankly, as though she had been drugged, and convulsively clutched at her mother's arms.

"What a person to trust: a porter!" said the old lady, fussing round her daughter and crying. "What a jealous girl you are! He is not going to deceive you, and how dare he? We are not just anybody. Though we are of the merchant class, yet he has no right, for you are his lawful wife! We can take proceedings! I gave twenty thousand roubles with you! You did not want for a dowry!"

And the old lady herself sobbed and gesticulated, and she felt faint, too, and lay down on her trunk. Neither of them noticed that patches of blue had made their appearance in the sky, that the clouds were more transparent, that the first sunbeam was cautiously gliding over the wet grass in the garden, that with renewed gaiety the sparrows were hopping about the puddles which reflected the racing clouds.

Towards evening Kvashin arrived. Before leaving town he had gone to his flat and had learned from the porter that his wife had come in his absence.

"Here I am," he said gaily, coming into his mother-in-law's room and pretending not to notice their stern and tear-stained faces. "Here I am! It's five days since we have seen each other!"

He rapidly kissed his wife's hand and his mother-in-law's, and with the air of man delighted at having finished a difficult task, he lolled in an armchair.

"Ough!" he said, puffing out all the air from his lungs. "Here I have been worried to death. I have scarcely sat down. For almost five days now I have been, as it were, bivouacking. I haven't been to the flat once, would you believe it? I have been busy the whole time with the meeting of Shipunov's and Ivantchikov's creditors; I had to work in Galdeyev's office at the shop.… I've had nothing to eat or to drink, and slept on a bench, I was chilled through.… I hadn't a free minute. I hadn't even time to go to the flat. That's how I came not to be at home, Nadyusha,…"

And Kvashin, holding his sides as though his back were aching, glanced stealthily at his wife and mother-in-law to see the effect of his lie, or as he called it, diplomacy. The mother-in-law and wife were looking at each other in joyful astonishment, as though beyond all hope and expectation they had found something precious, which they had lost.… Their faces beamed, their eyes glowed.…

"My dear man," cried the old lady, jumping up, "why am I sitting here? Tea! Tea at once! Perhaps you are hungry?"

“Of course he is hungry,” cried his wife, pulling off her head a bandage soaked in vinegar. “Mamma, bring the wine, and the savouries. Natalya, lay the table! Oh, my goodness, nothing is ready!”

And both of them, frightened, happy, and bustling, ran about the room. The old lady could not look without laughing at her daughter who had slandered an innocent man, and the daughter felt ashamed.…

The table was soon laid. Kvashin, who smelt of madeira and liqueurs and who could scarcely breathe from repletion, complained of being hungry, forced himself to munch and kept on talking of the meeting of Shipunov’s and Ivantchikov’s creditors, while his wife and mother-in-law could not take their eyes off his face, and both thought:

“How clever and kind he is! How handsome!”

“All serene,” thought Kvashin, as he lay down on the well-filled feather bed. “Though they are regular tradesmen’s wives, though they are Philistines, yet they have a charm of their own, and one can spend a day or two of the week here with enjoyment.…”

He wrapped himself up, got warm, and as he dozed off, he said to himself:

“All serene!”

A Play

"Pavel Vassilyevitch, there's a lady here, asking for you," Luka announced. "She's been waiting a good hour.…"

Pavel Vassilyevitch had only just finished lunch. Hearing of the lady, he frowned and said:

"Oh, damn her! Tell her I'm busy."

"She has been here five times already, Pavel Vassilyevitch. She says she really must see you.… She's almost crying."

"H'm… very well, then, ask her into the study."

Without haste Pavel Vassilyevitch put on his coat, took a pen in one hand, and a book in the other, and trying to look as though he were very busy he went into the study. There the visitor was awaiting him—a large stout lady with a red, beefy face, in spectacles. She looked very respectable, and her dress was more than fashionable (she had on a crinolette of four storeys and a high hat with a reddish bird in it). On seeing him she turned up her eyes and folded her hands in supplication.

"You don't remember me, of course," she began in a high masculine tenor, visibly agitated. "I… I have had the pleasure of meeting you at the Hrutskys.… I am Mme. Murashkin.…"

"A… a… a… h'm… Sit down! What can I do for you?"

"You… you see… I… I…" the lady went on, sitting down and becoming still more agitated. "You don't remember me.… I'm Mme. Murashkin.… You see I'm a great admirer of your talent and always read your articles with great enjoyment.… Don't imagine I'm flattering you—God forbid!—I'm only giving honour where honour is due.… I am always reading you… always! To some extent I am myself not a stranger to literature—that is, of course… I will not venture to call myself an authoress, but… still I have added my little quota… I have published at different times three stories for children.… You have not read them, of course.… I have translated a good deal and… and my late brother used to write for *The Cause*."

"To be sure… er—er—er—What can I do for you?"

“You see… (the lady cast down her eyes and turned redder) I know your talents… your views, Pavel Vassilyevitch, and I have been longing to learn your opinion, or more exactly… to ask your advice. I must tell you I have perpetrated a play, my firstborn—*pardon pour l’expression*!—and before sending it to the Censor I should like above all things to have your opinion on it.”

Nervously, with the flutter of a captured bird, the lady fumbled in her skirt and drew out a fat manuscript.

Pavel Vassilyevitch liked no articles but his own. When threatened with the necessity of reading other people’s, or listening to them, he felt as though he were facing the cannon’s mouth. Seeing the manuscript he took fright and hastened to say:

“Very good,… leave it,… I’ll read it.”

“Pavel Vassilyevitch,” the lady said languishingly, clasping her hands and raising them in supplication, “I know you’re busy.… Your every minute is precious, and I know you’re inwardly cursing me at this moment, but… Be kind, allow me to read you my play.… Do be so very sweet!”

“I should be delighted…” faltered Pavel Vassilyevitch; “but, Madam, I’m… I’m very busy.… I’m… I’m obliged to set off this minute.”

“Pavel Vassilyevitch,” moaned the lady and her eyes filled with tears, “I’m asking a sacrifice! I am insolent, I am intrusive, but be magnanimous. Tomorrow I’m leaving for Kazan and I should like to know your opinion today. Grant me half an hour of your attention… only one half-hour… I implore you!”

Pavel Vassilyevitch was cotton-wool at core, and could not refuse. When it seemed to him that the lady was about to burst into sobs and fall on her knees, he was overcome with confusion and muttered helplessly.

“Very well; certainly… I will listen… I will give you half an hour.”

The lady uttered a shriek of joy, took off her hat and settling herself, began to read. At first she read a scene in which a footman and a house maid, tidying up a sumptuous drawing room, talked at length about their young lady, Anna Sergyevna, who was building a school and a hospital in the village. When the footman had left the room, the maidservant pronounced a monologue to the effect that education is light and ignorance is darkness; then Mme. Murashkin brought the footman back into the drawing room and set him uttering a long monologue concerning his master, the General, who disliked his daughter’s views, intended to marry her to a rich *kammer junker*, and held that the salvation of the people lay in unadulterated ignorance. Then, when the servants had left

the stage, the young lady herself appeared and informed the audience that she had not slept all night, but had been thinking of Valentin Ivanovitch, who was the son of a poor teacher and assisted his sick father gratuitously. Valentin had studied all the sciences, but had no faith in friendship nor in love; he had no object in life and longed for death, and therefore she, the young lady, must save him.

Pavel Vassilyevitch listened, and thought with yearning anguish of his sofa. He scanned the lady viciously, felt her masculine tenor thumping on his eardrums, understood nothing, and thought:

"The devil sent you… as though I wanted to listen to your tosh! It's not my fault you've written a play, is it? My God! what a thick manuscript! What an infliction!"

Pavel Vassilyevitch glanced at the wall where the portrait of his wife was hanging and remembered that his wife had asked him to buy and bring to their summer cottage five yards of tape, a pound of cheese, and some tooth-powder.

"I hope I've not lost the pattern of that tape," he thought, "where did I put it? I believe it's in my blue reefer jacket.… Those wretched flies have covered her portrait with spots already, I must tell Olga to wash the glass.… She's reading the twelfth scene, so we must soon be at the end of the first act. As though inspiration were possible in this heat and with such a mountain of flesh, too! Instead of writing plays she'd much better eat cold vinegar hash and sleep in a cellar.…"

"You don't think that monologue's a little too long?" the lady asked suddenly, raising her eyes.

Pavel Vassilyevitch had not heard the monologue, and said in a voice as guilty as though not the lady but he had written that monologue:

"No, no, not at all. It's very nice.…"

The lady beamed with happiness and continued reading:

ANNA You are consumed by analysis. Too early you have ceased to live in the heart and have put your faith in the intellect.

VALENTIN What do you mean by the heart? That is a concept of anatomy. As a conventional term for what are called the feelings, I do not admit it.

ANNA (*Confused.*) And love? Surely that is not merely a product of the association of ideas? Tell me frankly, have

you ever loved?

VALENTIN (*Bitterly.*) Let us not touch on old wounds not yet healed. (*A pause.*) What are you thinking of?

During the sixteenth scene Pavel Vassilyevitch yawned, and accidently made with his teeth the sound dogs make when they catch a fly. He was dismayed at this unseemly sound, and to cover it assumed an expression of rapt attention.

"Scene seventeen! When will it end?" he thought. "Oh, my God! If this torture is prolonged another ten minutes I shall shout for the police. It's insufferable."

But at last the lady began reading more loudly and more rapidly, and finally raising her voice she read, "Curtain."

Pavel Vassilyevitch uttered a faint sigh and was about to get up, but the lady promptly turned the page and went on reading.

ACT II

Scene, a village street. On right, School. On left, Hospital. VILLAGERS male and female, sitting on the hospital steps.

"Excuse me," Pavel Vassilyevitch broke in, "how many acts are there?"

"Five," answered the lady, and at once, as though fearing her audience might escape her, she went on rapidly.

VALENTIN is looking out of the schoolhouse window. In the background VILLAGERS can be seen taking their goods to the inn.

Like a man condemned to be executed and convinced of the impossibility of a reprieve, Pavel Vassilyevitch gave up expecting the end, abandoned all hope, and simply tried to prevent his eyes from closing, and to retain an expression of attention on his face.… The future when the lady would finish her play and depart seemed to him so remote that he did not even think of it.

"Trooo—too—too—too…" the lady's voice sounded in his ears. "Troo—too—too… sh—sh—sh—sh…"

"I forgot to take my soda," he thought. "What am I thinking about? Oh—my soda.… Most likely I shall have a bilious attack.… It's

extraordinary, Smirnovsky swills vodka all day long and yet he never has a bilious attack.… There's a bird settled on the window… a sparrow.…"

Pavel Vassilyevitch made an effort to unglue his strained and closing eyelids, yawned without opening his mouth, and stared at Mme. Murashkin. She grew misty and swayed before his eyes, turned into a triangle and her head pressed against the ceiling.…

VALENTIN No, let me depart.

ANNA (*In dismay.*) Why?

VALENTIN (*Aside.*) She has turned pale! (*To her.*) Do not force me to explain. Sooner would I die than you should know the reason.

ANNA (*After a pause.*) You cannot go away.…

The lady began to swell, swelled to an immense size, and melted into the dingy atmosphere of the study—only her moving mouth was visible; then she suddenly dwindled to the size of a bottle, swayed from side to side, and with the table retreated to the further end of the room…

VALENTIN (*Holding* ANNA *in his arms.*) You have given me new life! You have shown me an object to live for! You have renewed me as the Spring rain renews the awakened earth! But… it is too late, too late! The ill that gnaws at my heart is beyond cure.…

Pavel Vassilyevitch started and with dim and smarting eyes stared at the reading lady; for a minute he gazed fixedly as though understanding nothing.…

SCENE XI

The same. The BARON and the POLICE INSPECTOR with assistants.

VALENTIN Take me!

ANNA I am his! Take me too! Yes, take me too! I love him, I love him more than life!

BARON Anna Sergyevna, you forget that you are ruining your father.…

The lady began swelling again.… Looking round him wildly Pavel Vassilyevitch got up, yelled in a deep, unnatural voice, snatched from the table a heavy paperweight, and beside himself, brought it down with all his force on the authoress's head.…

"Give me in charge, I've killed her!" he said to the maidservant who ran in, a minute later.

The jury acquitted him.

A Transgression

A collegiate assessor called Miguev stopped at a telegraph-post in the course of his evening walk and heaved a deep sigh. A week before, as he was returning home from his evening walk, he had been overtaken at that very spot by his former housemaid, Agnia, who said to him viciously:

"Wait a bit! I'll cook you such a crab that'll teach you to ruin innocent girls! I'll leave the baby at your door, and I'll have the law of you, and I'll tell your wife, too…."

And she demanded that he should put five thousand roubles into the bank in her name. Miguev remembered it, heaved a sigh, and once more reproached himself with heartfelt repentance for the momentary infatuation which had caused him so much worry and misery.

When he reached his bungalow, he sat down to rest on the doorstep. It was just ten o'clock, and a bit of the moon peeped out from behind the clouds. There was not a soul in the street nor near the bungalows; elderly summer visitors were already going to bed, while young ones were walking in the wood. Feeling in both his pockets for a match to light his cigarette, Miguev brought his elbow into contact with something soft. He looked idly at his right elbow, and his face was instantly contorted by a look of as much horror as though he had seen a snake beside him. On the step at the very door lay a bundle. Something oblong in shape was wrapped up in something—judging by the feel of it, a wadded quilt. One end of the bundle was a little open, and the collegiate assessor, putting in his hand, felt something damp and warm. He leaped on to his feet in horror, and looked about him like a criminal trying to escape from his warders….

"She has left it!" he muttered wrathfully through his teeth, clenching his fists. "Here it lies…. Here lies my transgression! O Lord!"

He was numb with terror, anger, and shame… What was he to do now? What would his wife say if she found out? What would his colleagues at the office say? His Excellency would be sure to dig him in the ribs, guffaw, and say: "I congratulate you!… He-he-he! Though your

beard is gray, your heart is gay.… You are a rogue, Semyon Erastovitch!” The whole colony of summer visitors would know his secret now, and probably the respectable mothers of families would shut their doors to him. Such incidents always get into the papers, and the humble name of Miguev would be published all over Russia.…

The middle window of the bungalow was open and he could distinctly hear his wife, Anna Filippovna, laying the table for supper; in the yard close to the gate Yermolay, the porter, was plaintively strumming on the balalaika. The baby had only to wake up and begin to cry, and the secret would be discovered. Miguev was conscious of an overwhelming desire to make haste.

“Haste, haste!…” he muttered, “this minute, before anyone sees. I’ll carry it away and lay it on somebody’s doorstep.…”

Miguev took the bundle in one hand and quietly, with a deliberate step to avoid awakening suspicion, went down the street.…

“A wonderfully nasty position!” he reflected, trying to assume an air of unconcern. “A collegiate assessor walking down the street with a baby! Good heavens! if anyone sees me and understands the position, I am done for.… I’d better put it on this doorstep.… No, stay, the windows are open and perhaps someone is looking. Where shall I put it? I know! I’ll take it to the merchant Myelkin’s.… Merchants are rich people and tenderhearted; very likely they will say thank you and adopt it.”

And Miguev made up his mind to take the baby to Myelkin’s, although the merchant’s villa was in the furthest street, close to the river.

“If only it does not begin screaming or wriggle out of the bundle,” thought the collegiate assessor. “This is indeed a pleasant surprise! Here I am carrying a human being under my arm as though it were a portfolio. A human being, alive, with soul, with feelings like anyone else.… If by good luck the Myelkins adopt him, he may turn out somebody.… Maybe he will become a professor, a great general, an author.… Anything may happen! Now I am carrying him under my arm like a bundle of rubbish, and perhaps in thirty or forty years I may not dare to sit down in his presence.…”

As Miguev was walking along a narrow, deserted alley, beside a long row of fences, in the thick black shade of the lime trees, it suddenly struck him that he was doing something very cruel and criminal.

“How mean it is really!” he thought. “So mean that one can’t imagine anything meaner.… Why are we shifting this poor baby from door to door? It’s not its fault that it’s been born. It’s done us no harm. We are

scoundrels.… We take our pleasure, and the innocent babies have to pay the penalty. Only to think of all this wretched business! I've done wrong and the child has a cruel fate before it. If I lay it at the Myelkins' door, they'll send it to the foundling hospital, and there it will grow up among strangers, in mechanical routine,… no love, no petting, no spoiling.… And then he'll be apprenticed to a shoemaker,… he'll take to drink, will learn to use filthy language, will go hungry. A shoemaker! and he the son of a collegiate assessor, of good family.… He is my flesh and blood,…"

Miguev came out of the shade of the lime trees into the bright moonlight of the open road, and opening the bundle, he looked at the baby.

"Asleep!" he murmured. "You little rascal! why, you've an aquiline nose like your father's.… He sleeps and doesn't feel that it's his own father looking at him!… It's a drama, my boy… Well, well, you must forgive me. Forgive me, old boy.… It seems it's your fate.…"

The collegiate assessor blinked and felt a spasm running down his cheeks.… He wrapped up the baby, put him under his arm, and strode on. All the way to the Myelkins' villa social questions were swarming in his brain and conscience was gnawing in his bosom.

"If I were a decent, honest man," he thought, "I should damn everything, go with this baby to Anna Filippovna, fall on my knees before her, and say: 'Forgive me! I have sinned! Torture me, but we won't ruin an innocent child. We have no children; let us adopt him!' She's a good sort, she'd consent.… And then my child would be with me.… Ech!"

He reached the Myelkins' villa and stood still hesitating. He imagined himself in the parlor at home, sitting reading the paper while a little boy with an aquiline nose played with the tassels of his dressing gown. At the same time visions forced themselves on his brain of his winking colleagues, and of his Excellency digging him in the ribs and guffawing.… Besides the pricking of his conscience, there was something warm, sad, and tender in his heart.…

Cautiously the collegiate assessor laid the baby on the verandah step and waved his hand. Again he felt a spasm run over his face.…

"Forgive me, old fellow! I am a scoundrel," he muttered. "Don't remember evil against me."

He stepped back, but immediately cleared his throat resolutely and said:

"Oh, come what will! Damn it all! I'll take him, and let people say what they like!"

Miguev took the baby and strode rapidly back.

“Let them say what they like,” he thought. “I’ll go at once, fall on my knees, and say: ‘Anna Filippovna!’ Anna is a good sort, she’ll understand.… And we’ll bring him up.… If it’s a boy we’ll call him Vladimir, and if it’s a girl we’ll call her Anna! Anyway, it will be a comfort in our old age.”

And he did as he determined. Weeping and almost faint with shame and terror, full of hope and vague rapture, he went into his bungalow, went up to his wife, and fell on his knees before her.

“Anna Filippovna!” he said with a sob, and he laid the baby on the floor. “Hear me before you punish.… I have sinned! This is my child.… You remember Agnia? Well, it was the devil drove me to it.…”

And, almost unconscious with shame and terror, he jumped up without waiting for an answer, and ran out into the open air as though he had received a thrashing.…

“I’ll stay here outside till she calls me,” he thought. “I’ll give her time to recover, and to think it over.…”

The porter Yermolay passed him with his balalaika, glanced at him and shrugged his shoulders. A minute later he passed him again, and again he shrugged his shoulders.

“Here’s a go! Did you ever!” he muttered grinning. “Aksinya, the washerwoman, was here just now, Semyon Erastovitch. The silly woman put her baby down on the steps here, and while she was indoors with me, someone took and carried off the baby… Who’d have thought it!”

“What? What are you saying?” shouted Miguev at the top of his voice.

Yermolay, interpreting his master’s wrath in his own fashion, scratched his head and heaved a sigh.

“I am sorry, Semyon Erastovitch,” he said, “but it’s the summer holidays,… one can’t get on without… without a woman, I mean.…”

And glancing at his master’s eyes glaring at him with anger and astonishment, he cleared his throat guiltily and went on:

“It’s a sin, of course, but there—what is one to do?… You’ve forbidden us to have strangers in the house, I know, but we’ve none of our own now. When Agnia was here I had no women to see me, for I had one at home; but now, you can see for yourself, sir,… one can’t help having strangers. In Agnia’s time, of course, there was nothing irregular, because…”

“Be off, you scoundrel!” Miguev shouted at him, stamping, and he went back into the room.

Anna Filippovna, amazed and wrathful, was sitting as before, her tear-stained eyes fixed on the baby.…

"There! there!" Miguev muttered with a pale face, twisting his lips into a smile. "It was a joke.… It's not my baby,… it's the washerwoman's!… I… I was joking.… Take it to the porter."

From the Diary of a Violent-Tempered Man

I am a serious person and my mind is of a philosophic bent. My vocation is the study of finance. I am a student of financial law and I have chosen as the subject of my dissertation—the Past and Future of the Dog Licence. I need hardly point out that young ladies, songs, moonlight, and all that sort of silliness are entirely out of my line.

Morning. Ten o'clock. My *maman* pours me out a cup of coffee. I drink it and go out on the little balcony to set to work on my dissertation. I take a clean sheet of paper, dip the pen into the ink, and write out the title: "The Past and Future of the Dog Licence."

After thinking a little I write: "Historical Survey. We may deduce from some allusions in Herodotus and Xenophon that the origin of the tax on dogs goes back to.…"

But at that point I hear footsteps that strike me as highly suspicious. I look down from the balcony and see below a young lady with a long face and a long waist. Her name, I believe, is Nadenka or Varenka, it really does not matter which. She is looking for something, pretends not to have noticed me, and is humming to herself:

"Dost thou remember that song full of tenderness?"

I read through what I have written and want to continue, but the young lady pretends to have just caught sight of me, and says in a mournful voice:

"Good morning, Nikolay Andreitch. Only fancy what a misfortune I have had! I went for a walk yesterday and lost the little ball off my bracelet!"

I read through once more the opening of my dissertation, I trim up the tail of the letter *g* and mean to go on, but the young lady persists.

"Nikolay Andreitch," she says, "won't you see me home? The Karelins have such a huge dog that I simply daren't pass it alone."

There is no getting out of it. I lay down my pen and go down to her. Nadenka (or Varenka) takes my arm and we set off in the direction of her villa.

When the duty of walking arm-in-arm with a lady falls to my lot, for some reason or other I always feel like a peg with a heavy cloak hanging on it. Nadenka (or Varenka), between ourselves, of an ardent temperament (her grandfather was an Armenian), has a peculiar art of throwing her whole weight on one's arm and clinging to one's side like a leech. And so we walk along.

As we pass the Karelins', I see a huge dog, who reminds me of the dog licence. I think with despair of the work I have begun and sigh.

"What are you sighing for?" asks Nadenka (or Varenka), and heaves a sigh herself.

Here I must digress for a moment to explain that Nadenka or Varenka (now I come to think of it, I believe I have heard her called Mashenka) imagines, I can't guess why, that I am in love with her, and therefore thinks it her duty as a humane person always to look at me with compassion and to soothe my wound with words.

"Listen," said she, stopping. "I know why you are sighing. You are in love, yes; but I beg you for the sake of our friendship to believe that the girl you love has the deepest respect for you. She cannot return your love; but is it her fault that her heart has long been another's?"

Mashenka's nose begins to swell and turn red, her eyes fill with tears: she evidently expects some answer from me, but, fortunately, at this moment we arrive. Mashenka's mamma, a good-natured woman but full of conventional ideas, is sitting on the terrace: glancing at her daughter's agitated face, she looks intently at me and sighs, as though saying to herself: "Ah, these young people! they don't even know how to keep their secrets to themselves!"

On the terrace with her are several young ladies of various colours and a retired officer who is staying in the villa next to ours. He was wounded during the last war in the left temple and the right hip. This unfortunate man is, like myself, proposing to devote the summer to literary work. He is writing the "Memoirs of a Military Man." Like me, he begins his honourable labours every morning, but before he has written more than "I was born in…" some Varenka or Mashenka is sure to appear under his balcony, and the wounded hero is borne off under guard.

All the party sitting on the terrace are engaged in preparing some miserable fruit for jam. I make my bows and am about to beat a retreat, but the young ladies of various colours seize my hat with a squeal and insist on my staying. I sit down. They give me a plate of fruit and a hairpin. I begin taking the seeds out.

The young ladies of various colours talk about men: they say that So-and-So is nice-looking, that So-and-So is handsome but not nice, that somebody else is nice but ugly, and that a fourth would not have been bad-looking if his nose were not like a thimble, and so on.

"And you, *Monsieur Nicolas*," says Varenka's mamma, turning to me, "are not handsome, but you are attractive.… There is something about your face.… In men, though, it's not beauty but intelligence that matters," she adds, sighing.

The young ladies sigh, too, and drop their eyes… they agree that the great thing in men is not beauty but intelligence. I steal a glance sideways at a looking-glass to ascertain whether I really am attractive. I see a shaggy head, a bushy beard, moustaches, eyebrows, hair on my cheeks, hair up to my eyes, a perfect thicket with a solid nose sticking up out of it like a watchtower. Attractive! h'm!

"But it's by the qualities of your soul, after all, that you will make your way, *Nicolas*," sighs Nadenka's mamma, as though affirming some secret and original idea of her own.

And Nadenka is sympathetically distressed on my account, but the conviction that a man passionately in love with her is sitting opposite is obviously a source of the greatest enjoyment to her.

When they have done with men, the young ladies begin talking about love. After a long conversation about love, one of the young ladies gets up and goes away. Those that remain begin to pick her to pieces. Everyone agrees that she is stupid, unbearable, ugly, and that one of her shoulder-blades sticks out in a shocking way.

But at last, thank goodness! I see our maid. My *maman* has sent her to call me in to dinner. Now I can make my escape from this uncongenial company and go back to my work. I get up and make my bows.

Varenka's *maman*, Varenka herself, and the variegated young ladies surround me, and declare that I cannot possibly go, because I promised yesterday to dine with them and go to the woods to look for mushrooms. I bow and sit down again. My soul is boiling with rage, and I feel that in another moment I may not be able to answer for myself, that there may be an explosion, but gentlemanly feeling and the fear of committing a breach of good manners compels me to obey the ladies. And I obey them.

We sit down to dinner. The wounded officer, whose wound in the temple has affected the muscles of the left cheek, eats as though he had a bit in his mouth. I roll up little balls of bread, think about the dog licence,

and, knowing the ungovernable violence of my temper, try to avoid speaking. Nadenka looks at me sympathetically.

Soup, tongue and peas, roast fowl, and compote. I have no appetite, but eat from politeness.

After dinner, while I am standing alone on the terrace, smoking, Nadenka's mamma comes up to me, presses my hand, and says breathlessly:

"Don't despair, *Nicolas*! She has such a heart,… such a heart!…"

We go towards the wood to gather mushrooms. Varenka hangs on my arm and clings to my side. My sufferings are indescribable, but I bear them in patience.

We enter the wood.

"Listen, *Monsieur Nicolas*," says Nadenka, sighing. "Why are you so melancholy? And why are you so silent?"

Extraordinary girl she is, really! What can I talk to her about? What have we in common?

"Oh, do say something!" she begs me.

I begin trying to think of something popular, something within the range of her understanding. After a moment's thought I say:

"The cutting down of forests has been greatly detrimental to the prosperity of Russia.…"

"*Nicolas*," sighs Nadenka, and her nose begins to turn red, "*Nicolas*, I see you are trying to avoid being open with me.… You seem to wish to punish me by your silence. Your feeling is not returned, and you wish to suffer in silence, in solitude… it is too awful, *Nicolas*!" she cries impulsively seizing my hand, and I see her nose beginning to swell. "What would you say if the girl you love were to offer you her eternal friendship?"

I mutter something incoherent, for I really can't think what to say to her.

In the first place, I'm not in love with any girl at all; in the second, what could I possibly want her eternal friendship for? and, thirdly, I have a violent temper.

Mashenka (or Varenka) hides her face in her hands and murmurs, as though to herself:

"He will not speak;… it is clear that he will have me make the sacrifice! I cannot love him, if my heart is still another's… but… I will think of it.… Very good, I will think of it… I will prove the strength of my soul, and perhaps, at the cost of my own happiness, I will save this man from suffering!"…

I can make nothing out of all this. It seems some special sort of puzzle.

We go farther into the wood and begin picking mushrooms. We are perfectly silent the whole time. Nadenka's face shows signs of inward struggle. I hear the bark of dogs; it reminds me of my dissertation, and I sigh heavily. Between the trees I catch sight of the wounded officer limping painfully along. The poor fellow's right leg is lame from his wound, and on his left arm he has one of the variegated young ladies. His face expresses resignation to destiny.

We go back to the house to drink tea, after which we play croquet and listen to one of the variegated young ladies singing a song: "No, no, thou lovest not, no, no." At the word "no" she twists her mouth till it almost touches one ear.

"*Charmant!*" wail the other young ladies, "*Charmant!*"

The evening comes on. A detestable moon creeps up behind the bushes. There is perfect stillness in the air, and an unpleasant smell of freshly cut hay. I take up my hat and try to get away.

"I have something I must say to you!" Mashenka whispers to me significantly, "don't go away!"

I have a foreboding of evil, but politeness obliges me to remain. Mashenka takes my arm and leads me away to a garden walk. By this time her whole figure expresses conflict. She is pale and gasping for breath, and she seems absolutely set on pulling my right arm out of the socket. What can be the matter with her?

"Listen!" she mutters. "No, I cannot! No! …" She tries to say something, but hesitates. Now I see from her face that she has come to some decision. With gleaming eyes and swollen nose she snatches my hand, and says hurriedly, "*Nicolas*, I am yours! Love you I cannot, but I promise to be true to you!"

Then she squeezes herself to my breast, and at once springs away.

"Someone is coming," she whispers. "Farewell! … Tomorrow at eleven o'clock I will be in the arbour.… Farewell!"

And she vanishes. Completely at a loss for an explanation of her conduct and suffering from a painful palpitation of the heart, I make my way home. There the "Past and Future of the Dog Licence" is awaiting me, but I am quite unable to work. I am furious.… I may say, my anger is terrible. Damn it all! I allow no one to treat me like a boy, I am a man of violent temper, and it is not safe to trifle with me!

When the maid comes in to call me to supper, I shout to her: "Go out of the room!" Such hastiness augurs nothing good.

Next morning. Typical holiday weather. Temperature below freezing, a cutting wind, rain, mud, and a smell of naphthaline, because my *maman* has taken all her wraps out of her trunks. A devilish morning! It is the 7th of August, 1887, the date of the solar eclipse. I may here remark that at the time of an eclipse every one of us may, without special astronomical knowledge, be of the greatest service. Thus, for example, any one of us can (1) take the measurement of the diameters of the sun and the moon; (2) sketch the corona of the sun; (3) take the temperature; (4) take observations of plants and animals during the eclipse; (5) note down his own impressions, and so on.

It is a matter of such exceptional importance that I lay aside the "Past and Future of the Dog Licence" and make up my mind to observe the eclipse.

We all get up very early, and I divide the work as follows: I am to measure the diameter of the sun and moon; the wounded officer is to sketch the corona; and the other observations are undertaken by Mashenka and the variegated young ladies.

We all meet together and wait.

"What is the cause of the eclipse?" asks Mashenka.

I reply: "A solar eclipse occurs when the moon, moving in the plane of the ecliptic, crosses the line joining the centres of the sun and the earth."

"And what does the ecliptic mean?"

I explain. Mashenka listens attentively.

"Can one see through the smoked glass the line joining the centres of the sun and the earth?" she enquires.

I reply that this is only an imaginary line, drawn theoretically.

"If it is only an imaginary line, how can the moon cross it?" Varenka says, wondering.

I make no reply. I feel my spleen rising at this naive question.

"It's all nonsense," says Mashenka's *maman*. "Impossible to tell what's going to happen. You've never been in the sky, so what can you know of what is to happen with the sun and moon? It's all fancy."

At that moment a black patch begins to move over the sun. General confusion follows. The sheep and horses and cows run bellowing about the fields with their tails in the air. The dogs howl. The bugs, thinking night has come on, creep out of the cracks in the walls and bite the people who are still in bed.

The deacon, who was engaged in bringing some cucumbers from the market garden, jumped out of his cart and hid under the bridge; while his horse walked off into somebody else's yard, where the pigs ate up all the

cucumbers. The excise officer, who had not slept at home that night, but at a lady friend's, dashed out with nothing on but his nightshirt, and running into the crowd shouted frantically: "Save yourself, if you can!"

Numbers of the lady visitors, even young and pretty ones, run out of their villas without even putting their slippers on. Scenes occur which I hesitate to describe.

"Oh, how dreadful!" shriek the variegated young ladies. "It's really too awful!"

"Mesdames, watch!" I cry. "Time is precious!"

And I hasten to measure the diameters. I remember the corona, and look towards the wounded officer. He stands doing nothing.

"What's the matter?" I shout. "How about the corona?"

He shrugs his shoulders and looks helplessly towards his arms. The poor fellow has variegated young ladies on both sides of him, clinging to him in terror and preventing him from working. I seize a pencil and note down the time to a second. That is of great importance. I note down the geographical position of the point of observation. That, too, is of importance. I am just about to measure the diameter when Mashenka seizes my hand, and says:

"Do not forget today, eleven o'clock."

I withdraw my hand, feeling every second precious, try to continue my observations, but Varenka clutches my arm and clings to me. Pencil, pieces of glass, drawings—all are scattered on the grass. Hang it! It's high time the girl realized that I am a man of violent temper, and when I am roused my fury knows no bounds, I cannot answer for myself.

I try to continue, but the eclipse is over.

"Look at me!" she whispers tenderly.

Oh, that is the last straw! Trying a man's patience like that can but have a fatal ending. I am not to blame if something terrible happens. I allow no one to make a laughing stock of me, and, God knows, when I am furious, I advise nobody to come near me, damn it all! There's nothing I might not do! One of the young ladies, probably noticing from my face what a rage I am in, and anxious to propitiate me, says:

"I did exactly what you told me, Nikolay Andreitch; I watched the animals. I saw the grey dog chasing the cat just before the eclipse, and wagging his tail for a long while afterwards."

So nothing came of the eclipse after all.

I go home. Thanks to the rain, I work indoors instead of on the balcony. The wounded officer has risked it, and has again got as far as "I

was born in…” when I see one of the variegated young ladies pounce down on him and bear him off to her villa.

I cannot work, for I am still in a fury and suffering from palpitation of the heart. I do not go to the arbour. It is impolite not to, but, after all, I can’t be expected to go in the rain.

At twelve o’clock I receive a letter from Mashenka, a letter full of reproaches and entreaties to go to the arbour, addressing me as “thou.” At one o’clock I get a second letter, and at two, a third.… I must go.… But before going I must consider what I am to say to her. I will behave like a gentleman.

To begin with, I will tell her that she is mistaken in supposing that I am in love with her. That’s a thing one does not say to a lady as a rule, though. To tell a lady that one’s not in love with her, is almost as rude as to tell an author he can’t write.

The best thing will be to explain my views of marriage.

I put on my winter overcoat, take an umbrella, and walk to the arbour.

Knowing the hastiness of my temper, I am afraid I may be led into speaking too strongly; I will try to restrain myself.

I find Nadenka still waiting for me. She is pale and in tears. On seeing me she utters a cry of joy, flings herself on my neck, and says:

“At last! You are trying my patience.… Listen, I have not slept all night.… I have been thinking and thinking.… I believe that when I come to know you better I shall learn to love you.…”

I sit down, and begin to unfold my views of marriage. To begin with, to clear the ground of digressions and to be as brief as possible, I open with a short historical survey. I speak of marriage in ancient Egypt and India, then pass to more recent times, a few ideas from Schopenhauer. Mashenka listens attentively, but all of a sudden, through some strange incoherence of ideas, thinks fit to interrupt me:

“*Nicolas*, kiss me!” she says.

I am embarrassed and don’t know what to say to her. She repeats her request. There seems no avoiding it. I get up and bend over her long face, feeling as I do so just as I did in my childhood when I was lifted up to kiss my grandmother in her coffin. Not content with the kiss, Mashenka leaps up and impulsively embraces me. At that instant, Mashenka’s *maman* appears in the doorway of the arbour.… She makes a face as though in alarm, and saying “sh-sh” to someone with her, vanishes like Mephistopheles through the trapdoor.

Confused and enraged, I return to our villa. At home I find Varenka’s *maman* embracing my *maman* with tears in her eyes. And my *maman*

weeps and says:

"I always hoped for it!"

And then, if you please, Nadenka's *maman* comes up to me, embraces me, and says:

"May God bless you!… Mind you love her well.… Remember the sacrifice she is making for your sake!"

And here I am at my wedding. At the moment I write these last words, my best man is at my side, urging me to make haste. These people have no idea of my character! I have a violent temper, I cannot always answer for myself! Hang it all! God knows what will come of it! To lead a violent, desperate man to the altar is as unwise as to thrust one's hand into the cage of a ferocious tiger. We shall see, we shall see!

And so, I am married. Everybody congratulates me and Varenka keeps clinging to me and saying:

"Now you are mine, mine; do you understand that? Tell me that you love me!" And her nose swells as she says it.

I learn from my best man that the wounded officer has very cleverly escaped the snares of Hymen. He showed the variegated young lady a medical certificate that owing to the wound in his temple he was at times mentally deranged and incapable of contracting a valid marriage. An inspiration! I might have got a certificate too. An uncle of mine drank himself to death, another uncle was extremely absentminded (on one occasion he put a lady's muff on his head in mistake for his hat), an aunt of mine played a great deal on the piano, and used to put out her tongue at gentlemen she did not like. And my ungovernable temper is a very suspicious symptom.

But why do these great ideas always come too late? Why?

UPROOTED

AN INCIDENT OF MY TRAVELS

I was on my way back from evening service. The clock in the belfry of the Svyatogorsky Monastery pealed out its soft melodious chimes by way of prelude and then struck twelve. The great courtyard of the monastery stretched out at the foot of the Holy Mountains on the banks of the Donets, and, enclosed by the high hostel buildings as by a wall, seemed now in the night, when it was lighted up only by dim lanterns, lights in the windows, and the stars, a living hotch-potch full of movement, sound, and the most original confusion. From end to end, so far as the eye could see, it was all choked up with carts, old-fashioned coaches and chaises, vans, tilt-carts, about which stood crowds of horses, dark and white, and horned oxen, while people bustled about, and black long-skirted lay brothers threaded their way in and out in all directions. Shadows and streaks of light cast from the windows moved over the carts and the heads of men and horses, and in the dense twilight this all assumed the most monstrous capricious shapes: here the tilted shafts stretched upwards to the sky, here eyes of fire appeared in the face of a horse, there a lay brother grew a pair of black wings.… There was the noise of talk, the snorting and munching of horses, the creaking of carts, the whimpering of children. Fresh crowds kept walking in at the gate and belated carts drove up.

The pines which were piled up on the overhanging mountain, one above another, and leaned towards the roof of the hostel, gazed into the courtyard as into a deep pit, and listened in wonder; in their dark thicket the cuckoos and nightingales never ceased calling.… Looking at the confusion, listening to the uproar, one fancied that in this living hotch-potch no one understood anyone, that everyone was looking for something and would not find it, and that this multitude of carts, chaises and human beings could not ever succeed in getting off.

More than ten thousand people flocked to the Holy Mountains for the festivals of St. John the Divine and St. Nikolay the wonder-worker. Not only the hostel buildings, but even the bakehouse, the tailoring room, the carpenter’s shop, the carriage house, were filled to overflowing.… Those

who had arrived towards night clustered like flies in autumn, by the walls, round the wells in the yard, or in the narrow passages of the hostel, waiting to be shown a resting-place for the night. The lay brothers, young and old, were in an incessant movement, with no rest or hope of being relieved. By day or late at night they produced the same impression of men hastening somewhere and agitated by something, yet, in spite of their extreme exhaustion, their faces remained full of courage and kindly welcome, their voices friendly, their movements rapid.… For everyone who came they had to find a place to sleep, and to provide food and drink; to those who were deaf, slow to understand, or profuse in questions, they had to give long and wearisome explanations, to tell them why there were no empty rooms, at what o'clock the service was to be, where holy bread was sold, and so on. They had to run, to carry, to talk incessantly, but more than that, they had to be polite, too, to be tactful, to try to arrange that the Greeks from Mariupol, accustomed to live more comfortably than the Little Russians, should be put with other Greeks, that some shopkeeper from Bahmut or Lisitchansk, dressed like a lady, should not be offended by being put with peasants. There were continual cries of: "Father, kindly give us some kvass! Kindly give us some hay!" or "Father, may I drink water after confession?" And the lay brother would have to give out kvass or hay or to answer: "Address yourself to the priest, my good woman, we have not the authority to give permission." Another question would follow, "Where is the priest then?" and the lay brother would have to explain where was the priest's cell. With all this bustling activity, he yet had to make time to go to service in the church, to serve in the part devoted to the gentry, and to give full answers to the mass of necessary and unnecessary questions which pilgrims of the educated class are fond of showering about them. Watching them during the course of twenty-four hours, I found it hard to imagine when these black moving figures sat down and when they slept.

When, coming back from the evening service, I went to the hostel in which a place had been assigned me, the monk in charge of the sleeping quarters was standing in the doorway, and beside him, on the steps, was a group of several men and women dressed like townsfolk.

"Sir," said the monk, stopping me, "will you be so good as to allow this young man to pass the night in your room? If you would do us the favour! There are so many people and no place left—it is really dreadful!"

And he indicated a short figure in a light overcoat and a straw hat. I consented, and my chance companion followed me. Unlocking the little

padlock on my door, I was always, whether I wanted to or not, obliged to look at the picture that hung on the doorpost on a level with my face. This picture with the title, *A Meditation on Death*, depicted a monk on his knees, gazing at a coffin and at a skeleton laying in it. Behind the man's back stood another skeleton, somewhat more solid and carrying a scythe.

"There are no bones like that," said my companion, pointing to the place in the skeleton where there ought to have been a pelvis. "Speaking generally, you know, the spiritual fare provided for the people is not of the first quality," he added, and heaved through his nose a long and very melancholy sigh, meant to show me that I had to do with a man who really knew something about spiritual fare.

While I was looking for the matches to light a candle he sighed once more and said:

"When I was in Harkov I went several times to the anatomy theatre and saw the bones there; I have even been in the mortuary. Am I not in your way?"

My room was small and poky, with neither table nor chairs in it, but quite filled up with a chest of drawers by the window, the stove and two little wooden sofas which stood against the walls, facing one another, leaving a narrow space to walk between them. Thin rusty-looking little mattresses lay on the little sofas, as well as my belongings. There were two sofas, so this room was evidently intended for two, and I pointed out the fact to my companion.

"They will soon be ringing for mass, though," he said, "and I shan't have to be in your way very long."

Still under the impression that he was in my way and feeling awkward, he moved with a guilty step to his little sofa, sighed guiltily and sat down. When the tallow candle with its dim, dilatory flame had left off flickering and burned up sufficiently to make us both visible, I could make out what he was like. He was a young man of two-and-twenty, with a round and pleasing face, dark childlike eyes, dressed like a townsman in grey cheap clothes, and as one could judge from his complexion and narrow shoulders, not used to manual labour. He was of a very indefinite type; one could take him neither for a student nor for a man in trade, still less for a workman. But looking at his attractive face and childlike friendly eyes, I was unwilling to believe he was one of those vagabond impostors with whom every conventual establishment where they give food and lodging is flooded, and who give themselves out as divinity students, expelled for standing up for justice, or for

church singers who have lost their voice.… There was something characteristic, typical, very familiar in his face, but what exactly, I could not remember nor make out.

For a long time he sat silent, pondering. Probably because I had not shown appreciation of his remarks about bones and the mortuary, he thought that I was ill-humoured and displeased at his presence. Pulling a sausage out of his pocket, he turned it about before his eyes and said irresolutely:

"Excuse my troubling you,… have you a knife?"

I gave him a knife.

"The sausage is disgusting," he said, frowning and cutting himself off a little bit. "In the shop here they sell you rubbish and fleece you horribly.… I would offer you a piece, but you would scarcely care to consume it. Will you have some?"

In his language, too, there was something typical that had a very great deal in common with what was characteristic in his face, but what it was exactly I still could not decide. To inspire confidence and to show that I was not ill-humoured, I took some of the proffered sausage. It certainly was horrible; one needed the teeth of a good house-dog to deal with it. As we worked our jaws we got into conversation; we began complaining to each other of the lengthiness of the service.

"The rule here approaches that of Mount Athos," I said; "but at Athos the night services last ten hours, and on great feast-days—fourteen! You should go there for prayers!"

"Yes," answered my companion, and he wagged his head, "I have been here for three weeks. And you know, every day services, every day services. On ordinary days at midnight they ring for matins, at five o'clock for early mass, at nine o'clock for late mass. Sleep is utterly out of the question. In the daytime there are hymns of praise, special prayers, vespers.… And when I was preparing for the sacrament I was simply dropping from exhaustion." He sighed and went on: "And it's awkward not to go to church.… The monks give one a room, feed one, and, you know, one is ashamed not to go. One wouldn't mind standing it for a day or two, perhaps, but three weeks is too much—much too much! Are you here for long?"

"I am going tomorrow evening."

"But I am staying another fortnight."

"But I thought it was not the rule to stay for so long here?" I said.

"Yes, that's true: if anyone stays too long, sponging on the monks, he is asked to go. Judge for yourself, if the proletariat were allowed to stay

on here as long as they liked there would never be a room vacant, and they would eat up the whole monastery. That's true. But the monks make an exception for me, and I hope they won't turn me out for some time. You know I am a convert."

"You mean?"

"I am a Jew baptized.… Only lately I have embraced orthodoxy."

Now I understood what I had before been utterly unable to understand from his face: his thick lips, and his way of twitching up the right corner of his mouth and his right eyebrow, when he was talking, and that peculiar oily brilliance of his eyes which is only found in Jews. I understood, too, his phraseology.… From further conversation I learned that his name was Alexandr Ivanitch, and had in the past been Isaac, that he was a native of the Mogilev province, and that he had come to the Holy Mountains from Novotcherkassk, where he had adopted the orthodox faith.

Having finished his sausage, Alexandr Ivanitch got up, and, raising his right eyebrow, said his prayer before the icon. The eyebrow remained up when he sat down again on the little sofa and began giving me a brief account of his long biography.

"From early childhood I cherished a love for learning," he began in a tone which suggested he was not speaking of himself, but of some great man of the past. "My parents were poor Hebrews; they exist by buying and selling in a small way; they live like beggars, you know, in filth. In fact, all the people there are poor and superstitious; they don't like education, because education, very naturally, turns a man away from religion.… They are fearful fanatics.… Nothing would induce my parents to let me be educated, and they wanted me to take to trade, too, and to know nothing but the Talmud.… But you will agree, it is not everyone who can spend his whole life struggling for a crust of bread, wallowing in filth, and mumbling the Talmud. At times officers and country gentlemen would put up at papa's inn, and they used to talk a great deal of things which in those days I had never dreamed of; and, of course, it was alluring and moved me to envy. I used to cry and entreat them to send me to school, but they taught me to read Hebrew and nothing more. Once I found a Russian newspaper, and took it home with me to make a kite of it. I was beaten for it, though I couldn't read Russian. Of course, fanaticism is inevitable, for every people instinctively strives to preserve its nationality, but I did not know that then and was very indignant.…"

Having made such an intellectual observation, Isaac, as he had been, raised his right eyebrow higher than ever in his satisfaction and looked at me, as it were, sideways, like a cock at a grain of corn, with an air as though he would say: “Now at last you see for certain that I am an intellectual man, don’t you?” After saying something more about fanaticism and his irresistible yearning for enlightenment, he went on:

“What could I do? I ran away to Smolensk. And there I had a cousin who relined saucepans and made tins. Of course, I was glad to work under him, as I had nothing to live upon; I was barefoot and in rags.… I thought I could work by day and study at night and on Saturdays. And so I did, but the police found out I had no passport and sent me back by stages to my father.…”

Alexandr Ivanitch shrugged one shoulder and sighed.

“What was one to do?” he went on, and the more vividly the past rose up before his mind, the more marked his Jewish accent became. “My parents punished me and handed me over to my grandfather, a fanatical old Jew, to be reformed. But I went off at night to Shklov. And when my uncle tried to catch me in Shklov, I went off to Mogilev; there I stayed two days and then I went off to Starodub with a comrade.”

Later on he mentioned in his story Gonel, Kiev, Byelaya, Tserkov, Uman, Balt, Bendery and at last reached Odessa.

“In Odessa I wandered about for a whole week, out of work and hungry, till I was taken in by some Jews who went about the town buying secondhand clothes. I knew how to read and write by then, and had done arithmetic up to fractions, and I wanted to go to study somewhere, but I had not the means. What was I to do? For six months I went about Odessa buying old clothes, but the Jews paid me no wages, the rascals. I resented it and left them. Then I went by steamer to Perekop.”

“What for?”

“Oh, nothing. A Greek promised me a job there. In short, till I was sixteen I wandered about like that with no definite work and no roots till I got to Poltava. There a student, a Jew, found out that I wanted to study, and gave me a letter to the Harkov students. Of course, I went to Harkov. The students consulted together and began to prepare me for the technical school. And, you know, I must say the students that I met there were such that I shall never forget them to the day of my death. To say nothing of their giving me food and lodging, they set me on the right path, they made me think, showed me the object of life. Among them

were intellectual remarkable people who by now are celebrated. For instance, you have heard of Grumaher, haven't you?"

"No, I haven't."

"You haven't! He wrote very clever articles in the *Harkov Gazette*, and was preparing to be a professor. Well, I read a great deal and attended the student's societies, where you hear nothing that is commonplace. I was working up for six months, but as one has to have been through the whole high school course of mathematics to enter the technical school, Grumaher advised me to try for the veterinary institute, where they admit high school boys from the sixth form. Of course, I began working for it. I did not want to be a veterinary surgeon but they told me that after finishing the course at the veterinary institute I should be admitted to the faculty of medicine without examination. I learnt all Kühner; I could read Cornelius Nepos, *à livre ouvert*; and in Greek I read through almost all Curtius. But, you know, one thing and another,… the students leaving and the uncertainty of my position, and then I heard that my mamma had come and was looking for me all over Harkov. Then I went away. What was I to do? But luckily I learned that there was a school of mines here on the Donets line. Why should I not enter that? You know the school of mines qualifies one as a mining foreman—a splendid berth. I know of mines where the foremen get a salary of fifteen hundred a year. Capital.… I entered it.…"

With an expression of reverent awe on his face Alexandr Ivanitch enumerated some two dozen abstruse sciences in which instruction was given at the school of mines; he described the school itself, the construction of the shafts, and the condition of the miners.… Then he told me a terrible story which sounded like an invention, though I could not help believing it, for his tone in telling it was too genuine and the expression of horror on his Semitic face was too evidently sincere.

"While I was doing the practical work, I had such an accident one day!" he said, raising both eyebrows. "I was at a mine here in the Donets district. You have seen, I dare say, how people are let down into the mine. You remember when they start the horse and set the gates moving one bucket on the pulley goes down into the mine, while the other comes up; when the first begins to come up, then the second goes down—exactly like a well with two pails. Well, one day I got into the bucket, began going down, and can you fancy, all at once I heard, 'Trrr!' The chain had broken and I flew to the devil together with the bucket and the broken bit of chain.… I fell from a height of twenty feet, flat on my chest and stomach, while the bucket, being heavier, reached the bottom

before me, and I hit this shoulder here against its edge. I lay, you know, stunned. I thought I was killed, and all at once I saw a fresh calamity: the other bucket, which was going up, having lost the counterbalancing weight, was coming down with a crash straight upon me.… What was I to do? Seeing the position, I squeezed closer to the wall, crouching and waiting for the bucket to come full crush next minute on my head. I thought of papa and mamma and Mogilev and Grumaher.… I prayed.… But happily… it frightens me even to think of it.…"

Alexandr Ivanitch gave a constrained smile and rubbed his forehead with his hand.

"But happily it fell beside me and only caught this side a little.… It tore off coat, shirt and skin, you know, from this side.… The force of it was terrific. I was unconscious after it. They got me out and sent me to the hospital. I was there four months, and the doctors there said I should go into consumption. I always have a cough now and a pain in my chest. And my psychic condition is terrible.… When I am alone in a room I feel overcome with terror. Of course, with my health in that state, to be a mining foreman is out of the question. I had to give up the school of mines.…"

"And what are you doing now?" I asked.

"I have passed my examination as a village schoolmaster. Now I belong to the orthodox church, and I have a right to be a teacher. In Novotcherkassk, where I was baptized, they took a great interest in me and promised me a place in a church parish school. I am going there in a fortnight, and shall ask again."

Alexandr Ivanitch took off his overcoat and remained in a shirt with an embroidered Russian collar and a worsted belt.

"It is time for bed," he said, folding his overcoat for a pillow, and yawning. "Till lately, you know, I had no knowledge of God at all. I was an atheist. When I was lying in the hospital I thought of religion, and began reflecting on that subject. In my opinion, there is only one religion possible for a thinking man, and that is the Christian religion. If you don't believe in Christ, then there is nothing else to believe in,… is there? Judaism has outlived its day, and is preserved only owing to the peculiarities of the Jewish race. When civilization reaches the Jews there will not be a trace of Judaism left. All young Jews are atheists now, observe. The New Testament is the natural continuation of the Old, isn't it?"

I began trying to find out the reasons which had led him to take so grave and bold a step as the change of religion, but he kept repeating the

same, “The New Testament is the natural continuation of the Old”—a formula obviously not his own, but acquired—which did not explain the question in the least. In spite of my efforts and artifices, the reasons remained obscure. If one could believe that he had embraced Orthodoxy from conviction, as he said he had done, what was the nature and foundation of this conviction it was impossible to grasp from his words. It was equally impossible to assume that he had changed his religion from interested motives: his cheap shabby clothes, his going on living at the expense of the convent, and the uncertainty of his future, did not look like interested motives. There was nothing for it but to accept the idea that my companion had been impelled to change his religion by the same restless spirit which had flung him like a chip of wood from town to town, and which he, using the generally accepted formula, called the craving for enlightenment.

Before going to bed I went into the corridor to get a drink of water. When I came back my companion was standing in the middle of the room, and he looked at me with a scared expression. His face looked a greyish white, and there were drops of perspiration on his forehead.

“My nerves are in an awful state,” he muttered with a sickly smile, “awful! It’s acute psychological disturbance. But that’s of no consequence.”

And he began reasoning again that the New Testament was a natural continuation of the Old, that Judaism has outlived its day.… Picking out his phrases, he seemed to be trying to put together the forces of his conviction and to smother with them the uneasiness of his soul, and to prove to himself that in giving up the religion of his fathers he had done nothing dreadful or peculiar, but had acted as a thinking man free from prejudice, and that therefore he could boldly remain in a room all alone with his conscience. He was trying to convince himself, and with his eyes besought my assistance.

Meanwhile a big clumsy wick had burned up on our tallow candle. It was by now getting light. At the gloomy little window, which was turning blue, we could distinctly see both banks of the Donets River and the oak copse beyond the river. It was time to sleep.

“It will be very interesting here tomorrow,” said my companion when I put out the candle and went to bed. “After early mass, the procession will go in boats from the Monastery to the Hermitage.”

Raising his right eyebrow and putting his head on one side, he prayed before the icons, and, without undressing, lay down on his little sofa.

“Yes,” he said, turning over on the other side.

“Why yes?” I asked.

“When I accepted orthodoxy in Novotcherkassk my mother was looking for me in Rostov. She felt that I meant to change my religion,” he sighed, and went on: “It is six years since I was there in the province of Mogilev. My sister must be married by now.”

After a short silence, seeing that I was still awake, he began talking quietly of how they soon, thank God, would give him a job, and that at last he would have a home of his own, a settled position, his daily bread secure.… And I was thinking that this man would never have a home of his own, nor a settled position, nor his daily bread secure. He dreamed aloud of a village school as of the Promised Land; like the majority of people, he had a prejudice against a wandering life, and regarded it as something exceptional, abnormal and accidental, like an illness, and was looking for salvation in ordinary workaday life. The tone of his voice betrayed that he was conscious of his abnormal position and regretted it. He seemed as it were apologizing and justifying himself.

Not more than a yard from me lay a homeless wanderer; in the rooms of the hostels and by the carts in the courtyard among the pilgrims some hundreds of such homeless wanderers were waiting for the morning, and further away, if one could picture to oneself the whole of Russia, a vast multitude of such uprooted creatures was pacing at that moment along high roads and sidetracks, seeking something better, or were waiting for the dawn, asleep in wayside inns and little taverns, or on the grass under the open sky.… As I fell asleep I imagined how amazed and perhaps even overjoyed all these people would have been if reasoning and words could be found to prove to them that their life was as little in need of justification as any other. In my sleep I heard a bell ring outside as plaintively as though shedding bitter tears, and the lay brother calling out several times:

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon us! Come to mass!”

When I woke up my companion was not in the room. It was sunny and there was a murmur of the crowds through the window. Going out, I learned that mass was over and that the procession had set off for the Hermitage some time before. The people were wandering in crowds upon the river bank and, feeling at liberty, did not know what to do with themselves: they could not eat or drink, as the late mass was not yet over at the Hermitage; the Monastery shops where pilgrims are so fond of crowding and asking prices were still shut. In spite of their exhaustion, many of them from sheer boredom were trudging to the Hermitage. The path from the Monastery to the Hermitage, towards which I directed my

steps, twined like a snake along the high steep bank, going up and down and threading in and out among the oaks and pines. Below, the Donets gleamed, reflecting the sun; above, the rugged chalk cliff stood up white with bright green on the top from the young foliage of oaks and pines, which, hanging one above another, managed somehow to grow on the vertical cliff without falling. The pilgrims trailed along the path in single file, one behind another. The majority of them were Little Russians from the neighbouring districts, but there were many from a distance, too, who had come on foot from the provinces of Kursk and Orel; in the long string of varied colours there were Greek settlers, too, from Mariupol, strongly built, sedate and friendly people, utterly unlike their weakly and degenerate compatriots who fill our southern seaside towns. There were men from the Donets, too, with red stripes on their breeches, and emigrants from the Tavritchesky province. There were a good many pilgrims of a nondescript class, like my Alexandr Ivanitch; what sort of people they were and where they came from it was impossible to tell from their faces, from their clothes, or from their speech. The path ended at the little landing-stage, from which a narrow road went to the left to the Hermitage, cutting its way through the mountain. At the landing-stage stood two heavy big boats of a forbidding aspect, like the New Zealand pirogues which one may see in the works of Jules Verne. One boat with rugs on the seats was destined for the clergy and the singers, the other without rugs for the public. When the procession was returning I found myself among the elect who had succeeded in squeezing themselves into the second. There were so many of the elect that the boat scarcely moved, and one had to stand all the way without stirring and to be careful that one’s hat was not crushed. The route was lovely. Both banks—one high, steep and white, with overhanging pines and oaks, with the crowds hurrying back along the path, and the other shelving, with green meadows and an oak copse bathed in sunshine—looked as happy and rapturous as though the May morning owed its charm only to them. The reflection of the sun in the rapidly flowing Donets quivered and raced away in all directions, and its long rays played on the chasubles, on the banners and on the drops splashed up by the oars. The singing of the Easter hymns, the ringing of the bells, the splash of the oars in the water, the calls of the birds, all mingled in the air into something tender and harmonious. The boat with the priests and the banners led the way; at its helm the black figure of a lay brother stood motionless as a statue.

When the procession was getting near the Monastery, I noticed Alexandr Ivanitch among the elect. He was standing in front of them all, and, his mouth wide open with pleasure and his right eyebrow cocked up, was gazing at the procession. His face was beaming; probably at such moments, when there were so many people round him and it was so bright, he was satisfied with himself, his new religion, and his conscience.

When a little later we were sitting in our room, drinking tea, he still beamed with satisfaction; his face showed that he was satisfied both with the tea and with me, that he fully appreciated my being an intellectual, but that he would know how to play his part with credit if any intellectual topic turned up.…

"Tell me, what psychology ought I to read?" he began an intellectual conversation, wrinkling up his nose.

"Why, what do you want it for?"

"One cannot be a teacher without a knowledge of psychology. Before teaching a boy I ought to understand his soul."

I told him that psychology alone would not be enough to make one understand a boy's soul, and moreover psychology for a teacher who had not yet mastered the technical methods of instruction in reading, writing, and arithmetic would be a luxury as superfluous as the higher mathematics. He readily agreed with me, and began describing how hard and responsible was the task of a teacher, how hard it was to eradicate in the boy the habitual tendency to evil and superstition, to make him think honestly and independently, to instil into him true religion, the ideas of personal dignity, of freedom, and so on. In answer to this I said something to him. He agreed again. He agreed very readily, in fact. Obviously his brain had not a very firm grasp of all these "intellectual subjects."

Up to the time of my departure we strolled together about the Monastery, whiling away the long hot day. He never left my side a minute; whether he had taken a fancy to me or was afraid of solitude, God only knows! I remember we sat together under a clump of yellow acacia in one of the little gardens that are scattered on the mountain side.

"I am leaving here in a fortnight," he said; "it is high time."

"Are you going on foot?"

"From here to Slavyansk I shall walk, then by railway to Nikitovka; from Nikitovka the Donets line branches off, and along that branch line I shall walk as far as Hatsepetovka, and there a railway guard, I know, will help me on my way."

I thought of the bare, deserted steppe between Nikitovka and Hatsepetovka, and pictured to myself Alexandr Ivanitch striding along it, with his doubts, his homesickness, and his fear of solitude.… He read boredom in my face, and sighed.

"And my sister must be married by now," he said, thinking aloud, and at once, to shake off melancholy thoughts, pointed to the top of the rock and said:

"From that mountain one can see Izyum."

As we were walking up the mountain he had a little misfortune. I suppose he stumbled, for he slit his cotton trousers and tore the sole of his shoe.

"Tss!" he said, frowning as he took off a shoe and exposed a bare foot without a stocking. "How unpleasant!… That's a complication, you know, which… Yes!"

Turning the shoe over and over before his eyes, as though unable to believe that the sole was ruined forever, he spent a long time frowning, sighing, and clicking with his tongue.

I had in my trunk a pair of boots, old but fashionable, with pointed toes and laces. I had brought them with me in case of need, and only wore them in wet weather. When we got back to our room I made up a phrase as diplomatic as I could and offered him these boots. He accepted them and said with dignity:

"I should thank you, but I know that you consider thanks a convention."

He was pleased as a child with the pointed toes and the laces, and even changed his plans.

"Now I shall go to Novotcherkassk in a week, and not in a fortnight," he said, thinking aloud. "In shoes like these I shall not be ashamed to show myself to my godfather. I was not going away from here just because I hadn't any decent clothes.…"

When the coachman was carrying out my trunk, a lay brother with a good ironical face came in to sweep out the room. Alexandr Ivanitch seemed flustered and embarrassed and asked him timidly:

"Am I to stay here or go somewhere else?"

He could not make up his mind to occupy a whole room to himself, and evidently by now was feeling ashamed of living at the expense of the Monastery. He was very reluctant to part from me; to put off being lonely as long as possible, he asked leave to see me on my way.

The road from the Monastery, which had been excavated at the cost of no little labour in the chalk mountain, moved upwards, going almost like

a spiral round the mountain, over roots and under sullen overhanging pines.…

The Donets was the first to vanish from our sight, after it the Monastery yard with its thousands of people, and then the green roofs.… Since I was mounting upwards everything seemed vanishing into a pit. The cross on the church, burnished by the rays of the setting sun, gleamed brightly in the abyss and vanished. Nothing was left but the oaks, the pines, and the white road. But then our carriage came out on a level country, and that was all left below and behind us. Alexandr Ivanitch jumped out and, smiling mournfully, glanced at me for the last time with his childish eyes, and vanished from me forever.…

The impressions of the Holy Mountains had already become memories, and I saw something new: the level plain, the whitish-brown distance, the way side copse, and beyond it a windmill which stood without moving, and seemed bored at not being allowed to wave its sails because it was a holiday.

A Father

“I admit I have had a drop.… You must excuse me. I went into a beer shop on the way here, and as it was so hot had a couple of bottles. It’s hot, my boy.”

Old Musatov took a nondescript rag out of his pocket and wiped his shaven, battered face with it.

“I have come only for a minute, Borenka, my angel,” he went on, not looking at his son, “about something very important. Excuse me, perhaps I am hindering you. Haven’t you ten roubles, my dear, you could let me have till Tuesday? You see, I ought to have paid for my lodging yesterday, and money, you see!… None! Not to save my life!”

Young Musatov went out without a word, and began whispering the other side of the door with the landlady of the summer villa and his colleagues who had taken the villa with him. Three minutes later he came back, and without a word gave his father a ten-rouble note. The latter thrust it carelessly into his pocket without looking at it, and said:

“*Merci.* Well, how are you getting on? It’s a long time since we met.”

“Yes, a long time, not since Easter.”

“Half a dozen times I have been meaning to come to you, but I’ve never had time. First one thing, then another.… It’s simply awful! I am talking nonsense though.… All that’s nonsense. Don’t you believe me, Borenka. I said I would pay you back the ten roubles on Tuesday, don’t believe that either. Don’t believe a word I say. I have nothing to do at all, it’s simply laziness, drunkenness, and I am ashamed to be seen in such clothes in the street. You must excuse me, Borenka. Here I have sent the girl to you three times for money and written you piteous letters. Thanks for the money, but don’t believe the letters; I was telling fibs. I am ashamed to rob you, my angel; I know that you can scarcely make both ends meet yourself, and feed on locusts, but my impudence is too much for me. I am such a specimen of impudence—fit for a show!… You must excuse me, Borenka. I tell you the truth, because I can’t see your angel face without emotion.”

A minute passed in silence. The old man heaved a deep sigh and said:

“You might treat me to a glass of beer perhaps.”

His son went out without a word, and again there was a sound of whispering the other side of the door. When a little later the beer was brought in, the old man seemed to revive at the sight of the bottles and abruptly changed his tone.

“I was at the races the other day, my boy,” he began telling him, assuming a scared expression. “We were a party of three, and we pooled three roubles on Frisky. And, thanks to that Frisky, we got thirty-two roubles each for our rouble. I can’t get on without the races, my boy. It’s a gentlemanly diversion. My virago always gives me a dressing over the races, but I go. I love it, and that’s all about it.”

Boris, a fair-haired young man with a melancholy immobile face, was walking slowly up and down, listening in silence. When the old man stopped to clear his throat, he went up to him and said:

“I bought myself a pair of boots the other day, father, which turn out to be too tight for me. Won’t you take them? I’ll let you have them cheap.”

“If you like,” said the old man with a grimace, “only for the price you gave for them, without any cheapening.”

“Very well, I’ll let you have them on credit.”

The son groped under the bed and produced the new boots. The father took off his clumsy, rusty, evidently secondhand boots and began trying on the new ones.

“A perfect fit,” he said. “Right, let me keep them. And on Tuesday, when I get my pension, I’ll send you the money for them. That’s not true, though,” he went on, suddenly falling into the same tearful tone again. “And it was a lie about the races, too, and a lie about the pension. And you are deceiving me, Borenka.… I feel your generous tactfulness. I see through you! Your boots were too small, because your heart is too big. Ah, Borenka, Borenka! I understand it all and feel it!”

“Have you moved into new lodgings?” his son interrupted, to change the conversation.

“Yes, my boy. I move every month. My virago can’t stay long in the same place with her temper.”

“I went to your lodgings, I meant to ask you to stay here with me. In your state of health it would do you good to be in the fresh air.”

“No,” said the old man, with a wave of his hand, “the woman wouldn’t let me, and I shouldn’t care to myself. A hundred times you have tried to drag me out of the pit, and I have tried myself, but nothing came of it. Give it up. I must stick in my filthy hole. This minute, here I

am sitting, looking at your angel face, yet something is drawing me home to my hole. Such is my fate. You can't draw a dung-beetle to a rose. But it's time I was going, my boy. It's getting dark."

"Wait a minute then, I'll come with you. I have to go to town today myself."

Both put on their overcoats and went out. When a little while afterwards they were driving in a cab, it was already dark, and lights began to gleam in the windows.

"I've robbed you, Borenka!" the father muttered. "Poor children, poor children! It must be a dreadful trouble to have such a father! Borenka, my angel, I cannot lie when I see your face. You must excuse me.… What my depravity has come to, my God. Here I have just been robbing you, and put you to shame with my drunken state; I am robbing your brothers, too, and put them to shame, and you should have seen me yesterday! I won't conceal it, Borenka. Some neighbours, a wretched crew, came to see my virago; I got drunk, too, with them, and I blackguarded you poor children for all I was worth. I abused you, and complained that you had abandoned me. I wanted, you see, to touch the drunken hussies' hearts, and pose as an unhappy father. It's my way, you know, when I want to screen my vices I throw all the blame on my innocent children. I can't tell lies and hide things from you, Borenka. I came to see you as proud as a peacock, but when I saw your gentleness and kind heart, my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth, and it upset my conscience completely."

"Hush, father, let's talk of something else."

"Mother of God, what children I have," the old man went on, not heeding his son. "What wealth God has bestowed on me. Such children ought not to have had a black sheep like me for a father, but a real man with soul and feeling! I am not worthy of you!"

The old man took off his cap with a button at the top and crossed himself several times.

"Thanks be to Thee, O Lord!" he said with a sigh, looking from side to side as though seeking for an icon. "Remarkable, exceptional children! I have three sons, and they are all like one. Sober, steady, hardworking, and what brains! Cabman, what brains! Grigory alone has brains enough for ten. He speaks French, he speaks German, and talks better than any of your lawyers—one is never tired of listening. My children, my children, I can't believe that you are mine! I can't believe it! You are a martyr, my Borenka, I am ruining you, and I shall go on ruining you.… You give to me endlessly, though you know your money is thrown away.

The other day I sent you a pitiful letter, I described how ill I was, but you know I was lying, I wanted the money for rum. And you give to me because you are afraid to wound me by refusing. I know all that, and feel it. Grisha's a martyr, too. On Thursday I went to his office, drunk, filthy, ragged, reeking of vodka like a cellar… I went straight up, such a figure, I pestered him with nasty talk, while his colleagues and superiors and petitioners were standing round. I have disgraced him for life. And he wasn't the least confused, only turned a bit pale, but smiled and came up to me as though there were nothing the matter, even introduced me to his colleagues. Then he took me all the way home, and not a word of reproach. I rob him worse than you. Take your brother Sasha now, he's a martyr too! He married, as you know, a colonel's daughter of an aristocratic circle, and got a dowry with her.… You would think he would have nothing to do with me. No, brother, after his wedding he came with his young wife and paid me the first visit… in my hole.… Upon my soul!"

The old man gave a sob and then began laughing.

"And at that moment, as luck would have it, we were eating grated radish with kvass and frying fish, and there was a stink enough in the flat to make the devil sick. I was lying down—I'd had a drop—my virago bounced out at the young people with her face crimson,… It was a disgrace in fact. But Sasha rose superior to it all."

"Yes, our Sasha is a good fellow," said Boris.

"The most splendid fellow! You are all pure gold, you and Grisha and Sasha and Sonya. I worry you, torment you, disgrace you, rob you, and all my life I have not heard one word of reproach from you, you have never given me one cross look. It would be all very well if I had been a decent father to you—but as it is! You have had nothing from me but harm. I am a bad, dissipated man.… Now, thank God, I am quieter and I have no strength of will, but in old days when you were little I had determination, will. Whatever I said or did I always thought it was right. Sometimes I'd come home from the club at night, drunk and ill-humoured, and scold at your poor mother for spending money. The whole night I would be railing at her, and think it the right thing too; you would get up in the morning and go to school, while I'd still be venting my temper upon her. Heavens! I did torture her, poor martyr! When you came back from school and I was asleep you didn't dare to have dinner till I got up. At dinner again there would be a flare up. I daresay you remember. I wish no one such a father; God sent me to you for a trial. Yes, for a trial! Hold out, children, to the end! Honour thy father and thy

days shall be long. Perhaps for your noble conduct God will grant you long life. Cabman, stop!”

The old man jumped out of the cab and ran into a tavern. Half an hour later he came back, cleared his throat in a drunken way, and sat down beside his son.

“Where’s Sonya now?” he asked. “Still at boarding-school?”

“No, she left in May, and is living now with Sasha’s mother-in-law.”

“There!” said the old man in surprise. “She is a jolly good girl! So she is following her brother’s example.… Ah, Borenka, she has no mother, no one to rejoice over her! I say, Borenka, does she… does she know how I am living? Eh?”

Boris made no answer. Five minutes passed in profound silence. The old man gave a sob, wiped his face with a rag and said:

“I love her, Borenka! She is my only daughter, you know, and in one’s old age there is no comfort like a daughter. Could I see her, Borenka?”

“Of course, when you like.”

“Really? And she won’t mind?”

“Of course not, she has been trying to find you so as to see you.”

“Upon my soul! What children! Cabman, eh? Arrange it, Borenka darling! She is a young lady now, *delicatesse, consommé*, and all the rest of it in a refined way, and I don’t want to show myself to her in such an abject state. I’ll tell you how we’ll contrive to work it. For three days I will keep away from spirits, to get my filthy, drunken phiz into better order. Then I’ll come to you, and you shall lend me for the time some suit of yours; I’ll shave and have my hair cut, then you go and bring her to your flat. Will you?”

“Very well.”

“Cabman, stop!”

The old man sprang out of the cab again and ran into a tavern. While Boris was driving with him to his lodging he jumped out twice again, while his son sat silent and waited patiently for him. When, after dismissing the cab, they made their way across a long, filthy yard to the “virago’s” lodging, the old man put on an utterly shamefaced and guilty air, and began timidly clearing his throat and clicking with his lips.

“Borenka,” he said in an ingratiating voice, “if my virago begins saying anything, don’t take any notice… and behave to her, you know, affably. She is ignorant and impudent, but she’s a good baggage. There is a good, warm heart beating in her bosom!”

The long yard ended, and Boris found himself in a dark entry. The swing door creaked, there was a smell of cooking and a smoking

samovar. There was a sound of harsh voices. Passing through the passage into the kitchen Boris could see nothing but thick smoke, a line with washing on it, and the chimney of the samovar through a crack of which golden sparks were dropping.

"And here is my cell," said the old man, stooping down and going into a little room with a low-pitched ceiling, and an atmosphere unbearably stifling from the proximity of the kitchen.

Here three women were sitting at the table regaling themselves. Seeing the visitors, they exchanged glances and left off eating.

"Well, did you get it?" one of them, apparently the "virago" herself, asked abruptly.

"Yes, yes," muttered the old man. "Well, Boris, pray sit down. Everything is plain here, young man… we live in a simple way."

He bustled about in an aimless way. He felt ashamed before his son, and at the same time apparently he wanted to keep up before the women his dignity as cock of the walk, and as a forsaken, unhappy father.

"Yes, young man, we live simply with no nonsense," he went on muttering. "We are simple people, young man.… We are not like you, we don't want to keep up a show before people. No!… Shall we have a drink of vodka?"

One of the women (she was ashamed to drink before a stranger) heaved a sigh and said:

"Well, I'll have another drink on account of the mushrooms.… They are such mushrooms, they make you drink even if you don't want to. Ivan Gerasimitch, offer the young gentleman, perhaps he will have a drink!"

The last word she pronounced in a mincing drawl.

"Have a drink, young man!" said the father, not looking at his son. "We have no wine or liqueurs, my boy, we live in a plain way."

"He doesn't like our ways," sighed the "virago." "Never mind, never mind, he'll have a drink."

Not to offend his father by refusing, Boris took a wineglass and drank in silence. When they brought in the samovar, to satisfy the old man, he drank two cups of disgusting tea in silence, with a melancholy face. Without a word he listened to the virago dropping hints about there being in this world cruel, heartless children who abandon their parents.

"I know what you are thinking now!" said the old man, after drinking more and passing into his habitual state of drunken excitement. "You think I have let myself sink into the mire, that I am to be pitied, but to my thinking, this simple life is much more normal than your life,… I

don’t need anybody, and… and I don’t intend to eat humble pie.… I can’t endure a wretched boy’s looking at me with compassion.”

After tea he cleaned a herring and sprinkled it with onion, with such feeling, that tears of emotion stood in his eyes. He began talking again about the races and his winnings, about some Panama hat for which he had paid sixteen roubles the day before. He told lies with the same relish with which he ate herring and drank. His son sat on in silence for an hour, and began to say goodbye.

“I don’t venture to keep you,” the old man said, haughtily. “You must excuse me, young man, for not living as you would like!”

He ruffled up his feathers, snorted with dignity, and winked at the women.

“Goodbye, young man,” he said, seeing his son into the entry. “*Attendez.*”

In the entry, where it was dark, he suddenly pressed his face against the young man’s sleeve and gave a sob.

“I should like to have a look at Sonitchka,” he whispered. “Arrange it, Borenka, my angel. I’ll shave, I’ll put on your suit… I’ll put on a straight face… I’ll hold my tongue while she is there. Yes, yes, I will hold my tongue!”

He looked round timidly towards the door, through which the women’s voices were heard, checked his sobs, and said aloud:

“Goodbye, young man! *Attendez.*”

A Happy Ending

Lyubov Grigoryevna, a substantial, buxom lady of forty who undertook matchmaking and many other matters of which it is usual to speak only in whispers, had come to see Stytchkin, the head guard, on a day when he was off duty. Stytchkin, somewhat embarrassed, but, as always, grave, practical, and severe, was walking up and down the room, smoking a cigar and saying:

"Very pleased to make your acquaintance. Semyon Ivanovitch recommended you on the ground that you may be able to assist me in a delicate and very important matter affecting the happiness of my life. I have, Lyubov Grigoryevna, reached the age of fifty-two; that is a period of life at which very many have already grown-up children. My position is a secure one. Though my fortune is not large, yet I am in a position to support a beloved being and children at my side. I may tell you between ourselves that apart from my salary I have also money in the bank which my manner of living has enabled me to save. I am a practical and sober man, I lead a sensible and consistent life, so that I may hold myself up as an example to many. But one thing I lack—a domestic hearth of my own and a partner in life, and I live like a wandering Magyar, moving from place to place without any satisfaction. I have no one with whom to take counsel, and when I am ill no one to give me water, and so on. Apart from that, Lyubov Grigoryevna, a married man has always more weight in society than a bachelor.… I am a man of the educated class, with money, but if you look at me from a point of view, what am I? A man with no kith and kin, no better than some Polish priest. And therefore I should be very desirous to be united in the bonds of Hymen—that is, to enter into matrimony with some worthy person."

"An excellent thing," said the matchmaker, with a sigh.

"I am a solitary man and in this town I know no one. Where can I go, and to whom can I apply, since all the people here are strangers to me? That is why Semyon Ivanovitch advised me to address myself to a person who is a specialist in this line, and makes the arrangement of the

happiness of others her profession. And therefore I most earnestly beg you, Lyubov Grigoryevna, to assist me in ordering my future. You know all the marriageable young ladies in the town, and it is easy for you to accommodate me."

"I can.…"

"A glass of wine, I beg you.…"

With an habitual gesture the matchmaker raised her glass to her mouth and tossed it off without winking.

"I can," she repeated. "And what sort of bride would you like, Nikolay Nikolayitch?"

"Should I like? The bride fate sends me."

"Well, of course it depends on your fate, but everyone has his own taste, you know. One likes dark ladies, the other prefers fair ones."

"You see, Lyubov Grigoryevna," said Stytchkin, sighing sedately, "I am a practical man and a man of character; for me beauty and external appearance generally take a secondary place, for, as you know yourself, beauty is neither bowl nor platter, and a pretty wife involves a great deal of anxiety. The way I look at it is, what matters most in a woman is not what is external, but what lies within—that is, that she should have soul and all the qualities. A glass of wine, I beg.… Of course, it would be very agreeable that one's wife should be rather plump, but for mutual happiness it is not of great consequence; what matters is the mind. Properly speaking, a woman does not need mind either, for if she has brains she will have too high an opinion of herself, and take all sorts of ideas into her head. One cannot do without education nowadays, of course, but education is of different kinds. It would be pleasing for one's wife to know French and German, to speak various languages, very pleasing; but what's the use of that if she can't sew on one's buttons, perhaps? I am a man of the educated class: I am just as much at home, I may say, with Prince Kanitelin as I am with you here now. But my habits are simple, and I want a girl who is not too much a fine lady. Above all, she must have respect for me and feel that I have made her happiness."

"To be sure."

"Well, now as regards the essential.… I do not want a wealthy bride; I would never condescend to anything so low as to marry for money. I desire not to be kept by my wife, but to keep her, and that she may be sensible of it. But I do not want a poor girl either. Though I am a man of means, and am marrying not from mercenary motives, but from love, yet I cannot take a poor girl, for, as you know yourself, prices have gone up so, and there will be children."

“One might find one with a dowry,” said the matchmaker.

“A glass of wine, I beg.…”

There was a pause of five minutes.

The matchmaker heaved a sigh, took a sidelong glance at the guard, and asked:

“Well, now, my good sir… do you want anything in the bachelor line? I have some fine bargains. One is a French girl and one is a Greek. Well worth the money.”

The guard thought a moment and said:

“No, I thank you. In view of your favourable disposition, allow me to enquire now how much you ask for your exertions in regard to a bride?”

“I don’t ask much. Give me twenty-five roubles and the stuff for a dress, as is usual, and I will say thank you… but for the dowry, that’s a different account.”

Stytchkin folded his arms over his chest and fell to pondering in silence. After some thought he heaved a sigh and said:

“That’s dear.…”

“It’s not at all dear, Nikolay Nikolayitch! In old days when there were lots of weddings one did do it cheaper, but nowadays what are our earnings? If you make fifty roubles in a month that is not a fast, you may be thankful. It’s not on weddings we make our money, my good sir.”

Stytchkin looked at the matchmaker in amazement and shrugged his shoulders.

“H’m!… Do you call fifty roubles little?” he asked.

“Of course it is little! In old days we sometimes made more than a hundred.”

“H’m! I should never have thought it was possible to earn such a sum by these jobs. Fifty roubles! It is not every man that earns as much! Pray drink your wine.…”

The matchmaker drained her glass without winking. Stytchkin looked her over from head to foot in silence, then said:

“Fifty roubles.… Why, that is six hundred roubles a year.… Please take some more… With such dividends, you know, Lyubov Grigoryevna, you would have no difficulty in making a match for yourself.…”

“For myself,” laughed the matchmaker, “I am an old woman.”

“Not at all.… You have such a figure, and your face is plump and fair, and all the rest of it.”

The matchmaker was embarrassed. Stytchkin was also embarrassed and sat down beside her.

“You are still very attractive,” said he; “if you met with a practical, steady, careful husband, with his salary and your earnings you might even attract him very much, and you’d get on very well together.…”

“Goodness knows what you are saying, Nikolay Nikolayitch.”

“Well, I meant no harm.…”

A silence followed. Stytchkin began loudly blowing his nose, while the matchmaker turned crimson, and looking bashfully at him, asked:

“And how much do you get, Nikolay Nikolayitch?”

“I? Seventy-five roubles, besides tips.… Apart from that we make something out of candles and hares.”

“You go hunting, then?”

“No. Passengers who travel without tickets are called hares with us.”

Another minute passed in silence. Stytchkin got up and walked about the room in excitement.

“I don’t want a young wife,” said he. “I am a middle-aged man, and I want someone who… as it might be like you… staid and settled and a figure something like yours.…”

“Goodness knows what you are saying…” giggled the matchmaker, hiding her crimson face in her kerchief.

“There is no need to be long thinking about it. You are after my own heart, and you suit me in your qualities. I am a practical, sober man, and if you like me… what could be better? Allow me to make you a proposal!”

The matchmaker dropped a tear, laughed, and, in token of her consent, clinked glasses with Stytchkin.

“Well,” said the happy railway guard, “now allow me to explain to you the behaviour and manner of life I desire from you.… I am a strict, respectable, practical man. I take a gentlemanly view of everything. And I desire that my wife should be strict also, and should understand that to her I am a benefactor and the foremost person in the world.”

He sat down, and, heaving a deep sigh, began expounding to his bride-elect his views on domestic life and a wife’s duties.

In the Coach-House

It was between nine and ten o'clock in the evening. Stepan the coachman, Mihailo the house-porter, Alyoshka the coachman's grandson, who had come up from the village to stay with his grandfather, and Nikandr, an old man of seventy, who used to come into the yard every evening to sell salt herrings, were sitting round a lantern in the big coach-house, playing "kings." Through the wide-open door could be seen the whole yard, the big house, where the master's family lived, the gates, the cellars, and the porter's lodge. It was all shrouded in the darkness of night, and only the four windows of one of the lodges which was let were brightly lit up. The shadows of the coaches and sledges with their shafts tipped upwards stretched from the walls to the doors, quivering and cutting across the shadows cast by the lantern and the players.… On the other side of the thin partition that divided the coach-house from the stable were the horses. There was a scent of hay, and a disagreeable smell of salt herrings coming from old Nikandr.

The porter won and was king; he assumed an attitude such as was in his opinion befitting a king, and blew his nose loudly on a red-checked handkerchief.

"Now if I like I can chop off anybody's head," he said. Alyoshka, a boy of eight with a head of flaxen hair, left long uncut, who had only missed being king by two tricks, looked angrily and with envy at the porter. He pouted and frowned.

"I shall give you the trick, grandfather," he said, pondering over his cards; "I know you have got the queen of diamonds."

"Well, well, little silly, you have thought enough!"

Alyoshka timidly played the knave of diamonds. At that moment a ring was heard from the yard.

"Oh, hang you!" muttered the porter, getting up. "Go and open the gate, O king!"

When he came back a little later, Alyoshka was already a prince, the fish-hawker a soldier, and the coachman a peasant.

“It’s a nasty business,” said the porter, sitting down to the cards again. “I have just let the doctors out. They have not extracted it.”

“How could they? Just think, they would have to pick open the brains. If there is a bullet in the head, of what use are doctors?”

“He is lying unconscious,” the porter went on. “He is bound to die. Alyoshka, don’t look at the cards, you little puppy, or I will pull your ears! Yes, I let the doctors out, and the father and mother in… They have only just arrived. Such crying and wailing, Lord preserve us! They say he is the only son.… It’s a grief!”

All except Alyoshka, who was absorbed in the game, looked round at the brightly lighted windows of the lodge.

“I have orders to go to the police station tomorrow,” said the porter. “There will be an inquiry… But what do I know about it? I saw nothing of it. He called me this morning, gave me a letter, and said: ‘Put it in the letterbox for me.’ And his eyes were red with crying. His wife and children were not at home. They had gone out for a walk. So when I had gone with the letter, he put a bullet into his forehead from a revolver. When I came back his cook was wailing for the whole yard to hear.”

“It’s a great sin,” said the fish-hawker in a husky voice, and he shook his head, “a great sin!”

“From too much learning,” said the porter, taking a trick; “his wits outstripped his wisdom. Sometimes he would sit writing papers all night.… Play, peasant!… But he was a nice gentleman. And so white skinned, black-haired and tall!… He was a good lodger.”

“It seems the fair sex is at the bottom of it,” said the coachman, slapping the nine of trumps on the king of diamonds. “It seems he was fond of another man’s wife and disliked his own; it does happen.”

“The king rebels,” said the porter.

At that moment there was again a ring from the yard. The rebellious king spat with vexation and went out. Shadows like dancing couples flitted across the windows of the lodge. There was the sound of voices and hurried footsteps in the yard.

“I suppose the doctors have come again,” said the coachman. “Our Mihailo is run off his legs.…”

A strange wailing voice rang out for a moment in the air. Alyoshka looked in alarm at his grandfather, the coachman; then at the windows, and said:

“He stroked me on the head at the gate yesterday, and said, ‘What district do you come from, boy?’ Grandfather, who was that howled just now?”

His grandfather trimmed the light in the lantern and made no answer.

“The man is lost,” he said a little later, with a yawn. “He is lost, and his children are ruined, too. It’s a disgrace for his children for the rest of their lives now.”

The porter came back and sat down by the lantern.

“He is dead,” he said. “They have sent to the almshouse for the old women to lay him out.”

“The kingdom of heaven and eternal peace to him!” whispered the coachman, and he crossed himself.

Looking at him, Alyoshka crossed himself too.

“You can’t pray for such as him,” said the fish-hawker.

“Why not?”

“It’s a sin.”

“That’s true,” the porter assented. “Now his soul has gone straight to hell, to the devil.…”

“It’s a sin,” repeated the fish-hawker; “such as he have no funeral, no requiem, but are buried like carrion with no respect.”

The old man put on his cap and got up.

“It was the same thing at our lady’s,” he said, pulling his cap on further. “We were serfs in those days; the younger son of our mistress, the General’s lady, shot himself through the mouth with a pistol, from too much learning, too. It seems that by law such have to be buried outside the cemetery, without priests, without a requiem service; but to save disgrace our lady, you know, bribed the police and the doctors, and they gave her a paper to say her son had done it when delirious, not knowing what he was doing. You can do anything with money. So he had a funeral with priests and every honor, the music played, and he was buried in the church; for the deceased General had built that church with his own money, and all his family were buried there. Only this is what happened, friends. One month passed, and then another, and it was all right. In the third month they informed the General’s lady that the watchmen had come from that same church. What did they want? They were brought to her, they fell at her feet. ‘We can’t go on serving, your excellency,’ they said. ‘Look out for other watchmen and graciously dismiss us.’ ‘What for?’ ‘No,’ they said, ‘we can’t possibly; your son howls under the church all night.’”

Alyoshka shuddered, and pressed his face to the coachman’s back so as not to see the windows.

“At first the General’s lady would not listen,” continued the old man. “‘All this is your fancy, you simple folk have such notions,’ she said. ‘A

dead man cannot howl.' Some time afterwards the watchmen came to her again, and with them the sacristan. So the sacristan, too, had heard him howling. The General's lady saw that it was a bad job; she locked herself in her bedroom with the watchmen. 'Here, my friends, here are twenty-five roubles for you, and for that go by night in secret, so that no one should hear or see you, dig up my unhappy son, and bury him,' she said, 'outside the cemetery.' And I suppose she stood them a glass… And the watchmen did so. The stone with the inscription on it is there to this day, but he himself, the General's son, is outside the cemetery.… O Lord, forgive us our transgressions!" sighed the fish-hawker. "There is only one day in the year when one may pray for such people: the Saturday before Trinity.… You mustn't give alms to beggars for their sake, it is a sin, but you may feed the birds for the rest of their souls. The General's lady used to go out to the crossroads every three days to feed the birds. Once at the crossroads a black dog suddenly appeared; it ran up to the bread, and was such a… we all know what that dog was. The General's lady was like a half-crazy creature for five days afterwards, she neither ate nor drank.… All at once she fell on her knees in the garden, and prayed and prayed.… Well, goodbye, friends, the blessing of God and the Heavenly Mother be with you. Let us go, Mihailo, you'll open the gate for me."

The fish-hawker and the porter went out. The coachman and Alyoshka went out too, so as not to be left in the coach-house.

"The man was living and is dead!" said the coachman, looking towards the windows where shadows were still flitting to and fro. "Only this morning he was walking about the yard, and now he is lying dead."

"The time will come and we shall die too," said the porter, walking away with the fish-hawker, and at once they both vanished from sight in the darkness.

The coachman, and Alyoshka after him, somewhat timidly went up to the lighted windows. A very pale lady with large tear stained eyes, and a fine-looking gray headed man were moving two card-tables into the middle of the room, probably with the intention of laying the dead man upon them, and on the green cloth of the table numbers could still be seen written in chalk. The cook who had run about the yard wailing in the morning was now standing on a chair, stretching up to try and cover the looking glass with a towel.

"Grandfather what are they doing?" asked Alyoshka in a whisper.

"They are just going to lay him on the tables," answered his grandfather. "Let us go, child, it is bedtime."

The coachman and Alyoshka went back to the coach-house. They said their prayers, and took off their boots. Stepan lay down in a corner on the floor, Alyoshka in a sledge. The doors of the coach house were shut, there was a horrible stench from the extinguished lantern. A little later Alyoshka sat up and looked about him; through the crack of the door he could still see a light from those lighted windows.

“Grandfather, I am frightened!” he said.

“Come, go to sleep, go to sleep!…”

“I tell you I am frightened!”

“What are you frightened of? What a baby!”

They were silent.

Alyoshka suddenly jumped out of the sledge and, loudly weeping, ran to his grandfather.

“What is it? What’s the matter?” cried the coachman in a fright, getting up also.

“He’s howling!”

“Who is howling?”

“I am frightened, grandfather, do you hear?”

The coachman listened.

“It’s their crying,” he said. “Come! there, little silly! They are sad, so they are crying.”

“I want to go home,…” his grandson went on sobbing and trembling all over. “Grandfather, let us go back to the village, to mammy; come, grandfather dear, God will give you the heavenly kingdom for it.…”

“What a silly, ah! Come, be quiet, be quiet! Be quiet, I will light the lantern,… silly!”

The coachman fumbled for the matches and lighted the lantern. But the light did not comfort Alyoshka.

“Grandfather Stepan, let’s go to the village!” he besought him, weeping. “I am frightened here; oh, oh, how frightened I am! And why did you bring me from the village, accursed man?”

“Who’s an accursed man? You mustn’t use such disrespectable words to your lawful grandfather. I shall whip you.”

“Do whip me, grandfather, do; beat me like Sidor’s goat, but only take me to mammy, for God’s mercy!…”

“Come, come, grandson, come!” the coachman said kindly. “It’s all right, don’t be frightened.… I am frightened myself.… Say your prayers!”

The door creaked and the porter’s head appeared. “Aren’t you asleep, Stepan?” he asked. “I shan’t get any sleep all night,” he said, coming in.

“I shall be opening and shutting the gates all night.… What are you crying for, Alyoshka?”

“He is frightened,” the coachman answered for his grandson.

Again there was the sound of a wailing voice in the air. The porter said:

“They are crying. The mother can’t believe her eyes.… It’s dreadful how upset she is.”

“And is the father there?”

“Yes.… The father is all right. He sits in the corner and says nothing. They have taken the children to relations.… Well, Stepan, shall we have a game of trumps?”

“Yes,” the coachman agreed, scratching himself, “and you, Alyoshka, go to sleep. Almost big enough to be married, and blubbering, you rascal. Come, go along, grandson, go along.…”

The presence of the porter reassured Alyoshka. He went, not very resolutely, towards the sledge and lay down. And while he was falling asleep he heard a half-whisper.

“I beat and cover,” said his grandfather.

“I beat and cover,” repeated the porter.

The bell rang in the yard, the door creaked and seemed also saying: “I beat and cover.” When Alyoshka dreamed of the gentleman and, frightened by his eyes, jumped up and burst out crying, it was morning, his grandfather was snoring, and the coach-house no longer seemed terrible.

ZINOTCHKA

The party of sportsmen spent the night in a peasant's hut on some newly mown hay. The moon peeped in at the window; from the street came the mournful wheezing of a concertina; from the hay came a sickly sweet, faintly troubling scent. The sportsmen talked about dogs, about women, about first love, and about snipe. After all the ladies of their acquaintance had been picked to pieces, and hundreds of stories had been told, the stoutest of the sportsmen, who looked in the darkness like a haycock, and who talked in the mellow bass of a staff officer, gave a loud yawn and said:

"It is nothing much to be loved; the ladies are created for the purpose of loving us men. But, tell me, has any one of you fellows been hated—passionately, furiously hated? Has any one of you watched the ecstasies of hatred? Eh?"

No answer followed.

"Has no one, gentlemen?" asked the staff officer's bass voice. "But I, now, have been hated, hated by a pretty girl, and have been able to study the symptoms of first hatred directed against myself. It was the first, because it was something exactly the converse of first love. What I am going to tell, however, happened when I knew nothing about love or hate. I was eight at the time, but that made no difference; in this case it was not *he* but *she* that mattered. Well, I beg your attention. One fine summer evening, just before sunset, I was sitting in the nursery, doing my lesson with my governess, Zinotchka, a very charming and poetical creature who had left boarding school not long before. Zinotchka looked absentmindedly towards the window and said:

"'Yes. We breathe in oxygen; now tell me, Petya, what do we breathe out?'

"'Carbonic acid gas,' I answered, looking towards the same window.

"'Right,' assented Zinotchka. 'Plants, on the contrary, breathe in carbonic acid gas, and breathe out oxygen. Carbonic acid gas is contained in seltzer water, and in the fumes from the samovar.… It is a

very noxious gas. Near Naples there is the so-called Cave of Dogs, which contains carbonic acid gas; a dog dropped into it is suffocated and dies.’

“This luckless Cave of Dogs near Naples is a chemical marvel beyond which no governess ventures to go. Zinotchka always hotly maintained the usefulness of natural science, but I doubt if she knew any chemistry beyond this Cave.

“Well, she told me to repeat it. I repeated it. She asked me what was meant by the horizon. I answered. And meantime, while we were ruminating over the horizon and the Cave, in the yard below, my father was just getting ready to go shooting. The dogs yapped, the trace horses shifted from one leg to another impatiently and coquetted with the coachman, the footman packed the wagonette with parcels and all sorts of things. Beside the wagonette stood a brake in which my mother and sisters were sitting to drive to a name-day party at the Ivanetskys’. No one was left in the house but Zinotchka, me, and my eldest brother, a student, who had toothache. You can imagine my envy and my boredom.

“‘Well, what do we breathe in?’ asked Zinotchka, looking at the window.

“‘Oxygen…’

“‘Yes. And the horizon is the name given to the place where it seems to us as though the earth meets the sky.’

“Then the wagonette drove off, and after it the brake.… I saw Zinotchka take a note out of her pocket, crumple it up convulsively and press it to her temple, then she flushed crimson and looked at her watch.

“‘So, remember,’ she said, ‘that near Naples is the so-called Cave of Dogs.…’ She glanced at her watch again and went on: ‘where the sky seems to us to meet the earth.…’

“The poor girl in violent agitation walked about the room, and once more glanced at her watch. There was another half-hour before the end of our lesson.

“‘Now arithmetic,’ she said, breathing hard and turning over the pages of the sum-book with a trembling hand. ‘Come, you work out problem 325 and I… will be back directly.’

“She went out. I heard her scurry down the stairs, and then I saw her dart across the yard in her blue dress and vanish through the garden gate. The rapidity of her movements, the flush on her cheeks and her excitement, aroused my curiosity. Where had she run, and what for? Being intelligent beyond my years I soon put two and two together, and understood it all: she had run into the garden, taking advantage of the

absence of my stern parents, to steal in among the raspberry bushes, or to pick herself some cherries. If that were so, dash it all, I would go and have some cherries too. I threw aside the sum-book and ran into the garden. I ran to the cherry orchard, but she was not there. Passing by the raspberries, the gooseberries, and the watchman's shanty, she crossed the kitchen garden and reached the pond, pale, and starting at every sound. I stole after her, and what I saw, my friends, was this. At the edge of the pond, between the thick stumps of two old willows, stood my elder brother, Sasha; one could not see from his face that he had toothache. He looked towards Zinotchka as she approached him, and his whole figure was lighted up by an expression of happiness as though by sunshine. And Zinotchka, as though she were being driven into the Cave of Dogs, and were being forced to breathe carbonic acid gas, walked towards him, scarcely able to move one leg before the other, breathing hard, with her head thrown back.… To judge from appearances she was going to a rendezvous for the first time in her life. But at last she reached him.… For half a minute they gazed at each other in silence, as though they could not believe their eyes. Thereupon some force seemed to shove Zinotchka; she laid her hands on Sasha's shoulders and let her head droop upon his waistcoat. Sasha laughed, muttered something incoherent, and with the clumsiness of a man head over ears in love, laid both hands on Zinotchka's face. And the weather, gentlemen, was exquisite.… The hill behind which the sun was setting, the two willows, the green bank, the sky—all together with Sasha and Zinotchka were reflected in the pond… perfect stillness… you can imagine it. Millions of butterflies with long whiskers gleamed golden above the reeds; beyond the garden they were driving the cattle. In fact, it was a perfect picture.

"Of all I had seen the only thing I understood was that Sasha was kissing Zinotchka. That was improper. If *maman* heard of it they would both catch it. Feeling for some reason ashamed I went back to the nursery, not waiting for the end of the rendezvous. There I sat over the sum-book, pondered and reflected. A triumphant smile strayed upon my countenance. On one side it was agreeable to be the possessor of another person's secret; on the other it was also very agreeable that such authorities as Sasha and Zinotchka might at any moment be convicted by me of ignorance of the social proprieties. Now they were in my power, and their peace was entirely dependent on my magnanimity. I'd let them know.

“When I went to bed, Zinotchka came into the nursery as usual to find out whether I had dropped asleep without undressing and whether I had said my prayers. I looked at her pretty, happy face and grinned. I was bursting with my secret and itching to let it out. I had to drop a hint and enjoy the effect.

“‘I know,’ I said, grinning. ‘Gy—y.’

“‘What do you know?’

“‘Gy—y! I saw you near the willows kissing Sasha. I followed you and saw it all.’

“Zinotchka started, flushed all over, and overwhelmed by ‘my hint’ she sank down on the chair, on which stood a glass of water and a candlestick.

“‘I saw you… kissing…’ I repeated, sniggering and enjoying her confusion. ‘Aha! I’ll tell mamma!’

“Cowardly Zinotchka gazed at me intently, and convincing herself that I really did know all about it, clutched my hand in despair and muttered in a trembling whisper:

“‘Petya, it is low.… I beg of you, for God’s sake.… Be a man… don’t tell anyone.… Decent people don’t spy.… It’s low.… I entreat you.’

“The poor girl was terribly afraid of my mother, a stern and virtuous lady—that was one thing; and the second was that my grinning countenance could not but outrage her first love so pure and poetical, and you can imagine the state of her heart. Thanks to me, she did not sleep a wink all night, and in the morning she appeared at breakfast with blue rings round her eyes. When I met Sasha after breakfast I could not refrain from grinning and boasting:

“‘I know! I saw you yesterday kissing Mademoiselle Zina!’

“Sasha looked at me and said:

“‘You are a fool.’

“He was not so cowardly as Zinotchka, and so my effect did not come off. That provoked me to further efforts. If Sasha was not frightened it was evident that he did not believe that I had seen and knew all about it; wait a bit, I would show him.

“At our lessons before dinner Zinotchka did not look at me, and her voice faltered. Instead of trying to scare me she tried to propitiate me in every way, giving me full marks, and not complaining to my father of my naughtiness. Being intelligent beyond my years I exploited her secret: I did not learn my lessons, walked into the schoolroom on my head, and said all sorts of rude things. In fact, if I had remained in that vein till today I should have become a famous blackmailer. Well, a week

passed. Another person's secret irritated and fretted me like a splinter in my soul. I longed at all costs to blurt it out and gloat over the effect. And one day at dinner, when we had a lot of visitors, I gave a stupid snigger, looked fiendishly at Zinotchka and said:

"'I know. Gy—y! I saw!…'

"'What do you know?' asked my mother.

"I looked still more fiendishly at Zinotchka and Sasha. You ought to have seen how the girl flushed up, and how furious Sasha's eyes were! I bit my tongue and did not go on. Zinotchka gradually turned pale, clenched her teeth, and ate no more dinner. At our evening lessons that day I noticed a striking change in Zinotchka's face. It looked sterner, colder, as it were, more like marble, while her eyes gazed strangely straight into my face, and I give you my word of honour I have never seen such terrible, annihilating eyes, even in hounds when they overtake the wolf. I understood their expression perfectly, when in the middle of a lesson she suddenly clenched her teeth and hissed through them:

"'I hate you! Oh, you vile, loathsome creature, if you knew how I hate you, how I detest your cropped head, your vulgar, prominent ears!'

"But at once she took fright and said:

"'I am not speaking to you, I am repeating a part out of a play.…'

"Then, my friends, at night I saw her come to my bedside and gaze a long time into my face. She hated me passionately, and could not exist away from me. The contemplation of my hated pug of a face had become a necessity to her. I remember a lovely summer evening… with the scent of hay, perfect stillness, and so on. The moon was shining. I was walking up and down the avenue, thinking of cherry jam. Suddenly Zinotchka, looking pale and lovely, came up to me, she caught hold of my hand, and breathlessly began expressing herself:

"'Oh, how I hate you! I wish no one harm as I do you! Let me tell you that! I want you to understand that!'

"You understand, moonlight, her pale face, breathless with passion, the stillness… little pig as I was I actually enjoyed it. I listened to her, looked at her eyes.… At first I liked it, and enjoyed the novelty. Then I was suddenly seized with terror, I gave a scream, and ran into the house at breakneck speed.

"I made up my mind that the best thing to do was to complain to *maman*. And I did complain, mentioning incidentally how Sasha had kissed Zinotchka. I was stupid, and did not know what would follow, or I should have kept the secret to myself.… After hearing my story *maman* flushed with indignation and said:

“‘It is not your business to speak about that, you are still very young.… But, what an example for children.’

“My *maman* was not only virtuous but diplomatic. To avoid a scandal she did not get rid of Zinotchka at once, but set to work gradually, systematically, to pave the way for her departure, as one does with well-bred but intolerable people. I remember that when Zinotchka did leave us the last glance she cast at the house was directed at the window at which I was sitting, and I assure you, I remember that glance to this day.

“Zinotchka soon afterwards became my brother’s wife. She is the Zinaida Nikolaevna whom you know. The next time I met her I was already an ensign. In spite of all her efforts she could not recognize the hated Petya in the ensign with his moustache, but still she did not treat me quite like a relation.… And even now, in spite of my good-humoured baldness, meek corpulence, and unassuming air, she still looks askance at me, and feels put out when I go to see my brother. Hatred it seems can no more be forgotten than love.…

“Tchoo! I hear the cock crowing! Good night. Milord! Lie down!”

The Doctor

It was still in the drawing room, so still that a housefly that had flown in from outside could be distinctly heard brushing against the ceiling. Olga Ivanovna, the lady of the villa, was standing by the window, looking out at the flowerbeds and thinking. Dr. Tsvyetkov, who was her doctor as well as an old friend, and had been sent for to treat her son Misha, was sitting in an easy chair and swinging his hat, which he held in both hands, and he too was thinking. Except them, there was not a soul in the drawing room or in the adjoining rooms. The sun had set, and the shades of evening began settling in the corners under the furniture and on the cornices.

The silence was broken by Olga Ivanovna.

"No misfortune more terrible can be imagined," she said, without turning from the window. "You know that life has no value for me whatever apart from the boy."

"Yes, I know that," said the doctor.

"No value whatever," said Olga Ivanovna, and her voice quivered. "He is everything to me. He is my joy, my happiness, my wealth. And if, as you say, I cease to be a mother, if he… dies, there will be nothing left of me but a shadow. I cannot survive it."

Wringing her hands, Olga Ivanovna walked from one window to the other and went on:

"When he was born, I wanted to send him away to the Foundling Hospital, you remember that, but, my God, how can that time be compared with now? Then I was vulgar, stupid, feather-headed, but now I am a mother, do you understand? I am a mother, and that's all I care to know. Between the present and the past there is an impassable gulf."

Silence followed again. The doctor shifted his seat from the chair to the sofa and impatiently playing with his hat, kept his eyes fixed upon Olga Ivanovna. From his face it could be seen that he wanted to speak, and was waiting for a fitting moment.

“You are silent, but still I do not give up hope,” said the lady, turning round. “Why are you silent?”

“I should be as glad of any hope as you, Olga, but there is none,” Tsvyetkov answered, “we must look the hideous truth in the face. The boy has a tumour on the brain, and we must try to prepare ourselves for his death, for such cases never recover.”

“Nikolay, are you certain you are not mistaken?”

“Such questions lead to nothing. I am ready to answer as many as you like, but it will make it no better for us.”

Olga Ivanovna pressed her face into the window curtains, and began weeping bitterly. The doctor got up and walked several times up and down the drawing room, then went to the weeping woman, and lightly touched her arm. Judging from his uncertain movements, from the expression of his gloomy face, which looked dark in the dusk of the evening, he wanted to say something.

“Listen, Olga,” he began. “Spare me a minute’s attention; there is something I must ask you. You can’t attend to me now, though. I’ll come later, afterwards.…” He sat down again, and sank into thought. The bitter, imploring weeping, like the weeping of a little girl, continued. Without waiting for it to end, Tsvyetkov heaved a sigh and walked out of the drawing room. He went into the nursery to Misha. The boy was lying on his back as before, staring at one point as though he were listening. The doctor sat down on his bed and felt his pulse.

“Misha, does your head ache?” he asked.

Misha answered, not at once: “Yes. I keep dreaming.”

“What do you dream?”

“All sorts of things.…”

The doctor, who did not know how to talk with weeping women or with children, stroked his burning head, and muttered:

“Never mind, poor boy, never mind.… One can’t go through life without illness.… Misha, who am I—do you know me?”

Misha did not answer.

“Does your head ache very badly?”

“Ve-ery. I keep dreaming.”

After examining him and putting a few questions to the maid who was looking after the sick child, the doctor went slowly back to the drawing room. There it was by now dark, and Olga Ivanovna, standing by the window, looked like a silhouette.

“Shall I light up?” asked Tsvyetkov.

No answer followed. The housefly was still brushing against the ceiling. Not a sound floated in from outside as though the whole world, like the doctor, were thinking, and could not bring itself to speak. Olga Ivanovna was not weeping now, but as before, staring at the flowerbed in profound silence. When Tsvyetkov went up to her, and through the twilight glanced at her pale face, exhausted with grief, her expression was such as he had seen before during her attacks of acute, stupefying, sick headache.

"Nikolay Trofimitch!" she addressed him, "and what do you think about a consultation?"

"Very good; I'll arrange it tomorrow."

From the doctor's tone it could be easily seen that he put little faith in the benefit of a consultation. Olga Ivanovna would have asked him something else, but her sobs prevented her. Again she pressed her face into the window curtain. At that moment, the strains of a band playing at the club floated in distinctly. They could hear not only the wind instruments, but even the violins and the flutes.

"If he is in pain, why is he silent?" asked Olga Ivanovna. "All day long, not a sound, he never complains, and never cries. I know God will take the poor boy from us because we have not known how to prize him. Such a treasure!"

The band finished the march, and a minute later began playing a lively waltz for the opening of the ball.

"Good God, can nothing really be done?" moaned Olga Ivanovna. "Nikolay, you are a doctor and ought to know what to do! You must understand that I can't bear the loss of him! I can't survive it."

The doctor, who did not know how to talk to weeping women, heaved a sigh, and paced slowly about the drawing room. There followed a succession of oppressive pauses interspersed with weeping and the questions which lead to nothing. The band had already played a quadrille, a polka, and another quadrille. It got quite dark. In the adjoining room, the maid lighted the lamp; and all the while the doctor kept his hat in his hands, and seemed trying to say something. Several times Olga Ivanovna went off to her son, sat by him for half an hour, and came back again into the drawing room; she was continually breaking into tears and lamentations. The time dragged agonisingly, and it seemed as though the evening had no end.

At midnight, when the band had played the cotillion and ceased altogether, the doctor got ready to go.

“I will come again tomorrow,” he said, pressing the mother’s cold hand. “You go to bed.”

After putting on his greatcoat in the passage and picking up his walking-stick, he stopped, thought a minute, and went back into the drawing room.

“I’ll come tomorrow, Olga,” he repeated in a quivering voice. “Do you hear?”

She did not answer, and it seemed as though grief had robbed her of all power of speech. In his greatcoat and with his stick still in his hand, the doctor sat down beside her, and began in a soft, tender half-whisper, which was utterly out of keeping with his heavy, dignified figure:

“Olga! For the sake of your sorrow which I share.… Now, when falsehood is criminal, I beseech you to tell me the truth. You have always declared that the boy is my son. Is that the truth?”

Olga Ivanovna was silent.

“You have been the one attachment in my life,” the doctor went on, “and you cannot imagine how deeply my feeling is wounded by falsehood.… Come, I entreat you, Olga, for once in your life, tell me the truth.… At these moments one cannot lie. Tell me that Misha is not my son. I am waiting.”

“He is.”

Olga Ivanovna’s face could not be seen, but in her voice the doctor could hear hesitation. He sighed.

“Even at such moments you can bring yourself to tell a lie,” he said in his ordinary voice. “There is nothing sacred to you! Do listen, do understand me.… You have been the one only attachment in my life. Yes, you were depraved, vulgar, but I have loved no one else but you in my life. That trivial love, now that I am growing old, is the one solitary bright spot in my memories. Why do you darken it with deception? What is it for?”

“I don’t understand you.”

“Oh my God!” cried Tsvyetkov. “You are lying, you understand very well!” he cried more loudly, and he began pacing about the drawing room, angrily waving his stick. “Or have you forgotten? Then I will remind you! A father’s rights to the boy are equally shared with me by Petrov and Kurovsky the lawyer, who still make you an allowance for their son’s education, just as I do! Yes, indeed! I know all that quite well! I forgive your lying in the past, what does it matter? But now when you have grown older, at this moment when the boy is dying, your lying stifles me! How sorry I am that I cannot speak, how sorry I am!”

The doctor unbuttoned his overcoat, and still pacing about, said:

“Wretched woman! Even such moments have no effect on her! Even now she lies as freely as nine years ago in the Hermitage Restaurant! She is afraid if she tells me the truth I shall leave off giving her money, she thinks that if she did not lie I should not love the boy! You are lying! It’s contemptible!”

The doctor rapped the floor with his stick, and cried:

“It’s loathsome. Warped, corrupted creature! I must despise you, and I ought to be ashamed of my feeling. Yes! Your lying has stuck in my throat these nine years, I have endured it, but now it’s too much—too much.”

From the dark corner where Olga Ivanovna was sitting there came the sound of weeping. The doctor ceased speaking and cleared his throat. A silence followed. The doctor slowly buttoned up his overcoat, and began looking for his hat which he had dropped as he walked about.

“I lost my temper,” he muttered, bending down to the floor. “I quite lost sight of the fact that you cannot attend to me now.… God knows what I have said.… Don’t take any notice of it, Olga.”

He found his hat and went towards the dark corner.

“I have wounded you,” he said in a soft, tender half-whisper, “but once more I entreat you, tell me the truth; there should not be lying between us.… I blurted it out, and now you know that Petrov and Kurovsky are no secret to me. So now it is easy for you to tell me the truth.”

Olga Ivanovna thought a moment, and with perceptible hesitation, said:

“Nikolay, I am not lying—Misha is your child.”

“My God,” moaned the doctor, “then I will tell you something more: I have kept your letter to Petrov in which you call him Misha’s father! Olga, I know the truth, but I want to hear it from you! Do you hear?”

Olga Ivanovna made no reply, but went on weeping. After waiting for an answer the doctor shrugged his shoulders and went out.

“I will come tomorrow,” he called from the passage.

All the way home, as he sat in his carriage, he was shrugging his shoulders and muttering:

“What a pity that I don’t know how to speak! I haven’t the gift of persuading and convincing. It’s evident she does not understand me since she lies! It’s evident! How can I make her see? How?”

THE PIPE

Meliton Shishkin, a bailiff from the Dementyev farm, exhausted by the sultry heat of the fir-wood and covered with spiders' webs and pine-needles, made his way with his gun to the edge of the wood. His Damka—a mongrel between a yard dog and a setter—an extremely thin bitch heavy with young, trailed after her master with her wet tail between her legs, doing all she could to avoid pricking her nose. It was a dull, overcast morning. Big drops dripped from the bracken and from the trees that were wrapped in a light mist; there was a pungent smell of decay from the dampness of the wood.

There were birch trees ahead of him where the wood ended, and between their stems and branches he could see the misty distance. Beyond the birch trees someone was playing on a shepherd's rustic pipe. The player produced no more than five or six notes, dragged them out languidly with no attempt at forming a tune, and yet there was something harsh and extremely dreary in the sound of the piping.

As the copse became sparser, and the pines were interspersed with young birch trees, Meliton saw a herd. Hobbled horses, cows, and sheep were wandering among the bushes and, snapping the dry branches, sniffed at the herbage of the copse. A lean old shepherd, bareheaded, in a torn grey smock, stood leaning against the wet trunk of a birch tree. He stared at the ground, pondering something, and played his pipe, it seemed, mechanically.

"Good day, grandfather! God help you!" Meliton greeted him in a thin, husky voice which seemed incongruous with his huge stature and big, fleshy face. "How cleverly you are playing your pipe! Whose herd are you minding?"

"The Artamonovs'," the shepherd answered reluctantly, and he thrust the pipe into his bosom.

"So I suppose the wood is the Artamonovs' too?" Meliton inquired, looking about him. "Yes, it is the Artamonovs'; only fancy… I had completely lost myself. I got my face scratched all over in the thicket."

He sat down on the wet earth and began rolling up a bit of newspaper into a cigarette.

Like his voice, everything about the man was small and out of keeping with his height, his breadth, and his fleshy face: his smiles, his eyes, his buttons, his tiny cap, which would hardly keep on his big, closely-cropped head. When he talked and smiled there was something womanish, timid, and meek about his puffy, shaven face and his whole figure.

“What weather! God help us!” he said, and he turned his head from side to side. “Folk have not carried the oats yet, and the rain seems as though it had been taken on for good, God bless it.”

The shepherd looked at the sky, from which a drizzling rain was falling, at the wood, at the bailif’s wet clothes, pondered, and said nothing.

“The whole summer has been the same,” sighed Meliton. “A bad business for the peasants and no pleasure for the gentry.”

The shepherd looked at the sky again, thought a moment, and said deliberately, as though chewing each word:

“It’s all going the same way.… There is nothing good to be looked for.”

“How are things with you here?” Meliton inquired, lighting his cigarette. “Haven’t you seen any coveys of grouse in the Artamonovs’ clearing?”

The shepherd did not answer at once. He looked again at the sky and to right and left, thought a little, blinked.… Apparently he attached no little significance to his words, and to increase their value tried to pronounce them with deliberation and a certain solemnity. The expression of his face had the sharpness and staidness of old age, and the fact that his nose had a saddle-shaped depression across the middle and his nostrils turned upwards gave him a sly and sarcastic look.

“No, I believe I haven’t,” he said. “Our huntsman Eryomka was saying that on Elijah’s Day he started one covey near Pustoshye, but I dare say he was lying. There are very few birds.”

“Yes, brother, very few.… Very few everywhere! The shooting here, if one is to look at it with common sense, is good for nothing and not worth having. There is no game at all, and what there is is not worth dirtying your hands over—it is not full-grown. It is such poor stuff that one is ashamed to look at it.”

Meliton gave a laugh and waved his hands.

“Things happen so queerly in this world that it is simply laughable and nothing else. Birds nowadays have become so unaccountable: they sit late on their eggs, and there are some, I declare, that have not hatched them by St. Peter’s Day!”

“It’s all going the same,” said the shepherd, turning his face upwards. “There was little game last year, this year there are fewer birds still, and in another five years, mark my words, there will be none at all. As far as I can see there will soon be not only no game, but no birds at all.”

“Yes,” Meliton assented, after a moment’s thought. “That’s true.”

The shepherd gave a bitter smile and shook his head.

“It’s a wonder,” he said, “what has become of them all! I remember twenty years ago there used to be geese here, and cranes and ducks and grouse—clouds and clouds of them! The gentry used to meet together for shooting, and one heard nothing but pouf-pouf-pouf! pouf-pouf-pouf! There was no end to the woodcocks, the snipe, and the little teals, and the water-snipe were as common as starlings, or let us say sparrows—lots and lots of them! And what has become of them all? We don’t even see the birds of prey. The eagles, the hawks, and the owls have all gone.… There are fewer of every sort of wild beast, too. Nowadays, brother, even the wolf and the fox have grown rare, let alone the bear or the otter. And you know in old days there were even elks! For forty years I have been observing the works of God from year to year, and it is my opinion that everything is going the same way.”

“What way?”

“To the bad, young man. To ruin, we must suppose… The time has come for God’s world to perish.”

The old man put on his cap and began gazing at the sky.

“It’s a pity,” he sighed, after a brief silence. “O God, what a pity! Of course it is God’s will; the world was not created by us, but yet it is a pity, brother. If a single tree withers away, or let us say a single cow dies, it makes one sorry, but what will it be, good man, if the whole world crumbles into dust? Such blessings, Lord Jesus! The sun, and the sky, and the forest, and the rivers, and the creatures—all these have been created, adapted, and adjusted to one another. Each has been put to its appointed task and knows its place. And all that must perish.”

A mournful smile gleamed on the shepherd’s face, and his eyelids quivered.

“You say—the world is perishing,” said Meliton, pondering. “It may be that the end of the world is near at hand, but you can’t judge by the birds. I don’t think the birds can be taken as a sign.”

“Not the birds only,” said the shepherd. “It’s the wild beasts, too, and the cattle, and the bees, and the fish.… If you don’t believe me ask the old people; every old man will tell you that the fish are not at all what they used to be. In the seas, in the lakes, and in the rivers, there are fewer fish from year to year. In our Pestchanka, I remember, pike used to be caught a yard long, and there were eelpouts, and roach, and bream, and every fish had a presentable appearance; while nowadays, if you catch a wretched little pikelet or perch six inches long you have to be thankful. There are not any gudgeon even worth talking about. Every year it is worse and worse, and in a little while there will be no fish at all. And take the rivers now… the rivers are drying up, for sure.”

“It is true; they are drying up.”

“To be sure, that’s what I say. Every year they are shallower and shallower, and there are not the deep holes there used to be. And do you see the bushes yonder?” the old man asked, pointing to one side. “Beyond them is an old riverbed; it’s called a backwater. In my father’s time the Pestchanka flowed there, but now look; where have the evil spirits taken it to? It changes its course, and, mind you, it will go on changing till such time as it has dried up altogether. There used to be marshes and ponds beyond Kurgasovo, and where are they now? And what has become of the streams? Here in this very wood we used to have a stream flowing, and such a stream that the peasants used to set creels in it and caught pike; wild ducks used to spend the winter by it, and nowadays there is no water in it worth speaking of, even at the spring floods. Yes, brother, look where you will, things are bad everywhere. Everywhere!”

A silence followed. Meliton sank into thought, with his eyes fixed on one spot. He wanted to think of some one part of nature as yet untouched by the all-embracing ruin. Spots of light glistened on the mist and the slanting streaks of rain as though on opaque glass, and immediately died away again—it was the rising sun trying to break through the clouds and peep at the earth.

“Yes, the forests, too…” Meliton muttered.

“The forests, too,” the shepherd repeated. “They cut them down, and they catch fire, and they wither away, and no new ones are growing. Whatever does grow up is cut down at once; one day it shoots up and the next it has been cut down—and so on without end till nothing’s left. I have kept the herds of the commune ever since the time of Freedom, good man; before the time of Freedom I was shepherd of the master’s herds. I have watched them in this very spot, and I can’t remember a

summer day in all my life that I have not been here. And all the time I have been observing the works of God. I have looked at them in my time till I know them, and it is my opinion that all things growing are on the decline. Whether you take the rye, or the vegetables, or flowers of any sort, they are all going the same way."

"But people have grown better," observed the bailiff.

"In what way better?"

"Cleverer."

"Cleverer, maybe, that's true, young man; but what's the use of that? What earthly good is cleverness to people on the brink of ruin? One can perish without cleverness. What's the good of cleverness to a huntsman if there is no game? What I think is that God has given men brains and taken away their strength. People have grown weak, exceedingly weak. Take me, for instance… I am not worth a halfpenny, I am the humblest peasant in the whole village, and yet, young man, I have strength. Mind you, I am in my seventies, and I tend my herd day in and day out, and keep the night watch, too, for twenty kopecks, and I don't sleep, and I don't feel the cold; my son is cleverer than I am, but put him in my place and he would ask for a raise next day, or would be going to the doctors. There it is. I eat nothing but bread, for 'Give us this day our daily bread,' and my father ate nothing but bread, and my grandfather; but the peasant nowadays must have tea and vodka and white loaves, and must sleep from sunset to dawn, and he goes to the doctor and pampers himself in all sorts of ways. And why is it? He has grown weak; he has not the strength to endure. If he wants to stay awake, his eyes close—there is no doing anything."

"That's true," Meliton agreed; "the peasant is good for nothing nowadays."

"It's no good hiding what is wrong; we get worse from year to year. And if you take the gentry into consideration, they've grown feebler even more than the peasants have. The gentleman nowadays has mastered everything; he knows what he ought not to know, and what is the sense of it? It makes you feel pitiful to look at him.… He is a thin, puny little fellow, like some Hungarian or Frenchman; there is no dignity nor air about him; it's only in name he is a gentleman. There is no place for him, poor dear, and nothing for him to do, and there is no making out what he wants. Either he sits with a hook catching fish, or he lolls on his back reading, or trots about among the peasants saying all sorts of things to them, and those that are hungry go in for being clerks. So he spends his life in vain. And he has no notion of doing something real and useful.

The gentry in old days were half of them generals, but nowadays they are—a poor lot.”

“They are badly off nowadays,” said Meliton.

“They are poorer because God has taken away their strength. You can’t go against God.”

Meliton stared at a fixed point again. After thinking a little he heaved a sigh as staid, reasonable people do sigh, shook his head, and said:

“And all because of what? We have sinned greatly, we have forgotten God… and it seems that the time has come for all to end. And, after all, the world can’t last forever—it’s time to know when to take leave.”

The shepherd sighed and, as though wishing to cut short an unpleasant conversation, he walked away from the birch tree and began silently reckoning over the cows.

“Hey-hey-hey!” he shouted. “Hey-hey-hey! Bother you, the plague take you! The devil has taken you into the thicket. Tu-lu-lu!”

With an angry face he went into the bushes to collect his herd. Meliton got up and sauntered slowly along the edge of the wood. He looked at the ground at his feet and pondered; he still wanted to think of something which had not yet been touched by death. Patches of light crept upon the slanting streaks of rain again; they danced on the tops of the trees and died away among the wet leaves. Damka found a hedgehog under a bush, and wanting to attract her master’s attention to it, barked and howled.

“Did you have an eclipse or not?” the shepherd called from the bushes.

“Yes, we had,” answered Meliton.

“Ah! Folks are complaining all about that there was one. It shows there is disorder even in the heavens! It’s not for nothing.… Hey-hey-hey! Hey!”

Driving his herd together to the edge of the wood, the shepherd leaned against the birch tree, looked up at the sky, without haste took his pipe from his bosom and began playing. As before, he played mechanically and took no more than five or six notes; as though the pipe had come into his hands for the first time, the sounds floated from it uncertainly, with no regularity, not blending into a tune, but to Meliton, brooding on the destruction of the world, there was a sound in it of something very depressing and revolting which he would much rather not have heard. The highest, shrillest notes, which quivered and broke, seemed to be weeping disconsolately, as though the pipe were sick and frightened, while the lowest notes for some reason reminded him of the mist, the

dejected trees, the grey sky. Such music seemed in keeping with the weather, the old man and his sayings.

Meliton wanted to complain. He went up to the old man and, looking at his mournful, mocking face and at the pipe, muttered:

"And life has grown worse, grandfather. It is utterly impossible to live. Bad crops, want.… Cattle plague continually, diseases of all sorts.… We are crushed by poverty."

The bailiff's puffy face turned crimson and took a dejected, womanish expression. He twirled his fingers as though seeking words to convey his vague feeling and went on:

"Eight children, a wife… and my mother still living, and my whole salary ten roubles a month and to board myself. My wife has become a Satan from poverty.… I go off drinking myself. I am a sensible, steady man; I have education. I ought to sit at home in peace, but I stray about all day with my gun like a dog because it is more than I can stand; my home is hateful to me!"

Feeling that his tongue was uttering something quite different from what he wanted to say, the bailiff waved his hand and said bitterly:

"If the world's going to end I wish it would make haste about it. There's no need to drag it out and make folks miserable for nothing.…"

The old man took the pipe from his lips and, screwing up one eye, looked into its little opening. His face was sad and covered with thick drops like tears. He smiled and said:

"It's a pity, my friend! My goodness, what a pity! The earth, the forest, the sky, the beasts of all sorts—all this has been created, you know, adapted; they all have their intelligence. It is all going to ruin. And most of all I am sorry for people."

There was the sound in the wood of heavy rain coming nearer. Meliton looked in the direction of the sound, did up all his buttons, and said:

"I am going to the village. Goodbye, grandfather. What is your name?"

"Luka the Poor."

"Well, goodbye, Luka! Thank you for your good words. Damka, *ici*!"

After parting from the shepherd Meliton made his way along the edge of the wood, and then down hill to a meadow which by degrees turned into a marsh. There was a squelch of water under his feet, and the rusty marsh sedge, still green and juicy, drooped down to the earth as though afraid of being trampled underfoot. Beyond the marsh, on the bank of the Pestchanka, of which the old man had spoken, stood a row of willows, and beyond the willows a barn looked dark blue in the mist. One could

feel the approach of that miserable, utterly inevitable season, when the fields grow dark and the earth is muddy and cold, when the weeping willow seems still more mournful and tears trickle down its stem, and only the cranes fly away from the general misery, and even they, as though afraid of insulting dispirited nature by the expression of their happiness, fill the air with their mournful, dreary notes.

Meliton plodded along to the river, and heard the sounds of the pipe gradually dying away behind him. He still wanted to complain. He looked dejectedly about him, and he felt insufferably sorry for the sky and the earth and the sun and the woods and his Damka, and when the highest drawn-out note of the pipe floated quivering in the air, like a voice weeping, he felt extremely bitter and resentful of the impropriety in the conduct of nature.

The high note quivered, broke off, and the pipe was silent.

An Avenger

Shortly after finding his wife *in flagrante delicto* Fyodor Fyodorovitch Sigaev was standing in Schmuck and Co.'s, the gunsmiths, selecting a suitable revolver. His countenance expressed wrath, grief, and unalterable determination.

"I know what I must do," he was thinking. "The sanctities of the home are outraged, honour is trampled in the mud, vice is triumphant, and therefore as a citizen and a man of honour I must be their avenger. First, I will kill her and her lover and then myself."

He had not yet chosen a revolver or killed anyone, but already in imagination he saw three bloodstained corpses, broken skulls, brains oozing from them, the commotion, the crowd of gaping spectators, the postmortem.… With the malignant joy of an insulted man he pictured the horror of the relations and the public, the agony of the traitress, and was mentally reading leading articles on the destruction of the traditions of the home.

The shopman, a sprightly little Frenchified figure with rounded belly and white waistcoat, displayed the revolvers, and smiling respectfully and scraping with his little feet observed:

"… I would advise you, M'sieur, to take this superb revolver, the Smith and Wesson pattern, the last word in the science of firearms: triple-action, with ejector, kills at six hundred paces, central sight. Let me draw your attention, M'sieu, to the beauty of the finish. The most fashionable system, M'sieu. We sell a dozen every day for burglars, wolves, and lovers. Very correct and powerful action, hits at a great distance, and kills wife and lover with one bullet. As for suicide, M'sieu, I don't know a better pattern."

The shopman pulled and cocked the trigger, breathed on the barrel, took aim, and affected to be breathless with delight. Looking at his ecstatic countenance, one might have supposed that he would readily have put a bullet through his brains if he had only possessed a revolver of such a superb pattern as a Smith-Wesson.

“And what price?” asked Sigaev.

“Forty-five roubles, M’sieu.”

“Mm!… that’s too dear for me.”

“In that case, M’sieu, let me offer you another make, somewhat cheaper. Here, if you’ll kindly look, we have an immense choice, at all prices.… Here, for instance, this revolver of the Lefaucher pattern costs only eighteen roubles, but…” (the shopman pursed up his face contemptuously) “… but, M’sieu, it’s an old-fashioned make. They are only bought by hysterical ladies or the mentally deficient. To commit suicide or shoot one’s wife with a Lefaucher revolver is considered bad form nowadays. Smith-Wesson is the only pattern that’s correct style.”

“I don’t want to shoot myself or to kill anyone,” said Sigaev, lying sullenly. “I am buying it simply for a country cottage… to frighten away burglars.…”

“That’s not our business, what object you have in buying it.” The shopman smiled, dropping his eyes discreetly. “If we were to investigate the object in each case, M’sieu, we should have to close our shop. To frighten burglars Lefaucher is not a suitable pattern, M’sieu, for it goes off with a faint, muffled sound. I would suggest Mortimer’s, the so-called duelling pistol.…”

“Shouldn’t I challenge him to a duel?” flashed through Sigaev’s mind. “It’s doing him too much honour, though.… Beasts like that are killed like dogs.…”

The shopman, swaying gracefully and tripping to and fro on his little feet, still smiling and chattering, displayed before him a heap of revolvers. The most inviting and impressive of all was the Smith and Wesson’s. Sigaev picked up a pistol of that pattern, gazed blankly at it, and sank into brooding. His imagination pictured how he would blow out their brains, how blood would flow in streams over the rug and the parquet, how the traitress’s legs would twitch in her last agony.… But that was not enough for his indignant soul. The picture of blood, wailing, and horror did not satisfy him. He must think of something more terrible.

“I know! I’ll kill myself and him,” he thought, “but I’ll leave her alive. Let her pine away from the stings of conscience and the contempt of all surrounding her. For a sensitive nature like hers that will be far more agonizing than death.”

And he imagined his own funeral: he, the injured husband, lies in his coffin with a gentle smile on his lips, and she, pale, tortured by remorse, follows the coffin like a Niobe, not knowing where to hide herself to

escape from the withering, contemptuous looks cast upon her by the indignant crowd.

"I see, M'sieu, that you like the Smith and Wesson make," the shopman broke in upon his broodings. "If you think it too dear, very well, I'll knock off five roubles.… But we have other makes, cheaper."

The little Frenchified figure turned gracefully and took down another dozen cases of revolvers from the shelf.

"Here, M'sieu, price thirty roubles. That's not expensive, especially as the rate of exchange has dropped terribly and the Customs duties are rising every hour. M'sieu, I vow I am a Conservative, but even I am beginning to murmur. Why, with the rate of exchange and the Customs tariff, only the rich can purchase firearms. There's nothing left for the poor but Tula weapons and phosphorus matches, and Tula weapons are a misery! You may aim at your wife with a Tula revolver and shoot yourself through the shoulder-blade."

Sigaev suddenly felt mortified and sorry that he would be dead, and would miss seeing the agonies of the traitress. Revenge is only sweet when one can see and taste its fruits, and what sense would there be in it if he were lying in his coffin, knowing nothing about it?

"Hadn't I better do this?" he pondered. "I'll kill him, then I'll go to his funeral and look on, and after the funeral I'll kill myself. They'd arrest me, though, before the funeral, and take away my pistol.… And so I'll kill him, she shall remain alive, and I… for the time, I'll not kill myself, but go and be arrested. I shall always have time to kill myself. There will be this advantage about being arrested, that at the preliminary investigation I shall have an opportunity of exposing to the authorities and to the public all the infamy of her conduct. If I kill myself she may, with her characteristic duplicity and impudence, throw all the blame on me, and society will justify her behaviour and will very likely laugh at me.… If I remain alive, then…"

A minute later he was thinking:

"Yes, if I kill myself I may be blamed and suspected of petty feeling.… Besides, why should I kill myself? That's one thing. And for another, to shoot oneself is cowardly. And so I'll kill him and let her live, and I'll face my trial. I shall be tried, and she will be brought into court as a witness.… I can imagine her confusion, her disgrace when she is examined by my counsel! The sympathies of the court, of the Press, and of the public will certainly be with me."

While he deliberated the shopman displayed his wares, and felt it incumbent upon him to entertain his customer.

“Here are English ones, a new pattern, only just received,” he prattled on. “But I warn you, M’sieu, all these systems pale beside the Smith and Wesson. The other day—as I dare say you have read—an officer bought from us a Smith and Wesson. He shot his wife’s lover, and—would you believe it?—the bullet passed through him, pierced the bronze lamp, then the piano, and ricochetted back from the piano, killing the lapdog and bruising the wife. A magnificent record redounding to the honour of our firm! The officer is now under arrest. He will no doubt be convicted and sent to penal servitude. In the first place, our penal code is quite out of date; and, secondly, M’sieu, the sympathies of the court are always with the lover. Why is it? Very simple, M’sieu. The judges and the jury and the prosecutor and the counsel for the defence are all living with other men’s wives, and it’ll add to their comfort that there will be one husband the less in Russia. Society would be pleased if the government were to send all the husbands to Sahalin. Oh, M’sieu, you don’t know how it excites my indignation to see the corruption of morals nowadays. To love other men’s wives is as much the regular thing today as to smoke other men’s cigarettes and to read other men’s books. Every year our trade gets worse and worse—it doesn’t mean that wives are more faithful, but that husbands resign themselves to their position and are afraid of the law and penal servitude.”

The shopman looked round and whispered: “And whose fault is it, M’sieu? The government’s.”

“To go to Sahalin for the sake of a pig like that—there’s no sense in that either,” Sigaev pondered. “If I go to penal servitude it will only give my wife an opportunity of marrying again and deceiving a second husband. She would triumph.… And so I will leave *her* alive, I won’t kill myself, *him*… I won’t kill either. I must think of something more sensible and more effective. I will punish them with my contempt, and will take divorce proceedings that will make a scandal.”

“Here, M’sieu, is another make,” said the shopman, taking down another dozen from the shelf. “Let me call your attention to the original mechanism of the lock.”

In view of his determination a revolver was now of no use to Sigaev, but the shopman, meanwhile, getting more and more enthusiastic, persisted in displaying his wares before him. The outraged husband began to feel ashamed that the shopman should be taking so much trouble on his account for nothing, that he should be smiling, wasting time, displaying enthusiasm for nothing.

“Very well, in that case,” he muttered, “I’ll look in again later on… or I’ll send someone.”

He didn’t see the expression of the shopman’s face, but to smooth over the awkwardness of the position a little he felt called upon to make some purchase. But what should he buy? He looked round the walls of the shop to pick out something inexpensive, and his eyes rested on a green net hanging near the door.

“That’s… what’s that?” he asked.

“That’s a net for catching quails.”

“And what price is it?”

“Eight roubles, M’sieu.”

“Wrap it up for me.…”

The outraged husband paid his eight roubles, took the net, and, feeling even more outraged, walked out of the shop.

THE POST

It was three o’clock in the night. The postman, ready to set off, in his cap and his coat, with a rusty sword in his hand, was standing near the door, waiting for the driver to finish putting the mail bags into the cart which had just been brought round with three horses. The sleepy postmaster sat at his table, which was like a counter; he was filling up a form and saying:

“My nephew, the student, wants to go to the station at once. So look here, Ignatyev, let him get into the mail cart and take him with you to the station: though it is against the regulations to take people with the mail, what’s one to do? It’s better for him to drive with you free than for me to hire horses for him.”

“Ready!” they heard a shout from the yard.

“Well, go then, and God be with you,” said the postmaster. “Which driver is going?”

“Semyon Glazov.”

“Come, sign the receipt.”

The postman signed the receipt and went out. At the entrance of the post-office there was the dark outline of a cart and three horses. The horses were standing still except that one of the tracehorses kept uneasily shifting from one leg to the other and tossing its head, making the bell clang from time to time. The cart with the mail bags looked like a patch of darkness. Two silhouettes were moving lazily beside it: the student with a portmanteau in his hand and a driver. The latter was smoking a short pipe; the light of the pipe moved about in the darkness, dying away and flaring up again; for an instant it lighted up a bit of a sleeve, then a shaggy moustache and big copper-red nose, then stern-looking, overhanging eyebrows. The postman pressed down the mail bags with his hands, laid his sword on them and jumped into the cart. The student clambered irresolutely in after him, and accidentally touching him with his elbow, said timidly and politely: “I beg your pardon.”

The pipe went out. The postmaster came out of the post-office just as he was, in his waistcoat and slippers; shrinking from the night dampness and clearing his throat, he walked beside the cart and said:

“Well, God speed! Give my love to your mother, Mihailo. Give my love to them all. And you, Ignatyev, mind you don’t forget to give the parcel to Bystretsov.… Off!”

The driver took the reins in one hand, blew his nose, and, arranging the seat under himself, clicked to the horses.

“Give them my love,” the postmaster repeated.

The big bell clanged something to the little bells, the little bells gave it a friendly answer. The cart squeaked, moved. The big bell lamented, the little bells laughed. Standing up in his seat the driver lashed the restless tracehorse twice, and the cart rumbled with a hollow sound along the dusty road. The little town was asleep. Houses and trees stood black on each side of the broad street, and not a light was to be seen. Narrow clouds stretched here and there over the star-spangled sky, and where the dawn would soon be coming there was a narrow crescent moon; but neither the stars, of which there were many, nor the half-moon, which looked white, lighted up the night air. It was cold and damp, and there was a smell of autumn.

The student, who thought that politeness required him to talk affably to a man who had not refused to let him accompany him, began:

“In summer it would be light at this time, but now there is not even a sign of the dawn. Summer is over!”

The student looked at the sky and went on:

“Even from the sky one can see that it is autumn. Look to the right. Do you see three stars side by side in a straight line? That is the constellation of Orion, which, in our hemisphere, only becomes visible in September.”

The postman, thrusting his hands into his sleeves and retreating up to his ears into his coat collar, did not stir and did not glance at the sky. Apparently the constellation of Orion did not interest him. He was accustomed to see the stars, and probably he had long grown weary of them. The student paused for a while and then said:

“It’s cold! It’s time for the dawn to begin. Do you know what time the sun rises?”

“What?”

“What time does the sun rise now?”

“Between five and six,” said the driver.

The mail cart drove out of the town. Now nothing could be seen on either side of the road but the fences of kitchen gardens and here and

there a solitary willow tree; everything in front of them was shrouded in darkness. Here in the open country the half-moon looked bigger and the stars shone more brightly. Then came a scent of dampness; the postman shrank further into his collar, the student felt an unpleasant chill first creeping about his feet, then over the mail bags, over his hands and his face. The horses moved more slowly; the bell was mute as though it were frozen. There was the sound of the splash of water, and stars reflected in the water danced under the horses' feet and round the wheels.

But ten minutes later it became so dark that neither the stars nor the moon could be seen. The mail cart had entered the forest. Prickly pine branches were continually hitting the student on his cap and a spider's web settled on his face. Wheels and hoofs knocked against huge roots, and the mail cart swayed from side to side as though it were drunk.

"Keep to the road," said the postman angrily. "Why do you run up the edge? My face is scratched all over by the twigs! Keep more to the right!"

But at that point there was nearly an accident. The cart suddenly bounded as though in the throes of a convulsion, began trembling, and, with a creak, lurched heavily first to the right and then to the left, and at a fearful pace dashed along the forest track. The horses had taken fright at something and bolted.

"Wo! wo!" the driver cried in alarm. "Wo… you devils!"

The student, violently shaken, bent forward and tried to find something to catch hold of so as to keep his balance and save himself from being thrown out, but the leather mail bags were slippery, and the driver, whose belt the student tried to catch at, was himself tossed up and down and seemed every moment on the point of flying out. Through the rattle of the wheels and the creaking of the cart they heard the sword fall with a clank on the ground, then a little later something fell with two heavy thuds behind the mail cart.

"Wo!" the driver cried in a piercing voice, bending backwards. "Stop!"

The student fell on his face and bruised his forehead against the driver's seat, but was at once tossed back again and knocked his spine violently against the back of the cart.

"I am falling!" was the thought that flashed through his mind, but at that instant the horses dashed out of the forest into the open, turned sharply to the right, and rumbling over a bridge of logs, suddenly stopped dead, and the suddenness of this halt flung the student forward again.

The driver and the student were both breathless. The postman was not in the cart. He had been thrown out, together with his sword, the student's portmanteau, and one of the mail bags.

"Stop, you rascal! Sto-op!" they heard him shout from the forest. "You damned blackguard!" he shouted, running up to the cart, and there was a note of pain and fury in his tearful voice. "You anathema, plague take you!" he roared, dashing up to the driver and shaking his fist at him.

"What a to-do! Lord have mercy on us!" muttered the driver in a conscience-stricken voice, setting right something in the harness at the horses' heads. "It's all that devil of a tracehorse. Cursed filly; it is only a week since she has run in harness. She goes all right, but as soon as we go down hill there is trouble! She wants a touch or two on the nose, then she wouldn't play about like this… Stea-eady! Damn!"

While the driver was setting the horses to rights and looking for the portmanteau, the mail bag, and the sword on the road, the postman in a plaintive voice shrill with anger ejaculated oaths. After replacing the luggage the driver for no reason whatever led the horses for a hundred paces, grumbled at the restless tracehorse, and jumped up on the box.

When his fright was over the student felt amused and good-humoured. It was the first time in his life that he had driven by night in a mail cart, and the shaking he had just been through, the postman's having been thrown out, and the pain in his own back struck him as interesting adventures. He lighted a cigarette and said with a laugh:

"Why you know, you might break your neck like that! I very nearly flew out, and I didn't even notice you had been thrown out. I can fancy what it is like driving in autumn!"

The postman did not speak.

"Have you been going with the post for long?" the student asked.

"Eleven years."

"Oho; every day?"

"Yes, every day. I take this post and drive back again at once. Why?"

Making the journey every day, he must have had a good many interesting adventures in eleven years. On bright summer and gloomy autumn nights, or in winter when a ferocious snowstorm whirled howling round the mail cart, it must have been hard to avoid feeling frightened and uncanny. No doubt more than once the horses had bolted, the mail cart had stuck in the mud, they had been attacked by highwaymen, or had lost their way in the blizzard.…

"I can fancy what adventures you must have had in eleven years!" said the student. "I expect it must be terrible driving?"

He said this and expected that the postman would tell him something, but the latter preserved a sullen silence and retreated into his collar. Meanwhile it began to get light. The sky changed colour imperceptibly; it still seemed dark, but by now the horses and the driver and the road could be seen. The crescent moon looked bigger and bigger, and the cloud that stretched below it, shaped like a cannon in a gun-carriage, showed a faint yellow on its lower edge. Soon the postman's face was visible. It was wet with dew, grey and rigid as the face of a corpse. An expression of dull, sullen anger was set upon it, as though the postman were still in pain and still angry with the driver.

"Thank God it is daylight!" said the student, looking at his chilled and angry face. "I am quite frozen. The nights are cold in September, but as soon as the sun rises it isn't cold. Shall we soon reach the station?"

The postman frowned and made a wry face.

"How fond you are of talking, upon my word!" he said. "Can't you keep quiet when you are travelling?"

The student was confused, and did not approach him again all the journey. The morning came on rapidly. The moon turned pale and melted away into the dull grey sky, the cloud turned yellow all over, the stars grew dim, but the east was still cold-looking and the same colour as the rest of the sky, so that one could hardly believe the sun was hidden in it.

The chill of the morning and the surliness of the postman gradually infected the student. He looked apathetically at the country around him, waited for the warmth of the sun, and thought of nothing but how dreadful and horrible it must be for the poor trees and the grass to endure the cold nights. The sun rose dim, drowsy, and cold. The treetops were not gilded by the rays of the rising sun, as usually described, the sunbeams did not creep over the earth and there was no sign of joy in the flight of the sleepy birds. The cold remained just the same now that the sun was up as it had been in the night.

The student looked drowsily and ill-humouredly at the curtained windows of a mansion by which the mail cart drove. Behind those windows, he thought, people were most likely enjoying their soundest morning sleep not hearing the bells, nor feeling the cold, nor seeing the postman's angry face; and if the bell did wake some young lady, she would turn over on the other side, smile in the fullness of her warmth and comfort, and, drawing up her feet and putting her hand under her cheek, would go off to sleep more soundly than ever.

The student looked at the pond which gleamed near the house and thought of the carp and the pike which find it possible to live in cold

water.…

“It’s against the regulations to take anyone with the post.…” the postman said unexpectedly. “It’s not allowed! And since it is not allowed, people have no business… to get in.… Yes. It makes no difference to me, it’s true, only I don’t like it, and I don’t wish it.”

“Why didn’t you say so before, if you don’t like it?”

The postman made no answer but still had an unfriendly, angry expression. When, a little later, the horses stopped at the entrance of the station the student thanked him and got out of the cart. The mail train had not yet come in. A long goods train stood in a siding; in the tender the engine driver and his assistant, with faces wet with dew, were drinking tea from a dirty tin teapot. The carriages, the platforms, the seats were all wet and cold. Until the train came in the student stood at the buffet drinking tea while the postman, with his hands thrust up his sleeves and the same look of anger still on his face, paced up and down the platform in solitude, staring at the ground under his feet.

With whom was he angry? Was it with people, with poverty, with the autumn nights?

The Runaway

It had been a long business. At first Pashka had walked with his mother in the rain, at one time across a mown field, then by forest paths, where the yellow leaves stuck to his boots; he had walked until it was daylight. Then he had stood for two hours in the dark passage, waiting for the door to open. It was not so cold and damp in the passage as in the yard, but with the high wind spurts of rain flew in even there. When the passage gradually became packed with people Pashka, squeezed among them, leaned his face against somebody's sheepskin which smelt strongly of salt fish, and sank into a doze. But at last the bolt clicked, the door flew open, and Pashka and his mother went into the waiting room. All the patients sat on benches without stirring or speaking. Pashka looked round at them, and he too was silent, though he was seeing a great deal that was strange and funny. Only once, when a lad came into the waiting room hopping on one leg, Pashka longed to hop too; he nudged his mother's elbow, giggled in his sleeve, and said: "Look, mammy, a sparrow."

"Hush, child, hush!" said his mother.

A sleepy-looking hospital assistant appeared at the little window.

"Come and be registered!" he boomed out.

All of them, including the funny lad who hopped, filed up to the window. The assistant asked each one his name, and his father's name, where he lived, how long he had been ill, and so on. From his mother's answers, Pashka learned that his name was not Pashka, but Pavel Galaktionov, that he was seven years old, that he could not read or write, and that he had been ill ever since Easter.

Soon after the registration, he had to stand up for a little while; the doctor in a white apron, with a towel round his waist, walked across the waiting room. As he passed by the boy who hopped, he shrugged his shoulders, and said in a singsong tenor:

"Well, you are an idiot! Aren't you an idiot? I told you to come on Monday, and you come on Friday. It's nothing to me if you don't come at

all, but you know, you idiot, your leg will be done for!”

The lad made a pitiful face, as though he were going to beg for alms, blinked, and said:

“Kindly do something for me, Ivan Mikolaitch!”

“It’s no use saying ‘Ivan Mikolaitch,’” the doctor mimicked him. “You were told to come on Monday, and you ought to obey. You are an idiot, and that is all about it.”

The doctor began seeing the patients. He sat in his little room, and called up the patients in turn. Sounds were continually coming from the little room, piercing wails, a child’s crying, or the doctor’s angry words:

“Come, why are you bawling? Am I murdering you, or what? Sit quiet!”

Pashka’s turn came.

“Pavel Galaktionov!” shouted the doctor.

His mother was aghast, as though she had not expected this summons, and taking Pashka by the hand, she led him into the room.

The doctor was sitting at the table, mechanically tapping on a thick book with a little hammer.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, without looking at them.

“The little lad has an ulcer on his elbow, sir,” answered his mother, and her face assumed an expression as though she really were terribly grieved at Pashka’s ulcer.

“Undress him!”

Pashka, panting, unwound the kerchief from his neck, then wiped his nose on his sleeve, and began deliberately pulling off his sheepskin.

“Woman, you have not come here on a visit!” said the doctor angrily. “Why are you dawdling? You are not the only one here.”

Pashka hurriedly flung the sheepskin on the floor, and with his mother’s help took off his shirt… The doctor looked at him lazily, and patted him on his bare stomach.

“You have grown quite a respectable corporation, brother Pashka,” he said, and heaved a sigh. “Come, show me your elbow.”

Pashka looked sideways at the basin full of bloodstained slops, looked at the doctor’s apron, and began to cry.

“May-ay!” the doctor mimicked him. “Nearly old enough to be married, spoilt boy, and here he is blubbering! For shame!”

Pashka, trying not to cry, looked at his mother, and in that look could be read the entreaty: “Don’t tell them at home that I cried at the hospital.”

The doctor examined his elbow, pressed it, heaved a sigh, clicked with his lips, then pressed it again.

"You ought to be beaten, woman, but there is no one to do it," he said. "Why didn't you bring him before? Why, the whole arm is done for. Look, foolish woman. You see, the joint is diseased!"

"You know best, kind sir…" sighed the woman.

"Kind sir.… She's let the boy's arm rot, and now it is 'kind sir.' What kind of workman will he be without an arm? You'll be nursing him and looking after him for ages. I bet if you had had a pimple on your nose, you'd have run to the hospital quick enough, but you have left your boy to rot for six months. You are all like that."

The doctor lighted a cigarette. While the cigarette smoked, he scolded the woman, and shook his head in time to the song he was humming inwardly, while he thought of something else. Pashka stood naked before him, listening and looking at the smoke. When the cigarette went out, the doctor started, and said in a lower tone:

"Well, listen, woman. You can do nothing with ointments and drops in this case. You must leave him in the hospital."

"If necessary, sir, why not?"

"We must operate on him. You stop with me, Pashka," said the doctor, slapping Pashka on the shoulder. "Let mother go home, and you and I will stop here, old man. It's nice with me, old boy, it's first-rate here. I'll tell you what we'll do, Pashka, we will go catching finches together. I will show you a fox! We will go visiting together! Shall we? And mother will come for you tomorrow! Eh?"

Pashka looked inquiringly at his mother.

"You stay, child!" she said.

"He'll stay, he'll stay!" cried the doctor gleefully. "And there is no need to discuss it. I'll show him a live fox! We will go to the fair together to buy candy! Marya Denisovna, take him upstairs!"

The doctor, apparently a lighthearted and friendly fellow, seemed glad to have company; Pashka wanted to oblige him, especially as he had never in his life been to a fair, and would have been glad to have a look at a live fox, but how could he do without his mother?

After a little reflection he decided to ask the doctor to let his mother stay in the hospital too, but before he had time to open his mouth the lady assistant was already taking him upstairs. He walked up and looked about him with his mouth open. The staircase, the floors, and the doorposts—everything huge, straight, and bright-were painted a splendid yellow colour, and had a delicious smell of Lenten oil. On all sides lamps

were hanging, strips of carpet stretched along the floor, copper taps stuck out on the walls. But best of all Pashka liked the bedstead upon which he was made to sit down, and the grey woollen coverlet. He touched the pillows and the coverlet with his hands, looked round the ward, and made up his mind that it was very nice at the doctor's.

The ward was not a large one, it consisted of only three beds. One bed stood empty, the second was occupied by Pashka, and on the third sat an old man with sour eyes, who kept coughing and spitting into a mug. From Pashka's bed part of another ward could be seen with two beds; on one a very pale wasted-looking man with an india-rubber bottle on his head was asleep; on the other a peasant with his head tied up, looking very like a woman, was sitting with his arms spread out.

After making Pashka sit down, the assistant went out and came back a little later with a bundle of clothes under her arm.

"These are for you," she said, "put them on."

Pashka undressed and, not without satisfaction began attiring himself in his new array. When he had put on the shirt, the drawers, and the little grey dressing-gown, he looked at himself complacently, and thought that it would not be bad to walk through the village in that costume. His imagination pictured his mother's sending him to the kitchen garden by the river to gather cabbage leaves for the little pig; he saw himself walking along, while the boys and girls surrounded him and looked with envy at his little dressing-gown.

A nurse came into the ward, bringing two tin bowls, two spoons, and two pieces of bread. One bowl she set before the old man, the other before Pashka.

"Eat!" she said.

Looking into his bowl, Pashka saw some rich cabbage soup, and in the soup a piece of meat, and thought again that it was very nice at the doctor's, and that the doctor was not nearly so cross as he had seemed at first. He spent a long time swallowing the soup, licking the spoon after each mouthful, then when there was nothing left in the bowl but the meat he stole a look at the old man, and felt envious that he was still eating the soup. With a sigh Pashka attacked the meat, trying to make it last as long as possible, but his efforts were fruitless; the meat, too, quickly vanished. There was nothing left but the piece of bread. Plain bread without anything on it was not appetising, but there was no help for it. Pashka thought a little, and ate the bread. At that moment the nurse came in with another bowl. This time there was roast meat with potatoes in the bowl.

"And where is the bread?" asked the nurse.

Instead of answering, Pashka puffed out his cheeks, and blew out the air.

“Why did you gobble it all up?” said the nurse reproachfully. “What are you going to eat your meat with?”

She went and fetched another piece of bread. Pashka had never eaten roast meat in his life, and trying it now found it very nice. It vanished quickly, and then he had a piece of bread left bigger than the first. When the old man had finished his dinner, he put away the remains of his bread in a little table. Pashka meant to do the same, but on second thoughts ate his piece.

When he had finished he went for a walk. In the next ward, besides the two he had seen from the door, there were four other people. Of these only one drew his attention. This was a tall, extremely emaciated peasant with a morose-looking, hairy face. He was sitting on the bed, nodding his head and swinging his right arm all the time like a pendulum. Pashka could not take his eyes off him for a long time. At first the man’s regular pendulum-like movements seemed to him curious, and he thought they were done for the general amusement, but when he looked into the man’s face he felt frightened, and realised that he was terribly ill. Going into a third ward he saw two peasants with dark red faces as though they were smeared with clay. They were sitting motionless on their beds, and with their strange faces, in which it was hard to distinguish their features, they looked like heathen idols.

“Auntie, why do they look like that?” Pashka asked the nurse.

“They have got smallpox, little lad.”

Going back to his own ward, Pashka sat down on his bed and began waiting for the doctor to come and take him to catch finches, or to go to the fair. But the doctor did not come. He got a passing glimpse of a hospital assistant at the door of the next ward. He bent over the patient on whose head lay a bag of ice, and cried: “Mihailo!”

But the sleeping man did not stir. The assistant made a gesture and went away. Pashka scrutinised the old man, his next neighbour. The old man coughed without ceasing and spat into a mug. His cough had a long-drawn-out, creaking sound.

Pashka liked one peculiarity about him; when he drew the air in as he coughed, something in his chest whistled and sang on different notes.

“Grandfather, what is it whistles in you?” Pashka asked.

The old man made no answer. Pashka waited a little and asked:

“Grandfather, where is the fox?”

“What fox?”

“The live one.”

“Where should it be? In the forest!”

A long time passed, but the doctor still did not appear. The nurse brought in tea, and scolded Pashka for not having saved any bread for his tea; the assistant came once more and set to work to wake Mihailo. It turned blue outside the windows, the wards were lighted up, but the doctor did not appear. It was too late now to go to the fair and catch finches; Pashka stretched himself on his bed and began thinking. He remembered the candy promised him by the doctor, the face and voice of his mother, the darkness in his hut at home, the stove, peevish granny Yegorovna… and he suddenly felt sad and dreary. He remembered that his mother was coming for him next day, smiled, and shut his eyes.

He was awakened by a rustling. In the next ward someone was stepping about and speaking in a whisper. Three figures were moving about Mihailo’s bed in the dim light of the night-light and the icon lamp.

“Shall we take him, bed and all, or without?” asked one of them.

“Without. You won’t get through the door with the bed.”

“He’s died at the wrong time, the Kingdom of Heaven be his!”

One took Mihailo by his shoulders, another by his legs and lifted him up: Mihailo’s arms and the skirt of his dressing-gown hung limply to the ground. A third—it was the peasant who looked like a woman—crossed himself, and all three tramping clumsily with their feet and stepping on Mihailo’s skirts, went out of the ward.

There came the whistle and humming on different notes from the chest of the old man who was asleep. Pashka listened, peeped at the dark windows, and jumped out of bed in terror.

“Ma-a-mka!” he moaned in a deep bass.

And without waiting for an answer, he rushed into the next ward. There the darkness was dimly lighted up by a night-light and the icon lamp; the patients, upset by the death of Mihailo, were sitting on their bedsteads: their dishevelled figures, mixed up with the shadows, looked broader, taller, and seemed to be growing bigger and bigger; on the furthest bedstead in the corner, where it was darkest, there sat the peasant moving his head and his hand.

Pashka, without noticing the doors, rushed into the smallpox ward, from there into the corridor, from the corridor he flew into a big room where monsters, with long hair and the faces of old women, were lying and sitting on the beds. Running through the women’s wing he found himself again in the corridor, saw the banisters of the staircase he knew already, and ran downstairs. There he recognised the waiting room in

which he had sat that morning, and began looking for the door into the open air.

The latch creaked, there was a whiff of cold wind, and Pashka, stumbling, ran out into the yard. He had only one thought—to run, to run! He did not know the way, but felt convinced that if he ran he would be sure to find himself at home with his mother. The sky was overcast, but there was a moon behind the clouds. Pashka ran from the steps straight forward, went round the barn and stumbled into some thick bushes; after stopping for a minute and thinking, he dashed back again to the hospital, ran round it, and stopped again undecided; behind the hospital there were white crosses.

“Ma-a-mka!” he cried, and dashed back.

Running by the dark sinister buildings, he saw one lighted window.

The bright red patch looked dreadful in the darkness, but Pashka, frantic with terror, not knowing where to run, turned towards it. Beside the window was a porch with steps, and a front door with a white board on it; Pashka ran up the steps, looked in at the window, and was at once possessed by intense overwhelming joy. Through the window he saw the merry affable doctor sitting at the table reading a book. Laughing with happiness, Pashka stretched out his hands to the person he knew and tried to call out, but some unseen force choked him and struck at his legs; he staggered and fell down on the steps unconscious.

When he came to himself it was daylight, and a voice he knew very well, that had promised him a fair, finches, and a fox, was saying beside him:

“Well, you are an idiot, Pashka! Aren’t you an idiot? You ought to be beaten, but there’s no one to do it.”

A Problem

The strictest measures were taken that the Uskovs' family secret might not leak out and become generally known. Half of the servants were sent off to the theatre or the circus; the other half were sitting in the kitchen and not allowed to leave it. Orders were given that no one was to be admitted. The wife of the Colonel, her sister, and the governess, though they had been initiated into the secret, kept up a pretence of knowing nothing; they sat in the dining room and did not show themselves in the drawing room or the hall.

Sasha Uskov, the young man of twenty-five who was the cause of all the commotion, had arrived some time before, and by the advice of kindhearted Ivan Markovitch, his uncle, who was taking his part, he sat meekly in the hall by the door leading to the study, and prepared himself to make an open, candid explanation.

The other side of the door, in the study, a family council was being held. The subject under discussion was an exceedingly disagreeable and delicate one. Sasha Uskov had cashed at one of the banks a false promissory note, and it had become due for payment three days before, and now his two paternal uncles and Ivan Markovitch, the brother of his dead mother, were deciding the question whether they should pay the money and save the family honour, or wash their hands of it and leave the case to go for trial.

To outsiders who have no personal interest in the matter such questions seem simple; for those who are so unfortunate as to have to decide them in earnest they are extremely difficult. The uncles had been talking for a long time, but the problem seemed no nearer decision.

"My friends!" said the uncle who was a colonel, and there was a note of exhaustion and bitterness in his voice. "Who says that family honour is a mere convention? I don't say that at all. I am only warning you against a false view; I am pointing out the possibility of an unpardonable mistake. How can you fail to see it? I am not speaking Chinese; I am speaking Russian!"

“My dear fellow, we do understand,” Ivan Markovitch protested mildly.

“How can you understand if you say that I don’t believe in family honour? I repeat once more: fa-mil-y ho-nour fal-sely un-der-stood is a prejudice! Falsely understood! That’s what I say: whatever may be the motives for screening a scoundrel, whoever he may be, and helping him to escape punishment, it is contrary to law and unworthy of a gentleman. It’s not saving the family honour; it’s civic cowardice! Take the army, for instance.… The honour of the army is more precious to us than any other honour, yet we don’t screen our guilty members, but condemn them. And does the honour of the army suffer in consequence? Quite the opposite!”

The other paternal uncle, an official in the Treasury, a taciturn, dull-witted, and rheumatic man, sat silent, or spoke only of the fact that the Uskovs’ name would get into the newspapers if the case went for trial. His opinion was that the case ought to be hushed up from the first and not become public property; but, apart from publicity in the newspapers, he advanced no other argument in support of this opinion.

The maternal uncle, kindhearted Ivan Markovitch, spoke smoothly, softly, and with a tremor in his voice. He began with saying that youth has its rights and its peculiar temptations. Which of us has not been young, and who has not been led astray? To say nothing of ordinary mortals, even great men have not escaped errors and mistakes in their youth. Take, for instance, the biography of great writers. Did not every one of them gamble, drink, and draw down upon himself the anger of right-thinking people in his young days? If Sasha’s error bordered upon crime, they must remember that Sasha had received practically no education; he had been expelled from the high school in the fifth class; he had lost his parents in early childhood, and so had been left at the tenderest age without guidance and good, benevolent influences. He was nervous, excitable, had no firm ground under his feet, and, above all, he had been unlucky. Even if he were guilty, anyway he deserved indulgence and the sympathy of all compassionate souls. He ought, of course, to be punished, but he was punished as it was by his conscience and the agonies he was enduring now while awaiting the sentence of his relations. The comparison with the army made by the Colonel was delightful, and did credit to his lofty intelligence; his appeal to their feeling of public duty spoke for the chivalry of his soul, but they must not forget that in each individual the citizen is closely linked with the Christian.…

“Shall we be false to civic duty,” Ivan Markovitch exclaimed passionately, “if instead of punishing an erring boy we hold out to him a helping hand?”

Ivan Markovitch talked further of family honour. He had not the honour to belong to the Uskov family himself, but he knew their distinguished family went back to the thirteenth century; he did not forget for a minute, either, that his precious, beloved sister had been the wife of one of the representatives of that name. In short, the family was dear to him for many reasons, and he refused to admit the idea that, for the sake of a paltry fifteen hundred roubles, a blot should be cast on the escutcheon that was beyond all price. If all the motives he had brought forward were not sufficiently convincing, he, Ivan Markovitch, in conclusion, begged his listeners to ask themselves what was meant by crime? Crime is an immoral act founded upon ill-will. But is the will of man free? Philosophy has not yet given a positive answer to that question. Different views were held by the learned. The latest school of Lombroso, for instance, denies the freedom of the will, and considers every crime as the product of the purely anatomical peculiarities of the individual.

“Ivan Markovitch,” said the Colonel, in a voice of entreaty, “we are talking seriously about an important matter, and you bring in Lombroso, you clever fellow. Think a little, what are you saying all this for? Can you imagine that all your thunderings and rhetoric will furnish an answer to the question?”

Sasha Uskov sat at the door and listened. He felt neither terror, shame, nor depression, but only weariness and inward emptiness. It seemed to him that it made absolutely no difference to him whether they forgave him or not; he had come here to hear his sentence and to explain himself simply because kindhearted Ivan Markovitch had begged him to do so. He was not afraid of the future. It made no difference to him where he was: here in the hall, in prison, or in Siberia.

“If Siberia, then let it be Siberia, damn it all!”

He was sick of life and found it insufferably hard. He was inextricably involved in debt; he had not a farthing in his pocket; his family had become detestable to him; he would have to part from his friends and his women sooner or later, as they had begun to be too contemptuous of his sponging on them. The future looked black.

Sasha was indifferent, and was only disturbed by one circumstance; the other side of the door they were calling him a scoundrel and a criminal. Every minute he was on the point of jumping up, bursting into

the study and shouting in answer to the detestable metallic voice of the Colonel:

"You are lying!"

"Criminal" is a dreadful word—that is what murderers, thieves, robbers are; in fact, wicked and morally hopeless people. And Sasha was very far from being all that.… It was true he owed a great deal and did not pay his debts. But debt is not a crime, and it is unusual for a man not to be in debt. The Colonel and Ivan Markovitch were both in debt.…

"What have I done wrong besides?" Sasha wondered.

He had discounted a forged note. But all the young men he knew did the same. Handrikov and Von Burst always forged I.O.U.s from their parents or friends when their allowances were not paid at the regular time, and then when they got their money from home they redeemed them before they became due. Sasha had done the same, but had not redeemed the I.O.U. because he had not got the money which Handrikov had promised to lend him. He was not to blame; it was the fault of circumstances. It was true that the use of another person's signature was considered reprehensible; but, still, it was not a crime but a generally accepted dodge, an ugly formality which injured no one and was quite harmless, for in forging the Colonel's signature Sasha had had no intention of causing anybody damage or loss.

"No, it doesn't mean that I am a criminal…" thought Sasha. "And it's not in my character to bring myself to commit a crime. I am soft, emotional.… When I have the money I help the poor.…"

Sasha was musing after this fashion while they went on talking the other side of the door.

"But, my friends, this is endless," the Colonel declared, getting excited. "Suppose we were to forgive him and pay the money. You know he would not give up leading a dissipated life, squandering money, making debts, going to our tailors and ordering suits in our names! Can you guarantee that this will be his last prank? As far as I am concerned, I have no faith whatever in his reforming!"

The official of the Treasury muttered something in reply; after him Ivan Markovitch began talking blandly and suavely again. The Colonel moved his chair impatiently and drowned the other's words with his detestable metallic voice. At last the door opened and Ivan Markovitch came out of the study; there were patches of red on his lean shaven face.

"Come along," he said, taking Sasha by the hand. "Come and speak frankly from your heart. Without pride, my dear boy, humbly and from your heart."

Sasha went into the study. The official of the Treasury was sitting down; the Colonel was standing before the table with one hand in his pocket and one knee on a chair. It was smoky and stifling in the study. Sasha did not look at the official or the Colonel; he felt suddenly ashamed and uncomfortable. He looked uneasily at Ivan Markovitch and muttered:

"I'll pay it… I'll give it back.…"

"What did you expect when you discounted the I.O.U.?" he heard a metallic voice.

"I… Handrikov promised to lend me the money before now."

Sasha could say no more. He went out of the study and sat down again on the chair near the door.

He would have been glad to go away altogether at once, but he was choking with hatred and he awfully wanted to remain, to tear the Colonel to pieces, to say something rude to him. He sat trying to think of something violent and effective to say to his hated uncle, and at that moment a woman's figure, shrouded in the twilight, appeared at the drawing room door. It was the Colonel's wife. She beckoned Sasha to her, and, wringing her hands, said, weeping:

"*Alexandre*, I know you don't like me, but… listen to me; listen, I beg you.… But, my dear, how can this have happened? Why, it's awful, awful! For goodness' sake, beg them, defend yourself, entreat them."

Sasha looked at her quivering shoulders, at the big tears that were rolling down her cheeks, heard behind his back the hollow, nervous voices of worried and exhausted people, and shrugged his shoulders. He had not in the least expected that his aristocratic relations would raise such a tempest over a paltry fifteen hundred roubles! He could not understand her tears nor the quiver of their voices.

An hour later he heard that the Colonel was getting the best of it; the uncles were finally inclining to let the case go for trial.

"The matter's settled," said the Colonel, sighing. "Enough."

After this decision all the uncles, even the emphatic Colonel, became noticeably depressed. A silence followed.

"Merciful heavens!" sighed Ivan Markovitch. "My poor sister!"

And he began saying in a subdued voice that most likely his sister, Sasha's mother, was present unseen in the study at that moment. He felt in his soul how the unhappy, saintly woman was weeping, grieving, and begging for her boy. For the sake of her peace beyond the grave, they ought to spare Sasha.

The sound of a muffled sob was heard. Ivan Markovitch was weeping and muttering something which it was impossible to catch through the door. The Colonel got up and paced from corner to corner. The long conversation began over again.

But then the clock in the drawing room struck two. The family council was over. To avoid seeing the person who had moved him to such wrath, the Colonel went from the study, not into the hall, but into the vestibule.… Ivan Markovitch came out into the hall.… He was agitated and rubbing his hands joyfully. His tear-stained eyes looked good-humoured and his mouth was twisted into a smile.

“Capital,” he said to Sasha. “Thank God! You can go home, my dear, and sleep tranquilly. We have decided to pay the sum, but on condition that you repent and come with me tomorrow into the country and set to work.”

A minute later Ivan Markovitch and Sasha in their greatcoats and caps were going down the stairs. The uncle was muttering something edifying. Sasha did not listen, but felt as though some uneasy weight were gradually slipping off his shoulders. They had forgiven him; he was free! A gust of joy sprang up within him and sent a sweet chill to his heart. He longed to breathe, to move swiftly, to live! Glancing at the street lamps and the black sky, he remembered that Von Burst was celebrating his name-day that evening at the “Bear,” and again a rush of joy flooded his soul.…

“I am going!” he decided.

But then he remembered he had not a farthing, that the companions he was going to would despise him at once for his empty pockets. He must get hold of some money, come what may!

“Uncle, lend me a hundred roubles,” he said to Ivan Markovitch.

His uncle, surprised, looked into his face and backed against a lamppost.

“Give it to me,” said Sasha, shifting impatiently from one foot to the other and beginning to pant. “Uncle, I entreat you, give me a hundred roubles.”

His face worked; he trembled, and seemed on the point of attacking his uncle.…

“Won’t you?” he kept asking, seeing that his uncle was still amazed and did not understand. “Listen. If you don’t, I’ll give myself up tomorrow! I won’t let you pay the I.O.U.! I’ll present another false note tomorrow!”

Petrified, muttering something incoherent in his horror, Ivan Markovitch took a hundred-rouble note out of his pocketbook and gave it to Sasha. The young man took it and walked rapidly away from him.…

Taking a sledge, Sasha grew calmer, and felt a rush of joy within him again. The “rights of youth” of which kindhearted Ivan Markovitch had spoken at the family council woke up and asserted themselves. Sasha pictured the drinking-party before him, and, among the bottles, the women, and his friends, the thought flashed through his mind:

“Now I see that I am a criminal; yes, I am a criminal.”

The Old House

(A Story Told by a Houseowner)

The old house had to be pulled down that a new one might be built in its place. I led the architect through the empty rooms, and between our business talk told him various stories. The tattered wallpapers, the dingy windows, the dark stoves, all bore the traces of recent habitation and evoked memories. On that staircase, for instance, drunken men were once carrying down a dead body when they stumbled and flew headlong downstairs together with the coffin; the living were badly bruised, while the dead man looked very serious, as though nothing had happened, and shook his head when they lifted him up from the ground and put him back in the coffin. You see those three doors in a row: in there lived young ladies who were always receiving visitors, and so were better dressed than any other lodgers, and could pay their rent regularly. The door at the end of the corridor leads to the washhouse, where by day they washed clothes and at night made an uproar and drank beer. And in that flat of three rooms everything is saturated with bacteria and bacilli. It's not nice there. Many lodgers have died there, and I can positively assert that that flat was at some time cursed by someone, and that together with its human lodgers there was always another lodger, unseen, living in it. I remember particularly the fate of one family. Picture to yourself an ordinary man, not remarkable in any way, with a wife, a mother, and four children. His name was Putohin; he was a copying clerk at a notary's, and received thirty-five roubles a month. He was a sober, religious, serious man. When he brought me his rent for the flat he always apologised for being badly dressed; apologised for being five days late, and when I gave him a receipt he would smile good-humouredly and say: "Oh yes, there's that too, I don't like those receipts." He lived poorly but decently. In that middle room, the grandmother used to be with the four children; there they used to cook, sleep, receive their visitors, and even dance. This was Putohin's own room; he had a table in it, at which he used to work doing private jobs, copying parts for the theatre, advertisements, and so on. This room on the right was let to his lodger, Yegoritch, a locksmith—a steady fellow, but given to drink; he was

always too hot, and so used to go about in his waistcoat and barefoot. Yegoritch used to mend locks, pistols, children's bicycles, would not refuse to mend cheap clocks and make skates for a quarter-rouble, but he despised that work, and looked on himself as a specialist in musical instruments. Amongst the litter of steel and iron on his table there was always to be seen a concertina with a broken key, or a trumpet with its sides bent in. He paid Putohin two and a half roubles for his room; he was always at his worktable, and only came out to thrust some piece of iron into the stove.

On the rare occasions when I went into that flat in the evening, this was always the picture I came upon: Putohin would be sitting at his little table, copying something; his mother and his wife, a thin woman with an exhausted-looking face, were sitting near the lamp, sewing; Yegoritch would be making a rasping sound with his file. And the hot, still smouldering embers in the stove filled the room with heat and fumes; the heavy air smelt of cabbage soup, swaddling-clothes, and Yegoritch. It was poor and stuffy, but the working-class faces, the children's little drawers hung up along by the stove, Yegoritch's bits of iron had yet an air of peace, friendliness, content.… In the corridor outside the children raced about with well-combed heads, merry and profoundly convinced that everything was satisfactory in this world, and would be so endlessly, that one had only to say one's prayers every morning and at bedtime.

Now imagine in the midst of that same room, two paces from the stove, the coffin in which Putohin's wife is lying. There is no husband whose wife will live forever, but there was something special about this death. When, during the requiem service, I glanced at the husband's grave face, at his stern eyes, I thought: "Oho, brother!"

It seemed to me that he himself, his children, the grandmother and Yegoritch, were already marked down by that unseen being which lived with them in that flat. I am a thoroughly superstitious man, perhaps, because I am a houseowner and for forty years have had to do with lodgers. I believe if you don't win at cards from the beginning you will go on losing to the end; when fate wants to wipe you and your family off the face of the earth, it remains inexorable in its persecution, and the first misfortune is commonly only the first of a long series.… Misfortunes are like stones. One stone has only to drop from a high cliff for others to be set rolling after it. In short, as I came away from the requiem service at Putohin's, I believed that he and his family were in a bad way.

And, in fact, a week afterwards the notary quite unexpectedly dismissed Putohin, and engaged a young lady in his place. And would

you believe it, Putohin was not so much put out at the loss of his job as at being superseded by a young lady and not by a man. Why a young lady? He so resented this that on his return home he thrashed his children, swore at his mother, and got drunk. Yegoritch got drunk, too, to keep him company.

Putohin brought me the rent, but did not apologise this time, though it was eighteen days overdue, and said nothing when he took the receipt from me. The following month the rent was brought by his mother; she only brought me half, and promised to bring the remainder a week later. The third month, I did not get a farthing, and the porter complained to me that the lodgers in No. 23 were "not behaving like gentlemen."

These were ominous symptoms.

Picture this scene. A sombre Petersburg morning looks in at the dingy windows. By the stove, the granny is pouring out the children's tea. Only the eldest, Vassya, drinks out of a glass, for the others the tea is poured out into saucers. Yegoritch is squatting on his heels before the stove, thrusting a bit of iron into the fire. His head is heavy and his eyes are lustreless from yesterday's drinking-bout; he sighs and groans, trembles and coughs.

"He has quite put me off the right way, the devil," he grumbles; "he drinks himself and leads others into sin."

Putohin sits in his room, on the bedstead from which the bedclothes and the pillows have long ago disappeared, and with his hands straying in his hair looks blankly at the floor at his feet. He is tattered, unkempt, and ill.

"Drink it up, make haste or you will be late for school," the old woman urges on Vassya, "and it's time for me, too, to go and scrub the floors for the Jews.…"

The old woman is the only one in the flat who does not lose heart. She thinks of old times, and goes out to hard dirty work. On Fridays she scrubs the floors for the Jews at the crockery shop, on Saturdays she goes out washing for shopkeepers, and on Sundays she is racing about the town from morning to night, trying to find ladies who will help her. Every day she has work of some sort; she washes and scrubs, and is by turns a midwife, a matchmaker, or a beggar. It is true she, too, is not disinclined to drown her sorrows, but even when she has had a drop she does not forget her duties. In Russia there are many such tough old women, and how much of its welfare rests upon them!

When he has finished his tea, Vassya packs up his books in a satchel and goes behind the stove; his greatcoat ought to be hanging there beside

his granny's clothes. A minute later he comes out from behind the stove and asks:

"Where is my greatcoat?"

The grandmother and the other children look for the greatcoat together, they waste a long time in looking for it, but the greatcoat has utterly vanished. Where is it? The grandmother and Vassya are pale and frightened. Even Yegoritch is surprised. Putohin is the only one who does not move. Though he is quick to notice anything irregular or disorderly, this time he makes a pretence of hearing and seeing nothing. That is suspicious.

"He's sold it for drink," Yegoritch declares.

Putohin says nothing, so it is the truth. Vassya is overcome with horror. His greatcoat, his splendid greatcoat, made of his dead mother's cloth dress, with a splendid calico lining, gone for drink at the tavern! And with the greatcoat is gone too, of course, the blue pencil that lay in the pocket, and the notebook with "*Nota bene*" in gold letters on it! There's another pencil with india-rubber stuck into the notebook, and, besides that, there are transfer pictures lying in it.

Vassya would like to cry, but to cry is impossible. If his father, who has a headache, heard crying he would shout, stamp with his feet, and begin fighting, and after drinking he fights horribly. Granny would stand up for Vassya, and his father would strike granny too; it would end in Yegoritch getting mixed up in it too, clutching at his father and falling on the floor with him. The two would roll on the floor, struggling together and gasping with drunken animal fury, and granny would cry, the children would scream, the neighbours would send for the porter. No, better not cry.

Because he mustn't cry, or give vent to his indignation aloud, Vassya moans, wrings his hands and moves his legs convulsively, or biting his sleeve shakes it with his teeth as a dog does a hare. His eyes are frantic, and his face is distorted with despair. Looking at him, his granny all at once takes the shawl off her head, and she too makes queer movements with her arms and legs in silence, with her eyes fixed on a point in the distance. And at that moment I believe there is a definite certainty in the minds of the boy and the old woman that their life is ruined, that there is no hope.…

Putohin hears no crying, but he can see it all from his room. When, half an hour later, Vassya sets off to school, wrapped in his grandmother's shawl, he goes out with a face I will not undertake to describe, and walks after him. He longs to call the boy, to comfort him,

to beg his forgiveness, to promise him on his word of honour, to call his dead mother to witness, but instead of words, sobs break from him. It is a grey, cold morning. When he reaches the town school Vassya untwists his granny's shawl, and goes into the school with nothing over his jacket for fear the boys should say he looks like a woman. And when he gets home Putohin sobs, mutters some incoherent words, bows down to the ground before his mother and Yegoritch, and the locksmith's table. Then, recovering himself a little, he runs to me and begs me breathlessly, for God's sake, to find him some job. I give him hopes, of course.

"At last I am myself again," he said. "It's high time, indeed, to come to my senses. I've made a beast of myself, and now it's over."

He is delighted and thanks me, while I, who have studied these gentry thoroughly during the years I have owned the house, look at him, and am tempted to say:

"It's too late, dear fellow! You are a dead man already."

From me, Putohin runs to the town school. There he paces up and down, waiting till his boy comes out.

"I say, Vassya," he says joyfully, when the boy at last comes out, "I have just been promised a job. Wait a bit, I will buy you a splendid fur-coat.… I'll send you to the high school! Do you understand? To the high school! I'll make a gentleman of you! And I won't drink any more. On my honour I won't."

And he has intense faith in the bright future. But the evening comes on. The old woman, coming back from the Jews with twenty kopecks, exhausted and aching all over, sets to work to wash the children's clothes. Vassya is sitting doing a sum. Yegoritch is not working. Thanks to Putohin he has got into the way of drinking, and is feeling at the moment an overwhelming desire for drink. It's hot and stuffy in the room. Steam rises in clouds from the tub where the old woman is washing.

"Are we going?" Yegoritch asks surlily.

My lodger does not answer. After his excitement he feels insufferably dreary. He struggles with the desire to drink, with acute depression and… and, of course, depression gets the best of it. It is a familiar story.

Towards night, Yegoritch and Putohin go out, and in the morning Vassya cannot find granny's shawl.

That is the drama that took place in that flat. After selling the shawl for drink, Putohin did not come home again. Where he disappeared to I don't know. After he disappeared, the old woman first got drunk, then took to her bed. She was taken to the hospital, the younger children were

fetched by relations of some sort, and Vassya went into the washhouse here. In the daytime he handed the irons, and at night fetched the beer. When he was turned out of the washhouse he went into the service of one of the young ladies, used to run about at night on errands of some sort, and began to be spoken of as “a dangerous customer.”

What has happened to him since I don’t know.

And in this room here a street musician lived for ten years. When he died they found twenty thousand roubles in his feather bed.

THE CATTLE-DEALERS

The long goods train has been standing for hours in the little station. The engine is as silent as though its fire had gone out; there is not a soul near the train or in the station yard.

A pale streak of light comes from one of the vans and glides over the rails of a siding. In that van two men are sitting on an outspread cape: one is an old man with a big gray beard, wearing a sheepskin coat and a high lambskin hat, somewhat like a busby; the other a beardless youth in a threadbare cloth reefer jacket and muddy high boots. They are the owners of the goods. The old man sits, his legs stretched out before him, musing in silence; the young man half reclines and softly strums on a cheap accordion. A lantern with a tallow candle in it is hanging on the wall near them.

The van is quite full. If one glances in through the dim light of the lantern, for the first moment the eyes receive an impression of something shapeless, monstrous, and unmistakably alive, something very much like gigantic crabs which move their claws and feelers, crowd together, and noiselessly climb up the walls to the ceiling; but if one looks more closely, horns and their shadows, long lean backs, dirty hides, tails, eyes begin to stand out in the dusk. They are cattle and their shadows. There are eight of them in the van. Some turn round and stare at the men and swing their tails. Others try to stand or lie down more comfortably. They are crowded. If one lies down the others must stand and huddle closer. No manger, no halter, no litter, not a wisp of hay.…[1]

At last the old man pulls out of his pocket a silver watch and looks at the time: a quarter past two.

"We have been here nearly two hours," he says, yawning. "Better go and stir them up, or we may be here till morning. They have gone to sleep, or goodness knows what they are up to."

The old man gets up and, followed by his long shadow, cautiously gets down from the van into the darkness. He makes his way along beside the train to the engine, and after passing some two dozen vans sees a red

open furnace; a human figure sits motionless facing it; its peaked cap, nose, and knees are lighted up by the crimson glow, all the rest is black and can scarcely be distinguished in the darkness.

“Are we going to stay here much longer?” asks the old man.

No answer. The motionless figure is evidently asleep. The old man clears his throat impatiently and, shrinking from the penetrating damp, walks round the engine, and as he does so the brilliant light of the two engine lamps dazzles his eyes for an instant and makes the night even blacker to him; he goes to the station.

The platform and steps of the station are wet. Here and there are white patches of freshly fallen melting snow. In the station itself it is light and as hot as a steam-bath. There is a smell of paraffin. Except for the weighing-machine and a yellow seat on which a man wearing a guard’s uniform is asleep, there is no furniture in the place at all. On the left are two wide-open doors. Through one of them the telegraphic apparatus and a lamp with a green shade on it can be seen; through the other, a small room, half of it taken up by a dark cupboard. In this room the head guard and the engine-driver are sitting on the windowsill. They are both feeling a cap with their fingers and disputing.

“That’s not real beaver, it’s imitation,” says the engine-driver. “Real beaver is not like that. Five roubles would be a high price for the whole cap, if you care to know!”

“You know a great deal about it,…” the head guard says, offended. “Five roubles, indeed! Here, we will ask the merchant. Mr. Malahin,” he says, addressing the old man, “what do you say: is this imitation beaver or real?”

Old Malahin takes the cap into his hand, and with the air of a connoisseur pinches the fur, blows on it, sniffs at it, and a contemptuous smile lights up his angry face.

“It must be imitation!” he says gleefully. “Imitation it is.”

A dispute follows. The guard maintains that the cap is real beaver, and the engine-driver and Malahin try to persuade him that it is not. In the middle of the argument the old man suddenly remembers the object of his coming.

“Beaver and cap is all very well, but the train’s standing still, gentlemen!” he says. “Who is it we are waiting for? Let us start!”

“Let us,” the guard agrees. “We will smoke another cigarette and go on. But there is no need to be in a hurry.… We shall be delayed at the next station anyway!”

“Why should we?”

“Oh, well.… We are too much behind time.… If you are late at one station you can’t help being delayed at the other stations to let the trains going the opposite way pass. Whether we set off now or in the morning we shan’t be number fourteen. We shall have to be number twenty-three.”

“And how do you make that out?”

“Well, there it is.”

Malahin looks at the guard, reflects, and mutters mechanically as though to himself:

“God be my judge, I have reckoned it and even jotted it down in a notebook; we have wasted thirty-four hours standing still on the journey. If you go on like this, either the cattle will die, or they won’t pay me two roubles for the meat when I do get there. It’s not traveling, but ruination.”

The guard raises his eyebrows and sighs with an air that seems to say: “All that is unhappily true!” The engine-driver sits silent, dreamily looking at the cap. From their faces one can see that they have a secret thought in common, which they do not utter, not because they want to conceal it, but because such thoughts are much better expressed by signs than by words. And the old man understands. He feels in his pocket, takes out a ten-rouble note, and without preliminary words, without any change in the tone of his voice or the expression of his face, but with the confidence and directness with which probably only Russians give and take bribes, he gives the guard the note. The latter takes it, folds it in four, and without undue haste puts it in his pocket. After that all three go out of the room, and waking the sleeping guard on the way, go on to the platform.

“What weather!” grumbles the head guard, shrugging his shoulders. “You can’t see your hand before your face.”

“Yes, it’s vile weather.”

From the window they can see the flaxen head of the telegraph clerk appear beside the green lamp and the telegraphic apparatus; soon after another head, bearded and wearing a red cap, appears beside it—no doubt that of the stationmaster. The stationmaster bends down to the table, reads something on a blue form, rapidly passing his cigarette along the lines.… Malahin goes to his van.

The young man, his companion, is still half reclining and hardly audibly strumming on the accordion. He is little more than a boy, with no trace of a mustache; his full white face with its broad cheekbones is childishly dreamy; his eyes have a melancholy and tranquil look unlike

that of a grown-up person, but he is broad, strong, heavy and rough like the old man; he does not stir nor shift his position, as though he is not equal to moving his big body. It seems as though any movement he made would tear his clothes and be so noisy as to frighten both him and the cattle. From under his big fat fingers that clumsily pick out the stops and keys of the accordion comes a steady flow of thin, tinkling sounds which blend into a simple, monotonous little tune; he listens to it, and is evidently much pleased with his performance.

A bell rings, but with such a muffled note that it seems to come from far away. A hurried second bell soon follows, then a third and the guard's whistle. A minute passes in profound silence; the van does not move, it stands still, but vague sounds begin to come from beneath it, like the crunch of snow under sledge-runners; the van begins to shake and the sounds cease. Silence reigns again. But now comes the clank of buffers, the violent shock makes the van start and, as it were, give a lurch forward, and all the cattle fall against one another.

"May you be served the same in the world to come," grumbles the old man, setting straight his cap, which had slipped on the back of his head from the jolt. "He'll maim all my cattle like this!"

Yasha gets up without a word and, taking one of the fallen beasts by the horns, helps it to get on to its legs.… The jolt is followed by a stillness again. The sounds of crunching snow come from under the van again, and it seems as though the train had moved back a little.

"There will be another jolt in a minute," says the old man. And the convulsive quiver does, in fact, run along the train, there is a crashing sound and the bullocks fall on one another again.

"It's a job!" says Yasha, listening. "The train must be heavy. It seems it won't move."

"It was not heavy before, but now it has suddenly got heavy. No, my lad, the guard has not gone shares with him, I expect. Go and take him something, or he will be jolting us till morning."

Yasha takes a three-rouble note from the old man and jumps out of the van. The dull thud of his heavy footsteps resounds outside the van and gradually dies away. Stillness.… In the next van a bullock utters a prolonged subdued "moo," as though it were singing.

Yasha comes back. A cold damp wind darts into the van.

"Shut the door, Yasha, and we will go to bed," says the old man. "Why burn a candle for nothing?"

Yasha moves the heavy door; there is a sound of a whistle, the engine and the train set off.

“It’s cold,” mutters the old man, stretching himself on the cape and laying his head on a bundle. “It is very different at home! It’s warm and clean and soft, and there is room to say your prayers, but here we are worse off than any pigs. It’s four days and nights since I have taken off my boots.”

Yasha, staggering from the jolting of the train, opens the lantern and snuffs out the wick with his wet fingers. The light flares up, hisses like a frying pan and goes out.

“Yes, my lad,” Malahin goes on, as he feels Yasha lie down beside him and the young man’s huge back huddle against his own, “it’s cold. There is a draught from every crack. If your mother or your sister were to sleep here for one night they would be dead by morning. There it is, my lad, you wouldn’t study and go to the high school like your brothers, so you must take the cattle with your father. It’s your own fault, you have only yourself to blame.… Your brothers are asleep in their beds now, they are snug under the bedclothes, but you, the careless and lazy one, are in the same box as the cattle.… Yes.…”

The old man’s words are inaudible in the noise of the train, but for a long time he goes on muttering, sighing and clearing his throat.… The cold air in the railway van grows thicker and more stifling. The pungent odor of fresh dung and smoldering candle makes it so repulsive and acrid that it irritates Yasha’s throat and chest as he falls asleep. He coughs and sneezes, while the old man, being accustomed to it, breathes with his whole chest as though nothing were amiss, and merely clears his throat.

To judge from the swaying of the van and the rattle of the wheels the train is moving rapidly and unevenly. The engine breathes heavily, snorting out of time with the pulsation of the train, and altogether there is a medley of sounds. The bullocks huddle together uneasily and knock their horns against the walls.

When the old man wakes up, the deep blue sky of early morning is peeping in at the cracks and at the little uncovered window. He feels unbearably cold, especially in the back and the feet. The train is standing still; Yasha, sleepy and morose, is busy with the cattle.

The old man wakes up out of humor. Frowning and gloomy, he clears his throat angrily and looks from under his brows at Yasha who, supporting a bullock with his powerful shoulder and slightly lifting it, is trying to disentangle its leg.

“I told you last night that the cords were too long,” mutters the old man; “but no, ‘It’s not too long, Daddy.’ There’s no making you do anything, you will have everything your own way.… Blockhead!”

He angrily moves the door open and the light rushes into the van. A passenger train is standing exactly opposite the door, and behind it a red building with a roofed-in platform—a big station with a refreshment bar. The roofs and bridges of the trains, the earth, the sleepers, all are covered with a thin coating of fluffy, freshly fallen snow. In the spaces between the carriages of the passenger train the passengers can be seen moving to and fro, and a red-haired, red-faced gendarme walking up and down; a waiter in a frock-coat and a snow-white shirtfront, looking cold and sleepy, and probably very much dissatisfied with his fate, is running along the platform carrying a glass of tea and two rusks on a tray.

The old man gets up and begins saying his prayers towards the east. Yasha, having finished with the bullock and put down the spade in the corner, stands beside him and says his prayers also. He merely moves his lips and crosses himself; the father prays in a loud whisper and pronounces the end of each prayer aloud and distinctly.

"… And the life of the world to come. Amen," the old man says aloud, draws in a breath, and at once whispers another prayer, rapping out clearly and firmly at the end: "… and lay calves upon Thy altar!"

After saying his prayers, Yasha hurriedly crosses himself and says: "Five kopecks, please."

And on being given the five-kopeck piece, he takes a red copper teapot and runs to the station for boiling water. Taking long jumps over the rails and sleepers, leaving huge tracks in the feathery snow, and pouring away yesterday's tea out of the teapot he runs to the refreshment room and jingles his five-kopeck piece against his teapot. From the van the barkeeper can be seen pushing away the big teapot and refusing to give half of his samovar for five kopecks, but Yasha turns the tap himself and, spreading wide his elbows so as not to be interfered with fills his teapot with boiling water.

"Damned blackguard!" the barkeeper shouts after him as he runs back to the railway van.

The scowling face of Malahin grows a little brighter over the tea.

"We know how to eat and drink, but we don't remember our work. Yesterday we could do nothing all day but eat and drink, and I'll be bound we forgot to put down what we spent. What a memory! Lord have mercy on us!"

The old man recalls aloud the expenditure of the day before, and writes down in a tattered notebook where and how much he had given to guards, engine-drivers, oilers.…

Meanwhile the passenger train has long ago gone off, and an engine runs backwards and forwards on the empty line, apparently without any definite object, but simply enjoying its freedom. The sun has risen and is playing on the snow; bright drops are falling from the station roof and the tops of the vans.

Having finished his tea, the old man lazily saunters from the van to the station. Here in the middle of the first-class waiting room he sees the familiar figure of the guard standing beside the stationmaster, a young man with a handsome beard and in a magnificent rough woollen overcoat. The young man, probably new to his position, stands in the same place, gracefully shifting from one foot to the other like a good racehorse, looks from side to side, salutes everyone that passes by, smiles and screws up his eyes.… He is red-cheeked, sturdy, and good-humored; his face is full of eagerness, and is as fresh as though he had just fallen from the sky with the feathery snow. Seeing Malahin, the guard sighs guiltily and throws up his hands.

“We can’t go number fourteen,” he says. “We are very much behind time. Another train has gone with that number.”

The stationmaster rapidly looks through some forms, then turns his beaming blue eyes upon Malahin, and, his face radiant with smiles and freshness, showers questions on him:

“You are Mr. Malahin? You have the cattle? Eight vanloads? What is to be done now? You are late and I let number fourteen go in the night. What are we to do now?”

The young man discreetly takes hold of the fur of Malahin’s coat with two pink fingers and, shifting from one foot to the other, explains affably and convincingly that such and such numbers have gone already, and that such and such are going, and that he is ready to do for Malahin everything in his power. And from his face it is evident that he is ready to do anything to please not only Malahin, but the whole world—he is so happy, so pleased, and so delighted! The old man listens, and though he can make absolutely nothing of the intricate system of numbering the trains, he nods his head approvingly, and he, too, puts two fingers on the soft wool of the rough coat. He enjoys seeing and hearing the polite and genial young man. To show goodwill on his side also, he takes out a ten-rouble note and, after a moment’s thought, adds a couple of rouble notes to it, and gives them to the stationmaster. The latter takes them, puts his finger to his cap, and gracefully thrusts them into his pocket.

“Well, gentlemen, can’t we arrange it like this?” he says, kindled by a new idea that has flashed on him. “The troop train is late,… as you see,

it is not here,… so why shouldn’t you go as the troop train?[2] And I will let the troop train go as twenty-eight. Eh?”

“If you like,” agrees the guard.

“Excellent!” the stationmaster says, delighted. “In that case there is no need for you to wait here; you can set off at once. I’ll dispatch you immediately. Excellent!”

He salutes Malahin and runs off to his room, reading forms as he goes. The old man is very much pleased by the conversation that has just taken place; he smiles and looks about the room as though looking for something else agreeable.

“We’ll have a drink, though,” he says, taking the guard’s arm.

“It seems a little early for drinking.”

“No, you must let me treat you to a glass in a friendly way.”

They both go to the refreshment bar. After having a drink the guard spends a long time selecting something to eat.

He is a very stout, elderly man, with a puffy and discolored face. His fatness is unpleasant, flabby-looking, and he is sallow as people are who drink too much and sleep irregularly.

“And now we might have a second glass,” says Malahin. “It’s cold now, it’s no sin to drink. Please take some. So I can rely upon you, Mr. Guard, that there will be no hindrance or unpleasantness for the rest of the journey. For you know in moving cattle every hour is precious. Today meat is one price; and tomorrow, look you, it will be another. If you are a day or two late and don’t get your price, instead of a profit you get home—excuse my saying it—without your breeches. Pray take a little.… I rely on you, and as for standing you something or what you like, I shall be pleased to show you my respect at any time.”

After having fed the guard, Malahin goes back to the van.

“I have just got hold of the troop train,” he says to his son. “We shall go quickly. The guard says if we go all the way with that number we shall arrive at eight o’clock tomorrow evening. If one does not bestir oneself, my boy, one gets nothing.… That’s so.… So you watch and learn.…”

After the first bell a man with a face black with soot, in a blouse and filthy frayed trousers hanging very slack, comes to the door of the van. This is the oiler, who had been creeping under the carriages and tapping the wheels with a hammer.

“Are these your vans of cattle?” he asks.

“Yes. Why?”

“Why, because two of the vans are not safe. They can’t go on, they must stay here to be repaired.”

“Oh, come, tell us another! You simply want a drink, to get something out of me.… You should have said so.”

“As you please, only it is my duty to report it at once.”

Without indignation or protest, simply, almost mechanically, the old man takes two twenty-kopeck pieces out of his pocket and gives them to the oiler. He takes them very calmly, too, and looking good-naturedly at the old man enters into conversation.

“You are going to sell your cattle, I suppose.… It’s good business!”

Malahin sighs and, looking calmly at the oiler’s black face, tells him that trading in cattle used certainly to be profitable, but now it has become a risky and losing business.

“I have a mate here,” the oiler interrupts him. “You merchant gentlemen might make him a little present.…”

Malahin gives something to the mate too. The troop train goes quickly and the waits at the stations are comparatively short. The old man is pleased. The pleasant impression made by the young man in the rough overcoat has gone deep, the vodka he has drunk slightly clouds his brain, the weather is magnificent, and everything seems to be going well. He talks without ceasing, and at every stopping place runs to the refreshment bar. Feeling the need of a listener, he takes with him first the guard, and then the engine-driver, and does not simply drink, but makes a long business of it, with suitable remarks and clinking of glasses.

“You have your job and we have ours,” he says with an affable smile. “May God prosper us and you, and not our will but His be done.”

The vodka gradually excites him and he is worked up to a great pitch of energy. He wants to bestir himself, to fuss about, to make inquiries, to talk incessantly. At one minute he fumbles in his pockets and bundles and looks for some form. Then he thinks of something and cannot remember it; then takes out his pocketbook, and with no sort of object counts over his money. He bustles about, sighs and groans, clasps his hands.… Laying out before him the letters and telegrams from the meat salesmen in the city, bills, post office and telegraphic receipt forms, and his note book, he reflects aloud and insists on Yasha’s listening.

And when he is tired of reading over forms and talking about prices, he gets out at the stopping places, runs to the vans where his cattle are, does nothing, but simply clasps his hands and exclaims in horror.

“Oh, dear! oh, dear!” he says in a complaining voice. “Holy Martyr Vlassy! Though they are bullocks, though they are beasts, yet they want

to eat and drink as men do.… It’s four days and nights since they have drunk or eaten. Oh, dear! oh, dear!”

Yasha follows him and does what he is told like an obedient son. He does not like the old man’s frequent visits to the refreshment bar. Though he is afraid of his father, he cannot refrain from remarking on it.

“So you have begun already!” he says, looking sternly at the old man. “What are you rejoicing at? Is it your name-day or what?”

“Don’t you dare teach your father.”

“Fine goings on!”

When he has not to follow his father along the other vans Yasha sits on the cape and strums on the accordion. Occasionally he gets out and walks lazily beside the train; he stands by the engine and turns a prolonged, unmoving stare on the wheels or on the workmen tossing blocks of wood into the tender; the hot engine wheezes, the falling blocks come down with the mellow, hearty thud of fresh wood; the engine-driver and his assistant, very phlegmatic and imperturbable persons, perform incomprehensible movements and don’t hurry themselves. After standing for a while by the engine, Yasha saunters lazily to the station; here he looks at the eatables in the refreshment bar, reads aloud some quite uninteresting notice, and goes back slowly to the cattle van. His face expresses neither boredom nor desire; apparently he does not care where he is, at home, in the van, or by the engine.

Towards evening the train stops near a big station. The lamps have only just been lighted along the line; against the blue background in the fresh limpid air the lights are bright and pale like stars; they are only red and glowing under the station roof, where it is already dark. All the lines are loaded up with carriages, and it seems that if another train came in there would be no place for it. Yasha runs to the station for boiling water to make the evening tea. Well-dressed ladies and high school boys are walking on the platform. If one looks into the distance from the platform there are faraway lights twinkling in the evening dusk on both sides of the station—that is the town. What town? Yasha does not care to know. He sees only the dim lights and wretched buildings beyond the station, hears the cabmen shouting, feels a sharp, cold wind on his face, and imagines that the town is probably disagreeable, uncomfortable, and dull.

While they are having tea, when it is quite dark and a lantern is hanging on the wall again as on the previous evening, the train quivers from a slight shock and begins moving backwards. After going a little way it stops; they hear indistinct shouts, someone sets the chains

clanking near the buffers and shouts, “Ready!” The train moves and goes forward. Ten minutes later it is dragged back again.

Getting out of the van, Malahin does not recognize his train. His eight vans of bullocks are standing in the same row with some trolleys which were not a part of the train before. Two or three of these are loaded with rubble and the others are empty. The guards running to and fro on the platform are strangers. They give unwilling and indistinct answers to his questions. They have no thoughts to spare for Malahin; they are in a hurry to get the train together so as to finish as soon as possible and be back in the warmth.

“What number is this?” asks Malahin.

“Number eighteen.”

“And where is the troop train? Why have you taken me off the troop train?”

Getting no answer, the old man goes to the station. He looks first for the familiar figure of the head guard and, not finding him, goes to the stationmaster. The stationmaster is sitting at a table in his own room, turning over a bundle of forms. He is busy, and affects not to see the newcomer. His appearance is impressive: a cropped black head, prominent ears, a long hooked nose, a swarthy face; he has a forbidding and, as it were, offended expression. Malahin begins making his complaint at great length.

“What?” queries the stationmaster. “How is this?” He leans against the back of his chair and goes on, growing indignant: “What is it? and why shouldn’t you go by number eighteen? Speak more clearly, I don’t understand! How is it? Do you want me to be everywhere at once?”

He showers questions on him, and for no apparent reason grows sterner and sterner. Malahin is already feeling in his pocket for his pocketbook, but in the end the stationmaster, aggrieved and indignant, for some unknown reason jumps up from his seat and runs out of the room. Malahin shrugs his shoulders, and goes out to look for someone else to speak to.

From boredom or from a desire to put the finishing stroke to a busy day, or simply that a window with the inscription “Telegraph!” on it catches his eye, he goes to the window and expresses a desire to send off a telegram. Taking up a pen, he thinks for a moment, and writes on a blue form: “Urgent. Traffic Manager. Eight vans of live stock. Delayed at every station. Kindly send an express number. Reply paid. Malahin.”

Having sent off the telegram, he goes back to the stationmaster’s room. There he finds, sitting on a sofa covered with gray cloth, a

benevolent-looking gentleman in spectacles and a cap of raccoon fur; he is wearing a peculiar overcoat very much like a lady's, edged with fur, with frogs and slashed sleeves. Another gentleman, dried-up and sinewy, wearing the uniform of a railway inspector, stands facing him.

"Just think of it," says the inspector, addressing the gentleman in the queer overcoat. "I'll tell you an incident that really is A1! The Z—— railway line in the coolest possible way stole three hundred trucks from the N—— line. It's a fact, sir! I swear it! They carried them off, repainted them, put their letters on them, and that's all about it. The N—— line sends its agents everywhere, they hunt and hunt. And then—can you imagine it?—the Company happen to come upon a broken-down carriage of the Z—— line. They repair it at their depot, and all at once, bless my soul! see their own mark on the wheels What do you say to that? Eh? If I did it they would send me to Siberia, but the railway companies simply snap their fingers at it!"

It is pleasant to Malahin to talk to educated, cultured people. He strokes his beard and joins in the conversation with dignity.

"Take this case, gentlemen, for instance," he says. "I am transporting cattle to X——. Eight vanloads. Very good.… Now let us say they charge me for each vanload as a weight of ten tons; eight bullocks don't weigh ten tons, but much less, yet they don't take any notice of that.…"

At that instant Yasha walks into the room looking for his father. He listens and is about to sit down on a chair, but probably thinking of his weight goes and sits on the windowsill.

"They don't take any notice of that," Malahin goes on, "and charge me and my son the third-class fare, too, forty-two roubles, for going in the van with the bullocks. This is my son Yakov. I have two more at home, but they have gone in for study. Well and apart from that it is my opinion that the railways have ruined the cattle trade. In old days when they drove them in herds it was better."

The old man's talk is lengthy and drawn out. After every sentence he looks at Yasha as though he would say: "See how I am talking to clever people."

"Upon my word!" the inspector interrupts him. "No one is indignant, no one criticizes. And why? It is very simple. An abomination strikes the eye and arouses indignation only when it is exceptional, when the established order is broken by it. Here, where, saving your presence, it constitutes the long-established program and forms and enters into the basis of the order itself, where every sleeper on the line bears the trace of it and stinks of it, one too easily grows accustomed to it! Yes, sir!"

The second bell rings, the gentlemen in the queer overcoat gets up. The inspector takes him by the arm and, still talking with heat, goes off with him to the platform. After the third bell the stationmaster runs into his room, and sits down at his table.

“Listen, with what number am I to go?” asks Malahin.

The stationmaster looks at a form and says indignantly:

“Are you Malahin, eight vanloads? You must pay a rouble a van and six roubles and twenty kopecks for stamps. You have no stamps. Total, fourteen roubles, twenty kopecks.”

Receiving the money, he writes something down, dries it with sand, and, hurriedly snatching up a bundle of forms, goes quickly out of the room.

At ten o’clock in the evening Malahin gets an answer from the traffic manager: “Give precedence.”

Reading the telegram through, the old man winks significantly and, very well pleased with himself, puts it in his pocket.

“Here,” he says to Yasha, “look and learn.”

At midnight his train goes on. The night is dark and cold like the previous one; the waits at the stations are long. Yasha sits on the cape and imperturbably strums on the accordion, while the old man is still more eager to exert himself. At one of the stations he is overtaken by a desire to lodge a complaint. At his request a gendarme sits down and writes:

> “November 10, 188–.
> “—I, noncommissioned officer of the Z—— section of the N—— police department of railways, Ilya Tchered, in accordance with article II of the statute of May 19, 1871, have drawn up this protocol at the station of X—— as herewith follows.…”

“What am I to write next?” asks the gendarme.

Malahin lays out before him forms, postal and telegraph receipts, accounts.… He does not know himself definitely what he wants of the gendarme; he wants to describe in the protocol not any separate episode but his whole journey, with all his losses and conversations with stationmasters—to describe it lengthily and vindictively.

“At the station of Z——,” he says, “write that the stationmaster unlinked my vans from the troop train because he did not like my countenance.”

And he wants the gendarme to be sure to mention his countenance. The latter listens wearily, and goes on writing without hearing him to the end. He ends his protocol thus:

> “The above deposition I, noncommissioned officer Tchered, have written down in this protocol with a view to present it to the head of the Z—— section, and have handed a copy thereof to Gavril Malahin.”

The old man takes the copy, adds it to the papers with which his side pocket is stuffed, and, much pleased, goes back to his van.

In the morning Malahin wakes up again in a bad humor, but his wrath vents itself not on Yasha but the cattle.

“The cattle are done for!” he grumbles. “They are done for! They are at the last gasp! God be my judge! they will all die. Tfoo!”

The bullocks, who have had nothing to drink for many days, tortured by thirst, are licking the hoar frost on the walls, and when Malachin goes up to them they begin licking his cold fur jacket. From their clear, tearful eyes it can be seen that they are exhausted by thirst and the jolting of the train, that they are hungry and miserable.

“It’s a nice job taking you by rail, you wretched brutes!” mutters Malahin. “I could wish you were dead to get it over! It makes me sick to look at you!”

At midday the train stops at a big station where, according to the regulations, there was drinking water provided for cattle.

Water is given to the cattle, but the bullocks will not drink it: the water is too cold.…

Two more days and nights pass, and at last in the distance in the murky fog the city comes into sight. The journey is over. The train comes to a standstill before reaching the town, near a goods’ station. The bullocks, released from the van, stagger and stumble as though they were walking on slippery ice.

Having got through the unloading and veterinary inspection, Malahin and Yasha take up their quarters in a dirty, cheap hotel in the outskirts of the town, in the square in which the cattle-market is held. Their lodgings are filthy and their food is disgusting, unlike what they ever have at home; they sleep to the harsh strains of a wretched steam hurdy-gurdy which plays day and night in the restaurant under their lodging.

The old man spends his time from morning till night going about looking for purchasers, and Yasha sits for days in the hotel room, or goes out into the street to look at the town. He sees the filthy square heaped up with dung, the signboards of restaurants, the turreted walls of a monastery in the fog. Sometimes he runs across the street and looks into the grocer's shop, admires the jars of cakes of different colors, yawns, and lazily saunters back to his room. The city does not interest him.

At last the bullocks are sold to a dealer. Malahin hires drovers. The cattle are divided into herds, ten in each, and driven to the other end of the town. The bullocks, exhausted, go with drooping heads through the noisy streets, and look indifferently at what they see for the first and last time in their lives. The tattered drovers walk after them, their heads drooping too. They are bored.… Now and then some drover starts out of his brooding, remembers that there are cattle in front of him entrusted to his charge, and to show that he is doing his duty brings a stick down full swing on a bullock's back. The bullock staggers with the pain, runs forward a dozen paces, and looks about him as though he were ashamed at being beaten before people.

After selling the bullocks and buying for his family presents such as they could perfectly well have bought at home, Malahin and Yasha get ready for their journey back. Three hours before the train goes the old man, who has already had a drop too much with the purchaser and so is fussy, goes down with Yasha to the restaurant and sits down to drink tea. Like all provincials, he cannot eat and drink alone: he must have company as fussy and as fond of sedate conversation as himself.

"Call the host!" he says to the waiter; "tell him I should like to entertain him."

The hotelkeeper, a well-fed man, absolutely indifferent to his lodgers, comes and sits down to the table.

"Well, we have sold our stock," Malahin says, laughing. "I have swapped my goat for a hawk. Why, when we set off the price of meat was three roubles ninety kopecks, but when we arrived it had dropped to three roubles twenty-five. They tell us we are too late, we should have been here three days earlier, for now there is not the same demand for meat, St. Philip's fast has come.… Eh? It's a nice how-do-you-do! It meant a loss of fourteen roubles on each bullock. Yes. But only think what it costs to bring the stock! Fifteen roubles carriage, and you must put down six roubles for each bullock, tips, bribes, drinks, and one thing and another.…"

The hotelkeeper listens out of politeness and reluctantly drinks tea. Malahin sighs and groans, gesticulates, jests about his ill-luck, but everything shows that the loss he has sustained does not trouble him much. He doesn't mind whether he has lost or gained as long as he has listeners, has something to make a fuss about, and is not late for his train.

An hour later Malahin and Yasha, laden with bags and boxes, go downstairs from the hotel room to the front door to get into a sledge and drive to the station. They are seen off by the hotelkeeper, the waiter, and various women. The old man is touched. He thrusts ten-kopeck pieces in all directions, and says in a singsong voice:

"Good by, good health to you! God grant that all may be well with you. Please God if we are alive and well we shall come again in Lent. Goodbye. Thank you. God bless you!"

Getting into the sledge, the old man spends a long time crossing himself in the direction in which the monastery walls make a patch of darkness in the fog. Yasha sits beside him on the very edge of the seat with his legs hanging over the side. His face as before shows no sign of emotion and expresses neither boredom nor desire. He is not glad that he is going home, nor sorry that he has not had time to see the sights of the city.

"Drive on!"

The cabman whips up the horse and, turning round, begins swearing at the heavy and cumbersome luggage.

Expensive Lessons

For a cultivated man to be ignorant of foreign languages is a great inconvenience. Vorotov became acutely conscious of it when, after taking his degree, he began upon a piece of research work.

"It's awful," he said, breathing hard (although he was only twenty-six he was fat, heavy, and suffered from shortness of breath).

"It's awful! Without languages I'm like a bird without wings. I might just as well give up the work."

And he made up his mind at all costs to overcome his innate laziness, and to learn French and German; and began to look out for a teacher.

One winter noon, as Vorotov was sitting in his study at work, the servant told him that a young lady was inquiring for him.

"Ask her in," said Vorotov.

And a young lady elaborately dressed in the last fashion walked in. She introduced herself as a teacher of French, Alice Osipovna Enquête, and told Vorotov that she had been sent to him by one of his friends.

"Delighted! Please sit down," said Vorotov, breathing hard and putting his hand over the collar of his nightshirt (to breathe more freely he always wore a nightshirt at work instead of a stiff linen one with collar). "It was Pyotr Sergeitch sent you? Yes, yes… I asked him about it. Delighted!"

As he talked to Mdlle. Enquête he looked at her shyly and with curiosity. She was a genuine Frenchwoman, very elegant and still quite young. Judging from her pale, languid face, her short curly hair, and her unnaturally slim waist, she might have been eighteen; but looking at her broad, well-developed shoulders, the elegant lines of her back and her severe eyes, Vorotov thought that she was not less than three-and-twenty and might be twenty-five; but then again he began to think she was not more than eighteen. Her face looked as cold and businesslike as the face of a person who has come to speak about money. She did not once smile or frown, and only once a look of perplexity flitted over her face when

she learnt that she was not required to teach children, but a stout grown-up man.

"So, Alice Osipovna," said Vorotov, "we'll have a lesson every evening from seven to eight. As regards your terms—a rouble a lesson—I've nothing to say against that. By all means let it be a rouble.…"

And he asked her if she would not have some tea or coffee, whether it was a fine day, and with a good-natured smile, stroking the baize of the table, he inquired in a friendly voice who she was, where she had studied, and what she lived on.

With a cold, businesslike expression, Alice Osipovna answered that she had completed her studies at a private school and had the diploma of a private teacher, that her father had died lately of scarlet fever, that her mother was alive and made artificial flowers; that she, Mdlle. Enquête, taught in a private school till dinnertime, and after dinner was busy till evening giving lessons in different good families.

She went away leaving behind her the faint fragrance of a woman's clothes. For a long time afterwards Vorotov could not settle to work, but, sitting at the table stroking its green baize surface, he meditated.

"It's very pleasant to see a girl working to earn her own living," he thought. "On the other hand, it's very unpleasant to think that poverty should not spare such elegant and pretty girls as Alice Osipovna, and that she, too, should have to struggle for existence. It's a sad thing!"

Having never seen virtuous Frenchwomen before, he reflected also that this elegantly dressed young lady with her well-developed shoulders and exaggeratedly small waist in all probability followed another calling as well as giving French lessons.

The next evening when the clock pointed to five minutes to seven, Mdlle. Enquête appeared, rosy from the frost. She opened Margot, which she had brought with her, and without introduction began:

"French grammar has twenty-six letters. The first letter is called A, the second B…"

"Excuse me," Vorotov interrupted, smiling. "I must warn you, mademoiselle, that you must change your method a little in my case. You see, I know Russian, Greek, and Latin well.… I've studied comparative philology, and I think we might omit Margot and pass straight to reading some author."

And he explained to the French girl how grown-up people learn languages.

"A friend of mine," he said, "wanting to learn modern languages, laid before him the French, German, and Latin gospels, and read them side

by side, carefully analysing each word, and would you believe it, he attained his object in less than a year. Let us do the same. We'll take some author and read him."

The French girl looked at him in perplexity. Evidently the suggestion seemed to her very naive and ridiculous. If this strange proposal had been made to her by a child, she would certainly have been angry and have scolded it, but as he was a grown-up man and very stout and she could not scold him, she only shrugged her shoulders hardly perceptibly and said:

"As you please."

Vorotov rummaged in his bookcase and picked out a dog's-eared French book.

"Will this do?"

"It's all the same," she said.

"In that case let us begin, and good luck to it! Let's begin with the title… 'Mémoires.'"

"Reminiscences," Mdlle. Enquête translated.

With a good-natured smile, breathing hard, he spent a quarter of an hour over the word *mémoires*, and as much over the word *de*, and this wearied the young lady. She answered his questions languidly, grew confused, and evidently did not understand her pupil well, and did not attempt to understand him. Vorotov asked her questions, and at the same time kept looking at her fair hair and thinking:

"Her hair isn't naturally curly; she curls it. It's a strange thing! She works from morning to night, and yet she has time to curl her hair."

At eight o'clock precisely she got up, and saying coldly and dryly, "*Au revoir, monsieur*," walked out of the study, leaving behind her the same tender, delicate, disturbing fragrance. For a long time again her pupil did nothing; he sat at the table meditating.

During the days that followed he became convinced that his teacher was a charming, conscientious, and precise young lady, but that she was very badly educated, and incapable of teaching grown-up people, and he made up his mind not to waste his time, to get rid of her, and to engage another teacher. When she came the seventh time he took out of his pocket an envelope with seven roubles in it, and holding it in his hand, became very confused and began:

"Excuse me, Alice Osipovna, but I ought to tell you… I'm under painful necessity…"

Seeing the envelope, the French girl guessed what was meant, and for the first time during their lessons her face quivered and her cold,

businesslike expression vanished. She coloured a little, and dropping her eyes, began nervously fingering her slender gold chain. And Vorotov, seeing her perturbation, realised how much a rouble meant to her, and how bitter it would be to her to lose what she was earning.

"I ought to tell you," he muttered, growing more and more confused, and quavering inwardly; he hurriedly stuffed the envelope into his pocket and went on: "Excuse me, I… I must leave you for ten minutes."

And trying to appear as though he had not in the least meant to get rid of her, but only to ask her permission to leave her for a short time, he went into the next room and sat there for ten minutes. And then he returned more embarrassed than ever: it struck him that she might have interpreted his brief absence in some way of her own, and he felt awkward.

The lessons began again. Yorotov felt no interest in them. Realising that he would gain nothing from the lessons, he gave the French girl liberty to do as she liked, asking her nothing and not interrupting her. She translated away as she pleased ten pages during a lesson, and he did not listen, breathed hard, and having nothing better to do, gazed at her curly head, or her soft white hands or her neck and sniffed the fragrance of her clothes. He caught himself thinking very unsuitable thoughts, and felt ashamed, or he was moved to tenderness, and then he felt vexed and wounded that she was so cold and businesslike with him, and treated him as a pupil, never smiling and seeming afraid that he might accidentally touch her. He kept wondering how to inspire her with confidence and get to know her better, and to help her, to make her understand how badly she taught, poor thing.

One day Mdlle. Enquête came to the lesson in a smart pink dress, slightly décolleté, and surrounded by such a fragrance that she seemed to be wrapped in a cloud, and, if one blew upon her, ready to fly away into the air or melt away like smoke. She apologised and said she could stay only half an hour for the lesson, as she was going straight from the lesson to a dance.

He looked at her throat and the back of her bare neck, and thought he understood why Frenchwomen had the reputation of frivolous creatures easily seduced; he was carried away by this cloud of fragrance, beauty, and bare flesh, while she, unconscious of his thoughts and probably not in the least interested in them, rapidly turned over the pages and translated at full steam:

"'He was walking the street and meeting a gentleman his friend and saying, "Where are you striving to seeing your face so pale it makes me

sad.”’”

The *Mémoires* had long been finished, and now Alice was translating some other book. One day she came an hour too early for the lesson, apologizing and saying that she wanted to leave at seven and go to the Little Theatre. Seeing her out after the lesson, Vorotov dressed and went to the theatre himself. He went, and fancied that he was going simply for change and amusement, and that he was not thinking about Alice at all. He could not admit that a serious man, preparing for a learned career, lethargic in his habits, could fling up his work and go to the theatre simply to meet there a girl he knew very little, who was unintelligent and utterly unintellectual.

Yet for some reason his heart was beating during the intervals, and without realizing what he was doing, he raced about the corridors and foyer like a boy impatiently looking for someone, and he was disappointed when the interval was over. And when he saw the familiar pink dress and the handsome shoulders under the tulle, his heart quivered as though with a foretaste of happiness; he smiled joyfully, and for the first time in his life experienced the sensation of jealousy.

Alice was walking with two unattractive-looking students and an officer. She was laughing, talking loudly, and obviously flirting. Vorotov had never seen her like that. She was evidently happy, contented, warm, sincere. What for? Why? Perhaps because these men were her friends and belonged to her own circle. And Vorotov felt there was a terrible gulf between himself and that circle. He bowed to his teacher, but she gave him a chilly nod and walked quickly by; she evidently did not care for her friends to know that she had pupils, and that she had to give lessons to earn money.

After the meeting at the theatre Vorotov realised that he was in love.… During the subsequent lessons he feasted his eyes on his elegant teacher, and without struggling with himself, gave full rein to his imaginations, pure and impure. Mdlle. Enquête’s face did not cease to be cold; precisely at eight o’clock every evening she said coldly, “*Au revoir, monsieur*,” and he felt she cared nothing about him, and never would care anything about him, and that his position was hopeless.

Sometimes in the middle of a lesson he would begin dreaming, hoping, making plans. He inwardly composed declarations of love, remembered that Frenchwomen were frivolous and easily won, but it was enough for him to glance at the face of his teacher for his ideas to be extinguished as a candle is blown out when you bring it into the wind on the verandah. Once, overcome, forgetting himself as though in delirium,

he could not restrain himself, and barred her way as she was going from the study into the entry after the lesson, and, gasping for breath and stammering, began to declare his love:

"You are dear to me! I… I love you! Allow me to speak."

And Alice turned pale—probably from dismay, reflecting that after this declaration she could not come here again and get a rouble a lesson. With a frightened look in her eyes she said in a loud whisper:

"Ach, you mustn't! Don't speak, I entreat you! You mustn't!"

And Vorotov did not sleep all night afterwards; he was tortured by shame; he blamed himself and thought intensely. It seemed to him that he had insulted the girl by his declaration, that she would not come to him again.

He resolved to find out her address from the address bureau in the morning, and to write her a letter of apology. But Alice came without a letter. For the first minute she felt uncomfortable, then she opened a book and began briskly and rapidly translating as usual:

"'Oh, young gentleman, don't tear those flowers in my garden which I want to be giving to my ill daughter.…'"

She still comes to this day. Four books have already been translated, but Vorotov knows no French but the word *Mémoires*, and when he is asked about his literary researches, he waves his hand, and without answering, turns the conversation to the weather.

THE LION AND THE SUN

In one of the towns lying on this side of the Urals a rumour was afloat that a Persian magnate, called Rahat-Helam, was staying for a few days in the town and putting up at the Japan Hotel. This rumour made no impression whatever upon the inhabitants; a Persian had arrived, well, so be it. Only Stepan Ivanovitch Kutsyn, the mayor of the town, hearing of the arrival of the oriental gentleman from the secretary of the Town Hall, grew thoughtful and inquired:

"Where is he going?"

"To Paris or to London, I believe."

"H'm.… Then he is a bigwig, I suppose?"

"The devil only knows."

As he went home from the Town Hall and had his dinner, the mayor sank into thought again, and this time he went on thinking till the evening. The arrival of the distinguished Persian greatly intrigued him. It seemed to him that fate itself had sent him this Rahat-Helam, and that a favourable opportunity had come at last for realising his passionate, secretly cherished dream. Kutsyn had already two medals, and the Stanislav of the third degree, the badge of the Red Cross, and the badge of the Society of Saving from Drowning, and in addition to these he had made himself a little gold gun crossed by a guitar, and this ornament, hung from a buttonhole in his uniform, looked in the distance like something special, and delightfully resembled a badge of distinction. It is well known that the more orders and medals you have the more you want—and the mayor had long been desirous of receiving the Persian order of The Lion and the Sun; he desired it passionately, madly. He knew very well that there was no need to fight, or to subscribe to an asylum, or to serve on committees to obtain this order; all that was needed was a favourable opportunity. And now it seemed to him that this opportunity had come.

At noon on the following day he put on his chain and all his badges of distinction and went to the Japan. Destiny favoured him. When he

entered the distinguished Persian's apartment the latter was alone and doing nothing. Rahat-Helam, an enormous Asiatic, with a long nose like the beak of a snipe, with prominent eyes, and with a fez on his head, was sitting on the floor rummaging in his portmanteau.

"I beg you to excuse my disturbing you," began Kutsyn, smiling. "I have the honour to introduce myself, the hereditary, honourable citizen and cavalier, Stepan Ivanovitch Kutsyn, mayor of this town. I regard it as my duty to honour, in the person of your Highness, so to say, the representative of a friendly and neighbourly state."

The Persian turned and muttered something in very bad French, that sounded like tapping a board with a piece of wood.

"The frontiers of Persia"—Kutsyn continued the greeting he had previously learned by heart—"are in close contact with the borders of our spacious fatherland, and therefore mutual sympathies impel me, so to speak, to express my solidarity with you."

The illustrious Persian got up and again muttered something in a wooden tongue. Kutsyn, who knew no foreign language, shook his head to show that he did not understand.

"Well, how am I to talk to him?" he thought. "It would be a good thing to send for an interpreter at once, but it is a delicate matter, I can't talk before witnesses. The interpreter would be chattering all over the town afterwards."

And Kutsyn tried to recall the foreign words he had picked up from the newspapers.

"I am the mayor of the town," he muttered. "That is the *lord mayor*… *municipalais*… *Vwee? Kompreney?*"

He wanted to express his social position in words or in gesture, and did not know how. A picture hanging on the wall with an inscription in large letters, "The Town of Venice," helped him out of his difficulties. He pointed with his finger at the town, then at his own head, and in that way obtained, as he imagined, the phrase: "I am the head of the town." The Persian did not understand, but he gave a smile, and said:

"Goot, monsieur… goot…" Half-an-hour later the mayor was slapping the Persian, first on the knee and then on the shoulder, and saying:

"*Kompreney? Vwee?* As *lord mayor* and *municipalais* I suggest that you should take a little *promenage*… *kompreney? Promenage.*"

Kutsyn pointed at Venice, and with two fingers represented walking legs. Rahat-Helam who kept his eyes fixed on his medals, and was apparently guessing that this was the most important person in the town,

understood the word *promenage* and grinned politely. Then they both put on their coats and went out of the room. Downstairs near the door leading to the restaurant of the Japan, Kutsyn reflected that it would not be amiss to entertain the Persian. He stopped and indicating the tables, said:

"By Russian custom it wouldn't be amiss… *puree*, *entrekot*, champagne and so on, *kompreney*."

The illustrious visitor understood, and a little later they were both sitting in the very best room of the restaurant, eating, and drinking champagne.

"Let us drink to the prosperity of Persia!" said Kutsyn. "We Russians love the Persians. Though we are of another faith, yet there are common interests, mutual, so to say, sympathies… progress… Asiatic markets.… The campaigns of peace so to say.…"

The illustrious Persian ate and drank with an excellent appetite, he stuck his fork into a slice of smoked sturgeon, and wagging his head, enthusiastically said: "*Goot*, *bien*."

"You like it?" said the mayor delighted. "*Bien*, that's capital." And turning to the waiter he said: "Luka, my lad, see that two pieces of smoked sturgeon, the best you have, are sent up to his Highness's room!"

Then the mayor and the Persian magnate went to look at the menagerie. The townspeople saw their Stepan Ivanovitch, flushed with champagne, gay and very well pleased, leading the Persian about the principal streets and the bazaar, showing him the points of interest of the town, and even taking him to the fire tower.

Among other things the townspeople saw him stop near some stone gates with lions on it, and point out to the Persian first the lion, then the sun overhead, and then his own breast; then again he pointed to the lion and to the sun while the Persian nodded his head as though in sign of assent, and smiling showed his white teeth. In the evening they were sitting in the London Hotel listening to the harp-players, and where they spent the night is not known.

Next day the mayor was at the Town Hall in the morning; the officials there apparently already knew something and were making their conjectures, for the secretary went up to him and said with an ironical smile:

"It is the custom of the Persians when an illustrious visitor comes to visit you, you must slaughter a sheep with your own hands."

And a little later an envelope that had come by post was handed to him. The mayor tore it open and saw a caricature in it. It was a drawing

of Rahat-Helam with the mayor on his knees before him, stretching out his hands and saying:

> “To prove our Russian friendship
> For Persia’s mighty realm,
> And show respect for you, her envoy,
> Myself I’d slaughter like a lamb,
> But, pardon me, for I’m a—donkey!”

The mayor was conscious of an unpleasant feeling like a gnawing in the pit of the stomach, but not for long. By midday he was again with the illustrious Persian, again he was regaling him and showing him the points of interest in the town. Again he led him to the stone gates, and again pointed to the lion, to the sun and to his own breast. They dined at the Japan; after dinner, with cigars in their teeth, both, flushed and blissful, again mounted the fire tower, and the mayor, evidently wishing to entertain the visitor with an unusual spectacle, shouted from the top to a sentry walking below:

“Sound the alarm!”

But the alarm was not sounded as the firemen were at the baths at the moment.

They supped at the London and, after supper, the Persian departed. When he saw him off, Stepan Ivanovitch kissed him three times after the Russian fashion, and even grew tearful. And when the train started, he shouted:

“Give our greeting to Persia! Tell her that we love her!”

A year and four months had passed. There was a bitter frost, thirty-five degrees, and a piercing wind was blowing. Stepan Ivanovitch was walking along the street with his fur coat thrown open over his chest, and he was annoyed that he met no one to see the Lion and the Sun upon his breast. He walked about like this till evening with his fur coat open, was chilled to the bone, and at night tossed from side to side and could not get to sleep.

He felt heavy at heart.

There was a burning sensation inside him, and his heart throbbed uneasily; he had a longing now to get a Serbian order. It was a painful, passionate longing.

In Trouble

Pyotr Semyonitch, the bank manager, together with the bookkeeper, his assistant, and two members of the board, were taken in the night to prison. The day after the upheaval the merchant Avdeyev, who was one of the committee of auditors, was sitting with his friends in the shop saying:

"So it is God's will, it seems. There is no escaping your fate. Here today we are eating caviar and tomorrow, for aught we know, it will be prison, beggary, or maybe death. Anything may happen. Take Pyotr Semyonitch, for instance.…"

He spoke, screwing up his drunken eyes, while his friends went on drinking, eating caviar, and listening. Having described the disgrace and helplessness of Pyotr Semyonitch, who only the day before had been powerful and respected by all, Avdeyev went on with a sigh:

"The tears of the mouse come back to the cat. Serve them right, the scoundrels! They could steal, the rooks, so let them answer for it!"

"You'd better look out, Ivan Danilitch, that you don't catch it too!" one of his friends observed.

"What has it to do with me?"

"Why, they were stealing, and what were you auditors thinking about? I'll be bound, you signed the audit."

"It's all very well to talk!" laughed Avdeyev: "Signed it, indeed! They used to bring the accounts to my shop and I signed them. As though I understood! Give me anything you like, I'll scrawl my name to it. If you were to write that I murdered someone I'd sign my name to it. I haven't time to go into it; besides, I can't see without my spectacles."

After discussing the failure of the bank and the fate of Pyotr Semyonitch, Avdeyev and his friends went to eat pie at the house of a friend whose wife was celebrating her name-day. At the name-day party everyone was discussing the bank failure. Avdeyev was more excited than anyone, and declared that he had long foreseen the crash and knew two years before that things were not quite right at the bank. While they

were eating pie he described a dozen illegal operations which had come to his knowledge.

"If you knew, why did you not give information?" asked an officer who was present.

"I wasn't the only one: the whole town knew of it," laughed Avdeyev. "Besides, I haven't the time to hang about the law courts, damn them!"

He had a nap after the pie and then had dinner, then had another nap, then went to the evening service at the church of which he was a warden; after the service he went back to the name-day party and played preference till midnight. Everything seemed satisfactory.

But when Avdeyev hurried home after midnight the cook, who opened the door to him, looked pale, and was trembling so violently that she could not utter a word. His wife, Elizaveta Trofimovna, a flabby, overfed woman, with her grey hair hanging loose, was sitting on the sofa in the drawing room quivering all over, and vacantly rolling her eyes as though she were drunk. Her elder son, Vassily, a high school boy, pale too, and extremely agitated, was fussing round her with a glass of water.

"What's the matter?" asked Avdeyev, and looked angrily sideways at the stove (his family was constantly being upset by the fumes from it).

"The examining magistrate has just been with the police," answered Vassily; "they've made a search."

Avdeyev looked round him. The cupboards, the chests, the tables—everything bore traces of the recent search. For a minute Avdeyev stood motionless as though petrified, unable to understand; then his whole inside quivered and seemed to grow heavy, his left leg went numb, and, unable to endure his trembling, he lay down flat on the sofa. He felt his inside heaving and his rebellious left leg tapping against the back of the sofa.

In the course of two or three minutes he recalled the whole of his past, but could not remember any crime deserving of the attention of the police.

"It's all nonsense," he said, getting up. "They must have slandered me. Tomorrow I must lodge a complaint of their having dared to do such a thing."

Next morning after a sleepless night Avdeyev, as usual, went to his shop. His customers brought him the news that during the night the public prosecutor had sent the deputy manager and the head-clerk to prison as well. This news did not disturb Avdeyev. He was convinced that he had been slandered, and that if he were to lodge a complaint

today the examining magistrate would get into trouble for the search of the night before.

Between nine and ten o'clock he hurried to the town hall to see the secretary, who was the only educated man in the town council.

"Vladimir Stepanitch, what's this new fashion?" he said, bending down to the secretary's ear. "People have been stealing, but how do I come in? What has it to do with me? My dear fellow," he whispered, "there has been a search at my house last night! Upon my word! Have they gone crazy? Why touch me?"

"Because one shouldn't be a sheep," the secretary answered calmly. "Before you sign you ought to look."

"Look at what? But if I were to look at those accounts for a thousand years I could not make head or tail of them! It's all Greek to me! I am no bookkeeper. They used to bring them to me and I signed them."

"Excuse me. Apart from that you and your committee are seriously compromised. You borrowed nineteen thousand from the bank, giving no security."

"Lord have mercy upon us!" cried Avdeyev in amazement. "I am not the only one in debt to the bank! The whole town owes it money. I pay the interest and I shall repay the debt. What next! And besides, to tell the honest truth, it wasn't I myself borrowed the money. Pyotr Semyonitch forced it upon me. 'Take it,' he said, 'take it. If you don't take it,' he said, 'it means that you don't trust us and fight shy of us. You take it,' he said, 'and build your father a mill.' So I took it."

"Well, you see, none but children or sheep can reason like that. In any case, *signor*, you need not be anxious. You can't escape trial, of course, but you are sure to be acquitted."

The secretary's indifference and calm tone restored Avdeyev's composure. Going back to his shop and finding friends there, he again began drinking, eating caviar, and airing his views. He almost forgot the police search, and he was only troubled by one circumstance which he could not help noticing: his left leg was strangely numb, and his stomach for some reason refused to do its work.

That evening destiny dealt another overwhelming blow at Avdeyev: at an extraordinary meeting of the town council all members who were on the staff of the bank, Avdeyev among them, were asked to resign, on the ground that they were charged with a criminal offence. In the morning he received a request to give up immediately his duties as churchwarden.

After that Avdeyev lost count of the blows dealt him by fate, and strange, unprecedented days flitted rapidly by, one after another, and

every day brought some new, unexpected surprise. Among other things, the examining magistrate sent him a summons, and he returned home after the interview, insulted and red in the face.

"He gave me no peace, pestering me to tell him why I had signed. I signed, that's all about it. I didn't do it on purpose. They brought the papers to the shop and I signed them. I am no great hand at reading writing."

Young men with unconcerned faces arrived, sealed up the shop, and made an inventory of all the furniture of the house. Suspecting some intrigue behind this, and, as before, unconscious of any wrongdoing, Avdeyev in his mortification ran from one government office to another lodging complaints. He spent hours together in waiting rooms, composed long petitions, shed tears, swore. To his complaints the public prosecutor and the examining magistrate made the indifferent and rational reply: "Come to us when you are summoned: we have not time to attend to you now." While others answered: "It is not our business."

The secretary, an educated man, who, Avdeyev thought, might have helped him, merely shrugged his shoulders and said:

"It's your own fault. You shouldn't have been a sheep."

The old man exerted himself to the utmost, but his left leg was still numb, and his digestion was getting worse and worse. When he was weary of doing nothing and was getting poorer and poorer, he made up his mind to go to his father's mill, or to his brother, and begin dealing in corn. His family went to his father's and he was left alone. The days flitted by, one after another. Without a family, without a shop, and without money, the former churchwarden, an honoured and respected man, spent whole days going the round of his friends' shops, drinking, eating, and listening to advice. In the mornings and in the evenings, to while away the time, he went to church. Looking for hours together at the icons, he did not pray, but pondered. His conscience was clear, and he ascribed his position to mistake and misunderstanding; to his mind, it was all due to the fact that the officials and the examining magistrates were young men and inexperienced. It seemed to him that if he were to talk it over in detail and open his heart to some elderly judge, everything would go right again. He did not understand his judges, and he fancied they did not understand him.

The days raced by, and at last, after protracted, harassing delays, the day of the trial came. Avdeyev borrowed fifty roubles, and providing himself with spirit to rub on his leg and a decoction of herbs for his digestion, set off for the town where the circuit court was being held.

The trial lasted for ten days. Throughout the trial Avdeyev sat among his companions in misfortune with the stolid composure and dignity befitting a respectable and innocent man who is suffering for no fault of his own: he listened and did not understand a word. He was in an antagonistic mood. He was angry at being detained so long in the court, at being unable to get Lenten food anywhere, at his defending counsel's not understanding him, and, as he thought, saying the wrong thing. He thought that the judges did not understand their business. They took scarcely any notice of Avdeyev, they only addressed him once in three days, and the questions they put to him were of such a character that Avdeyev raised a laugh in the audience each time he answered them. When he tried to speak of the expenses he had incurred, of his losses, and of his meaning to claim his costs from the court, his counsel turned round and made an incomprehensible grimace, the public laughed, and the judge announced sternly that that had nothing to do with the case. The last words that he was allowed to say were not what his counsel had instructed him to say, but something quite different, which raised a laugh again.

During the terrible hour when the jury were consulting in their room he sat angrily in the refreshment bar, not thinking about the jury at all. He did not understand why they were so long deliberating when everything was so clear, and what they wanted of him.

Getting hungry, he asked the waiter to give him some cheap Lenten dish. For forty kopecks they gave him some cold fish and carrots. He ate it and felt at once as though the fish were heaving in a chilly lump in his stomach; it was followed by flatulence, heartburn, and pain.

Afterwards, as he listened to the foreman of the jury reading out the questions point by point, there was a regular revolution taking place in his inside, his whole body was bathed in a cold sweat, his left leg was numb; he did not follow, understood nothing, and suffered unbearably at not being able to sit or lie down while the foreman was reading. At last, when he and his companions were allowed to sit down, the public prosecutor got up and said something unintelligible, and all at once, as though they had sprung out of the earth, some police officers appeared on the scene with drawn swords and surrounded all the prisoners. Avdeyev was told to get up and go.

Now he understood that he was found guilty and in charge of the police, but he was not frightened nor amazed; such a turmoil was going on in his stomach that he could not think about his guards.

“So they won’t let us go back to the hotel?” he asked one of his companions. “But I have three roubles and an untouched quarter of a pound of tea in my room there.”

He spent the night at the police station; all night he was aware of a loathing for fish, and was thinking about the three roubles and the quarter of a pound of tea. Early in the morning, when the sky was beginning to turn blue, he was told to dress and set off. Two soldiers with bayonets took him to prison. Never before had the streets of the town seemed to him so long and endless. He walked not on the pavement but in the middle of the road in the muddy, thawing snow. His inside was still at war with the fish, his left leg was numb; he had forgotten his goloshes either in the court or in the police station, and his feet felt frozen.

Five days later all the prisoners were brought before the court again to hear their sentence. Avdeyev learnt that he was sentenced to exile in the province of Tobolsk. And that did not frighten nor amaze him either. He fancied for some reason that the trial was not yet over, that there were more adjournments to come, and that the final decision had not been reached yet.… He went on in the prison expecting this final decision every day.

Only six months later, when his wife and his son Vassily came to say goodbye to him, and when in the wasted, wretchedly dressed old woman he scarcely recognized his once fat and dignified Elizaveta Trofimovna, and when he saw his son wearing a short, shabby reefer-jacket and cotton trousers instead of the high school uniform, he realized that his fate was decided, and that whatever new “decision” there might be, his past would never come back to him. And for the first time since the trial and his imprisonment the angry expression left his face, and he wept bitterly.

THE KISS

At eight o'clock on the evening of the twentieth of May all the six batteries of the N—— Reserve Artillery Brigade halted for the night in the village of Myestetchki on their way to camp. When the general commotion was at its height, while some officers were busily occupied around the guns, while others, gathered together in the square near the church enclosure, were listening to the quartermasters, a man in civilian dress, riding a strange horse, came into sight round the church. The little dun-coloured horse with a good neck and a short tail came, moving not straight forward, but as it were sideways, with a sort of dance step, as though it were being lashed about the legs. When he reached the officers the man on the horse took off his hat and said:

"His Excellency Lieutenant-General von Rabbek invites the gentlemen to drink tea with him this minute.…"

The horse turned, danced, and retired sideways; the messenger raised his hat once more, and in an instant disappeared with his strange horse behind the church.

"What the devil does it mean?" grumbled some of the officers, dispersing to their quarters. "One is sleepy, and here this Von Rabbek with his tea! We know what tea means."

The officers of all the six batteries remembered vividly an incident of the previous year, when during manoeuvres they, together with the officers of a Cossack regiment, were in the same way invited to tea by a count who had an estate in the neighbourhood and was a retired army officer: the hospitable and genial count made much of them, fed them, and gave them drink, refused to let them go to their quarters in the village and made them stay the night. All that, of course, was very nice—nothing better could be desired, but the worst of it was, the old army officer was so carried away by the pleasure of the young men's company that till sunrise he was telling the officers anecdotes of his glorious past, taking them over the house, showing them expensive pictures, old engravings, rare guns, reading them autograph letters from

great people, while the weary and exhausted officers looked and listened, longing for their beds and yawning in their sleeves; when at last their host let them go, it was too late for sleep.

Might not this Von Rabbek be just such another? Whether he were or not, there was no help for it. The officers changed their uniforms, brushed themselves, and went all together in search of the gentleman's house. In the square by the church they were told they could get to His Excellency's by the lower path—going down behind the church to the river, going along the bank to the garden, and there an avenue would taken them to the house; or by the upper way—straight from the church by the road which, half a mile from the village, led right up to His Excellency's granaries. The officers decided to go by the upper way.

"What Von Rabbek is it?" they wondered on the way. "Surely not the one who was in command of the N—— cavalry division at Plevna?"

"No, that was not Von Rabbek, but simply Rabbe and no 'von.'"

"What lovely weather!"

At the first of the granaries the road divided in two: one branch went straight on and vanished in the evening darkness, the other led to the owner's house on the right. The officers turned to the right and began to speak more softly.… On both sides of the road stretched stone granaries with red roofs, heavy and sullen-looking, very much like barracks of a district town. Ahead of them gleamed the windows of the manor-house.

"A good omen, gentlemen," said one of the officers. "Our setter is the foremost of all; no doubt he scents game ahead of us! …"

Lieutenant Lobytko, who was walking in front, a tall and stalwart fellow, though entirely without moustache (he was over five-and-twenty, yet for some reason there was no sign of hair on his round, well-fed face), renowned in the brigade for his peculiar faculty for divining the presence of women at a distance, turned round and said:

"Yes, there must be women here; I feel that by instinct."

On the threshold the officers were met by Von Rabbek himself, a comely-looking man of sixty in civilian dress. Shaking hands with his guests, he said that he was very glad and happy to see them, but begged them earnestly for God's sake to excuse him for not asking them to stay the night; two sisters with their children, some brothers, and some neighbours, had come on a visit to him, so that he had not one spare room left.

The General shook hands with everyone, made his apologies, and smiled, but it was evident by his face that he was by no means so delighted as their last year's count, and that he had invited the officers

simply because, in his opinion, it was a social obligation to do so. And the officers themselves, as they walked up the softly carpeted stairs, as they listened to him, felt that they had been invited to this house simply because it would have been awkward not to invite them; and at the sight of the footmen, who hastened to light the lamps in the entrance below and in the anteroom above, they began to feel as though they had brought uneasiness and discomfort into the house with them. In a house in which two sisters and their children, brothers, and neighbours were gathered together, probably on account of some family festivity, or event, how could the presence of nineteen unknown officers possibly be welcome?

At the entrance to the drawing room the officers were met by a tall, graceful old lady with black eyebrows and a long face, very much like the Empress Eugénie. Smiling graciously and majestically, she said she was glad and happy to see her guests, and apologized that her husband and she were on this occasion unable to invite *messieurs les officiers* to stay the night. From her beautiful majestic smile, which instantly vanished from her face every time she turned away from her guests, it was evident that she had seen numbers of officers in her day, that she was in no humour for them now, and if she invited them to her house and apologized for not doing more, it was only because her breeding and position in society required it of her.

When the officers went into the big dining room, there were about a dozen people, men and ladies, young and old, sitting at tea at the end of a long table. A group of men was dimly visible behind their chairs, wrapped in a haze of cigar smoke; and in the midst of them stood a lanky young man with red whiskers, talking loudly, with a lisp, in English. Through a door beyond the group could be seen a light room with pale blue furniture.

“Gentlemen, there are so many of you that it is impossible to introduce you all!” said the General in a loud voice, trying to sound very cheerful. “Make each other’s acquaintance, gentlemen, without any ceremony!”

The officers—some with very serious and even stern faces, others with forced smiles, and all feeling extremely awkward—somehow made their bows and sat down to tea.

The most ill at ease of them all was Ryabovitch—a little officer in spectacles, with sloping shoulders, and whiskers like a lynx’s. While some of his comrades assumed a serious expression, while others wore forced smiles, his face, his lynx-like whiskers, and spectacles seemed to say: “I am the shyest, most modest, and most undistinguished officer in the whole brigade!” At first, on going into the room and sitting down to

the table, he could not fix his attention on any one face or object. The faces, the dresses, the cut-glass decanters of brandy, the steam from the glasses, the moulded cornices—all blended in one general impression that inspired in Ryabovitch alarm and a desire to hide his head. Like a lecturer making his first appearance before the public, he saw everything that was before his eyes, but apparently only had a dim understanding of it (among physiologists this condition, when the subject sees but does not understand, is called psychical blindness). After a little while, growing accustomed to his surroundings, Ryabovitch saw clearly and began to observe. As a shy man, unused to society, what struck him first was that in which he had always been deficient—namely, the extraordinary boldness of his new acquaintances. Von Rabbek, his wife, two elderly ladies, a young lady in a lilac dress, and the young man with the red whiskers, who was, it appeared, a younger son of Von Rabbek, very cleverly, as though they had rehearsed it beforehand, took seats between the officers, and at once got up a heated discussion in which the visitors could not help taking part. The lilac young lady hotly asserted that the artillery had a much better time than the cavalry and the infantry, while Von Rabbek and the elderly ladies maintained the opposite. A brisk interchange of talk followed. Ryabovitch watched the lilac young lady who argued so hotly about what was unfamiliar and utterly uninteresting to her, and watched artificial smiles come and go on her face.

Von Rabbek and his family skilfully drew the officers into the discussion, and meanwhile kept a sharp lookout over their glasses and mouths, to see whether all of them were drinking, whether all had enough sugar, why someone was not eating cakes or not drinking brandy. And the longer Ryabovitch watched and listened, the more he was attracted by this insincere but splendidly disciplined family.

After tea the officers went into the drawing room. Lieutenant Lobytko’s instinct had not deceived him. There were a great number of girls and young married ladies. The “setter” lieutenant was soon standing by a very young, fair girl in a black dress, and, bending down to her jauntily, as though leaning on an unseen sword, smiled and shrugged his shoulders coquettishly. He probably talked very interesting nonsense, for the fair girl looked at his well-fed face condescendingly and asked indifferently, “Really?” And from that uninterested “Really?” the setter, had he been intelligent, might have concluded that she would never call him to heel.

The piano struck up; the melancholy strains of a valse floated out of the wide open windows, and everyone, for some reason, remembered that it was spring, a May evening. Everyone was conscious of the fragrance of roses, of lilac, and of the young leaves of the poplar. Ryabovitch, in whom the brandy he had drunk made itself felt, under the influence of the music stole a glance towards the window, smiled, and began watching the movements of the women, and it seemed to him that the smell of roses, of poplars, and lilac came not from the garden, but from the ladies' faces and dresses.

Von Rabbek's son invited a scraggy-looking young lady to dance, and waltzed round the room twice with her. Lobytko, gliding over the parquet floor, flew up to the lilac young lady and whirled her away. Dancing began.… Ryabovitch stood near the door among those who were not dancing and looked on. He had never once danced in his whole life, and he had never once in his life put his arm round the waist of a respectable woman. He was highly delighted that a man should in the sight of all take a girl he did not know round the waist and offer her his shoulder to put her hand on, but he could not imagine himself in the position of such a man. There were times when he envied the boldness and swagger of his companions and was inwardly wretched; the consciousness that he was timid, that he was round-shouldered and uninteresting, that he had a long waist and lynx-like whiskers, had deeply mortified him, but with years he had grown used to this feeling, and now, looking at his comrades dancing or loudly talking, he no longer envied them, but only felt touched and mournful.

When the quadrille began, young Von Rabbek came up to those who were not dancing and invited two officers to have a game at billiards. The officers accepted and went with him out of the drawing room. Ryabovitch, having nothing to do and wishing to take part in the general movement, slouched after them. From the big drawing room they went into the little drawing room, then into a narrow corridor with a glass roof, and thence into a room in which on their entrance three sleepy-looking footmen jumped up quickly from the sofa. At last, after passing through a long succession of rooms, young Von Rabbek and the officers came into a small room where there was a billiard-table. They began to play.

Ryabovitch, who had never played any game but cards, stood near the billiard-table and looked indifferently at the players, while they in unbuttoned coats, with cues in their hands, stepped about, made puns, and kept shouting out unintelligible words.

The players took no notice of him, and only now and then one of them, shoving him with his elbow or accidentally touching him with the end of his cue, would turn round and say “Pardon!” Before the first game was over he was weary of it, and began to feel he was not wanted and in the way.… He felt disposed to return to the drawing room, and he went out.

On his way back he met with a little adventure. When he had gone halfway he noticed he had taken a wrong turning. He distinctly remembered that he ought to meet three sleepy footmen on his way, but he had passed five or six rooms, and those sleepy figures seemed to have vanished into the earth. Noticing his mistake, he walked back a little way and turned to the right; he found himself in a little dark room which he had not seen on his way to the billiard room. After standing there a little while, he resolutely opened the first door that met his eyes and walked into an absolutely dark room. Straight in front could be seen the crack in the doorway through which there was a gleam of vivid light; from the other side of the door came the muffled sound of a melancholy mazurka. Here, too, as in the drawing room, the windows were wide open and there was a smell of poplars, lilac and roses.…

Ryabovitch stood still in hesitation.… At that moment, to his surprise, he heard hurried footsteps and the rustling of a dress, a breathless feminine voice whispered “At last!” And two soft, fragrant, unmistakably feminine arms were clasped about his neck; a warm cheek was pressed to his cheek, and simultaneously there was the sound of a kiss. But at once the bestower of the kiss uttered a faint shriek and skipped back from him, as it seemed to Ryabovitch, with aversion. He, too, almost shrieked and rushed towards the gleam of light at the door.…

When he went back into the drawing room his heart was beating and his hands were trembling so noticeably that he made haste to hide them behind his back. At first he was tormented by shame and dread that the whole drawing room knew that he had just been kissed and embraced by a woman. He shrank into himself and looked uneasily about him, but as he became convinced that people were dancing and talking as calmly as ever, he gave himself up entirely to the new sensation which he had never experienced before in his life. Something strange was happening to him.… His neck, round which soft, fragrant arms had so lately been clasped, seemed to him to be anointed with oil; on his left cheek near his moustache where the unknown had kissed him there was a faint chilly tingling sensation as from peppermint drops, and the more he rubbed the place the more distinct was the chilly sensation; all over, from head to

foot, he was full of a strange new feeling which grew stronger and stronger.… He wanted to dance, to talk, to run into the garden, to laugh aloud.… He quite forgot that he was round-shouldered and uninteresting, that he had lynx-like whiskers and an “undistinguished appearance” (that was how his appearance had been described by some ladies whose conversation he had accidentally overheard). When Von Rabbek’s wife happened to pass by him, he gave her such a broad and friendly smile that she stood still and looked at him inquiringly.

“I like your house immensely!” he said, setting his spectacles straight.

The General’s wife smiled and said that the house had belonged to her father; then she asked whether his parents were living, whether he had long been in the army, why he was so thin, and so on.… After receiving answers to her questions, she went on, and after his conversation with her his smiles were more friendly than ever, and he thought he was surrounded by splendid people.…

At supper Ryabovitch ate mechanically everything offered him, drank, and without listening to anything, tried to understand what had just happened to him.… The adventure was of a mysterious and romantic character, but it was not difficult to explain it. No doubt some girl or young married lady had arranged a tryst with someone in the dark room; had waited a long time, and being nervous and excited had taken Ryabovitch for her hero; this was the more probable as Ryabovitch had stood still hesitating in the dark room, so that he, too, had seemed like a person expecting something.… This was how Ryabovitch explained to himself the kiss he had received.

“And who is she?” he wondered, looking round at the women’s faces. “She must be young, for elderly ladies don’t give rendezvous. That she was a lady, one could tell by the rustle of her dress, her perfume, her voice.…”

His eyes rested on the lilac young lady, and he thought her very attractive; she had beautiful shoulders and arms, a clever face, and a delightful voice. Ryabovitch, looking at her, hoped that she and no one else was his unknown.… But she laughed somehow artificially and wrinkled up her long nose, which seemed to him to make her look old. Then he turned his eyes upon the fair girl in a black dress. She was younger, simpler, and more genuine, had a charming brow, and drank very daintily out of her wineglass. Ryabovitch now hoped that it was she. But soon he began to think her face flat, and fixed his eyes upon the one next her.

“It’s difficult to guess,” he thought, musing. “If one takes the shoulders and arms of the lilac one only, adds the brow of the fair one and the eyes of the one on the left of Lobytko, then…”

He made a combination of these things in his mind and so formed the image of the girl who had kissed him, the image that he wanted her to have, but could not find at the table.…

After supper, replete and exhilarated, the officers began to take leave and say thank you. Von Rabbek and his wife began again apologizing that they could not ask them to stay the night.

“Very, very glad to have met you, gentlemen,” said Von Rabbek, and this time sincerely (probably because people are far more sincere and good-humoured at speeding their parting guests than on meeting them). “Delighted. I hope you will come on your way back! Don’t stand on ceremony! Where are you going? Do you want to go by the upper way? No, go across the garden; it’s nearer here by the lower way.”

The officers went out into the garden. After the bright light and the noise the garden seemed very dark and quiet. They walked in silence all the way to the gate. They were a little drunk, pleased, and in good spirits, but the darkness and silence made them thoughtful for a minute. Probably the same idea occurred to each one of them as to Ryabovitch: would there ever come a time for them when, like Von Rabbek, they would have a large house, a family, a garden—when they, too, would be able to welcome people, even though insincerely, feed them, make them drunk and contented?

Going out of the garden gate, they all began talking at once and laughing loudly about nothing. They were walking now along the little path that led down to the river, and then ran along the water’s edge, winding round the bushes on the bank, the pools, and the willows that overhung the water. The bank and the path were scarcely visible, and the other bank was entirely plunged in darkness. Stars were reflected here and there on the dark water; they quivered and were broken up on the surface—and from that alone it could be seen that the river was flowing rapidly. It was still. Drowsy curlews cried plaintively on the further bank, and in one of the bushes on the nearest side a nightingale was trilling loudly, taking no notice of the crowd of officers. The officers stood round the bush, touched it, but the nightingale went on singing.

“What a fellow!” they exclaimed approvingly. “We stand beside him and he takes not a bit of notice! What a rascal!”

At the end of the way the path went uphill, and, skirting the church enclosure, turned into the road. Here the officers, tired with walking

uphill, sat down and lighted their cigarettes. On the other side of the river a murky red fire came into sight, and having nothing better to do, they spent a long time in discussing whether it was a camp fire or a light in a window, or something else.… Ryabovitch, too, looked at the light, and he fancied that the light looked and winked at him, as though it knew about the kiss.

On reaching his quarters, Ryabovitch undressed as quickly as possible and got into bed. Lobytko and Lieutenant Merzlyakov—a peaceable, silent fellow, who was considered in his own circle a highly educated officer, and was always, whenever it was possible, reading the *Vyestnik Evropi*, which he carried about with him everywhere—were quartered in the same hut with Ryabovitch. Lobytko undressed, walked up and down the room for a long while with the air of a man who has not been satisfied, and sent his orderly for beer. Merzlyakov got into bed, put a candle by his pillow and plunged into reading the *Vyestnik Evropi*.

"Who was she?" Ryabovitch wondered, looking at the smoky ceiling.

His neck still felt as though he had been anointed with oil, and there was still the chilly sensation near his mouth as though from peppermint drops. The shoulders and arms of the young lady in lilac, the brow and the truthful eyes of the fair girl in black, waists, dresses, and brooches, floated through his imagination. He tried to fix his attention on these images, but they danced about, broke up and flickered. When these images vanished altogether from the broad dark background which every man sees when he closes his eyes, he began to hear hurried footsteps, the rustle of skirts, the sound of a kiss and—an intense groundless joy took possession of him.… Abandoning himself to this joy, he heard the orderly return and announce that there was no beer. Lobytko was terribly indignant, and began pacing up and down again.

"Well, isn't he an idiot?" he kept saying, stopping first before Ryabovitch and then before Merzlyakov. "What a fool and a dummy a man must be not to get hold of any beer! Eh? Isn't he a scoundrel?"

"Of course you can't get beer here," said Merzlyakov, not removing his eyes from the *Vyestnik Evropi*.

"Oh! Is that your opinion?" Lobytko persisted. "Lord have mercy upon us, if you dropped me on the moon I'd find you beer and women directly! I'll go and find some at once.… You may call me an impostor if I don't!"

He spent a long time in dressing and pulling on his high boots, then finished smoking his cigarette in silence and went out.

“Rabbek, Grabbek, Labbek,” he muttered, stopping in the outer room. “I don’t care to go alone, damn it all! Ryabovitch, wouldn’t you like to go for a walk? Eh?”

Receiving no answer, he returned, slowly undressed and got into bed. Merzlyakov sighed, put the *Vyestnik Evropi* away, and put out the light.

“H’m!…” muttered Lobytko, lighting a cigarette in the dark.

Ryabovitch pulled the bedclothes over his head, curled himself up in bed, and tried to gather together the floating images in his mind and to combine them into one whole. But nothing came of it. He soon fell asleep, and his last thought was that someone had caressed him and made him happy—that something extraordinary, foolish, but joyful and delightful, had come into his life. The thought did not leave him even in his sleep.

When he woke up the sensations of oil on his neck and the chill of peppermint about his lips had gone, but joy flooded his heart just as the day before. He looked enthusiastically at the window-frames, gilded by the light of the rising sun, and listened to the movement of the passersby in the street. People were talking loudly close to the window. Lebedetsky, the commander of Ryabovitch’s battery, who had only just overtaken the brigade, was talking to his sergeant at the top of his voice, being always accustomed to shout.

“What else?” shouted the commander.

“When they were shoeing yesterday, your high nobility, they drove a nail into Pigeon’s hoof. The vet put on clay and vinegar; they are leading him apart now. And also, your honour, Artemyev got drunk yesterday, and the lieutenant ordered him to be put in the limber of a spare gun-carriage.”

The sergeant reported that Karpov had forgotten the new cords for the trumpets and the rings for the tents, and that their honours, the officers, had spent the previous evening visiting General Von Rabbek. In the middle of this conversation the red-bearded face of Lebedetsky appeared in the window. He screwed up his shortsighted eyes, looking at the sleepy faces of the officers, and said good morning to them.

“Is everything all right?” he asked.

“One of the horses has a sore neck from the new collar,” answered Lobytko, yawning.

The commander sighed, thought a moment, and said in a loud voice:

“I am thinking of going to see Alexandra Yevgrafovna. I must call on her. Well, goodbye. I shall catch you up in the evening.”

A quarter of an hour later the brigade set off on its way. When it was moving along the road by the granaries, Ryabovitch looked at the house on the right. The blinds were down in all the windows. Evidently the household was still asleep. The one who had kissed Ryabovitch the day before was asleep, too. He tried to imagine her asleep. The wide-open windows of the bedroom, the green branches peeping in, the morning freshness, the scent of the poplars, lilac, and roses, the bed, a chair, and on it the skirts that had rustled the day before, the little slippers, the little watch on the table—all this he pictured to himself clearly and distinctly, but the features of the face, the sweet sleepy smile, just what was characteristic and important, slipped through his imagination like quicksilver through the fingers. When he had ridden on half a mile, he looked back: the yellow church, the house, and the river, were all bathed in light; the river with its bright green banks, with the blue sky reflected in it and glints of silver in the sunshine here and there, was very beautiful. Ryabovitch gazed for the last time at Myestetchki, and he felt as sad as though he were parting with something very near and dear to him.

And before him on the road lay nothing but long familiar, uninteresting pictures.… To right and to left, fields of young rye and buckwheat with rooks hopping about in them. If one looked ahead, one saw dust and the backs of men’s heads; if one looked back, one saw the same dust and faces.… Foremost of all marched four men with sabres—this was the vanguard. Next, behind, the crowd of singers, and behind them the trumpeters on horseback. The vanguard and the chorus of singers, like torchbearers in a funeral procession, often forgot to keep the regulation distance and pushed a long way ahead.… Ryabovitch was with the first cannon of the fifth battery. He could see all the four batteries moving in front of him. For anyone not a military man this long tedious procession of a moving brigade seems an intricate and unintelligible muddle; one cannot understand why there are so many people round one cannon, and why it is drawn by so many horses in such a strange network of harness, as though it really were so terrible and heavy. To Ryabovitch it was all perfectly comprehensible and therefore uninteresting. He had known for ever so long why at the head of each battery there rode a stalwart bombardier, and why he was called a bombardier; immediately behind this bombardier could be seen the horsemen of the first and then of the middle units. Ryabovitch knew that the horses on which they rode, those on the left, were called one name, while those on the right were called another—it was extremely

uninteresting. Behind the horsemen came two shaft-horses. On one of them sat a rider with the dust of yesterday on his back and a clumsy and funny-looking piece of wood on his leg. Ryabovitch knew the object of this piece of wood, and did not think it funny. All the riders waved their whips mechanically and shouted from time to time. The cannon itself was ugly. On the fore part lay sacks of oats covered with canvas, and the cannon itself was hung all over with kettles, soldiers' knapsacks, bags, and looked like some small harmless animal surrounded for some unknown reason by men and horses. To the leeward of it marched six men, the gunners, swinging their arms. After the cannon there came again more bombardiers, riders, shaft-horses, and behind them another cannon, as ugly and unimpressive as the first. After the second followed a third, a fourth; near the fourth an officer, and so on. There were six batteries in all in the brigade, and four cannons in each battery. The procession covered half a mile; it ended in a string of wagons near which an extremely attractive creature—the ass, Magar, brought by a battery commander from Turkey—paced pensively with his long-eared head drooping.

Ryabovitch looked indifferently before and behind, at the backs of heads and at faces; at any other time he would have been half asleep, but now he was entirely absorbed in his new agreeable thoughts. At first when the brigade was setting off on the march he tried to persuade himself that the incident of the kiss could only be interesting as a mysterious little adventure, that it was in reality trivial, and to think of it seriously, to say the least of it, was stupid; but now he bade farewell to logic and gave himself up to dreams.… At one moment he imagined himself in Von Rabbek's drawing room beside a girl who was like the young lady in lilac and the fair girl in black; then he would close his eyes and see himself with another, entirely unknown girl, whose features were very vague. In his imagination he talked, caressed her, leaned on her shoulder, pictured war, separation, then meeting again, supper with his wife, children.…

"Brakes on!" the word of command rang out every time they went downhill.

He, too, shouted "Brakes on!" and was afraid this shout would disturb his reverie and bring him back to reality.…

As they passed by some landowner's estate Ryabovitch looked over the fence into the garden. A long avenue, straight as a ruler, strewn with yellow sand and bordered with young birch trees, met his eyes.… With the eagerness of a man given up to dreaming, he pictured to himself little

feminine feet tripping along yellow sand, and quite unexpectedly had a clear vision in his imagination of the girl who had kissed him and whom he had succeeded in picturing to himself the evening before at supper. This image remained in his brain and did not desert him again.

At midday there was a shout in the rear near the string of wagons:

"Easy! Eyes to the left! Officers!"

The general of the brigade drove by in a carriage with a pair of white horses. He stopped near the second battery, and shouted something which no one understood. Several officers, among them Ryabovitch, galloped up to them.

"Well?" asked the general, blinking his red eyes. "Are there any sick?"

Receiving an answer, the general, a little skinny man, chewed, thought for a moment and said, addressing one of the officers:

"One of your drivers of the third cannon has taken off his leg-guard and hung it on the fore part of the cannon, the rascal. Reprimand him."

He raised his eyes to Ryabovitch and went on:

"It seems to me your front strap is too long."

Making a few other tedious remarks, the general looked at Lobytko and grinned.

"You look very melancholy today, Lieutenant Lobytko," he said. "Are you pining for Madame Lopuhov? Eh? Gentlemen, he is pining for Madame Lopuhov."

The lady in question was a very stout and tall person who had long passed her fortieth year. The general, who had a predilection for solid ladies, whatever their ages, suspected a similar taste in his officers. The officers smiled respectfully. The general, delighted at having said something very amusing and biting, laughed loudly, touched his coachman's back, and saluted. The carriage rolled on.…

"All I am dreaming about now which seems to me so impossible and unearthly is really quite an ordinary thing," thought Ryabovitch, looking at the clouds of dust racing after the general's carriage. "It's all very ordinary, and everyone goes through it.… That general, for instance, has once been in love; now he is married and has children. Captain Vahter, too, is married and beloved, though the nape of his neck is very red and ugly and he has no waist.… Salrnanov is coarse and very Tatar, but he has had a love affair that has ended in marriage.… I am the same as everyone else, and I, too, shall have the same experience as everyone else, sooner or later.…"

And the thought that he was an ordinary person, and that his life was ordinary, delighted him and gave him courage. He pictured her and his

happiness as he pleased, and put no rein on his imagination.

When the brigade reached their halting-place in the evening, and the officers were resting in their tents, Ryabovitch, Merzlyakov, and Lobytko were sitting round a box having supper. Merzlyakov ate without haste, and, as he munched deliberately, read the *Vyestnik Evropi*, which he held on his knees. Lobytko talked incessantly and kept filling up his glass with beer, and Ryabovitch, whose head was confused from dreaming all day long, drank and said nothing. After three glasses he got a little drunk, felt weak, and had an irresistible desire to impart his new sensations to his comrades.

"A strange thing happened to me at those Von Rabbeks'," he began, trying to put an indifferent and ironical tone into his voice. "You know I went into the billiard room.…"

He began describing very minutely the incident of the kiss, and a moment later relapsed into silence.… In the course of that moment he had told everything, and it surprised him dreadfully to find how short a time it took him to tell it. He had imagined that he could have been telling the story of the kiss till next morning. Listening to him, Lobytko, who was a great liar and consequently believed no one, looked at him sceptically and laughed. Merzlyakov twitched his eyebrows and, without removing his eyes from the *Vyestnik Evropi*, said:

"That's an odd thing! How strange!… throws herself on a man's neck, without addressing him by name.… She must be some sort of hysterical neurotic."

"Yes, she must," Ryabovitch agreed.

"A similar thing once happened to me," said Lobytko, assuming a scared expression. "I was going last year to Kovno.… I took a second-class ticket. The train was crammed, and it was impossible to sleep. I gave the guard half a rouble; he took my luggage and led me to another compartment.… I lay down and covered myself with a rug.… It was dark, you understand. Suddenly I felt someone touch me on the shoulder and breathe in my face. I made a movement with my hand and felt somebody's elbow.… I opened my eyes and only imagine—a woman. Black eyes, lips red as a prime salmon, nostrils breathing passionately—a bosom like a buffer.…"

"Excuse me," Merzlyakov interrupted calmly, "I understand about the bosom, but how could you see the lips if it was dark?"

Lobytko began trying to put himself right and laughing at Merzlyakov's unimaginativeness. It made Ryabovitch wince. He walked away from the box, got into bed, and vowed never to confide again.

Camp life began.… The days flowed by, one very much like another. All those days Ryabovitch felt, thought, and behaved as though he were in love. Every morning when his orderly handed him water to wash with, and he sluiced his head with cold water, he thought there was something warm and delightful in his life.

In the evenings when his comrades began talking of love and women, he would listen, and draw up closer; and he wore the expression of a soldier when he hears the description of a battle in which he has taken part. And on the evenings when the officers, out on the spree with the setter—Lobytko—at their head, made Don Juan excursions to the "suburb," and Ryabovitch took part in such excursions, he always was sad, felt profoundly guilty, and inwardly begged *her* forgiveness.… In hours of leisure or on sleepless nights, when he felt moved to recall his childhood, his father and mother—everything near and dear, in fact, he invariably thought of Myestetchki, the strange horse, Von Rabbek, his wife who was like the Empress Eugénie, the dark room, the crack of light at the door.…

On the thirty-first of August he went back from the camp, not with the whole brigade, but with only two batteries of it. He was dreaming and excited all the way, as though he were going back to his native place. He had an intense longing to see again the strange horse, the church, the insincere family of the Von Rabbeks, the dark room. The "inner voice," which so often deceives lovers, whispered to him for some reason that he would be sure to see her… and he was tortured by the questions, How he should meet her? What he would talk to her about? Whether she had forgotten the kiss? If the worst came to the worst, he thought, even if he did not meet her, it would be a pleasure to him merely to go through the dark room and recall the past.…

Towards evening there appeared on the horizon the familiar church and white granaries. Ryabovitch's heart beat.… He did not hear the officer who was riding beside him and saying something to him, he forgot everything, and looked eagerly at the river shining in the distance, at the roof of the house, at the dovecote round which the pigeons were circling in the light of the setting sun.

When they reached the church and were listening to the billeting orders, he expected every second that a man on horseback would come round the church enclosure and invite the officers to tea, but… the billeting orders were read, the officers were in haste to go on to the village, and the man on horseback did not appear.

“Von Rabbek will hear at once from the peasants that we have come and will send for us,” thought Ryabovitch, as he went into the hut, unable to understand why a comrade was lighting a candle and why the orderlies were hurriedly setting samovars.…

A painful uneasiness took possession of him. He lay down, then got up and looked out of the window to see whether the messenger were coming. But there was no sign of him.

He lay down again, but half an hour later he got up, and, unable to restrain his uneasiness, went into the street and strode towards the church. It was dark and deserted in the square near the church.… Three soldiers were standing silent in a row where the road began to go downhill. Seeing Ryabovitch, they roused themselves and saluted. He returned the salute and began to go down the familiar path.

On the further side of the river the whole sky was flooded with crimson: the moon was rising; two peasant women, talking loudly, were picking cabbage in the kitchen garden; behind the kitchen garden there were some dark huts.… And everything on the near side of the river was just as it had been in May: the path, the bushes, the willows overhanging the water… but there was no sound of the brave nightingale, and no scent of poplar and fresh grass.

Reaching the garden, Ryabovitch looked in at the gate. The garden was dark and still.… He could see nothing but the white stems of the nearest birch trees and a little bit of the avenue; all the rest melted together into a dark blur. Ryabovitch looked and listened eagerly, but after waiting for a quarter of an hour without hearing a sound or catching a glimpse of a light, he trudged back.…

He went down to the river. The General’s bathhouse and the bath-sheets on the rail of the little bridge showed white before him.… He went on to the bridge, stood a little, and, quite unnecessarily, touched the sheets. They felt rough and cold. He looked down at the water.… The river ran rapidly and with a faintly audible gurgle round the piles of the bathhouse. The red moon was reflected near the left bank; little ripples ran over the reflection, stretching it out, breaking it into bits, and seemed trying to carry it away.

“How stupid, how stupid!” thought Ryabovitch, looking at the running water. “How unintelligent it all is!”

Now that he expected nothing, the incident of the kiss, his impatience, his vague hopes and disappointment, presented themselves in a clear light. It no longer seemed to him strange that he had not seen the General’s messenger, and that he would never see the girl who had

accidentally kissed him instead of someone else; on the contrary, it would have been strange if he had seen her.…

The water was running, he knew not where or why, just as it did in May. In May it had flowed into the great river, from the great river into the sea; then it had risen in vapour, turned into rain, and perhaps the very same water was running now before Ryabovitch's eyes again.… What for? Why?

And the whole world, the whole of life, seemed to Ryabovitch an unintelligible, aimless jest.… And turning his eyes from the water and looking at the sky, he remembered again how fate in the person of an unknown woman had by chance caressed him, he remembered his summer dreams and fancies, and his life struck him as extraordinarily meagre, poverty-stricken, and colourless.…

When he went back to his hut he did not find one of his comrades. The orderly informed him that they had all gone to "General von Rabbek's, who had sent a messenger on horseback to invite them.…"

For an instant there was a flash of joy in Ryabovitch's heart, but he quenched it at once, got into bed, and in his wrath with his fate, as though to spite it, did not go to the General's.

Boys

“Volodya’s come!” someone shouted in the yard.

“Master Volodya’s here!” bawled Natalya the cook, running into the dining room. “Oh, my goodness!”

The whole Korolyov family, who had been expecting their Volodya from hour to hour, rushed to the windows. At the front door stood a wide sledge, with three white horses in a cloud of steam. The sledge was empty, for Volodya was already in the hall, untying his hood with red and chilly fingers. His school overcoat, his cap, his snowboots, and the hair on his temples were all white with frost, and his whole figure from head to foot diffused such a pleasant, fresh smell of the snow that the very sight of him made one want to shiver and say “brrr!”

His mother and aunt ran to kiss and hug him. Natalya plumped down at his feet and began pulling off his snowboots, his sisters shrieked with delight, the doors creaked and banged, and Volodya’s father, in his waistcoat and shirtsleeves, ran out into the hall with scissors in his hand, and cried out in alarm:

“We were expecting you all yesterday? Did you come all right? Had a good journey? Mercy on us! you might let him say ‘how do you do’ to his father! I am his father after all!”

“Bow-wow!” barked the huge black dog, Milord, in a deep bass, tapping with his tail on the walls and furniture.

For two minutes there was nothing but a general hubbub of joy. After the first outburst of delight was over the Korolyovs noticed that there was, besides their Volodya, another small person in the hall, wrapped up in scarves and shawls and white with frost. He was standing perfectly still in a corner, in the shadow of a big fox-lined overcoat.

“Volodya darling, who is it?” asked his mother, in a whisper.

“Oh!” cried Volodya. “This is—let me introduce my friend Lentilov, a schoolfellow in the second class.… I have brought him to stay with us.”

“Delighted to hear it! You are very welcome,” the father said cordially. “Excuse me, I’ve been at work without my coat.… Please come in!

Natalya, help Mr. Lentilov off with his things. Mercy on us, do turn that dog out! He is unendurable!”

A few minutes later, Volodya and his friend Lentilov, somewhat dazed by their noisy welcome, and still red from the outside cold, were sitting down to tea. The winter sun, making its way through the snow and the frozen tracery on the windowpanes, gleamed on the samovar, and plunged its pure rays in the tea-basin. The room was warm, and the boys felt as though the warmth and the frost were struggling together with a tingling sensation in their bodies.

“Well, Christmas will soon be here,” the father said in a pleasant singsong voice, rolling a cigarette of dark reddish tobacco. “It doesn’t seem long since the summer, when mamma was crying at your going… and here you are back again.… Time flies, my boy. Before you have time to cry out, old age is upon you. Mr. Lentilov, take some more, please help yourself! We don’t stand on ceremony!”

Volodya’s three sisters, Katya, Sonya, and Masha (the eldest was eleven), sat at the table and never took their eyes off the newcomer.

Lentilov was of the same height and age as Volodya, but not as round-faced and fair-skinned. He was thin, dark, and freckled; his hair stood up like a brush, his eyes were small, and his lips were thick. He was, in fact, distinctly ugly, and if he had not been wearing the school uniform, he might have been taken for the son of a cook. He seemed morose, did not speak, and never once smiled. The little girls, staring at him, immediately came to the conclusion that he must be a very clever and learned person. He seemed to be thinking about something all the time, and was so absorbed in his own thoughts, that, whenever he was spoken to, he started, threw his head back, and asked to have the question repeated.

The little girls noticed that Volodya, who had always been so merry and talkative, also said very little, did not smile at all, and hardly seemed to be glad to be home. All the time they were at tea he only once addressed his sisters, and then he said something so strange. He pointed to the samovar and said:

“In California they don’t drink tea, but gin.”

He, too, seemed absorbed in his own thoughts, and, to judge by the looks that passed between him and his friend Lentilov, their thoughts were the same.

After tea, they all went into the nursery. The girls and their father took up the work that had been interrupted by the arrival of the boys. They were making flowers and frills for the Christmas tree out of paper of

different colours. It was an attractive and noisy occupation. Every fresh flower was greeted by the little girls with shrieks of delight, even of awe, as though the flower had dropped straight from heaven; their father was in ecstasies too, and every now and then he threw the scissors on the floor, in vexation at their bluntness. Their mother kept running into the nursery with an anxious face, asking:

"Who has taken my scissors? Ivan Nikolaitch, have you taken my scissors again?"

"Mercy on us! I'm not even allowed a pair of scissors!" their father would respond in a lachrymose voice, and, flinging himself back in his chair, he would pretend to be a deeply injured man; but a minute later, he would be in ecstasies again.

On his former holidays Volodya, too, had taken part in the preparations for the Christmas tree, or had been running in the yard to look at the snow mountain that the watchman and the shepherd were building. But this time Volodya and Lentilov took no notice whatever of the coloured paper, and did not once go into the stable. They sat in the window and began whispering to one another; then they opened an atlas and looked carefully at a map.

"First to Perm…" Lentilov said, in an undertone, "from there to Tiumen, then Tomsk… then… then… Kamchatka. There the Samoyedes take one over Bering's Straits in boats.… And then we are in America.… There are lots of furry animals there.…"

"And California?" asked Volodya.

"California is lower down.… We've only to get to America and California is not far off.… And one can get a living by hunting and plunder."

All day long Lentilov avoided the little girls, and seemed to look at them with suspicion. In the evening he happened to be left alone with them for five minutes or so. It was awkward to be silent.

He cleared his throat morosely, rubbed his left hand against his right, looked sullenly at Katya and asked:

"Have you read Mayne Reid?"

"No, I haven't.… I say, can you skate?"

Absorbed in his own reflections, Lentilov made no reply to this question; he simply puffed out his cheeks, and gave a long sigh as though he were very hot. He looked up at Katya once more and said:

"When a herd of bisons stampedes across the prairie the earth trembles, and the frightened mustangs kick and neigh."

He smiled impressively and added:

“And the Indians attack the trains, too. But worst of all are the mosquitoes and the termites.”

“Why, what’s that?”

“They’re something like ants, but with wings. They bite fearfully. Do you know who I am?”

“Mr. Lentilov.”

“No, I am Montehomo, the Hawk’s Claw, Chief of the Ever Victorious.”

Masha, the youngest, looked at him, then into the darkness out of window and said, wondering:

“And we had lentils for supper yesterday.”

Lentilov’s incomprehensible utterances, and the way he was always whispering with Volodya, and the way Volodya seemed now to be always thinking about something instead of playing… all this was strange and mysterious. And the two elder girls, Katya and Sonya, began to keep a sharp lookout on the boys. At night, when the boys had gone to bed, the girls crept to their bedroom door, and listened to what they were saying. Ah, what they discovered! The boys were planning to run away to America to dig for gold: they had everything ready for the journey, a pistol, two knives, biscuits, a burning glass to serve instead of matches, a compass, and four roubles in cash. They learned that the boys would have to walk some thousands of miles, and would have to fight tigers and savages on the road: then they would get gold and ivory, slay their enemies, become pirates, drink gin, and finally marry beautiful maidens, and make a plantation.

The boys interrupted each other in their excitement. Throughout the conversation, Lentilov called himself “Montehomo, the Hawk’s Claw,” and Volodya was “my paleface brother!”

“Mind you don’t tell mamma,” said Katya, as they went back to bed. “Volodya will bring us gold and ivory from America, but if you tell mamma he won’t be allowed to go.”

The day before Christmas Eve, Lentilov spent the whole day poring over the map of Asia and making notes, while Volodya, with a languid and swollen face that looked as though it had been stung by a bee, walked about the rooms and ate nothing. And once he stood still before the holy image in the nursery, crossed himself, and said:

“Lord, forgive me a sinner; Lord, have pity on my poor unhappy mamma!”

In the evening he burst out crying. On saying good night he gave his father a long hug, and then hugged his mother and sisters. Katya and

Sonya knew what was the matter, but little Masha was puzzled, completely puzzled. Every time she looked at Lentilov she grew thoughtful and said with a sigh:

"When Lent comes, nurse says we shall have to eat peas and lentils."

Early in the morning of Christmas Eve, Katya and Sonya slipped quietly out of bed, and went to find out how the boys meant to run away to America. They crept to their door.

"Then you don't mean to go?" Lentilov was saying angrily. "Speak out: aren't you going?"

"Oh dear," Volodya wept softly. "How can I go? I feel so unhappy about mamma."

"My paleface brother, I pray you, let us set off. You declared you were going, you egged me on, and now the time comes, you funk it!"

"I… I… I'm not funking it, but I… I… I'm sorry for mamma."

"Say once and for all, are you going or are you not?"

"I am going, only… wait a little… I want to be at home a little."

"In that case I will go by myself," Lentilov declared. "I can get on without you. And you wanted to hunt tigers and fight! Since that's how it is, give me back my cartridges!"

At this Volodya cried so bitterly that his sisters could not help crying too. Silence followed.

"So you are not coming?" Lentilov began again.

"I… I… I am coming!"

"Well, put on your things, then."

And Lentilov tried to cheer Volodya up by singing the praises of America, growling like a tiger, pretending to be a steamer, scolding him, and promising to give him all the ivory and lions' and tigers' skins.

And this thin, dark boy, with his freckles and his bristling shock of hair, impressed the little girls as an extraordinary remarkable person. He was a hero, a determined character, who knew no fear, and he growled so ferociously, that, standing at the door, they really might imagine there was a tiger or lion inside. When the little girls went back to their room and dressed, Katya's eyes were full of tears, and she said:

"Oh, I feel so frightened!"

Everything was as usual till two o'clock, when they sat down to dinner. Then it appeared that the boys were not in the house. They sent to the servants' quarters, to the stables, to the bailiff's cottage. They were not to be found. They sent into the village—they were not there.

At tea, too, the boys were still absent, and by suppertime Volodya's mother was dreadfully uneasy, and even shed tears.

Late in the evening they sent again to the village, they searched everywhere, and walked along the river bank with lanterns. Heavens! what a fuss there was!

Next day the police officer came, and a paper of some sort was written out in the dining room. Their mother cried.…

All of a sudden a sledge stopped at the door, with three white horses in a cloud of steam.

“Volodya’s come,” someone shouted in the yard.

“Master Volodya’s here!” bawled Natalya, running into the dining room. And Milord barked his deep bass, “bow-wow.”

It seemed that the boys had been stopped in the Arcade, where they had gone from shop to shop asking where they could get gunpowder.

Volodya burst into sobs as soon as he came into the hall, and flung himself on his mother’s neck. The little girls, trembling, wondered with terror what would happen next. They saw their father take Volodya and Lentilov into his study, and there he talked to them a long while.

“Is this a proper thing to do?” their father said to them. “I only pray they won’t hear of it at school, you would both be expelled. You ought to be ashamed, Mr. Lentilov, really. It’s not at all the thing to do! You began it, and I hope you will be punished by your parents. How could you? Where did you spend the night?”

“At the station,” Lentilov answered proudly.

Then Volodya went to bed, and had a compress, steeped in vinegar, on his forehead.

A telegram was sent off, and next day a lady, Lentilov’s mother, made her appearance and bore off her son.

Lentilov looked morose and haughty to the end, and he did not utter a single word at taking leave of the little girls. But he took Katya’s book and wrote in it as a souvenir: “Montehomo, the Hawk’s Claw, Chief of the Ever Victorious.”

KASHTANKA
(A STORY)

I
MISBEHAVIOUR

A young dog, a reddish mongrel, between a dachshund and a “yard-dog,” very like a fox in face, was running up and down the pavement looking uneasily from side to side. From time to time she stopped and, whining and lifting first one chilled paw and then another, tried to make up her mind how it could have happened that she was lost.

She remembered very well how she had passed the day, and how, in the end, she had found herself on this unfamiliar pavement.

The day had begun by her master Luka Alexandritch’s putting on his hat, taking something wooden under his arm wrapped up in a red handkerchief, and calling: “Kashtanka, come along!”

Hearing her name the mongrel had come out from under the worktable, where she slept on the shavings, stretched herself voluptuously and run after her master. The people Luka Alexandritch worked for lived a very long way off, so that, before he could get to any one of them, the carpenter had several times to step into a tavern to fortify himself. Kashtanka remembered that on the way she had behaved extremely improperly. In her delight that she was being taken for a walk she jumped about, dashed barking after the trains, ran into yards, and chased other dogs. The carpenter was continually losing sight of her, stopping, and angrily shouting at her. Once he had even, with an expression of fury in his face, taken her fox-like ear in his fist, smacked her, and said emphatically: “Pla-a-ague take you, you pest!”

After having left the work where it had been bespoken, Luka Alexandritch went into his sister’s and there had something to eat and drink; from his sister’s he had gone to see a bookbinder he knew; from the bookbinder’s to a tavern, from the tavern to another crony’s, and so on. In short, by the time Kashtanka found herself on the unfamiliar

pavement, it was getting dusk, and the carpenter was as drunk as a cobbler. He was waving his arms and, breathing heavily, muttered:

“In sin my mother bore me! Ah, sins, sins! Here now we are walking along the street and looking at the street lamps, but when we die, we shall burn in a fiery Gehenna.…”

Or he fell into a good-natured tone, called Kashtanka to him, and said to her: “You, Kashtanka, are an insect of a creature, and nothing else. Beside a man, you are much the same as a joiner beside a cabinetmaker.…”

While he talked to her in that way, there was suddenly a burst of music. Kashtanka looked round and saw that a regiment of soldiers was coming straight towards her. Unable to endure the music, which unhinged her nerves, she turned round and round and wailed. To her great surprise, the carpenter, instead of being frightened, whining and barking, gave a broad grin, drew himself up to attention, and saluted with all his five fingers. Seeing that her master did not protest, Kashtanka whined louder than ever, and dashed across the road to the opposite pavement.

When she recovered herself, the band was not playing and the regiment was no longer there. She ran across the road to the spot where she had left her master, but alas, the carpenter was no longer there. She dashed forward, then back again and ran across the road once more, but the carpenter seemed to have vanished into the earth. Kashtanka began sniffing the pavement, hoping to find her master by the scent of his tracks, but some wretch had been that way just before in new rubber goloshes, and now all delicate scents were mixed with an acute stench of india-rubber, so that it was impossible to make out anything.

Kashtanka ran up and down and did not find her master, and meanwhile it had got dark. The street lamps were lighted on both sides of the road, and lights appeared in the windows. Big, fluffy snowflakes were falling and painting white the pavement, the horses’ backs and the cabmen’s caps, and the darker the evening grew the whiter were all these objects. Unknown customers kept walking incessantly to and fro, obstructing her field of vision and shoving against her with their feet. (All mankind Kashtanka divided into two uneven parts: masters and customers; between them there was an essential difference: the first had the right to beat her, and the second she had the right to nip by the calves of their legs.) These customers were hurrying off somewhere and paid no attention to her.

When it got quite dark, Kashtanka was overcome by despair and horror. She huddled up in an entrance and began whining piteously. The long day’s journeying with Luka Alexandritch had exhausted her, her ears and her paws were freezing, and, what was more, she was terribly hungry. Only twice in the whole day had she tasted a morsel: she had eaten a little paste at the bookbinder’s, and in one of the taverns she had found a sausage skin on the floor, near the counter—that was all. If she had been a human being she would have certainly thought: “No, it is impossible to live like this! I must shoot myself!”

II

A Mysterious Stranger

But she thought of nothing, she simply whined. When her head and back were entirely plastered over with the soft feathery snow, and she had sunk into a painful doze of exhaustion, all at once the door of the entrance clicked, creaked, and struck her on the side. She jumped up. A man belonging to the class of customers came out. As Kashtanka whined and got under his feet, he could not help noticing her. He bent down to her and asked:

"Doggy, where do you come from? Have I hurt you? O, poor thing, poor thing.… Come, don't be cross, don't be cross.… I am sorry."

Kashtanka looked at the stranger through the snowflakes that hung on her eyelashes, and saw before her a short, fat little man, with a plump, shaven face wearing a top hat and a fur coat that swung open.

"What are you whining for?" he went on, knocking the snow off her back with his fingers. "Where is your master? I suppose you are lost? Ah, poor doggy! What are we going to do now?"

Catching in the stranger's voice a warm, cordial note, Kashtanka licked his hand, and whined still more pitifully.

"Oh, you nice funny thing!" said the stranger. "A regular fox! Well, there's nothing for it, you must come along with me! Perhaps you will be of use for something.… Well!"

He clicked with his lips, and made a sign to Kashtanka with his hand, which could only mean one thing: "Come along!" Kashtanka went.

Not more than half an hour later she was sitting on the floor in a big, light room, and, leaning her head against her side, was looking with tenderness and curiosity at the stranger who was sitting at the table, dining. He ate and threw pieces to her.… At first he gave her bread and the green rind of cheese, then a piece of meat, half a pie and chicken bones, while through hunger she ate so quickly that she had not time to distinguish the taste, and the more she ate the more acute was the feeling of hunger.

"Your masters don't feed you properly," said the stranger, seeing with what ferocious greediness she swallowed the morsels without munching them. "And how thin you are! Nothing but skin and bones.…"

Kashtanka ate a great deal and yet did not satisfy her hunger, but was simply stupefied with eating. After dinner she lay down in the middle of the room, stretched her legs and, conscious of an agreeable weariness all over her body, wagged her tail. While her new master, lounging in an easy-chair, smoked a cigar, she wagged her tail and considered the question, whether it was better at the stranger's or at the carpenter's. The stranger's surroundings were poor and ugly; besides the easy-chairs, the sofa, the lamps and the rugs, there was nothing, and the room seemed empty. At the carpenter's the whole place was stuffed full of things: he had a table, a bench, a heap of shavings, planes, chisels, saws, a cage with a goldfinch, a basin.… The stranger's room smelt of nothing, while there was always a thick fog in the carpenter's room, and a glorious smell of glue, varnish, and shavings. On the other hand, the stranger had one great superiority—he gave her a great deal to eat and, to do him full justice, when Kashtanka sat facing the table and looking wistfully at him, he did not once hit or kick her, and did not once shout: "Go away, damned brute!"

When he had finished his cigar her new master went out, and a minute later came back holding a little mattress in his hands.

"Hey, you dog, come here!" he said, laying the mattress in the corner near the dog. "Lie down here, go to sleep!"

Then he put out the lamp and went away. Kashtanka lay down on the mattress and shut her eyes; the sound of a bark rose from the street, and she would have liked to answer it, but all at once she was overcome with unexpected melancholy. She thought of Luka Alexandritch, of his son Fedyushka, and her snug little place under the bench.… She remembered on the long winter evenings, when the carpenter was planing or reading the paper aloud, Fedyushka usually played with her.… He used to pull her from under the bench by her hind legs, and play such tricks with her, that she saw green before her eyes, and ached in every joint. He would make her walk on her hind legs, use her as a bell, that is, shake her violently by the tail so that she squealed and barked, and give her tobacco to sniff.… The following trick was particularly agonising: Fedyushka would tie a piece of meat to a thread and give it to Kashtanka, and then, when she had swallowed it he would, with a loud laugh, pull it back again from her stomach, and the more lurid were her memories the more loudly and miserably Kashtanka whined.

But soon exhaustion and warmth prevailed over melancholy. She began to fall asleep. Dogs ran by in her imagination: among them a shaggy old poodle, whom she had seen that day in the street with a white

patch on his eye and tufts of wool by his nose. Fedyushka ran after the poodle with a chisel in his hand, then all at once he too was covered with shaggy wool, and began merrily barking beside Kashtanka. Kashtanka and he good-naturedly sniffed each other’s noses and merrily ran down the street.…

III

New and Very Agreeable Acquaintances

When Kashtanka woke up it was already light, and a sound rose from the street, such as only comes in the daytime. There was not a soul in the room. Kashtanka stretched, yawned and, cross and ill-humoured, walked about the room. She sniffed the corners and the furniture, looked into the passage and found nothing of interest there. Besides the door that led into the passage there was another door. After thinking a little Kashtanka scratched on it with both paws, opened it, and went into the adjoining room. Here on the bed, covered with a rug, a customer, in whom she recognised the stranger of yesterday, lay asleep.

"*Rrrrr*…" she growled, but recollecting yesterday's dinner, wagged her tail, and began sniffing.

She sniffed the stranger's clothes and boots and thought they smelt of horses. In the bedroom was another door, also closed. Kashtanka scratched at the door, leaned her chest against it, opened it, and was instantly aware of a strange and very suspicious smell. Foreseeing an unpleasant encounter, growling and looking about her, Kashtanka walked into a little room with a dirty wallpaper and drew back in alarm. She saw something surprising and terrible. A grey gander came straight towards her, hissing, with its neck bowed down to the floor and its wings outspread. Not far from him, on a little mattress, lay a white tomcat; seeing Kashtanka, he jumped up, arched his back, wagged his tail with his hair standing on end and he, too, hissed at her. The dog was frightened in earnest, but not caring to betray her alarm, began barking loudly and dashed at the cat.… The cat arched his back more than ever, mewed and gave Kashtanka a smack on the head with his paw. Kashtanka jumped back, squatted on all four paws, and craning her nose towards the cat, went off into loud, shrill barks; meanwhile the gander came up behind and gave her a painful peck in the back. Kashtanka leapt up and dashed at the gander.

"What's this?" They heard a loud angry voice, and the stranger came into the room in his dressing-gown, with a cigar between his teeth. "What's the meaning of this? To your places!"

He went up to the cat, flicked him on his arched back, and said:

“Fyodor Timofeyitch, what’s the meaning of this? Have you got up a fight? Ah, you old rascal! Lie down!”

And turning to the gander he shouted: “Ivan Ivanitch, go home!”

The cat obediently lay down on his mattress and closed his eyes. Judging from the expression of his face and whiskers, he was displeased with himself for having lost his temper and got into a fight.

Kashtanka began whining resentfully, while the gander craned his neck and began saying something rapidly, excitedly, distinctly, but quite unintelligibly.

“All right, all right,” said his master, yawning. “You must live in peace and friendship.” He stroked Kashtanka and went on: “And you, redhair, don’t be frightened.… They are capital company, they won’t annoy you. Stay, what are we to call you? You can’t go on without a name, my dear.”

The stranger thought a moment and said: “I tell you what… you shall be Auntie.… Do you understand? Auntie!”

And repeating the word “Auntie” several times he went out. Kashtanka sat down and began watching. The cat sat motionless on his little mattress, and pretended to be asleep. The gander, craning his neck and stamping, went on talking rapidly and excitedly about something. Apparently it was a very clever gander; after every long tirade, he always stepped back with an air of wonder and made a show of being highly delighted with his own speech.… Listening to him and answering “R-r-r-r,” Kashtanka fell to sniffing the corners. In one of the corners she found a little trough in which she saw some soaked peas and a sop of rye crusts. She tried the peas; they were not nice; she tried the sopped bread and began eating it. The gander was not at all offended that the strange dog was eating his food, but, on the contrary, talked even more excitedly, and to show his confidence went to the trough and ate a few peas himself.

IV

Marvels on a Hurdle

A little while afterwards the stranger came in again, and brought a strange thing with him like a hurdle, or like the figure II. On the crosspiece on the top of this roughly made wooden frame hung a bell, and a pistol was also tied to it; there were strings from the tongue of the bell, and the trigger of the pistol. The stranger put the frame in the middle of the room, spent a long time tying and untying something, then looked at the gander and said: “Ivan Ivanitch, if you please!”

The gander went up to him and stood in an expectant attitude.

“Now then,” said the stranger, “let us begin at the very beginning. First of all, bow and make a curtsey! Look sharp!”

Ivan Ivanitch craned his neck, nodded in all directions, and scraped with his foot.

“Right. Bravo.… Now die!”

The gander lay on his back and stuck his legs in the air. After performing a few more similar, unimportant tricks, the stranger suddenly clutched at his head, and assuming an expression of horror, shouted: “Help! Fire! We are burning!”

Ivan Ivanitch ran to the frame, took the string in his beak, and set the bell ringing.

The stranger was very much pleased. He stroked the gander’s neck and said:

“Bravo, Ivan Ivanitch! Now pretend that you are a jeweller selling gold and diamonds. Imagine now that you go to your shop and find thieves there. What would you do in that case?”

The gander took the other string in his beak and pulled it, and at once a deafening report was heard. Kashtanka was highly delighted with the bell ringing, and the shot threw her into so much ecstasy that she ran round the frame barking.

“Auntie, lie down!” cried the stranger; “be quiet!”

Ivan Ivanitch’s task was not ended with the shooting. For a whole hour afterwards the stranger drove the gander round him on a cord, cracking a whip, and the gander had to jump over barriers and through hoops; he had to rear, that is, sit on his tail and wave his legs in the air. Kashtanka

could not take her eyes off Ivan Ivanitch, wriggled with delight, and several times fell to running after him with shrill barks. After exhausting the gander and himself, the stranger wiped the sweat from his brow and cried:

"Marya, fetch Havronya Ivanovna here!"

A minute later there was the sound of grunting. Kashtanka growled, assumed a very valiant air, and to be on the safe side, went nearer to the stranger. The door opened, an old woman looked in, and, saying something, led in a black and very ugly sow. Paying no attention to Kashtanka's growls, the sow lifted up her little hoof and grunted good-humouredly. Apparently it was very agreeable to her to see her master, the cat, and Ivan Ivanitch. When she went up to the cat and gave him a light tap on the stomach with her hoof, and then made some remark to the gander, a great deal of good-nature was expressed in her movements, and the quivering of her tail. Kashtanka realised at once that to growl and bark at such a character was useless.

The master took away the frame and cried. "Fyodor Timofeyitch, if you please!"

The cat stretched lazily, and reluctantly, as though performing a duty, went up to the sow.

"Come, let us begin with the Egyptian pyramid," began the master.

He spent a long time explaining something, then gave the word of command, "One… two… three!" At the word "three" Ivan Ivanitch flapped his wings and jumped on to the sow's back.… When, balancing himself with his wings and his neck, he got a firm foothold on the bristly back, Fyodor Timofeyitch listlessly and lazily, with manifest disdain, and with an air of scorning his art and not caring a pin for it, climbed on to the sow's back, then reluctantly mounted on to the gander, and stood on his hind legs. The result was what the stranger called the Egyptian pyramid. Kashtanka yapped with delight, but at that moment the old cat yawned and, losing his balance, rolled off the gander. Ivan Ivanitch lurched and fell off too. The stranger shouted, waved his hands, and began explaining something again. After spending an hour over the pyramid their indefatigable master proceeded to teach Ivan Ivanitch to ride on the cat, then began to teach the cat to smoke, and so on.

The lesson ended in the stranger's wiping the sweat off his brow and going away. Fyodor Timofeyitch gave a disdainful sniff, lay down on his mattress, and closed his eyes; Ivan Ivanitch went to the trough, and the pig was taken away by the old woman. Thanks to the number of her new impressions, Kashtanka hardly noticed how the day passed, and in the

evening she was installed with her mattress in the room with the dirty wallpaper, and spent the night in the society of Fyodor Timofeyitch and the gander.

V

Talent! Talent!

A month passed.

Kashtanka had grown used to having a nice dinner every evening, and being called Auntie. She had grown used to the stranger too, and to her new companions. Life was comfortable and easy.

Every day began in the same way. As a rule, Ivan Ivanitch was the first to wake up, and at once went up to Auntie or to the cat, twisting his neck, and beginning to talk excitedly and persuasively, but, as before, unintelligibly. Sometimes he would crane up his head in the air and utter a long monologue. At first Kashtanka thought he talked so much because he was very clever, but after a little time had passed, she lost all her respect for him; when he went up to her with his long speeches she no longer wagged her tail, but treated him as a tiresome chatterbox, who would not let anyone sleep and, without the slightest ceremony, answered him with “R-r-r-r!”

Fyodor Timofeyitch was a gentleman of a very different sort. When he woke he did not utter a sound, did not stir, and did not even open his eyes. He would have been glad not to wake, for, as was evident, he was not greatly in love with life. Nothing interested him, he showed an apathetic and nonchalant attitude to everything, he disdained everything and, even while eating his delicious dinner, sniffed contemptuously.

When she woke Kashtanka began walking about the room and sniffing the corners. She and the cat were the only ones allowed to go all over the flat; the gander had not the right to cross the threshold of the room with the dirty wallpaper, and Hayronya Ivanovna lived somewhere in a little outhouse in the yard and made her appearance only during the lessons. Their master got up late, and immediately after drinking his tea began teaching them their tricks. Every day the frame, the whip, and the hoop were brought in, and every day almost the same performance took place. The lesson lasted three or four hours, so that sometimes Fyodor Timofeyitch was so tired that he staggered about like a drunken man, and Ivan Ivanitch opened his beak and breathed heavily, while their master became red in the face and could not mop the sweat from his brow fast enough.

The lesson and the dinner made the day very interesting, but the evenings were tedious. As a rule, their master went off somewhere in the evening and took the cat and the gander with him. Left alone, Auntie lay down on her little mattress and began to feel sad.

Melancholy crept on her imperceptibly and took possession of her by degrees, as darkness does of a room. It began with the dog's losing every inclination to bark, to eat, to run about the rooms, and even to look at things; then vague figures, half dogs, half human beings, with countenances attractive, pleasant, but incomprehensible, would appear in her imagination; when they came Auntie wagged her tail, and it seemed to her that she had somewhere, at some time, seen them and loved them. And as she dropped asleep, she always felt that those figures smelt of glue, shavings, and varnish.

When she had grown quite used to her new life, and from a thin, long mongrel, had changed into a sleek, well-groomed dog, her master looked at her one day before the lesson and said:

"It's high time, Auntie, to get to business. You have kicked up your heels in idleness long enough. I want to make an artiste of you.… Do you want to be an artiste?"

And he began teaching her various accomplishments. At the first lesson he taught her to stand and walk on her hind legs, which she liked extremely. At the second lesson she had to jump on her hind legs and catch some sugar, which her teacher held high above her head. After that, in the following lessons she danced, ran tied to a cord, howled to music, rang the bell, and fired the pistol, and in a month could successfully replace Fyodor Timofeyitch in the "Egyptian Pyramid." She learned very eagerly and was pleased with her own success; running with her tongue out on the cord, leaping through the hoop, and riding on old Fyodor Timofeyitch, gave her the greatest enjoyment. She accompanied every successful trick with a shrill, delighted bark, while her teacher wondered, was also delighted, and rubbed his hands.

"It's talent! It's talent!" he said. "Unquestionable talent! You will certainly be successful!"

And Auntie grew so used to the word talent, that every time her master pronounced it, she jumped up as if it had been her name.

VI

An Uneasy Night

Auntie had a doggy dream that a porter ran after her with a broom, and she woke up in a fright.

It was quite dark and very stuffy in the room. The fleas were biting. Auntie had never been afraid of darkness before, but now, for some reason, she felt frightened and inclined to bark.

Her master heaved a loud sigh in the next room, then soon afterwards the sow grunted in her sty, and then all was still again. When one thinks about eating one's heart grows lighter, and Auntie began thinking how that day she had stolen the leg of a chicken from Fyodor Timofeyitch, and had hidden it in the drawing room, between the cupboard and the wall, where there were a great many spiders' webs and a great deal of dust. Would it not be as well to go now and look whether the chicken leg were still there or not? It was very possible that her master had found it and eaten it. But she must not go out of the room before morning, that was the rule. Auntie shut her eyes to go to sleep as quickly as possible, for she knew by experience that the sooner you go to sleep the sooner the morning comes. But all at once there was a strange scream not far from her which made her start and jump up on all four legs. It was Ivan Ivanitch, and his cry was not babbling and persuasive as usual, but a wild, shrill, unnatural scream like the squeak of a door opening. Unable to distinguish anything in the darkness, and not understanding what was wrong, Auntie felt still more frightened and growled: "R-r-r-r.…"

Some time passed, as long as it takes to eat a good bone; the scream was not repeated. Little by little Auntie's uneasiness passed off and she began to doze. She dreamed of two big black dogs with tufts of last year's coat left on their haunches and sides; they were eating out of a big basin some swill, from which there came a white steam and a most appetising smell; from time to time they looked round at Auntie, showed their teeth and growled: "We are not going to give you any!" But a peasant in a fur-coat ran out of the house and drove them away with a whip; then Auntie went up to the basin and began eating, but as soon as the peasant went out of the gate, the two black dogs rushed at her growling, and all at once there was again a shrill scream.

“K-gee! K-gee-gee!” cried Ivan Ivanitch.

Auntie woke, jumped up and, without leaving her mattress, went off into a yelping bark. It seemed to her that it was not Ivan Ivanitch that was screaming but someone else, and for some reason the sow again grunted in her sty.

Then there was the sound of shuffling slippers, and the master came into the room in his dressing-gown with a candle in his hand. The flickering light danced over the dirty wallpaper and the ceiling, and chased away the darkness. Auntie saw that there was no stranger in the room. Ivan Ivanitch was sitting on the floor and was not asleep. His wings were spread out and his beak was open, and altogether he looked as though he were very tired and thirsty. Old Fyodor Timofeyitch was not asleep either. He, too, must have been awakened by the scream.

“Ivan Ivanitch, what’s the matter with you?” the master asked the gander. “Why are you screaming? Are you ill?”

The gander did not answer. The master touched him on the neck, stroked his back, and said: “You are a queer chap. You don’t sleep yourself, and you don’t let other people.…”

When the master went out, carrying the candle with him, there was darkness again. Auntie felt frightened. The gander did not scream, but again she fancied that there was some stranger in the room. What was most dreadful was that this stranger could not be bitten, as he was unseen and had no shape. And for some reason she thought that something very bad would certainly happen that night. Fyodor Timofeyitch was uneasy too.

Auntie could hear him shifting on his mattress, yawning and shaking his head.

Somewhere in the street there was a knocking at a gate and the sow grunted in her sty. Auntie began to whine, stretched out her front-paws and laid her head down upon them. She fancied that in the knocking at the gate, in the grunting of the sow, who was for some reason awake, in the darkness and the stillness, there was something as miserable and dreadful as in Ivan Ivanitch’s scream. Everything was in agitation and anxiety, but why? Who was the stranger who could not be seen? Then two dim flashes of green gleamed for a minute near Auntie. It was Fyodor Timofeyitch, for the first time of their whole acquaintance coming up to her. What did he want? Auntie licked his paw, and not asking why he had come, howled softly and on various notes.

“K-gee!” cried Ivan Ivanitch, “K-g-ee!”

The door opened again and the master came in with a candle.

The gander was sitting in the same attitude as before, with his beak open, and his wings spread out, his eyes were closed.

“Ivan Ivanitch!” his master called him.

The gander did not stir. His master sat down before him on the floor, looked at him in silence for a minute, and said:

“Ivan Ivanitch, what is it? Are you dying? Oh, I remember now, I remember!” he cried out, and clutched at his head. “I know why it is! It’s because the horse stepped on you today! My God! My God!”

Auntie did not understand what her master was saying, but she saw from his face that he, too, was expecting something dreadful. She stretched out her head towards the dark window, where it seemed to her some stranger was looking in, and howled.

“He is dying, Auntie!” said her master, and wrung his hands. “Yes, yes, he is dying! Death has come into your room. What are we to do?”

Pale and agitated, the master went back into his room, sighing and shaking his head. Auntie was afraid to remain in the darkness, and followed her master into his bedroom. He sat down on the bed and repeated several times: “My God, what’s to be done?”

Auntie walked about round his feet, and not understanding why she was wretched and why they were all so uneasy, and trying to understand, watched every movement he made. Fyodor Timofeyitch, who rarely left his little mattress, came into the master’s bedroom too, and began rubbing himself against his feet. He shook his head as though he wanted to shake painful thoughts out of it, and kept peeping suspiciously under the bed.

The master took a saucer, poured some water from his washstand into it, and went to the gander again.

“Drink, Ivan Ivanitch!” he said tenderly, setting the saucer before him; “drink, darling.”

But Ivan Ivanitch did not stir and did not open his eyes. His master bent his head down to the saucer and dipped his beak into the water, but the gander did not drink, he spread his wings wider than ever, and his head remained lying in the saucer.

“No, there’s nothing to be done now,” sighed his master. “It’s all over. Ivan Ivanitch is gone!”

And shining drops, such as one sees on the windowpane when it rains, trickled down his cheeks. Not understanding what was the matter, Auntie and Fyodor Timofeyitch snuggled up to him and looked with horror at the gander.

“Poor Ivan Ivanitch!” said the master, sighing mournfully. “And I was dreaming I would take you in the spring into the country, and would walk with you on the green grass. Dear creature, my good comrade, you are no more! How shall I do without you now?”

It seemed to Auntie that the same thing would happen to her, that is, that she too, there was no knowing why, would close her eyes, stretch out her paws, open her mouth, and everyone would look at her with horror. Apparently the same reflections were passing through the brain of Fyodor Timofeyitch. Never before had the old cat been so morose and gloomy.

It began to get light, and the unseen stranger who had so frightened Auntie was no longer in the room. When it was quite daylight, the porter came in, took the gander, and carried him away. And soon afterwards the old woman came in and took away the trough.

Auntie went into the drawing room and looked behind the cupboard: her master had not eaten the chicken bone, it was lying in its place among the dust and spiders’ webs. But Auntie felt sad and dreary and wanted to cry. She did not even sniff at the bone, but went under the sofa, sat down there, and began softly whining in a thin voice.

VII

An Unsuccessful Debut

One fine evening the master came into the room with the dirty wallpaper, and, rubbing his hands, said:

"Well.…"

He meant to say something more, but went away without saying it. Auntie, who during her lessons had thoroughly studied his face and intonations, divined that he was agitated, anxious and, she fancied, angry. Soon afterwards he came back and said:

"Today I shall take with me Auntie and Fyodor Timofeyitch. Today, Auntie, you will take the place of poor Ivan Ivanitch in the 'Egyptian Pyramid.' Goodness knows how it will be! Nothing is ready, nothing has been thoroughly studied, there have been few rehearsals! We shall be disgraced, we shall come to grief!"

Then he went out again, and a minute later, came back in his fur-coat and top hat. Going up to the cat he took him by the forepaws and put him inside the front of his coat, while Fyodor Timofeyitch appeared completely unconcerned, and did not even trouble to open his eyes. To him it was apparently a matter of absolute indifference whether he remained lying down, or were lifted up by his paws, whether he rested on his mattress or under his master's fur-coat.

"Come along, Auntie," said her master.

Wagging her tail, and understanding nothing, Auntie followed him. A minute later she was sitting in a sledge by her master's feet and heard him, shrinking with cold and anxiety, mutter to himself:

"We shall be disgraced! We shall come to grief!"

The sledge stopped at a big strange-looking house, like a soup-ladle turned upside down. The long entrance to this house, with its three glass doors, was lighted up with a dozen brilliant lamps. The doors opened with a resounding noise and, like jaws, swallowed up the people who were moving to and fro at the entrance. There were a great many people, horses, too, often ran up to the entrance, but no dogs were to be seen.

The master took Auntie in his arms and thrust her in his coat, where Fyodor Timofeyirch already was. It was dark and stuffy there, but warm. For an instant two green sparks flashed at her; it was the cat, who opened

his eyes on being disturbed by his neighbour's cold rough paws. Auntie licked his ear, and, trying to settle herself as comfortably as possible, moved uneasily, crushed him under her cold paws, and casually poked her head out from under the coat, but at once growled angrily, and tucked it in again. It seemed to her that she had seen a huge, badly lighted room, full of monsters; from behind screens and gratings, which stretched on both sides of the room, horrible faces looked out: faces of horses with horns, with long ears, and one fat, huge countenance with a tail instead of a nose, and two long gnawed bones sticking out of his mouth.

The cat mewed huskily under Auntie's paws, but at that moment the coat was flung open, the master said, "Hop!" and Fyodor Timofeyitch and Auntie jumped to the floor. They were now in a little room with grey plank walls; there was no other furniture in it but a little table with a looking-glass on it, a stool, and some rags hung about the corners, and instead of a lamp or candles, there was a bright fan-shaped light attached to a little pipe fixed in the wall. Fyodor Timofeyitch licked his coat which had been ruffled by Auntie, went under the stool, and lay down. Their master, still agitated and rubbing his hands, began undressing.… He undressed as he usually did at home when he was preparing to get under the rug, that is, took off everything but his underlinen, then he sat down on the stool, and, looking in the looking-glass, began playing the most surprising tricks with himself.… First of all he put on his head a wig, with a parting and with two tufts of hair standing up like horns, then he smeared his face thickly with something white, and over the white colour painted his eyebrows, his moustaches, and red on his cheeks. His antics did not end with that. After smearing his face and neck, he began putting himself into an extraordinary and incongruous costume, such as Auntie had never seen before, either in houses or in the street. Imagine very full trousers, made of chintz covered with big flowers, such as is used in working-class houses for curtains and covering furniture, trousers which buttoned up just under his armpits. One trouser leg was made of brown chintz, the other of bright yellow. Almost lost in these, he then put on a short chintz jacket, with a big scalloped collar, and a gold star on the back, stockings of different colours, and green slippers.

Everything seemed going round before Auntie's eyes and in her soul. The white-faced, sack-like figure smelt like her master, its voice, too, was the familiar master's voice, but there were moments when Auntie was tortured by doubts, and then she was ready to run away from the parti-coloured figure and to bark. The new place, the fan-shaped light, the smell, the transformation that had taken place in her master—all this

aroused in her a vague dread and a foreboding that she would certainly meet with some horror such as the big face with the tail instead of a nose. And then, somewhere through the wall, some hateful band was playing, and from time to time she heard an incomprehensible roar. Only one thing reassured her—that was the imperturbability of Fyodor Timofeyitch. He dozed with the utmost tranquillity under the stool, and did not open his eyes even when it was moved.

A man in a dress coat and a white waistcoat peeped into the little room and said:

"Miss Arabella has just gone on. After her—you."

Their master made no answer. He drew a small box from under the table, sat down, and waited. From his lips and his hands it could be seen that he was agitated, and Auntie could hear how his breathing came in gasps.

"Monsieur George, come on!" someone shouted behind the door. Their master got up and crossed himself three times, then took the cat from under the stool and put him in the box.

"Come, Auntie," he said softly.

Auntie, who could make nothing out of it, went up to his hands, he kissed her on the head, and put her beside Fyodor Timofeyitch. Then followed darkness.… Auntie trampled on the cat, scratched at the walls of the box, and was so frightened that she could not utter a sound, while the box swayed and quivered, as though it were on the waves.…

"Here we are again!" her master shouted aloud: "here we are again!"

Auntie felt that after that shout the box struck against something hard and left off swaying. There was a loud deep roar, someone was being slapped, and that someone, probably the monster with the tail instead of a nose, roared and laughed so loud that the locks of the box trembled. In response to the roar, there came a shrill, squeaky laugh from her master, such as he never laughed at home.

"Ha!" he shouted, trying to shout above the roar. "Honoured friends! I have only just come from the station! My granny's kicked the bucket and left me a fortune! There is something very heavy in the box, it must be gold, ha! ha! I bet there's a million here! We'll open it and look.…"

The lock of the box clicked. The bright light dazzled Auntie's eyes, she jumped out of the box, and, deafened by the roar, ran quickly round her master, and broke into a shrill bark.

"Ha!" exclaimed her master. "Uncle Fyodor Timofeyitch! Beloved Aunt, dear relations! The devil take you!"

He fell on his stomach on the sand, seized the cat and Auntie, and fell to embracing them. While he held Auntie tight in his arms, she glanced round into the world into which fate had brought her and, impressed by its immensity, was for a minute dumbfounded with amazement and delight, then jumped out of her master's arms, and to express the intensity of her emotions, whirled round and round on one spot like a top. This new world was big and full of bright light; wherever she looked, on all sides, from floor to ceiling there were faces, faces, faces, and nothing else.

"Auntie, I beg you to sit down!" shouted her master. Remembering what that meant, Auntie jumped on to a chair, and sat down. She looked at her master. His eyes looked at her gravely and kindly as always, but his face, especially his mouth and teeth, were made grotesque by a broad immovable grin. He laughed, skipped about, twitched his shoulders, and made a show of being very merry in the presence of the thousands of faces. Auntie believed in his merriment, all at once felt all over her that those thousands of faces were looking at her, lifted up her fox-like head, and howled joyously.

"You sit there, Auntie," her master said to her, "while Uncle and I will dance the Kamarinsky."

Fyodor Timofeyitch stood looking about him indifferently, waiting to be made to do something silly. He danced listlessly, carelessly, sullenly, and one could see from his movements, his tail and his ears, that he had a profound contempt for the crowd, the bright light, his master and himself. When he had performed his allotted task, he gave a yawn and sat down.

"Now, Auntie!" said her master, "we'll have first a song, and then a dance, shall we?"

He took a pipe out of his pocket, and began playing. Auntie, who could not endure music, began moving uneasily in her chair and howled. A roar of applause rose from all sides. Her master bowed, and when all was still again, went on playing.… Just as he took one very high note, someone high up among the audience uttered a loud exclamation:

"Auntie!" cried a child's voice, "why it's Kashtanka!"

"Kashtanka it is!" declared a cracked drunken tenor. "Kashtanka! Strike me dead, Fedyushka, it is Kashtanka. Kashtanka! here!"

Someone in the gallery gave a whistle, and two voices, one a boy's and one a man's, called loudly: "Kashtanka! Kashtanka!"

Auntie started, and looked where the shouting came from. Two faces, one hairy, drunken and grinning, the other chubby, rosy-cheeked and

frightened-looking, dazed her eyes as the bright light had dazed them before.… She remembered, fell off the chair, struggled on the sand, then jumped up, and with a delighted yap dashed towards those faces. There was a deafening roar, interspersed with whistles and a shrill childish shout: “Kashtanka! Kashtanka!”

Auntie leaped over the barrier, then across someone’s shoulders. She found herself in a box: to get into the next tier she had to leap over a high wall. Auntie jumped, but did not jump high enough, and slipped back down the wall. Then she was passed from hand to hand, licked hands and faces, kept mounting higher and higher, and at last got into the gallery.…

Half an hour afterwards, Kashtanka was in the street, following the people who smelt of glue and varnish. Luka Alexandritch staggered and instinctively, taught by experience, tried to keep as far from the gutter as possible.

“In sin my mother bore me,” he muttered. “And you, Kashtanka, are a thing of little understanding. Beside a man, you are like a joiner beside a cabinetmaker.”

Fedyushka walked beside him, wearing his father’s cap. Kashtanka looked at their backs, and it seemed to her that she had been following them for ages, and was glad that there had not been a break for a minute in her life.

She remembered the little room with dirty wallpaper, the gander, Fyodor Timofeyitch, the delicious dinners, the lessons, the circus, but all that seemed to her now like a long, tangled, oppressive dream.

A Lady's Story

Nine years ago Pyotr Sergeyitch, the deputy prosecutor, and I were riding towards evening in haymaking time to fetch the letters from the station.

The weather was magnificent, but on our way back we heard a peal of thunder, and saw an angry black storm-cloud which was coming straight towards us. The storm-cloud was approaching us and we were approaching it.

Against the background of it our house and church looked white and the tall poplars shone like silver. There was a scent of rain and mown hay. My companion was in high spirits. He kept laughing and talking all sorts of nonsense. He said it would be nice if we could suddenly come upon a medieval castle with turreted towers, with moss on it and owls, in which we could take shelter from the rain and in the end be killed by a thunderbolt.…

Then the first wave raced through the rye and a field of oats, there was a gust of wind, and the dust flew round and round in the air. Pyotr Sergeyitch laughed and spurred on his horse.

"It's fine!" he cried, "it's splendid!"

Infected by his gaiety, I too began laughing at the thought that in a minute I should be drenched to the skin and might be struck by lightning.

Riding swiftly in a hurricane when one is breathless with the wind, and feels like a bird, thrills one and puts one's heart in a flutter. By the time we rode into our courtyard the wind had gone down, and big drops of rain were pattering on the grass and on the roofs. There was not a soul near the stable.

Pyotr Sergeyitch himself took the bridles off, and led the horses to their stalls. I stood in the doorway waiting for him to finish, and watching the slanting streaks of rain; the sweetish, exciting scent of hay was even stronger here than in the fields; the storm-clouds and the rain made it almost twilight.

“What a crash!” said Pyotr Sergeyitch, coming up to me after a very loud rolling peal of thunder when it seemed as though the sky were split in two. “What do you say to that?”

He stood beside me in the doorway and, still breathless from his rapid ride, looked at me. I could see that he was admiring me.

“Natalya Vladimirovna,” he said, “I would give anything only to stay here a little longer and look at you. You are lovely today.”

His eyes looked at me with delight and supplication, his face was pale. On his beard and mustache were glittering raindrops, and they, too, seemed to be looking at me with love.

“I love you,” he said. “I love you, and I am happy at seeing you. I know you cannot be my wife, but I want nothing, I ask nothing; only know that I love you. Be silent, do not answer me, take no notice of it, but only know that you are dear to me and let me look at you.”

His rapture affected me too; I looked at his enthusiastic face, listened to his voice which mingled with the patter of the rain, and stood as though spellbound, unable to stir.

I longed to go on endlessly looking at his shining eyes and listening.

“You say nothing, and that is splendid,” said Pyotr Sergeyitch. “Go on being silent.”

I felt happy. I laughed with delight and ran through the drenching rain to the house; he laughed too, and, leaping as he went, ran after me.

Both drenched, panting, noisily clattering up the stairs like children, we dashed into the room. My father and brother, who were not used to seeing me laughing and lighthearted, looked at me in surprise and began laughing too.

The storm-clouds had passed over and the thunder had ceased, but the raindrops still glittered on Pyotr Sergeyitch’s beard. The whole evening till suppertime he was singing, whistling, playing noisily with the dog and racing about the room after it, so that he nearly upset the servant with the samovar. And at supper he ate a great deal, talked nonsense, and maintained that when one eats fresh cucumbers in winter there is the fragrance of spring in one’s mouth.

When I went to bed I lighted a candle and threw my window wide open, and an undefined feeling took possession of my soul. I remembered that I was free and healthy, that I had rank and wealth, that I was beloved; above all, that I had rank and wealth, rank and wealth, my God! how nice that was!… Then, huddling up in bed at a touch of cold which reached me from the garden with the dew, I tried to discover

whether I loved Pyotr Sergeyitch or not,… and fell asleep unable to reach any conclusion.

And when in the morning I saw quivering patches of sunlight and the shadows of the lime trees on my bed, what had happened yesterday rose vividly in my memory. Life seemed to me rich, varied, full of charm. Humming, I dressed quickly and went out into the garden.…

And what happened afterwards? Why—nothing. In the winter when we lived in town Pyotr Sergeyitch came to see us from time to time. Country acquaintances are charming only in the country and in summer; in the town and in winter they lose their charm. When you pour out tea for them in the town it seems as though they are wearing other people's coats, and as though they stirred their tea too long. In the town, too, Pyotr Sergeyitch spoke sometimes of love, but the effect was not at all the same as in the country. In the town we were more vividly conscious of the wall that stood between us. I had rank and wealth, while he was poor, and he was not even a nobleman, but only the son of a deacon and a deputy public prosecutor; we both of us—I through my youth and he for some unknown reason—thought of that wall as very high and thick, and when he was with us in the town he would criticize aristocratic society with a forced smile, and maintain a sullen silence when there was anyone else in the drawing room. There is no wall that cannot be broken through, but the heroes of the modern romance, so far as I know them, are too timid, spiritless, lazy, and oversensitive, and are too ready to resign themselves to the thought that they are doomed to failure, that personal life has disappointed them; instead of struggling they merely criticize, calling the world vulgar and forgetting that their criticism passes little by little into vulgarity.

I was loved, happiness was not far away, and seemed to be almost touching me; I went on living in careless ease without trying to understand myself, not knowing what I expected or what I wanted from life, and time went on and on.… People passed by me with their love, bright days and warm nights flashed by, the nightingales sang, the hay smelt fragrant, and all this, sweet and overwhelming in remembrance, passed with me as with everyone rapidly, leaving no trace, was not prized, and vanished like mist.… Where is it all?

My father is dead, I have grown older; everything that delighted me, caressed me, gave me hope—the patter of the rain, the rolling of the thunder, thoughts of happiness, talk of love—all that has become nothing but a memory, and I see before me a flat desert distance; on the plain not one living soul, and out there on the horizon it is dark and terrible.…

A ring at the bell.… It is Pyotr Sergeyitch. When in the winter I see the trees and remember how green they were for me in the summer I whisper:

“Oh, my darlings!”

And when I see people with whom I spent my springtime, I feel sorrowful and warm and whisper the same thing.

He has long ago by my father’s good offices been transferred to town. He looks a little older, a little fallen away. He has long given up declaring his love, has left off talking nonsense, dislikes his official work, is ill in some way and disillusioned; he has given up trying to get anything out of life, and takes no interest in living. Now he has sat down by the hearth and looks in silence at the fire.…

Not knowing what to say I ask him:

“Well, what have you to tell me?”

“Nothing,” he answers.

And silence again. The red glow of the fire plays about his melancholy face.

I thought of the past, and all at once my shoulders began quivering, my head dropped, and I began weeping bitterly. I felt unbearably sorry for myself and for this man, and passionately longed for what had passed away and what life refused us now. And now I did not think about rank and wealth.

I broke into loud sobs, pressing my temples, and muttered:

“My God! my God! my life is wasted!”

And he sat and was silent, and did not say to me: “Don’t weep.” He understood that I must weep, and that the time for this had come.

I saw from his eyes that he was sorry for me; and I was sorry for him, too, and vexed with this timid, unsuccessful man who could not make a life for me, nor for himself.

When I saw him to the door, he was, I fancied, purposely a long while putting on his coat. Twice he kissed my hand without a word, and looked a long while into my tear-stained face. I believe at that moment he recalled the storm, the streaks of rain, our laughter, my face that day; he longed to say something to me, and he would have been glad to say it; but he said nothing, he merely shook his head and pressed my hand. God help him!

After seeing him out, I went back to my study and again sat on the carpet before the fireplace; the red embers were covered with ash and began to grow dim. The frost tapped still more angrily at the windows, and the wind droned in the chimney.

The maid came in and, thinking I was asleep, called my name.

A Story Without a Title

In the fifth century, just as now, the sun rose every morning and every evening retired to rest. In the morning, when the first rays kissed the dew, the earth revived, the air was filled with the sounds of rapture and hope; while in the evening the same earth subsided into silence and plunged into gloomy darkness. One day was like another, one night like another. From time to time a storm-cloud raced up and there was the angry rumble of thunder, or a negligent star fell out of the sky, or a pale monk ran to tell the brotherhood that not far from the monastery he had seen a tiger—and that was all, and then each day was like the next.

The monks worked and prayed, and their Father Superior played on the organ, made Latin verses, and wrote music. The wonderful old man possessed an extraordinary gift. He played on the organ with such art that even the oldest monks, whose hearing had grown somewhat dull towards the end of their lives, could not restrain their tears when the sounds of the organ floated from his cell. When he spoke of anything, even of the most ordinary things—for instance of the trees, of the wild beasts, or of the sea—they could not listen to him without a smile or tears, and it seemed that the same chords vibrated in his soul as in the organ. If he were moved to anger or abandoned himself to intense joy, or began speaking of something terrible or grand, then a passionate inspiration took possession of him, tears came into his flashing eyes, his face flushed, and his voice thundered, and as the monks listened to him they felt that their souls were spellbound by his inspiration; at such marvellous, splendid moments his power over them was boundless, and if he had bidden his elders fling themselves into the sea, they would all, every one of them, have hastened to carry out his wishes.

His music, his voice, his poetry in which he glorified God, the heavens and the earth, were a continual source of joy to the monks. It sometimes happened that through the monotony of their lives they grew weary of the trees, the flowers, the spring, the autumn, their ears were tired of the sound of the sea, and the song of the birds seemed tedious to them, but

the talents of their Father Superior were as necessary to them as their daily bread.

Dozens of years passed by, and every day was like every other day, every night was like every other night. Except the birds and the wild beasts, not one soul appeared near the monastery. The nearest human habitation was far away, and to reach it from the monastery, or to reach the monastery from it, meant a journey of over seventy miles across the desert. Only men who despised life, who had renounced it, and who came to the monastery as to the grave, ventured to cross the desert.

What was the amazement of the monks, therefore, when one night there knocked at their gate a man who turned out to be from the town, and the most ordinary sinner who loved life. Before saying his prayers and asking for the Father Superior's blessing, this man asked for wine and food. To the question how he had come from the town into the desert, he answered by a long story of hunting; he had gone out hunting, had drunk too much, and lost his way. To the suggestion that he should enter the monastery and save his soul, he replied with a smile: "I am not a fit companion for you!"

When he had eaten and drunk he looked at the monks who were serving him, shook his head reproachfully, and said:

"You don't do anything, you monks. You are good for nothing but eating and drinking. Is that the way to save one's soul? Only think, while you sit here in peace, eat and drink and dream of beatitude, your neighbours are perishing and going to hell. You should see what is going on in the town! Some are dying of hunger, others, not knowing what to do with their gold, sink into profligacy and perish like flies stuck in honey. There is no faith, no truth in men. Whose task is it to save them? Whose work is it to preach to them? It is not for me, drunk from morning till night as I am. Can a meek spirit, a loving heart, and faith in God have been given you for you to sit here within four walls doing nothing?"

The townsman's drunken words were insolent and unseemly, but they had a strange effect upon the Father Superior. The old man exchanged glances with his monks, turned pale, and said:

"My brothers, he speaks the truth, you know. Indeed, poor people in their weakness and lack of understanding are perishing in vice and infidelity, while we do not move, as though it did not concern us. Why should I not go and remind them of the Christ whom they have forgotten?"

The townsman's words had carried the old man away. The next day he took his staff, said farewell to the brotherhood, and set off for the town.

And the monks were left without music, and without his speeches and verses. They spent a month drearily, then a second, but the old man did not come back. At last after three months had passed the familiar tap of his staff was heard. The monks flew to meet him and showered questions upon him, but instead of being delighted to see them he wept bitterly and did not utter a word. The monks noticed that he looked greatly aged and had grown thinner; his face looked exhausted and wore an expression of profound sadness, and when he wept he had the air of a man who has been outraged.

The monks fell to weeping too, and began with sympathy asking him why he was weeping, why his face was so gloomy, but he locked himself in his cell without uttering a word. For seven days he sat in his cell, eating and drinking nothing, weeping and not playing on his organ. To knocking at his door and to the entreaties of the monks to come out and share his grief with them he replied with unbroken silence.

At last he came out. Gathering all the monks around him, with a tear-stained face and with an expression of grief and indignation, he began telling them of what had befallen him during those three months. His voice was calm and his eyes were smiling while he described his journey from the monastery to the town. On the road, he told them, the birds sang to him, the brooks gurgled, and sweet youthful hopes agitated his soul; he marched on and felt like a soldier going to battle and confident of victory; he walked on dreaming, and composed poems and hymns, and reached the end of his journey without noticing it.

But his voice quivered, his eyes flashed, and he was full of wrath when he came to speak of the town and of the men in it. Never in his life had he seen or even dared to imagine what he met with when he went into the town. Only then for the first time in his life, in his old age, he saw and understood how powerful was the devil, how fair was evil and how weak and fainthearted and worthless were men. By an unhappy chance the first dwelling he entered was the abode of vice. Some fifty men in possession of much money were eating and drinking wine beyond measure. Intoxicated by the wine, they sang songs and boldly uttered terrible, revolting words such as a God-fearing man could not bring himself to pronounce; boundlessly free, self-confident, and happy, they feared neither God nor the devil, nor death, but said and did what they liked, and went whither their lust led them. And the wine, clear as amber, flecked with sparks of gold, must have been irresistibly sweet and fragrant, for each man who drank it smiled blissfully and wanted to drink more. To the smile of man it responded with a smile and sparkled

joyfully when they drank it, as though it knew the devilish charm it kept hidden in its sweetness.

The old man, growing more and more incensed and weeping with wrath, went on to describe what he had seen. On a table in the midst of the revellers, he said, stood a sinful, half-naked woman. It was hard to imagine or to find in nature anything more lovely and fascinating. This reptile, young, longhaired, dark-skinned, with black eyes and full lips, shameless and insolent, showed her snow-white teeth and smiled as though to say: “Look how shameless, how beautiful I am.” Silk and brocade fell in lovely folds from her shoulders, but her beauty would not hide itself under her clothes, but eagerly thrust itself through the folds, like the young grass through the ground in spring. The shameless woman drank wine, sang songs, and abandoned herself to anyone who wanted her.

Then the old man, wrathfully brandishing his arms, described the horse-races, the bullfights, the theatres, the artists’ studios where they painted naked women or moulded them of clay. He spoke with inspiration, with sonorous beauty, as though he were playing on unseen chords, while the monks, petrified, greedily drank in his words and gasped with rapture.…

After describing all the charms of the devil, the beauty of evil, and the fascinating grace of the dreadful female form, the old man cursed the devil, turned and shut himself up in his cell.…

When he came out of his cell in the morning there was not a monk left in the monastery; they had all fled to the town.

SLEEPY

Night. Varka, the little nurse, a girl of thirteen, is rocking the cradle in which the baby is lying, and humming hardly audibly:

> “Hush-a-bye, my baby wee,
> While I sing a song for thee.”

A little green lamp is burning before the icon; there is a string stretched from one end of the room to the other, on which baby-clothes and a pair of big black trousers are hanging. There is a big patch of green on the ceiling from the icon lamp, and the baby-clothes and the trousers throw long shadows on the stove, on the cradle, and on Varka.… When the lamp begins to flicker, the green patch and the shadows come to life, and are set in motion, as though by the wind. It is stuffy. There is a smell of cabbage soup, and of the inside of a boot-shop.

The baby’s crying. For a long while he has been hoarse and exhausted with crying; but he still goes on screaming, and there is no knowing when he will stop. And Varka is sleepy. Her eyes are glued together, her head droops, her neck aches. She cannot move her eyelids or her lips, and she feels as though her face is dried and wooden, as though her head has become as small as the head of a pin.

“Hush-a-bye, my baby wee,” she hums, “while I cook the groats for thee.…”

A cricket is churring in the stove. Through the door in the next room the master and the apprentice Afanasy are snoring.… The cradle creaks plaintively, Varka murmurs—and it all blends into that soothing music of the night to which it is so sweet to listen, when one is lying in bed. Now that music is merely irritating and oppressive, because it goads her to sleep, and she must not sleep; if Varka—God forbid!—should fall asleep, her master and mistress would beat her.

The lamp flickers. The patch of green and the shadows are set in motion, forcing themselves on Varka’s fixed, half-open eyes, and in her

half slumbering brain are fashioned into misty visions. She sees dark clouds chasing one another over the sky, and screaming like the baby. But then the wind blows, the clouds are gone, and Varka sees a broad high road covered with liquid mud; along the high road stretch files of wagons, while people with wallets on their backs are trudging along and shadows flit backwards and forwards; on both sides she can see forests through the cold harsh mist. All at once the people with their wallets and their shadows fall on the ground in the liquid mud. “What is that for?” Varka asks. “To sleep, to sleep!” they answer her. And they fall sound asleep, and sleep sweetly, while crows and magpies sit on the telegraph wires, scream like the baby, and try to wake them.

“Hush-a-bye, my baby wee, and I will sing a song to thee,” murmurs Varka, and now she sees herself in a dark stuffy hut.

Her dead father, Yefim Stepanov, is tossing from side to side on the floor. She does not see him, but she hears him moaning and rolling on the floor from pain. “His guts have burst,” as he says; the pain is so violent that he cannot utter a single word, and can only draw in his breath and clack his teeth like the rattling of a drum:

“Boo—boo—boo—boo.…”

Her mother, Pelageya, has run to the master’s house to say that Yefim is dying. She has been gone a long time, and ought to be back. Varka lies awake on the stove, and hears her father’s “boo—boo—boo.” And then she hears someone has driven up to the hut. It is a young doctor from the town, who has been sent from the big house where he is staying on a visit. The doctor comes into the hut; he cannot be seen in the darkness, but he can be heard coughing and rattling the door.

“Light a candle,” he says.

“Boo—boo—boo,” answers Yefim.

Pelageya rushes to the stove and begins looking for the broken pot with the matches. A minute passes in silence. The doctor, feeling in his pocket, lights a match.

“In a minute, sir, in a minute,” says Pelageya. She rushes out of the hut, and soon afterwards comes back with a bit of candle.

Yefim’s cheeks are rosy and his eyes are shining, and there is a peculiar keenness in his glance, as though he were seeing right through the hut and the doctor.

“Come, what is it? What are you thinking about?” says the doctor, bending down to him. “Aha! have you had this long?”

“What? Dying, your honour, my hour has come.… I am not to stay among the living.”

“Don’t talk nonsense! We will cure you!”

“That’s as you please, your honour, we humbly thank you, only we understand.… Since death has come, there it is.”

The doctor spends a quarter of an hour over Yefim, then he gets up and says:

“I can do nothing. You must go into the hospital, there they will operate on you. Go at once… You must go! It’s rather late, they will all be asleep in the hospital, but that doesn’t matter, I will give you a note. Do you hear?”

“Kind sir, but what can he go in?” says Pelageya. “We have no horse.”

“Never mind. I’ll ask your master, he’ll let you have a horse.”

The doctor goes away, the candle goes out, and again there is the sound of “boo—boo—boo.” Half an hour later someone drives up to the hut. A cart has been sent to take Yefim to the hospital. He gets ready and goes.…

But now it is a clear bright morning. Pelageya is not at home; she has gone to the hospital to find what is being done to Yefim. Somewhere there is a baby crying, and Varka hears someone singing with her own voice:

“Hush-a-bye, my baby wee, I will sing a song to thee.”

Pelageya comes back; she crosses herself and whispers:

“They put him to rights in the night, but towards morning he gave up his soul to God.… The Kingdom of Heaven be his and peace everlasting.… They say he was taken too late.… He ought to have gone sooner.…”

Varka goes out into the road and cries there, but all at once someone hits her on the back of her head so hard that her forehead knocks against a birch tree. She raises her eyes, and sees facing her, her master, the shoemaker.

“What are you about, you scabby slut?” he says. “The child is crying, and you are asleep!”

He gives her a sharp slap behind the ear, and she shakes her head, rocks the cradle, and murmurs her song. The green patch and the shadows from the trousers and the baby-clothes move up and down, nod to her, and soon take possession of her brain again. Again she sees the high road covered with liquid mud. The people with wallets on their backs and the shadows have lain down and are fast asleep. Looking at them, Varka has a passionate longing for sleep; she would lie down with enjoyment, but her mother Pelageya is walking beside her, hurrying her on. They are hastening together to the town to find situations.

“Give alms, for Christ’s sake!” her mother begs of the people they meet. “Show us the Divine Mercy, kindhearted gentlefolk!”

“Give the baby here!” a familiar voice answers. “Give the baby here!” the same voice repeats, this time harshly and angrily. “Are you asleep, you wretched girl?”

Varka jumps up, and looking round grasps what is the matter: there is no high road, no Pelageya, no people meeting them, there is only her mistress, who has come to feed the baby, and is standing in the middle of the room. While the stout, broad-shouldered woman nurses the child and soothes it, Varka stands looking at her and waiting till she has done. And outside the windows the air is already turning blue, the shadows and the green patch on the ceiling are visibly growing pale, it will soon be morning.

“Take him,” says her mistress, buttoning up her chemise over her bosom; “he is crying. He must be bewitched.”

Varka takes the baby, puts him in the cradle and begins rocking it again. The green patch and the shadows gradually disappear, and now there is nothing to force itself on her eyes and cloud her brain. But she is as sleepy as before, fearfully sleepy! Varka lays her head on the edge of the cradle, and rocks her whole body to overcome her sleepiness, but yet her eyes are glued together, and her head is heavy.

“Varka, heat the stove!” she hears the master’s voice through the door.

So it is time to get up and set to work. Varka leaves the cradle, and runs to the shed for firewood. She is glad. When one moves and runs about, one is not so sleepy as when one is sitting down. She brings the wood, heats the stove, and feels that her wooden face is getting supple again, and that her thoughts are growing clearer.

“Varka, set the samovar!” shouts her mistress.

Varka splits a piece of wood, but has scarcely time to light the splinters and put them in the samovar, when she hears a fresh order:

“Varka, clean the master’s goloshes!”

She sits down on the floor, cleans the goloshes, and thinks how nice it would be to put her head into a big deep golosh, and have a little nap in it.… And all at once the golosh grows, swells, fills up the whole room. Varka drops the brush, but at once shakes her head, opens her eyes wide, and tries to look at things so that they may not grow big and move before her eyes.

“Varka, wash the steps outside; I am ashamed for the customers to see them!”

Varka washes the steps, sweeps and dusts the rooms, then heats another stove and runs to the shop. There is a great deal of work: she hasn't one minute free.

But nothing is so hard as standing in the same place at the kitchen table peeling potatoes. Her head droops over the table, the potatoes dance before her eyes, the knife tumbles out of her hand while her fat, angry mistress is moving about near her with her sleeves tucked up, talking so loud that it makes a ringing in Varka's ears. It is agonising, too, to wait at dinner, to wash, to sew, there are minutes when she longs to flop on to the floor regardless of everything, and to sleep.

The day passes. Seeing the windows getting dark, Varka presses her temples that feel as though they were made of wood, and smiles, though she does not know why. The dusk of evening caresses her eyes that will hardly keep open, and promises her sound sleep soon. In the evening visitors come.

"Varka, set the samovar!" shouts her mistress. The samovar is a little one, and before the visitors have drunk all the tea they want, she has to heat it five times. After tea Varka stands for a whole hour on the same spot, looking at the visitors, and waiting for orders.

"Varka, run and buy three bottles of beer!"

She starts off, and tries to run as quickly as she can, to drive away sleep.

"Varka, fetch some vodka! Varka, where's the corkscrew? Varka, clean a herring!"

But now, at last, the visitors have gone; the lights are put out, the master and mistress go to bed.

"Varka, rock the baby!" she hears the last order.

The cricket churrs in the stove; the green patch on the ceiling and the shadows from the trousers and the baby-clothes force themselves on Varka's half-opened eyes again, wink at her and cloud her mind.

"Hush-a-bye, my baby wee," she murmurs, "and I will sing a song to thee."

And the baby screams, and is worn out with screaming. Again Varka sees the muddy high road, the people with wallets, her mother Pelageya, her father Yefim. She understands everything, she recognises everyone, but through her half sleep she cannot understand the force which binds her, hand and foot, weighs upon her, and prevents her from living. She looks round, searches for that force that she may escape from it, but she cannot find it. At last, tired to death, she does her very utmost, strains her

eyes, looks up at the flickering green patch, and listening to the screaming, finds the foe who will not let her live.

That foe is the baby.

She laughs. It seems strange to her that she has failed to grasp such a simple thing before. The green patch, the shadows, and the cricket seem to laugh and wonder too.

The hallucination takes possession of Varka. She gets up from her stool, and with a broad smile on her face and wide unblinking eyes, she walks up and down the room. She feels pleased and tickled at the thought that she will be rid directly of the baby that binds her hand and foot.… Kill the baby and then sleep, sleep, sleep.…

Laughing and winking and shaking her fingers at the green patch, Varka steals up to the cradle and bends over the baby. When she has strangled him, she quickly lies down on the floor, laughs with delight that she can sleep, and in a minute is sleeping as sound as the dead.

THE STEPPE

THE STORY OF A JOURNEY

I

Early one morning in July a shabby covered chaise, one of those antediluvian chaises without springs in which no one travels in Russia nowadays, except merchant's clerks, dealers and the less well-to-do among priests, drove out of N——, the principal town of the province of Z——, and rumbled noisily along the posting-track. It rattled and creaked at every movement; the pail, hanging on behind, chimed in gruffly, and from these sounds alone and from the wretched rags of leather hanging loose about its peeling body one could judge of its decrepit age and readiness to drop to pieces.

Two of the inhabitants of N—— were sitting in the chaise; they were a merchant of N—— called Ivan Ivanitch Kuzmitchov, a man with a shaven face wearing glasses and a straw hat, more like a government clerk than a merchant, and Father Christopher Sireysky, the priest of the Church of St. Nikolay at N——, a little old man with long hair, in a grey canvas cassock, a wide-brimmed top-hat and a coloured embroidered girdle. The former was absorbed in thought, and kept tossing his head to shake off drowsiness; in his countenance an habitual businesslike reserve was struggling with the genial expression of a man who has just said goodbye to his relatives and has had a good drink at parting. The latter gazed with moist eyes wonderingly at God's world, and his smile was so broad that it seemed to embrace even the brim of his hat; his face was red and looked frozen. Both of them, Father Christopher as well as Kuzmitchov, were going to sell wool. At parting with their families they had just eaten heartily of pastry puffs and cream, and although it was so early in the morning had had a glass or two.… Both were in the best of humours.

Apart from the two persons described above and the coachman Deniska, who lashed the pair of frisky bay horses, there was another

figure in the chaise—a boy of nine with a sunburnt face, wet with tears. This was Yegorushka, Kuzmitchov's nephew. With the sanction of his uncle and the blessing of Father Christopher, he was now on his way to go to school. His mother, Olga Ivanovna, the widow of a collegiate secretary, and Kuzmitchov's sister, who was fond of educated people and refined society, had entreated her brother to take Yegorushka with him when he went to sell wool and to put him to school; and now the boy was sitting on the box beside the coachman Deniska, holding on to his elbow to keep from falling off, and dancing up and down like a kettle on the hob, with no notion where he was going or what he was going for. The rapid motion through the air blew out his red shirt like a balloon on his back and made his new hat with a peacock's feather in it, like a coachman's, keep slipping on to the back of his head. He felt himself an intensely unfortunate person, and had an inclination to cry.

When the chaise drove past the prison, Yegorushka glanced at the sentinels pacing slowly by the high white walls, at the little barred windows, at the cross shining on the roof, and remembered how the week before, on the day of the Holy Mother of Kazan, he had been with his mother to the prison church for the Dedication Feast, and how before that, at Easter, he had gone to the prison with Deniska and Ludmila the cook, and had taken the prisoners Easter bread, eggs, cakes and roast beef. The prisoners had thanked them and made the sign of the cross, and one of them had given Yegorushka a pewter buckle of his own making.

The boy gazed at the familiar places, while the hateful chaise flew by and left them all behind. After the prison he caught glimpses of black grimy foundries, followed by the snug green cemetery surrounded by a wall of cobblestones; white crosses and tombstones, nestling among green cherry trees and looking in the distance like patches of white, peeped out gaily from behind the wall. Yegorushka remembered that when the cherries were in blossom those white patches melted with the flowers into a sea of white; and that when the cherries were ripe the white tombstones and crosses were dotted with splashes of red like bloodstains. Under the cherry trees in the cemetery Yegorushka's father and granny, Zinaida Danilovna, lay sleeping day and night. When Granny had died she had been put in a long narrow coffin and two pennies had been put upon her eyes, which would not keep shut. Up to the time of her death she had been brisk, and used to bring soft rolls covered with poppy seeds from the market. Now she did nothing but sleep and sleep.…

Beyond the cemetery came the smoking brickyards. From under the long roofs of reeds that looked as though pressed flat to the ground, a thick black smoke rose in great clouds and floated lazily upwards. The sky was murky above the brickyards and the cemetery, and great shadows from the clouds of smoke crept over the fields and across the roads. Men and horses covered with red dust were moving about in the smoke near the roofs.

The town ended with the brickyards and the open country began. Yegorushka looked at the town for the last time, pressed his face against Deniska's elbow, and wept bitterly.

"Come, not done howling yet, crybaby!" cried Kuzmitchov. "You are blubbering again, little milksop! If you don't want to go, stay behind; no one is taking you by force!"

"Never mind, never mind, Yegor boy, never mind," Father Christopher muttered rapidly—"never mind, my boy.… Call upon God.… You are not going for your harm, but for your good. Learning is light, as the saying is, and ignorance is darkness.… That is so, truly."

"Do you want to go back?" asked Kuzmitchov.

"Yes,… yes,…" answered Yegorushka, sobbing.

"Well, you'd better go back then. Anyway, you are going for nothing; it's a day's journey for a spoonful of porridge."

"Never mind, never mind, my boy," Father Christopher went on. "Call upon God.… Lomonosov set off with the fishermen in the same way, and he became a man famous all over Europe. Learning in conjunction with faith brings forth fruit pleasing to God. What are the words of the prayer? For the glory of our Maker, for the comfort of our parents, for the benefit of our Church and our country.… Yes, indeed!"

"The benefit is not the same in all cases," said Kuzmitchov, lighting a cheap cigar; "some will study twenty years and get no sense from it."

"That does happen."

"Learning is a benefit to some, but others only muddle their brains. My sister is a woman who does not understand; she is set upon refinement, and wants to turn Yegorka into a learned man, and she does not understand that with my business I could settle Yegorka happily for the rest of his life. I tell you this, that if everyone were to go in for being learned and refined there would be no one to sow the corn and do the trading; they would all die of hunger."

"And if all go in for trading and sowing corn there will be no one to acquire learning."

And considering that each of them had said something weighty and convincing, Kuzmitchov and Father Christopher both looked serious and cleared their throats simultaneously.

Deniska, who had been listening to their conversation without understanding a word of it, shook his head and, rising in his seat, lashed at both the bays. A silence followed.

Meanwhile a wide boundless plain encircled by a chain of low hills lay stretched before the travellers' eyes. Huddling together and peeping out from behind one another, these hills melted together into rising ground, which stretched right to the very horizon and disappeared into the lilac distance; one drives on and on and cannot discern where it begins or where it ends.… The sun had already peeped out from beyond the town behind them, and quietly, without fuss, set to its accustomed task. At first in the distance before them a broad, bright, yellow streak of light crept over the ground where the earth met the sky, near the little barrows and the windmills, which in the distance looked like tiny men waving their arms. A minute later a similar streak gleamed a little nearer, crept to the right and embraced the hills. Something warm touched Yegorushka's spine; the streak of light, stealing up from behind, darted between the chaise and the horses, moved to meet the other streak, and soon the whole wide steppe flung off the twilight of early morning, and was smiling and sparkling with dew.

The cut rye, the coarse steppe grass, the milkwort, the wild hemp, all withered from the sultry heat, turned brown and half dead, now washed by the dew and caressed by the sun, revived, to fade again. Arctic petrels flew across the road with joyful cries; marmots called to one another in the grass. Somewhere, far away to the left, lapwings uttered their plaintive notes. A covey of partridges, scared by the chaise, fluttered up and with their soft *trrrr!* flew off to the hills. In the grass crickets, locusts and grasshoppers kept up their churring, monotonous music.

But a little time passed, the dew evaporated, the air grew stagnant, and the disillusioned steppe began to wear its jaded July aspect. The grass drooped, everything living was hushed. The sunbaked hills, brownish-green and lilac in the distance, with their quiet shadowy tones, the plain with the misty distance and, arched above them, the sky, which seems terribly deep and transparent in the steppes, where there are no woods or high hills, seemed now endless, petrified with dreariness.…

How stifling and oppressive it was! The chaise raced along, while Yegorushka saw always the same—the sky, the plain, the low hills.… The music in the grass was hushed, the petrels had flown away, the

partridges were out of sight, rooks hovered idly over the withered grass; they were all alike and made the steppe even more monotonous.

A hawk flew just above the ground, with an even sweep of its wings, suddenly halted in the air as though pondering on the dreariness of life, then fluttered its wings and flew like an arrow over the steppe, and there was no telling why it flew off and what it wanted. In the distance a windmill waved its sails.…

Now and then a glimpse of a white potsherd or a heap of stones broke the monotony; a grey stone stood out for an instant or a parched willow with a blue crow on its top branch; a marmot would run across the road and—again there flitted before the eyes only the high grass, the low hills, the rooks.…

But at last, thank God, a wagon loaded with sheaves came to meet them; a peasant wench was lying on the very top. Sleepy, exhausted by the heat, she lifted her head and looked at the travellers. Deniska gaped, looking at her; the horses stretched out their noses towards the sheaves; the chaise, squeaking, kissed the wagon, and the pointed ears passed over Father Christopher’s hat like a brush.

“You are driving over folks, fatty!” cried Deniska. “What a swollen lump of a face, as though a bumblebee had stung it!”

The girl smiled drowsily, and moving her lips lay down again; then a solitary poplar came into sight on the low hill. Someone had planted it, and God only knows why it was there. It was hard to tear the eyes away from its graceful figure and green drapery. Was that lovely creature happy? Sultry heat in summer, in winter frost and snowstorms, terrible nights in autumn when nothing is to be seen but darkness and nothing is to be heard but the senseless angry howling wind, and, worst of all, alone, alone for the whole of life.… Beyond the poplar stretches of wheat extended like a bright yellow carpet from the road to the top of the hills. On the hills the corn was already cut and laid up in sheaves, while at the bottom they were still cutting.… Six mowers were standing in a row swinging their scythes, and the scythes gleamed gaily and uttered in unison together “Vzhee, vzhee!” From the movements of the peasant women binding the sheaves, from the faces of the mowers, from the glitter of the scythes, it could be seen that the sultry heat was baking and stifling. A black dog with its tongue hanging out ran from the mowers to meet the chaise, probably with the intention of barking, but stopped halfway and stared indifferently at Deniska, who shook his whip at him; it was too hot to bark! One peasant woman got up and, putting both hands to her aching back, followed Yegorushka’s red shirt with her eyes.

Whether it was that the colour pleased her or that he reminded her of her children, she stood a long time motionless staring after him.

But now the wheat, too, had flashed by; again the parched plain, the sunburnt hills, the sultry sky stretched before them; again a hawk hovered over the earth. In the distance, as before, a windmill whirled its sails, and still it looked like a little man waving his arms. It was wearisome to watch, and it seemed as though one would never reach it, as though it were running away from the chaise.

Father Christopher and Kuzmitchov were silent. Deniska lashed the horses and kept shouting to them, while Yegorushka had left off crying, and gazed about him listlessly. The heat and the tedium of the steppes overpowered him. He felt as though he had been travelling and jolting up and down for a very long time, that the sun had been baking his back a long time. Before they had gone eight miles he began to feel "It must be time to rest." The geniality gradually faded out of his uncle's face and nothing else was left but the air of business reserve; and to a gaunt shaven face, especially when it is adorned with spectacles and the nose and temples are covered with dust, this reserve gives a relentless, inquisitorial appearance. Father Christopher never left off gazing with wonder at God's world, and smiling. Without speaking, he brooded over something pleasant and nice, and a kindly, genial smile remained imprinted on his face. It seemed as though some nice and pleasant thought were imprinted on his brain by the heat.

"Well, Deniska, shall we overtake the wagons today?" asked Kuzmitchov.

Deniska looked at the sky, rose in his seat, lashed at his horses and then answered:

"By nightfall, please God, we shall overtake them."

There was a sound of dogs barking. Half a dozen steppe sheepdogs, suddenly leaping out as though from ambush, with ferocious howling barks, flew to meet the chaise. All of them, extraordinarily furious, surrounded the chaise, with their shaggy spider-like muzzles and their eyes red with anger, and jostling against one another in their anger, raised a hoarse howl. They were filled with passionate hatred of the horses, of the chaise, and of the human beings, and seemed ready to tear them into pieces. Deniska, who was fond of teasing and beating, was delighted at the chance of it, and with a malignant expression bent over and lashed at the sheepdogs with his whip. The brutes growled more than ever, the horses flew on; and Yegorushka, who had difficulty in keeping his seat on the box, realized, looking at the dogs' eyes and teeth, that if

he fell down they would instantly tear him to bits; but he felt no fear and looked at them as malignantly as Deniska, and regretted that he had no whip in his hand.

The chaise came upon a flock of sheep.

“Stop!” cried Kuzmitchov. “Pull up! Woa!”

Deniska threw his whole body backwards and pulled up the horses.

“Come here!” Kuzmitchov shouted to the shepherd. “Call off the dogs, curse them!”

The old shepherd, tattered and barefoot, wearing a fur cap, with a dirty sack round his loins and a long crook in his hand—a regular figure from the Old Testament—called off the dogs, and taking off his cap, went up to the chaise. Another similar Old Testament figure was standing motionless at the other end of the flock, staring without interest at the travellers.

“Whose sheep are these?” asked Kuzmitchov.

“Varlamov’s,” the old man answered in a loud voice.

“Varlamov’s,” repeated the shepherd standing at the other end of the flock.

“Did Varlamov come this way yesterday or not?”

“He did not; his clerk came.…”

“Drive on!”

The chaise rolled on and the shepherds, with their angry dogs, were left behind. Yegorushka gazed listlessly at the lilac distance in front, and it began to seem as though the windmill, waving its sails, were getting nearer. It became bigger and bigger, grew quite large, and now he could distinguish clearly its two sails. One sail was old and patched, the other had only lately been made of new wood and glistened in the sun. The chaise drove straight on, while the windmill, for some reason, began retreating to the left. They drove on and on, and the windmill kept moving away to the left, and still did not disappear.

“A fine windmill Boltva has put up for his son,” observed Deniska.

“And how is it we don’t see his farm?”

“It is that way, beyond the creek.”

Boltva’s farm, too, soon came into sight, but yet the windmill did not retreat, did not drop behind; it still watched Yegorushka with its shining sail and waved. What a sorcerer!

II

Towards midday the chaise turned off the road to the right; it went on a little way at walking pace and then stopped. Yegorushka heard a soft, very caressing gurgle, and felt a different air breathe on his face with a cool velvety touch. Through a little pipe of hemlock stuck there by some unknown benefactor, water was running in a thin trickle from a low hill, put together by nature of huge monstrous stones. It fell to the ground, and limpid, sparkling gaily in the sun, and softly murmuring as though fancying itself a great tempestuous torrent, flowed swiftly away to the left. Not far from its source the little stream spread itself out into a pool; the burning sunbeams and the parched soil greedily drank it up and sucked away its strength; but a little further on it must have mingled with another rivulet, for a hundred paces away thick reeds showed green and luxuriant along its course, and three snipe flew up from them with a loud cry as the chaise drove by.

The travellers got out to rest by the stream and feed the horses. Kuzmitchov, Father Christopher and Yegorushka sat down on a mat in the narrow strip of shade cast by the chaise and the unharnessed horses. The nice pleasant thought that the heat had imprinted in Father Christopher's brain craved expression after he had had a drink of water and eaten a hard-boiled egg. He bent a friendly look upon Yegorushka, munched, and began:

"I studied too, my boy; from the earliest age God instilled into me good sense and understanding, so that while I was just such a lad as you I was beyond others, a comfort to my parents and preceptors by my good sense. Before I was fifteen I could speak and make verses in Latin, just as in Russian. I was the crosier-bearer to his Holiness Bishop Christopher. After mass one day, as I remember it was the patron saint's day of His Majesty Tsar Alexandr Pavlovitch of blessed memory, he unrobed at the altar, looked kindly at me and asked, '*Puer bone, quam appelaris?*' And I answered, '*Christopherus sum;*' and he said, '*Ergo connominati sumus*'—that is, that we were namesakes… Then he asked in Latin, 'Whose son are you?' To which I answered, also in Latin, that I was the son of deacon Sireysky of the village of Lebedinskoe. Seeing my

readiness and the clearness of my answers, his Holiness blessed me and said, ‘Write to your father that I will not forget him, and that I will keep you in view.’ The holy priests and fathers who were standing round the altar, hearing our discussion in Latin, were not a little surprised, and everyone expressed his pleasure in praise of me. Before I had moustaches, my boy, I could read Latin, Greek, and French; I knew philosophy, mathematics, secular history, and all the sciences. The Lord gave me a marvellous memory. Sometimes, if I read a thing once or twice, I knew it by heart. My preceptors and patrons were amazed, and so they expected I should make a learned man, a luminary of the Church. I did think of going to Kiev to continue my studies, but my parents did not approve. ‘You’ll be studying all your life,’ said my father; ‘when shall we see you finished?’ Hearing such words, I gave up study and took a post.… Of course, I did not become a learned man, but then I did not disobey my parents; I was a comfort to them in their old age and gave them a creditable funeral. Obedience is more than fasting and prayer.

“I suppose you have forgotten all your learning?” observed Kuzmitchov.

“I should think so! Thank God, I have reached my eightieth year! Something of philosophy and rhetoric I do remember, but languages and mathematics I have quite forgotten.”

Father Christopher screwed up his eyes, thought a minute and said in an undertone:

“What is a substance? A creature is a self-existing object, not requiring anything else for its completion.”

He shook his head and laughed with feeling.

“Spiritual nourishment!” he said. “Of a truth matter nourishes the flesh and spiritual nourishment the soul!”

“Learning is all very well,” sighed Kuzmitchov, “but if we don’t overtake Varlamov, learning won’t do much for us.”

“A man isn’t a needle—we shall find him. He must be going his rounds in these parts.”

Among the sedge were flying the three snipe they had seen before, and in their plaintive cries there was a note of alarm and vexation at having been driven away from the stream. The horses were steadily munching and snorting. Deniska walked about by them and, trying to appear indifferent to the cucumbers, pies, and eggs that the gentry were eating, he concentrated himself on the gadflies and horseflies that were fastening upon the horses’ backs and bellies; he squashed his victims apathetically,

emitting a peculiar, fiendishly triumphant, guttural sound, and when he missed them cleared his throat with an air of vexation and looked after every lucky one that escaped death.

"Deniska, where are you? Come and eat," said Kuzmitchov, heaving a deep sigh, a sign that he had had enough.

Deniska diffidently approached the mat and picked out five thick and yellow cucumbers (he did not venture to take the smaller and fresher ones), took two hard-boiled eggs that looked dark and were cracked, then irresolutely, as though afraid he might get a blow on his outstretched hand, touched a pie with his finger.

"Take them, take them," Kuzmitchov urged him on.

Deniska took the pies resolutely, and, moving some distance away, sat down on the grass with his back to the chaise. At once there was such a sound of loud munching that even the horses turned round to look suspiciously at Deniska.

After his meal Kuzmitchov took a sack containing something out of the chaise and said to Yegorushka:

"I am going to sleep, and you mind that no one takes the sack from under my head."

Father Christopher took off his cassock, his girdle, and his full coat, and Yegorushka, looking at him, was dumb with astonishment. He had never imagined that priests wore trousers, and Father Christopher had on real canvas trousers thrust into high boots, and a short striped jacket. Looking at him, Yegorushka thought that in this costume, so unsuitable to his dignified position, he looked with his long hair and beard very much like Robinson Crusoe. After taking off their outer garments Kuzmitchov and Father Christopher lay down in the shade under the chaise, facing one another, and closed their eyes. Deniska, who had finished munching, stretched himself out on his back and also closed his eyes.

"You look out that no one takes away the horses!" he said to Yegorushka, and at once fell asleep.

Stillness reigned. There was no sound except the munching and snorting of the horses and the snoring of the sleepers; somewhere far away a lapwing wailed, and from time to time there sounded the shrill cries of the three snipe who had flown up to see whether their uninvited visitors had gone away; the rivulet babbled, lisping softly, but all these sounds did not break the stillness, did not stir the stagnation, but, on the contrary, lulled all nature to slumber.

Yegorushka, gasping with the heat, which was particularly oppressive after a meal, ran to the sedge and from there surveyed the country. He saw exactly the same as he had in the morning: the plain, the low hills, the sky, the lilac distance; only the hills stood nearer; and he could not see the windmill, which had been left far behind. From behind the rocky hill from which the stream flowed rose another, smoother and broader; a little hamlet of five or six homesteads clung to it. No people, no trees, no shade were to be seen about the huts; it looked as though the hamlet had expired in the burning air and was dried up. To while away the time Yegorushka caught a grasshopper in the grass, held it in his closed hand to his ear, and spent a long time listening to the creature playing on its instrument. When he was weary of its music he ran after a flock of yellow butterflies who were flying towards the sedge on the watercourse, and found himself again beside the chaise, without noticing how he came there. His uncle and Father Christopher were sound asleep; their sleep would be sure to last two or three hours till the horses had rested.… How was he to get through that long time, and where was he to get away from the heat? A hard problem.… Mechanically Yegorushka put his lips to the trickle that ran from the waterpipe; there was a chilliness in his mouth and there was the smell of hemlock. He drank at first eagerly, then went on with effort till the sharp cold had run from his mouth all over his body and the water was spilt on his shirt. Then he went up to the chaise and began looking at the sleeping figures. His uncle's face wore, as before, an expression of businesslike reserve. Fanatically devoted to his work, Kuzmitchov always, even in his sleep and at church when they were singing, "Like the Cherubim," thought about his business and could never forget it for a moment; and now he was probably dreaming about bales of wool, wagons, prices, Varlamov.… Father Christopher, now, a soft, frivolous and absurd person, had never all his life been conscious of anything which could, like a boa-constrictor, coil about his soul and hold it tight. In all the numerous enterprises he had undertaken in his day what attracted him was not so much the business itself, but the bustle and the contact with other people involved in every undertaking. Thus, in the present expedition, he was not so much interested in wool, in Varlamov, and in prices, as in the long journey, the conversations on the way, the sleeping under a chaise, and the meals at odd times.… And now, judging from his face, he must have been dreaming of Bishop Christopher, of the Latin discussion, of his wife, of puffs and cream and all sorts of things that Kuzmitchov could not possibly dream of.

While Yegorushka was watching their sleeping faces he suddenly heard a soft singing; somewhere at a distance a woman was singing, and it was difficult to tell where and in what direction. The song was subdued, dreary and melancholy, like a dirge, and hardly audible, and seemed to come first from the right, then from the left, then from above, and then from underground, as though an unseen spirit were hovering over the steppe and singing. Yegorushka looked about him, and could not make out where the strange song came from. Then as he listened he began to fancy that the grass was singing; in its song, withered and half-dead, it was without words, but plaintively and passionately, urging that it was not to blame, that the sun was burning it for no fault of its own; it urged that it ardently longed to live, that it was young and might have been beautiful but for the heat and the drought; it was guiltless, but yet it prayed forgiveness and protested that it was in anguish, sad and sorry for itself.…

Yegorushka listened for a little, and it began to seem as though this dreary, mournful song made the air hotter, more suffocating and more stagnant.… To drown the singing he ran to the sedge, humming to himself and trying to make a noise with his feet. From there he looked about in all directions and found out who was singing. Near the furthest hut in the hamlet stood a peasant woman in a short petticoat, with long thin legs like a heron. She was sowing something. A white dust floated languidly from her sieve down the hillock. Now it was evident that she was singing. A couple of yards from her a little bareheaded boy in nothing but a smock was standing motionless. As though fascinated by the song, he stood stock-still, staring away into the distance, probably at Yegorushka’s crimson shirt.

The song ceased. Yegorushka sauntered back to the chaise, and to while away the time went again to the trickle of water.

And again there was the sound of the dreary song. It was the same long-legged peasant woman in the hamlet over the hill. Yegorushka’s boredom came back again. He left the pipe and looked upwards. What he saw was so unexpected that he was a little frightened. Just above his head on one of the big clumsy stones stood a chubby little boy, wearing nothing but a shirt, with a prominent stomach and thin legs, the same boy who had been standing before by the peasant woman. He was gazing with open mouth and unblinking eyes at Yegorushka’s crimson shirt and at the chaise, with a look of blank astonishment and even fear, as though he saw before him creatures of another world. The red colour of the shirt charmed and allured him. But the chaise and the men sleeping under it

excited his curiosity; perhaps he had not noticed how the agreeable red colour and curiosity had attracted him down from the hamlet, and now probably he was surprised at his own boldness. For a long while Yegorushka stared at him, and he at Yegorushka. Both were silent and conscious of some awkwardness. After a long silence Yegorushka asked:

"What's your name?"

The stranger's cheeks puffed out more than ever; he pressed his back against the rock, opened his eyes wide, moved his lips, and answered in a husky bass: "Tit!"

The boys said not another word to each other; after a brief silence, still keeping his eyes fixed on Yegorushka, the mysterious Tit kicked up one leg, felt with his heel for a niche and clambered up the rock; from that point he ascended to the next rock, staggering backwards and looking intently at Yegorushka, as though afraid he might hit him from behind, and so made his way upwards till he disappeared altogether behind the crest of the hill.

After watching him out of sight, Yegorushka put his arms round his knees and leaned his head on them.… The burning sun scorched the back of his head, his neck, and his spine. The melancholy song died away, then floated again on the stagnant stifling air. The rivulet gurgled monotonously, the horses munched, and time dragged on endlessly, as though it, too, were stagnant and had come to a standstill. It seemed as though a hundred years had passed since the morning. Could it be that God's world, the chaise and the horses would come to a standstill in that air, and, like the hills, turn to stone and remain forever in one spot? Yegorushka raised his head, and with smarting eyes looked before him; the lilac distance, which till then had been motionless, began heaving, and with the sky floated away into the distance.… It drew after it the brown grass, the sedge, and with extraordinary swiftness Yegorushka floated after the flying distance. Some force noiselessly drew him onwards, and the heat and the wearisome song flew after in pursuit. Yegorushka bent his head and shut his eyes.…

Deniska was the first to wake up. Something must have bitten him, for he jumped up, quickly scratched his shoulder and said:

"Plague take you, cursed idolater!"

Then he went to the brook, had a drink and slowly washed. His splashing and puffing roused Yegorushka from his lethargy. The boy looked at his wet face with drops of water and big freckles which made it look like marble, and asked:

"Shall we soon be going?"

Deniska looked at the height of the sun and answered:

"I expect so."

He dried himself with the tail of his shirt and, making a very serious face, hopped on one leg.

"I say, which of us will get to the sedge first?" he said.

Yegorushka was exhausted by the heat and drowsiness, but he raced off after him all the same. Deniska was in his twentieth year, was a coachman and going to be married, but he had not left off being a boy. He was very fond of flying kites, chasing pigeons, playing knuckle-bones, running races, and always took part in children's games and disputes. No sooner had his master turned his back or gone to sleep than Deniska would begin doing something such as hopping on one leg or throwing stones. It was hard for any grown-up person, seeing the genuine enthusiasm with which he frolicked about in the society of children, to resist saying, "What a baby!" Children, on the other hand, saw nothing strange in the invasion of their domain by the big coachman. "Let him play," they thought, "as long as he doesn't fight!" In the same way little dogs see nothing strange in it when a simple-hearted big dog joins their company uninvited and begins playing with them.

Deniska outstripped Yegorushka, and was evidently very much pleased at having done so. He winked at him, and to show that he could hop on one leg any distance, suggested to Yegorushka that he should hop with him along the road and from there, without resting, back to the chaise. Yegorushka declined this suggestion, for he was very much out of breath and exhausted.

All at once Deniska looked very grave, as he did not look even when Kuzmitchov gave him a scolding or threatened him with a stick; listening intently, he dropped quietly on one knee and an expression of sternness and alarm came into his face, such as one sees in people who hear heretical talk. He fixed his eyes on one spot, raised his hand curved into a hollow, and suddenly fell on his stomach on the ground and slapped the hollow of his hand down upon the grass.

"Caught!" he wheezed triumphantly, and, getting up, lifted a big grasshopper to Yegorushka's eyes.

The two boys stroked the grasshopper's broad green back with their fingers and touched his antenna, supposing that this would please the creature. Then Deniska caught a fat fly that had been sucking blood and offered it to the grasshopper. The latter moved his huge jaws, that were like the visor of a helmet, with the utmost unconcern, as though he had been long acquainted with Deniska, and bit off the fly's stomach. They

let him go. With a flash of the pink lining of his wings, he flew down into the grass and at once began his churring notes again. They let the fly go, too. It preened its wings, and without its stomach flew off to the horses.

A loud sigh was heard from under the chaise. It was Kuzmitchov waking up. He quickly raised his head, looked uneasily into the distance, and from that look, which passed by Yegorushka and Deniska without sympathy or interest, it could be seen that his thought on awaking was of the wool and of Varlamov.

“Father Christopher, get up; it is time to start,” he said anxiously. “Wake up; we’ve slept too long as it is! Deniska, put the horses in.”

Father Christopher woke up with the same smile with which he had fallen asleep; his face looked creased and wrinkled from sleep, and seemed only half the size. After washing and dressing, he proceeded without haste to take out of his pocket a little greasy psalter; and standing with his face towards the east, began in a whisper repeating the psalms of the day and crossing himself.

“Father Christopher,” said Kuzmitchov reproachfully, “it’s time to start; the horses are ready, and here are you,… upon my word.”

“In a minute, in a minute,” muttered Father Christopher. “I must read the psalms.… I haven’t read them today.”

“The psalms can wait.”

“Ivan Ivanitch, that is my rule every day.… I can’t…”

“God will overlook it.”

For a full quarter of an hour Father Christopher stood facing the east and moving his lips, while Kuzmitchov looked at him almost with hatred and impatiently shrugged his shoulders. He was particularly irritated when, after every “Hallelujah,” Father Christopher drew a long breath, rapidly crossed himself and repeated three times, intentionally raising his voice so that the others might cross themselves, “Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah! Glory be to Thee, O Lord!” At last he smiled, looked upwards at the sky, and, putting the psalter in his pocket, said:

“Finis!”

A minute later the chaise had started on the road. As though it were going backwards and not forwards, the travellers saw the same scene as they had before midday.

The low hills were still plunged in the lilac distance, and no end could be seen to them. There were glimpses of high grass and heaps of stones; strips of stubble land passed by them and still the same rooks, the same hawk, moving its wings with slow dignity, moved over the steppe. The

air was more sultry than ever; from the sultry heat and the stillness submissive nature was spellbound into silence.… No wind, no fresh cheering sound, no cloud.

But at last, when the sun was beginning to sink into the west, the steppe, the hills and the air could bear the oppression no longer, and, driven out of all patience, exhausted, tried to fling off the yoke. A fleecy ashen-grey cloud unexpectedly appeared behind the hills. It exchanged glances with the steppe, as though to say, “Here I am,” and frowned. Suddenly something burst in the stagnant air; there was a violent squall of wind which whirled round and round, roaring and whistling over the steppe. At once a murmur rose from the grass and last year’s dry herbage, the dust curled in spiral eddies over the road, raced over the steppe, and carrying with it straws, dragon flies and feathers, rose up in a whirling black column towards the sky and darkened the sun. Prickly uprooted plants ran stumbling and leaping in all directions over the steppe, and one of them got caught in the whirlwind, turned round and round like a bird, flew towards the sky, and turning into a little black speck, vanished from sight. After it flew another, and then a third, and Yegorushka saw two of them meet in the blue height and clutch at one another as though they were wrestling.

A bustard flew up by the very road. Fluttering his wings and his tail, he looked, bathed in the sunshine, like an angler’s glittering tin fish or a waterfly flashing so swiftly over the water that its wings cannot be told from its antenna, which seem to be growing before, behind and on all sides.… Quivering in the air like an insect with a shimmer of bright colours, the bustard flew high up in a straight line, then, probably frightened by a cloud of dust, swerved to one side, and for a long time the gleam of his wings could be seen.…

Then a corncrake flew up from the grass, alarmed by the hurricane and not knowing what was the matter. It flew with the wind and not against it, like all the other birds, so that all its feathers were ruffled up and it was puffed out to the size of a hen and looked very angry and impressive. Only the rooks who had grown old on the steppe and were accustomed to its vagaries hovered calmly over the grass, or taking no notice of anything, went on unconcernedly pecking with their stout beaks at the hard earth.

There was a dull roll of thunder beyond the hills; there came a whiff of fresh air. Deniska gave a cheerful whistle and lashed his horses. Father Christopher and Kuzmitchov held their hats and looked intently towards the hills.… How pleasant a shower of rain would have been!

One effort, one struggle more, and it seemed the steppe would have got the upper hand. But the unseen oppressive force gradually riveted its fetters on the wind and the air, laid the dust, and the stillness came back again as though nothing had happened, the cloud hid, the sunbaked hills frowned submissively, the air grew calm, and only somewhere the troubled lapwings wailed and lamented their destiny.…

Soon after that the evening came on.

III

In the dusk of evening a big house of one storey, with a rusty iron roof and with dark windows, came into sight. This house was called a posting-inn, though it had nothing like a stableyard, and it stood in the middle of the steppe, with no kind of enclosure round it. A little to one side of it a wretched little cherry orchard shut in by a hurdle fence made a dark patch, and under the windows stood sleepy sunflowers drooping their heavy heads. From the orchard came the clatter of a little toy windmill, set there to frighten away hares by the rattle. Nothing more could be seen near the house, and nothing could be heard but the steppe. The chaise had scarcely stopped at the porch with an awning over it, when from the house there came the sound of cheerful voices, one a man's, another a woman's; there was the creak of a swing-door, and in a flash a tall gaunt figure, swinging its arms and fluttering its coat, was standing by the chaise. This was the innkeeper, Moisey Moisevitch, a man no longer young, with a very pale face and a handsome beard as black as charcoal. He was wearing a threadbare black coat, which hung flapping on his narrow shoulders as though on a hatstand, and fluttered its skirts like wings every time Moisey Moisevitch flung up his hands in delight or horror. Besides his coat the innkeeper was wearing full white trousers, not stuck into his boots, and a velvet waistcoat with brown flowers on it that looked like gigantic bugs.

Moisey Moisevitch was at first dumb with excess of feeling on recognizing the travellers, then he clasped his hands and uttered a moan. His coat swung its skirts, his back bent into a bow, and his pale face twisted into a smile that suggested that to see the chaise was not merely a pleasure to him, but actually a joy so sweet as to be painful.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" he began in a thin singsong voice, breathless, fussing about and preventing the travellers from getting out of the chaise by his antics. "What a happy day for me! Oh, what am I to do now? Ivan Ivanitch! Father Christopher! What a pretty little gentleman sitting on the box, God strike me dead! Oh, my goodness! why am I standing here instead of asking the visitors indoors? Please walk in, I humbly beg

you.… You are kindly welcome! Give me all your things.… Oh, my goodness me!”

Moisey Moisevitch, who was rummaging in the chaise and assisting the travellers to alight, suddenly turned back and shouted in a voice as frantic and choking as though he were drowning and calling for help:

“Solomon! Solomon!”

“Solomon! Solomon!” a woman’s voice repeated indoors.

The swing-door creaked, and in the doorway appeared a rather short young Jew with a big beak-like nose, with a bald patch surrounded by rough red curly hair; he was dressed in a short and very shabby reefer jacket, with rounded lappets and short sleeves, and in short serge trousers, so that he looked skimpy and short-tailed like an unfledged bird. This was Solomon, the brother of Moisey Moisevitch. He went up to the chaise, smiling rather queerly, and did not speak or greet the travellers.

“Ivan Ivanitch and Father Christopher have come,” said Moisey Moisevitch in a tone as though he were afraid his brother would not believe him. “Dear, dear! What a surprise! Such honoured guests to have come us so suddenly! Come, take their things, Solomon. Walk in, honoured guests.”

A little later Kuzmitchov, Father Christopher, and Yegorushka were sitting in a big gloomy empty room at an old oak table. The table was almost in solitude, for, except a wide sofa covered with torn American leather and three chairs, there was no other furniture in the room. And, indeed, not everybody would have given the chairs that name. They were a pitiful semblance of furniture, covered with American leather that had seen its best days, and with backs bent backwards at an unnaturally acute angle, so that they looked like children’s sledges. It was hard to imagine what had been the unknown carpenter’s object in bending the chairbacks so mercilessly, and one was tempted to imagine that it was not the carpenter’s fault, but that some athletic visitor had bent the chairs like this as a feat, then had tried to bend them back again and had made them worse. The room looked gloomy, the walls were grey, the ceilings and the cornices were grimy; on the floor were chinks and yawning holes that were hard to account for (one might have fancied they were made by the heel of the same athlete), and it seemed as though the room would still have been dark if a dozen lamps had hung in it. There was nothing approaching an ornament on the walls or the windows. On one wall, however, there hung a list of regulations of some sort under a two-headed eagle in a grey wooden frame, and on another wall in the same

sort of frame an engraving with the inscription, “The Indifference of Man.” What it was to which men were indifferent it was impossible to make out, as the engraving was very dingy with age and was extensively flyblown. There was a smell of something decayed and sour in the room.

As he led the visitors into the room, Moisey Moisevitch went on wriggling, gesticulating, shrugging and uttering joyful exclamations; he considered these antics necessary in order to seem polite and agreeable.

“When did our wagons go by?” Kuzmitchov asked.

“One party went by early this morning, and the other, Ivan Ivanitch, put up here for dinner and went on towards evening.”

“Ah!… Has Varlamov been by or not?”

“No, Ivan Ivanitch. His clerk, Grigory Yegoritch, went by yesterday morning and said that he had to be today at the Molokans’ farm.”

“Good! so we will go after the wagons directly and then on to the Molokans’.”

“Mercy on us, Ivan Ivanitch!” Moisey Moisevitch cried in horror, flinging up his hands. “Where are you going for the night? You will have a nice little supper and stay the night, and tomorrow morning, please God, you can go on and overtake anyone you like.”

“There is no time for that.… Excuse me, Moisey Moisevitch, another time; but now I must make haste. We’ll stay a quarter of an hour and then go on; we can stay the night at the Molokans’.”

“A quarter of an hour!” squealed Moisey Moisevitch. “Have you no fear of God, Ivan Ivanitch? You will compel me to hide your caps and lock the door! You must have a cup of tea and a snack of something, anyway.”

“We have no time for tea,” said Kuzmitchov.

Moisey Moisevitch bent his head on one side, crooked his knees, and put his open hands before him as though warding off a blow, while with a smile of agonized sweetness he began imploring:

“Ivan Ivanitch! Father Christopher! Do be so good as to take a cup of tea with me. Surely I am not such a bad man that you can’t even drink tea in my house? Ivan Ivanitch!”

“Well, we may just as well have a cup of tea,” said Father Christopher, with a sympathetic smile; “that won’t keep us long.”

“Very well,” Kuzmitchov assented.

Moisey Moisevitch, in a fluster uttered an exclamation of joy, and shrugging as though he had just stepped out of cold weather into warm, ran to the door and cried in the same frantic voice in which he had called Solomon:

“Rosa! Rosa! Bring the samovar!”

A minute later the door opened, and Solomon came into the room carrying a large tray in his hands. Setting the tray on the table, he looked away sarcastically with the same queer smile as before. Now, by the light of the lamp, it was possible to see his smile distinctly; it was very complex, and expressed a variety of emotions, but the predominant element in it was undisguised contempt. He seemed to be thinking of something ludicrous and silly, to be feeling contempt and dislike, to be pleased at something and waiting for the favourable moment to turn something into ridicule and to burst into laughter. His long nose, his thick lips, and his sly prominent eyes seemed tense with the desire to laugh. Looking at his face, Kuzmitchov smiled ironically and asked:

“Solomon, why did you not come to our fair at N—— this summer, and act some Jewish scenes?”

Two years before, as Yegorushka remembered very well, at one of the booths at the fair at N——, Solomon had performed some scenes of Jewish life, and his acting had been a great success. The allusion to this made no impression whatever upon Solomon. Making no answer, he went out and returned a little later with the samovar.

When he had done what he had to do at the table he moved a little aside, and, folding his arms over his chest and thrusting out one leg, fixed his sarcastic eyes on Father Christopher. There was something defiant, haughty, and contemptuous in his attitude, and at the same time it was comic and pitiful in the extreme, because the more impressive his attitude the more vividly it showed up his short trousers, his bobtail coat, his caricature of a nose, and his birdlike plucked-looking little figure.

Moisey Moisevitch brought a footstool from the other room and sat down a little way from the table.

“I wish you a good appetite! Tea and sugar!” he began, trying to entertain his visitors. “I hope you will enjoy it. Such rare guests, such rare ones; it is years since I last saw Father Christopher. And will no one tell me who is this nice little gentleman?” he asked, looking tenderly at Yegorushka.

“He is the son of my sister, Olga Ivanovna,” answered Kuzmitchov.

“And where is he going?”

“To school. We are taking him to a high school.”

In his politeness, Moisey Moisevitch put on a look of wonder and wagged his head expressively.

“Ah, that is a fine thing,” he said, shaking his finger at the samovar. “That’s a fine thing. You will come back from the high school such a

gentleman that we shall all take off our hats to you. You will be wealthy and wise and so grand that your mamma will be delighted. Oh, that's a fine thing!"

He paused a little, stroked his knees, and began again in a jocose and deferential tone.

"You must excuse me, Father Christopher, but I am thinking of writing to the bishop to tell him you are robbing the merchants of their living. I shall take a sheet of stamped paper and write that I suppose Father Christopher is short of pence, as he has taken up with trade and begun selling wool."

"H'm, yes… it's a queer notion in my old age," said Father Christopher, and he laughed. "I have turned from priest to merchant, brother. I ought to be at home now saying my prayers, instead of galloping about the country like a Pharaoh in his chariot.… Vanity!"

"But it will mean a lot of pence!"

"Oh, I dare say! More kicks than halfpence, and serve me right. The wool's not mine, but my son-in-law Mikhail's!"

"Why doesn't he go himself?"

"Why, because… His mother's milk is scarcely dry upon his lips. He can buy wool all right, but when it comes to selling, he has no sense; he is young yet. He has wasted all his money; he wanted to grow rich and cut a dash, but he tried here and there, and no one would give him his price. And so the lad went on like that for a year, and then he came to me and said, 'Daddy, you sell the wool for me; be kind and do it! I am no good at the business!' And that is true enough. As soon as there is anything wrong then it's 'Daddy,' but till then they could get on without their dad. When he was buying he did not consult me, but now when he is in difficulties it's Daddy's turn. And what does his dad know about it? If it were not for Ivan Ivanitch, his dad could do nothing. I have a lot of worry with them."

"Yes; one has a lot of worry with one's children, I can tell you that," sighed Moisey Moisevitch. "I have six of my own. One needs schooling, another needs doctoring, and a third needs nursing, and when they grow up they are more trouble still. It is not only nowadays, it was the same in Holy Scripture. When Jacob had little children he wept, and when they grew up he wept still more bitterly."

"H'm, yes…" Father Christopher assented pensively, looking at his glass. "I have no cause myself to rail against the Lord. I have lived to the end of my days as any man might be thankful to live.… I have married my daughters to good men, my sons I have set up in life, and now I am

free; I have done my work and can go where I like. I live in peace with my wife. I eat and drink and sleep and rejoice in my grandchildren, and say my prayers and want nothing more. I live on the fat of the land, and don't need to curry favour with anyone. I have never had any trouble from childhood, and now suppose the Tsar were to ask me, 'What do you need? What would you like?' why, I don't need anything. I have everything I want and everything to be thankful for. In the whole town there is no happier man than I am. My only trouble is I have so many sins, but there—only God is without sin. That's right, isn't it?"

"No doubt it is."

"I have no teeth, of course; my poor old back aches; there is one thing and another,… asthma and that sort of thing.… I ache.… The flesh is weak, but then think of my age! I am in the eighties! One can't go on forever; one mustn't outstay one's welcome."

Father Christopher suddenly thought of something, spluttered into his glass and choked with laughter. Moisey Moisevitch laughed, too, from politeness, and he, too, cleared his throat.

"So funny!" said Father Christopher, and he waved his hand. "My eldest son Gavrila came to pay me a visit. He is in the medical line, and is a district doctor in the province of Tchernigov.… 'Very well…' I said to him, 'here I have asthma and one thing and another.… You are a doctor; cure your father!' He undressed me on the spot, tapped me, listened, and all sorts of tricks,… kneaded my stomach, and then he said, 'Dad, you ought to be treated with compressed air.'" Father Christopher laughed convulsively, till the tears came into his eyes, and got up.

"And I said to him, 'God bless your compressed air!'" he brought out through his laughter, waving both hands. "God bless your compressed air!"

Moisey Moisevitch got up, too, and with his hands on his stomach, went off into shrill laughter like the yap of a lapdog.

"God bless the compressed air!" repeated Father Christopher, laughing.

Moisey Moisevitch laughed two notes higher and so violently that he could hardly stand on his feet.

"Oh dear!" he moaned through his laughter. "Let me get my breath.… You'll be the death of me."

He laughed and talked, though at the same time he was casting timorous and suspicious looks at Solomon. The latter was standing in the same attitude and still smiling. To judge from his eyes and his smile, his contempt and hatred were genuine, but that was so out of keeping with

his plucked-looking figure that it seemed to Yegorushka as though he were putting on his defiant attitude and biting sarcastic smile to play the fool for the entertainment of their honoured guests.

After drinking six glasses of tea in silence, Kuzmitchov cleared a space before him on the table, took his bag, the one which he kept under his head when he slept under the chaise, untied the string and shook it. Rolls of paper notes were scattered out of the bag on the table.

"While we have the time, Father Christopher, let us reckon up," said Kuzmitchov.

Moisey Moisevitch was embarrassed at the sight of the money. He got up, and, as a man of delicate feeling unwilling to pry into other people's secrets, he went out of the room on tiptoe, swaying his arms. Solomon remained where he was.

"How many are there in the rolls of roubles?" Father Christopher began.

"The rouble notes are done up in fifties,… the three-rouble notes in nineties, the twenty-five and hundred roubles in thousands. You count out seven thousand eight hundred for Varlamov, and I will count out for Gusevitch. And mind you don't make a mistake…"

Yegorushka had never in his life seen so much money as was lying on the table before him. There must have been a great deal of money, for the roll of seven thousand eight hundred, which Father Christopher put aside for Varlamov, seemed very small compared with the whole heap. At any other time such a mass of money would have impressed Yegorushka, and would have moved him to reflect how many cracknels, buns and poppy-cakes could be bought for that money. Now he looked at it listlessly, only conscious of the disgusting smell of kerosene and rotten apples that came from the heap of notes. He was exhausted by the jolting ride in the chaise, tired out and sleepy. His head was heavy, his eyes would hardly keep open and his thoughts were tangled like threads. If it had been possible he would have been relieved to lay his head on the table, so as not to see the lamp and the fingers moving over the heaps of notes, and to have let his tired sleepy thoughts go still more at random. When he tried to keep awake, the light of the lamp, the cups and the fingers grew double, the samovar heaved and the smell of rotten apples seemed even more acrid and disgusting.

"Ah, money, money!" sighed Father Christopher, smiling. "You bring trouble! Now I expect my Mihailo is asleep and dreaming that I am going to bring him a heap of money like this."

“Your Mihailo Timofevitch is a man who doesn’t understand business,” said Kuzmitchov in an undertone; “he undertakes what isn’t his work, but you understand and can judge. You had better hand over your wool to me, as I have said already, and I would give you half a rouble above my own price—yes, I would, simply out of regard for you.…”

“No, Ivan Ivanitch.” Father Christopher sighed. “I thank you for your kindness.… Of course, if it were for me to decide, I shouldn’t think twice about it; but as it is, the wool is not mine, as you know.…”

Moisey Moisevitch came in on tiptoe. Trying from delicacy not to look at the heaps of money, he stole up to Yegorushka and pulled at his shirt from behind.

“Come along, little gentleman,” he said in an undertone, “come and see the little bear I can show you! Such a queer, cross little bear. Oo-oo!”

The sleepy boy got up and listlessly dragged himself after Moisey Moisevitch to see the bear. He went into a little room, where, before he saw anything, he felt he could not breathe from the smell of something sour and decaying, which was much stronger here than in the big room and probably spread from this room all over the house. One part of the room was occupied by a big bed, covered with a greasy quilt and another by a chest of drawers and heaps of rags of all kinds from a woman’s stiff petticoat to children’s little breeches and braces. A tallow candle stood on the chest of drawers.

Instead of the promised bear, Yegorushka saw a big fat Jewess with her hair hanging loose, in a red flannel skirt with black sprigs on it; she turned with difficulty in the narrow space between the bed and the chest of drawers and uttered drawn-out moaning as though she had toothache. On seeing Yegorushka, she made a doleful, woebegone face, heaved a long drawn-out sigh, and before he had time to look round, put to his lips a slice of bread smeared with honey.

“Eat it, dearie, eat it!” she said. “You are here without your mamma, and no one to look after you. Eat it up.”

Yegorushka did eat it, though after the goodies and poppy-cakes he had every day at home, he did not think very much of the honey, which was mixed with wax and bees’ wings. He ate while Moisey Moisevitch and the Jewess looked at him and sighed.

“Where are you going, dearie?” asked the Jewess.

“To school,” answered Yegorushka.

“And how many brothers and sisters have you got?”

“I am the only one; there are no others.”

“O-oh!” sighed the Jewess, and turned her eyes upward. “Poor mamma, poor mamma! How she will weep and miss you! We are going to send our Nahum to school in a year. O-oh!”

“Ah, Nahum, Nahum!” sighed Moisey Moisevitch, and the skin of his pale face twitched nervously. “And he is so delicate.”

The greasy quilt quivered, and from beneath it appeared a child’s curly head on a very thin neck; two black eyes gleamed and stared with curiosity at Yegorushka. Still sighing, Moisey Moisevitch and the Jewess went to the chest of drawers and began talking in Yiddish. Moisey Moisevitch spoke in a low bass undertone, and altogether his talk in Yiddish was like a continual “ghaal-ghaal-ghaal-ghaal,…” while his wife answered him in a shrill voice like a turkeycock’s, and the whole effect of her talk was something like “Too-too-too-too!” While they were consulting, another little curly head on a thin neck peeped out of the greasy quilt, then a third, then a fourth.… If Yegorushka had had a fertile imagination he might have imagined that the hundred-headed hydra was hiding under the quilt.

“Ghaal-ghaal-ghaal-ghaal!” said Moisey Moisevitch.

“Too-too-too-too!” answered the Jewess.

The consultation ended in the Jewess’s diving with a deep sigh into the chest of drawers, and, unwrapping some sort of green rag there, she took out a big rye cake made in the shape of a heart.

“Take it, dearie,” she said, giving Yegorushka the cake; “you have no mamma now—no one to give you nice things.”

Yegorushka stuck the cake in his pocket and staggered to the door, as he could not go on breathing the foul, sour air in which the innkeeper and his wife lived. Going back to the big room, he settled himself more comfortably on the sofa and gave up trying to check his straying thoughts.

As soon as Kuzmitchov had finished counting out the notes he put them back into the bag. He did not treat them very respectfully and stuffed them into the dirty sack without ceremony, as indifferently as though they had not been money but waste paper.

Father Christopher was talking to Solomon.

“Well, Solomon the Wise!” he said, yawning and making the sign of the cross over his mouth. “How is business?”

“What sort of business are you talking about?” asked Solomon, and he looked as fiendish, as though it were a hint of some crime on his part.

“Oh, things in general. What are you doing?”

“What am I doing?” Solomon repeated, and he shrugged his shoulders. “The same as everyone else.… You see, I am a menial, I am my brother’s servant; my brother’s the servant of the visitors; the visitors are Varlamov’s servants; and if I had ten millions, Varlamov would be my servant.”

“Why would he be your servant?”

“Why, because there isn’t a gentleman or millionaire who isn’t ready to lick the hand of a scabby Jew for the sake of making a kopeck. Now, I am a scabby Jew and a beggar. Everybody looks at me as though I were a dog, but if I had money Varlamov would play the fool before me just as Moisey does before you.”

Father Christopher and Kuzmitchov looked at each other. Neither of them understood Solomon. Kuzmitchov looked at him sternly and dryly, and asked:

“How can you compare yourself with Varlamov, you blockhead?”

“I am not such a fool as to put myself on a level with Varlamov,” answered Solomon, looking sarcastically at the speaker. “Though Varlamov is a Russian, he is at heart a scabby Jew; money and gain are all he lives for, but I threw my money in the stove! I don’t want money, or land, or sheep, and there is no need for people to be afraid of me and to take off their hats when I pass. So I am wiser than your Varlamov and more like a man!”

A little later Yegorushka, half asleep, heard Solomon in a hoarse hollow voice choked with hatred, in hurried stuttering phrases, talking about the Jews. At first he talked correctly in Russian, then he fell into the tone of a Jewish recitation, and began speaking as he had done at the fair with an exaggerated Jewish accent.

“Stop!…” Father Christopher said to him. “If you don’t like your religion you had better change it, but to laugh at it is a sin; it is only the lowest of the low who will make fun of his religion.”

“You don’t understand,” Solomon cut him short rudely. “I am talking of one thing and you are talking of something else.…”

“One can see you are a foolish fellow,” sighed Father Christopher. “I admonish you to the best of my ability, and you are angry. I speak to you like an old man quietly, and you answer like a turkeycock: ‘Bla—bla—bla!’ You really are a queer fellow.…”

Moisey Moisevitch came in. He looked anxiously at Solomon and at his visitors, and again the skin on his face quivered nervously. Yegorushka shook his head and looked about him; he caught a passing glimpse of Solomon’s face at the very moment when it was turned three-

quarters towards him and when the shadow of his long nose divided his left cheek in half; the contemptuous smile mingled with that shadow; the gleaming sarcastic eyes, the haughty expression, and the whole plucked-looking little figure, dancing and doubling itself before Yegorushka's eyes, made him now not like a buffoon, but like something one sometimes dreams of, like an evil spirit.

"What a ferocious fellow you've got here, Moisey Moisevitch! God bless him!" said Father Christopher with a smile. "You ought to find him a place or a wife or something.… There's no knowing what to make of him.…"

Kuzmitchov frowned angrily. Moisey Moisevitch looked uneasily and inquiringly at his brother and the visitors again.

"Solomon, go away!" he said shortly. "Go away!" and he added something in Yiddish. Solomon gave an abrupt laugh and went out.

"What was it?" Moisey Moisevitch asked Father Christopher anxiously.

"He forgets himself," answered Kuzmitchov. "He's rude and thinks too much of himself."

"I knew it!" Moisey Moisevitch cried in horror, clasping his hands. "Oh dear, oh dear!" he muttered in a low voice. "Be so kind as to excuse it, and don't be angry. He is such a queer fellow, such a queer fellow! Oh dear, oh dear! He is my own brother, but I have never had anything but trouble from him. You know he's…"

Moisey Moisevitch crooked his finger by his forehead and went on:

"He is not in his right mind;… he's hopeless. And I don't know what I am to do with him! He cares for nobody, he respects nobody, and is afraid of nobody.… You know he laughs at everybody, he says silly things, speaks familiarly to anyone. You wouldn't believe it, Varlamov came here one day and Solomon said such things to him that he gave us both a taste of his whip.… But why whip me? Was it my fault? God has robbed him of his wits, so it is God's will, and how am I to blame?"

Ten minutes passed and Moisey Moisevitch was still muttering in an undertone and sighing:

"He does not sleep at night, and is always thinking and thinking and thinking, and what he is thinking about God only knows. If you go to him at night he is angry and laughs. He doesn't like me either.… And there is nothing he wants! When our father died he left us each six thousand roubles. I bought myself an inn, married, and now I have children; and he burnt all his money in the stove. Such a pity, such a

pity! Why burn it? If he didn't want it he could give it to me, but why burn it?"

Suddenly the swing-door creaked and the floor shook under footsteps. Yegorushka felt a draught of cold air, and it seemed to him as though some big black bird had passed by him and had fluttered its wings close in his face. He opened his eyes.… His uncle was standing by the sofa with his sack in his hands ready for departure; Father Christopher, holding his broad-brimmed top-hat, was bowing to someone and smiling—not his usual soft kindly smile, but a respectful forced smile which did not suit his face at all—while Moisey Moisevitch looked as though his body had been broken into three parts, and he were balancing and doing his utmost not to drop to pieces. Only Solomon stood in the corner with his arms folded, as though nothing had happened, and smiled contemptuously as before.

"Your Excellency must excuse us for not being tidy," moaned Moisey Moisevitch with the agonizingly sweet smile, taking no more notice of Kuzmitchov or Father Christopher, but swaying his whole person so as to avoid dropping to pieces. "We are plain folks, your Excellency."

Yegorushka rubbed his eyes. In the middle of the room there really was standing an Excellency, in the form of a young plump and very beautiful woman in a black dress and a straw hat. Before Yegorushka had time to examine her features the image of the solitary graceful poplar he had seen that day on the hill for some reason came into his mind.

"Has Varlamov been here today?" a woman's voice inquired.

"No, your Excellency," said Moisey Moisevitch.

"If you see him tomorrow, ask him to come and see me for a minute."

All at once, quite unexpectedly, Yegorushka saw half an inch from his eyes velvety black eyebrows, big brown eyes, delicate feminine cheeks with dimples, from which smiles seemed radiating all over the face like sunbeams. There was a glorious scent.

"What a pretty boy!" said the lady. "Whose boy is it? Kazimir Mihalovitch, look what a charming fellow! Good heavens, he is asleep!"

And the lady kissed Yegorushka warmly on both cheeks, and he smiled and, thinking he was asleep, shut his eyes. The swing-door squeaked, and there was the sound of hurried footsteps, coming in and going out.

"Yegorushka, Yegorushka!" he heard two bass voices whisper. "Get up; it is time to start."

Somebody, it seemed to be Deniska, set him on his feet and led him by the arm. On the way he half-opened his eyes and once more saw the

beautiful lady in the black dress who had kissed him. She was standing in the middle of the room and watched him go out, smiling at him and nodding her head in a friendly way. As he got near the door he saw a handsome, stoutly built, dark man in a bowler hat and in leather gaiters. This must have been the lady's escort.

"Woa!" he heard from the yard.

At the front door Yegorushka saw a splendid new carriage and a pair of black horses. On the box sat a groom in livery, with a long whip in his hands. No one but Solomon came to see the travellers off. His face was tense with a desire to laugh; he looked as though he were waiting impatiently for the visitors to be gone, so that he might laugh at them without restraint.

"The Countess Dranitsky," whispered Father Christopher, clambering into the chaise.

"Yes, Countess Dranitsky," repeated Kuzmitchov, also in a whisper.

The impression made by the arrival of the countess was probably very great, for even Deniska spoke in a whisper, and only ventured to lash his bays and shout when the chaise had driven a quarter of a mile away and nothing could be seen of the inn but a dim light.

IV

Who was this elusive, mysterious Varlamov of whom people talked so much, whom Solomon despised, and whom even the beautiful countess needed? Sitting on the box beside Deniska, Yegorushka, half asleep, thought about this person. He had never seen him. But he had often heard of him and pictured him in his imagination. He knew that Varlamov possessed several tens of thousands of acres of land, about a hundred thousand sheep, and a great deal of money. Of his manner of life and occupation Yegorushka knew nothing, except that he was always "going his rounds in these parts," and he was always being looked for.

At home Yegorushka had heard a great deal of the Countess Dranitsky, too. She, too, had some tens of thousands of acres, a great many sheep, a stud farm and a great deal of money, but she did not "go rounds," but lived at home in a splendid house and grounds, about which Ivan Ivanitch, who had been more than once at the countess's on business, and other acquaintances told many marvellous tales; thus, for instance, they said that in the countess's drawing room, where the portraits of all the kings of Poland hung on the walls, there was a big table-clock in the form of a rock, on the rock a gold horse with diamond eyes, rearing, and on the horse the figure of a rider also of gold, who brandished his sword to right and to left whenever the clock struck. They said, too, that twice a year the countess used to give a ball, to which the gentry and officials of the whole province were invited, and to which even Varlamov used to come; all the visitors drank tea from silver samovars, ate all sorts of extraordinary things (they had strawberries and raspberries, for instance, in winter at Christmas), and danced to a band which played day and night.…

"And how beautiful she is," thought Yegorushka, remembering her face and smile.

Kuzmitchov, too, was probably thinking about the countess. For when the chaise had driven a mile and a half he said:

"But doesn't that Kazimir Mihalovitch plunder her right and left! The year before last when, do you remember, I bought some wool from her, he made over three thousand from my purchase alone."

“That is just what you would expect from a Pole,” said Father Christopher.

“And little does it trouble her. Young and foolish, as they say, her head is full of nonsense.”

Yegorushka, for some reason, longed to think of nothing but Varlamov and the countess, particularly the latter. His drowsy brain utterly refused ordinary thoughts, was in a cloud and retained only fantastic fairytale images, which have the advantage of springing into the brain of themselves without any effort on the part of the thinker, and completely vanishing of themselves at a mere shake of the head; and, indeed, nothing that was around him disposed to ordinary thoughts. On the right there were the dark hills which seemed to be screening something unseen and terrible; on the left the whole sky about the horizon was covered with a crimson glow, and it was hard to tell whether there was a fire somewhere, or whether it was the moon about to rise. As by day the distance could be seen, but its tender lilac tint had gone, quenched by the evening darkness, in which the whole steppe was hidden like Moisey Moisevitch’s children under the quilt.

Corncrakes and quails do not call in the July nights, the nightingale does not sing in the woodland marsh, and there is no scent of flowers, but still the steppe is lovely and full of life. As soon as the sun goes down and the darkness enfolds the earth, the day’s weariness is forgotten, everything is forgiven, and the steppe breathes a light sigh from its broad bosom. As though because the grass cannot see in the dark that it has grown old, a gay youthful twitter rises up from it, such as is not heard by day; chirruping, twittering, whistling, scratching, the basses, tenors and sopranos of the steppe all mingle in an incessant, monotonous roar of sound in which it is sweet to brood on memories and sorrows. The monotonous twitter soothes to sleep like a lullaby; you drive and feel you are falling asleep, but suddenly there comes the abrupt agitated cry of a wakeful bird, or a vague sound like a voice crying out in wonder “A-ah, a-ah!” and slumber closes one’s eyelids again. Or you drive by a little creek where there are bushes and hear the bird, called by the steppe dwellers “the sleeper,” call “Asleep, asleep, asleep!” while another laughs or breaks into trills of hysterical weeping—that is the owl. For whom do they call and who hears them on that plain, God only knows, but there is deep sadness and lamentation in their cry.… There is a scent of hay and dry grass and belated flowers, but the scent is heavy, sweetly mawkish and soft.

Everything can be seen through the mist, but it is hard to make out the colours and the outlines of objects. Everything looks different from what it is. You drive on and suddenly see standing before you right in the roadway a dark figure like a monk; it stands motionless, waiting, holding something in its hands.… Can it be a robber? The figure comes closer, grows bigger; now it is on a level with the chaise, and you see it is not a man, but a solitary bush or a great stone. Such motionless expectant figures stand on the low hills, hide behind the old barrows, peep out from the high grass, and they all look like human beings and arouse suspicion.

And when the moon rises the night becomes pale and dim. The mist seems to have passed away. The air is transparent, fresh and warm; one can see well in all directions and even distinguish the separate stalks of grass by the wayside. Stones and bits of pots can be seen at a long distance. The suspicious figures like monks look blacker against the light background of the night, and seem more sinister. More and more often in the midst of the monotonous chirruping there comes the sound of the “A-ah, a-ah!” of astonishment troubling the motionless air, and the cry of a sleepless or delirious bird. Broad shadows move across the plain like clouds across the sky, and in the inconceivable distance, if you look long and intently at it, misty monstrous shapes rise up and huddle one against another.… It is rather uncanny. One glances at the pale green, star-spangled sky on which there is no cloudlet, no spot, and understands why the warm air is motionless, why nature is on her guard, afraid to stir: she is afraid and reluctant to lose one instant of life. Of the unfathomable depth and infinity of the sky one can only form a conception at sea and on the steppe by night when the moon is shining. It is terribly lonely and caressing; it looks down languid and alluring, and its caressing sweetness makes one giddy.

You drive on for one hour, for a second.… You meet upon the way a silent old barrow or a stone figure put up God knows when and by whom; a nightbird floats noiselessly over the earth, and little by little those legends of the steppes, the tales of men you have met, the stories of some old nurse from the steppe, and all the things you have managed to see and treasure in your soul, come back to your mind. And then in the churring of insects, in the sinister figures, in the ancient barrows, in the blue sky, in the moonlight, in the flight of the nightbird, in everything you see and hear, triumphant beauty, youth, the fullness of power, and the passionate thirst for life begin to be apparent; the soul responds to the call of her lovely austere fatherland, and longs to fly over the steppes with the nightbird. And in the triumph of beauty, in the exuberance of

happiness you are conscious of yearning and grief, as though the steppe knew she was solitary, knew that her wealth and her inspiration were wasted for the world, not glorified in song, not wanted by anyone; and through the joyful clamour one hears her mournful, hopeless call for singers, singers!

"Woa! Good evening, Panteley! Is everything all right?"

"First-rate, Ivan Ivanitch!"

"Haven't you seen Varlamov, lads?"

"No, we haven't."

Yegorushka woke up and opened his eyes. The chaise had stopped. On the right the train of wagons stretched for a long way ahead on the road, and men were moving to and fro near them. All the wagons being loaded up with great bales of wool looked very high and fat, while the horses looked short-legged and little.

"Well, then, we shall go on to the Molokans'!" Kuzmitchov said aloud. "The Jew told us that Varlamov was putting up for the night at the Molokans'. So goodbye, lads! Good luck to you!"

"Goodbye, Ivan Ivanitch," several voices replied.

"I say, lads," Kuzmitchov cried briskly, "you take my little lad along with you! Why should he go jolting off with us for nothing? You put him on the bales, Panteley, and let him come on slowly, and we shall overtake you. Get down, Yegor! Go on; it's all right.…"

Yegorushka got down from the box-seat. Several hands caught him, lifted him high into the air, and he found himself on something big, soft, and rather wet with dew. It seemed to him now as though the sky were quite close and the earth far away.

"Hey, take his little coat!" Deniska shouted from somewhere far below.

His coat and bundle flung up from far below fell close to Yegorushka. Anxious not to think of anything, he quickly put his bundle under his head and covered himself with his coat, and stretching his legs out and shrinking a little from the dew, he laughed with content.

"Sleep, sleep, sleep,…" he thought.

"Don't be unkind to him, you devils!" he heard Deniska's voice below.

"Goodbye, lads; good luck to you," shouted Kuzmitchov. "I rely upon you!"

"Don't you be uneasy, Ivan Ivanitch!"

Deniska shouted to the horses, the chaise creaked and started, not along the road, but somewhere off to the side. For two minutes there was silence, as though the wagons were asleep and there was no sound except

the clanking of the pails tied on at the back of the chaise as it slowly died away in the distance. Then someone at the head of the wagons shouted:

"Kiruha! Sta-art!"

The foremost of the wagons creaked, then the second, then the third.… Yegorushka felt the wagon he was on sway and creak also. The wagons were moving. Yegorushka took a tighter hold of the cord with which the bales were tied on, laughed again with content, shifted the cake in his pocket, and fell asleep just as he did in his bed at home.…

When he woke up the sun had risen, it was screened by an ancient barrow, and, trying to shed its light upon the earth, it scattered its beams in all directions and flooded the horizon with gold. It seemed to Yegorushka that it was not in its proper place, as the day before it had risen behind his back, and now it was much more to his left.… And the whole landscape was different. There were no hills now, but on all sides, wherever one looked, there stretched the brown cheerless plain; here and there upon it small barrows rose up and rooks flew as they had done the day before. The belfries and huts of some village showed white in the distance ahead; as it was Sunday the Little Russians were at home baking and cooking—that could be seen by the smoke which rose from every chimney and hung, a dark blue transparent veil, over the village. In between the huts and beyond the church there were blue glimpses of a river, and beyond the river a misty distance. But nothing was so different from yesterday as the road. Something extraordinarily broad, spread out and titanic, stretched over the steppe by way of a road. It was a grey streak well trodden down and covered with dust, like all roads. Its width puzzled Yegorushka and brought thoughts of fairy tales to his mind. Who travelled along that road? Who needed so much space? It was strange and unintelligible. It might have been supposed that giants with immense strides, such as Ilya Muromets and Solovy the Brigand, were still surviving in Russia, and that their gigantic steeds were still alive. Yegorushka, looking at the road, imagined some half a dozen high chariots racing along side by side, like some he used to see in pictures in his Scripture history; these chariots were each drawn by six wild furious horses, and their great wheels raised a cloud of dust to the sky, while the horses were driven by men such as one may see in one's dreams or in imagination brooding over fairy tales. And if those figures had existed, how perfectly in keeping with the steppe and the road they would have been!

Telegraph-poles with two wires on them stretched along the right side of the road to its furthermost limit. Growing smaller and smaller they

disappeared near the village behind the huts and green trees, and then again came into sight in the lilac distance in the form of very small thin sticks that looked like pencils stuck into the ground. Hawks, falcons, and crows sat on the wires and looked indifferently at the moving wagons.

Yegorushka was lying in the last of the wagons, and so could see the whole string. There were about twenty wagons, and there was a driver to every three wagons. By the last wagon, the one in which Yegorushka was, there walked an old man with a grey beard, as short and lean as Father Christopher, but with a sunburnt, stern and brooding face. It is very possible that the old man was not stern and not brooding, but his red eyelids and his sharp long nose gave his face a stern frigid expression such as is common with people in the habit of continually thinking of serious things in solitude. Like Father Christopher he was wearing a wide-brimmed top-hat, not like a gentleman's, but made of brown felt, and in shape more like a cone with the top cut off than a real top-hat. Probably from a habit acquired in cold winters, when he must more than once have been nearly frozen as he trudged beside the wagons, he kept slapping his thighs and stamping with his feet as he walked. Noticing that Yegorushka was awake, he looked at him and said, shrugging his shoulders as though from the cold:

"Ah, you are awake, youngster! So you are the son of Ivan Ivanitch?"

"No; his nephew.…"

"Nephew of Ivan Ivanitch? Here I have taken off my boots and am hopping along barefoot. My feet are bad; they are swollen, and it's easier without my boots… easier, youngster… without boots, I mean.… So you are his nephew? He is a good man; no harm in him.… God give him health.… No harm in him… I mean Ivan Ivanitch.… He has gone to the Molokans'.… O Lord, have mercy upon us!"

The old man talked, too, as though it were very cold, pausing and not opening his mouth properly; and he mispronounced the labial consonants, stuttering over them as though his lips were frozen. As he talked to Yegorushka he did not once smile, and he seemed stern.

Two wagons ahead of them there walked a man wearing a long reddish-brown coat, a cap and high boots with sagging bootlegs and carrying a whip in his hand. This was not an old man, only about forty. When he looked round Yegorushka saw a long red face with a scanty goat-beard and a spongy looking swelling under his right eye. Apart from this very ugly swelling, there was another peculiar thing about him which caught the eye at once: in his left hand he carried a whip, while he waved the right as though he were conducting an unseen choir; from

time to time he put the whip under his arm, and then he conducted with both hands and hummed something to himself.

The next driver was a long rectilinear figure with extremely sloping shoulders and a back as flat as a board. He held himself as stiffly erect as though he were marching or had swallowed a yard measure. His hands did not swing as he walked, but hung down as if they were straight sticks, and he strode along in a wooden way, after the manner of toy soldiers, almost without bending his knees, and trying to take as long steps as possible. While the old man or the owner of the spongy swelling were taking two steps he succeeded in taking only one, and so it seemed as though he were walking more slowly than any of them, and would drop behind. His face was tied up in a rag, and on his head something stuck up that looked like a monk's peaked cap; he was dressed in a short Little Russian coat, with full dark blue trousers and bark shoes.

Yegorushka did not even distinguish those that were farther on. He lay on his stomach, picked a little hole in the bale, and, having nothing better to do, began twisting the wool into a thread. The old man trudging along below him turned out not to be so stern as one might have supposed from his face. Having begun a conversation, he did not let it drop.

"Where are you going?" he asked, stamping with his feet.

"To school," answered Yegorushka.

"To school? Aha!… Well, may the Queen of Heaven help you. Yes. One brain is good, but two are better. To one man God gives one brain, to another two brains, and to another three.… To another three, that is true.… One brain you are born with, one you get from learning, and a third with a good life. So you see, my lad, it is a good thing if a man has three brains. Living is easier for him, and, what's more, dying is, too. Dying is, too.… And we shall all die for sure."

The old man scratched his forehead, glanced upwards at Yegorushka with his red eyes, and went on:

"Maxim Nikolaitch, the gentleman from Slavyanoserbsk, brought a little lad to school, too, last year. I don't know how he is getting on there in studying the sciences, but he was a nice good little lad.… God give them help, they are nice gentlemen. Yes, he, too, brought his boy to school.… In Slavyanoserbsk there is no establishment, I suppose, for study. No.… But it is a nice town.… There's an ordinary school for simple folks, but for the higher studies there is nothing. No, that's true. What's your name?…"

"Yegorushka."

“Yegory, then.… The holy martyr Yegory, the Bearer of Victory, whose day is the twenty-third of April. And my christian name is Panteley,… Panteley Zaharov Holodov.… We are Holodovs.… I am a native of—maybe you’ve heard of it—Tim in the province of Kursk. My brothers are artisans and work at trades in the town, but I am a peasant.… I have remained a peasant. Seven years ago I went there—home, I mean. I went to the village and to the town.… To Tim, I mean. Then, thank God, they were all alive and well;… but now I don’t know.… Maybe some of them are dead.… And it’s time they did die, for some of them are older than I am. Death is all right; it is good so long, of course, as one does not die without repentance. There is no worse evil than an impenitent death; an impenitent death is a joy to the devil. And if you want to die penitent, so that you may not be forbidden to enter the mansions of the Lord, pray to the holy martyr Varvara. She is the intercessor. She is, that’s the truth.… For God has given her such a place in the heavens that everyone has the right to pray to her for penitence.”

Panteley went on muttering, and apparently did not trouble whether Yegorushka heard him or not. He talked listlessly, mumbling to himself, without raising or dropping his voice, but succeeded in telling him a great deal in a short time. All he said was made up of fragments that had very little connection with one another, and quite uninteresting for Yegorushka. Possibly he talked only in order to reckon over his thoughts aloud after the night spent in silence, in order to see if they were all there. After talking of repentance, he spoke about a certain Maxim Nikolaitch from Slavyanoserbsk.

“Yes, he took his little lad;… he took him, that’s true…”

One of the wagoners walking in front darted from his place, ran to one side and began lashing on the ground with his whip. He was a stalwart, broad-shouldered man of thirty, with curly flaxen hair and a look of great health and vigour. Judging from the movements of his shoulders and the whip, and the eagerness expressed in his attitude, he was beating something alive. Another wagoner, a short stubby little man with a bushy black beard, wearing a waistcoat and a shirt outside his trousers, ran up to him. The latter broke into a deep guffaw of laughter and coughing and said: “I say, lads, Dymov has killed a snake!”

There are people whose intelligence can be gauged at once by their voice and laughter. The man with the black beard belonged to that class of fortunate individuals; impenetrable stupidity could be felt in his voice and laugh. The flaxen-headed Dymov had finished, and lifting from the

ground with his whip something like a cord, flung it with a laugh into the cart.

“That’s not a viper; it’s a grass snake!” shouted someone.

The man with the wooden gait and the bandage round his face strode up quickly to the dead snake, glanced at it and flung up his stick-like arms.

“You jailbird!” he cried in a hollow wailing voice. “What have you killed a grass snake for? What had he done to you, you damned brute? Look, he has killed a grass snake; how would you like to be treated so?”

“Grass snakes ought not to be killed, that’s true,” Panteley muttered placidly, “they ought not… They are not vipers; though it looks like a snake, it is a gentle, innocent creature.… It’s friendly to man, the grass snake is.”

Dymov and the man with the black beard were probably ashamed, for they laughed loudly, and not answering, slouched lazily back to their wagons. When the hindmost wagon was level with the spot where the dead snake lay, the man with his face tied up standing over it turned to Panteley and asked in a tearful voice:

“Grandfather, what did he want to kill the grass snake for?”

His eyes, as Yegorushka saw now, were small and dingy looking; his face was grey, sickly and looked somehow dingy too while his chin was red and seemed very much swollen.

“Grandfather, what did he kill it for?” he repeated, striding along beside Panteley.

“A stupid fellow. His hands itch to kill, and that is why he does it,” answered the old man; “but he oughtn’t to kill a grass snake, that’s true.… Dymov is a ruffian, we all know, he kills everything he comes across, and Kiruha did not interfere. He ought to have taken its part, but instead of that, he goes off into ‘Ha-ha-ha!’ and ‘Ho-ho-ho!’… But don’t be angry, Vassya.… Why be angry? They’ve killed it—well, never mind them. Dymov is a ruffian and Kiruha acted from foolishness—never mind.… They are foolish people without understanding—but there, don’t mind them. Emelyan here never touches what he shouldn’t; he never does;… that is true,… because he is a man of education, while they are stupid.… Emelyan, he doesn’t touch things.”

The wagoner in the reddish-brown coat and the spongy swelling on his face, who was conducting an unseen choir, stopped. Hearing his name, and waiting till Panteley and Vassya came up to him, he walked beside them.

“What are you talking about?” he asked in a husky muffled voice.

“Why, Vassya here is angry,” said Panteley. “So I have been saying things to him to stop his being angry.… Oh, how my swollen feet hurt! Oh, oh! They are more inflamed than ever for Sunday, God’s holy day!”

“It’s from walking,” observed Vassya.

“No, lad, no. It’s not from walking. When I walk it seems easier; when I lie down and get warm,… it’s deadly. Walking is easier for me.”

Emelyan, in his reddish-brown coat, walked between Panteley and Vassya and waved his arms, as though they were going to sing. After waving them a little while he dropped them, and croaked out hopelessly:

“I have no voice. It’s a real misfortune. All last night and this morning I have been haunted by the trio ‘Lord, have Mercy’ that we sang at the wedding at Marionovsky’s. It’s in my head and in my throat. It seems as though I could sing it, but I can’t; I have no voice.”

He paused for a minute, thinking, then went on:

“For fifteen years I was in the choir. In all the Lugansky works there was, maybe, no one with a voice like mine. But, confound it, I bathed two years ago in the Donets, and I can’t get a single note true ever since. I took cold in my throat. And without a voice I am like a workman without hands.”

“That’s true,” Panteley agreed.

“I think of myself as a ruined man and nothing more.”

At that moment Vassya chanced to catch sight of Yegorushka. His eyes grew moist and smaller than ever.

“There’s a little gentleman driving with us,” and he covered his nose with his sleeve as though he were bashful. “What a grand driver! Stay with us and you shall drive the wagons and sell wool.”

The incongruity of one person being at once a little gentleman and a wagon driver seemed to strike him as very queer and funny, for he burst into a loud guffaw, and went on enlarging upon the idea. Emelyan glanced upwards at Yegorushka, too, but coldly and cursorily. He was absorbed in his own thoughts, and had it not been for Vassya, would not have noticed Yegorushka’s presence. Before five minutes had passed he was waving his arms again, then describing to his companions the beauties of the wedding anthem, “Lord, have Mercy,” which he had remembered in the night. He put the whip under his arm and waved both hands.

A mile from the village the wagons stopped by a well with a crane. Letting his pail down into the well, black-bearded Kiruha lay on his stomach on the framework and thrust his shaggy head, his shoulders, and part of his chest into the black hole, so that Yegorushka could see

nothing but his short legs, which scarcely touched the ground. Seeing the reflection of his head far down at the bottom of the well, he was delighted and went off into his deep bass stupid laugh, and the echo from the well answered him. When he got up his neck and face were as red as beetroot. The first to run up and drink was Dymov. He drank laughing, often turning from the pail to tell Kiruha something funny, then he turned round, and uttered aloud, to be heard all over the steppe, five very bad words. Yegorushka did not understand the meaning of such words, but he knew very well they were bad words. He knew the repulsion his friends and relations silently felt for such words. He himself, without knowing why, shared that feeling and was accustomed to think that only drunk and disorderly people enjoy the privilege of uttering such words aloud. He remembered the murder of the grass snake, listened to Dymov's laughter, and felt something like hatred for the man. And as ill-luck would have it, Dymov at that moment caught sight of Yegorushka, who had climbed down from the wagon and gone up to the well. He laughed aloud and shouted:

"I say, lads, the old man has been brought to bed of a boy in the night!"

Kiruha laughed his bass laugh till he coughed. Someone else laughed too, while Yegorushka crimsoned and made up his mind finally that Dymov was a very wicked man.

With his curly flaxen head, with his shirt opened on his chest and no hat on, Dymov looked handsome and exceptionally strong; in every movement he made one could see the reckless daredevil and athlete, knowing his value. He shrugged his shoulders, put his arms akimbo, talked and laughed louder than any of the rest, and looked as though he were going to lift up something very heavy with one hand and astonish the whole world by doing so. His mischievous mocking eyes glided over the road, the wagons, and the sky without resting on anything, and seemed looking for someone to kill, just as a pastime, and something to laugh at. Evidently he was afraid of no one, would stick at nothing, and most likely was not in the least interested in Yegorushka's opinion of him.… Yegorushka meanwhile hated his flaxen head, his clear face, and his strength with his whole heart, listened with fear and loathing to his laughter, and kept thinking what word of abuse he could pay him out with.

Panteley, too, went up to the pail. He took out of his pocket a little green glass of an icon lamp, wiped it with a rag, filled it from the pail

and drank from it, then filled it again, wrapped the little glass in the rag, and then put it back into his pocket.

“Grandfather, why do you drink out of a lamp?” Yegorushka asked him, surprised.

“One man drinks out of a pail and another out of a lamp,” the old man answered evasively. “Every man to his own taste.… You drink out of the pail—well, drink, and may it do you good.…”

“You darling, you beauty!” Vassya said suddenly, in a caressing, plaintive voice. “You darling!”

His eyes were fixed on the distance; they were moist and smiling, and his face wore the same expression as when he had looked at Yegorushka.

“Who is it you are talking to?” asked Kiruha.

“A darling fox,… lying on her back, playing like a dog.”

Everyone began staring into the distance, looking for the fox, but no one could see it, only Vassya with his grey muddy-looking eyes, and he was enchanted by it. His sight was extraordinarily keen, as Yegorushka learnt afterwards. He was so long-sighted that the brown steppe was for him always full of life and interest. He had only to look into the distance to see a fox, a hare, a bustard, or some other animal keeping at a distance from men. There was nothing strange in seeing a hare running away or a flying bustard—everyone crossing the steppes could see them; but it was not vouchsafed to everyone to see wild animals in their own haunts when they were not running nor hiding, nor looking about them in alarm. Yet Vassya saw foxes playing, hares washing themselves with their paws, bustards preening their wings and hammering out their hollow nests. Thanks to this keenness of sight, Vassya had, besides the world seen by everyone, another world of his own, accessible to no one else, and probably a very beautiful one, for when he saw something and was in raptures over it it was impossible not to envy him.

When the wagons set off again, the church bells were ringing for service.

V

The train of wagons drew up on the bank of a river on one side of a village. The sun was blazing, as it had been the day before; the air was stagnant and depressing. There were a few willows on the bank, but the shade from them did not fall on the earth, but on the water, where it was wasted; even in the shade under the wagon it was stifling and wearisome. The water, blue from the reflection of the sky in it, was alluring.

Styopka, a wagoner whom Yegorushka noticed now for the first time, a Little Russian lad of eighteen, in a long shirt without a belt, and full trousers that flapped like flags as he walked, undressed quickly, ran along the steep bank and plunged into the water. He dived three times, then swam on his back and shut his eyes in his delight. His face was smiling and wrinkled up as though he were being tickled, hurt and amused.

On a hot day when there is nowhere to escape from the sultry, stifling heat, the splash of water and the loud breathing of a man bathing sounds like good music to the ear. Dymov and Kiruha, looking at Styopka, undressed quickly and one after the other, laughing loudly in eager anticipation of their enjoyment, dropped into the water, and the quiet, modest little river resounded with snorting and splashing and shouting. Kiruha coughed, laughed and shouted as though they were trying to drown him, while Dymov chased him and tried to catch him by the leg.

"Ha-ha-ha!" he shouted. "Catch him! Hold him!"

Kiruha laughed and enjoyed himself, but his expression was the same as it had been on dry land, stupid, with a look of astonishment on it as though someone had, unnoticed, stolen up behind him and hit him on the head with the butt-end of an axe. Yegorushka undressed, too, but did not let himself down by the bank, but took a run and a flying leap from the height of about ten feet. Describing an arc in the air, he fell into the water, sank deep, but did not reach the bottom; some force, cold and pleasant to the touch, seemed to hold him up and bring him back to the surface. He popped out and, snorting and blowing bubbles, opened his eyes; but the sun was reflected in the water quite close to his face. At first blinding spots of light, then rainbow colours and dark patches,

flitted before his eyes. He made haste to dive again, opened his eyes in the water and saw something cloudy-green like a sky on a moonlight night. Again the same force would not let him touch the bottom and stay in the coolness, but lifted him to the surface. He popped out and heaved a sigh so deep that he had a feeling of space and freshness, not only in his chest, but in his stomach. Then, to get from the water everything he possibly could get, he allowed himself every luxury; he lay on his back and basked, splashed, frolicked, swam on his face, on his side, on his back and standing up—just as he pleased till he was exhausted. The other bank was thickly overgrown with reeds; it was golden in the sun, and the flowers of the reeds hung drooping to the water in lovely tassels. In one place the reeds were shaking and nodding, with their flowers rustling—Styopka and Kiruha were hunting crayfish.

"A crayfish, look, lads! A crayfish!" Kiruha cried triumphantly and actually showed a crayfish.

Yegorushka swam up to the reeds, dived, and began fumbling among their roots. Burrowing in the slimy, liquid mud, he felt something sharp and unpleasant—perhaps it really was a crayfish. But at that minute someone seized him by the leg and pulled him to the surface. Spluttering and coughing, Yegorushka opened his eyes and saw before him the wet grinning face of the daredevil Dymov. The impudent fellow was breathing hard, and from a look in his eyes he seemed inclined for further mischief. He held Yegorushka tight by the leg, and was lifting his hand to take hold of his neck. But Yegorushka tore himself away with repulsion and terror, as though disgusted at being touched and afraid that the bully would drown him, and said:

"Fool! I'll punch you in the face."

Feeling that this was not sufficient to express his hatred, he thought a minute and added:

"You blackguard! You son of a bitch!"

But Dymov, as though nothing were the matter, took no further notice of Yegorushka, but swam off to Kiruha, shouting:

"Ha-ha-ha! Let us catch fish! Mates, let us catch fish."

"To be sure," Kiruha agreed; "there must be a lot of fish here."

"Styopka, run to the village and ask the peasants for a net!"

"They won't give it to me."

"They will, you ask them. Tell them that they should give it to us for Christ's sake, because we are just the same as pilgrims."

"That's true."

Styopka clambered out of the water, dressed quickly, and without a cap on he ran, his full trousers flapping, to the village. The water lost all its charm for Yegorushka after his encounter with Dymov. He got out and began dressing. Panteley and Vassya were sitting on the steep bank, with their legs hanging down, looking at the bathers. Emelyan was standing naked, up to his knees in the water, holding on to the grass with one hand to prevent himself from falling while the other stroked his body. With his bony shoulder-blades, with the swelling under his eye, bending down and evidently afraid of the water, he made a ludicrous figure. His face was grave and severe. He looked angrily at the water, as though he were just going to upbraid it for having given him cold in the Donets and robbed him of his voice.

"And why don't you bathe?" Yegorushka asked Vassya.

"Oh, I don't care for it,…" answered Vassya.

"How is it your chin is swollen?"

"It's bad.… I used to work at the match factory, little sir.… The doctor used to say that it would make my jaw rot. The air is not healthy there. There were three chaps beside me who had their jaws swollen, and with one of them it rotted away altogether."

Styopka soon came back with the net. Dymov and Kiruha were already turning blue and getting hoarse by being so long in the water, but they set about fishing eagerly. First they went to a deep place beside the reeds; there Dymov was up to his neck, while the water went over squat Kiruha's head. The latter spluttered and blew bubbles, while Dymov stumbling on the prickly roots, fell over and got caught in the net; both flopped about in the water, and made a noise, and nothing but mischief came of their fishing.

"It's deep," croaked Kiruha. "You won't catch anything."

"Don't tug, you devil!" shouted Dymov trying to put the net in the proper position. "Hold it up."

"You won't catch anything here," Panteley shouted from the bank. "You are only frightening the fish, you stupids! Go more to the left! It's shallower there!"

Once a big fish gleamed above the net; they all drew a breath, and Dymov struck the place where it had vanished with his fist, and his face expressed vexation.

"Ugh!" cried Panteley, and he stamped his foot. "You've let the perch slip! It's gone!"

Moving more to the left, Dymov and Kiruha picked out a shallower place, and then fishing began in earnest. They had wandered off some

hundred paces from the wagons; they could be seen silently trying to go as deep as they could and as near the reeds, moving their legs a little at a time, drawing out the nets, beating the water with their fists to drive them towards the nets. From the reeds they got to the further bank; they drew the net out, then, with a disappointed air, lifting their knees high as they walked, went back into the reeds. They were talking about something, but what it was no one could hear. The sun was scorching their backs, the flies were stinging them, and their bodies had turned from purple to crimson. Styopka was walking after them with a pail in his hands; he had tucked his shirt right up under his armpits, and was holding it up by the hem with his teeth. After every successful catch he lifted up some fish, and letting it shine in the sun, shouted:

"Look at this perch! We've five like that!"

Every time Dymov, Kiruha and Styopka pulled out the net they could be seen fumbling about in the mud in it, putting some things into the pail and throwing other things away; sometimes they passed something that was in the net from hand to hand, examined it inquisitively, then threw that, too, away.

"What is it?" they shouted to them from the bank.

Styopka made some answer, but it was hard to make out his words. Then he climbed out of the water and, holding the pail in both hands, forgetting to let his shirt drop, ran to the wagons.

"It's full!" he shouted, breathing hard. "Give us another!"

Yegorushka looked into the pail: it was full. A young pike poked its ugly nose out of the water, and there were swarms of crayfish and little fish round about it. Yegorushka put his hand down to the bottom and stirred up the water; the pike vanished under the crayfish and a perch and a tench swam to the surface instead of it. Vassya, too, looked into the pail. His eyes grew moist and his face looked as caressing as before when he saw the fox. He took something out of the pail, put it to his mouth and began chewing it.

"Mates," said Styopka in amazement, "Vassya is eating a live gudgeon! Phoo!"

"It's not a gudgeon, but a minnow," Vassya answered calmly, still munching.

He took a fish's tail out of his mouth, looked at it caressingly, and put it back again. While he was chewing and crunching with his teeth it seemed to Yegorushka that he saw before him something not human. Vassya's swollen chin, his lustreless eyes, his extraordinary sharp sight,

the fish’s tail in his mouth, and the caressing friendliness with which he crunched the gudgeon made him like an animal.

Yegorushka felt dreary beside him. And the fishing was over, too. He walked about beside the wagons, thought a little, and, feeling bored, strolled off to the village.

Not long afterwards he was standing in the church, and with his forehead leaning on somebody’s back, listened to the singing of the choir. The service was drawing to a close. Yegorushka did not understand church singing and did not care for it. He listened a little, yawned, and began looking at the backs and heads before him. In one head, red and wet from his recent bathe, he recognized Emelyan. The back of his head had been cropped in a straight line higher than is usual; the hair in front had been cut unbecomingly high, and Emelyan’s ears stood out like two dock leaves, and seemed to feel themselves out of place. Looking at the back of his head and his ears, Yegorushka, for some reason, thought that Emelyan was probably very unhappy. He remembered the way he conducted with his hands, his husky voice, his timid air when he was bathing, and felt intense pity for him. He longed to say something friendly to him.

“I am here, too,” he said, putting out his hand.

People who sing tenor or bass in the choir, especially those who have at any time in their lives conducted, are accustomed to look with a stern and unfriendly air at boys. They do not give up this habit, even when they leave off being in a choir. Turning to Yegorushka, Emelyan looked at him from under his brows and said:

“Don’t play in church!”

Then Yegorushka moved forwards nearer to the icon-stand. Here he saw interesting people. On the right side, in front of everyone, a lady and a gentleman were standing on a carpet. There were chairs behind them. The gentleman was wearing newly ironed shantung trousers; he stood as motionless as a soldier saluting, and held high his bluish shaven chin. There was a very great air of dignity in his stand-up collar, in his blue chin, in his small bald patch and his cane. His neck was so strained from excess of dignity, and his chin was drawn up so tensely, that it looked as though his head were ready to fly off and soar upwards any minute. The lady, who was stout and elderly and wore a white silk shawl, held her head on one side and looked as though she had done someone a favour, and wanted to say: “Oh, don’t trouble yourself to thank me; I don’t like it.…” A thick wall of Little Russian heads stood all round the carpet.

Yegorushka went up to the icon-stand and began kissing the local icons. Before each image he slowly bowed down to the ground, without getting up, looked round at the congregation, then got up and kissed the icon. The contact of his forehead with the cold floor afforded him great satisfaction. When the beadle came from the altar with a pair of long snuffers to put out the candles, Yegorushka jumped up quickly from the floor and ran up to him.

"Have they given out the holy bread?" he asked.

"There is none; there is none," the beadle muttered gruffly. "It is no use your…"

The service was over; Yegorushka walked out of the church in a leisurely way, and began strolling about the marketplace. He had seen a good many villages, marketplaces, and peasants in his time, and everything that met his eyes was entirely without interest for him. At a loss for something to do, he went into a shop over the door of which hung a wide strip of red cotton. The shop consisted of two roomy, badly lighted parts; in one half they sold drapery and groceries, in the other there were tubs of tar, and there were horse-collars hanging from the ceiling; from both came the savoury smell of leather and tar. The floor of the shop had been watered; the man who watered it must have been a very whimsical and original person, for it was sprinkled in patterns and mysterious symbols. The shopkeeper, an overfed-looking man with a broad face and round beard, apparently a Great Russian, was standing, leaning his person over the counter. He was nibbling a piece of sugar as he drank his tea, and heaved a deep sigh at every sip. His face expressed complete indifference, but each sigh seemed to be saying:

"Just wait a minute; I will give it you."

"Give me a farthing's worth of sunflower seeds," Yegorushka said, addressing him.

The shopkeeper raised his eyebrows, came out from behind the counter, and poured a farthing's worth of sunflower seeds into Yegorushka's pocket, using an empty pomatum pot as a measure. Yegorushka did not want to go away. He spent a long time in examining the box of cakes, thought a little and asked, pointing to some little cakes covered with the mildew of age:

"How much are these cakes?"

"Two for a farthing."

Yegorushka took out of his pocket the cake given him the day before by the Jewess, and asked him:

"And how much do you charge for cakes like this?"

The shopman took the cake in his hands, looked at it from all sides, and raised one eyebrow.

"Like that?" he asked.

Then he raised the other eyebrow, thought a minute, and answered:

"Two for three farthings.…"

A silence followed.

"Whose boy are you?" the shopman asked, pouring himself out some tea from a red copper teapot.

"The nephew of Ivan Ivanitch."

"There are all sorts of Ivan Ivanitchs," the shopkeeper sighed. He looked over Yegorushka's head towards the door, paused a minute and asked:

"Would you like some tea?"

"Please.…" Yegorushka assented not very readily, though he felt an intense longing for his usual morning tea.

The shopkeeper poured him out a glass and gave him with it a bit of sugar that looked as though it had been nibbled. Yegorushka sat down on the folding chair and began drinking it. He wanted to ask the price of a pound of sugar almonds, and had just broached the subject when a customer walked in, and the shopkeeper, leaving his glass of tea, attended to his business. He led the customer into the other half, where there was a smell of tar, and was there a long time discussing something with him. The customer, a man apparently very obstinate and pigheaded, was continually shaking his head to signify his disapproval, and retreating towards the door. The shopkeeper tried to persuade him of something and began pouring some oats into a big sack for him.

"Do you call those oats?" the customer said gloomily. "Those are not oats, but chaff. It's a mockery to give that to the hens; enough to make the hens laugh.… No, I will go to Bondarenko."

When Yegorushka went back to the river a small camp fire was smoking on the bank. The wagoners were cooking their dinner. Styopka was standing in the smoke, stirring the cauldron with a big notched spoon. A little on one side Kiruha and Vassya, with eyes reddened from the smoke, were sitting cleaning the fish. Before them lay the net covered with slime and water weeds, and on it lay gleaming fish and crawling crayfish.

Emelyan, who had not long been back from the church, was sitting beside Panteley, waving his arm and humming just audibly in a husky voice: "To Thee we sing.…" Dymov was moving about by the horses.

When they had finished cleaning them, Kiruha and Vassya put the fish and the living crayfish together in the pail, rinsed them, and from the pail poured them all into the boiling water.

“Shall I put in some fat?” asked Styopka, skimming off the froth.

“No need. The fish will make its own gravy,” answered Kiruha.

Before taking the cauldron off the fire Styopka scattered into the water three big handfuls of millet and a spoonful of salt; finally he tried it, smacked his lips, licked the spoon, and gave a self-satisfied grunt, which meant that the grain was done.

All except Panteley sat down near the cauldron and set to work with their spoons.

“You there! Give the little lad a spoon!” Panteley observed sternly. “I dare say he is hungry too!”

“Ours is peasant fare,” sighed Kiruha.

“Peasant fare is welcome, too, when one is hungry.”

They gave Yegorushka a spoon. He began eating, not sitting, but standing close to the cauldron and looking down into it as in a hole. The grain smelt of fish and fish-scales were mixed up with the millet. The crayfish could not be hooked out with a spoon, and the men simply picked them out of the cauldron with their hands; Vassya did so particularly freely, and wetted his sleeves as well as his hands in the mess. But yet the stew seemed to Yegorushka very nice, and reminded him of the crayfish soup which his mother used to make at home on fast-days. Panteley was sitting apart munching bread.

“Grandfather, why aren’t you eating?” Emelyan asked him.

“I don’t eat crayfish.… Nasty things,” the old man said, and turned away with disgust.

While they were eating they all talked. From this conversation Yegorushka gathered that all his new acquaintances, in spite of the differences of their ages and their characters, had one point in common which made them all alike: they were all people with a splendid past and a very poor present. Of their past they all—every one of them—spoke with enthusiasm; their attitude to the present was almost one of contempt. The Russian loves recalling life, but he does not love living. Yegorushka did not yet know that, and before the stew had been all eaten he firmly believed that the men sitting round the cauldron were the injured victims of fate. Panteley told them that in the past, before there were railways, he used to go with trains of wagons to Moscow and to Nizhni, and used to earn so much that he did not know what to do with his money; and what merchants there used to be in those days! what fish!

how cheap everything was! Now the roads were shorter, the merchants were stingier, the peasants were poorer, the bread was dearer, everything had shrunk and was on a smaller scale. Emelyan told them that in old days he had been in the choir in the Lugansky works, and that he had a remarkable voice and read music splendidly, while now he had become a peasant and lived on the charity of his brother, who sent him out with his horses and took half his earnings. Vassya had once worked in a match factory; Kiruha had been a coachman in a good family, and had been reckoned the smartest driver of a three-in-hand in the whole district. Dymov, the son of a well-to-do peasant, lived at ease, enjoyed himself and had known no trouble till he was twenty, when his stern harsh father, anxious to train him to work, and afraid he would be spoiled at home, had sent him to a carrier's to work as a hired labourer. Styopka was the only one who said nothing, but from his beardless face it was evident that his life had been a much better one in the past.

Thinking of his father, Dymov frowned and left off eating. Sullenly from under his brows he looked round at his companions and his eye rested upon Yegorushka.

"You heathen, take off your cap," he said rudely. "You can't eat with your cap on, and you a gentleman too!"

Yegorushka took off his hat and did not say a word, but the stew lost all savour for him, and he did not hear Panteley and Vassya intervening on his behalf. A feeling of anger with the insulting fellow was rankling oppressively in his breast, and he made up his mind that he would do him some injury, whatever it cost him.

After dinner everyone sauntered to the wagons and lay down in the shade.

"Are we going to start soon, grandfather?" Yegorushka asked Panteley.

"In God's good time we shall set off. There's no starting yet; it is too hot.… O Lord, Thy will be done. Holy Mother… Lie down, little lad."

Soon there was a sound of snoring from under the wagons. Yegorushka meant to go back to the village, but on consideration, yawned and lay down by the old man.

VI

The wagons remained by the river the whole day, and set off again when the sun was setting.

Yegorushka was lying on the bales again; the wagon creaked softly and swayed from side to side. Panteley walked below, stamping his feet, slapping himself on his thighs and muttering. The air was full of the churring music of the steppes, as it had been the day before.

Yegorushka lay on his back, and, putting his hands under his head, gazed upwards at the sky. He watched the glow of sunset kindle, then fade away; guardian angels covering the horizon with their gold wings disposed themselves to slumber. The day had passed peacefully; the quiet peaceful night had come, and they could stay tranquilly at home in heaven.… Yegorushka saw the sky by degrees grow dark and the mist fall over the earth—saw the stars light up, one after the other.…

When you gaze a long while fixedly at the deep sky thoughts and feelings for some reason merge in a sense of loneliness. One begins to feel hopelessly solitary, and everything one used to look upon as near and akin becomes infinitely remote and valueless; the stars that have looked down from the sky thousands of years already, the mists and the incomprehensible sky itself, indifferent to the brief life of man, oppress the soul with their silence when one is left face to face with them and tries to grasp their significance. One is reminded of the solitude awaiting each one of us in the grave, and the reality of life seems awful… full of despair.…

Yegorushka thought of his grandmother, who was sleeping now under the cherry trees in the cemetery. He remembered how she lay in her coffin with pennies on her eyes, how afterwards she was shut in and let down into the grave; he even recalled the hollow sound of the clods of earth on the coffin lid.… He pictured his granny in the dark and narrow coffin, helpless and deserted by everyone. His imagination pictured his granny suddenly awakening, not understanding where she was, knocking upon the lid and calling for help, and in the end swooning with horror and dying again. He imagined his mother dead, Father Christopher, Countess Dranitsky, Solomon. But however much he tried to imagine

himself in the dark tomb, far from home, outcast, helpless and dead, he could not succeed; for himself personally he could not admit the possibility of death, and felt that he would never die.…

Panteley, for whom death could not be far away, walked below and went on reckoning up his thoughts.

"All right.… Nice gentlefolk,…" he muttered. "Took his little lad to school—but how he is doing now I haven't heard say—in Slavyanoserbsk. I say there is no establishment for teaching them to be very clever.… No, that's true—a nice little lad, no harm in him.… He'll grow up and be a help to his father.… You, Yegory, are little now, but you'll grow big and will keep your father and mother.… So it is ordained of God, 'Honour your father and your mother.' … I had children myself, but they were burnt.… My wife was burnt and my children,… that's true.… The hut caught fire on the night of Epiphany.… I was not at home, I was driving in Oryol. In Oryol.… Marya dashed out into the street, but remembering that the children were asleep in the hut, ran back and was burnt with her children.… Next day they found nothing but bones."

About midnight Yegorushka and the wagoners were again sitting round a small camp fire. While the dry twigs and stems were burning up, Kiruha and Vassya went off somewhere to get water from a creek; they vanished into the darkness, but could be heard all the time talking and clinking their pails; so the creek was not far away. The light from the fire lay a great flickering patch on the earth; though the moon was bright, yet everything seemed impenetrably black beyond that red patch. The light was in the wagoners' eyes, and they saw only part of the great road; almost unseen in the darkness the wagons with the bales and the horses looked like a mountain of undefined shape. Twenty paces from the camp fire at the edge of the road stood a wooden cross that had fallen aslant. Before the camp fire had been lighted, when he could still see things at a distance, Yegorushka had noticed that there was a similar old slanting cross on the other side of the great road.

Coming back with the water, Kiruha and Vassya filled the cauldron and fixed it over the fire. Styopka, with the notched spoon in his hand, took his place in the smoke by the cauldron, gazing dreamily into the water for the scum to rise. Panteley and Emelyan were sitting side by side in silence, brooding over something. Dymov was lying on his stomach, with his head propped on his fists, looking into the fire.… Styopka's shadow was dancing over him, so that his handsome face was at one minute covered with darkness, at the next lighted up.… Kiruha

and Vassya were wandering about at a little distance gathering dry grass and bark for the fire. Yegorushka, with his hands in his pockets, was standing by Panteley, watching how the fire devoured the grass.

All were resting, musing on something, and they glanced cursorily at the cross over which patches of red light were dancing. There is something melancholy, pensive, and extremely poetical about a solitary tomb; one feels its silence, and the silence gives one the sense of the presence of the soul of the unknown man who lies under the cross. Is that soul at peace on the steppe? Does it grieve in the moonlight? Near the tomb the steppe seems melancholy, dreary and mournful; the grass seems more sorrowful, and one fancies the grasshoppers chirrup less freely, and there is no passerby who would not remember that lonely soul and keep looking back at the tomb, till it was left far behind and hidden in the mists.…

"Grandfather, what is that cross for?" asked Yegorushka.

Panteley looked at the cross and then at Dymov and asked:

"Nikola, isn't this the place where the mowers killed the merchants?"

Dymov not very readily raised himself on his elbow, looked at the road and said:

"Yes, it is.…"

A silence followed. Kiruha broke up some dry stalks, crushed them up together and thrust them under the cauldron. The fire flared up brightly; Styopka was enveloped in black smoke, and the shadow cast by the cross danced along the road in the dusk beside the wagons.

"Yes, they were killed," Dymov said reluctantly. "Two merchants, father and son, were travelling, selling holy images. They put up in the inn not far from here that is now kept by Ignat Fomin. The old man had a drop too much, and began boasting that he had a lot of money with him. We all know merchants are a boastful set, God preserve us.… They can't resist showing off before the likes of us. And at the time some mowers were staying the night at the inn. So they overheard what the merchants said and took note of it."

"O Lord!… Holy Mother!" sighed Panteley.

"Next day, as soon as it was light," Dymov went on, "the merchants were preparing to set off and the mowers tried to join them. 'Let us go together, your worships. It will be more cheerful and there will be less danger, for this is an out-of-the-way place.…' The merchants had to travel at a walking pace to avoid breaking the images, and that just suited the mowers.…"

Dymov rose into a kneeling position and stretched.

“Yes,” he went on, yawning. “Everything went all right till they reached this spot, and then the mowers let fly at them with their scythes. The son, he was a fine young fellow, snatched the scythe from one of them, and he used it, too.… Well, of course, they got the best of it because there were eight of them. They hacked at the merchants so that there was not a sound place left on their bodies; when they had finished they dragged both of them off the road, the father to one side and the son to the other. Opposite that cross there is another cross on this side.… Whether it is still standing, I don’t know.… I can’t see from here.…”

“It is,” said Kiruha.

“They say they did not find much money afterwards.”

“No,” Panteley confirmed; “they only found a hundred roubles.”

“And three of them died afterwards, for the merchant had cut them badly with the scythe, too. They died from loss of blood. One had his hand cut off, so that they say he ran three miles without his hand, and they found him on a mound close to Kurikovo. He was squatting on his heels, with his head on his knees, as though he were lost in thought, but when they looked at him there was no life in him and he was dead.…”

“They found him by the track of blood,” said Panteley.

Everyone looked at the cross, and again there was a hush. From somewhere, most likely from the creek, floated the mournful cry of the bird: “Sleep! sleep! sleep!”

“There are a great many wicked people in the world,” said Emelyan.

“A great many,” assented Panteley, and he moved up closer to the fire as though he were frightened. “A great many,” he went on in a low voice. “I’ve seen lots and lots of them.… Wicked people!… I have seen a great many holy and just, too.… Queen of Heaven, save us and have mercy on us. I remember once thirty years ago, or maybe more, I was driving a merchant from Morshansk. The merchant was a jolly handsome fellow, with money, too… the merchant was… a nice man, no harm in him.… So we put up for the night at an inn. And in Russia the inns are not what they are in these parts. There the yards are roofed in and look like the ground floor, or let us say like barns in good farms. Only a barn would be a bit higher. So we put up there and were all right. My merchant was in a room, while I was with the horses, and everything was as it should be. So, lads, I said my prayers before going to sleep and began walking about the yard. And it was a dark night, I couldn’t see anything; it was no good trying. So I walked about a bit up to the wagons, or nearly, when I saw a light gleaming. What could it mean? I thought the people of the inn had gone to bed long ago, and besides the

merchant and me there were no other guests in the inn.… Where could the light have come from? I felt suspicious.… I went closer… towards the light.… The Lord have mercy upon me! and save me, Queen of Heaven! I looked and there was a little window with a grating,… close to the ground, in the house… I lay down on the ground and looked in; as soon as I looked in a cold chill ran all down me.…”

Kiruha, trying not to make a noise, thrust a handful of twigs into the fire. After waiting for it to leave off crackling and hissing, the old man went on:

“I looked in and there was a big cellar, black and dark.… There was a lighted lantern on a tub. In the middle of the cellar were about a dozen men in red shirts with their sleeves turned up, sharpening long knives.… Ugh! So we had fallen into a nest of robbers.… What’s to be done? I ran to the merchant, waked him up quietly, and said: ‘Don’t be frightened, merchant,’ said I, ‘but we are in a bad way. We have fallen into a nest of robbers,’ I said. He turned pale and asked: ‘What are we to do now, Panteley? I have a lot of money that belongs to orphans. As for my life,’ he said, ‘that’s in God’s hands. I am not afraid to die, but it’s dreadful to lose the orphans’ money,’ said he.… What were we to do? The gates were locked; there was no getting out. If there had been a fence one could have climbed over it, but with the yard shut up!… ‘Come, don’t be frightened, merchant,’ said I; ‘but pray to God. Maybe the Lord will not let the orphans suffer. Stay still.’ said I, ‘and make no sign, and meanwhile, maybe, I shall think of something.…’ Right!… I prayed to God and the Lord put the thought into my mind.… I clambered up on my chaise and softly,… softly so that no one should hear, began pulling out the straw in the thatch, made a hole and crept out, crept out.… Then I jumped off the roof and ran along the road as fast as I could. I ran and ran till I was nearly dead.… I ran maybe four miles without taking breath, if not more. Thank God I saw a village. I ran up to a hut and began tapping at a window. ‘Good Christian people,’ I said, and told them all about it, ‘do not let a Christian soul perish.…’ I waked them all up.… The peasants gathered together and went with me,… one with a cord, one with an oak-stick, others with pitchforks.… We broke in the gates of the innyard and went straight to the cellar.… And the robbers had just finished sharpening their knives and were going to kill the merchant. The peasants took them, every one of them, bound them and carried them to the police. The merchant gave them three hundred roubles in his joy, and gave me five gold pieces and put my name down. They said that they found human bones in the cellar afterwards, heaps

and heaps of them.… Bones!… So they robbed people and then buried them, so that there should be no traces.… Well, afterwards they were punished at Morshansk.”

Panteley had finished his story, and he looked round at his listeners. They were gazing at him in silence. The water was boiling by now and Styopka was skimming off the froth.

“Is the fat ready?” Kiruha asked him in a whisper.

“Wait a little.… Directly.”

Styopka, his eyes fixed on Panteley as though he were afraid that the latter might begin some story before he was back, ran to the wagons; soon he came back with a little wooden bowl and began pounding some lard in it.

“I went another journey with a merchant, too,…” Panteley went on again, speaking as before in a low voice and with fixed unblinking eyes. “His name, as I remember now, was Pyotr Grigoritch. He was a nice man,… the merchant was. We stopped in the same way at an inn.… He indoors and me with the horses.… The people of the house, the innkeeper and his wife, seemed friendly good sort of people; the labourers, too, seemed all right; but yet, lads, I couldn’t sleep. I had a queer feeling in my heart,… a queer feeling, that was just it. The gates were open and there were plenty of people about, and yet I felt afraid and not myself. Everyone had been asleep long ago. It was the middle of the night; it would soon be time to get up, and I was lying alone in my chaise and could not close my eyes, as though I were some owl. And then, lads, I heard this sound, ‘Toop! toop! toop!’ Someone was creeping up to the chaise. I poke my head out, and there was a peasant woman in nothing but her shift and with her feet bare.… ‘What do you want, good woman?’ I asked. And she was all of a tremble; her face was terror-stricken… ‘Get up, good man,’ said she; ‘the people are plotting evil.… They mean to kill your merchant. With my own ears I heard the master whispering with his wife.…’ So it was not for nothing, the foreboding of my heart! ‘And who are you?’ I asked. ‘I am their cook,’ she said.… Right!… So I got out of the chaise and went to the merchant. I waked him up and said: ‘Things aren’t quite right, Pyotr Grigoritch.… Make haste and rouse yourself from sleep, your worship, and dress now while there is still time,’ I said; ‘and to save our skins, let us get away from trouble.’ He had no sooner begun dressing when the door opened and, mercy on us! I saw, Holy Mother! the innkeeper and his wife come into the room with three labourers.… So they had persuaded the labourers to join them. ‘The merchant has a lot of money, and we’ll go shares,’ they

told them. Every one of the five had a long knife in their hand each a knife. The innkeeper locked the door and said: ‘Say your prayers, travellers,… and if you begin screaming,’ they said, ‘we won’t let you say your prayers before you die.…’ As though we could scream! I had such a lump in my throat I could not cry out.… The merchant wept and said: ‘Good Christian people! you have resolved to kill me because my money tempts you. Well, so be it; I shall not be the first nor shall I be the last. Many of us merchants have been murdered at inns. But why, good Christian brothers,’ says he, ‘murder my driver? Why should he have to suffer for my money?’ And he said that so pitifully! And the innkeeper answered him: ‘If we leave him alive,’ said he, ‘he will be the first to bear witness against us. One may just as well kill two as one. You can but answer once for seven misdeeds… Say your prayers, that’s all you can do, and it is no good talking!’ The merchant and I knelt down side by side and wept and said our prayers. He thought of his children. I was young in those days; I wanted to live.… We looked at the images and prayed, and so pitifully that it brings a tear even now.… And the innkeeper’s wife looks at us and says: ‘Good people,’ said she, ‘don’t bear a grudge against us in the other world and pray to God for our punishment, for it is want that drives us to it.’ We prayed and wept and prayed and wept, and God heard us. He had pity on us, I suppose.… At the very minute when the innkeeper had taken the merchant by the beard to rip open his throat with his knife suddenly someone seemed to tap at the window from the yard! We all started, and the innkeeper’s hands dropped.… Someone was tapping at the window and shouting: ‘Pyotr Grigoritch,’ he shouted, ‘are you here? Get ready and let’s go!’ The people saw that someone had come for the merchant; they were terrified and took to their heels.… And we made haste into the yard, harnessed the horses, and were out of sight in a minute…”

“Who was it knocked at the window?” asked Dymov.

“At the window? It must have been a holy saint or angel, for there was no one else.… When we drove out of the yard there wasn’t a soul in the street.… It was the Lord’s doing.”

Panteley told other stories, and in all of them “long knives” figured and all alike sounded made up. Had he heard these stories from someone else, or had he made them up himself in the remote past, and afterwards, as his memory grew weaker, mixed up his experiences with his imaginations and become unable to distinguish one from the other? Anything is possible, but it is strange that on this occasion and for the rest of the journey, whenever he happened to tell a story, he gave

unmistakable preference to fiction, and never told of what he really had experienced. At the time Yegorushka took it all for the genuine thing, and believed every word; later on it seemed to him strange that a man who in his day had travelled all over Russia and seen and known so much, whose wife and children had been burnt to death, so failed to appreciate the wealth of his life that whenever he was sitting by the camp fire he was either silent or talked of what had never been.

Over their porridge they were all silent, thinking of what they had just heard. Life is terrible and marvellous, and so, however terrible a story you tell in Russia, however you embroider it with nests of robbers, long knives and such marvels, it always finds an echo of reality in the soul of the listener, and only a man who has been a good deal affected by education looks askance distrustfully, and even he will be silent. The cross by the roadside, the dark bales of wool, the wide expanse of the plain, and the lot of the men gathered together by the camp fire—all this was of itself so marvellous and terrible that the fantastic colours of legend and fairytale were pale and blended with life.

All the others ate out of the cauldron, but Panteley sat apart and ate his porridge out of a wooden bowl. His spoon was not like those the others had, but was made of cypress wood, with a little cross on it. Yegorushka, looking at him, thought of the little icon glass and asked Styopka softly:

"Why does Grandfather sit apart?"

"He is an Old Believer," Styopka and Vassya answered in a whisper. And as they said it they looked as though they were speaking of some secret vice or weakness.

All sat silent, thinking. After the terrible stories there was no inclination to speak of ordinary things. All at once in the midst of the silence Vassya drew himself up and, fixing his lustreless eyes on one point, pricked up his ears.

"What is it?" Dymov asked him.

"Someone is coming," answered Vassya.

"Where do you see him?"

"Yo-on-der! There's something white…"

There was nothing to be seen but darkness in the direction in which Vassya was looking; everyone listened, but they could hear no sound of steps.

"Is he coming by the high road?" asked Dymov.

"No, over the open country.… He is coming this way."

A minute passed in silence.

“And maybe it’s the merchant who was buried here walking over the steppe,” said Dymov.

All looked askance at the cross, exchanged glances and suddenly broke into a laugh. They felt ashamed of their terror.

“Why should he walk?” asked Panteley. “It’s only those walk at night whom the earth will not take to herself. And the merchants were all right.… The merchants have received the crown of martyrs.”

But all at once they heard the sound of steps; someone was coming in haste.

“He’s carrying something,” said Vassya.

They could hear the grass rustling and the dry twigs crackling under the feet of the approaching wayfarer. But from the glare of the camp fire nothing could be seen. At last the steps sounded close by, and someone coughed. The flickering light seemed to part; a veil dropped from the wagoners’ eyes, and they saw a man facing them.

Whether it was due to the flickering light or because everyone wanted to make out the man’s face first of all, it happened, strangely enough, that at the first glance at him they all saw, first of all, not his face nor his clothes, but his smile. It was an extraordinarily good-natured, broad, soft smile, like that of a baby on waking, one of those infectious smiles to which it is difficult not to respond by smiling too. The stranger, when they did get a good look at him, turned out to be a man of thirty, ugly and in no way remarkable. He was a tall Little Russian, with a long nose, long arms and long legs; everything about him seemed long except his neck, which was so short that it made him seem stooping. He was wearing a clean white shirt with an embroidered collar, white trousers, and new high boots, and in comparison with the wagoners he looked quite a dandy. In his arms he was carrying something big, white, and at the first glance strange-looking, and the stock of a gun also peeped out from behind his shoulder.

Coming from the darkness into the circle of light, he stopped short as though petrified, and for half a minute looked at the wagoners as though he would have said: “Just look what a smile I have!”

Then he took a step towards the fire, smiled still more radiantly and said:

“Bread and salt, friends!”

“You are very welcome!” Panteley answered for them all.

The stranger put down by the fire what he was carrying in his arms—it was a dead bustard—and greeted them once more.

They all went up to the bustard and began examining it.

“A fine big bird; what did you kill it with?” asked Dymov.

“Grapeshot. You can’t get him with small shot, he won’t let you get near enough. Buy it, friends! I will let you have it for twenty kopecks.”

“What use would it be to us? It’s good roast, but I bet it would be tough boiled; you could not get your teeth into it.…”

“Oh, what a pity! I would take it to the gentry at the farm; they would give me half a rouble for it. But it’s a long way to go—twelve miles!”

The stranger sat down, took off his gun and laid it beside him.

He seemed sleepy and languid; he sat smiling, and, screwing up his eyes at the firelight, apparently thinking of something very agreeable. They gave him a spoon; he began eating.

“Who are you?” Dymov asked him.

The stranger did not hear the question; he made no answer, and did not even glance at Dymov. Most likely this smiling man did not taste the flavour of the porridge either, for he seemed to eat it mechanically, lifting the spoon to his lips sometimes very full and sometimes quite empty. He was not drunk, but he seemed to have something nonsensical in his head.

“I ask you who you are?” repeated Dymov.

“I?” said the unknown, starting. “Konstantin Zvonik from Rovno. It’s three miles from here.”

And anxious to show straight off that he was not quite an ordinary peasant, but something better, Konstantin hastened to add:

“We keep bees and fatten pigs.”

“Do you live with your father or in a house of your own?”

“No; now I am living in a house of my own. I have parted. This month, just after St. Peter’s Day, I got married. I am a married man now!… It’s eighteen days since the wedding.”

“That’s a good thing,” said Panteley. “Marriage is a good thing.… God’s blessing is on it.”

“His young wife sits at home while he rambles about the steppe,” laughed Kiruha. “Queer chap!”

As though he had been pinched on the tenderest spot, Konstantin started, laughed and flushed crimson.

“But, Lord, she is not at home!” he said quickly, taking the spoon out of his mouth and looking round at everyone with an expression of delight and wonder. “She is not; she has gone to her mother’s for three days! Yes, indeed, she has gone away, and I feel as though I were not married.…”

Konstantin waved his hand and turned his head; he wanted to go on thinking, but the joy which beamed in his face prevented him. As though

he were not comfortable, he changed his attitude, laughed, and again waved his hand. He was ashamed to share his happy thoughts with strangers, but at the same time he had an irresistible longing to communicate his joy.

"She has gone to Demidovo to see her mother," he said, blushing and moving his gun. "She'll be back tomorrow.… She said she would be back to dinner."

"And do you miss her?" said Dymov.

"Oh, Lord, yes; I should think so. We have only been married such a little while, and she has gone away.… Eh! Oh, but she is a tricky one, God strike me dead! She is such a fine, splendid girl, such a one for laughing and singing, full of life and fire! When she is there your brain is in a whirl, and now she is away I wander about the steppe like a fool, as though I had lost something. I have been walking since dinner."

Konstantin rubbed his eyes, looked at the fire and laughed.

"You love her, then,…" said Panteley.

"She is so fine and splendid," Konstantin repeated, not hearing him; "such a housewife, clever and sensible. You wouldn't find another like her among simple folk in the whole province. She has gone away.… But she is missing me, I kno-ow! I know the little magpie. She said she would be back tomorrow by dinnertime.… And just think how queer!" Konstantin almost shouted, speaking a note higher and shifting his position. "Now she loves me and is sad without me, and yet she would not marry me."

"But eat," said Kiruha.

"She would not marry me," Konstantin went on, not heeding him. "I have been struggling with her for three years! I saw her at the Kalatchik fair; I fell madly in love with her, was ready to hang myself.… I live at Rovno, she at Demidovo, more than twenty miles apart, and there was nothing I could do. I sent matchmakers to her, and all she said was: 'I won't!' Ah, the magpie! I sent her one thing and another, earrings and cakes, and twenty pounds of honey—but still she said: 'I won't!' And there it was. If you come to think of it, I was not a match for her! She was young and lovely, full of fire, while I am old: I shall soon be thirty, and a regular beauty, too; a fine beard like a goat's, a clear complexion all covered with pimples—how could I be compared with her! The only thing to be said is that we are well off, but then the Vahramenkys are well off, too. They've six oxen, and they keep a couple of labourers. I was in love, friends, as though I were plague-stricken. I couldn't sleep or eat; my brain was full of thoughts, and in such a maze, Lord preserve us!

I longed to see her, and she was in Demidovo. What do you think? God be my witness, I am not lying, three times a week I walked over there on foot just to have a look at her. I gave up my work! I was so frantic that I even wanted to get taken on as a labourer in Demidovo, so as to be near her. I was in misery! My mother called in a witch a dozen times; my father tried thrashing me. For three years I was in this torment, and then I made up my mind. 'Damn my soul!' I said. 'I will go to the town and be a cabman.… It seems it is fated not to be.' At Easter I went to Demidovo to have a last look at her.…"

Konstantin threw back his head and went off into a mirthful tinkling laugh, as though he had just taken someone in very cleverly.

"I saw her by the river with the lads," he went on. "I was overcome with anger.… I called her aside and maybe for a full hour I said all manner of things to her. She fell in love with me! For three years she did not like me! she fell in love with me for what I said to her.…"

"What did you say to her?" asked Dymov.

"What did I say? I don't remember… How could one remember? My words flowed at the time like water from a tap, without stopping to take breath. Ta-ta-ta! And now I can't utter a word.… Well, so she married me.… She's gone now to her mother's, the magpie, and while she is away here I wander over the steppe. I can't stay at home. It's more than I can do!"

Konstantin awkwardly released his feet, on which he was sitting, stretched himself on the earth, and propped his head in his fists, then got up and sat down again. Everyone by now thoroughly understood that he was in love and happy, poignantly happy; his smile, his eyes, and every movement, expressed fervent happiness. He could not find a place for himself, and did not know what attitude to take to keep himself from being overwhelmed by the multitude of his delightful thoughts. Having poured out his soul before these strangers, he settled down quietly at last, and, looking at the fire, sank into thought.

At the sight of this happy man everyone felt depressed and longed to be happy, too. Everyone was dreamy. Dymov got up, walked about softly by the fire, and from his walk, from the movement of his shoulder-blades, it could be seen that he was weighed down by depression and yearning. He stood still for a moment, looked at Konstantin and sat down.

The camp fire had died down by now; there was no flicker, and the patch of red had grown small and dim.… And as the fire went out the moonlight grew clearer and clearer. Now they could see the full width of

the road, the bales of wool, the shafts of the wagons, the munching horses; on the further side of the road there was the dim outline of the second cross.…

Dymov leaned his cheek on his hand and softly hummed some plaintive song. Konstantin smiled drowsily and chimed in with a thin voice. They sang for half a minute, then sank into silence. Emelyan started, jerked his elbows and wriggled his fingers.

“Lads,” he said in an imploring voice, “let’s sing something sacred!” Tears came into his eyes. “Lads,” he repeated, pressing his hands on his heart, “let’s sing something sacred!”

“I don’t know anything,” said Konstantin.

Everyone refused, then Emelyan sang alone. He waved both arms, nodded his head, opened his mouth, but nothing came from his throat but a discordant gasp. He sang with his arms, with his head, with his eyes, even with the swelling on his face; he sang passionately with anguish, and the more he strained his chest to extract at least one note from it, the more discordant were his gasps.

Yegorushka, like the rest, was overcome with depression. He went to his wagon, clambered up on the bales and lay down. He looked at the sky, and thought of happy Konstantin and his wife. Why did people get married? What were women in the world for? Yegorushka put the vague questions to himself, and thought that a man would certainly be happy if he had an affectionate, merry and beautiful woman continually living at his side. For some reason he remembered the Countess Dranitsky, and thought it would probably be very pleasant to live with a woman like that; he would perhaps have married her with pleasure if that idea had not been so shameful. He recalled her eyebrows, the pupils of her eyes, her carriage, the clock with the horseman.… The soft warm night moved softly down upon him and whispered something in his ear, and it seemed to him that it was that lovely woman bending over him, looking at him with a smile and meaning to kiss him.…

Nothing was left of the fire but two little red eyes, which kept on growing smaller and smaller. Konstantin and the wagoners were sitting by it, dark motionless figures, and it seemed as though there were many more of them than before. The twin crosses were equally visible, and far, far away, somewhere by the high road there gleamed a red light—other people cooking their porridge, most likely.

“Our Mother Russia is the he-ad of all the world!” Kiruha sang out suddenly in a harsh voice, choked and subsided. The steppe echo caught

up his voice, carried it on, and it seemed as though stupidity itself were rolling on heavy wheels over the steppe.

"It's time to go," said Panteley. "Get up, lads."

While they were putting the horses in, Konstantin walked by the wagons and talked rapturously of his wife.

"Goodbye, mates!" he cried when the wagons started. "Thank you for your hospitality. I shall go on again towards that light. It's more than I can stand."

And he quickly vanished in the mist, and for a long time they could hear him striding in the direction of the light to tell those other strangers of his happiness.

When Yegorushka woke up next day it was early morning; the sun had not yet risen. The wagons were at a standstill. A man in a white cap and a suit of cheap grey material, mounted on a little Cossack stallion, was talking to Dymov and Kiruha beside the foremost wagon. A mile and a half ahead there were long low white barns and little houses with tiled roofs; there were neither yards nor trees to be seen beside the little houses.

"What village is that, Grandfather?" asked Yegorushka.

"That's the Armenian Settlement, youngster," answered Panteley. "The Armenians live there. They are a good sort of people,… the Armenians are."

The man in grey had finished talking to Dymov and Kiruha; he pulled up his little stallion and looked across towards the settlement.

"What a business, only think!" sighed Panteley, looking towards the settlement, too, and shuddering at the morning freshness. "He has sent a man to the settlement for some papers, and he doesn't come.… He should have sent Styopka."

"Who is that, Grandfather?" asked Yegorushka.

"Varlamov."

My goodness! Yegorushka jumped up quickly, getting upon his knees, and looked at the white cap. It was hard to recognize the mysterious elusive Varlamov, who was sought by everyone, who was always "on his rounds," and who had far more money than Countess Dranitsky, in the short, grey little man in big boots, who was sitting on an ugly little nag and talking to peasants at an hour when all decent people were asleep.

"He is all right, a good man," said Panteley, looking towards the settlement. "God give him health—a splendid gentleman, Semyon Alexandritch.… It's people like that the earth rests upon. That's true.… The cocks are not crowing yet, and he is already up and about.…

Another man would be asleep, or gallivanting with visitors at home, but he is on the steppe all day,… on his rounds.… He does not let things slip.… No-o! He's a fine fellow…"

Varlamov was talking about something, while he kept his eyes fixed. The little stallion shifted from one leg to another impatiently.

"Semyon Alexandritch!" cried Panteley, taking off his hat. "Allow us to send Styopka! Emelyan, call out that Styopka should be sent."

But now at last a man on horseback could be seen coming from the settlement. Bending very much to one side and brandishing his whip above his head like a gallant young Caucasian, and wanting to astonish everyone by his horsemanship, he flew towards the wagons with the swiftness of a bird.

"That must be one of his circuit men," said Panteley. "He must have a hundred such horsemen or maybe more."

Reaching the first wagon, he pulled up his horse, and taking off his hat, handed Varlamov a little book. Varlamov took several papers out of the book, read them and cried:

"And where is Ivantchuk's letter?"

The horseman took the book back, looked at the papers and shrugged his shoulders. He began saying something, probably justifying himself and asking to be allowed to ride back to the settlement again. The little stallion suddenly stirred as though Varlamov had grown heavier. Varlamov stirred too.

"Go along!" he cried angrily, and he waved his whip at the man.

Then he turned his horse round and, looking through the papers in the book, moved at a walking pace alongside the wagons. When he reached the hindmost, Yegorushka strained his eyes to get a better look at him. Varlamov was an elderly man. His face, a simple Russian sunburnt face with a small grey beard, was red, wet with dew and covered with little blue veins; it had the same expression of businesslike coldness as Ivan Ivanitch's face, the same look of fanatical zeal for business. But yet what a difference could be felt between him and Kuzmitchov! Uncle Ivan Ivanitch always had on his face, together with his businesslike reserve, a look of anxiety and apprehension that he would not find Varlamov, that he would be late, that he would miss a good price; nothing of that sort, so characteristic of small and dependent persons, could be seen in the face or figure of Varlamov. This man made the price himself, was not looking for anyone, and did not depend on anyone; however ordinary his exterior, yet in everything, even in the manner of holding his whip, there was a sense of power and habitual authority over the steppe.

As he rode by Yegorushka he did not glance at him. Only the little stallion deigned to notice Yegorushka; he looked at him with his large foolish eyes, and even he showed no interest. Panteley bowed to Varlamov; the latter noticed it, and without taking his eyes off the sheets of paper, said lisping:

"How are you, old man?"

Varlamov's conversation with the horseman and the way he had brandished his whip had evidently made an overwhelming impression on the whole party. Everyone looked grave. The man on horseback, cast down at the anger of the great man, remained stationary, with his hat off, and the rein loose by the foremost wagon; he was silent, and seemed unable to grasp that the day had begun so badly for him.

"He is a harsh old man,…" muttered Panteley. "It's a pity he is so harsh! But he is all right, a good man.… He doesn't abuse men for nothing.… It's no matter.…"

After examining the papers, Varlamov thrust the book into his pocket; the little stallion, as though he knew what was in his mind, without waiting for orders, started and dashed along the high road.

VII

On the following night the wagoners had halted and were cooking their porridge. On this occasion there was a sense of overwhelming oppression over everyone. It was sultry; they all drank a great deal, but could not quench their thirst. The moon was intensely crimson and sullen, as though it were sick. The stars, too, were sullen, the mist was thicker, the distance more clouded. Nature seemed as though languid and weighed down by some foreboding.

There was not the same liveliness and talk round the camp fire as there had been the day before. All were dreary and spoke listlessly and without interest. Panteley did nothing but sigh and complain of his feet, and continually alluded to impenitent deathbeds.

Dymov was lying on his stomach, chewing a straw in silence; there was an expression of disgust on his face as though the straw smelt unpleasant, a spiteful and exhausted look.… Vassya complained that his jaw ached, and prophesied bad weather; Emelyan was not waving his arms, but sitting still and looking gloomily at the fire. Yegorushka, too, was weary. This slow travelling exhausted him, and the sultriness of the day had given him a headache.

While they were cooking the porridge, Dymov, to relieve his boredom, began quarrelling with his companions.

“Here he lolls, the lumpy face, and is the first to put his spoon in,” he said, looking spitefully at Emelyan. “Greedy! always contrives to sit next the cauldron. He’s been a church-singer, so he thinks he is a gentleman! There are a lot of singers like you begging along the high road!”

“What are you pestering me for?” asked Emelyan, looking at him angrily.

“To teach you not to be the first to dip into the cauldron. Don’t think too much of yourself!”

“You are a fool, and that is all about it!” wheezed out Emelyan.

Knowing by experience how such conversations usually ended, Panteley and Vassya intervened and tried to persuade Dymov not to quarrel about nothing.

“A church-singer!” The bully would not desist, but laughed contemptuously. “Anyone can sing like that—sit in the church porch and sing ‘Give me alms, for Christ’s sake!’ Ugh! you are a nice fellow!”

Emelyan did not speak. His silence had an irritating effect on Dymov. He looked with still greater hatred at the ex-singer and said:

“I don’t care to have anything to do with you, or I would show you what to think of yourself.”

“But why are you pushing me, you Mazeppa?” Emelyan cried, flaring up. “Am I interfering with you?”

“What did you call me?” asked Dymov, drawing himself up, and his eyes were suffused with blood. “Eh! I am a Mazeppa? Yes? Take that, then; go and look for it.”

Dymov snatched the spoon out of Emelyan’s hand and flung it far away. Kiruha, Vassya, and Styopka ran to look for it, while Emelyan fixed an imploring and questioning look on Panteley. His face suddenly became small and wrinkled; it began twitching, and the ex-singer began to cry like a child.

Yegorushka, who had long hated Dymov, felt as though the air all at once were unbearably stifling, as though the fire were scorching his face; he longed to run quickly to the wagons in the darkness, but the bully’s angry bored eyes drew the boy to him. With a passionate desire to say something extremely offensive, he took a step towards Dymov and brought out, gasping for breath:

“You are the worst of the lot; I can’t bear you!”

After this he ought to have run to the wagons, but he could not stir from the spot and went on:

“In the next world you will burn in hell! I’ll complain to Ivan Ivanitch. Don’t you dare insult Emelyan!”

“Say this too, please,” laughed Dyrnov: “‘every little sucking-pig wants to lay down the law.’ Shall I pull your ear?”

Yegorushka felt that he could not breathe; and something which had never happened to him before—he suddenly began shaking all over, stamping his feet and crying shrilly:

“Beat him, beat him!”

Tears gushed from his eyes; he felt ashamed, and ran staggering back to the wagon. The effect produced by his outburst he did not see. Lying on the bales and twitching his arms and legs, he whispered:

“Mother, mother!”

And these men and the shadows round the camp fire, and the dark bales and the faraway lightning, which was flashing every minute in the

distance—all struck him now as terrible and unfriendly. He was overcome with terror and asked himself in despair why and how he had come into this unknown land in the company of terrible peasants? Where was his uncle now, where was Father Christopher, where was Deniska? Why were they so long in coming? Hadn't they forgotten him? At the thought that he was forgotten and cast out to the mercy of fate, he felt such a cold chill of dread that he had several times an impulse to jump off the bales of wool, and run back full speed along the road; but the thought of the huge dark crosses, which would certainly meet him on the way, and the lightning flashing in the distance, stopped him.… And only when he whispered, "Mother, mother!" he felt as it were a little better.

The wagoners must have been full of dread, too. After Yegorushka had run away from the camp fire they sat at first for a long time in silence, then they began speaking in hollow undertones about something, saying that it was coming and that they must make haste and get away from it.… They quickly finished supper, put out the fire and began harnessing the horses in silence. From their fluster and the broken phrases they uttered it was apparent they foresaw some trouble. Before they set off on their way, Dymov went up to Panteley and asked softly:

"What's his name?"

"Yegory," answered Panteley.

Dymov put one foot on the wheel, caught hold of the cord which was tied round the bales and pulled himself up. Yegorushka saw his face and curly head. The face was pale and looked grave and exhausted, but there was no expression of spite in it.

"Yera!" he said softly, "here, hit me!"

Yegorushka looked at him in surprise. At that instant there was a flash of lightning.

"It's all right, hit me," repeated Dymov. And without waiting for Yegorushka to hit him or to speak to him, he jumped down and said: "How dreary I am!"

Then, swaying from one leg to the other and moving his shoulder-blades, he sauntered lazily alongside the string of wagons and repeated in a voice half weeping, half angry:

"How dreary I am! O Lord! Don't you take offence, Emelyan," he said as he passed Emelyan. "Ours is a wretched cruel life!"

There was a flash of lightning on the right, and, like a reflection in the looking-glass, at once a second flash in the distance.

"Yegory, take this," cried Panteley, throwing up something big and dark.

“What is it?” asked Yegorushka.

“A mat. There will be rain, so cover yourself up.”

Yegorushka sat up and looked about him. The distance had grown perceptibly blacker, and now oftener than every minute winked with a pale light. The blackness was being bent towards the right as though by its own weight.

“Will there be a storm, Grandfather?” asked Yegorushka.

“Ah, my poor feet, how they ache!” Panteley said in a high-pitched voice, stamping his feet and not hearing the boy.

On the left someone seemed to strike a match in the sky; a pale phosphorescent streak gleamed and went out. There was a sound as though someone very far away were walking over an iron roof, probably barefoot, for the iron gave a hollow rumble.

“It’s set in!” cried Kiruha.

Between the distance and the horizon on the right there was a flash of lightning so vivid that it lighted up part of the steppe and the spot where the clear sky met the blackness. A terrible cloud was swooping down, without haste, a compact mass; big black shreds hung from its edge; similar shreds pressing one upon another were piling up on the right and left horizon. The tattered, ragged look of the storm-cloud gave it a drunken disorderly air. There was a distinct, not smothered, growl of thunder. Yegorushka crossed himself and began quickly putting on his greatcoat.

“I am dreary!” Dymov’s shout floated from the foremost wagon, and it could be told from his voice that he was beginning to be ill-humoured again. “I am so dreary!”

All at once there was a squall of wind, so violent that it almost snatched away Yegorushka’s bundle and mat; the mat fluttered in all directions and flapped on the bale and on Yegorushka’s face. The wind dashed whistling over the steppe, whirled round in disorder and raised such an uproar from the grass that neither the thunder nor the creaking of the wheels could be heard; it blew from the black storm-cloud, carrying with it clouds of dust and the scent of rain and wet earth. The moonlight grew mistier, as it were dirtier; the stars were even more overcast; and clouds of dust could be seen hurrying along the edge of the road, followed by their shadows. By now, most likely, the whirlwind eddying round and lifting from the earth dust, dry grass and feathers, was mounting to the very sky; uprooted plants must have been flying by that very black storm-cloud, and how frightened they must have been! But

through the dust that clogged the eyes nothing could be seen but the flash of lightning.

Yegorushka, thinking it would pour with rain in a minute, knelt up and covered himself with the mat.

“Panteley-ey!” someone shouted in the front. “A… a… va!”

“I can’t!” Panteley answered in a loud high voice. “A… a… va! Arya… a!”

There was an angry clap of thunder, which rolled across the sky from right to left, then back again, and died away near the foremost wagon.

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth,” whispered Yegorushka, crossing himself. “Fill heaven and earth with Thy glory.”

The blackness in the sky yawned wide and breathed white fire. At once there was another clap of thunder. It had scarcely ceased when there was a flash of lightning so broad that Yegorushka suddenly saw through a slit in the mat the whole high road to the very horizon, all the wagoners and even Kiruha’s waistcoat. The black shreds had by now moved upwards from the left, and one of them, a coarse, clumsy monster like a claw with fingers, stretched to the moon. Yegorushka made up his mind to shut his eyes tight, to pay no attention to it, and to wait till it was all over.

The rain was for some reason long in coming. Yegorushka peeped out from the mat in the hope that perhaps the storm-cloud was passing over. It was fearfully dark. Yegorushka could see neither Panteley, nor the bale of wool, nor himself; he looked sideways towards the place where the moon had lately been, but there was the same black darkness there as over the wagons. And in the darkness the flashes of lightning seemed more violent and blinding, so that they hurt his eyes.

“Panteley!” called Yegorushka.

No answer followed. But now a gust of wind for the last time flung up the mat and hurried away. A quiet regular sound was heard. A big cold drop fell on Yegorushka’s knee, another trickled over his hand. He noticed that his knees were not covered, and tried to rearrange the mat, but at that moment something began pattering on the road, then on the shafts and the bales. It was the rain. As though they understood one another, the rain and the mat began prattling of something rapidly, gaily and most annoyingly like two magpies.

Yegorushka knelt up or rather squatted on his boots. While the rain was pattering on the mat, he leaned forward to screen his knees, which were suddenly wet. He succeeded in covering his knees, but in less than a minute was aware of a penetrating, unpleasant dampness behind on his

back and the calves of his legs. He returned to his former position, exposing his knees to the rain, and wondered what to do to rearrange the mat which he could not see in the darkness. But his arms were already wet, the water was trickling up his sleeves and down his collar, and his shoulder-blades felt chilly. And he made up his mind to do nothing but sit motionless and wait till it was all over.

"Holy, holy, holy!" he whispered.

Suddenly, exactly over his head, the sky cracked with a fearful deafening din; he huddled up and held his breath, waiting for the fragments to fall upon his head and back. He inadvertently opened his eyes and saw a blinding intense light flare out and flash five times on his fingers, his wet sleeves, and on the trickles of water running from the mat upon the bales and down to the ground. There was a fresh peal of thunder as violent and awful; the sky was not growling and rumbling now, but uttering short crashing sounds like the crackling of dry wood.

"Trrah! tah! tah! tah!" the thunder rang out distinctly, rolled over the sky, seemed to stumble, and somewhere by the foremost wagons or far behind to fall with an abrupt angry "Trrra!"

The flashes of lightning had at first been only terrible, but with such thunder they seemed sinister and menacing. Their magic light pierced through closed eyelids and sent a chill all over the body. What could he do not to see them? Yegorushka made up his mind to turn over on his face. Cautiously, as though afraid of being watched, he got on all fours, and his hands slipping on the wet bale, he turned back again.

"Trrah! tah! tah!" floated over his head, rolled under the wagons and exploded "Kraa!"

Again he inadvertently opened his eyes and saw a new danger: three huge giants with long pikes were following the wagon! A flash of lightning gleamed on the points of their pikes and lighted up their figures very distinctly. They were men of huge proportions, with covered faces, bowed heads, and heavy footsteps. They seemed gloomy and dispirited and lost in thought. Perhaps they were not following the wagons with any harmful intent, and yet there was something awful in their proximity.

Yegorushka turned quickly forward, and trembling all over cried: "Panteley! Grandfather!"

"Trrah! tah! tah!" the sky answered him.

He opened his eyes to see if the wagoners were there. There were flashes of lightning in two places, which lighted up the road to the far distance, the whole string of wagons and all the wagoners. Streams of water were flowing along the road and bubbles were dancing. Panteley

was walking beside the wagon; his tall hat and his shoulder were covered with a small mat; his figure expressed neither terror nor uneasiness, as though he were deafened by the thunder and blinded by the lightning.

"Grandfather, the giants!" Yegorushka shouted to him in tears.

But the old man did not hear. Further away walked Emelyan. He was covered from head to foot with a big mat and was triangular in shape. Vassya, without anything over him, was walking with the same wooden step as usual, lifting his feet high and not bending his knees. In the flash of lightning it seemed as though the wagons were not moving and the men were motionless, that Vassya's lifted foot was rigid in the same position.…

Yegorushka called the old man once more. Getting no answer, he sat motionless, and no longer waited for it all to end. He was convinced that the thunder would kill him in another minute, that he would accidentally open his eyes and see the terrible giants, and he left off crossing himself, calling the old man and thinking of his mother, and was simply numb with cold and the conviction that the storm would never end.

But at last there was the sound of voices.

"Yegory, are you asleep?" Panteley cried below. "Get down! Is he deaf, the silly little thing?…"

"Something like a storm!" said an unfamiliar bass voice, and the stranger cleared his throat as though he had just tossed off a good glass of vodka.

Yegorushka opened his eyes. Close to the wagon stood Panteley, Emelyan, looking like a triangle, and the giants. The latter were by now much shorter, and when Yegorushka looked more closely at them they turned out to be ordinary peasants, carrying on their shoulders not pikes but pitchforks. In the space between Panteley and the triangular figure, gleamed the window of a low-pitched hut. So the wagons were halting in the village. Yegorushka flung off the mat, took his bundle and made haste to get off the wagon. Now when close to him there were people talking and a lighted window he no longer felt afraid, though the thunder was crashing as before and the whole sky was streaked with lightning.

"It was a good storm, all right,…" Panteley was muttering. "Thank God,… my feet are a little softened by the rain. It was all right.… Have you got down, Yegory? Well, go into the hut; it is all right.…"

"Holy, holy, holy!" wheezed Emelyan, "it must have struck something.… Are you of these parts?" he asked the giants.

"No, from Glinovo. We belong to Glinovo. We are working at the Platers'."

“Threshing?”

“All sorts. Just now we are getting in the wheat. The lightning, the lightning! It is long since we have had such a storm.…”

Yegorushka went into the hut. He was met by a lean hunchbacked old woman with a sharp chin. She stood holding a tallow candle in her hands, screwing up her eyes and heaving prolonged sighs.

“What a storm God has sent us!” she said. “And our lads are out for the night on the steppe; they’ll have a bad time, poor dears! Take off your things, little sir, take off your things.”

Shivering with cold and shrugging squeamishly, Yegorushka pulled off his drenched overcoat, then stretched out his arms and straddled his legs, and stood a long time without moving. The slightest movement caused an unpleasant sensation of cold and wetness. His sleeves and the back of his shirt were sopped, his trousers stuck to his legs, his head was dripping.

“What’s the use of standing there, with your legs apart, little lad?” said the old woman. “Come, sit down.”

Holding his legs wide apart, Yegorushka went up to the table and sat down on a bench near somebody’s head. The head moved, puffed a stream of air through its nose, made a chewing sound and subsided. A mound covered with a sheepskin stretched from the head along the bench; it was a peasant woman asleep.

The old woman went out sighing, and came back with a big watermelon and a little sweet melon.

“Have something to eat, my dear! I have nothing else to offer you,…” she said, yawning. She rummaged in the table and took out a long sharp knife, very much like the one with which the brigands killed the merchants in the inn. “Have some, my dear!”

Yegorushka, shivering as though he were in a fever, ate a slice of sweet melon with black bread and then a slice of watermelon, and that made him feel colder still.

“Our lads are out on the steppe for the night,…” sighed the old woman while he was eating. “The terror of the Lord! I’d light the candle under the icon, but I don’t know where Stepanida has put it. Have some more, little sir, have some more.…”

The old woman gave a yawn and, putting her right hand behind her, scratched her left shoulder.

“It must be two o’clock now,” she said; “it will soon be time to get up. Our lads are out on the steppe for the night; they are all wet through for sure.…”

“Granny,” said Yegorushka. “I am sleepy.”

“Lie down, my dear, lie down,” the old woman sighed, yawning. “Lord Jesus Christ! I was asleep, when I heard a noise as though someone were knocking. I woke up and looked, and it was the storm God had sent us.… I’d have lighted the candle, but I couldn’t find it.”

Talking to herself, she pulled some rags, probably her own bed, off the bench, took two sheepskins off a nail by the stove, and began laying them out for a bed for Yegorushka. “The storm doesn’t grow less,” she muttered. “If only nothing’s struck in an unlucky hour. Our lads are out on the steppe for the night. Lie down and sleep, my dear.… Christ be with you, my child.… I won’t take away the melon; maybe you’ll have a bit when you get up.”

The sighs and yawns of the old woman, the even breathing of the sleeping woman, the half-darkness of the hut, and the sound of the rain outside, made one sleepy. Yegorushka was shy of undressing before the old woman. He only took off his boots, lay down and covered himself with the sheepskin.

“Is the little lad lying down?” he heard Panteley whisper a little later.

“Yes,” answered the old woman in a whisper. “The terror of the Lord! It thunders and thunders, and there is no end to it.”

“It will soon be over,” wheezed Panteley, sitting down; “it’s getting quieter.… The lads have gone into the huts, and two have stayed with the horses. The lads have.… They can’t;… the horses would be taken away.… I’ll sit here a bit and then go and take my turn.… We can’t leave them; they would be taken.…”

Panteley and the old woman sat side by side at Yegorushka’s feet, talking in hissing whispers and interspersing their speech with sighs and yawns. And Yegorushka could not get warm. The warm heavy sheepskin lay on him, but he was trembling all over; his arms and legs were twitching, and his whole inside was shivering.… He undressed under the sheepskin, but that was no good. His shivering grew more and more acute.

Panteley went out to take his turn with the horses, and afterwards came back again, and still Yegorushka was shivering all over and could not get to sleep. Something weighed upon his head and chest and oppressed him, and he did not know what it was, whether it was the old people whispering, or the heavy smell of the sheepskin. The melon he had eaten had left an unpleasant metallic taste in his mouth. Moreover he was being bitten by fleas.

“Grandfather, I am cold,” he said, and did not know his own voice.

“Go to sleep, my child, go to sleep,” sighed the old woman.

Tit came up to the bedside on his thin little legs and waved his arms, then grew up to the ceiling and turned into a windmill.… Father Christopher, not as he was in the chaise, but in his full vestments with the sprinkler in his hand, walked round the mill, sprinkling it with holy water, and it left off waving. Yegorushka, knowing this was delirium, opened his eyes.

“Grandfather,” he called, “give me some water.”

No one answered. Yegorushka felt it insufferably stifling and uncomfortable lying down. He got up, dressed, and went out of the hut. Morning was beginning. The sky was overcast, but it was no longer raining. Shivering and wrapping himself in his wet overcoat, Yegorushka walked about the muddy yard and listened to the silence; he caught sight of a little shed with a half-open door made of reeds. He looked into this shed, went into it, and sat down in a dark corner on a heap of dry dung.

There was a tangle of thoughts in his heavy head; his mouth was dry and unpleasant from the metallic taste. He looked at his hat, straightened the peacock’s feather on it, and thought how he had gone with his mother to buy the hat. He put his hand into his pocket and took out a lump of brownish sticky paste. How had that paste come into his pocket? He thought a minute, smelt it; it smelt of honey. Aha! it was the Jewish cake! How sopped it was, poor thing!

Yegorushka examined his coat. It was a little grey overcoat with big bone buttons, cut in the shape of a frock-coat. At home, being a new and expensive article, it had not been hung in the hall, but with his mother’s dresses in her bedroom; he was only allowed to wear it on holidays. Looking at it, Yegorushka felt sorry for it. He thought that he and the greatcoat were both abandoned to the mercy of destiny; he thought that he would never get back home, and began sobbing so violently that he almost fell off the heap of dung.

A big white dog with woolly tufts like curl-papers about its face, sopping from the rain, came into the shed and stared with curiosity at Yegorushka. It seemed to be hesitating whether to bark or not. Deciding that there was no need to bark, it went cautiously up to Yegorushka, ate the sticky plaster and went out again.

“There are Varlamov’s men!” someone shouted in the street.

After having his cry out, Yegorushka went out of the shed and, walking round a big puddle, made his way towards the street. The wagons were standing exactly opposite the gateway. The drenched wagoners, with their muddy feet, were sauntering beside them or sitting

on the shafts, as listless and drowsy as flies in autumn. Yegorushka looked at them and thought: “How dreary and comfortless to be a peasant!” He went up to Panteley and sat down beside him on the shaft.

“Grandfather, I’m cold,” he said, shivering and thrusting his hands up his sleeves.

“Never mind, we shall soon be there,” yawned Panteley. “Never mind, you will get warm.”

It must have been early when the wagons set off, for it was not hot. Yegorushka lay on the bales of wool and shivered with cold, though the sun soon came out and dried his clothes, the bales, and the earth. As soon as he closed his eyes he saw Tit and the windmill again. Feeling a sickness and heaviness all over, he did his utmost to drive away these images, but as soon as they vanished the daredevil Dymov, with red eyes and lifted fists, rushed at Yegorushka with a roar, or there was the sound of his complaint: “I am so dreary!” Varlamov rode by on his little Cossack stallion; happy Konstantin passed, with a smile and the bustard in his arms. And how tedious these people were, how sickening and unbearable!

Once—it was towards evening—he raised his head to ask for water. The wagons were standing on a big bridge across a broad river. There was black smoke below over the river, and through it could be seen a steamer with a barge in tow. Ahead of them, beyond the river, was a huge mountain dotted with houses and churches; at the foot of the mountain an engine was being shunted along beside some goods trucks.

Yegorushka had never before seen steamers, nor engines, nor broad rivers. Glancing at them now, he was not alarmed or surprised; there was not even a look of anything like curiosity in his face. He merely felt sick, and made haste to turn over to the edge of the bale. He was sick. Panteley, seeing this, cleared his throat and shook his head.

“Our little lad’s taken ill,” he said. “He must have got a chill to the stomach. The little lad must… away from home; it’s a bad lookout!”

VIII

The wagons stopped at a big inn for merchants, not far from the quay. As Yegorushka climbed down from the wagon he heard a very familiar voice. Someone was helping him to get down, and saying:

"We arrived yesterday evening.… We have been expecting you all day. We meant to overtake you yesterday, but it was out of our way; we came by the other road. I say, how you have crumpled your coat! You'll catch it from your uncle!"

Yegorushka looked into the speaker's mottled face and remembered that this was Deniska.

"Your uncle and Father Christopher are in the inn now, drinking tea; come along!"

And he led Yegorushka to a big two-storied building, dark and gloomy like the almshouse at N——. After going across the entry, up a dark staircase and through a narrow corridor, Yegorushka and Deniska reached a little room in which Ivan Ivanitch and Father Christopher were sitting at the tea-table. Seeing the boy, both the old men showed surprise and pleasure.

"Aha! Yegor Ni-ko-la-aitch!" chanted Father Christopher. "Mr. Lomonosov!"

"Ah, our gentleman that is to be," said Kuzmitchov, "pleased to see you!"

Yegorushka took off his greatcoat, kissed his uncle's hand and Father Christopher's, and sat down to the table.

"Well, how did you like the journey, *puer bone*?" Father Christopher pelted him with questions as he poured him out some tea, with his radiant smile. "Sick of it, I've no doubt? God save us all from having to travel by wagon or with oxen. You go on and on, God forgive us; you look ahead and the steppe is always lying stretched out the same as it was—you can't see the end of it! It's not travelling but regular torture. Why don't you drink your tea? Drink it up; and in your absence, while you have been trailing along with the wagons, we have settled all our business capitally. Thank God we have sold our wool to Tcherepahin,

and no one could wish to have done better.… We have made a good bargain.”

At the first sight of his own people Yegorushka felt an overwhelming desire to complain. He did not listen to Father Christopher, but thought how to begin and what exactly to complain of. But Father Christopher’s voice, which seemed to him harsh and unpleasant, prevented him from concentrating his attention and confused his thoughts. He had not sat at the table five minutes before he got up, went to the sofa and lay down.

“Well, well,” said Father Christopher in surprise. “What about your tea?”

Still thinking what to complain of, Yegorushka leaned his head against the wall and broke into sobs.

“Well, well!” repeated Father Christopher, getting up and going to the sofa. “Yegory, what is the matter with you? Why are you crying?”

“I’m… I’m ill,” Yegorushka brought out.

“Ill?” said Father Christopher in amazement. “That’s not the right thing, my boy.… One mustn’t be ill on a journey. Aie, aie, what are you thinking about, boy… eh?”

He put his hand to Yegorushka’s head, touched his cheek and said:

“Yes, your head’s feverish.… You must have caught cold or else have eaten something.… Pray to God.”

“Should we give him quinine?…” said Ivan Ivanitch, troubled.

“No; he ought to have something hot.… Yegory, have a little drop of soup? Eh?”

“I… don’t want any,” said Yegorushka.

“Are you feeling chilly?”

“I was chilly before, but now… now I am hot. And I ache all over.…”

Ivan Ivanitch went up to the sofa, touched Yegorushka on the head, cleared his throat with a perplexed air, and went back to the table.

“I tell you what, you undress and go to bed,” said Father Christopher. “What you want is sleep now.”

He helped Yegorushka to undress, gave him a pillow and covered him with a quilt, and over that Ivan Ivanitch’s greatcoat. Then he walked away on tiptoe and sat down to the table. Yegorushka shut his eyes, and at once it seemed to him that he was not in the hotel room, but on the high road beside the camp fire. Emelyan waved his hands, and Dymov with red eyes lay on his stomach and looked mockingly at Yegorushka.

“Beat him, beat him!” shouted Yegorushka.

“He is delirious,” said Father Christopher in an undertone.

“It’s a nuisance!” sighed Ivan Ivanitch.

“He must be rubbed with oil and vinegar. Please God, he will be better tomorrow.”

To be rid of bad dreams, Yegorushka opened his eyes and began looking towards the fire. Father Christopher and Ivan Ivanitch had now finished their tea and were talking in a whisper. The first was smiling with delight, and evidently could not forget that he had made a good bargain over his wool; what delighted him was not so much the actual profit he had made as the thought that on getting home he would gather round him his big family, wink slyly and go off into a chuckle; at first he would deceive them all, and say that he had sold the wool at a price below its value, then he would give his son-in-law, Mihail, a fat pocketbook and say: “Well, take it! that’s the way to do business!” Kuzmitchov did not seem pleased; his face expressed, as before, a businesslike reserve and anxiety.

“If I could have known that Tcherepahin would give such a price,” he said in a low voice, “I wouldn’t have sold Makarov those five tons at home. It is vexatious! But who could have told that the price had gone up here?”

A man in a white shirt cleared away the samovar and lighted the little lamp before the icon in the corner. Father Christopher whispered something in his ear; the man looked, made a serious face like a conspirator, as though to say, “I understand,” went out, and returned a little while afterwards and put something under the sofa. Ivan Ivanitch made himself a bed on the floor, yawned several times, said his prayers lazily, and lay down.

“I think of going to the cathedral tomorrow,” said Father Christopher. “I know the sacristan there. I ought to go and see the bishop after mass, but they say he is ill.”

He yawned and put out the lamp. Now there was no light in the room but the little lamp before the icon.

“They say he can’t receive visitors,” Father Christopher went on, undressing. “So I shall go away without seeing him.”

He took off his full coat, and Yegorushka saw Robinson Crusoe reappear. Robinson stirred something in a saucer, went up to Yegorushka and whispered:

“Lomonosov, are you asleep? Sit up; I’m going to rub you with oil and vinegar. It’s a good thing, only you must say a prayer.”

Yegorushka roused himself quickly and sat up. Father Christopher pulled down the boy’s shirt, and shrinking and breathing jerkily, as though he were being tickled himself, began rubbing Yegorushka’s chest.

“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,” he whispered, “lie with your back upwards—that’s it.… You’ll be all right tomorrow, but don’t do it again.… You are as hot as fire. I suppose you were on the road in the storm.”

“Yes.”

“You might well fall ill! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,… you might well fall ill!”

After rubbing Yegorushka, Father Christopher put on his shirt again, covered him, made the sign of the cross over him, and walked away. Then Yegorushka saw him saying his prayers. Probably the old man knew a great many prayers by heart, for he stood a long time before the icon murmuring. After saying his prayers he made the sign of the cross over the window, the door, Yegorushka, and Ivan Ivanitch, lay down on the little sofa without a pillow, and covered himself with his full coat. A clock in the corridor struck ten. Yegorushka thought how long a time it would be before morning; feeling miserable, he pressed his forehead against the back of the sofa and left off trying to get rid of the oppressive misty dreams. But morning came much sooner than he expected.

It seemed to him that he had not been lying long with his head pressed to the back of the sofa, but when he opened his eyes slanting rays of sunlight were already shining on the floor through the two windows of the little hotel room. Father Christopher and Ivan Ivanitch were not in the room. The room had been tidied; it was bright, snug, and smelt of Father Christopher, who always smelt of cypress and dried cornflowers (at home he used to make the holy-water sprinklers and decorations for the icon-stands out of cornflowers, and so he was saturated with the smell of them). Yegorushka looked at the pillow, at the slanting sunbeams, at his boots, which had been cleaned and were standing side by side near the sofa, and laughed. It seemed strange to him that he was not on the bales of wool, that everything was dry around him, and that there was no thunder and lightning on the ceiling.

He jumped off the sofa and began dressing. He felt splendid; nothing was left of his yesterday’s illness but a slight weakness in his legs and neck. So the vinegar and oil had done good. He remembered the steamer, the railway engine, and the broad river, which he had dimly seen the day before, and now he made haste to dress, to run to the quay and have a look at them. When he had washed and was putting on his red shirt, the latch of the door clicked, and Father Christopher appeared in the doorway, wearing his top-hat and a brown silk cassock over his canvas coat and carrying his staff in his hand. Smiling and radiant (old men are

always radiant when they come back from church), he put a roll of holy bread and a parcel of some sort on the table, prayed before the icon, and said:

"God has sent us blessings—well, how are you?"

"Quite well now," answered Yegorushka, kissing his hand.

"Thank God.… I have come from mass. I've been to see a sacristan I know. He invited me to breakfast with him, but I didn't go. I don't like visiting people too early, God bless them!"

He took off his cassock, stroked himself on the chest, and without haste undid the parcel. Yegorushka saw a little tin of caviar, a piece of dry sturgeon, and a French loaf.

"See; I passed a fish-shop and brought this," said Father Christopher. "There is no need to indulge in luxuries on an ordinary weekday; but I thought, I've an invalid at home, so it is excusable. And the caviar is good, real sturgeon.…"

The man in the white shirt brought in the samovar and a tray with tea-things.

"Eat some," said Father Christopher, spreading the caviar on a slice of bread and handing it to Yegorushka. "Eat now and enjoy yourself, but the time will soon come for you to be studying. Mind you study with attention and application, so that good may come of it. What you have to learn by heart, learn by heart, but when you have to tell the inner sense in your own words, without regard to the outer form, then say it in your own words. And try to master all subjects. One man knows mathematics excellently, but has never heard of Pyotr Mogila; another knows about Pyotr Mogila, but cannot explain about the moon. But you study so as to understand everything. Study Latin, French, German,… geography, of course, history, theology, philosophy, mathematics,… and when you have mastered everything, not with haste but with prayer and with zeal, then go into the service. When you know everything it will be easy for you in any line of life.… You study and strive for the divine blessing, and God will show you what to be. Whether a doctor, a judge or an engineer.…"

Father Christopher spread a little caviar on a piece of bread, put it in his mouth and said:

"The Apostle Paul says: 'Do not apply yourself to strange and diverse studies.' Of course, if it is black magic, unlawful arts, or calling up spirits from the other world, like Saul, or studying subjects that can be of no use to yourself or others, better not learn them. You must undertake only what God has blessed. Take example… the Holy Apostles spoke in

all languages, so you study languages. Basil the Great studied mathematics and philosophy—so you study them; St. Nestor wrote history—so you study and write history. Take example from the saints."

Father Christopher sipped the tea from his saucer, wiped his moustaches, and shook his head.

"Good!" he said. "I was educated in the old-fashioned way; I have forgotten a great deal by now, but still I live differently from other people. Indeed, there is no comparison. For instance, in company at a dinner, or at an assembly, one says something in Latin, or makes some allusion from history or philosophy, and it pleases people, and it pleases me myself.… Or when the circuit court comes and one has to take the oath, all the other priests are shy, but I am quite at home with the judges, the prosecutors, and the lawyers. I talk intellectually, drink a cup of tea with them, laugh, ask them what I don't know,… and they like it. So that's how it is, my boy. Learning is light and ignorance is darkness. Study! It's hard, of course; nowadays study is expensive.… Your mother is a widow; she lives on her pension, but there, of course…"

Father Christopher glanced apprehensively towards the door, and went on in a whisper:

"Ivan Ivanitch will assist. He won't desert you. He has no children of his own, and he will help you. Don't be uneasy."

He looked grave, and whispered still more softly:

"Only mind, Yegory, don't forget your mother and Ivan Ivanitch, God preserve you from it. The commandment bids you honour your mother, and Ivan Ivanitch is your benefactor and takes the place of a father to you. If you become learned, God forbid you should be impatient and scornful with people because they are not so clever as you, then woe, woe to you!"

Father Christopher raised his hand and repeated in a thin voice:

"Woe to you! Woe to you!"

Father Christopher's tongue was loosened, and he was, as they say, warming to his subject; he would not have finished till dinnertime but the door opened and Ivan Ivanitch walked in. He said good morning hurriedly, sat down to the table, and began rapidly swallowing his tea.

"Well, I have settled all our business," he said. "We might have gone home today, but we have still to think about Yegor. We must arrange for him. My sister told me that Nastasya Petrovna, a friend of hers, lives somewhere here, so perhaps she will take him in as a boarder."

He rummaged in his pocketbook, found a crumpled note and read:

“‘Little Lower Street: Nastasya Petrovna Toskunov, living in a house of her own.’ We must go at once and try to find her. It’s a nuisance!”

Soon after breakfast Ivan Ivanitch and Yegorushka left the inn.

“It’s a nuisance,” muttered his uncle. “You are sticking to me like a burr. You and your mother want education and gentlemanly breeding and I have nothing but worry with you both.…”

When they crossed the yard, the wagons and the drivers were not there. They had all gone off to the quay early in the morning. In a far-off dark corner of the yard stood the chaise.

“Goodbye, chaise!” thought Yegorushka.

At first they had to go a long way uphill by a broad street, then they had to cross a big marketplace; here Ivan Ivanitch asked a policeman for Little Lower Street.

“I say,” said the policeman, with a grin, “it’s a long way off, out that way towards the town grazing ground.”

They met several cabs but Ivan Ivanitch only permitted himself such a weakness as taking a cab in exceptional cases and on great holidays. Yegorushka and he walked for a long while through paved streets, then along streets where there were only wooden planks at the sides and no pavements, and in the end got to streets where there were neither planks nor pavements. When their legs and their tongues had brought them to Little Lower Street they were both red in the face, and taking off their hats, wiped away the perspiration.

“Tell me, please,” said Ivan Ivanitch, addressing an old man sitting on a little bench by a gate, “where is Nastasya Petrovna Toskunov’s house?”

“There is no one called Toskunov here,” said the old man, after pondering a moment. “Perhaps it’s Timoshenko you want.”

“No, Toskunov.…”

“Excuse me, there’s no one called Toskunov.…”

Ivan Ivanitch shrugged his shoulders and trudged on farther.

“You needn’t look,” the old man called after them. “I tell you there isn’t, and there isn’t.”

“Listen, auntie,” said Ivan Ivanitch, addressing an old woman who was sitting at a corner with a tray of pears and sunflower seeds, “where is Nastasya Petrovna Toskunov’s house?”

The old woman looked at him with surprise and laughed.

“Why, Nastasya Petrovna live in her own house now!” she cried. “Lord! it is eight years since she married her daughter and gave up the house to her son-in-law! It’s her son-in-law lives there now.”

And her eyes expressed: “How is it you didn’t know a simple thing like that, you fools?”

“And where does she live now?” Ivan Ivanitch asked.

“Oh, Lord!” cried the old woman, flinging up her hands in surprise. “She moved ever so long ago! It’s eight years since she gave up her house to her son-in-law! Upon my word!”

She probably expected Ivan Ivanitch to be surprised, too, and to exclaim: “You don’t say so,” but Ivan Ivanitch asked very calmly:

“Where does she live now?”

The old woman tucked up her sleeves and, stretching out her bare arm to point, shouted in a shrill piercing voice:

“Go straight on, straight on, straight on. You will pass a little red house, then you will see a little alley on your left. Turn down that little alley, and it will be the third gate on the right.…”

Ivan Ivanitch and Yegorushka reached the little red house, turned to the left down the little alley, and made for the third gate on the right. On both sides of this very old grey gate there was a grey fence with big gaps in it. The first part of the fence was tilting forwards and threatened to fall, while on the left of the gate it sloped backwards towards the yard. The gate itself stood upright and seemed to be still undecided which would suit it best—to fall forwards or backwards. Ivan Ivanitch opened the little gate at the side, and he and Yegorushka saw a big yard overgrown with weeds and burdocks. A hundred paces from the gate stood a little house with a red roof and green shutters. A stout woman with her sleeves tucked up and her apron held out was standing in the middle of the yard, scattering something on the ground and shouting in a voice as shrill as that of the woman selling fruit:

“Chick!… Chick!… Chick!”

Behind her sat a red dog with pointed ears. Seeing the strangers, he ran to the little gate and broke into a tenor bark (all red dogs have a tenor bark).

“Whom do you want?” asked the woman, putting up her hand to shade her eyes from the sun.

“Good morning!” Ivan Ivanitch shouted, too, waving off the red dog with his stick. “Tell me, please, does Nastasya Petrovna Toskunov live here?”

“Yes! But what do you want with her?”

“Perhaps you are Nastasya Petrovna?”

“Well, yes, I am!”

“Very pleased to see you.… You see, your old friend Olga Ivanovna Knyasev sends her love to you. This is her little son. And I, perhaps you remember, am her brother Ivan Ivanitch.… You are one of us from N——.… You were born among us and married there.…”

A silence followed. The stout woman stared blankly at Ivan Ivanitch, as though not believing or not understanding him, then she flushed all over, and flung up her hands; the oats were scattered out of her apron and tears spurted from her eyes.

“Olga Ivanovna!” she screamed, breathless with excitement. “My own darling! Ah, holy saints, why am I standing here like a fool? My pretty little angel.…”

She embraced Yegorushka, wetted his face with her tears, and broke down completely.

“Heavens!” she said, wringing her hands, “Olga’s little boy! How delightful! He is his mother all over! The image of his mother! But why are you standing in the yard? Come indoors.”

Crying, gasping for breath and talking as she went, she hurried towards the house. Her visitors trudged after her.

“The room has not been done yet,” she said, ushering the visitors into a stuffy little drawing room adorned with many icons and pots of flowers. “Oh, Mother of God! Vassilisa, go and open the shutters anyway! My little angel! My little beauty! I did not know that Olitchka had a boy like that!”

When she had calmed down and got over her first surprise Ivan Ivanitch asked to speak to her alone. Yegorushka went into another room; there was a sewing-machine; in the window was a cage with a starling in it, and there were as many icons and flowers as in the drawing room. Near the machine stood a little girl with a sunburnt face and chubby cheeks like Tit’s, and a clean cotton dress. She stared at Yegorushka without blinking, and apparently felt very awkward. Yegorushka looked at her and after a pause asked:

“What’s your name?”

The little girl moved her lips, looked as if she were going to cry, and answered softly:

“Atka.…”

This meant Katka.

“He will live with you,” Ivan Ivanitch was whispering in the drawing room, “if you will be so kind, and we will pay ten roubles a month for his keep. He is not a spoilt boy; he is quiet.…”

“I really don’t know what to say, Ivan Ivanitch!” Nastasya Petrovna sighed tearfully. “Ten roubles a month is very good, but it is a dreadful thing to take another person’s child! He may fall ill or something.…”

When Yegorushka was summoned back to the drawing room Ivan Ivanitch was standing with his hat in his hands, saying goodbye.

“Well, let him stay with you now, then,” he said. “Goodbye! You stay, Yegor!” he said, addressing his nephew. “Don’t be troublesome; mind you obey Nastasya Petrovna.… Goodbye; I am coming again tomorrow.”

And he went away. Nastasya once more embraced Yegorushka, called him a little angel, and with a tear-stained face began preparing for dinner. Three minutes later Yegorushka was sitting beside her, answering her endless questions and eating hot savoury cabbage soup.

In the evening he sat again at the same table and, resting his head on his hand, listened to Nastasya Petrovna. Alternately laughing and crying, she talked of his mother’s young days, her own marriage, her children.… A cricket chirruped in the stove, and there was a faint humming from the burner of the lamp. Nastasya Petrovna talked in a low voice, and was continually dropping her thimble in her excitement; and Katka her granddaughter, crawled under the table after it and each time sat a long while under the table, probably examining Yegorushka’s feet; and Yegorushka listened, half dozing and looking at the old woman’s face, her wart with hairs on it, and the stains of tears, and he felt sad, very sad. He was put to sleep on a chest and told that if he were hungry in the night he must go out into the little passage and take some chicken, put there under a plate in the window.

Next morning Ivan Ivanitch and Father Christopher came to say goodbye. Nastasya Petrovna was delighted to see them, and was about to set the samovar; but Ivan Ivanitch, who was in a great hurry, waved his hands and said:

“We have no time for tea! We are just setting off.”

Before parting they all sat down and were silent for a minute. Nastasya Petrovna heaved a deep sigh and looked towards the icon with tear-stained eyes.

“Well,” began Ivan Ivanitch, getting up, “so you will stay.…”

All at once the look of businesslike reserve vanished from his face; he flushed a little and said with a mournful smile:

“Mind you work hard.… Don’t forget your mother, and obey Nastasya Petrovna.… If you are diligent at school, Yegor, I’ll stand by you.”

He took his purse out of his pocket, turned his back to Yegorushka, fumbled for a long time among the smaller coins, and, finding a ten-kopeck piece, gave it to Yegorushka.

Father Christopher, without haste, blessed Yegorushka.

“In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.… Study,” he said. “Work hard, my lad. If I die, remember me in your prayers. Here is a ten-kopeck piece from me, too.…”

Yegorushka kissed his hand, and shed tears; something whispered in his heart that he would never see the old man again.

“I have applied at the high school already,” said Ivan Ivanitch in a voice as though there were a corpse in the room. “You will take him for the entrance examination on the seventh of August.… Well, goodbye; God bless you, goodbye, Yegor!”

“You might at least have had a cup of tea,” wailed Nastasya Petrovna.

Through the tears that filled his eyes Yegorushka could not see his uncle and Father Christopher go out. He rushed to the window, but they were not in the yard, and the red dog, who had just been barking, was running back from the gate with the air of having done his duty. When Yegorushka ran out of the gate Ivan Ivanitch and Father Christopher, the former waving his stick with the crook, the latter his staff, were just turning the corner. Yegorushka felt that with these people all that he had known till then had vanished from him forever. He sank helplessly on to the little bench, and with bitter tears greeted the new unknown life that was beginning for him now.…

What would that life be like?

LIGHTS

The dog was barking excitedly outside. And Ananyev the engineer, his assistant called Von Schtenberg, and I went out of the hut to see at whom it was barking. I was the visitor, and might have remained indoors, but I must confess my head was a little dizzy from the wine I had drunk, and I was glad to get a breath of fresh air.

"There is nobody here," said Ananyev when we went out. "Why are you telling stories, Azorka? You fool!"

There was not a soul in sight.

"The fool," Azorka, a black house-dog, probably conscious of his guilt in barking for nothing and anxious to propitiate us, approached us, diffidently wagging his tail. The engineer bent down and touched him between his ears.

"Why are you barking for nothing, creature?" he said in the tone in which good-natured people talk to children and dogs. "Have you had a bad dream or what? Here, doctor, let me commend to your attention," he said, turning to me, "a wonderfully nervous subject! Would you believe it, he can't endure solitude—he is always having terrible dreams and suffering from nightmares; and when you shout at him he has something like an attack of hysterics."

"Yes, a dog of refined feelings," the student chimed in.

Azorka must have understood that the conversation was concerning him. He turned his head upwards and grinned plaintively, as though to say, "Yes, at times I suffer unbearably, but please excuse it!"

It was an August night, there were stars, but it was dark. Owing to the fact that I had never in my life been in such exceptional surroundings, as I had chanced to come into now, the starry night seemed to me gloomy, inhospitable, and darker than it was in reality. I was on a railway line which was still in process of construction. The high, half-finished embankment, the mounds of sand, clay, and rubble, the holes, the wheelbarrows standing here and there, the flat tops of the mud huts in which the workmen lived—all this muddle, coloured to one tint by the

darkness, gave the earth a strange, wild aspect that suggested the times of chaos. There was so little order in all that lay before me that it was somehow strange in the midst of the hideously excavated, grotesque-looking earth to see the silhouettes of human beings and the slender telegraph posts. Both spoiled the ensemble of the picture, and seemed to belong to a different world. It was still, and the only sound came from the telegraph wire droning its wearisome refrain somewhere very high above our heads.

We climbed up on the embankment and from its height looked down upon the earth. A hundred yards away where the pits, holes, and mounds melted into the darkness of the night, a dim light was twinkling. Beyond it gleamed another light, beyond that a third, then a hundred paces away two red eyes glowed side by side—probably the windows of some hut—and a long series of such lights, growing continually closer and dimmer, stretched along the line to the very horizon, then turned in a semicircle to the left and disappeared in the darkness of the distance. The lights were motionless. There seemed to be something in common between them and the stillness of the night and the disconsolate song of the telegraph wire. It seemed as though some weighty secret were buried under the embankment and only the lights, the night, and the wires knew of it.

"How glorious, O Lord!" sighed Ananyev; "such space and beauty that one can't tear oneself away! And what an embankment! It's not an embankment, my dear fellow, but a regular Mont Blanc. It's costing millions.…"

Going into ecstasies over the lights and the embankment that was costing millions, intoxicated by the wine and his sentimental mood, the engineer slapped Von Schtenberg on the shoulder and went on in a jocose tone:

"Well, Mihail Mihailitch, lost in reveries? No doubt it is pleasant to look at the work of one's own hands, eh? Last year this very spot was bare steppe, not a sight of human life, and now look: life… civilisation… And how splendid it all is, upon my soul! You and I are building a railway, and after we are gone, in another century or two, good men will build a factory, a school, a hospital, and things will begin to move! Eh!"

The student stood motionless with his hands thrust in his pockets, and did not take his eyes off the lights. He was not listening to the engineer, but was thinking, and was apparently in the mood in which one does not want to speak or to listen. After a prolonged silence he turned to me and said quietly:

“Do you know what those endless lights are like? They make me think of something long dead, that lived thousands of years ago, something like the camps of the Amalekites or the Philistines. It is as though some people of the Old Testament had pitched their camp and were waiting for morning to fight with Saul or David. All that is wanting to complete the illusion is the blare of trumpets and sentries calling to one another in some Ethiopian language.”

And, as though of design, the wind fluttered over the line and brought a sound like the clank of weapons. A silence followed. I don’t know what the engineer and the student were thinking of, but it seemed to me already that I actually saw before me something long dead and even heard the sentry talking in an unknown tongue. My imagination hastened to picture the tents, the strange people, their clothes, their armour.

“Yes,” muttered the student pensively, “once Philistines and Amalekites were living in this world, making wars, playing their part, and now no trace of them remains. So it will be with us. Now we are making a railway, are standing here philosophising, but two thousand years will pass—and of this embankment and of all those men, asleep after their hard work, not one grain of dust will remain. In reality, it’s awful!”

“You must drop those thoughts…” said the engineer gravely and admonishingly.

“Why?”

“Because…. Thoughts like that are for the end of life, not for the beginning of it. You are too young for them.”

“Why so?” repeated the student.

“All these thoughts of the transitoriness, the insignificance and the aimlessness of life, of the inevitability of death, of the shadows of the grave, and so on, all such lofty thoughts, I tell you, my dear fellow, are good and natural in old age when they come as the product of years of inner travail, and are won by suffering and really are intellectual riches; for a youthful brain on the threshold of real life they are simply a calamity! A calamity!” Ananyev repeated with a wave of his hand. “To my mind it is better at your age to have no head on your shoulders at all than to think on these lines. I am speaking seriously, Baron. And I have been meaning to speak to you about it for a long time, for I noticed from the very first day of our acquaintance your partiality for these damnable ideas!”

“Good gracious, why are they damnable?” the student asked with a smile, and from his voice and his face I could see that he asked the

question from simple politeness, and that the discussion raised by the engineer did not interest him in the least.

I could hardly keep my eyes open. I was dreaming that immediately after our walk we should wish each other good night and go to bed, but my dream was not quickly realised. When we had returned to the hut the engineer put away the empty bottles and took out of a large wicker hamper two full ones, and uncorking them, sat down to his worktable with the evident intention of going on drinking, talking, and working. Sipping a little from his glass, he made pencil notes on some plans and went on pointing out to the student that the latter's way of thinking was not what it should be. The student sat beside him checking accounts and saying nothing. He, like me, had no inclination to speak or to listen. That I might not interfere with their work, I sat away from the table on the engineer's crooked-legged travelling bedstead, feeling bored and expecting every moment that they would suggest I should go to bed. It was going on for one o'clock.

Having nothing to do, I watched my new acquaintances. I had never seen Ananyev or the student before. I had only made their acquaintance on the night I have described. Late in the evening I was returning on horseback from a fair to the house of a landowner with whom I was staying, had got on the wrong road in the dark and lost my way. Going round and round by the railway line and seeing how dark the night was becoming, I thought of the "barefoot railway roughs," who lie in wait for travellers on foot and on horseback, was frightened, and knocked at the first hut I came to. There I was cordially received by Ananyev and the student. As is usually the case with strangers casually brought together, we quickly became acquainted, grew friendly and at first over the tea and afterward over the wine, began to feel as though we had known each other for years. At the end of an hour or so, I knew who they were and how fate had brought them from town to the faraway steppe; and they knew who I was, what my occupation and my way of thinking.

Nikolay Anastasyevitch Ananyev, the engineer, was a broad-shouldered, thickset man, and, judging from his appearance, he had, like Othello, begun the "descent into the vale of years," and was growing rather too stout. He was just at that stage which old matchmaking women mean when they speak of "a man in the prime of his age," that is, he was neither young nor old, was fond of good fare, good liquor, and praising the past, panted a little as he walked, snored loudly when he was asleep, and in his manner with those surrounding him displayed that calm imperturbable good humour which is always acquired by decent people

by the time they have reached the grade of a staff officer and begun to grow stout. His hair and beard were far from being grey, but already, with a condescension of which he was unconscious, he addressed young men as “my dear boy” and felt himself entitled to lecture them good-humouredly about their way of thinking. His movements and his voice were calm, smooth, and self-confident, as they are in a man who is thoroughly well aware that he has got his feet firmly planted on the right road, that he has definite work, a secure living, a settled outlook.… His sunburnt, thick-nosed face and muscular neck seemed to say: “I am well fed, healthy, satisfied with myself, and the time will come when you young people too, will be well-fed, healthy, and satisfied with yourselves.…” He was dressed in a cotton shirt with the collar awry and in full linen trousers thrust into his high boots. From certain trifles, as for instance, from his coloured worsted girdle, his embroidered collar, and the patch on his elbow, I was able to guess that he was married and in all probability tenderly loved by his wife.

Baron Von Schtenberg, a student of the Institute of Transport, was a young man of about three or four and twenty. Only his fair hair and scanty beard, and, perhaps, a certain coarseness and frigidity in his features showed traces of his descent from Barons of the Baltic provinces; everything else—his name, Mihail Mihailovitch, his religion, his ideas, his manners, and the expression of his face were purely Russian. Wearing, like Ananyev, a cotton shirt and high boots, with his round shoulders, his hair left uncut, and his sunburnt face, he did not look like a student or a Baron, but like an ordinary Russian workman. His words and gestures were few, he drank reluctantly without relish, checked the accounts mechanically, and seemed all the while to be thinking of something else. His movements and voice were calm, and smooth too, but his calmness was of a different kind from the engineer’s. His sunburnt, slightly ironical, dreamy face, his eyes which looked up from under his brows, and his whole figure were expressive of spiritual stagnation—mental sloth. He looked as though it did not matter to him in the least whether the light were burning before him or not, whether the wine were nice or nasty, and whether the accounts he was checking were correct or not.… And on his intelligent, calm face I read: “I don’t see so far any good in definite work, a secure living, and a settled outlook. It’s all nonsense. I was in Petersburg, now I am sitting here in this hut, in the autumn I shall go back to Petersburg, then in the spring here again.… What sense there is in all that I don’t know, and no one knows.… And so it’s no use talking about it.…”

He listened to the engineer without interest, with the condescending indifference with which cadets in the senior classes listen to an effusive and good-natured old attendant. It seemed as though there were nothing new to him in what the engineer said, and that if he had not himself been too lazy to talk, he would have said something newer and cleverer. Meanwhile Ananyev would not desist. He had by now laid aside his good-humoured, jocose tone and spoke seriously, even with a fervour which was quite out of keeping with his expression of calmness. Apparently he had no distaste for abstract subjects, was fond of them, indeed, but had neither skill nor practice in the handling of them. And this lack of practice was so pronounced in his talk that I did not always grasp his meaning at once.

"I hate those ideas with all my heart!" he said, "I was infected by them myself in my youth, I have not quite got rid of them even now, and I tell you—perhaps because I am stupid and such thoughts were not the right food for my mind—they did me nothing but harm. That's easy to understand! Thoughts of the aimlessness of life, of the insignificance and transitoriness of the visible world, Solomon's 'vanity of vanities' have been, and are to this day, the highest and final stage in the realm of thought. The thinker reaches that stage and—comes to a halt! There is nowhere further to go. The activity of the normal brain is completed with this, and that is natural and in the order of things. Our misfortune is that we begin thinking at that end. What normal people end with we begin with. From the first start, as soon as the brain begins working independently, we mount to the very topmost, final step and refuse to know anything about the steps below."

"What harm is there in that?" said the student.

"But you must understand that it's abnormal," shouted Ananyev, looking at him almost wrathfully. "If we find means of mounting to the topmost step without the help of the lower ones, then the whole long ladder, that is the whole of life, with its colours, sounds, and thoughts, loses all meaning for us. That at your age such reflections are harmful and absurd, you can see from every step of your rational independent life. Let us suppose you sit down this minute to read Darwin or Shakespeare, you have scarcely read a page before the poison shows itself; and your long life, and Shakespeare, and Darwin, seem to you nonsense, absurdity, because you know you will die, that Shakespeare and Darwin have died too, that their thoughts have not saved them, nor the earth, nor you, and that if life is deprived of meaning in that way, all science, poetry, and exalted thoughts seem only useless diversions, the

idle playthings of grown up people; and you leave off reading at the second page. Now, let us suppose that people come to you as an intelligent man and ask your opinion about war, for instance: whether it is desirable, whether it is morally justifiable or not. In answer to that terrible question you merely shrug your shoulders and confine yourself to some commonplace, because for you, with your way of thinking, it makes absolutely no difference whether hundreds of thousands of people die a violent death, or a natural one: the results are the same—ashes and oblivion. You and I are building a railway line. What's the use, one may ask, of our worrying our heads, inventing, rising above the hackneyed thing, feeling for the workmen, stealing or not stealing, when we know that this railway line will turn to dust within two thousand years, and so on, and so on.… You must admit that with such a disastrous way of looking at things there can be no progress, no science, no art, nor even thought itself. We fancy that we are cleverer than the crowd, and than Shakespeare. In reality our thinking leads to nothing because we have no inclination to go down to the lower steps and there is nowhere higher to go, so our brain stands at the freezing point—neither up nor down; I was in bondage to these ideas for six years, and by all that is holy, I never read a sensible book all that time, did not gain a ha'porth of wisdom, and did not raise my moral standard an inch. Was not that disastrous? Moreover, besides being corrupted ourselves, we bring poison into the lives of those surrounding us. It would be all right if, with our pessimism, we renounced life, went to live in a cave, or made haste to die, but, as it is, in obedience to the universal law, we live, feel, love women, bring up children, construct railways!"

"Our thoughts make no one hot or cold," the student said reluctantly.

"Ah! there you are again!—do stop it! You have not yet had a good sniff at life. But when you have lived as long as I have you will know a thing or two! Our theory of life is not so innocent as you suppose. In practical life, in contact with human beings, it leads to nothing but horrors and follies. It has been my lot to pass through experiences which I would not wish a wicked Tatar to endure."

"For instance?" I asked.

"For instance?" repeated the engineer.

He thought a minute, smiled and said:

"For instance, take this example. More correctly, it is not an example, but a regular drama, with a plot and a denouement. An excellent lesson! Ah, what a lesson!"

He poured out wine for himself and us, emptied his glass, stroked his broad chest with his open hands, and went on, addressing himself more to me than to the student.

“It was in the year 187–, soon after the war, and when I had just left the University. I was going to the Caucasus, and on the way stopped for five days in the seaside town of N——. I must tell you that I was born and grew up in that town, and so there is nothing odd in my thinking N—— extraordinarily snug, cosy, and beautiful, though for a man from Petersburg or Moscow, life in it would be as dreary and comfortless as in any Tchuhloma or Kashira. With melancholy I passed by the high school where I had been a pupil; with melancholy I walked about the very familiar park, I made a melancholy attempt to get a nearer look at people I had not seen for a long time—all with the same melancholy.

“Among other things, I drove out one evening to the so-called Quarantine. It was a small mangy copse in which, at some forgotten time of plague, there really had been a quarantine station, and which was now the resort of summer visitors. It was a drive of three miles from the town along a good soft road. As one drove along one saw on the left the blue sea, on the right the unending gloomy steppe; there was plenty of air to breathe, and wide views for the eyes to rest on. The copse itself lay on the seashore. Dismissing my cabman, I went in at the familiar gates and first turned along an avenue leading to a little stone summerhouse which I had been fond of in my childhood. In my opinion that round, heavy summerhouse on its clumsy columns, which combined the romantic charm of an old tomb with the ungainliness of a Sobakevitch,[3] was the most poetical nook in the whole town. It stood at the edge above the cliff, and from it there was a splendid view of the sea.

“I sat down on the seat, and, bending over the parapet, looked down. A path ran from the summerhouse along the steep, almost overhanging cliff, between the lumps of clay and tussocks of burdock. Where it ended, far below on the sandy shore, low waves were languidly foaming and softly purring. The sea was as majestic, as infinite, and as forbidding as seven years before when I left the high school and went from my native town to the capital; in the distance there was a dark streak of smoke—a steamer was passing—and except for this hardly visible and motionless streak and the sea-swallows that flitted over the water, there was nothing to give life to the monotonous view of sea and sky. To right and left of the summerhouse stretched uneven clay cliffs.

“You know that when a man in a melancholy mood is left tête-à-tête with the sea, or any landscape which seems to him grandiose, there is

always, for some reason, mixed with melancholy, a conviction that he will live and die in obscurity, and he reflectively snatches up a pencil and hastens to write his name on the first thing that comes handy. And that, I suppose, is why all convenient solitary nooks like my summerhouse are always scrawled over in pencil or carved with penknives. I remember as though it were today; looking at the parapet I read: ‘Ivan Korolkov, May 16, 1876.’ Beside Korolkov some local dreamer had scribbled freely, adding:

> “‘He stood on the desolate ocean’s strand,
> While his soul was filled with imaginings grand.’

“And his handwriting was dreamy, limp like wet silk. An individual called Kross, probably an insignificant, little man, felt his unimportance so deeply that he gave full licence to his penknife and carved his name in deep letters an inch high. I took a pencil out of my pocket mechanically, and I too scribbled on one of the columns. All that is irrelevant, however… You must forgive me—I don’t know how to tell a story briefly.

“I was sad and a little bored. Boredom, the stillness, and the purring of the sea gradually brought me to the line of thought we have been discussing. At that period, towards the end of the ’seventies, it had begun to be fashionable with the public, and later, at the beginning of the ’eighties, it gradually passed from the general public into literature, science, and politics. I was no more than twenty-six at the time, but I knew perfectly well that life was aimless and had no meaning, that everything was a deception and an illusion, that in its essential nature and results a life of penal servitude in Sahalin was not in any way different from a life spent in Nice, that the difference between the brain of a Kant and the brain of a fly was of no real significance, that no one in this world is righteous or guilty, that everything was stuff and nonsense and damn it all! I lived as though I were doing a favour to some unseen power which compelled me to live, and to which I seemed to say: ‘Look, I don’t care a straw for life, but I am living!’ I thought on one definite line, but in all sorts of keys, and in that respect I was like the subtle gourmand who could prepare a hundred appetising dishes from nothing but potatoes. There is no doubt that I was one-sided and even to some extent narrow, but I fancied at the time that my intellectual horizon had neither beginning nor end, and that my thought was as boundless as the sea. Well, as far as I can judge by myself, the philosophy of which we

are speaking has something alluring, narcotic in its nature, like tobacco or morphia. It becomes a habit, a craving. You take advantage of every minute of solitude to gloat over thoughts of the aimlessness of life and the darkness of the grave. While I was sitting in the summerhouse, Greek children with long noses were decorously walking about the avenues. I took advantage of the occasion and, looking at them, began reflecting in this style:

"'Why are these children born, and what are they living for? Is there any sort of meaning in their existence? They grow up, without themselves knowing what for; they will live in this Godforsaken, comfortless hole for no sort of reason, and then they will die.…'

"And I actually felt vexed with those children because they were walking about decorously and talking with dignity, as though they did not hold their little colourless lives so cheap and knew what they were living for.… I remember that far away at the end of an avenue three feminine figures came into sight. Three young ladies, one in a pink dress, two in white, were walking arm-in-arm, talking and laughing. Looking after them, I thought:

"'It wouldn't be bad to have an affair with some woman for a couple of days in this dull place.'

"I recalled by the way that it was three weeks since I had visited my Petersburg lady, and thought that a passing love affair would come in very appropriately for me just now. The young lady in white in the middle was rather younger and better looking than her companions, and judging by her manners and her laugh, she was a high school girl in an upper form. I looked, not without impure thoughts, at her bust, and at the same time reflected about her: 'She will be trained in music and manners, she will be married to some Greek—God help us!—will lead a grey, stupid, comfortless life, will bring into the world a crowd of children without knowing why, and then will die. An absurd life!'

"I must say that as a rule I was a great hand at combining my lofty ideas with the lowest prose.

"Thoughts of the darkness of the grave did not prevent me from giving busts and legs their full due. Our dear Baron's exalted ideas do not prevent him from going on Saturdays to Vukolovka on amatory expeditions. To tell the honest truth, as far as I remember, my attitude to women was most insulting. Now, when I think of that high school girl, I blush for my thoughts then, but at the time my conscience was perfectly untroubled. I, the son of honourable parents, a Christian, who had received a superior education, not naturally wicked or stupid, felt not the

slightest uneasiness when I paid women *blutgeld*, as the Germans call it, or when I followed high school girls with insulting looks.… The trouble is that youth makes its demands, and our philosophy has nothing in principle against those demands, whether they are good or whether they are loathsome. One who knows that life is aimless and death inevitable is not interested in the struggle against nature or the conception of sin: whether you struggle or whether you don't, you will die and rot just the same.… Secondly, my friends, our philosophy instils even into very young people what is called reasonableness. The predominance of reason over the heart is simply overwhelming amongst us. Direct feeling, inspiration—everything is choked by petty analysis. Where there is reasonableness there is coldness, and cold people—it's no use to disguise it—know nothing of chastity. That virtue is only known to those who are warm, affectionate, and capable of love. Thirdly, our philosophy denies the significance of each individual personality. It's easy to see that if I deny the personality of some Natalya Stepanovna, it's absolutely nothing to me whether she is insulted or not. Today one insults her dignity as a human being and pays her *blutgeld*, and next day thinks no more of her.

"So I sat in the summerhouse and watched the young ladies. Another woman's figure appeared in the avenue, with fair hair, her head uncovered and a white knitted shawl on her shoulders. She walked along the avenue, then came into the summerhouse, and taking hold of the parapet, looked indifferently below and into the distance over the sea. As she came in she paid no attention to me, as though she did not notice me. I scrutinised her from foot to head (not from head to foot, as one scrutinises men) and found that she was young, not more than five-and-twenty, nice-looking, with a good figure, in all probability married and belonging to the class of respectable women. She was dressed as though she were at home, but fashionably and with taste, as ladies are, as a rule, in N——.

"'This one would do nicely,' I thought, looking at her handsome figure and her arms; 'she is all right.… She is probably the wife of some doctor or schoolmaster.…'

"But to make up to her—that is, to make her the heroine of one of those impromptu affairs to which tourists are so prone—was not easy and, indeed, hardly possible. I felt that as I gazed at her face. The way she looked, and the expression of her face, suggested that the sea, the smoke in the distance, and the sky had bored her long, long ago, and wearied her sight. She seemed to be tired, bored, and thinking about something dreary, and her face had not even that fussy, affectedly

indifferent expression which one sees in the face of almost every woman when she is conscious of the presence of an unknown man in her vicinity.

"The fair-haired lady took a bored and passing glance at me, sat down on a seat and sank into reverie, and from her face I saw that she had no thoughts for me, and that I, with my Petersburg appearance, did not arouse in her even simple curiosity. But yet I made up my mind to speak to her, and asked: 'Madam, allow me to ask you at what time do the wagonettes go from here to the town?'

"'At ten or eleven, I believe.…'"

"I thanked her. She glanced at me once or twice, and suddenly there was a gleam of curiosity, then of something like wonder on her passionless face.… I made haste to assume an indifferent expression and to fall into a suitable attitude; she was catching on! She suddenly jumped up from the seat, as though something had bitten her, and examining me hurriedly, with a gentle smile, asked timidly:

"'Oh, aren't you Ananyev?'

"'Yes, I am Ananyev,' I answered.

"'And don't you recognise me? No?'

"I was a little confused. I looked intently at her, and—would you believe it?—I recognised her not from her face nor her figure, but from her gentle, weary smile. It was Natalya Stepanovna, or, as she was called, Kisotchka, the very girl I had been head over ears in love with seven or eight years before, when I was wearing the uniform of a high school boy. The doings of far, vanished days, the days of long ago.… I remember this Kisotchka, a thin little high school girl of fifteen or sixteen, when she was something just for a schoolboy's taste, created by nature especially for Platonic love. What a charming little girl she was! Pale, fragile, light—she looked as though a breath would send her flying like a feather to the skies—a gentle, perplexed face, little hands, soft long hair to her belt, a waist as thin as a wasp's—altogether something ethereal, transparent like moonlight—in fact, from the point of view of a high school boy a peerless beauty.… Wasn't I in love with her! I did not sleep at night. I wrote verses.… Sometimes in the evenings she would sit on a seat in the park while we schoolboys crowded round her, gazing reverently; in response to our compliments, our sighing, and attitudinising, she would shrink nervously from the evening damp, screw up her eyes, and smile gently, and at such times she was awfully like a pretty little kitten. As we gazed at her every one of us had a desire to caress her and stroke her like a cat, hence her nickname of Kisotchka.

“In the course of the seven or eight years since we had met, Kisotchka had greatly changed. She had grown more robust and stouter, and had quite lost the resemblance to a soft, fluffy kitten. It was not that her features looked old or faded, but they had somehow lost their brilliance and looked sterner, her hair seemed shorter, she looked taller, and her shoulders were quite twice as broad, and what was most striking, there was already in her face the expression of motherliness and resignation commonly seen in respectable women of her age, and this, of course, I had never seen in her before.… In short, of the school-girlish and the Platonic her face had kept the gentle smile and nothing more.…

“We got into conversation. Learning that I was already an engineer, Kisotchka was immensely delighted.

“‘How good that is!’ she said, looking joyfully into my face. ‘Ah, how good! And how splendid you all are! Of all who left with you, not one has been a failure—they have all turned out well. One an engineer, another a doctor, a third a teacher, another, they say, is a celebrated singer in Petersburg.… You are all splendid, all of you.… Ah, how good that is!’

“Kisotchka’s eyes shone with genuine goodwill and gladness. She was admiring me like an elder sister or a former governess. While I looked at her sweet face and thought, ‘It wouldn’t be bad to get hold of her today!’

“‘Do you remember, Natalya Stepanovna,’ I asked her, ‘how I once brought you in the park a bouquet with a note in it? You read my note, and such a look of bewilderment came into your face.…’

“‘No, I don’t remember that,’ she said, laughing. ‘But I remember how you wanted to challenge Florens to a duel over me.…’

“‘Well, would you believe it, I don’t remember that.…’

“‘Well, that’s all over and done with…’ sighed Kisotchka. ‘At one time I was your idol, and now it is my turn to look up to all of you.…’

“From further conversation I learned that two years after leaving the high school, Kisotchka had been married to a resident in the town who was half Greek, half Russian, had a post either in the bank or in the insurance society, and also carried on a trade in corn. He had a strange surname, something in the style of Populaki or Skarandopulo.… Goodness only knows—I have forgotten.… As a matter of fact, Kisotchka spoke little and with reluctance about herself. The conversation was only about me. She asked me about the College of Engineering, about my comrades, about Petersburg, about my plans, and everything I said moved her to eager delight and exclamations of, ‘Oh, how good that is!’

“We went down to the sea and walked over the sands; then when the night air began to blow chill and damp from the sea we climbed up again. All the while our talk was of me and of the past. We walked about until the reflection of the sunset had died away from the windows of the summer villas.

“‘Come in and have some tea,’ Kisotchka suggested. ‘The samovar must have been on the table long ago.… I am alone at home,’ she said, as her villa came into sight through the green of the acacias. ‘My husband is always in the town and only comes home at night, and not always then, and I must own that I am so dull that it’s simply deadly.’

“I followed her in, admiring her back and shoulders. I was glad that she was married. Married women are better material for temporary love affairs than girls. I was also pleased that her husband was not at home. At the same time I felt that the affair would not come off.…

“We went into the house. The rooms were smallish and had low ceilings, and the furniture was typical of the summer villa (Russians like having at their summer villas uncomfortable heavy, dingy furniture which they are sorry to throw away and have nowhere to put), but from certain details I could observe that Kisotchka and her husband were not badly off, and must be spending five or six thousand roubles a year. I remember that in the middle of the room which Kisotchka called the dining room there was a round table, supported for some reason on six legs, and on it a samovar and cups. At the edge of the table lay an open book, a pencil, and an exercise book. I glanced at the book and recognised it as *Malinin and Burenin’s Arithmetical Examples*. It was open, as I now remember, at the ‘Rules of Compound Interest.’

“‘To whom are you giving lessons?’ I asked Kisotchka.’

“‘Nobody,’ she answered. ‘I am just doing some.… I have nothing to do, and am so bored that I think of the old days and do sums.’

“‘Have you any children?’

“‘I had a baby boy, but he only lived a week.’

“We began drinking tea. Admiring me, Kisotchka said again how good it was that I was an engineer, and how glad she was of my success. And the more she talked and the more genuinely she smiled, the stronger was my conviction that I should go away without having gained my object. I was a connoisseur in love affairs in those days, and could accurately gauge my chances of success. You can boldly reckon on success if you are tracking down a fool or a woman as much on the look out for new experiences and sensations as yourself, or an adventuress to whom you are a stranger. If you come across a sensible and serious woman, whose

face has an expression of weary submission and goodwill, who is genuinely delighted at your presence, and, above all, respects you, you may as well turn back. To succeed in that case needs longer than one day.

"And by evening light Kisotchka seemed even more charming than by day. She attracted me more and more, and apparently she liked me too, and the surroundings were most appropriate: the husband not at home, no servants visible, stillness around.… Though I had little confidence in success, I made up my mind to begin the attack anyway. First of all it was necessary to get into a familiar tone and to change Kisotchka's lyrically earnest mood into a more frivolous one.

"'Let us change the conversation, Natalya Stepanovna,' I began. 'Let us talk of something amusing. First of all, allow me, for the sake of old times, to call you Kisotchka.'

"She allowed me.

"'Tell me, please, Kisotchka,' I went on, 'what is the matter with all the fair sex here. What has happened to them? In old days they were all so moral and virtuous, and now, upon my word, if one asks about anyone, one is told such things that one is quite shocked at human nature.… One young lady has eloped with an officer; another has run away and carried off a high school boy with her; another—a married woman—has run away from her husband with an actor; a fourth has left her husband and gone off with an officer, and so on and so on. It's a regular epidemic! If it goes on like this there won't be a girl or a young woman left in your town!'

"I spoke in a vulgar, playful tone. If Kisotchka had laughed in response I should have gone on in this style: 'You had better look out, Kisotchka, or some officer or actor will be carrying you off!' She would have dropped her eyes and said: 'As though anyone would care to carry me off; there are plenty younger and better looking.…' And I should have said: 'Nonsense, Kisotchka—I for one should be delighted!' And so on in that style, and it would all have gone swimmingly. But Kisotchka did not laugh in response; on the contrary, she looked grave and sighed.

"'All you have been told is true,' she said. 'My cousin Sonya ran away from her husband with an actor. Of course, it is wrong.… Everyone ought to bear the lot that fate has laid on him, but I do not condemn them or blame them.… Circumstances are sometimes too strong for anyone!'

"'That is so, Kisotchka, but what circumstances can produce a regular epidemic?'

“‘It’s very simple and easy to understand,’ replied Kisotchka, raising her eyebrows. ‘There is absolutely nothing for us educated girls and women to do with ourselves. Not everyone is able to go to the University, to become a teacher, to live for ideas, in fact, as men do. They have to be married.… And whom would you have them marry? You boys leave the high school and go away to the University, never to return to your native town again, and you marry in Petersburg or Moscow, while the girls remain.… To whom are they to be married? Why, in the absence of decent cultured men, goodness knows what sort of men they marry—stockbrokers and such people of all kinds, who can do nothing but drink and get into rows at the club.… A girl married like that, at random.… And what is her life like afterwards? You can understand: a well-educated, cultured woman is living with a stupid, boorish man; if she meets a cultivated man, an officer, an actor, or a doctor—well, she gets to love him, her life becomes unbearable to her, and she runs away from her husband. And one can’t condemn her!’

“‘If that is so, Kisotchka, why get married?’ I asked.

“‘Yes, of course,’ said Kisotchka with a sigh, ‘but you know every girl fancies that any husband is better than nothing.… Altogether life is horrid here, Nikolay Anastasyevitch, very horrid! Life is stifling for a girl and stifling when one is married.… Here they laugh at Sonya for having run away from her husband, but if they could see into her soul they would not laugh.…’”

Azorka began barking outside again. He growled angrily at someone, then howled miserably and dashed with all his force against the wall of the hut.… Ananyev’s face was puckered with pity; he broke off his story and went out. For two minutes he could be heard outside comforting his dog. “Good dog! poor dog!”

“Our Nikolay Anastasyevitch is fond of talking,” said Von Schtenberg, laughing. “He is a good fellow,” he added after a brief silence.

Returning to the hut, the engineer filled up our glasses and, smiling and stroking his chest, went on:

“And so my attack was unsuccessful. There was nothing for it, I put off my unclean thoughts to a more favourable occasion, resigned myself to my failure and, as the saying is, waved my hand. What is more, under the influence of Kisotchka’s voice, the evening air, and the stillness, I gradually myself fell into a quiet sentimental mood. I remember I sat in an easy chair by the wide-open window and glanced at the trees and darkened sky. The outlines of the acacias and the lime trees were just the same as they had been eight years before; just as then, in the days of my

childhood, somewhere far away there was the tinkling of a wretched piano, and the public had just the same habit of sauntering to and fro along the avenues, but the people were not the same. Along the avenues there walked now not my comrades and I and the object of my adoration, but schoolboys and young ladies who were strangers. And I felt melancholy. When to my inquiries about acquaintances I five times received from Kisotchka the answer, ‘He is dead,’ my melancholy changed into the feeling one has at the funeral service of a good man. And sitting there at the window, looking at the promenading public and listening to the tinkling piano, I saw with my own eyes for the first time in my life with what eagerness one generation hastens to replace another, and what a momentous significance even some seven or eight years may have in a man’s life!

“Kisotchka put a bottle of red wine on the table. I drank it off, grew sentimental, and began telling a long story about something or other. Kisotchka listened as before, admiring me and my cleverness. And time passed. The sky was by now so dark that the outlines of the acacias and lime trees melted into one, the public was no longer walking up and down the avenues, the piano was silent and the only sound was the even murmur of the sea.

“Young people are all alike. Be friendly to a young man, make much of him, regale him with wine, let him understand that he is attractive and he will sit on and on, forget that it is time to go, and talk and talk and talk.… His hosts cannot keep their eyes open, it’s past their bedtime, and he still stays and talks. That was what I did. Once I chanced to look at the clock; it was half-past ten. I began saying goodbye.

“‘Have another glass before your walk,’ said Kisotchka.

“I took another glass, again I began talking at length, forgot it was time to go, and sat down. Then there came the sound of men’s voices, footsteps and the clank of spurs.

“‘I think my husband has come in.…’ said Kisotchka listening.

“The door creaked, two voices came now from the passage and I saw two men pass the door that led into the dining room: one a stout, solid, dark man with a hooked nose, wearing a straw hat, and the other a young officer in a white tunic. As they passed the door they both glanced casually and indifferently at Kisotchka and me, and I fancied both of them were drunk.

“‘She told you a lie then, and you believed her!’ we heard a loud voice with a marked nasal twang say a minute later. ‘To begin with, it wasn’t at the big club but at the little one.’

“‘You are angry, Jupiter, so you are wrong.…’ said another voice, obviously the officer’s, laughing and coughing. ‘I say, can I stay the night? Tell me honestly, shall I be in your way?’

“‘What a question! Not only you can, but you must. What will you have, beer or wine?’

“They were sitting two rooms away from us, talking loudly, and apparently feeling no interest in Kisotchka or her visitor. A perceptible change came over Kisotchka on her husband’s arrival. At first she flushed red, then her face wore a timid, guilty expression; she seemed to be troubled by some anxiety, and I began to fancy that she was ashamed to show me her husband and wanted me to go.

“I began taking leave. Kisotchka saw me to the front door. I remember well her gentle mournful smile and kind patient eyes as she pressed my hand and said:

“‘Most likely we shall never see each other again. Well, God give you every blessing. Thank you!’

“Not one sigh, not one fine phrase. As she said goodbye she was holding the candle in her hand; patches of light danced over her face and neck, as though chasing her mournful smile. I pictured to myself the old Kisotchka whom one used to want to stroke like a cat, I looked intently at the present Kisotchka, and for some reason recalled her words: ‘Everyone ought to bear the lot that fate has laid on him.’ And I had a pang at my heart. I instinctively guessed how it was, and my conscience whispered to me that I, in my happiness and indifference, was face to face with a good, warmhearted, loving creature, who was broken by suffering.

“I said goodbye and went to the gate. By now it was quite dark. In the south the evenings draw in early in July and it gets dark rapidly. Towards ten o’clock it is so dark that you can’t see an inch before your nose. I lighted a couple of dozen matches before, almost groping, I found my way to the gate.

“‘Cab!’ I shouted, going out of the gate; not a sound, not a sigh in answer.… ‘Cab,’ I repeated, ‘hey, Cab!’

“But there was no cab of any description. The silence of the grave. I could hear nothing but the murmur of the drowsy sea and the beating of my heart from the wine. Lifting my eyes to the sky I found not a single star. It was dark and sullen. Evidently the sky was covered with clouds. For some reason I shrugged my shoulders, smiling foolishly, and once more, not quite so resolutely, shouted for a cab.

“The echo answered me. A walk of three miles across open country and in the pitch dark was not an agreeable prospect. Before making up my mind to walk, I spent a long time deliberating and shouting for a cab; then, shrugging my shoulders, I walked lazily back to the copse, with no definite object in my mind. It was dreadfully dark in the copse. Here and there between the trees the windows of the summer villas glowed a dull red. A raven, disturbed by my steps and the matches with which I lighted my way to the summerhouse, flew from tree to tree and rustled among the leaves. I felt vexed and ashamed, and the raven seemed to understand this, and croaked *krrra!* I was vexed that I had to walk, and ashamed that I had stayed on at Kisotchka’s, chatting like a boy.

“I made my way to the summerhouse, felt for the seat and sat down. Far below me, behind a veil of thick darkness, the sea kept up a low angry growl. I remember that, as though I were blind, I could see neither sky nor sea, nor even the summerhouse in which I was sitting. And it seemed to me as though the whole world consisted only of the thoughts that were straying through my head, dizzy from the wine, and of an unseen power murmuring monotonously somewhere below. And afterwards, as I sank into a doze, it began to seem that it was not the sea murmuring, but my thoughts, and that the whole world consisted of nothing but me. And concentrating the whole world in myself in this way, I thought no more of cabs, of the town, and of Kisotchka, and abandoned myself to the sensation I was so fond of: that is, the sensation of fearful isolation when you feel that in the whole universe, dark and formless, you alone exist. It is a proud, demoniac sensation, only possible to Russians whose thoughts and sensations are as large, boundless, and gloomy as their plains, their forests, and their snow. If I had been an artist I should certainly have depicted the expression of a Russian’s face when he sits motionless and, with his legs under him and his head clasped in his hands, abandons himself to this sensation.… And together with this sensation come thoughts of the aimlessness of life, of death, and of the darkness of the grave.… The thoughts are not worth a brass farthing, but the expression of face must be fine.…

“While I was sitting and dozing, unable to bring myself to get up—I was warm and comfortable—all at once, against the even monotonous murmur of the sea, as though upon a canvas, sounds began to grow distinct which drew my attention from myself.… Someone was coming hurriedly along the avenue. Reaching the summerhouse this someone stopped, gave a sob like a little girl, and said in the voice of a weeping child: ‘My God, when will it all end! Merciful Heavens!’

“Judging from the voice and the weeping I took it to be a little girl of ten or twelve. She walked irresolutely into the summerhouse, sat down, and began half-praying, half-complaining aloud.…

“‘Merciful God!’ she said, crying, ‘it’s unbearable. It’s beyond all endurance! I suffer in silence, but I want to live too.… Oh, my God! My God!’

“And so on in the same style.

“I wanted to look at the child and speak to her. So as not to frighten her I first gave a loud sigh and coughed, then cautiously struck a match.… There was a flash of bright light in the darkness, which lighted up the weeping figure. It was Kisotchka!”

“Marvels upon marvels!” said Von Schtenberg with a sigh. “Black night, the murmur of the sea; she in grief, he with a sensation of world—solitude.… It’s too much of a good thing.… You only want Circassians with daggers to complete it.”

“I am not telling you a tale, but fact.”

“Well, even if it is a fact… it all proves nothing, and there is nothing new in it.…”

“Wait a little before you find fault! Let me finish,” said Ananyev, waving his hand with vexation; “don’t interfere, please! I am not telling you, but the doctor.… Well,” he went on, addressing me and glancing askance at the student who bent over his books and seemed very well satisfied at having gibed at the engineer—“well, Kisotchka was not surprised or frightened at seeing me. It seemed as though she had known beforehand that she would find me in the summerhouse. She was breathing in gasps and trembling all over as though in a fever, while her tear-stained face, so far as I could distinguish it as I struck match after match, was not the intelligent, submissive weary face I had seen before, but something different, which I cannot understand to this day. It did not express pain, nor anxiety, nor misery—nothing of what was expressed by her words and her tears.… I must own that, probably because I did not understand it, it looked to me senseless and as though she were drunk.

“‘I can’t bear it,’ muttered Kisotchka in the voice of a crying child. ‘It’s too much for me, Nikolay Anastasyitch. Forgive me, Nikolav Anastasyitch. I can’t go on living like this.… I am going to the town to my mother’s.… Take me there.… Take me there, for God’s sake!’

“In the presence of tears I can neither speak nor be silent. I was flustered and muttered some nonsense trying to comfort her.

“‘No, no; I will go to my mother’s,’ said Kisotchka resolutely, getting up and clutching my arm convulsively (her hands and her sleeves were

wet with tears). ‘Forgive me, Nikolay Anastasyitch, I am going.… I can bear no more.…’

“‘Kisotchka, but there isn’t a single cab,’ I said. ‘How can you go?’

“‘No matter, I’ll walk.… It’s not far. I can’t bear it.…’

“I was embarrassed, but not touched. Kisotchka’s tears, her trembling, and the blank expression of her face suggested to me a trivial, French or Little Russian melodrama, in which every ounce of cheap shallow feeling is washed down with pints of tears.

“I didn’t understand her, and knew I did not understand her; I ought to have been silent, but for some reason, most likely for fear my silence might be taken for stupidity, I thought fit to try to persuade her not to go to her mother’s, but to stay at home. When people cry, they don’t like their tears to be seen. And I lighted match after match and went on striking till the box was empty. What I wanted with this ungenerous illumination, I can’t conceive to this day. Cold-hearted people are apt to be awkward, and even stupid.

“In the end Kisotchka took my arm and we set off. Going out of the gate, we turned to the right and sauntered slowly along the soft dusty road. It was dark. As my eyes grew gradually accustomed to the darkness, I began to distinguish the silhouettes of the old gaunt oaks and lime trees which bordered the road. The jagged, precipitous cliffs, intersected here and there by deep, narrow ravines and creeks, soon showed indistinctly, a black streak on the right. Low bushes nestled by the hollows, looking like sitting figures. It was uncanny. I looked sideways suspiciously at the cliffs, and the murmur of the sea and the stillness of the country alarmed my imagination. Kisotchka did not speak. She was still trembling, and before she had gone half a mile she was exhausted with walking and was out of breath. I too was silent.

“Three-quarters of a mile from the Quarantine Station there was a deserted building of four storeys, with a very high chimney in which there had once been a steam flour mill. It stood solitary on the cliff, and by day it could be seen for a long distance, both by sea and by land. Because it was deserted and no one lived in it, and because there was an echo in it which distinctly repeated the steps and voices of passersby, it seemed mysterious. Picture me in the dark night arm-in-arm with a woman who was running away from her husband near this tall long monster which repeated the sound of every step I took and stared at me fixedly with its hundred black windows. A normal young man would have been moved to romantic feelings in such surroundings, but I looked at the dark windows and thought: ‘All this is very impressive, but time

will come when of that building and of Kisotchka and her troubles and of me with my thoughts, not one grain of dust will remain.… All is nonsense and vanity.…’

“When we reached the flour mill Kisotchka suddenly stopped, took her arm out of mine, and said, no longer in a childish voice, but in her own:

“‘Nikolay Anastasyitch, I know all this seems strange to you. But I am terribly unhappy! And you cannot even imagine how unhappy! It’s impossible to imagine it! I don’t tell you about it because one can’t talk about it.… Such a life, such a life!…’

“Kisotchka did not finish. She clenched her teeth and moaned as though she were doing her utmost not to scream with pain.

“‘Such a life!’ she repeated with horror, with the cadence and the southern, rather Ukrainian accent which particularly in women gives to emotional speech the effect of singing. ‘It is a life! Ah, my God, my God! what does it mean? Oh, my God, my God!’

“As though trying to solve the riddle of her fate, she shrugged her shoulders in perplexity, shook her head, and clasped her hands. She spoke as though she were singing, moved gracefully, and reminded me of a celebrated Little Russian actress.

“‘Great God, it is as though I were in a pit,’ she went on. ‘If one could live for one minute in happiness as other people live! Oh, my God, my God! I have come to such disgrace that before a stranger I am running away from my husband by night, like some disreputable creature! Can I expect anything good after that?’

“As I admired her movements and her voice, I began to feel annoyed that she was not on good terms with her husband. ‘It would be nice to have got on into relations with her!’ flitted through my mind; and this pitiless thought stayed in my brain, haunted me all the way and grew more and more alluring.

“About a mile from the flour mill we had to turn to the left by the cemetery. At the turning by the corner of the cemetery there stood a stone windmill, and by it a little hut in which the miller lived. We passed the mill and the hut, turned to the left and reached the gates of the cemetery. There Kisotchka stopped and said:

“‘I am going back, Nikolay Anastasyitch! You go home, and God bless you, but I am going back. I am not frightened.’

“‘Well, what next!’ I said, disconcerted. ‘If you are going, you had better go!’

“‘I have been too hasty.… It was all about nothing that mattered. You and your talk took me back to the past and put all sort of ideas into my head.… I was sad and wanted to cry, and my husband said rude things to me before that officer, and I could not bear it.… And what’s the good of my going to the town to my mother’s? Will that make me any happier? I must go back.… But never mind… let us go on,’ said Kisotchka, and she laughed. ‘It makes no difference!’

“I remembered that over the gate of the cemetery there was an inscription: ‘The hour will come wherein all they that lie in the grave will hear the voice of the Son of God.’ I knew very well that sooner of later I and Kisotchka and her husband and the officer in the white tunic would lie under the dark trees in the churchyard; I knew that an unhappy and insulted fellow-creature was walking beside me. All this I recognised distinctly, but at the same time I was troubled by an oppressive and unpleasant dread that Kisotchka would turn back, and that I should not manage to say to her what had to be said. Never at any other time in my life have thoughts of a higher order been so closely interwoven with the basest animal prose as on that night.… It was horrible!

“Not far from the cemetery we found a cab. When we reached the High Street, where Kisotchka’s mother lived, we dismissed the cab and walked along the pavement. Kisotchka was silent all the while, while I looked at her, and I raged at myself, ‘Why don’t you begin? Now’s the time!’ About twenty paces from the hotel where I was staying, Kisotchka stopped by the lamppost and burst into tears.

“‘Nikolay Anastasyitch!’ she said, crying and laughing and looking at me with wet shining eyes, ‘I shall never forget your sympathy.… How good you are! All of you are so splendid—all of you! Honest, greathearted, kind, clever.… Ah, how good that is!’

“She saw in me a highly educated man, advanced in every sense of the word, and on her tear-stained laughing face, together with the emotion and enthusiasm aroused by my personality, there was clearly written regret that she so rarely saw such people, and that God had not vouchsafed her the bliss of being the wife of one of them. She muttered, ‘Ah, how splendid it is!’ The childish gladness on her face, the tears, the gentle smile, the soft hair, which had escaped from under the kerchief, and the kerchief itself thrown carelessly over her head, in the light of the street lamp reminded me of the old Kisotchka whom one had wanted to stroke like a kitten.

“I could not restrain myself, and began stroking her hair, her shoulders, and her hands.

“‘Kisotchka, what do you want?’ I muttered. ‘I’ll go to the ends of the earth with you if you like! I will take you out of this hole and give you happiness. I love you.… Let us go, my sweet? Yes? Will you?’

“Kisotchka’s face was flooded with bewilderment. She stepped back from the street lamp and, completely overwhelmed, gazed at me with wide-open eyes. I gripped her by the arm, began showering kisses on her face, her neck, her shoulders, and went on making vows and promises. In love affairs vows and promises are almost a physiological necessity. There’s no getting on without them. Sometimes you know you are lying and that promises are not necessary, but still you vow and protest. Kisotchka, utterly overwhelmed, kept staggering back and gazing at me with round eyes.

“‘Please don’t! Please don’t!’ she muttered, holding me off with her hands.

“I clasped her tightly in my arms. All at once she broke into hysterical tears. And her face had the same senseless blank expression that I had seen in the summerhouse when I lighted the matches. Without asking her consent, preventing her from speaking, I dragged her forcibly towards my hotel. She seemed almost swooning and did not walk, but I took her under the arms and almost carried her.… I remember, as we were going up the stairs, some man with a red band in his cap looked wonderingly at me and bowed to Kisotchka.…”

Ananvev flushed crimson and paused. He walked up and down near the table in silence, scratched the back of his head with an air of vexation, and several times shrugged his shoulders and twitched his shoulder-blades, while a shiver ran down his huge back. The memory was painful and made him ashamed, and he was struggling with himself.

“It’s horrible!” he said, draining a glass of wine and shaking his head. “I am told that in every introductory lecture on women’s diseases the medical students are admonished to remember that each one of them has a mother, a sister, a fiancée, before undressing and examining a female patient.… That advice would be very good not only for medical students but for everyone who in one way or another has to deal with a woman’s life. Now that I have a wife and a little daughter, oh, how well I understand that advice! How I understand it, my God! You may as well hear the rest, though.… As soon as she had become my mistress, Kisotchka’s view of the position was very different from mine. First of all she felt for me a deep and passionate love. What was for me an

ordinary amatory episode was for her an absolute revolution in her life. I remember, it seemed to me that she had gone out of her mind. Happy for the first time in her life, looking five years younger, with an inspired enthusiastic face, not knowing what to do with herself for happiness, she laughed and cried and never ceased dreaming aloud how next day we would set off for the Caucasus, then in the autumn to Petersburg; how we would live afterwards.

"'Don't worry yourself about my husband,' she said to reassure me. 'He is bound to give me a divorce. Everyone in the town knows that he is living with the elder Kostovitch. We will get a divorce and be married.'

"When women love they become acclimatised and at home with people very quickly, like cats. Kisotchka had only spent an hour and a half in my room when she already felt as though she were at home and was ready to treat my property as though it were her own. She packed my things in my portmanteau, scolded me for not hanging my new expensive overcoat on a peg instead of flinging it on a chair, and so on.

"I looked at her, listened, and felt weariness and vexation. I was conscious of a slight twinge of horror at the thought that a respectable, honest, and unhappy woman had so easily, after some three or four hours, succumbed to the first man she met. As a respectable man, you see, I didn't like it. Then, too, I was unpleasantly impressed by the fact that women of Kisotchka's sort, not deep or serious, are too much in love with life, and exalt what is in reality such a trifle as love for a man to the level of bliss, misery, a complete revolution in life.… Moreover, now that I was satisfied, I was vexed with myself for having been so stupid as to get entangled with a woman whom I should have to deceive. And in spite of my disorderly life I must observe that I could not bear telling lies.

"I remember that Kisotchka sat down at my feet, laid her head on my knees, and, looking at me with shining, loving eyes, asked:

"'Kolya, do you love me? Very, very much?'

"And she laughed with happiness.… This struck me as sentimental, affected, and not clever; and meanwhile I was already inclined to look for 'depth of thought' before everything.

"'Kisotchka, you had better go home,' I said, or else your people will be sure to miss you and will be looking for you all over the town; and it would be awkward for you to go to your mother in the morning.'

"Kisotchka agreed. At parting we arranged to meet at midday next morning in the park, and the day after to set off together to Pyatigorsk. I went into the street to see her home, and I remember that I caressed her

with genuine tenderness on the way. There was a minute when I felt unbearably sorry for her, for trusting me so implicitly, and I made up my mind that I would really take her to Pyatigorsk, but remembering that I had only six hundred roubles in my portmanteau, and that it would be far more difficult to break it off with her in the autumn than now, I made haste to suppress my compassion.

"We reached the house where Kisotchka's mother lived. I pulled at the bell. When footsteps were heard at the other side of the door Kisotchka suddenly looked grave, glanced upwards to the sky, made the sign of the Cross over me several times and, clutching my hand, pressed it to her lips.

"'Till tomorrow,' she said, and disappeared into the house.

"I crossed to the opposite pavement and from there looked at the house. At first the windows were in darkness, then in one of the windows there was the glimmer of the faint bluish flame of a newly lighted candle; the flame grew, gave more light, and I saw shadows moving about the rooms together with it.

"'They did not expect her,' I thought.

"Returning to my hotel room I undressed, drank off a glass of red wine, ate some fresh caviar which I had bought that day in the bazaar, went to bed in a leisurely way, and slept the sound, untroubled sleep of a tourist.

"In the morning I woke up with a headache and in a bad humour. Something worried me.

"'What's the matter?' I asked myself, trying to explain my uneasiness. 'What's upsetting me?'

"And I put down my uneasiness to the dread that Kisotchka might turn up any minute and prevent my going away, and that I should have to tell lies and act a part before her. I hurriedly dressed, packed my things, and left the hotel, giving instructions to the porter to take my luggage to the station for the seven o'clock train in the evening. I spent the whole day with a doctor friend and left the town that evening. As you see, my philosophy did not prevent me from taking to my heels in a mean and treacherous flight.…

"All the while that I was at my friend's, and afterwards driving to the station, I was tormented by anxiety. I fancied that I was afraid of meeting with Kisotchka and a scene. In the station I purposely remained in the toilet room till the second bell rang, and while I was making my way to my compartment, I was oppressed by a feeling as though I were covered

all over with stolen things. With what impatience and terror I waited for the third bell!

"At last the third bell that brought my deliverance rang at last, the train moved; we passed the prison, the barracks, came out into the open country, and yet, to my surprise, the feeling of uneasiness still persisted, and still I felt like a thief passionately longing to escape. It was queer. To distract my mind and calm myself I looked out of the window. The train ran along the coast. The sea was smooth, and the turquoise sky, almost half covered with the tender, golden crimson light of sunset, was gaily and serenely mirrored in it. Here and there fishing boats and rafts made black patches on its surface. The town, as clean and beautiful as a toy, stood on the high cliff, and was already shrouded in the mist of evening. The golden domes of its churches, the windows and the greenery reflected the setting sun, glowing and melting like shimmering gold.… The scent of the fields mingled with the soft damp air from the sea.

"The train flew rapidly along. I heard the laughter of passengers and guards. Everyone was good-humoured and lighthearted, yet my unaccountable uneasiness grew greater and greater.… I looked at the white mist that covered the town and I imagined how a woman with a senseless blank face was hurrying up and down in that mist by the churches and the houses, looking for me and moaning, 'Oh, my God! Oh, my God!' in the voice of a little girl or the cadences of a Little Russian actress. I recalled her grave face and big anxious eyes as she made the sign of the Cross over me, as though I belonged to her, and mechanically I looked at the hand which she had kissed the day before.

"'Surely I am not in love?' I asked myself, scratching my hand.

"Only as night came on when the passengers were asleep and I was left tête-à-tête with my conscience, I began to understand what I had not been able to grasp before. In the twilight of the railway carriage the image of Kisotchka rose before me, haunted me and I recognised clearly that I had committed a crime as bad as murder. My conscience tormented me. To stifle this unbearable feeling, I assured myself that everything was nonsense and vanity, that Kisotchka and I would die and decay, that her grief was nothing in comparison with death, and so on and so on… and that if you come to that, there is no such thing as free will, and that therefore I was not to blame. But all these arguments only irritated me and were extraordinarily quickly crowded out by other thoughts. There was a miserable feeling in the hand that Kisotchka had kissed.… I kept lying down and getting up again, drank vodka at the stations, forced myself to eat bread and butter, fell to assuring myself again that life had

no meaning, but nothing was of any use. A strange and if you like absurd ferment was going on in my brain. The most incongruous ideas crowded one after another in disorder, getting more and more tangled, thwarting each other, and I, the thinker, ‘with my brow bent on the earth,’ could make out nothing and could not find my bearings in this mass of essential and nonessential ideas. It appeared that I, the thinker, had not mastered the technique of thinking, and that I was no more capable of managing my own brain than mending a watch. For the first time in my life I was really thinking eagerly and intensely, and that seemed to me so monstrous that I said to myself: ‘I am going off my head.’ A man whose brain does not work at all times, but only at painful moments, is often haunted by the thought of madness.

“I spent a day and a night in this misery, then a second night, and learning from experience how little my philosophy was to me, I came to my senses and realised at last what sort of a creature I was. I saw that my ideas were not worth a brass farthing, and that before meeting Kisotchka I had not begun to think and had not even a conception of what thinking in earnest meant; now through suffering I realised that I had neither convictions nor a definite moral standard, nor heart, nor reason; my whole intellectual and moral wealth consisted of specialist knowledge, fragments, useless memories, other people’s ideas—and nothing else; and my mental processes were as lacking in complexity, as useless and as rudimentary as a Yakut’s.… If I had disliked lying, had not stolen, had not murdered, and, in fact, made obviously gross mistakes, that was not owing to my convictions—I had none, but because I was in bondage, hand and foot, to my nurse’s fairy tales and to copybook morals, which had entered into my flesh and blood and without my noticing it guided me in life, though I looked on them as absurd.…

“I realised that I was not a thinker, not a philosopher, but simply a dilettante. God had given me a strong healthy Russian brain with promise of talent. And, only fancy, here was that brain at twenty-six, undisciplined, completely free from principles, not weighed down by any stores of knowledge, but only lightly sprinkled with information of a sort in the engineering line; it was young and had a physiological craving for exercise, it was on the lookout for it, when all at once quite casually the fine juicy idea of the aimlessness of life and the darkness beyond the tomb descends upon it. It greedily sucks it in, puts its whole outlook at its disposal and begins playing with it, like a cat with a mouse. There is neither learning nor system in the brain, but that does not matter. It deals with the great ideas with its own innate powers, like a self-educated man,

and before a month has passed the owner of the brain can turn a potato into a hundred dainty dishes, and fancies himself a philosopher.…

"Our generation has carried this dilettantism, this playing with serious ideas into science, into literature, into politics, and into everything which it is not too lazy to go into, and with its dilettantism has introduced, too, its coldness, its boredom, and its one-sidedness and, as it seems to me, it has already succeeded in developing in the masses a new hitherto nonexistent attitude to serious ideas.

"I realised and appreciated my abnormality and utter ignorance, thanks to a misfortune. My normal thinking, so it seems to me now, dates from the day when I began again from the A, B, C, when my conscience sent me flying back to N——, when with no philosophical subtleties I repented, besought Kisotchka's forgiveness like a naughty boy and wept with her.…"

Ananyev briefly described his last interview with Kisotchka.

"H'm.…" the student filtered through his teeth when the engineer had finished. "That's the sort of thing that happens."

His face still expressed mental inertia, and apparently Ananyev's story had not touched him in the least. Only when the engineer after a moment's pause, began expounding his view again and repeating what he had said at first, the student frowned irritably, got up from the table and walked away to his bed. He made his bed and began undressing.

"You look as though you have really convinced someone this time," he said irritably.

"Me convince anybody!" said the engineer. "My dear soul, do you suppose I claim to do that? God bless you! To convince you is impossible. You can reach conviction only by way of personal experience and suffering!"

"And then—it's queer logic!" grumbled the student as he put on his nightshirt. "The ideas which you so dislike, which are so ruinous for the young are, according to you, the normal thing for the old; it's as though it were a question of grey hairs.… Where do the old get this privilege? What is it based upon? If these ideas are poison, they are equally poisonous for all?"

"Oh, no, my dear soul, don't say so!" said the engineer with a sly wink. "Don't say so. In the first place, old men are not dilettanti. Their pessimism comes to them not casually from outside, but from the depths of their own brains, and only after they have exhaustively studied the Hegels and Kants of all sorts, have suffered, have made no end of mistakes, in fact—when they have climbed the whole ladder from

bottom to top. Their pessimism has both personal experience and sound philosophic training behind it. Secondly, the pessimism of old thinkers does not take the form of idle talk, as it does with you and me, but of *weltschmertz*, of suffering; it rests in them on a Christian foundation because it is derived from love for humanity and from thoughts about humanity, and is entirely free from the egoism which is noticeable in dilettanti. You despise life because its meaning and its object are hidden just from you, and you are only afraid of your own death, while the real thinker is unhappy because the truth is hidden from all and he is afraid for all men. For instance, there is living not far from here the Crown forester, Ivan Alexandritch. He is a nice old man. At one time he was a teacher somewhere, and used to write something; the devil only knows what he was, but anyway he is a remarkably clever fellow and in philosophy he is A1. He has read a great deal and he is continually reading now. Well, we came across him lately in the Gruzovsky district.… They were laying the sleepers and rails just at the time. It's not a difficult job, but Ivan Alexandritch, not being a specialist, looked at it as though it were a conjuring trick. It takes an experienced workman less than a minute to lay a sleeper and fix a rail on it. The workmen were in good form and really were working smartly and rapidly; one rascal in particular brought his hammer down with exceptional smartness on the head of the nail and drove it in at one blow, though the handle of the hammer was two yards or more in length and each nail was a foot long. Ivan Alexandritch watched the workmen a long time, was moved, and said to me with tears in his eyes:

"'What a pity that these splendid men will die!' Such pessimism I understand."

"All that proves nothing and explains nothing," said the student, covering himself up with a sheet; "all that is simply pounding liquid in a mortar. No one knows anything and nothing can be proved by words."

He peeped out from under the sheet, lifted up his head and, frowning irritably, said quickly:

"One must be very naive to believe in human words and logic and to ascribe any determining value to them. You can prove and disprove anything you like with words, and people will soon perfect the technique of language to such a point that they will prove with mathematical certainty that twice two is seven. I am fond of reading and listening, but as to believing, no thank you; I can't, and I don't want to. I believe only in God, but as for you, if you talk to me till the Second Coming and

seduce another five hundred Kisotchkas, I shall believe in you only when I go out of my mind.… Goodnight.”

The student hid his head under the sheet and turned his face towards the wall, meaning by this action to let us know that he did not want to speak or listen. The argument ended at that.

Before going to bed the engineer and I went out of the hut, and I saw the lights once more.

“We have tired you out with our chatter,” said Ananyev, yawning and looking at the sky. “Well, my good sir! The only pleasure we have in this dull hole is drinking and philosophising.… What an embankment, Lord have mercy on us!” he said admiringly, as we approached the embankment; “it is more like Mount Ararat than an embankment.”

He paused for a little, then said: “Those lights remind the Baron of the Amalekites, but it seems to me that they are like the thoughts of man.… You know the thoughts of each individual man are scattered like that in disorder, stretch in a straight line towards some goal in the midst of the darkness and, without shedding light on anything, without lighting up the night, they vanish somewhere far beyond old age. But enough philosophising! It’s time to go bye-bye.”

When we were back in the hut the engineer began begging me to take his bed.

“Oh please!” he said imploringly, pressing both hands on his heart. “I entreat you, and don’t worry about me! I can sleep anywhere, and, besides, I am not going to bed just yet. Please do—it’s a favour!”

I agreed, undressed, and went to bed, while he sat down to the table and set to work on the plans.

“We fellows have no time for sleep,” he said in a low voice when I had got into bed and shut my eyes. “When a man has a wife and two children he can’t think of sleep. One must think now of food and clothes and saving for the future. And I have two of them, a little son and a daughter.… The boy, little rascal, has a jolly little face. He’s not six yet, and already he shows remarkable abilities, I assure you.… I have their photographs here, somewhere.… Ah, my children, my children!”

He rummaged among his papers, found their photographs, and began looking at them. I fell asleep.

I was awakened by the barking of Azorka and loud voices. Von Schtenberg with bare feet and ruffled hair was standing in the doorway dressed in his underclothes, talking loudly with someone.… It was getting light. A gloomy dark blue dawn was peeping in at the door, at the windows, and through the crevices in the hut walls, and casting a faint

light on my bed, on the table with the papers, and on Ananyev. Stretched on the floor on a cloak, with a leather pillow under his head, the engineer lay asleep with his fleshy, hairy chest uppermost; he was snoring so loudly that I pitied the student from the bottom of my heart for having to sleep in the same room with him every night.

"Why on earth are we to take them?" shouted Von Schtenberg. "It has nothing to do with us! Go to Tchalisov! From whom do the cauldrons come?"

"From Nikitin…" a bass voice answered gruffly.

"Well, then, take them to Tchalisov.… That's not in our department. What the devil are you standing there for? Drive on!"

"Your honour, we have been to Tchalisov already," said the bass voice still more gruffly. "Yesterday we were the whole day looking for him down the line, and were told at his hut that he had gone to the Dymkovsky section. Please take them, your honour! How much longer are we to go carting them about? We go carting them on and on along the line, and see no end to it."

"What is it?" Ananyev asked huskily, waking up and lifting his head quickly.

"They have brought some cauldrons from Nikitin's," said the student, "and he is begging us to take them. And what business is it of ours to take them?"

"Do be so kind, your honour, and set things right! The horses have been two days without food and the master, for sure, will be angry. Are we to take them back, or what? The railway ordered the cauldrons, so it ought to take them.…"

"Can't you understand, you blockhead, that it has nothing to do with us? Go on to Tchalisov!"

"What is it? Who's there?" Ananyev asked huskily again. "Damnation take them all," he said, getting up and going to the door. "What is it?"

I dressed, and two minutes later went out of the hut. Ananyev and the student, both in their underclothes and barefooted, were angrily and impatiently explaining to a peasant who was standing before them bareheaded, with his whip in his hand, apparently not understanding them. Both faces looked preoccupied with workaday cares.

"What use are your cauldrons to me," shouted Ananyev. "Am I to put them on my head, or what? If you can't find Tchalisov, find his assistant, and leave us in peace!"

Seeing me, the student probably recalled the conversation of the previous night. The workaday expression vanished from his sleepy face

and a look of mental inertia came into it. He waved the peasant off and walked away absorbed in thought.

It was a cloudy morning. On the line where the lights had been gleaming the night before, the workmen, just roused from sleep, were swarming. There was a sound of voices and the squeaking of wheelbarrows. The working day was beginning. One poor little nag harnessed with cord was already plodding towards the embankment, tugging with its neck, and dragging along a cartful of sand.

I began saying goodbye.… A great deal had been said in the night, but I carried away with me no answer to any question, and in the morning, of the whole conversation there remained in my memory, as in a filter, only the lights and the image of Kisotchka. As I got on the horse, I looked at the student and Ananyev for the last time, at the hysterical dog with the lustreless, tipsy-looking eyes, at the workmen flitting to and fro in the morning fog, at the embankment, at the little nag straining with its neck, and thought:

“There is no making out anything in this world.”

And when I lashed my horse and galloped along the line, and when a little later I saw nothing before me but the endless gloomy plain and the cold overcast sky, I recalled the questions which were discussed in the night. I pondered while the sun-scorched plain, the immense sky, the oak forest, dark on the horizon and the hazy distance, seemed saying to me:

“Yes, there’s no understanding anything in this world!”

The sun began to rise.…

THE BEAUTIES

I

I remember, when I was a high school boy in the fifth or sixth class, I was driving with my grandfather from the village of Bolshoe Kryepkoe in the Don region to Rostov-on-the-Don. It was a sultry, languidly dreary day of August. Our eyes were glued together, and our mouths were parched from the heat and the dry burning wind which drove clouds of dust to meet us; one did not want to look or speak or think, and when our drowsy driver, a Little Russian called Karpo, swung his whip at the horses and lashed me on my cap, I did not protest or utter a sound, but only, rousing myself from half-slumber, gazed mildly and dejectedly into the distance to see whether there was a village visible through the dust. We stopped to feed the horses in a big Armenian village at a rich Armenian's whom my grandfather knew. Never in my life have I seen a greater caricature than that Armenian. Imagine a little shaven head with thick overhanging eyebrows, a beak of a nose, long gray mustaches, and a wide mouth with a long cherrywood chibouk sticking out of it. This little head was clumsily attached to a lean hunchback carcass attired in a fantastic garb, a short red jacket, and full bright blue trousers. This figure walked straddling its legs and shuffling with its slippers, spoke without taking the chibouk out of its mouth, and behaved with truly Armenian dignity, not smiling, but staring with wide-open eyes and trying to take as little notice as possible of its guests.

There was neither wind nor dust in the Armenian's rooms, but it was just as unpleasant, stifling, and dreary as in the steppe and on the road. I remember, dusty and exhausted by the heat, I sat in the corner on a green box. The unpainted wooden walls, the furniture, and the floors colored with yellow ocher smelt of dry wood baked by the sun. Wherever I looked there were flies and flies and flies.… Grandfather and the

Armenian were talking about grazing, about manure, and about oats.… I knew that they would be a good hour getting the samovar; that grandfather would be not less than an hour drinking his tea, and then would lie down to sleep for two or three hours; that I should waste a quarter of the day waiting, after which there would be again the heat, the dust, the jolting cart. I heard the muttering of the two voices, and it began to seem to me that I had been seeing the Armenian, the cupboard with the crockery, the flies, the windows with the burning sun beating on them, for ages and ages, and should only cease to see them in the far-off future, and I was seized with hatred for the steppe, the sun, the flies.…

A Little Russian peasant woman in a kerchief brought in a tray of tea-things, then the samovar. The Armenian went slowly out into the passage and shouted: “Mashya, come and pour out tea! Where are you, Mashya?”

Hurried footsteps were heard, and there came into the room a girl of sixteen in a simple cotton dress and a white kerchief. As she washed the crockery and poured out the tea, she was standing with her back to me, and all I could see was that she was of a slender figure, barefooted, and that her little bare heels were covered by long trousers.

The Armenian invited me to have tea. Sitting down to the table, I glanced at the girl, who was handing me a glass of tea, and felt all at once as though a wind were blowing over my soul and blowing away all the impressions of the day with their dust and dreariness. I saw the bewitching features of the most beautiful face I have ever met in real life or in my dreams. Before me stood a beauty, and I recognized that at the first glance as I should have recognized lightning.

I am ready to swear that Masha—or, as her father called her, Mashya—was a real beauty, but I don’t know how to prove it. It sometimes happens that clouds are huddled together in disorder on the horizon, and the sun hiding behind them colors them and the sky with tints of every possible shade—crimson, orange, gold, lilac, muddy pink; one cloud is like a monk, another like a fish, a third like a Turk in a turban. The glow of sunset enveloping a third of the sky gleams on the cross on the church, flashes on the windows of the manor house, is reflected in the river and the puddles, quivers on the trees; far, far away against the background of the sunset, a flock of wild ducks is flying homewards.… And the boy herding the cows, and the surveyor driving in his chaise over the dam, and the gentleman out for a walk, all gaze at the sunset, and every one of them thinks it terribly beautiful, but no one knows or can say in what its beauty lies.

I was not the only one to think the Armenian girl beautiful. My grandfather, an old man of seventy, gruff and indifferent to women and the beauties of nature, looked caressingly at Masha for a full minute, and asked:

"Is that your daughter, Avert Nazaritch?"

"Yes, she is my daughter," answered the Armenian.

"A fine young lady," said my grandfather approvingly.

An artist would have called the Armenian girl's beauty classical and severe, it was just that beauty, the contemplation of which—God knows why!—inspires in one the conviction that one is seeing correct features; that hair, eyes, nose, mouth, neck, bosom, and every movement of the young body all go together in one complete harmonious accord in which nature has not blundered over the smallest line. You fancy for some reason that the ideally beautiful woman must have such a nose as Masha's, straight and slightly aquiline, just such great dark eyes, such long lashes, such a languid glance; you fancy that her black curly hair and eyebrows go with the soft white tint of her brow and cheeks as the green reeds go with the quiet stream. Masha's white neck and her youthful bosom were not fully developed, but you fancy the sculptor would need a great creative genius to mold them. You gaze, and little by little the desire comes over you to say to Masha something extraordinarily pleasant, sincere, beautiful, as beautiful as she herself was.

At first I felt hurt and abashed that Masha took no notice of me, but was all the time looking down; it seemed to me as though a peculiar atmosphere, proud and happy, separated her from me and jealously screened her from my eyes.

"That's because I am covered with dust," I thought, "am sunburnt, and am still a boy."

But little by little I forgot myself, and gave myself up entirely to the consciousness of beauty. I thought no more now of the dreary steppe, of the dust, no longer heard the buzzing of the flies, no longer tasted the tea, and felt nothing except that a beautiful girl was standing only the other side of the table.

I felt this beauty rather strangely. It was not desire, nor ecstasy, nor enjoyment that Masha excited in me, but a painful though pleasant sadness. It was a sadness vague and undefined as a dream. For some reason I felt sorry for myself, for my grandfather and for the Armenian, even for the girl herself, and I had a feeling as though we all four had lost something important and essential to life which we should never find

again. My grandfather, too, grew melancholy; he talked no more about manure or about oats, but sat silent, looking pensively at Masha.

After tea my grandfather lay down for a nap while I went out of the house into the porch. The house, like all the houses in the Armenian village stood in the full sun; there was not a tree, not an awning, no shade. The Armenian's great courtyard, overgrown with goosefoot and wild mallows, was lively and full of gaiety in spite of the great heat. Threshing was going on behind one of the low hurdles which intersected the big yard here and there. Round a post stuck into the middle of the threshing-floor ran a dozen horses harnessed side by side, so that they formed one long radius. A Little Russian in a long waistcoat and full trousers was walking beside them, cracking a whip and shouting in a tone that sounded as though he were jeering at the horses and showing off his power over them.

"A—a—a, you damned brutes! … A—a—a, plague take you! Are you frightened?"

The horses, sorrel, white, and piebald, not understanding why they were made to run round in one place and to crush the wheat straw, ran unwillingly as though with effort, swinging their tails with an offended air. The wind raised up perfect clouds of golden chaff from under their hoofs and carried it away far beyond the hurdle. Near the tall fresh stacks peasant women were swarming with rakes, and carts were moving, and beyond the stacks in another yard another dozen similar horses were running round a post, and a similar Little Russian was cracking his whip and jeering at the horses.

The steps on which I was sitting were hot; on the thin rails and here and there on the window-frames sap was oozing out of the wood from the heat; red ladybirds were huddling together in the streaks of shadow under the steps and under the shutters. The sun was baking me on my head, on my chest, and on my back, but I did not notice it, and was conscious only of the thud of bare feet on the uneven floor in the passage and in the rooms behind me. After clearing away the tea-things, Masha ran down the steps, fluttering the air as she passed, and like a bird flew into a little grimy outhouse—I suppose the kitchen—from which came the smell of roast mutton and the sound of angry talk in Armenian. She vanished into the dark doorway, and in her place there appeared on the threshold an old bent, red-faced Armenian woman wearing green trousers. The old woman was angry and was scolding someone. Soon afterwards Masha appeared in the doorway, flushed with the heat of the kitchen and carrying a big black loaf on her shoulder; swaying gracefully

under the weight of the bread, she ran across the yard to the threshing-floor, darted over the hurdle, and, wrapt in a cloud of golden chaff, vanished behind the carts. The Little Russian who was driving the horses lowered his whip, sank into silence, and gazed for a minute in the direction of the carts. Then when the Armenian girl darted again by the horses and leaped over the hurdle, he followed her with his eyes, and shouted to the horses in a tone as though he were greatly disappointed:

"Plague take you, unclean devils!"

And all the while I was unceasingly hearing her bare feet, and seeing how she walked across the yard with a grave, preoccupied face. She ran now down the steps, swishing the air about me, now into the kitchen, now to the threshing-floor, now through the gate, and I could hardly turn my head quickly enough to watch her.

And the oftener she fluttered by me with her beauty, the more acute became my sadness. I felt sorry both for her and for myself and for the Little Russian, who mournfully watched her every time she ran through the cloud of chaff to the carts. Whether it was envy of her beauty, or that I was regretting that the girl was not mine, and never would be, or that I was a stranger to her; or whether I vaguely felt that her rare beauty was accidental, unnecessary, and, like everything on earth, of short duration; or whether, perhaps, my sadness was that peculiar feeling which is excited in man by the contemplation of real beauty, God only knows.

The three hours of waiting passed unnoticed. It seemed to me that I had not had time to look properly at Masha when Karpo drove up to the river, bathed the horse, and began to put it in the shafts. The wet horse snorted with pleasure and kicked his hoofs against the shafts. Karpo shouted to it: "Ba—ack!" My grandfather woke up. Masha opened the creaking gates for us, we got into the chaise and drove out of the yard. We drove in silence as though we were angry with one another.

When, two or three hours later, Rostov and Nahitchevan appeared in the distance, Karpo, who had been silent the whole time, looked round quickly, and said:

"A fine wench, that at the Armenian's."

And he lashed his horses.

II

Another time, after I had become a student, I was traveling by rail to the south. It was May. At one of the stations, I believe it was between Byelgorod and Harkov, I got out of the tram to walk about the platform.

The shades of evening were already lying on the station garden, on the platform, and on the fields; the station screened off the sunset, but on the topmost clouds of smoke from the engine, which were tinged with rosy light, one could see the sun had not yet quite vanished.

As I walked up and down the platform I noticed that the greater number of the passengers were standing or walking near a second-class compartment, and that they looked as though some celebrated person were in that compartment. Among the curious whom I met near this compartment I saw, however, an artillery officer who had been my fellow-traveler, an intelligent, cordial, and sympathetic fellow—as people mostly are whom we meet on our travels by chance and with whom we are not long acquainted.

“What are you looking at there?” I asked.

He made no answer, but only indicated with his eyes a feminine figure. It was a young girl of seventeen or eighteen, wearing a Russian dress, with her head bare and a little shawl flung carelessly on one shoulder; not a passenger, but I suppose a sister or daughter of the stationmaster. She was standing near the carriage window, talking to an elderly woman who was in the train. Before I had time to realize what I was seeing, I was suddenly overwhelmed by the feeling I had once experienced in the Armenian village.

The girl was remarkably beautiful, and that was unmistakable to me and to those who were looking at her as I was.

If one is to describe her appearance feature by feature, as the practice is, the only really lovely thing was her thick wavy fair hair, which hung loose with a black ribbon tied round her head; all the other features were either irregular or very ordinary. Either from a peculiar form of coquettishness, or from shortsightedness, her eyes were screwed up, her nose had an undecided tilt, her mouth was small, her profile was feebly and insipidly drawn, her shoulders were narrow and undeveloped for her

age—and yet the girl made the impression of being really beautiful, and looking at her, I was able to feel convinced that the Russian face does not need strict regularity in order to be lovely; what is more, that if instead of her turn-up nose the girl had been given a different one, correct and plastically irreproachable like the Armenian girl's, I fancy her face would have lost all its charm from the change.

Standing at the window talking, the girl, shrugging at the evening damp, continually looking round at us, at one moment put her arms akimbo, at the next raised her hands to her head to straighten her hair, talked, laughed, while her face at one moment wore an expression of wonder, the next of horror, and I don't remember a moment when her face and body were at rest. The whole secret and magic of her beauty lay just in these tiny, infinitely elegant movements, in her smile, in the play of her face, in her rapid glances at us, in the combination of the subtle grace of her movements with her youth, her freshness, the purity of her soul that sounded in her laugh and voice, and with the weakness we love so much in children, in birds, in fawns, and in young trees.

It was that butterfly's beauty so in keeping with waltzing, darting about the garden, laughter and gaiety, and incongruous with serious thought, grief, and repose; and it seemed as though a gust of wind blowing over the platform, or a fall of rain, would be enough to wither the fragile body and scatter the capricious beauty like the pollen of a flower.

"So—o!…" the officer muttered with a sigh when, after the second bell, we went back to our compartment.

And what that "So—o" meant I will not undertake to decide.

Perhaps he was sad, and did not want to go away from the beauty and the spring evening into the stuffy train; or perhaps he, like me, was unaccountably sorry for the beauty, for himself, and for me, and for all the passengers, who were listlessly and reluctantly sauntering back to their compartments. As we passed the station window, at which a pale, red-haired telegraphist with upstanding curls and a faded, broad-cheeked face was sitting beside his apparatus, the officer heaved a sigh and said:

"I bet that telegraphist is in love with that pretty girl. To live out in the wilds under one roof with that ethereal creature and not fall in love is beyond the power of man. And what a calamity, my friend! what an ironical fate, to be stooping, unkempt, gray, a decent fellow and not a fool, and to be in love with that pretty, stupid little girl who would never take a scrap of notice of you! Or worse still: imagine that telegraphist is

in love, and at the same time married, and that his wife is as stooping, as unkempt, and as decent a person as himself.”

On the platform between our carriage and the next the guard was standing with his elbows on the railing, looking in the direction of the beautiful girl, and his battered, wrinkled, unpleasantly beefy face, exhausted by sleepless nights and the jolting of the train, wore a look of tenderness and of the deepest sadness, as though in that girl he saw happiness, his own youth, soberness, purity, wife, children; as though he were repenting and feeling in his whole being that that girl was not his, and that for him, with his premature old age, his uncouthness, and his beefy face, the ordinary happiness of a man and a passenger was as far away as heaven.…

The third bell rang, the whistles sounded, and the train slowly moved off. First the guard, the stationmaster, then the garden, the beautiful girl with her exquisitely sly smile, passed before our windows.…

Putting my head out and looking back, I saw how, looking after the train, she walked along the platform by the window where the telegraph clerk was sitting, smoothed her hair, and ran into the garden. The station no longer screened off the sunset, the plain lay open before us, but the sun had already set and the smoke lay in black clouds over the green, velvety young corn. It was melancholy in the spring air, and in the darkening sky, and in the railway carriage.

The familiar figure of the guard came into the carriage, and he began lighting the candles.

THE PARTY

I

After the festive dinner with its eight courses and its endless conversation, Olga Mihalovna, whose husband's name-day was being celebrated, went out into the garden. The duty of smiling and talking incessantly, the clatter of the crockery, the stupidity of the servants, the long intervals between the courses, and the stays she had put on to conceal her condition from the visitors, wearied her to exhaustion. She longed to get away from the house, to sit in the shade and rest her heart with thoughts of the baby which was to be born to her in another two months. She was used to these thoughts coming to her as she turned to the left out of the big avenue into the narrow path. Here in the thick shade of the plums and cherry trees the dry branches used to scratch her neck and shoulders; a spider's web would settle on her face, and there would rise up in her mind the image of a little creature of undetermined sex and undefined features, and it began to seem as though it were not the spider's web that tickled her face and neck caressingly, but that little creature. When, at the end of the path, a thin wicker hurdle came into sight, and behind it podgy beehives with tiled roofs; when in the motionless, stagnant air there came a smell of hay and honey, and a soft buzzing of bees was audible, then the little creature would take complete possession of Olga Mihalovna. She used to sit down on a bench near the shanty woven of branches, and fall to thinking.

This time, too, she went on as far as the seat, sat down, and began thinking; but instead of the little creature there rose up in her imagination the figures of the grown-up people whom she had just left. She felt dreadfully uneasy that she, the hostess, had deserted her guests, and she remembered how her husband, Pyotr Dmitritch, and her uncle, Nikolay Nikolaitch, had argued at dinner about trial by jury, about the press, and

about the higher education of women. Her husband, as usual, argued in order to show off his Conservative ideas before his visitors—and still more in order to disagree with her uncle, whom he disliked. Her uncle contradicted him and wrangled over every word he uttered, so as to show the company that he, Uncle Nikolay Nikolaitch, still retained his youthful freshness of spirit and freethinking in spite of his fifty-nine years. And towards the end of dinner even Olga Mihalovna herself could not resist taking part and unskilfully attempting to defend university education for women—not that that education stood in need of her defence, but simply because she wanted to annoy her husband, who to her mind was unfair. The guests were wearied by this discussion, but they all thought it necessary to take part in it, and talked a great deal, although none of them took any interest in trial by jury or the higher education of women.…

Olga Mihalovna was sitting on the nearest side of the hurdle near the shanty. The sun was hidden behind the clouds. The trees and the air were overcast as before rain, but in spite of that it was hot and stifling. The hay cut under the trees on the previous day was lying ungathered, looking melancholy, with here and there a patch of colour from the faded flowers, and from it came a heavy, sickly scent. It was still. The other side of the hurdle there was a monotonous hum of bees.…

Suddenly she heard footsteps and voices; someone was coming along the path towards the beehouse.

“How stifling it is!” said a feminine voice. “What do you think—is it going to rain, or not?”

“It is going to rain, my charmer, but not before night,” a very familiar male voice answered languidly. “There will be a good rain.”

Olga Mihalovna calculated that if she made haste to hide in the shanty they would pass by without seeing her, and she would not have to talk and to force herself to smile. She picked up her skirts, bent down and crept into the shanty. At once she felt upon her face, her neck, her arms, the hot air as heavy as steam. If it had not been for the stuffiness and the close smell of rye bread, fennel, and brushwood, which prevented her from breathing freely, it would have been delightful to hide from her visitors here under the thatched roof in the dusk, and to think about the little creature. It was cosy and quiet.

“What a pretty spot!” said a feminine voice. “Let us sit here, Pyotr Dmitritch.”

Olga Mihalovna began peeping through a crack between two branches. She saw her husband, Pyotr Dmitritch, and Lubotchka Sheller,

a girl of seventeen who had not long left boarding-school. Pyotr Dmitritch, with his hat on the back of his head, languid and indolent from having drunk so much at dinner, slouched by the hurdle and raked the hay into a heap with his foot; Lubotchka, pink with the heat and pretty as ever, stood with her hands behind her, watching the lazy movements of his big handsome person.

Olga Mihalovna knew that her husband was attractive to women, and did not like to see him with them. There was nothing out of the way in Pyotr Dmitritch's lazily raking together the hay in order to sit down on it with Lubotchka and chatter to her of trivialities; there was nothing out of the way, either, in pretty Lubotchka's looking at him with her soft eyes; but yet Olga Mihalovna felt vexed with her husband and frightened and pleased that she could listen to them.

"Sit down, enchantress," said Pyotr Dmitritch, sinking down on the hay and stretching. "That's right. Come, tell me something."

"What next! If I begin telling you anything you will go to sleep."

"Me go to sleep? Allah forbid! Can I go to sleep while eyes like yours are watching me?"

In her husband's words, and in the fact that he was lolling with his hat on the back of his head in the presence of a lady, there was nothing out of the way either. He was spoilt by women, knew that they found him attractive, and had adopted with them a special tone which everyone said suited him. With Lubotchka he behaved as with all women. But, all the same, Olga Mihalovna was jealous.

"Tell me, please," said Lubotchka, after a brief silence—"is it true that you are to be tried for something?"

"I? Yes, I am… numbered among the transgressors, my charmer."

"But what for?"

"For nothing, but just… it's chiefly a question of politics," yawned Pyotr Dmitritch—"the antagonisms of Left and Right. I, an obscurantist and reactionary, ventured in an official paper to make use of an expression offensive in the eyes of such immaculate Gladstones as Vladimir Pavlovitch Vladimirov and our local justice of the peace—Kuzma Grigoritch Vostryakov."

Pytor Dmitritch yawned again and went on:

"And it is the way with us that you may express disapproval of the sun or the moon, or anything you like, but God preserve you from touching the Liberals! Heaven forbid! A Liberal is like the poisonous dry fungus which covers you with a cloud of dust if you accidentally touch it with your finger."

“What happened to you?”

“Nothing particular. The whole flareup started from the merest trifle. A teacher, a detestable person of clerical associations, hands to Vostryakov a petition against a tavern-keeper, charging him with insulting language and behaviour in a public place. Everything showed that both the teacher and the tavern-keeper were drunk as cobblers, and that they behaved equally badly. If there had been insulting behaviour, the insult had anyway been mutual. Vostryakov ought to have fined them both for a breach of the peace and have turned them out of the court—that is all. But that’s not our way of doing things. With us what stands first is not the person—not the fact itself, but the trademark and label. However great a rascal a teacher may be, he is always in the right because he is a teacher; a tavern-keeper is always in the wrong because he is a tavern-keeper and a moneygrubber. Vostryakov placed the tavern-keeper under arrest. The man appealed to the Circuit Court; the Circuit Court triumphantly upheld Vostryakov’s decision. Well, I stuck to my own opinion.… Got a little hot.… That was all.”

Pyotr Dmitritch spoke calmly with careless irony. In reality the trial that was hanging over him worried him extremely. Olga Mihalovna remembered how on his return from the unfortunate session he had tried to conceal from his household how troubled he was, and how dissatisfied with himself. As an intelligent man he could not help feeling that he had gone too far in expressing his disagreement; and how much lying had been needful to conceal that feeling from himself and from others! How many unnecessary conversations there had been! How much grumbling and insincere laughter at what was not laughable! When he learned that he was to be brought up before the Court, he seemed at once harassed and depressed; he began to sleep badly, stood oftener than ever at the windows, drumming on the panes with his fingers. And he was ashamed to let his wife see that he was worried, and it vexed her.

“They say you have been in the province of Poltava?” Lubotchka questioned him.

“Yes,” answered Pyotr Dmitritch. “I came back the day before yesterday.”

“I expect it is very nice there.”

“Yes, it is very nice, very nice indeed; in fact, I arrived just in time for the haymaking, I must tell you, and in the Ukraine the haymaking is the most poetical moment of the year. Here we have a big house, a big garden, a lot of servants, and a lot going on, so that you don’t see the haymaking; here it all passes unnoticed. There, at the farm, I have a

meadow of forty-five acres as flat as my hand. You can see the men mowing from any window you stand at. They are mowing in the meadow, they are mowing in the garden. There are no visitors, no fuss nor hurry either, so that you can't help seeing, feeling, hearing nothing but the haymaking. There is a smell of hay indoors and outdoors. There's the sound of the scythes from sunrise to sunset. Altogether Little Russia is a charming country. Would you believe it, when I was drinking water from the rustic wells and filthy vodka in some Jew's tavern, when on quiet evenings the strains of the Little Russian fiddle and the tambourines reached me, I was tempted by a fascinating idea—to settle down on my place and live there as long as I chose, far away from Circuit Courts, intellectual conversations, philosophizing women, long dinners.…"

Pyotr Dmitritch was not lying. He was unhappy and really longed to rest. And he had visited his Poltava property simply to avoid seeing his study, his servants, his acquaintances, and everything that could remind him of his wounded vanity and his mistakes.

Lubotchka suddenly jumped up and waved her hands about in horror.

"Oh! A bee, a bee!" she shrieked. "It will sting!"

"Nonsense; it won't sting," said Pyotr Dmitritch. "What a coward you are!"

"No, no, no," cried Lubotchka; and looking round at the bees, she walked rapidly back.

Pyotr Dmitritch walked away after her, looking at her with a softened and melancholy face. He was probably thinking, as he looked at her, of his farm, of solitude, and—who knows?—perhaps he was even thinking how snug and cosy life would be at the farm if his wife had been this girl—young, pure, fresh, not corrupted by higher education, not with child.…

When the sound of their footsteps had died away, Olga Mihalovna came out of the shanty and turned towards the house. She wanted to cry. She was by now acutely jealous. She could understand that her husband was worried, dissatisfied with himself and ashamed, and when people are ashamed they hold aloof, above all from those nearest to them, and are unreserved with strangers; she could understand, also, that she had nothing to fear from Lubotchka or from those women who were now drinking coffee indoors. But everything in general was terrible, incomprehensible, and it already seemed to Olga Mihalovna that Pyotr Dmitritch only half belonged to her.

“He has no right to do it!” she muttered, trying to formulate her jealousy and her vexation with her husband. “He has no right at all. I will tell him so plainly!”

She made up her mind to find her husband at once and tell him all about it: it was disgusting, absolutely disgusting, that he was attractive to other women and sought their admiration as though it were some heavenly manna; it was unjust and dishonourable that he should give to others what belonged by right to his wife, that he should hide his soul and his conscience from his wife to reveal them to the first pretty face he came across. What harm had his wife done him? How was she to blame? Long ago she had been sickened by his lying: he was forever posing, flirting, saying what he did not think, and trying to seem different from what he was and what he ought to be. Why this falsity? Was it seemly in a decent man? If he lied he was demeaning himself and those to whom he lied, and slighting what he lied about. Could he not understand that if he swaggered and posed at the judicial table, or held forth at dinner on the prerogatives of government, that he, simply to provoke her uncle, was showing thereby that he had not a ha’p’orth of respect for the Court, or himself, or any of the people who were listening and looking at him?

Coming out into the big avenue, Olga Mihalovna assumed an expression of face as though she had just gone away to look after some domestic matter. In the verandah the gentlemen were drinking liqueur and eating strawberries: one of them, the Examining Magistrate—a stout elderly man, blagueur and wit—must have been telling some rather free anecdote, for, seeing their hostess, he suddenly clapped his hands over his fat lips, rolled his eyes, and sat down. Olga Mihalovna did not like the local officials. She did not care for their clumsy, ceremonious wives, their scandal-mongering, their frequent visits, their flattery of her husband, whom they all hated. Now, when they were drinking, were replete with food and showed no signs of going away, she felt their presence an agonizing weariness; but not to appear impolite, she smiled cordially to the Magistrate, and shook her finger at him. She walked across the dining room and drawing room smiling, and looking as though she had gone to give some order and make some arrangement. “God grant no one stops me,” she thought, but she forced herself to stop in the drawing room to listen from politeness to a young man who was sitting at the piano playing: after standing for a minute, she cried, “Bravo, bravo, M. Georges!” and clapping her hands twice, she went on.

She found her husband in his study. He was sitting at the table, thinking of something. His face looked stern, thoughtful, and guilty. This

was not the same Pyotr Dmitritch who had been arguing at dinner and whom his guests knew, but a different man—wearied, feeling guilty and dissatisfied with himself, whom nobody knew but his wife. He must have come to the study to get cigarettes. Before him lay an open cigarette-case full of cigarettes, and one of his hands was in the table drawer; he had paused and sunk into thought as he was taking the cigarettes.

Olga Mihalovna felt sorry for him. It was as clear as day that this man was harassed, could find no rest, and was perhaps struggling with himself. Olga Mihalovna went up to the table in silence: wanting to show that she had forgotten the argument at dinner and was not cross, she shut the cigarette-case and put it in her husband's coat pocket.

"What should I say to him?" she wondered; "I shall say that lying is like a forest—the further one goes into it the more difficult it is to get out of it. I will say to him, 'You have been carried away by the false part you are playing; you have insulted people who were attached to you and have done you no harm. Go and apologize to them, laugh at yourself, and you will feel better. And if you want peace and solitude, let us go away together.'"

Meeting his wife's gaze, Pyotr Dmitritch's face immediately assumed the expression it had worn at dinner and in the garden—indifferent and slightly ironical. He yawned and got up.

"It's past five," he said, looking at his watch. "If our visitors are merciful and leave us at eleven, even then we have another six hours of it. It's a cheerful prospect, there's no denying!"

And whistling something, he walked slowly out of the study with his usual dignified gait. She could hear him with dignified firmness cross the dining room, then the drawing room, laugh with dignified assurance, and say to the young man who was playing, "Bravo! bravo!" Soon his footsteps died away: he must have gone out into the garden. And now not jealousy, not vexation, but real hatred of his footsteps, his insincere laugh and voice, took possession of Olga Mihalovna. She went to the window and looked out into the garden. Pyotr Dmitritch was already walking along the avenue. Putting one hand in his pocket and snapping the fingers of the other, he walked with confident swinging steps, throwing his head back a little, and looking as though he were very well satisfied with himself, with his dinner, with his digestion, and with nature.…

Two little schoolboys, the children of Madame Tchizhevsky, who had only just arrived, made their appearance in the avenue, accompanied by

their tutor, a student wearing a white tunic and very narrow trousers. When they reached Pyotr Dmitritch, the boys and the student stopped, and probably congratulated him on his name-day. With a graceful swing of his shoulders, he patted the children on their cheeks, and carelessly offered the student his hand without looking at him. The student must have praised the weather and compared it with the climate of Petersburg, for Pyotr Dmitritch said in a loud voice, in a tone as though he were not speaking to a guest, but to an usher of the court or a witness:

"What! It's cold in Petersburg? And here, my good sir, we have a salubrious atmosphere and the fruits of the earth in abundance. Eh? What?"

And thrusting one hand in his pocket and snapping the fingers of the other, he walked on. Till he had disappeared behind the nut bushes, Olga Mihalovna watched the back of his head in perplexity. How had this man of thirty-four come by the dignified deportment of a general? How had he come by that impressive, elegant manner? Where had he got that vibration of authority in his voice? Where had he got these "what's," "to be sure's," and "my good sir's"?

Olga Mihalovna remembered how in the first months of her marriage she had felt dreary at home alone and had driven into the town to the Circuit Court, at which Pyotr Dmitritch had sometimes presided in place of her godfather, Count Alexey Petrovitch. In the presidential chair, wearing his uniform and a chain on his breast, he was completely changed. Stately gestures, a voice of thunder, "what," "to be sure," careless tones.… Everything, all that was ordinary and human, all that was individual and personal to himself that Olga Mihalovna was accustomed to seeing in him at home, vanished in grandeur, and in the presidential chair there sat not Pyotr Dmitritch, but another man whom everyone called Mr. President. This consciousness of power prevented him from sitting still in his place, and he seized every opportunity to ring his bell, to glance sternly at the public, to shout.… Where had he got his short-sight and his deafness when he suddenly began to see and hear with difficulty, and, frowning majestically, insisted on people speaking louder and coming closer to the table? From the height of his grandeur he could hardly distinguish faces or sounds, so that it seemed that if Olga Mihalovna herself had gone up to him he would have shouted even to her, "Your name?" Peasant witnesses he addressed familiarly, he shouted at the public so that his voice could be heard even in the street, and behaved incredibly with the lawyers. If a lawyer had to speak to him, Pyotr Dmitritch, turning a little away from him, looked with half-closed

eyes at the ceiling, meaning to signify thereby that the lawyer was utterly superfluous and that he was neither recognizing him nor listening to him; if a badly-dressed lawyer spoke, Pyotr Dmitritch pricked up his ears and looked the man up and down with a sarcastic, annihilating stare as though to say: “Queer sort of lawyers nowadays!”

“What do you mean by that?” he would interrupt.

If a would-be eloquent lawyer mispronounced a foreign word, saying, for instance, “factitious” instead of “fictitious,” Pyotr Dmitritch brightened up at once and asked, “What? How? Factitious? What does that mean?” and then observed impressively: “Don’t make use of words you do not understand.” And the lawyer, finishing his speech, would walk away from the table, red and perspiring, while Pyotr Dmitritch; with a self-satisfied smile, would lean back in his chair triumphant. In his manner with the lawyers he imitated Count Alexey Petrovitch a little, but when the latter said, for instance, “Counsel for the defence, you keep quiet for a little!” it sounded paternally good-natured and natural, while the same words in Pyotr Dmitritch’s mouth were rude and artificial.

II

There were sounds of applause. The young man had finished playing. Olga Mihalovna remembered her guests and hurried into the drawing room.

“I have so enjoyed your playing,” she said, going up to the piano. “I have so enjoyed it. You have a wonderful talent! But don’t you think our piano’s out of tune?”

At that moment the two schoolboys walked into the room, accompanied by the student.

“My goodness! Mitya and Kolya,” Olga Mihalovna drawled joyfully, going to meet them: “How big they have grown! One would not know you! But where is your mamma?”

“I congratulate you on the name-day,” the student began in a free-and-easy tone, “and I wish you all happiness. Ekaterina Andreyevna sends her congratulations and begs you to excuse her. She is not very well.”

“How unkind of her! I have been expecting her all day. Is it long since you left Petersburg?” Olga Mihalovna asked the student. “What kind of weather have you there now?” And without waiting for an answer, she looked cordially at the schoolboys and repeated:

“How tall they have grown! It is not long since they used to come with their nurse, and they are at school already! The old grow older while the young grow up.… Have you had dinner?”

“Oh, please don’t trouble!” said the student.

“Why, you have not had dinner?”

“For goodness’ sake, don’t trouble!”

“But I suppose you are hungry?” Olga Mihalovna said it in a harsh, rude voice, with impatience and vexation—it escaped her unawares, but at once she coughed, smiled, and flushed crimson. “How tall they have grown!” she said softly.

“Please don’t trouble!” the student said once more.

The student begged her not to trouble; the boys said nothing; obviously all three of them were hungry. Olga Mihalovna took them into the dining room and told Vassily to lay the table.

“How unkind of your mamma!” she said as she made them sit down. “She has quite forgotten me. Unkind, unkind, unkind… you must tell her so. What are you studying?” she asked the student.

“Medicine.”

“Well, I have a weakness for doctors, only fancy. I am very sorry my husband is not a doctor. What courage anyone must have to perform an operation or dissect a corpse, for instance! Horrible! Aren’t you frightened? I believe I should die of terror! Of course, you drink vodka?”

“Please don’t trouble.”

“After your journey you must have something to drink. Though I am a woman, even I drink sometimes. And Mitya and Kolya will drink Malaga. It’s not a strong wine; you need not be afraid of it. What fine fellows they are, really! They’ll be thinking of getting married next.”

Olga Mihalovna talked without ceasing; she knew by experience that when she had guests to entertain it was far easier and more comfortable to talk than to listen. When you talk there is no need to strain your attention to think of answers to questions, and to change your expression of face. But unawares she asked the student a serious question; the student began a lengthy speech and she was forced to listen. The student knew that she had once been at the University, and so tried to seem a serious person as he talked to her.

“What subject are you studying?” she asked, forgetting that she had already put that question to him.

“Medicine.”

Olga Mihalovna now remembered that she had been away from the ladies for a long while.

“Yes? Then I suppose you are going to be a doctor?” she said, getting up. “That’s splendid. I am sorry I did not go in for medicine myself. So you will finish your dinner here, gentlemen, and then come into the garden. I will introduce you to the young ladies.”

She went out and glanced at her watch: it was five minutes to six. And she wondered that the time had gone so slowly, and thought with horror that there were six more hours before midnight, when the party would break up. How could she get through those six hours? What phrases could she utter? How should she behave to her husband?

There was not a soul in the drawing room or on the verandah. All the guests were sauntering about the garden.

“I shall have to suggest a walk in the birchwood before tea, or else a row in the boats,” thought Olga Mihalovna, hurrying to the croquet ground, from which came the sounds of voices and laughter.

“And sit the old people down to Vint.…” She met Grigory the footman coming from the croquet ground with empty bottles.

“Where are the ladies?” she asked.

“Among the raspberry bushes. The master’s there, too.”

“Oh, good heavens!” someone on the croquet lawn shouted with exasperation. “I have told you a thousand times over! To know the Bulgarians you must see them! You can’t judge from the papers!”

Either because of the outburst or for some other reason, Olga Mihalovna was suddenly aware of a terrible weakness all over, especially in her legs and in her shoulders. She felt she could not bear to speak, to listen, or to move.

“Grigory,” she said faintly and with an effort, “when you have to serve tea or anything, please don’t appeal to me, don’t ask me anything, don’t speak of anything.… Do it all yourself, and… and don’t make a noise with your feet, I entreat you.… I can’t, because…”

Without finishing, she walked on towards the croquet lawn, but on the way she thought of the ladies, and turned towards the raspberry-bushes. The sky, the air, and the trees looked gloomy again and threatened rain; it was hot and stifling. An immense flock of crows, foreseeing a storm, flew cawing over the garden. The paths were more overgrown, darker, and narrower as they got nearer the kitchen garden. In one of them, buried in a thick tangle of wild pear, crab apple, sorrel, young oaks, and hopbine, clouds of tiny black flies swarmed round Olga Mihalovna. She covered her face with her hands and began forcing herself to think of the little creature.… There floated through her imagination the figures of Grigory, Mitya, Kolya, the faces of the peasants who had come in the morning to present their congratulations.

She heard footsteps, and she opened her eyes. Uncle Nikolay Nikolaitch was coming rapidly towards her.

“It’s you, dear? I am very glad…” he began, breathless. “A couple of words.…” He mopped with his handkerchief his red shaven chin, then suddenly stepped back a pace, flung up his hands and opened his eyes wide. “My dear girl, how long is this going on?” he said rapidly, spluttering. “I ask you: is there no limit to it? I say nothing of the demoralizing effect of his martinet views on all around him, of the way he insults all that is sacred and best in me and in every honest thinking man—I will say nothing about that, but he might at least behave decently! Why, he shouts, he bellows, gives himself airs, poses as a sort of Bonaparte, does not let one say a word.… I don’t know what the devil’s the matter with him! These lordly gestures, this condescending

tone; and laughing like a general! Who is he, allow me to ask you? I ask you, who is he? The husband of his wife, with a few paltry acres and the rank of a titular who has had the luck to marry an heiress! An upstart and a *junker*, like so many others! A type out of Shtchedrin! Upon my word, it's either that he's suffering from megalomania, or that old rat in his dotage, Count Alexey Petrovitch, is right when he says that children and young people are a long time growing up nowadays, and go on playing they are cabmen and generals till they are forty!"

"That's true, that's true," Olga Mihalovna assented. "Let me pass."

"Now just consider: what is it leading to?" her uncle went on, barring her way. "How will this playing at being a general and a Conservative end? Already he has got into trouble! Yes, to stand his trial! I am very glad of it! That's what his noise and shouting has brought him to—to stand in the prisoner's dock. And it's not as though it were the Circuit Court or something: it's the Central Court! Nothing worse could be imagined, I think! And then he has quarrelled with everyone! He is celebrating his name-day, and look, Vostryakov's not here, nor Yahontov, nor Vladimirov, nor Shevud, nor the Count.… There is no one, I imagine, more Conservative than Count Alexey Petrovitch, yet even he has not come. And he never will come again. He won't come, you will see!"

"My God! but what has it to do with me?" asked Olga Mihalovna.

"What has it to do with you? Why, you are his wife! You are clever, you have had a university education, and it was in your power to make him an honest worker!"

"At the lectures I went to they did not teach us how to influence tiresome people. It seems as though I should have to apologize to all of you for having been at the University," said Olga Mihalovna sharply. "Listen, uncle. If people played the same scales over and over again the whole day long in your hearing, you wouldn't be able to sit still and listen, but would run away. I hear the same thing over again for days together all the year round. You must have pity on me at last."

Her uncle pulled a very long face, then looked at her searchingly and twisted his lips into a mocking smile.

"So that's how it is," he piped in a voice like an old woman's. "I beg your pardon!" he said, and made a ceremonious bow. "If you have fallen under his influence yourself, and have abandoned your convictions, you should have said so before. I beg your pardon!"

"Yes, I have abandoned my convictions," she cried. "There; make the most of it!"

“I beg your pardon!”

Her uncle for the last time made her a ceremonious bow, a little on one side, and, shrinking into himself, made a scrape with his foot and walked back.

“Idiot!” thought Olga Mihalovna. “I hope he will go home.”

She found the ladies and the young people among the raspberries in the kitchen garden. Some were eating raspberries; others, tired of eating raspberries, were strolling about the strawberry beds or foraging among the sugar-peas. A little on one side of the raspberry bed, near a branching appletree propped up by posts which had been pulled out of an old fence, Pyotr Dmitritch was mowing the grass. His hair was falling over his forehead, his cravat was untied. His watch-chain was hanging loose. Every step and every swing of the scythe showed skill and the possession of immense physical strength. Near him were standing Lubotchka and the daughters of a neighbour, Colonel Bukryeev—two anaemic and unhealthily stout fair girls, Natalya and Valentina, or, as they were always called, Nata and Vata, both wearing white frocks and strikingly like each other. Pyotr Dmitritch was teaching them to mow.

“It’s very simple,” he said. “You have only to know how to hold the scythe and not to get too hot over it—that is, not to use more force than is necessary! Like this.… Wouldn’t you like to try?” he said, offering the scythe to Lubotchka. “Come!”

Lubotchka took the scythe clumsily, blushed crimson, and laughed.

“Don’t be afraid, Lubov Alexandrovna!” cried Olga Mihalovna, loud enough for all the ladies to hear that she was with them. “Don’t be afraid! You must learn! If you marry a Tolstoyan he will make you mow.”

Lubotchka raised the scythe, but began laughing again, and, helpless with laughter, let go of it at once. She was ashamed and pleased at being talked to as though grown up. Nata, with a cold, serious face, with no trace of smiling or shyness, took the scythe, swung it and caught it in the grass; Vata, also without a smile, as cold and serious as her sister, took the scythe, and silently thrust it into the earth. Having done this, the two sisters linked arms and walked in silence to the raspberries.

Pyotr Dmitritch laughed and played about like a boy, and this childish, frolicsome mood in which he became exceedingly good-natured suited him far better than any other. Olga Mihalovna loved him when he was like that. But his boyishness did not usually last long. It did not this time; after playing with the scythe, he for some reason thought it necessary to take a serious tone about it.

“When I am mowing, I feel, do you know, healthier and more normal,” he said. “If I were forced to confine myself to an intellectual life I believe I should go out of my mind. I feel that I was not born to be a man of culture! I ought to mow, plough, sow, drive out the horses.”

And Pyotr Dmitritch began a conversation with the ladies about the advantages of physical labour, about culture, and then about the pernicious effects of money, of property. Listening to her husband, Olga Mihalovna, for some reason, thought of her dowry.

“And the time will come, I suppose,” she thought, “when he will not forgive me for being richer than he. He is proud and vain. Maybe he will hate me because he owes so much to me.”

She stopped near Colonel Bukryeev, who was eating raspberries and also taking part in the conversation.

“Come,” he said, making room for Olga Mihalovna and Pyotr Dmitritch. “The ripest are here.… And so, according to Proudhon,” he went on, raising his voice, “property is robbery. But I must confess I don’t believe in Proudhon, and don’t consider him a philosopher. The French are not authorities, to my thinking—God bless them!”

“Well, as for Proudhons and Buckles and the rest of them, I am weak in that department,” said Pyotr Dmitritch. “For philosophy you must apply to my wife. She has been at University lectures and knows all your Schopenhauers and Proudhons by heart.…”

Olga Mihalovna felt bored again. She walked again along a little path by apple and pear trees, and looked again as though she was on some very important errand. She reached the gardener’s cottage. In the doorway the gardener’s wife, Varvara, was sitting together with her four little children with big shaven heads. Varvara, too, was with child and expecting to be confined on Elijah’s Day. After greeting her, Olga Mihalovna looked at her and the children in silence and asked:

“Well, how do you feel?”

“Oh, all right.…”

A silence followed. The two women seemed to understand each other without words.

“It’s dreadful having one’s first baby,” said Olga Mihalovna after a moment’s thought. “I keep feeling as though I shall not get through it, as though I shall die.”

“I fancied that, too, but here I am alive. One has all sorts of fancies.”

Varvara, who was just going to have her fifth, looked down a little on her mistress from the height of her experience and spoke in a rather didactic tone, and Olga Mihalovna could not help feeling her authority;

she would have liked to have talked of her fears, of the child, of her sensations, but she was afraid it might strike Varvara as naive and trivial. And she waited in silence for Varvara to say something herself.

“Olya, we are going indoors,” Pyotr Dmitritch called from the raspberries.

Olga Mihalovna liked being silent, waiting and watching Varvara. She would have been ready to stay like that till night without speaking or having any duty to perform. But she had to go. She had hardly left the cottage when Lubotchka, Nata, and Vata came running to meet her. The sisters stopped short abruptly a couple of yards away; Lubotchka ran right up to her and flung herself on her neck.

“You dear, darling, precious,” she said, kissing her face and her neck. “Let us go and have tea on the island!”

“On the island, on the island!” said the precisely similar Nata and Vata, both at once, without a smile.

“But it’s going to rain, my dears.”

“It’s not, it’s not,” cried Lubotchka with a woebegone face. “They’ve all agreed to go. Dear! darling!”

“They are all getting ready to have tea on the island,” said Pyotr Dmitritch, coming up. “See to arranging things.… We will all go in the boats, and the samovars and all the rest of it must be sent in the carriage with the servants.”

He walked beside his wife and gave her his arm. Olga Mihalovna had a desire to say something disagreeable to her husband, something biting, even about her dowry perhaps—the crueller the better, she felt. She thought a little, and said:

“Why is it Count Alexey Petrovitch hasn’t come? What a pity!”

“I am very glad he hasn’t come,” said Pyotr Dmitritch, lying. “I’m sick to death of that old lunatic.”

“But yet before dinner you were expecting him so eagerly!”

III

Half an hour later all the guests were crowding on the bank near the pile to which the boats were fastened. They were all talking and laughing, and were in such excitement and commotion that they could hardly get into the boats. Three boats were crammed with passengers, while two stood empty. The keys for unfastening these two boats had been somehow mislaid, and messengers were continually running from the river to the house to look for them. Some said Grigory had the keys, others that the bailiff had them, while others suggested sending for a blacksmith and breaking the padlocks. And all talked at once, interrupting and shouting one another down. Pyotr Dmitritch paced impatiently to and fro on the bank, shouting:

"What the devil's the meaning of it! The keys ought always to be lying in the hall window! Who has dared to take them away? The bailiff can get a boat of his own if he wants one!"

At last the keys were found. Then it appeared that two oars were missing. Again there was a great hullabaloo. Pyotr Dmitritch, who was weary of pacing about the bank, jumped into a long, narrow boat hollowed out of the trunk of a poplar, and, lurching from side to side and almost falling into the water, pushed off from the bank. The other boats followed him one after another, amid loud laughter and the shrieks of the young ladies.

The white cloudy sky, the trees on the riverside, the boats with the people in them, and the oars, were reflected in the water as in a mirror; under the boats, far away below in the bottomless depths, was a second sky with the birds flying across it. The bank on which the house and gardens stood was high, steep, and covered with trees; on the other, which was sloping, stretched broad green water-meadows with sheets of water glistening in them. The boats had floated a hundred yards when, behind the mournfully drooping willows on the sloping banks, huts and a herd of cows came into sight; they began to hear songs, drunken shouts, and the strains of a concertina.

Here and there on the river fishing-boats were scattered about, setting their nets for the night. In one of these boats was the festive party,

playing on homemade violins and violoncellos.

Olga Mihalovna was sitting at the rudder; she was smiling affably and talking a great deal to entertain her visitors, while she glanced stealthily at her husband. He was ahead of them all, standing up punting with one oar. The light sharp-nosed canoe, which all the guests called the "deathtrap"—while Pyotr Dmitritch, for some reason, called it *Penderaklia*—flew along quickly; it had a brisk, crafty expression, as though it hated its heavy occupant and was looking out for a favourable moment to glide away from under his feet. Olga Mihalovna kept looking at her husband, and she loathed his good looks which attracted everyone, the back of his head, his attitude, his familiar manner with women; she hated all the women sitting in the boat with her, was jealous, and at the same time was trembling every minute in terror that the frail craft would upset and cause an accident.

"Take care, Pyotr!" she cried, while her heart fluttered with terror. "Sit down! We believe in your courage without all that!"

She was worried, too, by the people who were in the boat with her. They were all ordinary good sort of people like thousands of others, but now each one of them struck her as exceptional and evil. In each one of them she saw nothing but falsity. "That young man," she thought, "rowing, in gold-rimmed spectacles, with chestnut hair and a nice-looking beard: he is a mamma's darling, rich, and well-fed, and always fortunate, and everyone considers him an honourable, freethinking, advanced man. It's not a year since he left the University and came to live in the district, but he already talks of himself as 'we active members of the Zemstvo.' But in another year he will be bored like so many others and go off to Petersburg, and to justify running away, will tell everyone that the Zemstvos are good-for-nothing, and that he has been deceived in them. While from the other boat his young wife keeps her eyes fixed on him, and believes that he is 'an active member of the Zemstvo,' just as in a year she will believe that the Zemstvo is good-for-nothing. And that stout, carefully shaven gentleman in the straw hat with the broad ribbon, with an expensive cigar in his mouth: he is fond of saying, 'It is time to put away dreams and set to work!' He has Yorkshire pigs, Butler's hives, rapeseed, pineapples, a dairy, a cheese factory, Italian bookkeeping by double entry; but every summer he sells his timber and mortgages part of his land to spend the autumn with his mistress in the Crimea. And there's Uncle Nikolay Nikolaitch, who has quarrelled with Pyotr Dmitritch, and yet for some reason does not go home."

Olga Mihalovna looked at the other boats, and there, too, she saw only uninteresting, queer creatures, affected or stupid people. She thought of all the people she knew in the district, and could not remember one person of whom one could say or think anything good. They all seemed to her mediocre, insipid, unintelligent, narrow, false, heartless; they all said what they did not think, and did what they did not want to. Dreariness and despair were stifling her; she longed to leave off smiling, to leap up and cry out, “I am sick of you,” and then jump out and swim to the bank.

“I say, let’s take Pyotr Dmitritch in tow!” someone shouted.

“In tow, in tow!” the others chimed in. “Olga Mihalovna, take your husband in tow.”

To take him in tow, Olga Mihalovna, who was steering, had to seize the right moment and to catch hold of his boat by the chain at the beak. When she bent over to the chain Pyotr Dmitritch frowned and looked at her in alarm.

“I hope you won’t catch cold,” he said.

“If you are uneasy about me and the child, why do you torment me?” thought Olga Mihalovna.

Pyotr Dmitritch acknowledged himself vanquished, and, not caring to be towed, jumped from the *Penderaklia* into the boat which was overful already, and jumped so carelessly that the boat lurched violently, and everyone cried out in terror.

“He did that to please the ladies,” thought Olga Mihalovna; “he knows it’s charming.” Her hands and feet began trembling, as she supposed, from boredom, vexation from the strain of smiling and the discomfort she felt all over her body. And to conceal this trembling from her guests, she tried to talk more loudly, to laugh, to move.

“If I suddenly begin to cry,” she thought, “I shall say I have toothache.…”

But at last the boats reached the “Island of Good Hope,” as they called the peninsula formed by a bend in the river at an acute angle, covered with a copse of old birch trees, oaks, willows, and poplars. The tables were already laid under the trees; the samovars were smoking, and Vassily and Grigory, in their swallowtails and white knitted gloves, were already busy with the tea-things. On the other bank, opposite the Island of Good Hope, there stood the carriages which had come with the provisions. The baskets and parcels of provisions were carried across to the island in a little boat like the *Penderaklia*. The footmen, the coachmen, and even the peasant who was sitting in the boat, had the

solemn expression befitting a name-day such as one only sees in children and servants.

While Olga Mihalovna was making the tea and pouring out the first glasses, the visitors were busy with the liqueurs and sweet things. Then there was the general commotion usual at picnics over drinking tea, very wearisome and exhausting for the hostess. Grigory and Vassily had hardly had time to take the glasses round before hands were being stretched out to Olga Mihalovna with empty glasses. One asked for no sugar, another wanted it stronger, another weak, a fourth declined another glass. And all this Olga Mihalovna had to remember, and then to call, “Ivan Petrovitch, is it without sugar for you?” or, “Gentlemen, which of you wanted it weak?” But the guest who had asked for weak tea, or no sugar, had by now forgotten it, and, absorbed in agreeable conversation, took the first glass that came. Depressed-looking figures wandered like shadows at a little distance from the table, pretending to look for mushrooms in the grass, or reading the labels on the boxes—these were those for whom there were not glasses enough. “Have you had tea?” Olga Mihalovna kept asking, and the guest so addressed begged her not to trouble, and said, “I will wait,” though it would have suited her better for the visitors not to wait but to make haste.

Some, absorbed in conversation, drank their tea slowly, keeping their glasses for half an hour; others, especially some who had drunk a good deal at dinner, would not leave the table, and kept on drinking glass after glass, so that Olga Mihalovna scarcely had time to fill them. One jocular young man sipped his tea through a lump of sugar, and kept saying, “Sinful man that I am, I love to indulge myself with the Chinese herb.” He kept asking with a heavy sigh: “Another tiny dish of tea more, if you please.” He drank a great deal, nibbled his sugar, and thought it all very amusing and original, and imagined that he was doing a clever imitation of a Russian merchant. None of them understood that these trifles were agonizing to their hostess, and, indeed, it was hard to understand it, as Olga Mihalovna went on all the time smiling affably and talking nonsense.

But she felt ill.… She was irritated by the crowd of people, the laughter, the questions, the jocular young man, the footmen harassed and run off their legs, the children who hung round the table; she was irritated at Vata’s being like Nata, at Kolya’s being like Mitya, so that one could not tell which of them had had tea and which of them had not. She felt that her smile of forced affability was passing into an expression of anger, and she felt every minute as though she would burst into tears.

“Rain, my friends,” cried someone.

Everyone looked at the sky.

“Yes, it really is rain…” Pyotr Dmitritch assented, and wiped his cheek.

Only a few drops were falling from the sky—the real rain had not begun yet; but the company abandoned their tea and made haste to get off. At first they all wanted to drive home in the carriages, but changed their minds and made for the boats. On the pretext that she had to hasten home to give directions about the supper, Olga Mihalovna asked to be excused for leaving the others, and went home in the carriage.

When she got into the carriage, she first of all let her face rest from smiling. With an angry face she drove through the village, and with an angry face acknowledged the bows of the peasants she met. When she got home, she went to the bedroom by the back way and lay down on her husband’s bed.

“Merciful God!” she whispered. “What is all this hard labour for? Why do all these people hustle each other here and pretend that they are enjoying themselves? Why do I smile and lie? I don’t understand it.”

She heard steps and voices. The visitors had come back.

“Let them come,” thought Olga Mihalovna; “I shall lie a little longer.”

But a maidservant came and said:

“Marya Grigoryevna is going, madam.”

Olga Mihalovna jumped up, tidied her hair and hurried out of the room.

“Marya Grigoryevna, what is the meaning of this?” she began in an injured voice, going to meet Marya Grigoryevna. “Why are you in such a hurry?”

“I can’t help it, darling! I’ve stayed too long as it is; my children are expecting me home.”

“It’s too bad of you! Why didn’t you bring your children with you?”

“If you will let me, dear, I will bring them on some ordinary day, but today…”

“Oh, please do,” Olga Mihalovna interrupted; “I shall be delighted! Your children are so sweet! Kiss them all for me.… But, really, I am offended with you! I don’t understand why you are in such a hurry!”

“I really must, I really must.… Goodbye, dear. Take care of yourself. In your condition, you know…”

And the ladies kissed each other. After seeing the departing guest to her carriage, Olga Mihalovna went in to the ladies in the drawing room.

There the lamps were already lighted and the gentlemen were sitting down to cards.

IV

The party broke up after supper about a quarter past twelve. Seeing her visitors off, Olga Mihalovna stood at the door and said:

"You really ought to take a shawl! It's turning a little chilly. Please God, you don't catch cold!"

"Don't trouble, Olga Mihalovna," the ladies answered as they got into the carriage. "Well, goodbye. Mind now, we are expecting you; don't play us false!"

"Wo-o-o!" the coachman checked the horses.

"Ready, Denis! Goodbye, Olga Mihalovna!"

"Kiss the children for me!"

The carriage started and immediately disappeared into the darkness. In the red circle of light cast by the lamp in the road, a fresh pair or trio of impatient horses, and the silhouette of a coachman with his hands held out stiffly before him, would come into view. Again there began kisses, reproaches, and entreaties to come again or to take a shawl. Pyotr Dmitritch kept running out and helping the ladies into their carriages.

"You go now by Efremovshtchina," he directed the coachman; "it's nearer through Mankino, but the road is worse that way. You might have an upset.… Goodbye, my charmer. *Mille* compliments to your artist!"

"Goodbye, Olga Mihalovna, darling! Go indoors, or you will catch cold! It's damp!"

"Wo-o-o! you rascal!"

"What horses have you got here?" Pyotr Dmitritch asked.

"They were bought from Haidorov, in Lent," answered the coachman.

"Capital horses.…"

And Pyotr Dmitritch patted the trace horse on the haunch.

"Well, you can start! God give you good luck!"

The last visitor was gone at last; the red circle on the road quivered, moved aside, contracted and went out, as Vassily carried away the lamp from the entrance. On previous occasions when they had seen off their visitors, Pyotr Dmitritch and Olga Mihalovna had begun dancing about the drawing room, facing each other, clapping their hands and singing:

“They’ve gone! They’ve gone!” But now Olga Mihalovna was not equal to that. She went to her bedroom, undressed, and got into bed.

She fancied she would fall asleep at once and sleep soundly. Her legs and her shoulders ached painfully, her head was heavy from the strain of talking, and she was conscious, as before, of discomfort all over her body. Covering her head over, she lay still for three or four minutes, then peeped out from under the bedclothes at the lamp before the icon, listened to the silence, and smiled.

“It’s nice, it’s nice,” she whispered, curling up her legs, which felt as if they had grown longer from so much walking. “Sleep, sleep.…”

Her legs would not get into a comfortable position; she felt uneasy all over, and she turned on the other side. A big fly blew buzzing about the bedroom and thumped against the ceiling. She could hear, too, Grigory and Vassily stepping cautiously about the drawing room, putting the chairs back in their places; it seemed to Olga Mihalovna that she could not go to sleep, nor be comfortable till those sounds were hushed. And again she turned over on the other side impatiently.

She heard her husband’s voice in the drawing room. Someone must be staying the night, as Pyotr Dmitritch was addressing someone and speaking loudly:

“I don’t say that Count Alexey Petrovitch is an impostor. But he can’t help seeming to be one, because all of you gentlemen attempt to see in him something different from what he really is. His craziness is looked upon as originality, his familiar manners as good-nature, and his complete absence of opinions as Conservatism. Even granted that he is a Conservative of the stamp of ’84, what after all is Conservatism?”

Pyotr Dmitritch, angry with Count Alexey Petrovitch, his visitors, and himself, was relieving his heart. He abused both the Count and his visitors, and in his vexation with himself was ready to speak out and to hold forth upon anything. After seeing his guest to his room, he walked up and down the drawing room, walked through the dining room, down the corridor, then into his study, then again went into the drawing room, and came into the bedroom. Olga Mihalovna was lying on her back, with the bedclothes only to her waist (by now she felt hot), and with an angry face, watched the fly that was thumping against the ceiling.

“Is someone staying the night?” she asked.

“Yegorov.”

Pyotr Dmitritch undressed and got into his bed.

Without speaking, he lighted a cigarette, and he, too, fell to watching the fly. There was an uneasy and forbidding look in his eyes. Olga

Mihalovna looked at his handsome profile for five minutes in silence. It seemed to her for some reason that if her husband were suddenly to turn facing her, and to say, “Olga, I am unhappy,” she would cry or laugh, and she would be at ease. She fancied that her legs were aching and her body was uncomfortable all over because of the strain on her feelings.

“Pyotr, what are you thinking of?” she said.

“Oh, nothing…” her husband answered.

“You have taken to having secrets from me of late: that’s not right.”

“Why is it not right?” answered Pyotr Dmitritch drily and not at once. “We all have our personal life, every one of us, and we are bound to have our secrets.”

“Personal life, our secrets… that’s all words! Understand you are wounding me!” said Olga Mihalovna, sitting up in bed. “If you have a load on your heart, why do you hide it from me? And why do you find it more suitable to open your heart to women who are nothing to you, instead of to your wife? I overheard your outpourings to Lubotchka by the beehouse today.”

“Well, I congratulate you. I am glad you did overhear it.”

This meant, “Leave me alone and let me think.” Olga Mihalovna was indignant. Vexation, hatred, and wrath, which had been accumulating within her during the whole day, suddenly boiled over; she wanted at once to speak out, to hurt her husband without putting it off till tomorrow, to wound him, to punish him.… Making an effort to control herself and not to scream, she said:

“Let me tell you, then, that it’s all loathsome, loathsome, loathsome! I’ve been hating you all day; you see what you’ve done.”

Pyotr Dmitritch, too, got up and sat on the bed.

“It’s loathsome, loathsome, loathsome,” Olga Mihalovna went on, beginning to tremble all over. “There’s no need to congratulate me; you had better congratulate yourself! It’s a shame, a disgrace. You have wrapped yourself in lies till you are ashamed to be alone in the room with your wife! You are a deceitful man! I see through you and understand every step you take!”

“Olya, I wish you would please warn me when you are out of humour. Then I will sleep in the study.”

Saying this, Pyotr Dmitritch picked up his pillow and walked out of the bedroom. Olga Mihalovna had not foreseen this. For some minutes she remained silent with her mouth open, trembling all over and looking at the door by which her husband had gone out, and trying to understand what it meant. Was this one of the devices to which deceitful people have

recourse when they are in the wrong, or was it a deliberate insult aimed at her pride? How was she to take it? Olga Mihalovna remembered her cousin, a lively young officer, who often used to tell her, laughing, that when “his spouse nagged at him” at night, he usually picked up his pillow and went whistling to spend the night in his study, leaving his wife in a foolish and ridiculous position. This officer was married to a rich, capricious, and foolish woman whom he did not respect but simply put up with.

Olga Mihalovna jumped out of bed. To her mind there was only one thing left for her to do now; to dress with all possible haste and to leave the house forever. The house was her own, but so much the worse for Pyotr Dmitritch. Without pausing to consider whether this was necessary or not, she went quickly to the study to inform her husband of her intention (“Feminine logic!” flashed through her mind), and to say something wounding and sarcastic at parting.…

Pyotr Dmitritch was lying on the sofa and pretending to read a newspaper. There was a candle burning on a chair near him. His face could not be seen behind the newspaper.

“Be so kind as to tell me what this means? I am asking you.”

“Be so kind…” Pyotr Dmitritch mimicked her, not showing his face. “It’s sickening, Olga! Upon my honour, I am exhausted and not up to it.… Let us do our quarrelling tomorrow.”

“No, I understand you perfectly!” Olga Mihalovna went on. “You hate me! Yes, yes! You hate me because I am richer than you! You will never forgive me for that, and will always be lying to me!” (“Feminine logic!” flashed through her mind again.) “You are laughing at me now.… I am convinced, in fact, that you only married me in order to have property qualifications and those wretched horses.… Oh, I am miserable!”

Pyotr Dmitritch dropped the newspaper and got up. The unexpected insult overwhelmed him. With a childishly helpless smile he looked desperately at his wife, and holding out his hands to her as though to ward off blows, he said imploringly:

“Olya!”

And expecting her to say something else awful, he leaned back in his chair, and his huge figure seemed as helplessly childish as his smile.

“Olya, how could you say it?” he whispered.

Olga Mihalovna came to herself. She was suddenly aware of her passionate love for this man, remembered that he was her husband, Pyotr Dmitritch, without whom she could not live for a day, and who loved her

passionately, too. She burst into loud sobs that sounded strange and unlike her, and ran back to her bedroom.

She fell on the bed, and short hysterical sobs, choking her and making her arms and legs twitch, filled the bedroom. Remembering there was a visitor sleeping three or four rooms away, she buried her head under the pillow to stifle her sobs, but the pillow rolled on to the floor, and she almost fell on the floor herself when she stooped to pick it up. She pulled the quilt up to her face, but her hands would not obey her, but tore convulsively at everything she clutched.

She thought that everything was lost, that the falsehood she had told to wound her husband had shattered her life into fragments. Her husband would not forgive her. The insult she had hurled at him was not one that could be effaced by any caresses, by any vows.… How could she convince her husband that she did not believe what she had said?

“It’s all over, it’s all over!” she cried, not noticing that the pillow had slipped on to the floor again. “For God’s sake, for God’s sake!”

Probably roused by her cries, the guest and the servants were now awake; next day all the neighbourhood would know that she had been in hysterics and would blame Pyotr Dmitritch. She made an effort to restrain herself, but her sobs grew louder and louder every minute.

“For God’s sake,” she cried in a voice not like her own, and not knowing why she cried it. “For God’s sake!”

She felt as though the bed were heaving under her and her feet were entangled in the bedclothes. Pyotr Dmitritch, in his dressing gown, with a candle in his hand, came into the bedroom.

“Olya, hush!” he said.

She raised herself, and kneeling up in bed, screwing up her eyes at the light, articulated through her sobs:

“Understand… understand!…”

She wanted to tell him that she was tired to death by the party, by his falsity, by her own falsity, that it had all worked together, but she could only articulate:

“Understand… understand!”

“Come, drink!” he said, handing her some water.

She took the glass obediently and began drinking, but the water splashed over and was spilt on her arms, her throat and knees.

“I must look horribly unseemly,” she thought.

Pyotr Dmitritch put her back in bed without a word, and covered her with the quilt, then he took the candle and went out.

“For God’s sake!” Olga Mihalovna cried again. “Pyotr, understand, understand!”

Suddenly something gripped her in the lower part of her body and back with such violence that her wailing was cut short, and she bit the pillow from the pain. But the pain let her go again at once, and she began sobbing again.

The maid came in, and arranging the quilt over her, asked in alarm:

“Mistress, darling, what is the matter?”

“Go out of the room,” said Pyotr Dmitritch sternly, going up to the bed.

“Understand… understand!…” Olga Mihalovna began.

“Olya, I entreat you, calm yourself,” he said. “I did not mean to hurt you. I would not have gone out of the room if I had known it would have hurt you so much; I simply felt depressed. I tell you, on my honour…”

“Understand!… You were lying, I was lying.…”

“I understand.… Come, come, that’s enough! I understand,” said Pyotr Dmitritch tenderly, sitting down on her bed. “You said that in anger; I quite understand. I swear to God I love you beyond anything on earth, and when I married you I never once thought of your being rich. I loved you immensely, and that’s all… I assure you. I have never been in want of money or felt the value of it, and so I cannot feel the difference between your fortune and mine. It always seemed to me we were equally well off. And that I have been deceitful in little things, that… of course, is true. My life has hitherto been arranged in such a frivolous way that it has somehow been impossible to get on without paltry lying. It weighs on me, too, now.… Let us leave off talking about it, for goodness’ sake!”

Olga Mihalovna again felt in acute pain, and clutched her husband by the sleeve.

“I am in pain, in pain, in pain…” she said rapidly. “Oh, what pain!”

“Damnation take those visitors!” muttered Pyotr Dmitritch, getting up. “You ought not to have gone to the island today!” he cried. “What an idiot I was not to prevent you! Oh, my God!”

He scratched his head in vexation, and, with a wave of his hand, walked out of the room.

Then he came into the room several times, sat down on the bed beside her, and talked a great deal, sometimes tenderly, sometimes angrily, but she hardly heard him. Her sobs were continually interrupted by fearful attacks of pain, and each time the pain was more acute and prolonged. At first she held her breath and bit the pillow during the pain, but then she began screaming on an unseemly piercing note. Once seeing her husband

near her, she remembered that she had insulted him, and without pausing to think whether it were really Pyotr Dmitritch or whether she were in delirium, clutched his hand in both hers and began kissing it.

"You were lying, I was lying…" she began justifying herself. "Understand, understand.… They have exhausted me, driven me out of all patience."

"Olya, we are not alone," said Pyotr Dmitritch.

Olga Mihalovna raised her head and saw Varvara, who was kneeling by the chest of drawers and pulling out the bottom drawer. The top drawers were already open. Then Varvara got up, red from the strained position, and with a cold, solemn face began trying to unlock a box.

"Marya, I can't unlock it!" she said in a whisper. "You unlock it, won't you?"

Marya, the maid, was digging a candle end out of the candlestick with a pair of scissors, so as to put in a new candle; she went up to Varvara and helped her to unlock the box.

"There should be nothing locked…" whispered Varvara. "Unlock this basket, too, my good girl. Master," she said, "you should send to Father Mihail to unlock the holy gates! You must!"

"Do what you like," said Pyotr Dmitritch, breathing hard, "only, for God's sake, make haste and fetch the doctor or the midwife! Has Vassily gone? Send someone else. Send your husband!"

"It's the birth," Olga Mihalovna thought. "Varvara," she moaned, "but he won't be born alive!"

"It's all right, it's all right, mistress," whispered Varvara. "Please God, he will be alive! he will be alive!"

When Olga Mihalovna came to herself again after a pain she was no longer sobbing nor tossing from side to side, but moaning. She could not refrain from moaning even in the intervals between the pains. The candles were still burning, but the morning light was coming through the blinds. It was probably about five o'clock in the morning. At the round table there was sitting some unknown woman with a very discreet air, wearing a white apron. From her whole appearance it was evident she had been sitting there a long time. Olga Mihalovna guessed that she was the midwife.

"Will it soon be over?" she asked, and in her voice she heard a peculiar and unfamiliar note which had never been there before. "I must be dying in childbirth," she thought.

Pyotr Dmitritch came cautiously into the bedroom, dressed for the day, and stood at the window with his back to his wife. He lifted the blind and

looked out of window.

"What rain!" he said.

"What time is it?" asked Olga Mihalovna, in order to hear the unfamiliar note in her voice again.

"A quarter to six," answered the midwife.

"And what if I really am dying?" thought Olga Mihalovna, looking at her husband's head and the windowpanes on which the rain was beating. "How will he live without me? With whom will he have tea and dinner, talk in the evenings, sleep?"

And he seemed to her like a forlorn child; she felt sorry for him and wanted to say something nice, caressing and consolatory. She remembered how in the spring he had meant to buy himself some harriers, and she, thinking it a cruel and dangerous sport, had prevented him from doing it.

"Pyotr, buy yourself harriers," she moaned.

He dropped the blind and went up to the bed, and would have said something; but at that moment the pain came back, and Olga Mihalovna uttered an unseemly, piercing scream.

The pain and the constant screaming and moaning stupefied her. She heard, saw, and sometimes spoke, but hardly understood anything, and was only conscious that she was in pain or was just going to be in pain. It seemed to her that the name-day party had been long, long ago—not yesterday, but a year ago perhaps; and that her new life of agony had lasted longer than her childhood, her school days, her time at the University, and her marriage, and would go on for a long, long time, endlessly. She saw them bring tea to the midwife, and summon her at midday to lunch and afterwards to dinner; she saw Pyotr Dmitritch grow used to coming in, standing for long intervals by the window, and going out again; saw strange men, the maid, Varvara, come in as though they were at home.… Varvara said nothing but, "He will, he will," and was angry when anyone closed the drawers and the chest. Olga Mihalovna saw the light change in the room and in the windows: at one time it was twilight, then thick like fog, then bright daylight as it had been at dinnertime the day before, then again twilight… and each of these changes lasted as long as her childhood, her school days, her life at the University.…

In the evening two doctors—one bony, bald, with a big red beard; the other with a swarthy Jewish face and cheap spectacles—performed some sort of operation on Olga Mihalovna. To these unknown men touching her body she felt utterly indifferent. By now she had no feeling of shame,

no will, and anyone might do what he would with her. If anyone had rushed at her with a knife, or had insulted Pyotr Dmitritch, or had robbed her of her right to the little creature, she would not have said a word.

They gave her chloroform during the operation. When she came to again, the pain was still there and insufferable. It was night. And Olga Mihalovna remembered that there had been just such a night with the stillness, the lamp, with the midwife sitting motionless by the bed, with the drawers of the chest pulled out, with Pyotr Dmitritch standing by the window, but some time very, very long ago.…

V

“I am not dead…” thought Olga Mihalovna when she began to understand her surroundings again, and when the pain was over.

A bright summer day looked in at the widely open windows; in the garden below the windows, the sparrows and the magpies never ceased chattering for one instant.

The drawers were shut now, her husband’s bed had been made. There was no sign of the midwife or of the maid, or of Varvara in the room, only Pyotr Dmitritch was standing, as before, motionless by the window looking into the garden. There was no sound of a child’s crying, no one was congratulating her or rejoicing, it was evident that the little creature had not been born alive.

“Pyotr!”

Olga Mihalovna called to her husband.

Pyotr Dmitritch looked round. It seemed as though a long time must have passed since the last guest had departed and Olga Mihalovna had insulted her husband, for Pyotr Dmitritch was perceptibly thinner and hollow-eyed.

“What is it?” he asked, coming up to the bed.

He looked away, moved his lips and smiled with childlike helplessness.

“Is it all over?” asked Olga Mihalovna.

Pyotr Dmitritch tried to make some answer, but his lips quivered and his mouth worked like a toothless old man’s, like Uncle Nikolay Nikolaitch’s.

“Olya,” he said, wringing his hands; big tears suddenly dropping from his eyes. “Olya, I don’t care about your property qualification, nor the Circuit Courts…” (he gave a sob) “nor particular views, nor those visitors, nor your fortune.… I don’t care about anything! Why didn’t we take care of our child? Oh, it’s no good talking!”

With a despairing gesture he went out of the bedroom.

But nothing mattered to Olga Mihalovna now, there was a mistiness in her brain from the chloroform, an emptiness in her soul.… The dull

indifference to life which had overcome her when the two doctors were performing the operation still had possession of her.

THE SHOEMAKER AND THE DEVIL

It was Christmas Eve. Marya had long been snoring on the stove; all the paraffin in the little lamp had burnt out, but Fyodor Nilov still sat at work. He would long ago have flung aside his work and gone out into the street, but a customer from Kolokolny Lane, who had a fortnight before ordered some boots, had been in the previous day, had abused him roundly, and had ordered him to finish the boots at once before the morning service.

"It's a convict's life!" Fyodor grumbled as he worked. "Some people have been asleep long ago, others are enjoying themselves, while you sit here like some Cain and sew for the devil knows whom.…"

To save himself from accidentally falling asleep, he kept taking a bottle from under the table and drinking out of it, and after every pull at it he twisted his head and said aloud:

"What is the reason, kindly tell me, that customers enjoy themselves while I am forced to sit and work for them? Because they have money and I am a beggar?"

He hated all his customers, especially the one who lived in Kolokolny Lane. He was a gentleman of gloomy appearance, with long hair, a yellow face, blue spectacles, and a husky voice. He had a German name which one could not pronounce. It was impossible to tell what was his calling and what he did. When, a fortnight before, Fyodor had gone to take his measure, he, the customer, was sitting on the floor pounding something in a mortar. Before Fyodor had time to say good morning the contents of the mortar suddenly flared up and burned with a bright red flame; there was a stink of sulphur and burnt feathers, and the room was filled with a thick pink smoke, so that Fyodor sneezed five times; and as he returned home afterwards, he thought: "Anyone who feared God would not have anything to do with things like that."

When there was nothing left in the bottle Fyodor put the boots on the table and sank into thought. He leaned his heavy head on his fist and began thinking of his poverty, of his hard life with no glimmer of light in

it. Then he thought of the rich, of their big houses and their carriages, of their hundred-rouble notes.… How nice it would be if the houses of these rich men—the devil flay them!—were smashed, if their horses died, if their fur coats and sable caps got shabby! How splendid it would be if the rich, little by little, changed into beggars having nothing, and he, a poor shoemaker, were to become rich, and were to lord it over some other poor shoemaker on Christmas Eve.

Dreaming like this, Fyodor suddenly thought of his work, and opened his eyes.

"Here's a go," he thought, looking at the boots. "The job has been finished ever so long ago, and I go on sitting here. I must take the boots to the gentleman."

He wrapped up the work in a red handkerchief, put on his things, and went out into the street. A fine hard snow was falling, pricking the face as though with needles. It was cold, slippery, dark, the gas-lamps burned dimly, and for some reason there was a smell of paraffin in the street, so that Fyodor coughed and cleared his throat. Rich men were driving to and fro on the road, and every rich man had a ham and a bottle of vodka in his hands. Rich young ladies peeped at Fyodor out of the carriages and sledges, put out their tongues and shouted, laughing:

"Beggar! Beggar!"

Students, officers, and merchants walked behind Fyodor, jeering at him and crying:

"Drunkard! Drunkard! Infidel cobbler! Soul of a bootleg! Beggar!"

All this was insulting, but Fyodor held his tongue and only spat in disgust. But when Kuzma Lebyodkin from Warsaw, a master-bootmaker, met him and said: "I've married a rich woman and I have men working under me, while you are a beggar and have nothing to eat," Fyodor could not refrain from running after him. He pursued him till he found himself in Kolokolny Lane. His customer lived in the fourth house from the corner on the very top floor. To reach him one had to go through a long, dark courtyard, and then to climb up a very high slippery staircase which tottered under one's feet. When Fyodor went in to him he was sitting on the floor pounding something in a mortar, just as he had been the fortnight before.

"Your honor, I have brought your boots," said Fyodor sullenly.

The customer got up and began trying on the boots in silence. Desiring to help him, Fyodor went down on one knee and pulled off his old boot, but at once jumped up and staggered towards the door in horror. The customer had not a foot, but a hoof like a horse's.

“Aha!” thought Fyodor; “here’s a go!”

The first thing should have been to cross himself, then to leave everything and run downstairs; but he immediately reflected that he was meeting a devil for the first and probably the last time, and not to take advantage of his services would be foolish. He controlled himself and determined to try his luck. Clasping his hands behind him to avoid making the sign of the cross, he coughed respectfully and began:

“They say that there is nothing on earth more evil and impure than the devil, but I am of the opinion, your honor, that the devil is highly educated. He has—excuse my saying it—hoofs and a tail behind, but he has more brains than many a student.”

“I like you for what you say,” said the devil, flattered. “Thank you, shoemaker! What do you want?”

And without loss of time the shoemaker began complaining of his lot. He began by saying that from his childhood up he had envied the rich. He had always resented it that all people did not live alike in big houses and drive with good horses. Why, he asked, was he poor? How was he worse than Kuzma Lebyodkin from Warsaw, who had his own house, and whose wife wore a hat? He had the same sort of nose, the same hands, feet, head, and back, as the rich, and so why was he forced to work when others were enjoying themselves? Why was he married to Marya and not to a lady smelling of scent? He had often seen beautiful young ladies in the houses of rich customers, but they either took no notice of him whatever, or else sometimes laughed and whispered to each other: “What a red nose that shoemaker has!” It was true that Marya was a good, kind, hardworking woman, but she was not educated; her hand was heavy and hit hard, and if one had occasion to speak of politics or anything intellectual before her, she would put her spoke in and talk the most awful nonsense.

“What do you want, then?” his customer interrupted him.

“I beg you, your honor Satan Ivanitch, to be graciously pleased to make me a rich man.”

“Certainly. Only for that you must give me up your soul! Before the cocks crow, go and sign on this paper here that you give me up your soul.”

“Your honor,” said Fyodor politely, “when you ordered a pair of boots from me I did not ask for the money in advance. One has first to carry out the order and then ask for payment.”

“Oh, very well!” the customer assented.

A bright flame suddenly flared up in the mortar, a pink thick smoke came puffing out, and there was a smell of burnt feathers and sulphur. When the smoke had subsided, Fyodor rubbed his eyes and saw that he was no longer Fyodor, no longer a shoemaker, but quite a different man, wearing a waistcoat and a watch-chain, in a new pair of trousers, and that he was sitting in an armchair at a big table. Two footmen were handing him dishes, bowing low and saying:

"Kindly eat, your honor, and may it do you good!"

What wealth! The footmen handed him a big piece of roast mutton and a dish of cucumbers, and then brought in a frying pan a roast goose, and a little afterwards boiled pork with horseradish cream. And how dignified, how genteel it all was! Fyodor ate, and before each dish drank a big glass of excellent vodka, like some general or some count. After the pork he was handed some boiled grain moistened with goose fat, then an omelette with bacon fat, then fried liver, and he went on eating and was delighted. What more? They served, too, a pie with onion and steamed turnip with kvass.

"How is it the gentry don't burst with such meals?" he thought.

In conclusion they handed him a big pot of honey. After dinner the devil appeared in blue spectacles and asked with a low bow:

"Are you satisfied with your dinner, Fyodor Pantelyeitch?"

But Fyodor could not answer one word, he was so stuffed after his dinner. The feeling of repletion was unpleasant, oppressive, and to distract his thoughts he looked at the boot on his left foot.

"For a boot like that I used not to take less than seven and a half roubles. What shoemaker made it?" he asked.

"Kuzma Lebyodkin," answered the footman.

"Send for him, the fool!"

Kuzma Lebyodkin from Warsaw soon made his appearance. He stopped in a respectful attitude at the door and asked:

"What are your orders, your honor?"

"Hold your tongue!" cried Fyodor, and stamped his foot. "Don't dare to argue; remember your place as a cobbler! Blockhead! You don't know how to make boots! I'll beat your ugly phiz to a jelly! Why have you come?"

"For money."

"What money? Be off! Come on Saturday! Boy, give him a cuff!"

But he at once recalled what a life the customers used to lead him, too, and he felt heavy at heart, and to distract his attention he took a fat pocketbook out of his pocket and began counting his money. There was a

great deal of money, but Fyodor wanted more still. The devil in the blue spectacles brought him another notebook fatter still, but he wanted even more; and the more he counted it, the more discontented he became.

In the evening the evil one brought him a full-bosomed lady in a red dress, and said that this was his new wife. He spent the whole evening kissing her and eating gingerbreads, and at night he went to bed on a soft, downy featherbed, turned from side to side, and could not go to sleep. He felt uncanny.

"We have a great deal of money," he said to his wife; "we must look out or thieves will be breaking in. You had better go and look with a candle."

He did not sleep all night, and kept getting up to see if his box was all right. In the morning he had to go to church to matins. In church the same honor is done to rich and poor alike. When Fyodor was poor he used to pray in church like this: "God, forgive me, a sinner!" He said the same thing now though he had become rich. What difference was there? And after death Fyodor rich would not be buried in gold, not in diamonds, but in the same black earth as the poorest beggar. Fyodor would burn in the same fire as cobblers. Fyodor resented all this, and, too, he felt weighed down all over by his dinner, and instead of prayer he had all sorts of thoughts in his head about his box of money, about thieves, about his bartered, ruined soul.

He came out of church in a bad temper. To drive away his unpleasant thoughts as he had often done before, he struck up a song at the top of his voice. But as soon as he began a policeman ran up and said, with his fingers to the peak of his cap:

"Your honor, gentlefolk must not sing in the street! You are not a shoemaker!"

Fyodor leaned his back against a fence and fell to thinking: what could he do to amuse himself?

"Your honor," a porter shouted to him, "don't lean against the fence, you will spoil your fur coat!"

Fyodor went into a shop and bought himself the very best concertina, then went out into the street playing it. Everybody pointed at him and laughed.

"And a gentleman, too," the cabmen jeered at him; "like some cobbler.…"

"Is it the proper thing for gentlefolk to be disorderly in the street?" a policeman said to him. "You had better go into a tavern!"

“Your honor, give us a trifle, for Christ’s sake,” the beggars wailed, surrounding Fyodor on all sides.

In earlier days when he was a shoemaker the beggars took no notice of him, now they wouldn’t let him pass.

And at home his new wife, the lady, was waiting for him, dressed in a green blouse and a red skirt. He meant to be attentive to her, and had just lifted his arm to give her a good clout on the back, but she said angrily:

“Peasant! Ignorant lout! You don’t know how to behave with ladies! If you love me you will kiss my hand; I don’t allow you to beat me.”

“This is a blasted existence!” thought Fyodor. “People do lead a life! You mustn’t sing, you mustn’t play the concertina, you mustn’t have a lark with a lady.… Pfoo!”

He had no sooner sat down to tea with the lady when the evil spirit in the blue spectacles appeared and said:

“Come, Fyodor Pantelyeitch, I have performed my part of the bargain. Now sign your paper and come along with me!”

And he dragged Fyodor to hell, straight to the furnace, and devils flew up from all directions and shouted:

“Fool! Blockhead! Ass!”

There was a fearful smell of paraffin in hell, enough to suffocate one. And suddenly it all vanished. Fyodor opened his eyes and saw his table, the boots, and the tin lamp. The lamp-glass was black, and from the faint light on the wick came clouds of stinking smoke as from a chimney. Near the table stood the customer in the blue spectacles, shouting angrily:

“Fool! Blockhead! Ass! I’ll give you a lesson, you scoundrel! You took the order a fortnight ago and the boots aren’t ready yet! Do you suppose I want to come trapesing round here half a dozen times a day for my boots? You wretch! you brute!”

Fyodor shook his head and set to work on the boots. The customer went on swearing and threatening him for a long time. At last when he subsided, Fyodor asked sullenly:

“And what is your occupation, sir?”

“I make Bengal lights and fireworks. I am a pyrotechnician.”

They began ringing for matins. Fyodor gave the customer the boots, took the money for them, and went to church.

Carriages and sledges with bearskin rugs were dashing to and fro in the street; merchants, ladies, officers were walking along the pavement together with the humbler folk.… But Fyodor did not envy them nor repine at his lot. It seemed to him now that rich and poor were equally

badly off. Some were able to drive in a carriage, and others to sing songs at the top of their voice and to play the concertina, but one and the same thing, the same grave, was awaiting all alike, and there was nothing in life for which one would give the devil even a tiny scrap of one’s soul.

THE BET

I

It was a dark autumn night. The old banker was walking up and down his study and remembering how, fifteen years before, he had given a party one autumn evening. There had been many clever men there, and there had been interesting conversations. Among other things they had talked of capital punishment. The majority of the guests, among whom were many journalists and intellectual men, disapproved of the death penalty. They considered that form of punishment out of date, immoral, and unsuitable for Christian states. In the opinion of some of them the death penalty ought to be replaced everywhere by imprisonment for life.

"I don't agree with you," said their host the banker. "I have not tried either the death penalty or imprisonment for life, but if one may judge *a priori*, the death penalty is more moral and more humane than imprisonment for life. Capital punishment kills a man at once, but lifelong imprisonment kills him slowly. Which executioner is the more humane, he who kills you in a few minutes or he who drags the life out of you in the course of many years?"

"Both are equally immoral," observed one of the guests, "for they both have the same object—to take away life. The State is not God. It has not the right to take away what it cannot restore when it wants to."

Among the guests was a young lawyer, a young man of five-and-twenty. When he was asked his opinion, he said:

"The death sentence and the life sentence are equally immoral, but if I had to choose between the death penalty and imprisonment for life, I would certainly choose the second. To live anyhow is better than not at all."

A lively discussion arose. The banker, who was younger and more nervous in those days, was suddenly carried away by excitement; he

struck the table with his fist and shouted at the young man:

"It's not true! I'll bet you two millions you wouldn't stay in solitary confinement for five years."

"If you mean that in earnest," said the young man, "I'll take the bet, but I would stay not five but fifteen years."

"Fifteen? Done!" cried the banker. "Gentlemen, I stake two millions!"

"Agreed! You stake your millions and I stake my freedom!" said the young man.

And this wild, senseless bet was carried out! The banker, spoilt and frivolous, with millions beyond his reckoning, was delighted at the bet. At supper he made fun of the young man, and said:

"Think better of it, young man, while there is still time. To me two millions are a trifle, but you are losing three or four of the best years of your life. I say three or four, because you won't stay longer. Don't forget either, you unhappy man, that voluntary confinement is a great deal harder to bear than compulsory. The thought that you have the right to step out in liberty at any moment will poison your whole existence in prison. I am sorry for you."

And now the banker, walking to and fro, remembered all this, and asked himself: "What was the object of that bet? What is the good of that man's losing fifteen years of his life and my throwing away two millions? Can it prove that the death penalty is better or worse than imprisonment for life? No, no. It was all nonsensical and meaningless. On my part it was the caprice of a pampered man, and on his part simple greed for money.…"

Then he remembered what followed that evening. It was decided that the young man should spend the years of his captivity under the strictest supervision in one of the lodges in the banker's garden. It was agreed that for fifteen years he should not be free to cross the threshold of the lodge, to see human beings, to hear the human voice, or to receive letters and newspapers. He was allowed to have a musical instrument and books, and was allowed to write letters, to drink wine, and to smoke. By the terms of the agreement, the only relations he could have with the outer world were by a little window made purposely for that object. He might have anything he wanted—books, music, wine, and so on—in any quantity he desired by writing an order, but could only receive them through the window. The agreement provided for every detail and every trifle that would make his imprisonment strictly solitary, and bound the young man to stay there *exactly* fifteen years, beginning from twelve o'clock of November 14, 1870, and ending at twelve o'clock of

November 14, 1885. The slightest attempt on his part to break the conditions, if only two minutes before the end, released the banker from the obligation to pay him two millions.

For the first year of his confinement, as far as one could judge from his brief notes, the prisoner suffered severely from loneliness and depression. The sounds of the piano could be heard continually day and night from his lodge. He refused wine and tobacco. Wine, he wrote, excites the desires, and desires are the worst foes of the prisoner; and besides, nothing could be more dreary than drinking good wine and seeing no one. And tobacco spoilt the air of his room. In the first year the books he sent for were principally of a light character; novels with a complicated love plot, sensational and fantastic stories, and so on.

In the second year the piano was silent in the lodge, and the prisoner asked only for the classics. In the fifth year music was audible again, and the prisoner asked for wine. Those who watched him through the window said that all that year he spent doing nothing but eating and drinking and lying on his bed, frequently yawning and angrily talking to himself. He did not read books. Sometimes at night he would sit down to write; he would spend hours writing, and in the morning tear up all that he had written. More than once he could be heard crying.

In the second half of the sixth year the prisoner began zealously studying languages, philosophy, and history. He threw himself eagerly into these studies—so much so that the banker had enough to do to get him the books he ordered. In the course of four years some six hundred volumes were procured at his request. It was during this period that the banker received the following letter from his prisoner:

“My dear Jailer, I write you these lines in six languages. Show them to people who know the languages. Let them read them. If they find not one mistake I implore you to fire a shot in the garden. That shot will show me that my efforts have not been thrown away. The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages, but the same flame burns in them all. Oh, if you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels now from being able to understand them!” The prisoner’s desire was fulfilled. The banker ordered two shots to be fired in the garden.

Then after the tenth year, the prisoner sat immovably at the table and read nothing but the Gospel. It seemed strange to the banker that a man who in four years had mastered six hundred learned volumes should waste nearly a year over one thin book easy of comprehension. Theology and histories of religion followed the Gospels.

In the last two years of his confinement the prisoner read an immense quantity of books quite indiscriminately. At one time he was busy with the natural sciences, then he would ask for Byron or Shakespeare. There were notes in which he demanded at the same time books on chemistry, and a manual of medicine, and a novel, and some treatise on philosophy or theology. His reading suggested a man swimming in the sea among the wreckage of his ship, and trying to save his life by greedily clutching first at one spar and then at another.

II

The old banker remembered all this, and thought:

"Tomorrow at twelve o'clock he will regain his freedom. By our agreement I ought to pay him two millions. If I do pay him, it is all over with me: I shall be utterly ruined."

Fifteen years before, his millions had been beyond his reckoning; now he was afraid to ask himself which were greater, his debts or his assets. Desperate gambling on the Stock Exchange, wild speculation and the excitability which he could not get over even in advancing years, had by degrees led to the decline of his fortune and the proud, fearless, self-confident millionaire had become a banker of middling rank, trembling at every rise and fall in his investments. "Cursed bet!" muttered the old man, clutching his head in despair "Why didn't the man die? He is only forty now. He will take my last penny from me, he will marry, will enjoy life, will gamble on the Exchange; while I shall look at him with envy like a beggar, and hear from him every day the same sentence: 'I am indebted to you for the happiness of my life, let me help you!' No, it is too much! The one means of being saved from bankruptcy and disgrace is the death of that man!"

It struck three o'clock, the banker listened; everyone was asleep in the house and nothing could be heard outside but the rustling of the chilled trees. Trying to make no noise, he took from a fireproof safe the key of the door which had not been opened for fifteen years, put on his overcoat, and went out of the house.

It was dark and cold in the garden. Rain was falling. A damp cutting wind was racing about the garden, howling and giving the trees no rest. The banker strained his eyes, but could see neither the earth nor the white statues, nor the lodge, nor the trees. Going to the spot where the lodge stood, he twice called the watchman. No answer followed. Evidently the watchman had sought shelter from the weather, and was now asleep somewhere either in the kitchen or in the greenhouse.

"If I had the pluck to carry out my intention," thought the old man, "Suspicion would fall first upon the watchman."

He felt in the darkness for the steps and the door, and went into the entry of the lodge. Then he groped his way into a little passage and lighted a match. There was not a soul there. There was a bedstead with no bedding on it, and in the corner there was a dark cast-iron stove. The seals on the door leading to the prisoner's rooms were intact.

When the match went out the old man, trembling with emotion, peeped through the little window. A candle was burning dimly in the prisoner's room. He was sitting at the table. Nothing could be seen but his back, the hair on his head, and his hands. Open books were lying on the table, on the two easy-chairs, and on the carpet near the table.

Five minutes passed and the prisoner did not once stir. Fifteen years' imprisonment had taught him to sit still. The banker tapped at the window with his finger, and the prisoner made no movement whatever in response. Then the banker cautiously broke the seals off the door and put the key in the keyhole. The rusty lock gave a grating sound and the door creaked. The banker expected to hear at once footsteps and a cry of astonishment, but three minutes passed and it was as quiet as ever in the room. He made up his mind to go in.

At the table a man unlike ordinary people was sitting motionless. He was a skeleton with the skin drawn tight over his bones, with long curls like a woman's and a shaggy beard. His face was yellow with an earthy tint in it, his cheeks were hollow, his back long and narrow, and the hand on which his shaggy head was propped was so thin and delicate that it was dreadful to look at it. His hair was already streaked with silver, and seeing his emaciated, aged-looking face, no one would have believed that he was only forty. He was asleep.… In front of his bowed head there lay on the table a sheet of paper on which there was something written in fine handwriting.

"Poor creature!" thought the banker, "he is asleep and most likely dreaming of the millions. And I have only to take this half-dead man, throw him on the bed, stifle him a little with the pillow, and the most conscientious expert would find no sign of a violent death. But let us first read what he has written here.…"

The banker took the page from the table and read as follows:

"Tomorrow at twelve o'clock I regain my freedom and the right to associate with other men, but before I leave this room and see the sunshine, I think it necessary to say a few words to you. With a clear conscience I tell you, as before God, who beholds me, that I despise freedom and life and health, and all that in your books is called the good things of the world.

“For fifteen years I have been intently studying earthly life. It is true I have not seen the earth nor men, but in your books I have drunk fragrant wine, I have sung songs, I have hunted stags and wild boars in the forests, have loved women.… Beauties as ethereal as clouds, created by the magic of your poets and geniuses, have visited me at night, and have whispered in my ears wonderful tales that have set my brain in a whirl. In your books I have climbed to the peaks of Elburz and Mont Blanc, and from there I have seen the sun rise and have watched it at evening flood the sky, the ocean, and the mountaintops with gold and crimson. I have watched from there the lightning flashing over my head and cleaving the storm-clouds. I have seen green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, towns. I have heard the singing of the sirens, and the strains of the shepherds’ pipes; I have touched the wings of comely devils who flew down to converse with me of God.… In your books I have flung myself into the bottomless pit, performed miracles, slain, burned towns, preached new religions, conquered whole kingdoms.…

“Your books have given me wisdom. All that the unresting thought of man has created in the ages is compressed into a small compass in my brain. I know that I am wiser than all of you.

“And I despise your books, I despise wisdom and the blessings of this world. It is all worthless, fleeting, illusory, and deceptive, like a mirage. You may be proud, wise, and fine, but death will wipe you off the face of the earth as though you were no more than mice burrowing under the floor, and your posterity, your history, your immortal geniuses will burn or freeze together with the earthly globe.

“You have lost your reason and taken the wrong path. You have taken lies for truth, and hideousness for beauty. You would marvel if, owing to strange events of some sorts, frogs and lizards suddenly grew on apple and orange trees instead of fruit, or if roses began to smell like a sweating horse; so I marvel at you who exchange heaven for earth. I don’t want to understand you.

“To prove to you in action how I despise all that you live by, I renounce the two millions of which I once dreamed as of paradise and which now I despise. To deprive myself of the right to the money I shall go out from here five hours before the time fixed, and so break the compact.…”

When the banker had read this he laid the page on the table, kissed the strange man on the head, and went out of the lodge, weeping. At no other time, even when he had lost heavily on the Stock Exchange, had he felt

so great a contempt for himself. When he got home he lay on his bed, but his tears and emotion kept him for hours from sleeping.

Next morning the watchmen ran in with pale faces, and told him they had seen the man who lived in the lodge climb out of the window into the garden, go to the gate, and disappear. The banker went at once with the servants to the lodge and made sure of the flight of his prisoner. To avoid arousing unnecessary talk, he took from the table the writing in which the millions were renounced, and when he got home locked it up in the fireproof safe.

THE PRINCESS

A carriage with four fine sleek horses drove in at the big so-called Red Gate of the N—— Monastery. While it was still at a distance, the priests and monks who were standing in a group round the part of the hostel allotted to the gentry, recognised by the coachman and horses that the lady in the carriage was Princess Vera Gavrilovna, whom they knew very well.

An old man in livery jumped off the box and helped the princess to get out of the carriage. She raised her dark veil and moved in a leisurely way up to the priests to receive their blessing; then she nodded pleasantly to the rest of the monks and went into the hostel.

"Well, have you missed your princess?" she said to the monk who brought in her things. "It's a whole month since I've been to see you. But here I am; behold your princess. And where is the Father Superior? My goodness, I am burning with impatience! Wonderful, wonderful old man! You must be proud of having such a Superior."

When the Father Superior came in, the princess uttered a shriek of delight, crossed her arms over her bosom, and went up to receive his blessing.

"No, no, let me kiss your hand," she said, snatching it and eagerly kissing it three times. "How glad I am to see you at last, holy Father! I'm sure you've forgotten your princess, but my thoughts have been in your dear monastery every moment. How delightful it is here! This living for God far from the busy, giddy world has a special charm of its own, holy Father, which I feel with my whole soul although I cannot express it!"

The princess's cheeks glowed and tears came into her eyes. She talked incessantly, fervently, while the Father Superior, a grave, plain, shy old man of seventy, remained mute or uttered abruptly, like a soldier on duty, phrases such as:

"Certainly, Your Excellency.… Quite so. I understand."

"Has Your Excellency come for a long stay?" he inquired.

“I shall stay the night here, and tomorrow I’m going on to Klavdia Nikolaevna’s—it’s a long time since I’ve seen her—and the day after tomorrow I’ll come back to you and stay three or four days. I want to rest my soul here among you, holy Father.…”

The princess liked being at the monastery at N——. For the last two years it had been a favourite resort of hers; she used to go there almost every month in the summer and stay two or three days, even sometimes a week. The shy novices, the stillness, the low ceilings, the smell of cypress, the modest fare, the cheap curtains on the windows—all this touched her, softened her, and disposed her to contemplation and good thoughts. It was enough for her to be half an hour in the hostel for her to feel that she, too, was timid and modest, and that she, too, smelt of cypress-wood. The past retreated into the background, lost its significance, and the princess began to imagine that in spite of her twenty-nine years she was very much like the old Father Superior, and that, like him, she was created not for wealth, not for earthly grandeur and love, but for a peaceful life secluded from the world, a life in twilight like the hostel.

It happens that a ray of light gleams in the dark cell of the anchorite absorbed in prayer, or a bird alights on the window and sings its song; the stern anchorite will smile in spite of himself, and a gentle, sinless joy will pierce through the load of grief over his sins, like water flowing from under a stone. The princess fancied she brought from the outside world just such comfort as the ray of light or the bird. Her gay, friendly smile, her gentle eyes, her voice, her jests, her whole personality in fact, her little graceful figure always dressed in simple black, must arouse in simple, austere people a feeling of tenderness and joy. Everyone, looking at her, must think: “God has sent us an angel.…” And feeling that no one could help thinking this, she smiled still more cordially, and tried to look like a bird.

After drinking tea and resting, she went for a walk. The sun was already setting. From the monastery garden came a moist fragrance of freshly watered mignonette, and from the church floated the soft singing of men’s voices, which seemed very pleasant and mournful in the distance. It was the evening service. In the dark windows where the little lamps glowed gently, in the shadows, in the figure of the old monk sitting at the church door with a collecting-box, there was such unruffled peace that the princess felt moved to tears.

Outside the gate, in the walk between the wall and the birch trees where there were benches, it was quite evening. The air grew rapidly

darker and darker. The princess went along the walk, sat on a seat, and sank into thought.

She thought how good it would be to settle down for her whole life in this monastery where life was as still and unruffled as a summer evening; how good it would be to forget the ungrateful, dissipated prince; to forget her immense estates, the creditors who worried her every day, her misfortunes, her maid Dasha, who had looked at her impertinently that morning. It would be nice to sit here on the bench all her life and watch through the trunks of the birch trees the evening mist gathering in wreaths in the valley below; the rooks flying home in a black cloud like a veil far, far away above the forest; two novices, one astride a piebald horse, another on foot driving out the horses for the night and rejoicing in their freedom, playing pranks like little children; their youthful voices rang out musically in the still air, and she could distinguish every word. It is nice to sit and listen to the silence: at one moment the wind blows and stirs the tops of the birch trees, then a frog rustles in last year's leaves, then the clock on the belfry strikes the quarter.… One might sit without moving, listen and think, and think.…

An old woman passed by with a wallet on her back. The princess thought that it would be nice to stop the old woman and to say something friendly and cordial to her, to help her.… But the old woman turned the corner without once looking round.

Not long afterwards a tall man with a grey beard and a straw hat came along the walk. When he came up to the princess, he took off his hat and bowed. From the bald patch on his head and his sharp, hooked nose the princess recognised him as the doctor, Mihail Ivanovitch, who had been in her service at Dubovki. She remembered that someone had told her that his wife had died the year before, and she wanted to sympathise with him, to console him.

"Doctor, I expect you don't recognise me?" she said with an affable smile.

"Yes, Princess, I recognised you," said the doctor, taking off his hat again.

"Oh, thank you; I was afraid that you, too, had forgotten your princess. People only remember their enemies, but they forget their friends. Have you, too, come to pray?"

"I am the doctor here, and I have to spend the night at the monastery every Saturday."

"Well, how are you?" said the princess, sighing. "I hear that you have lost your wife. What a calamity!"

“Yes, Princess, for me it is a great calamity.”

“There’s nothing for it! We must bear our troubles with resignation. Not one hair of a man’s head is lost without the Divine Will.”

“Yes, Princess.”

To the princess’s friendly, gentle smile and her sighs the doctor responded coldly and dryly: “Yes, Princess.” And the expression of his face was cold and dry.

“What else can I say to him?” she wondered.

“How long it is since we met!” she said. “Five years! How much water has flowed under the bridge, how many changes in that time; it quite frightens one to think of it! You know, I am married.… I am not a countess now, but a princess. And by now I am separated from my husband too.”

“Yes, I heard so.”

“God has sent me many trials. No doubt you have heard, too, that I am almost ruined. My Dubovki, Sofyino, and Kiryakovo have all been sold for my unhappy husband’s debts. And I have only Baranovo and Mihaltsevo left. It’s terrible to look back: how many changes and misfortunes of all kinds, how many mistakes!”

“Yes, Princess, many mistakes.”

The princess was a little disconcerted. She knew her mistakes; they were all of such a private character that no one but she could think or speak of them. She could not resist asking:

“What mistakes are you thinking about?”

“You referred to them, so you know them…” answered the doctor, and he smiled. “Why talk about them!”

“No; tell me, doctor. I shall be very grateful to you. And please don’t stand on ceremony with me. I love to hear the truth.”

“I am not your judge, Princess.”

“Not my judge! What a tone you take! You must know something about me. Tell me!”

“If you really wish it, very well. Only I regret to say I’m not clever at talking, and people can’t always understand me.”

The doctor thought a moment and began:

“A lot of mistakes; but the most important of them, in my opinion, was the general spirit that prevailed on all your estates. You see, I don’t know how to express myself. I mean chiefly the lack of love, the aversion for people that was felt in absolutely everything. Your whole system of life was built upon that aversion. Aversion for the human voice, for faces, for heads, steps… in fact, for everything that makes up a

human being. At all the doors and on the stairs there stand sleek, rude, and lazy grooms in livery to prevent badly dressed persons from entering the house; in the hall there are chairs with high backs so that the footmen waiting there, during balls and receptions, may not soil the walls with their heads; in every room there are thick carpets that no human step may be heard; everyone who comes in is infallibly warned to speak as softly and as little as possible, and to say nothing that might have a disagreeable effect on the nerves or the imagination. And in your room you don't shake hands with anyone or ask him to sit down—just as you didn't shake hands with me or ask me to sit down.…"

"By all means, if you like," said the princess, smiling and holding out her hand. "Really, to be cross about such trifles.…"

"But I am not cross," laughed the doctor, but at once he flushed, took off his hat, and waving it about, began hotly: "To be candid, I've long wanted an opportunity to tell you all I think.… That is, I want to tell you that you look upon the mass of mankind from the Napoleonic standpoint as food for the cannon. But Napoleon had at least some idea; you have nothing except aversion."

"I have an aversion for people?" smiled the princess, shrugging her shoulders in astonishment. "I have!"

"Yes, you! You want facts? By all means. In Mihaltsevo three former cooks of yours, who have gone blind in your kitchens from the heat of the stove, are living upon charity. All the health and strength and good looks that is found on your hundreds of thousands of acres is taken by you and your parasites for your grooms, your footmen, and your coachmen. All these two-legged cattle are trained to be flunkeys, overeat themselves, grow coarse, lose the 'image and likeness,' in fact.… Young doctors, agricultural experts, teachers, intellectual workers generally—think of it!—are torn away from their honest work and forced for a crust of bread to take part in all sorts of mummeries which make every decent man feel ashamed! Some young men cannot be in your service for three years without becoming hypocrites, toadies, sneaks.… Is that a good thing? Your Polish superintendents, those abject spies, all those Kazimers and Kaetans, go hunting about on your hundreds of thousands of acres from morning to night, and to please you try to get three skins off one ox. Excuse me, I speak disconnectedly, but that doesn't matter. You don't look upon the simple people as human beings. And even the princes, counts, and bishops who used to come and see you, you looked upon simply as decorative figures, not as living beings. But the worst of

all, the thing that most revolts me, is having a fortune of over a million and doing nothing for other people, nothing!”

The princess sat amazed, aghast, offended, not knowing what to say or how to behave. She had never before been spoken to in such a tone. The doctor’s unpleasant, angry voice and his clumsy, faltering phrases made a harsh clattering noise in her ears and her head. Then she began to feel as though the gesticulating doctor was hitting her on the head with his hat.

“It’s not true!” she articulated softly, in an imploring voice. “I’ve done a great deal of good for other people; you know it yourself!”

“Nonsense!” cried the doctor. “Can you possibly go on thinking of your philanthropic work as something genuine and useful, and not a mere mummery? It was a farce from beginning to end; it was playing at loving your neighbour, the most open farce which even children and stupid peasant women saw through! Take for instance your—what was it called?—house for homeless old women without relations, of which you made me something like a head doctor, and of which you were the patroness. Mercy on us! What a charming institution it was! A house was built with parquet floors and a weathercock on the roof; a dozen old women were collected from the villages and made to sleep under blankets and sheets of Dutch linen, and given toffee to eat.”

The doctor gave a malignant chuckle into his hat, and went on speaking rapidly and stammering:

“It was a farce! The attendants kept the sheets and the blankets under lock and key, for fear the old women should soil them—‘Let the old devil’s pepper-pots sleep on the floor.’ The old women did not dare to sit down on the beds, to put on their jackets, to walk over the polished floors. Everything was kept for show and hidden away from the old women as though they were thieves, and the old women were clothed and fed on the sly by other people’s charity, and prayed to God night and day to be released from their prison and from the canting exhortations of the sleek rascals to whose care you committed them. And what did the managers do? It was simply charming! About twice a week there would be thirty-five thousand messages to say that the princess—that is, you—were coming to the home next day. That meant that next day I had to abandon my patients, dress up and be on parade. Very good; I arrive. The old women, in everything clean and new, are already drawn up in a row, waiting. Near them struts the old garrison rat—the superintendent with his mawkish, sneaking smile. The old women yawn and exchange glances, but are afraid to complain. We wait. The junior steward gallops

up. Half an hour later the senior steward; then the superintendent of the accounts' office, then another, and then another of them… they keep arriving endlessly. They all have mysterious, solemn faces. We wait and wait, shift from one leg to another, look at the clock—all this in monumental silence because we all hate each other like poison. One hour passes, then a second, and then at last the carriage is seen in the distance, and… and…"

The doctor went off into a shrill laugh and brought out in a shrill voice:

"You get out of the carriage, and the old hags, at the word of command from the old garrison rat, begin chanting: 'The Glory of our Lord in Zion the tongue of man cannot express…' A pretty scene, wasn't it?"

The doctor went off into a bass chuckle, and waved his hand as though to signify that he could not utter another word for laughing. He laughed heavily, harshly, with clenched teeth, as ill-natured people laugh; and from his voice, from his face, from his glittering, rather insolent eyes it could be seen that he had a profound contempt for the princess, for the home, and for the old women. There was nothing amusing or laughable in all that he described so clumsily and coarsely, but he laughed with satisfaction, even with delight.

"And the school?" he went on, panting from laughter. "Do you remember how you wanted to teach peasant children yourself? You must have taught them very well, for very soon the children all ran away, so that they had to be thrashed and bribed to come and be taught. And you remember how you wanted to feed with your own hands the infants whose mothers were working in the fields. You went about the village crying because the infants were not at your disposal, as the mothers would take them to the fields with them. Then the village foreman ordered the mothers by turns to leave their infants behind for your entertainment. A strange thing! They all ran away from your benevolence like mice from a cat! And why was it? It's very simple. Not because our people are ignorant and ungrateful, as you always explained it to yourself, but because in all your fads, if you'll excuse the word, there wasn't a ha'p'orth of love and kindness! There was nothing but the desire to amuse yourself with living puppets, nothing else.… A person who does not feel the difference between a human being and a lapdog ought not to go in for philanthropy. I assure you, there's a great difference between human beings and lapdogs!"

The princess's heart was beating dreadfully; there was a thudding in her ears, and she still felt as though the doctor were beating her on the head with his hat. The doctor talked quickly, excitedly, and uncouthly, stammering and gesticulating unnecessarily. All she grasped was that she was spoken to by a coarse, ill-bred, spiteful, and ungrateful man; but what he wanted of her and what he was talking about, she could not understand.

"Go away!" she said in a tearful voice, putting up her hands to protect her head from the doctor's hat; "go away!"

"And how you treat your servants!" the doctor went on, indignantly. "You treat them as the lowest scoundrels, and don't look upon them as human beings. For example, allow me to ask, why did you dismiss me? For ten years I worked for your father and afterwards for you, honestly, without vacations or holidays. I gained the love of all for more than seventy miles round, and suddenly one fine day I am informed that I am no longer wanted. What for? I've no idea to this day. I, a doctor of medicine, a gentleman by birth, a student of the Moscow University, father of a family—am such a petty, insignificant insect that you can kick me out without explaining the reason! Why stand on ceremony with me! I heard afterwards that my wife went without my knowledge three times to intercede with you for me—you wouldn't receive her. I am told she cried in your hall. And I shall never forgive her for it, never!"

The doctor paused and clenched his teeth, making an intense effort to think of something more to say, very unpleasant and vindictive. He thought of something, and his cold, frowning face suddenly brightened.

"Take your attitude to this monastery!" he said with avidity. "You've never spared anyone, and the holier the place, the more chance of its suffering from your loving-kindness and angelic sweetness. Why do you come here? What do you want with the monks here, allow me to ask you? What is Hecuba to you or you to Hecuba? It's another farce, another amusement for you, another sacrilege against human dignity, and nothing more. Why, you don't believe in the monks' God; you've a God of your own in your heart, whom you've evolved for yourself at spiritualist séances. You look with condescension upon the ritual of the Church; you don't go to mass or vespers; you sleep till midday.… Why do you come here?… You come with a God of your own into a monastery you have nothing to do with, and you imagine that the monks look upon it as a very great honour. To be sure they do! You'd better ask, by the way, what your visits cost the monastery. You were graciously pleased to arrive here this evening, and a messenger from your estate

arrived on horseback the day before yesterday to warn them of your coming. They were the whole day yesterday getting the rooms ready and expecting you. This morning your advance-guard arrived—an insolent maid, who keeps running across the courtyard, rustling her skirts, pestering them with questions, giving orders.… I can't endure it! The monks have been on the lookout all day, for if you were not met with due ceremony, there would be trouble! You'd complain to the bishop! 'The monks don't like me, your holiness; I don't know what I've done to displease them. It's true I'm a great sinner, but I'm so unhappy!' Already one monastery has been in hot water over you. The Father Superior is a busy, learned man; he hasn't a free moment, and you keep sending for him to come to your rooms. Not a trace of respect for age or for rank! If at least you were a bountiful giver to the monastery, one wouldn't resent it so much, but all this time the monks have not received a hundred roubles from you!"

Whenever people worried the princess, misunderstood her, or mortified her, and when she did not know what to say or do, she usually began to cry. And on this occasion, too, she ended by hiding her face in her hands and crying aloud in a thin treble like a child. The doctor suddenly stopped and looked at her. His face darkened and grew stern.

"Forgive me, Princess," he said in a hollow voice. "I've given way to a malicious feeling and forgotten myself. It was not right."

And coughing in an embarrassed way, he walked away quickly, without remembering to put his hat on.

Stars were already twinkling in the sky. The moon must have been rising on the further side of the monastery, for the sky was clear, soft, and transparent. Bats were flitting noiselessly along the white monastery wall.

The clock slowly struck three quarters, probably a quarter to nine. The princess got up and walked slowly to the gate. She felt wounded and was crying, and she felt that the trees and the stars and even the bats were pitying her, and that the clock struck musically only to express its sympathy with her. She cried and thought how nice it would be to go into a monastery for the rest of her life. On still summer evenings she would walk alone through the avenues, insulted, injured, misunderstood by people, and only God and the starry heavens would see the martyr's tears. The evening service was still going on in the church. The princess stopped and listened to the singing; how beautiful the singing sounded in the still darkness! How sweet to weep and suffer to the sound of that singing!

Going into her rooms, she looked at her tear-stained face in the glass and powdered it, then she sat down to supper. The monks knew that she liked pickled sturgeon, little mushrooms, Malaga and plain honey-cakes that left a taste of cypress in the mouth, and every time she came they gave her all these dishes. As she ate the mushrooms and drank the Malaga, the princess dreamed of how she would be finally ruined and deserted—how all her stewards, bailiffs, clerks, and maidservants for whom she had done so much, would be false to her, and begin to say rude things; how people all the world over would set upon her, speak ill of her, jeer at her. She would renounce her title, would renounce society and luxury, and would go into a convent without one word of reproach to anyone; she would pray for her enemies—and then they would all understand her and come to beg her forgiveness, but by that time it would be too late.…

After supper she knelt down in the corner before the icon and read two chapters of the Gospel. Then her maid made her bed and she got into it. Stretching herself under the white quilt, she heaved a sweet, deep sigh, as one sighs after crying, closed her eyes, and began to fall asleep.

In the morning she waked up and glanced at her watch. It was half-past nine. On the carpet near the bed was a bright, narrow streak of sunlight from a ray which came in at the window and dimly lighted up the room. Flies were buzzing behind the black curtain at the window. “It’s early,” thought the princess, and she closed her eyes.

Stretching and lying snug in her bed, she recalled her meeting yesterday with the doctor and all the thoughts with which she had gone to sleep the night before: she remembered she was unhappy. Then she thought of her husband living in Petersburg, her stewards, doctors, neighbours, the officials of her acquaintance… a long procession of familiar masculine faces passed before her imagination. She smiled and thought, if only these people could see into her heart and understand her, they would all be at her feet.

At a quarter past eleven she called her maid.

“Help me to dress, Dasha,” she said languidly. “But go first and tell them to get out the horses. I must set off for Klavdia Nikolaevna’s.”

Going out to get into the carriage, she blinked at the glaring daylight and laughed with pleasure: it was a wonderfully fine day! As she scanned from her half-closed eyes the monks who had gathered round the steps to see her off, she nodded graciously and said:

“Goodbye, my friends! Till the day after tomorrow.”

It was an agreeable surprise to her that the doctor was with the monks by the steps. His face was pale and severe.

“Princess,” he said with a guilty smile, taking off his hat, “I’ve been waiting here a long time to see you. Forgive me, for God’s sake.… I was carried away yesterday by an evil, vindictive feeling and I talked… nonsense. In short, I beg your pardon.”

The princess smiled graciously, and held out her hand for him to kiss. He kissed it, turning red.

Trying to look like a bird, the princess fluttered into the carriage and nodded in all directions. There was a gay, warm, serene feeling in her heart, and she felt herself that her smile was particularly soft and friendly. As the carriage rolled towards the gates, and afterwards along the dusty road past huts and gardens, past long trains of wagons and strings of pilgrims on their way to the monastery, she still screwed up her eyes and smiled softly. She was thinking there was no higher bliss than to bring warmth, light, and joy wherever one went, to forgive injuries, to smile graciously on one’s enemies. The peasants she passed bowed to her, the carriage rustled softly, clouds of dust rose from under the wheels and floated over the golden rye, and it seemed to the princess that her body was swaying not on carriage cushions but on clouds, and that she herself was like a light, transparent little cloud.…

“How happy I am!” she murmured, shutting her eyes. “How happy I am!”

A Dreary Story

From the Notebook of an Old Man

I

There is in Russia an emeritus Professor Nikolay Stepanovitch, a chevalier and privy councillor; he has so many Russian and foreign decorations that when he has occasion to put them on the students nickname him “The Icon-stand.” His acquaintances are of the most aristocratic; for the last twenty-five or thirty years, at any rate, there has not been one single distinguished man of learning in Russia with whom he has not been intimately acquainted. There is no one for him to make friends with nowadays; but if we turn to the past, the long list of his famous friends winds up with such names as Pirogov, Kavelin, and the poet Nekrasov, all of whom bestowed upon him a warm and sincere affection. He is a member of all the Russian and of three foreign universities. And so on, and so on. All that and a great deal more that might be said makes up what is called my “name.”

That is my name as known to the public. In Russia it is known to every educated man, and abroad it is mentioned in the lecture room with the addition “honoured and distinguished.” It is one of those fortunate names to abuse which or to take which in vain, in public or in print, is considered a sign of bad taste. And that is as it should be. You see, my name is closely associated with the conception of a highly distinguished man of great gifts and unquestionable usefulness. I have the industry and power of endurance of a camel, and that is important, and I have talent, which is even more important. Moreover, while I am on this subject, I am a well-educated, modest, and honest fellow. I have never poked my nose into literature or politics; I have never sought popularity in polemics with the ignorant; I have never made speeches either at public dinners or at the funerals of my friends.… In fact, there is no slur on my learned name, and there is no complaint one can make against it. It is fortunate.

The bearer of that name, that is I, see myself as a man of sixty-two, with a bald head, with false teeth, and with an incurable tic douloureux. I am myself as dingy and unsightly as my name is brilliant and splendid. My head and my hands tremble with weakness; my neck, as Turgenev says of one of his heroines, is like the handle of a double bass; my chest is hollow; my shoulders narrow; when I talk or lecture, my mouth turns down at one corner; when I smile, my whole face is covered with aged-looking, deathly wrinkles. There is nothing impressive about my pitiful figure; only, perhaps, when I have an attack of tic douloureux my face wears a peculiar expression, the sight of which must have roused in everyone the grim and impressive thought, “Evidently that man will soon die.”

I still, as in the past, lecture fairly well; I can still, as in the past, hold the attention of my listeners for a couple of hours. My fervour, the literary skill of my exposition, and my humour, almost efface the defects of my voice, though it is harsh, dry, and monotonous as a praying beggar’s. I write poorly. That bit of my brain which presides over the faculty of authorship refuses to work. My memory has grown weak; there is a lack of sequence in my ideas, and when I put them on paper it always seems to me that I have lost the instinct for their organic connection; my construction is monotonous; my language is poor and timid. Often I write what I do not mean; I have forgotten the beginning when I am writing the end. Often I forget ordinary words, and I always have to waste a great deal of energy in avoiding superfluous phrases and unnecessary parentheses in my letters, both unmistakable proofs of a decline in mental activity. And it is noteworthy that the simpler the letter the more painful the effort to write it. At a scientific article I feel far more intelligent and at ease than at a letter of congratulation or a minute of proceedings. Another point: I find it easier to write German or English than to write Russian.

As regards my present manner of life, I must give a foremost place to the insomnia from which I have suffered of late. If I were asked what constituted the chief and fundamental feature of my existence now, I should answer, Insomnia. As in the past, from habit I undress and go to bed exactly at midnight. I fall asleep quickly, but before two o’clock I wake up and feel as though I had not slept at all. Sometimes I get out of bed and light a lamp. For an hour or two I walk up and down the room looking at the familiar photographs and pictures. When I am weary of walking about, I sit down to my table. I sit motionless, thinking of nothing, conscious of no inclination; if a book is lying before me, I

mechanically move it closer and read it without any interest—in that way not long ago I mechanically read through in one night a whole novel, with the strange title *The Song the Lark Was Singing*; or to occupy my attention I force myself to count to a thousand; or I imagine the face of one of my colleagues and begin trying to remember in what year and under what circumstances he entered the service. I like listening to sounds. Two rooms away from me my daughter Liza says something rapidly in her sleep, or my wife crosses the drawing room with a candle and invariably drops the matchbox; or a warped cupboard creaks; or the burner of the lamp suddenly begins to hum—and all these sounds, for some reason, excite me.

To lie awake at night means to be at every moment conscious of being abnormal, and so I look forward with impatience to the morning and the day when I have a right to be awake. Many wearisome hours pass before the cock crows in the yard. He is my first bringer of good tidings. As soon as he crows I know that within an hour the porter will wake up below, and, coughing angrily, will go upstairs to fetch something. And then a pale light will begin gradually glimmering at the windows, voices will sound in the street.…

The day begins for me with the entrance of my wife. She comes in to me in her petticoat, before she has done her hair, but after she has washed, smelling of flower-scented eau de cologne, looking as though she had come in by chance. Every time she says exactly the same thing: “Excuse me, I have just come in for a minute.… Have you had a bad night again?”

Then she puts out the lamp, sits down near the table, and begins talking. I am no prophet, but I know what she will talk about. Every morning it is exactly the same thing. Usually, after anxious inquiries concerning my health, she suddenly mentions our son who is an officer serving at Warsaw. After the twentieth of each month we send him fifty roubles, and that serves as the chief topic of our conversation.

“Of course it is difficult for us,” my wife would sigh, “but until he is completely on his own feet it is our duty to help him. The boy is among strangers, his pay is small.… However, if you like, next month we won’t send him fifty, but forty. What do you think?”

Daily experience might have taught my wife that constantly talking of our expenses does not reduce them, but my wife refuses to learn by experience, and regularly every morning discusses our officer son, and tells me that bread, thank God, is cheaper, while sugar is a halfpenny

dearer—with a tone and an air as though she were communicating interesting news.

I listen, mechanically assent, and probably because I have had a bad night, strange and inappropriate thoughts intrude themselves upon me. I gaze at my wife and wonder like a child. I ask myself in perplexity, is it possible that this old, very stout, ungainly woman, with her dull expression of petty anxiety and alarm about daily bread, with eyes dimmed by continual brooding over debts and money difficulties, who can talk of nothing but expenses and who smiles at nothing but things getting cheaper—is it possible that this woman is no other than the slender Varya whom I fell in love with so passionately for her fine, clear intelligence, for her pure soul, her beauty, and, as Othello his Desdemona, for her "sympathy" for my studies? Could that woman be no other than the Varya who had once borne me a son?

I look with strained attention into the face of this flabby, spiritless, clumsy old woman, seeking in her my Varya, but of her past self nothing is left but her anxiety over my health and her manner of calling my salary "our salary," and my cap "our cap." It is painful for me to look at her, and, to give her what little comfort I can, I let her say what she likes, and say nothing even when she passes unjust criticisms on other people or pitches into me for not having a private practice or not publishing textbooks.

Our conversation always ends in the same way. My wife suddenly remembers with dismay that I have not had my tea.

"What am I thinking about, sitting here?" she says, getting up. "The samovar has been on the table ever so long, and here I stay gossiping. My goodness! how forgetful I am growing!"

She goes out quickly, and stops in the doorway to say:

"We owe Yegor five months' wages. Did you know it? You mustn't let the servants' wages run on; how many times I have said it! It's much easier to pay ten roubles a month than fifty roubles every five months!"

As she goes out, she stops to say:

"The person I am sorriest for is our Liza. The girl studies at the Conservatoire, always mixes with people of good position, and goodness knows how she is dressed. Her fur coat is in such a state she is ashamed to show herself in the street. If she were somebody else's daughter it wouldn't matter, but of course everyone knows that her father is a distinguished professor, a privy councillor."

And having reproached me with my rank and reputation, she goes away at last. That is how my day begins. It does not improve as it goes

on.

As I am drinking my tea, my Liza comes in wearing her fur coat and her cap, with her music in her hand, already quite ready to go to the Conservatoire. She is two-and-twenty. She looks younger, is pretty, and rather like my wife in her young days. She kisses me tenderly on my forehead and on my hand, and says:

"Good morning, papa; are you quite well?"

As a child she was very fond of ice-cream, and I used often to take her to a confectioner's. Ice-cream was for her the type of everything delightful. If she wanted to praise me she would say: "You are as nice as cream, papa." We used to call one of her little fingers "pistachio ice," the next, "cream ice," the third "raspberry," and so on. Usually when she came in to say good morning to me I used to sit her on my knee, kiss her little fingers, and say:

"Creamy ice… pistachio… lemon.…"

And now, from old habit, I kiss Liza's fingers and mutter: "Pistachio… cream… lemon…" but the effect is utterly different. I am cold as ice and I am ashamed. When my daughter comes in to me and touches my forehead with her lips I start as though a bee had stung me on the head, give a forced smile, and turn my face away. Ever since I have been suffering from sleeplessness, a question sticks in my brain like a nail. My daughter often sees me, an old man and a distinguished man, blush painfully at being in debt to my footman; she sees how often anxiety over petty debts forces me to lay aside my work and to walk up and down the room for hours together, thinking; but why is it she never comes to me in secret to whisper in my ear: "Father, here is my watch, here are my bracelets, my earrings, my dresses.… Pawn them all; you want money…"? How is it that, seeing how her mother and I are placed in a false position and do our utmost to hide our poverty from people, she does not give up her expensive pleasure of music lessons? I would not accept her watch nor her bracelets, nor the sacrifice of her lessons—God forbid! That isn't what I want.

I think at the same time of my son, the officer at Warsaw. He is a clever, honest, and sober fellow. But that is not enough for me. I think if I had an old father, and if I knew there were moments when he was put to shame by his poverty, I should give up my officer's commission to somebody else, and should go out to earn my living as a workman. Such thoughts about my children poison me. What is the use of them? It is only a narrow-minded or embittered man who can harbour evil thoughts about ordinary people because they are not heroes. But enough of that!

At a quarter to ten I have to go and give a lecture to my dear boys. I dress and walk along the road which I have known for thirty years, and which has its history for me. Here is the big grey house with the chemist's shop; at this point there used to stand a little house, and in it was a beershop; in that beershop I thought out my thesis and wrote my first love-letter to Varya. I wrote it in pencil, on a page headed "Historia morbi." Here there is a grocer's shop; at one time it was kept by a little Jew, who sold me cigarettes on credit; then by a fat peasant woman, who liked the students because "every one of them has a mother"; now there is a red-haired shopkeeper sitting in it, a very stolid man who drinks tea from a copper teapot. And here are the gloomy gates of the University, which have long needed doing up; I see the bored porter in his sheepskin, the broom, the drifts of snow.… On a boy coming fresh from the provinces and imagining that the temple of science must really be a temple, such gates cannot make a healthy impression. Altogether the dilapidated condition of the University buildings, the gloominess of the corridors, the griminess of the walls, the lack of light, the dejected aspect of the steps, the hatstands and the benches, take a prominent position among predisposing causes in the history of Russian pessimism.… Here is our garden… I fancy it has grown neither better nor worse since I was a student. I don't like it. It would be far more sensible if there were tall pines and fine oaks growing here instead of sickly-looking lime trees, yellow acacias, and skimpy pollard lilacs. The student whose state of mind is in the majority of cases created by his surroundings, ought in the place where he is studying to see facing him at every turn nothing but what is lofty, strong and elegant.… God preserve him from gaunt trees, broken windows, grey walls, and doors covered with torn American leather!

When I go to my own entrance the door is flung wide open, and I am met by my colleague, contemporary, and namesake, the porter Nikolay. As he lets me in he clears his throat and says:

"A frost, your Excellency!"

Or, if my greatcoat is wet:

"Rain, your Excellency!"

Then he runs on ahead of me and opens all the doors on my way. In my study he carefully takes off my fur coat, and while doing so manages to tell me some bit of University news. Thanks to the close intimacy existing between all the University porters and beadles, he knows everything that goes on in the four faculties, in the office, in the rector's private room, in the library. What does he not know? When in an evil

day a rector or dean, for instance, retires, I hear him in conversation with the young porters mention the candidates for the post, explain that such a one would not be confirmed by the minister, that another would himself refuse to accept it, then drop into fantastic details concerning mysterious papers received in the office, secret conversations alleged to have taken place between the minister and the trustee, and so on. With the exception of these details, he almost always turns out to be right. His estimates of the candidates, though original, are very correct, too. If one wants to know in what year someone read his thesis, entered the service, retired, or died, then summon to your assistance the vast memory of that soldier, and he will not only tell you the year, the month and the day, but will furnish you also with the details that accompanied this or that event. Only one who loves can remember like that.

He is the guardian of the University traditions. From the porters who were his predecessors he has inherited many legends of University life, has added to that wealth much of his own gained during his time of service, and if you care to hear he will tell you many long and intimate stories. He can tell one about extraordinary sages who knew *everything*, about remarkable students who did not sleep for weeks, about numerous martyrs and victims of science; with him good triumphs over evil, the weak always vanquishes the strong, the wise man the fool, the humble the proud, the young the old. There is no need to take all these fables and legends for sterling coin; but filter them, and you will have left what is wanted: our fine traditions and the names of real heroes, recognized as such by all.

In our society the knowledge of the learned world consists of anecdotes of the extraordinary absentmindedness of certain old professors, and two or three witticisms variously ascribed to Gruber, to me, and to Babukin. For the educated public that is not much. If it loved science, learned men, and students, as Nikolay does, its literature would long ago have contained whole epics, records of sayings and doings such as, unfortunately, it cannot boast of now.

After telling me a piece of news, Nikolay assumes a severe expression, and conversation about business begins. If any outsider could at such times overhear Nikolay’s free use of our terminology, he might perhaps imagine that he was a learned man disguised as a soldier. And, by the way, the rumours of the erudition of the University porters are greatly exaggerated. It is true that Nikolay knows more than a hundred Latin words, knows how to put the skeleton together, sometimes prepares the apparatus and amuses the students by some long, learned

quotation, but the by no means complicated theory of the circulation of the blood, for instance, is as much a mystery to him now as it was twenty years ago.

At the table in my study, bending low over some book or preparation, sits Pyotr Ignatyevitch, my demonstrator, a modest and industrious but by no means clever man of five-and-thirty, already bald and corpulent; he works from morning to night, reads a lot, remembers well everything he has read—and in that way he is not a man, but pure gold; in all else he is a carthorse or, in other words, a learned dullard. The carthorse characteristics that show his lack of talent are these: his outlook is narrow and sharply limited by his specialty; outside his special branch he is simple as a child.

"Fancy! what a misfortune! They say Skobelev is dead."

Nikolay crosses himself, but Pyotr Ignatyevitch turns to me and asks:

"What Skobelev is that?"

Another time—somewhat earlier—I told him that Professor Perov was dead. Good Pyotr Ignatyevitch asked:

"What did he lecture on?"

I believe if Patti had sung in his very ear, if a horde of Chinese had invaded Russia, if there had been an earthquake, he would not have stirred a limb, but screwing up his eye, would have gone on calmly looking through his microscope. What is he to Hecuba or Hecuba to him, in fact? I would give a good deal to see how this dry stick sleeps with his wife at night.

Another characteristic is his fanatical faith in the infallibility of science, and, above all, of everything written by the Germans. He believes in himself, in his preparations; knows the object of life, and knows nothing of the doubts and disappointments that turn the hair of talent grey. He has a slavish reverence for authorities and a complete lack of any desire for independent thought. To change his convictions is difficult, to argue with him impossible. How is one to argue with a man who is firmly persuaded that medicine is the finest of sciences, that doctors are the best of men, and that the traditions of the medical profession are superior to those of any other? Of the evil past of medicine only one tradition has been preserved—the white tie still worn by doctors; for a learned—in fact, for any educated man the only traditions that can exist are those of the University as a whole, with no distinction between medicine, law, etc. But it would be hard for Pyotr Ignatyevitch to accept these facts, and he is ready to argue with you till the day of judgment.

I have a clear picture in my mind of his future. In the course of his life he will prepare many hundreds of chemicals of exceptional purity; he will write a number of dry and very accurate memoranda, will make some dozen conscientious translations, but he won't do anything striking. To do that one must have imagination, inventiveness, the gift of insight, and Pyotr Ignatyevitch has nothing of the kind. In short, he is not a master in science, but a journeyman.

Pyotr Ignatyevitch, Nikolay, and I, talk in subdued tones. We are not quite ourselves. There is always a peculiar feeling when one hears through the doors a murmur as of the sea from the lecture-theatre. In the course of thirty years I have not grown accustomed to this feeling, and I experience it every morning. I nervously button up my coat, ask Nikolay unnecessary questions, lose my temper.… It is just as though I were frightened; it is not timidity, though, but something different which I can neither describe nor find a name for.

Quite unnecessarily, I look at my watch and say: "Well, it's time to go in."

And we march into the room in the following order: foremost goes Nikolay, with the chemicals and apparatus or with a chart; after him I come; and then the carthorse follows humbly, with hanging head; or, when necessary, a dead body is carried in first on a stretcher, followed by Nikolay, and so on. On my entrance the students all stand up, then they sit down, and the sound as of the sea is suddenly hushed. Stillness reigns.

I know what I am going to lecture about, but I don't know how I am going to lecture, where I am going to begin or with what I am going to end. I haven't a single sentence ready in my head. But I have only to look round the lecture-hall (it is built in the form of an amphitheatre) and utter the stereotyped phrase, "Last lecture we stopped at…" when sentences spring up from my soul in a long string, and I am carried away by my own eloquence. I speak with irresistible rapidity and passion, and it seems as though there were no force which could check the flow of my words. To lecture well—that is, with profit to the listeners and without boring them—one must have, besides talent, experience and a special knack; one must possess a clear conception of one's own powers, of the audience to which one is lecturing, and of the subject of one's lecture. Moreover, one must be a man who knows what he is doing; one must keep a sharp lookout, and not for one second lose sight of what lies before one.

A good conductor, interpreting the thought of the composer, does twenty things at once: reads the score, waves his baton, watches the

singer, makes a motion sideways, first to the drum then to the wind-instruments, and so on. I do just the same when I lecture. Before me a hundred and fifty faces, all unlike one another; three hundred eyes all looking straight into my face. My object is to dominate this many-headed monster. If every moment as I lecture I have a clear vision of the degree of its attention and its power of comprehension, it is in my power. The other foe I have to overcome is in myself. It is the infinite variety of forms, phenomena, laws, and the multitude of ideas of my own and other people's conditioned by them. Every moment I must have the skill to snatch out of that vast mass of material what is most important and necessary, and, as rapidly as my words flow, clothe my thought in a form in which it can be grasped by the monster's intelligence, and may arouse its attention, and at the same time one must keep a sharp lookout that one's thoughts are conveyed, not just as they come, but in a certain order, essential for the correct composition of the picture I wish to sketch. Further, I endeavour to make my diction literary, my definitions brief and precise, my wording, as far as possible, simple and eloquent. Every minute I have to pull myself up and remember that I have only an hour and forty minutes at my disposal. In short, one has one's work cut out. At one and the same minute one has to play the part of savant and teacher and orator, and it's a bad thing if the orator gets the upper hand of the savant or of the teacher in one, or vice versa.

You lecture for a quarter of an hour, for half an hour, when you notice that the students are beginning to look at the ceiling, at Pyotr Ignatyevitch; one is feeling for his handkerchief, another shifts in his seat, another smiles at his thoughts.… That means that their attention is flagging. Something must be done. Taking advantage of the first opportunity, I make some pun. A broad grin comes on to a hundred and fifty faces, the eyes shine brightly, the sound of the sea is audible for a brief moment.… I laugh too. Their attention is refreshed, and I can go on.

No kind of sport, no kind of game or diversion, has ever given me such enjoyment as lecturing. Only at lectures have I been able to abandon myself entirely to passion, and have understood that inspiration is not an invention of the poets, but exists in real life, and I imagine Hercules after the most piquant of his exploits felt just such voluptuous exhaustion as I experience after every lecture.

That was in old times. Now at lectures I feel nothing but torture. Before half an hour is over I am conscious of an overwhelming weakness in my legs and my shoulders. I sit down in my chair, but I am not

accustomed to lecture sitting down; a minute later I get up and go on standing, then sit down again. There is a dryness in my mouth, my voice grows husky, my head begins to go round.… To conceal my condition from my audience I continually drink water, cough, often blow my nose as though I were hindered by a cold, make puns inappropriately, and in the end break off earlier than I ought to. But above all I am ashamed.

My conscience and my intelligence tell me that the very best thing I could do now would be to deliver a farewell lecture to the boys, to say my last word to them, to bless them, and give up my post to a man younger and stronger than me. But, God, be my judge, I have not manly courage enough to act according to my conscience.

Unfortunately, I am not a philosopher and not a theologian. I know perfectly well that I cannot live more than another six months; it might be supposed that I ought now to be chiefly concerned with the question of the shadowy life beyond the grave, and the visions that will visit my slumbers in the tomb. But for some reason my soul refuses to recognize these questions, though my mind is fully alive to their importance. Just as twenty, thirty years ago, so now, on the threshold of death, I am interested in nothing but science. As I yield up my last breath I shall still believe that science is the most important, the most splendid, the most essential thing in the life of man; that it always has been and will be the highest manifestation of love, and that only by means of it will man conquer himself and nature. This faith is perhaps naive and may rest on false assumptions, but it is not my fault that I believe that and nothing else; I cannot overcome in myself this belief.

But that is not the point. I only ask people to be indulgent to my weakness, and to realize that to tear from the lecture-theatre and his pupils a man who is more interested in the history of the development of the bone medulla than in the final object of creation would be equivalent to taking him and nailing him up in his coffin without waiting for him to be dead.

Sleeplessness and the consequent strain of combating increasing weakness leads to something strange in me. In the middle of my lecture tears suddenly rise in my throat, my eyes begin to smart, and I feel a passionate, hysterical desire to stretch out my hands before me and break into loud lamentation. I want to cry out in a loud voice that I, a famous man, have been sentenced by fate to the death penalty, that within some six months another man will be in control here in the lecture-theatre. I want to shriek that I am poisoned; new ideas such as I have not known before have poisoned the last days of my life, and are still stinging my

brain like mosquitoes. And at that moment my position seems to me so awful that I want all my listeners to be horrified, to leap up from their seats and to rush in panic terror, with desperate screams, to the exit.

It is not easy to get through such moments.

II

After my lecture I sit at home and work. I read journals and monographs, or prepare my next lecture; sometimes I write something. I work with interruptions, as I have from time to time to see visitors.

There is a ring at the bell. It is a colleague come to discuss some business matter with me. He comes in to me with his hat and his stick, and, holding out both these objects to me, says:

"Only for a minute! Only for a minute! Sit down, *collega*! Only a couple of words."

To begin with, we both try to show each other that we are extraordinarily polite and highly delighted to see each other. I make him sit down in an easy-chair, and he makes me sit down; as we do so, we cautiously pat each other on the back, touch each other's buttons, and it looks as though we were feeling each other and afraid of scorching our fingers. Both of us laugh, though we say nothing amusing. When we are seated we bow our heads towards each other and begin talking in subdued voices. However affectionately disposed we may be to one another, we cannot help adorning our conversation with all sorts of Chinese mannerisms, such as "As you so justly observed," or "I have already had the honour to inform you"; we cannot help laughing if one of us makes a joke, however unsuccessfully. When we have finished with business my colleague gets up impulsively and, waving his hat in the direction of my work, begins to say goodbye. Again we paw one another and laugh. I see him into the hall; when I assist my colleague to put on his coat, while he does all he can to decline this high honour. Then when Yegor opens the door my colleague declares that I shall catch cold, while I make a show of being ready to go even into the street with him. And when at last I go back into my study my face still goes on smiling, I suppose from inertia.

A little later another ring at the bell. Somebody comes into the hall, and is a long time coughing and taking off his things. Yegor announces a student. I tell him to ask him in. A minute later a young man of agreeable appearance comes in. For the last year he and I have been on strained relations; he answers me disgracefully at the examinations, and I mark

him one. Every year I have some seven such hopefuls whom, to express it in the students' slang, I "chivy" or "floor." Those of them who fail in their examination through incapacity or illness usually bear their cross patiently and do not haggle with me; those who come to the house and haggle with me are always youths of sanguine temperament, broad natures, whose failure at examinations spoils their appetites and hinders them from visiting the opera with their usual regularity. I let the first class off easily, but the second I chivy through a whole year.

"Sit down," I say to my visitor; "what have you to tell me?"

"Excuse me, professor, for troubling you," he begins, hesitating, and not looking me in the face. "I would not have ventured to trouble you if it had not been… I have been up for your examination five times, and have been ploughed.… I beg you, be so good as to mark me for a pass, because…"

The argument which all the sluggards bring forward on their own behalf is always the same; they have passed well in all their subjects and have only come to grief in mine, and that is the more surprising because they have always been particularly interested in my subject and knew it so well; their failure has always been entirely owing to some incomprehensible misunderstanding.

"Excuse me, my friend," I say to the visitor; "I cannot mark you for a pass. Go and read up the lectures and come to me again. Then we shall see."

A pause. I feel an impulse to torment the student a little for liking beer and the opera better than science, and I say, with a sigh:

"To my mind, the best thing you can do now is to give up medicine altogether. If, with your abilities, you cannot succeed in passing the examination, it's evident that you have neither the desire nor the vocation for a doctor's calling."

The sanguine youth's face lengthens.

"Excuse me, professor," he laughs, "but that would be odd of me, to say the least of it. After studying for five years, all at once to give it up."

"Oh, well! Better to have lost your five years than have to spend the rest of your life in doing work you do not care for."

But at once I feel sorry for him, and I hasten to add:

"However, as you think best. And so read a little more and come again."

"When?" the idle youth asks in a hollow voice.

"When you like. Tomorrow if you like."

And in his good-natured eyes I read:

“I can come all right, but of course you will plough me again, you beast!”

“Of course,” I say, “you won’t know more science for going in for my examination another fifteen times, but it is training your character, and you must be thankful for that.”

Silence follows. I get up and wait for my visitor to go, but he stands and looks towards the window, fingers his beard, and thinks. It grows boring.

The sanguine youth’s voice is pleasant and mellow, his eyes are clever and ironical, his face is genial, though a little bloated from frequent indulgence in beer and overlong lying on the sofa; he looks as though he could tell me a lot of interesting things about the opera, about his affairs of the heart, and about comrades whom he likes. Unluckily, it is not the thing to discuss these subjects, or else I should have been glad to listen to him.

“Professor, I give you my word of honour that if you mark me for a pass I… I’ll…”

As soon as we reach the “word of honour” I wave my hands and sit down to the table. The student ponders a minute longer, and says dejectedly:

“In that case, goodbye… I beg your pardon.”

“Goodbye, my friend. Good luck to you.”

He goes irresolutely into the hall, slowly puts on his outdoor things, and, going out into the street, probably ponders for some time longer; unable to think of anything, except “old devil,” inwardly addressed to me, he goes into a wretched restaurant to dine and drink beer, and then home to bed. “Peace be to thy ashes, honest toiler.”

A third ring at the bell. A young doctor, in a pair of new black trousers, gold spectacles, and of course a white tie, walks in. He introduces himself. I beg him to be seated, and ask what I can do for him. Not without emotion, the young devotee of science begins telling me that he has passed his examination as a doctor of medicine, and that he has now only to write his dissertation. He would like to work with me under my guidance, and he would be greatly obliged to me if I would give him a subject for his dissertation.

“Very glad to be of use to you, colleague,” I say, “but just let us come to an understanding as to the meaning of a dissertation. That word is taken to mean a composition which is a product of independent creative effort. Is that not so? A work written on another man’s subject and under another man’s guidance is called something different.…”

The doctor says nothing. I fly into a rage and jump up from my seat.

"Why is it you all come to me?" I cry angrily. "Do I keep a shop? I don't deal in subjects. For the thousand and oneth time I ask you all to leave me in peace! Excuse my brutality, but I am quite sick of it!"

The doctor remains silent, but a faint flush is apparent on his cheekbones. His face expresses a profound reverence for my fame and my learning, but from his eyes I can see he feels a contempt for my voice, my pitiful figure, and my nervous gesticulation. I impress him in my anger as a queer fish.

"I don't keep a shop," I go on angrily. "And it is a strange thing! Why don't you want to be independent? Why have you such a distaste for independence?"

I say a great deal, but he still remains silent. By degrees I calm down, and of course give in. The doctor gets a subject from me for his theme not worth a halfpenny, writes under my supervision a dissertation of no use to anyone, with dignity defends it in a dreary discussion, and receives a degree of no use to him.

The rings at the bell may follow one another endlessly, but I will confine my description here to four of them. The bell rings for the fourth time, and I hear familiar footsteps, the rustle of a dress, a dear voice.…

Eighteen years ago a colleague of mine, an oculist, died leaving a little daughter Katya, a child of seven, and sixty thousand roubles. In his will he made me the child's guardian. Till she was ten years old Katya lived with us as one of the family, then she was sent to a boarding-school, and only spent the summer holidays with us. I never had time to look after her education. I only superintended it at leisure moments, and so I can say very little about her childhood.

The first thing I remember, and like so much in remembrance, is the extraordinary trustfulness with which she came into our house and let herself be treated by the doctors, a trustfulness which was always shining in her little face. She would sit somewhere out of the way, with her face tied up, invariably watching something with attention; whether she watched me writing or turning over the pages of a book, or watched my wife bustling about, or the cook scrubbing a potato in the kitchen, or the dog playing, her eyes invariably expressed the same thought—that is, "Everything that is done in this world is nice and sensible." She was curious, and very fond of talking to me. Sometimes she would sit at the table opposite me, watching my movements and asking questions. It interested her to know what I was reading, what I did at the University, whether I was not afraid of the dead bodies, what I did with my salary.

“Do the students fight at the University?” she would ask.

“They do, dear.”

“And do you make them go down on their knees?”

“Yes, I do.”

And she thought it funny that the students fought and I made them go down on their knees, and she laughed. She was a gentle, patient, good child. It happened not infrequently that I saw something taken away from her, saw her punished without reason, or her curiosity repressed; at such times a look of sadness was mixed with the invariable expression of trustfulness on her face—that was all. I did not know how to take her part; only when I saw her sad I had an inclination to draw her to me and to commiserate her like some old nurse: “My poor little orphan one!”

I remember, too, that she was fond of fine clothes and of sprinkling herself with scent. In that respect she was like me. I, too, am fond of pretty clothes and nice scent.

I regret that I had not time nor inclination to watch over the rise and development of the passion which took complete possession of Katya when she was fourteen or fifteen. I mean her passionate love for the theatre. When she used to come from boarding-school and stay with us for the summer holidays, she talked of nothing with such pleasure and such warmth as of plays and actors. She bored us with her continual talk of the theatre. My wife and children would not listen to her. I was the only one who had not the courage to refuse to attend to her. When she had a longing to share her transports, she used to come into my study and say in an imploring tone:

“Nikolay Stepanovitch, do let me talk to you about the theatre!”

I pointed to the clock, and said:

“I’ll give you half an hour—begin.”

Later on she used to bring with her dozens of portraits of actors and actresses which she worshipped; then she attempted several times to take part in private theatricals, and the upshot of it all was that when she left school she came to me and announced that she was born to be an actress.

I had never shared Katya’s inclinations for the theatre. To my mind, if a play is good there is no need to trouble the actors in order that it may make the right impression; it is enough to read it. If the play is poor, no acting will make it good.

In my youth I often visited the theatre, and now my family takes a box twice a year and carries me off for a little distraction. Of course, that is not enough to give me the right to judge of the theatre. In my opinion the theatre has become no better than it was thirty or forty years ago. Just as

in the past, I can never find a glass of clean water in the corridors or foyers of the theatre. Just as in the past, the attendants fine me twenty kopecks for my fur coat, though there is nothing reprehensible in wearing a warm coat in winter. As in the past, for no sort of reason, music is played in the intervals, which adds something new and uncalled-for to the impression made by the play. As in the past, men go in the intervals and drink spirits in the buffet. If no progress can be seen in trifles, I should look for it in vain in what is more important. When an actor wrapped from head to foot in stage traditions and conventions tries to recite a simple ordinary speech, “To be or not to be,” not simply, but invariably with the accompaniment of hissing and convulsive movements all over his body, or when he tries to convince me at all costs that Tchatsky, who talks so much with fools and is so fond of folly, is a very clever man, and that *Woe from Wit* is not a dull play, the stage gives me the same feeling of conventionality which bored me so much forty years ago when I was regaled with the classical howling and beating on the breast. And every time I come out of the theatre more conservative than I go in.

The sentimental and confiding public may be persuaded that the stage, even in its present form, is a school; but anyone who is familiar with a school in its true sense will not be caught with that bait. I cannot say what will happen in fifty or a hundred years, but in its actual condition the theatre can serve only as an entertainment. But this entertainment is too costly to be frequently enjoyed. It robs the state of thousands of healthy and talented young men and women, who, if they had not devoted themselves to the theatre, might have been good doctors, farmers, schoolmistresses, officers; it robs the public of the evening hours—the best time for intellectual work and social intercourse. I say nothing of the waste of money and the moral damage to the spectator when he sees murder, fornication, or false witness unsuitably treated on the stage.

Katya was of an entirely different opinion. She assured me that the theatre, even in its present condition, was superior to the lecture-hall, to books, or to anything in the world. The stage was a power that united in itself all the arts, and actors were missionaries. No art nor science was capable of producing so strong and so certain an effect on the soul of man as the stage, and it was with good reason that an actor of medium quality enjoys greater popularity than the greatest savant or artist. And no sort of public service could provide such enjoyment and gratification as the theatre.

And one fine day Katya joined a troupe of actors, and went off, I believe to Ufa, taking away with her a good supply of money, a store of rainbow hopes, and the most aristocratic views of her work.

Her first letters on the journey were marvellous. I read them, and was simply amazed that those small sheets of paper could contain so much youth, purity of spirit, holy innocence, and at the same time subtle and apt judgments which would have done credit to a fine mas culine intellect. It was more like a rapturous paean of praise she sent me than a mere description of the Volga, the country, the towns she visited, her companions, her failures and successes; every sentence was fragrant with that confiding trustfulness I was accustomed to read in her face—and at the same time there were a great many grammatical mistakes, and there was scarcely any punctuation at all.

Before six months had passed I received a highly poetical and enthusiastic letter beginning with the words, “I have come to love…” This letter was accompanied by a photograph representing a young man with a shaven face, a wide-brimmed hat, and a plaid flung over his shoulder. The letters that followed were as splendid as before, but now commas and stops made their appearance in them, the grammatical mistakes disappeared, and there was a distinctly masculine flavour about them. Katya began writing to me how splendid it would be to build a great theatre somewhere on the Volga, on a cooperative system, and to attract to the enterprise the rich merchants and the steamer owners; there would be a great deal of money in it; there would be vast audiences; the actors would play on cooperative terms.… Possibly all this was really excellent, but it seemed to me that such schemes could only originate from a man’s mind.

However that may have been, for a year and a half everything seemed to go well: Katya was in love, believed in her work, and was happy; but then I began to notice in her letters unmistakable signs of falling off. It began with Katya’s complaining of her companions—this was the first and most ominous symptom; if a young scientific or literary man begins his career with bitter complaints of scientific and literary men, it is a sure sign that he is worn out and not fit for his work. Katya wrote to me that her companions did not attend the rehearsals and never knew their parts; that one could see in every one of them an utter disrespect for the public in the production of absurd plays, and in their behaviour on the stage; that for the benefit of the Actors’ Fund, which they only talked about, actresses of the serious drama demeaned themselves by singing chansonettes, while tragic actors sang comic songs making fun of

deceived husbands and the pregnant condition of unfaithful wives, and so on. In fact, it was amazing that all this had not yet ruined the provincial stage, and that it could still maintain itself on such a rotten and unsubstantial footing.

In answer I wrote Katya a long and, I must confess, a very boring letter. Among other things, I wrote to her:

"I have more than once happened to converse with old actors, very worthy men, who showed a friendly disposition towards me; from my conversations with them I could understand that their work was controlled not so much by their own intelligence and free choice as by fashion and the mood of the public. The best of them had had to play in their day in tragedy, in operetta, in Parisian farces, and in extravaganzas, and they always seemed equally sure that they were on the right path and that they were of use. So, as you see, the cause of the evil must be sought, not in the actors, but, more deeply, in the art itself and in the attitude of the whole of society to it."

This letter of mine only irritated Katya. She answered me:

"You and I are singing parts out of different operas. I wrote to you, not of the worthy men who showed a friendly disposition to you, but of a band of knaves who have nothing worthy about them. They are a horde of savages who have got on the stage simply because no one would have taken them elsewhere, and who call themselves artists simply because they are impudent. There are numbers of dull-witted creatures, drunkards, intriguing schemers and slanderers, but there is not one person of talent among them. I cannot tell you how bitter it is to me that the art I love has fallen into the hands of people I detest; how bitter it is that the best men look on at evil from afar, not caring to come closer, and, instead of intervening, write ponderous commonplaces and utterly useless sermons.…" And so on, all in the same style.

A little time passed, and I got this letter: "I have been brutally deceived. I cannot go on living. Dispose of my money as you think best. I loved you as my father and my only friend. Goodbye."

It turned out that *he*, too, belonged to the "horde of savages." Later on, from certain hints, I gathered that there had been an attempt at suicide. I believe Katya tried to poison herself. I imagine that she must have been seriously ill afterwards, as the next letter I got was from Yalta, where she had most probably been sent by the doctors. Her last letter contained a request to send her a thousand roubles to Yalta as quickly as possible, and ended with these words:

“Excuse the gloominess of this letter; yesterday I buried my child.” After spending about a year in the Crimea, she returned home.

She had been about four years on her travels, and during those four years, I must confess, I had played a rather strange and unenviable part in regard to her. When in earlier days she had told me she was going on the stage, and then wrote to me of her love; when she was periodically overcome by extravagance, and I continually had to send her first one and then two thousand roubles; when she wrote to me of her intention of suicide, and then of the death of her baby, every time I lost my head, and all my sympathy for her sufferings found no expression except that, after prolonged reflection, I wrote long, boring letters which I might just as well not have written. And yet I took a father’s place with her and loved her like a daughter!

Now Katya is living less than half a mile off. She has taken a flat of five rooms, and has installed herself fairly comfortably and in the taste of the day. If anyone were to undertake to describe her surroundings, the most characteristic note in the picture would be indolence. For the indolent body there are soft lounges, soft stools; for indolent feet soft rugs; for indolent eyes faded, dingy, or flat colours; for the indolent soul the walls are hung with a number of cheap fans and trivial pictures, in which the originality of the execution is more conspicuous than the subject; and the room contains a multitude of little tables and shelves filled with utterly useless articles of no value, and shapeless rags in place of curtains.… All this, together with the dread of bright colours, of symmetry, and of empty space, bears witness not only to spiritual indolence, but also to a corruption of natural taste. For days together Katya lies on the lounge reading, principally novels and stories. She only goes out of the house once a day, in the afternoon, to see me.

I go on working while Katya sits silent not far from me on the sofa, wrapping herself in her shawl, as though she were cold. Either because I find her sympathetic or because I was used to her frequent visits when she was a little girl, her presence does not prevent me from concentrating my attention. From time to time I mechanically ask her some question; she gives very brief replies; or, to rest for a minute, I turn round and watch her as she looks dreamily at some medical journal or review. And at such moments I notice that her face has lost the old look of confiding trustfulness. Her expression now is cold, apathetic, and absentminded, like that of passengers who had to wait too long for a train. She is dressed, as in old days, simply and beautifully, but carelessly; her dress and her hair show visible traces of the sofas and rocking-chairs in which

she spends whole days at a stretch. And she has lost the curiosity she had in old days. She has ceased to ask me questions now, as though she had experienced everything in life and looked for nothing new from it.

Towards four o'clock there begins to be sounds of movement in the hall and in the drawing room. Liza has come back from the Conservatoire, and has brought some girlfriends in with her. We hear them playing on the piano, trying their voices and laughing; in the dining room Yegor is laying the table, with the clatter of crockery.

"Goodbye," said Katya. "I won't go in and see your people today. They must excuse me. I haven't time. Come and see me."

While I am seeing her to the door, she looks me up and down grimly, and says with vexation:

"You are getting thinner and thinner! Why don't you consult a doctor? I'll call at Sergey Fyodorovitch's and ask him to have a look at you."

"There's no need, Katya."

"I can't think where your people's eyes are! They are a nice lot, I must say!"

She puts on her fur coat abruptly, and as she does so two or three hairpins drop unnoticed on the floor from her carelessly arranged hair. She is too lazy and in too great a hurry to do her hair up; she carelessly stuffs the falling curls under her hat, and goes away.

When I go into the dining room my wife asks me:

"Was Katya with you just now? Why didn't she come in to see us? It's really strange.…"

"Mamma," Liza says to her reproachfully, "let her alone, if she doesn't want to. We are not going down on our knees to her."

"It's very neglectful, anyway. To sit for three hours in the study without remembering our existence! But of course she must do as she likes."

Varya and Liza both hate Katya. This hatred is beyond my comprehension, and probably one would have to be a woman in order to understand it. I am ready to stake my life that of the hundred and fifty young men I see every day in the lecture-theatre, and of the hundred elderly ones I meet every week, hardly one could be found capable of understanding their hatred and aversion for Katya's past—that is, for her having been a mother without being a wife, and for her having had an illegitimate child; and at the same time I cannot recall one woman or girl of my acquaintance who would not consciously or unconsciously harbour such feelings. And this is not because woman is purer or more virtuous than man: why, virtue and purity are not very different from vice

if they are not free from evil feeling. I attribute this simply to the backwardness of woman. The mournful feeling of compassion and the pang of conscience experienced by a modern man at the sight of suffering is, to my mind, far greater proof of culture and moral elevation than hatred and aversion. Woman is as tearful and as coarse in her feelings now as she was in the Middle Ages, and to my thinking those who advise that she should be educated like a man are quite right.

My wife also dislikes Katya for having been an actress, for ingratitude, for pride, for eccentricity, and for the numerous vices which one woman can always find in another.

Besides my wife and daughter and me, there are dining with us two or three of my daughter's friends and Alexandr Adolfovitch Gnekker, her admirer and suitor. He is a fair-haired young man under thirty, of medium height, very stout and broad-shouldered, with red whiskers near his ears, and little waxed moustaches which make his plump smooth face look like a toy. He is dressed in a very short reefer jacket, a flowered waistcoat, breeches very full at the top and very narrow at the ankle, with a large check pattern on them, and yellow boots without heels. He has prominent eyes like a crab's, his cravat is like a crab's neck, and I even fancy there is a smell of crab-soup about the young man's whole person. He visits us every day, but no one in my family knows anything of his origin nor of the place of his education, nor of his means of livelihood. He neither plays nor sings, but has some connection with music and singing, sells somebody's pianos somewhere, is frequently at the Conservatoire, is acquainted with all the celebrities, and is a steward at the concerts; he criticizes music with great authority, and I have noticed that people are eager to agree with him.

Rich people always have dependents hanging about them; the arts and sciences have the same. I believe there is not an art nor a science in the world free from "foreign bodies" after the style of this Mr. Gnekker. I am not a musician, and possibly I am mistaken in regard to Mr. Gnekker, of whom, indeed, I know very little. But his air of authority and the dignity with which he takes his stand beside the piano when anyone is playing or singing strike me as very suspicious.

You may be ever so much of a gentleman and a privy councillor, but if you have a daughter you cannot be secure of immunity from that petty bourgeois atmosphere which is so often brought into your house and into your mood by the attentions of suitors, by matchmaking and marriage. I can never reconcile myself, for instance, to the expression of triumph on my wife's face every time Gnekker is in our company, nor can I

reconcile myself to the bottles of Lafitte, port and sherry which are only brought out on his account, that he may see with his own eyes the liberal and luxurious way in which we live. I cannot tolerate the habit of spasmodic laughter Liza has picked up at the Conservatoire, and her way of screwing up her eyes whenever there are men in the room. Above all, I cannot understand why a creature utterly alien to my habits, my studies, my whole manner of life, completely different from the people I like, should come and see me every day, and every day should dine with me. My wife and my servants mysteriously whisper that he is a suitor, but still I don't understand his presence; it rouses in me the same wonder and perplexity as if they were to set a Zulu beside me at the table. And it seems strange to me, too, that my daughter, whom I am used to thinking of as a child, should love that cravat, those eyes, those soft cheeks.…

In the old days I used to like my dinner, or at least was indifferent about it; now it excites in me no feeling but weariness and irritation. Ever since I became an "Excellency" and one of the Deans of the Faculty my family has for some reason found it necessary to make a complete change in our menu and dining habits. Instead of the simple dishes to which I was accustomed when I was a student and when I was in practice, now they feed me with a puree with little white things like circles floating about in it, and kidneys stewed in madeira. My rank as a general and my fame have robbed me forever of cabbage-soup and savoury pies, and goose with applesauce, and bream with boiled grain. They have robbed me of our maidservant Agasha, a chatty and laughter-loving old woman, instead of whom Yegor, a dull-witted and conceited fellow with a white glove on his right hand, waits at dinner. The intervals between the courses are short, but they seem immensely long because there is nothing to occupy them. There is none of the gaiety of the old days, the spontaneous talk, the jokes, the laughter; there is nothing of mutual affection and the joy which used to animate the children, my wife, and me when in old days we met together at meals. For me, the celebrated man of science, dinner was a time of rest and reunion, and for my wife and children a fête—brief indeed, but bright and joyous—in which they knew that for half an hour I belonged, not to science, not to students, but to them alone. Our real exhilaration from one glass of wine is gone forever, gone is Agasha, gone the bream with boiled grain, gone the uproar that greeted every little startling incident at dinner, such as the cat and dog fighting under the table, or Katya's bandage falling off her face into her soup-plate.

To describe our dinner nowadays is as uninteresting as to eat it. My wife's face wears a look of triumph and affected dignity, and her habitual expression of anxiety. She looks at our plates and says, "I see you don't care for the joint. Tell me; you don't like it, do you?" and I am obliged to answer: "There is no need for you to trouble, my dear; the meat is very nice." And she will say: "You always stand up for me, Nikolay Stepanovitch, and you never tell the truth. Why is Alexandr Adolfovitch eating so little?" And so on in the same style all through dinner. Liza laughs spasmodically and screws up her eyes. I watch them both, and it is only now at dinner that it becomes absolutely evident to me that the inner life of these two has slipped away out of my ken. I have a feeling as though I had once lived at home with a real wife and children and that now I am dining with visitors, in the house of a sham wife who is not the real one, and am looking at a Liza who is not the real Liza. A startling change has taken place in both of them; I have missed the long process by which that change was effected, and it is no wonder that I can make nothing of it. Why did that change take place? I don't know. Perhaps the whole trouble is that God has not given my wife and daughter the same strength of character as me. From childhood I have been accustomed to resisting external influences, and have steeled myself pretty thoroughly. Such catastrophes in life as fame, the rank of a general, the transition from comfort to living beyond our means, acquaintance with celebrities, etc., have scarcely affected me, and I have remained intact and unashamed; but on my wife and Liza, who have not been through the same hardening process and are weak, all this has fallen like an avalanche of snow, overwhelming them. Gnekker and the young ladies talk of fugues, of counterpoint, of singers and pianists, of Bach and Brahms, while my wife, afraid of their suspecting her of ignorance of music, smiles to them sympathetically and mutters: "That's exquisite… really! You don't say so!…" Gnekker eats with solid dignity, jests with solid dignity, and condescendingly listens to the remarks of the young ladies. From time to time he is moved to speak in bad French, and then, for some reason or other, he thinks it necessary to address me as "*Votre Excellence*."

And I am glum. Evidently I am a constraint to them and they are a constraint to me. I have never in my earlier days had a close knowledge of class antagonism, but now I am tormented by something of that sort. I am on the lookout for nothing but bad qualities in Gnekker; I quickly find them, and am fretted at the thought that a man not of my circle is sitting here as my daughter's suitor. His presence has a bad influence on

me in other ways, too. As a rule, when I am alone or in the society of people I like, never think of my own achievements, or, if I do recall them, they seem to me as trivial as though I had only completed my studies yesterday; but in the presence of people like Gnekker my achievements in science seem to be a lofty mountain the top of which vanishes into the clouds, while at its foot Gnekkers are running about scarcely visible to the naked eye.

After dinner I go into my study and there smoke my pipe, the only one in the whole day, the sole relic of my old bad habit of smoking from morning till night. While I am smoking my wife comes in and sits down to talk to me. Just as in the morning, I know beforehand what our conversation is going to be about.

"I must talk to you seriously, Nikolay Stepanovitch," she begins. "I mean about Liza.… Why don't you pay attention to it?"

"To what?"

"You pretend to notice nothing. But that is not right. We can't shirk responsibility.… Gnekker has intentions in regard to Liza.… What do you say?"

"That he is a bad man I can't say, because I don't know him, but that I don't like him I have told you a thousand times already."

"But you can't… you can't!"

She gets up and walks about in excitement.

"You can't take up that attitude to a serious step," she says. "When it is a question of our daughter's happiness we must lay aside all personal feeling. I know you do not like him.… Very good… if we refuse him now, if we break it all off, how can you be sure that Liza will not have a grievance against us all her life? Suitors are not plentiful nowadays, goodness knows, and it may happen that no other match will turn up.… He is very much in love with Liza, and she seems to like him.… Of course, he has no settled position, but that can't be helped. Please God, in time he will get one. He is of good family and well off."

"Where did you learn that?"

"He told us so. His father has a large house in Harkov and an estate in the neighbourhood. In short, Nikolay Stepanovitch, you absolutely must go to Harkov."

"What for?"

"You will find out all about him there.… You know the professors there; they will help you. I would go myself, but I am a woman. I cannot.…"

"I am not going to Harkov," I say morosely.

My wife is frightened, and a look of intense suffering comes into her face.

“For God’s sake, Nikolay Stepanovitch,” she implores me, with tears in her voice—“for God’s sake, take this burden off me! I am so worried!”

It is painful for me to look at her.

“Very well, Varya,” I say affectionately, “if you wish it, then certainly I will go to Harkov and do all you want.”

She presses her handkerchief to her eyes and goes off to her room to cry, and I am left alone.

A little later lights are brought in. The armchair and the lampshade cast familiar shadows that have long grown wearisome on the walls and on the floor, and when I look at them I feel as though the night had come and with it my accursed sleeplessness. I lie on my bed, then get up and walk about the room, then lie down again. As a rule it is after dinner, at the approach of evening, that my nervous excitement reaches its highest pitch. For no reason I begin crying and burying my head in the pillow. At such times I am afraid that someone may come in; I am afraid of suddenly dying; I am ashamed of my tears, and altogether there is something insufferable in my soul. I feel that I can no longer bear the sight of my lamp, of my books, of the shadows on the floor. I cannot bear the sound of the voices coming from the drawing room. Some force unseen, uncomprehended, is roughly thrusting me out of my flat. I leap up hurriedly, dress, and cautiously, that my family may not notice, slip out into the street. Where am I to go?

The answer to that question has long been ready in my brain. To Katya.

III

As a rule she is lying on the sofa or in a lounge-chair reading. Seeing me, she raises her head languidly, sits up, and shakes hands.

"You are always lying down," I say, after pausing and taking breath. "That's not good for you. You ought to occupy yourself with something."

"What?"

"I say you ought to occupy yourself in some way."

"With what? A woman can be nothing but a simple workwoman or an actress."

"Well, if you can't be a workwoman, be an actress."

She says nothing.

"You ought to get married," I say, half in jest.

"There is no one to marry. There's no reason to, either."

"You can't live like this."

"Without a husband? Much that matters; I could have as many men as I like if I wanted to."

"That's ugly, Katya."

"What is ugly?"

"Why, what you have just said."

Noticing that I am hurt and wishing to efface the disagreeable impression, Katya says:

"Let us go; come this way."

She takes me into a very snug little room, and says, pointing to the writing-table:

"Look… I have got that ready for you. You shall work here. Come here every day and bring your work with you. They only hinder you there at home. Will you work here? Will you like to?"

Not to wound her by refusing, I answer that I will work here, and that I like the room very much. Then we both sit down in the snug little room and begin talking.

The warm, snug surroundings and the presence of a sympathetic person does not, as in old days, arouse in me a feeling of pleasure, but an intense impulse to complain and grumble. I feel for some reason that if I lament and complain I shall feel better.

“Things are in a bad way with me, my dear—very bad.…”

“What is it?”

“You see how it is, my dear; the best and holiest right of kings is the right of mercy. And I have always felt myself a king, since I have made unlimited use of that right. I have never judged, I have been indulgent, I have readily forgiven everyone, right and left. Where others have protested and expressed indignation, I have only advised and persuaded. All my life it has been my endeavour that my society should not be a burden to my family, to my students, to my colleagues, to my servants. And I know that this attitude to people has had a good influence on all who have chanced to come into contact with me. But now I am not a king. Something is happening to me that is only excusable in a slave; day and night my brain is haunted by evil thoughts, and feelings such as I never knew before are brooding in my soul. I am full of hatred, and contempt, and indignation, and loathing, and dread. I have become excessively severe, exacting, irritable, ungracious, suspicious. Even things that in old days would have provoked me only to an unnecessary jest and a good-natured laugh now arouse an oppressive feeling in me. My reasoning, too, has undergone a change: in old days I despised money; now I harbour an evil feeling, not towards money, but towards the rich as though they were to blame: in old days I hated violence and tyranny, but now I hate the men who make use of violence, as though they were alone to blame, and not all of us who do not know how to educate each other. What is the meaning of it? If these new ideas and new feelings have come from a change of convictions, what is that change due to? Can the world have grown worse and I better, or was I blind before and indifferent? If this change is the result of a general decline of physical and intellectual powers—I am ill, you know, and every day I am losing weight—my position is pitiable; it means that my new ideas are morbid and abnormal; I ought to be ashamed of them and think them of no consequence.…”

“Illness has nothing to do with it,” Katya interrupts me; “it’s simply that your eyes are opened, that’s all. You have seen what in old days, for some reason, you refused to see. To my thinking, what you ought to do first of all, is to break with your family for good, and go away.”

“You are talking nonsense.”

“You don’t love them; why should you force your feelings? Can you call them a family? Nonentities! If they died today, no one would notice their absence tomorrow.”

Katya despises my wife and Liza as much as they hate her. One can hardly talk at this date of people's having a right to despise one another. But if one looks at it from Katya's standpoint and recognizes such a right, one can see she has as much right to despise my wife and Liza as they have to hate her.

"Nonentities," she goes on. "Have you had dinner today? How was it they did not forget to tell you it was ready? How is it they still remember your existence?"

"Katya," I say sternly, "I beg you to be silent."

"You think I enjoy talking about them? I should be glad not to know them at all. Listen, my dear: give it all up and go away. Go abroad. The sooner the better."

"What nonsense! What about the University?"

"The University, too. What is it to you? There's no sense in it, anyway. You have been lecturing for thirty years, and where are your pupils? Are many of them celebrated scientific men? Count them up! And to multiply the doctors who exploit ignorance and pile up hundreds of thousands for themselves, there is no need to be a good and talented man. You are not wanted."

"Good heavens! how harsh you are!" I cry in horror. "How harsh you are! Be quiet or I will go away! I don't know how to answer the harsh things you say!"

The maid comes in and summons us to tea. At the samovar our conversation, thank God, changes. After having had my grumble out, I have a longing to give way to another weakness of old age, reminiscences. I tell Katya about my past, and to my great astonishment tell her incidents which, till then, I did not suspect of being still preserved in my memory, and she listens to me with tenderness, with pride, holding her breath. I am particularly fond of telling her how I was educated in a seminary and dreamed of going to the University.

"At times I used to walk about our seminary garden…" I would tell her. "If from some faraway tavern the wind floated sounds of a song and the squeaking of an accordion, or a sledge with bells dashed by the garden-fence, it was quite enough to send a rush of happiness, filling not only my heart, but even my stomach, my legs, my arms.… I would listen to the accordion or the bells dying away in the distance and imagine myself a doctor, and paint pictures, one better than another. And here, as you see, my dreams have come true. I have had more than I dared to dream of. For thirty years I have been the favourite professor, I have had splendid comrades, I have enjoyed fame and honour. I have loved,

married from passionate love, have had children. In fact, looking back upon it, I see my whole life as a fine composition arranged with talent. Now all that is left to me is not to spoil the end. For that I must die like a man. If death is really a thing to dread, I must meet it as a teacher, a man of science, and a citizen of a Christian country ought to meet it, with courage and untroubled soul. But I am spoiling the end; I am sinking, I fly to you, I beg for help, and you tell me 'Sink; that is what you ought to do.'"

But here there comes a ring at the front-door. Katya and I recognize it, and say:

"It must be Mihail Fyodorovitch."

And a minute later my colleague, the philologist Mihail Fyodorovitch, a tall, well-built man of fifty, clean-shaven, with thick grey hair and black eyebrows, walks in. He is a good-natured man and an excellent comrade. He comes of a fortunate and talented old noble family which has played a prominent part in the history of literature and enlightenment. He is himself intelligent, talented, and very highly educated, but has his oddities. To a certain extent we are all odd and all queer fish, but in his oddities there is something exceptional, apt to cause anxiety among his acquaintances. I know a good many people for whom his oddities completely obscure his good qualities.

Coming in to us, he slowly takes off his gloves and says in his velvety bass:

"Good evening. Are you having tea? That's just right. It's diabolically cold."

Then he sits down to the table, takes a glass, and at once begins talking. What is most characteristic in his manner of talking is the continually jesting tone, a sort of mixture of philosophy and drollery as in Shakespeare's gravediggers. He is always talking about serious things, but he never speaks seriously. His judgments are always harsh and railing, but, thanks to his soft, even, jesting tone, the harshness and abuse do not jar upon the ear, and one soon grows used to them. Every evening he brings with him five or six anecdotes from the University, and he usually begins with them when he sits down to table.

"Oh, Lord!" he sighs, twitching his black eyebrows ironically. "What comic people there are in the world!"

"Well?" asks Katya.

"As I was coming from my lecture this morning I met that old idiot N——. N—— on the stairs.… He was going along as usual, sticking out his chin like a horse, looking for someone to listen to his grumblings at

his migraine, at his wife, and his students who won't attend his lectures. 'Oh,' I thought, 'he has seen me—I am done for now; it is all up.…'"

And so on in the same style. Or he will begin like this:

"I was yesterday at our friend Z——. Z——'s public lecture. I wonder how it is our alma mater—don't speak of it after dark—dare display in public such noodles and patent dullards as that Z——. Z——… Why, he is a European fool! Upon my word, you could not find another like him all over Europe! He lectures—can you imagine?—as though he were sucking a sugar-stick—sue, sue, sue;… he is in a nervous funk; he can hardly decipher his own manuscript; his poor little thoughts crawl along like a bishop on a bicycle, and, what's worse, you can never make out what he is trying to say. The deadly dullness is awful, the very flies expire. It can only be compared with the boredom in the assembly-hall at the yearly meeting when the traditional address is read—damn it!"

And at once an abrupt transition:

"Three years ago—Nikolay Stepanovitch here will remember it—I had to deliver that address. It was hot, stifling, my uniform cut me under the arms—it was deadly! I read for half an hour, for an hour, for an hour and a half, for two hours.… 'Come,' I thought; 'thank God, there are only ten pages left!' And at the end there were four pages that there was no need to read, and I reckoned to leave them out. 'So there are only six really,' I thought; 'that is, only six pages left to read.' But, only fancy, I chanced to glance before me, and, sitting in the front row, side by side, were a general with a ribbon on his breast and a bishop. The poor beggars were numb with boredom; they were staring with their eyes wide open to keep awake, and yet they were trying to put on an expression of attention and to pretend that they understood what I was saying and liked it. 'Well,' I thought, 'since you like it you shall have it! I'll pay you out;' so I just gave them those four pages too."

As is usual with ironical people, when he talks nothing in his face smiles but his eyes and eyebrows. At such times there is no trace of hatred or spite in his eyes, but a great deal of humour, and that peculiar fox-like slyness which is only to be noticed in very observant people. Since I am speaking about his eyes, I notice another peculiarity in them. When he takes a glass from Katya, or listens to her speaking, or looks after her as she goes out of the room for a moment, I notice in his eyes something gentle, beseeching, pure.…

The maidservant takes away the samovar and puts on the table a large piece of cheese, some fruit, and a bottle of Crimean champagne—a rather poor wine of which Katya had grown fond in the Crimea. Mihail

Fyodorovitch takes two packs of cards off the whatnot and begins to play patience. According to him, some varieties of patience require great concentration and attention, yet while he lays out the cards he does not leave off distracting his attention with talk. Katya watches his cards attentively, and more by gesture than by words helps him in his play. She drinks no more than a couple of wineglasses of wine the whole evening; I drink four glasses, and the rest of the bottle falls to the share of Mihail Fyodorovitch, who can drink a great deal and never get drunk.

Over our patience we settle various questions, principally of the higher order, and what we care for most of all—that is, science and learning—is more roughly handled than anything.

"Science, thank God, has outlived its day," says Mihail Fyodorovitch emphatically. "Its song is sung. Yes, indeed. Mankind begins to feel impelled to replace it by something different. It has grown on the soil of superstition, been nourished by superstition, and is now just as much the quintessence of superstition as its defunct granddames, alchemy, metaphysics, and philosophy. And, after all, what has it given to mankind? Why, the difference between the learned Europeans and the Chinese who have no science is trifling, purely external. The Chinese know nothing of science, but what have they lost thereby?"

"Flies know nothing of science, either," I observe, "but what of that?"

"There is no need to be angry, Nikolay Stepanovitch. I only say this here between ourselves… I am more careful than you think, and I am not going to say this in public—God forbid! The superstition exists in the multitude that the arts and sciences are superior to agriculture, commerce, superior to handicrafts. Our sect is maintained by that superstition, and it is not for you and me to destroy it. God forbid!"

After patience the younger generation comes in for a dressing too.

"Our audiences have degenerated," sighs Mihail Fyodorovitch. "Not to speak of ideals and all the rest of it, if only they were capable of work and rational thought! In fact, it's a case of 'I look with mournful eyes on the young men of today.'"

"Yes; they have degenerated horribly," Katya agrees. "Tell me, have you had one man of distinction among them for the last five or ten years?"

"I don't know how it is with the other professors, but I can't remember any among mine."

"I have seen in my day many of your students and young scientific men and many actors—well, I have never once been so fortunate as to

meet—I won’t say a hero or a man of talent, but even an interesting man. It’s all the same grey mediocrity, puffed up with self-conceit.”

All this talk of degeneration always affects me as though I had accidentally overheard offensive talk about my own daughter. It offends me that these charges are wholesale, and rest on such worn-out commonplaces, on such wordy vapourings as degeneration and absence of ideals, or on references to the splendours of the past. Every accusation, even if it is uttered in ladies’ society, ought to be formulated with all possible definiteness, or it is not an accusation, but idle disparagement, unworthy of decent people.

I am an old man, I have been lecturing for thirty years, but I notice neither degeneration nor lack of ideals, and I don’t find that the present is worse than the past. My porter Nikolay, whose experience of this subject has its value, says that the students of today are neither better nor worse than those of the past.

If I were asked what I don’t like in my pupils of today, I should answer the question, not straight off and not at length, but with sufficient definiteness. I know their failings, and so have no need to resort to vague generalities. I don’t like their smoking, using spirituous beverages, marrying late, and often being so irresponsible and careless that they will let one of their number be starving in their midst while they neglect to pay their subscriptions to the Students’ Aid Society. They don’t know modern languages, and they don’t express themselves correctly in Russian; no longer ago than yesterday my colleague, the professor of hygiene, complained to me that he had to give twice as many lectures, because the students had a very poor knowledge of physics and were utterly ignorant of meteorology. They are readily carried away by the influence of the last new writers, even when they are not first-rate, but they take absolutely no interest in classics such as Shakespeare, Marcus Aurelius, Epictetus, or Pascal, and this inability to distinguish the great from the small betrays their ignorance of practical life more than anything. All difficult questions that have more or less a social character (for instance the migration question) they settle by studying monographs on the subject, but not by way of scientific investigation or experiment, though that method is at their disposal and is more in keeping with their calling. They gladly become ward-surgeons, assistants, demonstrators, external teachers, and are ready to fill such posts until they are forty, though independence, a sense of freedom and personal initiative, are no less necessary in science than, for instance, in art or commerce. I have pupils and listeners, but no successors and helpers, and so I love them

and am touched by them, but am not proud of them. And so on, and so on.…

Such shortcomings, however numerous they may be, can only give rise to a pessimistic or faultfinding temper in a fainthearted and timid man. All these failings have a casual, transitory character, and are completely dependent on conditions of life; in some ten years they will have disappeared or given place to other fresh defects, which are all inevitable and will in their turn alarm the fainthearted. The students' sins often vex me, but that vexation is nothing in comparison with the joy I have been experiencing now for the last thirty years when I talk to my pupils, lecture to them, watch their relations, and compare them with people not of their circle.

Mihail Fyodorovitch speaks evil of everything. Katya listens, and neither of them notices into what depths the apparently innocent diversion of finding fault with their neighbours is gradually drawing them. They are not conscious how by degrees simple talk passes into malicious mockery and jeering, and how they are both beginning to drop into the habits and methods of slander.

"Killing types one meets with," says Mihail Fyodorovitch. "I went yesterday to our friend Yegor Petrovitch's, and there I found a studious gentleman, one of your medicals in his third year, I believe. Such a face!… in the Dobrolubov style, the imprint of profound thought on his brow; we got into talk. 'Such doings, young man,' said I. 'I've read,' said I, 'that some German—I've forgotten his name—has created from the human brain a new kind of alkaloid, idiotine.' What do you think? He believed it, and there was positively an expression of respect on his face, as though to say, 'See what we fellows can do!' And the other day I went to the theatre. I took my seat. In the next row directly in front of me were sitting two men: one of 'us fellows' and apparently a law student, the other a shaggy-looking figure, a medical student. The latter was as drunk as a cobbler. He did not look at the stage at all. He was dozing with his nose on his shirtfront. But as soon as an actor begins loudly reciting a monologue, or simply raises his voice, our friend starts, pokes his neighbour in the ribs, and asks, 'What is he saying? Is it elevating?' 'Yes,' answers one of our fellows. 'B-r-r-ravo!' roars the medical student. 'Elevating! Bravo!' He had gone to the theatre, you see, the drunken blockhead, not for the sake of art, the play, but for elevation! He wanted noble sentiments."

Katya listens and laughs. She has a strange laugh; she catches her breath in rhythmically regular gasps, very much as though she were

playing the accordion, and nothing in her face is laughing but her nostrils. I grow depressed and don't know what to say. Beside myself, I fire up, leap up from my seat, and cry:

"Do leave off! Why are you sitting here like two toads, poisoning the air with your breath? Give over!"

And without waiting for them to finish their gossip I prepare to go home. And, indeed, it is high time: it is past ten.

"I will stay a little longer," says Mihail Fyodorovitch. "Will you allow me, Ekaterina Vladimirovna?"

"I will," answers Katya.

"*Bene!* In that case have up another little bottle."

They both accompany me with candles to the hall, and while I put on my fur coat, Mihail Fyodorovitch says:

"You have grown dreadfully thin and older looking, Nikolay Stepanovitch. What's the matter with you? Are you ill?"

"Yes; I am not very well."

"And you are not doing anything for it…" Katya puts in grimly.

"Why don't you? You can't go on like that! God helps those who help themselves, my dear fellow. Remember me to your wife and daughter, and make my apologies for not having been to see them. In a day or two, before I go abroad, I shall come to say goodbye. I shall be sure to. I am going away next week."

I come away from Katya, irritated and alarmed by what has been said about my being ill, and dissatisfied with myself. I ask myself whether I really ought not to consult one of my colleagues. And at once I imagine how my colleague, after listening to me, would walk away to the window without speaking, would think a moment, then would turn round to me and, trying to prevent my reading the truth in his face, would say in a careless tone: "So far I see nothing serious, but at the same time, *collega*, I advise you to lay aside your work.…" And that would deprive me of my last hope.

Who is without hope? Now that I am diagnosing my illness and prescribing for myself, from time to time I hope that I am deceived by my own illness, that I am mistaken in regard to the albumen and the sugar I find, and in regard to my heart, and in regard to the swellings I have twice noticed in the mornings; when with the fervour of the hypochondriac I look through the textbooks of therapeutics and take a different medicine every day, I keep fancying that I shall hit upon something comforting. All that is petty.

Whether the sky is covered with clouds or the moon and the stars are shining, I turn my eyes towards it every evening and think that death is taking me soon. One would think that my thoughts at such times ought to be deep as the sky, brilliant, striking.… But no! I think about myself, about my wife, about Liza, Gnekker, the students, people in general; my thoughts are evil, petty, I am insincere with myself, and at such times my theory of life may be expressed in the words the celebrated Araktcheev said in one of his intimate letters: “Nothing good can exist in the world without evil, and there is more evil than good.” That is, everything is disgusting; there is nothing to live for, and the sixty-two years I have already lived must be reckoned as wasted. I catch myself in these thoughts, and try to persuade myself that they are accidental, temporary, and not deeply rooted in me, but at once I think:

“If so, what drives me every evening to those two toads?”

And I vow to myself that I will never go to Katya’s again, though I know I shall go next evening.

Ringing the bell at the door and going upstairs, I feel that I have no family now and no desire to bring it back again. It is clear that the new Araktcheev thoughts are not casual, temporary visitors, but have possession of my whole being. With my conscience ill at ease, dejected, languid, hardly able to move my limbs, feeling as though tons were added to my weight, I get into bed and quickly drop asleep.

And then—insomnia!

IV

Summer comes on and life is changed.

One fine morning Liza comes in to me and says in a jesting tone:

"Come, your Excellency! We are ready."

My Excellency is conducted into the street, and seated in a cab. As I go along, having nothing to do, I read the signboards from right to left. The word "Traktir" reads "Ritkart"; that would just suit some baron's family: Baroness Ritkart. Farther on I drive through fields, by the graveyard, which makes absolutely no impression on me, though I shall soon lie in it; then I drive by forests and again by fields. There is nothing of interest. After two hours of driving, my Excellency is conducted into the lower storey of a summer villa and installed in a small, very cheerful little room with light blue hangings.

At night there is sleeplessness as before, but in the morning I do not put a good face upon it and listen to my wife, but lie in bed. I do not sleep, but lie in the drowsy, half-conscious condition in which you know you are not asleep, but dreaming. At midday I get up and from habit sit down at my table, but I do not work now; I amuse myself with French books in yellow covers, sent me by Katya. Of course, it would be more patriotic to read Russian authors, but I must confess I cherish no particular liking for them. With the exception of two or three of the older writers, all our literature of today strikes me as not being literature, but a special sort of home industry, which exists simply in order to be encouraged, though people do not readily make use of its products. The very best of these home products cannot be called remarkable and cannot be sincerely praised without qualification. I must say the same of all the literary novelties I have read during the last ten or fifteen years; not one of them is remarkable, and not one of them can be praised without a "but." Cleverness, a good tone, but no talent; talent, a good tone, but no cleverness; or talent, cleverness, but not a good tone.

I don't say the French books have talent, cleverness, and a good tone. They don't satisfy me, either. But they are not so tedious as the Russian, and it is not unusual to find in them the chief element of artistic creation—the feeling of personal freedom which is lacking in the

Russian authors. I don't remember one new book in which the author does not try from the first page to entangle himself in all sorts of conditions and contracts with his conscience. One is afraid to speak of the naked body; another ties himself up hand and foot in psychological analysis; a third must have a "warm attitude to man"; a fourth purposely scrawls whole descriptions of nature that he may not be suspected of writing with a purpose.… One is bent upon being middle-class in his work, another must be a nobleman, and so on. There is intentionalness, circumspection, and self-will, but they have neither the independence nor the manliness to write as they like, and therefore there is no creativeness.

All this applies to what is called "*belles-lettres.*"

As for serious treatises in Russian on sociology, for instance, on art, and so on, I do not read them simply from timidity. In my childhood and early youth I had for some reason a terror of doorkeepers and attendants at the theatre, and that terror has remained with me to this day. I am afraid of them even now. It is said that we are only afraid of what we do not understand. And, indeed, it is very difficult to understand why doorkeepers and theatre attendants are so dignified, haughty, and majestically rude. I feel exactly the same terror when I read serious articles. Their extraordinary dignity, their bantering lordly tone, their familiar manner to foreign authors, their ability to split straws with dignity—all that is beyond my understanding; it is intimidating and utterly unlike the quiet, gentlemanly tone to which I am accustomed when I read the works of our medical and scientific writers. It oppresses me to read not only the articles written by serious Russians, but even works translated or edited by them. The pretentious, edifying tone of the preface; the redundancy of remarks made by the translator, which prevent me from concentrating my attention; the question marks and "sic" in parenthesis scattered all over the book or article by the liberal translator, are to my mind an outrage on the author and on my independence as a reader.

Once I was summoned as an expert to a circuit court; in an interval one of my fellow-experts drew my attention to the rudeness of the public prosecutor to the defendants, among whom there were two ladies of good education. I believe I did not exaggerate at all when I told him that the prosecutor's manner was no ruder than that of the authors of serious articles to one another. Their manners are, indeed, so rude that I cannot speak of them without distaste. They treat one another and the writers they criticize either with superfluous respect, at the sacrifice of their own dignity, or, on the contrary, with far more ruthlessness than I have shown

in my notes and my thoughts in regard to my future son-in-law Gnekker. Accusations of irrationality, of evil intentions, and, indeed, of every sort of crime, form an habitual ornament of serious articles. And that, as young medical men are fond of saying in their monographs, is the *ultima ratio*! Such ways must infallibly have an effect on the morals of the younger generation of writers, and so I am not at all surprised that in the new works with which our literature has been enriched during the last ten or fifteen years the heroes drink too much vodka and the heroines are not over-chaste.

I read French books, and I look out of the window which is open; I can see the spikes of my garden-fence, two or three scraggy trees, and beyond the fence the road, the fields, and beyond them a broad stretch of pinewood. Often I admire a boy and girl, both flaxen-headed and ragged, who clamber on the fence and laugh at my baldness. In their shining little eyes I read, "Go up, go up, thou baldhead!" They are almost the only people who care nothing for my celebrity or my rank.

Visitors do not come to me every day now. I will only mention the visits of Nikolay and Pyotr Ignatyevitch. Nikolay usually comes to me on holidays, with some pretext of business, though really to see me. He arrives very much exhilarated, a thing which never occurs to him in the winter.

"What have you to tell me?" I ask, going out to him in the hall.

"Your Excellency!" he says, pressing his hand to his heart and looking at me with the ecstasy of a lover—"your Excellency! God be my witness! Strike me dead on the spot! *Gaudeamus egitur juventus!*"

And he greedily kisses me on the shoulder, on the sleeve, and on the buttons.

"Is everything going well?" I ask him.

"Your Excellency! So help me God! …"

He persists in grovelling before me for no sort of reason, and soon bores me, so I send him away to the kitchen, where they give him dinner.

Pyotr Ignatyevitch comes to see me on holidays, too, with the special object of seeing me and sharing his thoughts with me. He usually sits down near my table, modest, neat, and reasonable, and does not venture to cross his legs or put his elbows on the table. All the time, in a soft, even, little voice, in rounded bookish phrases, he tells me various, to his mind, very interesting and piquant items of news which he has read in the magazines and journals. They are all alike and may be reduced to this type: "A Frenchman has made a discovery; someone else, a German, has denounced him, proving that the discovery was made in 1870 by some

American; while a third person, also a German, trumps them both by proving they both had made fools of themselves, mistaking bubbles of air for dark pigment under the microscope." Even when he wants to amuse me, Pyotr Ignatyevitch tells me things in the same lengthy, circumstantial manner as though he were defending a thesis, enumerating in detail the literary sources from which he is deriving his narrative, doing his utmost to be accurate as to the date and number of the journals and the name of everyone concerned, invariably mentioning it in full—Jean Jacques Petit, never simply Petit. Sometimes he stays to dinner with us, and then during the whole of dinnertime he goes on telling me the same sort of piquant anecdotes, reducing everyone at table to a state of dejected boredom. If Gnekker and Liza begin talking before him of fugues and counterpoint, Brahms and Bach, he drops his eyes modestly, and is overcome with embarrassment; he is ashamed that such trivial subjects should be discussed before such serious people as him and me.

In my present state of mind five minutes of him is enough to sicken me as though I had been seeing and hearing him for an eternity. I hate the poor fellow. His soft, smooth voice and bookish language exhaust me, and his stories stupefy me.… He cherishes the best of feelings for me, and talks to me simply in order to give me pleasure, and I repay him by looking at him as though I wanted to hypnotize him, and think, "Go, go, go!…" But he is not amenable to thought-suggestion, and sits on and on and on.…

While he is with me I can never shake off the thought, "It's possible when I die he will be appointed to succeed me," and my poor lecture-hall presents itself to me as an oasis in which the spring is died up; and I am ungracious, silent, and surly with Pyotr Ignatyevitch, as though he were to blame for such thoughts, and not I myself. When he begins, as usual, praising up the German savants, instead of making fun of him good-humouredly, as I used to do, I mutter sullenly:

"Asses, your Germans!…"

That is like the late Professor Nikita Krylov, who once, when he was bathing with Pirogov at Revel and vexed at the water's being very cold, burst out with, "Scoundrels, these Germans!" I behave badly with Pyotr Ignatyevitch, and only when he is going away, and from the window I catch a glimpse of his grey hat behind the garden-fence, I want to call out and say, "Forgive me, my dear fellow!"

Dinner is even drearier than in the winter. Gnekker, whom now I hate and despise, dines with us almost every day. I used to endure his presence in silence, now I aim biting remarks at him which make my

wife and daughter blush. Carried away by evil feeling, I often say things that are simply stupid, and I don't know why I say them. So on one occasion it happened that I stared a long time at Gnekker, and, apropos of nothing, I fired off:

> "An eagle may perchance swoop down below a cock,
> But never will the fowl soar upwards to the clouds…"

And the most vexatious thing is that the fowl Gnekker shows himself much cleverer than the eagle professor. Knowing that my wife and daughter are on his side, he takes up the line of meeting my gibes with condescending silence, as though to say:

"The old chap is in his dotage; what's the use of talking to him?"

Or he makes fun of me good-naturedly. It is wonderful how petty a man may become! I am capable of dreaming all dinnertime of how Gnekker will turn out to be an adventurer, how my wife and Liza will come to see their mistake, and how I will taunt them—and such absurd thoughts at the time when I am standing with one foot in the grave!

There are now, too, misunderstandings of which in the old days I had no idea except from hearsay. Though I am ashamed of it, I will describe one that occurred the other day after dinner.

I was sitting in my room smoking a pipe; my wife came in as usual, sat down, and began saying what a good thing it would be for me to go to Harkov now while it is warm and I have free time, and there find out what sort of person our Gnekker is.

"Very good; I will go," I assented.

My wife, pleased with me, got up and was going to the door, but turned back and said:

"By the way, I have another favour to ask of you. I know you will be angry, but it is my duty to warn you.… Forgive my saying it, Nikolay Stepanovitch, but all our neighbours and acquaintances have begun talking about your being so often at Katya's. She is clever and well-educated; I don't deny that her company may be agreeable; but at your age and with your social position it seems strange that you should find pleasure in her society.… Besides, she has such a reputation that…"

All the blood suddenly rushed to my brain, my eyes flashed fire, I leaped up and, clutching at my head and stamping my feet, shouted in a voice unlike my own:

"Let me alone! let me alone! let me alone!"

Probably my face was terrible, my voice was strange, for my wife suddenly turned pale and began shrieking aloud in a despairing voice that was utterly unlike her own. Liza, Gnekker, then Yegor, came running in at our shouts.…

“Let me alone!” I cried; “let me alone! Go away!”

My legs turned numb as though they had ceased to exist; I felt myself falling into someone’s arms; for a little while I still heard weeping, then sank into a swoon which lasted two or three hours.

Now about Katya; she comes to see me every day towards evening, and of course neither the neighbours nor our acquaintances can avoid noticing it. She comes in for a minute and carries me off for a drive with her. She has her own horse and a new chaise bought this summer. Altogether she lives in an expensive style; she has taken a big detached villa with a large garden, and has taken all her town retinue with her—two maids, a coachman… I often ask her:

“Katya, what will you live on when you have spent your father’s money?”

“Then we shall see,” she answers.

“That money, my dear, deserves to be treated more seriously. It was earned by a good man, by honest labour.”

“You have told me that already. I know it.”

At first we drive through the open country, then through the pinewood which is visible from my window. Nature seems to me as beautiful as it always has been, though some evil spirit whispers to me that these pines and fir trees, birds, and white clouds on the sky, will not notice my absence when in three or four months I am dead. Katya loves driving, and she is pleased that it is fine weather and that I am sitting beside her. She is in good spirits and does not say harsh things.

“You are a very good man, Nikolay Stepanovitch,” she says. “You are a rare specimen, and there isn’t an actor who would understand how to play you. Me or Mihail Fyodorovitch, for instance, any poor actor could do, but not you. And I envy you, I envy you horribly! Do you know what I stand for? What?”

She ponders for a minute, and then asks me:

“Nikolay Stepanovitch, I am a negative phenomenon! Yes?”

“Yes,” I answer.

“H’m! what am I to do?”

What answer was I to make her? It is easy to say “work,” or “give your possessions to the poor,” or “know yourself,” and because it is so easy to say that, I don’t know what to answer.

My colleagues when they teach therapeutics advise “the individual study of each separate case.” One has but to obey this advice to gain the conviction that the methods recommended in the textbooks as the best and as providing a safe basis for treatment turn out to be quite unsuitable in individual cases. It is just the same in moral ailments.

But I must make some answer, and I say:

“You have too much free time, my dear; you absolutely must take up some occupation. After all, why shouldn’t you be an actress again if it is your vocation?”

“I cannot!”

“Your tone and manner suggest that you are a victim. I don’t like that, my dear; it is your own fault. Remember, you began with falling out with people and methods, but you have done nothing to make either better. You did not struggle with evil, but were cast down by it, and you are not the victim of the struggle, but of your own impotence. Well, of course you were young and inexperienced then; now it may all be different. Yes, really, go on the stage. You will work, you will serve a sacred art.”

“Don’t pretend, Nikolay Stepanovitch,” Katya interrupts me. “Let us make a compact once for all; we will talk about actors, actresses, and authors, but we will let art alone. You are a splendid and rare person, but you don’t know enough about art sincerely to think it sacred. You have no instinct or feeling for art. You have been hard at work all your life, and have not had time to acquire that feeling. Altogether… I don’t like talk about art,” she goes on nervously. “I don’t like it! And, my goodness, how they have vulgarized it!”

“Who has vulgarized it?”

“They have vulgarized it by drunkenness, the newspapers by their familiar attitude, clever people by philosophy.”

“Philosophy has nothing to do with it.”

“Yes, it has. If anyone philosophizes about it, it shows he does not understand it.”

To avoid bitterness I hasten to change the subject, and then sit a long time silent. Only when we are driving out of the wood and turning towards Katya’s villa I go back to my former question, and say:

“You have still not answered me, why you don’t want to go on the stage.”

“Nikolay Stepanovitch, this is cruel!” she cries, and suddenly flushes all over. “You want me to tell you the truth aloud? Very well, if… if you like it! I have no talent! No talent and… and a great deal of vanity! So there!”

After making this confession she turns her face away from me, and to hide the trembling of her hands tugs violently at the reins.

As we are driving towards her villa we see Mihail Fyodorovitch walking near the gate, impatiently awaiting us.

“That Mihail Fyodorovitch again!” says Katya with vexation. “Do rid me of him, please! I am sick and tired of him… bother him!”

Mihail Fyodorovitch ought to have gone abroad long ago, but he puts off going from week to week. Of late there have been certain changes in him. He looks, as it were, sunken, has taken to drinking until he is tipsy, a thing which never used to happen to him, and his black eyebrows are beginning to turn grey. When our chaise stops at the gate he does not conceal his joy and his impatience. He fussily helps me and Katya out, hurriedly asks questions, laughs, rubs his hands, and that gentle, imploring, pure expression, which I used to notice only in his eyes, is now suffused all over his face. He is glad and at the same time he is ashamed of his gladness, ashamed of his habit of spending every evening with Katya. And he thinks it necessary to explain his visit by some obvious absurdity such as: “I was driving by, and I thought I would just look in for a minute.”

We all three go indoors; first we drink tea, then the familiar packs of cards, the big piece of cheese, the fruit, and the bottle of Crimean champagne are put upon the table. The subjects of our conversation are not new; they are just the same as in the winter. We fall foul of the University, the students, and literature and the theatre; the air grows thick and stifling with evil speaking, and poisoned by the breath, not of two toads as in the winter, but of three. Besides the velvety baritone laugh and the giggle like the gasp of a concertina, the maid who waits upon us hears an unpleasant cracked “He, he!” like the chuckle of a general in a vaudeville.

V

There are terrible nights with thunder, lightning, rain, and wind, such as are called among the people “sparrow nights.” There has been one such night in my personal life.

I woke up after midnight and leaped suddenly out of bed. It seemed to me for some reason that I was just immediately going to die. Why did it seem so? I had no sensation in my body that suggested my immediate death, but my soul was oppressed with terror, as though I had suddenly seen a vast menacing glow of fire.

I rapidly struck a light, drank some water straight out of the decanter, then hurried to the open window. The weather outside was magnificent. There was a smell of hay and some other very sweet scent. I could see the spikes of the fence, the gaunt, drowsy trees by the window, the road, the dark streak of woodland, there was a serene, very bright moon in the sky and not a single cloud, perfect stillness, not one leaf stirring. I felt that everything was looking at me and waiting for me to die.…

It was uncanny. I closed the window and ran to my bed. I felt for my pulse, and not finding it in my wrist, tried to find it in my temple, then in my chin, and again in my wrist, and everything I touched was cold and clammy with sweat. My breathing came more and more rapidly, my body was shivering, all my inside was in commotion; I had a sensation on my face and on my bald head as though they were covered with spiders’ webs.

What should I do? Call my family? No; it would be no use. I could not imagine what my wife and Liza would do when they came in to me.

I hid my head under the pillow, closed my eyes, and waited and waited.… My spine was cold; it seemed to be drawn inwards, and I felt as though death were coming upon me stealthily from behind.

“Kee-vee! kee-vee!” I heard a sudden shriek in the night’s stillness, and did not know where it was—in my breast or in the street—“Kee-vee! kee-vee!”

“My God, how terrible!” I would have drunk some more water, but by then it was fearful to open my eyes and I was afraid to raise my head. I was possessed by unaccountable animal terror, and I cannot understand

why I was so frightened: was it that I wanted to live, or that some new unknown pain was in store for me?

Upstairs, overhead, someone moaned or laughed. I listened. Soon afterwards there was a sound of footsteps on the stairs. Someone came hurriedly down, then went up again. A minute later there was a sound of steps downstairs again; someone stopped near my door and listened.

“Who is there?” I cried.

The door opened. I boldly opened my eyes, and saw my wife. Her face was pale and her eyes were tear-stained.

“You are not asleep, Nikolay Stepanovitch?” she asked.

“What is it?”

“For God’s sake, go up and have a look at Liza; there is something the matter with her.…”

“Very good, with pleasure,” I muttered, greatly relieved at not being alone. “Very good, this minute.…”

I followed my wife, heard what she said to me, and was too agitated to understand a word. Patches of light from her candle danced about the stairs, our long shadows trembled. My feet caught in the skirts of my dressing-gown; I gasped for breath, and felt as though something were pursuing me and trying to catch me from behind.

“I shall die on the spot, here on the staircase,” I thought. “On the spot.…” But we passed the staircase, the dark corridor with the Italian windows, and went into Liza’s room. She was sitting on the bed in her nightdress, with her bare feet hanging down, and she was moaning.

“Oh, my God! Oh, my God!” she was muttering, screwing up her eyes at our candle. “I can’t bear it.”

“Liza, my child,” I said, “what is it?”

Seeing me, she began crying out, and flung herself on my neck.

“My kind papa!…” she sobbed—“my dear, good papa… my darling, my pet, I don’t know what is the matter with me.… I am miserable!”

She hugged me, kissed me, and babbled fond words I used to hear from her when she was a child.

“Calm yourself, my child. God be with you,” I said. “There is no need to cry. I am miserable, too.”

I tried to tuck her in; my wife gave her water, and we awkwardly stumbled by her bedside; my shoulder jostled against her shoulder, and meanwhile I was thinking how we used to give our children their bath together.

“Help her! help her!” my wife implored me. “Do something!”

What could I do? I could do nothing. There was some load on the girl's heart; but I did not understand, I knew nothing about it, and could only mutter:

"It's nothing, it's nothing; it will pass. Sleep, sleep!"

To make things worse, there was a sudden sound of dogs howling, at first subdued and uncertain, then loud, two dogs howling together. I had never attached significance to such omens as the howling of dogs or the shrieking of owls, but on that occasion it sent a pang to my heart, and I hastened to explain the howl to myself.

"It's nonsense," I thought, "the influence of one organism on another. The intensely strained condition of my nerves has infected my wife, Liza, the dog—that is all.… Such infection explains presentiments, forebodings.…"

When a little later I went back to my room to write a prescription for Liza, I no longer thought I should die at once, but only had such a weight, such a feeling of oppression in my soul that I felt actually sorry that I had not died on the spot. For a long time I stood motionless in the middle of the room, pondering what to prescribe for Liza. But the moans overhead ceased, and I decided to prescribe nothing, and yet I went on standing there.…

There was a deathlike stillness, such a stillness, as some author has expressed it, "it rang in one's ears." Time passed slowly; the streaks of moonlight on the windowsill did not shift their position, but seemed as though frozen.… It was still some time before dawn.

But the gate in the fence creaked, someone stole in and, breaking a twig from one of those scraggy trees, cautiously tapped on the window with it.

"Nikolay Stepanovitch," I heard a whisper. "Nikolay Stepanovitch."

I opened the window, and fancied I was dreaming: under the window, huddled against the wall, stood a woman in a black dress, with the moonlight bright upon her, looking at me with great eyes. Her face was pale, stern, and weird-looking in the moonlight, like marble, her chin was quivering.

"It is I," she said—"I… Katya."

In the moonlight all women's eyes look big and black, all people look taller and paler, and that was probably why I had not recognized her for the first minute.

"What is it?"

"Forgive me!" she said. "I suddenly felt unbearably miserable… I couldn't stand it, so came here. There was a light in your window and…

and I ventured to knock.… I beg your pardon. Ah! if you knew how miserable I am! What are you doing just now?”

“Nothing.… I can’t sleep.”

“I had a feeling that there was something wrong, but that is nonsense.”

Her brows were lifted, her eyes shone with tears, and her whole face was lighted up with the familiar look of trustfulness which I had not seen for so long.

“Nikolay Stepanovitch,” she said imploringly, stretching out both hands to me, “my precious friend, I beg you, I implore you.… If you don’t despise my affection and respect for you, consent to what I ask of you.”

“What is it?”

“Take my money from me!”

“Come! what an idea! What do I want with your money?”

“You’ll go away somewhere for your health.… You ought to go for your health. Will you take it? Yes? Nikolay Stepanovitch darling, yes?”

She looked greedily into my face and repeated: “Yes, you will take it?”

“No, my dear, I won’t take it,” I said. “Thank you.”

She turned her back upon me and bowed her head. Probably I refused her in a tone which made further conversation about money impossible.

“Go home to bed,” I said. “We will see each other tomorrow.”

“So you don’t consider me your friend?” she asked dejectedly.

“I don’t say that. But your money would be no use to me now.”

“I beg your pardon…” she said, dropping her voice a whole octave. “I understand you… to be indebted to a person like me… a retired actress.… But, goodbye.…”

And she went away so quickly that I had not time even to say goodbye.

VI

I am in Harkov.

As it would be useless to contend against my present mood and, indeed, beyond my power, I have made up my mind that the last days of my life shall at least be irreproachable externally. If I am unjust in regard to my wife and daughter, which I fully recognize, I will try and do as she wishes; since she wants me to go to Harkov, I go to Harkov. Besides, I have become of late so indifferent to everything that it is really all the same to me where I go, to Harkov, or to Paris, or to Berditchev.

I arrived here at midday, and have put up at the hotel not far from the cathedral. The train was jolting, there were draughts, and now I am sitting on my bed, holding my head and expecting tic douloureux. I ought to have gone today to see some professors of my acquaintance, but I have neither strength nor inclination.

The old corridor attendant comes in and asks whether I have brought my bed-linen. I detain him for five minutes, and put several questions to him about Gnekker, on whose account I have come here. The attendant turns out to be a native of Harkov; he knows the town like the fingers of his hand, but does not remember any household of the surname of Gnekker. I question him about the estate—the same answer.

The clock in the corridor strikes one, then two, then three.… These last months in which I am waiting for death seem much longer than the whole of my life. And I have never before been so ready to resign myself to the slowness of time as now. In the old days, when one sat in the station and waited for a train, or presided in an examination room, a quarter of an hour would seem an eternity. Now I can sit all night on my bed without moving, and quite unconcernedly reflect that tomorrow will be followed by another night as long and colourless, and the day after tomorrow.

In the corridor it strikes five, six, seven.… It grows dark.

There is a dull pain in my cheek, the tic beginning. To occupy myself with thoughts, I go back to my old point of view, when I was not so indifferent, and ask myself why I, a distinguished man, a privy councillor, am sitting in this little hotel room, on this bed with the

unfamiliar grey quilt. Why am I looking at that cheap tin washing-stand and listening to the whirr of the wretched clock in the corridor? Is all this in keeping with my fame and my lofty position? And I answer these questions with a jeer. I am amused by the naivete with which I used in my youth to exaggerate the value of renown and of the exceptional position which celebrities are supposed to enjoy. I am famous, my name is pronounced with reverence, my portrait has been both in the *Niva* and in the *Illustrated News of the World*; I have read my biography even in a German magazine. And what of all that? Here I am sitting utterly alone in a strange town, on a strange bed, rubbing my aching cheek with my hand.… Domestic worries, the hard-heartedness of creditors, the rudeness of the railway servants, the inconveniences of the passport system, the expensive and unwholesome food in the refreshment rooms, the general rudeness and coarseness in social intercourse—all this, and a great deal more which would take too long to reckon up, affects me as much as any working man who is famous only in his alley. In what way, does my exceptional position find expression? Admitting that I am celebrated a thousand times over, that I am a hero of whom my country is proud. They publish bulletins of my illness in every paper, letters of sympathy come to me by post from my colleagues, my pupils, the general public; but all that does not prevent me from dying in a strange bed, in misery, in utter loneliness. Of course, no one is to blame for that; but I in my foolishness dislike my popularity. I feel as though it had cheated me.

At ten o’clock I fall asleep, and in spite of the tic I sleep soundly, and should have gone on sleeping if I had not been awakened. Soon after one came a sudden knock at the door.

“Who is there?”

“A telegram.”

“You might have waited till tomorrow,” I say angrily, taking the telegram from the attendant. “Now I shall not get to sleep again.”

“I am sorry. Your light was burning, so I thought you were not asleep.”

I tear open the telegram and look first at the signature. From my wife.

“What does she want?”

“Gnekker was secretly married to Liza yesterday. Return.”

I read the telegram, and my dismay does not last long. I am dismayed, not by what Liza and Gnekker have done, but by the indifference with which I hear of their marriage. They say philosophers and the truly wise are indifferent. It is false: indifference is the paralysis of the soul; it is premature death.

I go to bed again, and begin trying to think of something to occupy my mind. What am I to think about? I feel as though everything had been thought over already and there is nothing which could hold my attention now.

When daylight comes I sit up in bed with my arms round my knees, and to pass the time I try to know myself. “Know thyself” is excellent and useful advice; it is only a pity that the ancients never thought to indicate the means of following this precept.

When I have wanted to understand somebody or myself I have considered, not the actions, in which everything is relative, but the desires.

“Tell me what you want, and I will tell you what manner of man you are.”

And now I examine myself: what do I want?

I want our wives, our children, our friends, our pupils, to love in us, not our fame, not the brand and not the label, but to love us as ordinary men. Anything else? I should like to have had helpers and successors. Anything else? I should like to wake up in a hundred years’ time and to have just a peep out of one eye at what is happening in science. I should have liked to have lived another ten years… What further? Why, nothing further. I think and think, and can think of nothing more. And however much I might think, and however far my thoughts might travel, it is clear to me that there is nothing vital, nothing of great importance in my desires. In my passion for science, in my desire to live, in this sitting on a strange bed, and in this striving to know myself—in all the thoughts, feelings, and ideas I form about everything, there is no common bond to connect it all into one whole. Every feeling and every thought exists apart in me; and in all my criticisms of science, the theatre, literature, my pupils, and in all the pictures my imagination draws, even the most skilful analyst could not find what is called a general idea, or the god of a living man.

And if there is not that, then there is nothing.

In a state so poverty-stricken, a serious ailment, the fear of death, the influences of circumstance and men were enough to turn upside down and scatter in fragments all which I had once looked upon as my theory of life, and in which I had seen the meaning and joy of my existence. So there is nothing surprising in the fact that I have overshadowed the last months of my life with thoughts and feelings only worthy of a slave and barbarian, and that now I am indifferent and take no heed of the dawn. When a man has not in him what is loftier and mightier than all external

impressions a bad cold is really enough to upset his equilibrium and make him begin to see an owl in every bird, to hear a dog howling in every sound. And all his pessimism or optimism with his thoughts great and small have at such times significance as symptoms and nothing more.

I am vanquished. If it is so, it is useless to think, it is useless to talk. I will sit and wait in silence for what is to come.

In the morning the corridor attendant brings me tea and a copy of the local newspaper. Mechanically I read the advertisements on the first page, the leading article, the extracts from the newspapers and journals, the chronicle of events.… In the latter I find, among other things, the following paragraph: “Our distinguished savant, Professor Nikolay Stepanovitch So-and-so, arrived yesterday in Harkov, and is staying in the So-and-so Hotel.”

Apparently, illustrious names are created to live on their own account, apart from those that bear them. Now my name is promenading tranquilly about Harkov; in another three months, printed in gold letters on my monument, it will shine bright as the sun itself, while I shall be already under the moss.

A light tap at the door. Somebody wants me.

“Who is there? Come in.”

The door opens, and I step back surprised and hurriedly wrap my dressing-gown round me. Before me stands Katya.

“How do you do?” she says, breathless with running upstairs. “You didn’t expect me? I have come here, too.… I have come, too!”

She sits down and goes on, hesitating and not looking at me.

“Why don’t you speak to me? I have come, too… today.… I found out that you were in this hotel, and have come to you.”

“Very glad to see you,” I say, shrugging my shoulders, “but I am surprised. You seem to have dropped from the skies. What have you come for?”

“Oh… I’ve simply come.”

Silence. Suddenly she jumps up impulsively and comes to me.

“Nikolay Stepanovitch,” she says, turning pale and pressing her hands on her bosom—“Nikolay Stepanovitch, I cannot go on living like this! I cannot! For God’s sake tell me quickly, this minute, what I am to do! Tell me, what am I to do?”

“What can I tell you?” I ask in perplexity. “I can do nothing.”

“Tell me, I beseech you,” she goes on, breathing hard and trembling all over. “I swear that I cannot go on living like this. It’s too much for

me!”

She sinks on a chair and begins sobbing. She flings her head back, wrings her hands, taps with her feet; her hat falls off and hangs bobbing on its elastic; her hair is ruffled.

“Help me! help me!” she implores me. “I cannot go on!”

She takes her handkerchief out of her travelling-bag, and with it pulls out several letters, which fall from her lap to the floor. I pick them up, and on one of them I recognize the handwriting of Mihail Fyodorovitch and accidentally read a bit of a word “passionat…”

“There is nothing I can tell you, Katya,” I say.

“Help me!” she sobs, clutching at my hand and kissing it. “You are my father, you know, my only friend! You are clever, educated; you have lived so long; you have been a teacher! Tell me, what am I to do?”

“Upon my word, Katya, I don’t know.…”

I am utterly at a loss and confused, touched by her sobs, and hardly able to stand.

“Let us have lunch, Katya,” I say, with a forced smile. “Give over crying.”

And at once I add in a sinking voice:

“I shall soon be gone, Katya.…”

“Only one word, only one word!” she weeps, stretching out her hands to me.

“What am I to do?”

“You are a queer girl, really…” I mutter. “I don’t understand it! So sensible, and all at once crying your eyes out.…”

A silence follows. Katya straightens her hair, puts on her hat, then crumples up the letters and stuffs them in her bag—and all this deliberately, in silence. Her face, her bosom, and her gloves are wet with tears, but her expression now is cold and forbidding.… I look at her, and feel ashamed that I am happier than she. The absence of what my philosophic colleagues call a general idea I have detected in myself only just before death, in the decline of my days, while the soul of this poor girl has known and will know no refuge all her life, all her life!

“Let us have lunch, Katya,” I say.

“No, thank you,” she answers coldly. Another minute passes in silence. “I don’t like Harkov,” I say; “it’s so grey here—such a grey town.”

“Yes, perhaps.… It’s ugly. I am here not for long, passing through. I am going on today.”

“Where?”

“To the Crimea… that is, to the Caucasus.”

“Oh! For long?”

“I don’t know.”

Katya gets up, and, with a cold smile, holds out her hand without looking at me.

I want to ask her, “Then, you won’t be at my funeral?” but she does not look at me; her hand is cold and, as it were, strange. I escort her to the door in silence. She goes out, walks down the long corridor without looking back; she knows that I am looking after her, and most likely she will look back at the turn.

No, she did not look back. I’ve seen her black dress for the last time: her steps have died away. Farewell, my treasure!

THE TEACHER OF LITERATURE

I

There was the thud of horses' hoofs on the wooden floor; they brought out of the stable the black horse, Count Nulin; then the white, Giant; then his sister Maika. They were all magnificent, expensive horses. Old Shelestov saddled Giant and said, addressing his daughter Masha:

"Well, Marie Godefroi, come, get on! Hopla!"

Masha Shelestov was the youngest of the family; she was eighteen, but her family could not get used to thinking that she was not a little girl, and so they still called her Manya and Manyusa; and after there had been a circus in the town which she had eagerly visited, everyone began to call her Marie Godefroi.

"Hop-la!" she cried, mounting Giant. Her sister Varya got on Maika, Nikitin on Count Nulin, the officers on their horses, and the long picturesque cavalcade, with the officers in white tunics and the ladies in their riding habits, moved at a walking pace out of the yard.

Nikitin noticed that when they were mounting the horses and afterwards riding out into the street, Masha for some reason paid attention to no one but himself. She looked anxiously at him and at Count Nulin and said:

"You must hold him all the time on the curb, Sergey Vassilitch. Don't let him shy. He's pretending."

And either because her Giant was very friendly with Count Nulin, or perhaps by chance, she rode all the time beside Nikitin, as she had done the day before, and the day before that. And he looked at her graceful little figure sitting on the proud white beast, at her delicate profile, at the chimneypot hat, which did not suit her at all and made her look older than her age—looked at her with joy, with tenderness, with rapture; listened to her, taking in little of what she said, and thought:

“I promise on my honour, I swear to God, I won’t be afraid and I’ll speak to her today.”

It was seven o’clock in the evening—the time when the scent of white acacia and lilac is so strong that the air and the very trees seem heavy with the fragrance. The band was already playing in the town gardens. The horses made a resounding thud on the pavement, on all sides there were sounds of laughter, talk, and the banging of gates. The soldiers they met saluted the officers, the schoolboys bowed to Nikitin, and all the people who were hurrying to the gardens to hear the band were pleased at the sight of the party. And how warm it was! How soft-looking were the clouds scattered carelessly about the sky, how kindly and comforting the shadows of the poplars and the acacias, which stretched across the street and reached as far as the balconies and second stories of the houses on the other side.

They rode on out of the town and set off at a trot along the high road. Here there was no scent of lilac and acacia, no music of the band, but there was the fragrance of the fields, there was the green of young rye and wheat, the marmots were squeaking, the rooks were cawing. Wherever one looked it was green, with only here and there black patches of bare ground, and far away to the left in the cemetery a white streak of apple-blossom.

They passed the slaughterhouses, then the brewery, and overtook a military band hastening to the suburban gardens.

“Polyansky has a very fine horse, I don’t deny that,” Masha said to Nikitin, with a glance towards the officer who was riding beside Varya. “But it has blemishes. That white patch on its left leg ought not to be there, and, look, it tosses its head. You can’t train it not to now; it will toss its head till the end of its days.”

Masha was as passionate a lover of horses as her father. She felt a pang when she saw other people with fine horses, and was pleased when she saw defects in them. Nikitin knew nothing about horses; it made absolutely no difference to him whether he held his horse on the bridle or on the curb, whether he trotted or galloped; he only felt that his position was strained and unnatural, and that consequently the officers who knew how to sit in their saddles must please Masha more than he could. And he was jealous of the officers.

As they rode by the suburban gardens someone suggested their going in and getting some seltzer water. They went in. There were no trees but oaks in the gardens; they had only just come into leaf, so that through the young foliage the whole garden could still be seen with its platform, little

tables, and swings, and the crows' nests were visible, looking like big hats. The party dismounted near a table and asked for seltzer water. People they knew, walking about the garden, came up to them. Among them the army doctor in high boots, and the conductor of the band, waiting for the musicians. The doctor must have taken Nikitin for a student, for he asked: "Have you come for the summer holidays?"

"No, I am here permanently," answered Nikitin. "I am a teacher at the school."

"You don't say so?" said the doctor, with surprise. "So young and already a teacher?"

"Young, indeed! My goodness, I'm twenty-six!"

"You have a beard and moustache, but yet one would never guess you were more than twenty-two or twenty-three. How young-looking you are!"

"What a beast!" thought Nikitin. "He, too, takes me for a whippersnapper!"

He disliked it extremely when people referred to his youth, especially in the presence of women or the schoolboys. Ever since he had come to the town as a master in the school he had detested his own youthful appearance. The schoolboys were not afraid of him, old people called him "young man," ladies preferred dancing with him to listening to his long arguments, and he would have given a great deal to be ten years older.

From the garden they went on to the Shelestovs' farm. There they stopped at the gate and asked the bailiff's wife, Praskovya, to bring some new milk. Nobody drank the milk; they all looked at one another, laughed, and galloped back. As they rode back the band was playing in the suburban garden; the sun was setting behind the cemetery, and half the sky was crimson from the sunset.

Masha again rode beside Nikitin. He wanted to tell her how passionately he loved her, but he was afraid he would be overheard by the officers and Varya, and he was silent. Masha was silent, too, and he felt why she was silent and why she was riding beside him, and was so happy that the earth, the sky, the lights of the town, the black outline of the brewery—all blended for him into something very pleasant and comforting, and it seemed to him as though Count Nulin were stepping on air and would climb up into the crimson sky.

They arrived home. The samovar was already boiling on the table, old Shelestov was sitting with his friends, officials in the Circuit Court, and as usual he was criticizing something.

“It’s loutishness!” he said. “Loutishness and nothing more. Yes!”

Since Nikitin had been in love with Masha, everything at the Shelestovs’ pleased him: the house, the garden, and the evening tea, and the wickerwork chairs, and the old nurse, and even the word “loutishness,” which the old man was fond of using. The only thing he did not like was the number of cats and dogs and the Egyptian pigeons, who moaned disconsolately in a big cage in the verandah. There were so many house-dogs and yard-dogs that he had only learnt to recognize two of them in the course of his acquaintance with the Shelestovs: Mushka and Som. Mushka was a little mangy dog with a shaggy face, spiteful and spoiled. She hated Nikitin: when she saw him she put her head on one side, showed her teeth, and began: “Rrr… nga-nga-nga… rrr…!” Then she would get under his chair, and when he would try to drive her away she would go off into piercing yaps, and the family would say: “Don’t be frightened. She doesn’t bite. She is a good dog.”

Som was a tall black dog with long legs and a tail as hard as a stick. At dinner and tea he usually moved about under the table, and thumped on people’s boots and on the legs of the table with his tail. He was a good-natured, stupid dog, but Nikitin could not endure him because he had the habit of putting his head on people’s knees at dinner and messing their trousers with saliva. Nikitin had more than once tried to hit him on his head with a knife-handle, to flip him on the nose, had abused him, had complained of him, but nothing saved his trousers.

After their ride the tea, jam, rusks, and butter seemed very nice. They all drank their first glass in silence and with great relish; over the second they began an argument. It was always Varya who started the arguments at tea; she was good-looking, handsomer than Masha, and was considered the cleverest and most cultured person in the house, and she behaved with dignity and severity, as an eldest daughter should who has taken the place of her dead mother in the house. As the mistress of the house, she felt herself entitled to wear a dressing gown in the presence of her guests, and to call the officers by their surnames; she looked on Masha as a little girl, and talked to her as though she were a schoolmistress. She used to speak of herself as an old maid—so she was certain she would marry.

Every conversation, even about the weather, she invariably turned into an argument. She had a passion for catching at words, pouncing on contradictions, quibbling over phrases. You would begin talking to her, and she would stare at you and suddenly interrupt: “Excuse me, excuse me, Petrov, the other day you said the very opposite!”

Or she would smile ironically and say: “I notice, though, you begin to advocate the principles of the secret police. I congratulate you.”

If you jested or made a pun, you would hear her voice at once: “That’s stale,” “That’s pointless.” If an officer ventured on a joke, she would make a contemptuous grimace and say, “An army joke!”

And she rolled the *r* so impressively that Mushka invariably answered from under a chair, “Rrr… nga-nga-nga…!”

On this occasion at tea the argument began with Nikitin’s mentioning the school examinations.

“Excuse me, Sergey Vassilitch,” Varya interrupted him. “You say it’s difficult for the boys. And whose fault is that, let me ask you? For instance, you set the boys in the eighth class an essay on ‘Pushkin as a Psychologist.’ To begin with, you shouldn’t set such a difficult subject; and, secondly, Pushkin was not a psychologist. Shtchedrin now, or Dostoevsky let us say, is a different matter, but Pushkin is a great poet and nothing more.”

“Shtchedrin is one thing, and Pushkin is another,” Nikitin answered sulkily.

“I know you don’t think much of Shtchedrin at the high school, but that’s not the point. Tell me, in what sense is Pushkin a psychologist?”

“Why, do you mean to say he was not a psychologist? If you like, I’ll give you examples.”

And Nikitin recited several passages from *Onyegin* and then from *Boris Godunov*.

“I see no psychology in that.” Varya sighed. “The psychologist is the man who describes the recesses of the human soul, and that’s fine poetry and nothing more.”

“I know the sort of psychology you want,” said Nikitin, offended. “You want someone to saw my finger with a blunt saw while I howl at the top of my voice—that’s what you mean by psychology.”

“That’s poor! But still you haven’t shown me in what sense Pushkin is a psychologist?”

When Nikitin had to argue against anything that seemed to him narrow, conventional, or something of that kind, he usually leaped up from his seat, clutched at his head with both hands, and began with a moan, running from one end of the room to another. And it was the same now: he jumped up, clutched his head in his hands, and with a moan walked round the table, then he sat down a little way off.

The officers took his part. Captain Polyansky began assuring Varya that Pushkin really was a psychologist, and to prove it quoted two lines

from Lermontov; Lieutenant Gernet said that if Pushkin had not been a psychologist they would not have erected a monument to him in Moscow.

"That's loutishness!" was heard from the other end of the table. "I said as much to the governor: 'It's loutishness, your Excellency,' I said."

"I won't argue any more," cried Nikitin. "It's unending.… Enough! Ach, get away, you nasty dog!" he cried to Som, who laid his head and paw on his knee.

"Rrr… nga-nga-nga!" came from under the table.

"Admit that you are wrong!" cried Varya. "Own up!"

But some young ladies came in, and the argument dropped of itself. They all went into the drawing room. Varya sat down at the piano and began playing dances. They danced first a waltz, then a polka, then a quadrille with a grand chain which Captain Polyansky led through all the rooms, then a waltz again.

During the dancing the old men sat in the drawing room, smoking and looking at the young people. Among them was Shebaldin, the director of the municipal bank, who was famed for his love of literature and dramatic art. He had founded the local Musical and Dramatic Society, and took part in the performances himself, confining himself, for some reason, to playing comic footmen or to reading in a singsong voice *The Woman Who Was a Sinner*. His nickname in the town was "the Mummy," as he was tall, very lean and scraggy, and always had a solemn air and a fixed, lustreless eye. He was so devoted to the dramatic art that he even shaved his moustache and beard, and this made him still more like a mummy.

After the grand chain, he shuffled up to Nikitin sideways, coughed, and said:

"I had the pleasure of being present during the argument at tea. I fully share your opinion. We are of one mind, and it would be a great pleasure to me to talk to you. Have you read Lessing on the dramatic art of Hamburg?"

"No, I haven't."

Shebaldin was horrified, and waved his hands as though he had burnt his fingers, and saying nothing more, staggered back from Nikitin. Shebaldin's appearance, his question, and his surprise, struck Nikitin as funny, but he thought none the less:

"It really is awkward. I am a teacher of literature, and to this day I've not read Lessing. I must read him."

Before supper the whole company, old and young, sat down to play “fate.” They took two packs of cards: one pack was dealt round to the company, the other was laid on the table face downwards.

“The one who has this card in his hand,” old Shelestov began solemnly, lifting the top card of the second pack, “is fated to go into the nursery and kiss nurse.”

The pleasure of kissing the nurse fell to the lot of Shebaldin. They all crowded round him, took him to the nursery, and laughing and clapping their hands, made him kiss the nurse. There was a great uproar and shouting.

“Not so ardently!” cried Shelestov with tears of laughter. “Not so ardently!”

It was Nikitin’s “fate” to hear the confessions of all. He sat on a chair in the middle of the drawing room. A shawl was brought and put over his head. The first who came to confess to him was Varya.

“I know your sins,” Nikitin began, looking in the darkness at her stern profile. “Tell me, madam, how do you explain your walking with Polyansky every day? Oh, it’s not for nothing she walks with an hussar!”

“That’s poor,” said Varya, and walked away.

Then under the shawl he saw the shine of big motionless eyes, caught the lines of a dear profile in the dark, together with a familiar, precious fragrance which reminded Nikitin of Masha’s room.

“Marie Godefroi,” he said, and did not know his own voice, it was so soft and tender, “what are your sins?”

Masha screwed up her eyes and put out the tip of her tongue at him, then she laughed and went away. And a minute later she was standing in the middle of the room, clapping her hands and crying:

“Supper, supper, supper!”

And they all streamed into the dining room. At supper Varya had another argument, and this time with her father. Polyansky ate stolidly, drank red wine, and described to Nikitin how once in a winter campaign he had stood all night up to his knees in a bog; the enemy was so near that they were not allowed to speak or smoke, the night was cold and dark, a piercing wind was blowing. Nikitin listened and stole side-glances at Masha. She was gazing at him immovably, without blinking, as though she was pondering something or was lost in a reverie.… It was pleasure and agony to him both at once.

“Why does she look at me like that?” was the question that fretted him. “It’s awkward. People may notice it. Oh, how young, how naive she is!”

The party broke up at midnight. When Nikitin went out at the gate, a window opened on the first-floor, and Masha showed herself at it.

"Sergey Vassilitch!" she called.

"What is it?"

"I tell you what…" said Masha, evidently thinking of something to say. "I tell you what… Polyansky said he would come in a day or two with his camera and take us all. We must meet here."

"Very well."

Masha vanished, the window was slammed, and someone immediately began playing the piano in the house.

"Well, it is a house!" thought Nikitin while he crossed the street. "A house in which there is no moaning except from Egyptian pigeons, and they only do it because they have no other means of expressing their joy!"

But the Shelestovs were not the only festive household. Nikitin had not gone two hundred paces before he heard the strains of a piano from another house. A little further he met a peasant playing the balalaika at the gate. In the gardens the band struck up a potpourri of Russian songs.

Nikitin lived nearly half a mile from the Shelestoys' in a flat of eight rooms at the rent of three hundred roubles a year, which he shared with his colleague Ippolit Ippolititch, a teacher of geography and history. When Nikitin went in this Ippolit Ippolititch, a snub-nosed, middle-aged man with a reddish beard, with a coarse, good-natured, unintellectual face like a workman's, was sitting at the table correcting his pupils' maps. He considered that the most important and necessary part of the study of geography was the drawing of maps, and of the study of history the learning of dates: he would sit for nights together correcting in blue pencil the maps drawn by the boys and girls he taught, or making chronological tables.

"What a lovely day it has been!" said Nikitin, going in to him. "I wonder at you—how can you sit indoors?"

Ippolit Ippolititch was not a talkative person; he either remained silent or talked of things which everybody knew already. Now what he answered was:

"Yes, very fine weather. It's May now; we soon shall have real summer. And summer's a very different thing from winter. In the winter you have to heat the stoves, but in summer you can keep warm without. In summer you have your window open at night and still are warm, and in winter you are cold even with the double frames in."

Nikitin had not sat at the table for more than one minute before he was bored.

“Goodnight!” he said, getting up and yawning. “I wanted to tell you something romantic concerning myself, but you are—geography! If one talks to you of love, you will ask one at once, ‘What was the date of the Battle of Kalka?’ Confound you, with your battles and your capes in Siberia!”

“What are you cross about?”

“Why, it is vexatious!”

And vexed that he had not spoken to Masha, and that he had no one to talk to of his love, he went to his study and lay down upon the sofa. It was dark and still in the study. Lying gazing into the darkness, Nikitin for some reason began thinking how in two or three years he would go to Petersburg, how Masha would see him off at the station and would cry; in Petersburg he would get a long letter from her in which she would entreat him to come home as quickly as possible. And he would write to her.… He would begin his letter like that: “My dear little rat!”

“Yes, my dear little rat!” he said, and he laughed.

He was lying in an uncomfortable position. He put his arms under his head and put his left leg over the back of the sofa. He felt more comfortable. Meanwhile a pale light was more and more perceptible at the windows, sleepy cocks crowed in the yard. Nikitin went on thinking how he would come back from Petersburg, how Masha would meet him at the station, and with a shriek of delight would fling herself on his neck; or, better still, he would cheat her and come home by stealth late at night: the cook would open the door, then he would go on tiptoe to the bedroom, undress noiselessly, and jump into bed! And she would wake up and be overjoyed.

It was beginning to get quite light. By now there were no windows, no study. On the steps of the brewery by which they had ridden that day Masha was sitting, saying something. Then she took Nikitin by the arm and went with him to the suburban garden. There he saw the oaks and, the crows’ nests like hats. One of the nests rocked; out of it peeped Shebaldin, shouting loudly: “You have not read Lessing!”

Nikitin shuddered all over and opened his eyes. Ippolit Ippolititch was standing before the sofa, and throwing back his head, was putting on his cravat.

“Get up; it’s time for school,” he said. “You shouldn’t sleep in your clothes; it spoils your clothes. You should sleep in your bed, undressed.”

And as usual he began slowly and emphatically saying what everybody knew.

Nikitin's first lesson was on Russian language in the second class. When at nine o'clock punctually he went into the classroom, he saw written on the blackboard two large letters—M. S. That, no doubt, meant Masha Shelestov.

"They've scented it out already, the rascals…" thought Nikitin. "How is it they know everything?"

The second lesson was in the fifth class. And there two letters, M. S., were written on the blackboard; and when he went out of the classroom at the end of the lesson, he heard the shout behind him as though from a theatre gallery:

"Hurrah for Masha Shelestov!"

His head was heavy from sleeping in his clothes, his limbs were weighted down with inertia. The boys, who were expecting every day to break up before the examinations, did nothing, were restless, and so bored that they got into mischief. Nikitin, too, was restless, did not notice their pranks, and was continually going to the window. He could see the street brilliantly lighted up with the sun; above the houses the blue limpid sky, the birds, and far, far away, beyond the gardens and the houses, vast indefinite distance, the forests in the blue haze, the smoke from a passing train.…

Here two officers in white tunics, playing with their whips, passed in the street in the shade of the acacias. Here a lot of Jews, with grey beards, and caps on, drove past in a wagonette.… The governess walked by with the director's granddaughter. Som ran by in the company of two other dogs.… And then Varya, wearing a simple grey dress and red stockings, carrying the *Vyestnik Evropi* in her hand, passed by. She must have been to the town library.…

And it would be a long time before lessons were over at three o'clock! And after school he could not go home nor to the Shelestovs', but must go to give a lesson at Wolf's. This Wolf, a wealthy Jew who had turned Lutheran, did not send his children to the high school, but had them taught at home by the high school masters, and paid five roubles a lesson.

He was bored, bored, bored.

At three o'clock he went to Wolf's and spent there, as it seemed to him, an eternity. He left there at five o'clock, and before seven he had to be at the high school again to a meeting of the masters—to draw up the plan for the viva voce examination of the fourth and sixth classes.

When late in the evening he left the high school and went to the Shelestovs', his heart was beating and his face was flushed. A month before, even a week before, he had, every time that he made up his mind to speak to her, prepared a whole speech, with an introduction and a conclusion. Now he had not one word ready; everything was in a muddle in his head, and all he knew was that today he would *certainly* declare himself, and that it was utterly impossible to wait any longer.

"I will ask her to come to the garden," he thought; "we'll walk about a little and I'll speak."

There was not a soul in the hall; he went into the dining room and then into the drawing room.… There was no one there either. He could hear Varya arguing with someone upstairs and the clink of the dressmaker's scissors in the nursery.

There was a little room in the house which had three names: the little room, the passage room, and the dark room. There was a big cupboard in it where they kept medicines, gunpowder, and their hunting gear. Leading from this room to the first floor was a narrow wooden staircase where cats were always asleep. There were two doors in it—one leading to the nursery, one to the drawing room. When Nikitin went into this room to go upstairs, the door from the nursery opened and shut with such a bang that it made the stairs and the cupboard tremble; Masha, in a dark dress, ran in with a piece of blue material in her hand, and, not noticing Nikitin, darted towards the stairs.

"Stay…" said Nikitin, stopping her. "Good evening, Godefroi.… Allow me.…"

He gasped, he did not know what to say; with one hand he held her hand and with the other the blue material. And she was half frightened, half surprised, and looked at him with big eyes.

"Allow me…" Nikitin went on, afraid she would go away. "There's something I must say to you.… Only… it's inconvenient here. I cannot, I am incapable.… Understand, Godefroi, I can't—that's all.…"

The blue material slipped on to the floor, and Nikitin took Masha by the other hand. She turned pale, moved her lips, then stepped back from Nikitin and found herself in the corner between the wall and the cupboard.

"On my honour, I assure you…" he said softly. "Masha, on my honour.…"

She threw back her head and he kissed her lips, and that the kiss might last longer he put his fingers to her cheeks; and it somehow happened that he found himself in the corner between the cupboard and the wall,

and she put her arms round his neck and pressed her head against his chin.

Then they both ran into the garden. The Shelestoys had a garden of nine acres. There were about twenty old maples and lime trees in it; there was one fir tree, and all the rest were fruit trees: cherries, apples, pears, horse chestnuts, silvery olive trees.… There were heaps of flowers, too.

Nikitin and Masha ran along the avenues in silence, laughed, asked each other from time to time disconnected questions which they did not answer. A crescent moon was shining over the garden, and drowsy tulips and irises were stretching up from the dark grass in its faint light, as though entreating for words of love for them, too.

When Nikitin and Masha went back to the house, the officers and the young ladies were already assembled and dancing the mazurka. Again Polyansky led the grand chain through all the rooms, again after dancing they played “fate.” Before supper, when the visitors had gone into the dining room, Masha, left alone with Nikitin, pressed close to him and said:

“You must speak to papa and Varya yourself; I am ashamed.”

After supper he talked to the old father. After listening to him, Shelestov thought a little and said:

“I am very grateful for the honour you do me and my daughter, but let me speak to you as a friend. I will speak to you, not as a father, but as one gentleman to another. Tell me, why do you want to be married so young? Only peasants are married so young, and that, of course, is loutishness. But why should you? Where’s the satisfaction of putting on the fetters at your age?”

“I am not young!” said Nikitin, offended. “I am in my twenty-seventh year.”

“Papa, the farrier has come!” cried Varya from the other room.

And the conversation broke off. Varya, Masha, and Polyansky saw Nikitin home. When they reached his gate, Varya said:

“Why is it your mysterious Metropolit Metropolititch never shows himself anywhere? He might come and see us.”

The mysterious Ippolit Ippolititch was sitting on his bed, taking off his trousers, when Nikitin went in to him.

“Don’t go to bed, my dear fellow,” said Nikitin breathlessly. “Stop a minute; don’t go to bed!”

Ippolit Ippolititch put on his trousers hurriedly and asked in a flutter:

“What is it?”

“I am going to be married.”

Nikitin sat down beside his companion, and looking at him wonderingly, as though surprised at himself, said:

"Only fancy, I am going to be married! To Masha Shelestov! I made an offer today."

"Well? She seems a good sort of girl. Only she is very young."

"Yes, she is young," sighed Nikitin, and shrugged his shoulders with a careworn air. "Very, very young!"

"She was my pupil at the high school. I know her. She wasn't bad at geography, but she was no good at history. And she was inattentive in class, too."

Nikitin for some reason felt suddenly sorry for his companion, and longed to say something kind and comforting to him.

"My dear fellow, why don't you get married?" he asked. "Why don't you marry Varya, for instance? She is a splendid, first-rate girl! It's true she is very fond of arguing, but a heart… what a heart! She was just asking about you. Marry her, my dear boy! Eh?"

He knew perfectly well that Varya would not marry this dull, snub-nosed man, but still persuaded him to marry her—why?

"Marriage is a serious step," said Ippolit Ippolititch after a moment's thought. "One has to look at it all round and weigh things thoroughly; it's not to be done rashly. Prudence is always a good thing, and especially in marriage, when a man, ceasing to be a bachelor, begins a new life."

And he talked of what everyone has known for ages. Nikitin did not stay to listen, said goodnight, and went to his own room. He undressed quickly and quickly got into bed, in order to be able to think the sooner of his happiness, of Masha, of the future; he smiled, then suddenly recalled that he had not read Lessing.

"I must read him," he thought. "Though, after all, why should I? Bother him!"

And exhausted by his happiness, he fell asleep at once and went on smiling till the morning.

He dreamed of the thud of horses' hoofs on a wooden floor; he dreamed of the black horse Count Nulin, then of the white Giant and its sister Maika, being led out of the stable.

II

“It was very crowded and noisy in the church, and once someone cried out, and the head priest, who was marrying Masha and me, looked through his spectacles at the crowd, and said severely: ‘Don’t move about the church, and don’t make a noise, but stand quietly and pray. You should have the fear of God in your hearts.’

“My best men were two of my colleagues, and Masha’s best men were Captain Polyansky and Lieutenant Gernet. The bishop’s choir sang superbly. The sputtering of the candles, the brilliant light, the gorgeous dresses, the officers, the numbers of gay, happy faces, and a special ethereal look in Masha, everything together—the surroundings and the words of the wedding prayers—moved me to tears and filled me with triumph. I thought how my life had blossomed, how poetically it was shaping itself! Two years ago I was still a student, I was living in cheap furnished rooms, without money, without relations, and, as I fancied then, with nothing to look forward to. Now I am a teacher in the high school in one of the best provincial towns, with a secure income, loved, spoiled. It is for my sake, I thought, this crowd is collected, for my sake three candelabra have been lighted, the deacon is booming, the choir is doing its best; and it’s for my sake that this young creature, whom I soon shall call my wife, is so young, so elegant, and so joyful. I recalled our first meetings, our rides into the country, my declaration of love and the weather, which, as though expressly, was so exquisitely fine all the summer; and the happiness which at one time in my old rooms seemed to me possible only in novels and stories, I was now experiencing in reality—I was now, as it were, holding it in my hands.

“After the ceremony they all crowded in disorder round Masha and me, expressed their genuine pleasure, congratulated us and wished us joy. The brigadier-general, an old man of seventy, confined himself to congratulating Masha, and said to her in a squeaky, aged voice, so loud that it could be heard all over the church:

“‘I hope that even after you are married you may remain the rose you are now, my dear.’

“The officers, the director, and all the teachers smiled from politeness, and I was conscious of an agreeable artificial smile on my face, too. Dear Ippolit Ippolititch, the teacher of history and geography, who always says what everyone has heard before, pressed my hand warmly and said with feeling:

“‘Hitherto you have been unmarried and have lived alone, and now you are married and no longer single.’

“From the church we went to a two-storied house which I am receiving as part of the dowry. Besides that house Masha is bringing me twenty thousand roubles, as well as a piece of waste land with a shanty on it, where I am told there are numbers of hens and ducks which are not looked after and are turning wild. When I got home from the church, I stretched myself at full length on the low sofa in my new study and began to smoke; I felt snug, cosy, and comfortable, as I never had in my life before. And meanwhile the wedding party were shouting ‘Hurrah!’ while a wretched band in the hall played flourishes and all sorts of trash. Varya, Masha’s sister, ran into the study with a wineglass in her hand, and with a queer, strained expression, as though her mouth were full of water; apparently she had meant to go on further, but she suddenly burst out laughing and sobbing, and the wineglass crashed on the floor. We took her by the arms and led her away.

“‘Nobody can understand!’ she muttered afterwards, lying on the old nurse’s bed in a back room. ‘Nobody, nobody! My God, nobody can understand!’

“But everyone understood very well that she was four years older than her sister Masha, and still unmarried, and that she was crying, not from envy, but from the melancholy consciousness that her time was passing, and perhaps had passed. When they danced the quadrille, she was back in the drawing room with a tear-stained and heavily powdered face, and I saw Captain Polyansky holding a plate of ice before her while she ate it with a spoon.

“It is past five o’clock in the morning. I took up my diary to describe my complete and perfect happiness, and thought I would write a good six pages, and read it tomorrow to Masha; but, strange to say, everything is muddled in my head and as misty as a dream, and I can remember vividly nothing but that episode with Varya, and I want to write, ‘Poor Varya!’ I could go on sitting here and writing ‘Poor Varya!’ By the way, the trees have begun rustling; it will rain. The crows are cawing, and my Masha, who has just gone to sleep, has for some reason a sorrowful face.”

For a long while afterwards Nikitin did not write his diary. At the beginning of August he had the school examinations, and after the fifteenth the classes began. As a rule he set off for school before nine in the morning, and before ten o'clock he was looking at his watch and pining for his Masha and his new house. In the lower forms he would set some boy to dictate, and while the boys were writing, would sit in the window with his eyes shut, dreaming; whether he dreamed of the future or recalled the past, everything seemed to him equally delightful, like a fairy tale. In the senior classes they were reading aloud Gogol or Pushkin's prose works, and that made him sleepy; people, trees, fields, horses, rose before his imagination, and he would say with a sigh, as though fascinated by the author:

"How lovely!"

At the midday recess Masha used to send him lunch in a snow-white napkin, and he would eat it slowly, with pauses, to prolong the enjoyment of it; and Ippolit Ippolititch, whose lunch as a rule consisted of nothing but bread, looked at him with respect and envy, and gave expression to some familiar fact, such as:

"Men cannot live without food."

After school Nikitin went straight to give his private lessons, and when at last by six o'clock he got home, he felt excited and anxious, as though he had been away for a year. He would run upstairs breathless, find Masha, throw his arms round her, and kiss her and swear that he loved her, that he could not live without her, declare that he had missed her fearfully, and ask her in trepidation how she was and why she looked so depressed. Then they would dine together. After dinner he would lie on the sofa in his study and smoke, while she sat beside him and talked in a low voice.

His happiest days now were Sundays and holidays, when he was at home from morning till evening. On those days he took part in the naive but extraordinarily pleasant life which reminded him of a pastoral idyl. He was never weary of watching how his sensible and practical Masha was arranging her nest, and anxious to show that he was of some use in the house, he would do something useless—for instance, bring the chaise out of the stable and look at it from every side. Masha had installed a regular dairy with three cows, and in her cellar she had many jugs of milk and pots of sour cream, and she kept it all for butter. Sometimes, by way of a joke, Nikitin would ask her for a glass of milk, and she would be quite upset because it was against her rules; but he would laugh and throw his arms round her, saying:

“There, there; I was joking, my darling! I was joking!”

Or he would laugh at her strictness when, finding in the cupboard some stale bit of cheese or sausage as hard as a stone, she would say seriously:

“They will eat that in the kitchen.”

He would observe that such a scrap was only fit for a mousetrap, and she would reply warmly that men knew nothing about housekeeping, and that it was just the same to the servants if you were to send down a hundredweight of savouries to the kitchen. He would agree, and embrace her enthusiastically. Everything that was just in what she said seemed to him extraordinary and amazing; and what did not fit in with his convictions seemed to him naive and touching.

Sometimes he was in a philosophical mood, and he would begin to discuss some abstract subject while she listened and looked at his face with curiosity.

“I am immensely happy with you, my joy,” he used to say, playing with her fingers or plaiting and unplaiting her hair. “But I don’t look upon this happiness of mine as something that has come to me by chance, as though it had dropped from heaven. This happiness is a perfectly natural, consistent, logical consequence. I believe that man is the creator of his own happiness, and now I am enjoying just what I have myself created. Yes, I speak without false modesty: I have created this happiness myself and I have a right to it. You know my past. My unhappy childhood, without father or mother; my depressing youth, poverty—all this was a struggle, all this was the path by which I made my way to happiness.…”

In October the school sustained a heavy loss: Ippolit Ippolititch was taken ill with erysipelas on the head and died. For two days before his death he was unconscious and delirious, but even in his delirium he said nothing that was not perfectly well known to everyone.

“The Volga flows into the Caspian Sea.… Horses eat oats and hay.…”

There were no lessons at the high school on the day of his funeral. His colleagues and pupils were the coffin-bearers, and the school choir sang all the way to the grave the anthem “Holy God.” Three priests, two deacons, all his pupils and the staff of the boys’ high school, and the bishop’s choir in their best kaftans, took part in the procession. And passersby who met the solemn procession, crossed themselves and said:

“God grant us all such a death.”

Returning home from the cemetery much moved, Nikitin got out his diary from the table and wrote:

“We have just consigned to the tomb Ippolit Ippolititch Ryzhitsky. Peace to your ashes, modest worker! Masha, Varya, and all the women at the funeral, wept from genuine feeling, perhaps because they knew this uninteresting, humble man had never been loved by a woman. I wanted to say a warm word at my colleague’s grave, but I was warned that this might displease the director, as he did not like our poor friend. I believe that this is the first day since my marriage that my heart has been heavy.”

There was no other event of note in the scholastic year.

The winter was mild, with wet snow and no frost; on Epiphany Eve, for instance, the wind howled all night as though it were autumn, and water trickled off the roofs; and in the morning, at the ceremony of the blessing of the water, the police allowed no one to go on the river, because they said the ice was swelling up and looked dark. But in spite of bad weather Nikitin’s life was as happy as in summer. And, indeed, he acquired another source of pleasure; he learned to play Vint. Only one thing troubled him, moved him to anger, and seemed to prevent him from being perfectly happy: the cats and dogs which formed part of his wife’s dowry. The rooms, especially in the morning, always smelt like a menagerie, and nothing could destroy the odour; the cats frequently fought with the dogs. The spiteful beast Mushka was fed a dozen times a day; she still refused to recognize Nikitin and growled at him: “Rrr … nga-nga-nga!”

One night in Lent he was returning home from the club where he had been playing cards. It was dark, raining, and muddy. Nikitin had an unpleasant feeling at the bottom of his heart and could not account for it. He did not know whether it was because he had lost twelve roubles at cards, or whether because one of the players, when they were settling up, had said that of course Nikitin had pots of money, with obvious reference to his wife’s portion. He did not regret the twelve roubles, and there was nothing offensive in what had been said; but, still, there was the unpleasant feeling. He did not even feel a desire to go home.

“Foo, how horrid!” he said, standing still at a lamppost.

It occurred to him that he did not regret the twelve roubles because he got them for nothing. If he had been a working man he would have known the value of every farthing, and would not have been so careless whether he lost or won. And his good fortune had all, he reflected, come to him by chance, for nothing, and really was as superfluous for him as medicine for the healthy. If, like the vast majority of people, he had been harassed by anxiety for his daily bread, had been struggling for existence, if his back and chest had ached from work, then supper, a

warm snug home, and domestic happiness, would have been the necessity, the compensation, the crown of his life; as it was, all this had a strange, indefinite significance for him.

"Foo, how horrid!" he repeated, knowing perfectly well that these reflections were in themselves a bad sign.

When he got home Masha was in bed: she was breathing evenly and smiling, and was evidently sleeping with great enjoyment. Near her the white cat lay curled up, purring. While Nikitin lit the candle and lighted his cigarette, Masha woke up and greedily drank a glass of water.

"I ate too many sweets," she said, and laughed. "Have you been home?" she asked after a pause.

"No."

Nikitin knew already that Captain Polyansky, on whom Varya had been building great hopes of late, was being transferred to one of the western provinces, and was already making his farewell visits in the town, and so it was depressing at his father-in-law's.

"Varya looked in this evening," said Masha, sitting up. "She did not say anything, but one could see from her face how wretched she is, poor darling! I can't bear Polyansky. He is fat and bloated, and when he walks or dances his cheeks shake.… He is not a man I would choose. But, still, I did think he was a decent person."

"I think he is a decent person now," said Nikitin.

"Then why has he treated Varya so badly?"

"Why badly?" asked Nikitin, beginning to feel irritation against the white cat, who was stretching and arching its back. "As far as I know, he has made no proposal and has given her no promises."

"Then why was he so often at the house? If he didn't mean to marry her, he oughtn't to have come."

Nikitin put out the candle and got into bed. But he felt disinclined to lie down and to sleep. He felt as though his head were immense and empty as a barn, and that new, peculiar thoughts were wandering about in it like tall shadows. He thought that, apart from the soft light of the icon lamp, that beamed upon their quiet domestic happiness, that apart from this little world in which he and this cat lived so peacefully and happily, there was another world.… And he had a passionate, poignant longing to be in that other world, to work himself at some factory or big workshop, to address big audiences, to write, to publish, to raise a stir, to exhaust himself, to suffer.… He wanted something that would engross him till he forgot himself, ceased to care for the personal happiness which yielded him only sensations so monotonous. And suddenly there

rose vividly before his imagination the figure of Shebaldin with his clean-shaven face, saying to him with horror: “You haven’t even read Lessing! You are quite behind the times! How you have gone to seed!”

Masha woke up and again drank some water. He glanced at her neck, at her plump shoulders and throat, and remembered the word the brigadier-general had used in church—“rose.”

“Rose,” he muttered, and laughed.

His laugh was answered by a sleepy growl from Mushka under the bed: “Rrr… nga-nga-nga…!”

A heavy anger sank like a cold weight on his heart, and he felt tempted to say something rude to Masha, and even to jump up and hit her; his heart began throbbing.

“So then,” he asked, restraining himself, “since I went to your house, I was bound in duty to marry you?”

“Of course. You know that very well.”

“That’s nice.” And a minute later he repeated: “That’s nice.”

To relieve the throbbing of his heart, and to avoid saying too much, Nikitin went to his study and lay down on the sofa, without a pillow; then he lay on the floor on the carpet.

“What nonsense it is!” he said to reassure himself. “You are a teacher, you are working in the noblest of callings.… What need have you of any other world? What rubbish!”

But almost immediately he told himself with conviction that he was not a real teacher, but simply a government employee, as commonplace and mediocre as the Czech who taught Greek. He had never had a vocation for teaching, he knew nothing of the theory of teaching, and never had been interested in the subject; he did not know how to treat children; he did not understand the significance of what he taught, and perhaps did not teach the right things. Poor Ippolit Ippolititch had been frankly stupid, and all the boys, as well as his colleagues, knew what he was and what to expect from him; but he, Nikitin, like the Czech, knew how to conceal his stupidity and cleverly deceived everyone by pretending that, thank God, his teaching was a success. These new ideas frightened Nikitin; he rejected them, called them stupid, and believed that all this was due to his nerves, that he would laugh at himself.

And he did, in fact, by the morning laugh at himself and call himself an old woman; but it was clear to him that his peace of mind was lost, perhaps, forever, and that in that little two-story house happiness was henceforth impossible for him. He realized that the illusion had

evaporated, and that a new life of unrest and clear sight was beginning which was incompatible with peace and personal happiness.

Next day, which was Sunday, he was at the school chapel, and there met his colleagues and the director. It seemed to him that they were entirely preoccupied with concealing their ignorance and discontent with life, and he, too, to conceal his uneasiness, smiled affably and talked of trivialities. Then he went to the station and saw the mail train come in and go out, and it was agreeable to him to be alone and not to have to talk to anyone.

At home he found Varya and his father-in-law, who had come to dinner. Varya's eyes were red with crying, and she complained of a headache, while Shelestov ate a great deal, saying that young men nowadays were unreliable, and that there was very little gentlemanly feeling among them.

"It's loutishness!" he said. "I shall tell him so to his face: 'It's loutishness, sir,' I shall say."

Nikitin smiled affably and helped Masha to look after their guests, but after dinner he went to his study and shut the door.

The March sun was shining brightly in at the windows and shedding its warm rays on the table. It was only the twentieth of the month, but already the cabmen were driving with wheels, and the starlings were noisy in the garden. It was just the weather in which Masha would come in, put one arm round his neck, tell him the horses were saddled or the chaise was at the door, and ask him what she should put on to keep warm. Spring was beginning as exquisitely as last spring, and it promised the same joys.… But Nikitin was thinking that it would be nice to take a holiday and go to Moscow, and stay at his old lodgings there. In the next room they were drinking coffee and talking of Captain Polyansky, while he tried not to listen and wrote in his diary: "Where am I, my God? I am surrounded by vulgarity and vulgarity. Wearisome, insignificant people, pots of sour cream, jugs of milk, cockroaches, stupid women.… There is nothing more terrible, mortifying, and distressing than vulgarity. I must escape from here, I must escape today, or I shall go out of my mind!"

A Nervous Breakdown

I

A medical student called Mayer, and a pupil of the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture called Rybnikov, went one evening to see their friend Vassilyev, a law student, and suggested that he should go with them to S—— Street. For a long time Vassilyev would not consent to go, but in the end he put on his greatcoat and went with them.

He knew nothing of fallen women except by hearsay and from books, and he had never in his life been in the houses in which they live. He knew that there are immoral women who, under the pressure of fatal circumstances—environment, bad education, poverty, and so on—are forced to sell their honor for money. They know nothing of pure love, have no children, have no civil rights; their mothers and sisters weep over them as though they were dead, science treats of them as an evil, men address them with contemptuous familiarity. But in spite of all that, they do not lose the semblance and image of God. They all acknowledge their sin and hope for salvation. Of the means that lead to salvation they can avail themselves to the fullest extent. Society, it is true, will not forgive people their past, but in the sight of God St. Mary of Egypt is no lower than the other saints. When it had happened to Vassilyev in the street to recognize a fallen woman as such, by her dress or her manners, or to see a picture of one in a comic paper, he always remembered a story he had once read: a young man, pure and self-sacrificing, loves a fallen woman and urges her to become his wife; she, considering herself unworthy of such happiness, takes poison.

Vassilyev lived in one of the side streets turning out of Tverskoy Boulevard. When he came out of the house with his two friends it was about eleven o’clock. The first snow had not long fallen, and all nature was under the spell of the fresh snow. There was the smell of snow in the

air, the snow crunched softly under the feet; the earth, the roofs, the trees, the seats on the boulevard, everything was soft, white, young, and this made the houses look quite different from the day before; the street lamps burned more brightly, the air was more transparent, the carriages rumbled with a deeper note, and with the fresh, light, frosty air a feeling stirred in the soul akin to the white, youthful, feathery snow. “Against my will an unknown force,” hummed the medical student in his agreeable tenor, “has led me to these mournful shores.”

“Behold the mill…” the artist seconded him, “in ruins now.…”

“Behold the mill… in ruins now,” the medical student repeated, raising his eyebrows and shaking his head mournfully.

He paused, rubbed his forehead, trying to remember the words, and then sang aloud, so well that passersby looked round:

> “Here in old days when I was free,
> Love, free, unfettered, greeted me.”

The three of them went into a restaurant and, without taking off their greatcoats, drank a couple of glasses of vodka each. Before drinking the second glass, Vassilyev noticed a bit of cork in his vodka, raised the glass to his eyes, and gazed into it for a long time, screwing up his shortsighted eyes. The medical student did not understand his expression, and said:

“Come, why look at it? No philosophizing, please. Vodka is given us to be drunk, sturgeon to be eaten, women to be visited, snow to be walked upon. For one evening anyway live like a human being!”

“But I haven’t said anything…” said Vassilyev, laughing. “Am I refusing to?”

There was a warmth inside him from the vodka. He looked with softened feelings at his friends, admired them and envied them. In these strong, healthy, cheerful people how wonderfully balanced everything is, how finished and smooth is everything in their minds and souls! They sing, and have a passion for the theatre, and draw, and talk a great deal, and drink, and they don’t have headaches the day after; they are both poetical and debauched, both soft and hard; they can work, too, and be indignant, and laugh without reason, and talk nonsense; they are warm, honest, self-sacrificing, and as men are in no way inferior to himself, Vassilyev, who watched over every step he took and every word he uttered, who was fastidious and cautious, and ready to raise every trifle to the level of a problem. And he longed for one evening to live as his

friends did, to open out, to let himself loose from his own control. If vodka had to be drunk, he would drink it, though his head would be splitting next morning. If he were taken to the women he would go. He would laugh, play the fool, gaily respond to the passing advances of strangers in the street.…

He went out of the restaurant laughing. He liked his friends—one in a crushed broad-brimmed hat, with an affectation of artistic untidiness; the other in a sealskin cap, a man not poor, though he affected to belong to the Bohemia of learning. He liked the snow, the pale street lamps, the sharp black tracks left in the first snow by the feet of the passersby. He liked the air, and especially that limpid, tender, naive, as it were virginal tone, which can be seen in nature only twice in the year—when everything is covered with snow, and in spring on bright days and moonlight evenings when the ice breaks on the river.

> “Against my will an unknown force,
> Has led me to these mournful shores,”

he hummed in an undertone.

And the tune for some reason haunted him and his friends all the way, and all three of them hummed it mechanically, not in time with one another.

Vassilyev’s imagination was picturing how, in another ten minutes, he and his friends would knock at a door; how by little dark passages and dark rooms they would steal in to the women; how, taking advantage of the darkness, he would strike a match, would light up and see the face of a martyr and a guilty smile. The unknown, fair or dark, would certainly have her hair down and be wearing a white dressing-jacket; she would be panic-stricken by the light, would be fearfully confused, and would say: “For God’s sake, what are you doing! Put it out!” It would all be dreadful, but interesting and new.

II

The friends turned out of Trubnoy Square into Gratchevka, and soon reached the side street which Vassilyev only knew by reputation. Seeing two rows of houses with brightly lighted windows and wide-open doors, and hearing gay strains of pianos and violins, sounds which floated out from every door and mingled in a strange chaos, as though an unseen orchestra were tuning up in the darkness above the roofs, Vassilyev was surprised and said:

"What a lot of houses!"

"That's nothing," said the medical student. "In London there are ten times as many. There are about a hundred thousand such women there."

The cabmen were sitting on their boxes as calmly and indifferently as in any other side street; the same passersby were walking along the pavement as in other streets. No one was hurrying, no one was hiding his face in his coat-collar, no one shook his head reproachfully.… And in this indifference to the noisy chaos of pianos and violins, to the bright windows and wide-open doors, there was a feeling of something very open, insolent, reckless, and devil-may-care. Probably it was as gay and noisy at the slave-markets in their day, and people's faces and movements showed the same indifference.

"Let us begin from the beginning," said the artist.

The friends went into a narrow passage lighted by a lamp with a reflector. When they opened the door a man in a black coat, with an unshaven face like a flunkey's, and sleepy-looking eyes, got up lazily from a yellow sofa in the hall. The place smelt like a laundry with an odor of vinegar in addition. A door from the hall led into a brightly lighted room. The medical student and the artist stopped at this door and, craning their necks, peeped into the room.

"*Buona sera, signori, rigolleto—hugenotti—traviata!*" began the artist, with a theatrical bow.

"*Havanna—tarakano—pistoleto!*" said the medical student, pressing his cap to his breast and bowing low.

Vassilyev was standing behind them. He would have liked to make a theatrical bow and say something silly, too, but he only smiled, felt an

awkwardness that was like shame, and waited impatiently for what would happen next.

A little fair girl of seventeen or eighteen, with short hair, in a short light-blue frock with a bunch of white ribbon on her bosom, appeared in the doorway.

“Why do you stand at the door?” she said. “Take off your coats and come into the drawing room.”

The medical student and the artist, still talking Italian, went into the drawing room. Vassilyev followed them irresolutely.

“Gentlemen, take off your coats!” the flunkey said sternly; “you can’t go in like that.”

In the drawing room there was, besides the girl, another woman, very stout and tall, with a foreign face and bare arms. She was sitting near the piano, laying out a game of patience on her lap. She took no notice whatever of the visitors.

“Where are the other young ladies?” asked the medical student.

“They are having their tea,” said the fair girl. “Stepan,” she called, “go and tell the young ladies some students have come!”

A little later a third young lady came into the room. She was wearing a bright red dress with blue stripes. Her face was painted thickly and unskillfully, her brow was hidden under her hair, and there was an unblinking, frightened stare in her eyes. As she came in, she began at once singing some song in a coarse, powerful contralto. After her a fourth appeared, and after her a fifth.…

In all this Vassilyev saw nothing new or interesting. It seemed to him that that room, the piano, the looking-glass in its cheap gilt frame, the bunch of white ribbon, the dress with the blue stripes, and the blank indifferent faces, he had seen before and more than once. Of the darkness, the silence, the secrecy, the guilty smile, of all that he had expected to meet here and had dreaded, he saw no trace.

Everything was ordinary, prosaic, and uninteresting. Only one thing faintly stirred his curiosity—the terrible, as it were intentionally designed, bad taste which was visible in the cornices, in the absurd pictures, in the dresses, in the bunch of ribbons. There was something characteristic and peculiar in this bad taste.

“How poor and stupid it all is!” thought Vassilyev. “What is there in all this trumpery I see now that can tempt a normal man and excite him to commit the horrible sin of buying a human being for a rouble? I understand any sin for the sake of splendor, beauty, grace, passion, taste;

but what is there here? What is there here worth sinning for? But… one mustn't think!"

"Beardy, treat me to some porter!" said the fair girl, addressing him.

Vassilyev was at once overcome with confusion.

"With pleasure," he said, bowing politely. "Only excuse me, madam, I.… I won't drink with you. I don't drink."

Five minutes later the friends went off into another house.

"Why did you ask for porter?" said the medical student angrily. "What a millionaire! You have thrown away six roubles for no reason whatever—simply waste!"

"If she wants it, why not let her have the pleasure?" said Vassilyev, justifying himself.

"You did not give pleasure to her, but to the 'Madam.' They are told to ask the visitors to stand them treat because it is a profit to the keeper."

"Behold the mill…" hummed the artist, "in ruins now.…"

Going into the next house, the friends stopped in the hall and did not go into the drawing room. Here, as in the first house, a figure in a black coat, with a sleepy face like a flunkey's, got up from a sofa in the hall. Looking at this flunkey, at his face and his shabby black coat, Vassilyev thought: "What must an ordinary simple Russian have gone through before fate flung him down as a flunkey here? Where had he been before and what had he done? What was awaiting him? Was he married? Where was his mother, and did she know that he was a servant here?" And Vassilyev could not help particularly noticing the flunkey in each house. In one of the houses—he thought it was the fourth—there was a little spare, frail-looking flunkey with a watch-chain on his waistcoat. He was reading a newspaper, and took no notice of them when they went in. Looking at his face Vassilyev, for some reason, thought that a man with such a face might steal, might murder, might bear false witness. But the face was really interesting: a big forehead, gray eyes, a little flattened nose, thin compressed lips, and a blankly stupid and at the same time insolent expression like that of a young harrier overtaking a hare. Vassilyev thought it would be nice to touch this man's hair, to see whether it was soft or coarse. It must be coarse like a dog's.

III

Having drunk two glasses of porter, the artist became suddenly tipsy and grew unnaturally lively.

“Let’s go to another!” he said peremptorily, waving his hands. “I will take you to the best one.”

When he had brought his friends to the house which in his opinion was the best, he declared his firm intention of dancing a quadrille. The medical student grumbled something about their having to pay the musicians a rouble, but agreed to be his vis-à-vis. They began dancing.

It was just as nasty in the best house as in the worst. Here there were just the same looking-glasses and pictures, the same styles of coiffure and dress. Looking round at the furnishing of the rooms and the costumes, Vassilyev realized that this was not lack of taste, but something that might be called the taste, and even the style, of S—— Street, which could not be found elsewhere—something intentional in its ugliness, not accidental, but elaborated in the course of years. After he had been in eight houses he was no longer surprised at the color of the dresses, at the long trains, the gaudy ribbons, the sailor dresses, and the thick purplish rouge on the cheeks; he saw that it all had to be like this, that if a single one of the women had been dressed like a human being, or if there had been one decent engraving on the wall, the general tone of the whole street would have suffered.

“How unskillfully they sell themselves!” he thought. “How can they fail to understand that vice is only alluring when it is beautiful and hidden, when it wears the mask of virtue? Modest black dresses, pale faces, mournful smiles, and darkness would be far more effective than this clumsy tawdriness. Stupid things! If they don’t understand it of themselves, their visitors might surely have taught them.…”

A young lady in a Polish dress edged with white fur came up to him and sat down beside him.

“You nice dark man, why aren’t you dancing?” she asked. “Why are you so dull?”

“Because it is dull.”

“Treat me to some Lafitte. Then it won’t be dull.”

Vassilyev made no answer. He was silent for a little, and then asked:

“What time do you get to sleep?”

“At six o’clock.”

“And what time do you get up?”

“Sometimes at two and sometimes at three.”

“And what do you do when you get up?”

“We have coffee, and at six o’clock we have dinner.”

“And what do you have for dinner?”

“Usually soup, beefsteak, and dessert. Our madam keeps the girls well. But why do you ask all this?”

“Oh, just to talk.…”

Vassilyev longed to talk to the young lady about many things. He felt an intense desire to find out where she came from, whether her parents were living, and whether they knew that she was here; how she had come into this house; whether she were cheerful and satisfied, or sad and oppressed by gloomy thoughts; whether she hoped some day to get out of her present position.… But he could not think how to begin or in what shape to put his questions so as not to seem impertinent. He thought for a long time, and asked:

“How old are you?”

“Eighty,” the young lady jested, looking with a laugh at the antics of the artist as he danced.

All at once she burst out laughing at something, and uttered a long cynical sentence loud enough to be heard by everyone. Vassilyev was aghast, and not knowing how to look, gave a constrained smile. He was the only one who smiled; all the others, his friends, the musicians, the women, did not even glance towards his neighbor, but seemed not to have heard her.

“Stand me some Lafitte,” his neighbor said again.

Vassilyev felt a repulsion for her white fur and for her voice, and walked away from her. It seemed to him hot and stifling, and his heart began throbbing slowly but violently, like a hammer—one! two! three!

“Let us go away!” he said, pulling the artist by his sleeve.

“Wait a little; let me finish.”

While the artist and the medical student were finishing the quadrille, to avoid looking at the women, Vassilyev scrutinized the musicians. A respectable-looking old man in spectacles, rather like Marshal Bazaine, was playing the piano; a young man with a fair beard, dressed in the latest fashion, was playing the violin. The young man had a face that did not look stupid nor exhausted, but intelligent, youthful, and fresh. He

was dressed fancifully and with taste; he played with feeling. It was a mystery how he and the respectable-looking old man had come here. How was it they were not ashamed to sit here? What were they thinking about when they looked at the women?

If the violin and the piano had been played by men in rags, looking hungry, gloomy, drunken, with dissipated or stupid faces, then one could have understood their presence, perhaps. As it was, Vassilyev could not understand it at all. He recalled the story of the fallen woman he had once read, and he thought now that that human figure with the guilty smile had nothing in common with what he was seeing now. It seemed to him that he was seeing not fallen women, but some different world quite apart, alien to him and incomprehensible; if he had seen this world before on the stage, or read of it in a book, he would not have believed in it.…

The woman with the white fur burst out laughing again and uttered a loathsome sentence in a loud voice. A feeling of disgust took possession of him. He flushed crimson and went out of the room.

“Wait a minute, we are coming too!” the artist shouted to him.

IV

“While we were dancing,” said the medical student, as they all three went out into the street, “I had a conversation with my partner. We talked about her first romance. He, the hero, was an accountant at Smolensk with a wife and five children. She was seventeen, and she lived with her papa and mamma, who sold soap and candles.”

“How did he win her heart?” asked Vassilyev.

“By spending fifty roubles on underclothes for her. What next!”

“So he knew how to get his partner’s story out of her,” thought Vassilyev about the medical student. “But I don’t know how to.”

“I say, I am going home!” he said.

“What for?”

“Because I don’t know how to behave here. Besides, I am bored, disgusted. What is there amusing in it? If they were human beings—but they are savages and animals. I am going; do as you like.”

“Come, Grisha, Grigory, darling…” said the artist in a tearful voice, hugging Vassilyev, “come along! Let’s go to one more together and damnation take them!… Please do, Grisha!”

They persuaded Vassilyev and led him up a staircase. In the carpet and the gilt banisters, in the porter who opened the door, and in the panels that decorated the hall, the same S—— Street style was apparent, but carried to a greater perfection, more imposing.

“I really will go home!” said Vassilyev as he was taking off his coat.

“Come, come, dear boy,” said the artist, and he kissed him on the neck. “Don’t be tiresome.… Gri-gri, be a good comrade! We came together, we will go back together. What a beast you are, really!”

“I can wait for you in the street. I think it’s loathsome, really!”

“Come, come, Grisha.… If it is loathsome, you can observe it! Do you understand? You can observe!”

“One must take an objective view of things,” said the medical student gravely.

Vassilyev went into the drawing room and sat down. There were a number of visitors in the room besides him and his friends: two infantry officers, a bald, gray-haired gentleman in spectacles, two beardless

youths from the institute of land-surveying, and a very tipsy man who looked like an actor. All the young ladies were taken up with these visitors and paid no attention to Vassilyev.

Only one of them, dressed à la Aida, glanced sideways at him, smiled, and said, yawning: “A dark one has come.…”

Vassilyev’s heart was throbbing and his face burned. He felt ashamed before these visitors of his presence here, and he felt disgusted and miserable. He was tormented by the thought that he, a decent and loving man (such as he had hitherto considered himself), hated these women and felt nothing but repulsion towards them. He felt pity neither for the women nor the musicians nor the flunkeys.

“It is because I am not trying to understand them,” he thought. “They are all more like animals than human beings, but of course they are human beings all the same, they have souls. One must understand them and then judge.…”

“Grisha, don’t go, wait for us,” the artist shouted to him and disappeared.

The medical student disappeared soon after.

“Yes, one must make an effort to understand, one mustn’t be like this.…” Vassilyev went on thinking.

And he began gazing at each of the women with strained attention, looking for a guilty smile. But either he did not know how to read their faces, or not one of these women felt herself to be guilty; he read on every face nothing but a blank expression of everyday vulgar boredom and complacency. Stupid faces, stupid smiles, harsh, stupid voices, insolent movements, and nothing else. Apparently each of them had in the past a romance with an accountant based on underclothes for fifty roubles, and looked for no other charm in the present but coffee, a dinner of three courses, wines, quadrilles, sleeping till two in the afternoon.…

Finding no guilty smile, Vassilyev began to look whether there was not one intelligent face. And his attention was caught by one pale, rather sleepy, exhausted-looking face.… It was a dark woman, not very young, wearing a dress covered with spangles; she was sitting in an easy-chair, looking at the floor lost in thought. Vassilyev walked from one corner of the room to the other, and, as though casually, sat down beside her.

“I must begin with something trivial,” he thought, “and pass to what is serious.…”

“What a pretty dress you have,” and with his finger he touched the gold fringe of her fichu.

“Oh, is it?…” said the dark woman listlessly.

“What province do you come from?”

“I? From a distance.… From Tchernigov.”

“A fine province. It’s nice there.”

“Any place seems nice when one is not in it.”

“It’s a pity I cannot describe nature,” thought Vassilyev. “I might touch her by a description of nature in Tchernigov. No doubt she loves the place if she has been born there.”

“Are you dull here?” he asked.

“Of course I am dull.”

“Why don’t you go away from here if you are dull?”

“Where should I go to? Go begging or what?”

“Begging would be easier than living here.”

“How do you know that? Have you begged?”

“Yes, when I hadn’t the money to study. Even if I hadn’t anyone could understand that. A beggar is anyway a free man, and you are a slave.”

The dark woman stretched, and watched with sleepy eyes the footman who was bringing a trayful of glasses and seltzer water.

“Stand me a glass of porter,” she said, and yawned again.

“Porter,” thought Vassilyev. “And what if your brother or mother walked in at this moment? What would you say? And what would they say? There would be porter then, I imagine.…”

All at once there was the sound of weeping. From the adjoining room, from which the footman had brought the seltzer water, a fair man with a red face and angry eyes ran in quickly. He was followed by the tall, stout “madam,” who was shouting in a shrill voice:

“Nobody has given you leave to slap girls on the cheeks! We have visitors better than you, and they don’t fight! Impostor!”

A hubbub arose. Vassilyev was frightened and turned pale. In the next room there was the sound of bitter, genuine weeping, as though of someone insulted. And he realized that there were real people living here who, like people everywhere else, felt insulted, suffered, wept, and cried for help. The feeling of oppressive hate and disgust gave way to an acute feeling of pity and anger against the aggressor. He rushed into the room where there was weeping. Across rows of bottles on a marble-top table he distinguished a suffering face, wet with tears, stretched out his hands towards that face, took a step towards the table, but at once drew back in horror. The weeping girl was drunk.

As he made his way though the noisy crowd gathered about the fair man, his heart sank and he felt frightened like a child; and it seemed to him that in this alien, incomprehensible world people wanted to pursue

him, to beat him, to pelt him with filthy words.… He tore down his coat from the hatstand and ran headlong downstairs.

V

Leaning against the fence, he stood near the house waiting for his friends to come out. The sounds of the pianos and violins, gay, reckless, insolent, and mournful, mingled in the air in a sort of chaos, and this tangle of sounds seemed again like an unseen orchestra tuning up on the roofs. If one looked upwards into the darkness, the black background was all spangled with white, moving spots: it was snow falling. As the snowflakes came into the light they floated round lazily in the air like down, and still more lazily fell to the ground. The snowflakes whirled thickly round Vassilyev and hung upon his beard, his eyelashes, his eyebrows.… The cabmen, the horses, and the passersby were white.

"And how can the snow fall in this street!" thought Vassilyev. "Damnation take these houses!"

His legs seemed to be giving way from fatigue, simply from having run down the stairs; he gasped for breath as though he had been climbing uphill, his heart beat so loudly that he could hear it. He was consumed by a desire to get out of the street as quickly as possible and to go home, but even stronger was his desire to wait for his companions and vent upon them his oppressive feeling.

There was much he did not understand in these houses, the souls of ruined women were a mystery to him as before; but it was clear to him that the thing was far worse than could have been believed. If that sinful woman who had poisoned herself was called fallen, it was difficult to find a fitting name for all these who were dancing now to this tangle of sound and uttering long, loathsome sentences. They were not on the road to ruin, but ruined.

"There is vice," he thought, "but neither consciousness of sin nor hope of salvation. They are sold and bought, steeped in wine and abominations, while they, like sheep, are stupid, indifferent, and don't understand. My God! My God!"

It was clear to him, too, that everything that is called human dignity, personal rights, the Divine image and semblance, were defiled to their very foundations—"to the very marrow," as drunkards say—and that not only the street and the stupid women were responsible for it.

A group of students, white with snow, passed him laughing and talking gaily; one, a tall thin fellow, stopped, glanced into Vassilyev's face, and said in a drunken voice:

"One of us! A bit on, old man? Aha-ha! Never mind, have a good time! Don't be downhearted, old chap!"

He took Vassilyev by the shoulder and pressed his cold wet mustache against his cheek, then he slipped, staggered, and, waving both hands, cried:

"Hold on! Don't upset!"

And laughing, he ran to overtake his companions.

Through the noise came the sound of the artist's voice:

"Don't you dare to hit the women! I won't let you, damnation take you! You scoundrels!"

The medical student appeared in the doorway. He looked from side to side, and seeing Vassilyev, said in an agitated voice:

"You here! I tell you it's really impossible to go anywhere with Yegor! What a fellow he is! I don't understand him! He has got up a scene! Do you hear? Yegor!" he shouted at the door. "Yegor!"

"I won't allow you to hit women!" the artist's piercing voice sounded from above. Something heavy and lumbering rolled down the stairs. It was the artist falling headlong. Evidently he had been pushed downstairs.

He picked himself up from the ground, shook his hat, and, with an angry and indignant face, brandished his fist towards the top of the stairs and shouted:

"Scoundrels! Torturers! Bloodsuckers! I won't allow you to hit them! To hit a weak, drunken woman! Oh, you brutes!…"

"Yegor!… Come, Yegor!…" the medical student began imploring him. "I give you my word of honor I'll never come with you again. On my word of honor I won't!"

Little by little the artist was pacified and the friends went homewards.

"Against my will an unknown force," hummed the medical student, "has led me to these mournful shores."

"Behold the mill," the artist chimed in a little later, "in ruins now. What a lot of snow, Holy Mother! Grisha, why did you go? You are a funk, a regular old woman."

Vassilyev walked behind his companions, looked at their backs, and thought:

"One of two things: either we only fancy prostitution is an evil, and we exaggerate it; or, if prostitution really is as great an evil as is generally assumed, these dear friends of mine are as much slaveowners,

violators, and murderers, as the inhabitants of Syria and Cairo, that are described in the *Neva*. Now they are singing, laughing, talking sense, but haven't they just been exploiting hunger, ignorance, and stupidity? They have—I have been a witness of it. What is the use of their humanity, their medicine, their painting? The science, art, and lofty sentiments of these soul-destroyers remind me of the piece of bacon in the story. Two brigands murdered a beggar in a forest; they began sharing his clothes between them, and found in his wallet a piece of bacon. 'Well found,' said one of them, 'let us have a bit.' 'What do you mean? How can you?' cried the other in horror. 'Have you forgotten that today is Wednesday?' And they would not eat it. After murdering a man, they came out of the forest in the firm conviction that they were keeping the fast. In the same way these men, after buying women, go their way imagining that they are artists and men of science.…"

"Listen!" he said sharply and angrily. "Why do you come here? Is it possible—is it possible you don't understand how horrible it is? Your medical books tell you that every one of these women dies prematurely of consumption or something; art tells you that morally they are dead even earlier. Every one of them dies because she has in her time to entertain five hundred men on an average, let us say. Each one of them is killed by five hundred men. You are among those five hundred! If each of you in the course of your lives visits this place or others like it two hundred and fifty times, it follows that one woman is killed for every two of you! Can't you understand that? Isn't it horrible to murder, two of you, three of you, five of you, a foolish, hungry woman! Ah! isn't it awful, my God!"

"I knew it would end like that," the artist said frowning. "We ought not to have gone with this fool and ass! You imagine you have grand notions in your head now, ideas, don't you? No, it's the devil knows what, but not ideas. You are looking at me now with hatred and repulsion, but I tell you it's better you should set up twenty more houses like those than look like that. There's more vice in your expression than in the whole street! Come along, Volodya, let him go to the devil! He's a fool and an ass, and that's all.…"

"We human beings do murder each other," said the medical student. "It's immoral, of course, but philosophizing doesn't help it. Goodbye!"

At Trubnoy Square the friends said goodbye and parted. When he was left alone, Vassilyev strode rapidly along the boulevard. He felt frightened of the darkness, of the snow which was falling in heavy flakes on the ground, and seemed as though it would cover up the whole world;

he felt frightened of the street lamps shining with pale light through the clouds of snow. His soul was possessed by an unaccountable, fainthearted terror. Passersby came towards him from time to time, but he timidly moved to one side; it seemed to him that women, none but women, were coming from all sides and staring at him. …

“It’s beginning,” he thought, “I am going to have a breakdown.”

VI

At home he lay on his bed and said, shuddering all over: “They are alive! Alive! My God, those women are alive!”

He encouraged his imagination in all sorts of ways to picture himself the brother of a fallen woman, or her father; then a fallen woman herself, with her painted cheeks; and it all moved him to horror.

It seemed to him that he must settle the question at once at all costs, and that this question was not one that did not concern him, but was his own personal problem. He made an immense effort, repressed his despair, and, sitting on the bed, holding his head in his hands, began thinking how one could save all the women he had seen that day. The method for attacking problems of all kinds was, as he was an educated man, well known to him. And, however excited he was, he strictly adhered to that method. He recalled the history of the problem and its literature, and for a quarter of an hour he paced from one end of the room to the other trying to remember all the methods practiced at the present time for saving women. He had very many good friends and acquaintances who lived in lodgings in Petersburg.… Among them were a good many honest and self-sacrificing men. Some of them had attempted to save women.…

“All these not very numerous attempts,” thought Vassilyev, “can be divided into three groups. Some, after buying the woman out of the brothel, took a room for her, bought her a sewing machine, and she became a sempstress. And whether he wanted to or not, after having bought her out he made her his mistress; then when he had taken his degree, he went away and handed her into the keeping of some other decent man as though she were a thing. And the fallen woman remained a fallen woman. Others, after buying her out, took a lodging apart for her, bought the inevitable sewing machine, and tried teaching her to read, preaching at her and giving her books. The woman lived and sewed as long as it was interesting and a novelty to her, then getting bored, began receiving men on the sly, or ran away and went back where she could sleep till three o’clock, drink coffee, and have good dinners. The third class, the most ardent and self-sacrificing, had taken a bold, resolute

step. They had married them. And when the insolent and spoilt, or stupid and crushed animal became a wife, the head of a household, and afterwards a mother, it turned her whole existence and attitude to life upside down, so that it was hard to recognize the fallen woman afterwards in the wife and the mother. Yes, marriage was the best and perhaps the only means."

"But it is impossible!" Vassilyev said aloud, and he sank upon his bed. "I, to begin with, could not marry one! To do that one must be a saint and be unable to feel hatred or repulsion. But supposing that I, the medical student, and the artist mastered ourselves and did marry them—suppose they were all married. What would be the result? The result would be that while here in Moscow they were being married, some Smolensk accountant would be debauching another lot, and that lot would be streaming here to fill the vacant places, together with others from Saratov, Nizhni-Novgorod, Warsaw.… And what is one to do with the hundred thousand in London? What's one to do with those in Hamburg?"

The lamp in which the oil had burnt down began to smoke. Vassilyev did not notice it. He began pacing to and fro again, still thinking. Now he put the question differently: what must be done that fallen women should not be needed? For that, it was essential that the men who buy them and do them to death should feel all the immorality of their share in enslaving them and should be horrified. One must save the men.

"One won't do anything by art and science, that is clear…" thought Vassilyev. "The only way out of it is missionary work."

And he began to dream how he would the next evening stand at the corner of the street and say to every passerby: "Where are you going and what for? Have some fear of God!"

He would turn to the apathetic cabmen and say to them: "Why are you staying here? Why aren't you revolted? Why aren't you indignant? I suppose you believe in God and know that it is a sin, that people go to hell for it? Why don't you speak? It is true that they are strangers to you, but you know even they have fathers, brothers like yourselves.…"

One of Vassilyev's friends had once said of him that he was a talented man. There are all sorts of talents—talent for writing, talent for the stage, talent for art; but he had a peculiar talent—a talent for *humanity*. He possessed an extraordinarily fine delicate scent for pain in general. As a good actor reflects in himself the movements and voice of others, so Vassilyev could reflect in his soul the sufferings of others. When he saw tears, he wept; beside a sick man, he felt sick himself and moaned; if he saw an act of violence, he felt as though he himself were the victim of it,

he was frightened as a child, and in his fright ran to help. The pain of others worked on his nerves, excited him, roused him to a state of frenzy, and so on.

Whether this friend were right I don't know, but what Vassilyev experienced when he thought this question was settled was something like inspiration. He cried and laughed, spoke aloud the words that he should say next day, felt a fervent love for those who would listen to him and would stand beside him at the corner of the street to preach; he sat down to write letters, made vows to himself.…

All this was like inspiration also from the fact that it did not last long. Vassilyev was soon tired. The cases in London, in Hamburg, in Warsaw, weighed upon him by their mass as a mountain weighs upon the earth; he felt dispirited, bewildered, in the face of this mass; he remembered that he had not a gift for words, that he was cowardly and timid, that indifferent people would not be willing to listen and understand him, a law student in his third year, a timid and insignificant person; that genuine missionary work included not only teaching but deeds…

When it was daylight and carriages were already beginning to rumble in the street, Vassilyev was lying motionless on the sofa, staring into space. He was no longer thinking of the women, nor of the men, nor of missionary work. His whole attention was turned upon the spiritual agony which was torturing him. It was a dull, vague, undefined anguish akin to misery, to an extreme form of terror and to despair. He could point to the place where the pain was, in his breast under his heart; but he could not compare it with anything. In the past he had had acute toothache, he had had pleurisy and neuralgia, but all that was insignificant compared with this spiritual anguish. In the presence of that pain life seemed loathsome. The dissertation, the excellent work he had written already, the people he loved, the salvation of fallen women—everything that only the day before he had cared about or been indifferent to, now when he thought of them irritated him in the same way as the noise of the carriages, the scurrying footsteps of the waiters in the passage, the daylight.… If at that moment someone had performed a great deed of mercy or had committed a revolting outrage, he would have felt the same repulsion for both actions. Of all the thoughts that strayed through his mind only two did not irritate him: one was that at every moment he had the power to kill himself, the other that this agony would not last more than three days. This last he knew by experience.

After lying for a while he got up and, wringing his hands, walked about the room, not as usual from corner to corner, but round the room

beside the walls. As he passed he glanced at himself in the looking-glass. His face looked pale and sunken, his temples looked hollow, his eyes were bigger, darker, more staring, as though they belonged to someone else, and they had an expression of insufferable mental agony.

At midday the artist knocked at the door.

"Grigory, are you at home?" he asked.

Getting no answer, he stood for a minute, pondered, and answered himself in Little Russian: "Nay. The confounded fellow has gone to the University."

And he went away. Vassilyev lay down on the bed and, thrusting his head under the pillow, began crying with agony, and the more freely his tears flowed the more terrible his mental anguish became. As it began to get dark, he thought of the agonizing night awaiting him, and was overcome by a horrible despair. He dressed quickly, ran out of his room, and, leaving his door wide open, for no object or reason, went out into the street. Without asking himself where he should go, he walked quickly along Sadovoy Street.

Snow was falling as heavily as the day before; it was thawing. Thrusting his hands into his sleeves, shuddering and frightened at the noises, at the trambells, and at the passersby, Vassilyev walked along Sadovoy Street as far as Suharev Tower; then to the Red Gate; from there he turned off to Basmannya Street. He went into a tavern and drank off a big glass of vodka, but that did not make him feel better. When he reached Razgulya he turned to the right, and strode along side streets in which he had never been before in his life. He reached the old bridge by which the Yauza runs gurgling, and from which one can see long rows of lights in the windows of the Red Barracks. To distract his spiritual anguish by some new sensation or some other pain, Vassilyev, not knowing what to do, crying and shuddering, undid his greatcoat and jacket and exposed his bare chest to the wet snow and the wind. But that did not lessen his suffering either. Then he bent down over the rail of the bridge and looked down into the black, yeasty Yauza, and he longed to plunge down head foremost; not from loathing for life, not for the sake of suicide, but in order to bruise himself at least, and by one pain to ease the other. But the black water, the darkness, the deserted banks covered with snow were terrifying. He shivered and walked on. He walked up and down by the Red Barracks, then turned back and went down to a copse, from the copse back to the bridge again.

"No, home, home!" he thought. "At home I believe it's better…"

And he went back. When he reached home he pulled off his wet coat and cap, began pacing round the room, and went on pacing round and round without stopping till morning.

VII

When next morning the artist and the medical student went in to him, he was moving about the room with his shirt torn, biting his hands and moaning with pain.

“For God’s sake!” he sobbed when he saw his friends, “take me where you please, do what you can; but for God’s sake, save me quickly! I shall kill myself!”

The artist turned pale and was helpless. The medical student, too, almost shed tears, but considering that doctors ought to be cool and composed in every emergency said coldly:

“It’s a nervous breakdown. But it’s nothing. Let us go at once to the doctor.”

“Wherever you like, only for God’s sake, make haste!”

“Don’t excite yourself. You must try and control yourself.”

The artist and the medical student with trembling hands put Vassilyev’s coat and hat on and led him out into the street.

“Mihail Sergeyitch has been wanting to make your acquaintance for a long time,” the medical student said on the way. “He is a very nice man and thoroughly good at his work. He took his degree in 1882, and he has an immense practice already. He treats students as though he were one himself.”

“Make haste, make haste!…” Vassilyev urged.

Mihail Sergeyitch, a stout, fair-haired doctor, received the friends with politeness and frigid dignity, and smiled only on one side of his face.

“Rybnikov and Mayer have spoken to me of your illness already,” he said. “Very glad to be of service to you. Well? Sit down, I beg.…”

He made Vassilyev sit down in a big armchair near the table, and moved a box of cigarettes towards him.

“Now then!” he began, stroking his knees. “Let us get to work.… How old are you?”

He asked questions and the medical student answered them. He asked whether Vassilyev’s father had suffered from certain special diseases, whether he drank to excess, whether he were remarkable for cruelty or any peculiarities. He made similar inquiries about his grandfather,

mother, sisters, and brothers. On learning that his mother had a beautiful voice and sometimes acted on the stage, he grew more animated at once, and asked:

"Excuse me, but don't you remember, perhaps, your mother had a passion for the stage?"

Twenty minutes passed. Vassilyev was annoyed by the way the doctor kept stroking his knees and talking of the same thing.

"So far as I understand your questions, doctor," he said, "you want to know whether my illness is hereditary or not. It is not."

The doctor proceeded to ask Vassilyev whether he had had any secret vices as a boy, or had received injuries to his head; whether he had had any aberrations, any peculiarities, or exceptional propensities. Half the questions usually asked by doctors of their patients can be left unanswered without the slightest ill effect on the health, but Mihail Sergeyitch, the medical student, and the artist all looked as though if Vassilyev failed to answer one question all would be lost. As he received answers, the doctor for some reason noted them down on a slip of paper. On learning that Vassilyev had taken his degree in natural science, and was now studying law, the doctor pondered.

"He wrote a first-rate piece of original work last year,…" said the medical student.

"I beg your pardon, but don't interrupt me; you prevent me from concentrating," said the doctor, and he smiled on one side of his face. "Though, of course, that does enter into the diagnosis. Intense intellectual work, nervous exhaustion.… Yes, yes.… And do you drink vodka?" he said, addressing Vassilyev.

"Very rarely."

Another twenty minutes passed. The medical student began telling the doctor in a low voice his opinion as to the immediate cause of the attack, and described how the day before yesterday the artist, Vassilyev, and he had visited S—— Street.

The indifferent, reserved, and frigid tone in which his friends and the doctor spoke of the women and that miserable street struck Vassilyev as strange in the extreme.…

"Doctor, tell me one thing only," he said, controlling himself so as not to speak rudely. "Is prostitution an evil or not?"

"My dear fellow, who disputes it?" said the doctor, with an expression that suggested that he had settled all such questions for himself long ago. "Who disputes it?"

"You are a mental doctor, aren't you?" Vassilyev asked curtly.

“Yes, a mental doctor.”

“Perhaps all of you are right!” said Vassilyev, getting up and beginning to walk from one end of the room to the other. “Perhaps! But it all seems marvelous to me! That I should have taken my degree in two faculties you look upon as a great achievement; because I have written a work which in three years will be thrown aside and forgotten, I am praised up to the skies; but because I cannot speak of fallen women as unconcernedly as of these chairs, I am being examined by a doctor, I am called mad, I am pitied!”

Vassilyev for some reason felt all at once unutterably sorry for himself, and his companions, and all the people he had seen two days before, and for the doctor; he burst into tears and sank into a chair.

His friends looked inquiringly at the doctor. The latter, with the air of completely comprehending the tears and the despair, of feeling himself a specialist in that line, went up to Vassilyev and, without a word, gave him some medicine to drink; and then, when he was calmer, undressed him and began to investigate the degree of sensibility of the skin, the reflex action of the knees, and so on.

And Vassilyev felt easier. When he came out from the doctor’s he was beginning to feel ashamed; the rattle of the carriages no longer irritated him, and the load at his heart grew lighter and lighter as though it were melting away. He had two prescriptions in his hand: one was for bromide, one was for morphia.… He had taken all these remedies before.

In the street he stood still and, saying goodbye to his friends, dragged himself languidly to the University.

THE HORSE-STEALERS

A hospital assistant, called Yergunov, an empty-headed fellow, known throughout the district as a great braggart and drunkard, was returning one evening in Christmas week from the hamlet of Ryepino, where he had been to make some purchases for the hospital. That he might get home in good time and not be late, the doctor had lent him his very best horse.

At first it had been a still day, but at eight o'clock a violent snowstorm came on, and when he was only about four miles from home Yergunov completely lost his way.

He did not know how to drive, he did not know the road, and he drove on at random, hoping that the horse would find the way of itself. Two hours passed; the horse was exhausted, he himself was chilled, and already began to fancy that he was not going home, but back towards Ryepino. But at last above the uproar of the storm he heard the faraway barking of a dog, and a murky red blur came into sight ahead of him: little by little, the outlines of a high gate could be discerned, then a long fence on which there were nails with their points uppermost, and beyond the fence there stood the slanting crane of a well. The wind drove away the mist of snow from before the eyes, and where there had been a red blur, there sprang up a small, squat little house with a steep thatched roof. Of the three little windows one, covered on the inside with something red, was lighted up.

What sort of place was it? Yergunov remembered that to the right of the road, three and a half or four miles from the hospital, there was Andrey Tchirikov's tavern. He remembered, too, that this Tchirikov, who had been lately killed by some sledge-drivers, had left a wife and a daughter called Lyubka, who had come to the hospital two years before as a patient. The inn had a bad reputation, and to visit it late in the evening, and especially with someone else's horse, was not free from risk. But there was no help for it. Yergunov fumbled in his knapsack for

his revolver, and, coughing sternly, tapped at the window-frame with his whip.

“Hey! who is within?” he cried. “Hey, granny! let me come in and get warm!”

With a hoarse bark a black dog rolled like a ball under the horse’s feet, then another white one, then another black one—there must have been a dozen of them. Yergunov looked to see which was the biggest, swung his whip and lashed at it with all his might. A small, long-legged puppy turned its sharp muzzle upwards and set up a shrill, piercing howl.

Yergunov stood for a long while at the window, tapping. But at last the hoarfrost on the trees near the house glowed red, and a muffled female figure appeared with a lantern in her hands.

“Let me in to get warm, granny,” said Yergunov. “I was driving to the hospital, and I have lost my way. It’s such weather, God preserve us. Don’t be afraid; we are your own people, granny.”

“All my own people are at home, and we didn’t invite strangers,” said the figure grimly. “And what are you knocking for? The gate is not locked.”

Yergunov drove into the yard and stopped at the steps.

“Bid your labourer take my horse out, granny,” said he.

“I am not granny.”

And indeed she was not a granny. While she was putting out the lantern the light fell on her face, and Yergunov saw black eyebrows, and recognized Lyubka.

“There are no labourers about now,” she said as she went into the house. “Some are drunk and asleep, and some have been gone to Ryepino since the morning. It’s a holiday.…”

As he fastened his horse up in the shed, Yergunov heard a neigh, and distinguished in the darkness another horse, and felt on it a Cossack saddle. So there must be someone else in the house besides the woman and her daughter. For greater security Yergunov unsaddled his horse, and when he went into the house, took with him both his purchases and his saddle.

The first room into which he went was large and very hot, and smelt of freshly washed floors. A short, lean peasant of about forty, with a small, fair beard, wearing a dark blue shirt, was sitting at the table under the holy images. It was Kalashnikov, an arrant scoundrel and horse-stealer, whose father and uncle kept a tavern in Bogalyovka, and disposed of the stolen horses where they could. He too had been to the hospital more than once, not for medical treatment, but to see the doctor

about horses—to ask whether he had not one for sale, and whether his honour would not like to swap his bay mare for a dun-coloured gelding. Now his head was pomaded and a silver earring glittered in his ear, and altogether he had a holiday air. Frowning and dropping his lower lip, he was looking intently at a big dog's-eared picture-book. Another peasant lay stretched on the floor near the stove; his head, his shoulders, and his chest were covered with a sheepskin—he was probably asleep; beside his new boots, with shining bits of metal on the heels, there were two dark pools of melted snow.

Seeing the hospital assistant, Kalashnikov greeted him.

"Yes, it is weather," said Yergunov, rubbing his chilled knees with his open hands. "The snow is up to one's neck; I am soaked to the skin, I can tell you. And I believe my revolver is, too…."

He took out his revolver, looked it all over, and put it back in his knapsack. But the revolver made no impression at all; the peasant went on looking at the book.

"Yes, it is weather.… I lost my way, and if it had not been for the dogs here, I do believe it would have been my death. There would have been a nice to-do. And where are the women?"

"The old woman has gone to Ryepino, and the girl is getting supper ready…" answered Kalashnikov.

Silence followed. Yergunov, shivering and gasping, breathed on his hands, huddled up, and made a show of being very cold and exhausted. The still angry dogs could be heard howling outside. It was dreary.

"You come from Bogalyovka, don't you?" he asked the peasant sternly.

"Yes, from Bogalyovka."

And to while away the time Yergunov began to think about Bogalyovka. It was a big village and it lay in a deep ravine, so that when one drove along the high road on a moonlight night, and looked down into the dark ravine and then up at the sky, it seemed as though the moon were hanging over a bottomless abyss and it were the end of the world. The path going down was steep, winding, and so narrow that when one drove down to Bogalyovka on account of some epidemic or to vaccinate the people, one had to shout at the top of one's voice, or whistle all the way, for if one met a cart coming up one could not pass. The peasants of Bogalyovka had the reputation of being good gardeners and horse-stealers. They had well-stocked gardens. In spring the whole village was buried in white cherry-blossom, and in the summer they sold cherries at three kopecks a pail. One could pay three kopecks and pick as one liked.

Their women were handsome and looked well fed, they were fond of finery, and never did anything even on working-days, but spent all their time sitting on the ledge in front of their houses and searching in each other's heads.

But at last there was the sound of footsteps. Lyubka, a girl of twenty, with bare feet and a red dress, came into the room.… She looked sideways at Yergunov and walked twice from one end of the room to the other. She did not move simply, but with tiny steps, thrusting forward her bosom; evidently she enjoyed padding about with her bare feet on the freshly washed floor, and had taken off her shoes on purpose.

Kalashnikov laughed at something and beckoned her with his finger. She went up to the table, and he showed her a picture of the Prophet Elijah, who, driving three horses abreast, was dashing up to the sky. Lyubka put her elbow on the table; her plait fell across her shoulder—a long chestnut plait tied with red ribbon at the end—and it almost touched the floor. She, too, smiled.

"A splendid, wonderful picture," said Kalashnikov. "Wonderful," he repeated, and motioned with his hand as though he wanted to take the reins instead of Elijah.

The wind howled in the stove; something growled and squeaked as though a big dog had strangled a rat.

"Ugh! the unclean spirits are abroad!" said Lyubka.

"That's the wind," said Kalashnikov; and after a pause he raised his eyes to Yergunov and asked:

"And what is your learned opinion, Osip Vassilyitch—are there devils in this world or not?"

"What's one to say, brother?" said Yergunov, and he shrugged one shoulder. "If one reasons from science, of course there are no devils, for it's a superstition; but if one looks at it simply, as you and I do now, there are devils, to put it shortly.… I have seen a great deal in my life.… When I finished my studies I served as medical assistant in the army in a regiment of the dragoons, and I have been in the war, of course. I have a medal and a decoration from the Red Cross, but after the treaty of San Stefano I returned to Russia and went into the service of the Zemstvo. And in consequence of my enormous circulation about the world, I may say I have seen more than many another has dreamed of. It has happened to me to see devils, too; that is, not devils with horns and a tail—that is all nonsense—but just, to speak precisely, something of the sort."

"Where?" asked Kalashnikov.

“In various places. There is no need to go far. Last year I met him here—speak of him not at night—near this very inn. I was driving, I remember, to Golyshino; I was going there to vaccinate. Of course, as usual, I had the racing droshky and a horse, and all the necessary paraphernalia, and, what’s more, I had a watch and all the rest of it, so I was on my guard as I drove along, for fear of some mischance. There are lots of tramps of all sorts. I came up to the Zmeinoy Ravine—damnation take it—and was just going down it, when all at once somebody comes up to me—such a fellow! Black hair, black eyes, and his whole face looked smutted with soot.… He comes straight up to the horse and takes hold of the left rein: ‘Stop!’ He looked at the horse, then at me, then dropped the reins, and without saying a bad word, ‘Where are you going?’ says he. And he showed his teeth in a grin, and his eyes were spiteful-looking.

“‘Ah,’ thought I, ‘you are a queer customer!’ ‘I am going to vaccinate for the smallpox,’ said I. ‘And what is that to you?’ ‘Well, if that’s so,’ says he, ‘vaccinate me.’ He bared his arm and thrust it under my nose. Of course, I did not bandy words with him; I just vaccinated him to get rid of him. Afterwards I looked at my lancet and it had gone rusty.”

The peasant who was asleep near the stove suddenly turned over and flung off the sheepskin; to his great surprise, Yergunov recognized the stranger he had met that day at Zmeinoy Ravine. This peasant’s hair, beard, and eyes were black as soot; his face was swarthy; and, to add to the effect, there was a black spot the size of a lentil on his right cheek. He looked mockingly at the hospital assistant and said:

“I did take hold of the left rein—that was so; but about the smallpox you are lying, sir. And there was not a word said about the smallpox between us.”

Yergunov was disconcerted.

“I’m not talking about you,” he said. “Lie down, since you are lying down.”

The dark-skinned peasant had never been to the hospital, and Yergunov did not know who he was or where he came from; and now, looking at him, he made up his mind that the man must be a gypsy. The peasant got up and, stretching and yawning loudly, went up to Lyubka and Kalashnikov, and sat down beside them, and he, too, began looking at the book. His sleepy face softened and a look of envy came into it.

“Look, Merik,” Lyubka said to him; “get me such horses and I will drive to heaven.”

“Sinners can’t drive to heaven,” said Kalashnikov. “That’s for holiness.”

Then Lyubka laid the table and brought in a big piece of fat bacon, salted cucumbers, a wooden platter of boiled meat cut up into little pieces, then a frying pan, in which there were sausages and cabbage spluttering. A cut-glass decanter of vodka, which diffused a smell of orange-peel all over the room when it was poured out, was put on the table also.

Yergunov was annoyed that Kalashnikov and the dark fellow Merik talked together and took no notice of him at all, behaving exactly as though he were not in the room. And he wanted to talk to them, to brag, to drink, to have a good meal, and if possible to have a little fun with Lyubka, who sat down near him half a dozen times while they were at supper, and, as though by accident, brushed against him with her handsome shoulders and passed her hands over her broad hips. She was a healthy, active girl, always laughing and never still: she would sit down, then get up, and when she was sitting down she would keep turning first her face and then her back to her neighbour, like a fidgety child, and never failed to brush against him with her elbows or her knees.

And he was displeased, too, that the peasants drank only a glass each and no more, and it was awkward for him to drink alone. But he could not refrain from taking a second glass, all the same, then a third, and he ate all the sausage. He brought himself to flatter the peasants, that they might accept him as one of the party instead of holding him at arm’s length.

“You are a fine set of fellows in Bogalyovka!” he said, and wagged his head.

“In what way fine fellows?” enquired Kalashnikov.

“Why, about horses, for instance. Fine fellows at stealing!”

“H’m! fine fellows, you call them. Nothing but thieves and drunkards.”

“They have had their day, but it is over,” said Merik, after a pause. “But now they have only Filya left, and he is blind.”

“Yes, there is no one but Filya,” said Kalashnikov, with a sigh. “Reckon it up, he must be seventy; the German settlers knocked out one of his eyes, and he does not see well with the other. It is cataract. In old days the police officer would shout as soon as he saw him: ‘Hey, you Shamil!’ and all the peasants called him that—he was Shamil all over the place; and now his only name is One-eyed Filya. But he was a fine fellow! Lyuba’s father, Andrey Grigoritch, and he stole one night into

Rozhnovo—there were cavalry regiments stationed there—and carried off nine of the soldiers' horses, the very best of them. They weren't frightened of the sentry, and in the morning they sold all the horses for twenty roubles to the gypsy Afonka. Yes! But nowadays a man contrives to carry off a horse whose rider is drunk or asleep, and has no fear of God, but will take the very boots from a drunkard, and then slinks off and goes away a hundred and fifty miles with a horse, and haggles at the market, haggles like a Jew, till the policeman catches him, the fool. There is no fun in it; it is simply a disgrace! A paltry set of people, I must say."

"What about Merik?" asked Lyubka.

"Merik is not one of us," said Kalashnikov. "He is a Harkov man from Mizhiritch. But that he is a bold fellow, that's the truth; there's no gainsaying that he is a fine fellow."

Lyubka looked slyly and gleefully at Merik, and said:

"It wasn't for nothing they dipped him in a hole in the ice."

"How was that?" asked Yergunov.

"It was like this…" said Merik, and he laughed. "Filya carried off three horses from the Samoylenka tenants, and they pitched upon me. There were ten of the tenants at Samoylenka, and with their labourers there were thirty altogether, and all of them Molokans.… So one of them says to me at the market: 'Come and have a look, Merik; we have brought some new horses from the fair.' I was interested, of course. I went up to them, and the whole lot of them, thirty men, tied my hands behind me and led me to the river. 'We'll show you fine horses,' they said. One hole in the ice was there already; they cut another beside it seven feet away. Then, to be sure, they took a cord and put a noose under my armpits, and tied a crooked stick to the other end, long enough to reach both holes. They thrust the stick in and dragged it through. I went plop into the ice-hole just as I was, in my fur coat and my high boots, while they stood and shoved me, one with his foot and one with his stick, then dragged me under the ice and pulled me out of the other hole."

Lyubka shuddered and shrugged.

"At first I was in a fever from the cold," Merik went on, "but when they pulled me out I was helpless, and lay in the snow, and the Molokans stood round and hit me with sticks on my knees and my elbows. It hurt fearfully. They beat me and they went away… and everything on me was frozen, my clothes were covered with ice. I got up, but I couldn't move. Thank God, a woman drove by and gave me a lift."

Meanwhile Yergunov had drunk five or six glasses of vodka; his heart felt lighter, and he longed to tell some extraordinary, wonderful story too, and to show that he, too, was a bold fellow and not afraid of anything.

"I'll tell you what happened to us in Penza Province…" he began.

Either because he had drunk a great deal and was a little tipsy, or perhaps because he had twice been detected in a lie, the peasants took not the slightest notice of him, and even left off answering his questions. What was worse, they permitted themselves a frankness in his presence that made him feel uncomfortable and cold all over, and that meant that they took no notice of him.

Kalashnikov had the dignified manners of a sedate and sensible man; he spoke weightily, and made the sign of the cross over his mouth every time he yawned, and no one could have supposed that this was a thief, a heartless thief who had stripped poor creatures, who had already been twice in prison, and who had been sentenced by the commune to exile in Siberia, and had been bought off by his father and uncle, who were as great thieves and rogues as he was. Merik gave himself the airs of a bravo. He saw that Lyubka and Kalashnikov were admiring him, and looked upon himself as a very fine fellow, and put his arms akimbo, squared his chest, or stretched so that the bench creaked under him.…

After supper Kalashnikov prayed to the holy image without getting up from his seat, and shook hands with Merik; the latter prayed too, and shook Kalashnikov's hand. Lyubka cleared away the supper, shook out on the table some peppermint biscuits, dried nuts, and pumpkin seeds, and placed two bottles of sweet wine.

"The kingdom of heaven and peace everlasting to Andrey Grigoritch," said Kalashnikov, clinking glasses with Merik. "When he was alive we used to gather together here or at his brother Martin's, and—my word! my word! what men, what talks! Remarkable conversations! Martin used to be here, and Filya, and Fyodor Stukotey.… It was all done in style, it was all in keeping.… And what fun we had! We did have fun, we did have fun!"

Lyubka went out and soon afterwards came back wearing a green kerchief and beads.

"Look, Merik, what Kalashnikov brought me today," she said.

She looked at herself in the looking-glass, and tossed her head several times to make the beads jingle. And then she opened a chest and began taking out, first, a cotton dress with red and blue flowers on it, and then a red one with flounces which rustled and crackled like paper, then a new

kerchief, dark blue, shot with many colours—and all these things she showed and flung up her hands, laughing as though astonished that she had such treasures.

Kalashnikov tuned the balalaika and began playing it, but Yergunov could not make out what sort of song he was singing, and whether it was gay or melancholy, because at one moment it was so mournful he wanted to cry, and at the next it would be merry. Merik suddenly jumped up and began tapping with his heels on the same spot, then, brandishing his arms, he moved on his heels from the table to the stove, from the stove to the chest, then he bounded up as though he had been stung, clicked the heels of his boots together in the air, and began going round and round in a crouching position. Lyubka waved both her arms, uttered a desperate shriek, and followed him. At first she moved sideways, like a snake, as though she wanted to steal up to someone and strike him from behind. She tapped rapidly with her bare heels as Merik had done with the heels of his boots, then she turned round and round like a top and crouched down, and her red dress was blown out like a bell. Merik, looking angrily at her, and showing his teeth in a grin, flew towards her in the same crouching posture as though he wanted to crush her with his terrible legs, while she jumped up, flung back her head, and waving her arms as a big bird does its wings, floated across the room scarcely touching the floor.…

"What a flame of a girl!" thought Yergunov, sitting on the chest, and from there watching the dance. "What fire! Give up everything for her, and it would be too little.…"

And he regretted that he was a hospital assistant, and not a simple peasant, that he wore a reefer coat and a chain with a gilt key on it instead of a blue shirt with a cord tied round the waist. Then he could boldly have sung, danced, flung both arms round Lyubka as Merik did.…

The sharp tapping, shouts, and whoops set the crockery ringing in the cupboard and the flame of the candle dancing.

The thread broke and the beads were scattered all over the floor, the green kerchief slipped off, and Lyubka was transformed into a red cloud flitting by and flashing black eyes, and it seemed as though in another second Merik's arms and legs would drop off.

But finally Merik stamped for the last time, and stood still as though turned to stone. Exhausted and almost breathless, Lyubka sank on to his bosom and leaned against him as against a post, and he put his arms

round her, and looking into her eyes, said tenderly and caressingly, as though in jest:

"I'll find out where your old mother's money is hidden, I'll murder her and cut your little throat for you, and after that I will set fire to the inn.… People will think you have perished in the fire, and with your money I shall go to Kuban. I'll keep droves of horses and flocks of sheep.…"

Lyubka made no answer, but only looked at him with a guilty air, and asked:

"And is it nice in Kuban, Merik?"

He said nothing, but went to the chest, sat down, and sank into thought; most likely he was dreaming of Kuban.

"It's time for me to be going," said Kalashnikov, getting up. "Filya must be waiting for me. Goodbye, Lyuba."

Yergunov went out into the yard to see that Kalashnikov did not go off with his horse. The snowstorm still persisted. White clouds were floating about the yard, their long tails clinging to the rough grass and the bushes, while on the other side of the fence in the open country huge giants in white robes with wide sleeves were whirling round and falling to the ground, and getting up again to wave their arms and fight. And the wind, the wind! The bare birches and cherry trees, unable to endure its rude caresses, bowed low down to the ground and wailed: "God, for what sin hast Thou bound us to the earth and will not let us go free?"

"Wo!" said Kalashnikov sternly, and he got on his horse; one half of the gate was opened, and by it lay a high snowdrift. "Well, get on!" shouted Kalashnikov. His little short-legged nag set off, and sank up to its stomach in the drift at once. Kalashnikov was white all over with the snow, and soon vanished from sight with his horse.

When Yergunov went back into the room, Lyubka was creeping about the floor picking up her beads; Merik was not there.

"A splendid girl!" thought Yergunov, as he lay down on the bench and put his coat under his head. "Oh, if only Merik were not here." Lyubka excited him as she crept about the floor by the bench, and he thought that if Merik had not been there he would certainly have got up and embraced her, and then one would see what would happen. It was true she was only a girl, but not likely to be chaste; and even if she were—need one stand on ceremony in a den of thieves? Lyubka collected her beads and went out. The candle burnt down and the flame caught the paper in the candlestick. Yergunov laid his revolver and matches beside him, and put out the candle. The light before the holy images flickered so much that it

hurt his eyes, and patches of light danced on the ceiling, on the floor, and on the cupboard, and among them he had visions of Lyubka, buxom, full-bosomed: now she was turning round like a top, now she was exhausted and breathless.…

"Oh, if the devils would carry off that Merik," he thought.

The little lamp gave a last flicker, spluttered, and went out. Someone, it must have been Merik, came into the room and sat down on the bench. He puffed at his pipe, and for an instant lighted up a dark cheek with a patch on it. Yergunov's throat was irritated by the horrible fumes of the tobacco smoke.

"What filthy tobacco you have got—damnation take it!" said Yergunov. "It makes me positively sick."

"I mix my tobacco with the flowers of the oats," answered Merik after a pause. "It is better for the chest."

He smoked, spat, and went out again. Half an hour passed, and all at once there was the gleam of a light in the passage. Merik appeared in a coat and cap, then Lyubka with a candle in her hand.

"Do stay, Merik," said Lyubka in an imploring voice.

"No, Lyuba, don't keep me."

"Listen, Merik," said Lyubka, and her voice grew soft and tender. "I know you will find mother's money, and will do for her and for me, and will go to Kuban and love other girls; but God be with you. I only ask you one thing, sweetheart: do stay!"

"No, I want some fun…" said Merik, fastening his belt.

"But you have nothing to go on.… You came on foot; what are you going on?"

Merik bent down to Lyubka and whispered something in her ear; she looked towards the door and laughed through her tears.

"He is asleep, the puffed-up devil…" she said.

Merik embraced her, kissed her vigorously, and went out. Yergunov thrust his revolver into his pocket, jumped up, and ran after him.

"Get out of the way!" he said to Lyubka, who hurriedly bolted the door of the entry and stood across the threshold. "Let me pass! Why are you standing here?"

"What do you want to go out for?"

"To have a look at my horse."

Lyubka gazed up at him with a sly and caressing look.

"Why look at it? You had better look at me.…" she said, then she bent down and touched with her finger the gilt watch-key that hung on his chain.

“Let me pass, or he will go off on my horse,” said Yergunov. “Let me go, you devil!” he shouted, and giving her an angry blow on the shoulder, he pressed his chest against her with all his might to push her away from the door, but she kept tight hold of the bolt, and was like iron.

“Let me go!” he shouted, exhausted; “he will go off with it, I tell you.”

“Why should he? He won’t.” Breathing hard and rubbing her shoulder, which hurt, she looked up at him again, flushed a little and laughed. “Don’t go away, dear heart,” she said; “I am dull alone.”

Yergunov looked into her eyes, hesitated, and put his arms round her; she did not resist.

“Come, no nonsense; let me go,” he begged her. She did not speak.

“I heard you just now,” he said, “telling Merik that you love him.”

“I dare say.… My heart knows who it is I love.”

She put her finger on the key again, and said softly: “Give me that.”

Yergunov unfastened the key and gave it to her. She suddenly craned her neck and listened with a grave face, and her expression struck Yergunov as cold and cunning; he thought of his horse, and now easily pushed her aside and ran out into the yard. In the shed a sleepy pig was grunting with lazy regularity and a cow was knocking her horn. Yergunov lighted a match and saw the pig, and the cow, and the dogs, which rushed at him on all sides at seeing the light, but there was no trace of the horse. Shouting and waving his arms at the dogs, stumbling over the drifts and sticking in the snow, he ran out at the gate and fell to gazing into the darkness. He strained his eyes to the utmost, and saw only the snow flying and the snowflakes distinctly forming into all sorts of shapes; at one moment the white, laughing face of a corpse would peep out of the darkness, at the next a white horse would gallop by with an Amazon in a muslin dress upon it, at the next a string of white swans would fly overhead.… Shaking with anger and cold, and not knowing what to do, Yergunov fired his revolver at the dogs, and did not hit one of them; then he rushed back to the house.

When he went into the entry he distinctly heard someone scurry out of the room and bang the door. It was dark in the room. Yergunov pushed against the door; it was locked. Then, lighting match after match, he rushed back into the entry, from there into the kitchen, and from the kitchen into a little room where all the walls were hung with petticoats and dresses, where there was a smell of cornflowers and fennel, and a bedstead with a perfect mountain of pillows, standing in the corner by the stove; this must have been the old mother’s room. From there he passed into another little room, and here he saw Lyubka. She was lying

on a chest, covered with a gay-coloured patchwork cotton quilt, pretending to be asleep. A little icon-lamp was burning in the corner above the pillow.

"Where is my horse?" Yergunov asked.

Lyubka did not stir.

"Where is my horse, I am asking you?" Yergunov repeated still more sternly, and he tore the quilt off her. "I am asking you, she-devil!" he shouted.

She jumped up on her knees, and with one hand holding her shift and with the other trying to clutch the quilt, huddled against the wall.… She looked at Yergunov with repulsion and terror in her eyes, and, like a wild beast in a trap, kept cunning watch on his faintest movement.

"Tell me where my horse is, or I'll knock the life out of you," shouted Yergunov.

"Get away, dirty brute!" she said in a hoarse voice.

Yergunov seized her by the shift near the neck and tore it. And then he could not restrain himself, and with all his might embraced the girl. But hissing with fury, she slipped out of his arms, and freeing one hand—the other was tangled in the torn shift—hit him a blow with her fist on the skull.

His head was dizzy with the pain, there was a ringing and rattling in his ears, he staggered back, and at that moment received another blow—this time on the temple. Reeling and clutching at the doorposts, that he might not fall, he made his way to the room where his things were, and lay down on the bench; then after lying for a little time, took the matchbox out of his pocket and began lighting match after match for no object: he lit it, blew it out, and threw it under the table, and went on till all the matches were gone.

Meanwhile the air began to turn blue outside, the cocks began to crow, but his head still ached, and there was an uproar in his ears as though he were sitting under a railway bridge and hearing the trains passing over his head. He got, somehow, into his coat and cap; the saddle and the bundle of his purchases he could not find, his knapsack was empty: it was not for nothing that someone had scurried out of the room when he came in from the yard.

He took a poker from the kitchen to keep off the dogs, and went out into the yard, leaving the door open. The snowstorm had subsided and it was calm outside.… When he went out at the gate, the white plain looked dead, and there was not a single bird in the morning sky. On both

sides of the road and in the distance there were bluish patches of young copse.

Yergunov began thinking how he would be greeted at the hospital and what the doctor would say to him; it was absolutely necessary to think of that, and to prepare beforehand to answer questions he would be asked, but this thought grew blurred and slipped away. He walked along thinking of nothing but Lyubka, of the peasants with whom he had passed the night; he remembered how, after Lyubka struck him the second time, she had bent down to the floor for the quilt, and how her loose hair had fallen on the floor. His mind was in a maze, and he wondered why there were in the world doctors, hospital assistants, merchants, clerks, and peasants instead of simple free men? There are, to be sure, free birds, free beasts, a free Merik, and they are not afraid of anyone, and don't need anyone! And whose idea was it, who had decreed that one must get up in the morning, dine at midday, go to bed in the evening; that a doctor takes precedence of a hospital assistant; that one must live in rooms and love only one's wife? And why not the contrary—dine at night and sleep in the day? Ah, to jump on a horse without enquiring whose it is, to ride races with the wind like a devil, over fields and forests and ravines, to make love to girls, to mock at everyone.…

Yergunov thrust the poker into the snow, pressed his forehead to the cold white trunk of a birch tree, and sank into thought; and his grey, monotonous life, his wages, his subordinate position, the dispensary, the everlasting to-do with the bottles and blisters, struck him as contemptible, sickening.

"Who says it's a sin to enjoy oneself?" he asked himself with vexation. "Those who say that have never lived in freedom like Merik and Kalashnikov, and have never loved Lyubka; they have been beggars all their lives, have lived without any pleasure, and have only loved their wives, who are like frogs."

And he thought about himself that he had not hitherto been a thief, a swindler, or even a brigand, simply because he could not, or had not yet met with a suitable opportunity.

A year and a half passed. In spring, after Easter, Yergunov, who had long before been dismissed from the hospital and was hanging about without

a job, came out of the tavern in Ryepino and sauntered aimlessly along the street.

He went out into the open country. Here there was the scent of spring, and a warm caressing wind was blowing. The calm, starry night looked down from the sky on the earth. My God, how infinite the depth of the sky, and with what fathomless immensity it stretched over the world! The world is created well enough, only why and with what right do people, thought Yergunov, divide their fellows into the sober and the drunken, the employed and the dismissed, and so on. Why do the sober and well fed sleep comfortably in their homes while the drunken and the hungry must wander about the country without a refuge? Why was it that if anyone had not a job and did not get a salary he had to go hungry, without clothes and boots? Whose idea was it? Why was it the birds and the wild beasts in the woods did not have jobs and get salaries, but lived as they pleased?

Far away in the sky a beautiful crimson glow lay quivering, stretched wide over the horizon. Yergunov stopped, and for a long time he gazed at it, and kept wondering why was it that if he had carried off someone else's samovar the day before and sold it for drink in the taverns it would be a sin? Why was it?

Two carts drove by on the road; in one of them there was a woman asleep, in the other sat an old man without a cap on.

"Grandfather, where is that fire?" asked Yergunov.

"Andrey Tchirikov's inn," answered the old man.

And Yergunov recalled what had happened to him eighteen months before in the winter, in that very inn, and how Merik had boasted; and he imagined the old woman and Lyubka, with their throats cut, burning, and he envied Merik. And when he walked back to the tavern, looking at the houses of the rich publicans, cattle-dealers, and blacksmiths, he reflected how nice it would be to steal by night into some rich man's house!

GUSEV

I

It was getting dark; it would soon be night.

Gusev, a discharged soldier, sat up in his hammock and said in an undertone:

"I say, Pavel Ivanitch. A soldier at Sutchan told me: while they were sailing a big fish came into collision with their ship and stove a hole in it."

The nondescript individual whom he was addressing, and whom everyone in the ship's hospital called Pavel Ivanitch, was silent, as though he had not heard.

And again a stillness followed… The wind frolicked with the rigging, the screw throbbed, the waves lashed, the hammocks creaked, but the ear had long ago become accustomed to these sounds, and it seemed that everything around was asleep and silent. It was dreary. The three invalids—two soldiers and a sailor—who had been playing cards all the day were asleep and talking in their dreams.

It seemed as though the ship were beginning to rock. The hammock slowly rose and fell under Gusev, as though it were heaving a sigh, and this was repeated once, twice, three times.… Something crashed on to the floor with a clang: it must have been a jug falling down.

"The wind has broken loose from its chain…" said Gusev, listening.

This time Pavel Ivanitch cleared his throat and answered irritably:

"One minute a vessel's running into a fish, the next, the wind's breaking loose from its chain. Is the wind a beast that it can break loose from its chain?"

"That's how christened folk talk."

"They are as ignorant as you are then. They say all sorts of things. One must keep a head on one's shoulders and use one's reason. You are a

senseless creature.”

Pavel Ivanitch was subject to seasickness. When the sea was rough he was usually ill-humoured, and the merest trifle would make him irritable. And in Gusev’s opinion there was absolutely nothing to be vexed about. What was there strange or wonderful, for instance, in the fish or in the wind’s breaking loose from its chain? Suppose the fish were as big as a mountain and its back were as hard as a sturgeon: and in the same way, supposing that away yonder at the end of the world there stood great stone walls and the fierce winds were chained up to the walls… if they had not broken loose, why did they tear about all over the sea like maniacs, and struggle to escape like dogs? If they were not chained up, what did become of them when it was calm?

Gusev pondered for a long time about fishes as big as a mountain and stout, rusty chains, then he began to feel dull and thought of his native place to which he was returning after five years’ service in the East. He pictured an immense pond covered with snow.… On one side of the pond the redbrick building of the potteries with a tall chimney and clouds of black smoke; on the other side—a village.… His brother Alexey comes out in a sledge from the fifth yard from the end; behind him sits his little son Vanka in big felt overboots, and his little girl Akulka, also in big felt boots. Alexey has been drinking, Vanka is laughing, Akulka’s face he could not see, she had muffled herself up.

“You never know, he’ll get the children frozen…” thought Gusev. “Lord send them sense and judgment that they may honour their father and mother and not be wiser than their parents.”

“They want re-soleing,” a delirious sailor says in a bass voice. “Yes, yes!”

Gusev’s thoughts break off, and instead of a pond there suddenly appears apropos of nothing a huge bull’s head without eyes, and the horse and sledge are not driving along, but are whirling round and round in a cloud of smoke. But still he was glad he had seen his own folks. He held his breath from delight, shudders ran all over him, and his fingers twitched.

“The Lord let us meet again,” he muttered feverishly, but he at once opened his eyes and sought in the darkness for water.

He drank and lay back, and again the sledge was moving, then again the bull’s head without eyes, smoke, clouds.… And so on till daybreak.

II

The first outline visible in the darkness was a blue circle—the little round window; then little by little Gusev could distinguish his neighbour in the next hammock, Pavel Ivanitch. The man slept sitting up, as he could not breathe lying down. His face was grey, his nose was long and sharp, his eyes looked huge from the terrible thinness of his face, his temples were sunken, his beard was skimpy, his hair was long.… Looking at him you could not make out of what class he was, whether he were a gentleman, a merchant, or a peasant. Judging from his expression and his long hair he might have been a hermit or a lay brother in a monastery—but if one listened to what he said it seemed that he could not be a monk. He was worn out by his cough and his illness and by the stifling heat, and breathed with difficulty, moving his parched lips. Noticing that Gusev was looking at him he turned his face towards him and said:

"I begin to guess.… Yes.… I understand it all perfectly now."

"What do you understand, Pavel Ivanitch?"

"I'll tell you.… It has always seemed to me strange that terribly ill as you are you should be here in a steamer where it is so hot and stifling and we are always being tossed up and down, where, in fact, everything threatens you with death; now it is all clear to me.… Yes.… Your doctors put you on the steamer to get rid of you. They get sick of looking after poor brutes like you.… You don't pay them anything, they have a bother with you, and you damage their records with your deaths—so, of course, you are brutes! It's not difficult to get rid of you.… All that is necessary is, in the first place, to have no conscience or humanity, and, secondly, to deceive the steamer authorities. The first condition need hardly be considered, in that respect we are artists; and one can always succeed in the second with a little practice. In a crowd of four hundred healthy soldiers and sailors half a dozen sick ones are not conspicuous; well, they drove you all on to the steamer, mixed you with the healthy ones, hurriedly counted you over, and in the confusion nothing amiss was noticed, and when the steamer had started they saw that there were paralytics and consumptives in the last stage lying about on the deck.…"

Gusev did not understand Pavel Ivanitch; but supposing he was being blamed, he said in self-defence:

"I lay on the deck because I had not the strength to stand; when we were unloaded from the barge on to the ship I caught a fearful chill."

"It's revolting," Pavel Ivanitch went on. "The worst of it is they know perfectly well that you can't last out the long journey, and yet they put you here. Supposing you get as far as the Indian Ocean, what then? It's horrible to think of it.… And that's their gratitude for your faithful, irreproachable service!"

Pavel Ivanitch's eyes looked angry; he frowned contemptuously and said, gasping:

"Those are the people who ought to be plucked in the newspapers till the feathers fly in all directions."

The two sick soldiers and the sailor were awake and already playing cards. The sailor was half reclining in his hammock, the soldiers were sitting near him on the floor in the most uncomfortable attitudes. One of the soldiers had his right arm in a sling, and the hand was swathed up in a regular bundle so that he held his cards under his right arm or in the crook of his elbow while he played with the left. The ship was rolling heavily. They could not stand up, nor drink tea, nor take their medicines.

"Were you an officer's servant?" Pavel Ivanitch asked Gusev.

"Yes, an officer's servant."

"My God, my God!" said Pavel Ivanitch, and he shook his head mournfully. "To tear a man out of his home, drag him twelve thousand miles away, then to drive him into consumption and… and what is it all for, one wonders? To turn him into a servant for some Captain Kopeikin or midshipman Dirka! How logical!"

"It's not hard work, Pavel Ivanitch. You get up in the morning and clean the boots, get the samovar, sweep the rooms, and then you have nothing more to do. The lieutenant is all the day drawing plans, and if you like you can say your prayers, if you like you can read a book or go out into the street. God grant everyone such a life."

"Yes, very nice, the lieutenant draws plans all the day and you sit in the kitchen and pine for home.… Plans indeed!… It is not plans that matter, but a human life. Life is not given twice, it must be treated mercifully."

"Of course, Pavel Ivanitch, a bad man gets no mercy anywhere, neither at home nor in the army, but if you live as you ought and obey orders, who has any need to insult you? The officers are educated

gentlemen, they understand.… In five years I was never once in prison, and I was never struck a blow, so help me God, but once.”

“What for?”

“For fighting. I have a heavy hand, Pavel Ivanitch. Four Chinamen came into our yard; they were bringing firewood or something, I don’t remember. Well, I was bored and I knocked them about a bit, one’s nose began bleeding, damn the fellow.… The lieutenant saw it through the little window, he was angry and gave me a box on the ear.”

“Foolish, pitiful man…” whispered Pavel Ivanitch. “You don’t understand anything.”

He was utterly exhausted by the tossing of the ship and closed his eyes; his head alternately fell back and dropped forward on his breast. Several times he tried to lie down but nothing came of it; his difficulty in breathing prevented it.

“And what did you hit the four Chinamen for?” he asked a little while afterwards.

“Oh, nothing. They came into the yard and I hit them.”

And a stillness followed.… The cardplayers had been playing for two hours with enthusiasm and loud abuse of one another, but the motion of the ship overcame them, too; they threw aside the cards and lay down. Again Gusev saw the big pond, the brick building, the village.… Again the sledge was coming along, again Vanka was laughing and Akulka, silly little thing, threw open her fur coat and stuck her feet out, as much as to say: “Look, good people, my snowboots are not like Vanka’s, they are new ones.”

“Five years old, and she has no sense yet,” Gusev muttered in delirium. “Instead of kicking your legs you had better come and get your soldier uncle a drink. I will give you something nice.”

Then Andron with a flintlock gun on his shoulder was carrying a hare he had killed, and he was followed by the decrepit old Jew Isaitchik, who offers to barter the hare for a piece of soap; then the black calf in the shed, then Domna sewing at a shirt and crying about something, and then again the bull’s head without eyes, black smoke.…

Overhead someone gave a loud shout, several sailors ran by, they seemed to be dragging something bulky over the deck, something fell with a crash. Again they ran by.… Had something gone wrong? Gusev raised his head, listened, and saw that the two soldiers and the sailor were playing cards again; Pavel Ivanitch was sitting up moving his lips. It was stifling, one hadn’t strength to breathe, one was thirsty, the water was warm, disgusting. The ship heaved as much as ever.

Suddenly something strange happened to one of the soldiers playing cards.… He called hearts diamonds, got muddled in his score, and dropped his cards, then with a frightened, foolish smile looked round at all of them.

“I shan’t be a minute, mates, I’ll…” he said, and lay down on the floor.

Everybody was amazed. They called to him, he did not answer.

“Stephan, maybe you are feeling bad, eh?” the soldier with his arm in a sling asked him. “Perhaps we had better bring the priest, eh?”

“Have a drink of water, Stepan…” said the sailor. “Here, lad, drink.”

“Why are you knocking the jug against his teeth?” said Gusev angrily. “Don’t you see, turnip head?”

“What?”

“What?” Gusev repeated, mimicking him. “There is no breath in him, he is dead! That’s what! What nonsensical people, Lord have mercy on us…!”

III

The ship was not rocking and Pavel Ivanitch was more cheerful. He was no longer ill-humoured. His face had a boastful, defiant, mocking expression. He looked as though he wanted to say: “Yes, in a minute I will tell you something that will make you split your sides with laughing.” The little round window was open and a soft breeze was blowing on Pavel Ivanitch. There was a sound of voices, of the plash of oars in the water.… Just under the little window someone began droning in a high, unpleasant voice: no doubt it was a Chinaman singing.

“Here we are in the harbour,” said Pavel Ivanitch, smiling ironically. “Only another month and we shall be in Russia. Well, worthy gentlemen and warriors! I shall arrive at Odessa and from there go straight to Harkov. In Harkov I have a friend, a literary man. I shall go to him and say, ‘Come, old man, put aside your horrid subjects, ladies’ amours and the beauties of nature, and show up human depravity.’ ”

For a minute he pondered, then said:

“Gusev, do you know how I took them in?”

“Took in whom, Pavel Ivanitch?”

“Why, these fellows.… You know that on this steamer there is only a first-class and a third-class, and they only allow peasants—that is the rift-raft—to go in the third. If you have got on a reefer jacket and have the faintest resemblance to a gentleman or a bourgeois you must go first-class, if you please. You must fork out five hundred roubles if you die for it. Why, I ask, have you made such a rule? Do you want to raise the prestige of educated Russians thereby? Not a bit of it. We don’t let you go third-class simply because a decent person can’t go third-class; it is very horrible and disgusting. Yes, indeed. I am very grateful for such solicitude for decent people’s welfare. But in any case, whether it is nasty there or nice, five hundred roubles I haven’t got. I haven’t pilfered government money. I haven’t exploited the natives, I haven’t trafficked in contraband, I have flogged no one to death, so judge whether I have the right to travel first-class and even less to reckon myself of the educated class? But you won’t catch them with logic.… One has to resort to deception. I put on a workman’s coat and high boots, I assumed

a drunken, servile mug and went to the agents: ‘Give us a little ticket, your honour,’ said I.…”

“Why, what class do you belong to?” asked a sailor.

“Clerical. My father was an honest priest, he always told the great ones of the world the truth to their faces; and he had a great deal to put up with in consequence.”

Pavel Ivanitch was exhausted with talking and gasped for breath, but still went on:

“Yes, I always tell people the truth to their faces. I am not afraid of anyone or anything. There is a vast difference between me and all of you in that respect. You are in darkness, you are blind, crushed; you see nothing and what you do see you don’t understand.… You are told the wind breaks loose from its chain, that you are beasts, Petchenyegs, and you believe it; they punch you in the neck, you kiss their hands; some animal in a sable-lined coat robs you and then tips you fifteen kopecks and you: ‘Let me kiss your hand, sir.’ You are pariahs, pitiful people.… I am a different sort. My eyes are open, I see it all as clearly as a hawk or an eagle when it floats over the earth, and I understand it all. I am a living protest. I see irresponsible tyranny—I protest. I see cant and hypocrisy—I protest. I see swine triumphant—I protest. And I cannot be suppressed, no Spanish Inquisition can make me hold my tongue. No.… Cut out my tongue and I would protest in dumb show; shut me up in a cellar—I will shout from it to be heard half a mile away, or I will starve myself to death that they may have another weight on their black consciences. Kill me and I will haunt them with my ghost. All my acquaintances say to me: ‘You are a most insufferable person, Pavel Ivanitch.’ I am proud of such a reputation. I have served three years in the far East, and I shall be remembered there for a hundred years: I had rows with everyone. My friends write to me from Russia, ‘Don’t come back,’ but here I am going back to spite them… yes.… That is life as I understand it. That is what one can call life.”

Gusev was looking at the little window and was not listening. A boat was swaying on the transparent, soft, turquoise water all bathed in hot, dazzling sunshine. In it there were naked Chinamen holding up cages with canaries and calling out:

“It sings, it sings!”

Another boat knocked against the first; the steam cutter darted by. And then there came another boat with a fat Chinaman sitting in it, eating rice with little sticks.

Languidly the water heaved, languidly the white seagulls floated over it.

“I should like to give that fat fellow one in the neck,” thought Gusev, gazing at the stout Chinaman, with a yawn.

He dozed off, and it seemed to him that all nature was dozing, too. Time flew swiftly by; imperceptibly the day passed, imperceptibly the darkness came on.… The steamer was no longer standing still, but moving on further.

IV

Two days passed, Pavel Ivanitch lay down instead of sitting up; his eyes were closed, his nose seemed to have grown sharper.

"Pavel Ivanitch," Gusev called to him. "Hey, Pavel Ivanitch."

Pavel Ivanitch opened his eyes and moved his lips.

"Are you feeling bad?"

"No… it's nothing…" answered Pavel Ivanitch, gasping. "Nothing; on the contrary—I am rather better.… You see I can lie down. I am a little easier.…"

"Well, thank God for that, Pavel Ivanitch."

"When I compare myself with you I am sorry for you… poor fellow. My lungs are all right, it is only a stomach cough.… I can stand hell, let alone the Red Sea. Besides I take a critical attitude to my illness and to the medicines they give me for it. While you… you are in darkness.… It's hard for you, very, very hard!"

The ship was not rolling, it was calm, but as hot and stifling as a bathhouse; it was not only hard to speak but even hard to listen. Gusev hugged his knees, laid his head on them and thought of his home. Good heavens, what a relief it was to think of snow and cold in that stifling heat! You drive in a sledge, all at once the horses take fright at something and bolt.… Regardless of the road, the ditches, the ravines, they dash like mad things, right through the village, over the pond by the pottery works, out across the open fields. "Hold on," the pottery hands and the peasants shout, meeting them. "Hold on." But why? Let the keen, cold wind beat in one's face and bite one's hands; let the lumps of snow, kicked up by the horses' hoofs, fall on one's cap, on one's back, down one's collar, on one's chest; let the runners ring on the snow, and the traces and the sledge be smashed, deuce take them one and all! And how delightful when the sledge upsets and you go flying full tilt into a drift, face downwards in the snow, and then you get up white all over with icicles on your moustaches; no cap, no gloves, your belt undone.… People laugh, the dogs bark.…

Pavel Ivanitch half opened one eye, looked at Gusev with it, and asked softly:

“Gusev, did your commanding officer steal?”

“Who can tell, Pavel Ivanitch! We can’t say, it didn’t reach us.”

And after that a long time passed in silence. Gusev brooded, muttered something in delirium, and kept drinking water; it was hard for him to talk and hard to listen, and he was afraid of being talked to. An hour passed, a second, a third; evening came on, then night, but he did not notice it. He still sat dreaming of the frost.

There was a sound as though someone came into the hospital, and voices were audible, but a few minutes passed and all was still again.

“The Kingdom of Heaven and eternal peace,” said the soldier with his arm in a sling. “He was an uncomfortable man.”

“What?” asked Gusev. “Who?”

“He is dead, they have just carried him up.”

“Oh, well,” muttered Gusev, yawning, “the Kingdom of Heaven be his.”

“What do you think?” the soldier with his arm in a sling asked Gusev. “Will he be in the Kingdom of Heaven or not?”

“Who is it you are talking about?”

“Pavel Ivanitch.”

“He will be… he suffered so long. And there is another thing, he belonged to the clergy, and the priests always have a lot of relations. Their prayers will save him.”

The soldier with the sling sat down on a hammock near Gusev and said in an undertone:

“And you, Gusev, are not long for this world. You will never get to Russia.”

“Did the doctor or his assistant say so?” asked Gusev.

“It isn’t that they said so, but one can see it.… One can see directly when a man’s going to die. You don’t eat, you don’t drink; it’s dreadful to see how thin you’ve got. It’s consumption, in fact. I say it, not to upset you, but because maybe you would like to have the sacrament and extreme unction. And if you have any money you had better give it to the senior officer.”

“I haven’t written home…” Gusev sighed. “I shall die and they won’t know.”

“They’ll hear of it,” the sick sailor brought out in a bass voice. “When you die they will put it down in the *Gazette*, at Odessa they will send in a report to the commanding officer there and he will send it to the parish or somewhere.…”

Gusev began to be uneasy after such a conversation and to feel a vague yearning. He drank water—it was not that; he dragged himself to the window and breathed the hot, moist air—it was not that; he tried to think of home, of the frost—it was not that.… At last it seemed to him one minute longer in the ward and he would certainly expire.

"It's stifling, mates…" he said. "I'll go on deck. Help me up, for Christ's sake."

"All right," assented the soldier with the sling. "I'll carry you, you can't walk, hold on to my neck."

Gusev put his arm round the soldier's neck, the latter put his unhurt arm round him and carried him up. On the deck sailors and time-expired soldiers were lying asleep side by side; there were so many of them it was difficult to pass.

"Stand down," the soldier with the sling said softly. "Follow me quietly, hold on to my shirt.…"

It was dark. There was no light on deck, nor on the masts, nor anywhere on the sea around. At the furthest end of the ship the man on watch was standing perfectly still like a statue, and it looked as though he were asleep. It seemed as though the steamer were abandoned to itself and were going at its own will.

"Now they will throw Pavel Ivanitch into the sea," said the soldier with the sling. "In a sack and then into the water."

"Yes, that's the rule."

"But it's better to lie at home in the earth. Anyway, your mother comes to the grave and weeps."

"Of course."

There was a smell of hay and of dung. There were oxen standing with drooping heads by the ship's rail. One, two, three; eight of them! And there was a little horse. Gusev put out his hand to stroke it, but it shook its head, showed its teeth, and tried to bite his sleeve.

"Damned brute…" said Gusev angrily.

The two of them, he and the soldier, threaded their way to the head of the ship, then stood at the rail and looked up and down. Overhead deep sky, bright stars, peace and stillness, exactly as at home in the village, below darkness and disorder. The tall waves were resounding, no one could tell why. Whichever wave you looked at each one was trying to rise higher than all the rest and to chase and crush the next one; after it a third as fierce and hideous flew noisily, with a glint of light on its white crest.

The sea has no sense and no pity. If the steamer had been smaller and not made of thick iron, the waves would have crushed it to pieces without the slightest compunction, and would have devoured all the people in it with no distinction of saints or sinners. The steamer had the same cruel and meaningless expression. This monster with its huge beak was dashing onwards, cutting millions of waves in its path; it had no fear of the darkness nor the wind, nor of space, nor of solitude, caring for nothing, and if the ocean had its people, this monster would have crushed them, too, without distinction of saints or sinners.

"Where are we now?" asked Gusev.

"I don't know. We must be in the ocean."

"There is no sight of land…"

"No indeed! They say we shan't see it for seven days."

The two soldiers watched the white foam with the phosphorus light on it and were silent, thinking. Gusev was the first to break the silence.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," he said, "only one is full of dread as though one were sitting in a dark forest; but if, for instance, they let a boat down on to the water this minute and an officer ordered me to go a hundred miles over the sea to catch fish, I'd go. Or, let's say, if a Christian were to fall into the water this minute, I'd go in after him. A German or a Chinaman I wouldn't save, but I'd go in after a Christian."

"And are you afraid to die?"

"Yes. I am sorry for the folks at home. My brother at home, you know, isn't steady; he drinks, he beats his wife for nothing, he does not honour his parents. Everything will go to ruin without me, and father and my old mother will be begging their bread, I shouldn't wonder. But my legs won't bear me, brother, and it's hot here. Let's go to sleep."

V

Gusev went back to the ward and got into his hammock. He was again tormented by a vague craving, and he could not make out what he wanted. There was an oppression on his chest, a throbbing in his head, his mouth was so dry that it was difficult for him to move his tongue. He dozed, and murmured in his sleep, and, worn out with nightmares, his cough, and the stifling heat, towards morning he fell into a sound sleep. He dreamed that they were just taking the bread out of the oven in the barracks and he climbed into the stove and had a steam bath in it, lashing himself with a bunch of birch twigs. He slept for two days, and at midday on the third two sailors came down and carried him out.

He was sewn up in sailcloth and to make him heavier they put with him two iron weights. Sewn up in the sailcloth he looked like a carrot or a radish: broad at the head and narrow at the feet.… Before sunset they brought him up to the deck and put him on a plank; one end of the plank lay on the side of the ship, the other on a box, placed on a stool. Round him stood the soldiers and the officers with their caps off.

“Blessed be the Name of the Lord…” the priest began. “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.”

“Amen,” chanted three sailors.

The soldiers and the officers crossed themselves and looked away at the waves. It was strange that a man should be sewn up in sailcloth and should soon be flying into the sea. Was it possible that such a thing might happen to anyone?

The priest strewed earth upon Gusev and bowed down. They sang “Eternal Memory.”

The man on watch duty tilted up the end of the plank, Gusev slid off and flew head foremost, turned a somersault in the air and splashed into the sea. He was covered with foam and for a moment looked as though he were wrapped in lace, but the minute passed and he disappeared in the waves.

He went rapidly towards the bottom. Did he reach it? It was said to be three miles to the bottom. After sinking sixty or seventy feet, he began moving more and more slowly, swaying rhythmically, as though he were

hesitating and, carried along by the current, moved more rapidly sideways than downwards.

Then he was met by a shoal of the fish called harbour pilots. Seeing the dark body the fish stopped as though petrified, and suddenly turned round and disappeared. In less than a minute they flew back swift as an arrow to Gusev, and began zigzagging round him in the water.

After that another dark body appeared. It was a shark. It swam under Gusev with dignity and no show of interest, as though it did not notice him, and sank down upon its back, then it turned belly upwards, basking in the warm, transparent water and languidly opened its jaws with two rows of teeth. The harbour pilots are delighted, they stop to see what will come next. After playing a little with the body the shark nonchalantly puts its jaws under it, cautiously touches it with its teeth, and the sailcloth is rent its full length from head to foot; one of the weights falls out and frightens the harbour pilots, and striking the shark on the ribs goes rapidly to the bottom.

Overhead at this time the clouds are massed together on the side where the sun is setting; one cloud like a triumphal arch, another like a lion, a third like a pair of scissors.… From behind the clouds a broad, green shaft of light pierces through and stretches to the middle of the sky; a little later another, violet-coloured, lies beside it; next that, one of gold, then one rose-coloured.… The sky turns a soft lilac. Looking at this gorgeous, enchanted sky, at first the ocean scowls, but soon it, too, takes tender, joyous, passionate colours for which it is hard to find a name in human speech.

Peasant Wives

In the village of Reybuzh, just facing the church, stands a two-storeyed house with a stone foundation and an iron roof. In the lower storey the owner himself, Filip Ivanov Kashin, nicknamed “Dyudya,” lives with his family, and on the upper floor, where it is apt to be very hot in summer and very cold in winter, they put up government officials, merchants, or landowners, who chance to be travelling that way. Dyudya rents some bits of land, keeps a tavern on the high road, does a trade in tar, honey, cattle, and jackdaws, and has already something like eight thousand roubles put by in the bank in the town.

His elder son, Fyodor, is head engineer in the factory, and, as the peasants say of him, he has risen so high in the world that he is quite out of reach now. Fyodor’s wife, Sofya, a plain, ailing woman, lives at home at her father-in-law’s. She is forever crying, and every Sunday she goes over to the hospital for medicine. Dyudya’s second son, the hunchback Alyoshka, is living at home at his father’s. He has only lately been married to Varvara, whom they singled out for him from a poor family. She is a handsome young woman, smart and buxom. When officials or merchants put up at the house, they always insist on having Varvara to bring in the samovar and make their beds.

One June evening when the sun was setting and the air was full of the smell of hay, of steaming dung-heaps and new milk, a plain-looking cart drove into Dyudya’s yard with three people in it: a man of about thirty in a canvas suit, beside him a little boy of seven or eight in a long black coat with big bone buttons, and on the driver’s seat a young fellow in a red shirt.

The young fellow took out the horses and led them out into the street to walk them up and down a bit, while the traveller washed, said a prayer, turning towards the church, then spread a rug near the cart and sat down with the boy to supper. He ate without haste, sedately, and Dyudya, who had seen a good many travellers in his time, knew him from his manners for a businesslike man, serious and aware of his own value.

Dyudya was sitting on the step in his waistcoat without a cap on, waiting for the visitor to speak first. He was used to hearing all kinds of stories from the travellers in the evening, and he liked listening to them before going to bed. His old wife, Afanasyevna, and his daughter-in-law Sofya, were milking in the cowshed. The other daughter-in-law, Varvara, was sitting at the open window of the upper storey, eating sunflower seeds.

“The little chap will be your son, I’m thinking?” Dyudya asked the traveller.

“No; adopted. An orphan. I took him for my soul’s salvation.”

They got into conversation. The stranger seemed to be a man fond of talking and ready of speech, and Dyudya learned from him that he was from the town, was of the tradesman class, and had a house of his own, that his name was Matvey Savitch, that he was on his way now to look at some gardens that he was renting from some German colonists, and that the boy’s name was Kuzka. The evening was hot and close, no one felt inclined for sleep. When it was getting dark and pale stars began to twinkle here and there in the sky, Matvey Savitch began to tell how he had come by Kuzka. Afanasyevna and Sofya stood a little way off, listening. Kuzka had gone to the gate.

“It’s a complicated story, old man,” began Matvey Savitch, “and if I were to tell you all just as it happened, it would take all night and more. Ten years ago in a little house in our street, next door to me, where now there’s a tallow and oil factory, there was living an old widow, Marfa Semyonovna Kapluntsev, and she had two sons: one was a guard on the railway, but the other, Vasya, who was just my own age, lived at home with his mother. Old Kapluntsev had kept five pair of horses and sent carriers all over the town; his widow had not given up the business, but managed the carriers as well as her husband had done, so that some days they would bring in as much as five roubles from their rounds.

“The young fellow, too, made a trifle on his own account. He used to breed fancy pigeons and sell them to fanciers; at times he would stand for hours on the roof, waving a broom in the air and whistling; his pigeons were right up in the clouds, but it wasn’t enough for him, and he’d want them to go higher yet. Siskins and starlings, too, he used to catch, and he made cages for sale. All trifles, but, mind you, he’d pick up some ten roubles a month over such trifles. Well, as time went on, the old lady lost the use of her legs and took to her bed. In consequence of which event the house was left without a woman to look after it, and that’s for all the world like a man without an eye. The old lady bestirred herself

and made up her mind to marry Vasya. They called in a matchmaker at once, the women got to talking of one thing and another, and Vasya went off to have a look at the girls. He picked out Mashenka, a widow's daughter. They made up their minds without loss of time and in a week it was all settled. The girl was a little slip of a thing, seventeen, but fair-skinned and pretty-looking, and like a lady in all her ways; and a decent dowry with her, five hundred roubles, a cow, a bed.… Well, the old lady—it seemed as though she had known it was coming—three days after the wedding, departed to the Heavenly Jerusalem where is neither sickness nor sighing. The young people gave her a good funeral and began their life together. For just six months they got on splendidly, and then all of a sudden another misfortune. It never rains but it pours: Vasya was summoned to the recruiting office to draw lots for the service. He was taken, poor chap, for a soldier, and not even granted exemption. They shaved his head and packed him off to Poland. It was God's will; there was nothing to be done. When he said goodbye to his wife in the yard, he bore it all right; but as he glanced up at the hayloft and his pigeons for the last time, he burst out crying. It was pitiful to see him.

"At first Mashenka got her mother to stay with her, that she mightn't be dull all alone; she stayed till the baby—this very Kuzka here—was born, and then she went off to Oboyan to another married daughter's and left Mashenka alone with the baby. There were five peasants—the carriers—a drunken saucy lot; horses, too, and dray-carts to see to, and then the fence would be broken or the soot afire in the chimney—jobs beyond a woman, and through our being neighbours, she got into the way of turning to me for every little thing.… Well, I'd go over, set things to rights, and give advice.… Naturally, not without going indoors, drinking a cup of tea and having a little chat with her. I was a young fellow, intellectual, and fond of talking on all sorts of subjects; she, too, was well-bred and educated. She was always neatly dressed, and in summer she walked out with a sunshade. Sometimes I would begin upon religion or politics with her, and she was flattered and would entertain me with tea and jam.… In a word, not to make a long story of it, I must tell you, old man, a year had not passed before the Evil One, the enemy of all mankind, confounded me. I began to notice that any day I didn't go to see her, I seemed out of sorts and dull. And I'd be continually making up something that I must see her about: 'It's high time,' I'd say to myself, 'to put the double windows in for the winter,' and the whole day I'd idle away over at her place putting in the windows and take good care to leave a couple of them over for the next day too.

“‘I ought to count over Vasya’s pigeons, to see none of them have strayed,’ and so on. I used always to be talking to her across the fence, and in the end I made a little gate in the fence so as not to have to go so far round. From womankind comes much evil into the world and every kind of abomination. Not we sinners only; even the saints themselves have been led astray by them. Mashenka did not try to keep me at a distance. Instead of thinking of her husband and being on her guard, she fell in love with me. I began to notice that she was dull without me, and was always walking to and fro by the fence looking into my yard through the cracks.

“My brains were going round in my head in a sort of frenzy. On Thursday in Holy Week I was going early in the morning—it was scarcely light—to market. I passed close by her gate, and the Evil One was by me—at my elbow. I looked—she had a gate with open trellis work at the top—and there she was, up already, standing in the middle of the yard, feeding the ducks. I could not restrain myself, and I called her name. She came up and looked at me through the trellis.… Her little face was white, her eyes soft and sleepy-looking.… I liked her looks immensely, and I began paying her compliments, as though we were not at the gate, but just as one does on name-days, while she blushed, and laughed, and kept looking straight into my eyes without winking.… I lost all sense and began to declare my love to her.… She opened the gate, and from that morning we began to live as man and wife.…”

The hunchback Alyoshka came into the yard from the street and ran out of breath into the house, not looking at anyone. A minute later he ran out of the house with a concertina. Jingling some coppers in his pocket, and cracking sunflower seeds as he ran, he went out at the gate.

“And who’s that, pray?” asked Matvey Savitch.

“My son Alexey,” answered Dyudya. “He’s off on a spree, the rascal. God has afflicted him with a hump, so we are not very hard on him.”

“And he’s always drinking with the other fellows, always drinking,” sighed Afanasyevna. “Before Carnival we married him, thinking he’d be steadier, but there! he’s worse than ever.”

“It’s been no use. Simply keeping another man’s daughter for nothing,” said Dyudya.

Somewhere behind the church they began to sing a glorious, mournful song. The words they could not catch and only the voices could be heard—two tenors and a bass. All were listening; there was complete stillness in the yard.… Two voices suddenly broke off with a loud roar of laughter, but the third, a tenor, still sang on, and took so high a note that

everyone instinctively looked upwards, as though the voice had soared to heaven itself.

Varvara came out of the house, and screening her eyes with her hand, as though from the sun, she looked towards the church.

"It's the priest's sons with the schoolmaster," she said.

Again all the three voices began to sing together. Matvey Savitch sighed and went on:

"Well, that's how it was, old man. Two years later we got a letter from Vasya from Warsaw. He wrote that he was being sent home sick. He was ill. By that time I had put all that foolishness out of my head, and I had a fine match picked out all ready for me, only I didn't know how to break it off with my sweetheart. Every day I'd make up my mind to have it out with Mashenka, but I didn't know how to approach her so as not to have a woman's screeching about my ears. The letter freed my hands. I read it through with Mashenka; she turned white as a sheet, while I said to her: 'Thank God; now,' says I, 'you'll be a married woman again.' But says she: 'I'm not going to live with him.' 'Why, isn't he your husband?' said I. 'Is it an easy thing?… I never loved him and I married him not of my own free will. My mother made me.' 'Don't try to get out of it, silly,' said I, 'but tell me this: were you married to him in church or not?' 'I was married,' she said, 'but it's you that I love, and I will stay with you to the day of my death. Folks may jeer. I don't care.…' 'You're a Christian woman,' said I, 'and have read the Scriptures; what is written there?'

"Once married, with her husband she must live," said Dyudya.

"'Man and wife are one flesh. We have sinned,' I said, 'you and I, and it is enough; we must repent and fear God. We must confess it all to Vasya,' said I; 'he's a quiet fellow and soft—he won't kill you. And indeed,' said I, 'better to suffer torments in this world at the hands of your lawful master than to gnash your teeth at the dread Seat of Judgment.' The wench wouldn't listen; she stuck to her silly, 'It's you I love!' and nothing more could I get out of her.

"Vasya came back on the Saturday before Trinity, early in the morning. From my fence I could see everything; he ran into the house, and came back a minute later with Kuzka in his arms, and he was laughing and crying all at once; he was kissing Kuzka and looking up at the hayloft, and hadn't the heart to put the child down, and yet he was longing to go to his pigeons. He was always a soft sort of chap—sentimental. That day passed off very well, all quiet and proper. They had begun ringing the church bells for the evening service, when the

thought struck me: ‘Tomorrow’s Trinity Sunday; how is it they are not decking the gates and the fence with green? Something’s wrong,’ I thought. I went over to them. I peeped in, and there he was, sitting on the floor in the middle of the room, his eyes staring like a drunken man’s, the tears streaming down his cheeks and his hands shaking; he was pulling cracknels, necklaces, gingerbread nuts, and all sorts of little presents out of his bundle and flinging them on the floor. Kuzka—he was three years old—was crawling on the floor, munching the gingerbreads, while Mashenka stood by the stove, white and shivering all over, muttering: ‘I’m not your wife; I can’t live with you,’ and all sorts of foolishness. I bowed down at Vasya’s feet, and said: ‘We have sinned against you, Vassily Maximitch; forgive us, for Christ’s sake!’ Then I got up and spoke to Mashenka: ‘You, Marya Semyonovna, ought now to wash Vassily Maximitch’s feet and drink the water. Do you be an obedient wife to him, and pray to God for me, that He in His mercy may forgive my transgression.’ It came to me like an inspiration from an angel of Heaven; I gave her solemn counsel and spoke with such feeling that my own tears flowed too. And so two days later Vasya comes to me: ‘Matyusha,’ says he, ‘I forgive you and my wife; God have mercy on you! She was a soldier’s wife, a young thing all alone; it was hard for her to be on her guard. She’s not the first, nor will she be the last. Only,’ he says, ‘I beg you to behave as though there had never been anything between you, and to make no sign, while I,’ says he, ‘will do my best to please her in every way, so that she may come to love me again.’ He gave me his hand on it, drank a cup of tea, and went away more cheerful.

“‘Well,’ thought I, ‘thank God!’ and I did feel glad that everything had gone off so well. But no sooner had Vasya gone out of the yard, when in came Mashenka. Ah! What I had to suffer! She hung on my neck, weeping and praying: ‘For God’s sake, don’t cast me off; I can’t live without you!’”

“The vile hussy!” sighed Dyudya.

“I swore at her, stamped my foot, and dragging her into the passage, I fastened the door with the hook. ‘Go to your husband,’ I cried. ‘Don’t shame me before folks. Fear God!’ And every day there was a scene of that sort.

“One morning I was standing in my yard near the stable cleaning a bridle. All at once I saw her running through the little gate into my yard, with bare feet, in her petticoat, and straight towards me; she clutched at the bridle, getting all smeared with the pitch, and shaking and weeping, she cried: ‘I can’t stand him; I loathe him; I can’t bear it! If you don’t

love me, better kill me!’ I was angry, and I struck her twice with the bridle, but at that instant Vasya ran in at the gate, and in a despairing voice he shouted: ‘Don’t beat her! Don’t beat her!’ But he ran up himself, and waving his arms, as though he were mad, he let fly with his fists at her with all his might, then flung her on the ground and kicked her. I tried to defend her, but he snatched up the reins and thrashed her with them, and all the while, like a colt’s whinny, he went: ‘He—he—he!’”

“I’d take the reins and let you feel them,” muttered Varvara, moving away; “murdering our sister, the damned brutes!…”

“Hold your tongue, you jade!” Dyudya shouted at her.

“‘He—he—he!’” Matvey Savitch went on. “A carrier ran out of his yard; I called to my workman, and the three of us got Mashenka away from him and carried her home in our arms. The disgrace of it! The same day I went over in the evening to see how things were. She was lying in bed, all wrapped up in bandages, nothing but her eyes and nose to be seen; she was looking at the ceiling. I said: ‘Good evening, Marya Semyonovna!’ She did not speak. And Vasya was sitting in the next room, his head in his hands, crying and saying: ‘Brute that I am! I’ve ruined my life! O God, let me die!’ I sat for half an hour by Mashenka and gave her a good talking-to. I tried to frighten her a bit. ‘The righteous,’ said I, ‘after this life go to Paradise, but you will go to a Gehenna of fire, like all adulteresses. Don’t strive against your husband, go and lay yourself at his feet.’ But never a word from her; she didn’t so much as blink an eyelid, for all the world as though I were talking to a post. The next day Vasya fell ill with something like cholera, and in the evening I heard that he was dead. Well, so they buried him, and Mashenka did not go to the funeral; she didn’t care to show her shameless face and her bruises. And soon there began to be talk all over the district that Vasya had not died a natural death, that Mashenka had made away with him. It got to the ears of the police; they had Vasya dug up and cut open, and in his stomach they found arsenic. It was clear he had been poisoned; the police came and took Mashenka away, and with her the innocent Kuzka. They were put in prison.… The woman had gone too far—God punished her.… Eight months later they tried her. She sat, I remember, on a low stool, with a little white kerchief on her head, wearing a grey gown, and she was so thin, so pale, so sharp-eyed it made one sad to look at her. Behind her stood a soldier with a gun. She would not confess her guilt. Some in the court said she had poisoned her husband and others declared he had poisoned himself for grief. I was one

of the witnesses. When they questioned me, I told the whole truth according to my oath. ‘Hers,’ said I, ‘is the guilt. It’s no good to conceal it; she did not love her husband, and she had a will of her own.…’ The trial began in the morning and towards night they passed this sentence: to send her to hard labour in Siberia for thirteen years. After that sentence Mashenka remained three months longer in prison. I went to see her, and from Christian charity I took her a little tea and sugar. But as soon as she set eyes on me she began to shake all over, wringing her hands and muttering: ‘Go away! go away!’ And Kuzka she clasped to her as though she were afraid I would take him away. ‘See,’ said I, ‘what you have come to! Ah, Masha, Masha! you would not listen to me when I gave you good advice, and now you must repent it. You are yourself to blame,’ said I; ‘blame yourself!’ I was giving her good counsel, but she: ‘Go away, go away!’ huddling herself and Kuzka against the wall, and trembling all over.

“When they were taking her away to the chief town of our province, I walked by the escort as far as the station and slipped a rouble into her bundle for my soul’s salvation. But she did not get as far as Siberia.… She fell sick of fever and died in prison.”

“Live like a dog and you must die a dog’s death,” said Dyudya.

“Kuzka was sent back home.… I thought it over and took him to bring up. After all—though a convict’s child—still he was a living soul, a Christian.… I was sorry for him. I shall make him my clerk, and if I have no children of my own, I’ll make a merchant of him. Wherever I go now, I take him with me; let him learn his work.”

All the while Matvey Savitch had been telling his story, Kuzka had sat on a little stone near the gate. His head propped in both hands, he gazed at the sky, and in the distance he looked in the dark like a stump of wood.

“Kuzka, come to bed,” Matvey Savitch bawled to him.

“Yes, it’s time,” said Dyudya, getting up; he yawned loudly and added:

“Folks will go their own way, and that’s what comes of it.”

Over the yard the moon was floating now in the heavens; she was moving one way, while the clouds beneath moved the other way; the clouds were disappearing into the darkness, but still the moon could be seen high above the yard.

Matvey Savitch said a prayer, facing the church, and saying good night, he lay down on the ground near his cart. Kuzka, too, said a prayer, lay down in the cart, and covered himself with his little overcoat; he made himself a little hole in the hay so as to be more comfortable, and

curled up so that his elbows looked like knees. From the yard Dyudya could be seen lighting a candle in his room below, putting on his spectacles and standing in the corner with a book. He was a long while reading and crossing himself.

The travellers fell asleep. Afanasyevna and Sofya came up to the cart and began looking at Kuzka.

"The little orphan's asleep," said the old woman. "He's thin and frail, nothing but bones. No mother and no one to care for him properly."

"My Grishutka must be two years older," said Sofya. "Up at the factory he lives like a slave without his mother. The foreman beats him, I dare say. When I looked at this poor mite just now, I thought of my own Grishutka, and my heart went cold within me."

A minute passed in silence.

"Doesn't remember his mother, I suppose," said the old woman.

"How could he remember?"

And big tears began dropping from Sofya's eyes.

"He's curled himself up like a cat," she said, sobbing and laughing with tenderness and sorrow.… "Poor motherless mite!"

Kuzka started and opened his eyes. He saw before him an ugly, wrinkled, tear-stained face, and beside it another, aged and toothless, with a sharp chin and hooked nose, and high above them the infinite sky with the flying clouds and the moon. He cried out in fright, and Sofya, too, uttered a cry; both were answered by the echo, and a faint stir passed over the stifling air; a watchman tapped somewhere near, a dog barked. Matvey Savitch muttered something in his sleep and turned over on the other side.

Late at night when Dyudya and the old woman and the neighbouring watchman were all asleep, Sofya went out to the gate and sat down on the bench. She felt stifled and her head ached from weeping. The street was a wide and long one; it stretched for nearly two miles to the right and as far to the left, and the end of it was out of sight. The moon was now not over the yard, but behind the church. One side of the street was flooded with moonlight, while the other side lay in black shadow. The long shadows of the poplars and the starling-cotes stretched right across the street, while the church cast a broad shadow, black and terrible that enfolded Dyudya's gates and half his house. The street was still and deserted. From time to time the strains of music floated faintly from the end of the street—Alyoshka, most likely, playing his concertina.

Someone moved in the shadow near the church enclosure, and Sofya could not make out whether it were a man or a cow, or perhaps merely a

big bird rustling in the trees. But then a figure stepped out of the shadow, halted, and said something in a man's voice, then vanished down the turning by the church. A little later, not three yards from the gate, another figure came into sight; it walked straight from the church to the gate and stopped short, seeing Sofya on the bench.

"Varvara, is that you?" said Sofya.

"And if it were?"

It was Varvara. She stood still a minute, then came up to the bench and sat down.

"Where have you been?" asked Sofya.

Varvara made no answer.

"You'd better mind you don't get into trouble with such goings-on, my girl," said Sofya. "Did you hear how Mashenka was kicked and lashed with the reins? You'd better look out, or they'll treat you the same."

"Well, let them!"

Varvara laughed into her kerchief and whispered:

"I have just been with the priest's son."

"Nonsense!"

"I have!"

"It's a sin!" whispered Sofya.

"Well, let it be.… What do I care? If it's a sin, then it is a sin, but better be struck dead by thunder than live like this. I'm young and strong, and I've a filthy crooked hunchback for a husband, worse than Dyudya himself, curse him! When I was a girl, I hadn't bread to eat, or a shoe to my foot, and to get away from that wretchedness I was tempted by Alyoshka's money, and got caught like a fish in a net, and I'd rather have a viper for my bedfellow than that scurvy Alyoshka. And what's your life? It makes me sick to look at it. Your Fyodor sent you packing from the factory and he's taken up with another woman. They have robbed you of your boy and made a slave of him. You work like a horse, and never hear a kind word. I'd rather pine all my days an old maid, I'd rather get half a rouble from the priest's son, I'd rather beg my bread, or throw myself into the well…

"It's a sin!" whispered Sofya again.

"Well, let it be."

Somewhere behind the church the same three voices, two tenors and a bass, began singing again a mournful song. And again the words could not be distinguished.

"They are not early to bed," Varvara said, laughing.

And she began telling in a whisper of her midnight walks with the priest's son, and of the stories he had told her, and of his comrades, and of the fun she had with the travellers who stayed in the house. The mournful song stirred a longing for life and freedom. Sofya began to laugh; she thought it sinful and terrible and sweet to hear about, and she felt envious and sorry that she, too, had not been a sinner when she was young and pretty.

In the churchyard they heard twelve strokes beaten on the watchman's board.

"It's time we were asleep," said Sofya, getting up, "or, maybe, we shall catch it from Dyudya."

They both went softly into the yard.

"I went away without hearing what he was telling about Mashenka," said Varvara, making herself a bed under the window.

"She died in prison, he said. She poisoned her husband."

Varvara lay down beside Sofya a while, and said softly:

"I'd make away with my Alyoshka and never regret it."

"You talk nonsense; God forgive you."

When Sofya was just dropping asleep, Varvara, coming close, whispered in her ear:

"Let us get rid of Dyudya and Alyoshka!"

Sofya started and said nothing. Then she opened her eyes and gazed a long while steadily at the sky.

"People would find out," she said.

"No, they wouldn't. Dyudya's an old man, it's time he did die; and they'd say Alyoshka died of drink."

"I'm afraid… God would chastise us."

"Well, let Him.…"

Both lay awake thinking in silence.

"It's cold," said Sofya, beginning to shiver all over. "It will soon be morning.… Are you asleep?"

"No.… Don't you mind what I say, dear," whispered Varvara; "I get so mad with the damned brutes, I don't know what I do say. Go to sleep, or it will be daylight directly.… Go to sleep."

Both were quiet and soon they fell asleep.

Earlier than all woke the old woman. She waked up Sofya and they went together into the cowshed to milk the cows. The hunchback Alyoshka came in hopelessly drunk without his concertina; his breast and knees had been in the dust and straw—he must have fallen down in the road. Staggering, he went into the cowshed, and without undressing

he rolled into a sledge and began to snore at once. When first the crosses on the church and then the windows were flashing in the light of the rising sun, and shadows stretched across the yard over the dewy grass from the trees and the top of the well, Matvey Savitch jumped up and began hurrying about:

"Kuzka! get up!" he shouted. "It's time to put in the horses! Look sharp!"

The bustle of morning was beginning. A young Jewess in a brown gown with flounces led a horse into the yard to drink. The pulley of the well creaked plaintively, the bucket knocked as it went down.…

Kuzka, sleepy, tired, covered with dew, sat up in the cart, lazily putting on his little overcoat, and listening to the drip of the water from the bucket into the well as he shivered with the cold.

"Auntie!" shouted Matvey Savitch to Sofya, "tell my lad to hurry up and to harness the horses!"

And Dyudya at the same instant shouted from the window:

"Sofya, take a farthing from the Jewess for the horse's drink! They're always in here, the mangy creatures!"

In the street sheep were running up and down, baaing; the peasant women were shouting at the shepherd, while he played his pipes, cracked his whip, or answered them in a thick sleepy bass. Three sheep strayed into the yard, and not finding the gate again, pushed at the fence.

Varvara was waked by the noise, and bundling her bedding up in her arms, she went into the house.

"You might at least drive the sheep out!" the old woman bawled after her, "my lady!"

"I dare say! As if I were going to slave for you Herods!" muttered Varvara, going into the house.

Dyudya came out of the house with his accounts in his hands, sat down on the step, and began reckoning how much the traveller owed him for the night's lodging, oats, and watering his horses.

"You charge pretty heavily for the oats, my good man," said Matvey Savitch.

"If it's too much, don't take them. There's no compulsion, merchant."

When the travellers were ready to start, they were detained for a minute. Kuzka had lost his cap.

"Little swine, where did you put it?" Matvey Savitch roared angrily. "Where is it?"

Kuzka's face was working with terror; he ran up and down near the cart, and not finding it there, ran to the gate and then to the shed. The old

woman and Sofya helped him look.

“I’ll pull your ears off!” yelled Matvey Savitch. “Dirty brat!”

The cap was found at the bottom of the cart.

Kuzka brushed the hay off it with his sleeve, put it on, and timidly he crawled into the cart, still with an expression of terror on his face as though he were afraid of a blow from behind.

Matvey Savitch crossed himself. The driver gave a tug at the reins and the cart rolled out of the yard.

THE WIFE

I

I received the following letter:

> "Dear Sir, Pavel Andreitch!
> "Not far from you—that is to say, in the village of Pestrovo—very distressing incidents are taking place, concerning which I feel it my duty to write to you. All the peasants of that village sold their cottages and all their belongings, and set off for the province of Tomsk, but did not succeed in getting there, and have come back. Here, of course, they have nothing now; everything belongs to other people. They have settled three or four families in a hut, so that there are no less than fifteen persons of both sexes in each hut, not counting the young children; and the long and the short of it is, there is nothing to eat. There is famine and there is a terrible pestilence of hunger, or spotted, typhus; literally everyone is stricken. The doctor's assistant says one goes into a cottage and what does one see? Everyone is sick, everyone delirious, some laughing, others frantic; the huts are filthy; there is no one to fetch them water, no one to give them a drink, and nothing to eat but frozen potatoes. What can Sobol (our Zemstvo doctor) and his lady assistant do when more than medicine the peasants need bread which they have not? The District Zemstvo refuses to assist them, on the ground that their names have been taken off the register of this district, and that they are now reckoned as inhabitants of Tomsk; and, besides, the Zemstvo has no money.
>
> "Laying these facts before you, and knowing your humanity, I beg you not to refuse immediate help.

“Your well-wisher.”

Obviously the letter was written by the doctor with the animal name[4] or his lady assistant. Zemstvo doctors and their assistants go on for years growing more and more convinced every day that they can do *nothing*, and yet continue to receive their salaries from people who are living upon frozen potatoes, and consider they have a right to judge whether I am humane or not.

Worried by the anonymous letter and by the fact that peasants came every morning to the servants’ kitchen and went down on their knees there, and that twenty sacks of rye had been stolen at night out of the barn, the wall having first been broken in, and by the general depression which was fostered by conversations, newspapers, and horrible weather—worried by all this, I worked listlessly and ineffectively. I was writing *A History of Railways*; I had to read a great number of Russian and foreign books, pamphlets, and articles in the magazines, to make calculations, to refer to logarithms, to think and to write; then again to read, calculate, and think; but as soon as I took up a book or began to think, my thoughts were in a muddle, my eyes began blinking, I would get up from the table with a sigh and begin walking about the big rooms of my deserted country-house. When I was tired of walking about I would stand still at my study window, and, looking across the wide courtyard, over the pond and the bare young birch trees and the great fields covered with recently fallen, thawing snow, I saw on a low hill on the horizon a group of mud-coloured huts from which a black muddy road ran down in an irregular streak through the white field. That was Pestrovo, concerning which my anonymous correspondent had written to me. If it had not been for the crows who, foreseeing rain or snowy weather, floated cawing over the pond and the fields, and the tapping in the carpenter’s shed, this bit of the world about which such a fuss was being made would have seemed like the Dead Sea; it was all so still, motionless, lifeless, and dreary!

My uneasiness hindered me from working and concentrating myself; I did not know what it was, and chose to believe it was disappointment. I had actually given up my post in the Department of Ways and Communications, and had come here into the country expressly to live in peace and to devote myself to writing on social questions. It had long been my cherished dream. And now I had to say goodbye both to peace and to literature, to give up everything and think only of the peasants. And that was inevitable, because I was convinced that there was

absolutely nobody in the district except me to help the starving. The people surrounding me were uneducated, unintellectual, callous, for the most part dishonest, or if they were honest, they were unreasonable and unpractical like my wife, for instance. It was impossible to rely on such people, it was impossible to leave the peasants to their fate, so that the only thing left to do was to submit to necessity and see to setting the peasants to rights myself.

I began by making up my mind to give five thousand roubles to the assistance of the starving peasants. And that did not decrease, but only aggravated my uneasiness. As I stood by the window or walked about the rooms I was tormented by the question which had not occurred to me before: how this money was to be spent. To have bread bought and to go from hut to hut distributing it was more than one man could do, to say nothing of the risk that in your haste you might give twice as much to one who was well-fed or to one who was making money out of his fellows as to the hungry. I had no faith in the local officials. All these district captains and tax inspectors were young men, and I distrusted them as I do all young people of today, who are materialistic and without ideals. The District Zemstvo, the Peasant Courts, and all the local institutions, inspired in me not the slightest desire to appeal to them for assistance. I knew that all these institutions who were busily engaged in picking out plums from the Zemstvo and the government pie had their mouths always wide open for a bite at any other pie that might turn up.

The idea occurred to me to invite the neighbouring landowners and suggest to them to organize in my house something like a committee or a centre to which all subscriptions could be forwarded, and from which assistance and instructions could be distributed throughout the district; such an organization, which would render possible frequent consultations and free control on a big scale, would completely meet my views. But I imagined the lunches, the dinners, the suppers and the noise, the waste of time, the verbosity and the bad taste which that mixed provincial company would inevitably bring into my house, and I made haste to reject my idea.

As for the members of my own household, the last thing I could look for was help or support from them. Of my father’s household, of the household of my childhood, once a big and noisy family, no one remained but the governess Mademoiselle Marie, or, as she was now called, Marya Gerasimovna, an absolutely insignificant person. She was a precise little old lady of seventy, who wore a light grey dress and a cap

with white ribbons, and looked like a china doll. She always sat in the drawing room reading.

Whenever I passed by her, she would say, knowing the reason for my brooding:

“What can you expect, Pasha? I told you how it would be before. You can judge from our servants.”

My wife, Natalya Gavrilovna, lived on the lower storey, all the rooms of which she occupied. She slept, had her meals, and received her visitors downstairs in her own rooms, and took not the slightest interest in how I dined, or slept, or whom I saw. Our relations with one another were simple and not strained, but cold, empty, and dreary as relations are between people who have been so long estranged, that even living under the same roof gives no semblance of nearness. There was no trace now of the passionate and tormenting love—at one time sweet, at another bitter as wormwood—which I had once felt for Natalya Gavrilovna. There was nothing left, either, of the outbursts of the past—the loud altercations, upbraidings, complaints, and gusts of hatred which had usually ended in my wife’s going abroad or to her own people, and in my sending money in small but frequent instalments that I might sting her pride oftener. (My proud and sensitive wife and her family live at my expense, and much as she would have liked to do so, my wife could not refuse my money: that afforded me satisfaction and was one comfort in my sorrow.) Now when we chanced to meet in the corridor downstairs or in the yard, I bowed, she smiled graciously. We spoke of the weather, said that it seemed time to put in the double windows, and that someone with bells on their harness had driven over the dam. And at such times I read in her face: “I am faithful to you and am not disgracing your good name which you think so much about; you are sensible and do not worry me; we are quits.”

I assured myself that my love had died long ago, that I was too much absorbed in my work to think seriously of my relations with my wife. But, alas! that was only what I imagined. When my wife talked aloud downstairs I listened intently to her voice, though I could not distinguish one word. When she played the piano downstairs I stood up and listened. When her carriage or her saddle-horse was brought to the door, I went to the window and waited to see her out of the house; then I watched her get into her carriage or mount her horse and ride out of the yard. I felt that there was something wrong with me, and was afraid the expression of my eyes or my face might betray me. I looked after my wife and then watched for her to come back that I might see again from the window her

face, her shoulders, her fur coat, her hat. I felt dreary, sad, infinitely regretful, and felt inclined in her absence to walk through her rooms, and longed that the problem that my wife and I had not been able to solve because our characters were incompatible, should solve itself in the natural way as soon as possible—that is, that this beautiful woman of twenty-seven might make haste and grow old, and that my head might be grey and bald.

One day at lunch my bailiff informed me that the Pestrovo peasants had begun to pull the thatch off the roofs to feed their cattle. Marya Gerasimovna looked at me in alarm and perplexity.

"What can I do?" I said to her. "One cannot fight single-handed, and I have never experienced such loneliness as I do now. I would give a great deal to find one man in the whole province on whom I could rely."

"Invite Ivan Ivanitch," said Marya Gerasimovna.

"To be sure!" I thought, delighted. "That is an idea! *C'est raison*," I hummed, going to my study to write to Ivan Ivanitch. "*C'est raison, c'est raison.*"

II

Of all the mass of acquaintances who, in this house twenty-five to thirty-five years ago, had eaten, drunk, masqueraded, fallen in love, married bored us with accounts of their splendid packs of hounds and horses, the only one still living was Ivan Ivanitch Bragin. At one time he had been very active, talkative, noisy, and given to falling in love, and had been famous for his extreme views and for the peculiar charm of his face, which fascinated men as well as women; now he was an old man, had grown corpulent, and was living out his days with neither views nor charm. He came the day after getting my letter, in the evening just as the samovar was brought into the dining room and little Marya Gerasimovna had begun slicing the lemon.

"I am very glad to see you, my dear fellow," I said gaily, meeting him. "Why, you are stouter than ever.…"

"It isn't getting stout; it's swelling," he answered. "The bees must have stung me."

With the familiarity of a man laughing at his own fatness, he put his arms round my waist and laid on my breast his big soft head, with the hair combed down on the forehead like a Little Russian's, and went off into a thin, aged laugh.

"And you go on getting younger," he said through his laugh. "I wonder what dye you use for your hair and beard; you might let me have some of it." Sniffing and gasping, he embraced me and kissed me on the cheek. "You might give me some of it," he repeated. "Why, you are not forty, are you?"

"Alas, I am forty-six!" I said, laughing.

Ivan Ivanitch smelt of tallow candles and cooking, and that suited him. His big, puffy, slow-moving body was swathed in a long frock-coat like a coachman's full coat, with a high waist, and with hooks and eyes instead of buttons, and it would have been strange if he had smelt of eau de cologne, for instance. In his long, unshaven, bluish double chin, which looked like a thistle, his goggle eyes, his shortness of breath, and in the whole of his clumsy, slovenly figure, in his voice, his laugh, and his words, it was difficult to recognize the graceful, interesting talker

who used in old days to make the husbands of the district jealous on account of their wives.

“I am in great need of your assistance, my friend,” I said, when we were sitting in the dining room, drinking tea. “I want to organize relief for the starving peasants, and I don’t know how to set about it. So perhaps you will be so kind as to advise me.”

“Yes, yes, yes,” said Ivan Ivanitch, sighing. “To be sure, to be sure, to be sure.…”

“I would not have worried you, my dear fellow, but really there is no one here but you I can appeal to. You know what people are like about here.”

“To be sure, to be sure, to be sure.… Yes.”

I thought that as we were going to have a serious, business consultation in which anyone might take part, regardless of their position or personal relations, why should I not invite Natalya Gavrilovna.

“*Tres faciunt collegium*,” I said gaily. “What if we were to ask Natalya Gavrilovna? What do you think? Fenya,” I said, turning to the maid, “ask Natalya Gavrilovna to come upstairs to us, if possible at once. Tell her it’s a very important matter.”

A little later Natalya Gavrilovna came in. I got up to meet her and said:

“Excuse us for troubling you, Natalie. We are discussing a very important matter, and we had the happy thought that we might take advantage of your good advice, which you will not refuse to give us. Please sit down.”

Ivan Ivanitch kissed her hand while she kissed his forehead; then, when we all sat down to the table, he, looking at her tearfully and blissfully, craned forward to her and kissed her hand again. She was dressed in black, her hair was carefully arranged, and she smelt of fresh scent. She had evidently dressed to go out or was expecting somebody. Coming into the dining room, she held out her hand to me with simple friendliness, and smiled to me as graciously as she did to Ivan Ivanitch—that pleased me; but as she talked she moved her fingers, often and abruptly leaned back in her chair and talked rapidly, and this jerkiness in her words and movements irritated me and reminded me of her native town—Odessa, where the society, men and women alike, had wearied me by its bad taste.

“I want to do something for the famine-stricken peasants,” I began, and after a brief pause I went on: “Money, of course, is a great thing, but to confine oneself to subscribing money, and with that to be satisfied,

would be evading the worst of the trouble. Help must take the form of money, but the most important thing is a proper and sound organization. Let us think it over, my friends, and do something."

Natalya Gavrilovna looked at me inquiringly and shrugged her shoulders as though to say, "What do I know about it?"

"Yes, yes, famine…" muttered Ivan Ivanitch. "Certainly… yes."

"It's a serious position," I said, "and assistance is needed as soon as possible. I imagine the first point among the principles which we must work out ought to be promptitude. We must act on the military principles of judgment, promptitude, and energy."

"Yes, promptitude…" repeated Ivan Ivanitch in a drowsy and listless voice, as though he were dropping asleep. "Only one can't do anything. The crops have failed, and so what's the use of all your judgment and energy?… It's the elements.… You can't go against God and fate."

"Yes, but that's what man has a head for, to contend against the elements."

"Eh? Yes… that's so, to be sure.… Yes."

Ivan Ivanitch sneezed into his handkerchief, brightened up, and as though he had just woken up, looked round at my wife and me.

"My crops have failed, too." He laughed a thin little laugh and gave a sly wink as though this were really funny. "No money, no corn, and a yard full of labourers like Count Sheremetyev's. I want to kick them out, but I haven't the heart to."

Natalya Gavrilovna laughed, and began questioning him about his private affairs. Her presence gave me a pleasure such as I had not felt for a long time, and I was afraid to look at her for fear my eyes would betray my secret feeling. Our relations were such that that feeling might seem surprising and ridiculous.

She laughed and talked with Ivan Ivanitch without being in the least disturbed that she was in my room and that I was not laughing.

"And so, my friends, what are we to do?" I asked after waiting for a pause. "I suppose before we do anything else we had better immediately open a subscription-list. We will write to our friends in the capitals and in Odessa, Natalie, and ask them to subscribe. When we have got together a little sum we will begin buying corn and fodder for the cattle; and you, Ivan Ivanitch, will you be so kind as to undertake distributing the relief? Entirely relying on your characteristic tact and efficiency, we will only venture to express a desire that before you give any relief you make acquaintance with the details of the case on the spot, and also, which is very important, you should be careful that corn should be

distributed only to those who are in genuine need, and not to the drunken, the idle, or the dishonest."

"Yes, yes, yes…" muttered Ivan Ivanitch. "To be sure, to be sure."

"Well, one won't get much done with that slobbering wreck," I thought, and I felt irritated.

"I am sick of these famine-stricken peasants, bother them! It's nothing but grievances with them!" Ivan Ivanitch went on, sucking the rind of the lemon. "The hungry have a grievance against those who have enough, and those who have enough have a grievance against the hungry. Yes… hunger stupefies and maddens a man and makes him savage; hunger is not a potato. When a man is starving he uses bad language, and steals, and may do worse.… One must realize that."

Ivan Ivanitch choked over his tea, coughed, and shook all over with a squeaky, smothered laughter.

"'There was a battle at Pol… Poltava,'" he brought out, gesticulating with both hands in protest against the laughter and coughing which prevented him from speaking. "'There was a battle at Poltava!' When three years after the Emancipation we had famine in two districts here, Fyodor Fyodoritch came and invited me to go to him. 'Come along, come along,' he persisted, and nothing else would satisfy him. 'Very well, let us go,' I said. And, so we set off. It was in the evening; there was snow falling. Towards night we were getting near his place, and suddenly from the wood came 'bang!' and another time 'bang!' 'Oh, damn it all!'… I jumped out of the sledge, and I saw in the darkness a man running up to me, knee-deep in the snow. I put my arm round his shoulder, like this, and knocked the gun out of his hand. Then another one turned up; I fetched him a knock on the back of his head so that he grunted and flopped with his nose in the snow. I was a sturdy chap then, my fist was heavy; I disposed of two of them, and when I turned round Fyodor was sitting astride of a third. We did not let our three fine fellows go; we tied their hands behind their backs so that they might not do us or themselves any harm, and took the fools into the kitchen. We were angry with them and at the same time ashamed to look at them; they were peasants we knew, and were good fellows; we were sorry for them. They were quite stupid with terror. One was crying and begging our pardon, the second looked like a wild beast and kept swearing, the third knelt down and began to pray. I said to Fedya: 'Don't bear them a grudge; let them go, the rascals!' He fed them, gave them a bushel of flour each, and let them go: 'Get along with you,' he said. So that's what he did.… The Kingdom of Heaven be his and everlasting peace! He understood and did

not bear them a grudge; but there were some who did, and how many people they ruined! Yes… Why, over the affair at the Klotchkovs' tavern eleven men were sent to the disciplinary battalion. Yes.… And now, look, it's the same thing. Anisyin, the investigating magistrate, stayed the night with me last Thursday, and he told me about some landowner.… Yes.… They took the wall of his barn to pieces at night and carried off twenty sacks of rye. When the gentleman heard that such a crime had been committed, he sent a telegram to the Governor and another to the police captain, another to the investigating magistrate!… Of course, everyone is afraid of a man who is fond of litigation. The authorities were in a flutter and there was a general hubbub. Two villages were searched."

"Excuse me, Ivan Ivanitch," I said. "Twenty sacks of rye were stolen from me, and it was I who telegraphed to the Governor. I telegraphed to Petersburg, too. But it was by no means out of love for litigation, as you are pleased to express it, and not because I bore them a grudge. I look at every subject from the point of view of principle. From the point of view of the law, theft is the same whether a man is hungry or not."

"Yes, yes…" muttered Ivan Ivanitch in confusion. "Of course… To be sure, yes."

Natalya Gavrilovna blushed.

"There are people…" she said and stopped; she made an effort to seem indifferent, but she could not keep it up, and looked into my eyes with the hatred that I know so well. "There are people," she said, "for whom famine and human suffering exist simply that they may vent their hateful and despicable temperaments upon them."

I was confused and shrugged my shoulders.

"I meant to say generally," she went on, "that there are people who are quite indifferent and completely devoid of all feeling of sympathy, yet who do not pass human suffering by, but insist on meddling for fear people should be able to do without them. Nothing is sacred for their vanity."

"There are people," I said softly, "who have an angelic character, but who express their glorious ideas in such a form that it is difficult to distinguish the angel from an Odessa market-woman."

I must confess it was not happily expressed.

My wife looked at me as though it cost her a great effort to hold her tongue. Her sudden outburst, and then her inappropriate eloquence on the subject of my desire to help the famine-stricken peasants, were, to say the least, out of place; when I had invited her to come upstairs I had

expected quite a different attitude to me and my intentions. I cannot say definitely what I had expected, but I had been agreeably agitated by the expectation. Now I saw that to go on speaking about the famine would be difficult and perhaps stupid.

"Yes…" Ivan Ivanitch muttered inappropriately. "Burov, the merchant, must have four hundred thousand at least. I said to him: 'Hand over one or two thousand to the famine. You can't take it with you when you die, anyway.' He was offended. But we all have to die, you know. Death is not a potato."

A silence followed again.

"So there's nothing left for me but to reconcile myself to loneliness," I sighed. "One cannot fight single-handed. Well, I will try single-handed. Let us hope that my campaign against the famine will be more successful than my campaign against indifference."

"I am expected downstairs," said Natalya Gavrilovna.

She got up from the table and turned to Ivan Ivanitch.

"So you will look in upon me downstairs for a minute? I won't say goodbye to you."

And she went away.

Ivan Ivanitch was now drinking his seventh glass of tea, choking, smacking his lips, and sucking sometimes his moustache, sometimes the lemon. He was muttering something drowsily and listlessly, and I did not listen but waited for him to go. At last, with an expression that suggested that he had only come to me to take a cup of tea, he got up and began to take leave. As I saw him out I said:

"And so you have given me no advice."

"Eh? I am a feeble, stupid old man," he answered. "What use would my advice be? You shouldn't worry yourself.… I really don't know why you worry yourself. Don't disturb yourself, my dear fellow! Upon my word, there's no need," he whispered genuinely and affectionately, soothing me as though I were a child. "Upon my word, there's no need."

"No need? Why, the peasants are pulling the thatch off their huts, and they say there is typhus somewhere already."

"Well, what of it? If there are good crops next year, they'll thatch them again, and if we die of typhus others will live after us. Anyway, we have to die—if not now, later. Don't worry yourself, my dear."

"I can't help worrying myself," I said irritably.

We were standing in the dimly lighted vestibule. Ivan Ivanitch suddenly took me by the elbow, and, preparing to say something evidently very important, looked at me in silence for a couple of minutes.

“Pavel Andreitch!” he said softly, and suddenly in his puffy, set face and dark eyes there was a gleam of the expression for which he had once been famous and which was truly charming. “Pavel Andreitch, I speak to you as a friend: try to be different! One is ill at ease with you, my dear fellow, one really is!”

He looked intently into my face; the charming expression faded away, his eyes grew dim again, and he sniffed and muttered feebly:

“Yes, yes.… Excuse an old man.… It’s all nonsense… yes.”

As he slowly descended the staircase, spreading out his hands to balance himself and showing me his huge, bulky back and red neck, he gave me the unpleasant impression of a sort of crab.

“You ought to go away, your Excellency,” he muttered. “To Petersburg or abroad.… Why should you live here and waste your golden days? You are young, wealthy, and healthy.… Yes.… Ah, if I were younger I would whisk away like a hare, and snap my fingers at everything.”

III

My wife's outburst reminded me of our married life together. In old days after every such outburst we felt irresistibly drawn to each other; we would meet and let off all the dynamite that had accumulated in our souls. And now after Ivan Ivanitch had gone away I had a strong impulse to go to my wife. I wanted to go downstairs and tell her that her behaviour at tea had been an insult to me, that she was cruel, petty, and that her plebeian mind had never risen to a comprehension of what *I* was saying and of what *I* was doing. I walked about the rooms a long time thinking of what I would say to her and trying to guess what she would say to me.

That evening, after Ivan Ivanitch went away, I felt in a peculiarly irritating form the uneasiness which had worried me of late. I could not sit down or sit still, but kept walking about in the rooms that were lighted up and keeping near to the one in which Marya Gerasimovna was sitting. I had a feeling very much like that which I had on the North Sea during a storm when everyone thought that our ship, which had no freight nor ballast, would overturn. And that evening I understood that my uneasiness was not disappointment, as I had supposed, but a different feeling, though what exactly I could not say, and that irritated me more than ever.

"I will go to her," I decided. "I can think of a pretext. I shall say that I want to see Ivan Ivanitch; that will be all."

I went downstairs and walked without haste over the carpeted floor through the vestibule and the hall. Ivan Ivanitch was sitting on the sofa in the drawing room; he was drinking tea again and muttering something. My wife was standing opposite to him and holding on to the back of a chair. There was a gentle, sweet, and docile expression on her face, such as one sees on the faces of people listening to crazy saints or holy men when a peculiar hidden significance is imagined in their vague words and mutterings. There was something morbid, something of a nun's exaltation, in my wife's expression and attitude; and her low-pitched, half-dark rooms with their old-fashioned furniture, with her birds asleep

in their cages, and with a smell of geranium, reminded me of the rooms of some abbess or pious old lady.

I went into the drawing room. My wife showed neither surprise nor confusion, and looked at me calmly and serenely, as though she had known I should come.

"I beg your pardon," I said softly. "I am so glad you have not gone yet, Ivan Ivanitch. I forgot to ask you, do you know the Christian name of the president of our Zemstvo?"

"Andrey Stanislavovitch. Yes.…"

"*Merci*," I said, took out my notebook, and wrote it down.

There followed a silence during which my wife and Ivan Ivanitch were probably waiting for me to go; my wife did not believe that I wanted to know the president's name—I saw that from her eyes.

"Well, I must be going, my beauty," muttered Ivan Ivanitch, after I had walked once or twice across the drawing room and sat down by the fireplace.

"No," said Natalya Gavrilovna quickly, touching his hand. "Stay another quarter of an hour.… Please do!"

Evidently she did not wish to be left alone with me without a witness.

"Oh, well, I'll wait a quarter of an hour, too," I thought.

"Why, it's snowing!" I said, getting up and looking out of window. "A good fall of snow! Ivan Ivanitch"—I went on walking about the room—"I do regret not being a sportsman. I can imagine what a pleasure it must be coursing hares or hunting wolves in snow like this!"

My wife, standing still, watched my movements, looking out of the corner of her eyes without turning her head. She looked as though she thought I had a sharp knife or a revolver in my pocket.

"Ivan Ivanitch, do take me out hunting some day," I went on softly. "I shall be very, very grateful to you."

At that moment a visitor came into the room. He was a tall, thickset gentleman whom I did not know, with a bald head, a big fair beard, and little eyes. From his baggy, crumpled clothes and his manners I took him to be a parish clerk or a teacher, but my wife introduced him to me as Dr. Sobol.

"Very, very glad to make your acquaintance," said the doctor in a loud tenor voice, shaking hands with me warmly, with a naive smile. "Very glad!"

He sat down at the table, took a glass of tea, and said in a loud voice:

"Do you happen to have a drop of rum or brandy? Have pity on me, Olya, and look in the cupboard; I am frozen," he said, addressing the

maid.

I sat down by the fire again, looked on, listened, and from time to time put in a word in the general conversation. My wife smiled graciously to the visitors and kept a sharp lookout on me, as though I were a wild beast. She was oppressed by my presence, and this aroused in me jealousy, annoyance, and an obstinate desire to wound her. “Wife, these snug rooms, the place by the fire,” I thought, “are mine, have been mine for years, but some crazy Ivan Ivanitch or Sobol has for some reason more right to them than I. Now I see my wife, not out of window, but close at hand, in ordinary home surroundings that I feel the want of now I am growing older, and, in spite of her hatred for me, I miss her as years ago in my childhood I used to miss my mother and my nurse. And I feel that now, on the verge of old age, my love for her is purer and loftier than it was in the past; and that is why I want to go up to her, to stamp hard on her toe with my heel, to hurt her and smile as I do it.”

“Monsieur Marten,” I said, addressing the doctor, “how many hospitals have we in the district?”

“Sobol,” my wife corrected.

“Two,” answered Sobol.

“And how many deaths are there every year in each hospital?”

“Pavel Andreitch, I want to speak to you,” said my wife.

She apologized to the visitors and went to the next room. I got up and followed her.

“You will go upstairs to your own rooms this minute,” she said.

“You are ill-bred,” I said to her.

“You will go upstairs to your own rooms this very minute,” she repeated sharply, and she looked into my face with hatred.

She was standing so near that if I had stooped a little my beard would have touched her face.

“What is the matter?” I asked. “What harm have I done all at once?”

Her chin quivered, she hastily wiped her eyes, and, with a cursory glance at the looking-glass, whispered:

“The old story is beginning all over again. Of course you won’t go away. Well, do as you like. I’ll go away myself, and you stay.”

We returned to the drawing room, she with a resolute face, while I shrugged my shoulders and tried to smile. There were some more visitors—an elderly lady and a young man in spectacles. Without greeting the new arrivals or taking leave of the others, I went off to my own rooms.

After what had happened at tea and then again downstairs, it became clear to me that our “family happiness,” which we had begun to forget about in the course of the last two years, was through some absurd and trivial reason beginning all over again, and that neither I nor my wife could now stop ourselves; and that next day or the day after, the outburst of hatred would, as I knew by experience of past years, be followed by something revolting which would upset the whole order of our lives. “So it seems that during these two years we have grown no wiser, colder, or calmer,” I thought as I began walking about the rooms. “So there will again be tears, outcries, curses, packing up, going abroad, then the continual sickly fear that she will disgrace me with some coxcomb out there, Italian or Russian, refusing a passport, letters, utter loneliness, missing her, and in five years old age, grey hairs.” I walked about, imagining what was really impossible—her, grown handsomer, stouter, embracing a man I did not know. By now convinced that that would certainly happen, “Why,” I asked myself, “Why, in one of our long past quarrels, had not I given her a divorce, or why had she not at that time left me altogether? I should not have had this yearning for her now, this hatred, this anxiety; and I should have lived out my life quietly, working and not worrying about anything.”

A carriage with two lamps drove into the yard, then a big sledge with three horses. My wife was evidently having a party.

Till midnight everything was quiet downstairs and I heard nothing, but at midnight there was a sound of moving chairs and a clatter of crockery. So there was supper. Then the chairs moved again, and through the floor I heard a noise; they seemed to be shouting hurrah. Marya Gerasimovna was already asleep and I was quite alone in the whole upper storey; the portraits of my forefathers, cruel, insignificant people, looked at me from the walls of the drawing room, and the reflection of my lamp in the window winked unpleasantly. And with a feeling of jealousy and envy for what was going on downstairs, I listened and thought: “I am master here; if I like, I can in a moment turn out all that fine crew.” But I knew that all that was nonsense, that I could not turn out anyone, and the word “master” had no meaning. One may think oneself master, married, rich, a kammer-junker, as much as one likes, and at the same time not know what it means.

After supper someone downstairs began singing in a tenor voice.

“Why, nothing special has happened,” I tried to persuade myself. “Why am I so upset? I won’t go downstairs tomorrow, that’s all; and that will be the end of our quarrel.”

At a quarter past one I went to bed.

“Have the visitors downstairs gone?” I asked Alexey as he was undressing me.

“Yes, sir, they’ve gone.”

“And why were they shouting hurrah?”

“Alexey Dmitritch Mahonov subscribed for the famine fund a thousand bushels of flour and a thousand roubles. And the old lady—I don’t know her name—promised to set up a soup kitchen on her estate to feed a hundred and fifty people. Thank God… Natalya Gavrilovna has been pleased to arrange that all the gentry should assemble every Friday.”

“To assemble here, downstairs?”

“Yes, sir. Before supper they read a list: since August up to today Natalya Gavrilovna has collected eight thousand roubles, besides corn. Thank God.… What I think is that if our mistress does take trouble for the salvation of her soul, she will soon collect a lot. There are plenty of rich people here.”

Dismissing Alexey, I put out the light and drew the bedclothes over my head.

“After all, why am I so troubled?” I thought. “What force draws me to the starving peasants like a butterfly to a flame? I don’t know them, I don’t understand them; I have never seen them and I don’t like them. Why this uneasiness?”

I suddenly crossed myself under the quilt.

“But what a woman she is!” I said to myself, thinking of my wife. “There’s a regular committee held in the house without my knowing. Why this secrecy? Why this conspiracy? What have I done to them? Ivan Ivanitch is right—I must go away.”

Next morning I woke up firmly resolved to go away. The events of the previous day—the conversation at tea, my wife, Sobol, the supper, my apprehensions—worried me, and I felt glad to think of getting away from the surroundings which reminded me of all that. While I was drinking my coffee the bailiff gave me a long report on various matters. The most agreeable item he saved for the last.

“The thieves who stole our rye have been found,” he announced with a smile. “The magistrate arrested three peasants at Pestrovo yesterday.”

“Go away!” I shouted at him; and apropos of nothing, I picked up the cake-basket and flung it on the floor.

IV

After lunch I rubbed my hands, and thought I must go to my wife and tell her that I was going away. Why? Who cared? Nobody cares, I answered, but why shouldn't I tell her, especially as it would give her nothing but pleasure? Besides, to go away after our yesterday's quarrel without saying a word would not be quite tactful: she might think that I was frightened of her, and perhaps the thought that she has driven me out of my house may weigh upon her. It would be just as well, too, to tell her that I subscribe five thousand, and to give her some advice about the organization, and to warn her that her inexperience in such a complicated and responsible matter might lead to most lamentable results. In short, I wanted to see my wife, and while I thought of various pretexts for going to her, I had a firm conviction in my heart that I should do so.

It was still light when I went in to her, and the lamps had not yet been lighted. She was sitting in her study, which led from the drawing room to her bedroom, and, bending low over the table, was writing something quickly. Seeing me, she started, got up from the table, and remained standing in an attitude such as to screen her papers from me.

"I beg your pardon, I have only come for a minute," I said, and, I don't know why, I was overcome with embarrassment. "I have learnt by chance that you are organizing relief for the famine, Natalie."

"Yes, I am. But that's my business," she answered.

"Yes, it is your business," I said softly. "I am glad of it, for it just fits in with my intentions. I beg your permission to take part in it."

"Forgive me, I cannot let you do it," she said in response, and looked away.

"Why not, Natalie?" I said quietly. "Why not? I, too, am well fed and I, too, want to help the hungry."

"I don't know what it has to do with you," she said with a contemptuous smile, shrugging her shoulders. "Nobody asks you."

"Nobody asks you, either, and yet you have got up a regular committee in *my* house," I said.

"I am asked, but you can have my word for it no one will ever ask you. Go and help where you are not known."

“For God’s sake, don’t talk to me in that tone.” I tried to be mild, and besought myself most earnestly not to lose my temper. For the first few minutes I felt glad to be with my wife. I felt an atmosphere of youth, of home, of feminine softness, of the most refined elegance—exactly what was lacking on my floor and in my life altogether. My wife was wearing a pink flannel dressing-gown; it made her look much younger, and gave a softness to her rapid and sometimes abrupt movements. Her beautiful dark hair, the mere sight of which at one time stirred me to passion, had from sitting so long with her head bent come loose from the comb and was untidy, but, to my eyes, that only made it look more rich and luxuriant. All this, though is banal to the point of vulgarity. Before me stood an ordinary woman, perhaps neither beautiful nor elegant, but this was my wife with whom I had once lived, and with whom I should have been living to this day if it had not been for her unfortunate character; she was the one human being on the terrestrial globe whom I loved. At this moment, just before going away, when I knew that I should no longer see her even through the window, she seemed to me fascinating even as she was, cold and forbidding, answering me with a proud and contemptuous mockery. I was proud of her, and confessed to myself that to go away from her was terrible and impossible.

“Pavel Andreitch,” she said after a brief silence, “for two years we have not interfered with each other but have lived quietly. Why do you suddenly feel it necessary to go back to the past? Yesterday you came to insult and humiliate me,” she went on, raising her voice, and her face flushed and her eyes flamed with hatred; “but restrain yourself; do not do it, Pavel Andreitch! Tomorrow I will send in a petition and they will give me a passport, and I will go away; I will go! I will go! I’ll go into a convent, into a widows’ home, into an almshouse.…”

“Into a lunatic asylum!” I cried, not able to restrain myself.

“Well, even into a lunatic asylum! That would be better, that would be better,” she cried, with flashing eyes. “When I was in Pestrovo today I envied the sick and starving peasant women because they are not living with a man like you. They are free and honest, while, thanks to you, I am a parasite, I am perishing in idleness, I eat your bread, I spend your money, and I repay you with my liberty and a fidelity which is of no use to anyone. Because you won’t give me a passport, I must respect your good name, though it doesn’t exist.”

I had to keep silent. Clenching my teeth, I walked quickly into the drawing room, but turned back at once and said:

“I beg you earnestly that there should be no more assemblies, plots, and meetings of conspirators in my house! I only admit to my house those with whom I am acquainted, and let all your crew find another place to do it if they want to take up philanthropy. I can’t allow people at midnight in my house to be shouting hurrah at successfully exploiting an hysterical woman like you!”

My wife, pale and wringing her hands, took a rapid stride across the room, uttering a prolonged moan as though she had toothache. With a wave of my hand, I went into the drawing room. I was choking with rage, and at the same time I was trembling with terror that I might not restrain myself, and that I might say or do something which I might regret all my life. And I clenched my hands tight, hoping to hold myself in.

After drinking some water and recovering my calm a little, I went back to my wife. She was standing in the same attitude as before, as though barring my approach to the table with the papers. Tears were slowly trickling down her pale, cold face. I paused then and said to her bitterly but without anger:

“How you misunderstand me! How unjust you are to me! I swear upon my honour I came to you with the best of motives, with nothing but the desire to do good!”

“Pavel Andreitch!” she said, clasping her hands on her bosom, and her face took on the agonized, imploring expression with which frightened, weeping children beg not to be punished, “I know perfectly well that you will refuse me, but still I beg you. Force yourself to do one kind action in your life. I entreat you, go away from here! That’s the only thing you can do for the starving peasants. Go away, and I will forgive you everything, everything!”

“There is no need for you to insult me, Natalie,” I sighed, feeling a sudden rush of humility. “I had already made up my mind to go away, but I won’t go until I have done something for the peasants. It’s my duty!”

“Ach!” she said softly with an impatient frown. “You can make an excellent bridge or railway, but you can do nothing for the starving peasants. Do understand!”

“Indeed? Yesterday you reproached me with indifference and with being devoid of the feeling of compassion. How well you know me!” I laughed. “You believe in God—well, God is my witness that I am worried day and night.…”

“I see that you are worried, but the famine and compassion have nothing to do with it. You are worried because the starving peasants can get on without you, and because the Zemstvo, and in fact everyone who is helping them, does not need your guidance.”

I was silent, trying to suppress my irritation. Then I said:

“I came to speak to you on business. Sit down. Please sit down.”

She did not sit down.

“I beg you to sit down,” I repeated, and I motioned her to a chair.

She sat down. I sat down, too, thought a little, and said:

“I beg you to consider earnestly what I am saying. Listen.… Moved by love for your fellow-creatures, you have undertaken the organization of famine relief. I have nothing against that, of course; I am completely in sympathy with you, and am prepared to cooperate with you in every way, whatever our relations may be. But, with all my respect for your mind and your heart… and your heart,” I repeated, “I cannot allow such a difficult, complex, and responsible matter as the organization of relief to be left in your hands entirely. You are a woman, you are inexperienced, you know nothing of life, you are too confiding and expansive. You have surrounded yourself with assistants whom you know nothing about. I am not exaggerating if I say that under these conditions your work will inevitably lead to two deplorable consequences. To begin with, our district will be left unrelieved; and, secondly, you will have to pay for your mistakes and those of your assistants, not only with your purse, but with your reputation. The money deficit and other losses I could, no doubt, make good, but who could restore you your good name? When through lack of proper supervision and oversight there is a rumour that you, and consequently I, have made two hundred thousand over the famine fund, will your assistants come to your aid?”

She said nothing.

“Not from vanity, as you say,” I went on, “but simply that the starving peasants may not be left unrelieved and your reputation may not be injured, I feel it my moral duty to take part in your work.”

“Speak more briefly,” said my wife.

“You will be so kind,” I went on, “as to show me what has been subscribed so far and what you have spent. Then inform me daily of every fresh subscription in money or kind, and of every fresh outlay. You will also give me, Natalie, the list of your helpers. Perhaps they are quite decent people; I don’t doubt it; but, still, it is absolutely necessary to make inquiries.”

She was silent. I got up, and walked up and down the room.

"Let us set to work, then," I said, and I sat down to her table.

"Are you in earnest?" she asked, looking at me in alarm and bewilderment.

"Natalie, do be reasonable!" I said appealingly, seeing from her face that she meant to protest. "I beg you, trust my experience and my sense of honour."

"I don't understand what you want."

"Show me how much you have collected and how much you have spent."

"I have no secrets. Anyone may see. Look."

On the table lay five or six school exercise books, several sheets of notepaper covered with writing, a map of the district, and a number of pieces of paper of different sizes. It was getting dusk. I lighted a candle.

"Excuse me, I don't see anything yet," I said, turning over the leaves of the exercise books. "Where is the account of the receipt of money subscriptions?"

"That can be seen from the subscription lists."

"Yes, but you must have an account," I said, smiling at her naivete. "Where are the letters accompanying the subscriptions in money or in kind? *Pardon*, a little practical advice, Natalie: it's absolutely necessary to keep those letters. You ought to number each letter and make a special note of it in a special record. You ought to do the same with your own letters. But I will do all that myself."

"Do so, do so…" she said.

I was very much pleased with myself. Attracted by this living interesting work, by the little table, the naive exercise books and the charm of doing this work in my wife's society, I was afraid that my wife would suddenly hinder me and upset everything by some sudden whim, and so I was in haste and made an effort to attach no consequence to the fact that her lips were quivering, and that she was looking about her with a helpless and frightened air like a wild creature in a trap.

"I tell you what, Natalie," I said without looking at her; "let me take all these papers and exercise books upstairs to my study. There I will look through them and tell you what I think about it tomorrow. Have you any more papers?" I asked, arranging the exercise books and sheets of papers in piles.

"Take them, take them all!" said my wife, helping me to arrange them, and big tears ran down her cheeks. "Take it all! That's all that was left me in life.… Take the last."

“Ach! Natalie, Natalie!” I sighed reproachfully.

She opened the drawer in the table and began flinging the papers out of it on the table at random, poking me in the chest with her elbow and brushing my face with her hair; as she did so, copper coins kept dropping upon my knees and on the floor.

“Take everything!” she said in a husky voice.

When she had thrown out the papers she walked away from me, and putting both hands to her head, she flung herself on the couch. I picked up the money, put it back in the drawer, and locked it up that the servants might not be led into dishonesty; then I gathered up all the papers and went off with them. As I passed my wife I stopped and, looking at her back and shaking shoulders, I said:

“What a baby you are, Natalie! Fie, fie! Listen, Natalie: when you realize how serious and responsible a business it is you will be the first to thank me. I assure you you will.”

In my own room I set to work without haste. The exercise books were not bound, the pages were not numbered. The entries were put in all sorts of handwritings; evidently anyone who liked had a hand in managing the books. In the record of the subscriptions in kind there was no note of their money value. But, excuse me, I thought, the rye which is now worth one rouble fifteen kopecks may be worth two roubles fifteen kopecks in two months’ time! Was that the way to do things? Then, “Given to A. M. Sobol 32 roubles.” When was it given? For what purpose was it given? Where was the receipt? There was nothing to show, and no making anything of it. In case of legal proceedings, these papers would only obscure the case.

“How naive she is!” I thought with surprise. “What a child!”

I felt both vexed and amused.

V

My wife had already collected eight thousand; with my five it would be thirteen thousand. For a start that was very good. The business which had so worried and interested me was at last in my hands; I was doing what the others would not and could not do; I was doing my duty, organizing the relief fund in a practical and businesslike way.

Everything seemed to be going in accordance with my desires and intentions; but why did my feeling of uneasiness persist? I spent four hours over my wife's papers, making out their meaning and correcting her mistakes, but instead of feeling soothed, I felt as though someone were standing behind me and rubbing my back with a rough hand. What was it I wanted? The organization of the relief fund had come into trustworthy hands, the hungry would be fed—what more was wanted?

The four hours of this light work for some reason exhausted me, so that I could not sit bending over the table nor write. From below I heard from time to time a smothered moan; it was my wife sobbing. Alexey, invariably meek, sleepy, and sanctimonious, kept coming up to the table to see to the candles, and looked at me somewhat strangely.

"Yes, I must go away," I decided at last, feeling utterly exhausted. "As far as possible from these agreeable impressions! I will set off tomorrow."

I gathered together the papers and exercise books, and went down to my wife. As, feeling quite worn out and shattered, I held the papers and the exercise books to my breast with both hands, and passing through my bedroom saw my trunks, the sound of weeping reached me through the floor.

"Are you a kammer-junker?" a voice whispered in my ear. "That's a very pleasant thing. But yet you are a reptile."

"It's all nonsense, nonsense, nonsense," I muttered as I went downstairs. "Nonsense… and it's nonsense, too, that I am actuated by vanity or a love of display.… What rubbish! Am I going to get a decoration for working for the peasants or be made the director of a department? Nonsense, nonsense! And who is there to show off to here in the country?"

I was tired, frightfully tired, and something kept whispering in my ear: “Very pleasant. But, still, you are a reptile.” For some reason I remembered a line out of an old poem I knew as a child: “How pleasant it is to be good!”

My wife was lying on the couch in the same attitude, on her face and with her hands clutching her head. She was crying. A maid was standing beside her with a perplexed and frightened face. I sent the maid away, laid the papers on the table, thought a moment and said:

“Here are all your papers, Natalie. It’s all in order, it’s all capital, and I am very much pleased. I am going away tomorrow.”

She went on crying. I went into the drawing room and sat there in the dark. My wife’s sobs, her sighs, accused me of something, and to justify myself I remembered the whole of our quarrel, starting from my unhappy idea of inviting my wife to our consultation and ending with the exercise books and these tears. It was an ordinary attack of our conjugal hatred, senseless and unseemly, such as had been frequent during our married life, but what had the starving peasants to do with it? How could it have happened that they had become a bone of contention between us? It was just as though pursuing one another we had accidentally run up to the altar and had carried on a quarrel there.

“Natalie,” I said softly from the drawing room, “hush, hush!”

To cut short her weeping and make an end of this agonizing state of affairs, I ought to have gone up to my wife and comforted her, caressed her, or apologized; but how could I do it so that she would believe me? How could I persuade the wild duck, living in captivity and hating me, that it was dear to me, and that I felt for its sufferings? I had never known my wife, so I had never known how to talk to her or what to talk about. Her appearance I knew very well and appreciated it as it deserved, but her spiritual, moral world, her mind, her outlook on life, her frequent changes of mood, her eyes full of hatred, her disdain, the scope and variety of her reading which sometimes struck me, or, for instance, the nun-like expression I had seen on her face the day before—all that was unknown and incomprehensible to me. When in my collisions with her I tried to define what sort of a person she was, my psychology went no farther than deciding that she was giddy, impractical, ill-tempered, guided by feminine logic; and it seemed to me that that was quite sufficient. But now that she was crying I had a passionate desire to know more.

The weeping ceased. I went up to my wife. She sat up on the couch, and, with her head propped in both hands, looked fixedly and dreamily at

the fire.

"I am going away tomorrow morning," I said.

She said nothing. I walked across the room, sighed, and said:

"Natalie, when you begged me to go away, you said: 'I will forgive you everything, everything.' … So you think I have wronged you. I beg you calmly and in brief terms to formulate the wrong I've done you."

"I am worn out. Afterwards, some time…" said my wife.

"How am I to blame?" I went on. "What have I done? Tell me: you are young and beautiful, you want to live, and I am nearly twice your age and hated by you, but is that my fault? I didn't marry you by force. But if you want to live in freedom, go; I'll give you your liberty. You can go and love whom you please.… I will give you a divorce."

"That's not what I want," she said. "You know I used to love you and always thought of myself as older than you. That's all nonsense.… You are not to blame for being older or for my being younger, or that I might be able to love someone else if I were free; but because you are a difficult person, an egoist, and hate everyone."

"Perhaps so. I don't know," I said.

"Please go away. You want to go on at me till the morning, but I warn you I am quite worn out and cannot answer you. You promised me to go to town. I am very grateful; I ask nothing more."

My wife wanted me to go away, but it was not easy for me to do that. I was dispirited and I dreaded the big, cheerless, chill rooms that I was so weary of. Sometimes when I had an ache or a pain as a child, I used to huddle up to my mother or my nurse, and when I hid my face in the warm folds of their dress, it seemed to me as though I were hiding from the pain. And in the same way it seemed to me now that I could only hide from my uneasiness in this little room beside my wife. I sat down and screened away the light from my eyes with my hand.… There was a stillness.

"How are you to blame?" my wife said after a long silence, looking at me with red eyes that gleamed with tears. "You are very well educated and very well bred, very honest, just, and high-principled, but in you the effect of all that is that wherever you go you bring suffocation, oppression, something insulting and humiliating to the utmost degree. You have a straightforward way of looking at things, and so you hate the whole world. You hate those who have faith, because faith is an expression of ignorance and lack of culture, and at the same time you hate those who have no faith for having no faith and no ideals; you hate old people for being conservative and behind the times, and young

people for freethinking. The interests of the peasantry and of Russia are dear to you, and so you hate the peasants because you suspect every one of them of being a thief and a robber. You hate everyone. You are just, and always take your stand on your legal rights, and so you are always at law with the peasants and your neighbours. You have had twenty bushels of rye stolen, and your love of order has made you complain of the peasants to the Governor and all the local authorities, and to send a complaint of the local authorities to Petersburg. Legal justice!" said my wife, and she laughed. "On the ground of your legal rights and in the interests of morality, you refuse to give me a passport. Law and morality is such that a self-respecting healthy young woman has to spend her life in idleness, in depression, and in continual apprehension, and to receive in return board and lodging from a man she does not love. You have a thorough knowledge of the law, you are very honest and just, you respect marriage and family life, and the effect of all that is that all your life you have not done one kind action, that everyone hates you, that you are on bad terms with everyone, and the seven years that you have been married you've only lived seven months with your wife. You've had no wife and I've had no husband. To live with a man like you is impossible; there is no way of doing it. In the early years I was frightened with you, and now I am ashamed.… That's how my best years have been wasted. When I fought with you I ruined my temper, grew shrewish, coarse, timid, mistrustful.… Oh, but what's the use of talking! As though you wanted to understand! Go upstairs, and God be with you!"

My wife lay down on the couch and sank into thought.

"And how splendid, how enviable life might have been!" she said softly, looking reflectively into the fire. "What a life it might have been! There's no bringing it back now."

Anyone who has lived in the country in winter and knows those long dreary, still evenings when even the dogs are too bored to bark and even the clocks seem weary of ticking, and anyone who on such evenings has been troubled by awakening conscience and has moved restlessly about, trying now to smother his conscience, now to interpret it, will understand the distraction and the pleasure my wife's voice gave me as it sounded in the snug little room, telling me I was a bad man. I did not understand what was wanted of me by my conscience, and my wife, translating it in her feminine way, made clear to me in the meaning of my agitation. As often before in the moments of intense uneasiness, I guessed that the whole secret lay, not in the starving peasants, but in my not being the sort of a man I ought to be.

My wife got up with an effort and came up to me.

"Pavel Andreitch," she said, smiling mournfully, "forgive me, I don't believe you: you are not going away, but I will ask you one more favour. Call this"—she pointed to her papers—"self-deception, feminine logic, a mistake, as you like; but do not hinder me. It's all that is left me in life." She turned away and paused. "Before this I had nothing. I have wasted my youth in fighting with you. Now I have caught at this and am living; I am happy.… It seems to me that I have found in this a means of justifying my existence."

"Natalie, you are a good woman, a woman of ideas," I said, looking at my wife enthusiastically, "and everything you say and do is intelligent and fine."

I walked about the room to conceal my emotion.

"Natalie," I went on a minute later, "before I go away, I beg of you as a special favour, help me to do something for the starving peasants!"

"What can I do?" said my wife, shrugging her shoulders. "Here's the subscription list."

She rummaged among the papers and found the subscription list.

"Subscribe some money," she said, and from her tone I could see that she did not attach great importance to her subscription list; "that is the only way in which you can take part in the work."

I took the list and wrote: "Anonymous, 5,000."

In this "anonymous" there was something wrong, false, conceited, but I only realized that when I noticed that my wife flushed very red and hurriedly thrust the list into the heap of papers. We both felt ashamed; I felt that I must at all costs efface this clumsiness at once, or else I should feel ashamed afterwards, in the train and at Petersburg. But how efface it? What was I to say?

"I fully approve of what you are doing, Natalie," I said genuinely, "and I wish you every success. But allow me at parting to give you one piece of advice, Natalie; be on your guard with Sobol, and with your assistants generally, and don't trust them blindly. I don't say they are not honest, but they are not gentlefolks; they are people with no ideas, no ideals, no faith, with no aim in life, no definite principles, and the whole object of their life is comprised in the rouble. Rouble, rouble, rouble!" I sighed. "They are fond of getting money easily, for nothing, and in that respect the better educated they are the more they are to be dreaded."

My wife went to the couch and lay down.

"Ideas," she brought out, listlessly and reluctantly, "ideas, ideals, objects of life, principles… you always used to use those words when

you wanted to insult or humiliate someone, or say something unpleasant. Yes, that's your way: if with your views and such an attitude to people you are allowed to take part in anything, you would destroy it from the first day. It's time you understand that."

She sighed and paused.

"It's coarseness of character, Pavel Andreitch," she said. "You are well-bred and educated, but what a… Scythian you are in reality! That's because you lead a cramped life full of hatred, see no one, and read nothing but your engineering books. And, you know, there are good people, good books! Yes… but I am exhausted and it wearies me to talk. I ought to be in bed."

"So I am going away, Natalie," I said.

"Yes… yes.… *Merci.*…"

I stood still for a little while, then went upstairs. An hour later—it was half-past one—I went downstairs again with a candle in my hand to speak to my wife. I didn't know what I was going to say to her, but I felt that I must say some thing very important and necessary. She was not in her study, the door leading to her bedroom was closed.

"Natalie, are you asleep?" I asked softly.

There was no answer.

I stood near the door, sighed, and went into the drawing room. There I sat down on the sofa, put out the candle, and remained sitting in the dark till the dawn.

VI

I went to the station at ten o’clock in the morning. There was no frost, but snow was falling in big wet flakes and an unpleasant damp wind was blowing.

We passed a pond and then a birch copse, and then began going uphill along the road which I could see from my window. I turned round to take a last look at my house, but I could see nothing for the snow. Soon afterwards dark huts came into sight ahead of us as in a fog. It was Pestrovo.

“If I ever go out of my mind, Pestrovo will be the cause of it,” I thought. “It persecutes me.”

We came out into the village street. All the roofs were intact, not one of them had been pulled to pieces; so my bailiff had told a lie. A boy was pulling along a little girl and a baby in a sledge. Another boy of three, with his head wrapped up like a peasant woman’s and with huge mufflers on his hands, was trying to catch the flying snowflakes on his tongue, and laughing. Then a wagon loaded with fagots came toward us and a peasant walking beside it, and there was no telling whether his beard was white or whether it was covered with snow. He recognized my coachman, smiled at him and said something, and mechanically took off his hat to me. The dogs ran out of the yards and looked inquisitively at my horses. Everything was quiet, ordinary, as usual. The emigrants had returned, there was no bread; in the huts “some were laughing, some were delirious”; but it all looked so ordinary that one could not believe it really was so. There were no distracted faces, no voices whining for help, no weeping, nor abuse, but all around was stillness, order, life, children, sledges, dogs with dishevelled tails. Neither the children nor the peasant we met were troubled; why was I so troubled?

Looking at the smiling peasant, at the boy with the huge mufflers, at the huts, remembering my wife, I realized there was no calamity that could daunt this people; I felt as though there were already a breath of victory in the air. I felt proud and felt ready to cry out that I was with them too; but the horses were carrying us away from the village into the open country, the snow was whirling, the wind was howling, and I was

left alone with my thoughts. Of the million people working for the peasantry, life itself had cast me out as a useless, incompetent, bad man. I was a hindrance, a part of the people's calamity; I was vanquished, cast out, and I was hurrying to the station to go away and hide myself in Petersburg in a hotel in Bolshaya Morskaya.

An hour later we reached the station. The coachman and a porter with a disc on his breast carried my trunks into the ladies' room. My coachman Nikanor, wearing high felt boots and the skirt of his coat tucked up through his belt, all wet with the snow and glad I was going away, gave me a friendly smile and said:

"A fortunate journey, your Excellency. God give you luck."

Everyone, by the way, calls me "your Excellency," though I am only a collegiate councillor and a kammer-junker. The porter told me the train had not yet left the next station; I had to wait. I went outside, and with my head heavy from my sleepless night, and so exhausted I could hardly move my legs, I walked aimlessly towards the pump. There was not a soul anywhere near.

"Why am I going?" I kept asking myself. "What is there awaiting me there? The acquaintances from whom I have come away, loneliness, restaurant dinners, noise, the electric light, which makes my eyes ache. Where am I going, and what am I going for? What am I going for?"

And it seemed somehow strange to go away without speaking to my wife. I felt that I was leaving her in uncertainty. Going away, I ought to have told that she was right, that I really was a bad man.

When I turned away from the pump, I saw in the doorway the stationmaster, of whom I had twice made complaints to his superiors, turning up the collar of his coat, shrinking from the wind and the snow. He came up to me, and putting two fingers to the peak of his cap, told me with an expression of helpless confusion, strained respectfulness, and hatred on his face, that the train was twenty minutes late, and asked me would I not like to wait in the warm?

"Thank you," I answered, "but I am probably not going. Send word to my coachman to wait; I have not made up my mind."

I walked to and fro on the platform and thought, should I go away or not? When the train came in I decided not to go. At home I had to expect my wife's amazement and perhaps her mockery, the dismal upper storey and my uneasiness; but, still, at my age that was easier and as it were more homelike than travelling for two days and nights with strangers to Petersburg, where I should be conscious every minute that my life was of no use to anyone or to anything, and that it was approaching its end. No,

better at home whatever awaited me there.… I went out of the station. It was awkward by daylight to return home, where everyone was so glad at my going. I might spend the rest of the day till evening at some neighbour's, but with whom? With some of them I was on strained relations, others I did not know at all. I considered and thought of Ivan Ivanitch.

"We are going to Bragino!" I said to the coachman, getting into the sledge.

"It's a long way," sighed Nikanor; "it will be twenty miles, or maybe twenty-five."

"Oh, please, my dear fellow," I said in a tone as though Nikanor had the right to refuse. "Please let us go!"

Nikanor shook his head doubtfully and said slowly that we really ought to have put in the shafts, not Circassian, but Peasant or Siskin; and uncertainly, as though expecting I should change my mind, took the reins in his gloves, stood up, thought a moment, and then raised his whip.

"A whole series of inconsistent actions…" I thought, screening my face from the snow. "I must have gone out of my mind. Well, I don't care.…"

In one place, on a very high and steep slope, Nikanor carefully held the horses in to the middle of the descent, but in the middle the horses suddenly bolted and dashed downhill at a fearful rate; he raised his elbows and shouted in a wild, frantic voice such as I had never heard from him before:

"Hey! Let's give the general a drive! If you come to grief he'll buy new ones, my darlings! Hey! look out! We'll run you down!"

Only now, when the extraordinary pace we were going at took my breath away, I noticed that he was very drunk. He must have been drinking at the station. At the bottom of the descent there was the crash of ice; a piece of dirty frozen snow thrown up from the road hit me a painful blow in the face.

The runaway horses ran up the hill as rapidly as they had downhill, and before I had time to shout to Nikanor my sledge was flying along on the level in an old pine forest, and the tall pines were stretching out their shaggy white paws to me from all directions.

"I have gone out of my mind, and the coachman's drunk," I thought. "Good!"

I found Ivan Ivanitch at home. He laughed till he coughed, laid his head on my breast, and said what he always did say on meeting me:

“You grow younger and younger. I don’t know what dye you use for your hair and your beard; you might give me some of it.”

“I’ve come to return your call, Ivan Ivanitch,” I said untruthfully. “Don’t be hard on me; I’m a townsman, conventional; I do keep count of calls.”

“I am delighted, my dear fellow. I am an old man; I like respect.… Yes.”

From his voice and his blissfully smiling face, I could see that he was greatly flattered by my visit. Two peasant women helped me off with my coat in the entry, and a peasant in a red shirt hung it on a hook, and when Ivan Ivanitch and I went into his little study, two barefooted little girls were sitting on the floor looking at a picture-book; when they saw us they jumped up and ran away, and a tall, thin old woman in spectacles came in at once, bowed gravely to me, and picking up a pillow from the sofa and a picture-book from the floor, went away. From the adjoining rooms we heard incessant whispering and the patter of bare feet.

“I am expecting the doctor to dinner,” said Ivan Ivanitch. “He promised to come from the relief centre. Yes. He dines with me every Wednesday, God bless him.” He craned towards me and kissed me on the neck. “You have come, my dear fellow, so you are not vexed,” he whispered, sniffing. “Don’t be vexed, my dear creature. Yes. Perhaps it is annoying, but don’t be cross. My only prayer to God before I die is to live in peace and harmony with all in the true way. Yes.”

“Forgive me, Ivan Ivanitch, I will put my feet on a chair,” I said, feeling that I was so exhausted I could not be myself; I sat further back on the sofa and put up my feet on an armchair. My face was burning from the snow and the wind, and I felt as though my whole body were basking in the warmth and growing weaker from it.

“It’s very nice here,” I went on—“warm, soft, snug… and goose-feather pens,” I laughed, looking at the writing-table; “sand instead of blotting-paper.”

“Eh? Yes… yes.… The writing-table and the mahogany cupboard here were made for my father by a self-taught cabinetmaker—Glyeb Butyga, a serf of General Zhukov’s. Yes… a great artist in his own way.”

Listlessly and in the tone of a man dropping asleep, he began telling me about cabinetmaker Butyga. I listened. Then Ivan Ivanitch went into the next room to show me a polisander wood chest of drawers remarkable for its beauty and cheapness. He tapped the chest with his fingers, then called my attention to a stove of patterned tiles, such as one never sees now. He tapped the stove, too, with his fingers. There was an

atmosphere of good-natured simplicity and well-fed abundance about the chest of drawers, the tiled stove, the low chairs, the pictures embroidered in wool and silk on canvas in solid, ugly frames. When one remembers that all those objects were standing in the same places and precisely in the same order when I was a little child, and used to come here to name-day parties with my mother, it is simply unbelievable that they could ever cease to exist.

I thought what a fearful difference between Butyga and me! Butyga who made things, above all, solidly and substantially, and seeing in that his chief object, gave to length of life peculiar significance, had no thought of death, and probably hardly believed in its possibility; I, when I built my bridges of iron and stone which would last a thousand years, could not keep from me the thought, "It's not for long… it's no use." If in time Butyga's cupboard and my bridge should come under the notice of some sensible historian of art, he would say: "These were two men remarkable in their own way: Butyga loved his fellow-creatures and would not admit the thought that they might die and be annihilated, and so when he made his furniture he had the immortal man in his mind. The engineer Asorin did not love life or his fellow-creatures; even in the happy moments of creation, thoughts of death, of finiteness and dissolution, were not alien to him, and we see how insignificant and finite, how timid and poor, are these lines of his.…"

"I only heat these rooms," muttered Ivan Ivanitch, showing me his rooms. "Ever since my wife died and my son was killed in the war, I have kept the best rooms shut up. Yes… see…"

He opened a door, and I saw a big room with four columns, an old piano, and a heap of peas on the floor; it smelt cold and damp.

"The garden seats are in the next room…" muttered Ivan Ivanitch. "There's no one to dance the mazurka now.… I've shut them up."

We heard a noise. It was Dr. Sobol arriving. While he was rubbing his cold hands and stroking his wet beard, I had time to notice in the first place that he had a very dull life, and so was pleased to see Ivan Ivanitch and me; and, secondly, that he was a naive and simple-hearted man. He looked at me as though I were very glad to see him and very much interested in him.

"I have not slept for two nights," he said, looking at me naively and stroking his beard. "One night with a confinement, and the next I stayed at a peasant's with the bugs biting me all night. I am as sleepy as Satan, do you know."

With an expression on his face as though it could not afford me anything but pleasure, he took me by the arm and led me to the dining room. His naive eyes, his crumpled coat, his cheap tie and the smell of iodoform made an unpleasant impression upon me; I felt as though I were in vulgar company. When we sat down to table he filled my glass with vodka, and, smiling helplessly, I drank it; he put a piece of ham on my plate and I ate it submissively.

"*Repetitia est mater studiorum*," said Sobol, hastening to drink off another wineglassful. "Would you believe it, the joy of seeing good people has driven away my sleepiness? I have turned into a peasant, a savage in the wilds; I've grown coarse, but I am still an educated man, and I tell you in good earnest, it's tedious without company."

They served first for a cold course white sucking-pig with horseradish cream, then a rich and very hot cabbage soup with pork on it, with boiled buckwheat, from which rose a column of steam. The doctor went on talking, and I was soon convinced that he was a weak, unfortunate man, disorderly in external life. Three glasses of vodka made him drunk; he grew unnaturally lively, ate a great deal, kept clearing his throat and smacking his lips, and already addressed me in Italian, "*Eccellenza.*" Looking naively at me as though he were convinced that I was very glad to see and hear him, he informed me that he had long been separated from his wife and gave her three-quarters of his salary; that she lived in the town with his children, a boy and a girl, whom he adored; that he loved another woman, a widow, well educated, with an estate in the country, but was rarely able to see her, as he was busy with his work from morning till night and had not a free moment.

"The whole day long, first at the hospital, then on my rounds," he told us; "and I assure you, Eccellenza, I have not time to read a book, let alone going to see the woman I love. I've read nothing for ten years! For ten years, Eccellenza. As for the financial side of the question, ask Ivan Ivanitch: I have often no money to buy tobacco."

"On the other hand, you have the moral satisfaction of your work," I said.

"What?" he asked, and he winked. "No," he said, "better let us drink."

I listened to the doctor, and, after my invariable habit, tried to take his measure by my usual classification—materialist, idealist, filthy lucre, gregarious instincts, and so on; but no classification fitted him even approximately; and strange to say, while I simply listened and looked at him, he seemed perfectly clear to me as a person, but as soon as I began trying to classify him he became an exceptionally complex, intricate, and

incomprehensible character in spite of all his candour and simplicity. “Is that man,” I asked myself, “capable of wasting other people’s money, abusing their confidence, being disposed to sponge on them?” And now this question, which had once seemed to me grave and important, struck me as crude, petty, and coarse.

Pie was served; then, I remember, with long intervals between, during which we drank homemade liquors, they gave us a stew of pigeons, some dish of giblets, roast sucking-pig, partridges, cauliflower, curd dumplings, curd cheese and milk, jelly, and finally pancakes and jam. At first I ate with great relish, especially the cabbage soup and the buckwheat, but afterwards I munched and swallowed mechanically, smiling helplessly and unconscious of the taste of anything. My face was burning from the hot cabbage soup and the heat of the room. Ivan Ivanitch and Sobol, too, were crimson.

“To the health of your wife,” said Sobol. “She likes me. Tell her her doctor sends her his respects.”

“She’s fortunate, upon my word,” sighed Ivan Ivanitch. “Though she takes no trouble, does not fuss or worry herself, she has become the most important person in the whole district. Almost the whole business is in her hands, and they all gather round her, the doctor, the District Captains, and the ladies. With people of the right sort that happens of itself. Yes…. The apple tree need take no thought for the apple to grow on it; it will grow of itself.”

“It’s only people who don’t care who take no thought,” said I.

“Eh? Yes…” muttered Ivan Ivanitch, not catching what I said, “that’s true…. One must not worry oneself. Just so, just so…. Only do your duty towards God and your neighbour, and then never mind what happens.”

“Eccellenza,” said Sobol solemnly, “just look at nature about us: if you poke your nose or your ear out of your fur collar it will be frostbitten; stay in the fields for one hour, you’ll be buried in the snow; while the village is just the same as in the days of Rurik, the same Petchenyegs and Polovtsi. It’s nothing but being burnt down, starving, and struggling against nature in every way. What was I saying? Yes! If one thinks about it, you know, looks into it and analyses all this hotch-potch, if you will allow me to call it so, it’s not life but more like a fire in a theatre! Anyone who falls down or screams with terror, or rushes about, is the worst enemy of good order; one must stand up and look sharp, and not stir a hair! There’s no time for whimpering and busying oneself with trifles. When you have to deal with elemental forces you

must put out force against them, be firm and as unyielding as a stone. Isn't that right, grandfather?" He turned to Ivan Ivanitch and laughed. "I am no better than a woman myself; I am a limp rag, a flabby creature, so I hate flabbiness. I can't endure petty feelings! One mopes, another is frightened, a third will come straight in here and say: 'Fie on you! Here you've guzzled a dozen courses and you talk about the starving!' That's petty and stupid! A fourth will reproach you, Eccellenza, for being rich. Excuse me, Eccellenza," he went on in a loud voice, laying his hand on his heart, "but your having set our magistrate the task of hunting day and night for your thieves—excuse me, that's also petty on your part. I am a little drunk, so that's why I say this now, but you know, it is petty!"

"Who's asking him to worry himself? I don't understand!" I said, getting up.

I suddenly felt unbearably ashamed and mortified, and I walked round the table.

"Who asks him to worry himself? I didn't ask him to.… Damn him!"

"They have arrested three men and let them go again. They turned out not to be the right ones, and now they are looking for a fresh lot," said Sobol, laughing. "It's too bad!"

"I did not ask him to worry himself," said I, almost crying with excitement. "What's it all for? What's it all for? Well, supposing I was wrong, supposing I have done wrong, why do they try to put me more in the wrong?"

"Come, come, come, come!" said Sobol, trying to soothe me. "Come! I have had a drop, that is why I said it. My tongue is my enemy. Come," he sighed, "we have eaten and drunk wine, and now for a nap."

He got up from the table, kissed Ivan Ivanitch on the head, and staggering from repletion, went out of the dining room. Ivan Ivanitch and I smoked in silence.

"I don't sleep after dinner, my dear," said Ivan Ivanitch, "but you have a rest in the lounge room."

I agreed. In the half-dark and warmly heated room they called the lounge room, there stood against the walls long, wide sofas, solid and heavy, the work of Butyga the cabinet maker; on them lay high, soft, white beds, probably made by the old woman in spectacles. On one of them Sobol, without his coat and boots, already lay asleep with his face to the back of the sofa; another bed was awaiting me. I took off my coat and boots, and, overcome by fatigue, by the spirit of Butyga which hovered over the quiet lounge room, and by the light, caressing snore of Sobol, I lay down submissively.

And at once I began dreaming of my wife, of her room, of the stationmaster with his face full of hatred, the heaps of snow, a fire in the theatre. I dreamed of the peasants who had stolen twenty sacks of rye out of my barn.

"Anyway, it's a good thing the magistrate let them go," I said.

I woke up at the sound of my own voice, looked for a moment in perplexity at Sobol's broad back, at the buckles of his waistcoat, at his thick heels, then lay down again and fell asleep.

When I woke up the second time it was quite dark. Sobol was asleep. There was peace in my heart, and I longed to make haste home. I dressed and went out of the lounge room. Ivan Ivanitch was sitting in a big armchair in his study, absolutely motionless, staring at a fixed point, and it was evident that he had been in the same state of petrifaction all the while I had been asleep.

"Good!" I said, yawning. "I feel as though I had woken up after breaking the fast at Easter. I shall often come and see you now. Tell me, did my wife ever dine here?"

"So-ome-ti-mes… sometimes,"' muttered Ivan Ivanitch, making an effort to stir. "She dined here last Saturday. Yes.… She likes me."

After a silence I said:

"Do you remember, Ivan Ivanitch, you told me I had a disagreeable character and that it was difficult to get on with me? But what am I to do to make my character different?"

"I don't know, my dear boy.… I'm a feeble old man, I can't advise you.… Yes.… But I said that to you at the time because I am fond of you and fond of your wife, and I was fond of your father.… Yes. I shall soon die, and what need have I to conceal things from you or to tell you lies? So I tell you: I am very fond of you, but I don't respect you. No, I don't respect you."

He turned towards me and said in a breathless whisper:

"It's impossible to respect you, my dear fellow. You look like a real man. You have the figure and deportment of the French President Carnot—I saw a portrait of him the other day in an illustrated paper… yes.… You use lofty language, and you are clever, and you are high up in the service beyond all reach, but haven't real soul, my dear boy… there's no strength in it."

"A Scythian, in fact," I laughed. "But what about my wife? Tell me something about my wife; you know her better."

I wanted to talk about my wife, but Sobol came in and prevented me.

“I’ve had a sleep and a wash,” he said, looking at me naively. “I’ll have a cup of tea with some rum in it and go home.”

VII

It was by now past seven. Besides Ivan Ivanitch, women servants, the old dame in spectacles, the little girls and the peasant, all accompanied us from the hall out on to the steps, wishing us goodbye and all sorts of blessings, while near the horses in the darkness there were standing and moving about men with lanterns, telling our coachmen how and which way to drive, and wishing us a lucky journey. The horses, the men, and the sledges were white.

"Where do all these people come from?" I asked as my three horses and the doctor's two moved at a walking pace out of the yard.

"They are all his serfs," said Sobol. "The new order has not reached him yet. Some of the old servants are living out their lives with him, and then there are orphans of all sorts who have nowhere to go; there are some, too, who insist on living there, there's no turning them out. A queer old man!"

Again the flying horses, the strange voice of drunken Nikanor, the wind and the persistent snow, which got into one's eyes, one's mouth, and every fold of one's fur coat.…

"Well, I am running a rig," I thought, while my bells chimed in with the doctor's, the wind whistled, the coachmen shouted; and while this frantic uproar was going on, I recalled all the details of that strange wild day, unique in my life, and it seemed to me that I really had gone out of my mind or become a different man. It was as though the man I had been till that day were already a stranger to me.

The doctor drove behind and kept talking loudly with his coachman. From time to time he overtook me, drove side by side, and always, with the same naive confidence that it was very pleasant to me, offered me a cigarette or asked for the matches. Or, overtaking me, he would lean right out of his sledge, and waving about the sleeves of his fur coat, which were at least twice as long as his arms, shout:

"Go it, Vaska! Beat the thousand roublers! Hey, my kittens!"

And to the accompaniment of loud, malicious laughter from Sobol and his Vaska the doctor's kittens raced ahead. My Nikanor took it as an affront, and held in his three horses, but when the doctor's bells had

passed out of hearing, he raised his elbows, shouted, and our horses flew like mad in pursuit. We drove into a village, there were glimpses of lights, the silhouettes of huts. Someone shouted:

"Ah, the devils!" We seemed to have galloped a mile and a half, and still it was the village street and there seemed no end to it. When we caught up the doctor and drove more quietly, he asked for matches and said:

"Now try and feed that street! And, you know, there are five streets like that, sir. Stay, stay," he shouted. "Turn in at the tavern! We must get warm and let the horses rest."

They stopped at the tavern.

"I have more than one village like that in my district," said the doctor, opening a heavy door with a squeaky block, and ushering me in front of him. "If you look in broad daylight you can't see to the end of the street, and there are side-streets, too, and one can do nothing but scratch one's head. It's hard to do anything."

We went into the best room where there was a strong smell of tablecloths, and at our entrance a sleepy peasant in a waistcoat and a shirt worn outside his trousers jumped up from a bench. Sobol asked for some beer and I asked for tea.

"It's hard to do anything," said Sobol. "Your wife has faith; I respect her and have the greatest reverence for her, but I have no great faith myself. As long as our relations to the people continue to have the character of ordinary philanthropy, as shown in orphan asylums and almshouses, so long we shall only be shuffling, shamming, and deceiving ourselves, and nothing more. Our relations ought to be businesslike, founded on calculation, knowledge, and justice. My Vaska has been working for me all his life; his crops have failed, he is sick and starving. If I give him fifteen kopecks a day, by so doing I try to restore him to his former condition as a workman; that is, I am first and foremost looking after my own interests, and yet for some reason I call that fifteen kopecks relief, charity, good works. Now let us put it like this. On the most modest computation, reckoning seven kopecks a soul and five souls a family, one needs three hundred and fifty roubles a day to feed a thousand families. That sum is fixed by our practical duty to a thousand families. Meanwhile we give not three hundred and fifty a day, but only ten, and say that that is relief, charity, that that makes your wife and all of us exceptionally good people and hurrah for our humaneness. That is it, my dear soul! Ah! if we would talk less of being humane and calculated more, reasoned, and took a conscientious attitude to our

duties! How many such humane, sensitive people there are among us who tear about in all good faith with subscription lists, but don't pay their tailors or their cooks. There is no logic in our life; that's what it is! No logic!"

We were silent for a while. I was making a mental calculation and said:

"I will feed a thousand families for two hundred days. Come and see me tomorrow to talk it over."

I was pleased that this was said quite simply, and was glad that Sobol answered me still more simply:

"Right."

We paid for what we had and went out of the tavern.

"I like going on like this," said Sobol, getting into the sledge. "Eccellenza, oblige me with a match. I've forgotten mine in the tavern."

A quarter of an hour later his horses fell behind, and the sound of his bells was lost in the roar of the snowstorm. Reaching home, I walked about my rooms, trying to think things over and to define my position clearly to myself; I had not one word, one phrase, ready for my wife. My brain was not working.

But without thinking of anything, I went downstairs to my wife. She was in her room, in the same pink dressing-gown, and standing in the same attitude as though screening her papers from me. On her face was an expression of perplexity and irony, and it was evident that having heard of my arrival, she had prepared herself not to cry, not to entreat me, not to defend herself, as she had done the day before, but to laugh at me, to answer me contemptuously, and to act with decision. Her face was saying: "If that's how it is, goodbye."

"Natalie, I've not gone away," I said, "but it's not deception. I have gone out of my mind; I've grown old, I'm ill, I've become a different man—think as you like.… I've shaken off my old self with horror, with horror; I despise him and am ashamed of him, and the new man who has been in me since yesterday will not let me go away. Do not drive me away, Natalie!"

She looked intently into my face and believed me, and there was a gleam of uneasiness in her eyes. Enchanted by her presence, warmed by the warmth of her room, I muttered as in delirium, holding out my hands to her:

"I tell you, I have no one near to me but you. I have never for one minute ceased to miss you, and only obstinate vanity prevented me from owning it. The past, when we lived as husband and wife, cannot be

brought back, and there's no need; but make me your servant, take all my property, and give it away to anyone you like. I am at peace, Natalie, I am content.… I am at peace."

My wife, looking intently and with curiosity into my face, suddenly uttered a faint cry, burst into tears, and ran into the next room. I went upstairs to my own storey.

An hour later I was sitting at my table, writing my *History of Railways*, and the starving peasants did not now hinder me from doing so. Now I feel no uneasiness. Neither the scenes of disorder which I saw when I went the round of the huts at Pestrovo with my wife and Sobol the other day, nor malignant rumours, nor the mistakes of the people around me, nor old age close upon me—nothing disturbs me. Just as the flying bullets do not hinder soldiers from talking of their own affairs, eating and cleaning their boots, so the starving peasants do not hinder me from sleeping quietly and looking after my personal affairs. In my house and far around it there is in full swing the work which Dr. Sobol calls "an orgy of philanthropy." My wife often comes up to me and looks about my rooms uneasily, as though looking for what more she can give to the starving peasants "to justify her existence," and I see that, thanks to her, there will soon be nothing of our property left and we shall be poor; but that does not trouble me, and I smile at her gaily. What will happen in the future I don't know.

THE GRASSHOPPER

I

All Olga Ivanovna's friends and acquaintances were at her wedding.

"Look at him; isn't it true that there is something in him?" she said to her friends, with a nod towards her husband, as though she wanted to explain why she was marrying a simple, very ordinary, and in no way remarkable man.

Her husband, Osip Stepanitch Dymov, was a doctor, and only of the rank of a titular councillor. He was on the staff of two hospitals: in one a ward-surgeon and in the other a dissecting demonstrator. Every day from nine to twelve he saw patients and was busy in his ward, and after twelve o'clock he went by tram to the other hospital, where he dissected. His private practice was a small one, not worth more than five hundred roubles a year. That was all. What more could one say about him? Meanwhile, Olga Ivanovna and her friends and acquaintances were not quite ordinary people. Every one of them was remarkable in some way, and more or less famous; already had made a reputation and was looked upon as a celebrity; or if not yet a celebrity, gave brilliant promise of becoming one. There was an actor from the Dramatic Theatre, who was a great talent of established reputation, as well as an elegant, intelligent, and modest man, and a capital elocutionist, and who taught Olga Ivanovna to recite; there was a singer from the opera, a good-natured, fat man who assured Olga Ivanovna, with a sigh, that she was ruining herself, that if she would take herself in hand and not be lazy she might make a remarkable singer; then there were several artists, and chief among them Ryabovsky, a very handsome, fair young man of five-and-twenty who painted genre pieces, animal studies, and landscapes, was successful at exhibitions, and had sold his last picture for five hundred roubles. He touched up Olga Ivanovna's sketches, and used to say she

might do something. Then a violoncellist, whose instrument used to sob, and who openly declared that of all the ladies of his acquaintance the only one who could accompany him was Olga Ivanovna; then there was a literary man, young but already well known, who had written stories, novels, and plays. Who else? Why, Vassily Vassilyitch, a landowner and amateur illustrator and vignettist, with a great feeling for the old Russian style, the old ballad and epic. On paper, on china, and on smoked plates, he produced literally marvels. In the midst of this free artistic company, spoiled by fortune, though refined and modest, who recalled the existence of doctors only in times of illness, and to whom the name of Dymov sounded in no way different from Sidorov or Tarasov—in the midst of this company Dymov seemed strange, not wanted, and small, though he was tall and broad-shouldered. He looked as though he had on somebody else's coat, and his beard was like a shopman's. Though if he had been a writer or an artist, they would have said that his beard reminded them of Zola.

An artist said to Olga Ivanovna that with her flaxen hair and in her wedding dress she was very much like a graceful cherry tree when it is covered all over with delicate white blossoms in spring.

"Oh, let me tell you," said Olga Ivanovna, taking his arm, "how it was it all came to pass so suddenly. Listen, listen!… I must tell you that my father was on the same staff at the hospital as Dymov. When my poor father was taken ill, Dymov watched for days and nights together at his bedside. Such self-sacrifice! Listen, Ryabovsky! You, my writer, listen; it is very interesting! Come nearer. Such self-sacrifice, such genuine sympathy! I sat up with my father, and did not sleep for nights, either. And all at once—the princess had won the hero's heart—my Dymov fell head over ears in love. Really, fate is so strange at times! Well, after my father's death he came to see me sometimes, met me in the street, and one fine evening, all at once he made me an offer… like snow upon my head.… I lay awake all night, crying, and fell hellishly in love myself. And here, as you see, I am his wife. There really is something strong, powerful, bearlike about him, isn't there? Now his face is turned three-quarters towards us in a bad light, but when he turns round look at his forehead. Ryabovsky, what do you say to that forehead? Dymov, we are talking about you!" she called to her husband. "Come here; hold out your honest hand to Ryabovsky.… That's right, be friends."

Dymov, with a naive and good-natured smile, held out his hand to Ryabovsky, and said:

“Very glad to meet you. There was a Ryabovsky in my year at the medical school. Was he a relation of yours?”

II

Olga Ivanovna was twenty-two, Dymov was thirty-one. They got on splendidly together when they were married. Olga Ivanovna hung all her drawing room walls with her own and other people's sketches, in frames and without frames, and near the piano and furniture arranged picturesque corners with Japanese parasols, easels, daggers, busts, photographs, and rags of many colours.… In the dining room she papered the walls with peasant woodcuts, hung up bark shoes and sickles, stood in a corner a scythe and a rake, and so achieved a dining room in the Russian style. In her bedroom she draped the ceiling and the walls with dark cloths to make it like a cavern, hung a Venetian lantern over the beds, and at the door set a figure with a halberd. And everyone thought that the young people had a very charming little home.

When she got up at eleven o'clock every morning, Olga Ivanovna played the piano or, if it were sunny, painted something in oils. Then between twelve and one she drove to her dressmaker's. As Dymov and she had very little money, only just enough, she and her dressmaker were often put to clever shifts to enable her to appear constantly in new dresses and make a sensation with them. Very often out of an old dyed dress, out of bits of tulle, lace, plush, and silk, costing nothing, perfect marvels were created, something bewitching—not a dress, but a dream. From the dressmaker's Olga Ivanovna usually drove to some actress of her acquaintance to hear the latest theatrical gossip, and incidentally to try and get hold of tickets for the first night of some new play or for a benefit performance. From the actress's she had to go to some artist's studio or to some exhibition or to see some celebrity—either to pay a visit or to give an invitation or simply to have a chat. And everywhere she met with a gay and friendly welcome, and was assured that she was good, that she was sweet, that she was rare.… Those whom she called great and famous received her as one of themselves, as an equal, and predicted with one voice that, with her talents, her taste, and her intelligence, she would do great things if she concentrated herself. She sang, she played the piano, she painted in oils, she carved, she took part in amateur performances; and all this not just anyhow, but all with talent,

whether she made lanterns for an illumination or dressed up or tied somebody's cravat—everything she did was exceptionally graceful, artistic, and charming. But her talents showed themselves in nothing so clearly as in her faculty for quickly becoming acquainted and on intimate terms with celebrated people. No sooner did anyone become ever so little celebrated, and set people talking about him, than she made his acquaintance, got on friendly terms the same day, and invited him to her house. Every new acquaintance she made was a veritable fête for her. She adored celebrated people, was proud of them, dreamed of them every night. She craved for them, and never could satisfy her craving. The old ones departed and were forgotten, new ones came to replace them, but to these, too, she soon grew accustomed or was disappointed in them, and began eagerly seeking for fresh great men, finding them and seeking for them again. What for?

Between four and five she dined at home with her husband. His simplicity, good sense, and kindheartedness touched her and moved her up to enthusiasm. She was constantly jumping up, impulsively hugging his head and showering kisses on it.

"You are a clever, generous man, Dymov," she used to say, "but you have one very serious defect. You take absolutely no interest in art. You don't believe in music or painting."

"I don't understand them," he would say mildly. "I have spent all my life in working at natural science and medicine, and I have never had time to take an interest in the arts."

"But, you know, that's awful, Dymov!"

"Why so? Your friends don't know anything of science or medicine, but you don't reproach them with it. Everyone has his own line. I don't understand landscapes and operas, but the way I look at it is that if one set of sensible people devote their whole lives to them, and other sensible people pay immense sums for them, they must be of use. I don't understand them, but not understanding does not imply disbelieving in them."

"Let me shake your honest hand!"

After dinner Olga Ivanovna would drive off to see her friends, then to a theatre or to a concert, and she returned home after midnight. So it was every day.

On Wednesdays she had "At Homes." At these "At Homes" the hostess and her guests did not play cards and did not dance, but entertained themselves with various arts. An actor from the Dramatic Theatre recited, a singer sang, artists sketched in the albums of which

Olga Ivanovna had a great number, the violoncellist played, and the hostess herself sketched, carved, sang, and played accompaniments. In the intervals between the recitations, music, and singing, they talked and argued about literature, the theatre, and painting. There were no ladies, for Olga Ivanovna considered all ladies wearisome and vulgar except actresses and her dressmaker. Not one of these entertainments passed without the hostess starting at every ring at the bell, and saying, with a triumphant expression, “It is he,” meaning by “he,” of course, some new celebrity. Dymov was not in the drawing room, and no one remembered his existence. But exactly at half-past eleven the door leading into the dining room opened, and Dymov would appear with his good-natured, gentle smile and say, rubbing his hands:

“Come to supper, gentlemen.”

They all went into the dining room, and every time found on the table exactly the same things: a dish of oysters, a piece of ham or veal, sardines, cheese, caviar, mushrooms, vodka, and two decanters of wine.

“My dear *maitre d’ hotel*!” Olga Ivanovna would say, clasping her hands with enthusiasm, “you are simply fascinating! My friends, look at his forehead! Dymov, turn your profile. Look! he has the face of a Bengal tiger and an expression as kind and sweet as a gazelle. Ah, the darling!”

The visitors ate, and, looking at Dymov, thought, “He really is a nice fellow”; but they soon forgot about him, and went on talking about the theatre, music, and painting.

The young people were happy, and their life flowed on without a hitch.

The third week of their honeymoon was spent, however, not quite happily—sadly, indeed. Dymov caught erysipelas in the hospital, was in bed for six days, and had to have his beautiful black hair cropped. Olga Ivanovna sat beside him and wept bitterly, but when he was better she put a white handkerchief on his shaven head and began to paint him as a Bedouin. And they were both in good spirits. Three days after he had begun to go back to the hospital he had another mischance.

“I have no luck, little mother,” he said one day at dinner. “I had four dissections to do today, and I cut two of my fingers at one. And I did not notice it till I got home.”

Olga Ivanovna was alarmed. He smiled, and told her that it did not matter, and that he often cut his hands when he was dissecting.

“I get absorbed, little mother, and grow careless.”

Olga Ivanovna dreaded symptoms of blood-poisoning, and prayed about it every night, but all went well. And again life flowed on peaceful and happy, free from grief and anxiety. The present was happy, and to follow it spring was at hand, already smiling in the distance, and promising a thousand delights. There would be no end to their happiness. In April, May and June a summer villa a good distance out of town; walks, sketching, fishing, nightingales; and then from July right on to autumn an artist's tour on the Volga, and in this tour Olga Ivanovna would take part as an indispensable member of the society. She had already had made for her two travelling dresses of linen, had bought paints, brushes, canvases, and a new palette for the journey. Almost every day Ryabovsky visited her to see what progress she was making in her painting; when she showed him her painting, he used to thrust his hands deep into his pockets, compress his lips, sniff, and say:

"Ye—es…! That cloud of yours is screaming: it's not in the evening light. The foreground is somehow chewed up, and there is something, you know, not the thing.… And your cottage is weighed down and whines pitifully. That corner ought to have been taken more in shadow, but on the whole it is not bad; I like it."

And the more incomprehensible he talked, the more readily Olga Ivanovna understood him.

III

After dinner on the second day of Trinity week, Dymov bought some sweets and some savouries and went down to the villa to see his wife. He had not seen her for a fortnight, and missed her terribly. As he sat in the train and afterwards as he looked for his villa in a big wood, he felt all the while hungry and weary, and dreamed of how he would have supper in freedom with his wife, then tumble into bed and to sleep. And he was delighted as he looked at his parcel, in which there was caviar, cheese, and white salmon.

The sun was setting by the time he found his villa and recognized it. The old servant told him that her mistress was not at home, but that most likely she would soon be in. The villa, very uninviting in appearance, with low ceilings papered with writing-paper and with uneven floors full of crevices, consisted only of three rooms. In one there was a bed, in the second there were canvases, brushes, greasy papers, and men's overcoats and hats lying about on the chairs and in the windows, while in the third Dymov found three unknown men; two were dark-haired and had beards, the other was clean-shaven and fat, apparently an actor. There was a samovar boiling on the table.

"What do you want?" asked the actor in a bass voice, looking at Dymov ungraciously. "Do you want Olga Ivanovna? Wait a minute; she will be here directly."

Dymov sat down and waited. One of the dark-haired men, looking sleepily and listlessly at him, poured himself out a glass of tea, and asked:

"Perhaps you would like some tea?"

Dymov was both hungry and thirsty, but he refused tea for fear of spoiling his supper. Soon he heard footsteps and a familiar laugh; a door slammed, and Olga Ivanovna ran into the room, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and carrying a box in her hand; she was followed by Ryabovsky, rosy and good-humoured, carrying a big umbrella and a campstool.

"Dymov!" cried Olga Ivanovna, and she flushed crimson with pleasure. "Dymov!" she repeated, laying her head and both arms on his

bosom. “Is that you? Why haven’t you come for so long? Why? Why?”

“When could I, little mother? I am always busy, and whenever I am free it always happens somehow that the train does not fit.”

“But how glad I am to see you! I have been dreaming about you the whole night, the whole night, and I was afraid you must be ill. Ah! if you only knew how sweet you are! You have come in the nick of time! You will be my salvation! You are the only person who can save me! There is to be a most original wedding here tomorrow,” she went on, laughing, and tying her husband’s cravat. “A young telegraph clerk at the station, called Tchikeldyeev, is going to be married. He is a handsome young man and—well, not stupid, and you know there is something strong, bearlike in his face… you might paint him as a young Norman. We summer visitors take a great interest in him, and have promised to be at his wedding.… He is a lonely, timid man, not well off, and of course it would be a shame not to be sympathetic to him. Fancy! the wedding will be after the service; then we shall all walk from the church to the bride’s lodgings… you see the wood, the birds singing, patches of sunlight on the grass, and all of us spots of different colours against the bright green background—very original, in the style of the French impressionists. But, Dymov, what am I to go to the church in?” said Olga Ivanovna, and she looked as though she were going to cry. “I have nothing here, literally nothing! no dress, no flowers, no gloves… you must save me. Since you have come, fate itself bids you save me. Take the keys, my precious, go home and get my pink dress from the wardrobe. You remember it; it hangs in front.… Then, in the storeroom, on the floor, on the right side, you will see two cardboard boxes. When you open the top one you will see tulle, heaps of tulle and rags of all sorts, and under them flowers. Take out all the flowers carefully, try not to crush them, darling; I will choose among them later.… And buy me some gloves.”

“Very well,” said Dymov; “I will go tomorrow and send them to you.”

“Tomorrow?” asked Olga Ivanovna, and she looked at him surprised. “You won’t have time tomorrow. The first train goes tomorrow at nine, and the wedding’s at eleven. No, darling, it must be today; it absolutely must be today. If you won’t be able to come tomorrow, send them by a messenger. Come, you must run along.… The passenger train will be in directly; don’t miss it, darling.”

“Very well.”

“Oh, how sorry I am to let you go!” said Olga Ivanovna, and tears came into her eyes. “And why did I promise that telegraph clerk, like a silly?”

Dymov hurriedly drank a glass of tea, took a cracknel, and, smiling gently, went to the station. And the caviar, the cheese, and the white salmon were eaten by the two dark gentlemen and the fat actor.

IV

On a still moonlight night in July Olga Ivanovna was standing on the deck of a Volga steamer and looking alternately at the water and at the picturesque banks. Beside her was standing Ryabovsky, telling her the black shadows on the water were not shadows, but a dream, that it would be sweet to sink into forgetfulness, to die, to become a memory in the sight of that enchanted water with the fantastic glimmer, in sight of the fathomless sky and the mournful, dreamy shores that told of the vanity of our life and of the existence of something higher, blessed, and eternal. The past was vulgar and uninteresting, the future was trivial, and that marvellous night, unique in a lifetime, would soon be over, would blend with eternity; then, why live?

And Olga Ivanovna listened alternately to Ryabovsky's voice and the silence of the night, and thought of her being immortal and never dying. The turquoise colour of the water, such as she had never seen before, the sky, the riverbanks, the black shadows, and the unaccountable joy that flooded her soul, all told her that she would make a great artist, and that somewhere in the distance, in the infinite space beyond the moonlight, success, glory, the love of the people, lay awaiting her.… When she gazed steadily without blinking into the distance, she seemed to see crowds of people, lights, triumphant strains of music, cries of enthusiasm, she herself in a white dress, and flowers showered upon her from all sides. She thought, too, that beside her, leaning with his elbows on the rail of the steamer, there was standing a real great man, a genius, one of God's elect.… All that he had created up to the present was fine, new, and extraordinary, but what he would create in time, when with maturity his rare talent reached its full development, would be astounding, immeasurably sublime; and that could be seen by his face, by his manner of expressing himself and his attitude to nature. He talked of shadows, of the tones of evening, of the moonlight, in a special way, in a language of his own, so that one could not help feeling the fascination of his power over nature. He was very handsome, original, and his life, free, independent, aloof from all common cares, was like the life of a bird.

“It’s growing cooler,” said Olga Ivanovna, and she gave a shudder.

Ryabovsky wrapped her in his cloak, and said mournfully:

“I feel that I am in your power; I am a slave. Why are you so enchanting today?”

He kept staring intently at her, and his eyes were terrible. And she was afraid to look at him.

“I love you madly,” he whispered, breathing on her cheek. “Say one word to me and I will not go on living; I will give up art…” he muttered in violent emotion. “Love me, love.…”

“Don’t talk like that,” said Olga Ivanovna, covering her eyes. “It’s dreadful! How about Dymov?”

“What of Dymov? Why Dymov? What have I to do with Dymov? The Volga, the moon, beauty, my love, ecstasy, and there is no such thing as Dymov.… Ah! I don’t know… I don’t care about the past; give me one moment, one instant!”

Olga Ivanovna’s heart began to throb. She tried to think about her husband, but all her past, with her wedding, with Dymov, and with her “At Homes,” seemed to her petty, trivial, dingy, unnecessary, and far, far away.… Yes, really, what of Dymov? Why Dymov? What had she to do with Dymov? Had he any existence in nature, or was he only a dream?

“For him, a simple and ordinary man the happiness he has had already is enough,” she thought, covering her face with her hands. “Let them condemn me, let them curse me, but in spite of them all I will go to my ruin; I will go to my ruin!… One must experience everything in life. My God! how terrible and how glorious!”

“Well? Well?” muttered the artist, embracing her, and greedily kissing the hands with which she feebly tried to thrust him from her. “You love me? Yes? Yes? Oh, what a night! marvellous night!”

“Yes, what a night!” she whispered, looking into his eyes, which were bright with tears.

Then she looked round quickly, put her arms round him, and kissed him on the lips.

“We are nearing Kineshmo!” said someone on the other side of the deck.

They heard heavy footsteps; it was a waiter from the refreshment-bar.

“Waiter,” said Olga Ivanovna, laughing and crying with happiness, “bring us some wine.”

The artist, pale with emotion, sat on the seat, looking at Olga Ivanovna with adoring, grateful eyes; then he closed his eyes, and said, smiling languidly:

“I am tired.”
And he leaned his head against the rail.

V

On the second of September the day was warm and still, but overcast. In the early morning a light mist had hung over the Volga, and after nine o'clock it had begun to spout with rain. And there seemed no hope of the sky clearing. Over their morning tea Ryabovsky told Olga Ivanovna that painting was the most ungrateful and boring art, that he was not an artist, that none but fools thought that he had any talent, and all at once, for no rhyme or reason, he snatched up a knife and with it scraped over his very best sketch. After his tea he sat plunged in gloom at the window and gazed at the Volga. And now the Volga was dingy, all of one even colour without a gleam of light, cold-looking. Everything, everything recalled the approach of dreary, gloomy autumn. And it seemed as though nature had removed now from the Volga the sumptuous green covers from the banks, the brilliant reflections of the sunbeams, the transparent blue distance, and all its smart gala array, and had packed it away in boxes till the coming spring, and the crows were flying above the Volga and crying tauntingly, "Bare, bare!"

Ryabovsky heard their cawing, and thought he had already gone off and lost his talent, that everything in this world was relative, conditional, and stupid, and that he ought not to have taken up with this woman.… In short, he was out of humour and depressed.

Olga Ivanovna sat behind the screen on the bed, and, passing her fingers through her lovely flaxen hair, pictured herself first in the drawing room, then in the bedroom, then in her husband's study; her imagination carried her to the theatre, to the dressmaker, to her distinguished friends. Were they getting something up now? Did they think of her? The season had begun by now, and it would be time to think about her "At Homes." And Dymov? Dear Dymov! with what gentleness and childlike pathos he kept begging her in his letters to make haste and come home! Every month he sent her seventy-five roubles, and when she wrote him that she had lent the artists a hundred roubles, he sent that hundred too. What a kind, generous-hearted man! The travelling wearied Olga Ivanovna; she was bored; and she longed to get away from the peasants, from the damp smell of the river, and to cast off the feeling

of physical uncleanliness of which she was conscious all the time, living in the peasants' huts and wandering from village to village. If Ryabovsky had not given his word to the artists that he would stay with them till the twentieth of September, they might have gone away that very day. And how nice that would have been!

"My God!" moaned Ryabovsky. "Will the sun ever come out? I can't go on with a sunny landscape without the sun.…"

"But you have a sketch with a cloudy sky," said Olga Ivanovna, coming from behind the screen. "Do you remember, in the right foreground forest trees, on the left a herd of cows and geese? You might finish it now."

"Aie!" the artist scowled. "Finish it! Can you imagine I am such a fool that I don't know what I want to do?"

"How you have changed to me!" sighed Olga Ivanovna.

"Well, a good thing too!"

Olga Ivanovna's face quivered; she moved away to the stove and began to cry.

"Well, that's the last straw—crying! Give over! I have a thousand reasons for tears, but I am not crying."

"A thousand reasons!" cried Olga Ivanovna. "The chief one is that you are weary of me. Yes!" she said, and broke into sobs. "If one is to tell the truth, you are ashamed of our love. You keep trying to prevent the artists from noticing it, though it is impossible to conceal it, and they have known all about it for ever so long."

"Olga, one thing I beg you," said the artist in an imploring voice, laying his hand on his heart—"one thing; don't worry me! I want nothing else from you!"

"But swear that you love me still!"

"This is agony!" the artist hissed through his teeth, and he jumped up. "It will end by my throwing myself in the Volga or going out of my mind! Let me alone!"

"Come, kill me, kill me!" cried Olga Ivanovna. "Kill me!"

She sobbed again, and went behind the screen. There was a swish of rain on the straw thatch of the hut. Ryabovsky clutched his head and strode up and down the hut; then with a resolute face, as though bent on proving something to somebody, put on his cap, slung his gun over his shoulder, and went out of the hut.

After he had gone, Olga Ivanovna lay a long time on the bed, crying. At first she thought it would be a good thing to poison herself, so that when Ryabovsky came back he would find her dead; then her

imagination carried her to her drawing room, to her husband's study, and she imagined herself sitting motionless beside Dymov and enjoying the physical peace and cleanliness, and in the evening sitting in the theatre, listening to Mazini. And a yearning for civilization, for the noise and bustle of the town, for celebrated people sent a pang to her heart. A peasant woman came into the hut and began in a leisurely way lighting the stove to get the dinner. There was a smell of charcoal fumes, and the air was filled with bluish smoke. The artists came in, in muddy high boots and with faces wet with rain, examined their sketches, and comforted themselves by saying that the Volga had its charms even in bad weather. On the wall the cheap clock went "tic-tic-tic." … The flies, feeling chilled, crowded round the icon in the corner, buzzing, and one could hear the cockroaches scurrying about among the thick portfolios under the seats.…

Ryabovsky came home as the sun was setting. He flung his cap on the table, and, without removing his muddy boots, sank pale and exhausted on the bench and closed his eyes.

"I am tired…" he said, and twitched his eyebrows, trying to raise his eyelids.

To be nice to him and to show she was not cross, Olga Ivanovna went up to him, gave him a silent kiss, and passed the comb through his fair hair. She meant to comb it for him.

"What's that?" he said, starting as though something cold had touched him, and he opened his eyes. "What is it? Please let me alone."

He thrust her off, and moved away. And it seemed to her that there was a look of aversion and annoyance on his face.

At that time the peasant woman cautiously carried him, in both hands, a plate of cabbage-soup. And Olga Ivanovna saw how she wetted her fat fingers in it. And the dirty peasant woman, standing with her body thrust forward, and the cabbage-soup which Ryabovsky began eating greedily, and the hut, and their whole way of life, which she at first had so loved for its simplicity and artistic disorder, seemed horrible to her now. She suddenly felt insulted, and said coldly:

"We must part for a time, or else from boredom we shall quarrel in earnest. I am sick of this; I am going today."

"Going how? Astride on a broomstick?"

"Today is Thursday, so the steamer will be here at half-past nine."

"Eh? Yes, yes.… Well, go, then…" Ryabovsky said softly, wiping his mouth with a towel instead of a dinner napkin. "You are dull and have

nothing to do here, and one would have to be a great egoist to try and keep you. Go home, and we shall meet again after the twentieth."

Olga Ivanovna packed in good spirits. Her cheeks positively glowed with pleasure. Could it really be true, she asked herself, that she would soon be writing in her drawing room and sleeping in her bedroom, and dining with a cloth on the table? A weight was lifted from her heart, and she no longer felt angry with the artist.

"My paints and brushes I will leave with you, Ryabovsky," she said. "You can bring what's left.… Mind, now, don't be lazy here when I am gone; don't mope, but work. You are such a splendid fellow, Ryabovsky!"

At ten o'clock Ryabovsky gave her a farewell kiss, in order, as she thought, to avoid kissing her on the steamer before the artists, and went with her to the landing-stage. The steamer soon came up and carried her away.

She arrived home two and a half days later. Breathless with excitement, she went, without taking off her hat or waterproof, into the drawing room and thence into the dining room. Dymov, with his waistcoat unbuttoned and no coat, was sitting at the table sharpening a knife on a fork; before him lay a grouse on a plate. As Olga Ivanovna went into the flat she was convinced that it was essential to hide everything from her husband, and that she would have the strength and skill to do so; but now, when she saw his broad, mild, happy smile, and shining, joyful eyes, she felt that to deceive this man was as vile, as revolting, and as impossible and out of her power as to bear false witness, to steal, or to kill, and in a flash she resolved to tell him all that had happened. Letting him kiss and embrace her, she sank down on her knees before him and hid her face.

"What is it, what is it, little mother?" he asked tenderly. "Were you homesick?"

She raised her face, red with shame, and gazed at him with a guilty and imploring look, but fear and shame prevented her from telling him the truth.

"Nothing," she said; "it's just nothing.…"

"Let us sit down," he said, raising her and seating her at the table. "That's right, eat the grouse. You are starving, poor darling."

She eagerly breathed in the atmosphere of home and ate the grouse, while he watched her with tenderness and laughed with delight.

VI

Apparently, by the middle of the winter Dymov began to suspect that he was being deceived. As though his conscience was not clear, he could not look his wife straight in the face, did not smile with delight when he met her, and to avoid being left alone with her, he often brought in to dinner his colleague, Korostelev, a little close-cropped man with a wrinkled face, who kept buttoning and unbuttoning his reefer jacket with embarrassment when he talked with Olga Ivanovna, and then with his right hand nipped his left moustache. At dinner the two doctors talked about the fact that a displacement of the diaphragm was sometimes accompanied by irregularities of the heart, or that a great number of neurotic complaints were met with of late, or that Dymov had the day before found a cancer of the lower abdomen while dissecting a corpse with the diagnosis of pernicious anaemia. And it seemed as though they were talking of medicine to give Olga Ivanovna a chance of being silent—that is, of not lying. After dinner Korostelev sat down to the piano, while Dymov sighed and said to him:

"Ech, brother—well, well! Play something melancholy."

Hunching up his shoulders and stretching his fingers wide apart, Korostelev played some chords and began singing in a tenor voice, "Show me the abode where the Russian peasant would not groan," while Dymov sighed once more, propped his head on his fist, and sank into thought.

Olga Ivanovna had been extremely imprudent in her conduct of late. Every morning she woke up in a very bad humour and with the thought that she no longer cared for Ryabovsky, and that, thank God, it was all over now. But as she drank her coffee she reflected that Ryabovsky had robbed her of her husband, and that now she was left with neither her husband nor Ryabovsky; then she remembered talks she had heard among her acquaintances of a picture Ryabovsky was preparing for the exhibition, something striking, a mixture of genre and landscape, in the style of Polyenov, about which everyone who had been into his studio went into raptures; and this, of course, she mused, he had created under her influence, and altogether, thanks to her influence, he had greatly

changed for the better. Her influence was so beneficent and essential that if she were to leave him he might perhaps go to ruin. And she remembered, too, that the last time he had come to see her in a greatcoat with flecks on it and a new tie, he had asked her languidly:

"Am I beautiful?"

And with his elegance, his long curls, and his blue eyes, he really was very beautiful (or perhaps it only seemed so), and he had been affectionate to her.

Considering and remembering many things Olga Ivanovna dressed and in great agitation drove to Ryabovsky's studio. She found him in high spirits, and enchanted with his really magnificent picture. He was dancing about and playing the fool and answering serious questions with jokes. Olga Ivanovna was jealous of the picture and hated it, but from politeness she stood before the picture for five minutes in silence, and, heaving a sigh, as though before a holy shrine, said softly:

"Yes, you have never painted anything like it before. Do you know, it is positively awe-inspiring?"

And then she began beseeching him to love her and not to cast her off, to have pity on her in her misery and her wretchedness. She shed tears, kissed his hands, insisted on his swearing that he loved her, told him that without her good influence he would go astray and be ruined. And, when she had spoilt his good-humour, feeling herself humiliated, she would drive off to her dressmaker or to an actress of her acquaintance to try and get theatre tickets.

If she did not find him at his studio she left a letter in which she swore that if he did not come to see her that day she would poison herself. He was scared, came to see her, and stayed to dinner. Regardless of her husband's presence, he would say rude things to her, and she would answer him in the same way. Both felt they were a burden to each other, that they were tyrants and enemies, and were wrathful, and in their wrath did not notice that their behaviour was unseemly, and that even Korostelev, with his close-cropped head, saw it all. After dinner Ryabovsky made haste to say goodbye and get away.

"Where are you off to?" Olga Ivanovna would ask him in the hall, looking at him with hatred.

Scowling and screwing up his eyes, he mentioned some lady of their acquaintance, and it was evident that he was laughing at her jealousy and wanted to annoy her. She went to her bedroom and lay down on her bed; from jealousy, anger, a sense of humiliation and shame, she bit the pillow and began sobbing aloud. Dymov left Korostelev in the drawing room,

went into the bedroom, and with a desperate and embarrassed face said softly:

"Don't cry so loud, little mother; there's no need. You must be quiet about it. You must not let people see.… You know what is done is done, and can't be mended."

Not knowing how to ease the burden of her jealousy, which actually set her temples throbbing with pain, and thinking still that things might be set right, she would wash, powder her tear-stained face, and fly off to the lady mentioned.

Not finding Ryabovsky with her, she would drive off to a second, then to a third. At first she was ashamed to go about like this, but afterwards she got used to it, and it would happen that in one evening she would make the round of all her female acquaintances in search of Ryabovsky, and they all understood it.

One day she said to Ryabovsky of her husband:

"That man crushes me with his magnanimity."

This phrase pleased her so much that when she met the artists who knew of her affair with Ryabovsky she said every time of her husband, with a vigorous movement of her arm:

"That man crushes me with his magnanimity."

Their manner of life was the same as it had been the year before. On Wednesdays they were "At Home"; an actor recited, the artists sketched. The violoncellist played, a singer sang, and invariably at half-past eleven the door leading to the dining room opened and Dymov, smiling, said:

"Come to supper, gentlemen."

As before, Olga Ivanovna hunted celebrities, found them, was not satisfied, and went in pursuit of fresh ones. As before, she came back late every night; but now Dymov was not, as last year, asleep, but sitting in his study at work of some sort. He went to bed at three o'clock and got up at eight.

One evening when she was getting ready to go to the theatre and standing before the pier glass, Dymov came into her bedroom, wearing his dress-coat and a white tie. He was smiling gently and looked into his wife's face joyfully, as in old days; his face was radiant.

"I have just been defending my thesis," he said, sitting down and smoothing his knees.

"Defending?" asked Olga Ivanovna.

"Oh, oh!" he laughed, and he craned his neck to see his wife's face in the mirror, for she was still standing with her back to him, doing up her

hair. “Oh, oh,” he repeated, “do you know it’s very possible they may offer me the Readership in General Pathology? It seems like it.”

It was evident from his beaming, blissful face that if Olga Ivanovna had shared with him his joy and triumph he would have forgiven her everything, both the present and the future, and would have forgotten everything, but she did not understand what was meant by a “readership” or by “general pathology”; besides, she was afraid of being late for the theatre, and she said nothing.

He sat there another two minutes, and with a guilty smile went away.

VII

It had been a very troubled day.

Dymov had a very bad headache; he had no breakfast, and did not go to the hospital, but spent the whole time lying on his sofa in the study. Olga Ivanovna went as usual at midday to see Ryabovsky, to show him her still-life sketch, and to ask him why he had not been to see her the evening before. The sketch seemed to her worthless, and she had painted it only in order to have an additional reason for going to the artist.

She went in to him without ringing, and as she was taking off her goloshes in the entry she heard a sound as of something running softly in the studio, with a feminine rustle of skirts; and as she hastened to peep in she caught a momentary glimpse of a bit of brown petticoat, which vanished behind a big picture draped, together with the easel, with black calico, to the floor. There could be no doubt that a woman was hiding there. How often Olga Ivanovna herself had taken refuge behind that picture!

Ryabovsky, evidently much embarrassed, held out both hands to her, as though surprised at her arrival, and said with a forced smile:

"Aha! Very glad to see you! Anything nice to tell me?"

Olga Ivanovna's eyes filled with tears. She felt ashamed and bitter, and would not for a million roubles have consented to speak in the presence of the outsider, the rival, the deceitful woman who was standing now behind the picture, and probably giggling malignantly.

"I have brought you a sketch," she said timidly in a thin voice, and her lips quivered. "*Nature morte.*"

"Ah—ah!… A sketch?"

The artist took the sketch in his hands, and as he examined it walked, as it were mechanically, into the other room.

Olga Ivanovna followed him humbly.

"*Nature morte*… first-rate sort," he muttered, falling into rhyme. "Kurort… sport… port…"

From the studio came the sound of hurried footsteps and the rustle of a skirt.

So she had gone. Olga Ivanovna wanted to scream aloud, to hit the artist on the head with something heavy, but she could see nothing through her tears, was crushed by her shame, and felt herself, not Olga Ivanovna, not an artist, but a little insect.

"I am tired…" said the artist languidly, looking at the sketch and tossing his head as though struggling with drowsiness. "It's very nice, of course, but here a sketch today, a sketch last year, another sketch in a month… I wonder you are not bored with them. If I were you I should give up painting and work seriously at music or something. You're not an artist, you know, but a musician. But you can't think how tired I am! I'll tell them to bring us some tea, shall I?"

He went out of the room, and Olga Ivanovna heard him give some order to his footman. To avoid farewells and explanations, and above all to avoid bursting into sobs, she ran as fast as she could, before Ryabovsky came back, to the entry, put on her goloshes, and went out into the street; then she breathed easily, and felt she was free forever from Ryabovsky and from painting and from the burden of shame which had so crushed her in the studio. It was all over!

She drove to her dressmaker's; then to see Barnay, who had only arrived the day before; from Barnay to a music-shop, and all the time she was thinking how she would write Ryabovsky a cold, cruel letter full of personal dignity, and how in the spring or the summer she would go with Dymov to the Crimea, free herself finally from the past there, and begin a new life.

On getting home late in the evening she sat down in the drawing room, without taking off her things, to begin the letter. Ryabovsky had told her she was not an artist, and to pay him out she wrote to him now that he painted the same thing every year, and said exactly the same thing every day; that he was at a standstill, and that nothing more would come of him than had come already. She wanted to write, too, that he owed a great deal to her good influence, and that if he was going wrong it was only because her influence was paralysed by various dubious persons like the one who had been hiding behind the picture that day.

"Little mother!" Dymov called from the study, without opening the door.

"What is it?"

"Don't come in to me, but only come to the door—that's right.… The day before yesterday I must have caught diphtheria at the hospital, and now… I am ill. Make haste and send for Korostelev."

Olga Ivanovna always called her husband by his surname, as she did all the men of her acquaintance; she disliked his Christian name, Osip, because it reminded her of the Osip in Gogol and the silly pun on his name. But now she cried:

"Osip, it cannot be!"

"Send for him; I feel ill," Dymov said behind the door, and she could hear him go back to the sofa and lie down. "Send!" she heard his voice faintly.

"Good Heavens!" thought Olga Ivanovna, turning chill with horror. "Why, it's dangerous!"

For no reason she took the candle and went into the bedroom, and there, reflecting what she must do, glanced casually at herself in the pier glass. With her pale, frightened face, in a jacket with sleeves high on the shoulders, with yellow ruches on her bosom, and with stripes running in unusual directions on her skirt, she seemed to herself horrible and disgusting. She suddenly felt poignantly sorry for Dymov, for his boundless love for her, for his young life, and even for the desolate little bed in which he had not slept for so long; and she remembered his habitual, gentle, submissive smile. She wept bitterly, and wrote an imploring letter to Korostelev. It was two o'clock in the night.

VIII

When towards eight o'clock in the morning Olga Ivanovna, her head heavy from want of sleep and her hair unbrushed, came out of her bedroom, looking unattractive and with a guilty expression on her face, a gentleman with a black beard, apparently the doctor, passed by her into the entry. There was a smell of drugs. Korostelev was standing near the study door, twisting his left moustache with his right hand.

"Excuse me, I can't let you go in," he said surlily to Olga Ivanovna; "it's catching. Besides, it's no use, really; he is delirious, anyway."

"Has he really got diphtheria?" Olga Ivanovna asked in a whisper.

"People who wantonly risk infection ought to be hauled up and punished for it," muttered Korostelev, not answering Olga Ivanovna's question. "Do you know why he caught it? On Tuesday he was sucking up the mucus through a pipette from a boy with diphtheria. And what for? It was stupid.… Just from folly.…"

"Is it dangerous, very?" asked Olga Ivanovna.

"Yes; they say it is the malignant form. We ought to send for Shrek really."

A little red-haired man with a long nose and a Jewish accent arrived; then a tall, stooping, shaggy individual, who looked like a head deacon; then a stout young man with a red face and spectacles. These were doctors who came to watch by turns beside their colleague. Korostelev did not go home when his turn was over, but remained and wandered about the rooms like an uneasy spirit. The maid kept getting tea for the various doctors, and was constantly running to the chemist, and there was no one to do the rooms. There was a dismal stillness in the flat.

Olga Ivanovna sat in her bedroom and thought that God was punishing her for having deceived her husband. That silent, unrepining, uncomprehended creature, robbed by his mildness of all personality and will, weak from excessive kindness, had been suffering in obscurity somewhere on his sofa, and had not complained. And if he were to complain even in delirium, the doctors watching by his bedside would learn that diphtheria was not the only cause of his sufferings. They would ask Korostelev. He knew all about it, and it was not for nothing

that he looked at his friend's wife with eyes that seemed to say that she was the real chief criminal and diphtheria was only her accomplice. She did not think now of the moonlight evening on the Volga, nor the words of love, nor their poetical life in the peasant's hut. She thought only that from an idle whim, from self-indulgence, she had sullied herself all over from head to foot in something filthy, sticky, which one could never wash off.…

"Oh, how fearfully false I've been!" she thought, recalling the troubled passion she had known with Ryabovsky. "Curse it all!…"

At four o'clock she dined with Korostelev. He did nothing but scowl and drink red wine, and did not eat a morsel. She ate nothing, either. At one minute she was praying inwardly and vowing to God that if Dymov recovered she would love him again and be a faithful wife to him. Then, forgetting herself for a minute, she would look at Korostelev, and think: "Surely it must be dull to be a humble, obscure person, not remarkable in any way, especially with such a wrinkled face and bad manners!"

Then it seemed to her that God would strike her dead that minute for not having once been in her husband's study, for fear of infection. And altogether she had a dull, despondent feeling and a conviction that her life was spoilt, and that there was no setting it right anyhow.…

After dinner darkness came on. When Olga Ivanovna went into the drawing room Korostelev was asleep on the sofa, with a gold-embroidered silk cushion under his head.

"Khee-poo-ah," he snored—"khee-poo-ah."

And the doctors as they came to sit up and went away again did not notice this disorder. The fact that a strange man was asleep and snoring in the drawing room, and the sketches on the walls and the exquisite decoration of the room, and the fact that the lady of the house was dishevelled and untidy—all that aroused not the slightest interest now. One of the doctors chanced to laugh at something, and the laugh had a strange and timid sound that made one's heart ache.

When Olga Ivanovna went into the drawing room next time, Korostelev was not asleep, but sitting up and smoking.

"He has diphtheria of the nasal cavity," he said in a low voice, "and the heart is not working properly now. Things are in a bad way, really."

"But you will send for Shrek?" said Olga Ivanovna.

"He has been already. It was he noticed that the diphtheria had passed into the nose. What's the use of Shrek! Shrek's no use at all, really. He is Shrek, I am Korostelev, and nothing more."

The time dragged on fearfully slowly. Olga Ivanovna lay down in her clothes on her bed, that had not been made all day, and sank into a doze. She dreamed that the whole flat was filled up from floor to ceiling with a huge piece of iron, and that if they could only get the iron out they would all be lighthearted and happy. Waking, she realized that it was not the iron but Dymov's illness that was weighing on her.

"*Nature morte*, port…" she thought, sinking into forgetfulness again. "Sport… Kurort… and what of Shrek? Shrek… trek… wreck.… And where are my friends now? Do they know that we are in trouble? Lord, save… spare! Shrek… trek…"

And again the iron was there.… The time dragged on slowly, though the clock on the lower storey struck frequently. And bells were continually ringing as the doctors arrived.… The housemaid came in with an empty glass on a tray, and asked, "Shall I make the bed, madam?" and getting no answer, went away.

The clock below struck the hour. She dreamed of the rain on the Volga; and again someone came into her bedroom, she thought a stranger. Olga Ivanovna jumped up, and recognized Korostelev.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"About three."

"Well, what is it?"

"What, indeed!… I've come to tell you he is passing.…"

He gave a sob, sat down on the bed beside her, and wiped away the tears with his sleeve. She could not grasp it at once, but turned cold all over and began slowly crossing herself.

"He is passing," he repeated in a shrill voice, and again he gave a sob. "He is dying because he sacrificed himself. What a loss for science!" he said bitterly. "Compare him with all of us. He was a great man, an extraordinary man! What gifts! What hopes we all had of him!" Korostelev went on, wringing his hands: "Merciful God, he was a man of science; we shall never look on his like again. Osip Dymov, what have you done—aie, aie, my God!"

Korostelev covered his face with both hands in despair, and shook his head.

"And his moral force," he went on, seeming to grow more and more exasperated against someone. "Not a man, but a pure, good, loving soul, and clean as crystal. He served science and died for science. And he worked like an ox night and day—no one spared him—and with his youth and his learning he had to take a private practice and work at translations at night to pay for these… vile rags!"

Korostelev looked with hatred at Olga Ivanovna, snatched at the sheet with both hands and angrily tore it, as though it were to blame.

"He did not spare himself, and others did not spare him. Oh, what's the use of talking!"

"Yes, he was a rare man," said a bass voice in the drawing room.

Olga Ivanovna remembered her whole life with him from the beginning to the end, with all its details, and suddenly she understood that he really was an extraordinary, rare, and, compared with everyone else she knew, a great man. And remembering how her father, now dead, and all the other doctors had behaved to him, she realized that they really had seen in him a future celebrity. The walls, the ceiling, the lamp, and the carpet on the floor, seemed to be winking at her sarcastically, as though they would say, "You were blind! you were blind!" With a wail she flung herself out of the bedroom, dashed by some unknown man in the drawing room, and ran into her husband's study. He was lying motionless on the sofa, covered to the waist with a quilt. His face was fearfully thin and sunken, and was of a greyish-yellow colour such as is never seen in the living; only from the forehead, from the black eyebrows and from the familiar smile, could he be recognized as Dymov. Olga Ivanovna hurriedly felt his chest, his forehead, and his hands. The chest was still warm, but the forehead and hands were unpleasantly cold, and the half-open eyes looked, not at Olga Ivanovna, but at the quilt.

"Dymov!" she called aloud, "Dymov!" She wanted to explain to him that it had been a mistake, that all was not lost, that life might still be beautiful and happy, that he was an extraordinary, rare, great man, and that she would all her life worship him and bow down in homage and holy awe before him.…

"Dymov!" she called him, patting him on the shoulder, unable to believe that he would never wake again. "Dymov! Dymov!"

In the drawing room Korostelev was saying to the housemaid:

"Why keep asking? Go to the church beadle and enquire where they live. They'll wash the body and lay it out, and do everything that is necessary."

After the Theatre

Nadya Zelenin had just come back with her mamma from the theatre where she had seen a performance of *Yevgeny Onyegin*. As soon as she reached her own room she threw off her dress, let down her hair, and in her petticoat and white dressing-jacket hastily sat down to the table to write a letter like Tatyana's.

"I love you," she wrote, "but you do not love me, do not love me!"

She wrote it and laughed.

She was only sixteen and did not yet love anyone. She knew that an officer called Gorny and a student called Gruzdev loved her, but now after the opera she wanted to be doubtful of their love. To be unloved and unhappy—how interesting that was. There is something beautiful, touching, and poetical about it when one loves and the other is indifferent. Onyegin was interesting because he was not in love at all, and Tatyana was fascinating because she was so much in love; but if they had been equally in love with each other and had been happy, they would perhaps have seemed dull.

"Leave off declaring that you love me," Nadya went on writing, thinking of Gorny. "I cannot believe it. You are very clever, cultivated, serious, you have immense talent, and perhaps a brilliant future awaits you, while I am an uninteresting girl of no importance, and you know very well that I should be only a hindrance in your life. It is true that you were attracted by me and thought you had found your ideal in me, but that was a mistake, and now you are asking yourself in despair: 'Why did I meet that girl?' And only your goodness of heart prevents you from owning it to yourself.…"

Nadya felt sorry for herself, she began to cry, and went on:

"It is hard for me to leave my mother and my brother, or I should take a nun's veil and go whither chance may lead me. And you would be left free and would love another. Oh, if I were dead!"

She could not make out what she had written through her tears; little rainbows were quivering on the table, on the floor, on the ceiling, as

though she were looking through a prism. She could not write, she sank back in her easy-chair and fell to thinking of Gorny.

My God! how interesting, how fascinating men were! Nadya recalled the fine expression, ingratiating, guilty, and soft, which came into the officer's face when one argued about music with him, and the effort he made to prevent his voice from betraying his passion. In a society where cold haughtiness and indifference are regarded as signs of good breeding and gentlemanly bearing, one must conceal one's passions. And he did try to conceal them, but he did not succeed, and everyone knew very well that he had a passionate love of music. The endless discussions about music and the bold criticisms of people who knew nothing about it kept him always on the strain; he was frightened, timid, and silent. He played the piano magnificently, like a professional pianist, and if he had not been in the army he would certainly have been a famous musician.

The tears on her eyes dried. Nadya remembered that Gorny had declared his love at a Symphony concert, and again downstairs by the hatstand where there was a tremendous draught blowing in all directions.

"I am very glad that you have at last made the acquaintance of Gruzdev, our student friend," she went on writing. "He is a very clever man, and you will be sure to like him. He came to see us yesterday and stayed till two o'clock. We were all delighted with him, and I regretted that you had not come. He said a great deal that was remarkable."

Nadya laid her arms on the table and leaned her head on them, and her hair covered the letter. She recalled that the student, too, loved her, and that he had as much right to a letter from her as Gorny. Wouldn't it be better after all to write to Gruzdev? There was a stir of joy in her bosom for no reason whatever; at first the joy was small, and rolled in her bosom like an india-rubber ball; then it became more massive, bigger, and rushed like a wave. Nadya forgot Gorny and Gruzdev; her thoughts were in a tangle and her joy grew and grew; from her bosom it passed into her arms and legs, and it seemed as though a light, cool breeze were breathing on her head and ruffling her hair. Her shoulders quivered with subdued laughter, the table and the lamp chimney shook, too, and tears from her eyes splashed on the letter. She could not stop laughing, and to prove to herself that she was not laughing about nothing she made haste to think of something funny.

"What a funny poodle," she said, feeling as though she would choke with laughter. "What a funny poodle!"

She thought how, after tea the evening before, Gruzdev had played with Maxim the poodle, and afterwards had told them about a very

intelligent poodle who had run after a crow in the yard, and the crow had looked round at him and said: “Oh, you scamp!”

The poodle, not knowing he had to do with a learned crow, was fearfully confused and retreated in perplexity, then began barking.…

“No, I had better love Gruzdev,” Nadya decided, and she tore up the letter to Gorny.

She fell to thinking of the student, of his love, of her love; but the thoughts in her head insisted on flowing in all directions, and she thought about everything—about her mother, about the street, about the pencil, about the piano.… She thought of them joyfully, and felt that everything was good, splendid, and her joy told her that this was not all, that in a little while it would be better still. Soon it would be spring, summer, going with her mother to Gorbiki. Gorny would come for his furlough, would walk about the garden with her and make love to her. Gruzdev would come too. He would play croquet and skittles with her, and would tell her wonderful things. She had a passionate longing for the garden, the darkness, the pure sky, the stars. Again her shoulders shook with laughter, and it seemed to her that there was a scent of wormwood in the room and that a twig was tapping at the window.

She went to her bed, sat down, and not knowing what to do with the immense joy which filled her with yearning, she looked at the holy image hanging at the back of her bed, and said:

“Oh, Lord God! Oh, Lord God!”

In Exile

Old Semyon, nicknamed “Canny,” and a young Tatar, whom no one knew by name, were sitting on the riverbank by the campfire; the other three ferrymen were in the hut. Semyon, an old man of sixty, lean and toothless, but broad shouldered and still healthy-looking, was drunk; he would have gone in to sleep long before, but he had a bottle in his pocket and he was afraid that the fellows in the hut would ask him for vodka. The Tatar was ill and weary, and wrapping himself up in his rags was describing how nice it was in the Simbirsk province, and what a beautiful and clever wife he had left behind at home. He was not more than twenty five, and now by the light of the campfire, with his pale and sick, mournful face, he looked like a boy.

“To be sure, it is not paradise here,” said Canny. “You can see for yourself, the water, the bare banks, clay, and nothing else.… Easter has long passed and yet there is ice on the river, and this morning there was snow…”

“It’s bad! it’s bad!” said the Tatar, and looked round him in terror.

The dark, cold river was flowing ten paces away; it grumbled, lapped against the hollow clay banks and raced on swiftly towards the faraway sea. Close to the bank there was the dark blur of a big barge, which the ferrymen called a *karbos*. Far away on the further bank, lights, dying down and flickering up again, zigzagged like little snakes; they were burning last year’s grass. And beyond the little snakes there was darkness again. There little icicles could be heard knocking against the barge. It was damp and cold.…

The Tatar glanced at the sky. There were as many stars as at home, and the same blackness all round, but something was lacking. At home in the Simbirsk province the stars were quite different, and so was the sky.

“It’s bad! it’s bad!” he repeated.

“You will get used to it,” said Semyon, and he laughed. “Now you are young and foolish, the milk is hardly dry on your lips, and it seems to you in your foolishness that you are more wretched than anyone; but the

time will come when you will say to yourself: ‘I wish no one a better life than mine.’ You look at me. Within a week the floods will be over and we shall set up the ferry; you will all go wandering off about Siberia while I shall stay and shall begin going from bank to bank. I’ve been going like that for twenty-two years, day and night. The pike and the salmon are under the water while I am on the water. And thank God for it, I want nothing; God give everyone such a life.”

The Tatar threw some dry twigs on the campfire, lay down closer to the blaze, and said:

“My father is a sick man. When he dies my mother and wife will come here. They have promised.”

“And what do you want your wife and mother for?” asked Canny. “That’s mere foolishness, my lad. It’s the devil confounding you, damn his soul! Don’t you listen to him, the cursed one. Don’t let him have his way. He is at you about the women, but you spite him; say, ‘I don’t want them!’ He is on at you about freedom, but you stand up to him and say: ‘I don’t want it!’ I want nothing, neither father nor mother, nor wife, nor freedom, nor post, nor paddock; I want nothing, damn their souls!”

Semyon took a pull at the bottle and went on:

“I am not a simple peasant, not of the working class, but the son of a deacon, and when I was free I lived at Kursk; I used to wear a frock-coat, and now I have brought myself to such a pass that I can sleep naked on the ground and eat grass. And I wish no one a better life. I want nothing and I am afraid of nobody, and the way I look at it is that there is nobody richer and freer than I am. When they sent me here from Russia from the first day I stuck it out; I want nothing! The devil was at me about my wife and about my home and about freedom, but I told him: ‘I want nothing.’ I stuck to it, and here you see I live well, and I don’t complain, and if anyone gives way to the devil and listens to him, if but once, he is lost, there is no salvation for him: he is sunk in the bog to the crown of his head and will never get out.

“It is not only a foolish peasant like you, but even gentlemen, well-educated people, are lost. Fifteen years ago they sent a gentleman here from Russia. He hadn’t shared something with his brothers and had forged something in a will. They did say he was a prince or a baron, but maybe he was simply an official—who knows? Well, the gentleman arrived here, and first thing he bought himself a house and land in Muhortinskoe. ‘I want to live by my own work,’ says he, ‘in the sweat of my brow, for I am not a gentleman now,’ says he, ‘but a settler.’ ‘Well,’ says I, ‘God help you, that’s the right thing.’ He was a young man then,

busy and careful; he used to mow himself and catch fish and ride sixty miles on horseback. Only this is what happened: from the very first year he took to riding to Gyrino for the post; he used to stand on my ferry and sigh: ‘Ech, Semyon, how long it is since they sent me any money from home!’ ‘You don’t want money, Vassily Sergeyitch,’ says I. ‘What use is it to you? You cast away the past, and forget it as though it had never been at all, as though it had been a dream, and begin to live anew. Don’t listen to the devil,’ says I; ‘he will bring you to no good, he’ll draw you into a snare. Now you want money,’ says I, ‘but in a very little while you’ll be wanting something else, and then more and more. If you want to be happy,’ says I, the chief thing is not to want anything. Yes.… If,’ says I, ‘if Fate has wronged you and me cruelly it’s no good asking for her favor and bowing down to her, but you despise her and laugh at her, or else she will laugh at you.’ That’s what I said to him.…

“Two years later I ferried him across to this side, and he was rubbing his hands and laughing. ‘I am going to Gyrino to meet my wife,’ says he. ‘She was sorry for me,’ says he; ‘she has come. She is good and kind.’ And he was breathless with joy. So a day later he came with his wife. A beautiful young lady in a hat; in her arms was a baby girl. And lots of luggage of all sorts. And my Vassily Sergeyitch was fussing round her; he couldn’t take his eyes off her and couldn’t say enough in praise of her. ‘Yes, brother Semyon, even in Siberia people can live!’ ‘Oh, all right,’ thinks I, ‘it will be a different tale presently.’ And from that time forward he went almost every week to inquire whether money had not come from Russia. He wanted a lot of money. ‘She is losing her youth and beauty here in Siberia for my sake,’ says he, ‘and sharing my bitter lot with me, and so I ought,’ says he, ‘to provide her with every comfort.…’

“To make it livelier for the lady he made acquaintance with the officials and all sorts of riffraff. And of course he had to give food and drink to all that crew, and there had to be a piano and a shaggy lapdog on the sofa—plague take it!… Luxury, in fact, self-indulgence. The lady did not stay with him long. How could she? The clay, the water, the cold, no vegetables for you, no fruit. All around you ignorant and drunken people and no sort of manners, and she was a spoilt lady from Petersburg or Moscow.… To be sure she moped. Besides, her husband, say what you like, was not a gentleman now, but a settler—not the same rank.

“Three years later, I remember, on the eve of the Assumption, there was shouting from the further bank. I went over with the ferry, and what do I see but the lady, all wrapped up, and with her a young gentleman, an official. A sledge with three horses.… I ferried them across here, they

got in and away like the wind. They were soon lost to sight. And towards morning Vassily Sergeyitch galloped down to the ferry. ‘Didn’t my wife come this way with a gentleman in spectacles, Semyon?’ ‘She did,’ said I; ‘you may look for the wind in the fields!’ He galloped in pursuit of them. For five days and nights he was riding after them. When I ferried him over to the other side afterwards, he flung himself on the ferry and beat his head on the boards of the ferry and howled. ‘So that’s how it is,’ says I. I laughed, and reminded him, ‘people can live even in Siberia!’ And he beat his head harder than ever.…

“Then he began longing for freedom. His wife had slipped off to Russia, and of course he was drawn there to see her and to get her away from her lover. And he took, my lad, to galloping almost every day, either to the post or the town to see the commanding officer; he kept sending in petitions for them to have mercy on him and let him go back home; and he used to say that he had spent some two hundred roubles on telegrams alone. He sold his land and mortgaged his house to the Jews. He grew gray and bent, and yellow in the face, as though he was in consumption. If he talked to you he would go, *khee—khee—khee,*… and there were tears in his eyes. He kept rushing about like this with petitions for eight years, but now he has grown brighter and more cheerful again: he has found another whim to give way to. You see, his daughter has grown up. He looks at her, and she is the apple of his eye. And to tell the truth she is all right, good-looking, with black eyebrows and a lively disposition. Every Sunday he used to ride with her to church in Gyrino. They used to stand on the ferry, side by side, she would laugh and he could not take his eyes off her. ‘Yes, Semyon,’ says he, ‘people can live even in Siberia. Even in Siberia there is happiness. Look,’ says he, ‘what a daughter I have got! I warrant you wouldn’t find another like her for a thousand *versts* round.’ ‘Your daughter is all right,’ says I, ‘that’s true, certainly.’ But to myself I thought: ‘Wait a bit, the wench is young, her blood is dancing, she wants to live, and there is no life here.’ And she did begin to pine, my lad.… She faded and faded, and now she can hardly crawl about. Consumption.

“So you see what Siberian happiness is, damn its soul! You see how people can live in Siberia.… He has taken to going from one doctor to another and taking them home with him. As soon as he hears that two or three hundred miles away there is a doctor or a sorcerer, he will drive to fetch him. A terrible lot of money he spent on doctors, and to my thinking he had better have spent the money on drink.… She’ll die just the same. She is certain to die, and then it will be all over with him. He’ll

hang himself from grief or run away to Russia—that's a sure thing. He'll run away and they'll catch him, then he will be tried, sent to prison, he will have a taste of the lash.…"

"Good! good!" said the Tatar, shivering with cold.

"What is good?" asked Canny.

"His wife, his daughter.… What of prison and what of sorrow!—anyway, he did see his wife and his daughter.… You say, want nothing. But 'nothing' is bad! His wife lived with him three years—that was a gift from God. 'Nothing' is bad, but three years is good. How not understand?"

Shivering and hesitating, with effort picking out the Russian words of which he knew but few, the Tatar said that God forbid one should fall sick and die in a strange land, and be buried in the cold and dark earth; that if his wife came to him for one day, even for one hour, that for such happiness he would be ready to bear any suffering and to thank God. Better one day of happiness than nothing.

Then he described again what a beautiful and clever wife he had left at home. Then, clutching his head in both hands, he began crying and assuring Semyon that he was not guilty, and was suffering for nothing. His two brothers and an uncle had carried off a peasant's horses, and had beaten the old man till he was half dead, and the commune had not judged fairly, but had contrived a sentence by which all the three brothers were sent to Siberia, while the uncle, a rich man, was left at home.

"You will get used to it!" said Semyon.

The Tatar was silent, and stared with tear-stained eyes at the fire; his face expressed bewilderment and fear, as though he still did not understand why he was here in the darkness and the wet, beside strangers, and not in the Simbirsk province.

Canny lay near the fire, chuckled at something, and began humming a song in an undertone.

"What joy has she with her father?" he said a little later. "He loves her and he rejoices in her, that's true; but, mate, you must mind your p's and q's with him, he is a strict old man, a harsh old man. And young wenches don't want strictness. They want petting and ha-ha-ha! and ho-ho-ho! and scent and pomade. Yes.… Ech! life, life," sighed Semyon, and he got up heavily. "The vodka is all gone, so it is time to sleep. Eh? I am going, my lad.…"

Left alone, the Tatar put on more twigs, lay down and stared at the fire; he began thinking of his own village and of his wife. If his wife

could only come for a month, for a day; and then if she liked she might go back again. Better a month or even a day than nothing. But if his wife kept her promise and came, what would he have to feed her on? Where could she live here?

“If there were not something to eat, how could she live?” the Tatar asked aloud.

He was paid only ten kopecks for working all day and all night at the oar; it is true that travelers gave him tips for tea and for vodkas but the men shared all they received among themselves, and gave nothing to the Tatar, but only laughed at him. And from poverty he was hungry, cold, and frightened.… Now, when his whole body was aching and shivering, he ought to go into the hut and lie down to sleep; but he had nothing to cover him there, and it was colder than on the riverbank; here he had nothing to cover him either, but at least he could make up the fire.…

In another week, when the floods were quite over and they set the ferry going, none of the ferrymen but Semyon would be wanted, and the Tatar would begin going from village to village begging for alms and for work. His wife was only seventeen; she was beautiful, spoilt, and shy; could she possibly go from village to village begging alms with her face unveiled? No, it was terrible even to think of that.…

It was already getting light; the barge, the bushes of willow on the water, and the waves could be clearly discerned, and if one looked round there was the steep clay slope; at the bottom of it the hut thatched with dingy brown straw, and the huts of the village lay clustered higher up. The cocks were already crowing in the village.

The rusty red clay slope, the barge, the river, the strange, unkind people, hunger, cold, illness, perhaps all that was not real. Most likely it was all a dream, thought the Tatar. He felt that he was asleep and heard his own snoring.… Of course he was at home in the Simbirsk province, and he had only to call his wife by name for her to answer; and in the next room was his mother.… What terrible dreams there are, though! What are they for? The Tatar smiled and opened his eyes. What river was this, the Volga?

Snow was falling.

“Boat!” was shouted on the further side. “Boat!”

The Tatar woke up, and went to wake his mates and row over to the other side. The ferrymen came on to the riverbank, putting on their torn sheepskins as they walked, swearing with voices husky from sleepiness and shivering from the cold. On waking from their sleep, the river, from which came a breath of piercing cold, seemed to strike them as revolting

and horrible. They jumped into the barge without hurrying themselves.… The Tatar and the three ferrymen took the long, broad-bladed oars, which in the darkness looked like the claws of crabs; Semyon leaned his stomach against the tiller. The shout on the other side still continued, and two shots were fired from a revolver, probably with the idea that the ferrymen were asleep or had gone to the pothouse in the village.

“All right, you have plenty of time,” said Semyon in the tone of a man convinced that there was no necessity in this world to hurry—that it would lead to nothing, anyway.

The heavy, clumsy barge moved away from the bank and floated between the willow-bushes, and only the willows slowly moving back showed that the barge was not standing still but moving. The ferrymen swung the oars evenly in time; Semyon lay with his stomach on the tiller and, describing a semicircle in the air, flew from one side to the other. In the darkness it looked as though the men were sitting on some antediluvian animal with long paws, and were moving on it through a cold, desolate land, the land of which one sometimes dreams in nightmares.

They passed beyond the willows and floated out into the open. The creak and regular splash of the oars was heard on the further shore, and a shout came: “Make haste! make haste!”

Another ten minutes passed, and the barge banged heavily against the landing-stage.

“And it keeps sprinkling and sprinkling,” muttered Semyon, wiping the snow from his face; “and where it all comes from God only knows.”

On the bank stood a thin man of medium height in a jacket lined with fox fur and in a white lambskin cap. He was standing at a little distance from his horses and not moving; he had a gloomy, concentrated expression, as though he were trying to remember something and angry with his untrustworthy memory. When Semyon went up to him and took off his cap, smiling, he said:

“I am hastening to Anastasyevka. My daughter’s worse again, and they say that there is a new doctor at Anastasyevka.”

They dragged the carriage on to the barge and floated back. The man whom Semyon addressed as Vassily Sergeyitch stood all the time motionless, tightly compressing his thick lips and staring off into space; when his coachman asked permission to smoke in his presence he made no answer, as though he had not heard. Semyon, lying with his stomach on the tiller, looked mockingly at him and said:

“Even in Siberia people can live—can li-ive!”

There was a triumphant expression on Canny’s face, as though he had proved something and was delighted that things had happened as he had foretold. The unhappy helplessness of the man in the fox-skin coat evidently afforded him great pleasure.

“It’s muddy driving now, Vassily Sergeyitch,” he said when the horses were harnessed again on the bank. “You should have put off going for another fortnight, when it will be drier. Or else not have gone at all.… If any good would come of your going—but as you know yourself, people have been driving about for years and years, day and night, and it’s always been no use. That’s the truth.”

Vassily Sergeyitch tipped him without a word, got into his carriage and drove off.

“There, he has galloped off for a doctor!” said Semyon, shrinking from the cold. “But looking for a good doctor is like chasing the wind in the fields or catching the devil by the tail, plague take your soul! What a queer chap, Lord forgive me a sinner!”

The Tatar went up to Canny, and, looking at him with hatred and repulsion, shivering, and mixing Tatar words with his broken Russian, said: “He is good… good; but you are bad! You are bad! The gentleman is a good soul, excellent, and you are a beast, bad! The gentleman is alive, but you are a dead carcass.… God created man to be alive, and to have joy and grief and sorrow; but you want nothing, so you are not alive, you are stone, clay! A stone wants nothing and you want nothing. You are a stone, and God does not love you, but He loves the gentleman!”

Everyone laughed; the Tatar frowned contemptuously, and with a wave of his hand wrapped himself in his rags and went to the campfire. The ferrymen and Semyon sauntered to the hut.

“It’s cold,” said one ferryman huskily as he stretched himself on the straw with which the damp clay floor was covered.

“Yes, its not warm,” another assented. “It’s a dog’s life.…”

They all lay down. The door was thrown open by the wind and the snow drifted into the hut; nobody felt inclined to get up and shut the door: they were cold, and it was too much trouble.

“I am all right,” said Semyon as he began to doze. “I wouldn’t wish anyone a better life.”

“You are a tough one, we all know. Even the devils won’t take you!”

Sounds like a dog’s howling came from outside.

“What’s that? Who’s there?”

“It’s the Tatar crying.”
“I say.… He’s a queer one!”
“He’ll get u-used to it!” said Semyon, and at once fell asleep.
The others were soon asleep too. The door remained unclosed.

TERROR

MY FRIEND'S STORY

Dmitri Petrovitch Silin had taken his degree and entered the government service in Petersburg, but at thirty he gave up his post and went in for agriculture. His farming was fairly successful, and yet it always seemed to me that he was not in his proper place, and that he would do well to go back to Petersburg. When sunburnt, grey with dust, exhausted with toil, he met me near the gates or at the entrance, and then at supper struggled with sleepiness and his wife took him off to bed as though he were a baby; or when, overcoming his sleepiness, he began in his soft, cordial, almost imploring voice, to talk about his really excellent ideas, I saw him not as a farmer nor an agriculturist, but only as a worried and exhausted man, and it was clear to me that he did not really care for farming, but that all he wanted was for the day to be over and "Thank God for it."

I liked to be with him, and I used to stay on his farm for two or three days at a time. I liked his house, and his park, and his big fruit garden, and the river—and his philosophy, which was clear, though rather spiritless and rhetorical. I suppose I was fond of him on his own account, though I can't say that for certain, as I have not up to now succeeded in analysing my feelings at that time. He was an intelligent, kindhearted, genuine man, and not a bore, but I remember that when he confided to me his most treasured secrets and spoke of our relation to each other as friendship, it disturbed me unpleasantly, and I was conscious of awkwardness. In his affection for me there was something inappropriate, tiresome, and I should have greatly preferred commonplace friendly relations.

The fact is that I was extremely attracted by his wife, Marya Sergeyevna. I was not in love with her, but I was attracted by her face, her eyes, her voice, her walk. I missed her when I did not see her for a long time, and my imagination pictured no one at that time so eagerly as that young, beautiful, elegant woman. I had no definite designs in regard to her, and did not dream of anything of the sort, yet for some reason, whenever we were left alone, I remembered that her husband looked upon me as his friend, and I felt awkward. When she played my

favourite pieces on the piano or told me something interesting, I listened with pleasure, and yet at the same time for some reason the reflection that she loved her husband, that he was my friend, and that she herself looked upon me as his friend, obtruded themselves upon me, my spirits flagged, and I became listless, awkward, and dull. She noticed this change and would usually say:

"You are dull without your friend. We must send out to the fields for him."

And when Dmitri Petrovitch came in, she would say:

"Well, here is your friend now. Rejoice."

So passed a year and a half.

It somehow happened one July Sunday that Dmitri Petrovitch and I, having nothing to do, drove to the big village of Klushino to buy things for supper. While we were going from one shop to another the sun set and the evening came on—the evening which I shall probably never forget in my life. After buying cheese that smelt like soap, and petrified sausages that smelt of tar, we went to the tavern to ask whether they had any beer. Our coachman went off to the blacksmith to get our horses shod, and we told him we would wait for him near the church. We walked, talked, laughed over our purchases, while a man who was known in the district by a very strange nickname, "Forty Martyrs," followed us all the while in silence with a mysterious air like a detective. This Forty Martyrs was no other than Gavril Syeverov, or more simply Gavryushka, who had been for a short time in my service as a footman and had been dismissed by me for drunkenness. He had been in Dmitri Petrovitch's service, too, and by him had been dismissed for the same vice. He was an inveterate drunkard, and indeed his whole life was as drunk and disorderly as himself. His father had been a priest and his mother of noble rank, so by birth he belonged to the privileged class; but however carefully I scrutinized his exhausted, respectful, and always perspiring face, his red beard now turning grey, his pitifully torn reefer jacket and his red shirt, I could not discover in him the faintest trace of anything we associate with privilege. He spoke of himself as a man of education, and used to say that he had been in a clerical school, but had not finished his studies there, as he had been expelled for smoking; then he had sung in the bishop's choir and lived for two years in a monastery, from which he was also expelled, but this time not for smoking but for "his weakness." He had walked all over two provinces, had presented petitions to the Consistory, and to various government offices, and had been four times on his trial. At last, being stranded in our district, he had

served as a footman, as a forester, as a kennelman, as a sexton, had married a cook who was a widow and rather a loose character, and had so hopelessly sunk into a menial position, and had grown so used to filth and dirt, that he even spoke of his privileged origin with a certain scepticism, as of some myth. At the time I am describing, he was hanging about without a job, calling himself a carrier and a huntsman, and his wife had disappeared and made no sign.

From the tavern we went to the church and sat in the porch, waiting for the coachman. Forty Martyrs stood a little way off and put his hand before his mouth in order to cough in it respectfully if need be. By now it was dark; there was a strong smell of evening dampness, and the moon was on the point of rising. There were only two clouds in the clear starry sky exactly over our heads: one big one and one smaller; alone in the sky they were racing after one another like mother and child, in the direction where the sunset was glowing.

"What a glorious day!" said Dmitri Petrovitch.

"In the extreme…" Forty Martyrs assented, and he coughed respectfully into his hand. "How was it, Dmitri Petrovitch, you thought to visit these parts?" he asked in an ingratiating voice, evidently anxious to get up a conversation.

Dmitri Petrovitch made no answer. Forty Martyrs heaved a deep sigh and said softly, not looking at us:

"I suffer solely through a cause to which I must answer to Almighty God. No doubt about it, I am a hopeless and incompetent man; but believe me, on my conscience, I am without a crust of bread and worse off than a dog.… Forgive me, Dmitri Petrovitch."

Silin was not listening, but sat musing with his head propped on his fists. The church stood at the end of the street on the high riverbank, and through the trellis gate of the enclosure we could see the river, the water-meadows on the near side of it, and the crimson glare of a camp fire about which black figures of men and horses were moving. And beyond the fire, further away, there were other lights, where there was a little village. They were singing there. On the river, and here and there on the meadows, a mist was rising. High narrow coils of mist, thick and white as milk, were trailing over the river, hiding the reflection of the stars and hovering over the willows. Every minute they changed their form, and it seemed as though some were embracing, others were bowing, others lifting up their arms to heaven with wide sleeves like priests, as though they were praying.… Probably they reminded Dmitri Petrovitch of

ghosts and of the dead, for he turned facing me and asked with a mournful smile:

"Tell me, my dear fellow, why is it that when we want to tell some terrible, mysterious, and fantastic story, we draw our material, not from life, but invariably from the world of ghosts and of the shadows beyond the grave."

"We are frightened of what we don't understand."

"And do you understand life? Tell me: do you understand life better than the world beyond the grave?"

Dmitri Petrovitch was sitting quite close to me, so that I felt his breath upon my cheek. In the evening twilight his pale, lean face seemed paler than ever and his dark beard was black as soot. His eyes were sad, truthful, and a little frightened, as though he were about to tell me something horrible. He looked into my eyes and went on in his habitual imploring voice:

"Our life and the life beyond the grave are equally incomprehensible and horrible. If anyone is afraid of ghosts he ought to be afraid, too, of me, and of those lights and of the sky, seeing that, if you come to reflect, all that is no less fantastic and beyond our grasp than apparitions from the other world. Prince Hamlet did not kill himself because he was afraid of the visions that might haunt his dreams after death. I like that famous soliloquy of his, but, to be candid, it never touched my soul. I will confess to you as a friend that in moments of depression I have sometimes pictured to myself the hour of my death. My fancy invented thousands of the gloomiest visions, and I have succeeded in working myself up to an agonizing exaltation, to a state of nightmare, and I assure you that that did not seem to me more terrible than reality. What I mean is, apparitions are terrible, but life is terrible, too. I don't understand life and I am afraid of it, my dear boy; I don't know. Perhaps I am a morbid person, unhinged. It seems to a sound, healthy man that he understands everything he sees and hears, but that 'seeming' is lost to me, and from day to day I am poisoning myself with terror. There is a disease, the fear of open spaces, but my disease is the fear of life. When I lie on the grass and watch a little beetle which was born yesterday and understands nothing, it seems to me that its life consists of nothing else but fear, and in it I see myself."

"What is it exactly you are frightened of?" I asked.

"I am afraid of everything. I am not by nature a profound thinker, and I take little interest in such questions as the life beyond the grave, the destiny of humanity, and, in fact, I am rarely carried away to the heights.

What chiefly frightens me is the common routine of life from which none of us can escape. I am incapable of distinguishing what is true and what is false in my actions, and they worry me. I recognize that education and the conditions of life have imprisoned me in a narrow circle of falsity, that my whole life is nothing else than a daily effort to deceive myself and other people, and to avoid noticing it; and I am frightened at the thought that to the day of my death I shall not escape from this falsity. Today I do something and tomorrow I do not understand why I did it. I entered the service in Petersburg and took fright; I came here to work on the land, and here, too, I am frightened.… I see that we know very little and so make mistakes every day. We are unjust, we slander one another and spoil each other's lives, we waste all our powers on trash which we do not need and which hinders us from living; and that frightens me, because I don't understand why and for whom it is necessary. I don't understand men, my dear fellow, and I am afraid of them. It frightens me to look at the peasants, and I don't know for what higher objects they are suffering and what they are living for. If life is an enjoyment, then they are unnecessary, superfluous people; if the object and meaning of life is to be found in poverty and unending, hopeless ignorance, I can't understand for whom and what this torture is necessary. I understand no one and nothing. Kindly try to understand this specimen, for instance," said Dmitri Petrovitch, pointing to Forty Martyrs. "Think of him!"

Noticing that we were looking at him, Forty Martyrs coughed deferentially into his fist and said:

"I was always a faithful servant with good masters, but the great trouble has been spirituous liquor. If a poor fellow like me were shown consideration and given a place, I would kiss the icon. My word's my bond."

The sexton walked by, looked at us in amazement, and began pulling the rope. The bell, abruptly breaking upon the stillness of the evening, struck ten with a slow and prolonged note.

"It's ten o'clock, though," said Dmitri Petrovitch. "It's time we were going. Yes, my dear fellow," he sighed, "if only you knew how afraid I am of my ordinary everyday thoughts, in which one would have thought there should be nothing dreadful. To prevent myself thinking I distract my mind with work and try to tire myself out that I may sleep sound at night. Children, a wife—all that seems ordinary with other people; but how that weighs upon me, my dear fellow!"

He rubbed his face with his hands, cleared his throat, and laughed.

“If I could only tell you how I have played the fool in my life!” he said. “They all tell me that I have a sweet wife, charming children, and that I am a good husband and father. They think I am very happy and envy me. But since it has come to that, I will tell you in secret: my happy family life is only a grievous misunderstanding, and I am afraid of it.” His pale face was distorted by a wry smile. He put his arm round my waist and went on in an undertone:

“You are my true friend; I believe in you and have a deep respect for you. Heaven gave us friendship that we may open our hearts and escape from the secrets that weigh upon us. Let me take advantage of your friendly feeling for me and tell you the whole truth. My home life, which seems to you so enchanting, is my chief misery and my chief terror. I got married in a strange and stupid way. I must tell you that I was madly in love with Masha before I married her, and was courting her for two years. I asked her to marry me five times, and she refused me because she did not care for me in the least. The sixth, when burning with passion I crawled on my knees before her and implored her to take a beggar and marry me, she consented.… What she said to me was: ‘I don’t love you, but I will be true to you.…’ I accepted that condition with rapture. At the time I understood what that meant, but I swear to God I don’t understand it now. ‘I don’t love you, but I will be true to you.’ What does that mean? It’s a fog, a darkness. I love her now as intensely as I did the day we were married, while she, I believe, is as indifferent as ever, and I believe she is glad when I go away from home. I don’t know for certain whether she cares for me or not—I don’t know, I don’t know; but, as you see, we live under the same roof, call each other ‘thou,’ sleep together, have children, our property is in common.… What does it mean, what does it mean? What is the object of it? And do you understand it at all, my dear fellow? It’s cruel torture! Because I don’t understand our relations, I hate, sometimes her, sometimes myself, sometimes both at once. Everything is in a tangle in my brain; I torment myself and grow stupid. And as though to spite me, she grows more beautiful every day, she is getting more wonderful… I fancy her hair is marvellous, and her smile is like no other woman’s. I love her, and I know that my love is hopeless. Hopeless love for a woman by whom one has two children! Is that intelligible? And isn’t it terrible? Isn’t it more terrible than ghosts?”

He was in the mood to have talked on a good deal longer, but luckily we heard the coachman’s voice. Our horses had arrived. We got into the carriage, and Forty Martyrs, taking off his cap, helped us both into the

carriage with an expression that suggested that he had long been waiting for an opportunity to come in contact with our precious persons.

“Dmitri Petrovitch, let me come to you,” he said, blinking furiously and tilting his head on one side. “Show Divine Mercy! I am dying of hunger!”

“Very well,” said Silin. “Come, you shall stay three days, and then we shall see.”

“Certainly, sir,” said Forty Martyrs, overjoyed. “I’ll come today, sir.”

It was a five miles’ drive home. Dmitri Petrovitch, glad that he had at last opened his heart to his friend, kept his arm round my waist all the way; and speaking now, not with bitterness and not with apprehension, but quite cheerfully, told me that if everything had been satisfactory in his home life, he should have returned to Petersburg and taken up scientific work there. The movement which had driven so many gifted young men into the country was, he said, a deplorable movement. We had plenty of rye and wheat in Russia, but absolutely no cultured people. The strong and gifted among the young ought to take up science, art, and politics; to act otherwise meant being wasteful. He generalized with pleasure and expressed regret that he would be parting from me early next morning, as he had to go to a sale of timber.

And I felt awkward and depressed, and it seemed to me that I was deceiving the man. And at the same time it was pleasant to me. I gazed at the immense crimson moon which was rising, and pictured the tall, graceful, fair woman, with her pale face, always well-dressed and fragrant with some special scent, rather like musk, and for some reason it pleased me to think she did not love her husband.

On reaching home, we sat down to supper. Marya Sergeyevna, laughing, regaled us with our purchases, and I thought that she certainly had wonderful hair and that her smile was unlike any other woman’s. I watched her, and I wanted to detect in every look and movement that she did not love her husband, and I fancied that I did see it.

Dmitri Petrovitch was soon struggling with sleep. After supper he sat with us for ten minutes and said:

“Do as you please, my friends, but I have to be up at three o’clock tomorrow morning. Excuse my leaving you.”

He kissed his wife tenderly, pressed my hand with warmth and gratitude, and made me promise that I would certainly come the following week. That he might not oversleep next morning, he went to spend the night in the lodge.

Marya Sergeyevna always sat up late, in the Petersburg fashion, and for some reason on this occasion I was glad of it.

"And now," I began when we were left alone, "and now you'll be kind and play me something."

I felt no desire for music, but I did not know how to begin the conversation. She sat down to the piano and played, I don't remember what. I sat down beside her and looked at her plump white hands and tried to read something on her cold, indifferent face. Then she smiled at something and looked at me.

"You are dull without your friend," she said.

I laughed.

"It would be enough for friendship to be here once a month, but I turn up oftener than once a week."

Saying this, I got up and walked from one end of the room to the other. She too got up and walked away to the fireplace.

"What do you mean to say by that?" she said, raising her large, clear eyes and looking at me.

I made no answer.

"What you say is not true," she went on, after a moment's thought. "You only come here on account of Dmitri Petrovitch. Well, I am very glad. One does not often see such friendships nowadays."

"Aha!" I thought, and, not knowing what to say, I asked: "Would you care for a turn in the garden?"

I went out upon the verandah. Nervous shudders were running over my head and I felt chilly with excitement. I was convinced now that our conversation would be utterly trivial, and that there was nothing particular we should be able to say to one another, but that, that night, what I did not dare to dream of was bound to happen—that it was bound to be that night or never.

"What lovely weather!" I said aloud.

"It makes absolutely no difference to me," she answered.

I went into the drawing room. Marya Sergeyevna was standing, as before, near the fireplace, with her hands behind her back, looking away and thinking of something.

"Why does it make no difference to you?" I asked.

"Because I am bored. You are only bored without your friend, but I am always bored. However… that is of no interest to you."

I sat down to the piano and struck a few chords, waiting to hear what she would say.

“Please don’t stand on ceremony,” she said, looking angrily at me, and she seemed as though on the point of crying with vexation. “If you are sleepy, go to bed. Because you are Dmitri Petrovitch’s friend, you are not in duty bound to be bored with his wife’s company. I don’t want a sacrifice. Please go.”

I did not, of course, go to bed. She went out on the verandah while I remained in the drawing room and spent five minutes turning over the music. Then I went out, too. We stood close together in the shadow of the curtains, and below us were the steps bathed in moonlight. The black shadows of the trees stretched across the flower beds and the yellow sand of the paths.

“I shall have to go away tomorrow, too,” I said.

“Of course, if my husband’s not at home you can’t stay here,” she said sarcastically. “I can imagine how miserable you would be if you were in love with me! Wait a bit: one day I shall throw myself on your neck.… I shall see with what horror you will run away from me. That would be interesting.”

Her words and her pale face were angry, but her eyes were full of tender passionate love. I already looked upon this lovely creature as my property, and then for the first time I noticed that she had golden eyebrows, exquisite eyebrows. I had never seen such eyebrows before. The thought that I might at once press her to my heart, caress her, touch her wonderful hair, seemed to me such a miracle that I laughed and shut my eyes.

“It’s bedtime now.… A peaceful night,” she said.

“I don’t want a peaceful night,” I said, laughing, following her into the drawing room. “I shall curse this night if it is a peaceful one.”

Pressing her hand, and escorting her to the door, I saw by her face that she understood me, and was glad that I understood her, too.

I went to my room. Near the books on the table lay Dmitri Petrovitch’s cap, and that reminded me of his affection for me. I took my stick and went out into the garden. The mist had risen here, too, and the same tall, narrow, ghostly shapes which I had seen earlier on the river were trailing round the trees and bushes and wrapping about them. What a pity I could not talk to them!

In the extraordinarily transparent air, each leaf, each drop of dew stood out distinctly; it was all smiling at me in the stillness half asleep, and as I passed the green seats I recalled the words in some play of Shakespeare’s: “How sweetly falls the moonlight on yon seat!”

There was a mound in the garden; I went up it and sat down. I was tormented by a delicious feeling. I knew for certain that in a moment I should hold in my arms, should press to my heart her magnificent body, should kiss her golden eyebrows; and I wanted to disbelieve it, to tantalize myself, and was sorry that she had cost me so little trouble and had yielded so soon.

But suddenly I heard heavy footsteps. A man of medium height appeared in the avenue, and I recognized him at once as Forty Martyrs. He sat down on the bench and heaved a deep sigh, then crossed himself three times and lay down. A minute later he got up and lay on the other side. The gnats and the dampness of the night prevented his sleeping.

"Oh, life!" he said. "Wretched, bitter life!"

Looking at his bent, wasted body and hearing his heavy, noisy sighs, I thought of an unhappy, bitter life of which the confession had been made to me that day, and I felt uneasy and frightened at my blissful mood. I came down the knoll and went to the house.

"Life, as he thinks, is terrible," I thought, "so don't stand on ceremony with it, bend it to your will, and until it crushes you, snatch all you can wring from it."

Marya Sergeyevna was standing on the verandah. I put my arms round her without a word, and began greedily kissing her eyebrows, her temples, her neck.…

In my room she told me she had loved me for a long time, more than a year. She vowed eternal love, cried and begged me to take her away with me. I repeatedly took her to the window to look at her face in the moonlight, and she seemed to me a lovely dream, and I made haste to hold her tight to convince myself of the truth of it. It was long since I had known such raptures.… Yet somewhere far away at the bottom of my heart I felt an awkwardness, and I was ill at ease. In her love for me there was something incongruous and burdensome, just as in Dmitri Petrovitch's friendship. It was a great, serious passion with tears and vows, and I wanted nothing serious in it—no tears, no vows, no talk of the future. Let that moonlight night flash through our lives like a meteor and—*basta*!

At three o'clock she went out of my room, and, while I was standing in the doorway, looking after her, at the end of the corridor Dmitri Petrovitch suddenly made his appearance; she started and stood aside to let him pass, and her whole figure was expressive of repulsion. He gave a strange smile, coughed, and came into my room.

"I forgot my cap here yesterday," he said without looking at me.

He found it and, holding it in both hands, put it on his head; then he looked at my confused face, at my slippers, and said in a strange, husky voice unlike his own:

“I suppose it must be my fate that I should understand nothing.… If you understand anything, I congratulate you. It’s all darkness before my eyes.”

And he went out, clearing his throat. Afterwards from the window I saw him by the stable, harnessing the horses with his own hands. His hands were trembling, he was in nervous haste and kept looking round at the house; probably he was feeling terror. Then he got into the gig, and, with a strange expression as though afraid of being pursued, lashed the horses.

Shortly afterwards I set off, too. The sun was already rising, and the mist of the previous day clung timidly to the bushes and the hillocks. On the box of the carriage was sitting Forty Martyrs; he had already succeeded in getting drunk and was muttering tipsy nonsense.

“I am a free man,” he shouted to the horses. “Ah, my honeys, I am a nobleman in my own right, if you care to know!”

The terror of Dmitri Petrovitch, the thought of whom I could not get out of my head, infected me. I thought of what had happened and could make nothing of it. I looked at the rooks, and it seemed so strange and terrible that they were flying.

“Why have I done this?” I kept asking myself in bewilderment and despair. “Why has it turned out like this and not differently? To whom and for what was it necessary that she should love me in earnest, and that he should come into my room to fetch his cap? What had a cap to do with it?”

I set off for Petersburg that day, and I have not seen Dmitri Petrovitch nor his wife since. I am told that they are still living together.

NEIGHBOURS

Pyotr Mihalitch Ivashin was very much out of humour: his sister, a young girl, had gone away to live with Vlassitch, a married man. To shake off the despondency and depression which pursued him at home and in the fields, he called to his aid his sense of justice, his genuine and noble ideas—he had always defended free-love!—but this was of no avail, and he always came back to the same conclusion as their foolish old nurse, that his sister had acted wrongly and that Vlassitch had abducted his sister. And that was distressing.

His mother did not leave her room all day long; the old nurse kept sighing and speaking in whispers; his aunt had been on the point of taking her departure every day, and her trunks were continually being brought down to the hall and carried up again to her room. In the house, in the yard, and in the garden it was as still as though there were someone dead in the house. His aunt, the servants, and even the peasants, so it seemed to Pyotr Mihalitch, looked at him enigmatically and with perplexity, as though they wanted to say, “Your sister has been seduced; why are you doing nothing?” And he reproached himself for inactivity, though he did not know precisely what action he ought to have taken.

So passed six days. On the seventh—it was Sunday afternoon—a messenger on horseback brought a letter. The address was in a familiar feminine handwriting: “Her Excy. Anna Nikolaevna Ivashin.” Pyotr Mihalitch fancied that there was something defiant, provocative, in the handwriting and in the abbreviation “Excy.” And advanced ideas in women are obstinate, ruthless, cruel.

“She’d rather die than make any concession to her unhappy mother, or beg her forgiveness,” thought Pyotr Mihalitch, as he went to his mother with the letter.

His mother was lying on her bed, dressed. Seeing her son, she rose impulsively, and straightening her grey hair, which had fallen from under her cap, asked quickly:

“What is it? What is it?”

“This has come…” said her son, giving her the letter.

Zina’s name, and even the pronoun “she” was not uttered in the house. Zina was spoken of impersonally: “this has come,” “Gone away,” and so on.… The mother recognised her daughter’s handwriting, and her face grew ugly and unpleasant, and her grey hair escaped again from her cap.

“No!” she said, with a motion of her hands, as though the letter scorched her fingers. “No, no, never! Nothing would induce me!”

The mother broke into hysterical sobs of grief and shame; she evidently longed to read the letter, but her pride prevented her. Pyotr Mihalitch realised that he ought to open the letter himself and read it aloud, but he was overcome by anger such as he had never felt before; he ran out into the yard and shouted to the messenger:

“Say there will be no answer! There will be no answer! Tell them that, you beast!”

And he tore up the letter; then tears came into his eyes, and feeling that he was cruel, miserable, and to blame, he went out into the fields.

He was only twenty-seven, but he was already stout. He dressed like an old man in loose, roomy clothes, and suffered from asthma. He already seemed to be developing the characteristics of an elderly country bachelor. He never fell in love, never thought of marriage, and loved no one but his mother, his sister, his old nurse, and the gardener, Vassilitch. He was fond of good fare, of his nap after dinner, and of talking about politics and exalted subjects. He had in his day taken his degree at the university, but he now looked upon his studies as though in them he had discharged a duty incumbent upon young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five; at any rate, the ideas which now strayed every day through his mind had nothing in common with the university or the subjects he had studied there.

In the fields it was hot and still, as though rain were coming. It was steaming in the wood, and there was a heavy fragrant scent from the pines and rotting leaves. Pyotr Mihalitch stopped several times and wiped his wet brow. He looked at his winter corn and his spring oats, walked round the clover-field, and twice drove away a partridge with its chicks which had strayed in from the wood. And all the while he was thinking that this insufferable state of things could not go on forever, and that he must end it one way or another. End it stupidly, madly, but he must end it.

“But how? What can I do?” he asked himself, and looked imploringly at the sky and at the trees, as though begging for their help.

But the sky and the trees were mute. His noble ideas were no help, and his common sense whispered that the agonising question could have no solution but a stupid one, and that today's scene with the messenger was not the last one of its kind. It was terrible to think what was in store for him!

As he returned home the sun was setting. By now it seemed to him that the problem was incapable of solution. He could not accept the accomplished fact, and he could not refuse to accept it, and there was no intermediate course. When, taking off his hat and fanning himself with his handkerchief, he was walking along the road, and had only another mile and a half to go before he would reach home, he heard bells behind him. It was a very choice and successful combination of bells, which gave a clear crystal note. No one had such bells on his horses but the police captain, Medovsky, formerly an officer in the hussars, a man in broken-down health, who had been a great rake and spendthrift, and was a distant relation of Pyotr Mihalitch. He was like one of the family at the Ivashins' and had a tender, fatherly affection for Zina, as well as a great admiration for her.

"I was coming to see you," he said, overtaking Pyotr Mihalitch. "Get in; I'll give you a lift."

He was smiling and looked cheerful. Evidently he did not yet know that Zina had gone to live with Vlassitch; perhaps he had been told of it already, but did not believe it. Pyotr Mihalitch felt in a difficult position.

"You are very welcome," he muttered, blushing till the tears came into his eyes, and not knowing how to lie or what to say. "I am delighted," he went on, trying to smile, "but… Zina is away and mother is ill."

"How annoying!" said the police captain, looking pensively at Pyotr Mihalitch. "And I was meaning to spend the evening with you. Where has Zinaida Mihalovna gone?"

"To the Sinitskys', and I believe she meant to go from there to the monastery. I don't quite know."

The police captain talked a little longer and then turned back. Pyotr Mihalitch walked home, and thought with horror what the police captain's feelings would be when he learned the truth. And Pyotr Mihalitch imagined his feelings, and actually experiencing them himself, went into the house.

"Lord help us," he thought, "Lord help us!"

At evening tea the only one at the table was his aunt. As usual, her face wore the expression that seemed to say that though she was a weak, defenceless woman, she would allow no one to insult her. Pyotr

Mihalitch sat down at the other end of the table (he did not like his aunt) and began drinking tea in silence.

"Your mother has had no dinner again today," said his aunt. "You ought to do something about it, Petrusha. Starving oneself is no help in sorrow."

It struck Pyotr Mihalitch as absurd that his aunt should meddle in other people's business and should make her departure depend on Zina's having gone away. He was tempted to say something rude to her, but restrained himself. And as he restrained himself he felt the time had come for action, and that he could not bear it any longer. Either he must act at once or fall on the ground, and scream and bang his head upon the floor. He pictured Vlassitch and Zina, both of them progressive and self-satisfied, kissing each other somewhere under a maple tree, and all the anger and bitterness that had been accumulating in him for the last seven days fastened upon Vlassitch.

"One has seduced and abducted my sister," he thought, "another will come and murder my mother, a third will set fire to the house and sack the place.… And all this under the mask of friendship, lofty ideas, unhappiness!"

"No, it shall not be!" Pyotr Mihalitch cried suddenly, and he brought his fist down on the table.

He jumped up and ran out of the dining room. In the stable the steward's horse was standing ready saddled. He got on it and galloped off to Vlassitch.

There was a perfect tempest within him. He felt a longing to do something extraordinary, startling, even if he had to repent of it all his life afterwards. Should he call Vlassitch a blackguard, slap him in the face, and then challenge him to a duel? But Vlassitch was not one of those men who do fight duels; being called a blackguard and slapped in the face would only make him more unhappy, and would make him shrink into himself more than ever. These unhappy, defenceless people are the most insufferable, the most tiresome creatures in the world. They can do anything with impunity. When the luckless man responds to well-deserved reproach by looking at you with eyes full of deep and guilty feeling, and with a sickly smile bends his head submissively, even justice itself could not lift its hand against him.

"No matter. I'll horsewhip him before her eyes and tell him what I think of him," Pyotr Mihalitch decided.

He was riding through his wood and waste land, and he imagined Zina would try to justify her conduct by talking about the rights of women and

individual freedom, and about there being no difference between legal marriage and free union. Like a woman, she would argue about what she did not understand. And very likely at the end she would ask, “How do you come in? What right have you to interfere?”

“No, I have no right,” muttered Pyotr Mihalitch. “But so much the better.… The harsher I am, the less right I have to interfere, the better.”

It was sultry. Clouds of gnats hung over the ground and in the waste places the peewits called plaintively. Everything betokened rain, but he could not see a cloud in the sky. Pyotr Mihalitch crossed the boundary of his estate and galloped over a smooth, level field. He often went along this road and knew every bush, every hollow in it. What now in the far distance looked in the dusk like a dark cliff was a red church; he could picture it all down to the smallest detail, even the plaster on the gate and the calves that were always grazing in the church enclosure. Three-quarters of a mile to the right of the church there was a copse like a dark blur—it was Count Koltonovitch’s. And beyond the church Vlassitch’s estate began.

From behind the church and the count’s copse a huge black storm-cloud was rising, and there were ashes of white lightning.

“Here it is!” thought Pyotr Mihalitch. “Lord help us, Lord help us!”

The horse was soon tired after its quick gallop, and Pyotr Mihalitch was tired too. The storm-cloud looked at him angrily and seemed to advise him to go home. He felt a little scared.

“I will prove to them they are wrong,” he tried to reassure himself. “They will say that it is free-love, individual freedom; but freedom means self-control and not subjection to passion. It’s not liberty but license!”

He reached the count’s big pond; it looked dark blue and frowning under the cloud, and a smell of damp and slime rose from it. Near the dam, two willows, one old and one young, drooped tenderly towards one another. Pyotr Mihalitch and Vlassitch had been walking near this very spot only a fortnight before, humming a students’ song:

> “‘Youth is wasted, life is nought, when the heart is cold and loveless.’”

A wretched song!

It was thundering as Pyotr Mihalitch rode through the copse, and the trees were bending and rustling in the wind. He had to make haste. It was only three-quarters of a mile through a meadow from the copse to

Vlassitch's house. Here there were old birch trees on each side of the road. They had the same melancholy and unhappy air as their owner Vlassitch, and looked as tall and lanky as he. Big drops of rain pattered on the birches and on the grass; the wind had suddenly dropped, and there was a smell of wet earth and poplars. Before him he saw Vlassitch's fence with a row of yellow acacias, which were tall and lanky too; where the fence was broken he could see the neglected orchard.

Pyotr Mihalitch was not thinking now of the horsewhip or of a slap in the face, and did not know what he would do at Vlassitch's. He felt nervous. He felt frightened on his own account and on his sister's, and was terrified at the thought of seeing her. How would she behave with her brother? What would they both talk about? And had he not better go back before it was too late? As he made these reflections, he galloped up the avenue of lime trees to the house, rode round the big clumps of lilacs, and suddenly saw Vlassitch.

Vlassitch, wearing a cotton shirt, and top-boots, bending forward, with no hat on in the rain, was coming from the corner of the house to the front door. He was followed by a workman with a hammer and a box of nails. They must have been mending a shutter which had been banging in the wind. Seeing Pyotr Mihalitch, Vlassitch stopped.

"It's you!" he said, smiling. "That's nice."

"Yes, I've come, as you see," said Pyotr Mihalitch, brushing the rain off himself with both hands.

"Well, that's capital! I'm very glad," said Vlassitch, but he did not hold out his hand: evidently he did not venture, but waited for Pyotr Mihalitch to hold out his. "It will do the oats good," he said, looking at the sky.

"Yes."

They went into the house in silence. To the right of the hall was a door leading to another hall and then to the drawing room, and on the left was a little room which in winter was used by the steward. Pyotr Mihalitch and Vlassitch went into this little room.

"Where were you caught in the rain?"

"Not far off, quite close to the house."

Pyotr Mihalitch sat down on the bed. He was glad of the noise of the rain and the darkness of the room. It was better: it made it less dreadful, and there was no need to see his companion's face. There was no anger in his heart now, nothing but fear and vexation with himself. He felt he had made a bad beginning, and that nothing would come of this visit.

Both were silent for some time and affected to be listening to the rain.

“Thank you, Petrusha,” Vlassitch began, clearing his throat. “I am very grateful to you for coming. It’s generous and noble of you. I understand it, and, believe me, I appreciate it. Believe me.”

He looked out of the window and went on, standing in the middle of the room:

“Everything happened so secretly, as though we were concealing it all from you. The feeling that you might be wounded and angry has been a blot on our happiness all these days. But let me justify myself. We kept it secret not because we did not trust you. To begin with, it all happened suddenly, by a kind of inspiration; there was no time to discuss it. Besides, it’s such a private, delicate matter, and it was awkward to bring a third person in, even someone as intimate as you. Above all, in all this we reckoned on your generosity. You are a very noble and generous person. I am infinitely grateful to you. If you ever need my life, come and take it.”

Vlassitch talked in a quiet, hollow bass, always on the same droning note; he was evidently agitated. Pyotr Mihalitch felt it was his turn to speak, and that to listen and keep silent would really mean playing the part of a generous and noble simpleton, and that had not been his idea in coming. He got up quickly and said, breathlessly in an undertone:

“Listen, Grigory. You know I liked you and could have desired no better husband for my sister; but what has happened is awful! It’s terrible to think of it!”

“Why is it terrible?” asked Vlassitch, with a quiver in his voice. “It would be terrible if we had done wrong, but that isn’t so.”

“Listen, Grigory. You know I have no prejudices; but, excuse my frankness, to my mind you have both acted selfishly. Of course, I shan’t say so to my sister—it will distress her; but you ought to know: mother is miserable beyond all description.”

“Yes, that’s sad,” sighed Vlassitch. “We foresaw that, Petrusha, but what could we have done? Because one’s actions hurt other people, it doesn’t prove that they are wrong. What’s to be done! Every important step one takes is bound to distress somebody. If you went to fight for freedom, that would distress your mother, too. What’s to be done! Anyone who puts the peace of his family before everything has to renounce the life of ideas completely.”

There was a vivid flash of lightning at the window, and the lightning seemed to change the course of Vlassitch’s thoughts. He sat down beside Pyotr Mihalitch and began saying what was utterly beside the point.

“I have such a reverence for your sister, Petrusha,” he said. “When I used to come and see you, I felt as though I were going to a holy shrine, and I really did worship Zina. Now my reverence for her grows every day. For me she is something higher than a wife—yes, higher!” Vlassitch waved his hands. “She is my holy of holies. Since she is living with me, I enter my house as though it were a temple. She is an extraordinary, rare, most noble woman!”

“Well, he’s off now!” thought Pyotr Mihalitch; he disliked the word “woman.”

“Why shouldn’t you be married properly?” he asked. “How much does your wife want for a divorce?”

“Seventy-five thousand.”

“It’s rather a lot. But if we were to negotiate with her?”

“She won’t take a farthing less. She is an awful woman, brother,” sighed Vlassitch. “I’ve never talked to you about her before—it was unpleasant to think of her; but now that the subject has come up, I’ll tell you about her. I married her on the impulse of the moment—a fine, honourable impulse. An officer in command of a battalion of our regiment—if you care to hear the details—had an affair with a girl of eighteen; that is, to put it plainly, he seduced her, lived with her for two months, and abandoned her. She was in an awful position, brother. She was ashamed to go home to her parents; besides, they wouldn’t have received her. Her lover had abandoned her; there was nothing left for her but to go to the barracks and sell herself. The other officers in the regiment were indignant. They were by no means saints themselves, but the baseness of it was so striking. Besides, no one in the regiment could endure the man. And to spite him, you understand, the indignant lieutenants and ensigns began getting up a subscription for the unfortunate girl. And when we subalterns met together and began to subscribe five or ten roubles each, I had a sudden inspiration. I felt it was an opportunity to do something fine. I hastened to the girl and warmly expressed my sympathy. And while I was on my way to her, and while I was talking to her, I loved her fervently as a woman insulted and injured. Yes.… Well, a week later I made her an offer. The colonel and my comrades thought my marriage out of keeping with the dignity of an officer. That roused me more than ever. I wrote a long letter, do you know, in which I proved that my action ought to be inscribed in the annals of the regiment in letters of gold, and so on. I sent the letter to my colonel and copies to my comrades. Well, I was excited, and, of course, I could not avoid being rude. I was asked to leave the regiment. I have a

rough copy of it put away somewhere; I'll give it to you to read sometime. It was written with great feeling. You will see what lofty and noble sentiments I was experiencing. I resigned my commission and came here with my wife. My father had left a few debts, I had no money, and from the first day my wife began making acquaintances, dressing herself smartly, and playing cards, and I was obliged to mortgage the estate. She led a bad life, you understand, and you are the only one of the neighbours who hasn't been her lover. After two years I gave her all I had to set me free and she went off to town. Yes.… And now I pay her twelve hundred roubles a year. She is an awful woman! There is a fly, brother, which lays an egg in the back of a spider so that the spider can't shake it off: the grub fastens upon the spider and drinks its heart's blood. That was how this woman fastened upon me and sucks the blood of my heart. She hates and despises me for being so stupid; that is, for marrying a woman like her. My chivalry seems to her despicable. 'A wise man cast me off,' she says, 'and a fool picked me up.' To her thinking no one but a pitiful idiot could have behaved as I did. And that is insufferably bitter to me, brother. Altogether, I may say in parenthesis, fate has been hard upon me, very hard."

Pyotr Mihalitch listened to Vlassitch and wondered in perplexity what it was in this man that had so charmed his sister. He was not young—he was forty-one—lean and lanky, narrow-chested, with a long nose, and grey hairs in his beard. He talked in a droning voice, had a sickly smile, and waved his hands awkwardly as he talked. He had neither health, nor pleasant, manly manners, nor savoir-faire, nor gaiety, and in all his exterior there was something colourless and indefinite. He dressed without taste, his surroundings were depressing, he did not care for poetry or painting because "they have no answer to give to the questions of the day"—that is, he did not understand them; music did not touch him. He was a poor farmer.

His estate was in a wretched condition and was mortgaged; he was paying twelve percent on the second mortgage and owed ten thousand on personal securities as well. When the time came to pay the interest on the mortgage or to send money to his wife, he asked everyone to lend him money with as much agitation as though his house were on fire, and, at the same time losing his head, he would sell the whole of his winter store of fuel for five roubles and a stack of straw for three roubles, and then have his garden fence or old cucumber-frames chopped up to heat his stoves. His meadows were ruined by pigs, the peasants' cattle strayed in the undergrowth in his woods, and every year the old trees were fewer

and fewer: beehives and rusty pails lay about in his garden and kitchen-garden. He had neither talents nor abilities, nor even ordinary capacity for living like other people. In practical life he was a weak, naive man, easy to deceive and to cheat, and the peasants with good reason called him “simple.”

He was a Liberal, and in the district was regarded as a “Red,” but even his progressiveness was a bore. There was no originality nor moving power about his independent views: he was revolted, indignant, and delighted always on the same note; it was always spiritless and ineffective. Even in moments of strong enthusiasm he never raised his head or stood upright. But the most tiresome thing of all was that he managed to express even his best and finest ideas so that they seemed in him commonplace and out of date. It reminded one of something old one had read long ago, when slowly and with an air of profundity he would begin discoursing of his noble, lofty moments, of his best years; or when he went into raptures over the younger generation, which has always been, and still is, in advance of society; or abused Russians for donning their dressing-gowns at thirty and forgetting the principles of their alma mater. If you stayed the night with him, he would put Pissarev or Darwin on your bedroom table; if you said you had read it, he would go and bring Dobrolubov.

In the district this was called freethinking, and many people looked upon this freethinking as an innocent and harmless eccentricity; it made him profoundly unhappy, however. It was for him the maggot of which he had just been speaking; it had fastened upon him and was sucking his lifeblood. In his past there had been the strange marriage in the style of Dostoevsky; long letters and copies written in a bad, unintelligible handwriting, but with great feeling, endless misunderstandings, explanations, disappointments, then debts, a second mortgage, the allowance to his wife, the monthly borrowing of money—and all this for no benefit to anyone, either himself or others. And in the present, as in the past, he was still in a nervous flurry, on the lookout for heroic actions, and poking his nose into other people’s affairs; as before, at every favourable opportunity there were long letters and copies, wearisome, stereotyped conversations about the village community, or the revival of handicrafts or the establishment of cheese factories—conversations as like one another as though he had prepared them, not in his living brain, but by some mechanical process. And finally this scandal with Zina of which one could not see the end!

And meanwhile Zina was young—she was only twenty-two—good-looking, elegant, gay; she was fond of laughing, chatter, argument, a passionate musician; she had good taste in dress, in furniture, in books, and in her own home she would not have put up with a room like this, smelling of boots and cheap vodka. She, too, had advanced ideas, but in her freethinking one felt the overflow of energy, the vanity of a young, strong, spirited girl, passionately eager to be better and more original than others.… How had it happened that she had fallen in love with Vlassitch?

"He is a Quixote, an obstinate fanatic, a maniac," thought Pyotr Mihalitch, "and she is as soft, yielding, and weak in character as I am.… She and I give in easily, without resistance. She loves him; but, then, I, too, love him in spite of everything."

Pyotr Mihalitch considered Vlassitch a good, straightforward man, but narrow and one-sided. In his perturbations and his sufferings, and in fact in his whole life, he saw no lofty aims, remote or immediate; he saw nothing but boredom and incapacity for life. His self-sacrifice and all that Vlassitch himself called heroic actions or noble impulses seemed to him a useless waste of force, unnecessary blank shots which consumed a great deal of powder. And Vlassitch's fanatical belief in the extraordinary loftiness and faultlessness of his own way of thinking struck him as naive and even morbid; and the fact that Vlassitch all his life had contrived to mix the trivial with the exalted, that he had made a stupid marriage and looked upon it as an act of heroism, and then had affairs with other women and regarded that as a triumph of some idea or other was simply incomprehensible.

Nevertheless, Pyotr Mihalitch was fond of Vlassitch; he was conscious of a sort of power in him, and for some reason he had never had the heart to contradict him.

Vlassitch sat down quite close to him for a talk in the dark, to the accompaniment of the rain, and he had cleared his throat as a prelude to beginning on something lengthy, such as the history of his marriage. But it was intolerable for Pyotr Mihalitch to listen to him; he was tormented by the thought that he would see his sister directly.

"Yes, you've had bad luck," he said gently; "but, excuse me, we've been wandering from the point. That's not what we are talking about."

"Yes, yes, quite so. Well, let us come back to the point," said Vlassitch, and he stood up. "I tell you, Petrusha, our conscience is clear. We are not married, but there is no need for me to prove to you that our marriage is perfectly legitimate. You are as free in your ideas as I am,

and, happily, there can be no disagreement between us on that point. As for our future, that ought not to alarm you. I'll work in the sweat of my brow, I'll work day and night—in fact, I will strain every nerve to make Zina happy. Her life will be a splendid one! You may ask, am I able to do it. I am, brother! When a man devotes every minute to one thought, it's not difficult for him to attain his object. But let us go to Zina; it will be a joy to her to see you."

Pyotr Mihalitch's heart began to beat. He got up and followed Vlassitch into the hall, and from there into the drawing room. There was nothing in the huge gloomy room but a piano and a long row of old chairs ornamented with bronze, on which no one ever sat. There was a candle alight on the piano. From the drawing room they went in silence into the dining room. This room, too, was large and comfortless; in the middle of the room there was a round table with two leaves with six thick legs, and only one candle. A clock in a large mahogany case like an icon stand pointed to half-past two.

Vlassitch opened the door into the next room and said:

"Zina, here is Petrusha come to see us!"

At once there was the sound of hurried footsteps and Zina came into the dining room. She was tall, plump, and very pale, and, just as when he had seen her for the last time at home, she was wearing a black skirt and a red blouse, with a large buckle on her belt. She flung one arm round her brother and kissed him on the temple.

"What a storm!" she said. "Grigory went off somewhere and I was left quite alone in the house."

She was not embarrassed, and looked at her brother as frankly and candidly as at home; looking at her, Pyotr Mihalitch, too, lost his embarrassment.

"But you are not afraid of storms," he said, sitting down at the table.

"No," she said, "but here the rooms are so big, the house is so old, and when there is thunder it all rattles like a cupboard full of crockery. It's a charming house altogether," she went on, sitting down opposite her brother. "There's some pleasant memory in every room. In my room, only fancy, Grigory's grandfather shot himself."

"In August we shall have the money to do up the lodge in the garden," said Vlassitch.

"For some reason when it thunders I think of that grandfather," Zina went on. "And in this dining room somebody was flogged to death."

"That's an actual fact," said Vlassitch, and he looked with wide-open eyes at Pyotr Mihalitch. "Sometime in the forties this place was let to a

Frenchman called Olivier. The portrait of his daughter is lying in an attic now—a very pretty girl. This Olivier, so my father told me, despised Russians for their ignorance and treated them with cruel derision. Thus, for instance, he insisted on the priest walking without his hat for half a mile round his house, and on the church bells being rung when the Olivier family drove through the village. The serfs and altogether the humble of this world, of course, he treated with even less ceremony. Once there came along this road one of the simple-hearted sons of wandering Russia, somewhat after the style of Gogol's divinity student, Homa Brut. He asked for a night's lodging, pleased the bailiffs, and was given a job at the office of the estate. There are many variations of the story. Some say the divinity student stirred up the peasants, others that Olivier's daughter fell in love with him. I don't know which is true, only one fine evening Olivier called him in here and cross-examined him, then ordered him to be beaten. Do you know, he sat here at this table drinking claret while the stable-boys beat the man. He must have tried to wring something out of him. Towards morning the divinity student died of the torture and his body was hidden. They say it was thrown into Koltovitch's pond. There was an inquiry, but the Frenchman paid some thousands to someone in authority and went away to Alsace. His lease was up just then, and so the matter ended."

"What scoundrels!" said Zina, shuddering.

"My father remembered Olivier and his daughter well. He used to say she was remarkably beautiful and eccentric. I imagine the divinity student had done both—stirred up the peasants and won the daughter's heart. Perhaps he wasn't a divinity student at all, but someone travelling incognito."

Zina grew thoughtful; the story of the divinity student and the beautiful French girl had evidently carried her imagination far away. It seemed to Pyotr Mihalitch that she had not changed in the least during the last week, except that she was a little paler. She looked calm and just as usual, as though she had come with her brother to visit Vlassitch. But Pyotr Mihalitch felt that some change had taken place in himself. Before, when she was living at home, he could have spoken to her about anything, and now he did not feel equal to asking her the simple question, "How do you like being here?" The question seemed awkward and unnecessary. Probably the same change had taken place in her. She was in no haste to turn the conversation to her mother, to her home, to her relations with Vlassitch; she did not defend herself, she did not say that free unions are better than marriages in the church; she was not

agitated, and calmly brooded over the story of Olivier.… And why had they suddenly begun talking of Olivier?

"You are both of you wet with the rain," said Zina, and she smiled joyfully; she was touched by this point of resemblance between her brother and Vlassitch.

And Pyotr Mihalitch felt all the bitterness and horror of his position. He thought of his deserted home, the closed piano, and Zina's bright little room into which no one went now; he thought there were no prints of little feet on the garden-paths, and that before tea no one went off, laughing gaily, to bathe. What he had clung to more and more from his childhood upwards, what he had loved thinking about when he used to sit in the stuffy classroom or the lecture theatre—brightness, purity, and joy, everything that filled the house with life and light, had gone never to return, had vanished, and was mixed up with a coarse, clumsy story of some battalion officer, a chivalrous lieutenant, a depraved woman and a grandfather who had shot himself.… And to begin to talk about his mother or to think that the past could ever return would mean not understanding what was clear.

Pyotr Mihalitch's eyes filled with tears and his hand began to tremble as it lay on the table. Zina guessed what he was thinking about, and her eyes, too, glistened and looked red.

"Grigory, come here," she said to Vlassitch.

They walked away to the window and began talking of something in a whisper. From the way that Vlassitch stooped down to her and the way she looked at him, Pyotr Mihalitch realised again that everything was irreparably over, and that it was no use to talk of anything. Zina went out of the room.

"Well, brother!" Vlassitch began, after a brief silence, rubbing his hands and smiling. "I called our life happiness just now, but that was, so to speak, poetical license. In reality, there has not been a sense of happiness so far. Zina has been thinking all the time of you, of her mother, and has been worrying; looking at her, I, too, felt worried. Hers is a bold, free nature, but, you know, it's difficult when you're not used to it, and she is young, too. The servants call her 'Miss'; it seems a trifle, but it upsets her. There it is, brother."

Zina brought in a plateful of strawberries. She was followed by a little maidservant, looking crushed and humble, who set a jug of milk on the table and made a very low bow: she had something about her that was in keeping with the old furniture, something petrified and dreary.

The sound of the rain had ceased. Pyotr Mihalitch ate strawberries while Vlassitch and Zina looked at him in silence. The moment of the inevitable but useless conversation was approaching, and all three felt the burden of it. Pyotr Mihalitch's eyes filled with tears again; he pushed away his plate and said that he must be going home, or it would be getting late, and perhaps it would rain again. The time had come when common decency required Zina to speak of those at home and of her new life.

"How are things at home?" she asked rapidly, and her pale face quivered. "How is mother?"

"You know mother…" said Pyotr Mihalitch, not looking at her.

"Petrusha, you've thought a great deal about what has happened," she said, taking hold of her brother's sleeve, and he knew how hard it was for her to speak. "You've thought a great deal: tell me, can we reckon on mother's accepting Grigory… and the whole position, one day?"

She stood close to her brother, face to face with him, and he was astonished that she was so beautiful, and that he seemed not to have noticed it before. And it seemed to him utterly absurd that his sister, so like his mother, pampered, elegant, should be living with Vlassitch and in Vlassitch's house, with the petrified servant, and the table with six legs—in the house where a man had been flogged to death, and that she was not going home with him, but was staying here to sleep.

"You know mother," he said, not answering her question. "I think you ought to have… to do something, to ask her forgiveness or something.…"

"But to ask her forgiveness would mean pretending we had done wrong. I'm ready to tell a lie to comfort mother, but it won't lead anywhere. I know mother. Well, what will be, must be!" said Zina, growing more cheerful now that the most unpleasant had been said. "We'll wait for five years, ten years, and be patient, and then God's will be done."

She took her brother's arm, and when she walked through the dark hall she squeezed close to him. They went out on the steps. Pyotr Mihalitch said goodbye, got on his horse, and set off at a walk; Zina and Vlassitch walked a little way with him. It was still and warm, with a delicious smell of hay; stars were twinkling brightly between the clouds. Vlassitch's old garden, which had seen so many gloomy stories in its time, lay slumbering in the darkness, and for some reason it was mournful riding through it.

“Zina and I today after dinner spent some really exalted moments,” said Vlassitch. “I read aloud to her an excellent article on the question of emigration. You must read it, brother! You really must. It’s remarkable for its lofty tone. I could not resist writing a letter to the editor to be forwarded to the author. I wrote only a single line: ‘I thank you and warmly press your noble hand.’ ”

Pyotr Mihalitch was tempted to say, “Don’t meddle in what does not concern you,” but he held his tongue.

Vlassitch walked by his right stirrup and Zina by the left; both seemed to have forgotten that they had to go home. It was damp, and they had almost reached Koltovitch’s copse. Pyotr Mihalitch felt that they were expecting something from him, though they hardly knew what it was, and he felt unbearably sorry for them. Now as they walked by the horse with submissive faces, lost in thought, he had a deep conviction that they were unhappy, and could not be happy, and their love seemed to him a melancholy, irreparable mistake. Pity and the sense that he could do nothing to help them reduced him to that state of spiritual softening when he was ready to make any sacrifice to get rid of the painful feeling of sympathy.

“I’ll come over sometimes for a night,” he said.

But it sounded as though he were making a concession, and did not satisfy him. When they stopped near Koltovitch’s copse to say goodbye, he bent down to Zina, touched her shoulder, and said:

“You are right, Zina! You have done well.” To avoid saying more and bursting into tears, he lashed his horse and galloped into the wood. As he rode into the darkness, he looked round and saw Vlassitch and Zina walking home along the road—he taking long strides, while she walked with a hurried, jerky step beside him—talking eagerly about something.

“I am an old woman!” thought Pyotr Mihalitch. “I went to solve the question and I have only made it more complicated—there it is!”

He was heavy at heart. When he got out of the copse he rode at a walk and then stopped his horse near the pond. He wanted to sit and think without moving. The moon was rising and was reflected in a streak of red on the other side of the pond. There were low rumbles of thunder in the distance. Pyotr Mihalitch looked steadily at the water and imagined his sister’s despair, her martyr-like pallor, the tearless eyes with which she would conceal her humiliation from others. He imagined her with child, imagined the death of their mother, her funeral, Zina’s horror.… The proud, superstitious old woman would be sure to die of grief. Terrible pictures of the future rose before him on the background of

smooth, dark water, and among pale feminine figures he saw himself, a weak, cowardly man with a guilty face.

A hundred paces off on the right bank of the pond, something dark was standing motionless: was it a man or a tall post? Pyotr Mihalitch thought of the divinity student who had been killed and thrown into the pond.

“Olivier behaved inhumanly, but one way or another he did settle the question, while I have settled nothing and have only made it worse,” he thought, gazing at the dark figure that looked like a ghost. “He said and did what he thought right while I say and do what I don’t think right; and I don’t know really what I do think.…”

He rode up to the dark figure: it was an old rotten post, the relic of some shed.

From Koltovitch’s copse and garden there came a strong fragrant scent of lilies of the valley and honey-laden flowers. Pyotr Mihalitch rode along the bank of the pond and looked mournfully into the water. And thinking about his life, he came to the conclusion he had never said or acted upon what he really thought, and other people had repaid him in the same way. And so the whole of life seemed to him as dark as this water in which the night sky was reflected and water-weeds grew in a tangle. And it seemed to him that nothing could ever set it right.

WARD NO. 6

I

In the hospital yard there stands a small lodge surrounded by a perfect forest of burdocks, nettles, and wild hemp. Its roof is rusty, the chimney is tumbling down, the steps at the front-door are rotting away and overgrown with grass, and there are only traces left of the stucco. The front of the lodge faces the hospital; at the back it looks out into the open country, from which it is separated by the grey hospital fence with nails on it. These nails, with their points upwards, and the fence, and the lodge itself, have that peculiar, desolate, Godforsaken look which is only found in our hospital and prison buildings.

If you are not afraid of being stung by the nettles, come by the narrow footpath that leads to the lodge, and let us see what is going on inside. Opening the first door, we walk into the entry. Here along the walls and by the stove every sort of hospital rubbish lies littered about. Mattresses, old tattered dressing-gowns, trousers, blue striped shirts, boots and shoes no good for anything—all these remnants are piled up in heaps, mixed up and crumpled, mouldering and giving out a sickly smell.

The porter, Nikita, an old soldier wearing rusty good-conduct stripes, is always lying on the litter with a pipe between his teeth. He has a grim, surly, battered-looking face, overhanging eyebrows which give him the expression of a sheepdog of the steppes, and a red nose; he is short and looks thin and scraggy, but he is of imposing deportment and his fists are vigorous. He belongs to the class of simple-hearted, practical, and dull-witted people, prompt in carrying out orders, who like discipline better than anything in the world, and so are convinced that it is their duty to beat people. He showers blows on the face, on the chest, on the back, on whatever comes first, and is convinced that there would be no order in the place if he did not.

Next you come into a big, spacious room which fills up the whole lodge except for the entry. Here the walls are painted a dirty blue, the ceiling is as sooty as in a hut without a chimney—it is evident that in the winter the stove smokes and the room is full of fumes. The windows are disfigured by iron gratings on the inside. The wooden floor is grey and full of splinters. There is a stench of sour cabbage, of smouldering wicks, of bugs, and of ammonia, and for the first minute this stench gives you the impression of having walked into a menagerie.

There are bedsteads screwed to the floor. Men in blue hospital dressing-gowns, and wearing nightcaps in the old style, are sitting and lying on them. These are the lunatics.

There are five of them in all here. Only one is of the upper class, the rest are all artisans. The one nearest the door—a tall, lean workman with shining red whiskers and tear-stained eyes—sits with his head propped on his hand, staring at the same point. Day and night he grieves, shaking his head, sighing and smiling bitterly. He takes a part in conversation and usually makes no answer to questions; he eats and drinks mechanically when food is offered him. From his agonizing, throbbing cough, his thinness, and the flush on his cheeks, one may judge that he is in the first stage of consumption. Next to him is a little, alert, very lively old man, with a pointed beard and curly black hair like a negro's. By day he walks up and down the ward from window to window, or sits on his bed, cross-legged like a Turk, and, ceaselessly as a bullfinch whistles, softly sings and titters. He shows his childish gaiety and lively character at night also when he gets up to say his prayers—that is, to beat himself on the chest with his fists, and to scratch with his fingers at the door. This is the Jew Moiseika, an imbecile, who went crazy twenty years ago when his hat factory was burnt down.

And of all the inhabitants of Ward No. 6, he is the only one who is allowed to go out of the lodge, and even out of the yard into the street. He has enjoyed this privilege for years, probably because he is an old inhabitant of the hospital—a quiet, harmless imbecile, the buffoon of the town, where people are used to seeing him surrounded by boys and dogs. In his wretched gown, in his absurd nightcap, and in slippers, sometimes with bare legs and even without trousers, he walks about the streets, stopping at the gates and little shops, and begging for a copper. In one place they will give him some kvass, in another some bread, in another a copper, so that he generally goes back to the ward feeling rich and well fed. Everything that he brings back Nikita takes from him for his own benefit. The soldier does this roughly, angrily turning the Jew's pockets

inside out, and calling God to witness that he will not let him go into the street again, and that breach of the regulations is worse to him than anything in the world.

Moiseika likes to make himself useful. He gives his companions water, and covers them up when they are asleep; he promises each of them to bring him back a kopeck, and to make him a new cap; he feeds with a spoon his neighbour on the left, who is paralyzed. He acts in this way, not from compassion nor from any considerations of a humane kind, but through imitation, unconsciously dominated by Gromov, his neighbour on the right hand.

Ivan Dmitritch Gromov, a man of thirty-three, who is a gentleman by birth, and has been a court usher and provincial secretary, suffers from the mania of persecution. He either lies curled up in bed, or walks from corner to corner as though for exercise; he very rarely sits down. He is always excited, agitated, and overwrought by a sort of vague, undefined expectation. The faintest rustle in the entry or shout in the yard is enough to make him raise his head and begin listening: whether they are coming for him, whether they are looking for him. And at such times his face expresses the utmost uneasiness and repulsion.

I like his broad face with its high cheekbones, always pale and unhappy, and reflecting, as though in a mirror, a soul tormented by conflict and long-continued terror. His grimaces are strange and abnormal, but the delicate lines traced on his face by profound, genuine suffering show intelligence and sense, and there is a warm and healthy light in his eyes. I like the man himself, courteous, anxious to be of use, and extraordinarily gentle to everyone except Nikita. When anyone drops a button or a spoon, he jumps up from his bed quickly and picks it up; every day he says good morning to his companions, and when he goes to bed he wishes them good night.

Besides his continually overwrought condition and his grimaces, his madness shows itself in the following way also. Sometimes in the evenings he wraps himself in his dressing-gown, and, trembling all over, with his teeth chattering, begins walking rapidly from corner to corner and between the bedsteads. It seems as though he is in a violent fever. From the way he suddenly stops and glances at his companions, it can be seen that he is longing to say something very important, but, apparently reflecting that they would not listen, or would not understand him, he shakes his head impatiently and goes on pacing up and down. But soon the desire to speak gets the upper hand of every consideration, and he will let himself go and speak fervently and passionately. His talk is

disordered and feverish like delirium, disconnected, and not always intelligible, but, on the other hand, something extremely fine may be felt in it, both in the words and the voice. When he talks you recognize in him the lunatic and the man. It is difficult to reproduce on paper his insane talk. He speaks of the baseness of mankind, of violence trampling on justice, of the glorious life which will one day be upon earth, of the window-gratings, which remind him every minute of the stupidity and cruelty of oppressors. It makes a disorderly, incoherent potpourri of themes old but not yet out of date.

II

Some twelve or fifteen years ago an official called Gromov, a highly respectable and prosperous person, was living in his own house in the principal street of the town. He had two sons, Sergey and Ivan. When Sergey was a student in his fourth year he was taken ill with galloping consumption and died, and his death was, as it were, the first of a whole series of calamities which suddenly showered on the Gromov family. Within a week of Sergey's funeral the old father was put on trial for fraud and misappropriation, and he died of typhoid in the prison hospital soon afterwards. The house, with all their belongings, was sold by auction, and Ivan Dmitritch and his mother were left entirely without means.

Hitherto in his father's lifetime, Ivan Dmitritch, who was studying in the University of Petersburg, had received an allowance of sixty or seventy roubles a month, and had had no conception of poverty; now he had to make an abrupt change in his life. He had to spend his time from morning to night giving lessons for next to nothing, to work at copying, and with all that to go hungry, as all his earnings were sent to keep his mother. Ivan Dmitritch could not stand such a life; he lost heart and strength, and, giving up the university, went home.

Here, through interest, he obtained the post of teacher in the district school, but could not get on with his colleagues, was not liked by the boys, and soon gave up the post. His mother died. He was for six months without work, living on nothing but bread and water; then he became a court usher. He kept this post until he was dismissed owing to his illness.

He had never even in his young student days given the impression of being perfectly healthy. He had always been pale, thin, and given to catching cold; he ate little and slept badly. A single glass of wine went to his head and made him hysterical. He always had a craving for society, but, owing to his irritable temperament and suspiciousness, he never became very intimate with anyone, and had no friends. He always spoke with contempt of his fellow-townsmen, saying that their coarse ignorance and sleepy animal existence seemed to him loathsome and horrible. He spoke in a loud tenor, with heat, and invariably either with

scorn and indignation, or with wonder and enthusiasm, and always with perfect sincerity. Whatever one talked to him about he always brought it round to the same subject: that life was dull and stifling in the town; that the townspeople had no lofty interests, but lived a dingy, meaningless life, diversified by violence, coarse profligacy, and hypocrisy; that scoundrels were well fed and clothed, while honest men lived from hand to mouth; that they needed schools, a progressive local paper, a theatre, public lectures, the coordination of the intellectual elements; that society must see its failings and be horrified. In his criticisms of people he laid on the colours thick, using only black and white, and no fine shades; mankind was divided for him into honest men and scoundrels: there was nothing in between. He always spoke with passion and enthusiasm of women and of love, but he had never been in love.

In spite of the severity of his judgments and his nervousness, he was liked, and behind his back was spoken of affectionately as Vanya. His innate refinement and readiness to be of service, his good breeding, his moral purity, and his shabby coat, his frail appearance and family misfortunes, aroused a kind, warm, sorrowful feeling. Moreover, he was well educated and well read; according to the townspeople’s notions, he knew everything, and was in their eyes something like a walking encyclopedia.

He had read a great deal. He would sit at the club, nervously pulling at his beard and looking through the magazines and books; and from his face one could see that he was not reading, but devouring the pages without giving himself time to digest what he read. It must be supposed that reading was one of his morbid habits, as he fell upon anything that came into his hands with equal avidity, even last year’s newspapers and calendars. At home he always read lying down.

III

One autumn morning Ivan Dmitritch, turning up the collar of his greatcoat and splashing through the mud, made his way by side-streets and back lanes to see some artisan, and to collect some payment that was owing. He was in a gloomy mood, as he always was in the morning. In one of the side-streets he was met by two convicts in fetters and four soldiers with rifles in charge of them. Ivan Dmitritch had very often met convicts before, and they had always excited feelings of compassion and discomfort in him; but now this meeting made a peculiar, strange impression on him. It suddenly seemed to him for some reason that he, too, might be put into fetters and led through the mud to prison like that. After visiting the artisan, on the way home he met near the post office a police superintendent of his acquaintance, who greeted him and walked a few paces along the street with him, and for some reason this seemed to him suspicious. At home he could not get the convicts or the soldiers with their rifles out of his head all day, and an unaccountable inward agitation prevented him from reading or concentrating his mind. In the evening he did not light his lamp, and at night he could not sleep, but kept thinking that he might be arrested, put into fetters, and thrown into prison. He did not know of any harm he had done, and could be certain that he would never be guilty of murder, arson, or theft in the future either; but was it not easy to commit a crime by accident, unconsciously, and was not false witness always possible, and, indeed, miscarriage of justice? It was not without good reason that the agelong experience of the simple people teaches that beggary and prison are ills none can be safe from. A judicial mistake is very possible as legal proceedings are conducted nowadays, and there is nothing to be wondered at in it. People who have an official, professional relation to other men’s sufferings—for instance, judges, police officers, doctors—in course of time, through habit, grow so callous that they cannot, even if they wish it, take any but a formal attitude to their clients; in this respect they are not different from the peasant who slaughters sheep and calves in the backyard, and does not notice the blood. With this formal, soulless attitude to human personality the judge needs but one thing—time—in order to deprive an

innocent man of all rights of property, and to condemn him to penal servitude. Only the time spent on performing certain formalities for which the judge is paid his salary, and then—it is all over. Then you may look in vain for justice and protection in this dirty, wretched little town a hundred and fifty miles from a railway station! And, indeed, is it not absurd even to think of justice when every kind of violence is accepted by society as a rational and consistent necessity, and every act of mercy—for instance, a verdict of acquittal—calls forth a perfect outburst of dissatisfied and revengeful feeling?

In the morning Ivan Dmitritch got up from his bed in a state of horror, with cold perspiration on his forehead, completely convinced that he might be arrested any minute. Since his gloomy thoughts of yesterday had haunted him so long, he thought, it must be that there was some truth in them. They could not, indeed, have come into his mind without any grounds whatever.

A policeman walking slowly passed by the windows: that was not for nothing. Here were two men standing still and silent near the house. Why were they silent? And agonizing days and nights followed for Ivan Dmitritch. Everyone who passed by the windows or came into the yard seemed to him a spy or a detective. At midday the chief of the police usually drove down the street with a pair of horses; he was going from his estate near the town to the police department; but Ivan Dmitritch fancied every time that he was driving especially quickly, and that he had a peculiar expression: it was evident that he was in haste to announce that there was a very important criminal in the town. Ivan Dmitritch started at every ring at the bell and knock at the gate, and was agitated whenever he came upon anyone new at his landlady’s; when he met police officers and gendarmes he smiled and began whistling so as to seem unconcerned. He could not sleep for whole nights in succession expecting to be arrested, but he snored loudly and sighed as though in deep sleep, that his landlady might think he was asleep; for if he could not sleep it meant that he was tormented by the stings of conscience—what a piece of evidence! Facts and common sense persuaded him that all these terrors were nonsense and morbidity, that if one looked at the matter more broadly there was nothing really terrible in arrest and imprisonment—so long as the conscience is at ease; but the more sensibly and logically he reasoned, the more acute and agonizing his mental distress became. It might be compared with the story of a hermit who tried to cut a dwelling-place for himself in a virgin forest; the more zealously he worked with his axe, the thicker the forest grew. In the end

Ivan Dmitritch, seeing it was useless, gave up reasoning altogether, and abandoned himself entirely to despair and terror.

He began to avoid people and to seek solitude. His official work had been distasteful to him before: now it became unbearable to him. He was afraid they would somehow get him into trouble, would put a bribe in his pocket unnoticed and then denounce him, or that he would accidentally make a mistake in official papers that would appear to be fraudulent, or would lose other people's money. It is strange that his imagination had never at other times been so agile and inventive as now, when every day he thought of thousands of different reasons for being seriously anxious over his freedom and honour; but, on the other hand, his interest in the outer world, in books in particular, grew sensibly fainter, and his memory began to fail him.

In the spring when the snow melted there were found in the ravine near the cemetery two half-decomposed corpses—the bodies of an old woman and a boy bearing the traces of death by violence. Nothing was talked of but these bodies and their unknown murderers. That people might not think he had been guilty of the crime, Ivan Dmitritch walked about the streets, smiling, and when he met acquaintances he turned pale, flushed, and began declaring that there was no greater crime than the murder of the weak and defenceless. But this duplicity soon exhausted him, and after some reflection he decided that in his position the best thing to do was to hide in his landlady's cellar. He sat in the cellar all day and then all night, then another day, was fearfully cold, and waiting till dusk, stole secretly like a thief back to his room. He stood in the middle of the room till daybreak, listening without stirring. Very early in the morning, before sunrise, some workmen came into the house. Ivan Dmitritch knew perfectly well that they had come to mend the stove in the kitchen, but terror told him that they were police officers disguised as workmen. He slipped stealthily out of the flat, and, overcome by terror, ran along the street without his cap and coat. Dogs raced after him barking, a peasant shouted somewhere behind him, the wind whistled in his ears, and it seemed to Ivan Dmitritch that the force and violence of the whole world was massed together behind his back and was chasing after him.

He was stopped and brought home, and his landlady sent for a doctor. Doctor Andrey Yefimitch, of whom we shall have more to say hereafter, prescribed cold compresses on his head and laurel drops, shook his head, and went away, telling the landlady he should not come again, as one should not interfere with people who are going out of their minds. As he

had not the means to live at home and be nursed, Ivan Dmitritch was soon sent to the hospital, and was there put into the ward for venereal patients. He could not sleep at night, was full of whims and fancies, and disturbed the patients, and was soon afterwards, by Andrey Yefimitch's orders, transferred to Ward No. 6.

Within a year Ivan Dmitritch was completely forgotten in the town, and his books, heaped up by his landlady in a sledge in the shed, were pulled to pieces by boys.

IV

Ivan Dmitritch's neighbour on the left hand is, as I have said already, the Jew Moiseika; his neighbour on the right hand is a peasant so rolling in fat that he is almost spherical, with a blankly stupid face, utterly devoid of thought. This is a motionless, gluttonous, unclean animal who has long ago lost all powers of thought or feeling. An acrid, stifling stench always comes from him.

Nikita, who has to clean up after him, beats him terribly with all his might, not sparing his fists; and what is dreadful is not his being beaten—that one can get used to—but the fact that this stupefied creature does not respond to the blows with a sound or a movement, nor by a look in the eyes, but only sways a little like a heavy barrel.

The fifth and last inhabitant of Ward No. 6 is a man of the artisan class who had once been a sorter in the post office, a thinnish, fair little man with a good-natured but rather sly face. To judge from the clear, cheerful look in his calm and intelligent eyes, he has some pleasant idea in his mind, and has some very important and agreeable secret. He has under his pillow and under his mattress something that he never shows anyone, not from fear of its being taken from him and stolen, but from modesty. Sometimes he goes to the window, and turning his back to his companions, puts something on his breast, and bending his head, looks at it; if you go up to him at such a moment, he is overcome with confusion and snatches something off his breast. But it is not difficult to guess his secret.

"Congratulate me," he often says to Ivan Dmitritch; "I have been presented with the Stanislav order of the second degree with the star. The second degree with the star is only given to foreigners, but for some reason they want to make an exception for me," he says with a smile, shrugging his shoulders in perplexity. "That I must confess I did not expect."

"I don't understand anything about that," Ivan Dmitritch replies morosely.

"But do you know what I shall attain to sooner or later?" the former sorter persists, screwing up his eyes slyly. "I shall certainly get the

Swedish Polar Star. That’s an order it is worth working for, a white cross with a black ribbon. It’s very beautiful.”

Probably in no other place is life so monotonous as in this ward. In the morning the patients, except the paralytic and the fat peasant, wash in the entry at a big tab and wipe themselves with the skirts of their dressing-gowns; after that they drink tea out of tin mugs which Nikita brings them out of the main building. Everyone is allowed one mugful. At midday they have soup made out of sour cabbage and boiled grain, in the evening their supper consists of grain left from dinner. In the intervals they lie down, sleep, look out of window, and walk from one corner to the other. And so every day. Even the former sorter always talks of the same orders.

Fresh faces are rarely seen in Ward No. 6. The doctor has not taken in any new mental cases for a long time, and the people who are fond of visiting lunatic asylums are few in this world. Once every two months Semyon Lazaritch, the barber, appears in the ward. How he cuts the patients’ hair, and how Nikita helps him to do it, and what a trepidation the lunatics are always thrown into by the arrival of the drunken, smiling barber, we will not describe.

No one even looks into the ward except the barber. The patients are condemned to see day after day no one but Nikita.

A rather strange rumour has, however, been circulating in the hospital of late.

It is rumoured that the doctor has begun to visit Ward No. 6.

V

A strange rumour!

Dr. Andrey Yefimitch Ragin is a strange man in his way. They say that when he was young he was very religious, and prepared himself for a clerical career, and that when he had finished his studies at the high school in 1863 he intended to enter a theological academy, but that his father, a surgeon and doctor of medicine, jeered at him and declared point-blank that he would disown him if he became a priest. How far this is true I don't know, but Andrey Yefimitch himself has more than once confessed that he has never had a natural bent for medicine or science in general.

However that may have been, when he finished his studies in the medical faculty he did not enter the priesthood. He showed no special devoutness, and was no more like a priest at the beginning of his medical career than he is now.

His exterior is heavy—coarse like a peasant's, his face, his beard, his flat hair, and his coarse, clumsy figure, suggest an overfed, intemperate, and harsh innkeeper on the high road. His face is surly-looking and covered with blue veins, his eyes are little and his nose is red. With his height and broad shoulders he has huge hands and feet; one would think that a blow from his fist would knock the life out of anyone, but his step is soft, and his walk is cautious and insinuating; when he meets anyone in a narrow passage he is always the first to stop and make way, and to say, not in a bass, as one would expect, but in a high, soft tenor: "I beg your pardon!" He has a little swelling on his neck which prevents him from wearing stiff starched collars, and so he always goes about in soft linen or cotton shirts. Altogether he does not dress like a doctor. He wears the same suit for ten years, and the new clothes, which he usually buys at a Jewish shop, look as shabby and crumpled on him as his old ones; he sees patients and dines and pays visits all in the same coat; but this is not due to niggardliness, but to complete carelessness about his appearance.

When Andrey Yefimitch came to the town to take up his duties the "institution founded to the glory of God" was in a terrible condition. One

could hardly breathe for the stench in the wards, in the passages, and in the courtyards of the hospital. The hospital servants, the nurses, and their children slept in the wards together with the patients. They complained that there was no living for beetles, bugs, and mice. The surgical wards were never free from erysipelas. There were only two scalpels and not one thermometer in the whole hospital; potatoes were kept in the baths. The superintendent, the housekeeper, and the medical assistant robbed the patients, and of the old doctor, Andrey Yefimitch's predecessor, people declared that he secretly sold the hospital alcohol, and that he kept a regular harem consisting of nurses and female patients. These disorderly proceedings were perfectly well known in the town, and were even exaggerated, but people took them calmly; some justified them on the ground that there were only peasants and working men in the hospital, who could not be dissatisfied, since they were much worse off at home than in the hospital—they couldn't be fed on woodcocks! Others said in excuse that the town alone, without help from the Zemstvo, was not equal to maintaining a good hospital; thank God for having one at all, even a poor one. And the newly formed Zemstvo did not open infirmaries either in the town or the neighbourhood, relying on the fact that the town already had its hospital.

After looking over the hospital Andrey Yefimitch came to the conclusion that it was an immoral institution and extremely prejudicial to the health of the townspeople. In his opinion the most sensible thing that could be done was to let out the patients and close the hospital. But he reflected that his will alone was not enough to do this, and that it would be useless; if physical and moral impurity were driven out of one place, they would only move to another; one must wait for it to wither away of itself. Besides, if people open a hospital and put up with having it, it must be because they need it; superstition and all the nastiness and abominations of daily life were necessary, since in process of time they worked out to something sensible, just as manure turns into black earth. There was nothing on earth so good that it had not something nasty about its first origin.

When Andrey Yefimitch undertook his duties he was apparently not greatly concerned about the irregularities at the hospital. He only asked the attendants and nurses not to sleep in the wards, and had two cupboards of instruments put up; the superintendent, the housekeeper, the medical assistant, and the erysipelas remained unchanged.

Andrey Yefimitch loved intelligence and honesty intensely, but he had no strength of will nor belief in his right to organize an intelligent and

honest life about him. He was absolutely unable to give orders, to forbid things, and to insist. It seemed as though he had taken a vow never to raise his voice and never to make use of the imperative. It was difficult for him to say “Fetch” or “Bring”; when he wanted his meals he would cough hesitatingly and say to the cook, “How about tea?…” or “How about dinner?…” To dismiss the superintendent or to tell him to leave off stealing, or to abolish the unnecessary parasitic post altogether, was absolutely beyond his powers. When Andrey Yefimitch was deceived or flattered, or accounts he knew to be cooked were brought him to sign, he would turn as red as a crab and feel guilty, but yet he would sign the accounts. When the patients complained to him of being hungry or of the roughness of the nurses, he would be confused and mutter guiltily: “Very well, very well, I will go into it later.… Most likely there is some misunderstanding…”

At first Andrey Yefimitch worked very zealously. He saw patients every day from morning till dinnertime, performed operations, and even attended confinements. The ladies said of him that he was attentive and clever at diagnosing diseases, especially those of women and children. But in process of time the work unmistakably wearied him by its monotony and obvious uselessness. Today one sees thirty patients, and tomorrow they have increased to thirty-five, the next day forty, and so on from day to day, from year to year, while the mortality in the town did not decrease and the patients did not leave off coming. To be any real help to forty patients between morning and dinner was not physically possible, so it could but lead to deception. If twelve thousand patients were seen in a year it meant, if one looked at it simply, that twelve thousand men were deceived. To put those who were seriously ill into wards, and to treat them according to the principles of science, was impossible, too, because though there were principles there was no science; if he were to put aside philosophy and pedantically follow the rules as other doctors did, the things above all necessary were cleanliness and ventilation instead of dirt, wholesome nourishment instead of broth made of stinking, sour cabbage, and good assistants instead of thieves; and, indeed, why hinder people dying if death is the normal and legitimate end of everyone? What is gained if some shopkeeper or clerk lives an extra five or ten years? If the aim of medicine is by drugs to alleviate suffering, the question forces itself on one: why alleviate it? In the first place, they say that suffering leads man to perfection; and in the second, if mankind really learns to alleviate its sufferings with pills and drops, it will completely abandon religion and philosophy, in which it

has hitherto found not merely protection from all sorts of trouble, but even happiness. Pushkin suffered terrible agonies before his death, poor Heine lay paralyzed for several years; why, then, should not some Andrey Yefimitch or Matryona Savishna be ill, since their lives had nothing of importance in them, and would have been entirely empty and like the life of an amoeba except for suffering?

Oppressed by such reflections, Andrey Yefimitch relaxed his efforts and gave up visiting the hospital every day.

VI

His life was passed like this. As a rule he got up at eight o'clock in the morning, dressed, and drank his tea. Then he sat down in his study to read, or went to the hospital. At the hospital the outpatients were sitting in the dark, narrow little corridor waiting to be seen by the doctor. The nurses and the attendants, tramping with their boots over the brick floors, ran by them; gaunt-looking patients in dressing-gowns passed; dead bodies and vessels full of filth were carried by; the children were crying, and there was a cold draught. Andrey Yefimitch knew that such surroundings were torture to feverish, consumptive, and impressionable patients; but what could be done? In the consulting room he was met by his assistant, Sergey Sergeyitch—a fat little man with a plump, well-washed shaven face, with soft, smooth manners, wearing a new loosely cut suit, and looking more like a senator than a medical assistant. He had an immense practice in the town, wore a white tie, and considered himself more proficient than the doctor, who had no practice. In the corner of the consulting room there stood a large icon in a shrine with a heavy lamp in front of it, and near it a candle-stand with a white cover on it. On the walls hung portraits of bishops, a view of the Svyatogorsky Monastery, and wreaths of dried cornflowers. Sergey Sergeyitch was religious, and liked solemnity and decorum. The icon had been put up at his expense; at his instructions some one of the patients read the hymns of praise in the consulting room on Sundays, and after the reading Sergey Sergeyitch himself went through the wards with a censer and burned incense.

There were a great many patients, but the time was short, and so the work was confined to the asking of a few brief questions and the administration of some drugs, such as castor-oil or volatile ointment. Andrey Yefimitch would sit with his cheek resting in his hand, lost in thought and asking questions mechanically. Sergey Sergeyitch sat down too, rubbing his hands, and from time to time putting in his word.

"We suffer pain and poverty," he would say, "because we do not pray to the merciful God as we should. Yes!"

Andrey Yefimitch never performed any operation when he was seeing patients; he had long ago given up doing so, and the sight of blood upset him. When he had to open a child's mouth in order to look at its throat, and the child cried and tried to defend itself with its little hands, the noise in his ears made his head go round and brought tears to his eyes. He would make haste to prescribe a drug, and motion to the woman to take the child away.

He was soon wearied by the timidity of the patients and their incoherence, by the proximity of the pious Sergey Sergeyitch, by the portraits on the walls, and by his own questions which he had asked over and over again for twenty years. And he would go away after seeing five or six patients. The rest would be seen by his assistant in his absence.

With the agreeable thought that, thank God, he had no private practice now, and that no one would interrupt him, Andrey Yefimitch sat down to the table immediately on reaching home and took up a book. He read a great deal and always with enjoyment. Half his salary went on buying books, and of the six rooms that made up his abode three were heaped up with books and old magazines. He liked best of all works on history and philosophy; the only medical publication to which he subscribed was *The Doctor*, of which he always read the last pages first. He would always go on reading for several hours without a break and without being weary. He did not read as rapidly and impulsively as Ivan Dmitritch had done in the past, but slowly and with concentration, often pausing over a passage which he liked or did not find intelligible. Near the books there always stood a decanter of vodka, and a salted cucumber or a pickled apple lay beside it, not on a plate, but on the baize tablecloth. Every half-hour he would pour himself out a glass of vodka and drink it without taking his eyes off the book. Then without looking at it he would feel for the cucumber and bite off a bit.

At three o'clock he would go cautiously to the kitchen door; cough, and say, "Daryushka, what about dinner?…"

After his dinner—a rather poor and untidily served one—Andrey Yefimitch would walk up and down his rooms with his arms folded, thinking. The clock would strike four, then five, and still he would be walking up and down thinking. Occasionally the kitchen door would creak, and the red and sleepy face of Daryushka would appear.

"Andrey Yefimitch, isn't it time for you to have your beer?" she would ask anxiously.

"No, it's not time yet…" he would answer. "I'll wait a little.… I'll wait a little…"

Towards the evening the postmaster, Mihail Averyanitch, the only man in town whose society did not bore Andrey Yefimitch, would come in. Mihail Averyanitch had once been a very rich landowner, and had served in the calvary, but had come to ruin, and was forced by poverty to take a job in the post office late in life. He had a hale and hearty appearance, luxuriant grey whiskers, the manners of a well-bred man, and a loud, pleasant voice. He was good-natured and emotional, but hot-tempered. When anyone in the post office made a protest, expressed disagreement, or even began to argue, Mihail Averyanitch would turn crimson, shake all over, and shout in a voice of thunder, “Hold your tongue!” so that the post office had long enjoyed the reputation of an institution which it was terrible to visit. Mihail Averyanitch liked and respected Andrey Yefimitch for his culture and the loftiness of his soul; he treated the other inhabitants of the town superciliously, as though they were his subordinates.

“Here I am,” he would say, going in to Andrey Yefimitch. “Good evening, my dear fellow! I’ll be bound, you are getting sick of me, aren’t you?”

“On the contrary, I am delighted,” said the doctor. “I am always glad to see you.”

The friends would sit on the sofa in the study and for some time would smoke in silence.

“Daryushka, what about the beer?” Andrey Yefimitch would say.

They would drink their first bottle still in silence, the doctor brooding and Mihail Averyanitch with a gay and animated face, like a man who has something very interesting to tell. The doctor was always the one to begin the conversation.

“What a pity,” he would say quietly and slowly, not looking his friend in the face (he never looked anyone in the face)—“what a great pity it is that there are no people in our town who are capable of carrying on intelligent and interesting conversation, or care to do so. It is an immense privation for us. Even the educated class do not rise above vulgarity; the level of their development, I assure you, is not a bit higher than that of the lower orders.”

“Perfectly true. I agree.”

“You know, of course,” the doctor went on quietly and deliberately, “that everything in this world is insignificant and uninteresting except the higher spiritual manifestations of the human mind. Intellect draws a sharp line between the animals and man, suggests the divinity of the latter, and to some extent even takes the place of the immortality which

does not exist. Consequently the intellect is the only possible source of enjoyment. We see and hear of no trace of intellect about us, so we are deprived of enjoyment. We have books, it is true, but that is not at all the same as living talk and converse. If you will allow me to make a not quite apt comparison: books are the printed score, while talk is the singing."

"Perfectly true."

A silence would follow. Daryushka would come out of the kitchen and with an expression of blank dejection would stand in the doorway to listen, with her face propped on her fist.

"Eh!" Mihail Averyanitch would sigh. "To expect intelligence of this generation!"

And he would describe how wholesome, entertaining, and interesting life had been in the past. How intelligent the educated class in Russia used to be, and what lofty ideas it had of honour and friendship; how they used to lend money without an I.O.U., and it was thought a disgrace not to give a helping hand to a comrade in need; and what campaigns, what adventures, what skirmishes, what comrades, what women! And the Caucasus, what a marvellous country! The wife of a battalion commander, a queer woman, used to put on an officer's uniform and drive off into the mountains in the evening, alone, without a guide. It was said that she had a love affair with some princeling in the native village.

"Queen of Heaven, Holy Mother…" Daryushka would sigh.

"And how we drank! And how we ate! And what desperate liberals we were!"

Andrey Yefimitch would listen without hearing; he was musing as he sipped his beer.

"I often dream of intellectual people and conversation with them," he said suddenly, interrupting Mihail Averyanitch. "My father gave me an excellent education, but under the influence of the ideas of the sixties made me become a doctor. I believe if I had not obeyed him then, by now I should have been in the very centre of the intellectual movement. Most likely I should have become a member of some university. Of course, intellect, too, is transient and not eternal, but you know why I cherish a partiality for it. Life is a vexatious trap; when a thinking man reaches maturity and attains to full consciousness he cannot help feeling that he is in a trap from which there is no escape. Indeed, he is summoned without his choice by fortuitous circumstances from nonexistence into life… what for? He tries to find out the meaning and object of his existence; he is told nothing, or he is told absurdities; he

knocks and it is not opened to him; death comes to him—also without his choice. And so, just as in prison men held together by common misfortune feel more at ease when they are together, so one does not notice the trap in life when people with a bent for analysis and generalization meet together and pass their time in the interchange of proud and free ideas. In that sense the intellect is the source of an enjoyment nothing can replace."

"Perfectly true."

Not looking his friend in the face, Andrey Yefimitch would go on, quietly and with pauses, talking about intellectual people and conversation with them, and Mihail Averyanitch would listen attentively and agree: "Perfectly true."

"And you do not believe in the immortality of the soul?" he would ask suddenly.

"No, honoured Mihail Averyanitch; I do not believe it, and have no grounds for believing it."

"I must own I doubt it too. And yet I have a feeling as though I should never die. Oh, I think to myself: 'Old fogey, it is time you were dead!' But there is a little voice in my soul says: 'Don't believe it; you won't die.'"

Soon after nine o'clock Mihail Averyanitch would go away. As he put on his fur coat in the entry he would say with a sigh:

"What a wilderness fate has carried us to, though, really! What's most vexatious of all is to have to die here. Ech!…"

VII

After seeing his friend out Andrey Yefimitch would sit down at the table and begin reading again. The stillness of the evening, and afterwards of the night, was not broken by a single sound, and it seemed as though time were standing still and brooding with the doctor over the book, and as though there were nothing in existence but the books and the lamp with the green shade. The doctor's coarse peasant-like face was gradually lighted up by a smile of delight and enthusiasm over the progress of the human intellect. Oh, why is not man immortal? he thought. What is the good of the brain centres and convolutions, what is the good of sight, speech, self-consciousness, genius, if it is all destined to depart into the soil, and in the end to grow cold together with the earth's crust, and then for millions of years to fly with the earth round the sun with no meaning and no object? To do that there was no need at all to draw man with his lofty, almost godlike intellect out of nonexistence, and then, as though in mockery, to turn him into clay. The transmutation of substances! But what cowardice to comfort oneself with that cheap substitute for immortality! The unconscious processes that take place in nature are lower even than the stupidity of man, since in stupidity there is, anyway, consciousness and will, while in those processes there is absolutely nothing. Only the coward who has more fear of death than dignity can comfort himself with the fact that his body will in time live again in the grass, in the stones, in the toad. To find one's immortality in the transmutation of substances is as strange as to prophesy a brilliant future for the case after a precious violin has been broken and become useless.

When the clock struck, Andrey Yefimitch would sink back into his chair and close his eyes to think a little. And under the influence of the fine ideas of which he had been reading he would, unawares, recall his past and his present. The past was hateful—better not to think of it. And it was the same in the present as in the past. He knew that at the very time when his thoughts were floating together with the cooling earth round the sun, in the main building beside his abode people were suffering in sickness and physical impurity: someone perhaps could not

sleep and was making war upon the insects, someone was being infected by erysipelas, or moaning over too tight a bandage; perhaps the patients were playing cards with the nurses and drinking vodka. According to the yearly return, twelve thousand people had been deceived; the whole hospital rested as it had done twenty years ago on thieving, filth, scandals, gossip, on gross quackery, and, as before, it was an immoral institution extremely injurious to the health of the inhabitants. He knew that Nikita knocked the patients about behind the barred windows of Ward No. 6, and that Moiseika went about the town every day begging alms.

On the other hand, he knew very well that a magical change had taken place in medicine during the last twenty-five years. When he was studying at the university he had fancied that medicine would soon be overtaken by the fate of alchemy and metaphysics; but now when he was reading at night the science of medicine touched him and excited his wonder, and even enthusiasm. What unexpected brilliance, what a revolution! Thanks to the antiseptic system operations were performed such as the great Pirogov had considered impossible even *in spe*. Ordinary Zemstvo doctors were venturing to perform the resection of the kneecap; of abdominal operations only one percent was fatal; while stone was considered such a trifle that they did not even write about it. A radical cure for syphilis had been discovered. And the theory of heredity, hypnotism, the discoveries of Pasteur and of Koch, hygiene based on statistics, and the work of Zemstvo doctors!

Psychiatry with its modern classification of mental diseases, methods of diagnosis, and treatment, was a perfect Elborus in comparison with what had been in the past. They no longer poured cold water on the heads of lunatics nor put strait-waistcoats upon them; they treated them with humanity, and even, so it was stated in the papers, got up balls and entertainments for them. Andrey Yefimitch knew that with modern tastes and views such an abomination as Ward No. 6 was possible only a hundred and fifty miles from a railway in a little town where the mayor and all the town council were half-illiterate tradesmen who looked upon the doctor as an oracle who must be believed without any criticism even if he had poured molten lead into their mouths; in any other place the public and the newspapers would long ago have torn this little Bastille to pieces.

“But, after all, what of it?” Andrey Yefimitch would ask himself, opening his eyes. “There is the antiseptic system, there is Koch, there is Pasteur, but the essential reality is not altered a bit; ill-health and

mortality are still the same. They get up balls and entertainments for the mad, but still they don't let them go free; so it's all nonsense and vanity, and there is no difference in reality between the best Vienna clinic and my hospital." But depression and a feeling akin to envy prevented him from feeling indifferent; it must have been owing to exhaustion. His heavy head sank on to the book, he put his hands under his face to make it softer, and thought: "I serve in a pernicious institution and receive a salary from people whom I am deceiving. I am not honest, but then, I of myself am nothing, I am only part of an inevitable social evil: all local officials are pernicious and receive their salary for doing nothing.… And so for my dishonesty it is not I who am to blame, but the times.… If I had been born two hundred years later I should have been different…"

When it struck three he would put out his lamp and go into his bedroom; he was not sleepy.

VIII

Two years before, the Zemstvo in a liberal mood had decided to allow three hundred roubles a year to pay for additional medical service in the town till the Zemstvo hospital should be opened, and the district doctor, Yevgeny Fyodoritch Hobotov, was invited to the town to assist Andrey Yefimitch. He was a very young man—not yet thirty—tall and dark, with broad cheekbones and little eyes; his forefathers had probably come from one of the many alien races of Russia. He arrived in the town without a farthing, with a small portmanteau, and a plain young woman whom he called his cook. This woman had a baby at the breast. Yevgeny Fyodoritch used to go about in a cap with a peak, and in high boots, and in the winter wore a sheepskin. He made great friends with Sergey Sergeyitch, the medical assistant, and with the treasurer, but held aloof from the other officials, and for some reason called them aristocrats. He had only one book in his lodgings, *The Latest Prescriptions of the Vienna Clinic for 1881*. When he went to a patient he always took this book with him. He played billiards in the evening at the club: he did not like cards. He was very fond of using in conversation such expressions as “endless bobbery,” “canting soft soap,” “shut up with your finicking…”

He visited the hospital twice a week, made the round of the wards, and saw outpatients. The complete absence of antiseptic treatment and the cupping roused his indignation, but he did not introduce any new system, being afraid of offending Andrey Yefimitch. He regarded his colleague as a sly old rascal, suspected him of being a man of large means, and secretly envied him. He would have been very glad to have his post.

IX

On a spring evening towards the end of March, when there was no snow left on the ground and the starlings were singing in the hospital garden, the doctor went out to see his friend the postmaster as far as the gate. At that very moment the Jew Moiseika, returning with his booty, came into the yard. He had no cap on, and his bare feet were thrust into goloshes; in his hand he had a little bag of coppers.

“Give me a kopeck!” he said to the doctor, smiling, and shivering with cold. Andrey Yefimitch, who could never refuse anyone anything, gave him a ten-kopeck piece.

“How bad that is!” he thought, looking at the Jew’s bare feet with their thin red ankles. “Why, it’s wet.”

And stirred by a feeling akin both to pity and disgust, he went into the lodge behind the Jew, looking now at his bald head, now at his ankles. As the doctor went in, Nikita jumped up from his heap of litter and stood at attention.

“Good day, Nikita,” Andrey Yefimitch said mildly. “That Jew should be provided with boots or something, he will catch cold.”

“Certainly, your honour. I’ll inform the superintendent.”

“Please do; ask him in my name. Tell him that I asked.”

The door into the ward was open. Ivan Dmitritch, lying propped on his elbow on the bed, listened in alarm to the unfamiliar voice, and suddenly recognized the doctor. He trembled all over with anger, jumped up, and with a red and wrathful face, with his eyes starting out of his head, ran out into the middle of the road.

“The doctor has come!” he shouted, and broke into a laugh. “At last! Gentlemen, I congratulate you. The doctor is honouring us with a visit! Cursed reptile!” he shrieked, and stamped in a frenzy such as had never been seen in the ward before. “Kill the reptile! No, killing’s too good. Drown him in the midden-pit!”

Andrey Yefimitch, hearing this, looked into the ward from the entry and asked gently: “What for?”

“What for?” shouted Ivan Dmitritch, going up to him with a menacing air and convulsively wrapping himself in his dressing-gown. “What for?

Thief!” he said with a look of repulsion, moving his lips as though he would spit at him. “Quack! hangman!”

“Calm yourself,” said Andrey Yefimitch, smiling guiltily. “I assure you I have never stolen anything; and as to the rest, most likely you greatly exaggerate. I see you are angry with me. Calm yourself, I beg, if you can, and tell me coolly what are you angry for?”

“What are you keeping me here for?”

“Because you are ill.”

“Yes, I am ill. But you know dozens, hundreds of madmen are walking about in freedom because your ignorance is incapable of distinguishing them from the sane. Why am I and these poor wretches to be shut up here like scapegoats for all the rest? You, your assistant, the superintendent, and all your hospital rabble, are immeasurably inferior to every one of us morally; why then are we shut up and you not? Where’s the logic of it?”

“Morality and logic don’t come in, it all depends on chance. If anyone is shut up he has to stay, and if anyone is not shut up he can walk about, that’s all. There is neither morality nor logic in my being a doctor and your being a mental patient, there is nothing but idle chance.”

“That twaddle I don’t understand…” Ivan Dmitritch brought out in a hollow voice, and he sat down on his bed.

Moiseika, whom Nikita did not venture to search in the presence of the doctor, laid out on his bed pieces of bread, bits of paper, and little bones, and, still shivering with cold, began rapidly in a singsong voice saying something in Yiddish. He most likely imagined that he had opened a shop.

“Let me out,” said Ivan Dmitritch, and his voice quivered.

“I cannot.”

“But why, why?”

“Because it is not in my power. Think, what use will it be to you if I do let you out? Go. The townspeople or the police will detain you or bring you back.”

“Yes, yes, that’s true,” said Ivan Dmitritch, and he rubbed his forehead. “It’s awful! But what am I to do, what?”

Andrey Yefimitch liked Ivan Dmitritch’s voice and his intelligent young face with its grimaces. He longed to be kind to the young man and soothe him; he sat down on the bed beside him, thought, and said:

“You ask me what to do. The very best thing in your position would be to run away. But, unhappily, that is useless. You would be taken up. When society protects itself from the criminal, mentally deranged, or

otherwise inconvenient people, it is invincible. There is only one thing left for you: to resign yourself to the thought that your presence here is inevitable."

"It is no use to anyone."

"So long as prisons and madhouses exist someone must be shut up in them. If not you, I. If not I, some third person. Wait till in the distant future prisons and madhouses no longer exist, and there will be neither bars on the windows nor hospital gowns. Of course, that time will come sooner or later."

Ivan Dmitritch smiled ironically.

"You are jesting," he said, screwing up his eyes. "Such gentlemen as you and your assistant Nikita have nothing to do with the future, but you may be sure, sir, better days will come! I may express myself cheaply, you may laugh, but the dawn of a new life is at hand; truth and justice will triumph, and—our turn will come! I shall not live to see it, I shall perish, but some people's great-grandsons will see it. I greet them with all my heart and rejoice, rejoice with them! Onward! God be your help, friends!"

With shining eyes Ivan Dmitritch got up, and stretching his hands towards the window, went on with emotion in his voice:

"From behind these bars I bless you! Hurrah for truth and justice! I rejoice!"

"I see no particular reason to rejoice," said Andrey Yefimitch, who thought Ivan Dmitritch's movement theatrical, though he was delighted by it. "Prisons and madhouses there will not be, and truth, as you have just expressed it, will triumph; but the reality of things, you know, will not change, the laws of nature will still remain the same. People will suffer pain, grow old, and die just as they do now. However magnificent a dawn lighted up your life, you would yet in the end be nailed up in a coffin and thrown into a hole."

"And immortality?"

"Oh, come, now!"

"You don't believe in it, but I do. Somebody in Dostoevsky or Voltaire said that if there had not been a God men would have invented him. And I firmly believe that if there is no immortality the great intellect of man will sooner or later invent it."

"Well said," observed Andrey Yefimitch, smiling with pleasure; "it's a good thing you have faith. With such a belief one may live happily even shut up within walls. You have studied somewhere, I presume?"

"Yes, I have been at the university, but did not complete my studies."

“You are a reflecting and a thoughtful man. In any surroundings you can find tranquillity in yourself. Free and deep thinking which strives for the comprehension of life, and complete contempt for the foolish bustle of the world—those are two blessings beyond any that man has ever known. And you can possess them even though you lived behind threefold bars. Diogenes lived in a tub, yet he was happier than all the kings of the earth.”

“Your Diogenes was a blockhead,” said Ivan Dmitritch morosely. “Why do you talk to me about Diogenes and some foolish comprehension of life?” he cried, growing suddenly angry and leaping up. “I love life; I love it passionately. I have the mania of persecution, a continual agonizing terror; but I have moments when I am overwhelmed by the thirst for life, and then I am afraid of going mad. I want dreadfully to live, dreadfully!”

He walked up and down the ward in agitation, and said, dropping his voice:

“When I dream I am haunted by phantoms. People come to me, I hear voices and music, and I fancy I am walking through woods or by the seashore, and I long so passionately for movement, for interests.… Come, tell me, what news is there?” asked Ivan Dmitritch; “what’s happening?”

“Do you wish to know about the town or in general?”

“Well, tell me first about the town, and then in general.”

“Well, in the town it is appallingly dull.… There’s no one to say a word to, no one to listen to. There are no new people. A young doctor called Hobotov has come here recently.”

“He had come in my time. Well, he is a low cad, isn’t he?”

“Yes, he is a man of no culture. It’s strange, you know.… Judging by every sign, there is no intellectual stagnation in our capital cities; there is a movement—so there must be real people there too; but for some reason they always send us such men as I would rather not see. It’s an unlucky town!”

“Yes, it is an unlucky town,” sighed Ivan Dmitritch, and he laughed. “And how are things in general? What are they writing in the papers and reviews?”

It was by now dark in the ward. The doctor got up, and, standing, began to describe what was being written abroad and in Russia, and the tendency of thought that could be noticed now. Ivan Dmitritch listened attentively and put questions, but suddenly, as though recalling

something terrible, clutched at his head and lay down on the bed with his back to the doctor.

"What's the matter?" asked Andrey Yefimitch.

"You will not hear another word from me," said Ivan Dmitritch rudely. "Leave me alone."

"Why so?"

"I tell you, leave me alone. Why the devil do you persist?"

Andrey Yefimitch shrugged his shoulders, heaved a sigh, and went out. As he crossed the entry he said: "You might clear up here, Nikita… there's an awfully stuffy smell."

"Certainly, your honour."

"What an agreeable young man!" thought Andrey Yefimitch, going back to his flat. "In all the years I have been living here I do believe he is the first I have met with whom one can talk. He is capable of reasoning and is interested in just the right things."

While he was reading, and afterwards, while he was going to bed, he kept thinking about Ivan Dmitritch, and when he woke next morning he remembered that he had the day before made the acquaintance of an intelligent and interesting man, and determined to visit him again as soon as possible.

X

Ivan Dmitritch was lying in the same position as on the previous day, with his head clutched in both hands and his legs drawn up. His face was not visible.

“Good day, my friend,” said Andrey Yefimitch. “You are not asleep, are you?”

“In the first place, I am not your friend,” Ivan Dmitritch articulated into the pillow; “and in the second, your efforts are useless; you will not get one word out of me.”

“Strange,” muttered Andrey Yefimitch in confusion. “Yesterday we talked peacefully, but suddenly for some reason you took offence and broke off all at once.… Probably I expressed myself awkwardly, or perhaps gave utterance to some idea which did not fit in with your convictions.…”

“Yes, a likely idea!” said Ivan Dmitritch, sitting up and looking at the doctor with irony and uneasiness. His eyes were red. “You can go and spy and probe somewhere else, it’s no use your doing it here. I knew yesterday what you had come for.”

“A strange fancy,” laughed the doctor. “So you suppose me to be a spy?”

“Yes, I do.… A spy or a doctor who has been charged to test me—it’s all the same—”

“Oh excuse me, what a queer fellow you are really!”

The doctor sat down on the stool near the bed and shook his head reproachfully.

“But let us suppose you are right,” he said, “let us suppose that I am treacherously trying to trap you into saying something so as to betray you to the police. You would be arrested and then tried. But would you be any worse off being tried and in prison than you are here? If you are banished to a settlement, or even sent to penal servitude, would it be worse than being shut up in this ward? I imagine it would be no worse.… What, then, are you afraid of?”

These words evidently had an effect on Ivan Dmitritch. He sat down quietly.

It was between four and five in the afternoon—the time when Andrey Yefimitch usually walked up and down his rooms, and Daryushka asked whether it was not time for his beer. It was a still, bright day.

"I came out for a walk after dinner, and here I have come, as you see," said the doctor. "It is quite spring."

"What month is it? March?" asked Ivan Dmitritch.

"Yes, the end of March."

"Is it very muddy?"

"No, not very. There are already paths in the garden."

"It would be nice now to drive in an open carriage somewhere into the country," said Ivan Dmitritch, rubbing his red eyes as though he were just awake, "then to come home to a warm, snug study, and… and to have a decent doctor to cure one's headache.… It's so long since I have lived like a human being. It's disgusting here! Insufferably disgusting!"

After his excitement of the previous day he was exhausted and listless, and spoke unwillingly. His fingers twitched, and from his face it could be seen that he had a splitting headache.

"There is no real difference between a warm, snug study and this ward," said Andrey Yefimitch. "A man's peace and contentment do not lie outside a man, but in himself."

"What do you mean?"

"The ordinary man looks for good and evil in external things—that is, in carriages, in studies—but a thinking man looks for it in himself."

"You should go and preach that philosophy in Greece, where it's warm and fragrant with the scent of pomegranates, but here it is not suited to the climate. With whom was it I was talking of Diogenes? Was it with you?"

"Yes, with me yesterday."

"Diogenes did not need a study or a warm habitation; it's hot there without. You can lie in your tub and eat oranges and olives. But bring him to Russia to live: he'd be begging to be let indoors in May, let alone December. He'd be doubled up with the cold."

"No. One can be insensible to cold as to every other pain. Marcus Aurelius says: 'A pain is a vivid idea of pain; make an effort of will to change that idea, dismiss it, cease to complain, and the pain will disappear.' That is true. The wise man, or simply the reflecting, thoughtful man, is distinguished precisely by his contempt for suffering; he is always contented and surprised at nothing."

"Then I am an idiot, since I suffer and am discontented and surprised at the baseness of mankind."

“You are wrong in that; if you will reflect more on the subject you will understand how insignificant is all that external world that agitates us. One must strive for the comprehension of life, and in that is true happiness.”

“Comprehension…” repeated Ivan Dmitritch frowning. “External, internal.… Excuse me, but I don’t understand it. I only know,” he said, getting up and looking angrily at the doctor—“I only know that God has created me of warm blood and nerves, yes, indeed! If organic tissue is capable of life it must react to every stimulus. And I do! To pain I respond with tears and outcries, to baseness with indignation, to filth with loathing. To my mind, that is just what is called life. The lower the organism, the less sensitive it is, and the more feebly it reacts to stimulus; and the higher it is, the more responsively and vigorously it reacts to reality. How is it you don’t know that? A doctor, and not know such trifles! To despise suffering, to be always contented, and to be surprised at nothing, one must reach this condition”—and Ivan Dmitritch pointed to the peasant who was a mass of fat—“or to harden oneself by suffering to such a point that one loses all sensibility to it—that is, in other words, to cease to live. You must excuse me, I am not a sage or a philosopher,” Ivan Dmitritch continued with irritation, “and I don’t understand anything about it. I am not capable of reasoning.”

“On the contrary, your reasoning is excellent.”

“The Stoics, whom you are parodying, were remarkable people, but their doctrine crystallized two thousand years ago and has not advanced, and will not advance, an inch forward, since it is not practical or living. It had a success only with the minority which spends its life in savouring all sorts of theories and ruminating over them; the majority did not understand it. A doctrine which advocates indifference to wealth and to the comforts of life, and a contempt for suffering and death, is quite unintelligible to the vast majority of men, since that majority has never known wealth or the comforts of life; and to despise suffering would mean to it despising life itself, since the whole existence of man is made up of the sensations of hunger, cold, injury, and a Hamlet-like dread of death. The whole of life lies in these sensations; one may be oppressed by it, one may hate it, but one cannot despise it. Yes, so, I repeat, the doctrine of the Stoics can never have a future; from the beginning of time up to today you see continually increasing the struggle, the sensibility to pain, the capacity of responding to stimulus.”

Ivan Dmitritch suddenly lost the thread of his thoughts, stopped, and rubbed his forehead with vexation.

“I meant to say something important, but I have lost it,” he said. “What was I saying? Oh, yes! This is what I mean: one of the Stoics sold himself into slavery to redeem his neighbour, so, you see, even a Stoic did react to stimulus, since, for such a generous act as the destruction of oneself for the sake of one’s neighbour, he must have had a soul capable of pity and indignation. Here in prison I have forgotten everything I have learned, or else I could have recalled something else. Take Christ, for instance: Christ responded to reality by weeping, smiling, being sorrowful and moved to wrath, even overcome by misery. He did not go to meet His sufferings with a smile, He did not despise death, but prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane that this cup might pass Him by.”

Ivan Dmitritch laughed and sat down.

“Granted that a man’s peace and contentment lie not outside but in himself,” he said, “granted that one must despise suffering and not be surprised at anything, yet on what ground do you preach the theory? Are you a sage? A philosopher?”

“No, I am not a philosopher, but everyone ought to preach it because it is reasonable.”

“No, I want to know how it is that you consider yourself competent to judge of ‘comprehension,’ contempt for suffering, and so on. Have you ever suffered? Have you any idea of suffering? Allow me to ask you, were you ever thrashed in your childhood?”

“No, my parents had an aversion for corporal punishment.”

“My father used to flog me cruelly; my father was a harsh, sickly government clerk with a long nose and a yellow neck. But let us talk of you. No one has laid a finger on you all your life, no one has scared you nor beaten you; you are as strong as a bull. You grew up under your father’s wing and studied at his expense, and then you dropped at once into a sinecure. For more than twenty years you have lived rent free with heating, lighting, and service all provided, and had the right to work how you pleased and as much as you pleased, even to do nothing. You were naturally a flabby, lazy man, and so you have tried to arrange your life so that nothing should disturb you or make you move. You have handed over your work to the assistant and the rest of the rabble while you sit in peace and warmth, save money, read, amuse yourself with reflections, with all sorts of lofty nonsense, and” (Ivan Dmitritch looked at the doctor’s red nose) “with boozing; in fact, you have seen nothing of life, you know absolutely nothing of it, and are only theoretically acquainted with reality; you despise suffering and are surprised at nothing for a very simple reason: vanity of vanities, the external and the internal, contempt

for life, for suffering and for death, comprehension, true happiness—that's the philosophy that suits the Russian sluggard best. You see a peasant beating his wife, for instance. Why interfere? Let him beat her, they will both die sooner or later, anyway; and, besides, he who beats injures by his blows, not the person he is beating, but himself. To get drunk is stupid and unseemly, but if you drink you die, and if you don't drink you die. A peasant woman comes with toothache… well, what of it? Pain is the idea of pain, and besides 'there is no living in this world without illness; we shall all die, and so, go away, woman, don't hinder me from thinking and drinking vodka.' A young man asks advice, what he is to do, how he is to live; anyone else would think before answering, but you have got the answer ready: strive for 'comprehension' or for true happiness. And what is that fantastic 'true happiness'? There's no answer, of course. We are kept here behind barred windows, tortured, left to rot; but that is very good and reasonable, because there is no difference at all between this ward and a warm, snug study. A convenient philosophy. You can do nothing, and your conscience is clear, and you feel you are wise.… No, sir, it is not philosophy, it's not thinking, it's not breadth of vision, but laziness, fakirism, drowsy stupefaction. Yes," cried Ivan Dmitritch, getting angry again, "you despise suffering, but I'll be bound if you pinch your finger in the door you will howl at the top of your voice."

"And perhaps I shouldn't howl," said Andrey Yefimitch, with a gentle smile.

"Oh, I dare say! Well, if you had a stroke of paralysis, or supposing some fool or bully took advantage of his position and rank to insult you in public, and if you knew he could do it with impunity, then you would understand what it means to put people off with comprehension and true happiness."

"That's original," said Andrey Yefimitch, laughing with pleasure and rubbing his hands. "I am agreeably struck by your inclination for drawing generalizations, and the sketch of my character you have just drawn is simply brilliant. I must confess that talking to you gives me great pleasure. Well, I've listened to you, and now you must graciously listen to me."

XI

The conversation went on for about an hour longer, and apparently made a deep impression on Andrey Yefimitch. He began going to the ward every day. He went there in the mornings and after dinner, and often the dusk of evening found him in conversation with Ivan Dmitritch. At first Ivan Dmitritch held aloof from him, suspected him of evil designs, and openly expressed his hostility. But afterwards he got used to him, and his abrupt manner changed to one of condescending irony.

Soon it was all over the hospital that the doctor, Andrey Yefimitch, had taken to visiting Ward No. 6. No one—neither Sergey Sergevitch, nor Nikita, nor the nurses—could conceive why he went there, why he stayed there for hours together, what he was talking about, and why he did not write prescriptions. His actions seemed strange. Often Mihail Averyanitch did not find him at home, which had never happened in the past, and Daryushka was greatly perturbed, for the doctor drank his beer now at no definite time, and sometimes was even late for dinner.

One day—it was at the end of June—Dr. Hobotov went to see Andrey Yefimitch about something. Not finding him at home, he proceeded to look for him in the yard; there he was told that the old doctor had gone to see the mental patients. Going into the lodge and stopping in the entry, Hobotov heard the following conversation:

“We shall never agree, and you will not succeed in converting me to your faith,” Ivan Dmitritch was saying irritably; “you are utterly ignorant of reality, and you have never known suffering, but have only like a leech fed beside the sufferings of others, while I have been in continual suffering from the day of my birth till today. For that reason, I tell you frankly, I consider myself superior to you and more competent in every respect. It’s not for you to teach me.”

“I have absolutely no ambition to convert you to my faith,” said Andrey Yefimitch gently, and with regret that the other refused to understand him. “And that is not what matters, my friend; what matters is not that you have suffered and I have not. Joy and suffering are passing; let us leave them, never mind them. What matters is that you and I think; we see in each other people who are capable of thinking and

reasoning, and that is a common bond between us however different our views. If you knew, my friend, how sick I am of the universal senselessness, ineptitude, stupidity, and with what delight I always talk with you! You are an intelligent man, and I enjoyed your company."

Hobotov opened the door an inch and glanced into the ward; Ivan Dmitritch in his nightcap and the doctor Andrey Yefimitch were sitting side by side on the bed. The madman was grimacing, twitching, and convulsively wrapping himself in his gown, while the doctor sat motionless with bowed head, and his face was red and look helpless and sorrowful. Hobotov shrugged his shoulders, grinned, and glanced at Nikita. Nikita shrugged his shoulders too.

Next day Hobotov went to the lodge, accompanied by the assistant. Both stood in the entry and listened.

"I fancy our old man has gone clean off his chump!" said Hobotov as he came out of the lodge.

"Lord have mercy upon us sinners!" sighed the decorous Sergey Sergeyitch, scrupulously avoiding the puddles that he might not muddy his polished boots. "I must own, honoured Yevgeny Fyodoritch, I have been expecting it for a long time."

XII

After this Andrey Yefimitch began to notice a mysterious air in all around him. The attendants, the nurses, and the patients looked at him inquisitively when they met him, and then whispered together. The superintendent's little daughter Masha, whom he liked to meet in the hospital garden, for some reason ran away from him now when he went up with a smile to stroke her on the head. The postmaster no longer said, "Perfectly true," as he listened to him, but in unaccountable confusion muttered, "Yes, yes, yes…" and looked at him with a grieved and thoughtful expression; for some reason he took to advising his friend to give up vodka and beer, but as a man of delicate feeling he did not say this directly, but hinted it, telling him first about the commanding officer of his battalion, an excellent man, and then about the priest of the regiment, a capital fellow, both of whom drank and fell ill, but on giving up drinking completely regained their health. On two or three occasions Andrey Yefimitch was visited by his colleague Hobotov, who also advised him to give up spirituous liquors, and for no apparent reason recommended him to take bromide.

In August Andrey Yefimitch got a letter from the mayor of the town asking him to come on very important business. On arriving at the town hall at the time fixed, Andrey Yefimitch found there the military commander, the superintendent of the district school, a member of the town council, Hobotov, and a plump, fair gentleman who was introduced to him as a doctor. This doctor, with a Polish surname difficult to pronounce, lived at a pedigree stud-farm twenty miles away, and was now on a visit to the town.

"There's something that concerns you," said the member of the town council, addressing Andrey Yefimitch after they had all greeted one another and sat down to the table. "Here Yevgeny Fyodoritch says that there is not room for the dispensary in the main building, and that it ought to be transferred to one of the lodges. That's of no consequence—of course it can be transferred, but the point is that the lodge wants doing up."

“Yes, it would have to be done up,” said Andrey Yefimitch after a moment’s thought. “If the corner lodge, for instance, were fitted up as a dispensary, I imagine it would cost at least five hundred roubles. An unproductive expenditure!”

Everyone was silent for a space.

“I had the honour of submitting to you ten years ago,” Andrey Yefimitch went on in a low voice, “that the hospital in its present form is a luxury for the town beyond its means. It was built in the forties, but things were different then. The town spends too much on unnecessary buildings and superfluous staff. I believe with a different system two model hospitals might be maintained for the same money.”

“Well, let us have a different system, then!” the member of the town council said briskly.

“I have already had the honour of submitting to you that the medical department should be transferred to the supervision of the Zemstvo.”

“Yes, transfer the money to the Zemstvo and they will steal it,” laughed the fair-haired doctor.

“That’s what it always comes to,” the member of the council assented, and he also laughed.

Andrey Yefimitch looked with apathetic, lustreless eyes at the fair-haired doctor and said: “One should be just.”

Again there was silence. Tea was brought in. The military commander, for some reason much embarrassed, touched Andrey Yefimitch’s hand across the table and said: “You have quite forgotten us, doctor. But of course you are a hermit: you don’t play cards and don’t like women. You would be dull with fellows like us.”

They all began saying how boring it was for a decent person to live in such a town. No theatre, no music, and at the last dance at the club there had been about twenty ladies and only two gentlemen. The young men did not dance, but spent all the time crowding round the refreshment bar or playing cards.

Not looking at anyone and speaking slowly in a low voice, Andrey Yefimitch began saying what a pity, what a terrible pity it was that the townspeople should waste their vital energy, their hearts, and their minds on cards and gossip, and should have neither the power nor the inclination to spend their time in interesting conversation and reading, and should refuse to take advantage of the enjoyments of the mind. The mind alone was interesting and worthy of attention, all the rest was low and petty. Hobotov listened to his colleague attentively and suddenly asked:

“Andrey Yefimitch, what day of the month is it?”

Having received an answer, the fair-haired doctor and he, in the tone of examiners conscious of their lack of skill, began asking Andrey Yefimitch what was the day of the week, how many days there were in the year, and whether it was true that there was a remarkable prophet living in Ward No. 6.

In response to the last question Andrey Yefimitch turned rather red and said: “Yes, he is mentally deranged, but he is an interesting young man.”

They asked him no other questions.

When he was putting on his overcoat in the entry, the military commander laid a hand on his shoulder and said with a sigh:

“It’s time for us old fellows to rest!”

As he came out of the hall, Andrey Yefimitch understood that it had been a committee appointed to enquire into his mental condition. He recalled the questions that had been asked him, flushed crimson, and for some reason, for the first time in his life, felt bitterly grieved for medical science.

“My God…” he thought, remembering how these doctors had just examined him; “why, they have only lately been hearing lectures on mental pathology; they had passed an examination—what’s the explanation of this crass ignorance? They have not a conception of mental pathology!”

And for the first time in his life he felt insulted and moved to anger.

In the evening of the same day Mihail Averyanitch came to see him. The postmaster went up to him without waiting to greet him, took him by both hands, and said in an agitated voice:

“My dear fellow, my dear friend, show me that you believe in my genuine affection and look on me as your friend!” And preventing Andrey Yefimitch from speaking, he went on, growing excited: “I love you for your culture and nobility of soul. Listen to me, my dear fellow. The rules of their profession compel the doctors to conceal the truth from you, but I blurt out the plain truth like a soldier. You are not well! Excuse me, my dear fellow, but it is the truth; everyone about you has been noticing it for a long time. Dr. Yevgeny Fyodoritch has just told me that it is essential for you to rest and distract your mind for the sake of your health. Perfectly true! Excellent! In a day or two I am taking a holiday and am going away for a sniff of a different atmosphere. Show that you are a friend to me, let us go together! Let us go for a jaunt as in the good old days.”

“I feel perfectly well,” said Andrey Yefimitch after a moment’s thought. “I can’t go away. Allow me to show you my friendship in some other way.”

To go off with no object, without his books, without his Daryushka, without his beer, to break abruptly through the routine of life, established for twenty years—the idea for the first minute struck him as wild and fantastic, but he remembered the conversation at the Zemstvo committee and the depressing feelings with which he had returned home, and the thought of a brief absence from the town in which stupid people looked on him as a madman was pleasant to him.

“And where precisely do you intend to go?” he asked.

“To Moscow, to Petersburg, to Warsaw.… I spent the five happiest years of my life in Warsaw. What a marvellous town! Let us go, my dear fellow!”

XIII

A week later it was suggested to Andrey Yefimitch that he should have a rest—that is, send in his resignation—a suggestion he received with indifference, and a week later still, Mihail Averyanitch and he were sitting in a posting carriage driving to the nearest railway station. The days were cool and bright, with a blue sky and a transparent distance. They were two days driving the hundred and fifty miles to the railway station, and stayed two nights on the way. When at the posting station the glasses given them for their tea had not been properly washed, or the drivers were slow in harnessing the horses, Mihail Averyanitch would turn crimson, and quivering all over would shout:

"Hold your tongue! Don't argue!"

And in the carriage he talked without ceasing for a moment, describing his campaigns in the Caucasus and in Poland. What adventures he had had, what meetings! He talked loudly and opened his eyes so wide with wonder that he might well be thought to be lying. Moreover, as he talked he breathed in Andrey Yefimitch's face and laughed into his ear. This bothered the doctor and prevented him from thinking or concentrating his mind.

In the train they travelled, from motives of economy, third-class in a non-smoking compartment. Half the passengers were decent people. Mihail Averyanitch soon made friends with everyone, and moving from one seat to another, kept saying loudly that they ought not to travel by these appalling lines. It was a regular swindle! A very different thing riding on a good horse: one could do over seventy miles a day and feel fresh and well after it. And our bad harvests were due to the draining of the Pinsk marshes; altogether, the way things were done was dreadful. He got excited, talked loudly, and would not let others speak. This endless chatter to the accompaniment of loud laughter and expressive gestures wearied Andrey Yefimitch.

"Which of us is the madman?" he thought with vexation. "I, who try not to disturb my fellow-passengers in any way, or this egoist who thinks that he is cleverer and more interesting than anyone here, and so will leave no one in peace?"

In Moscow Mihail Averyanitch put on a military coat without epaulettes and trousers with red braid on them. He wore a military cap and overcoat in the street, and soldiers saluted him. It seemed to Andrey Yefimitch, now, that his companion was a man who had flung away all that was good and kept only what was bad of all the characteristics of a country gentleman that he had once possessed. He liked to be waited on even when it was quite unnecessary. The matches would be lying before him on the table, and he would see them and shout to the waiter to give him the matches; he did not hesitate to appear before a maidservant in nothing but his underclothes; he used the familiar mode of address to all footmen indiscriminately, even old men, and when he was angry called them fools and blockheads. This, Andrey Yefimitch thought, was like a gentleman, but disgusting.

First of all Mihail Averyanitch led his friend to the Iversky Madonna. He prayed fervently, shedding tears and bowing down to the earth, and when he had finished, heaved a deep sigh and said:

“Even though one does not believe it makes one somehow easier when one prays a little. Kiss the icon, my dear fellow.”

Andrey Yefimitch was embarrassed and he kissed the image, while Mihail Averyanitch pursed up his lips and prayed in a whisper, and again tears came into his eyes. Then they went to the Kremlin and looked there at the Tsar-cannon and the Tsar-bell, and even touched them with their fingers, admired the view over the river, visited St. Saviour’s and the Rumyantsev museum.

They dined at Tyestov’s. Mihail Averyanitch looked a long time at the menu, stroking his whiskers, and said in the tone of a gourmand accustomed to dine in restaurants:

“We shall see what you give us to eat today, angel!”

XIV

The doctor walked about, looked at things, ate and drank, but he had all the while one feeling: annoyance with Mihail Averyanitch. He longed to have a rest from his friend, to get away from him, to hide himself, while the friend thought it was his duty not to let the doctor move a step away from him, and to provide him with as many distractions as possible. When there was nothing to look at he entertained him with conversation. For two days Andrey Yefimitch endured it, but on the third he announced to his friend that he was ill and wanted to stay at home for the whole day; his friend replied that in that case he would stay too—that really he needed rest, for he was run off his legs already. Andrey Yefimitch lay on the sofa, with his face to the back, and clenching his teeth, listened to his friend, who assured him with heat that sooner or later France would certainly thrash Germany, that there were a great many scoundrels in Moscow, and that it was impossible to judge of a horse's quality by its outward appearance. The doctor began to have a buzzing in his ears and palpitations of the heart, but out of delicacy could not bring himself to beg his friend to go away or hold his tongue. Fortunately Mihail Averyanitch grew weary of sitting in the hotel room, and after dinner he went out for a walk.

As soon as he was alone Andrey Yefimitch abandoned himself to a feeling of relief. How pleasant to lie motionless on the sofa and to know that one is alone in the room! Real happiness is impossible without solitude. The fallen angel betrayed God probably because he longed for solitude, of which the angels know nothing. Andrey Yefimitch wanted to think about what he had seen and heard during the last few days, but he could not get Mihail Averyanitch out of his head.

"Why, he has taken a holiday and come with me out of friendship, out of generosity," thought the doctor with vexation; "nothing could be worse than this friendly supervision. I suppose he is good-natured and generous and a lively fellow, but he is a bore. An insufferable bore. In the same way there are people who never say anything but what is clever and good, yet one feels that they are dull-witted people."

For the following days Andrey Yefimitch declared himself ill and would not leave the hotel room; he lay with his face to the back of the sofa, and suffered agonies of weariness when his friend entertained him with conversation, or rested when his friend was absent. He was vexed with himself for having come, and with his friend, who grew every day more talkative and more free-and-easy; he could not succeed in attuning his thoughts to a serious and lofty level.

"This is what I get from the real life Ivan Dmitritch talked about," he thought, angry at his own pettiness. "It's of no consequence, though.… I shall go home, and everything will go on as before.…"

It was the same thing in Petersburg too; for whole days together he did not leave the hotel room, but lay on the sofa and only got up to drink beer.

Mihail Averyanitch was all haste to get to Warsaw.

"My dear man, what should I go there for?" said Andrey Yefimitch in an imploring voice. "You go alone and let me get home! I entreat you!"

"On no account," protested Mihail Averyanitch. "It's a marvellous town."

Andrey Yefimitch had not the strength of will to insist on his own way, and much against his inclination went to Warsaw. There he did not leave the hotel room, but lay on the sofa, furious with himself, with his friend, and with the waiters, who obstinately refused to understand Russian; while Mihail Averyanitch, healthy, hearty, and full of spirits as usual, went about the town from morning to night, looking for his old acquaintances. Several times he did not return home at night. After one night spent in some unknown haunt he returned home early in the morning, in a violently excited condition, with a red face and tousled hair. For a long time he walked up and down the rooms muttering something to himself, then stopped and said:

"Honour before everything."

After walking up and down a little longer he clutched his head in both hands and pronounced in a tragic voice: "Yes, honour before everything! Accursed be the moment when the idea first entered my head to visit this Babylon! My dear friend," he added, addressing the doctor, "you may despise me, I have played and lost; lend me five hundred roubles!"

Andrey Yefimitch counted out five hundred roubles and gave them to his friend without a word. The latter, still crimson with shame and anger, incoherently articulated some useless vow, put on his cap, and went out. Returning two hours later he flopped into an easy-chair, heaved a loud sigh, and said:

“My honour is saved. Let us go, my friend; I do not care to remain another hour in this accursed town. Scoundrels! Austrian spies!”

By the time the friends were back in their own town it was November, and deep snow was lying in the streets. Dr. Hobotov had Andrey Yefimitch’s post; he was still living in his old lodgings, waiting for Andrey Yefimitch to arrive and clear out of the hospital apartments. The plain woman whom he called his cook was already established in one of the lodges.

Fresh scandals about the hospital were going the round of the town. It was said that the plain woman had quarrelled with the superintendent, and that the latter had crawled on his knees before her begging forgiveness. On the very first day he arrived Andrey Yefimitch had to look out for lodgings.

“My friend,” the postmaster said to him timidly, “excuse an indiscreet question: what means have you at your disposal?”

Andrey Yefimitch, without a word, counted out his money and said: “Eighty-six roubles.”

“I don’t mean that,” Mihail Averyanitch brought out in confusion, misunderstanding him; “I mean, what have you to live on?”

“I tell you, eighty-six roubles… I have nothing else.”

Mihail Averyanitch looked upon the doctor as an honourable man, yet he suspected that he had accumulated a fortune of at least twenty thousand. Now learning that Andrey Yefimitch was a beggar, that he had nothing to live on he was for some reason suddenly moved to tears and embraced his friend.

XV

Andrey Yefimitch now lodged in a little house with three windows. There were only three rooms besides the kitchen in the little house. The doctor lived in two of them which looked into the street, while Daryushka and the landlady with her three children lived in the third room and the kitchen. Sometimes the landlady's lover, a drunken peasant who was rowdy and reduced the children and Daryushka to terror, would come for the night. When he arrived and established himself in the kitchen and demanded vodka, they all felt very uncomfortable, and the doctor would be moved by pity to take the crying children into his room and let them lie on his floor, and this gave him great satisfaction.

He got up as before at eight o'clock, and after his morning tea sat down to read his old books and magazines: he had no money for new ones. Either because the books were old, or perhaps because of the change in his surroundings, reading exhausted him, and did not grip his attention as before. That he might not spend his time in idleness he made a detailed catalogue of his books and gummed little labels on their backs, and this mechanical, tedious work seemed to him more interesting than reading. The monotonous, tedious work lulled his thoughts to sleep in some unaccountable way, and the time passed quickly while he thought of nothing. Even sitting in the kitchen, peeling potatoes with Daryushka or picking over the buckwheat grain, seemed to him interesting. On Saturdays and Sundays he went to church. Standing near the wall and half closing his eyes, he listened to the singing and thought of his father, of his mother, of the university, of the religions of the world; he felt calm and melancholy, and as he went out of the church afterwards he regretted that the service was so soon over. He went twice to the hospital to talk to Ivan Dmitritch. But on both occasions Ivan Dmitritch was unusually excited and ill-humoured; he bade the doctor leave him in peace, as he had long been sick of empty chatter, and declared, to make up for all his sufferings, he asked from the damned scoundrels only one favour—solitary confinement. Surely they would not refuse him even that? On both occasions when Andrey Yefimitch was taking leave of him and wishing him good night, he answered rudely and said:

“Go to hell!”

And Andrey Yefimitch did not know now whether to go to him for the third time or not. He longed to go.

In old days Andrey Yefimitch used to walk about his rooms and think in the interval after dinner, but now from dinnertime till evening tea he lay on the sofa with his face to the back and gave himself up to trivial thoughts which he could not struggle against. He was mortified that after more than twenty years of service he had been given neither a pension nor any assistance. It is true that he had not done his work honestly, but, then, all who are in the Service get a pension without distinction whether they are honest or not. Contemporary justice lies precisely in the bestowal of grades, orders, and pensions, not for moral qualities or capacities, but for service whatever it may have been like. Why was he alone to be an exception? He had no money at all. He was ashamed to pass by the shop and look at the woman who owned it. He owed thirty-two roubles for beer already. There was money owing to the landlady also. Daryushka sold old clothes and books on the sly, and told lies to the landlady, saying that the doctor was just going to receive a large sum of money.

He was angry with himself for having wasted on travelling the thousand roubles he had saved up. How useful that thousand roubles would have been now! He was vexed that people would not leave him in peace. Hobotov thought it his duty to look in on his sick colleague from time to time. Everything about him was revolting to Andrey Yefimitch—his well-fed face and vulgar, condescending tone, and his use of the word “colleague,” and his high top-boots; the most revolting thing was that he thought it was his duty to treat Andrey Yefimitch, and thought that he really was treating him. On every visit he brought a bottle of bromide and rhubarb pills.

Mihail Averyanitch, too, thought it his duty to visit his friend and entertain him. Every time he went in to Andrey Yefimitch with an affectation of ease, laughed constrainedly, and began assuring him that he was looking very well today, and that, thank God, he was on the high road to recovery, and from this it might be concluded that he looked on his friend’s condition as hopeless. He had not yet repaid his Warsaw debt, and was overwhelmed by shame; he was constrained, and so tried to laugh louder and talk more amusingly. His anecdotes and descriptions seemed endless now, and were an agony both to Andrey Yefimitch and himself.

In his presence Andrey Yefimitch usually lay on the sofa with his face to the wall, and listened with his teeth clenched; his soul was oppressed with rankling disgust, and after every visit from his friend he felt as though this disgust had risen higher, and was mounting into his throat.

To stifle petty thoughts he made haste to reflect that he himself, and Hobotov, and Mihail Averyanitch, would all sooner or later perish without leaving any trace on the world. If one imagined some spirit flying by the earthly globe in space in a million years he would see nothing but clay and bare rocks. Everything—culture and the moral law—would pass away and not even a burdock would grow out of them. Of what consequence was shame in the presence of a shopkeeper, of what consequence was the insignificant Hobotov or the wearisome friendship of Mihail Averyanitch? It was all trivial and nonsensical.

But such reflections did not help him now. Scarcely had he imagined the earthly globe in a million years, when Hobotov in his high top-boots or Mihail Averyanitch with his forced laugh would appear from behind a bare rock, and he even heard the shamefaced whisper: “The Warsaw debt.… I will repay it in a day or two, my dear fellow, without fail.…”

XVI

One day Mihail Averyanitch came after dinner when Andrey Yefimitch was lying on the sofa. It so happened that Hobotov arrived at the same time with his bromide. Andrey Yefimitch got up heavily and sat down, leaning both arms on the sofa.

“You have a much better colour today than you had yesterday, my dear man,” began Mihail Averyanitch. “Yes, you look jolly. Upon my soul, you do!”

“It’s high time you were well, dear colleague,” said Hobotov, yawning. “I’ll be bound, you are sick of this bobbery.”

“And we shall recover,” said Mihail Averyanitch cheerfully. “We shall live another hundred years! To be sure!”

“Not a hundred years, but another twenty,” Hobotov said reassuringly. “It’s all right, all right, colleague; don’t lose heart.… Don’t go piling it on!”

“We’ll show what we can do,” laughed Mihail Averyanitch, and he slapped his friend on the knee. “We’ll show them yet! Next summer, please God, we shall be off to the Caucasus, and we will ride all over it on horseback—trot, trot, trot! And when we are back from the Caucasus I shouldn’t wonder if we will all dance at the wedding.” Mihail Averyanitch gave a sly wink. “We’ll marry you, my dear boy, we’ll marry you.…”

Andrey Yefimitch felt suddenly that the rising disgust had mounted to his throat, his heart began beating violently.

“That’s vulgar,” he said, getting up quickly and walking away to the window. “Don’t you understand that you are talking vulgar nonsense?”

He meant to go on softly and politely, but against his will he suddenly clenched his fists and raised them above his head.

“Leave me alone,” he shouted in a voice unlike his own, blushing crimson and shaking all over. “Go away, both of you!”

Mihail Averyanitch and Hobotov got up and stared at him first with amazement and then with alarm.

“Go away, both!” Andrey Yefimitch went on shouting. “Stupid people! Foolish people! I don’t want either your friendship or your

medicines, stupid man! Vulgar! Nasty!”

Hobotov and Mihail Averyanitch, looking at each other in bewilderment, staggered to the door and went out. Andrey Yefimitch snatched up the bottle of bromide and flung it after them; the bottle broke with a crash on the doorframe.

“Go to the devil!” he shouted in a tearful voice, running out into the passage. “To the devil!”

When his guests were gone Andrey Yefimitch lay down on the sofa, trembling as though in a fever, and went on for a long while repeating: “Stupid people! Foolish people!”

When he was calmer, what occurred to him first of all was the thought that poor Mihail Averyanitch must be feeling fearfully ashamed and depressed now, and that it was all dreadful. Nothing like this had ever happened to him before. Where was his intelligence and his tact? Where was his comprehension of things and his philosophical indifference?

The doctor could not sleep all night for shame and vexation with himself, and at ten o’clock next morning he went to the post office and apologized to the postmaster.

“We won’t think again of what has happened,” Mihail Averyanitch, greatly touched, said with a sigh, warmly pressing his hand. “Let bygones be bygones. Lyubavkin,” he suddenly shouted so loud that all the postmen and other persons present started, “hand a chair; and you wait,” he shouted to a peasant woman who was stretching out a registered letter to him through the grating. “Don’t you see that I am busy? We will not remember the past,” he went on, affectionately addressing Andrey Yefimitch; “sit down, I beg you, my dear fellow.”

For a minute he stroked his knees in silence, and then said:

“I have never had a thought of taking offence. Illness is no joke, I understand. Your attack frightened the doctor and me yesterday, and we had a long talk about you afterwards. My dear friend, why won’t you treat your illness seriously? You can’t go on like this.… Excuse me speaking openly as a friend,” whispered Mihail Averyanitch. “You live in the most unfavourable surroundings, in a crowd, in uncleanliness, no one to look after you, no money for proper treatment.… My dear friend, the doctor and I implore you with all our hearts, listen to our advice: go into the hospital! There you will have wholesome food and attendance and treatment. Though, between ourselves, Yevgeny Fyodoritch is *mauvais ton*, yet he does understand his work, you can fully rely upon him. He has promised me he will look after you.”

Andrey Yefimitch was touched by the postmaster's genuine sympathy and the tears which suddenly glittered on his cheeks.

"My honoured friend, don't believe it!" he whispered, laying his hand on his heart; "don't believe them. It's all a sham. My illness is only that in twenty years I have only found one intelligent man in the whole town, and he is mad. I am not ill at all, it's simply that I have got into an enchanted circle which there is no getting out of. I don't care; I am ready for anything."

"Go into the hospital, my dear fellow."

"I don't care if it were into the pit."

"Give me your word, my dear man, that you will obey Yevgeny Fyodoritch in everything."

"Certainly I will give you my word. But I repeat, my honoured friend, I have got into an enchanted circle. Now everything, even the genuine sympathy of my friends, leads to the same thing—to my ruin. I am going to my ruin, and I have the manliness to recognize it."

"My dear fellow, you will recover."

"What's the use of saying that?" said Andrey Yefimitch, with irritation. "There are few men who at the end of their lives do not experience what I am experiencing now. When you are told that you have something such as diseased kidneys or enlarged heart, and you begin being treated for it, or are told you are mad or a criminal—that is, in fact, when people suddenly turn their attention to you—you may be sure you have got into an enchanted circle from which you will not escape. You will try to escape and make things worse. You had better give in, for no human efforts can save you. So it seems to me."

Meanwhile the public was crowding at the grating. That he might not be in their way, Andrey Yefimitch got up and began to take leave. Mihail Averyanitch made him promise on his honour once more, and escorted him to the outer door.

Towards evening on the same day Hobotov, in his sheepskin and his high top-boots, suddenly made his appearance, and said to Andrey Yefimitch in a tone as though nothing had happened the day before:

"I have come on business, colleague. I have come to ask you whether you would not join me in a consultation. Eh?"

Thinking that Hobotov wanted to distract his mind with an outing, or perhaps really to enable him to earn something, Andrey Yefimitch put on his coat and hat, and went out with him into the street. He was glad of the opportunity to smooth over his fault of the previous day and to be reconciled, and in his heart thanked Hobotov, who did not even allude to

yesterday’s scene and was evidently sparing him. One would never have expected such delicacy from this uncultured man.

“Where is your invalid?” asked Andrey Yefimitch.

“In the hospital.… I have long wanted to show him to you. A very interesting case.”

They went into the hospital yard, and going round the main building, turned towards the lodge where the mental cases were kept, and all this, for some reason, in silence. When they went into the lodge Nikita as usual jumped up and stood at attention.

“One of the patients here has a lung complication.” Hobotov said in an undertone, going into the yard with Andrey Yefimitch. “You wait here, I’ll be back directly. I am going for a stethoscope.”

And he went away.

XVII

It was getting dusk. Ivan Dmitritch was lying on his bed with his face thrust unto his pillow; the paralytic was sitting motionless, crying quietly and moving his lips. The fat peasant and the former sorter were asleep. It was quiet.

Andrey Yefimitch sat down on Ivan Dmitritch's bed and waited. But half an hour passed, and instead of Hobotov, Nikita came into the ward with a dressing-gown, some underlinen, and a pair of slippers in a heap on his arm.

"Please change your things, your honour," he said softly. "Here is your bed; come this way," he added, pointing to an empty bedstead which had obviously recently been brought into the ward. "It's all right; please God, you will recover."

Andrey Yefimitch understood it all. Without saying a word he crossed to the bed to which Nikita pointed and sat down; seeing that Nikita was standing waiting, he undressed entirely and he felt ashamed. Then he put on the hospital clothes; the drawers were very short, the shirt was long, and the dressing-gown smelt of smoked fish.

"Please God, you will recover," repeated Nikita, and he gathered up Andrey Yefimitch's clothes into his arms, went out, and shut the door after him.

"No matter…" thought Andrey Yefimitch, wrapping himself in his dressing-gown in a shamefaced way and feeling that he looked like a convict in his new costume. "It's no matter.… It does not matter whether it's a dress-coat or a uniform or this dressing-gown."

But how about his watch? And the notebook that was in the side-pocket? And his cigarettes? Where had Nikita taken his clothes? Now perhaps to the day of his death he would not put on trousers, a waistcoat, and high boots. It was all somehow strange and even incomprehensible at first. Andrey Yefimitch was even now convinced that there was no difference between his landlady's house and Ward No. 6, that everything in this world was nonsense and vanity of vanities. And yet his hands were trembling, his feet were cold, and he was filled with dread at the thought that soon Ivan Dmitritch would get up and see that he was in a

dressing-gown. He got up and walked across the room and sat down again.

Here he had been sitting already half an hour, an hour, and he was miserably sick of it: was it really possible to live here a day, a week, and even years like these people? Why, he had been sitting here, had walked about and sat down again; he could get up and look out of window and walk from corner to corner again, and then what? Sit so all the time, like a post, and think? No, that was scarcely possible.

Andrey Yefimitch lay down, but at once got up, wiped the cold sweat from his brow with his sleeve and felt that his whole face smelt of smoked fish. He walked about again.

"It's some misunderstanding…" he said, turning out the palms of his hands in perplexity. "It must be cleared up. There is a misunderstanding."

Meanwhile Ivan Dmitritch woke up; he sat up and propped his cheeks on his fists. He spat. Then he glanced lazily at the doctor, and apparently for the first minute did not understand; but soon his sleepy face grew malicious and mocking.

"Aha! so they have put you in here, too, old fellow?" he said in a voice husky from sleepiness, screwing up one eye. "Very glad to see you. You sucked the blood of others, and now they will suck yours. Excellent!"

"It's a misunderstanding…" Andrey Yefimitch brought out, frightened by Ivan Dmitritch's words; he shrugged his shoulders and repeated: "It's some misunderstanding."

Ivan Dmitritch spat again and lay down.

"Cursed life," he grumbled, "and what's bitter and insulting, this life will not end in compensation for our sufferings, it will not end with apotheosis as it would in an opera, but with death; peasants will come and drag one's dead body by the arms and the legs to the cellar. Ugh! Well, it does not matter.… We shall have our good time in the other world.… I shall come here as a ghost from the other world and frighten these reptiles. I'll turn their hair grey."

Moiseika returned, and, seeing the doctor, held out his hand.

"Give me one little kopeck," he said.

XVIII

Andrey Yefimitch walked away to the window and looked out into the open country. It was getting dark, and on the horizon to the right a cold crimson moon was mounting upwards. Not far from the hospital fence, not much more than two hundred yards away, stood a tall white house shut in by a stone wall. This was the prison.

"So this is real life," thought Andrey Yefimitch, and he felt frightened.

The moon and the prison, and the nails on the fence, and the faraway flames at the bone-charring factory were all terrible. Behind him there was the sound of a sigh. Andrey Yefimitch looked round and saw a man with glittering stars and orders on his breast, who was smiling and slyly winking. And this, too, seemed terrible.

Andrey Yefimitch assured himself that there was nothing special about the moon or the prison, that even sane persons wear orders, and that everything in time will decay and turn to earth, but he was suddenly overcome with desire; he clutched at the grating with both hands and shook it with all his might. The strong grating did not yield.

Then that it might not be so dreadful he went to Ivan Dmitritch's bed and sat down.

"I have lost heart, my dear fellow," he muttered, trembling and wiping away the cold sweat, "I have lost heart."

"You should be philosophical," said Ivan Dmitritch ironically.

"My God, my God.… Yes, yes.… You were pleased to say once that there was no philosophy in Russia, but that all people, even the paltriest, talk philosophy. But you know the philosophizing of the paltriest does not harm anyone," said Andrey Yefimitch in a tone as if he wanted to cry and complain. "Why, then, that malignant laugh, my friend, and how can these paltry creatures help philosophizing if they are not satisfied? For an intelligent, educated man, made in God's image, proud and loving freedom, to have no alternative but to be a doctor in a filthy, stupid, wretched little town, and to spend his whole life among bottles, leeches, mustard plasters! Quackery, narrowness, vulgarity! Oh, my God!"

"You are talking nonsense. If you don't like being a doctor you should have gone in for being a statesman."

“I could not, I could not do anything. We are weak, my dear friend.… I used to be indifferent. I reasoned boldly and soundly, but at the first coarse touch of life upon me I have lost heart.… Prostration… We are weak, we are poor creatures… and you, too, my dear friend, you are intelligent, generous, you drew in good impulses with your mother’s milk, but you had hardly entered upon life when you were exhausted and fell ill.… Weak, weak!”

Andrey Yefimitch was all the while at the approach of evening tormented by another persistent sensation besides terror and the feeling of resentment. At last he realized that he was longing for a smoke and for beer.

“I am going out, my friend,” he said. “I will tell them to bring a light; I can’t put up with this.… I am not equal to it.…”

Andrey Yefimitch went to the door and opened it, but at once Nikita jumped up and barred his way.

“Where are you going? You can’t, you can’t!” he said. “It’s bedtime.”

“But I’m only going out for a minute to walk about the yard,” said Andrey Yefimitch.

“You can’t, you can’t; it’s forbidden. You know that yourself.”

“But what difference will it make to anyone if I do go out?” asked Andrey Yefimitch, shrugging his shoulders. “I don’t understand. Nikita, I must go out!” he said in a trembling voice. “I must.”

“Don’t be disorderly, it’s not right,” Nikita said peremptorily.

“This is beyond everything,” Ivan Dmitritch cried suddenly, and he jumped up. “What right has he not to let you out? How dare they keep us here? I believe it is clearly laid down in the law that no one can be deprived of freedom without trial! It’s an outrage! It’s tyranny!”

“Of course it’s tyranny,” said Andrey Yefimitch, encouraged by Ivan Dmitritch’s outburst. “I must go out, I want to. He has no right! Open, I tell you.”

“Do you hear, you dull-witted brute?” cried Ivan Dmitritch, and he banged on the door with his fist. “Open the door, or I will break it open! Torturer!”

“Open the door,” cried Andrey Yefimitch, trembling all over; “I insist!”

“Talk away!” Nikita answered through the door, “talk away.…”

“Anyhow, go and call Yevgeny Fyodoritch! Say that I beg him to come for a minute!”

“His honour will come of himself tomorrow.”

“They will never let us out,” Ivan Dmitritch was going on meanwhile. “They will leave us to rot here! Oh, Lord, can there really be no hell in the next world, and will these wretches be forgiven? Where is justice? Open the door, you wretch! I am choking!” he cried in a hoarse voice, and flung himself upon the door. “I’ll dash out my brains, murderers!”

Nikita opened the door quickly, and roughly with both his hands and his knee shoved Andrey Yefimitch back, then swung his arm and punched him in the face with his fist. It seemed to Andrey Yefimitch as though a huge salt wave enveloped him from his head downwards and dragged him to the bed; there really was a salt taste in his mouth: most likely the blood was running from his teeth. He waved his arms as though he were trying to swim out and clutched at a bedstead, and at the same moment felt Nikita hit him twice on the back.

Ivan Dmitritch gave a loud scream. He must have been beaten too.

Then all was still, the faint moonlight came through the grating, and a shadow like a net lay on the floor. It was terrible. Andrey Yefimitch lay and held his breath: he was expecting with horror to be struck again. He felt as though someone had taken a sickle, thrust it into him, and turned it round several times in his breast and bowels. He bit the pillow from pain and clenched his teeth, and all at once through the chaos in his brain there flashed the terrible unbearable thought that these people, who seemed now like black shadows in the moonlight, had to endure such pain day by day for years. How could it have happened that for more than twenty years he had not known it and had refused to know it? He knew nothing of pain, had no conception of it, so he was not to blame, but his conscience, as inexorable and as rough as Nikita, made him turn cold from the crown of his head to his heels. He leaped up, tried to cry out with all his might, and to run in haste to kill Nikita, and then Hobotov, the superintendent and the assistant, and then himself; but no sound came from his chest, and his legs would not obey him. Gasping for breath, he tore at the dressing-gown and the shirt on his breast, rent them, and fell senseless on the bed.

XIX

Next morning his head ached, there was a droning in his ears and a feeling of utter weakness all over. He was not ashamed at recalling his weakness the day before. He had been cowardly, had even been afraid of the moon, had openly expressed thoughts and feelings such as he had not expected in himself before; for instance, the thought that the paltry people who philosophized were really dissatisfied. But now nothing mattered to him.

He ate nothing; he drank nothing. He lay motionless and silent.

"It is all the same to me," he thought when they asked him questions. "I am not going to answer.… It's all the same to me."

After dinner Mihail Averyanitch brought him a quarter pound of tea and a pound of fruit pastilles. Daryushka came too and stood for a whole hour by the bed with an expression of dull grief on her face. Dr. Hobotov visited him. He brought a bottle of bromide and told Nikita to fumigate the ward with something.

Towards evening Andrey Yefimitch died of an apoplectic stroke. At first he had a violent shivering fit and a feeling of sickness; something revolting as it seemed, penetrating through his whole body, even to his fingertips, strained from his stomach to his head and flooded his eyes and ears. There was a greenness before his eyes. Andrey Yefimitch understood that his end had come, and remembered that Ivan Dmitritch, Mihail Averyanitch, and millions of people believed in immortality. And what if it really existed? But he did not want immortality—and he thought of it only for one instant. A herd of deer, extraordinarily beautiful and graceful, of which he had been reading the day before, ran by him; then a peasant woman stretched out her hand to him with a registered letter.… Mihail Averyanitch said something, then it all vanished, and Andrey Yefimitch sank into oblivion forever.

The hospital porters came, took him by his arms and legs, and carried him away to the chapel.

There he lay on the table, with open eyes, and the moon shed its light upon him at night. In the morning Sergey Sergeyitch came, prayed piously before the crucifix, and closed his former chief's eyes.

Next day Andrey Yefimitch was buried. Mihail Averyanitch and Daryushka were the only people at the funeral.

THE TWO VOLODYAS

"Let me; I want to drive myself! I'll sit by the driver!" Sofya Lvovna said in a loud voice. "Wait a minute, driver; I'll get up on the box beside you."

She stood up in the sledge, and her husband, Vladimir Nikititch, and the friend of her childhood, Vladimir Mihalovitch, held her arms to prevent her falling. The three horses were galloping fast.

"I said you ought not to have given her brandy," Vladimir Nikititch whispered to his companion with vexation. "What a fellow you are, really!"

The Colonel knew by experience that in women like his wife, Sofya Lvovna, after a little too much wine, turbulent gaiety was followed by hysterical laughter and then tears. He was afraid that when they got home, instead of being able to sleep, he would have to be administering compresses and drops.

"Wo!" cried Sofya Lvovna. "I want to drive myself!"

She felt genuinely gay and triumphant. For the last two months, ever since her wedding, she had been tortured by the thought that she had married Colonel Yagitch from worldly motives and, as it is said, *par dépit;* but that evening, at the restaurant, she had suddenly become convinced that she loved him passionately. In spite of his fifty-four years, he was so slim, agile, supple, he made puns and hummed to the gipsies' tunes so charmingly. Really, the older men were nowadays a thousand times more interesting than the young. It seemed as though age and youth had changed parts. The Colonel was two years older than her father, but could there be any importance in that if, honestly speaking, there were infinitely more vitality, go, and freshness in him than in herself, though she was only twenty-three?

"Oh, my darling!" she thought. "You are wonderful!"

She had become convinced in the restaurant, too, that not a spark of her old feeling remained. For the friend of her childhood, Vladimir Mihalovitch, or simply Volodya, with whom only the day before she had

been madly, miserably in love, she now felt nothing but complete indifference. All that evening he had seemed to her spiritless, torpid, uninteresting, and insignificant, and the sangfroid with which he habitually avoided paying at restaurants on this occasion revolted her, and she had hardly been able to resist saying, “If you are poor, you should stay at home.” The Colonel paid for all.

Perhaps because trees, telegraph posts, and drifts of snow kept flitting past her eyes, all sorts of disconnected ideas came rushing into her mind. She reflected: the bill at the restaurant had been a hundred and twenty roubles, and a hundred had gone to the gipsies, and tomorrow she could fling away a thousand roubles if she liked; and only two months ago, before her wedding, she had not had three roubles of her own, and had to ask her father for every trifle. What a change in her life!

Her thoughts were in a tangle. She recalled, how, when she was a child of ten, Colonel Yagitch, now her husband, used to make love to her aunt, and everyone in the house said that he had ruined her. And her aunt had, in fact, often come down to dinner with her eyes red from crying, and was always going off somewhere; and people used to say of her that the poor thing could find no peace anywhere. He had been very handsome in those days, and had an extraordinary reputation as a lady-killer. So much so that he was known all over the town, and it was said of him that he paid a round of visits to his adorers every day like a doctor visiting his patients. And even now, in spite of his grey hair, his wrinkles, and his spectacles, his thin face looked handsome, especially in profile.

Sofya Lvovna’s father was an army doctor, and had at one time served in the same regiment with Colonel Yagitch. Volodya’s father was an army doctor too, and he, too, had once been in the same regiment as her father and Colonel Yagitch. In spite of many amatory adventures, often very complicated and disturbing, Volodya had done splendidly at the university, and had taken a very good degree. Now he was specialising in foreign literature, and was said to be writing a thesis. He lived with his father, the army doctor, in the barracks, and had no means of his own, though he was thirty. As children Sofya and he had lived under the same roof, though in different flats. He often came to play with her, and they had dancing and French lessons together. But when he grew up into a graceful, remarkably handsome young man, she began to feel shy of him, and then fell madly in love with him, and had loved him right up to the time when she was married to Yagitch. He, too, had been renowned for his success with women almost from the age of fourteen, and the ladies who deceived their husbands on his account excused themselves by

saying that he was only a boy. Someone had told a story of him lately that when he was a student living in lodgings so as to be near the university, it always happened if one knocked at his door, that one heard his footstep, and then a whispered apology: "*Pardon, je ne suis pas setul.*" Yagitch was delighted with him, and blessed him as a worthy successor, as Derchavin blessed Pushkin; he appeared to be fond of him. They would play billiards or picquet by the hour together without uttering a word, if Yagitch drove out on any expedition he always took Volodya with him, and Yagitch was the only person Volodya initiated into the mysteries of his thesis. In earlier days, when Yagitch was rather younger, they had often been in the position of rivals, but they had never been jealous of one another. In the circle in which they moved Yagitch was nicknamed "Big Volodya," and his friend Little Volodya.

Besides Big Volodya, Little Volodya, and Sofya Lvovna, there was a fourth person in the sledge—Margarita Alexandrovna, or, as everyone called her, Rita, a cousin of Madame Yagitch—a very pale girl over thirty, with black eyebrows and a pince-nez, who was forever smoking cigarettes, even in the bitterest frost, and who always had her knees and the front of her blouse covered with cigarette ash. She spoke through her nose, drawling every word, was of a cold temperament, could drink any amount of wine and liquor without being drunk, and used to tell scandalous anecdotes in a languid and tasteless way. At home she spent her days reading thick magazines, covering them with cigarette ash, or eating frozen apples.

"Sonia, give over fooling," she said, drawling. "It's really silly."

As they drew near the city gates they went more slowly, and began to pass people and houses. Sofya Lvovna subsided, nestled up to her husband, and gave herself up to her thoughts. Little Volodya sat opposite. By now her lighthearted and cheerful thoughts were mingled with gloomy ones. She thought that the man sitting opposite knew that she loved him, and no doubt he believed the gossip that she married the Colonel *par dépit*. She had never told him of her love; she had not wanted him to know, and had done her best to hide her feeling, but from her face she knew that he understood her perfectly—and her pride suffered. But what was most humiliating in her position was that, since her wedding, Volodya had suddenly begun to pay her attention, which he had never done before, spending hours with her, sitting silent or chattering about trifles; and even now in the sledge, though he did not talk to her, he touched her foot with his and pressed her hand a little. Evidently that was all he wanted, that she should be married; and it was

evident that he despised her and that she only excited in him an interest of a special kind as though she were an immoral and disreputable woman. And when the feeling of triumph and love for her husband were mingled in her soul with humiliation and wounded pride, she was overcome by a spirit of defiance, and longed to sit on the box, to shout and whistle to the horses.

Just as they passed the nunnery the huge hundred-ton bell rang out. Rita crossed herself.

"Our Olga is in that nunnery," said Sofya Lvovna, and she, too, crossed herself and shuddered.

"Why did she go into the nunnery?" said the Colonel.

"*Par dépit*," Rita answered crossly, with obvious allusion to Sofya's marrying Yagitch. "*Par dépit* is all the fashion nowadays. Defiance of all the world. She was always laughing, a desperate flirt, fond of nothing but balls and young men, and all of a sudden off she went—to surprise everyone!"

"That's not true," said Volodya, turning down the collar of his fur coat and showing his handsome face. "It wasn't a case of *par dépit*; it was simply horrible, if you like. Her brother Dmitri was sent to penal servitude, and they don't know where he is now. And her mother died of grief."

He turned up his collar again.

"Olga did well," he added in a muffled voice. "Living as an adopted child, and with such a paragon as Sofya Lvovna—one must take that into consideration too!"

Sofya Lvovna heard a tone of contempt in his voice, and longed to say something rude to him, but she said nothing. The spirit of defiance came over her again; she stood up again and shouted in a tearful voice:

"I want to go to the early service! Driver, back! I want to see Olga."

They turned back. The nunnery bell had a deep note, and Sofya Lvovna fancied there was something in it that reminded her of Olga and her life. The other church bells began ringing too. When the driver stopped the horses, Sofya Lvovna jumped out of the sledge and, unescorted and alone, went quickly up to the gate.

"Make haste, please!" her husband called to her. "It's late already."

She went in at the dark gateway, then by the avenue that led from the gate to the chief church. The snow crunched under her feet, and the ringing was just above her head, and seemed to vibrate through her whole being. Here was the church door, then three steps down, and an anteroom with icons of the saints on both sides, a fragrance of juniper

and incense, another door, and a dark figure opening it and bowing very low. The service had not yet begun. One nun was walking by the icon-screen and lighting the candles on the tall standard candlesticks, another was lighting the chandelier. Here and there, by the columns and the side chapels, there stood black, motionless figures. “I suppose they must remain standing as they are now till the morning,” thought Sofya Lvovna, and it seemed to her dark, cold, and dreary—drearier than a graveyard. She looked with a feeling of dreariness at the still, motionless figures and suddenly felt a pang at her heart. For some reason, in one short nun, with thin shoulders and a black kerchief on her head, she recognised Olga, though when Olga went into the nunnery she had been plump and had looked taller. Hesitating and extremely agitated, Sofya Lvovna went up to the nun, and looking over her shoulder into her face, recognised her as Olga.

“Olga!” she cried, throwing up her hands, and could not speak from emotion. “Olga!”

The nun knew her at once; she raised her eyebrows in surprise, and her pale, freshly washed face, and even, it seemed, the white headcloth that she wore under her wimple, beamed with pleasure.

“What a miracle from God!” she said, and she, too, threw up her thin, pale little hands.

Sofya Lvovna hugged her and kissed her warmly, and was afraid as she did so that she might smell of spirits.

“We were just driving past, and we thought of you,” she said, breathing hard, as though she had been running. “Dear me! How pale you are! I… I’m very glad to see you. Well, tell me how are you? Are you dull?”

Sofya Lvovna looked round at the other nuns, and went on in a subdued voice:

“There’ve been so many changes at home… you know, I’m married to Colonel Yagitch. You remember him, no doubt.… I am very happy with him.”

“Well, thank God for that. And is your father quite well?”

“Yes, he is quite well. He often speaks of you. You must come and see us during the holidays, Olga, won’t you?”

“I will come,” said Olga, and she smiled. “I’ll come on the second day.”

Sofya Lvovna began crying, she did not know why, and for a minute she shed tears in silence, then she wiped her eyes and said:

“Rita will be very sorry not to have seen you. She is with us too. And Volodya’s here. They are close to the gate. How pleased they’d be if you’d come out and see them. Let’s go out to them; the service hasn’t begun yet.”

“Let us,” Olga agreed. She crossed herself three times and went out with Sofya Lvovna to the entrance.

“So you say you’re happy, Sonitchka?” she asked when they came out at the gate.

“Very.”

“Well, thank God for that.”

The two Volodyas, seeing the nun, got out of the sledge and greeted her respectfully. Both were visibly touched by her pale face and her black monastic dress, and both were pleased that she had remembered them and come to greet them. That she might not be cold, Sofya Lvovna wrapped her up in a rug and put one half of her fur coat round her. Her tears had relieved and purified her heart, and she was glad that this noisy, restless, and, in reality, impure night should unexpectedly end so purely and serenely. And to keep Olga by her a little longer she suggested:

“Let us take her for a drive! Get in, Olga; we’ll go a little way.”

The men expected the nun to refuse—saints don’t dash about in three-horse sledges; but to their surprise, she consented and got into the sledge. And while the horses were galloping to the city gate all were silent, and only tried to make her warm and comfortable, and each of them was thinking of what she had been in the past and what she was now. Her face was now passionless, inexpressive, cold, pale, and transparent, as though there were water, not blood, in her veins. And two or three years ago she had been plump and rosy, talking about her suitors and laughing at every trifle.

Near the city gate the sledge turned back; when it stopped ten minutes later near the nunnery, Olga got out of the sledge. The bell had begun to ring more rapidly.

“The Lord save you,” said Olga, and she bowed low as nuns do.

“Mind you come, Olga.”

“I will, I will.”

She went and quickly disappeared through the gateway. And when after that they drove on again, Sofya Lvovna felt very sad. Everyone was silent. She felt dispirited and weak all over. That she should have made a nun get into a sledge and drive in a company hardly sober seemed to her now stupid, tactless, and almost sacrilegious. As the intoxication passed off, the desire to deceive herself passed away also. It was clear to her

now that she did not love her husband, and never could love him, and that it all had been foolishness and nonsense. She had married him from interested motives, because, in the words of her school friends, he was madly rich, and because she was afraid of becoming an old maid like Rita, and because she was sick of her father, the doctor, and wanted to annoy Volodya.

If she could have imagined when she got married, that it would be so oppressive, so dreadful, and so hideous, she would not have consented to the marriage for all the wealth in the world. But now there was no setting it right. She must make up her mind to it.

They reached home. Getting into her warm, soft bed, and pulling the bedclothes over her, Sofya Lvovna recalled the dark church, the smell of incense, and the figures by the columns, and she felt frightened at the thought that these figures would be standing there all the while she was asleep. The early service would be very, very long; then there would be "the hours," then the mass, then the service of the day.

"But of course there is a God—there certainly is a God; and I shall have to die, so that sooner or later one must think of one's soul, of eternal life, like Olga. Olga is saved now; she has settled all questions for herself.… But if there is no God? Then her life is wasted. But how is it wasted? Why is it wasted?"

And a minute later the thought came into her mind again:

"There is a God; death must come; one must think of one's soul. If Olga were to see death before her this minute she would not be afraid. She is prepared. And the great thing is that she has already solved the problem of life for herself. There is a God… yes.… But is there no other solution except going into a monastery? To go into the monastery means to renounce life, to spoil it.…"

Sofya Lvovna began to feel rather frightened; she hid her head under her pillow.

"I mustn't think about it," she whispered. "I mustn't.…"

Yagitch was walking about on the carpet in the next room with a soft jingle of spurs, thinking about something. The thought occurred to Sofya Lvovna that this man was near and dear to her only for one reason—that his name, too, was Vladimir. She sat up in bed and called tenderly:

"Volodya!"

"What is it?" her husband responded.

"Nothing."

She lay down again. She heard a bell, perhaps the same nunnery bell. Again she thought of the vestibule and the dark figures, and thoughts of

God and of inevitable death strayed through her mind, and she covered her ears that she might not hear the bell. She thought that before old age and death there would be a long, long life before her, and that day by day she would have to put up with being close to a man she did not love, who had just now come into the bedroom and was getting into bed, and would have to stifle in her heart her hopeless love for the other young, fascinating, and, as she thought, exceptional man. She looked at her husband and tried to say good night to him, but suddenly burst out crying instead. She was vexed with herself.

"Well, now then for the music!" said Yagitch.

She was not pacified till ten o'clock in the morning. She left off crying and trembling all over, but she began to have a splitting headache. Yagitch was in haste to go to the late mass, and in the next room was grumbling at his orderly, who was helping him to dress. He came into the bedroom once with the soft jingle of his spurs to fetch something, and then a second time wearing his epaulettes, and his orders on his breast, limping slightly from rheumatism; and it struck Sofya Lvovna that he looked and walked like a bird of prey.

She heard Yagitch ring the telephone bell.

"Be so good as to put me on to the Vassilevsky barracks," he said; and a minute later: "Vassilevsky barracks? Please ask Doctor Salimovitch to come to the telephone…" And a minute later: "With whom am I speaking? Is it you, Volodya? Delighted. Ask your father to come to us at once, dear boy; my wife is rather shattered after yesterday. Not at home, you say? H'm!… Thank you. Very good. I shall be much obliged… *Merci.*"

Yagitch came into the bedroom for the third time, bent down to his wife, made the sign of the cross over her, gave her his hand to kiss (the women who had been in love with him used to kiss his hand and he had got into the habit of it), and saying that he should be back to dinner, went out.

At twelve o'clock the maid came in to announce that Vladimir Mihalovitch had arrived. Sofya Lvovna, staggering with fatigue and headache, hurriedly put on her marvellous new lilac dressing-gown trimmed with fur, and hastily did up her hair after a fashion. She was conscious of an inexpressible tenderness in her heart, and was trembling with joy and with fear that he might go away. She wanted nothing but to look at him.

Volodya came dressed correctly for calling, in a swallowtail coat and white tie. When Sofya Lvovna came in he kissed her hand and expressed

his genuine regret that she was ill. Then when they had sat down, he admired her dressing-gown.

"I was upset by seeing Olga yesterday," she said. "At first I felt it dreadful, but now I envy her. She is like a rock that cannot be shattered; there is no moving her. But was there no other solution for her, Volodya? Is burying oneself alive the only solution of the problem of life? Why, it's death, not life!"

At the thought of Olga, Volodya's face softened.

"Here, you are a clever man, Volodya," said Sofya Lvovna. "Show me how to do what Olga has done. Of course, I am not a believer and should not go into a nunnery, but one can do something equivalent. Life isn't easy for me," she added after a brief pause. "Tell me what to do.… Tell me something I can believe in. Tell me something, if it's only one word."

"One word? By all means: *tararaboomdeeay*."

"Volodya, why do you despise me?" she asked hotly. "You talk to me in a special, fatuous way, if you'll excuse me, not as one talks to one's friends and women one respects. You are so good at your work, you are fond of science; why do you never talk of it to me? Why is it? Am I not good enough?"

Volodya frowned with annoyance and said:

"Why do you want science all of a sudden? Don't you perhaps want constitutional government? Or sturgeon and horseradish?"

"Very well, I am a worthless, trivial, silly woman with no convictions. I have a mass, a mass of defects. I am neurotic, corrupt, and I ought to be despised for it. But you, Volodya, are ten years older than I am, and my husband is thirty years older. I've grown up before your eyes, and if you would, you could have made anything you liked of me—an angel. But you"—her voice quivered—"treat me horribly. Yagitch has married me in his old age, and you…"

"Come, come," said Volodya, sitting nearer her and kissing both her hands. "Let the Schopenhauers philosophise and prove whatever they like, while we'll kiss these little hands."

"You despise me, and if only you knew how miserable it makes me," she said uncertainly, knowing beforehand that he would not believe her. "And if you only knew how I want to change, to begin another life! I think of it with enthusiasm!" and tears of enthusiasm actually came into her eyes. "To be good, honest, pure, not to be lying; to have an object in life."

"Come, come, come, please don't be affected! I don't like it!" said Volodya, and an ill-humoured expression came into his face. "Upon my

word, you might be on the stage. Let us behave like simple people."

To prevent him from getting cross and going away, she began defending herself, and forced herself to smile to please him; and again she began talking of Olga, and of how she longed to solve the problem of her life and to become something real.

"Ta-ra-ra-boomdee-ay," he hummed. "Ta-ra-ra-boom-dee-ay!"

And all at once he put his arm round her waist, while she, without knowing what she was doing, laid her hands on his shoulders and for a minute gazed with ecstasy, almost intoxication, at his clever, ironical face, his brow, his eyes, his handsome beard.

"You have known that I love you for ever so long," she confessed to him, and she blushed painfully, and felt that her lips were twitching with shame. "I love you. Why do you torture me?"

She shut her eyes and kissed him passionately on the lips, and for a long while, a full minute, could not take her lips away, though she knew it was unseemly, that he might be thinking the worse of her, that a servant might come in.

"Oh, how you torture me!" she repeated.

When half an hour later, having got all that he wanted, he was sitting at lunch in the dining room, she was kneeling before him, gazing greedily into his face, and he told her that she was like a little dog waiting for a bit of ham to be thrown to it. Then he sat her on his knee, and dancing her up and down like a child, hummed:

"Tara-raboom-dee-ay.… Tara-raboom-dee-ay." And when he was getting ready to go she asked him in a passionate whisper:

"When? Today? Where?" And held out both hands to his mouth as though she wanted to seize his answer in them.

"Today it will hardly be convenient," he said after a minute's thought. "Tomorrow, perhaps."

And they parted. Before dinner Sofya Lvovna went to the nunnery to see Olga, but there she was told that Olga was reading the psalter somewhere over the dead. From the nunnery she went to her father's and found that he, too, was out. Then she took another sledge and drove aimlessly about the streets till evening. And for some reason she kept thinking of the aunt whose eyes were red with crying, and who could find no peace anywhere.

And at night they drove out again with three horses to a restaurant out of town and listened to the gipsies. And driving back past the nunnery again, Sofya Lvovna thought of Olga, and she felt aghast at the thought that for the girls and women of her class there was no solution but to go

on driving about and telling lies, or going into a nunnery to mortify the flesh.… And next day she met her lover, and again Sofya Lvovna drove about the town alone in a hired sledge thinking about her aunt.

A week later Volodya threw her over. And after that life went on as before, uninteresting, miserable, and sometimes even agonising. The Colonel and Volodya spent hours playing billiards and picquet, Rita told anecdotes in the same languid, tasteless way, and Sofya Lvovna went about alone in hired sledges and kept begging her husband to take her for a good drive with three horses.

Going almost every day to the nunnery, she wearied Olga, complaining of her unbearable misery, weeping, and feeling as she did so that she brought with her into the cell something impure, pitiful, shabby. And Olga repeated to her mechanically as though a lesson learnt by rote, that all this was of no consequence, that it would all pass and God would forgive her.

ROTHSCHILD'S FIDDLE

The town was a little one, worse than a village, and it was inhabited by scarcely any but old people who died with an infrequency that was really annoying. In the hospital and in the prison fortress very few coffins were needed. In fact business was bad. If Yakov Ivanov had been an undertaker in the chief town of the province he would certainly have had a house of his own, and people would have addressed him as Yakov Matveyitch; here in this wretched little town people called him simply Yakov; his nickname in the street was for some reason "Bronze," and he lived in a poor way like a humble peasant, in a little old hut in which there was only one room, and in this room he and Marfa, the stove, a double bed, the coffins, his bench, and all their belongings were crowded together.

Yakov made good, solid coffins. For peasants and working people he made them to fit himself, and this was never unsuccessful, for there were none taller and stronger than he, even in the prison, though he was seventy. For gentry and for women he made them to measure, and used an iron foot-rule for the purpose. He was very unwilling to take orders for children's coffins, and made them straight off without measurements, contemptuously, and when he was paid for the work he always said:

"I must confess I don't like trumpery jobs."

Apart from his trade, playing the fiddle brought him in a small income.

The Jews' orchestra conducted by Moisey Ilyitch Shahkes, the tinsmith, who took more than half their receipts for himself, played as a rule at weddings in the town. As Yakov played very well on the fiddle, especially Russian songs, Shahkes sometimes invited him to join the orchestra at a fee of half a rouble a day, in addition to tips from the visitors. When Bronze sat in the orchestra first of all his face became crimson and perspiring; it was hot, there was a suffocating smell of garlic, the fiddle squeaked, the double bass wheezed close to his right ear, while the flute wailed at his left, played by a gaunt, red-haired Jew

who had a perfect network of red and blue veins all over his face, and who bore the name of the famous millionaire Rothschild. And this accursed Jew contrived to play even the liveliest things plaintively. For no apparent reason Yakov little by little became possessed by hatred and contempt for the Jews, and especially for Rothschild; he began to pick quarrels with him, rail at him in unseemly language and once even tried to strike him, and Rothschild was offended and said, looking at him ferociously:

"If it were not that I respect you for your talent, I would have sent you flying out of the window."

Then he began to weep. And because of this Yakov was not often asked to play in the orchestra; he was only sent for in case of extreme necessity in the absence of one of the Jews.

Yakov was never in a good temper, as he was continually having to put up with terrible losses. For instance, it was a sin to work on Sundays or Saints' days, and Monday was an unlucky day, so that in the course of the year there were some two hundred days on which, whether he liked it or not, he had to sit with his hands folded. And only think, what a loss that meant. If anyone in the town had a wedding without music, or if Shahkes did not send for Yakov, that was a loss, too. The superintendent of the prison was ill for two years and was wasting away, and Yakov was impatiently waiting for him to die, but the superintendent went away to the chief town of the province to be doctored, and there took and died. There's a loss for you, ten roubles at least, as there would have been an expensive coffin to make, lined with brocade. The thought of his losses haunted Yakov, especially at night; he laid his fiddle on the bed beside him, and when all sorts of nonsensical ideas came into his mind he touched a string; the fiddle gave out a sound in the darkness, and he felt better.

On the sixth of May of the previous year Marfa had suddenly been taken ill. The old woman's breathing was laboured, she drank a great deal of water, and she staggered as she walked, yet she lighted the stove in the morning and even went herself to get water. Towards evening she lay down. Yakov played his fiddle all day; when it was quite dark he took the book in which he used every day to put down his losses, and, feeling dull, he began adding up the total for the year. It came to more than a thousand roubles. This so agitated him that he flung the reckoning beads down, and trampled them under his feet. Then he picked up the reckoning beads, and again spent a long time clicking with them and heaving deep, strained sighs. His face was crimson and wet with

perspiration. He thought that if he had put that lost thousand roubles in the bank, the interest for a year would have been at least forty roubles, so that forty roubles was a loss too. In fact, wherever one turned there were losses and nothing else.

"Yakov!" Marfa called unexpectedly. "I am dying."

He looked round at his wife. Her face was rosy with fever, unusually bright and joyful-looking. Bronze, accustomed to seeing her face always pale, timid, and unhappy-looking, was bewildered. It looked as if she really were dying and were glad that she was going away forever from that hut, from the coffins, and from Yakov.… And she gazed at the ceiling and moved her lips, and her expression was one of happiness, as though she saw death as her deliverer and were whispering with him.

It was daybreak; from the windows one could see the flush of dawn. Looking at the old woman, Yakov for some reason reflected that he had not once in his life been affectionate to her, had had no feeling for her, had never once thought to buy her a kerchief, or to bring her home some dainty from a wedding, but had done nothing but shout at her, scold her for his losses, shake his fists at her; it is true he had never actually beaten her, but he had frightened her, and at such times she had always been numb with terror. Why, he had forbidden her to drink tea because they spent too much without that, and she drank only hot water. And he understood why she had such a strange, joyful face now, and he was overcome with dread.

As soon as it was morning he borrowed a horse from a neighbour and took Marfa to the hospital. There were not many patients there, and so he had not long to wait, only three hours. To his great satisfaction the patients were not being received by the doctor, who was himself ill, but by the assistant, Maxim Nikolaitch, an old man of whom everyone in the town used to say that, though he drank and was quarrelsome, he knew more than the doctor.

"I wish you good day," said Yakov, leading his old woman into the consulting room. "You must excuse us, Maxim Nikolaitch, we are always troubling you with our trumpery affairs. Here you see my better half is ailing, the partner of my life, as they say, excuse the expression.…"

Knitting his grizzled brows and stroking his whiskers the assistant began to examine the old woman, and she sat on a stool, a wasted, bent figure with a sharp nose and open mouth, looking like a bird that wants to drink.

“H—m… Ah!…” the assistant said slowly, and he heaved a sigh. “Influenza and possibly fever. There’s typhus in the town now. Well, the old woman has lived her life, thank God.… How old is she?”

“She’ll be seventy in another year, Maxim Nikolaitch.”

“Well, the old woman has lived her life, it’s time to say goodbye.”

“You are quite right in what you say, of course, Maxim Nikolaitch,” said Yakov, smiling from politeness, “and we thank you feelingly for your kindness, but allow me to say every insect wants to live.”

“To be sure,” said the assistant, in a tone which suggested that it depended upon him whether the woman lived or died. “Well, then, my good fellow, put a cold compress on her head, and give her these powders twice a day, and so goodbye. *Bonjour.*”

From the expression of his face Yakov saw that it was a bad case, and that no sort of powders would be any help; it was clear to him that Marfa would die very soon, if not today, tomorrow. He nudged the assistant’s elbow, winked at him, and said in a low voice:

“If you would just cup her, Maxim Nikolaitch.”

“I have no time, I have no time, my good fellow. Take your old woman and go in God’s name. Goodbye.”

“Be so gracious,” Yakov besought him. “You know yourself that if, let us say, it were her stomach or her inside that were bad, then powders or drops, but you see she had got a chill! In a chill the first thing is to let blood, Maxim Nikolaitch.”

But the assistant had already sent for the next patient, and a peasant woman came into the consulting room with a boy.

“Go along! go along,” he said to Yakov, frowning. “It’s no use to—”

“In that case put on leeches, anyway! Make us pray for you forever.”

The assistant flew into a rage and shouted:

“You speak to me again! You blockhead.…”

Yakov flew into a rage too, and he turned crimson all over, but he did not utter a word. He took Marfa on his arm and led her out of the room. Only when they were sitting in the cart he looked morosely and ironically at the hospital, and said:

“A nice set of artists they have settled here! No fear, but he would have cupped a rich man, but even a leech he grudges to the poor. The Herods!”

When they got home and went into the hut, Marfa stood for ten minutes holding on to the stove. It seemed to her that if she were to lie down Yakov would talk to her about his losses, and scold her for lying down and not wanting to work. Yakov looked at her drearily and thought

that tomorrow was St. John the Divine's, and next day St. Nikolay the Wonder-worker's, and the day after that was Sunday, and then Monday, an unlucky day. For four days he would not be able to work, and most likely Marfa would die on one of those days; so he would have to make the coffin today. He picked up his iron rule, went up to the old woman and took her measure. Then she lay down, and he crossed himself and began making the coffin.

When the coffin was finished Bronze put on his spectacles and wrote in his book: "Marfa Ivanov's coffin, two roubles, forty kopecks."

And he heaved a sigh. The old woman lay all the time silent with her eyes closed. But in the evening, when it got dark, she suddenly called the old man.

"Do you remember, Yakov," she asked, looking at him joyfully. "Do you remember fifty years ago God gave us a little baby with flaxen hair? We used always to be sitting by the river then, singing songs… under the willows," and laughing bitterly, she added: "The baby girl died."

Yakov racked his memory, but could not remember the baby or the willows.

"It's your fancy," he said.

The priest arrived; he administered the sacrament and extreme unction. Then Marfa began muttering something unintelligible, and towards morning she died. Old women, neighbours, washed her, dressed her, and laid her in the coffin. To avoid paying the sacristan, Yakov read the psalms over the body himself, and they got nothing out of him for the grave, as the gravedigger was a crony of his. Four peasants carried the coffin to the graveyard, not for money, but from respect. The coffin was followed by old women, beggars, and a couple of crazy saints, and the people who met it crossed themselves piously.… And Yakov was very much pleased that it was so creditable, so decorous, and so cheap, and no offence to anyone. As he took his last leave of Marfa he touched the coffin and thought: "A good piece of work!"

But as he was going back from the cemetery he was overcome by acute depression. He didn't feel quite well: his breathing was laboured and feverish, his legs felt weak, and he had a craving for drink. And thoughts of all sorts forced themselves on his mind. He remembered again that all his life he had never felt for Marfa, had never been affectionate to her. The fifty-two years they had lived in the same hut had dragged on a long, long time, but it had somehow happened that in all that time he had never once thought of her, had paid no attention to her, as though she had been a cat or a dog. And yet, every day, she had

lighted the stove, had cooked and baked, had gone for the water, had chopped the wood, had slept with him in the same bed, and when he came home drunk from the weddings always reverently hung his fiddle on the wall and put him to bed, and all this in silence, with a timid, anxious expression.

Rothschild, smiling and bowing, came to meet Yakov.

"I was looking for you, uncle," he said. "Moisey Ilyitch sends you his greetings and bids you come to him at once."

Yakov felt in no mood for this. He wanted to cry.

"Leave me alone," he said, and walked on.

"How can you," Rothschild said, fluttered, running on in front. "Moisey Ilyitch will be offended! He bade you come at once!"

Yakov was revolted at the Jew's gasping for breath and blinking, and having so many red freckles on his face. And it was disgusting to look at his green coat with black patches on it, and all his fragile, refined figure.

"Why are you pestering me, garlic?" shouted Yakov. "Don't persist!"

The Jew got angry and shouted too:

"Not so noisy, please, or I'll send you flying over the fence!"

"Get out of my sight!" roared Yakov, and rushed at him with his fists. "One can't live for you scabby Jews!"

Rothschild, half dead with terror, crouched down and waved his hands over his head, as though to ward off a blow; then he leapt up and ran away as fast as his legs could carry him: as he ran he gave little skips and kept clasping his hands, and Yakov could see how his long thin spine wriggled. Some boys, delighted at the incident, ran after him shouting "Jew! Jew!" Some dogs joined in the chase barking. Someone burst into a roar of laughter, then gave a whistle; the dogs barked with even more noise and unanimity. Then a dog must have bitten Rothschild, as a desperate, sickly scream was heard.

Yakov went for a walk on the grazing ground, then wandered on at random in the outskirts of the town, while the street boys shouted:

"Here's Bronze! Here's Bronze!"

He came to the river, where the curlews floated in the air uttering shrill cries and the ducks quacked. The sun was blazing hot, and there was a glitter from the water, so that it hurt the eyes to look at it. Yakov walked by a path along the bank and saw a plump, rosy-cheeked lady come out of the bathing-shed, and thought about her: "Ugh! you otter!"

Not far from the bathing-shed boys were catching crayfish with bits of meat; seeing him, they began shouting spitefully, "Bronze! Bronze!" And then he saw an old spreading willow tree with a big hollow in it, and

a crow’s nest on it.… And suddenly there rose up vividly in Yakov’s memory a baby with flaxen hair, and the willow tree Marfa had spoken of. Why, that is it, the same willow tree—green, still, and sorrowful.… How old it has grown, poor thing!

He sat down under it and began to recall the past. On the other bank, where now there was the water meadow, in those days there stood a big birchwood, and yonder on the bare hillside that could be seen on the horizon an old, old pine forest used to be a bluish patch in the distance. Big boats used to sail on the river. But now it was all smooth and unruffled, and on the other bank there stood now only one birch tree, youthful and slender like a young lady, and there was nothing on the river but ducks and geese, and it didn’t look as though there had ever been boats on it. It seemed as though even the geese were fewer than of old. Yakov shut his eyes, and in his imagination huge flocks of white geese soared, meeting one another.

He wondered how it had happened that for the last forty or fifty years of his life he had never once been to the river, or if he had been by it he had not paid attention to it. Why, it was a decent sized river, not a trumpery one; he might have gone in for fishing and sold the fish to merchants, officials, and the barkeeper at the station, and then have put money in the bank; he might have sailed in a boat from one house to another, playing the fiddle, and people of all classes would have paid to hear him; he might have tried getting big boats afloat again—that would be better than making coffins; he might have bred geese, killed them and sent them in the winter to Moscow. Why, the feathers alone would very likely mount up to ten roubles in the year. But he had wasted his time, he had done nothing of this. What losses! Ah! What losses! And if he had gone in for all those things at once—catching fish and playing the fiddle, and running boats and killing geese—what a fortune he would have made! But nothing of this had happened, even in his dreams; life had passed uselessly without any pleasure, had been wasted for nothing, not even a pinch of snuff; there was nothing left in front, and if one looked back—there was nothing there but losses, and such terrible ones, it made one cold all over. And why was it a man could not live so as to avoid these losses and misfortunes? One wondered why they had cut down the birch copse and the pine forest. Why was he walking with no reason on the grazing ground? Why do people always do what isn’t needful? Why had Yakov all his life scolded, bellowed, shaken his fists, ill-treated his wife, and, one might ask, what necessity was there for him to frighten and insult the Jew that day? Why did people in general hinder each other

from living? What losses were due to it! what terrible losses! If it were not for hatred and malice people would get immense benefit from one another.

In the evening and the night he had visions of the baby, of the willow, of fish, of slaughtered geese, and Marfa looking in profile like a bird that wants to drink, and the pale, pitiful face of Rothschild, and faces moved down from all sides and muttered of losses. He tossed from side to side, and got out of bed five times to play the fiddle.

In the morning he got up with an effort and went to the hospital. The same Maxim Nikolaitch told him to put a cold compress on his head, and gave him some powders, and from his tone and expression of face Yakov realized that it was a bad case and that no powders would be any use. As he went home afterwards, he reflected that death would be nothing but a benefit; he would not have to eat or drink, or pay taxes or offend people, and, as a man lies in his grave not for one year but for hundreds and thousands, if one reckoned it up the gain would be enormous. A man's life meant loss: death meant gain. This reflection was, of course, a just one, but yet it was bitter and mortifying; why was the order of the world so strange, that life, which is given to man only once, passes away without benefit?

He was not sorry to die, but at home, as soon as he saw his fiddle, it sent a pang to his heart and he felt sorry. He could not take the fiddle with him to the grave, and now it would be left forlorn, and the same thing would happen to it as to the birch copse and the pine forest. Everything in this world was wasted and would be wasted! Yakov went out of the hut and sat in the doorway, pressing the fiddle to his bosom. Thinking of his wasted, profitless life, he began to play, he did not know what, but it was plaintive and touching, and tears trickled down his cheeks. And the harder he thought, the more mournfully the fiddle wailed.

The latch clicked once and again, and Rothschild appeared at the gate. He walked across half the yard boldly, but seeing Yakov he stopped short, and seemed to shrink together, and probably from terror, began making signs with his hands as though he wanted to show on his fingers what o'clock it was.

"Come along, it's all right," said Yakov in a friendly tone, and he beckoned him to come up. "Come along!"

Looking at him mistrustfully and apprehensively, Rothschild began to advance, and stopped seven feet off.

“Be so good as not to beat me,” he said, ducking. “Moisey Ilyitch has sent me again. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ he said; ‘go to Yakov again and tell him,’ he said, ‘we can’t get on without him.’ There is a wedding on Wednesday.… Ye—es! Mr. Shapovalov is marrying his daughter to a good man.… And it will be a grand wedding, oo-oo!” added the Jew, screwing up one eye.

“I can’t come,” said Yakov, breathing hard. “I’m ill, brother.”

And he began playing again, and the tears gushed from his eyes on to the fiddle. Rothschild listened attentively, standing sideways to him and folding his arms on his chest. The scared and perplexed expression on his face, little by little, changed to a look of woe and suffering; he rolled his eyes as though he were experiencing an agonizing ecstasy, and articulated, “Vachhh!” and tears slowly ran down his cheeks and trickled on his greenish coat.

And Yakov lay in bed all the rest of the day grieving. In the evening, when the priest confessing him asked, Did he remember any special sin he had committed? straining his failing memory he thought again of Marfa’s unhappy face, and the despairing shriek of the Jew when the dog bit him, and said, hardly audibly, “Give the fiddle to Rothschild.”

“Very well,” answered the priest.

And now everyone in the town asks where Rothschild got such a fine fiddle. Did he buy it or steal it? Or perhaps it had come to him as a pledge. He gave up the flute long ago, and now plays nothing but the fiddle. As plaintive sounds flow now from his bow, as came once from his flute, but when he tries to repeat what Yakov played, sitting in the doorway, the effect is something so sad and sorrowful that his audience weep, and he himself rolls his eyes and articulates “Vachhh!…” And this new air was so much liked in the town that the merchants and officials used to be continually sending for Rothschild and making him play it over and over again a dozen times.

THE STUDENT

At first the weather was fine and still. The thrushes were calling, and in the swamps close by something alive droned pitifully with a sound like blowing into an empty bottle. A snipe flew by, and the shot aimed at it rang out with a gay, resounding note in the spring air. But when it began to get dark in the forest a cold, penetrating wind blew inappropriately from the east, and everything sank into silence. Needles of ice stretched across the pools, and it felt cheerless, remote, and lonely in the forest. There was a whiff of winter.

Ivan Velikopolsky, the son of a sacristan, and a student of the clerical academy, returning home from shooting, walked all the time by the path in the waterside meadow. His fingers were numb and his face was burning with the wind. It seemed to him that the cold that had suddenly come on had destroyed the order and harmony of things, that nature itself felt ill at ease, and that was why the evening darkness was falling more rapidly than usual. All around it was deserted and peculiarly gloomy. The only light was one gleaming in the widows' gardens near the river; the village, over three miles away, and everything in the distance all round was plunged in the cold evening mist. The student remembered that, as he went out from the house, his mother was sitting barefoot on the floor in the entry, cleaning the samovar, while his father lay on the stove coughing; as it was Good Friday nothing had been cooked, and the student was terribly hungry. And now, shrinking from the cold, he thought that just such a wind had blown in the days of Rurik and in the time of Ivan the Terrible and Peter, and in their time there had been just the same desperate poverty and hunger, the same thatched roofs with holes in them, ignorance, misery, the same desolation around, the same darkness, the same feeling of oppression—all these had existed, did exist, and would exist, and the lapse of a thousand years would make life no better. And he did not want to go home.

The gardens were called the widows' because they were kept by two widows, mother and daughter. A camp fire was burning brightly with a

crackling sound, throwing out light far around on the ploughed earth. The widow Vasilisa, a tall, fat old woman in a man's coat, was standing by and looking thoughtfully into the fire; her daughter Lukerya, a little pockmarked woman with a stupid-looking face, was sitting on the ground, washing a cauldron and spoons. Apparently they had just had supper. There was a sound of men's voices; it was the labourers watering their horses at the river.

"Here you have winter back again," said the student, going up to the camp fire. "Good evening."

Vasilisa started, but at once recognized him and smiled cordially.

"I did not know you; God bless you," she said.

"You'll be rich."

They talked. Vasilisa, a woman of experience, who had been in service with the gentry, first as a wet-nurse, afterwards as a children's nurse, expressed herself with refinement, and a soft, sedate smile never left her face; her daughter Lukerya, a village peasant woman, who had been beaten by her husband, simply screwed up her eyes at the student and said nothing, and she had a strange expression like that of a deaf mute.

"At just such a fire the Apostle Peter warmed himself," said the student, stretching out his hands to the fire, "so it must have been cold then, too. Ah, what a terrible night it must have been, granny! An utterly dismal long night!"

He looked round at the darkness, shook his head abruptly and asked:

"No doubt you have been at the reading of the Twelve Gospels?"

"Yes, I have," answered Vasilisa.

"If you remember at the Last Supper Peter said to Jesus, 'I am ready to go with Thee into darkness and unto death.' And our Lord answered him thus: 'I say unto thee, Peter, before the cock croweth thou wilt have denied Me thrice.' After the supper Jesus went through the agony of death in the garden and prayed, and poor Peter was weary in spirit and faint, his eyelids were heavy and he could not struggle against sleep. He fell asleep. Then you heard how Judas the same night kissed Jesus and betrayed Him to His tormentors. They took Him bound to the high priest and beat Him, while Peter, exhausted, worn out with misery and alarm, hardly awake, you know, feeling that something awful was just going to happen on earth, followed behind.… He loved Jesus passionately, intensely, and now he saw from far off how He was beaten…"

Lukerya left the spoons and fixed an immovable stare upon the student.

“They came to the high priest’s,” he went on; “they began to question Jesus, and meantime the labourers made a fire in the yard as it was cold, and warmed themselves. Peter, too, stood with them near the fire and warmed himself as I am doing. A woman, seeing him, said: ‘He was with Jesus, too’—that is as much as to say that he, too, should be taken to be questioned. And all the labourers that were standing near the fire must have looked sourly and suspiciously at him, because he was confused and said: ‘I don’t know Him.’ A little while after again someone recognized him as one of Jesus’ disciples and said: ‘Thou, too, art one of them,’ but again he denied it. And for the third time someone turned to him: ‘Why, did I not see thee with Him in the garden today?’ For the third time he denied it. And immediately after that time the cock crowed, and Peter, looking from afar off at Jesus, remembered the words He had said to him in the evening.… He remembered, he came to himself, went out of the yard and wept bitterly—bitterly. In the Gospel it is written: ‘He went out and wept bitterly.’ I imagine it: the still, still, dark, dark garden, and in the stillness, faintly audible, smothered sobbing…”

The student sighed and sank into thought. Still smiling, Vasilisa suddenly gave a gulp, big tears flowed freely down her cheeks, and she screened her face from the fire with her sleeve as though ashamed of her tears, and Lukerya, staring immovably at the student, flushed crimson, and her expression became strained and heavy like that of someone enduring intense pain.

The labourers came back from the river, and one of them riding a horse was quite near, and the light from the fire quivered upon him. The student said good night to the widows and went on. And again the darkness was about him and his fingers began to be numb. A cruel wind was blowing, winter really had come back and it did not feel as though Easter would be the day after tomorrow.

Now the student was thinking about Vasilisa: since she had shed tears all that had happened to Peter the night before the Crucifixion must have some relation to her.…

He looked round. The solitary light was still gleaming in the darkness and no figures could be seen near it now. The student thought again that if Vasilisa had shed tears, and her daughter had been troubled, it was evident that what he had just been telling them about, which had happened nineteen centuries ago, had a relation to the present—to both women, to the desolate village, to himself, to all people. The old woman had wept, not because he could tell the story touchingly, but because

Peter was near to her, because her whole being was interested in what was passing in Peter’s soul.

And joy suddenly stirred in his soul, and he even stopped for a minute to take breath. “The past,” he thought, “is linked with the present by an unbroken chain of events flowing one out of another.” And it seemed to him that he had just seen both ends of that chain; that when he touched one end the other quivered.

When he crossed the river by the ferry boat and afterwards, mounting the hill, looked at his village and towards the west where the cold crimson sunset lay a narrow streak of light, he thought that truth and beauty which had guided human life there in the garden and in the yard of the high priest had continued without interruption to this day, and had evidently always been the chief thing in human life and in all earthly life, indeed; and the feeling of youth, health, vigour—he was only twenty-two—and the inexpressible sweet expectation of happiness, of unknown mysterious happiness, took possession of him little by little, and life seemed to him enchanting, marvellous, and full of lofty meaning.

At a Country House

Pavel Ilyitch Rashevitch walked up and down, stepping softly on the floor covered with little Russian plaids, and casting a long shadow on the wall and ceiling while his guest, Meier, the deputy examining magistrate, sat on the sofa with one leg drawn up under him smoking and listening. The clock already pointed to eleven, and there were sounds of the table being laid in the room next to the study.

"Say what you like," Rashevitch was saying, "from the standpoint of fraternity, equality, and the rest of it, Mitka, the swineherd, is perhaps a man the same as Goethe and Frederick the Great; but take your stand on a scientific basis, have the courage to look facts in the face, and it will be obvious to you that blue blood is not a mere prejudice, that it is not a feminine invention. Blue blood, my dear fellow, has an historical justification, and to refuse to recognize it is, to my thinking, as strange as to refuse to recognize the antlers on a stag. One must reckon with facts! You are a law student and have confined your attention to the humane studies, and you can still flatter yourself with illusions of equality, fraternity, and so on; I am an incorrigible Darwinian, and for me words such as lineage, aristocracy, noble blood, are not empty sounds."

Rashevitch was roused and spoke with feeling. His eyes sparkled, his pince-nez would not stay on his nose, he kept nervously shrugging his shoulders and blinking, and at the word "Darwinian" he looked jauntily in the looking-glass and combed his grey beard with both hands. He was wearing a very short and shabby reefer jacket and narrow trousers; the rapidity of his movements, his jaunty air, and his abbreviated jacket all seemed out of keeping with him, and his big comely head, with long hair suggestive of a bishop or a veteran poet, seemed to have been fixed on to the body of a tall, lanky, affected youth. When he stood with his legs wide apart, his long shadow looked like a pair of scissors.

He was fond of talking, and he always fancied that he was saying something new and original. In the presence of Meier he was conscious of an unusual flow of spirits and rush of ideas. He found the examining

magistrate sympathetic, and was stimulated by his youth, his health, his good manners, his dignity, and, above all, by his cordial attitude to himself and his family. Rashevitch was not a favourite with his acquaintances; as a rule they fought shy of him, and, as he knew, declared that he had driven his wife into her grave with his talking, and they called him, behind his back, a spiteful creature and a toad. Meier, a man new to the district and unprejudiced, visited him often and readily and had even been known to say that Rashevitch and his daughters were the only people in the district with whom he felt as much at home as with his own people. Rashevitch liked him too, because he was a young man who might be a good match for his elder daughter, Genya.

And now, enjoying his ideas and the sound of his own voice, and looking with pleasure at the plump but well-proportioned, neatly cropped, correct Meier, Rashevitch dreamed of how he would arrange his daughter's marriage with a good man, and then how all his worries over the estate would pass to his son-in-law. Hateful worries! The interest owing to the bank had not been paid for the last two quarters, and fines and arrears of all sorts had mounted up to more than two thousand.

"To my mind there can be no doubt," Rashevitch went on, growing more and more enthusiastic, "that if a Richard Coeur-de-Lion, or Frederick Barbarossa, for instance, is brave and noble those qualities will pass by heredity to his son, together with the convolutions and bumps of the brain, and if that courage and nobility of soul are preserved in the son by means of education and exercise, and if he marries a princess who is also noble and brave, those qualities will be transmitted to his grandson, and so on, until they become a generic characteristic and pass organically into the flesh and blood. Thanks to a strict sexual selection, to the fact that highborn families have instinctively guarded themselves against marriage with their inferiors, and young men of high rank have not married just anybody, lofty, spiritual qualities have been transmitted from generation to generation in their full purity, have been preserved, and as time goes on have, through exercise, become more exalted and lofty. For the fact that there is good in humanity we are indebted to nature, to the normal, natural, consistent order of things, which has throughout the ages scrupulously segregated blue blood from plebeian. Yes, my dear boy, no low lout, no cook's son has given us literature, science, art, law, conceptions of honour and duty.… For all these things mankind is indebted exclusively to the aristocracy, and from that point of view, the point of view of natural history, an inferior Sobakevitch by the

very fact of his blue blood is superior and more useful than the very best merchant, even though the latter may have built fifteen museums. Say what you like! And when I refuse to shake hands with a low lout or a cook's son, or to let him sit down to table with me, by that very act I am safeguarding what is the best thing on earth, and am carrying out one of Mother Nature's finest designs for leading us up to perfection…"

Rashevitch stood still, combing his beard with both hands; his shadow, too, stood still on the wall, looking like a pair of scissors.

"Take Mother-Russia now," he went on, thrusting his hands in his pockets and standing first on his heels and then on his toes. "Who are her best people? Take our first-rate painters, writers, composers.… Who are they? They were all of aristocratic origin. Pushkin, Lermontov, Turgenev, Gontcharov, Tolstoy, they were not sexton's children."

"Gontcharov was a merchant," said Meier.

"Well, the exception only proves the rule. Besides, Gontcharov's genius is quite open to dispute. But let us drop names and turn to facts. What would you say, my good sir, for instance, to this eloquent fact: when one of the mob forces his way where he has not been permitted before, into society, into the world of learning, of literature, into the Zemstvo or the law courts, observe, Nature herself, first of all, champions the higher rights of humanity, and is the first to wage war on the rabble. As soon as the plebeian forces himself into a place he is not fit for he begins to ail, to go into consumption, to go out of his mind, and to degenerate, and nowhere do we find so many puny, neurotic wrecks, consumptives, and starvelings of all sorts as among these darlings. They die like flies in autumn. If it were not for this providential degeneration there would not have been a stone left standing of our civilization, the rabble would have demolished everything. Tell me, if you please, what has the inroad of the barbarians given us so far? What has the rabble brought with it?" Rashevitch assumed a mysterious, frightened expression, and went on: "Never has literature and learning been at such low ebb among us as now. The men of today, my good sir, have neither ideas nor ideals, and all their sayings and doings are permeated by one spirit—to get all they can and to strip someone to his last thread. All these men of today who give themselves out as honest and progressive people can be bought at a rouble a piece, and the distinguishing mark of the 'intellectual' of today is that you have to keep strict watch over your pocket when you talk to him, or else he will run off with your purse." Rashevitch winked and burst out laughing. "Upon my soul, he will!" he said, in a thin, gleeful voice. "And morals! What of their morals?"

Rashevitch looked round towards the door. “No one is surprised nowadays when a wife robs and leaves her husband. What’s that, a trifle! Nowadays, my dear boy, a chit of a girl of twelve is scheming to get a lover, and all these amateur theatricals and literary evenings are only invented to make it easier to get a rich merchant to take a girl on as his mistress.… Mothers sell their daughters, and people make no bones about asking a husband at what price he sells his wife, and one can haggle over the bargain, you know, my dear.…”

Meier, who had been sitting motionless and silent all the time, suddenly got up from the sofa and looked at his watch.

“I beg your pardon, Pavel Ilyitch,” he said, “it is time for me to be going.”

But Pavel Ilyitch, who had not finished his remarks, put his arm round him and, forcibly reseating him on the sofa, vowed that he would not let him go without supper. And again Meier sat and listened, but he looked at Rashevitch with perplexity and uneasiness, as though he were only now beginning to understand him. Patches of red came into his face. And when at last a maidservant came in to tell them that the young ladies asked them to go to supper, he gave a sigh of relief and was the first to walk out of the study.

At the table in the next room were Rashevitch’s daughters, Genya and Iraida, girls of four-and-twenty and two-and-twenty respectively, both very pale, with black eyes, and exactly the same height. Genya had her hair down, and Iraida had hers done up high on her head. Before eating anything they each drank a wineglassful of bitter liqueur, with an air as though they had drunk it by accident for the first time in their lives and both were overcome with confusion and burst out laughing.

“Don’t be naughty, girls,” said Rashevitch.

Genya and Iraida talked French with each other, and Russian with their father and their visitor. Interrupting one another, and mixing up French words with Russian, they began rapidly describing how just at this time in August, in previous years, they had set off to the boarding school and what fun it had been. Now there was nowhere to go, and they had to stay at their home in the country, summer and winter without change. Such dreariness!

“Don’t be naughty, girls,” Rashevitch said again.

He wanted to be talking himself. If other people talked in his presence, he suffered from a feeling like jealousy.

“So that’s how it is, my dear boy,” he began, looking affectionately at Meier. “In the simplicity and goodness of our hearts, and from fear of

being suspected of being behind the times, we fraternize with, excuse me, all sorts of riffraff, we preach fraternity and equality with moneylenders and innkeepers; but if we would only think, we should see how criminal that good-nature is. We have brought things to such a pass, that the fate of civilization is hanging on a hair. My dear fellow, what our forefathers gained in the course of ages will be tomorrow, if not today, outraged and destroyed by these modern Huns.…”

After supper they all went into the drawing room. Genya and Iraida lighted the candles on the piano, got out their music.… But their father still went on talking, and there was no telling when he would leave off. They looked with misery and vexation at their egoist-father, to whom the pleasure of chattering and displaying his intelligence was evidently more precious and important than his daughters’ happiness. Meier, the only young man who ever came to their house, came—they knew—for the sake of their charming, feminine society, but the irrepressible old man had taken possession of him, and would not let him move a step away.

“Just as the knights of the west repelled the invasions of the Mongols, so we, before it is too late, ought to unite and strike together against our foe,” Rashevitch went on in the tone of a preacher, holding up his right hand. “May I appear to the riffraff not as Pavel Ilyitch, but as a mighty, menacing Richard Coeur-de-Lion. Let us give up sloppy sentimentality; enough of it! Let us all make a compact, that as soon as a plebeian comes near us we fling some careless phrase straight in his ugly face: ‘Paws off! Go back to your kennel, you cur!’ straight in his ugly face,” Rashevitch went on gleefully, flicking his crooked finger in front of him. “In his ugly face!”

“I can’t do that,” Meier brought out, turning away.

“Why not?” Rashevitch answered briskly, anticipating a prolonged and interesting argument. “Why not?”

“Because I am of the artisan class myself!”

As he said this Meier turned crimson, and his neck seemed to swell, and tears actually gleamed in his eyes.

“My father was a simple workman,” he said, in a rough, jerky voice, “but I see no harm in that.”

Rashevitch was fearfully confused. Dumbfounded, as though he had been caught in the act of a crime, he gazed helplessly at Meier, and did not know what to say. Genya and Iraida flushed crimson, and bent over their music; they were ashamed of their tactless father. A minute passed in silence, and there was a feeling of unbearable discomfort, when all at

once with a sort of painful stiffness and inappropriateness, there sounded in the air the words:

"Yes, I am of the artisan class, and I am proud of it!"

Thereupon Meier, stumbling awkwardly among the furniture, took his leave, and walked rapidly into the hall, though his carriage was not yet at the door.

"You'll have a dark drive tonight," Rashevitch muttered, following him. "The moon does not rise till late tonight."

They stood together on the steps in the dark, and waited for the horses to be brought. It was cool.

"There's a falling star," said Meier, wrapping himself in his overcoat.

"There are a great many in August."

When the horses were at the door, Rashevitch gazed intently at the sky, and said with a sigh:

"A phenomenon worthy of the pen of Flammarion.…"

After seeing his visitor off, he walked up and down the garden, gesticulating in the darkness, reluctant to believe that such a queer, stupid misunderstanding had only just occurred. He was ashamed and vexed with himself. In the first place it had been extremely incautious and tactless on his part to raise the damnable subject of blue blood, without finding out beforehand what his visitor's position was. Something of the same sort had happened to him before; he had, on one occasion in a railway carriage, begun abusing the Germans, and it had afterwards appeared that all the persons he had been conversing with were German. In the second place he felt that Meier would never come and see him again. These intellectuals who have risen from the people are morbidly sensitive, obstinate and slow to forgive.

"It's bad, it's bad," muttered Rashevitch, spitting; he had a feeling of discomfort and loathing as though he had eaten soap. "Ah, it's bad!"

He could see from the garden, through the drawing room window, Genya by the piano, very pale, and looking scared, with her hair down. She was talking very, very rapidly.… Iraida was walking up and down the room, lost in thought; but now she, too, began talking rapidly with her face full of indignation. They were both talking at once. Rashevitch could not hear a word, but he guessed what they were talking about. Genya was probably complaining that her father drove away every decent person from the house with his talk, and today he had driven away from them their one acquaintance, perhaps a suitor, and now the poor young man would not have one place in the whole district where he could find rest for his soul. And judging by the despairing way in which

she threw up her arms, Iraida was talking probably on the subject of their dreary existence, their wasted youth.…

When he reached his own room, Rashevitch sat down on his bed and began to undress. He felt oppressed, and he was still haunted by the same feeling as though he had eaten soap. He was ashamed. As he undressed he looked at his long, sinewy, elderly legs, and remembered that in the district they called him the “toad,” and after every long conversation he always felt ashamed. Somehow or other, by some fatality, it always happened that he began mildly, amicably, with good intentions, calling himself an old student, an idealist, a Quixote, but without being himself aware of it, gradually passed into abuse and slander, and what was most surprising, with perfect sincerity criticized science, art and morals, though he had not read a book for the last twenty years, had been nowhere farther than their provincial town, and did not really know what was going on in the world. If he sat down to write anything, if it were only a letter of congratulation, there would somehow be abuse in the letter. And all this was strange, because in reality he was a man of feeling, given to tears. Could he be possessed by some devil which hated and slandered in him, apart from his own will?

“It’s bad,” he sighed, as he lay down under the quilt. “It’s bad.”

His daughters did not sleep either. There was a sound of laughter and screaming, as though someone was being pursued; it was Genya in hysterics. A little later Iraida was sobbing too. A maidservant ran barefoot up and down the passage several times.…

“What a business! Good Lord!…” muttered Rashevitch, sighing and tossing from side to side. “It’s bad.”

He had a nightmare. He dreamt he was standing naked, as tall as a giraffe, in the middle of the room, and saying, as he flicked his finger before him:

“In his ugly face! his ugly face! his ugly face!”

He woke up in a fright, and first of all remembered that a misunderstanding had happened in the evening, and that Meier would certainly not come again. He remembered, too, that he had to pay the interest at the bank, to find husbands for his daughters, that one must have food and drink, and close at hand were illness, old age, unpleasantnesses, that soon it would be winter, and that there was no wood.…

It was past nine o’clock in the morning. Rashevitch slowly dressed, drank his tea and ate two hunks of bread and butter. His daughters did not come down to breakfast; they did not want to meet him, and that

wounded him. He lay down on his sofa in his study, then sat down to his table and began writing a letter to his daughters. His hand shook and his eyes smarted. He wrote that he was old, and no use to anyone and that nobody loved him, and he begged his daughters to forget him, and when he died to bury him in a plain, deal coffin without ceremony, or to send his body to Harkov to the dissecting theatre. He felt that every line he wrote reeked of malice and affectation, but he could not stop, and went on writing and writing.

"The toad!" he suddenly heard from the next room; it was the voice of his elder daughter, a voice with a hiss of indignation. "The toad!"

"The toad!" the younger one repeated like an echo. "The toad!"

THE HEAD-GARDENER'S STORY

A sale of flowers was taking place in Count N——'s greenhouses. The purchasers were few in number—a landowner who was a neighbor of mine, a young timber-merchant, and myself. While the workmen were carrying out our magnificent purchases and packing them into the carts, we sat at the entry of the greenhouse and chatted about one thing and another. It is extremely pleasant to sit in a garden on a still April morning, listening to the birds, and watching the flowers brought out into the open air and basking in the sunshine.

The head-gardener, Mihail Karlovitch, a venerable old man with a full shaven face, wearing a fur waistcoat and no coat, superintended the packing of the plants himself, but at the same time he listened to our conversation in the hope of hearing something new. He was an intelligent, very good-hearted man, respected by everyone. He was for some reason looked upon by everyone as a German, though he was in reality on his father's side Swedish, on his mother's side Russian, and attended the Orthodox church. He knew Russian, Swedish, and German. He had read a good deal in those languages, and nothing one could do gave him greater pleasure than lending him some new book or talking to him, for instance, about Ibsen.

He had his weaknesses, but they were innocent ones: he called himself the head gardener, though there were no under-gardeners; the expression of his face was unusually dignified and haughty; he could not endure to be contradicted, and liked to be listened to with respect and attention.

"That young fellow there I can recommend to you as an awful rascal," said my neighbor, pointing to a laborer with a swarthy, gipsy face, who drove by with the water-barrel. "Last week he was tried in the town for burglary and was acquitted; they pronounced him mentally deranged, and yet look at him, he is the picture of health. Scoundrels are very often acquitted nowadays in Russia on grounds of abnormality and aberration, yet these acquittals, these unmistakable proofs of an indulgent attitude to crime, lead to no good. They demoralize the masses, the sense of justice

is blunted in all as they become accustomed to seeing vice unpunished, and you know in our age one may boldly say in the words of Shakespeare that in our evil and corrupt age virtue must ask forgiveness of vice."

"That's very true," the merchant assented. "Owing to these frequent acquittals, murder and arson have become much more common. Ask the peasants."

Mihail Karlovitch turned towards us and said:

"As far as I am concerned, gentlemen, I am always delighted to meet with these verdicts of not guilty. I am not afraid for morality and justice when they say 'Not guilty,' but on the contrary I feel pleased. Even when my conscience tells me the jury have made a mistake in acquitting the criminal, even then I am triumphant. Judge for yourselves, gentlemen; if the judges and the jury have more faith in *man* than in evidence, material proofs, and speeches for the prosecution, is not that faith *in man* in itself higher than any ordinary considerations? Such faith is only attainable by those few who understand and feel Christ."

"A fine thought," I said.

"But it's not a new one. I remember a very long time ago I heard a legend on that subject. A very charming legend," said the gardener, and he smiled. "I was told it by my grandmother, my father's mother, an excellent old lady. She told me it in Swedish, and it does not sound so fine, so classical, in Russian."

But we begged him to tell it and not to be put off by the coarseness of the Russian language. Much gratified, he deliberately lighted his pipe, looked angrily at the laborers, and began:

"There settled in a certain little town a solitary, plain, elderly gentleman called Thomson or Wilson—but that does not matter; the surname is not the point. He followed an honorable profession: he was a doctor. He was always morose and unsociable, and only spoke when required by his profession. He never visited anyone, never extended his acquaintance beyond a silent bow, and lived as humbly as a hermit. The fact was, he was a learned man, and in those days learned men were not like other people. They spent their days and nights in contemplation, in reading and in healing disease, looked upon everything else as trivial, and had no time to waste a word. The inhabitants of the town understood this, and tried not to worry him with their visits and empty chatter. They were very glad that God had sent them at last a man who could heal diseases, and were proud that such a remarkable man was living in their town. 'He knows everything,' they said about him.

“But that was not enough. They ought to have also said, ‘He loves everyone.’ In the breast of that learned man there beat a wonderful angelic heart. Though the people of that town were strangers and not his own people, yet he loved them like children, and did not spare himself for them. He was himself ill with consumption, he had a cough, but when he was summoned to the sick he forgot his own illness he did not spare himself and, gasping for breath, climbed up the hills however high they might be. He disregarded the sultry heat and the cold, despised thirst and hunger. He would accept no money and strange to say, when one of his patients died, he would follow the coffin with the relations, weeping.

“And soon he became so necessary to the town that the inhabitants wondered how they could have got on before without the man. Their gratitude knew no bounds. Grown-up people and children, good and bad alike, honest men and cheats—all in fact, respected him and knew his value. In the little town and all the surrounding neighborhood there was no man who would allow himself to do anything disagreeable to him; indeed, they would never have dreamed of it. When he came out of his lodging, he never fastened the doors or windows, in complete confidence that there was no thief who could bring himself to do him wrong. He often had in the course of his medical duties to walk along the high roads, through the forests and mountains haunted by numbers of hungry vagrants; but he felt that he was in perfect security.

“One night he was returning from a patient when robbers fell upon him in the forest, but when they recognized him, they took off their hats respectfully and offered him something to eat. When he answered that he was not hungry, they gave him a warm wrap and accompanied him as far as the town, happy that fate had given them the chance in some small way to show their gratitude to the benevolent man. Well, to be sure, my grandmother told me that even the horses and the cows and the dogs knew him and expressed their joy when they met him.

“And this man who seemed by his sanctity to have guarded himself from every evil, to whom even brigands and frenzied men wished nothing but good, was one fine morning found murdered. Covered with blood, with his skull broken, he was lying in a ravine, and his pale face wore an expression of amazement. Yes, not horror but amazement was the emotion that had been fixed upon his face when he saw the murderer before him. You can imagine the grief that overwhelmed the inhabitants of the town and the surrounding districts. All were in despair, unable to believe their eyes, wondering who could have killed the man. The judges who conducted the inquiry and examined the doctor’s body said: ‘Here

we have all the signs of a murder, but as there is not a man in the world capable of murdering our doctor, obviously it was not a case of murder, and the combination of evidence is due to simple chance. We must suppose that in the darkness he fell into the ravine of himself and was mortally injured.'

"The whole town agreed with this opinion. The doctor was buried, and nothing more was said about a violent death. The existence of a man who could have the baseness and wickedness to kill the doctor seemed incredible. There is a limit even to wickedness, isn't there?

"All at once, would you believe it, chance led them to discovering the murderer. A vagrant who had been many times convicted, notorious for his vicious life, was seen selling for drink a snuffbox and watch that had belonged to the doctor. When he was questioned he was confused, and answered with an obvious lie. A search was made, and in his bed was found a shirt with stains of blood on the sleeves, and a doctor's lancet set in gold. What more evidence was wanted? They put the criminal in prison. The inhabitants were indignant, and at the same time said:

"'It's incredible! It can't be so! Take care that a mistake is not made; it does happen, you know, that evidence tells a false tale.'

"At his trial the murderer obstinately denied his guilt. Everything was against him, and to be convinced of his guilt was as easy as to believe that this earth is black; but the judges seem to have gone mad: they weighed every proof ten times, looked distrustfully at the witnesses, flushed crimson and sipped water.… The trial began early in the morning and was only finished in the evening.

"'Accused!' the chief judge said, addressing the murderer, 'the court has found you guilty of murdering Dr. So-and-so, and has sentenced you to.…'

"The chief judge meant to say 'to the death penalty,' but he dropped from his hands the paper on which the sentence was written, wiped the cold sweat from his face, and cried out:

"'No! May God punish me if I judge wrongly, but I swear he is not guilty. I cannot admit the thought that there exists a man who would dare to murder our friend the doctor! A man could not sink so low!'

"'There cannot be such a man!' the other judges assented.

"'No,' the crowd cried. 'Let him go!'

"The murderer was set free to go where he chose, and not one soul blamed the court for an unjust verdict. And my grandmother used to say that for such faith in humanity God forgave the sins of all the inhabitants of that town. He rejoices when people believe that man is His image and

semblance, and grieves if, forgetful of human dignity, they judge worse of men than of dogs. The sentence of acquittal may bring harm to the inhabitants of the town, but on the other hand, think of the beneficial influence upon them of that faith in man—a faith which does not remain dead, you know; it raises up generous feelings in us, and always impels us to love and respect every man. Every man! And that is important."

Mihail Karlovitch had finished. My neighbor would have urged some objection, but the head-gardener made a gesture that signified that he did not like objections; then he walked away to the carts, and, with an expression of dignity, went on looking after the packing.

A Woman's Kingdom

I

Christmas Eve

Here was a thick roll of notes. It came from the bailiff at the forest villa; he wrote that he was sending fifteen hundred roubles, which he had been awarded as damages, having won an appeal. Anna Akimovna disliked and feared such words as "awarded damages" and "won the suit." She knew that it was impossible to do without the law, but for some reason, whenever Nazaritch, the manager of the factory, or the bailiff of her villa in the country, both of whom frequently went to law, used to win lawsuits of some sort for her benefit, she always felt uneasy and, as it were, ashamed. On this occasion, too, she felt uneasy and awkward, and wanted to put that fifteen hundred roubles further away that it might be out of her sight.

She thought with vexation that other girls of her age—she was in her twenty-sixth year—were now busy looking after their households, were weary and would sleep sound, and would wake up tomorrow morning in holiday mood; many of them had long been married and had children. Only she, for some reason, was compelled to sit like an old woman over these letters, to make notes upon them, to write answers, then to do nothing the whole evening till midnight, but wait till she was sleepy; and tomorrow they would all day long be coming with Christmas greetings and asking for favours; and the day after tomorrow there would certainly be some scandal at the factory—someone would be beaten or would die of drinking too much vodka, and she would be fretted by pangs of conscience; and after the holidays Nazaritch would turn off some twenty of the workpeople for absence from work, and all of the twenty would hang about at the front door, without their caps on, and she would be ashamed to go out to them, and they would be driven away like dogs.

And all her acquaintances would say behind her back, and write to her in anonymous letters, that she was a millionaire and exploiter—that she was devouring other men's lives and sucking the blood of the workers.

Here there lay a heap of letters read through and laid aside already. They were all begging letters. They were from people who were hungry, drunken, dragged down by large families, sick, degraded, despised.… Anna Akimovna had already noted on each letter, three roubles to be paid to one, five to another; these letters would go the same day to the office, and next the distribution of assistance would take place, or, as the clerks used to say, the beasts would be fed.

They would distribute also in small sums four hundred and seventy roubles—the interest on a sum bequeathed by the late Akim Ivanovitch for the relief of the poor and needy. There would be a hideous crush. From the gates to the doors of the office there would stretch a long file of strange people with brutal faces, in rags, numb with cold, hungry and already drunk, in husky voices calling down blessings upon Anna Akimovna, their benefactress, and her parents: those at the back would press upon those in front, and those in front would abuse them with bad language. The clerk would get tired of the noise, the swearing, and the singsong whining and blessing; would fly out and give someone a box on the ear to the delight of all. And her own people, the factory hands, who received nothing at Christmas but their wages, and had already spent every farthing of it, would stand in the middle of the yard, looking on and laughing—some enviously, others ironically.

"Merchants, and still more their wives, are fonder of beggars than they are of their own workpeople," thought Anna Akimovna. "It's always so."

Her eye fell upon the roll of money. It would be nice to distribute that hateful, useless money among the workpeople tomorrow, but it did not do to give the workpeople anything for nothing, or they would demand it again next time. And what would be the good of fifteen hundred roubles when there were eighteen hundred workmen in the factory besides their wives and children? Or she might, perhaps, pick out one of the writers of those begging letters—some luckless man who had long ago lost all hope of anything better, and give him the fifteen hundred. The money would come upon the poor creature like a thunderclap, and perhaps for the first time in his life he would feel happy. This idea struck Anna Akimovna as original and amusing, and it fascinated her. She took one letter at random out of the pile and read it. Some petty official called Tchalikov had long been out of a situation, was ill, and living in Gushtchin's Buildings; his wife was in consumption, and he had five little girls. Anna Akimovna

knew well the four-storeyed house, Gushtchin's Buildings, in which Tchalikov lived. Oh, it was a horrid, foul, unhealthy house!

"Well, I will give it to that Tchalikov," she decided. "I won't send it; I had better take it myself to prevent unnecessary talk. Yes," she reflected, as she put the fifteen hundred roubles in her pocket, "and I'll have a look at them, and perhaps I can do something for the little girls."

She felt lighthearted; she rang the bell and ordered the horses to be brought round.

When she got into the sledge it was past six o'clock in the evening. The windows in all the blocks of buildings were brightly lighted up, and that made the huge courtyard seem very dark: at the gates, and at the far end of the yard near the warehouses and the workpeople's barracks, electric lamps were gleaming.

Anna Akimovna disliked and feared those huge dark buildings, warehouses, and barracks where the workmen lived. She had only once been in the main building since her father's death. The high ceilings with iron girders; the multitude of huge, rapidly turning wheels, connecting straps and levers; the shrill hissing; the clank of steel; the rattle of the trolleys; the harsh puffing of steam; the faces—pale, crimson, or black with coal-dust; the shirts soaked with sweat; the gleam of steel, of copper, and of fire; the smell of oil and coal; and the draught, at times very hot and at times very cold—gave her an impression of hell. It seemed to her as though the wheels, the levers, and the hot hissing cylinders were trying to tear themselves away from their fastenings to crush the men, while the men, not hearing one another, ran about with anxious faces, and busied themselves about the machines, trying to stop their terrible movement. They showed Anna Akimovna something and respectfully explained it to her. She remembered how in the forge a piece of red-hot iron was pulled out of the furnace; and how an old man with a strap round his head, and another, a young man in a blue shirt with a chain on his breast, and an angry face, probably one of the foremen, struck the piece of iron with hammers; and how the golden sparks had been scattered in all directions; and how, a little afterwards, they had dragged out a huge piece of sheet-iron with a clang. The old man had stood erect and smiled, while the young man had wiped his face with his sleeve and explained something to her. And she remembered, too, how in another department an old man with one eye had been filing a piece of iron, and how the iron filings were scattered about; and how a red-haired man in black spectacles, with holes in his shirt, had been working at a lathe, making something out of a piece of steel: the lathe roared and

hissed and squeaked, and Anna Akimovna felt sick at the sound, and it seemed as though they were boring into her ears. She looked, listened, did not understand, smiled graciously, and felt ashamed. To get hundreds of thousands of roubles from a business which one does not understand and cannot like—how strange it is!

And she had not once been in the workpeople's barracks. There, she was told, it was damp; there were bugs, debauchery, anarchy. It was an astonishing thing: a thousand roubles were spent annually on keeping the barracks in good order, yet, if she were to believe the anonymous letters, the condition of the workpeople was growing worse and worse every year.

"There was more order in my father's day," thought Anna Akimovna, as she drove out of the yard, "because he had been a workman himself. I know nothing about it and only do silly things."

She felt depressed again, and was no longer glad that she had come, and the thought of the lucky man upon whom fifteen hundred roubles would drop from heaven no longer struck her as original and amusing. To go to some Tchalikov or other, when at home a business worth a million was gradually going to pieces and being ruined, and the workpeople in the barracks were living worse than convicts, meant doing something silly and cheating her conscience. Along the high road and across the fields near it, workpeople from the neighbouring cotton and paper factories were walking towards the lights of the town. There was the sound of talk and laughter in the frosty air. Anna Akimovna looked at the women and young people, and she suddenly felt a longing for a plain rough life among a crowd. She recalled vividly that faraway time when she used to be called Anyutka, when she was a little girl and used to lie under the same quilt with her mother, while a washerwoman who lodged with them used to wash clothes in the next room; while through the thin walls there came from the neighbouring flats sounds of laughter, swearing, children's crying, the accordion, and the whirr of carpenters' lathes and sewing machines; while her father, Akim Ivanovitch, who was clever at almost every craft, would be soldering something near the stove, or drawing or planing, taking no notice whatever of the noise and stuffiness. And she longed to wash, to iron, to run to the shop and the tavern as she used to do every day when she lived with her mother. She ought to have been a workgirl and not the factory owner! Her big house with its chandeliers and pictures; her footman Mishenka, with his glossy moustache and swallowtail coat; the devout and dignified Varvarushka, and smooth-tongued Agafyushka; and the young people of both sexes

who came almost every day to ask her for money, and with whom she always for some reason felt guilty; and the clerks, the doctors, and the ladies who were charitable at her expense, who flattered her and secretly despised her for her humble origin—how wearisome and alien it all was to her!

Here was the railway crossing and the city gate; then came houses alternating with kitchen gardens; and at last the broad street where stood the renowned Gushtchin's Buildings. The street, usually quiet, was now on Christmas Eve full of life and movement. The eating-houses and beer-shops were noisy. If someone who did not belong to that quarter but lived in the centre of the town had driven through the street now, he would have noticed nothing but dirty, drunken, and abusive people; but Anna Akimovna, who had lived in those parts all her life, was constantly recognizing in the crowd her own father or mother or uncle. Her father was a soft fluid character, a little fantastical, frivolous, and irresponsible. He did not care for money, respectability, or power; he used to say that a working man had no time to keep the holy-days and go to church; and if it had not been for his wife, he would probably never have gone to confession, taken the sacrament or kept the fasts. While her uncle, Ivan Ivanovitch, on the contrary, was like flint; in everything relating to religion, politics, and morality, he was harsh and relentless, and kept a strict watch, not only over himself, but also over all his servants and acquaintances. God forbid that one should go into his room without crossing oneself before the icon! The luxurious mansion in which Anna Akimovna now lived he had always kept locked up, and only opened it on great holidays for important visitors, while he lived himself in the office, in a little room covered with icons. He had leanings towards the Old Believers, and was continually entertaining priests and bishops of the old ritual, though he had been christened, and married, and had buried his wife in accordance with the Orthodox rites. He disliked Akim, his only brother and his heir, for his frivolity, which he called simpleness and folly, and for his indifference to religion. He treated him as an inferior, kept him in the position of a workman, paid him sixteen roubles a month. Akim addressed his brother with formal respect, and on the days of asking forgiveness, he and his wife and daughter bowed down to the ground before him. But three years before his death Ivan Ivanovitch had drawn closer to his brother, forgave his shortcomings, and ordered him to get a governess for Anyutka.

There was a dark, deep, evil-smelling archway under Gushtchin's Buildings; there was a sound of men coughing near the walls. Leaving

the sledge in the street, Anna Akimovna went in at the gate and there inquired how to get to No. 46 to see a clerk called Tchalikov. She was directed to the furthest door on the right in the third story. And in the courtyard and near the outer door, and even on the stairs, there was still the same loathsome smell as under the archway. In Anna Akimovna's childhood, when her father was a simple workman, she used to live in a building like that, and afterwards, when their circumstances were different, she had often visited them in the character of a Lady Bountiful. The narrow stone staircase with its steep dirty steps, with landings at every story; the greasy swinging lanterns; the stench; the troughs, pots, and rags on the landings near the doors—all this had been familiar to her long ago.… One door was open, and within could be seen Jewish tailors in caps, sewing. Anna Akimovna met people on the stairs, but it never entered her head that people might be rude to her. She was no more afraid of peasants or workpeople, drunk or sober, than of her acquaintances of the educated class.

There was no entry at No. 46; the door opened straight into the kitchen. As a rule the dwellings of workmen and mechanics smell of varnish, tar, hides, smoke, according to the occupation of the tenant; the dwellings of persons of noble or official class who have come to poverty may be known by a peculiar rancid, sour smell. This disgusting smell enveloped Anna Akimovna on all sides, and as yet she was only on the threshold. A man in a black coat, no doubt Tchalikov himself, was sitting in a corner at the table with his back to the door, and with him were five little girls. The eldest, a broad-faced thin girl with a comb in her hair, looked about fifteen, while the youngest, a chubby child with hair that stood up like a hedgehog, was not more than three. All the six were eating. Near the stove stood a very thin little woman with a yellow face, far gone in pregnancy. She was wearing a skirt and a white blouse, and had an oven fork in her hand.

"I did not expect you to be so disobedient, Liza," the man was saying reproachfully. "Fie, fie, for shame! Do you want papa to whip you—eh?"

Seeing an unknown lady in the doorway, the thin woman started, and put down the fork.

"Vassily Nikititch!" she cried, after a pause, in a hollow voice, as though she could not believe her eyes.

The man looked round and jumped up. He was a flat-chested, bony man with narrow shoulders and sunken temples. His eyes were small and hollow with dark rings round them, he had a wide mouth, and a long nose like a bird's beak—a little bit bent to the right. His beard was parted

in the middle, his moustache was shaven, and this made him look more like a hired footman than a government clerk.

“Does Mr. Tchalikov live here?” asked Anna Akimovna.

“Yes, madam,” Tchalikov answered severely, but immediately recognizing Anna Akimovna, he cried: “Anna Akimovna!” and all at once he gasped and clasped his hands as though in terrible alarm. “Benefactress!”

With a moan he ran to her, grunting inarticulately as though he were paralyzed—there was cabbage on his beard and he smelt of vodka—pressed his forehead to her muff, and seemed as though he were in a swoon.

“Your hand, your holy hand!” he brought out breathlessly. “It’s a dream, a glorious dream! Children, awaken me!”

He turned towards the table and said in a sobbing voice, shaking his fists:

“Providence has heard us! Our saviour, our angel, has come! We are saved! Children, down on your knees! on your knees!”

Madame Tchalikov and the little girls, except the youngest one, began for some reason rapidly clearing the table.

“You wrote that your wife was very ill,” said Anna Akimovna, and she felt ashamed and annoyed. “I am not going to give them the fifteen hundred,” she thought.

“Here she is, my wife,” said Tchalikov in a thin feminine voice, as though his tears had gone to his head. “Here she is, unhappy creature! With one foot in the grave! But we do not complain, madam. Better death than such a life. Better die, unhappy woman!”

“Why is he playing these antics?” thought Anna Akimovna with annoyance. “One can see at once he is used to dealing with merchants.”

“Speak to me like a human being,” she said. “I don’t care for farces.”

“Yes, madam; five bereaved children round their mother’s coffin with funeral candles—that’s a farce? Eh?” said Tchalikov bitterly, and turned away.

“Hold your tongue,” whispered his wife, and she pulled at his sleeve. “The place has not been tidied up, madam,” she said, addressing Anna Akimovna; “please excuse it… you know what it is where there are children. A crowded hearth, but harmony.”

“I am not going to give them the fifteen hundred,” Anna Akimovna thought again.

And to escape as soon as possible from these people and from the sour smell, she brought out her purse and made up her mind to leave them

twenty-five roubles, not more; but she suddenly felt ashamed that she had come so far and disturbed people for so little.

"If you give me paper and ink, I will write at once to a doctor who is a friend of mine to come and see you," she said, flushing red. "He is a very good doctor. And I will leave you some money for medicine."

Madame Tchalikov was hastening to wipe the table.

"It's messy here! What are you doing?" hissed Tchalikov, looking at her wrathfully. "Take her to the lodger's room! I make bold to ask you, madam, to step into the lodger's room," he said, addressing Anna Akimovna. "It's clean there."

"Osip Ilyitch told us not to go into his room!" said one of the little girls, sternly.

But they had already led Anna Akimovna out of the kitchen, through a narrow passage room between two bedsteads: it was evident from the arrangement of the beds that in one two slept lengthwise, and in the other three slept across the bed. In the lodger's room, that came next, it really was clean. A neat-looking bed with a red woollen quilt, a pillow in a white pillowcase, even a slipper for the watch, a table covered with a hempen cloth and on it, an inkstand of milky-looking glass, pens, paper, photographs in frames—everything as it ought to be; and another table for rough work, on which lay tidily arranged a watchmaker's tools and watches taken to pieces. On the walls hung hammers, pliers, awls, chisels, nippers, and so on, and there were three hanging clocks which were ticking; one was a big clock with thick weights, such as one sees in eating-houses.

As she sat down to write the letter, Anna Akimovna saw facing her on the table the photographs of her father and of herself. That surprised her.

"Who lives here with you?" she asked.

"Our lodger, madam, Pimenov. He works in your factory."

"Oh, I thought he must be a watchmaker."

"He repairs watches privately, in his leisure hours. He is an amateur."

After a brief silence during which nothing could be heard but the ticking of the clocks and the scratching of the pen on the paper, Tchalikov heaved a sigh and said ironically, with indignation:

"It's a true saying: gentle birth and a grade in the service won't put a coat on your back. A cockade in your cap and a noble title, but nothing to eat. To my thinking, if anyone of humble class helps the poor he is much more of a gentleman than any Tchalikov who has sunk into poverty and vice."

To flatter Anna Akimovna, he uttered a few more disparaging phrases about his gentle birth, and it was evident that he was humbling himself because he considered himself superior to her. Meanwhile she had finished her letter and had sealed it up. The letter would be thrown away and the money would not be spent on medicine—that she knew, but she put twenty-five roubles on the table all the same, and after a moment's thought, added two more red notes. She saw the wasted, yellow hand of Madame Tchalikov, like the claw of a hen, dart out and clutch the money tight.

"You have graciously given this for medicine," said Tchalikov in a quivering voice, "but hold out a helping hand to me also… and the children!" he added with a sob. "My unhappy children! I am not afraid for myself; it is for my daughters I fear! It's the hydra of vice that I fear!"

Trying to open her purse, the catch of which had gone wrong, Anna Akimovna was confused and turned red. She felt ashamed that people should be standing before her, looking at her hands and waiting, and most likely at the bottom of their hearts laughing at her. At that instant someone came into the kitchen and stamped his feet, knocking the snow off.

"The lodger has come in," said Madame Tchalikov.

Anna Akimovna grew even more confused. She did not want anyone from the factory to find her in this ridiculous position. As ill-luck would have it, the lodger came in at the very moment when, having broken the catch at last, she was giving Tchalikov some notes, and Tchalikov, grunting as though he were paraylzed, was feeling about with his lips where he could kiss her. In the lodger she recognized the workman who had once clanked the sheet-iron before her in the forge, and had explained things to her. Evidently he had come in straight from the factory; his face looked dark and grimy, and on one cheek near his nose was a smudge of soot. His hands were perfectly black, and his unbelted shirt shone with oil and grease. He was a man of thirty, of medium height, with black hair and broad shoulders, and a look of great physical strength. At the first glance Anna Akimovna perceived that he must be a foreman, who must be receiving at least thirty-five roubles a month, and a stern, loud-voiced man who struck the workmen in the face; all this was evident from his manner of standing, from the attitude he involuntarily assumed at once on seeing a lady in his room, and most of all from the fact that he did not wear top-boots, that he had breast pockets, and a pointed, picturesquely clipped beard. Her father, Akim

Ivanovitch, had been the brother of the factory owner, and yet he had been afraid of foremen like this lodger and had tried to win their favour.

"Excuse me for having come in here in your absence," said Anna Akimovna.

The workman looked at her in surprise, smiled in confusion and did not speak.

"You must speak a little louder, madam…." said Tchalikov softly. "When Mr. Pimenov comes home from the factory in the evenings he is a little hard of hearing."

But Anna Akimovna was by now relieved that there was nothing more for her to do here; she nodded to them and went rapidly out of the room. Pimenov went to see her out.

"Have you been long in our employment?" she asked in a loud voice, without turning to him.

"From nine years old. I entered the factory in your uncle's time."

"That's a long while! My uncle and my father knew all the workpeople, and I know hardly any of them. I had seen you before, but I did not know your name was Pimenov."

Anna Akimovna felt a desire to justify herself before him, to pretend that she had just given the money not seriously, but as a joke.

"Oh, this poverty," she sighed. "We give charity on holidays and working days, and still there is no sense in it. I believe it is useless to help such people as this Tchalikov."

"Of course it is useless," he agreed. "However much you give him, he will drink it all away. And now the husband and wife will be snatching it from one another and fighting all night," he added with a laugh.

"Yes, one must admit that our philanthropy is useless, boring, and absurd. But still, you must agree, one can't sit with one's hand in one's lap; one must do something. What's to be done with the Tchalikovs, for instance?"

She turned to Pimenov and stopped, expecting an answer from him; he, too, stopped and slowly, without speaking, shrugged his shoulders. Obviously he knew what to do with the Tchalikovs, but the treatment would have been so coarse and inhuman that he did not venture to put it into words. And the Tchalikovs were to him so utterly uninteresting and worthless, that a moment later he had forgotten them; looking into Anna Akimovna's eyes, he smiled with pleasure, and his face wore an expression as though he were dreaming about something very pleasant. Only, now standing close to him, Anna Akimovna saw from his face, and especially from his eyes, how exhausted and sleepy he was.

“Here, I ought to give him the fifteen hundred roubles!” she thought, but for some reason this idea seemed to her incongruous and insulting to Pimenov.

“I am sure you are aching all over after your work, and you come to the door with me,” she said as they went down the stairs. “Go home.”

But he did not catch her words. When they came out into the street, he ran on ahead, unfastened the cover of the sledge, and helping Anna Akimovna in, said:

“I wish you a happy Christmas!”

II

Christmas Morning

“They have left off ringing ever so long! It’s dreadful; you won’t be there before the service is over! Get up!”

“Two horses are racing, racing…” said Anna Akimovna, and she woke up; before her, candle in hand, stood her maid, red-haired Masha. “Well, what is it?”

“Service is over already,” said Masha with despair. “I have called you three times! Sleep till evening for me, but you told me yourself to call you!”

Anna Akimovna raised herself on her elbow and glanced towards the window. It was still quite dark outside, and only the lower edge of the window-frame was white with snow. She could hear a low, mellow chime of bells; it was not the parish church, but somewhere further away. The watch on the little table showed three minutes past six.

“Very well, Masha.… In three minutes…” said Anna Akimovna in an imploring voice, and she snuggled under the bedclothes.

She imagined the snow at the front door, the sledge, the dark sky, the crowd in the church, and the smell of juniper, and she felt dread at the thought; but all the same, she made up her mind that she would get up at once and go to early service. And while she was warm in bed and struggling with sleep—which seems, as though to spite one, particularly sweet when one ought to get up—and while she had visions of an immense garden on a mountain and then Gushtchin’s Buildings, she was worried all the time by the thought that she ought to get up that very minute and go to church.

But when she got up it was quite light, and it turned out to be half-past nine. There had been a heavy fall of snow in the night; the trees were clothed in white, and the air was particularly light, transparent, and tender, so that when Anna Akimovna looked out of the window her first impulse was to draw a deep, deep breath. And when she had washed, a relic of faraway childish feelings—joy that today was Christmas—suddenly stirred within her; after that she felt lighthearted, free and pure in soul, as though her soul, too, had been washed or plunged in the white snow. Masha came in, dressed up and tightly laced, and wished her a

happy Christmas; then she spent a long time combing her mistress's hair and helping her to dress. The fragrance and feeling of the new, gorgeous, splendid dress, its faint rustle, and the smell of fresh scent, excited Anna Akimoyna.

"Well, it's Christmas," she said gaily to Masha. "Now we will try our fortunes."

"Last year, I was to marry an old man. It turned up three times the same."

"Well, God is merciful."

"Well, Anna Akimovna, what I think is, rather than neither one thing nor the other, I'd marry an old man," said Masha mournfully, and she heaved a sigh. "I am turned twenty; it's no joke."

Everyone in the house knew that red-haired Masha was in love with Mishenka, the footman, and this genuine, passionate, hopeless love had already lasted three years.

"Come, don't talk nonsense," Anna Akimovna consoled her. "I am going on for thirty, but I am still meaning to marry a young man."

While his mistress was dressing, Mishenka, in a new swallowtail and polished boots, walked about the hall and drawing room and waited for her to come out, to wish her a happy Christmas. He had a peculiar walk, stepping softly and delicately; looking at his feet, his hands, and the bend of his head, it might be imagined that he was not simply walking, but learning to dance the first figure of a quadrille. In spite of his fine velvety moustache and handsome, rather flashy appearance, he was steady, prudent, and devout as an old man. He said his prayers, bowing down to the ground, and liked burning incense in his room. He respected people of wealth and rank and had a reverence for them; he despised poor people, and all who came to ask favours of any kind, with all the strength of his cleanly flunkey soul. Under his starched shirt he wore a flannel, winter and summer alike, being very careful of his health; his ears were plugged with cotton-wool.

When Anna Akimovna crossed the hall with Masha, he bent his head downwards a little and said in his agreeable, honeyed voice:

"I have the honour to congratulate you, Anna Akimovna, on the most solemn feast of the birth of our Lord."

Anna Akimovna gave him five roubles, while poor Masha was numb with ecstasy. His holiday getup, his attitude, his voice, and what he said, impressed her by their beauty and elegance; as she followed her mistress she could think of nothing, could see nothing, she could only smile, first blissfully and then bitterly. The upper story of the house was called the

best or visitors' half, while the name of the business part—old people's or simply women's part—was given to the rooms on the lower story where Aunt Tatyana Ivanovna kept house. In the upper part the gentry and educated visitors were entertained; in the lower story, simpler folk and the aunt's personal friends. Handsome, plump, and healthy, still young and fresh, and feeling she had on a magnificent dress which seemed to her to diffuse a sort of radiance all about her, Anna Akimovna went down to the lower story. Here she was met with reproaches for forgetting God now that she was so highly educated, for sleeping too late for the service, and for not coming downstairs to break the fast, and they all clasped their hands and exclaimed with perfect sincerity that she was lovely, wonderful; and she believed it, laughed, kissed them, gave one a rouble, another three or five according to their position. She liked being downstairs. Wherever one looked there were shrines, icons, little lamps, portraits of ecclesiastical personages—the place smelt of monks; there was a rattle of knives in the kitchen, and already a smell of something savoury, exceedingly appetizing, was pervading all the rooms. The yellow-painted floors shone, and from the doors narrow rugs with bright blue stripes ran like little paths to the icon corner, and the sunshine was simply pouring in at the windows.

In the dining room some old women, strangers, were sitting; in Varvarushka's room, too, there were old women, and with them a deaf and dumb girl, who seemed abashed about something and kept saying, "Bli, bli!…" Two skinny-looking little girls who had been brought out of the orphanage for Christmas came up to kiss Anna Akimovna's hand, and stood before her transfixed with admiration of her splendid dress; she noticed that one of the girls squinted, and in the midst of her lighthearted holiday mood she felt a sick pang at her heart at the thought that young men would despise the girl, and that she would never marry. In the cook Agafya's room, five huge peasants in new shirts were sitting round the samovar; these were not workmen from the factory, but relations of the cook. Seeing Anna Akimovna, all the peasants jumped up from their seats, and from regard for decorum, ceased munching, though their mouths were full. The cook Stepan, in a white cap, with a knife in his hand, came into the room and gave her his greetings; porters in high felt boots came in, and they, too, offered their greetings. The water-carrier peeped in with icicles on his beard, but did not venture to come in.

Anna Akimovna walked through the rooms followed by her retinue—the aunt, Varvarushka, Nikandrovna, the sewing-maid Marfa Petrovna,

and the downstairs Masha. Varvarushka—a tall, thin, slender woman, taller than anyone in the house, dressed all in black, smelling of cypress and coffee—crossed herself in each room before the icon, bowing down from the waist. And whenever one looked at her one was reminded that she had already prepared her shroud and that lottery tickets were hidden away by her in the same box.

"Anyutinka, be merciful at Christmas," she said, opening the door into the kitchen. "Forgive him, bless the man! Have done with it!"

The coachman Panteley, who had been dismissed for drunkenness in November, was on his knees in the middle of the kitchen. He was a good-natured man, but he used to be unruly when he was drunk, and could not go to sleep, but persisted in wandering about the buildings and shouting in a threatening voice, "I know all about it!" Now from his beefy and bloated face and from his bloodshot eyes it could be seen that he had been drinking continually from November till Christmas.

"Forgive me, Anna Akimovna," he brought out in a hoarse voice, striking his forehead on the floor and showing his bull-like neck.

"It was Auntie dismissed you; ask her."

"What about auntie?" said her aunt, walking into the kitchen, breathing heavily; she was very stout, and on her bosom one might have stood a tray of teacups and a samovar. "What about auntie now? You are mistress here, give your own orders; though these rascals might be all dead for all I care. Come, get up, you hog!" she shouted at Panteley, losing patience. "Get out of my sight! It's the last time I forgive you, but if you transgress again—don't ask for mercy!"

Then they went into the dining room to coffee. But they had hardly sat down, when the downstairs Masha rushed headlong in, saying with horror, "The singers!" And ran back again. They heard someone blowing his nose, a low bass cough, and footsteps that sounded like horses' iron-shod hoofs tramping about the entry near the hall. For half a minute all was hushed.… The singers burst out so suddenly and loudly that everyone started. While they were singing, the priest from the almshouses with the deacon and the sexton arrived. Putting on the stole, the priest slowly said that when they were ringing for matins it was snowing and not cold, but that the frost was sharper towards morning, God bless it! and now there must be twenty degrees of frost.

"Many people maintain, though, that winter is healthier than summer," said the deacon; then immediately assumed an austere expression and chanted after the priest. "Thy Birth, O Christ our Lord.…"

Soon the priest from the workmen's hospital came with the deacon, then the Sisters from the hospital, children from the orphanage, and then singing could be heard almost uninterruptedly. They sang, had lunch, and went away.

About twenty men from the factory came to offer their Christmas greetings. They were only the foremen, mechanicians, and their assistants, the pattern-makers, the accountant, and so on—all of good appearance, in new black coats. They were all first-rate men, as it were picked men; each one knew his value—that is, knew that if he lost his berth today, people would be glad to take him on at another factory. Evidently they liked Auntie, as they behaved freely in her presence and even smoked, and when they had all trooped in to have something to eat, the accountant put his arm round her immense waist. They were free-and-easy, perhaps, partly also because Varvarushka, who under the old masters had wielded great power and had kept watch over the morals of the clerks, had now no authority whatever in the house; and perhaps because many of them still remembered the time when Auntie Tatyana Ivanovna, whose brothers kept a strict hand over her, had been dressed like a simple peasant woman like Agafya, and when Anna Akimovna used to run about the yard near the factory buildings and everyone used to call her Anyutka.

The foremen ate, talked, and kept looking with amazement at Anna Akimovna, how she had grown up and how handsome she had become! But this elegant girl, educated by governesses and teachers, was a stranger to them; they could not understand her, and they instinctively kept closer to "Auntie," who called them by their names, continually pressed them to eat and drink, and, clinking glasses with them, had already drunk two wineglasses of rowanberry wine with them. Anna Akimovna was always afraid of their thinking her proud, an upstart, or a crow in peacock's feathers; and now while the foremen were crowding round the food, she did not leave the dining room, but took part in the conversation. She asked Pimenov, her acquaintance of the previous day:

"Why have you so many clocks in your room?"

"I mend clocks," he answered. "I take the work up between times, on holidays, or when I can't sleep."

"So if my watch goes wrong I can bring it to you to be repaired?" Anna Akimovna asked, laughing.

"To be sure, I will do it with pleasure," said Pimenov, and there was an expression of tender devotion in his face, when, not herself knowing why, she unfastened her magnificent watch from its chain and handed it

to him; he looked at it in silence and gave it back. “To be sure, I will do it with pleasure,” he repeated. “I don’t mend watches now. My eyes are weak, and the doctors have forbidden me to do fine work. But for you I can make an exception.”

“Doctors talk nonsense,” said the accountant. They all laughed. “Don’t you believe them,” he went on, flattered by the laughing; “last year a tooth flew out of a cylinder and hit old Kalmykov such a crack on the head that you could see his brains, and the doctor said he would die; but he is alive and working to this day, only he has taken to stammering since that mishap.”

“Doctors do talk nonsense, they do, but not so much,” sighed Auntie. “Pyotr Andreyitch, poor dear, lost his sight. Just like you, he used to work day in day out at the factory near the hot furnace, and he went blind. The eyes don’t like heat. But what are we talking about?” she said, rousing herself. “Come and have a drink. My best wishes for Christmas, my dears. I never drink with anyone else, but I drink with you, sinful woman as I am. Please God!”

Anna Akimovna fancied that after yesterday Pimenov despised her as a philanthropist, but was fascinated by her as a woman. She looked at him and thought that he behaved very charmingly and was nicely dressed. It is true that the sleeves of his coat were not quite long enough, and the coat itself seemed short-waisted, and his trousers were not wide and fashionable, but his tie was tied carelessly and with taste and was not as gaudy as the others’. And he seemed to be a good-natured man, for he ate submissively whatever Auntie put on his plate. She remembered how black he had been the day before, and how sleepy, and the thought of it for some reason touched her.

When the men were preparing to go, Anna Akimovna put out her hand to Pimenov. She wanted to ask him to come in sometimes to see her, without ceremony, but she did not know how to—her tongue would not obey her; and that they might not think she was attracted by Pimenov, she shook hands with his companions, too.

Then the boys from the school of which she was a patroness came. They all had their heads closely cropped and all wore grey blouses of the same pattern. The teacher—a tall, beardless young man with patches of red on his face—was visibly agitated as he formed the boys into rows; the boys sang in tune, but with harsh, disagreeable voices. The manager of the factory, Nazaritch, a bald, sharp-eyed Old Believer, could never get on with the teachers, but the one who was now anxiously waving his hands he despised and hated, though he could not have said why. He

behaved rudely and condescendingly to the young man, kept back his salary, meddled with the teaching, and had finally tried to dislodge him by appointing, a fortnight before Christmas, as porter to the school a drunken peasant, a distant relation of his wife's, who disobeyed the teacher and said rude things to him before the boys.

Anna Akimovna was aware of all this, but she could be of no help, for she was afraid of Nazaritch herself. Now she wanted at least to be very nice to the schoolmaster, to tell him she was very much pleased with him; but when after the singing he began apologizing for something in great confusion, and Auntie began to address him familiarly as she drew him without ceremony to the table, she felt, for some reason, bored and awkward, and giving orders that the children should be given sweets, went upstairs.

"In reality there is something cruel in these Christmas customs," she said a little while afterwards, as it were to herself, looking out of window at the boys, who were flocking from the house to the gates and shivering with cold, putting their coats on as they ran. "At Christmas one wants to rest, to sit at home with one's own people, and the poor boys, the teacher, and the clerks and foremen, are obliged for some reason to go through the frost, then to offer their greetings, show their respect, be put to confusion…"

Mishenka, who was standing at the door of the drawing room and overheard this, said:

"It has not come from us, and it will not end with us. Of course, I am not an educated man, Anna Akimovna, but I do understand that the poor must always respect the rich. It is well said, 'God marks the rogue.' In prisons, night refuges, and pothouses you never see any but the poor, while decent people, you may notice, are always rich. It has been said of the rich, 'Deep calls to deep.'"

"You always express yourself so tediously and incomprehensibly," said Anna Akimovna, and she walked to the other end of the big drawing room.

It was only just past eleven. The stillness of the big room, only broken by the singing that floated up from below, made her yawn. The bronzes, the albums, and the pictures on the walls, representing a ship at sea, cows in a meadow, and views of the Rhine, were so absolutely stale that her eyes simply glided over them without observing them. The holiday mood was already growing tedious. As before, Anna Akimovna felt that she was beautiful, good-natured, and wonderful, but now it seemed to her that that was of no use to anyone; it seemed to her that she did not know

for whom and for what she had put on this expensive dress, too, and, as always happened on all holidays, she began to be fretted by loneliness and the persistent thought that her beauty, her health, and her wealth, were a mere cheat, since she was not wanted, was of no use to anyone, and nobody loved her. She walked through all the rooms, humming and looking out of window; stopping in the drawing room, she could not resist beginning to talk to Mishenka.

"I don't know what you think of yourself, Misha," she said, and heaved a sigh. "Really, God might punish you for it."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. Excuse my meddling in your affairs. But it seems you are spoiling your own life out of obstinacy. You'll admit that it is high time you got married, and she is an excellent and deserving girl. You will never find anyone better. She's a beauty, clever, gentle, and devoted.… And her appearance!… If she belonged to our circle or a higher one, people would be falling in love with her for her red hair alone. See how beautifully her hair goes with her complexion. Oh, goodness! You don't understand anything, and don't know what you want," Anna Akimovna said bitterly, and tears came into her eyes. "Poor girl, I am so sorry for her! I know you want a wife with money, but I have told you already I will give Masha a dowry."

Mishenka could not picture his future spouse in his imagination except as a tall, plump, substantial, pious woman, stepping like a peacock, and, for some reason, with a long shawl over her shoulders; while Masha was thin, slender, tightly laced, and walked with little steps, and, worst of all, she was too fascinating and at times extremely attractive to Mishenka, and that, in his opinion, was incongruous with matrimony and only in keeping with loose behaviour. When Anna Akimovna had promised to give Masha a dowry, he had hesitated for a time; but once a poor student in a brown overcoat over his uniform, coming with a letter for Anna Akimovna, was fascinated by Masha, and could not resist embracing her near the hatstand, and she had uttered a faint shriek; Mishenka, standing on the stairs above, had seen this, and from that time had begun to cherish a feeling of disgust for Masha. A poor student! Who knows, if she had been embraced by a rich student or an officer the consequences might have been different.

"Why don't you wish it?" Anna Akimovna asked. "What more do you want?"

Mishenka was silent and looked at the armchair fixedly, and raised his eyebrows.

“Do you love someone else?”

Silence. The red-haired Masha came in with letters and visiting cards on a tray. Guessing that they were talking about her, she blushed to tears.

“The postmen have come,” she muttered. “And there is a clerk called Tchalikov waiting below. He says you told him to come today for something.”

“What insolence!” said Anna Akimovna, moved to anger. “I gave him no orders. Tell him to take himself off; say I am not at home!”

A ring was heard. It was the priests from her parish. They were always shown into the aristocratic part of the house—that is, upstairs. After the priests, Nazaritch, the manager of the factory, came to pay his visit, and then the factory doctor; then Mishenka announced the inspector of the elementary schools. Visitors kept arriving.

When there was a moment free, Anna Akimovna sat down in a deep armchair in the drawing room, and shutting her eyes, thought that her loneliness was quite natural because she had not married and never would marry.… But that was not her fault. Fate itself had flung her out of the simple working-class surroundings in which, if she could trust her memory, she had felt so snug and at home, into these immense rooms, where she could never think what to do with herself, and could not understand why so many people kept passing before her eyes. What was happening now seemed to her trivial, useless, since it did not and could not give her happiness for one minute.

“If I could fall in love,” she thought, stretching; the very thought of this sent a rush of warmth to her heart. “And if I could escape from the factory…” she mused, imagining how the weight of those factory buildings, barracks, and schools would roll off her conscience, roll off her mind.… Then she remembered her father, and thought if he had lived longer he would certainly have married her to a working man—to Pimenov, for instance. He would have told her to marry, and that would have been all about it. And it would have been a good thing; then the factory would have passed into capable hands.

She pictured his curly head, his bold profile, his delicate, ironical lips and the strength, the tremendous strength, in his shoulders, in his arms, in his chest, and the tenderness with which he had looked at her watch that day.

“Well,” she said, “it would have been all right. I would have married him.”

“Anna Akimovna,” said Mishenka, coming noiselessly into the drawing room.

“How you frightened me!” she said, trembling all over. “What do you want?”

“Anna Akimovna,” he said, laying his hand on his heart and raising his eyebrows, “you are my mistress and my benefactress, and no one but you can tell me what I ought to do about marriage, for you are as good as a mother to me.… But kindly forbid them to laugh and jeer at me downstairs. They won’t let me pass without it.”

“How do they jeer at you?”

“They call me Mashenka’s Mishenka.”

“Pooh, what nonsense!” cried Anna Akimovna indignantly. “How stupid you all are! What a stupid you are, Misha! How sick I am of you! I can’t bear the sight of you.”

III

Dinner

Just as the year before, the last to pay her visits were Krylin, an actual civil councillor, and Lysevitch, a well-known barrister. It was already dark when they arrived. Krylin, a man of sixty, with a wide mouth and with grey whiskers close to his ears, with a face like a lynx, was wearing a uniform with an Anna ribbon, and white trousers. He held Anna Akimovna's hand in both of his for a long while, looked intently in her face, moved his lips, and at last said, drawling upon one note:

"I used to respect your uncle… and your father, and enjoyed the privilege of their friendship. Now I feel it an agreeable duty, as you see, to present my Christmas wishes to their honoured heiress in spite of my infirmities and the distance I have to come.… And I am very glad to see you in good health."

The lawyer Lysevitch, a tall, handsome fair man, with a slight sprinkling of grey on his temples and beard, was distinguished by exceptionally elegant manners; he walked with a swaying step, bowed as it were reluctantly, and shrugged his shoulders as he talked, and all this with an indolent grace, like a spoiled horse fresh from the stable. He was well fed, extremely healthy, and very well off; on one occasion he had won forty thousand roubles, but concealed the fact from his friends. He was fond of good fare, especially cheese, truffles, and grated radish with hemp oil; while in Paris he had eaten, so he said, baked but unwashed guts. He spoke smoothly, fluently, without hesitation, and only occasionally, for the sake of effect, permitted himself to hesitate and snap his fingers as if picking up a word. He had long ceased to believe in anything he had to say in the law courts, or perhaps he did believe in it, but attached no kind of significance to it; it had all so long been familiar, stale, ordinary.… He believed in nothing but what was original and unusual. A copybook moral in an original form would move him to tears. Both his notebooks were filled with extraordinary expressions which he had read in various authors; and when he needed to look up any expression, he would search nervously in both books, and usually failed to find it. Anna Akimovna's father had in a good-humoured moment ostentatiously appointed him legal adviser in matters concerning the

factory, and had assigned him a salary of twelve thousand roubles. The legal business of the factory had been confined to two or three trivial actions for recovering debts, which Lysevitch handed to his assistants.

Anna Akimovna knew that he had nothing to do at the factory, but she could not dismiss him—she had not the moral courage; and besides, she was used to him. He used to call himself her legal adviser, and his salary, which he invariably sent for on the first of the month punctually, he used to call "stern prose." Anna Akimovna knew that when, after her father's death, the timber of her forest was sold for railway sleepers, Lysevitch had made more than fifteen thousand out of the transaction, and had shared it with Nazaritch. When first she found out they had cheated her she had wept bitterly, but afterwards she had grown used to it.

Wishing her a happy Christmas, and kissing both her hands, he looked her up and down, and frowned.

"You mustn't," he said with genuine disappointment. "I have told you, my dear, you mustn't!"

"What do you mean, Viktor Nikolaitch?"

"I have told you you mustn't get fat. All your family have an unfortunate tendency to grow fat. You mustn't," he repeated in an imploring voice, and kissed her hand. "You are so handsome! You are so splendid! Here, your Excellency, let me introduce the one woman in the world whom I have ever seriously loved."

"There is nothing surprising in that. To know Anna Akimovna at your age and not to be in love with her, that would be impossible."

"I adore her," the lawyer continued with perfect sincerity, but with his usual indolent grace. "I love her, but not because I am a man and she is a woman. When I am with her I always feel as though she belongs to some third sex, and I to a fourth, and we float away together into the domain of the subtlest shades, and there we blend into the spectrum. Leconte de Lisle defines such relations better than anyone. He has a superb passage, a marvellous passage.…"

Lysevitch rummaged in one notebook, then in the other, and, not finding the quotation, subsided. They began talking of the weather, of the opera, of the arrival, expected shortly, of Duse. Anna Akimovna remembered that the year before Lysevitch and, she fancied, Krylin had dined with her, and now when they were getting ready to go away, she began with perfect sincerity pointing out to them in an imploring voice that as they had no more visits to pay, they ought to remain to dinner with her. After some hesitation the visitors agreed.

In addition to the family dinner, consisting of cabbage soup, sucking pig, goose with apples, and so on, a so-called “French” or “chef’s” dinner used to be prepared in the kitchen on great holidays, in case any visitor in the upper story wanted a meal. When they heard the clatter of crockery in the dining room, Lysevitch began to betray a noticeable excitement; he rubbed his hands, shrugged his shoulders, screwed up his eyes, and described with feeling what dinners her father and uncle used to give at one time, and a marvellous *matelote* of turbots the cook here could make: it was not a *matelote*, but a veritable revelation! He was already gloating over the dinner, already eating it in imagination and enjoying it. When Anna Akimovna took his arm and led him to the dining room, he tossed off a glass of vodka and put a piece of salmon in his mouth; he positively purred with pleasure. He munched loudly, disgustingly, emitting sounds from his nose, while his eyes grew oily and rapacious.

The hors d’oeuvres were superb; among other things, there were fresh white mushrooms stewed in cream, and sauce *provençale* made of fried oysters and crayfish, strongly flavoured with some bitter pickles. The dinner, consisting of elaborate holiday dishes, was excellent, and so were the wines. Mishenka waited at table with enthusiasm. When he laid some new dish on the table and lifted the shining cover, or poured out the wine, he did it with the solemnity of a professor of black magic, and, looking at his face and his movements suggesting the first figure of a quadrille, the lawyer thought several times, “What a fool!”

After the third course Lysevitch said, turning to Anna Akimovna:

“The *fin de siècle* woman—I mean when she is young, and of course wealthy—must be independent, clever, elegant, intellectual, bold, and a little depraved. Depraved within limits, a little; for excess, you know, is wearisome. You ought not to vegetate, my dear; you ought not to live like everyone else, but to get the full savour of life, and a slight flavour of depravity is the sauce of life. Revel among flowers of intoxicating fragrance, breathe the perfume of musk, eat hashish, and best of all, love, love, love.… To begin with, in your place I would set up seven lovers—one for each day of the week; and one I would call Monday, one Tuesday, the third Wednesday, and so on, so that each might know his day.”

This conversation troubled Anna Akimovna; she ate nothing and only drank a glass of wine.

“Let me speak at last,” she said. “For myself personally, I can’t conceive of love without family life. I am lonely, lonely as the moon in

the sky, and a waning moon, too; and whatever you may say, I am convinced, I feel that this waning can only be restored by love in its ordinary sense. It seems to me that such love would define my duties, my work, make clear my conception of life. I want from love peace of soul, tranquillity; I want the very opposite of musk, and spiritualism, and *fin de siècle*… in short"—she grew embarrassed—"a husband and children."

"You want to be married? Well, you can do that, too," Lysevitch assented. "You ought to have all experiences: marriage, and jealousy, and the sweetness of the first infidelity, and even children.… But make haste and live—make haste, my dear: time is passing; it won't wait."

"Yes, I'll go and get married!" she said, looking angrily at his well-fed, satisfied face. "I will marry in the simplest, most ordinary way and be radiant with happiness. And, would you believe it, I will marry some plain working man, some mechanic or draughtsman."

"There is no harm in that, either. The Duchess Josiana loved Gwinplin, and that was permissible for her because she was a grand duchess. Everything is permissible for you, too, because you are an exceptional woman: if, my dear, you want to love a negro or an Arab, don't scruple; send for a negro. Don't deny yourself anything. You ought to be as bold as your desires; don't fall short of them."

"Can it be so hard to understand me?" Anna Akimovna asked with amazement, and her eyes were bright with tears. "Understand, I have an immense business on my hands—two thousand workmen, for whom I must answer before God. The men who work for me grow blind and deaf. I am afraid to go on like this; I am afraid! I am wretched, and you have the cruelty to talk to me of negroes and… and you smile!" Anna Akimovna brought her fist down on the table. "To go on living the life I am living now, or to marry someone as idle and incompetent as myself, would be a crime. I can't go on living like this," she said hotly, "I cannot!"

"How handsome she is!" said Lysevitch, fascinated by her. "My God, how handsome she is! But why are you angry, my dear? Perhaps I am wrong; but surely you don't imagine that if, for the sake of ideas for which I have the deepest respect, you renounce the joys of life and lead a dreary existence, your workmen will be any the better for it? Not a scrap! No, frivolity, frivolity!" he said decisively. "It's essential for you; it's your duty to be frivolous and depraved! Ponder that, my dear, ponder it."

Anna Akimovna was glad she had spoken out, and her spirits rose. She was pleased she had spoken so well, and that her ideas were so fine and

just, and she was already convinced that if Pimenov, for instance, loved her, she would marry him with pleasure.

Mishenka began to pour out champagne.

“You make me angry, Viktor Nikolaitch,” she said, clinking glasses with the lawyer. “It seems to me you give advice and know nothing of life yourself. According to you, if a man be a mechanic or a draughtsman, he is bound to be a peasant and an ignoramus! But they are the cleverest people! Extraordinary people!”

“Your uncle and father… I knew them and respected them…” Krylin said, pausing for emphasis (he had been sitting upright as a post, and had been eating steadily the whole time), “were people of considerable intelligence and… of lofty spiritual qualities.”

“Oh, to be sure, we know all about their qualities,” the lawyer muttered, and asked permission to smoke.

When dinner was over Krylin was led away for a nap. Lysevitch finished his cigar, and, staggering from repletion, followed Anna Akimovna into her study. Cosy corners with photographs and fans on the walls, and the inevitable pink or pale blue lanterns in the middle of the ceiling, he did not like, as the expression of an insipid and unoriginal character; besides, the memory of certain of his love affairs of which he was now ashamed was associated with such lanterns. Anna Akimovna’s study with its bare walls and tasteless furniture pleased him exceedingly. It was snug and comfortable for him to sit on a Turkish divan and look at Anna Akimovna, who usually sat on the rug before the fire, clasping her knees and looking into the fire and thinking of something; and at such moments it seemed to him that her peasant Old Believer blood was stirring within her.

Every time after dinner when coffee and liqueurs were handed, he grew livelier and began telling her various bits of literary gossip. He spoke with eloquence and inspiration, and was carried away by his own stories; and she listened to him and thought every time that for such enjoyment it was worth paying not only twelve thousand, but three times that sum, and forgave him everything she disliked in him. He sometimes told her the story of some tale or novel he had been reading, and then two or three hours passed unnoticed like a minute. Now he began rather dolefully in a failing voice with his eyes shut.

“It’s ages, my dear, since I have read anything,” he said when she asked him to tell her something. “Though I do sometimes read Jules Verne.”

“I was expecting you to tell me something new.”

“H’m!… new,” Lysevitch muttered sleepily, and he settled himself further back in the corner of the sofa. “None of the new literature, my dear, is any use for you or me. Of course, it is bound to be such as it is, and to refuse to recognize it is to refuse to recognize—would mean refusing to recognize the natural order of things, and I do recognize it, but…” Lysevitch seemed to have fallen asleep. But a minute later his voice was heard again:

“All the new literature moans and howls like the autumn wind in the chimney. ‘Ah, unhappy wretch! Ah, your life may be likened to a prison! Ah, how damp and dark it is in your prison! Ah, you will certainly come to ruin, and there is no chance of escape for you!’ That’s very fine, but I should prefer a literature that would tell us how to escape from prison. Of all contemporary writers, however, I prefer Maupassant.” Lysevitch opened his eyes. “A fine writer, a perfect writer!” Lysevitch shifted in his seat. “A wonderful artist! A terrible, prodigious, supernatural artist!” Lysevitch got up from the sofa and raised his right arm. “Maupassant!” he said rapturously. “My dear, read Maupassant! one page of his gives you more than all the riches of the earth! Every line is a new horizon. The softest, tenderest impulses of the soul alternate with violent tempestuous sensations; your soul, as though under the weight of forty thousand atmospheres, is transformed into the most insignificant little bit of some great thing of an undefined rosy hue which I fancy, if one could put it on one’s tongue, would yield a pungent, voluptuous taste. What a fury of transitions, of motives, of melodies! You rest peacefully on the lilies and the roses, and suddenly a thought—a terrible, splendid, irresistible thought—swoops down upon you like a locomotive, and bathes you in hot steam and deafens you with its whistle. Read Maupassant, dear girl; I insist on it.”

Lysevitch waved his arms and paced from corner to corner in violent excitement.

“Yes, it is inconceivable,” he pronounced, as though in despair; “his last thing overwhelmed me, intoxicated me! But I am afraid you will not care for it. To be carried away by it you must savour it, slowly suck the juice from each line, drink it in.… You must drink it in!…”

After a long introduction, containing many words such as “dæmonic sensuality,” “a network of the most delicate nerves,” “simoom,” “crystal,” and so on, he began at last telling the story of the novel. He did not tell the story so whimsically, but told it in minute detail, quoting from memory whole descriptions and conversations; the characters of the novel fascinated him, and to describe them he threw himself into

attitudes, changed the expression of his face and voice like a real actor. He laughed with delight at one moment in a deep bass, and at another, on a high shrill note, clasped his hands and clutched at his head with an expression which suggested that it was just going to burst. Anna Akimovna listened enthralled, though she had already read the novel, and it seemed to her ever so much finer and more subtle in the lawyer's version than in the book itself. He drew her attention to various subtleties, and emphasized the felicitous expressions and the profound thoughts, but she saw in it, only life, life, life and herself, as though she had been a character in the novel. Her spirits rose, and she, too, laughing and clasping her hands, thought that she could not go on living such a life, that there was no need to have a wretched life when one might have a splendid one. She remembered her words and thoughts at dinner, and was proud of them; and when Pimenov suddenly rose up in her imagination, she felt happy and longed for him to love her.

When he had finished the story, Lysevitch sat down on the sofa, exhausted.

"How splendid you are! How handsome!" he began, a little while afterwards in a faint voice as if he were ill. "I am happy near you, dear girl, but why am I forty-two instead of thirty? Your tastes and mine do not coincide: you ought to be depraved, and I have long passed that phase, and want a love as delicate and immaterial as a ray of sunshine—that is, from the point of view of a woman of your age, I am of no earthly use."

In his own words, he loved Turgenev, the singer of virginal love and purity, of youth, and of the melancholy Russian landscape; but he loved virginal love, not from knowledge but from hearsay, as something abstract, existing outside real life. Now he assured himself that he loved Anna Akimovna platonically, ideally, though he did not know what those words meant. But he felt comfortable, snug, warm. Anna Akimovna seemed to him enchanting, original, and he imagined that the pleasant sensation that was aroused in him by these surroundings was the very thing that was called platonic love.

He laid his cheek on her hand and said in the tone commonly used in coaxing little children:

"My precious, why have you punished me?"

"How? When?"

"I have had no Christmas present from you."

Anna Akimovna had never heard before of their sending a Christmas box to the lawyer, and now she was at a loss how much to give him. But

she must give him something, for he was expecting it, though he looked at her with eyes full of love.

"I suppose Nazaritch forgot it," she said, "but it is not too late to set it right."

She suddenly remembered the fifteen hundred she had received the day before, which was now lying in the toilet drawer in her bedroom. And when she brought that ungrateful money and gave it to the lawyer, and he put it in his coat pocket with indolent grace, the whole incident passed off charmingly and naturally. The sudden reminder of a Christmas box and this fifteen hundred was not unbecoming in Lysevitch.

"*Merci*," he said, and kissed her finger.

Krylin came in with blissful, sleepy face, but without his decorations.

Lysevitch and he stayed a little longer and drank a glass of tea each, and began to get ready to go. Anna Akimovna was a little embarrassed.… She had utterly forgotten in what department Krylin served, and whether she had to give him money or not; and if she had to, whether to give it now or send it afterwards in an envelope.

"Where does he serve?" she whispered to Lysevitch.

"Goodness knows," muttered Lysevitch, yawning.

She reflected that if Krylin used to visit her father and her uncle and respected them, it was probably not for nothing: apparently he had been charitable at their expense, serving in some charitable institution. As she said goodbye she slipped three hundred roubles into his hand; he seemed taken aback, and looked at her for a minute in silence with his pewtery eyes, but then seemed to understand and said:

"The receipt, honoured Anna Akimovna, you can only receive on the New Year."

Lysevitch had become utterly limp and heavy, and he staggered when Mishenka put on his overcoat.

As he went downstairs he looked like a man in the last stage of exhaustion, and it was evident that he would drop asleep as soon as he got into his sledge.

"Your Excellency," he said languidly to Krylin, stopping in the middle of the staircase, "has it ever happened to you to experience a feeling as though some unseen force were drawing you out longer and longer? You are drawn out and turn into the finest wire. Subjectively this finds expression in a curious voluptuous feeling which is impossible to compare with anything."

Anna Akimovna, standing at the top of the stairs, saw each of them give Mishenka a note.

“Goodbye! Come again!” she called to them, and ran into her bedroom.

She quickly threw off her dress, that she was weary of already, put on a dressing gown, and ran downstairs; and as she ran downstairs she laughed and thumped with her feet like a schoolboy; she had a great desire for mischief.

IV

EVENING

Auntie, in a loose print blouse, Varvarushka and two old women, were sitting in the dining room having supper. A big piece of salt meat, a ham, and various savouries, were lying on the table before them, and clouds of steam were rising from the meat, which looked particularly fat and appetizing. Wine was not served on the lower story, but they made up for it with a great number of spirits and homemade liqueurs. Agafyushka, the fat, white-skinned, well-fed cook, was standing with her arms crossed in the doorway and talking to the old women, and the dishes were being handed by the downstairs Masha, a dark girl with a crimson ribbon in her hair. The old women had had enough to eat before the morning was over, and an hour before supper had had tea and buns, and so they were now eating with effort—as it were, from a sense of duty.

"Oh, my girl!" sighed Auntie, as Anna Akimovna ran into the dining room and sat down beside her. "You've frightened me to death!"

Everyone in the house was pleased when Anna Akimovna was in good spirits and played pranks; this always reminded them that the old men were dead and that the old women had no authority in the house, and anyone could do as he liked without any fear of being sharply called to account for it. Only the two old women glanced askance at Anna Akimovna with amazement: she was humming, and it was a sin to sing at table.

"Our mistress, our beauty, our picture," Agafyushka began chanting with sugary sweetness. "Our precious jewel! The people, the people that have come today to look at our queen. Lord have mercy upon us! Generals, and officers and gentlemen.… I kept looking out of window and counting and counting till I gave it up."

"I'd as soon they did not come at all," said Auntie; she looked sadly at her niece and added: "They only waste the time for my poor orphan girl."

Anna Akimovna felt hungry, as she had eaten nothing since the morning. They poured her out some very bitter liqueur; she drank it off, and tasted the salt meat with mustard, and thought it extraordinarily nice. Then the downstairs Masha brought in the turkey, the pickled apples and

the gooseberries. And that pleased her, too. There was only one thing that was disagreeable: there was a draught of hot air from the tiled stove; it was stiflingly close and everyone's cheeks were burning. After supper the cloth was taken off and plates of peppermint biscuits, walnuts, and raisins were brought in.

"You sit down, too… no need to stand there!" said Auntie to the cook.

Agafyushka sighed and sat down to the table; Masha set a wineglass of liqueur before her, too, and Anna Akimovna began to feel as though Agafyushka's white neck were giving out heat like the stove. They were all talking of how difficult it was nowadays to get married, and saying that in old days, if men did not court beauty, they paid attention to money, but now there was no making out what they wanted; and while hunchbacks and cripples used to be left old maids, nowadays men would not have even the beautiful and wealthy. Auntie began to set this down to immorality, and said that people had no fear of God, but she suddenly remembered that Ivan Ivanitch, her brother, and Varvarushka—both people of holy life—had feared God, but all the same had had children on the sly, and had sent them to the Foundling Asylum. She pulled herself up and changed the conversation, telling them about a suitor she had once had, a factory hand, and how she had loved him, but her brothers had forced her to marry a widower, an icon-painter, who, thank God, had died two years after. The downstairs Masha sat down to the table, too, and told them with a mysterious air that for the last week some unknown man with a black moustache, in a greatcoat with an astrachan collar, had made his appearance every morning in the yard, had stared at the windows of the big house, and had gone on further—to the buildings; the man was all right, nice-looking.

All this conversation made Anna Akimovna suddenly long to be married—long intensely, painfully; she felt as though she would give half her life and all her fortune only to know that upstairs there was a man who was closer to her than anyone in the world, that he loved her warmly and was missing her; and the thought of such closeness, ecstatic and inexpressible in words, troubled her soul. And the instinct of youth and health flattered her with lying assurances that the real poetry of life was not over but still to come, and she believed it, and leaning back in her chair (her hair fell down as she did so), she began laughing, and, looking at her, the others laughed, too. And it was a long time before this causeless laughter died down in the dining room.

She was informed that the Stinging Beetle had come. This was a pilgrim woman called Pasha or Spiridonovna—a thin little woman of

fifty, in a black dress with a white kerchief, with keen eyes, sharp nose, and a sharp chin; she had sly, viperish eyes and she looked as though she could see right through everyone. Her lips were shaped like a heart. Her viperishness and hostility to everyone had earned her the nickname of the Stinging Beetle.

Going into the dining room without looking at anyone, she made for the icons and chanted in a high voice “Thy Holy Birth,” then she sang “The Virgin today gives birth to the Son,” then “Christ is born,” then she turned round and bent a piercing gaze upon all of them.

“A happy Christmas,” she said, and she kissed Anna Akimovna on the shoulder. “It’s all I could do, all I could do to get to you, my kind friends.” She kissed Auntie on the shoulder. “I should have come to you this morning, but I went in to some good people to rest on the way. ‘Stay, Spiridonovna, stay,’ they said, and I did not notice that evening was coming on.”

As she did not eat meat, they gave her salmon and caviar. She ate looking from under her eyelids at the company, and drank three glasses of vodka. When she had finished she said a prayer and bowed down to Anna Akimovna’s feet.

They began to play a game of “kings,” as they had done the year before, and the year before that, and all the servants in both stories crowded in at the doors to watch the game. Anna Akimovna fancied she caught a glimpse once or twice of Mishenka, with a patronizing smile on his face, among the crowd of peasant men and women. The first to be king was Stinging Beetle, and Anna Akimovna as the soldier paid her tribute; and then Auntie was king and Anna Akimovna was peasant, which excited general delight, and Agafyushka was prince, and was quite abashed with pleasure. Another game was got up at the other end of the table—played by the two Mashas, Varvarushka, and the sewing-maid Marfa Ptrovna, who was waked on purpose to play “kings,” and whose face looked cross and sleepy.

While they were playing they talked of men, and of how difficult it was to get a good husband nowadays, and which state was to be preferred—that of an old maid or a widow.

“You are a handsome, healthy, sturdy lass,” said Stinging Beetle to Anna Akimovna. “But I can’t make out for whose sake you are holding back.”

“What’s to be done if nobody will have me?”

“Or maybe you have taken a vow to remain a maid?” Stinging Beetle went on, as though she did not hear. “Well, that’s a good deed.… Remain

one," she repeated, looking intently and maliciously at her cards. "All right, my dear, remain one.… Yes… only maids, these saintly maids, are not all alike." She heaved a sigh and played the king. "Oh, no, my girl, they are not all alike! Some really watch over themselves like nuns, and butter would not melt in their mouths; and if such a one does sin in an hour of weakness, she is worried to death, poor thing! so it would be a sin to condemn her. While others will go dressed in black and sew their shroud, and yet love rich old men on the sly. Yes, y-es, my canary birds, some hussies will bewitch an old man and rule over him, my doves, rule over him and turn his head; and when they've saved up money and lottery tickets enough, they will bewitch him to his death."

Varvarushka's only response to these hints was to heave a sigh and look towards the icons. There was an expression of Christian meekness on her countenance.

"I know a maid like that, my bitterest enemy," Stinging Beetle went on, looking round at everyone in triumph; "she is always sighing, too, and looking at the icons, the she-devil. When she used to rule in a certain old man's house, if one went to her she would give one a crust, and bid one bow down to the icons while she would sing: 'In conception Thou dost abide a Virgin…!' On holidays she will give one a bite, and on working days she will reproach one for it. But nowadays I will make merry over her! I will make as merry as I please, my jewel."

Varvarushka glanced at the icons again and crossed herself.

"But no one will have me, Spiridonovna," said Anna Akimovna to change the conversation. "What's to be done?"

"It's your own fault. You keep waiting for highly educated gentlemen, but you ought to marry one of your own sort, a merchant."

"We don't want a merchant," said Auntie, all in a flutter. "Queen of Heaven, preserve us! A gentleman will spend your money, but then he will be kind to you, you poor little fool. But a merchant will be so strict that you won't feel at home in your own house. You'll be wanting to fondle him and he will be counting his money, and when you sit down to meals with him, he'll grudge you every mouthful, though it's your own, the lout!… Marry a gentleman."

They all talked at once, loudly interrupting one another, and Auntie tapped on the table with the nutcrackers and said, flushed and angry:

"We won't have a merchant; we won't have one! If you choose a merchant I shall go to an almshouse."

"Sh… Sh!… Hush!" cried Stinging Beetle; when all were silent she screwed up one eye and said: "Do you know what, Annushka, my

birdie…? There is no need for you to get married really like everyone else. You're rich and free, you are your own mistress; but yet, my child, it doesn't seem the right thing for you to be an old maid. I'll find you, you know, some trumpery and simple-witted man. You'll marry him for appearances and then have your fling, bonny lass! You can hand him five thousand or ten maybe, and pack him off where he came from, and you will be mistress in your own house—you can love whom you like and no one can say anything to you. And then you can love your highly educated gentleman. You'll have a jolly time!" Stinging Beetle snapped her fingers and gave a whistle.

"It's sinful," said Auntie.

"Oh, sinful," laughed Stinging Beetle. "She is educated, she understands. To cut someone's throat or bewitch an old man—that's a sin, that's true; but to love some charming young friend is not a sin at all. And what is there in it, really? There's no sin in it at all! The old pilgrim women have invented all that to make fools of simple folk. I, too, say everywhere it's a sin; I don't know myself why it's a sin." Stinging Beetle emptied her glass and cleared her throat. "Have your fling, bonny lass," this time evidently addressing herself. "For thirty years, wenches, I have thought of nothing but sins and been afraid, but now I see I have wasted my time, I've let it slip by like a ninny! Ah, I have been a fool, a fool!" She sighed. "A woman's time is short and every day is precious. You are handsome, Annushka, and very rich; but as soon as thirty-five or forty strikes for you your time is up. Don't listen to anyone, my girl; live, have your fling till you are forty, and then you will have time to pray forgiveness—there will be plenty of time to bow down and to sew your shroud. A candle to God and a poker to the devil! You can do both at once! Well, how is it to be? Will you make some little man happy?"

"I will," laughed Anna Akimovna. "I don't care now; I would marry a working man."

"Well, that would do all right! Oh, what a fine fellow you would choose then!" Stinging Beetle screwed up her eyes and shook her head. "O—o—oh!"

"I tell her myself," said Auntie, "it's no good waiting for a gentleman, so she had better marry, not a gentleman, but someone humbler; anyway we should have a man in the house to look after things. And there are lots of good men. She might have someone out of the factory. They are all sober, steady men.…"

"I should think so," Stinging Beetle agreed. "They are capital fellows. If you like, Aunt, I will make a match for her with Vassily Lebedinsky?"

“Oh, Vasya’s legs are so long,” said Auntie seriously. “He is so lanky. He has no looks.”

There was laughter in the crowd by the door.

“Well, Pimenov? Would you like to marry Pimenov?” Stinging Beetle asked Anna Akimovna.

“Very good. Make a match for me with Pimenov.”

“Really?”

“Yes, do!” Anna Akimovna said resolutely, and she struck her fist on the table. “On my honour, I will marry him.”

“Really?”

Anna Akimovna suddenly felt ashamed that her cheeks were burning and that everyone was looking at her; she flung the cards together on the table and ran out of the room. As she ran up the stairs and, reaching the upper story, sat down to the piano in the drawing room, a murmur of sound reached her from below like the roar of the sea; most likely they were talking of her and of Pimenov, and perhaps Stinging Beetle was taking advantage of her absence to insult Varvarushka and was putting no check on her language.

The lamp in the big room was the only light burning in the upper story, and it sent a glimmer through the door into the dark drawing room. It was between nine and ten, not later. Anna Akimovna played a waltz, then another, then a third; she went on playing without stopping. She looked into the dark corner beyond the piano, smiled, and inwardly called to it, and the idea occurred to her that she might drive off to the town to see someone, Lysevitch for instance, and tell him what was passing in her heart. She wanted to talk without ceasing, to laugh, to play the fool, but the dark corner was sullenly silent, and all round in all the rooms of the upper story it was still and desolate.

She was fond of sentimental songs, but she had a harsh, untrained voice, and so she only played the accompaniment and sang hardly audibly, just above her breath. She sang in a whisper one song after another, for the most part about love, separation, and frustrated hopes, and she imagined how she would hold out her hands to him and say with entreaty, with tears, “Pimenov, take this burden from me!” And then, just as though her sins had been forgiven, there would be joy and comfort in her soul, and perhaps a free, happy life would begin. In an anguish of anticipation she leant over the keys, with a passionate longing for the change in her life to come at once without delay, and was terrified at the thought that her old life would go on for some time longer. Then she played again and sang hardly above her breath, and all was stillness

about her. There was no noise coming from downstairs now, they must have gone to bed. It had struck ten some time before. A long, solitary, wearisome night was approaching.

Anna Akimovna walked through all the rooms, lay down for a while on the sofa, and read in her study the letters that had come that evening; there were twelve letters of Christmas greetings and three anonymous letters. In one of them some workman complained in a horrible, almost illegible handwriting that Lenten oil sold in the factory shop was rancid and smelt of paraffin; in another, someone respectfully informed her that over a purchase of iron Nazaritch had lately taken a bribe of a thousand roubles from someone; in a third she was abused for her inhumanity.

The excitement of Christmas was passing off, and to keep it up Anna Akimovna sat down at the piano again and softly played one of the new waltzes, then she remembered how cleverly and creditably she had spoken at dinner today. She looked round at the dark windows, at the walls with the pictures, at the faint light that came from the big room, and all at once she began suddenly crying, and she felt vexed that she was so lonely, and that she had no one to talk to and consult. To cheer herself she tried to picture Pimenov in her imagination, but it was unsuccessful.

It struck twelve. Mishenka, no longer wearing his swallowtail but in his reefer jacket, came in, and without speaking lighted two candles; then he went out and returned a minute later with a cup of tea on a tray.

“What are you laughing at?” she asked, noticing a smile on his face.

“I was downstairs and heard the jokes you were making about Pimenov…” he said, and put his hand before his laughing mouth. “If he were sat down to dinner today with Viktor Nikolaevitch and the general, he’d have died of fright.” Mishenka’s shoulders were shaking with laughter. “He doesn’t know even how to hold his fork, I bet.”

The footman’s laughter and words, his reefer jacket and moustache, gave Anna Akimovna a feeling of uncleanness. She shut her eyes to avoid seeing him, and, against her own will, imagined Pimenov dining with Lysevitch and Krylin, and his timid, unintellectual figure seemed to her pitiful and helpless, and she felt repelled by it. And only now, for the first time in the whole day, she realized clearly that all she had said and thought about Pimenov and marrying a workman was nonsense, folly, and wilfulness. To convince herself of the opposite, to overcome her repulsion, she tried to recall what she had said at dinner, but now she could not see anything in it: shame at her own thoughts and actions, and the fear that she had said something improper during the day, and disgust

at her own lack of spirit, overwhelmed her completely. She took up a candle and, as rapidly as if someone were pursuing her, ran downstairs, woke Spiridonovna, and began assuring her she had been joking. Then she went to her bedroom. Red-haired Masha, who was dozing in an armchair near the bed, jumped up and began shaking up the pillows. Her face was exhausted and sleepy, and her magnificent hair had fallen on one side.

"Tchalikov came again this evening," she said, yawning, "but I did not dare to announce him; he was very drunk. He says he will come again tomorrow."

"What does he want with me?" said Anna Akimovna, and she flung her comb on the floor. "I won't see him, I won't."

She made up her mind she had no one left in life but this Tchalikov, that he would never leave off persecuting her, and would remind her every day how uninteresting and absurd her life was. So all she was fit for was to help the poor. Oh, how stupid it was!

She lay down without undressing, and sobbed with shame and depression: what seemed to her most vexatious and stupid of all was that her dreams that day about Pimenov had been right, lofty, honourable, but at the same time she felt that Lysevitch and even Krylin were nearer to her than Pimenov and all the workpeople taken together. She thought that if the long day she had just spent could have been represented in a picture, all that had been bad and vulgar—as, for instance, the dinner, the lawyer's talk, the game of "kings"—would have been true, while her dreams and talk about Pimenov would have stood out from the whole as something false, as out of drawing; and she thought, too, that it was too late to dream of happiness, that everything was over for her, and it was impossible to go back to the life when she had slept under the same quilt with her mother, or to devise some new special sort of life.

Red-haired Masha was kneeling before the bed, gazing at her in mournful perplexity; then she, too, began crying, and laid her face against her mistress's arm, and without words it was clear why she was so wretched.

"We are fools!" said Anna Akimovna, laughing and crying. "We are fools! Oh, what fools we are!"

Anna on the Neck

I

After the wedding they had not even light refreshments; the happy pair simply drank a glass of champagne, changed into their travelling things, and drove to the station. Instead of a gay wedding ball and supper, instead of music and dancing, they went on a journey to pray at a shrine a hundred and fifty miles away. Many people commended this, saying that Modest Alexeitch was a man high up in the service and no longer young, and that a noisy wedding might not have seemed quite suitable; and music is apt to sound dreary when a government official of fifty-two marries a girl who is only just eighteen. People said, too, that Modest Alexeitch, being a man of principle, had arranged this visit to the monastery expressly in order to make his young bride realize that even in marriage he put religion and morality above everything.

The happy pair were seen off at the station. The crowd of relations and colleagues in the service stood, with glasses in their hands, waiting for the train to start to shout "Hurrah!" and the bride's father, Pyotr Leontyitch, wearing a top-hat and the uniform of a teacher, already drunk and very pale, kept craning towards the window, glass in hand and saying in an imploring voice:

"Anyuta! Anya, Anya! one word!"

Anna bent out of the window to him, and he whispered something to her, enveloping her in a stale smell of alcohol, blew into her ear—she could make out nothing—and made the sign of the cross over her face, her bosom, and her hands; meanwhile he was breathing in gasps and tears were shining in his eyes. And the schoolboys, Anna's brothers, Petya and Andrusha, pulled at his coat from behind, whispering in confusion:

"Father, hush!… Father, that's enough.…"

When the train started, Anna saw her father run a little way after the train, staggering and spilling his wine, and what a kind, guilty, pitiful face he had:

"Hurra—ah!" he shouted.

The happy pair were left alone. Modest Alexeitch looked about the compartment, arranged their things on the shelves, and sat down, smiling, opposite his young wife. He was an official of medium height, rather stout and puffy, who looked exceedingly well nourished, with long whiskers and no moustache. His clean-shaven, round, sharply defined chin looked like the heel of a foot. The most characteristic point in his face was the absence of moustache, the bare, freshly shaven place, which gradually passed into the fat cheeks, quivering like jelly. His deportment was dignified, his movements were deliberate, his manner was soft.

"I cannot help remembering now one circumstance," he said, smiling. "When, five years ago, Kosorotov received the order of St. Anna of the second grade, and went to thank His Excellency, His Excellency expressed himself as follows: 'So now you have three Annas: one in your buttonhole and two on your neck.' And it must be explained that at that time Kosorotov's wife, a quarrelsome and frivolous person, had just returned to him, and that her name was Anna. I trust that when I receive the Anna of the second grade His Excellency will not have occasion to say the same thing to me."

He smiled with his little eyes. And she, too, smiled, troubled at the thought that at any moment this man might kiss her with his thick damp lips, and that she had no right to prevent his doing so. The soft movements of his fat person frightened her; she felt both fear and disgust. He got up, without haste took off the order from his neck, took off his coat and waistcoat, and put on his dressing gown.

"That's better," he said, sitting down beside Anna.

Anna remembered what agony the wedding had been, when it had seemed to her that the priest, and the guests, and everyone in church had been looking at her sorrowfully and asking why, why was she, such a sweet, nice girl, marrying such an elderly, uninteresting gentleman. Only that morning she was delighted that everything had been satisfactorily arranged, but at the time of the wedding, and now in the railway carriage, she felt cheated, guilty, and ridiculous. Here she had married a rich man and yet she had no money, her wedding dress had been bought on credit, and when her father and brothers had been saying goodbye, she could see from their faces that they had not a farthing. Would they have any supper that day? And tomorrow? And for some reason it seemed to her

that her father and the boys were sitting tonight hungry without her, and feeling the same misery as they had the day after their mother's funeral.

"Oh, how unhappy I am!" she thought. "Why am I so unhappy?"

With the awkwardness of a man with settled habits, unaccustomed to deal with women, Modest Alexeitch touched her on the waist and patted her on the shoulder, while she went on thinking about money, about her mother and her mother's death. When her mother died, her father, Pyotr Leontyitch, a teacher of drawing and writing in the high school, had taken to drink, impoverishment had followed, the boys had not had boots or goloshes, their father had been hauled up before the magistrate, the warrant officer had come and made an inventory of the furniture.… What a disgrace! Anna had had to look after her drunken father, darn her brothers' stockings, go to market, and when she was complimented on her youth, her beauty, and her elegant manners, it seemed to her that everyone was looking at her cheap hat and the holes in her boots that were inked over. And at night there had been tears and a haunting dread that her father would soon, very soon, be dismissed from the school for his weakness, and that he would not survive it, but would die, too, like their mother. But ladies of their acquaintance had taken the matter in hand and looked about for a good match for Anna. This Modest Alexevitch, who was neither young nor good-looking but had money, was soon found. He had a hundred thousand in the bank and the family estate, which he had let on lease. He was a man of principle and stood well with His Excellency; it would be nothing to him, so they told Anna, to get a note from His Excellency to the directors of the high school, or even to the Education Commissioner, to prevent Pyotr Leontyitch from being dismissed.

While she was recalling these details, she suddenly heard strains of music which floated in at the window, together with the sound of voices. The train was stopping at a station. In the crowd beyond the platform an accordion and a cheap squeaky fiddle were being briskly played, and the sound of a military band came from beyond the villas and the tall birches and poplars that lay bathed in the moonlight; there must have been a dance in the place. Summer visitors and townspeople, who used to come out here by train in fine weather for a breath of fresh air, were parading up and down on the platform. Among them was the wealthy owner of all the summer villas—a tall, stout, dark man called Artynov. He had prominent eyes and looked like an Armenian. He wore a strange costume; his shirt was unbuttoned, showing his chest; he wore high boots with spurs, and a black cloak hung from his shoulders and dragged

on the ground like a train. Two boarhounds followed him with their sharp noses to the ground.

Tears were still shining in Anna's eyes, but she was not thinking now of her mother, nor of money, nor of her marriage; but shaking hands with schoolboys and officers she knew, she laughed gaily and said quickly:

"How do you do? How are you?"

She went out on to the platform between the carriages into the moonlight, and stood so that they could all see her in her new splendid dress and hat.

"Why are we stopping here?" she asked.

"This is a junction. They are waiting for the mail train to pass."

Seeing that Artynov was looking at her, she screwed up her eyes coquettishly and began talking aloud in French; and because her voice sounded so pleasant, and because she heard music and the moon was reflected in the pond, and because Artynov, the notorious Don Juan and spoiled child of fortune, was looking at her eagerly and with curiosity, and because everyone was in good spirits—she suddenly felt joyful, and when the train started and the officers of her acquaintance saluted her, she was humming the polka the strains of which reached her from the military band playing beyond the trees; and she returned to her compartment feeling as though it had been proved to her at the station that she would certainly be happy in spite of everything.

The happy pair spent two days at the monastery, then went back to town. They lived in a rent-free flat. When Modest Alexevitch had gone to the office, Anna played the piano, or shed tears of depression, or lay down on a couch and read novels or looked through fashion papers. At dinner Modest Alexevitch ate a great deal and talked about politics, about appointments, transfers, and promotions in the service, about the necessity of hard work, and said that, family life not being a pleasure but a duty, if you took care of the kopecks the roubles would take care of themselves, and that he put religion and morality before everything else in the world. And holding his knife in his fist as though it were a sword, he would say:

"Everyone ought to have his duties!"

And Anna listened to him, was frightened, and could not eat, and she usually got up from the table hungry. After dinner her husband lay down for a nap and snored loudly, while Anna went to see her own people. Her father and the boys looked at her in a peculiar way, as though just before she came in they had been blaming her for having married for money a tedious, wearisome man she did not love; her rustling skirts, her

bracelets, and her general air of a married lady, offended them and made them uncomfortable. In her presence they felt a little embarrassed and did not know what to talk to her about; but yet they still loved her as before, and were not used to having dinner without her. She sat down with them to cabbage soup, porridge, and fried potatoes, smelling of mutton dripping. Pyotr Leontyitch filled his glass from the decanter with a trembling hand and drank it off hurriedly, greedily, with repulsion, then poured out a second glass and then a third. Petya and Andrusha, thin, pale boys with big eyes, would take the decanter and say desperately:

"You mustn't, father.… Enough, father.…"

And Anna, too, was troubled and entreated him to drink no more; and he would suddenly fly into a rage and beat the table with his fists:

"I won't allow anyone to dictate to me!" he would shout. "Wretched boys! wretched girl! I'll turn you all out!"

But there was a note of weakness, of good-nature in his voice, and no one was afraid of him. After dinner he usually dressed in his best. Pale, with a cut on his chin from shaving, craning his thin neck, he would stand for half an hour before the glass, prinking, combing his hair, twisting his black moustache, sprinkling himself with scent, tying his cravat in a bow; then he would put on his gloves and his top-hat, and go off to give his private lessons. Or if it was a holiday he would stay at home and paint, or play the harmonium, which wheezed and growled; he would try to wrest from it pure harmonious sounds and would sing to it; or would storm at the boys:

"Wretches! Good-for-nothing boys! You have spoiled the instrument!"

In the evening Anna's husband played cards with his colleagues, who lived under the same roof in the government quarters. The wives of these gentlemen would come in—ugly, tastelessly dressed women, as coarse as cooks—and gossip would begin in the flat as tasteless and unattractive as the ladies themselves. Sometimes Modest Alexevitch would take Anna to the theatre. In the intervals he would never let her stir a step from his side, but walked about arm in arm with her through the corridors and the foyer. When he bowed to someone, he immediately whispered to Anna: "A civil councillor… visits at His Excellency's"; or, "A man of means… has a house of his own." When they passed the buffet Anna had a great longing for something sweet; she was fond of chocolate and apple cakes, but she had no money, and she did not like to ask her husband. He would take a pear, pinch it with his fingers, and ask uncertainly:

"How much?"

"Twenty-five kopecks!"

“I say!” he would reply, and put it down; but as it was awkward to leave the buffet without buying anything, he would order some seltzer water and drink the whole bottle himself, and tears would come into his eyes. And Anna hated him at such times.

And suddenly flushing crimson, he would say to her rapidly:

“Bow to that old lady!”

“But I don’t know her.”

“No matter. That’s the wife of the director of the local treasury! Bow, I tell you,” he would grumble insistently. “Your head won’t drop off.”

Anna bowed and her head certainly did not drop off, but it was agonizing. She did everything her husband wanted her to, and was furious with herself for having let him deceive her like the veriest idiot. She had only married him for his money, and yet she had less money now than before her marriage. In old days her father would sometimes give her twenty kopecks, but now she had not a farthing.

To take money by stealth or ask for it, she could not; she was afraid of her husband, she trembled before him. She felt as though she had been afraid of him for years. In her childhood the director of the high school had always seemed the most impressive and terrifying force in the world, sweeping down like a thunderstorm or a steam-engine ready to crush her; another similar force of which the whole family talked, and of which they were for some reason afraid, was His Excellency; then there were a dozen others, less formidable, and among them the teachers at the high school, with shaven upper lips, stern, implacable; and now finally, there was Modest Alexeitch, a man of principle, who even resembled the director in the face. And in Anna’s imagination all these forces blended together into one, and, in the form of a terrible, huge white bear, menaced the weak and erring such as her father. And she was afraid to say anything in opposition to her husband, and gave a forced smile, and tried to make a show of pleasure when she was coarsely caressed and defiled by embraces that excited her terror. Only once Pyotr Leontyitch had the temerity to ask for a loan of fifty roubles in order to pay some very irksome debt, but what an agony it had been!

“Very good; I’ll give it to you,” said Modest Alexeitch after a moment’s thought; “but I warn you I won’t help you again till you give up drinking. Such a failing is disgraceful in a man in the government service! I must remind you of the well-known fact that many capable people have been ruined by that passion, though they might possibly, with temperance, have risen in time to a very high position.”

And long-winded phrases followed: “inasmuch as…,” “following upon which proposition…,” “in view of the aforesaid contention…”; and Pyotr Leontyitch was in agonies of humiliation and felt an intense craving for alcohol.

And when the boys came to visit Anna, generally in broken boots and threadbare trousers, they, too, had to listen to sermons.

“Every man ought to have his duties!” Modest Alexeitch would say to them.

And he did not give them money. But he did give Anna bracelets, rings, and brooches, saying that these things would come in useful for a rainy day. And he often unlocked her drawer and made an inspection to see whether they were all safe.

II

Meanwhile winter came on. Long before Christmas there was an announcement in the local papers that the usual winter ball would take place on the twenty-ninth of December in the Hall of Nobility. Every evening after cards Modest Alexeitch was excitedly whispering with his colleagues' wives and glancing at Anna, and then paced up and down the room for a long while, thinking. At last, late one evening, he stood still, facing Anna, and said:

"You ought to get yourself a ball dress. Do you understand? Only please consult Marya Grigoryevna and Natalya Kuzminishna."

And he gave her a hundred roubles. She took the money, but she did not consult anyone when she ordered the ball dress; she spoke to no one but her father, and tried to imagine how her mother would have dressed for a ball. Her mother had always dressed in the latest fashion and had always taken trouble over Anna, dressing her elegantly like a doll, and had taught her to speak French and dance the mazurka superbly (she had been a governess for five years before her marriage). Like her mother, Anna could make a new dress out of an old one, clean gloves with benzine, hire jewels; and, like her mother, she knew how to screw up her eyes, lisp, assume graceful attitudes, fly into raptures when necessary, and throw a mournful and enigmatic look into her eyes. And from her father she had inherited the dark colour of her hair and eyes, her highly-strung nerves, and the habit of always making herself look her best.

When, half an hour before setting off for the ball, Modest Alexeitch went into her room without his coat on, to put his order round his neck before her pier-glass, dazzled by her beauty and the splendour of her fresh, ethereal dress, he combed his whiskers complacently and said:

"So that's what my wife can look like… so that's what you can look like! Anyuta!" he went on, dropping into a tone of solemnity, "I have made your fortune, and now I beg you to do something for mine. I beg you to get introduced to the wife of His Excellency! For God's sake, do! Through her I may get the post of senior reporting clerk!"

They went to the ball. They reached the Hall of Nobility, the entrance with the hall porter. They came to the vestibule with the hatstands, the

fur coats; footmen scurrying about, and ladies with low necks putting up their fans to screen themselves from the draughts. There was a smell of gas and of soldiers. When Anna, walking upstairs on her husband's arm, heard the music and saw herself full length in the looking-glass in the full glow of the lights, there was a rush of joy in her heart, and she felt the same presentiment of happiness as in the moonlight at the station. She walked in proudly, confidently, for the first time feeling herself not a girl but a lady, and unconsciously imitating her mother in her walk and in her manner. And for the first time in her life she felt rich and free. Even her husband's presence did not oppress her, for as she crossed the threshold of the hall she had guessed instinctively that the proximity of an old husband did not detract from her in the least, but, on the contrary, gave her that shade of piquant mystery that is so attractive to men. The orchestra was already playing and the dances had begun. After their flat Anna was overwhelmed by the lights, the bright colours, the music, the noise, and looking round the room, thought, "Oh, how lovely!" She at once distinguished in the crowd all her acquaintances, everyone she had met before at parties or on picnics—all the officers, the teachers, the lawyers, the officials, the landowners, His Excellency, Artynov, and the ladies of the highest standing, dressed up and very *décollettées*, handsome and ugly, who had already taken up their positions in the stalls and pavilions of the charity bazaar, to begin selling things for the benefit of the poor. A huge officer in epaulettes—she had been introduced to him in Staro-Kievsky Street when she was a schoolgirl, but now she could not remember his name—seemed to spring from out of the ground, begging her for a waltz, and she flew away from her husband, feeling as though she were floating away in a sailing-boat in a violent storm, while her husband was left far away on the shore. She danced passionately, with fervour, a waltz, then a polka and a quadrille, being snatched by one partner as soon as she was left by another, dizzy with music and the noise, mixing Russian with French, lisping, laughing, and with no thought of her husband or anything else. She excited great admiration among the men—that was evident, and indeed it could not have been otherwise; she was breathless with excitement, felt thirsty, and convulsively clutched her fan. Pyotr Leontyitch, her father, in a crumpled dress-coat that smelt of benzine, came up to her, offering her a plate of pink ice.

"You are enchanting this evening," he said, looking at her rapturously, "and I have never so much regretted that you were in such a hurry to get married.… What was it for? I know you did it for our sake, but…" With

a shaking hand he drew out a roll of notes and said: “I got the money for my lessons today, and can pay your husband what I owe him.”

She put the plate back into his hand, and was pounced upon by someone and borne off to a distance. She caught a glimpse over her partner’s shoulder of her father gliding over the floor, putting his arm round a lady and whirling down the ballroom with her.

“How sweet he is when he is sober!” she thought.

She danced the mazurka with the same huge officer; he moved gravely, as heavily as a dead carcase in a uniform, twitched his shoulders and his chest, stamped his feet very languidly—he felt fearfully disinclined to dance. She fluttered round him, provoking him by her beauty, her bare neck; her eyes glowed defiantly, her movements were passionate, while he became more and more indifferent, and held out his hands to her as graciously as a king.

“Bravo, bravo!” said people watching them.

But little by little the huge officer, too, broke out; he grew lively, excited, and, overcome by her fascination, was carried away and danced lightly, youthfully, while she merely moved her shoulders and looked slyly at him as though she were now the queen and he were her slave; and at that moment it seemed to her that the whole room was looking at them, and that everybody was thrilled and envied them. The huge officer had hardly had time to thank her for the dance, when the crowd suddenly parted and the men drew themselves up in a strange way, with their hands at their sides.

His Excellency, with two stars on his dress-coat, was walking up to her. Yes, His Excellency was walking straight towards her, for he was staring directly at her with a sugary smile, while he licked his lips as he always did when he saw a pretty woman.

“Delighted, delighted…” he began. “I shall order your husband to be clapped in a lockup for keeping such a treasure hidden from us till now. I’ve come to you with a message from my wife,” he went on, offering her his arm. “You must help us.… M-m-yes.… We ought to give you the prize for beauty as they do in America.… M-m-yes.… The Americans.… My wife is expecting you impatiently.”

He led her to a stall and presented her to a middle-aged lady, the lower part of whose face was disproportionately large, so that she looked as though she were holding a big stone in her mouth.

“You must help us,” she said through her nose in a singsong voice. “All the pretty women are working for our charity bazaar, and you are the only one enjoying yourself. Why won’t you help us?”

She went away, and Anna took her place by the cups and the silver samovar. She was soon doing a lively trade. Anna asked no less than a rouble for a cup of tea, and made the huge officer drink three cups. Artynov, the rich man with prominent eyes, who suffered from asthma, came up, too; he was not dressed in the strange costume in which Anna had seen him in the summer at the station, but wore a dress-coat like everyone else. Keeping his eyes fixed on Anna, he drank a glass of champagne and paid a hundred roubles for it, then drank some tea and gave another hundred—all this without saying a word, as he was short of breath through asthma.… Anna invited purchasers and got money out of them, firmly convinced by now that her smiles and glances could not fail to afford these people great pleasure. She realized now that she was created exclusively for this noisy, brilliant, laughing life, with its music, its dancers, its adorers, and her old terror of a force that was sweeping down upon her and menacing to crush her seemed to her ridiculous: she was afraid of no one now, and only regretted that her mother could not be there to rejoice at her success.

Pyotr Leontyitch, pale by now but still steady on his legs, came up to the stall and asked for a glass of brandy. Anna turned crimson, expecting him to say something inappropriate (she was already ashamed of having such a poor and ordinary father); but he emptied his glass, took ten roubles out of his roll of notes, flung it down, and walked away with dignity without uttering a word. A little later she saw him dancing in the grand chain, and by now he was staggering and kept shouting something, to the great confusion of his partner; and Anna remembered how at the ball three years before he had staggered and shouted in the same way, and it had ended in the police-sergeant’s taking him home to bed, and next day the director had threatened to dismiss him from his post. How inappropriate that memory was!

When the samovars were put out in the stalls and the exhausted ladies handed over their takings to the middle-aged lady with the stone in her mouth, Artynov took Anna on his arm to the hall where supper was served to all who had assisted at the bazaar. There were some twenty people at supper, not more, but it was very noisy. His Excellency proposed a toast:

“In this magnificent dining room it will be appropriate to drink to the success of the cheap dining rooms, which are the object of today’s bazaar.”

The brigadier-general proposed the toast: “To the power by which even the artillery is vanquished,” and all the company clinked glasses

with the ladies. It was very, very gay.

When Anna was escorted home it was daylight and the cooks were going to market. Joyful, intoxicated, full of new sensations, exhausted, she undressed, dropped into bed, and at once fell asleep.…

It was past one in the afternoon when the servant waked her and announced that M. Artynov had called. She dressed quickly and went down into the drawing room. Soon after Artynov, His Excellency called to thank her for her assistance in the bazaar. With a sugary smile, chewing his lips, he kissed her hand, and asking her permission to come again, took his leave, while she remained standing in the middle of the drawing room, amazed, enchanted, unable to believe that this change in her life, this marvellous change, had taken place so quickly; and at that moment Modest Alexeitch walked in… and he, too, stood before her now with the same ingratiating, sugary, cringingly respectful expression which she was accustomed to see on his face in the presence of the great and powerful; and with rapture, with indignation, with contempt, convinced that no harm would come to her from it, she said, articulating distinctly each word:

"Be off, you blockhead!"

From this time forward Anna never had one day free, as she was always taking part in picnics, expeditions, performances. She returned home every day after midnight, and went to bed on the floor in the drawing room, and afterwards used to tell everyone, touchingly, how she slept under flowers. She needed a very great deal of money, but she was no longer afraid of Modest Alexeitch, and spent his money as though it were her own; and she did not ask, did not demand it, simply sent him in the bills. "Give bearer two hundred roubles," or "Pay one hundred roubles at once."

At Easter Modest Alexeitch received the Anna of the second grade. When he went to offer his thanks, His Excellency put aside the paper he was reading and settled himself more comfortably in his chair.

"So now you have three Annas," he said, scrutinizing his white hands and pink nails—"one on your buttonhole and two on your neck."

Modest Alexeitch put two fingers to his lips as a precaution against laughing too loud and said:

"Now I have only to look forward to the arrival of a little Vladimir. I make bold to beg your Excellency to stand godfather."

He was alluding to Vladimir of the fourth grade, and was already imagining how he would tell everywhere the story of this pun, so happy in its readiness and audacity, and he wanted to say something equally

happy, but His Excellency was buried again in his newspaper, and merely gave him a nod.

And Anna went on driving about with three horses, going out hunting with Artynov, playing in one-act dramas, going out to supper, and was more and more rarely with her own family; they dined now alone. Pyotr Leontyitch was drinking more heavily than ever; there was no money, and the harmonium had been sold long ago for debt. The boys did not let him go out alone in the street now, but looked after him for fear he might fall down; and whenever they met Anna driving in Staro-Kievsky Street with a pair of horses and Artynov on the box instead of a coachman, Pyotr Leontyitch took off his top-hat, and was about to shout to her, but Petya and Andrusha took him by the arm, and said imploringly:

“You mustn’t, father. Hush, father!”

WHITEBROW

A hungry she-wolf got up to go hunting. Her cubs, all three of them, were sound asleep, huddled in a heap and keeping each other warm. She licked them and went off.

It was already March, a month of spring, but at night the trees snapped with the cold, as they do in December, and one could hardly put one's tongue out without its being nipped. The wolf-mother was in delicate health and nervous; she started at the slightest sound, and kept hoping that no one would hurt the little ones at home while she was away. The smell of the tracks of men and horses, logs, piles of faggots, and the dark road with horse-dung on it frightened her; it seemed to her that men were standing behind the trees in the darkness, and that dogs were howling somewhere beyond the forest.

She was no longer young and her scent had grown feebler, so that it sometimes happened that she took the track of a fox for that of a dog, and even at times lost her way, a thing that had never been in her youth. Owing to the weakness of her health she no longer hunted calves and big sheep as she had in old days, and kept her distance now from mares with colts; she fed on nothing but carrion; fresh meat she tasted very rarely, only in the spring when she would come upon a hare and take away her young, or make her way into a peasant's stall where there were lambs.

Some three miles from her lair there stood a winter hut on the posting road. There lived the keeper Ignat, an old man of seventy, who was always coughing and talking to himself; at night he was usually asleep, and by day he wandered about the forest with a single-barrelled gun, whistling to the hares. He must have worked among machinery in early days, for before he stood still he always shouted to himself: "Stop the machine!" and before going on: "Full speed!" He had a huge black dog of indeterminate breed, called Arapka. When it ran too far ahead he used to shout to it: "Reverse action!" Sometimes he used to sing, and as he did so staggered violently, and often fell down (the wolf thought the wind blew him over), and shouted: "Run off the rails!"

The wolf remembered that, in the summer and autumn, a ram and two ewes were pasturing near the winter hut, and when she had run by not so long ago she fancied that she had heard bleating in the stall. And now, as she got near the place, she reflected that it was already March, and, by that time, there would certainly be lambs in the stall. She was tormented by hunger, she thought with what greediness she would eat a lamb, and these thoughts made her teeth snap, and her eyes glitter in the darkness like two sparks of light.

Ignat's hut, his barn, cattle-stall, and well were surrounded by high snowdrifts. All was still. Arapka was, most likely, asleep in the barn.

The wolf clambered over a snowdrift on to the stall, and began scratching away the thatched roof with her paws and her nose. The straw was rotten and decaying, so that the wolf almost fell through; all at once a smell of warm steam, of manure, and of sheep's milk floated straight to her nostrils. Down below, a lamb, feeling the cold, bleated softly. Leaping through the hole, the wolf fell with her four paws and chest on something soft and warm, probably a sheep, and at the same moment, something in the stall suddenly began whining, barking, and going off into a shrill little yap; the sheep huddled against the wall, and the wolf, frightened, snatched the first thing her teeth fastened on, and dashed away.…

She ran at her utmost speed, while Arapka, who by now had scented the wolf, howled furiously, the frightened hens cackled, and Ignat, coming out into the porch, shouted: "Full speed! Blow the whistle!"

And he whistled like a steam-engine, and then shouted: "Ho-ho-ho-ho!" and all this noise was repeated by the forest echo. When, little by little, it all died away, the wolf somewhat recovered herself, and began to notice that the prey she held in her teeth and dragged along the snow was heavier and, as it were, harder than lambs usually were at that season; and it smelt somehow different, and uttered strange sounds.… The wolf stopped and laid her burden on the snow, to rest and begin eating it, then all at once she leapt back in disgust. It was not a lamb, but a black puppy, with a big head and long legs, of a large breed, with a white patch on his brow, like Arapka's. Judging from his manners he was a simple, ignorant, yard-dog. He licked his crushed and wounded back, and, as though nothing was the matter, wagged his tail and barked at the wolf. She growled like a dog, and ran away from him. He ran after her. She looked round and snapped her teeth. He stopped in perplexity, and, probably deciding that she was playing with him, craned his head in the

direction he had come from, and went off into a shrill, gleeful bark, as though inviting his mother Arapka to play with him and the wolf.

It was already getting light, and when the wolf reached her home in the thick aspen wood, each aspen tree could be seen distinctly, and the woodcocks were already awake, and the beautiful male birds often flew up, disturbed by the incautious gambols and barking of the puppy.

“Why does he run after me?” thought the wolf with annoyance. “I suppose he wants me to eat him.”

She lived with her cubs in a shallow hole; three years before, a tall old pine tree had been torn up by the roots in a violent storm, and the hole had been formed by it. Now there were dead leaves and moss at the bottom, and around it lay bones and bullocks’ horns, with which the little ones played. They were by now awake, and all three of them, very much alike, were standing in a row at the edge of their hole, looking at their returning mother, and wagging their tails. Seeing them, the puppy stopped a little way off, and stared at them for a very long time; seeing that they, too, were looking very attentively at him, he began barking angrily, as at strangers.

By now it was daylight and the sun had risen, the snow sparkled all around, but still the puppy stood a little way off and barked. The cubs sucked their mother, pressing her thin belly with their paws, while she gnawed a horse’s bone, dry and white; she was tormented by hunger, her head ached from the dog’s barking, and she felt inclined to fall on the uninvited guest and tear him to pieces.

At last the puppy was hoarse and exhausted; seeing they were not afraid of him, and not even attending to him, he began somewhat timidly approaching the cubs, alternately squatting down and bounding a few steps forward. Now, by daylight, it was easy to have a good look at him.… His white forehead was big, and on it was a hump such as is only seen on very stupid dogs; he had little, blue, dingy-looking eyes, and the expression of his whole face was extremely stupid. When he reached the cubs he stretched out his broad paws, laid his head upon them, and began:

“Mnya, myna… nga—nga—nga…!”

The cubs did not understand what he meant, but they wagged their tails. Then the puppy gave one of the cubs a smack on its big head with his paw. The cub, too, gave him a smack on the head. The puppy stood sideways to him, and looked at him askance, wagging his tail, then dashed off, and ran round several times on the frozen snow. The cubs ran after him, he fell on his back and kicked up his legs, and all three of them

fell upon him, squealing with delight, and began biting him, not to hurt but in play. The crows sat on the high pine tree, and looked down on their struggle, and were much troubled by it. They grew noisy and merry. The sun was hot, as though it were spring; and the woodcocks, continually flitting through the pine tree that had been blown down by the storm, looked as though made of emerald in the brilliant sunshine.

As a rule, wolf-mothers train their children to hunt by giving them prey to play with; and now watching the cubs chasing the puppy over the frozen snow and struggling with him, the mother thought:

"Let them learn."

When they had played long enough, the cubs went into the hole and lay down to sleep. The puppy howled a little from hunger, then he, too, stretched out in the sunshine. And when they woke up they began playing again.

All day long, and in the evening, the wolf-mother was thinking how the lamb had bleated in the cattle-shed the night before, and how it had smelt of sheep's milk, and she kept snapping her teeth from hunger, and never left off greedily gnawing the old bone, pretending to herself that it was the lamb. The cubs sucked their mother, and the puppy, who was hungry, ran round them and sniffed at the snow.

"I'll eat him…" the mother-wolf decided.

She went up to him, and he licked her nose and yapped at her, thinking that she wanted to play with him. In the past she had eaten dogs, but the dog smelt very doggy, and in the delicate state of her health she could not endure the smell; she felt disgusted and walked away.…

Towards night it grew cold. The puppy felt depressed and went home.

When the wolf-cubs were fast asleep, their mother went out hunting again. As on the previous night she was alarmed at every sound, and she was frightened by the stumps, the logs, the dark juniper bushes, which stood out singly, and in the distance were like human beings. She ran on the ice-covered snow, keeping away from the road.… All at once she caught a glimpse of something dark, far away on the road. She strained her eyes and ears: yes, something really was walking on in front, she could even hear the regular thud of footsteps. Surely not a badger? Cautiously holding her breath, and keeping always to one side, she overtook the dark patch, looked round, and recognised it. It was the puppy with the white brow, going with a slow, lingering step homewards.

"If only he doesn't hinder me again," thought the wolf, and ran quickly on ahead.

But the homestead was by now near. Again she clambered on to the cattle-shed by the snowdrift. The gap she had made yesterday had been already mended with straw, and two new rafters stretched across the roof. The wolf began rapidly working with her legs and nose, looking round to see whether the puppy were coming, but the smell of the warm steam and manure had hardly reached her nose before she heard a gleeful burst of barking behind her. It was the puppy. He leapt up to the wolf on the roof, then into the hole, and, feeling himself at home in the warmth, recognising his sheep, he barked louder than ever.… Arapka woke up in the barn, and, scenting a wolf, howled, the hens began cackling, and by the time Ignat appeared in the porch with his single-barrelled gun the frightened wolf was already far away.

"*Fuite!*" whistled Ignat. "*Fuite!* Full steam ahead!"

He pulled the trigger—the gun missed fire; he pulled the trigger again—again it missed fire; he tried a third time—and a great blaze of flame flew out of the barrel and there was a deafening boom, boom. It kicked him violently on the shoulder, and, taking his gun in one hand and his axe in the other, he went to see what the noise was about.

A little later he went back to the hut.

"What was it?" a pilgrim, who was staying the night at the hut and had been awakened by the noise, asked in a husky voice.

"It's all right," answered Ignat. "Nothing of consequence. Our Whitebrow has taken to sleeping with the sheep in the warm. Only he hasn't the sense to go in at the door, but always tries to wriggle in by the roof. The other night he tore a hole in the roof and went off on the spree, the rascal, and now he has come back and scratched away the roof again."

"Stupid dog."

"Yes, there is a spring snapped in his brain. I do detest fools," sighed Ignat, clambering on to the stove. "Come, man of God, it's early yet to get up. Let us sleep full steam!…"

In the morning he called Whitebrow, smacked him hard about the ears, and then showing him a stick, kept repeating to him:

"Go in at the door! Go in at the door! Go in at the door!"

ARIADNE

On the deck of a steamer sailing from Odessa to Sevastopol, a rather good-looking gentleman, with a little round beard, came up to me to smoke, and said:

"Notice those Germans sitting near the shelter? Whenever Germans or Englishmen get together, they talk about the crops, the price of wool, or their personal affairs. But for some reason or other when we Russians get together we never discuss anything but women and abstract subjects—but especially women."

This gentleman's face was familiar to me already. We had returned from abroad the evening before in the same train, and at Volotchisk when the luggage was being examined by the Customs, I saw him standing with a lady, his travelling companion, before a perfect mountain of trunks and baskets filled with ladies' clothes, and I noticed how embarrassed and downcast he was when he had to pay duty on some piece of silk frippery, and his companion protested and threatened to make a complaint. Afterwards, on the way to Odessa, I saw him carrying little pies and oranges to the ladies' compartment.

It was rather damp; the vessel swayed a little, and the ladies had retired to their cabins.

The gentleman with the little round beard sat down beside me and continued:

"Yes, when Russians come together they discuss nothing but abstract subjects and women. We are so intellectual, so solemn, that we utter nothing but truths and can discuss only questions of a lofty order. The Russian actor does not know how to be funny; he acts with profundity even in a farce. We're just the same: when we have got to talk of trifles we treat them only from an exalted point of view. It comes from a lack of boldness, sincerity, and simplicity. We talk so often about women, I fancy, because we are dissatisfied. We take too ideal a view of women, and make demands out of all proportion with what reality can give us; we get something utterly different from what we want, and the result is

dissatisfaction, shattered hopes, and inward suffering, and if anyone is suffering, he's bound to talk of it. It does not bore you to go on with this conversation?"

"No, not in the least."

"In that case, allow me to introduce myself," said my companion, rising from his seat a little:

"Ivan Ilyitch Shamohin, a Moscow landowner of a sort.… You I know very well."

He sat down and went on, looking at me with a genuine and friendly expression:

"A mediocre philosopher, like Max Nordau, would explain these incessant conversations about women as a form of erotic madness, or would put it down to our having been slaveowners and so on; I take quite a different view of it. I repeat, we are dissatisfied because we are idealists. We want the creatures who bear us and our children to be superior to us and to everything in the world. When we are young we adore and poeticize those with whom we are in love: love and happiness with us are synonyms. Among us in Russia marriage without love is despised, sensuality is ridiculed and inspires repulsion, and the greatest success is enjoyed by those tales and novels in which women are beautiful, poetical, and exalted; and if the Russian has been for years in ecstasies over Raphael's *Madonna*, or is eager for the emancipation of women, I assure you there is no affectation about it. But the trouble is that when we have been married or been intimate with a woman for some two or three years, we begin to feel deceived and disillusioned: we pair off with others, and again—disappointment, again—repulsion, and in the long run we become convinced that women are lying, trivial, fussy, unfair, undeveloped, cruel—in fact, far from being superior, are immeasurably inferior to us men. And in our dissatisfaction and disappointment there is nothing left for us but to grumble and talk about what we've been so cruelly deceived in."

While Shamohin was talking I noticed that the Russian language and our Russian surroundings gave him great pleasure. This was probably because he had been very homesick abroad. Though he praised the Russians and ascribed to them a rare idealism, he did not disparage foreigners, and that I put down to his credit. It could be seen, too, that there was some uneasiness in his soul, that he wanted to talk more of himself than of women, and that I was in for a long story in the nature of a confession. And when we had asked for a bottle of wine and had each of us drunk a glass, this was how he did in fact begin:

“I remember in a novel of Weltmann’s someone says, ‘So that’s the story!’ and someone else answers, ‘No, that’s not the story—that’s only the introduction to the story.’ In the same way what I’ve said so far is only the introduction; what I really want to tell you is my own love story. Excuse me, I must ask you again; it won’t bore you to listen?”

I told him it would not, and he went on:

The scene of my story is laid in the Moscow province in one of its northern districts. The scenery there, I must tell you, is exquisite. Our homestead is on the high bank of a rapid stream, where the water chatters noisily day and night: imagine a big old garden, neat flowerbeds, beehives, a kitchen-garden, and below it a river with leafy willows, which, when there is a heavy dew on them, have a lustreless look as though they had turned grey; and on the other side a meadow, and beyond the meadow on the upland a terrible, dark pine forest. In that forest delicious, reddish agarics grow in endless profusion, and elks still live in its deepest recesses. When I am nailed up in my coffin I believe I shall still dream of those early mornings, you know, when the sun hurts your eyes: or the wonderful spring evenings when the nightingales and the landrails call in the garden and beyond the garden, and sounds of the harmonica float across from the village, while they play the piano indoors and the stream babbles… when there is such music, in fact, that one wants at the same time to cry and to sing aloud.

We have not much arable land, but our pasture makes up for it, and with the forest yields about two thousand roubles a year. I am the only son of my father; we are both modest persons, and with my father’s pension that sum was amply sufficient for us.

The first three years after finishing at the university I spent in the country, looking after the estate and constantly expecting to be elected on some local assembly; but what was most important, I was violently in love with an extraordinarily beautiful and fascinating girl. She was the sister of our neighbour, Kotlovitch, a ruined landowner who had on his estate pineapples, marvellous peaches, lightning conductors, a fountain in the courtyard, and at the same time not a farthing in his pocket. He did nothing and knew how to do nothing. He was as flabby as though he had been made of boiled turnip; he used to doctor the peasants by homeopathy and was interested in spiritualism. He was, however, a man of great delicacy and mildness, and by no means a fool, but I have no fondness for these gentlemen who converse with spirits and cure peasant women by magnetism. In the first place, the ideas of people who are not intellectually free are always in a muddle, and it’s extremely difficult to

talk to them; and, secondly, they usually love no one, and have nothing to do with women, and their mysticism has an unpleasant effect on sensitive people. I did not care for his appearance either. He was tall, stout, white-skinned, with a little head, little shining eyes, and chubby white fingers. He did not shake hands, but kneaded one's hands in his. And he was always apologising. If he asked for anything it was "Excuse me"; if he gave you anything it was "Excuse me" too.

As for his sister, she was a character out of a different opera. I must explain that I had not been acquainted with the Kotlovitches in my childhood and early youth, for my father had been a professor at N——, and we had for many years lived away. When I did make their acquaintance the girl was twenty-two, had left school long before, and had spent two or three years in Moscow with a wealthy aunt who brought her out into society. When I was introduced and first had to talk to her, what struck me most of all was her rare and beautiful name—Ariadne. It suited her so wonderfully! She was a brunette, very thin, very slender, supple, elegant, and extremely graceful, with refined and exceedingly noble features. Her eyes were shining, too, but her brother's shone with a cold sweetness, mawkish as sugar-candy, while hers had the glow of youth, proud and beautiful. She conquered me on the first day of our acquaintance, and indeed it was inevitable. My first impression was so overwhelming that to this day I cannot get rid of my illusions; I am still tempted to imagine that nature had some grand, marvellous design when she created that girl.

Ariadne's voice, her walk, her hat, even her footprints on the sandy bank where she used to angle for gudgeon, filled me with delight and a passionate hunger for life. I judged of her spiritual being from her lovely face and lovely figure, and every word, every smile of Ariadne's bewitched me, conquered me and forced me to believe in the loftiness of her soul. She was friendly, ready to talk, gay and simple in her manners. She had a poetic belief in God, made poetic reflections about death, and there was such a wealth of varying shades in her spiritual organisation that even her faults seemed in her to carry with them peculiar, charming qualities. Suppose she wanted a new horse and had no money—what did that matter? Something might be sold or pawned, or if the steward swore that nothing could possibly be sold or pawned, the iron roofs might be torn off the lodges and taken to the factory, or at the very busiest time the farm-horses might be driven to the market and sold there for next to nothing. These unbridled desires reduced the whole household to despair at times, but she expressed them with such refinement that everything

was forgiven her; all things were permitted her as to a goddess or to Caesar's wife. My love was pathetic and was soon noticed by everyone—my father, the neighbours, and the peasants—and they all sympathised with me. When I stood the workmen vodka, they would bow and say: "May the Kotlovitch young lady be your bride, please God!"

And Ariadne herself knew that I loved her. She would often ride over on horseback or drive in the charabanc to see us, and would spend whole days with me and my father. She made great friends with the old man, and he even taught her to bicycle, which was his favourite amusement.

I remember helping her to get on the bicycle one evening, and she looked so lovely that I felt as though I were burning my hands when I touched her. I shuddered with rapture, and when the two of them, my old father and she, both looking so handsome and elegant, bicycled side by side along the main road, a black horse ridden by the steward dashed aside on meeting them, and it seemed to me that it dashed aside because it too was overcome by her beauty. My love, my worship, touched Ariadne and softened her; she had a passionate longing to be captivated like me and to respond with the same love. It was so poetical!

But she was incapable of really loving as I did, for she was cold and already somewhat corrupted. There was a demon in her, whispering to her day and night that she was enchanting, adorable; and, having no definite idea for what object she was created, or for what purpose life had been given her, she never pictured herself in the future except as very wealthy and distinguished, she had visions of balls, races, liveries, of sumptuous drawing rooms, of a salon of her own, and of a perfect swarm of counts, princes, ambassadors, celebrated painters and artists, all of them adoring her and in ecstasies over her beauty and her dresses.…

This thirst for personal success, and this continual concentration of the mind in one direction, makes people cold, and Ariadne was cold—to me, to nature, and to music. Meanwhile time was passing, and still there were no ambassadors on the scene. Ariadne went on living with her brother, the spiritualist: things went from bad to worse, so that she had nothing to buy hats and dresses with, and had to resort to all sorts of tricks and dodges to conceal her poverty.

As luck would have it, a certain Prince Maktuev, a wealthy man but an utterly insignificant person, had paid his addresses to her when she was living at her aunt's in Moscow. She had refused him, point-blank. But now she was fretted by the worm of repentance that she had refused him;

just as a peasant pouts with repulsion at a mug of kvass with cockroaches in it but yet drinks it, so she frowned disdainfully at the recollection of the prince, and yet she would say to me: “Say what you like, there is something inexplicable, fascinating, in a title.…”

She dreamed of a title, of a brilliant position, and at the same time she did not want to let me go. However one may dream of ambassadors one’s heart is not a stone, and one has wistful feelings for one’s youth. Ariadne tried to fall in love, made a show of being in love, and even swore that she loved me. But I am a highly strung and sensitive man; when I am loved I feel it even at a distance, without vows and assurances; at once I felt as it were a coldness in the air, and when she talked to me of love, it seemed to me as though I were listening to the singing of a metal nightingale. Ariadne was herself aware that she was lacking in something. She was vexed and more than once I saw her cry. Another time—can you imagine it?—all of a sudden she embraced me and kissed me. It happened in the evening on the riverbank, and I saw by her eyes that she did not love me, but was embracing me from curiosity, to test herself and to see what came of it. And I felt dreadful. I took her hands and said to her in despair: “These caresses without love cause me suffering!”

“What a queer fellow you are!” she said with annoyance, and walked away.

Another year or two might have passed, and in all probability I should have married her, and so my story would have ended, but fate was pleased to arrange our romance differently. It happened that a new personage appeared on our horizon. Ariadne’s brother had a visit from an old university friend called Mihail Ivanitch Lubkov, a charming man of whom coachmen and footmen used to say: “An entertaining gentleman.” He was a man of medium height, lean and bald, with a face like a good-natured bourgeois, not interesting, but pale and presentable, with a stiff, well-kept moustache, with a neck like gooseskin, and a big Adam’s apple. He used to wear pince-nez on a wide black ribbon, lisped, and could not pronounce either *r* or *l*. He was always in good spirits, everything amused him.

He had made an exceedingly foolish marriage at twenty, and had acquired two houses in Moscow as part of his wife’s dowry. He began doing them up and building a bathhouse, and was completely ruined. Now his wife and four children lodged in Oriental Buildings in great poverty, and he had to support them—and this amused him. He was thirty-six and his wife was by now forty-two, and that, too, amused him.

His mother, a conceited, sulky personage, with aristocratic pretensions, despised his wife and lived apart with a perfect menagerie of cats and dogs, and he had to allow her seventy-five roubles a month also; he was, too, a man of taste, liked lunching at the Slavyansky Bazaar and dining at the Hermitage; he needed a great deal of money, but his uncle only allowed him two thousand roubles a year, which was not enough, and for days together he would run about Moscow with his tongue out, as the saying is, looking for someone to borrow from—and this, too, amused him. He had come to Kotlovitch to find in the lap of nature, as he said, a rest from family life. At dinner, at supper, and on our walks, he talked about his wife, about his mother, about his creditors, about the bailiffs, and laughed at them; he laughed at himself and assured us that, thanks to his talent for borrowing, he had made a great number of agreeable acquaintances. He laughed without ceasing and we laughed too. Moreover, in his company we spent our time differently. I was more inclined to quiet, so to say idyllic pleasures; I liked fishing, evening walks, gathering mushrooms; Lubkov preferred picnics, fireworks, hunting. He used to get up picnics three times a week, and Ariadne, with an earnest and inspired face, used to write a list of oysters, champagne, sweets, and used to send me into Moscow to get them, without inquiring, of course, whether I had money. And at the picnics there were toasts and laughter, and again mirthful descriptions of how old his wife was, what fat lapdogs his mother had, and what charming people his creditors were.

Lubkov was fond of nature, but he regarded it as something long familiar and at the same time, in reality, infinitely beneath himself and created for his pleasure. He would sometimes stand still before some magnificent landscape and say: “It would be nice to have tea here.”

One day, seeing Ariadne walking in the distance with a parasol, he nodded towards her and said:

“She’s thin, and that’s what I like; I don’t like fat women.”

This made me wince. I asked him not to speak like that about women before me. He looked at me in surprise and said:

“What is there amiss in my liking thin women and not caring for fat ones?”

I made no answer. Afterwards, being in very good spirits and a trifle elevated, he said:

“I’ve noticed Ariadne Grigoryevna likes you. I can’t understand why you don’t go in and win.”

His words made me feel uncomfortable, and with some embarrassment I told him how I looked at love and women.

“I don’t know,” he sighed; “to my thinking, a woman’s a woman and a man’s a man. Ariadne Grigoryevna may be poetical and exalted, as you say, but it doesn’t follow that she must be superior to the laws of nature. You see for yourself that she has reached the age when she must have a husband or a lover. I respect women as much as you do, but I don’t think certain relations exclude poetry. Poetry’s one thing and love is another. It’s just the same as it is in farming. The beauty of nature is one thing and the income from your forests or fields is quite another.”

When Ariadne and I were fishing, Lubkov would lie on the sand close by and make fun of me, or lecture me on the conduct of life.

“I wonder, my dear sir, how you can live without a love affair,” he would say. “You are young, handsome, interesting—in fact, you’re a man not to be sniffed at, yet you live like a monk. Och! I can’t stand these fellows who are old at twenty-eight! I’m nearly ten years older than you are, and yet which of us is the younger? Ariadne Grigoryevna, which?”

“You, of course,” Ariadne answered him.

And when he was bored with our silence and the attention with which we stared at our floats he went home, and she said, looking at me angrily:

“You’re really not a man, but a mush, God forgive me! A man ought to be able to be carried away by his feelings, he ought to be able to be mad, to make mistakes, to suffer! A woman will forgive you audacity and insolence, but she will never forgive your reasonableness!”

She was angry in earnest, and went on:

“To succeed, a man must be resolute and bold. Lubkov is not so handsome as you are, but he is more interesting. He will always succeed with women because he’s not like you; he’s a man.…”

And there was actually a note of exasperation in her voice.

One day at supper she began saying, not addressing me, that if she were a man she would not stagnate in the country, but would travel, would spend the winter somewhere aboard—in Italy, for instance. Oh, Italy! At this point my father unconsciously poured oil on the flames; he began telling us at length about Italy, how splendid it was there, the exquisite scenery, the museums. Ariadne suddenly conceived a burning desire to go to Italy. She positively brought her fist down on the table and her eyes flashed as she said: “I must go!”

After that came conversations every day about Italy: how splendid it would be in Italy—ah, Italy!—oh, Italy! And when Ariadne looked at me over her shoulder, from her cold and obstinate expression I saw that in her dreams she had already conquered Italy with all its salons, celebrated

foreigners and tourists, and there was no holding her back now. I advised her to wait a little, to put off her tour for a year or two, but she frowned disdainfully and said:

"You're as prudent as an old woman!"

Lubkov was in favour of the tour. He said it could be done very cheaply, and he, too, would go to Italy and have a rest there from family life.

I behaved, I confess, as naively as a schoolboy.

Not from jealousy, but from a foreboding of something terrible and extraordinary, I tried as far as possible not to leave them alone together, and they made fun of me. For instance, when I went in they would pretend they had just been kissing one another, and so on. But lo and behold, one fine morning, her plump, white-skinned brother, the spiritualist, made his appearance and expressed his desire to speak to me alone.

He was a man without will; in spite of his education and his delicacy he could never resist reading another person's letter, if it lay before him on the table. And now he admitted that he had by chance read a letter of Lubkov's to Ariadne.

"From that letter I learned that she is very shortly going abroad. My dear fellow, I am very much upset! Explain it to me for goodness' sake. I can make nothing of it!"

As he said this he breathed hard, breathing straight in my face and smelling of boiled beef.

"Excuse me for revealing the secret of this letter to you, but you are Ariadne's friend, she respects you. Perhaps you know something of it. She wants to go away, but with whom? Mr. Lubkov is proposing to go with her. Excuse me, but this is very strange of Mr. Lubkov; he is a married man, he has children, and yet he is making a declaration of love; he is writing to Ariadne 'darling.' Excuse me, but it is so strange!"

I turned cold all over; my hands and feet went numb and I felt an ache in my chest, as if a three-cornered stone had been driven into it. Kotlovitch sank helplessly into an easy-chair, and his hands fell limply at his sides.

"What can I do?" I inquired.

"Persuade her.… Impress her mind.… Just consider, what is Lubkov to her? Is he a match for her? Oh, good God! How awful it is, how awful it is!" he went on, clutching his head. "She has had such splendid offers—Prince Maktuev and… and others. The prince adores her, and only last Wednesday week his late grandfather, Ilarion, declared

positively that Ariadne would be his wife—positively! His grandfather Ilarion is dead, but he is a wonderfully intelligent person; we call up his spirit every day.”

After this conversation I lay awake all night and thought of shooting myself. In the morning I wrote five letters and tore them all up. Then I sobbed in the barn. Then I took a sum of money from my father and set off for the Caucasus without saying goodbye.

Of course, a woman’s a woman and a man’s a man, but can all that be as simple in our day as it was before the Flood, and can it be that I, a cultivated man endowed with a complex spiritual organisation, ought to explain the intense attraction I feel towards a woman simply by the fact that her bodily formation is different from mine? Oh, how awful that would be! I want to believe that in his struggle with nature the genius of man has struggled with physical love too, as with an enemy, and that, if he has not conquered it, he has at least succeeded in tangling it in a network of illusions of brotherhood and love; and for me, at any rate, it is no longer a simple instinct of my animal nature as with a dog or a toad, but is real love, and every embrace is spiritualised by a pure impulse of the heart and respect for the woman. In reality, a disgust for the animal instinct has been trained for ages in hundreds of generations; it is inherited by me in my blood and forms part of my nature, and if I poetize love, is not that as natural and inevitable in our day as my ears’ not being able to move and my not being covered with fur? I fancy that’s how the majority of civilised people look at it, so that the absence of the moral, poetical element in love is treated in these days as a phenomenon, as a sign of atavism; they say it is a symptom of degeneracy, of many forms of insanity. It is true that, in poetizing love, we assume in those we love qualities that are lacking in them, and that is a source of continual mistakes and continual miseries for us. But to my thinking it is better, even so; that is, it is better to suffer than to find complacency on the basis of woman being woman and man being man.

In Tiflis I received a letter from my father. He wrote that Ariadne Grigoryevna had on such a day gone abroad, intending to spend the whole winter away. A month later I returned home. It was by now autumn. Every week Ariadne sent my father extremely interesting letters on scented paper, written in an excellent literary style. It is my opinion that every woman can be a writer. Ariadne described in great detail how it had not been easy for her to make it up with her aunt and induce the latter to give her a thousand roubles for the journey, and what a long time she had spent in Moscow trying to find an old lady, a distant relation, in

order to persuade her to go with her. Such a profusion of detail suggested fiction, and I realised, of course, that she had no chaperone with her.

Soon afterwards I, too, had a letter from her, also scented and literary. She wrote that she had missed me, missed my beautiful, intelligent, loving eyes. She reproached me affectionately for wasting my youth, for stagnating in the country when I might, like her, be living in paradise under the palms, breathing the fragrance of the orange trees. And she signed herself "Your forsaken Ariadne." Two days later came another letter in the same style, signed "Your forgotten Ariadne." My mind was confused. I loved her passionately, I dreamed of her every night, and then this "your forsaken," "your forgotten"—what did it mean? What was it for? And then the dreariness of the country, the long evenings, the disquieting thoughts of Lubkov.… The uncertainty tortured me, and poisoned my days and nights; it became unendurable. I could not bear it and went abroad.

Ariadne summoned me to Abbazzia. I arrived there on a bright warm day after rain; the raindrops were still hanging on the trees and glistening on the huge, barrack-like *dépendance* where Ariadne and Lubkov were living.

They were not at home. I went into the park; wandered about the avenues, then sat down. An Austrian General, with his hands behind him, walked past me, with red stripes on his trousers such as our generals wear. A baby was wheeled by in a perambulator and the wheels squeaked on the damp sand. A decrepit old man with jaundice passed, then a crowd of Englishwomen, a Catholic priest, then the Austrian General again. A military band, only just arrived from Fiume, with glittering brass instruments, sauntered by to the bandstand—they began playing.

Have you ever been at Abbazzia? It's a filthy little Slav town with only one street, which stinks, and in which one can't walk after rain without goloshes. I had read so much and always with such intense feeling about this earthly paradise that when afterwards, holding up my trousers, I cautiously crossed the narrow street, and in my ennui bought some hard pears from an old peasant woman who, recognising me as a Russian, said: "Tcheeteery" for "tchetyry" (four)—"davadtsat" for "dvadtsat" (twenty), and when I wondered in perplexity where to go and what to do here, and when I inevitably met Russians as disappointed as I was, I began to feel vexed and ashamed. There is a calm bay there full of steamers and boats with coloured sails. From there I could see Fiume and the distant islands covered with lilac mist, and it would have been

picturesque if the view over the bay had not been hemmed in by the hotels and their *dépendance*—buildings in an absurd, trivial style of architecture, with which the whole of that green shore has been covered by greedy money grubbers, so that for the most part you see nothing in this little paradise but windows, terraces, and little squares with tables and waiters' black coats. There is a park such as you find now in every watering-place abroad. And the dark, motionless, silent foliage of the palms, and the bright yellow sand in the avenue, and the bright green seats, and the glitter of the braying military horns—all this sickened me in ten minutes! And yet one is obliged for some reason to spend ten days, ten weeks, there!

Having been dragged reluctantly from one of these watering-places to another, I have been more and more struck by the inconvenient and niggardly life led by the wealthy and well-fed, the dullness and feebleness of their imagination, the lack of boldness in their tastes and desires. And how much happier are those tourists, old and young, who, not having the money to stay in hotels, live where they can, admire the view of the sea from the tops of the mountains, lying on the green grass, walk instead of riding, see the forests and villages at close quarters, observe the customs of the country, listen to its songs, fall in love with its women.…

While I was sitting in the park, it began to get dark, and in the twilight my Ariadne appeared, elegant and dressed like a princess; after her walked Lubkov, wearing a new loose-fitting suit, bought probably in Vienna.

"Why are you cross with me?" he was saying. "What have I done to you?"

Seeing me, she uttered a cry of joy, and probably, if we had not been in the park, would have thrown herself on my neck. She pressed my hands warmly and laughed; and I laughed too and almost cried with emotion. Questions followed, of the village, of my father, whether I had seen her brother, and so on. She insisted on my looking her straight in the face, and asked if I remembered the gudgeon, our little quarrels, the picnics.…

"How nice it all was really!" she sighed. "But we're not having a slow time here either. We have a great many acquaintances, my dear, my best of friends! Tomorrow I will introduce you to a Russian family here, but please buy yourself another hat." She scrutinised me and frowned. "Abbazzia is not the country," she said; "here one must be *comme il faut*."

Then we went to the restaurant. Ariadne was laughing and mischievous all the time; she kept calling me “dear,” “good,” “clever,” and seemed as though she could not believe her eyes that I was with her. We sat on till eleven o’clock, and parted very well satisfied both with the supper and with each other.

Next day Ariadne presented me to the Russian family as: “The son of a distinguished professor whose estate is next to ours.”

She talked to this family about nothing but estates and crops, and kept appealing to me. She wanted to appear to be a very wealthy landowner, and did, in fact, succeed in doing so. Her manner was superb like that of a real aristocrat, which indeed she was by birth.

“But what a person my aunt is!” she said suddenly, looking at me with a smile. “We had a slight tiff, and she has bolted off to Meran. What do you say to that?”

Afterwards when we were walking in the park I asked her:

“What aunt were you talking of just now? What aunt is that?”

“That was a saving lie,” laughed Ariadne. “They must not know I’m without a chaperone.”

After a moment’s silence she came closer to me and said:

“My dear, my dear, do be friends with Lubkov. He is so unhappy! His wife and mother are simply awful.”

She used the formal mode of address in speaking to Lubkov, and when she was going up to bed she said good night to him exactly as she did to me, and their rooms were on different floors. All this made me hope that it was all nonsense, and that there was no sort of love affair between them, and I felt at ease when I met him. And when one day he asked me for the loan of three hundred roubles, I gave it to him with the greatest pleasure.

Every day we spent in enjoying ourselves and in nothing but enjoying ourselves; we strolled in the park, we ate, we drank. Every day there were conversations with the Russian family. By degrees I got used to the fact that if I went into the park I should be sure to meet the old man with jaundice, the Catholic priest, and the Austrian General, who always carried a pack of little cards, and wherever it was possible sat down and played patience, nervously twitching his shoulders. And the band played the same thing over and over again.

At home in the country I used to feel ashamed to meet the peasants when I was fishing or on a picnic party on a working day; here too I was ashamed at the sight of the footmen, the coachmen, and the workmen who met us. It always seemed to me they were looking at me and

thinking: “Why are you doing nothing?” And I was conscious of this feeling of shame every day from morning to night. It was a strange, unpleasant, monotonous time; it was only varied by Lubkov’s borrowing from me now a hundred, now fifty guldens, and being suddenly revived by the money as a morphia-maniac is by morphia, beginning to laugh loudly at his wife, at himself, at his creditors.

At last it began to be rainy and cold. We went to Italy, and I telegraphed to my father begging him for mercy’s sake to send me eight hundred roubles to Rome. We stayed in Venice, in Bologna, in Florence, and in every town invariably put up at an expensive hotel, where we were charged separately for lights, and for service, and for heating, and for bread at lunch, and for the right of having dinner by ourselves. We ate enormously. In the morning they gave us *café complet*; at one o’clock lunch: meat, fish, some sort of omelette, cheese, fruits, and wine. At six o’clock dinner of eight courses with long intervals, during which we drank beer and wine. At nine o’clock tea. At midnight Ariadne would declare she was hungry, and ask for ham and boiled eggs. We would eat to keep her company.

In the intervals between meals we used to rush about the museums and exhibitions in continual anxiety for fear we should be late for dinner or lunch. I was bored at the sight of the pictures; I longed to be at home to rest; I was exhausted, looked about for a chair and hypocritically repeated after other people: “How exquisite, what atmosphere!” Like overfed boa constrictors, we noticed only the most glaring objects. The shop windows hypnotised us; we went into ecstasies over imitation brooches and bought a mass of useless trumpery.

The same thing happened in Rome, where it rained and there was a cold wind. After a heavy lunch we went to look at St. Peter’s, and thanks to our replete condition and perhaps the bad weather, it made no sort of impression on us, and detecting in each other an indifference to art, we almost quarrelled.

The money came from my father. I went to get it, I remember, in the morning. Lubkov went with me.

“The present cannot be full and happy when one has a past,” said he. “I have heavy burdens left on me by the past. However, if only I get the money, it’s no great matter, but if not, I’m in a fix. Would you believe it, I have only eight francs left, yet I must send my wife a hundred and my mother another. And we must live here too. Ariadne’s like a child; she won’t enter into the position, and flings away money like a duchess. Why did she buy a watch yesterday? And, tell me, what object is there in

our going on playing at being good children? Why, our hiding our relations from the servants and our friends costs us from ten to fifteen francs a day, as I have to have a separate room. What's the object of it?"

I felt as though a sharp stone had been turned round in my chest. There was no uncertainty now; it was all clear to me. I turned cold all over, and at once made a resolution to give up seeing them, to run away from them, to go home at once.…

"To get on terms with a woman is easy enough," Lubkov went on. "You have only to undress her; but afterwards what a bore it is, what a silly business!"

When I counted over the money I received he said:

"If you don't lend me a thousand francs, I am faced with complete ruin. Your money is the only resource left to me."

I gave him the money, and he at once revived and began laughing about his uncle, a queer fish, who could never keep his address secret from his wife. When I reached the hotel I packed and paid my bill. I had still to say goodbye to Ariadne.

I knocked at the door.

"*Entrez!*"

In her room was the usual morning disorder: tea-things on the table, an unfinished roll, an eggshell; a strong overpowering reek of scent. The bed had not been made, and it was evident that two had slept in it.

Ariadne herself had only just got out of bed and was now with her hair down in a flannel dressing-jacket.

I said good morning to her, and then sat in silence for a minute while she tried to put her hair tidy, and then I asked her, trembling all over:

"Why… why… did you send for me here?"

Evidently she guessed what I was thinking; she took me by the hand and said:

"I want you to be here, you are so pure."

I felt ashamed of my emotion, of my trembling. And I was afraid I might begin sobbing, too! I went out without saying another word, and within an hour I was sitting in the train. All the journey, for some reason, I imagined Ariadne with child, and she seemed disgusting to me, and all the women I saw in the trains and at the stations looked to me, for some reason, as if they too were with child, and they too seemed disgusting and pitiable. I was in the position of a greedy, passionate miser who should suddenly discover that all his gold coins were false. The pure, gracious images which my imagination, warmed by love, had cherished for so long, my plans, my hopes, my memories, my ideas of love and of

woman—all now were jeering and putting out their tongues at me. “Ariadne,” I kept asking with horror, “that young, intellectual, extraordinarily beautiful girl, the daughter of a senator, carrying on an intrigue with such an ordinary, uninteresting vulgarian? But why should she not love Lubkov?” I answered myself. “In what is he inferior to me? Oh, let her love anyone she likes, but why lie to me? But why is she bound to be open with me?” And so I went on over and over again till I was stupefied.

It was cold in the train; I was travelling first class, but even so there were three on a side, there were no double windows, the outer door opened straight into the compartment, and I felt as though I were in the stocks, cramped, abandoned, pitiful, and my legs were fearfully numb, and at the same time I kept recalling how fascinating she had been that morning in her dressing-jacket and with her hair down, and I was suddenly overcome by such acute jealousy that I leapt up in anguish, so that my neighbours stared at me in wonder and positive alarm.

At home I found deep snow and twenty degrees of frost. I’m fond of the winter; I’m fond of it because at that time, even in the hardest frosts, it’s particularly snug at home. It’s pleasant to put on one’s fur jacket and felt overboots on a clear frosty day, to do something in the garden or in the yard, or to read in a well warmed room, to sit in my father’s study before the open fire, to wash in my country bathhouse.… Only if there is no mother in the house, no sister and no children, it is somehow dreary on winter evenings, and they seem extraordinarily long and quiet. And the warmer and snugger it is, the more acutely is this lack felt. In the winter when I came back from abroad, the evenings were endlessly long, I was intensely depressed, so depressed that I could not even read; in the daytime I was coming and going, clearing away the snow in the garden or feeding the chickens and the calves, but in the evening it was all up with me.

I had never cared for visitors before, but now I was glad of them, for I knew there was sure to be talk of Ariadne. Kotlovitch, the spiritualist, used often to come to talk about his sister, and sometimes he brought with him his friend Prince Maktuev, who was as much in love with Ariadne as I was. To sit in Ariadne’s room, to finger the keys of her piano, to look at her music was a necessity for the prince—he could not live without it; and the spirit of his grandfather Ilarion was still predicting that sooner or later she would be his wife. The prince usually stayed a long time with us, from lunch to midnight, saying nothing all the time; in silence he would drink two or three bottles of beer, and from

time to time, to show that he too was taking part in the conversation, he would laugh an abrupt, melancholy, foolish laugh. Before going home he would always take me aside and ask me in an undertone: “When did you see Ariadne Grigoryevna last? Was she quite well? I suppose she’s not tired of being out there?”

Spring came on. There was the harrowing to do and then the sowing of spring corn and clover. I was sad, but there was the feeling of spring. One longed to accept the inevitable. Working in the fields and listening to the larks, I asked myself: “Couldn’t I have done with this question of personal happiness once and for all? Couldn’t I lay aside my fancy and marry a simple peasant girl?”

Suddenly when we were at our very busiest, I got a letter with the Italian stamp, and the clover and the beehives and the calves and the peasant girl all floated away like smoke. This time Ariadne wrote that she was profoundly, infinitely unhappy. She reproached me for not holding out a helping hand to her, for looking down upon her from the heights of my virtue and deserting her at the moment of danger. All this was written in a large, nervous handwriting with blots and smudges, and it was evident that she wrote in haste and distress. In conclusion she besought me to come and save her. Again my anchor was hauled up and I was carried away. Ariadne was in Rome. I arrived late in the evening, and when she saw me, she sobbed and threw herself on my neck. She had not changed at all that winter, and was just as young and charming. We had supper together and afterwards drove about Rome until dawn, and all the time she kept telling me about her doings. I asked where Lubkov was.

“Don’t remind me of that creature!” she cried. “He is loathsome and disgusting to me!”

“But I thought you loved him,” I said.

“Never,” she said. “At first he struck me as original and aroused my pity, that was all. He is insolent and takes a woman by storm. And that’s attractive. But we won’t talk about him. That is a melancholy page in my life. He has gone to Russia to get money. Serve him right! I told him not to dare to come back.”

She was living then, not at an hotel, but in a private lodging of two rooms which she had decorated in her own taste, frigidly and luxuriously.

After Lubkov had gone away she had borrowed from her acquaintances about five thousand francs, and my arrival certainly was the one salvation for her.

I had reckoned on taking her back to the country, but I did not succeed in that. She was homesick for her native place, but her recollections of the poverty she had been through there, of privations, of the rusty roof on her brother's house, roused a shudder of disgust, and when I suggested going home to her, she squeezed my hands convulsively and said:

"No, no, I shall die of boredom there!"

Then my love entered upon its final phase.

"Be the darling that you used to be; love me a little," said Ariadne, bending over to me. "You're sulky and prudent, you're afraid to yield to impulse, and keep thinking of consequences, and that's dull. Come, I beg you, I beseech you, be nice to me!… My pure one, my holy one, my dear one, I love you so!"

I became her lover. For a month anyway I was like a madman, conscious of nothing but rapture. To hold in one's arms a young and lovely body, with bliss to feel her warmth every time one waked up from sleep, and to remember that she was there—she, my Ariadne!—oh, it was not easy to get used to that! But yet I did get used to it, and by degrees became capable of reflecting on my new position. First of all, I realised, as before, that Ariadne did not love me. But she wanted to be really in love, she was afraid of solitude, and, above all, I was healthy, young, vigorous; she was sensual, like all cold people, as a rule—and we both made a show of being united by a passionate, mutual love. Afterwards I realised something else, too.

We stayed in Rome, in Naples, in Florence; we went to Paris, but there we thought it cold and went back to Italy. We introduced ourselves everywhere as husband and wife, wealthy landowners. People readily made our acquaintance and Ariadne had great social success everywhere. As she took lessons in painting, she was called an artist, and only imagine, that quite suited her, though she had not the slightest trace of talent.

She would sleep every day till two or three o'clock; she had her coffee and lunch in bed. At dinner she would eat soup, lobster, fish, meat, asparagus, game, and after she had gone to bed I used to bring up something, for instance roast beef, and she would eat it with a melancholy, careworn expression, and if she waked in the night she would eat apples and oranges.

The chief, so to say fundamental, characteristic of the woman was an amazing duplicity. She was continually deceitful every minute, apparently apart from any necessity, as it were by instinct, by an impulse such as makes the sparrow chirrup and the cockroach waggle its

antennae. She was deceitful with me, with the footman, with the porter, with the tradesmen in the shops, with her acquaintances; not one conversation, not one meeting, took place without affectation and pretence. A man had only to come into our room—whoever it might be, a waiter, or a baron—for her eyes, her expression, her voice to change, even the contour of her figure was transformed. At the very first glance at her then, you would have said there were no more wealthy and fashionable people in Italy than we. She never met an artist or a musician without telling him all sorts of lies about his remarkable talent.

"You have such a talent!" she would say, in honeyed cadences, "I'm really afraid of you. I think you must see right through people."

And all this simply in order to please, to be successful, to be fascinating! She waked up every morning with the one thought of "pleasing"! It was the aim and object of her life. If I had told her that in such a house, in such a street, there lived a man who was not attracted by her, it would have caused her real suffering. She wanted every day to enchant, to captivate, to drive men crazy. The fact that I was in her power and reduced to a complete nonentity before her charms gave her the same sort of satisfaction that visitors used to feel in tournaments. My subjection was not enough, and at nights, stretched out like a tigress, uncovered—she was always too hot—she would read the letters sent her by Lubkov; he besought her to return to Russia, vowing if she did not he would rob or murder someone to get the money to come to her. She hated him, but his passionate, slavish letters excited her. She had an extraordinary opinion of her own charms; she imagined that if somewhere, in some great assembly, men could have seen how beautifully she was made and the colour of her skin, she would have vanquished all Italy, the whole world. Her talk of her figure, of her skin, offended me, and observing this, she would, when she was angry, to vex me, say all sorts of vulgar things, taunting me. One day when we were at the summer villa of a lady of our acquaintance, and she lost her temper, she even went so far as to say: "If you don't leave off boring me with your sermons, I'll undress this minute and lie naked here on these flowers."

Often looking at her asleep, or eating, or trying to assume a naive expression, I wondered why that extraordinary beauty, grace, and intelligence had been given her by God. Could it simply be for lolling in bed, eating and lying, lying endlessly? And was she intelligent really? She was afraid of three candles in a row, of the number thirteen, was terrified of spells and bad dreams. She argued about free love and

freedom in general like a bigoted old woman, declared that Boleslav Markevitch was a better writer than Turgenev. But she was diabolically cunning and sharp, and knew how to seem a highly educated, advanced person in company.

Even at a good-humoured moment, she could always insult a servant or kill an insect without a pang; she liked bullfights, liked to read about murders, and was angry when prisoners were acquitted.

For the life Ariadne and I were leading, we had to have a great deal of money. My poor father sent me his pension, all the little sums he received, borrowed for me wherever he could, and when one day he answered me: "*Non habeo*," I sent him a desperate telegram in which I besought him to mortgage the estate. A little later I begged him to get money somehow on a second mortgage. He did this too without a murmur and sent me every farthing. Ariadne despised the practical side of life; all this was no concern of hers, and when flinging away thousands of francs to satisfy her mad desires I groaned like an old tree, she would be singing "Addio bella Napoli" with a light heart.

Little by little I grew cold to her and began to be ashamed of our tie. I am not fond of pregnancy and confinements, but now I sometimes dreamed of a child who would have been at least a formal justification of our life. That I might not be completely disgusted with myself, I began reading and visiting museums and galleries, gave up drinking and took to eating very little. If one keeps oneself well in hand from morning to night, one's heart seems lighter. I began to bore Ariadne too. The people with whom she won her triumphs were, by the way, all of the middling sort; as before, there were no ambassadors, there was no salon, the money did not run to it, and this mortified her and made her sob, and she announced to me at last that perhaps she would not be against our returning to Russia.

And here we are on our way. For the last few months she has been zealously corresponding with her brother; she evidently has some secret projects, but what they are—God knows! I am sick of trying to fathom her underhand schemes! But we're going, not to the country, but to Yalta and afterwards to the Caucasus. She can only exist now at watering-places, and if you knew how I hate all these watering-places, how suffocated and ashamed I am in them. If I could be in the country now! If I could only be working now, earning my bread by the sweat of my brow, atoning for my follies. I am conscious of a superabundance of energy and I believe that if I were to put that energy to work I could redeem my estate in five years. But now, as you see, there is a complication. Here

we’re not abroad, but in mother Russia; we shall have to think of lawful wedlock. Of course, all attraction is over; there is no trace left of my old love, but, however that may be, I am bound in honour to marry her.

Shamohin, excited by his story, went below with me and we continued talking about women. It was late. It appeared that he and I were in the same cabin.

“So far it is only in the village that woman has not fallen behind man,” said Shamohin. “There she thinks and feels just as man does, and struggles with nature in the name of culture as zealously as he. In the towns the woman of the bourgeois or intellectual class has long since fallen behind, and is returning to her primitive condition. She is half a human beast already, and, thanks to her, a great deal of what had been won by human genius has been lost again; the woman gradually disappears and in her place is the primitive female. This dropping-back on the part of the educated woman is a real danger to culture; in her retrogressive movement she tries to drag man after her and prevents him from moving forward. That is incontestable.”

I asked: “Why generalise? Why judge of all women from Ariadne alone? The very struggle of women for education and sexual equality, which I look upon as a struggle for justice, precludes any hypothesis of a retrograde movement.”

But Shamohin scarcely listened to me and he smiled distrustfully. He was a passionate, convinced misogynist, and it was impossible to alter his convictions.

“Oh, nonsense!” he interrupted. “When once a woman sees in me, not a man, not an equal, but a male, and her one anxiety all her life is to attract me—that is, to take possession of me—how can one talk of their rights? Oh, don’t you believe them; they are very, very cunning! We men make a great stir about their emancipation, but they don’t care about their emancipation at all, they only pretend to care about it; they are horribly cunning things, horribly cunning!”

I began to feel sleepy and weary of discussion. I turned over with my face to the wall.

“Yes,” I heard as I fell asleep—“yes, and it’s our education that’s at fault, sir. In our towns, the whole education and bringing up of women in its essence tends to develop her into the human beast—that is, to make her attractive to the male and able to vanquish him. Yes, indeed”—

Shamohin sighed—“little girls ought to be taught and brought up with boys, so that they might be always together. A woman ought to be trained so that she may be able, like a man, to recognise when she’s wrong, or she always thinks she’s in the right. Instil into a little girl from her cradle that a man is not first of all a cavalier or a possible lover, but her neighbour, her equal in everything. Train her to think logically, to generalise, and do not assure her that her brain weighs less than a man’s and that therefore she can be indifferent to the sciences, to the arts, to the tasks of culture in general. The apprentice to the shoemaker or the house painter has a brain of smaller size than the grown-up man too, yet he works, suffers, takes his part in the general struggle for existence. We must give up our attitude to the physiological aspect, too—to pregnancy and childbirth, seeing that in the first place women don’t have babies every month; secondly, not all women have babies; and, thirdly, a normal countrywoman works in the fields up to the day of her confinement and it does her no harm. Then there ought to be absolute equality in everyday life. If a man gives a lady his chair or picks up the handkerchief she has dropped, let her repay him in the same way. I have no objection if a girl of good family helps me to put on my coat or hands me a glass of water—”

I heard no more, for I fell asleep.

Next morning when we were approaching Sevastopol, it was damp, unpleasant weather; the ship rocked. Shamohin sat on deck with me, brooding and silent. When the bell rang for tea, men with their coat-collars turned up and ladies with pale, sleepy faces began going below; a young and very beautiful lady, the one who had been so angry with the Customs officers at Volotchisk, stopped before Shamohin and said with the expression of a naughty, fretful child:

“Jean, your birdie’s been seasick.”

Afterwards when I was at Yalta I saw the same beautiful lady dashing about on horseback with a couple of officers hardly able to keep up with her. And one morning I saw her in an overall and a Phrygian cap, sketching on the seafront with a great crowd admiring her a little way off. I too was introduced to her. She pressed my hand with great warmth, and looking at me ecstatically, thanked me in honeyed cadences for the pleasure I had given her by my writings.

“Don’t you believe her,” Shamohin whispered to me, “she has never read a word of them.”

When I was walking on the seafront in the early evening Shamohin met me with his arms full of big parcels of fruits and dainties.

“Prince Maktuev is here!” he said joyfully. “He came yesterday with her brother, the spiritualist! Now I understand what she was writing to him about! Oh, Lord!” he went on, gazing up to heaven, and pressing his parcels to his bosom. “If she hits it off with the prince, it means freedom, then I can go back to the country with my father!”

And he ran on.

“I begin to believe in spirits,” he called to me, looking back. “The spirit of grandfather Ilarion seems to have prophesied the truth! Oh, if only it is so!”

The day after this meeting I left Yalta and how Shamohin’s story ended I don’t know.

THE HELPMATE

"I've asked you not to tidy my table," said Nikolay Yevgrafitch. "There's no finding anything when you've tidied up. Where's the telegram? Where have you thrown it? Be so good as to look for it. It's from Kazan, dated yesterday."

The maid—a pale, very slim girl with an indifferent expression—found several telegrams in the basket under the table, and handed them to the doctor without a word; but all these were telegrams from patients. Then they looked in the drawing room, and in Olga Dmitrievna's room.

It was past midnight. Nikolay Yevgrafitch knew his wife would not be home very soon, not till five o'clock at least. He did not trust her, and when she was long away he could not sleep, was worried, and at the same time he despised his wife, and her bed, and her looking-glass, and her boxes of sweets, and the hyacinths, and the lilies of the valley which were sent her every day by some one or other, and which diffused the sickly fragrance of a florist's shop all over the house. On such nights he became petty, ill-humoured, irritable, and he fancied now that it was very necessary for him to have the telegram he had received the day before from his brother, though it contained nothing but Christmas greetings.

On the table of his wife's room under the box of stationery he found a telegram, and glanced at it casually. It was addressed to his wife, care of his mother-in-law, from Monte Carlo, and signed Michel.… The doctor did not understand one word of it, as it was in some foreign language, apparently English.

"Who is this Michel? Why Monte Carlo? Why directed care of her mother?"

During the seven years of his married life he had grown used to being suspicious, guessing, catching at clues, and it had several times occurred to him, that his exercise at home had qualified him to become an excellent detective. Going into his study and beginning to reflect, he recalled at once how he had been with his wife in Petersburg a year and a half ago, and had lunched with an old schoolfellow, a civil engineer, and

how that engineer had introduced to him and his wife a young man of two or three and twenty, called Mihail Ivanovitch, with rather a curious short surname—Riss. Two months later the doctor had seen the young man's photograph in his wife's album, with an inscription in French: "In remembrance of the present and in hope of the future." Later on he had met the young man himself at his mother-in-law's. And that was at the time when his wife had taken to being very often absent and coming home at four or five o'clock in the morning, and was constantly asking him to get her a passport for abroad, which he kept refusing to do; and a continual feud went on in the house which made him feel ashamed to face the servants.

Six months before, his colleagues had decided that he was going into consumption, and advised him to throw up everything and go to the Crimea. When she heard of this, Olga Dmitrievna affected to be very much alarmed; she began to be affectionate to her husband, and kept assuring him that it would be cold and dull in the Crimea, and that he had much better go to Nice, and that she would go with him, and there would nurse him, look after him, take care of him.

Now, he understood why his wife was so particularly anxious to go to Nice: her Michel lived at Monte Carlo.

He took an English dictionary, and translating the words, and guessing their meaning, by degrees he put together the following sentence: "I drink to the health of my beloved darling, and kiss her little foot a thousand times, and am impatiently expecting her arrival." He pictured the pitiable, ludicrous part he would play if he had agreed to go to Nice with his wife. He felt so mortified that he almost shed tears and began pacing to and fro through all the rooms of the flat in great agitation. His pride, his plebeian fastidiousness, was revolted. Clenching his fists and scowling with disgust, he wondered how he, the son of a village priest, brought up in a clerical school, a plain, straightforward man, a surgeon by profession—how could he have let himself be enslaved, have sunk into such shameful bondage to this weak, worthless, mercenary, low creature.

"'Little foot'!" he muttered to himself, crumpling up the telegram; "'little foot'!"

Of the time when he fell in love and proposed to her, and the seven years that he had been living with her, all that remained in his memory was her long, fragrant hair, a mass of soft lace, and her little feet, which certainly were very small, beautiful feet; and even now it seemed as though he still had from those old embraces the feeling of lace and silk

upon his hands and face—and nothing more. Nothing more—that is, not counting hysterics, shrieks, reproaches, threats, and lies—brazen, treacherous lies. He remembered how in his father's house in the village a bird would sometimes chance to fly in from the open air into the house and would struggle desperately against the windowpanes and upset things; so this woman from a class utterly alien to him had flown into his life and made complete havoc of it. The best years of his life had been spent as though in hell, his hopes for happiness shattered and turned into a mockery, his health gone, his rooms as vulgar in their atmosphere as a cocotte's, and of the ten thousand he earned every year he could never save ten roubles to send his old mother in the village, and his debts were already about fifteen thousand. It seemed that if a band of brigands had been living in his rooms his life would not have been so hopelessly, so irremediably ruined as by the presence of this woman.

He began coughing and gasping for breath. He ought to have gone to bed and got warm, but he could not. He kept walking about the rooms, or sat down to the table, nervously fidgeting with a pencil and scribbling mechanically on a paper.

"Trying a pen.… A little foot."

By five o'clock he grew weaker and threw all the blame on himself. It seemed to him now that if Olga Dmitrievna had married someone else who might have had a good influence over her—who knows?—she might after all have become a good, straightforward woman. He was a poor psychologist, and knew nothing of the female heart; besides, he was churlish, uninteresting.…

"I haven't long to live now," he thought. "I am a dead man, and ought not to stand in the way of the living. It would be strange and stupid to insist upon one's rights now. I'll have it out with her; let her go to the man she loves.… I'll give her a divorce. I'll take the blame on myself."

Olga Dmitrievna came in at last, and she walked into the study and sank into a chair just as she was in her white cloak, hat, and overboots.

"The nasty, fat boy," she said with a sob, breathing hard. "It's really dishonest; it's disgusting." She stamped. "I can't put up with it; I can't, I can't!"

"What's the matter?" asked Nikolay Yevgrafitch, going up to her.

"That student, Azarbekov, was seeing me home, and he lost my bag, and there was fifteen roubles in it. I borrowed it from mamma."

She was crying in a most genuine way, like a little girl, and not only her handkerchief, but even her gloves, were wet with tears.

“It can’t be helped!” said the doctor. “If he’s lost it, he’s lost it, and it’s no good worrying over it. Calm yourself; I want to talk to you.”

“I am not a millionaire to lose money like that. He says he’ll pay it back, but I don’t believe him; he’s poor…”

Her husband begged her to calm herself and to listen to him, but she kept on talking of the student and of the fifteen roubles she had lost.

“Ach! I’ll give you twenty-five roubles tomorrow if you’ll only hold your tongue!” he said irritably.

“I must take off my things!” she said, crying. “I can’t talk seriously in my fur coat! How strange you are!”

He helped her off with her coat and overboots, detecting as he did so the smell of the white wine she liked to drink with oysters (in spite of her etherealness she ate and drank a great deal). She went into her room and came back soon after, having changed her things and powdered her face, though her eyes still showed traces of tears. She sat down, retreating into her light, lacy dressing-gown, and in the mass of billowy pink her husband could see nothing but her hair, which she had let down, and her little foot wearing a slipper.

“What do you want to talk about?” she asked, swinging herself in a rocking-chair.

“I happened to see this;” and he handed her the telegram.

She read it and shrugged her shoulders.

“Well?” she said, rocking herself faster. “That’s the usual New Year’s greeting and nothing else. There are no secrets in it.”

“You are reckoning on my not knowing English. No, I don’t know it; but I have a dictionary. That telegram is from Riss; he drinks to the health of his beloved and sends you a thousand kisses. But let us leave that,” the doctor went on hurriedly. “I don’t in the least want to reproach you or make a scene. We’ve had scenes and reproaches enough; it’s time to make an end of them.… This is what I want to say to you: you are free, and can live as you like.”

There was a silence. She began crying quietly.

“I set you free from the necessity of lying and keeping up pretences,” Nikolay Yevgrafitch continued. “If you love that young man, love him; if you want to go abroad to him, go. You are young, healthy, and I am a wreck, and haven’t long to live. In short… you understand me.”

He was agitated and could not go on. Olga Dmitrievna, crying and speaking in a voice of self-pity, acknowledged that she loved Riss, and used to drive out of town with him and see him in his rooms, and now she really did long to go abroad.

“You see, I hide nothing from you,” she added, with a sigh. “My whole soul lies open before you. And I beg you again, be generous, get me a passport.”

“I repeat, you are free.”

She moved to another seat nearer him to look at the expression of his face. She did not believe him and wanted now to understand his secret meaning. She never did believe anyone, and however generous were their intentions, she always suspected some petty or ignoble motive or selfish object in them. And when she looked searchingly into his face, it seemed to him that there was a gleam of green light in her eyes as in a cat’s.

“When shall I get the passport?” she asked softly.

He suddenly had an impulse to say “Never”; but he restrained himself and said:

“When you like.”

“I shall only go for a month.”

“You’ll go to Riss for good. I’ll get you a divorce, take the blame on myself, and Riss can marry you.”

“But I don’t want a divorce!” Olga Dmitrievna retorted quickly, with an astonished face. “I am not asking you for a divorce! Get me a passport, that’s all.”

“But why don’t you want the divorce?” asked the doctor, beginning to feel irritated. “You are a strange woman. How strange you are! If you are fond of him in earnest and he loves you too, in your position you can do nothing better than get married. Can you really hesitate between marriage and adultery?”

“I understand you,” she said, walking away from him, and a spiteful, vindictive expression came into her face. “I understand you perfectly. You are sick of me, and you simply want to get rid of me, to force this divorce on me. Thank you very much; I am not such a fool as you think. I won’t accept the divorce and I won’t leave you—I won’t, I won’t! To begin with, I don’t want to lose my position in society,” she continued quickly, as though afraid of being prevented from speaking. “Secondly, I am twenty-seven and Riss is only twenty-three; he’ll be tired of me in a year and throw me over. And what’s more, if you care to know, I’m not certain that my feeling will last long… so there! I’m not going to leave you.”

“Then I’ll turn you out of the house!” shouted Nikolay Yevgrafitch, stamping. “I shall turn you out, you vile, loathsome woman!”

“We shall see!” she said, and went out.

It was broad daylight outside, but the doctor still sat at the table moving the pencil over the paper and writing mechanically.

“My dear Sir.… Little foot.”

Or he walked about and stopped in the drawing room before a photograph taken seven years ago, soon after his marriage, and looked at it for a long time. It was a family group: his father-in-law, his mother-in-law, his wife Olga Dmitrievna when she was twenty, and himself in the role of a happy young husband. His father-in-law, a clean-shaven, dropsical privy councillor, crafty and avaricious; his mother-in-law, a stout lady with small predatory features like a weasel, who loved her daughter to distraction and helped her in everything; if her daughter were strangling someone, the mother would not have protested, but would only have screened her with her skirts. Olga Dmitrievna, too, had small predatory-looking features, but more expressive and bolder than her mother’s; she was not a weasel, but a beast on a bigger scale! And Nikolay Yevgrafitch himself in the photograph looked such a guileless soul, such a kindly, good fellow, so open and simple-hearted; his whole face was relaxed in the naive, good-natured smile of a divinity student, and he had had the simplicity to believe that that company of beasts of prey into which destiny had chanced to thrust him would give him romance and happiness and all he had dreamed of when as a student he used to sing the song “Youth is wasted, life is nought, when the heart is cold and loveless.”

And once more he asked himself in perplexity how he, the son of a village priest, with his democratic bringing up—a plain, blunt, straightforward man—could have so helplessly surrendered to the power of this worthless, false, vulgar, petty creature, whose nature was so utterly alien to him.

When at eleven o’clock he put on his coat to go to the hospital the servant came into his study.

“What is it?” he asked.

“The mistress has got up and asks you for the twenty-five roubles you promised her yesterday.”

THE MURDER

I

The evening service was being celebrated at Progonnaya Station. Before the great icon, painted in glaring colours on a background of gold, stood the crowd of railway servants with their wives and children, and also of the timbermen and sawyers who worked close to the railway line. All stood in silence, fascinated by the glare of the lights and the howling of the snowstorm which was aimlessly disporting itself outside, regardless of the fact that it was the Eve of the Annunciation. The old priest from Vedenyapino conducted the service; the sacristan and Matvey Terehov were singing.

Matvey's face was beaming with delight; he sang stretching out his neck as though he wanted to soar upwards. He sang tenor and chanted the "Praises" too in a tenor voice with honied sweetness and persuasiveness. When he sang "Archangel Voices" he waved his arms like a conductor, and trying to second the sacristan's hollow bass with his tenor, achieved something extremely complex, and from his face it could be seen that he was experiencing great pleasure.

At last the service was over, and they all quietly dispersed, and it was dark and empty again, and there followed that hush which is only known in stations that stand solitary in the open country or in the forest when the wind howls and nothing else is heard and when all the emptiness around, all the dreariness of life slowly ebbing away is felt.

Matvey lived not far from the station at his cousin's tavern. But he did not want to go home. He sat down at the refreshment bar and began talking to the waiter in a low voice.

"We had our own choir in the tile factory. And I must tell you that though we were only workmen, our singing was first-rate, splendid. We were often invited to the town, and when the Deputy Bishop, Father

Ivan, took the service at Trinity Church, the bishop's singers sang in the right choir and we in the left. Only they complained in the town that we kept the singing on too long: 'the factory choir drag it out,' they used to say. It is true we began St. Andrey's prayers and the Praises between six and seven, and it was past eleven when we finished, so that it was sometimes after midnight when we got home to the factory. It was good," sighed Matvey. "Very good it was, indeed, Sergey Nikanoritch! But here in my father's house it is anything but joyful. The nearest church is four miles away; with my weak health I can't get so far; there are no singers there. And there is no peace or quiet in our family; day in day out, there is an uproar, scolding, uncleanliness; we all eat out of one bowl like peasants; and there are beetles in the cabbage soup.… God has not given me health, else I would have gone away long ago, Sergey Nikanoritch."

Matvey Terehov was a middle-aged man about forty-five, but he had a look of ill-health; his face was wrinkled and his lank, scanty beard was quite grey, and that made him seem many years older. He spoke in a weak voice, circumspectly, and held his chest when he coughed, while his eyes assumed the uneasy and anxious look one sees in very apprehensive people. He never said definitely what was wrong with him, but he was fond of describing at length how once at the factory he had lifted a heavy box and had ruptured himself, and how this had led to "the gripes," and had forced him to give up his work in the tile factory and come back to his native place; but he could not explain what he meant by "the gripes."

"I must own I am not fond of my cousin," he went on, pouring himself out some tea. "He is my elder; it is a sin to censure him, and I fear the Lord, but I cannot bear it in patience. He is a haughty, surly, abusive man; he is the torment of his relations and workmen, and constantly out of humour. Last Sunday I asked him in an amiable way, 'Brother, let us go to Pahomovo for the Mass!' but he said, 'I am not going; the priest there is a gambler;' and he would not come here today because, he said, the priest from Vedenyapino smokes and drinks vodka. He doesn't like the clergy! He reads Mass himself and the Hours and the Vespers, while his sister acts as sacristan; he says, 'Let us pray unto the Lord'! and she, in a thin little voice like a turkey-hen, 'Lord, have mercy upon us! …' It's a sin, that's what it is. Every day I say to him, 'Think what you are doing, brother! Repent, brother!' and he takes no notice."

Sergey Nikanoritch, the waiter, poured out five glasses of tea and carried them on a tray to the waiting room. He had scarcely gone in

when there was a shout:

“Is that the way to serve it, pig’s face? You don’t know how to wait!”

It was the voice of the stationmaster. There was a timid mutter, then again a harsh and angry shout:

“Get along!”

The waiter came back greatly crestfallen.

“There was a time when I gave satisfaction to counts and princes,” he said in a low voice; “but now I don’t know how to serve tea.… He called me names before the priest and the ladies!”

The waiter, Sergey Nikanoritch, had once had money of his own, and had kept a buffet at a first-class station, which was a junction, in the principal town of a province. There he had worn a swallowtail coat and a gold chain. But things had gone ill with him; he had squandered all his own money over expensive fittings and service; he had been robbed by his staff, and getting gradually into difficulties, had moved to another station less bustling. Here his wife had left him, taking with her all the silver, and he moved to a third station of a still lower class, where no hot dishes were served. Then to a fourth. Frequently changing his situation and sinking lower and lower, he had at last come to Progonnaya, and here he used to sell nothing but tea and cheap vodka, and for lunch hard-boiled eggs and dry sausages, which smelt of tar, and which he himself sarcastically said were only fit for the orchestra. He was bald all over the top of his head, and had prominent blue eyes and thick bushy whiskers, which he often combed out, looking into the little looking-glass. Memories of the past haunted him continually; he could never get used to sausage “only fit for the orchestra,” to the rudeness of the stationmaster, and to the peasants who used to haggle over the prices, and in his opinion it was as unseemly to haggle over prices in a refreshment room as in a chemist’s shop. He was ashamed of his poverty and degradation, and that shame was now the leading interest of his life.

“Spring is late this year,” said Matvey, listening. “It’s a good job; I don’t like spring. In spring it is very muddy, Sergey Nikanoritch. In books they write: Spring, the birds sing, the sun is setting, but what is there pleasant in that? A bird is a bird, and nothing more. I am fond of good company, of listening to folks, of talking of religion or singing something agreeable in chorus; but as for nightingales and flowers—bless them, I say!”

He began again about the tile factory, about the choir, but Sergey Nikanoritch could not get over his mortification, and kept shrugging his shoulders and muttering. Matvey said goodbye and went home.

There was no frost, and the snow was already melting on the roofs, though it was still falling in big flakes; they were whirling rapidly round and round in the air and chasing one another in white clouds along the railway line. And the oak forest on both sides of the line, in the dim light of the moon which was hidden somewhere high up in the clouds, resounded with a prolonged sullen murmur. When a violent storm shakes the trees, how terrible they are! Matvey walked along the causeway beside the line, covering his face and his hands, while the wind beat on his back. All at once a little nag, plastered all over with snow, came into sight; a sledge scraped along the bare stones of the causeway, and a peasant, white all over, too, with his head muffled up, cracked his whip. Matvey looked round after him, but at once, as though it had been a vision, there was neither sledge nor peasant to be seen, and he hastened his steps, suddenly scared, though he did not know why.

Here was the crossing and the dark little house where the signalman lived. The barrier was raised, and by it perfect mountains had drifted and clouds of snow were whirling round like witches on broomsticks. At that point the line was crossed by an old high road, which was still called "the track." On the right, not far from the crossing, by the roadside stood Terehov's tavern, which had been a posting inn. Here there was always a light twinkling at night.

When Matvey reached home there was a strong smell of incense in all the rooms and even in the entry. His cousin Yakov Ivanitch was still reading the evening service. In the prayer room where this was going on, in the corner opposite the door, there stood a shrine of old-fashioned ancestral icons in gilt settings, and both walls to right and to left were decorated with icons of ancient and modern fashion, in shrines and without them. On the table, which was draped to the floor, stood an icon of the Annunciation, and close by a cyprus-wood cross and the censer; wax candles were burning. Beside the table was a reading desk. As he passed by the prayer room, Matvey stopped and glanced in at the door. Yakov Ivanitch was reading at the desk at that moment, his sister Aglaia, a tall lean old woman in a dark-blue dress and white kerchief, was praying with him. Yakov Ivanitch's daughter Dashutka, an ugly freckled girl of eighteen, was there, too, barefoot as usual, and wearing the dress in which she had at nightfall taken water to the cattle.

"Glory to Thee Who hast shown us the light!" Yakov Ivanitch boomed out in a chant, bowing low.

Aglaia propped her chin on her hand and chanted in a thin, shrill, drawling voice. And upstairs, above the ceiling, there was the sound of

vague voices which seemed menacing or ominous of evil. No one had lived on the storey above since a fire there a long time ago. The windows were boarded up, and empty bottles lay about on the floor between the beams. Now the wind was banging and droning, and it seemed as though someone were running and stumbling over the beams.

Half of the lower storey was used as a tavern, while Terehov's family lived in the other half, so that when drunken visitors were noisy in the tavern every word they said could be heard in the rooms. Matvey lived in a room next to the kitchen, with a big stove, in which, in old days, when this had been a posting inn, bread had been baked every day. Dashutka, who had no room of her own, lived in the same room behind the stove. A cricket chirped there always at night and mice ran in and out.

Matvey lighted a candle and began reading a book which he had borrowed from the station policeman. While he was sitting over it the service ended, and they all went to bed. Dashutka lay down, too. She began snoring at once, but soon woke up and said, yawning:

"You shouldn't burn a candle for nothing, Uncle Matvey."

"It's my candle," answered Matvey; "I bought it with my own money."

Dashutka turned over a little and fell asleep again. Matvey sat up a good time longer—he was not sleepy—and when he had finished the last page he took a pencil out of a box and wrote on the book:

"I, Matvey Terehov, have read this book, and think it the very best of all the books I have read, for which I express my gratitude to the noncommissioned officer of the Police Department of Railways, Kuzma Nikolaev Zhukov, as the possessor of this priceless book."

He considered it an obligation of politeness to make such inscriptions in other people's books.

II

On Annunciation Day, after the mail train had been sent off, Matvey was sitting in the refreshment bar, talking and drinking tea with lemon in it.

The waiter and Zhukov the policeman were listening to him.

“I was, I must tell you,” Matvey was saying, “inclined to religion from my earliest childhood. I was only twelve years old when I used to read the epistle in church, and my parents were greatly delighted, and every summer I used to go on a pilgrimage with my dear mother. Sometimes other lads would be singing songs and catching crayfish, while I would be all the time with my mother. My elders commended me, and, indeed, I was pleased myself that I was of such good behaviour. And when my mother sent me with her blessing to the factory, I used between working hours to sing tenor there in our choir, and nothing gave me greater pleasure. I needn’t say, I drank no vodka, I smoked no tobacco, and lived in chastity; but we all know such a mode of life is displeasing to the enemy of mankind, and he, the unclean spirit, once tried to ruin me and began to darken my mind, just as now with my cousin. First of all, I took a vow to fast every Monday and not to eat meat any day, and as time went on all sorts of fancies came over me. For the first week of Lent down to Saturday the holy fathers have ordained a diet of dry food, but it is no sin for the weak or those who work hard even to drink tea, yet not a crumb passed into my mouth till the Sunday, and afterwards all through Lent I did not allow myself a drop of oil, and on Wednesdays and Fridays I did not touch a morsel at all. It was the same in the lesser fasts. Sometimes in St. Peter’s fast our factory lads would have fish soup, while I would sit a little apart from them and suck a dry crust. Different people have different powers, of course, but I can say of myself I did not find fast days hard, and, indeed, the greater the zeal the easier it seems. You are only hungry on the first days of the fast, and then you get used to it; it goes on getting easier, and by the end of a week you don’t mind it at all, and there is a numb feeling in your legs as though you were not on earth, but in the clouds. And, besides that, I laid all sorts of penances on myself; I used to get up in the night and pray, bowing down to the ground, used to drag heavy stones from place to place, used to go out

barefoot in the snow, and I even wore chains, too. Only, as time went on, you know, I was confessing one day to the priest and suddenly this reflection occurred to me: why, this priest, I thought, is married, he eats meat and smokes tobacco—how can he confess me, and what power has he to absolve my sins if he is more sinful that I? I even scruple to eat Lenten oil, while he eats sturgeon, I dare say. I went to another priest, and he, as ill luck would have it, was a fat fleshy man, in a silk cassock; he rustled like a lady, and he smelt of tobacco too. I went to fast and confess in the monastery, and my heart was not at ease even there; I kept fancying the monks were not living according to their rules. And after that I could not find a service to my mind: in one place they read the service too fast, in another they sang the wrong prayer, in a third the sacristan stammered. Sometimes, the Lord forgive me a sinner, I would stand in church and my heart would throb with anger. How could one pray, feeling like that? And I fancied that the people in the church did not cross themselves properly, did not listen properly; wherever I looked it seemed to me that they were all drunkards, that they broke the fast, smoked, lived loose lives and played cards. I was the only one who lived according to the commandments. The wily spirit did not slumber; it got worse as it went on. I gave up singing in the choir and I did not go to church at all; since my notion was that I was a righteous man and that the church did not suit me owing to its imperfections—that is, indeed, like a fallen angel, I was puffed up in my pride beyond all belief. After this I began attempting to make a church for myself. I hired from a deaf woman a tiny little room, a long way out of town near the cemetery, and made a prayer room like my cousin’s, only I had big church candlesticks, too, and a real censer. In this prayer room of mine I kept the rules of holy Mount Athos—that is, every day my matins began at midnight without fail, and on the eve of the chief of the twelve great holy days my midnight service lasted ten hours and sometimes even twelve. Monks are allowed by rule to sit during the singing of the Psalter and the reading of the Bible, but I wanted to be better than the monks, and so I used to stand all through. I used to read and sing slowly, with tears and sighing, lifting up my hands, and I used to go straight from prayer to work without sleeping; and, indeed, I was always praying at my work, too. Well, it got all over the town ‘Matvey is a saint; Matvey heals the sick and senseless.’ I never had healed anyone, of course, but we all know wherever any heresy or false doctrine springs up there’s no keeping the female sex away. They are just like flies on the honey. Old maids and females of all sorts came trailing to me, bowing down to my feet, kissing

my hands and crying out I was a saint and all the rest of it, and one even saw a halo round my head. It was too crowded in the prayer room. I took a bigger room, and then we had a regular tower of Babel. The devil got hold of me completely and screened the light from my eyes with his unclean hoofs. We all behaved as though we were frantic. I read, while the old maids and other females sang, and then after standing on their legs for twenty-four hours or longer without eating or drinking, suddenly a trembling would come over them as though they were in a fever; after that, one would begin screaming and then another—it was horrible! I, too, would shiver all over like a Jew in a frying pan, I don't know myself why, and our legs began to prance about. It's a strange thing, indeed: you don't want to, but you prance about and waggle your arms; and after that, screaming and shrieking, we all danced and ran after one another—ran till we dropped; and in that way, in wild frenzy, I fell into fornication."

The policeman laughed, but, noticing that no one else was laughing, became serious and said:

"That's Molokanism. I have heard they are all like that in the Caucasus."

"But I was not killed by a thunderbolt," Matvey went on, crossing himself before the icon and moving his lips. "My dead mother must have been praying for me in the other world. When everyone in the town looked upon me as a saint, and even the ladies and gentlemen of good family used to come to me in secret for consolation, I happened to go into our landlord, Osip Varlamitch, to ask forgiveness—it was the Day of Forgiveness—and he fastened the door with the hook, and we were left alone face to face. And he began to reprove me, and I must tell you Osip Varlamitch was a man of brains, though without education, and everyone respected and feared him, for he was a man of stern, God-fearing life and worked hard. He had been the mayor of the town, and a warden of the church for twenty years maybe, and had done a great deal of good; he had covered all the New Moscow Road with gravel, had painted the church, and had decorated the columns to look like malachite. Well, he fastened the door, and—'I have been wanting to get at you for a long time, you rascal,…' he said. 'You think you are a saint,' he said. 'No you are not a saint, but a backslider from God, a heretic and an evildoer!…' And he went on and on.… I can't tell you how he said it, so eloquently and cleverly, as though it were all written down, and so touchingly. He talked for two hours. His words penetrated my soul; my eyes were opened. I listened, listened and—burst into sobs! 'Be an ordinary man,'

he said, ‘eat and drink, dress and pray like everyone else. All that is above the ordinary is of the devil. Your chains,’ he said, ‘are of the devil; your fasting is of the devil; your prayer room is of the devil. It is all pride,’ he said. Next day, on Monday in Holy Week, it pleased God I should fall ill. I ruptured myself and was taken to the hospital. I was terribly worried, and wept bitterly and trembled. I thought there was a straight road before me from the hospital to hell, and I almost died. I was in misery on a bed of sickness for six months, and when I was discharged the first thing I did I confessed, and took the sacrament in the regular way and became a man again. Osip Varlamitch saw me off home and exhorted me: ‘Remember, Matvey, that anything above the ordinary is of the devil.’ And now I eat and drink like everyone else and pray like everyone else.… If it happens now that the priest smells of tobacco or vodka I don’t venture to blame him, because the priest, too, of course, is an ordinary man. But as soon as I am told that in the town or in the village a saint has set up who does not eat for weeks, and makes rules of his own, I know whose work it is. So that is how I carried on in the past, gentlemen. Now, like Osip Varlamitch, I am continually exhorting my cousins and reproaching them, but I am a voice crying in the wilderness. God has not vouchsafed me the gift.”

Matvey’s story evidently made no impression whatever. Sergey Nikanoritch said nothing, but began clearing the refreshments off the counter, while the policeman began talking of how rich Matvey’s cousin was.

“He must have thirty thousand at least,” he said.

Zhukov the policeman, a sturdy, well-fed, red-haired man with a full face (his cheeks quivered when he walked), usually sat lolling and crossing his legs when not in the presence of his superiors. As he talked he swayed to and fro and whistled carelessly, while his face had a self-satisfied replete air, as though he had just had dinner. He was making money, and he always talked of it with the air of a connoisseur. He undertook jobs as an agent, and when anyone wanted to sell an estate, a horse or a carriage, they applied to him.

“Yes, it will be thirty thousand, I dare say,” Sergey Nikanoritch assented. “Your grandfather had an immense fortune,” he said, addressing Matvey. “Immense it was; all left to your father and your uncle. Your father died as a young man and your uncle got hold of it all, and afterwards, of course, Yakov Ivanitch. While you were going pilgrimages with your mama and singing tenor in the factory, they didn’t let the grass grow under their feet.”

“Fifteen thousand comes to your share,” said the policeman swaying from side to side. “The tavern belongs to you in common, so the capital is in common. Yes. If I were in your place I should have taken it into court long ago. I would have taken it into court for one thing, and while the case was going on I’d have knocked his face to a jelly.”

Yakov Ivanitch was disliked because, when anyone believes differently from others, it upsets even people who are indifferent to religion. The policeman disliked him also because he, too, sold horses and carriages.

“You don’t care about going to law with your cousin because you have plenty of money of your own,” said the waiter to Matvey, looking at him with envy. “It is all very well for anyone who has means, but here I shall die in this position, I suppose.…”

Matvey began declaring that he hadn’t any money at all, but Sergey Nikanoritch was not listening. Memories of the past and of the insults which he endured every day came showering upon him. His bald head began to perspire; he flushed and blinked.

“A cursed life!” he said with vexation, and he banged the sausage on the floor.

III

The story ran that the tavern had been built in the time of Alexander I, by a widow who had settled here with her son; her name was Avdotya Terehov. The dark roofed-in courtyard and the gates always kept locked excited, especially on moonlight nights, a feeling of depression and unaccountable uneasiness in people who drove by with posting-horses, as though sorcerers or robbers were living in it; and the driver always looked back after he passed, and whipped up his horses. Travellers did not care to put up here, as the people of the house were always unfriendly and charged heavily. The yard was muddy even in summer; huge fat pigs used to lie there in the mud, and the horses in which the Terehovs dealt wandered about untethered, and often it happened that they ran out of the yard and dashed along the road like mad creatures, terrifying the pilgrim women. At that time there was a great deal of traffic on the road; long trains of loaded wagons trailed by, and all sorts of adventures happened, such as, for instance, that thirty years ago some wagoners got up a quarrel with a passing merchant and killed him, and a slanting cross is standing to this day half a mile from the tavern; posting-chaises with bells and the heavy *dormeuses* of country gentlemen drove by; and herds of horned cattle passed bellowing and stirring up clouds of dust.

When the railway came there was at first at this place only a platform, which was called simply a halt; ten years afterwards the present station, Progonnaya, was built. The traffic on the old posting-road almost ceased, and only local landowners and peasants drove along it now, but the working people walked there in crowds in spring and autumn. The posting-inn was transformed into a restaurant; the upper storey was destroyed by fire, the roof had grown yellow with rust, the roof over the yard had fallen by degrees, but huge fat pigs, pink and revolting, still wallowed in the mud in the yard. As before, the horses sometimes ran away and, lashing their tails dashed madly along the road. In the tavern they sold tea, hay oats and flour, as well as vodka and beer, to be drunk on the premises and also to be taken away; they sold spirituous liquors warily, for they had never taken out a licence.

The Terehovs had always been distinguished by their piety, so much so that they had even been given the nickname of the “Godlies.” But perhaps because they lived apart like bears, avoided people and thought out all their ideas for themselves, they were given to dreams and to doubts and to changes of faith and almost each generation had a peculiar faith of its own. The grandmother Avdotya, who had built the inn, was an Old Believer; her son and both her grandsons (the fathers of Matvey and Yakov) went to the Orthodox church, entertained the clergy, and worshipped before the new icons as devoutly as they had done before the old. The son in old age refused to eat meat and imposed upon himself the rule of silence, considering all conversation as sin; it was the peculiarity of the grandsons that they interpreted the Scripture not simply, but sought in it a hidden meaning, declaring that every sacred word must contain a mystery.

Avdotya’s great-grandson Matvey had struggled from early childhood with all sorts of dreams and fancies and had been almost ruined by it; the other great-grandson, Yakov Ivanitch, was orthodox, but after his wife’s death he gave up going to church and prayed at home. Following his example, his sister Aglaia had turned, too; she did not go to church herself, and did not let Dashutka go. Of Aglaia it was told that in her youth she used to attend the Flagellant meetings in Vedenyapino, and that she was still a Flagellant in secret, and that was why she wore a white kerchief.

Yakov Ivanitch was ten years older than Matvey—he was a very handsome tall old man with a big grey beard almost to his waist, and bushy eyebrows which gave his face a stern, even ill-natured expression. He wore a long jerkin of good cloth or a black sheepskin coat, and altogether tried to be clean and neat in dress; he wore goloshes even in dry weather. He did not go to church, because, to his thinking, the services were not properly celebrated and because the priests drank wine at unlawful times and smoked tobacco. Every day he read and sang the service at home with Aglaia. At Vedenyapino they left out the “Praises” at early matins, and had no evening service even on great holidays, but he used to read through at home everything that was laid down for every day, without hurrying or leaving out a single line, and even in his spare time read aloud the Lives of the Saints. And in everyday life he adhered strictly to the rules of the church; thus, if wine were allowed on some day in Lent “for the sake of the vigil,” then he never failed to drink wine, even if he were not inclined.

He read, sang, burned incense and fasted, not for the sake of receiving blessings of some sort from God, but for the sake of good order. Man cannot live without religion, and religion ought to be expressed from year to year and from day to day in a certain order, so that every morning and every evening a man might turn to God with exactly those words and thoughts that were befitting that special day and hour. One must live, and, therefore, also pray as is pleasing to God, and so every day one must read and sing what is pleasing to God—that is, what is laid down in the rule of the church. Thus the first chapter of St. John must only be read on Easter Day, and "It is most meet" must not be sung from Easter to Ascension, and so on. The consciousness of this order and its importance afforded Yakov Ivanitch great gratification during his religious exercises. When he was forced to break this order by some necessity—to drive to town or to the bank, for instance—his conscience was uneasy and he felt miserable.

When his cousin Matvey had returned unexpectedly from the factory and settled in the tavern as though it were his home, he had from the very first day disturbed his settled order. He refused to pray with them, had meals and drank tea at wrong times, got up late, drank milk on Wednesdays and Fridays on the pretext of weak health; almost every day he went into the prayer room while they were at prayers and cried: "Think what you are doing, brother! Repent, brother!" These words threw Yakov into a fury, while Aglaia could not refrain from beginning to scold; or at night Matvey would steal into the prayer room and say softly: "Cousin, your prayer is not pleasing to God. For it is written, First be reconciled with thy brother and then offer thy gift. You lend money at usury, you deal in vodka—repent!"

In Matvey's words Yakov saw nothing but the usual evasions of empty-headed and careless people who talk of loving your neighbour, of being reconciled with your brother, and so on, simply to avoid praying, fasting and reading holy books, and who talk contemptuously of profit and interest simply because they don't like working. Of course, to be poor, save nothing, and put by nothing was a great deal easier than being rich.

But yet he was troubled and could not pray as before. As soon as he went into the prayer room and opened the book he began to be afraid his cousin would come in and hinder him; and, in fact, Matvey did soon appear and cry in a trembling voice: "Think what you are doing, brother! Repent, brother!" Aglaia stormed and Yakov, too, flew into a passion and

shouted: “Go out of my house!” while Matvey answered him: “The house belongs to both of us.”

Yakov would begin singing and reading again, but he could not regain his calm, and unconsciously fell to dreaming over his book. Though he regarded his cousin’s words as nonsense, yet for some reason it had of late haunted his memory that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, that the year before last he had made a very good bargain over buying a stolen horse, that one day when his wife was alive a drunkard had died of vodka in his tavern.…

He slept badly at nights now and woke easily, and he could hear that Matvey, too, was awake, and continually sighing and pining for his tile factory. And while Yakov turned over from one side to another at night he thought of the stolen horse and the drunken man, and what was said in the gospels about the camel.

It looked as though his dreaminess were coming over him again. And as ill-luck would have it, although it was the end of March, every day it kept snowing, and the forest roared as though it were winter, and there was no believing that spring would ever come. The weather disposed one to depression, and to quarrelling and to hatred and in the night, when the wind droned over the ceiling, it seemed as though someone were living overhead in the empty storey; little by little the broodings settled like a burden on his mind, his head burned and he could not sleep.

IV

On the morning of the Monday before Good Friday, Matvey heard from his room Dashutka say to Aglaia:

"Uncle Matvey said, the other day, that there is no need to fast."

Matvey remembered the whole conversation he had had the evening before with Dashutka, and he felt hurt all at once.

"Girl, don't do wrong!" he said in a moaning voice, like a sick man. "You can't do without fasting; our Lord Himself fasted forty days. I only explained that fasting does a bad man no good."

"You should just listen to the factory hands; they can teach you goodness," Aglaia said sarcastically as she washed the floor (she usually washed the floors on working days and was always angry with everyone when she did it). "We know how they keep the fasts in the factory. You had better ask that uncle of yours—ask him about his 'Darling,' how he used to guzzle milk on fast days with her, the viper. He teaches others; he forgets about his viper. But ask him who was it he left his money with—who was it?"

Matvey had carefully concealed from everyone, as though it were a foul sore, that during that period of his life when old women and unmarried girls had danced and run about with him at their prayers he had formed a connection with a working woman and had had a child by her. When he went home he had given this woman all he had saved at the factory, and had borrowed from his landlord for his journey, and now he had only a few roubles which he spent on tea and candles. The "Darling" had informed him later on that the child was dead, and asked him in a letter what she should do with the money. This letter was brought from the station by the labourer. Aglaia intercepted it and read it, and had reproached Matvey with his "Darling" every day since.

"Just fancy, nine hundred roubles," Aglaia went on. "You gave nine hundred roubles to a viper, no relation, a factory jade, blast you!" She had flown into a passion by now and was shouting shrilly: "Can't you speak? I could tear you to pieces, wretched creature! Nine hundred roubles as though it were a farthing. You might have left it to Dashutka—she is a relation, not a stranger—or else have it sent to

Byelev for Marya's poor orphans. And your viper did not choke, may she be thrice accursed, the she-devil! May she never look upon the light of day!"

Yakov Ivanitch called to her: it was time to begin the "Hours." She washed, put on a white kerchief, and by now quiet and meek, went into the prayer room to the brother she loved. When she spoke to Matvey or served peasants in the tavern with tea she was a gaunt, keen-eyed, ill-humoured old woman; in the prayer room her face was serene and softened, she looked younger altogether, she curtsied affectedly, and even pursed up her lips.

Yakov Ivanitch began reading the service softly and dolefully, as he always did in Lent. After he had read a little he stopped to listen to the stillness that reigned through the house, and then went on reading again, with a feeling of gratification; he folded his hands in supplication, rolled his eyes, shook his head, sighed. But all at once there was the sound of voices. The policeman and Sergey Nikanoritch had come to see Matvey. Yakov Ivanitch was embarrassed at reading aloud and singing when there were strangers in the house, and now, hearing voices, he began reading in a whisper and slowly. He could hear in the prayer room the waiter say:

"The Tatar at Shtchepovo is selling his business for fifteen hundred. He'll take five hundred down and an I.O.U. for the rest. And so, Matvey Vassilitch, be so kind as to lend me that five hundred roubles. I will pay you two percent a month."

"What money have I got?" cried Matvey, amazed. "I have no money!"

"Two percent a month will be a godsend to you," the policeman explained. "While lying by, your money is simply eaten by the moth, and that's all that you get from it."

Afterwards the visitors went out and a silence followed. But Yakov Ivanitch had hardly begun reading and singing again when a voice was heard outside the door:

"Brother, let me have a horse to drive to Vedenyapino."

It was Matvey. And Yakov was troubled again. "Which can you go with?" he asked after a moment's thought. "The man has gone with the sorrel to take the pig, and I am going with the little stallion to Shuteykino as soon as I have finished."

"Brother, why is it you can dispose of the horses and not I?" Matvey asked with irritation.

"Because I am not taking them for pleasure, but for work."

“Our property is in common, so the horses are in common, too, and you ought to understand that, brother.”

A silence followed. Yakov did not go on praying, but waited for Matvey to go away from the door.

“Brother,” said Matvey, “I am a sick man. I don’t want possession—let them go; you have them, but give me a small share to keep me in my illness. Give it me and I’ll go away.”

Yakov did not speak. He longed to be rid of Matvey, but he could not give him money, since all the money was in the business; besides, there had never been a case of the family dividing in the whole history of the Terehovs. Division means ruin.

Yakov said nothing, but still waited for Matvey to go away, and kept looking at his sister, afraid that she would interfere, and that there would be a storm of abuse again, as there had been in the morning. When at last Matvey did go Yakov went on reading, but now he had no pleasure in it. There was a heaviness in his head and a darkness before his eyes from continually bowing down to the ground, and he was weary of the sound of his soft dejected voice. When such a depression of spirit came over him at night, he put it down to not being able to sleep; by day it frightened him, and he began to feel as though devils were sitting on his head and shoulders.

Finishing the service after a fashion, dissatisfied and ill-humoured, he set off for Shuteykino. In the previous autumn a gang of navvies had dug a boundary ditch near Progonnaya, and had run up a bill at the tavern for eighteen roubles, and now he had to find their foreman in Shuteykino and get the money from him. The road had been spoilt by the thaw and the snowstorm; it was of a dark colour and full of holes, and in parts it had given way altogether. The snow had sunk away at the sides below the road, so that he had to drive, as it were, upon a narrow causeway, and it was very difficult to turn off it when he met anything. The sky had been overcast ever since the morning and a damp wind was blowing.…

A long train of sledges met him; peasant women were carting bricks. Yakov had to turn off the road. His horse sank into the snow up to its belly; the sledge lurched over to the right, and to avoid falling out he bent over to the left, and sat so all the time the sledges moved slowly by him. Through the wind he heard the creaking of the sledge poles and the breathing of the gaunt horses, and the women saying about him, “There’s Godly coming,” while one, gazing with compassion at his horse, said quickly:

“It looks as though the snow will be lying till Yegory’s Day! They are worn out with it!”

Yakov sat uncomfortably huddled up, screwing up his eyes on account of the wind, while horses and red bricks kept passing before him. And perhaps because he was uncomfortable and his side ached, he felt all at once annoyed, and the business he was going about seemed to him unimportant, and he reflected that he might send the labourer next day to Shuteykino. Again, as in the previous sleepless night, he thought of the saying about the camel, and then memories of all sorts crept into his mind; of the peasant who had sold him the stolen horse, of the drunken man, of the peasant women who had brought their samovars to him to pawn. Of course, every merchant tries to get as much as he can, but Yakov felt depressed that he was in trade; he longed to get somewhere far away from this routine, and he felt dreary at the thought that he would have to read the evening service that day. The wind blew straight into his face and soughed in his collar; and it seemed as though it were whispering to him all these thoughts, bringing them from the broad white plain.… Looking at that plain, familiar to him from childhood, Yakov remembered that he had had just this same trouble and these same thoughts in his young days when dreams and imaginings had come upon him and his faith had wavered.

He felt miserable at being alone in the open country; he turned back and drove slowly after the sledges, and the women laughed and said:

“Godly has turned back.”

At home nothing had been cooked and the samovar was not heated on account of the fast, and this made the day seem very long. Yakov Ivanitch had long ago taken the horse to the stable, dispatched the flour to the station, and twice taken up the Psalms to read, and yet the evening was still far off. Aglaia had already washed all the floors, and, having nothing to do, was tidying up her chest, the lid of which was pasted over on the inside with labels off bottles. Matvey, hungry and melancholy, sat reading, or went up to the Dutch stove and slowly scrutinized the tiles which reminded him of the factory. Dashutka was asleep; then, waking up, she went to take water to the cattle. When she was getting water from the well the cord broke and the pail fell in. The labourer began looking for a boathook to get the pail out, and Dashutka, barefooted, with legs as red as a goose’s, followed him about in the muddy snow, repeating: “It’s too far!” She meant to say that the well was too deep for the hook to reach the bottom, but the labourer did not understand her, and evidently she bothered him, so that he suddenly turned around and abused her in

unseemly language. Yakov Ivanitch, coming out that moment into the yard, heard Dashutka answer the labourer in a long rapid stream of choice abuse, which she could only have learned from drunken peasants in the tavern.

“What are you saying, shameless girl!” he cried to her, and he was positively aghast. “What language!”

And she looked at her father in perplexity, dully, not understanding why she should not use those words. He would have admonished her, but she struck him as so savage and benighted; and for the first time he realized that she had no religion. And all this life in the forest, in the snow, with drunken peasants, with coarse oaths, seemed to him as savage and benighted as this girl, and instead of giving her a lecture he only waved his hand and went back into the room.

At that moment the policeman and Sergey Nikanoritch came in again to see Matvey. Yakov Ivanitch thought that these people, too, had no religion, and that that did not trouble them in the least; and human life began to seem to him as strange, senseless and unenlightened as a dog’s. Bareheaded he walked about the yard, then he went out on to the road, clenching his fists. Snow was falling in big flakes at the time. His beard was blown about in the wind. He kept shaking his head, as though there were something weighing upon his head and shoulders, as though devils were sitting on them; and it seemed to him that it was not himself walking about, but some wild beast, a huge terrible beast, and that if he were to cry out his voice would be a roar that would sound all over the forest and the plain, and would frighten everyone.…

V

When he went back into the house the policeman was no longer there, but the waiter was sitting with Matvey, counting something on the reckoning beads. He was in the habit of coming often, almost every day, to the tavern; in old days he had come to see Yakov Ivanitch, now he came to see Matvey. He was continually reckoning on the beads, while his face perspired and looked strained, or he would ask for money or, stroking his whiskers, would describe how he had once been in a first-class station and used to prepare champagne-punch for officers, and at grand dinners served the sturgeon-soup with his own hands. Nothing in this world interested him but refreshment bars, and he could only talk about things to eat, about wines and the paraphernalia of the dinner-table. On one occasion, handing a cup of tea to a young woman who was nursing her baby and wishing to say something agreeable to her, he expressed himself in this way:

"The mother's breast is the baby's refreshment bar."

Reckoning with the beads in Matvey's room, he asked for money; said he could not go on living at Progonnaya, and several times repeated in a tone of voice that sounded as though he were just going to cry:

"Where am I to go? Where am I to go now? Tell me that, please."

Then Matvey went into the kitchen and began peeling some boiled potatoes which he had probably put away from the day before. It was quiet, and it seemed to Yakov Ivanitch that the waiter was gone. It was past the time for evening service; he called Aglaia, and, thinking there was no one else in the house sang out aloud without embarrassment. He sang and read, but was inwardly pronouncing other words, "Lord, forgive me! Lord, save me!" and, one after another, without ceasing, he made low bows to the ground as though he wanted to exhaust himself, and he kept shaking his head, so that Aglaia looked at him with wonder. He was afraid Matvey would come in, and was certain that he would come in, and felt an anger against him which he could overcome neither by prayer nor by continually bowing down to the ground.

Matvey opened the door very softly and went into the prayer room.

“It’s a sin, such a sin!” he said reproachfully, and heaved a sigh. “Repent! Think what you are doing, brother!”

Yakov Ivanitch, clenching his fists and not looking at him for fear of striking him, went quickly out of the room. Feeling himself a huge terrible wild beast, just as he had done before on the road, he crossed the passage into the grey, dirty room, reeking with smoke and fog, in which the peasants usually drank tea, and there he spent a long time walking from one corner to the other, treading heavily, so that the crockery jingled on the shelves and the tables shook. It was clear to him now that he was himself dissatisfied with his religion, and could not pray as he used to do. He must repent, he must think things over, reconsider, live and pray in some other way. But how pray? And perhaps all this was a temptation of the devil, and nothing of this was necessary?… How was it to be? What was he to do? Who could guide him? What helplessness! He stopped and, clutching at his head, began to think, but Matvey’s being near him prevented him from reflecting calmly. And he went rapidly into the room.

Matvey was sitting in the kitchen before a bowl of potato, eating. Close by, near the stove, Aglaia and Dashutka were sitting facing one another, spinning yarn. Between the stove and the table at which Matvey was sitting was stretched an ironing-board; on it stood a cold iron.

“Sister,” Matvey asked, “let me have a little oil!”

“Who eats oil on a day like this?” asked Aglaia.

“I am not a monk, sister, but a layman. And in my weak health I may take not only oil but milk.”

“Yes, at the factory you may have anything.”

Aglaia took a bottle of Lenten oil from the shelf and banged it angrily down before Matvey, with a malignant smile evidently pleased that he was such a sinner.

“But I tell you, you can’t eat oil!” shouted Yakov.

Aglaia and Dashutka started, but Matvey poured the oil into the bowl and went on eating as though he had not heard.

“I tell you, you can’t eat oil!” Yakov shouted still more loudly; he turned red all over, snatched up the bowl, lifted it higher than his head, and dashed it with all his force to the ground, so that it flew into fragments. “Don’t dare to speak!” he cried in a furious voice, though Matvey had not said a word. “Don’t dare!” he repeated, and struck his fist on the table.

Matvey turned pale and got up.

“Brother!” he said, still munching—“brother, think what you are about!”

“Out of my house this minute!” shouted Yakov; he loathed Matvey’s wrinkled face, and his voice, and the crumbs on his moustache, and the fact that he was munching. “Out, I tell you!”

“Brother, calm yourself! The pride of hell has confounded you!”

“Hold your tongue!” (Yakov stamped.) “Go away, you devil!”

“If you care to know,” Matvey went on in a loud voice, as he, too, began to get angry, “you are a backslider from God and a heretic. The accursed spirits have hidden the true light from you; your prayer is not acceptable to God. Repent before it is too late! The deathbed of the sinner is terrible! Repent, brother!”

Yakov seized him by the shoulders and dragged him away from the table, while he turned whiter than ever, and frightened and bewildered, began muttering, “What is it? What’s the matter?” and, struggling and making efforts to free himself from Yakov’s hands, he accidentally caught hold of his shirt near the neck and tore the collar; and it seemed to Aglaia that he was trying to beat Yakov. She uttered a shriek, snatched up the bottle of Lenten oil and with all her force brought it down straight on the skull of the cousin she hated. Matvey reeled, and in one instant his face became calm and indifferent. Yakov, breathing heavily, excited, and feeling pleasure at the gurgle the bottle had made, like a living thing, when it had struck the head, kept him from falling and several times (he remembered this very distinctly) motioned Aglaia towards the iron with his finger; and only when the blood began trickling through his hands and he heard Dashutka’s loud wail, and when the ironing-board fell with a crash, and Matvey rolled heavily on it, Yakov left off feeling anger and understood what had happened.

“Let him rot, the factory buck!” Aglaia brought out with repulsion, still keeping the iron in her hand. The white bloodstained kerchief slipped on to her shoulders and her grey hair fell in disorder. “He’s got what he deserved!”

Everything was terrible. Dashutka sat on the floor near the stove with the yarn in her hands, sobbing, and continually bowing down, uttering at each bow a gasping sound. But nothing was so terrible to Yakov as the potato in the blood, on which he was afraid of stepping, and there was something else terrible which weighed upon him like a bad dream and seemed the worst danger, though he could not take it in for the first minute. This was the waiter, Sergey Nikanoritch, who was standing in the doorway with the reckoning beads in his hands, very pale, looking

with horror at what was happening in the kitchen. Only when he turned and went quickly into the passage and from there outside, Yakov grasped who it was and followed him.

Wiping his hands on the snow as he went, he reflected. The idea flashed through his mind that their labourer had gone away long before and had asked leave to stay the night at home in the village; the day before they had killed a pig, and there were huge bloodstains in the snow and on the sledge, and even one side of the top of the well was splattered with blood, so that it could not have seemed suspicious even if the whole of Yakov's family had been stained with blood. To conceal the murder would be agonizing, but for the policeman, who would whistle and smile ironically, to come from the station, for the peasants to arrive and bind Yakov's and Aglaia's hands, and take them solemnly to the district courthouse and from there to the town, while everyone on the way would point at them and say mirthfully, "They are taking the Godlies!"—this seemed to Yakov more agonizing than anything, and he longed to lengthen out the time somehow, so as to endure this shame not now, but later, in the future.

"I can lend you a thousand roubles,…" he said, overtaking Sergey Nikanoritch. "If you tell anyone, it will do no good.… There's no bringing the man back, anyway;" and with difficulty keeping up with the waiter, who did not look round, but tried to walk away faster than ever, he went on: "I can give you fifteen hundred.…"

He stopped because he was out of breath, while Sergey Nikanoritch walked on as quickly as ever, probably afraid that he would be killed, too. Only after passing the railway crossing and going half the way from the crossing to the station, he furtively looked round and walked more slowly. Lights, red and green, were already gleaming in the station and along the line; the wind had fallen, but flakes of snow were still coming down and the road had turned white again. But just at the station Sergey Nikanoritch stopped, thought a minute, and turned resolutely back. It was growing dark.

"Oblige me with the fifteen hundred, Yakov Ivanitch," he said, trembling all over. "I agree."

VI

Yakov Ivanitch's money was in the bank of the town and was invested in second mortgages; he only kept a little at home, Just what was wanted for necessary expenses. Going into the kitchen he felt for the matchbox, and while the sulphur was burning with a blue light he had time to make out the figure of Matvey, which was still lying on the floor near the table, but now it was covered with a white sheet, and nothing could be seen but his boots. A cricket was chirruping. Aglaia and Dashutka were not in the room, they were both sitting behind the counter in the tearoom, spinning yarn in silence. Yakov Ivanitch crossed to his own room with a little lamp in his hand, and pulled from under the bed a little box in which he kept his money. This time there were in it four hundred and twenty one-rouble notes and silver to the amount of thirty-five roubles; the notes had an unpleasant heavy smell. Putting the money together in his cap, Yakov Ivanitch went out into the yard and then out of the gate. He walked, looking from side to side, but there was no sign of the waiter.

"Hi!" cried Yakov.

A dark figure stepped out from the barrier at the railway crossing and came irresolutely towards him.

"Why do you keep walking about?" said Yakov with vexation, as he recognized the waiter. "Here you are; there is a little less than five hundred.… I've no more in the house."

"Very well;… very grateful to you," muttered Sergey Nikanoritch, taking the money greedily and stuffing it into his pockets. He was trembling all over, and that was perceptible in spite of the darkness. "Don't worry yourself, Yakov Ivanitch.… What should I chatter for? I came and went away, that's all I've had to do with it. As the saying is, I know nothing and I can tell nothing…" And at once he added with a sigh "Cursed life!"

For a minute they stood in silence, without looking at each other.

"So it all came from a trifle, goodness knows how,…" said the waiter, trembling. "I was sitting counting to myself when all at once a noise.… I looked through the door, and just on account of Lenten oil you.… Where is he now?"

“Lying there in the kitchen.”

“You ought to take him somewhere.… Why put it off?”

Yakov accompanied him to the station without a word, then went home again and harnessed the horse to take Matvey to Limarovo. He had decided to take him to the forest of Limarovo, and to leave him there on the road, and then he would tell everyone that Matvey had gone off to Vedenyapino and had not come back, and then everyone would think that he had been killed by someone on the road. He knew there was no deceiving anyone by this, but to move, to do something, to be active, was not as agonizing as to sit still and wait. He called Dashutka, and with her carried Matvey out. Aglaia stayed behind to clean up the kitchen.

When Yakov and Dashutka turned back they were detained at the railway crossing by the barrier being let down. A long goods train was passing, dragged by two engines, breathing heavily, and flinging puffs of crimson fire out of their funnels.

The foremost engine uttered a piercing whistle at the crossing in sight of the station.

“It’s whistling,…” said Dashutka.

The train had passed at last, and the signalman lifted the barrier without haste.

“Is that you, Yakov Ivanitch? I didn’t know you, so you’ll be rich.”

And then when they had reached home they had to go to bed.

Aglaia and Dashutka made themselves a bed in the tearoom and lay down side by side, while Yakov stretched himself on the counter. They neither said their prayers nor lighted the icon lamp before lying down to sleep. All three lay awake till morning, but did not utter a single word, and it seemed to them that all night someone was walking about in the empty storey overhead.

Two days later a police inspector and the examining magistrate came from the town and made a search, first in Matvey’s room and then in the whole tavern. They questioned Yakov first of all, and he testified that on the Monday Matvey had gone to Vedenyapino to confess, and that he must have been killed by the sawyers who were working on the line.

And when the examining magistrate had asked him how it had happened that Matvey was found on the road, while his cap had turned up at home—surely he had not gone to Vedenyapino without his cap?—and why they had not found a single drop of blood beside him in the snow on the road, though his head was smashed in and his face and chest were black with blood, Yakov was confused, lost his head and answered:

“I cannot tell.”

And just what Yakov had so feared happened: the policeman came, the district police officer smoked in the prayer room and Aglaia fell upon him with abuse and was rude to the police inspector; and afterwards when Yakov and Aglaia were led out to the yard, the peasants crowded at the gates and said, “They are taking the Godlies!” and it seemed that they were all glad.

At the inquiry the policeman stated positively that Yakov and Aglaia had killed Matvey in order not to share with him, and that Matvey had money of his own, and that if it was not found at the search evidently Yakov and Aglaia had got hold of it. And Dashutka was questioned. She said that Uncle Matvey and Aunt Aglaia quarrelled and almost fought every day over money, and that Uncle Matvey was rich, so much so that he had given someone—“his Darling”—nine hundred roubles.

Dashutka was left alone in the tavern. No one came now to drink tea or vodka, and she divided her time between cleaning up the rooms, drinking mead and eating rolls; but a few days later they questioned the signalman at the railway crossing, and he said that late on Monday evening he had seen Yakov and Dashutka driving from Limarovo. Dashutka, too, was arrested, taken to the town and put in prison. It soon became known, from what Aglaia said, that Sergey Nikanoritch had been present at the murder. A search was made in his room, and money was found in an unusual place, in his snowboots under the stove, and the money was all in small change, three hundred one-rouble notes. He swore he had made this money himself, and that he hadn’t been in the tavern for a year, but witnesses testified that he was poor and had been in great want of money of late, and that he used to go every day to the tavern to borrow from Matvey; and the policeman described how on the day of the murder he had himself gone twice to the tavern with the waiter to help him to borrow. It was recalled at this juncture that on Monday evening Sergey Nikanoritch had not been there to meet the passenger train, but had gone off somewhere. And he, too, was arrested and taken to the town.

The trial took place eleven months later.

Yakov Ivanitch looked much older and much thinner, and spoke in a low voice like a sick man. He felt weak, pitiful, lower in stature that anyone else, and it seemed as though his soul, too, like his body, had grown older and wasted, from the pangs of his conscience and from the dreams and imaginings which never left him all the while he was in prison. When it came out that he did not go to church the president of the court asked him:

“Are you a dissenter?”

“I can’t tell,” he answered.

He had no religion at all now; he knew nothing and understood nothing; and his old belief was hateful to him now, and seemed to him darkness and folly. Aglaia was not in the least subdued, and she still went on abusing the dead man, blaming him for all their misfortunes. Sergey Nikanoritch had grown a beard instead of whiskers. At the trial he was red and perspiring, and was evidently ashamed of his grey prison coat and of sitting on the same bench with humble peasants. He defended himself awkwardly, and, trying to prove that he had not been to the tavern for a whole year, got into an altercation with every witness, and the spectators laughed at him. Dashutka had grown fat in prison. At the trial she did not understand the questions put to her, and only said that when they killed Uncle Matvey she was dreadfully frightened, but afterwards she did not mind.

All four were found guilty of murder with mercenary motives. Yakov Ivanitch was sentenced to penal servitude for twenty years; Aglaia for thirteen and a half; Sergey Nikanoritch to ten; Dashutka to six.

VII

Late one evening a foreign steamer stopped in the roads of Dué in Sahalin and asked for coal. The captain was asked to wait till morning, but he did not want to wait over an hour, saying that if the weather changed for the worse in the night there would be a risk of his having to go off without coal. In the Gulf of Tartary the weather is liable to violent changes in the course of half an hour, and then the shores of Sahalin are dangerous. And already it had turned fresh, and there was a considerable sea running.

A gang of convicts were sent to the mine from the Voevodsky prison, the grimmest and most forbidding of all the prisons in Sahalin. The coal had to be loaded upon barges, and then they had to be towed by a steam-cutter alongside the steamer which was anchored more than a quarter of a mile from the coast, and then the unloading and reloading had to begin—an exhausting task when the barge kept rocking against the steamer and the men could scarcely keep on their legs for seasickness. The convicts, only just roused from their sleep, still drowsy, went along the shore, stumbling in the darkness and clanking their fetters. On the left, scarcely visible, was a tall, steep, extremely gloomy-looking cliff, while on the right there was a thick impenetrable mist, in which the sea moaned with a prolonged monotonous sound, “Ah!… ah!… ah!… ah!…” And it was only when the overseer was lighting his pipe, casting as he did so a passing ray of light on the escort with a gun and on the coarse faces of two or three of the nearest convicts, or when he went with his lantern close to the water that the white crests of the foremost waves could be discerned.

One of this gang was Yakov Ivanitch, nicknamed among the convicts the “Brush,” on account of his long beard. No one had addressed him by his name or his father’s name for a long time now; they called him simply Yashka.

He was here in disgrace, as, three months after coming to Siberia, feeling an intense irresistible longing for home, he had succumbed to temptation and run away; he had soon been caught, had been sentenced to penal servitude for life and given forty lashes. Then he was punished

by flogging twice again for losing his prison clothes, though on each occasion they were stolen from him. The longing for home had begun from the very time he had been brought to Odessa, and the convict train had stopped in the night at Progonnaya; and Yakov, pressing to the window, had tried to see his own home, and could see nothing in the darkness. He had no one with whom to talk of home. His sister Aglaia had been sent right across Siberia, and he did not know where she was now. Dashutka was in Sahalin, but she had been sent to live with some ex-convict in a far away settlement; there was no news of her except that once a settler who had come to the Voevodsky Prison told Yakov that Dashutka had three children. Sergey Nikanoritch was serving as a footman at a government official's at Dué, but he could not reckon on ever seeing him, as he was ashamed of being acquainted with convicts of the peasant class.

The gang reached the mine, and the men took their places on the quay. It was said there would not be any loading, as the weather kept getting worse and the steamer was meaning to set off. They could see three lights. One of them was moving: that was the steam-cutter going to the steamer, and it seemed to be coming back to tell them whether the work was to be done or not. Shivering with the autumn cold and the damp sea mist, wrapping himself in his short torn coat, Yakov Ivanitch looked intently without blinking in the direction in which lay his home. Ever since he had lived in prison together with men banished here from all ends of the earth—with Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Georgians, Chinese, Gypsies, Jews—and ever since he had listened to their talk and watched their sufferings, he had begun to turn again to God, and it seemed to him at last that he had learned the true faith for which all his family, from his grandmother Avdotya down, had so thirsted, which they had sought so long and which they had never found. He knew it all now and understood where God was, and how He was to be served, and the only thing he could not understand was why men's destinies were so diverse, why this simple faith which other men receive from God for nothing and together with their lives, had cost him such a price that his arms and legs trembled like a drunken man's from all the horrors and agonies which as far as he could see would go on without a break to the day of his death. He looked with strained eyes into the darkness, and it seemed to him that through the thousand miles of that mist he could see home, could see his native province, his district, Progonnaya, could see the darkness, the savagery, the heartlessness, and the dull, sullen, animal indifference of the men he had left there. His eyes were dimmed with

tears; but still he gazed into the distance where the pale lights of the steamer faintly gleamed, and his heart ached with yearning for home, and he longed to live, to go back home to tell them there of his new faith and to save from ruin if only one man, and to live without suffering if only for one day.

The cutter arrived, and the overseer announced in a loud voice that there would be no loading.

“Back!” he commanded. “Steady!”

They could hear the hoisting of the anchor chain on the steamer. A strong piercing wind was blowing by now; somewhere on the steep cliff overhead the trees were creaking. Most likely a storm was coming.

THREE YEARS

I

It was dark, and already lights had begun to gleam here and there in the houses, and a pale moon was rising behind the barracks at the end of the street. Laptev was sitting on a bench by the gate waiting for the end of the evening service at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul. He was reckoning that Yulia Sergeyevna would pass by on her way from the service, and then he would speak to her, and perhaps spend the whole evening with her.

He had been sitting there for an hour and a half already, and all that time his imagination had been busy picturing his Moscow rooms, his Moscow friends, his man Pyotr, and his writing-table. He gazed half wonderingly at the dark, motionless trees, and it seemed strange to him that he was living now, not in his summer villa at Sokolniki, but in a provincial town in a house by which a great herd of cattle was driven every morning and evening, accompanied by terrible clouds of dust and the blowing of a horn. He thought of long conversations in which he had taken part quite lately in Moscow—conversations in which it had been maintained that one could live without love, that passionate love was an obsession, that finally there is no such love, but only a physical attraction between the sexes—and so on, in the same style; he remembered them and thought mournfully that if he were asked now what love was, he could not have found an answer.

The service was over, the people began to appear. Laptev strained his eyes gazing at the dark figures. The bishop had been driven by in his carriage, the bells had stopped ringing, and the red and green lights in the belfry were one after another extinguished—there had been an illumination, as it was dedication day—but the people were still coming out, lingering, talking, and standing under the windows. But at last

Laptev heard a familiar voice, his heart began beating violently, and he was overcome with despair on seeing that Yulia Sergeyevna was not alone, but walking with two ladies.

"It's awful, awful!" he whispered, feeling jealous. "It's awful!"

At the corner of the lane, she stopped to say goodbye to the ladies, and while doing so glanced at Laptev.

"I was coming to see you," he said. "I'm coming for a chat with your father. Is he at home?"

"Most likely," she answered. "It's early for him to have gone to the club."

There were gardens all along the lane, and a row of lime trees growing by the fence cast a broad patch of shadow in the moonlight, so that the gate and the fences were completely plunged in darkness on one side, from which came the sounds of women whispering, smothered laughter, and someone playing softly on a balalaika. There was a fragrance of lime-flowers and of hay. This fragrance and the murmur of the unseen whispers worked upon Laptev. He was all at once overwhelmed with a passionate longing to throw his arms round his companion, to shower kisses on her face, her hands, her shoulders, to burst into sobs, to fall at her feet and to tell her how long he had been waiting for her. A faint scarcely perceptible scent of incense hung about her; and that scent reminded him of the time when he, too, believed in God and used to go to evening service, and when he used to dream so much of pure romantic love. And it seemed to him that, because this girl did not love him, all possibility of the happiness he had dreamed of then was lost to him forever.

She began speaking sympathetically of the illness of his sister, Nina Fyodorovna. Two months before his sister had undergone an operation for cancer, and now everyone was expecting a return of the disease.

"I went to see her this morning," said Yulia Sergeyevna, "and it seemed to me that during the last week she has, not exactly grown thin, but has, as it were, faded."

"Yes, yes," Laptev agreed. "There's no return of the symptoms, but every day I notice she grows weaker and weaker, and is wasting before my eyes. I don't understand what's the matter with her."

"Oh dear! And how strong she used to be, plump and rosy!" said Yulia Sergeyevna after a moment's silence. "Everyone here used to call her the Moscow lady. How she used to laugh! On holidays she used to dress up like a peasant girl, and it suited her so well."

Doctor Sergey Borisovitch was at home; he was a stout, red-faced man, wearing a long coat that reached below his knees, and looking as though he had short legs. He was pacing up and down his study, with his hands in his pockets, and humming to himself in an undertone, “Ru-ru-ru-ru.” His grey whiskers looked unkempt, and his hair was unbrushed, as though he had just got out of bed. And his study with pillows on the sofa, with stacks of papers in the corners, and with a dirty invalid poodle lying under the table, produced the same impression of unkemptness and untidiness as himself.

“M. Laptev wants to see you,” his daughter said to him, going into his study.

“Ru-ru-ru-ru,” he hummed louder than ever, and turning into the drawing room, gave his hand to Laptev, and asked: “What good news have you to tell me?”

It was dark in the drawing room. Laptev, still standing with his hat in his hand, began apologising for disturbing him; he asked what was to be done to make his sister sleep at night, and why she was growing so thin; and he was embarrassed by the thought that he had asked those very questions at his visit that morning.

“Tell me,” he said, “wouldn’t it be as well to send for some specialist on internal diseases from Moscow? What do you think of it?”

The doctor sighed, shrugged his shoulders, and made a vague gesture with his hands.

It was evident that he was offended. He was a very huffy man, prone to take offence, and always ready to suspect that people did not believe in him, that he was not recognised or properly respected, that his patients exploited him, and that his colleagues showed him ill-will. He was always jeering at himself, saying that fools like him were only made for the public to ride roughshod over them.

Yulia Sergeyevna lighted the lamp. She was tired out with the service, and that was evident from her pale, exhausted face, and her weary step. She wanted to rest. She sat down on the sofa, put her hands on her lap, and sank into thought. Laptev knew that he was ugly, and now he felt as though he were conscious of his ugliness all over his body. He was short, thin, with ruddy cheeks, and his hair had grown so thin that his head felt cold. In his expression there was none of that refined simplicity which makes even rough, ugly faces attractive; in the society of women, he was awkward, over-talkative, affected. And now he almost despised himself for it. He must talk that Yulia Sergeyevna might not be bored in his company. But what about? About his sister’s illness again?

And he began to talk about medicine, saying what is usually said. He approved of hygiene, and said that he had long ago wanted to found a night-refuge in Moscow—in fact, he had already calculated the cost of it. According to his plan the workmen who came in the evening to the night-refuge were to receive a supper of hot cabbage soup with bread, a warm, dry bed with a rug, and a place for drying their clothes and their boots.

Yulia Sergeyevna was usually silent in his presence, and in a strange way, perhaps by the instinct of a lover, he divined her thoughts and intentions. And now, from the fact that after the evening service she had not gone to her room to change her dress and drink tea, he deduced that she was going to pay some visit elsewhere.

"But I'm in no hurry with the night-refuge," he went on, speaking with vexation and irritability, and addressing the doctor, who looked at him, as it were, blankly and in perplexity, evidently unable to understand what induced him to raise the question of medicine and hygiene. "And most likely it will be a long time, too, before I make use of our estimate. I fear our night-shelter will fall into the hands of our pious humbugs and philanthropic ladies, who always ruin any undertaking."

Yulia Sergeyevna got up and held out her hand to Laptev.

"Excuse me," she said, "it's time for me to go. Please give my love to your sister."

"Ru-ru-ru-ru," hummed the doctor. "Ru-ru-ru-ru."

Yulia Sergeyevna went out, and after staying a little longer, Laptev said goodbye to the doctor and went home. When a man is dissatisfied and feels unhappy, how trivial seem to him the shapes of the lime trees, the shadows, the clouds, all the beauties of nature, so complacent, so indifferent! By now the moon was high up in the sky, and the clouds were scudding quickly below. "But how naive and provincial the moon is, how threadbare and paltry the clouds!" thought Laptev. He felt ashamed of the way he had talked just now about medicine, and the night-refuge. He felt with horror that next day he would not have will enough to resist trying to see her and talk to her again, and would again be convinced that he was nothing to her. And the day after—it would be the same. With what object? And how and when would it all end?

At home he went in to see his sister. Nina Fyodorovna still looked strong and gave the impression of being a well-built, vigorous woman, but her striking pallor made her look like a corpse, especially when, as now, she was lying on her back with her eyes closed; her eldest daughter

Sasha, a girl of ten years old, was sitting beside her reading aloud from her reading-book.

“Alyosha has come,” the invalid said softly to herself.

There had long been established between Sasha and her uncle a tacit compact, to take turns in sitting with the patient. On this occasion Sasha closed her reading-book, and without uttering a word, went softly out of the room. Laptev took an historical novel from the chest of drawers, and looking for the right page, sat down and began reading it aloud.

Nina Fyodorovna was born in Moscow of a merchant family. She and her two brothers had spent their childhood and early youth, living at home in Pyatnitsky Street. Their childhood was long and wearisome; her father treated her sternly, and had even on two or three occasions flogged her, and her mother had had a long illness and died. The servants were coarse, dirty, and hypocritical; the house was frequented by priests and monks, also hypocritical; they ate and drank and coarsely flattered her father, whom they did not like. The boys had the good fortune to go to school, while Nina was left practically uneducated. All her life she wrote an illegible scrawl, and had read nothing but historical novels. Seventeen years ago, when she was twenty-two, on a summer holiday at Himki, she made the acquaintance of her present husband, a landowner called Panaurov, had fallen in love with him, and married him secretly against her father’s will. Panaurov, a handsome, rather impudent fellow, who whistled and lighted his cigarette from the holy lamp, struck the father as an absolutely worthless person. And when the son-in-law began in his letters demanding a dowry, the old man wrote to his daughter that he would send her furs, silver, and various articles that had been left at her mother’s death, as well as thirty thousand roubles, but without his paternal blessing. Later he sent another twenty thousand. This money, as well as the dowry, was spent; the estate had been sold and Panaurov moved with his family to the town and got a job in a provincial government office. In the town he formed another tie, and had a second family, and this was the subject of much talk, as his illicit family was not a secret.

Nina Fyodorovna adored her husband. And now, listening to the historical novel, she was thinking how much she had gone through in her life, how much she had suffered, and that if anyone were to describe her life it would make a very pathetic story. As the tumour was in her breast, she was persuaded that love and her domestic grief were the cause of her illness, and that jealousy and tears had brought her to her hopeless state.

At last Alexey Fyodorovitch closed the book and said:

“That’s the end, and thank God for it. Tomorrow we’ll begin a new one.”

Nina Fyodorovna laughed. She had always been given to laughter, but of late Laptev had begun to notice that at moments her mind seemed weakened by illness, and she would laugh at the smallest trifle, and even without any cause at all.

“Yulia came before dinner while you were out,” she said. “So far as I can see, she hasn’t much faith in her papa. ‘Let papa go on treating you,’ she said, ‘but write in secret to the holy elder to pray for you, too.’ There is a holy man somewhere here. Yulia forgot her parasol here; you must take it to her tomorrow,” she went on after a brief pause. “No, when the end comes, neither doctors nor holy men are any help.”

“Nina, why can’t you sleep at night?” Laptev asked, to change the subject.

“Oh, well, I don’t go to sleep—that’s all. I lie and think.”

“What do you think about, dear?”

“About the children, about you… about my life. I’ve gone through a great deal, Alyosha, you know. When one begins to remember and remember.… My God!” She laughed. “It’s no joke to have borne five children as I have, to have buried three… Sometimes I was expecting to be confined while my Grigory Nikolaitch would be sitting at that very time with another woman. There would be no one to send for the doctor or the midwife. I would go into the passage or the kitchen for the servant, and there Jews, tradesmen, moneylenders, would be waiting for him to come home. My head used to go round.… He did not love me, though he never said so openly. Now I’ve grown calmer—it doesn’t weigh on my heart; but in old days, when I was younger, it hurt me—ach! how it hurt me, darling! Once—while we were still in the country—I found him in the garden with a lady, and I walked away… I walked on aimlessly, and I don’t know how, but I found myself in the church porch. I fell on my knees: ‘Queen of Heaven!’ I said. And it was night, the moon was shining.…”

She was exhausted, she began gasping for breath. Then, after resting a little, she took her brother’s hand and went on in a weak, toneless voice:

“How kind you are, Alyosha!… And how clever!… What a good man you’ve grown up into!”

At midnight Laptev said good night to her, and as he went away he took with him the parasol that Yulia Sergeyevna had forgotten. In spite of the late hour, the servants, male and female, were drinking tea in the dining room. How disorderly! The children were not in bed, but were

there in the dining room, too. They were all talking softly in undertones, and had not noticed that the lamp was smoking and would soon go out. All these people, big and little, were disturbed by a whole succession of bad omens and were in an oppressed mood. The glass in the hall had been broken, the samovar had been buzzing every day, and, as though on purpose, was even buzzing now. They were describing how a mouse had jumped out of Nina Fyodorovna's boot when she was dressing. And the children were quite aware of the terrible significance of these omens. The elder girl, Sasha, a thin little brunette, was sitting motionless at the table, and her face looked scared and woebegone, while the younger, Lida, a chubby fair child of seven, stood beside her sister looking from under her brows at the light.

Laptev went downstairs to his own rooms in the lower storey, where under the low ceilings it was always close and smelt of geraniums. In his sitting room, Panaurov, Nina Fyodorovna's husband, was sitting reading the newspaper. Laptev nodded to him and sat down opposite. Both sat still and said nothing. They used to spend whole evenings like this without speaking, and neither of them was in the least put out by this silence.

The little girls came down from upstairs to say good night. Deliberately and in silence, Panaurov made the sign of the cross over them several times, and gave them his hand to kiss. They dropped curtsies, and then went up to Laptev, who had to make the sign of the cross and give them his hand to kiss also. This ceremony with the hand-kissing and curtsying was repeated every evening.

When the children had gone out Panaurov laid aside the newspaper and said:

"It's not very lively in our God-fearing town! I must confess, my dear fellow," he added with a sigh, "I'm very glad that at last you've found some distraction."

"What do you mean?" asked Laptev.

"I saw you coming out of Dr. Byelavin's just now. I expect you don't go there for the sake of the papa."

"Of course not," said Laptev, and he blushed.

"Well, of course not. And by the way, you wouldn't find such another old brute as that papa if you hunted by daylight with a candle. You can't imagine what a foul, stupid, clumsy beast he is! You cultured people in the capitals are still interested in the provinces only on the lyrical side, only from the *paysage* and *Poor Anton* point of view, but I can assure you, my boy, there's nothing logical about it; there's nothing but

barbarism, meanness, and nastiness—that's all. Take the local devotees of science—the local intellectuals, so to speak. Can you imagine there are here in this town twenty-eight doctors? They've all made their fortunes, and they are living in houses of their own, and meanwhile the population is in just as helpless a condition as ever. Here, Nina had to have an operation, quite an ordinary one really, yet we were obliged to get a surgeon from Moscow; not one doctor here would undertake it. It's beyond all conception. They know nothing, they understand nothing. They take no interest in anything. Ask them, for instance, what cancer is—what it is, what it comes from."

And Panaurov began to explain what cancer was. He was a specialist on all scientific subjects, and explained from a scientific point of view everything that was discussed. But he explained it all in his own way. He had a theory of his own about the circulation of the blood, about chemistry, about astronomy. He talked slowly, softly, convincingly.

"It's beyond all conception," he pronounced in an imploring voice, screwing up his eyes, sighing languidly, and smiling as graciously as a king, and it was evident that he was very well satisfied with himself, and never gave a thought to the fact that he was fifty.

"I am rather hungry," said Laptev. "I should like something savoury."

"Well, that can easily be managed."

Not long afterwards Laptev and his brother-in-law were sitting upstairs in the dining room having supper. Laptev had a glass of vodka, and then began drinking wine. Panaurov drank nothing. He never drank, and never gambled, yet in spite of that he had squandered all his own and his wife's property, and had accumulated debts. To squander so much in such a short time, one must have, not passions, but a special talent. Panaurov liked dainty fare, liked a handsome dinner service, liked music after dinner, speeches, bowing footmen, to whom he would carelessly fling tips of ten, even twenty-five roubles. He always took part in all lotteries and subscriptions, sent bouquets to ladies of his acquaintance on their birthdays, bought cups, stands for glasses, studs, ties, walking-sticks, scents, cigarette-holders, pipes, lapdogs, parrots, Japanese bric-a-brac, antiques; he had silk nightshirts, and a bedstead made of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl. His dressing-gown was a genuine Bokhara, and everything was to correspond; and on all this there went every day, as he himself expressed, "a deluge" of money.

At supper he kept sighing and shaking his head.

"Yes, everything on this earth has an end," he said softly, screwing up his dark eyes. "You will fall in love and suffer. You will fall out of love;

you'll be deceived, for there is no woman who will not deceive; you will suffer, will be brought to despair, and will be faithless too. But the time will come when all this will be a memory, and when you will reason about it coldly and look upon it as utterly trivial.…"

Laptev, tired, a little drunk, looked at his handsome head, his clipped black beard, and seemed to understand why women so loved this pampered, conceited, and physically handsome creature.

After supper Panaurov did not stay in the house, but went off to his other lodgings. Laptev went out to see him on his way. Panaurov was the only man in the town who wore a top-hat, and his elegant, dandified figure, his top-hat and tan gloves, beside the grey fences, the pitiful little houses, with their three windows and the thickets of nettles, always made a strange and mournful impression.

After saying goodbye to him Laptev returned home without hurrying. The moon was shining brightly; one could distinguish every straw on the ground, and Laptev felt as though the moonlight were caressing his bare head, as though someone were passing a feather over his hair.

"I love!" he pronounced aloud, and he had a sudden longing to run to overtake Panaurov, to embrace him, to forgive him, to make him a present of a lot of money, and then to run off into the open country, into a wood, to run on and on without looking back.

At home he saw lying on the chair the parasol Yulia Sergeyevna had forgotten; he snatched it up and kissed it greedily. The parasol was a silk one, no longer new, tied round with old elastic. The handle was a cheap one, of white bone. Laptev opened it over him, and he felt as though there were the fragrance of happiness about him.

He settled himself more comfortably in his chair, and still keeping hold of the parasol, began writing to Moscow to one of his friends:

> "Dear Precious Kostya,
> "Here is news for you: I'm in love again! I say *again*, because six years ago I fell in love with a Moscow actress, though I didn't even succeed in making her acquaintance, and for the last year and a half I have been living with a certain person you know—a woman neither young nor good-looking. Ah, my dear boy, how unlucky I am in love. I've never had any success with women, and if I say *again* it's simply because it's rather sad and mortifying to acknowledge even to myself that my youth has passed entirely without love, and that I'm in love in

a real sense now for the first time in my life, at thirty-four. Let it stand that I love *again*.

"If only you knew what a girl she was! She couldn't be called a beauty—she has a broad face, she is very thin, but what a wonderful expression of goodness she has when she smiles! When she speaks, her voice is as clear as a bell. She never carries on a conversation with me—I don't know her; but when I'm beside her I feel she's a striking, exceptional creature, full of intelligence and lofty aspirations. She is religious, and you cannot imagine how deeply this touches me and exalts her in my eyes. On that point I am ready to argue with you endlessly. You may be right, to your thinking; but, still, I love to see her praying in church. She is a provincial, but she was educated in Moscow. She loves our Moscow; she dresses in the Moscow style, and I love her for that—love her, love her.… I see you frowning and getting up to read me a long lecture on what love is, and what sort of woman one can love, and what sort one cannot, and so on, and so on. But, dear Kostya, before I was in love I, too, knew quite well what love was.

"My sister thanks you for your message. She often recalls how she used to take Kostya Kotchevoy to the preparatory class, and never speaks of you except as *poor Kostya*, as she still thinks of you as the little orphan boy she remembers. And so, poor orphan, I'm in love. While it's a secret, don't say anything to a 'certain person.' I think it will all come right of itself, or, as the footman says in Tolstoy, will 'come round.'"

When he had finished his letter Laptev went to bed. He was so tired that he couldn't keep his eyes open, but for some reason he could not get to sleep; the noise in the street seemed to prevent him. The cattle were driven by to the blowing of a horn, and soon afterwards the bells began ringing for early mass. At one minute a cart drove by creaking; at the next, he heard the voice of some woman going to market. And the sparrows twittered the whole time.

II

The next morning was a cheerful one; it was a holiday. At ten o'clock Nina Fyodorovna, wearing a brown dress and with her hair neatly arranged, was led into the drawing room, supported on each side. There she walked about a little and stood by the open window, and her smile was broad and naive, and, looking at her, one recalled a local artist, a great drunkard, who wanted her to sit to him for a picture of the Russian carnival. And all of them—the children, the servants, her brother, Alexey Fyodorovitch, and she herself—were suddenly convinced, that she was certainly going to get well. With shrieks of laughter the children ran after their uncle, chasing him and catching him, and filling the house with noise.

People called to ask how she was, brought her holy bread, told her that in almost all the churches they were offering up prayers for her that day. She had been conspicuous for her benevolence in the town, and was liked. She was very ready with her charity, like her brother Alexey, who gave away his money freely, without considering whether it was necessary to give it or not. Nina Fyodorovna used to pay the school fees for poor children; used to give away tea, sugar, and jam to old women; used to provide trousseaux for poor brides; and if she picked up a newspaper, she always looked first of all to see if there were any appeals for charity or a paragraph about somebody's being in a destitute condition.

She was holding now in her hand a bundle of notes, by means of which various poor people, her protégés, had procured goods from a grocer's shop.

They had been sent her the evening before by the shopkeeper with a request for the payment of the total—eighty-two roubles.

"My goodness, what a lot they've had! They've no conscience!" she said, deciphering with difficulty her ugly handwriting. "It's no joke! Eighty-two roubles! I declare I won't pay it."

"I'll pay it today," said Laptev.

"Why should you? Why should you?" cried Nina Fyodorovna in agitation. "It's quite enough for me to take two hundred and fifty every

month from you and our brother. God bless you!” she added, speaking softly, so as not to be overheard by the servants.

“Well, but I spend two thousand five hundred a month,” he said. “I tell you again, dear: you have just as much right to spend it as I or Fyodor. Do understand that, once for all. There are three of us, and of every three kopecks of our father’s money, one belongs to you.”

But Nina Fyodorovna did not understand, and her expression looked as though she were mentally solving some very difficult problem. And this lack of comprehension in pecuniary matters, always made Laptev feel uneasy and troubled. He suspected that she had private debts in addition which worried her and of which she scrupled to tell him.

Then came the sound of footsteps and heavy breathing; it was the doctor coming up the stairs, dishevelled and unkempt as usual.

“Ru-ru-ru,” he was humming. “Ru-ru.”

To avoid meeting him, Laptev went into the dining room, and then went downstairs to his own room. It was clear to him that to get on with the doctor and to drop in at his house without formalities was impossible; and to meet the “old brute,” as Panaurov called him, was distasteful. That was why he so rarely saw Yulia. He reflected now that the father was not at home, that if he were to take Yulia Sergeyevna her parasol, he would be sure to find her at home alone, and his heart ached with joy. Haste, haste!

He took the parasol and, violently agitated, flew on the wings of love. It was hot in the street. In the big courtyard of the doctor’s house, overgrown with coarse grass and nettles, some twenty urchins were playing ball. These were all the children of working-class families who tenanted the three disreputable-looking lodges, which the doctor was always meaning to have done up, though he put it off from year to year. The yard resounded with ringing, healthy voices. At some distance on one side, Yulia Sergeyevna was standing at her porch, her hands folded, watching the game.

“Good morning!” Laptev called to her.

She looked round. Usually he saw her indifferent, cold, or tired as she had been the evening before. Now her face looked full of life and frolic, like the faces of the boys who were playing ball.

“Look, they never play so merrily in Moscow,” she said, going to meet him. “There are no such big yards there, though; they’ve no place to run there. Papa has only just gone to you,” she added, looking round at the children.

“I know; but I’ve not come to see him, but to see you,” said Laptev, admiring her youthfulness, which he had not noticed till then, and seemed only that day to have discovered in her; it seemed to him as though he were seeing her slender white neck with the gold chain for the first time. “I’ve come to see you…” he repeated. “My sister has sent you your parasol; you forgot it yesterday.”

She put out her hand to take the parasol, but he pressed it to his bosom and spoke passionately, without restraint, yielding again to the sweet ecstasy he had felt the night before, sitting under the parasol.

“I entreat you, give it me. I shall keep it in memory of you… of our acquaintance. It’s so wonderful!”

“Take it,” she said, and blushed; “but there’s nothing wonderful about it.”

He looked at her in ecstasy, in silence, not knowing what to say.

“Why am I keeping you here in the heat?” she said after a brief pause, laughing. “Let us go indoors.”

“I am not disturbing you?”

They went into the hall. Yulia Sergeyevna ran upstairs, her white dress with blue flowers on it rustling as she went.

“I can’t be disturbed,” she answered, stopping on the landing. “I never do anything. Every day is a holiday for me, from morning till night.”

“What you say is inconceivable to me,” he said, going up to her. “I grew up in a world in which everyone without exception, men and women alike, worked hard every day.”

“But if one has nothing to do?” she asked.

“One has to arrange one’s life under such conditions, that work is inevitable. There can be no clean and happy life without work.”

Again he pressed the parasol to his bosom, and to his own surprise spoke softly, in a voice unlike his own:

“If you would consent to be my wife I would give everything—I would give everything. There’s no price I would not pay, no sacrifice I would not make.”

She started and looked at him with wonder and alarm.

“What are you saying!” she brought out, turning pale. “It’s impossible, I assure you. Forgive me.”

Then with the same rustle of her skirts she went up higher, and vanished through the doorway.

Laptev grasped what this meant, and his mood was transformed, completely, abruptly, as though a light in his soul had suddenly been extinguished. Filled with the shame of a man humiliated, of a man who

is disdained, who is not liked, who is distasteful, perhaps disgusting, who is shunned, he walked out of the house.

"I would give everything," he thought, mimicking himself as he went home through the heat and recalled the details of his declaration. "I would give everything—like a regular tradesman. As though she wanted your *everything*!"

All he had just said seemed to him repulsively stupid. Why had he lied, saying that he had grown up in a world where everyone worked, without exception? Why had he talked to her in a lecturing tone about a clean and happy life? It was not clever, not interesting; it was false—false in the Moscow style. But by degrees there followed that mood of indifference into which criminals sink after a severe sentence. He began thinking that, thank God! everything was at an end and that the terrible uncertainty was over; that now there was no need to spend whole days in anticipation, in pining, in thinking always of the same thing. Now everything was clear; he must give up all hope of personal happiness, live without desires, without hopes, without dreams, or expectations, and to escape that dreary sadness which he was so sick of trying to soothe, he could busy himself with other people's affairs, other people's happiness, and old age would come on imperceptibly, and life would reach its end—and nothing more was wanted. He did not care, he wished for nothing, and could reason about it coolly, but there was a sort of heaviness in his face especially under his eyes, his forehead felt drawn tight like elastic—and tears were almost starting into his eyes. Feeling weak all over, he lay down on his bed, and in five minutes was sound asleep.

III

The proposal Laptev had made so suddenly threw Yulia Sergeyevna into despair.

She knew Laptev very little, had made his acquaintance by chance; he was a rich man, a partner in the well-known Moscow firm of Fyodor Laptev and Sons; always serious, apparently clever, and anxious about his sister's illness. It had seemed to her that he took no notice of her whatever, and she did not care about him in the least—and then all of a sudden that declaration on the stairs, that pitiful, ecstatic face.…

The offer had overwhelmed her by its suddenness and by the fact that the word wife had been uttered, and by the necessity of rejecting it. She could not remember what she had said to Laptev, but she still felt traces of the sudden, unpleasant feeling with which she had rejected him. He did not attract her; he looked like a shopman; he was not interesting; she could not have answered him except with a refusal, and yet she felt uncomfortable, as though she had done wrong.

"My God! without waiting to get into the room, on the stairs," she said to herself in despair, addressing the icon which hung over her pillow; "and no courting beforehand, but so strangely, so oddly.…"

In her solitude her agitation grew more intense every hour, and it was beyond her strength to master this oppressive feeling alone. She needed someone to listen to her story and to tell her that she had done right. But she had no one to talk to. She had lost her mother long before; she thought her father a queer man, and could not talk to him seriously. He worried her with his whims, his extreme readiness to take offence, and his meaningless gestures; and as soon as one began to talk to him, he promptly turned the conversation on himself. And in her prayer she was not perfectly open, because she did not know for certain what she ought to pray for.

The samovar was brought in. Yulia Sergeyevna, very pale and tired, looking dejected, came into the dining room to make tea—it was one of her duties—and poured out a glass for her father. Sergey Borisovitch, in his long coat that reached below his knees, with his red face and unkempt hair, walked up and down the room with his hands in his

pockets, pacing, not from corner to corner, but backwards and forwards at random, like a wild beast in its cage. He would stand still by the table, sip his glass of tea with relish, and pace about again, lost in thought.

"Laptev made me an offer today," said Yulia Sergeyevna, and she flushed crimson.

The doctor looked at her and did not seem to understand.

"Laptev?" he queried. "Panaurov's brother-in-law?"

He was fond of his daughter; it was most likely that she would sooner or later be married, and leave him, but he tried not to think about that. He was afraid of being alone, and for some reason fancied, that if he were left alone in that great house, he would have an apoplectic stroke, but he did not like to speak of this directly.

"Well, I'm delighted to hear it," he said, shrugging his shoulders. "I congratulate you with all my heart. It offers you a splendid opportunity for leaving me, to your great satisfaction. And I quite understand your feelings. To live with an old father, an invalid, half crazy, must be very irksome at your age. I quite understand you. And the sooner I'm laid out and in the devil's clutches, the better everyone will be pleased. I congratulate you with all my heart."

"I refused him."

The doctor felt relieved, but he was unable to stop himself and went on:

"I wonder, I've long wondered, why I've not yet been put into a madhouse—why I'm still wearing this coat instead of a strait-waistcoat? I still have faith in justice, in goodness. I am a fool, an idealist, and nowadays that's insanity, isn't it? And how do they repay me for my honesty? They almost throw stones at me and ride roughshod over me. And even my nearest kith and kin do nothing but try to get the better of me. It's high time the devil fetched an old fool like me.…"

"There's no talking to you like a rational being!" said Yulia.

She got up from the table impulsively, and went to her room in great wrath, remembering how often her father had been unjust to her. But a little while afterwards she felt sorry for her father, too, and when he was going to the club she went downstairs with him, and shut the door after him. It was a rough and stormy night; the door shook with the violence of the wind, and there were draughts in all directions in the passage, so that the candle was almost blown out. In her own domain upstairs Yulia Sergeyevna went the round of all the rooms, making the sign of the cross over every door and window; the wind howled, and it sounded as though

someone were walking on the roof. Never had it been so dreary, never had she felt so lonely.

She asked herself whether she had done right in rejecting a man, simply because his appearance did not attract her. It was true he was a man she did not love, and to marry him would mean renouncing forever her dreams, her conceptions of happiness in married life, but would she ever meet the man of whom she dreamed, and would he love her? She was twenty-one already. There were no eligible young men in the town. She pictured all the men she knew—government clerks, schoolmasters, officers, and some of them were married already, and their domestic life was conspicuous for its dreariness and triviality; others were uninteresting, colourless, unintelligent, immoral. Laptev was, anyway, a Moscow man, had taken his degree at the university, spoke French. He lived in the capital, where there were lots of clever, noble, remarkable people; where there was noise and bustle, splendid theatres, musical evenings, first-rate dressmakers, confectioners.… In the Bible it was written that a wife must love her husband, and great importance was given to love in novels, but wasn't there exaggeration in it? Was it out of the question to enter upon married life without love? It was said, of course, that love soon passed away, and that nothing was left but habit, and that the object of married life was not to be found in love, nor in happiness, but in duties, such as the bringing up of one's children, the care of one's household, and so on. And perhaps what was meant in the Bible was love for one's husband as one's neighbour, respect for him, charity.

At night Yulia Sergeyevna read the evening prayers attentively, then knelt down, and pressing her hands to her bosom, gazing at the flame of the lamp before the icon, said with feeling:

"Give me understanding, Holy Mother, our Defender! Give me understanding, O Lord!"

She had in the course of her life come across elderly maiden ladies, poor and of no consequence in the world, who bitterly repented and openly confessed their regret that they had refused suitors in the past. Would not the same thing happen to her? Had not she better go into a convent or become a Sister of Mercy?

She undressed and got into bed, crossing herself and crossing the air around her. Suddenly the bell rang sharply and plaintively in the corridor.

"Oh, my God!" she said, feeling a nervous irritation all over her at the sound. She lay still and kept thinking how poor this provincial life was in events, monotonous and yet not peaceful. One was constantly having to

tremble, to feel apprehensive, angry or guilty, and in the end one's nerves were so strained, that one was afraid to peep out of the bedclothes.

A little while afterwards the bell rang just as sharply again. The servant must have been asleep and had not heard. Yulia Sergeyevna lighted a candle, and feeling vexed with the servant, began with a shiver to dress, and when she went out into the corridor, the maid was already closing the door downstairs.

"I thought it was the master, but it's some one from a patient," she said.

Yulia Sergeyevna went back to her room. She took a pack of cards out of the chest of drawers, and decided that if after shuffling the cards well and cutting, the bottom card turned out to be a red one, it would mean *yes*—that is, she would accept Laptev's offer; and that if it was a black, it would mean *no*. The card turned out to be the ten of spades.

That relieved her mind—she fell asleep; but in the morning, she was wavering again between *yes* and *no*, and she was dwelling on the thought that she could, if she chose, change her life. The thought harassed her, she felt exhausted and unwell; but yet, soon after eleven, she dressed and went to see Nina Fyodorovna. She wanted to see Laptev: perhaps now he would seem more attractive to her; perhaps she had been wrong about him hitherto.…

She found it hard to walk against the wind. She struggled along, holding her hat on with both hands, and could see nothing for the dust.

IV

Going into his sister's room, and seeing to his surprise Yulia Sergeyevna, Laptev had again the humiliating sensation of a man who feels himself an object of repulsion. He concluded that if after what had happened yesterday she could bring herself so easily to visit his sister and meet him, it must be because she was not concerned about him, and regarded him as a complete nonentity. But when he greeted her, and with a pale face and dust under her eyes she looked at him mournfully and remorsefully, he saw that she, too, was miserable.

She did not feel well. She only stayed ten minutes, and began saying goodbye. And as she went out she said to Laptev:

"Will you see me home, Alexey Fyodorovitch?"

They walked along the street in silence, holding their hats, and he, walking a little behind, tried to screen her from the wind. In the lane it was more sheltered, and they walked side by side.

"Forgive me if I was not nice yesterday;" and her voice quavered as though she were going to cry. "I was so wretched! I did not sleep all night."

"I slept well all night," said Laptev, without looking at her; "but that doesn't mean that I was happy. My life is broken. I'm deeply unhappy, and after your refusal yesterday I go about like a man poisoned. The most difficult thing was said yesterday. Today I feel no embarrassment and can talk to you frankly. I love you more than my sister, more than my dead mother.… I can live without my sister, and without my mother, and I have lived without them, but life without you—is meaningless to me; I can't face it.…"

And now too, as usual, he guessed her intention.

He realised that she wanted to go back to what had happened the day before, and with that object had asked him to accompany her, and now was taking him home with her. But what could she add to her refusal? What new idea had she in her head? From everything, from her glances, from her smile, and even from her tone, from the way she held her head and shoulders as she walked beside him, he saw that, as before, she did

not love him, that he was a stranger to her. What more did she want to say?

Doctor Sergey Borisovitch was at home.

“You are very welcome. I’m always glad to see you, Fyodor Alexeyitch,” he said, mixing up his Christian name and his father’s. “Delighted, delighted!”

He had never been so polite before, and Laptev saw that he knew of his offer; he did not like that either. He was sitting now in the drawing room, and the room impressed him strangely, with its poor, common decorations, its wretched pictures, and though there were armchairs in it, and a huge lamp with a shade over it, it still looked like an uninhabited place, a huge barn, and it was obvious that no one could feel at home in such a room, except a man like the doctor. The next room, almost twice as large, was called the reception room, and in it there were only rows of chairs, as though for a dancing class. And while Laptev was sitting in the drawing room talking to the doctor about his sister, he began to be tortured by a suspicion. Had not Yulia Sergeyevna been to his sister Nina’s, and then brought him here to tell him that she would accept him? Oh, how awful it was! But the most awful thing of all was that his soul was capable of such a suspicion. And he imagined how the father and the daughter had spent the evening, and perhaps the night before, in prolonged consultation, perhaps dispute, and at last had come to the conclusion that Yulia had acted thoughtlessly in refusing a rich man. The words that parents use in such cases kept ringing in his ears:

“It is true you don’t love him, but think what good you could do!”

The doctor was going out to see patients. Laptev would have gone with him, but Yulia Sergeyevna said:

“I beg you to stay.”

She was distressed and dispirited, and told herself now that to refuse an honourable, good man who loved her, simply because he was not attractive, especially when marrying him would make it possible for her to change her mode of life, her cheerless, monotonous, idle life in which youth was passing with no prospect of anything better in the future—to refuse him under such circumstances was madness, caprice and folly, and that God might even punish her for it.

The father went out. When the sound of his steps had died away, she suddenly stood up before Laptev and said resolutely, turning horribly white as she did so:

“I thought for a long time yesterday, Alexey Fyodorovitch.… I accept your offer.”

He bent down and kissed her hand. She kissed him awkwardly on the head with cold lips.

He felt that in this love scene the chief thing—her love—was lacking, and that there was a great deal that was not wanted; and he longed to cry out, to run away, to go back to Moscow at once. But she was close to him, and she seemed to him so lovely, and he was suddenly overcome by passion. He reflected that it was too late for deliberation now; he embraced her passionately, and muttered some words, calling her "thou"; he kissed her on the neck, and then on the cheek, on the head.…

She walked away to the window, dismayed by these demonstrations, and both of them were already regretting what they had said and both were asking themselves in confusion:

"Why has this happened?"

"If only you knew how miserable I am!" she said, wringing her hands.

"What is it?" he said, going up to her, wringing his hands too. "My dear, for God's sake, tell me—what is it? Only tell the truth, I entreat you—nothing but the truth!"

"Don't pay any attention to it," she said, and forced herself to smile. "I promise you I'll be a faithful, devoted wife.… Come this evening."

Sitting afterwards with his sister and reading aloud an historical novel, he recalled it all and felt wounded that his splendid, pure, rich feeling was met with such a shallow response. He was not loved, but his offer had been accepted—in all probability because he was rich: that is, what was thought most of in him was what he valued least of all in himself. It was quite possible that Yulia, who was so pure and believed in God, had not once thought of his money; but she did not love him—did not love him, and evidently she had interested motives, vague, perhaps, and not fully thought out—still, it was so. The doctor's house with its common furniture was repulsive to him, and he looked upon the doctor himself as a wretched, greasy miser, a sort of operatic Gaspard from *Les Cloches de Corneville*. The very name "Yulia" had a vulgar sound. He imagined how he and his Yulia would stand at their wedding, in reality complete strangers to one another, without a trace of feeling on her side, just as though their marriage had been made by a professional matchmaker; and the only consolation left him now, as commonplace as the marriage itself, was the reflection that he was not the first, and would not be the last; that thousands of people were married like that; and that with time, when Yulia came to know him better, she would perhaps grow fond of him.

“Romeo and Juliet!” he said, as he shut the novel, and he laughed. “I am Romeo, Nina. You may congratulate me. I made an offer to Yulia Byelavin today.”

Nina Fyodorovna thought he was joking, but when she believed it, she began to cry; she was not pleased at the news.

“Well, I congratulate you,” she said. “But why is it so sudden?”

“No, it’s not sudden. It’s been going on since March, only you don’t notice anything.… I fell in love with her last March when I made her acquaintance here, in your rooms.”

“I thought you would marry someone in our Moscow set,” said Nina Fyodorovna after a pause. “Girls in our set are simpler. But what matters, Alyosha, is that you should be happy—that matters most. My Grigory Nikolaitch did not love me, and there’s no concealing it; you can see what our life is. Of course any woman may love you for your goodness and your brains, but, you see, Yulitchka is a girl of good family from a high-class boarding-school; goodness and brains are not enough for her. She is young, and, you, Alyosha, are not so young, and are not good-looking.”

To soften the last words, she stroked his head and said:

“You’re not good-looking, but you’re a dear.”

She was so agitated that a faint flush came into her cheeks, and she began discussing eagerly whether it would be the proper thing for her to bless Alyosha with the icon at the wedding. She was, she reasoned, his elder sister, and took the place of his mother; and she kept trying to convince her dejected brother that the wedding must be celebrated in proper style, with pomp and gaiety, so that no one could find fault with it.

Then he began going to the Byelavins’ as an accepted suitor, three or four times a day; and now he never had time to take Sasha’s place and read aloud the historical novel. Yulia used to receive him in her two rooms, which were at a distance from the drawing room and her father’s study, and he liked them very much. The walls in them were dark; in the corner stood a case of icons; and there was a smell of good scent and of the oil in the holy lamp. Her rooms were at the furthest end of the house; her bedstead and dressing-table were shut off by a screen. The doors of the bookcase were covered on the inside with a green curtain, and there were rugs on the floor, so that her footsteps were noiseless—and from this he concluded that she was of a reserved character, and that she liked a quiet, peaceful, secluded life. In her own home she was treated as though she were not quite grown up. She had no money of her own, and

sometimes when they were out for walks together, she was overcome with confusion at not having a farthing. Her father allowed her very little for dress and books, hardly ten pounds a year. And, indeed, the doctor himself had not much money in spite of his good practice. He played cards every night at the club, and always lost. Moreover, he bought mortgaged houses through a building society, and let them. The tenants were irregular in paying the rent, but he was convinced that such speculations were profitable. He had mortgaged his own house in which he and his daughter were living, and with the money so raised had bought a piece of waste ground, and had already begun to build on it a large two-storey house, meaning to mortgage it, too, as soon as it was finished.

Laptev now lived in a sort of cloud, feeling as though he were not himself, but his double, and did many things which he would never have brought himself to do before. He went three or four times to the club with the doctor, had supper with him, and offered him money for house-building. He even visited Panaurov at his other establishment. It somehow happened that Panaurov invited him to dinner, and without thinking, Laptev accepted. He was received by a lady of five-and-thirty. She was tall and thin, with hair touched with grey, and black eyebrows, apparently not Russian. There were white patches of powder on her face. She gave him a honeyed smile and pressed his hand jerkily, so that the bracelets on her white hands tinkled. It seemed to Laptev that she smiled like that because she wanted to conceal from herself and from others that she was unhappy. He also saw two little girls, aged five and three, who had a marked likeness to Sasha. For dinner they had milk-soup, cold veal, and chocolate. It was insipid and not good; but the table was splendid, with gold forks, bottles of Soyer, and cayenne pepper, an extraordinary bizarre cruet-stand, and a gold pepper-pot.

It was only as he was finishing the milk-soup that Laptev realised how very inappropriate it was for him to be dining there. The lady was embarrassed, and kept smiling, showing her teeth. Panaurov expounded didactically what being in love was, and what it was due to.

“We have in it an example of the action of electricity,” he said in French, addressing the lady. “Every man has in his skin microscopic glands which contain currents of electricity. If you meet with a person whose currents are parallel with your own, then you get love.”

When Laptev went home and his sister asked him where he had been he felt awkward, and made no answer.

He felt himself in a false position right up to the time of the wedding. His love grew more intense every day, and Yulia seemed to him a poetic and exalted creature; but, all the same, there was no mutual love, and the truth was that he was buying her and she was selling herself. Sometimes, thinking things over, he fell into despair and asked himself: should he run away? He did not sleep for nights together, and kept thinking how he should meet in Moscow the lady whom he had called in his letters “a certain person,” and what attitude his father and his brother, difficult people, would take towards his marriage and towards Yulia. He was afraid that his father would say something rude to Yulia at their first meeting. And something strange had happened of late to his brother Fyodor. In his long letters he had taken to writing of the importance of health, of the effect of illness on the mental condition, of the meaning of religion, but not a word about Moscow or business. These letters irritated Laptev, and he thought his brother’s character was changing for the worse.

The wedding was in September. The ceremony took place at the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul, after mass, and the same day the young couple set off for Moscow. When Laptev and his wife, in a black dress with a long train, already looking not a girl but a married woman, said goodbye to Nina Fyodorovna, the invalid’s face worked, but there was no tear in her dry eyes. She said:

“If—which God forbid—I should die, take care of my little girls.”

“Oh, I promise!” answered Yulia Sergeyevna, and her lips and eyelids began quivering too.

“I shall come to see you in October,” said Laptev, much moved. “You must get better, my darling.”

They travelled in a special compartment. Both felt depressed and uncomfortable. She sat in the corner without taking off her hat, and made a show of dozing, and he lay on the seat opposite, and he was disturbed by various thoughts—of his father, of “a certain person,” whether Yulia would like her Moscow flat. And looking at his wife, who did not love him, he wondered dejectedly “why this had happened.”

V

The Laptevs had a wholesale business in Moscow, dealing in fancy goods: fringe, tape, trimmings, crochet cotton, buttons, and so on. The gross receipts reached two millions a year; what the net profit was, no one knew but the old father. The sons and the clerks estimated the profits at approximately three hundred thousand, and said that it would have been a hundred thousand more if the old man had not "been too freehanded"—that is, had not allowed credit indiscriminately. In the last ten years alone the bad debts had mounted up to the sum of a million; and when the subject was referred to, the senior clerk would wink slyly and deliver himself of sentences the meaning of which was not clear to everyone:

"The psychological sequences of the age."

Their chief commercial operations were conducted in the town market in a building which was called the warehouse. The entrance to the warehouse was in the yard, where it was always dark, and smelt of matting and where the dray-horses were always stamping their hoofs on the asphalt. A very humble-looking door, studded with iron, led from the yard into a room with walls discoloured by damp and scrawled over with charcoal, lighted up by a narrow window covered by an iron grating. Then on the left was another room larger and cleaner with an iron stove and a couple of chairs, though it, too, had a prison window: this was the office, and from it a narrow stone staircase led up to the second storey, where the principal room was. This was rather a large room, but owing to the perpetual darkness, the low-pitched ceiling, the piles of boxes and bales, and the numbers of men that kept flitting to and fro in it, it made as unpleasant an impression on a newcomer as the others. In the offices on the top storey the goods lay in bales, in bundles and in cardboard boxes on the shelves; there was no order nor neatness in the arrangement of it, and if crimson threads, tassels, ends of fringe, had not peeped out here and there from holes in the paper parcels, no one could have guessed what was being bought and sold here. And looking at these crumpled paper parcels and boxes, no one would have believed that a

million was being made out of such trash, and that fifty men were employed every day in this warehouse, not counting the buyers.

When at midday, on the day after his arrival at Moscow, Laptev went into the warehouse, the workmen packing the goods were hammering so loudly that in the outer room and the office no one heard him come in. A postman he knew was coming down the stairs with a bundle of letters in his hand; he was wincing at the noise, and he did not notice Laptev either. The first person to meet him upstairs was his brother Fyodor Fyodorovitch, who was so like him that they passed for twins. This resemblance always reminded Laptev of his own personal appearance, and now, seeing before him a short, red-faced man with rather thin hair, with narrow plebeian hips, looking so uninteresting and so unintellectual, he asked himself: “Can I really look like that?”

“How glad I am to see you!” said Fyodor, kissing his brother and pressing his hand warmly. “I have been impatiently looking forward to seeing you every day, my dear fellow. When you wrote that you were getting married, I was tormented with curiosity, and I’ve missed you, too, brother. Only fancy, it’s six months since we saw each other. Well? How goes it? Nina’s very bad? Awfully bad?”

“Awfully bad.”

“It’s in God’s hands,” sighed Fyodor. “Well, what of your wife? She’s a beauty, no doubt? I love her already. Of course, she is my little sister now. We’ll make much of her between us.”

Laptev saw the broad, bent back—so familiar to him—of his father, Fyodor Stepanovitch. The old man was sitting on a stool near the counter, talking to a customer.

“Father, God has sent us joy!” cried Fyodor. “Brother has come!”

Fyodor Stepanovitch was a tall man of exceptionally powerful build, so that, in spite of his wrinkles and eighty years, he still looked a hale and vigorous man. He spoke in a deep, rich, sonorous voice, that resounded from his broad chest as from a barrel. He wore no beard, but a short-clipped military moustache, and smoked cigars. As he was always too hot, he used all the year round to wear a canvas coat at home and at the warehouse. He had lately had an operation for cataract. His sight was bad, and he did nothing in the business but talk to the customers and have tea and jam with them.

Laptev bent down and kissed his head and then his lips.

“It’s a good long time since we saw you, honoured sir,” said the old man—“a good long time. Well, am I to congratulate you on entering the state of holy matrimony? Very well, then; I congratulate you.”

And he put his lips out to be kissed. Laptev bent down and kissed him.

"Well, have you brought your young lady?" the old man asked, and without waiting for an answer, he said, addressing the customer: "'Herewith I beg to inform you, father, that I'm going to marry such and such a young lady.' Yes. But as for asking for his father's counsel or blessing, that's not in the rules nowadays. Now they go their own way. When I married I was over forty, but I went on my knees to my father and asked his advice. Nowadays we've none of that."

The old man was delighted to see his son, but thought it unseemly to show his affection or make any display of his joy. His voice and his manner of saying "your young lady" brought back to Laptev the depression he had always felt in the warehouse. Here every trifling detail reminded him of the past, when he used to be flogged and put on Lenten fare; he knew that even now boys were thrashed and punched in the face till their noses bled, and that when those boys grew up they would beat others. And before he had been five minutes in the warehouse, he always felt as though he were being scolded or punched in the face.

Fyodor slapped the customer on the shoulder and said to his brother:

"Here, Alyosha, I must introduce our Tambov benefactor, Grigory Timofeitch. He might serve as an example for the young men of the day; he's passed his fiftieth birthday, and he has tiny children."

The clerks laughed, and the customer, a lean old man with a pale face, laughed too.

"Nature above the normal capacity," observed the head-clerk, who was standing at the counter close by. "It always comes out when it's there."

The head-clerk—a tall man of fifty, in spectacles, with a dark beard, and a pencil behind his ear—usually expressed his ideas vaguely in roundabout hints, while his sly smile betrayed that he attached particular significance to his words. He liked to obscure his utterances with bookish words, which he understood in his own way, and many such words he used in a wrong sense. For instance, the word "except." When he had expressed some opinion positively and did not want to be contradicted, he would stretch out his hand and pronounce:

"Except!"

And what was most astonishing, the customers and the other clerks understood him perfectly. His name was Ivan Vassilitch Potchatkin, and he came from Kashira. Now, congratulating Laptev, he expressed himself as follows:

"It's the reward of valour, for the female heart is a strong opponent."

Another important person in the warehouse was a clerk called Makeitchev—a stout, solid, fair man with whiskers and a perfectly bald head. He went up to Laptev and congratulated him respectfully in a low voice:

"I have the honour, sir… The Lord has heard your parent's prayer. Thank God."

Then the other clerks began coming up to congratulate him on his marriage. They were all fashionably dressed, and looked like perfectly well-bred, educated men. Since between every two words they put in a "sir," their congratulations—something like "Best wishes, sir, for happiness, sir," uttered very rapidly in a low voice—sounded rather like the hiss of a whip in the air—"Shshsh-s-s-s-s-s!"

Laptev was soon bored and longing to go home, but it was awkward to go away. He was obliged to stay at least two hours at the warehouse to keep up appearances. He walked away from the counter and began asking Makeitchev whether things had gone well while he was away, and whether anything new had turned up, and the clerk answered him respectfully, avoiding his eyes. A boy with a cropped head, wearing a grey blouse, handed Laptev a glass of tea without a saucer; not long afterwards another boy, passing by, stumbled over a box, and almost fell down, and Makeitchev's face looked suddenly spiteful and ferocious like a wild beast's, and he shouted at him:

"Keep on your feet!"

The clerks were pleased that their young master was married and had come back at last; they looked at him with curiosity and friendly feeling, and each one thought it his duty to say something agreeable when he passed him. But Laptev was convinced that it was not genuine, and that they were only flattering him because they were afraid of him. He never could forget how fifteen years before, a clerk, who was mentally deranged, had run out into the street with nothing on but his shirt and shaking his fists at the windows, shouted that he had been ill-treated; and how, when the poor fellow had recovered, the clerks had jeered at him for long afterwards, reminding him how he had called his employers "planters" instead of "exploiters." Altogether the employees at Laptevs' had a very poor time of it, and this fact was a subject of conversation for the whole market. The worst of it was that the old man, Fyodor Stepanovitch, maintained something of an Asiatic despotism in his attitude to them. Thus, no one knew what wages were paid to the old man's favourites, Potchatkin and Makeitchev. They received no more than three thousand a year, together with bonuses, but he made out that

he paid them seven. The bonuses were given to all the clerks every year, but privately, so that the man who got little was bound from vanity to say he had got more. Not one boy knew when he would be promoted to be a clerk; not one of the men knew whether his employer was satisfied with him or not. Nothing was directly forbidden, and so the clerks never knew what was allowed, and what was not. They were not forbidden to marry, but they did not marry for fear of displeasing their employer and losing their place. They were allowed to have friends and pay visits, but the gates were shut at nine o'clock, and every morning the old man scanned them all suspiciously, and tried to detect any smell of vodka about them:

"Now then, breathe," he would say.

Every clerk was obliged to go to early service, and to stand in church in such a position that the old man could see them all. The fasts were strictly observed. On great occasions, such as the birthday of their employer or of any member of his family, the clerks had to subscribe and present a cake from Fley's, or an album. The clerks lived three or four in a room in the lower storey, and in the lodges of the house in Pyatnitsky Street, and at dinner ate from a common bowl, though there was a plate set before each of them. If one of the family came into the room while they were at dinner, they all stood up.

Laptev was conscious that only, perhaps, those among them who had been corrupted by the old man's training could seriously regard him as their benefactor; the others must have looked on him as an enemy and a "planter." Now, after six months' absence, he saw no change for the better; there was indeed something new which boded nothing good. His brother Fyodor, who had always been quiet, thoughtful, and extremely refined, was now running about the warehouse with a pencil behind his ear making a show of being very busy and businesslike, slapping customers on the shoulder and shouting "Friends!" to the clerks. Apparently he had taken up a new role, and Alexey did not recognise him in the part.

The old man's voice boomed unceasingly. Having nothing to do, he was laying down the law to a customer, telling him how he should order his life and his business, always holding himself up as an example. That boastfulness, that aggressive tone of authority, Laptev had heard ten, fifteen, twenty years ago. The old man adored himself; from what he said it always appeared that he had made his wife and all her relations happy, that he had been munificent to his children, and a benefactor to his clerks and employees and that everyone in the street and all his acquaintances remembered him in their prayers. Whatever he did was always right, and

if things went wrong with people it was because they did not take his advice; without his advice nothing could succeed. In church he stood in the foremost place, and even made observations to the priests, if in his opinion they were not conducting the service properly, and believed that this was pleasing God because God loved him.

At two o'clock everyone in the warehouse was hard at work, except the old man, who still went on booming in his deep voice. To avoid standing idle, Laptev took some trimmings from a workgirl and let her go; then listened to a customer, a merchant from Vologda, and told a clerk to attend to him.

"T.V.A.!" resounded on all sides (prices were denoted by letters in the warehouse and goods by numbers). "R.I.T.!" As he went away, Laptev said goodbye to no one but Fyodor.

"I shall come to Pyatnitsky Street with my wife tomorrow," he said; "but I warn you, if father says a single rude thing to her, I shall not stay there another minute."

"You're the same as ever," sighed Fyodor. "Marriage has not changed you. You must be patient with the old man. So till eleven o'clock, then. We shall expect you impatiently. Come directly after mass, then."

"I don't go to mass."

"That does not matter. The great thing is not to be later than eleven, so you may be in time to pray to God and to lunch with us. Give my greetings to my little sister and kiss her hand for me. I have a presentiment that I shall like her," Fyodor added with perfect sincerity. "I envy you, brother!" he shouted after him as Alexey went downstairs.

"And why does he shrink into himself in that shy way as though he fancied he was naked?" thought Laptev, as he walked along Nikolsky Street, trying to understand the change that had come over his brother. "And his language is new, too: 'Brother, dear brother, God has sent us joy; to pray to God'—just like Iudushka in Shtchedrin."

VI

At eleven o’clock the next day, which was Sunday, he was driving with his wife along Pyatnitsky Street in a light, one-horse carriage. He was afraid of his father’s doing something outrageous, and was already ill at ease. After two nights in her husband’s house Yulia Sergeyevna considered her marriage a mistake and a calamity, and if she had had to live with her husband in any other town but Moscow, it seemed to her that she could not have endured the horror of it. Moscow entertained her—she was delighted with the streets, the churches; and if it had been possible to drive about Moscow in those splendid sledges with expensive horses, to drive the whole day from morning till night, and with the swift motion to feel the cold autumn air blowing upon her, she would perhaps not have felt herself so unhappy.

Near a white, lately stuccoed two-storey house the coachman pulled up his horse, and began to turn to the right. They were expected, and near the gate stood two policemen and the porter in a new full-skirted coat, high boots, and goloshes. The whole space, from the middle of the street to the gates and all over the yard from the porch, was strewn with fresh sand. The porter took off his hat, the policemen saluted. Near the entrance Fyodor met them with a very serious face.

“Very glad to make your acquaintance, little sister,” he said, kissing Yulia’s hand. “You’re very welcome.”

He led her upstairs on his arm, and then along a corridor through a crowd of men and women. The anteroom was crowded too, and smelt of incense.

“I will introduce you to our father directly,” whispered Fyodor in the midst of a solemn, deathly silence. “A venerable old man, paterfamilias.”

In the big drawing room, by a table prepared for service, Fyodor Stepanovitch stood, evidently waiting for them, and with him the priest in a calotte, and a deacon. The old man shook hands with Yulia without saying a word. Everyone was silent. Yulia was overcome with confusion.

The priest and the deacon began putting on their vestments. A censer was brought in, giving off sparks and fumes of incense and charcoal. The candles were lighted. The clerks walked into the drawing room on tiptoe

and stood in two rows along the wall. There was perfect stillness, no one even coughed.

"The blessing of God," began the deacon. The service was read with great solemnity; nothing was left out and two canticles were sung—to sweetest Jesus and the most Holy Mother of God. The singers sang very slowly, holding up the music before them. Laptev noticed how confused his wife was. While they were singing the canticles, and the singers in different keys brought out "Lord have mercy on us," he kept expecting in nervous suspense that the old man would make some remark such as, "You don't know how to cross yourself," and he felt vexed. Why this crowd, and why this ceremony with priests and choristers? It was too bourgeois. But when she, like the old man, put her head under the gospel and afterwards several times dropped upon her knees, he realised that she liked it all, and was reassured.

At the end of the service, during "Many, many years," the priest gave the old man and Alexey the cross to kiss, but when Yulia went up, he put his hand over the cross, and showed he wanted to speak. Signs were made to the singers to stop.

"The prophet Samuel," began the priest, "went to Bethlehem at the bidding of the Lord, and there the elders of the town with fear and trembling asked him: 'Comest thou peaceably?' And the prophet answered: 'Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord: sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.' Even so, Yulia, servant of God, shall we ask of thee, Dost thou come bringing peace into this house?"

Yulia flushed with emotion. As he finished, the priest gave her the cross to kiss, and said in quite a different tone of voice:

"Now Fyodor Fyodorovitch must be married; it's high time."

The choir began singing once more, people began moving, and the room was noisy again. The old man, much touched, with his eyes full of tears, kissed Yulia three times, made the sign of the cross over her face, and said:

"This is your home. I'm an old man and need nothing."

The clerks congratulated her and said something, but the choir was singing so loud that nothing else could be heard. Then they had lunch and drank champagne. She sat beside the old father, and he talked to her, saying that families ought not to be parted but live together in one house; that separation and disunion led to permanent rupture.

"I've made money and the children only do the spending of it," he said. "Now, you live with me and save money. It's time for an old man

like me to rest.”

Yulia had all the time a vision of Fyodor flitting about so like her husband, but shyer and more restless; he fussed about her and often kissed her hand.

“We are plain people, little sister,” he said, and patches of red came into his face as he spoke. “We live simply in Russian style, like Christians, little sister.”

As they went home, Laptev felt greatly relieved that everything had gone off so well, and that nothing outrageous had happened as he had expected. He said to his wife:

“You’re surprised that such a stalwart, broad-shouldered father should have such stunted, narrow-chested sons as Fyodor and me. Yes; but it’s easy to explain! My father married my mother when he was forty-five, and she was only seventeen. She turned pale and trembled in his presence. Nina was born first—born of a comparatively healthy mother, and so she was finer and sturdier than we were. Fyodor and I were begotten and born after mother had been worn out by terror. I can remember my father correcting me—or, to speak plainly, beating me—before I was five years old. He used to thrash me with a birch, pull my ears, hit me on the head, and every morning when I woke up my first thought was whether he would beat me that day. Play and childish mischief was forbidden us. We had to go to morning service and to early mass. When we met priests or monks we had to kiss their hands; at home we had to sing hymns. Here you are religious and love all that, but I’m afraid of religion, and when I pass a church I remember my childhood, and am overcome with horror. I was taken to the warehouse as soon as I was eight years old. I worked like a working boy, and it was bad for my health, for I used to be beaten there every day. Afterwards when I went to the high school, I used to go to school till dinnertime, and after dinner I had to sit in that warehouse till evening; and things went on like that till I was twenty-two, till I got to know Yartsev, and he persuaded me to leave my father’s house. That Yartsev did a great deal for me. I tell you what,” said Laptev, and he laughed with pleasure: “let us go and pay Yartsev a visit at once. He’s a very fine fellow! How touched he will be!”

VII

On a Saturday in November Anton Rubinstein was conducting in a symphony concert. It was very hot and crowded. Laptev stood behind the columns, while his wife and Kostya Kotchevoy were sitting in the third or fourth row some distance in front. At the very beginning of an interval a “certain person,” Polina Nikolaevna Razsudin, quite unexpectedly passed by him. He had often since his marriage thought with trepidation of a possible meeting with her. When now she looked at him openly and directly, he realised that he had all this time shirked having things out with her, or writing her two or three friendly lines, as though he had been hiding from her; he felt ashamed and flushed crimson. She pressed his hand tightly and impulsively and asked:

“Have you seen Yartsev?”

And without waiting for an answer she went striding on impetuously as though someone were pushing her on from behind.

She was very thin and plain, with a long nose; her face always looked tired, and exhausted, and it seemed as though it were an effort to her to keep her eyes open, and not to fall down. She had fine, dark eyes, and an intelligent, kind, sincere expression, but her movements were awkward and abrupt. It was hard to talk to her, because she could not talk or listen quietly. Loving her was not easy. Sometimes when she was alone with Laptev she would go on laughing for a long time, hiding her face in her hands, and would declare that love was not the chief thing in life for her, and would be as whimsical as a girl of seventeen; and before kissing her he would have to put out all the candles. She was thirty. She was married to a schoolmaster, but had not lived with her husband for years. She earned her living by giving music lessons and playing in quartets.

During the ninth symphony she passed again as though by accident, but the crowd of men standing like a thick wall behind the columns prevented her going further, and she remained beside him. Laptev saw that she was wearing the same little velvet blouse she had worn at concerts last year and the year before. Her gloves were new, and her fan, too, was new, but it was a common one. She was fond of fine clothes, but she did not know how to dress, and grudged spending money on it. She

dressed so badly and untidily that when she was going to her lessons striding hurriedly down the street, she might easily have been taken for a young monk.

The public applauded and shouted encore.

“You’ll spend the evening with me,” said Polina Nikolaevna, going up to Laptev and looking at him severely. “When this is over we’ll go and have tea. Do you hear? I insist on it. You owe me a great deal, and haven’t the moral right to refuse me such a trifle.”

“Very well; let us go,” Laptev assented.

Endless calls followed the conclusion of the concert. The audience got up from their seats and went out very slowly, and Laptev could not go away without telling his wife. He had to stand at the door and wait.

“I’m dying for some tea,” Polina Nikolaevna said plaintively. “My very soul is parched.”

“You can get something to drink here,” said Laptev. “Let’s go to the buffet.”

“Oh, I’ve no money to fling away on waiters. I’m not a shopkeeper.”

He offered her his arm; she refused, in a long, wearisome sentence which he had heard many times, to the effect that she did not class herself with the feebler fair sex, and did not depend on the services of gentlemen.

As she talked to him she kept looking about at the audience and greeting acquaintances; they were her fellow-students at the higher courses and at the conservatorium, and her pupils. She gripped their hands abruptly, as though she were tugging at them. But then she began twitching her shoulders, and trembling as though she were in a fever, and at last said softly, looking at Laptev with horror:

“Who is it you’ve married? Where were your eyes, you mad fellow? What did you see in that stupid, insignificant girl? Why, I loved you for your mind, for your soul, but that china doll wants nothing but your money!”

“Let us drop that, Polina,” he said in a voice of supplication. “All that you can say to me about my marriage I’ve said to myself many times already. Don’t cause me unnecessary pain.”

Yulia Sergeyevna made her appearance, wearing a black dress with a big diamond brooch, which her father-in-law had sent her after the service. She was followed by her suite—Kotchevoy, two doctors of their acquaintance, an officer, and a stout young man in student’s uniform, called Kish.

“You go on with Kostya,” Laptev said to his wife. “I’m coming later.”

Yulia nodded and went on. Polina Nikolaevna gazed after her, quivering all over and twitching nervously, and in her eyes there was a look of repulsion, hatred, and pain.

Laptev was afraid to go home with her, foreseeing an unpleasant discussion, cutting words, and tears, and he suggested that they should go and have tea at a restaurant. But she said:

"No, no. I want to go home. Don't dare to talk to me of restaurants."

She did not like being in a restaurant, because the atmosphere of restaurants seemed to her poisoned by tobacco smoke and the breath of men. Against all men she did not know she cherished a strange prejudice, regarding them all as immoral rakes, capable of attacking her at any moment. Besides, the music played at restaurants jarred on her nerves and gave her a headache.

Coming out of the Hall of Nobility, they took a sledge in Ostozhenka and drove to Savelovsky Lane, where she lodged. All the way Laptev thought about her. It was true that he owed her a great deal. He had made her acquaintance at the flat of his friend Yartsev, to whom she was giving lessons in harmony. Her love for him was deep and perfectly disinterested, and her relations with him did not alter her habits; she went on giving her lessons and wearing herself out with work as before. Through her he came to understand and love music, which he had scarcely cared for till then.

"Half my kingdom for a cup of tea!" she pronounced in a hollow voice, covering her mouth with her muff that she might not catch cold. "I've given five lessons, confound them! My pupils are as stupid as posts; I nearly died of exasperation. I don't know how long this slavery can go on. I'm worn out. As soon as I can scrape together three hundred roubles, I shall throw it all up and go to the Crimea, to lie on the beach and drink in ozone. How I love the sea—oh, how I love the sea!"

"You'll never go," said Laptev. "To begin with, you'll never save the money; and, besides, you'd grudge spending it. Forgive me, I repeat again: surely it's quite as humiliating to collect the money by farthings from idle people who have music lessons to while away their time, as to borrow it from your friends."

"I haven't any friends," she said irritably. "And please don't talk nonsense. The working class to which I belong has one privilege: the consciousness of being incorruptible—the right to refuse to be indebted to wretched little shopkeepers, and to treat them with scorn. No, indeed, you don't buy me! I'm not a Yulitchka!"

Laptev did not attempt to pay the driver, knowing that it would call forth a perfect torrent of words, such as he had often heard before. She paid herself.

She had a little furnished room in the flat of a solitary lady who provided her meals. Her big Becker piano was for the time at Yartsev's in Great Nikitsky Street, and she went there every day to play on it. In her room there were armchairs in loose covers, a bed with a white summer quilt, and flowers belonging to the landlady; there were oleographs on the walls, and there was nothing that would have suggested that there was a woman, and a woman of university education, living in it. There was no toilet table; there were no books; there was not even a writing-table. It was evident that she went to bed as soon as she got home, and went out as soon as she got up in the morning.

The cook brought in the samovar. Polina Nikolaevna made tea, and, still shivering—the room was cold—began abusing the singers who had sung in the ninth symphony. She was so tired she could hardly keep her eyes open. She drank one glass of tea, then a second, and then a third.

"And so you are married," she said. "But don't be uneasy; I'm not going to pine away. I shall be able to tear you out of my heart. Only it's annoying and bitter to me that you are just as contemptible as everyone else; that what you want in a woman is not brains or intellect, but simply a body, good looks, and youth.… Youth!" she pronounced through her nose, as though mimicking someone, and she laughed. "Youth! You must have purity, *reinheit*! *reinheit!*" she laughed, throwing herself back in her chair. "*Reinheit!*"

When she left off laughing her eyes were wet with tears.

"You're happy, at any rate?" she asked.

"No."

"Does she love you?"

Laptev, agitated, and feeling miserable, stood up and began walking about the room.

"No," he repeated. "If you want to know, Polina, I'm very unhappy. There's no help for it; I've done the stupid thing, and there's no correcting it now. I must look at it philosophically. She married me without love, stupidly, perhaps with mercenary motives, but without understanding, and now she evidently sees her mistake and is miserable. I see it. At night we sleep together, but by day she is afraid to be left alone with me for five minutes, and tries to find distraction, society. With me she feels ashamed and frightened."

"And yet she takes money from you?"

“That’s stupid, Polina!” cried Laptev. “She takes money from me because it makes absolutely no difference to her whether she has it or not. She is an honest, pure girl. She married me simply because she wanted to get away from her father, that’s all.”

“And are you sure she would have married you if you had not been rich?” asked Polina.

“I’m not sure of anything,” said Laptev dejectedly. “Not of anything. I don’t understand anything. For God’s sake, Polina, don’t let us talk about it.”

“Do you love her?”

“Desperately.”

A silence followed. She drank a fourth glass, while he paced up and down, thinking that by now his wife was probably having supper at the doctors’ club.

“But is it possible to love without knowing why?” asked Polina, shrugging her shoulders. “No; it’s the promptings of animal passion! You are poisoned, intoxicated by that beautiful body, that *reinheit*! Go away from me; you are unclean! Go to her!”

She brandished her hand at him, then took up his hat and hurled it at him. He put on his fur coat without speaking and went out, but she ran after him into the passage, clutched his arm above the elbow, and broke into sobs.

“Hush, Polina! Don’t!” he said, and could not unclasp her fingers. “Calm yourself, I entreat you.”

She shut her eyes and turned pale, and her long nose became an unpleasant waxy colour like a corpse’s, and Laptev still could not unclasp her fingers. She had fainted. He lifted her up carefully, laid her on her bed, and sat by her for ten minutes till she came to herself. Her hands were cold, her pulse was weak and uneven.

“Go home,” she said, opening her eyes. “Go away, or I shall begin howling again. I must take myself in hand.”

When he came out, instead of going to the doctors’ club where his friends were expecting him, he went home. All the way home he was asking himself reproachfully why he had not settled down to married life with that woman who loved him so much, and was in reality his wife and friend. She was the one human being who was devoted to him; and, besides, would it not have been a grateful and worthy task to give happiness, peace, and a home to that proud, clever, overworked creature? Was it for him, he asked himself, to lay claim to youth and beauty, to that happiness which could not be, and which, as though in punishment or

mockery, had kept him for the last three months in a state of gloom and oppression. The honeymoon was long over, and he still, absurd to say, did not know what sort of person his wife was. To her school friends and her father she wrote long letters of five sheets, and was never at a loss for something to say to them, but to him she never spoke except about the weather or to tell him that dinner was ready, or that it was suppertime. When at night she said her lengthy prayers and then kissed her crosses and icons, he thought, watching her with hatred, “Here she’s praying. What’s she praying about? What about?” In his thoughts he showered insults on himself and her, telling himself that when he got into bed and took her into his arms, he was taking what he had paid for; but it was horrible. If only it had been a healthy, reckless, sinful woman; but here he had youth, piety, meekness, the pure eyes of innocence.… While they were engaged her piety had touched him; now the conventional definiteness of her views and convictions seemed to him a barrier, behind which the real truth could not be seen. Already everything in his married life was agonising. When his wife, sitting beside him in the theatre, sighed or laughed spontaneously, it was bitter to him that she enjoyed herself alone and would not share her delight with him. And it was remarkable that she was friendly with all his friends, and they all knew what she was like already, while he knew nothing about her, and only moped and was dumbly jealous.

When he got home Laptev put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and sat down in his study to read a novel. His wife was not at home. But within half an hour there was a ring at the hall door, and he heard the muffled footsteps of Pyotr running to open it. It was Yulia. She walked into the study in her fur coat, her cheeks rosy with the frost,

“There’s a great fire in Pryesnya,” she said breathlessly. “There’s a tremendous glow. I’m going to see it with Konstantin Ivanovitch.”

“Well, do, dear!”

The sight of her health, her freshness, and the childish horror in her eyes, reassured Laptev. He read for another half-hour and went to bed.

Next day Polina Nikolaevna sent to the warehouse two books she had borrowed from him, all his letters and his photographs; with them was a note consisting of one word—“*basta*.”

VIII

Towards the end of October Nina Fyodorovna had unmistakable symptoms of a relapse. There was a change in her face, and she grew rapidly thinner. In spite of acute pain she still imagined that she was getting better, and got up and dressed every morning as though she were well, and then lay on her bed, fully dressed, for the rest of the day. And towards the end she became very talkative. She would lie on her back and talk in a low voice, speaking with an effort and breathing painfully. She died suddenly under the following circumstances.

It was a clear moonlight evening. In the street people were tobogganing in the fresh snow, and their clamour floated in at the window. Nina Fyodorovna was lying on her back in bed, and Sasha, who had no one to take turns with her now, was sitting beside her half asleep.

"I don't remember his father's name," Nina Fyodorovna was saying softly, "but his name was Ivan Kotchevoy—a poor clerk. He was a sad drunkard, the Kingdom of Heaven be his! He used to come to us, and every month we used to give him a pound of sugar and two ounces of tea. And money, too, sometimes, of course. Yes.… And then, this is what happened. Our Kotchevoy began drinking heavily and died, consumed by vodka. He left a little son, a boy of seven. Poor little orphan! … We took him and hid him in the clerk's quarters, and he lived there for a whole year, without father's knowing. And when father did see him, he only waved his hand and said nothing. When Kostya, the little orphan, was nine years old—by that time I was engaged to be married—I took him round to all the day schools. I went from one to the other, and no one would take him. And he cried.… 'What are you crying for, little silly?' I said. I took him to Razgulyay to the second school, where—God bless them for it!—they took him, and the boy began going every day on foot from Pyatnitsky Street to Razgulyay Street and back again.… Alyosha paid for him.… By God's grace the boy got on, was good at his lessons, and turned out well.… He's a lawyer now in Moscow, a friend of Alyosha's, and so good in science. Yes, we had compassion on a fellow-creature and took him into our house, and now I daresay, he remembers us in his prayers… Yes.…"

Nina Fyodorovna spoke more and more slowly with long pauses, then after a brief silence she suddenly raised herself and sat up.

"There's something the matter with me… something seems wrong," she said. "Lord have mercy on me! Oh, I can't breathe!"

Sasha knew that her mother would soon die; seeing now how suddenly her face looked drawn, she guessed that it was the end, and she was frightened.

"Mother, you mustn't!" she began sobbing. "You mustn't."

"Run to the kitchen; let them go for father. I am very ill indeed."

Sasha ran through all the rooms calling, but there were none of the servants in the house, and the only person she found was Lida asleep on a chest in the dining room with her clothes on and without a pillow. Sasha ran into the yard just as she was without her goloshes, and then into the street. On a bench at the gate her nurse was sitting watching the tobogganing. From beyond the river, where the tobogganing slope was, came the strains of a military band.

"Nurse, mother's dying!" sobbed Sasha. "You must go for father!…"

The nurse went upstairs, and, glancing at the sick woman, thrust a lighted wax candle into her hand. Sasha rushed about in terror and besought someone to go for her father, then she put on a coat and a kerchief, and ran into the street. From the servants she knew already that her father had another wife and two children with whom he lived in Bazarny Street. She ran out of the gate and turned to the left, crying, and frightened of unknown people. She soon began to sink into the snow and grew numb with cold.

She met an empty sledge, but she did not take it: perhaps, she thought, the man would drive her out of town, rob her, and throw her into the cemetery (the servants had talked of such a case at tea). She went on and on, sobbing and panting with exhaustion. When she got into Bazarny Street, she inquired where M. Panaurov lived. An unknown woman spent a long time directing her, and seeing that she did not understand, took her by the hand and led her to a house of one storey that stood back from the street. The door stood open. Sasha ran through the entry, along the corridor, and found herself at last in a warm, lighted room where her father was sitting by the samovar with a lady and two children. But by now she was unable to utter a word, and could only sob. Panaurov understood.

"Mother's worse?" he asked. "Tell me, child: is mother worse?"

He was alarmed and sent for a sledge.

When they got home, Nina Fyodorovna was sitting propped up with pillows, with a candle in her hand. Her face looked dark and her eyes were closed. Crowding in the doorway stood the nurse, the cook, the housemaid, a peasant called Prokofy and a few persons of the humbler class, who were complete strangers. The nurse was giving them orders in a whisper, and they did not understand. Inside the room at the window stood Lida, with a pale and sleepy face, gazing severely at her mother.

Panaurov took the candle out of Nina Fyodorovna's hand, and, frowning contemptuously, flung it on the chest of drawers.

"This is awful!" he said, and his shoulders quivered. "Nina, you must lie down," he said affectionately. "Lie down, dear."

She looked at him, but did not know him. They laid her down on her back.

When the priest and the doctor, Sergey Borisovitch, arrived, the servants crossed themselves devoutly and prayed for her.

"What a sad business!" said the doctor thoughtfully, coming out into the drawing room. "Why, she was still young—not yet forty."

They heard the loud sobbing of the little girls. Panaurov, with a pale face and moist eyes, went up to the doctor and said in a faint, weak voice:

"Do me a favour, my dear fellow. Send a telegram to Moscow. I'm not equal to it."

The doctor fetched the ink and wrote the following telegram to his daughter:

"Madame Panaurov died at eight o'clock this evening. Tell your husband: a mortgaged house for sale in Dvoryansky Street, nine thousand cash. Auction on twelfth. Advise him not miss opportunity."

IX

Laptev lived in one of the turnings out of Little Dmitrovka. Besides the big house facing the street, he rented also a two-storey lodge in the yard at the back of his friend Kotchevoy, a lawyer's assistant whom all the Laptevs called Kostya, because he had grown up under their eyes. Facing this lodge stood another, also of two storeys, inhabited by a French family consisting of a husband and wife and five daughters.

There was a frost of twenty degrees. The windows were frozen over. Waking up in the morning, Kostya, with an anxious face, took twenty drops of a medicine; then, taking two dumbbells out of the bookcase, he did gymnastic exercises. He was tall and thin, with big reddish moustaches; but what was most noticeable in his appearance was the length of his legs.

Pyotr, a middle-aged peasant in a reefer jacket and cotton breeches tucked into his high boots, brought in the samovar and made the tea.

"It's very nice weather now, Konstantin Ivanovitch," he said.

"It is, but I tell you what, brother, it's a pity we can't get on, you and I, without such exclamations."

Pyotr sighed from politeness.

"What are the little girls doing?" asked Kotchevoy.

"The priest has not come. Alexey Fyodorovitch is giving them their lesson himself."

Kostya found a spot in the window that was not covered with frost, and began looking through a field-glass at the windows of the house where the French family lived.

"There's no seeing," he said.

Meanwhile Alexey Fyodorovitch was giving Sasha and Lida a scripture lesson below. For the last six weeks they had been living in Moscow, and were installed with their governess in the lower storey of the lodge. And three times a week a teacher from a school in the town, and a priest, came to give them lessons. Sasha was going through the New Testament and Lida was going through the Old. The time before Lida had been set the story up to Abraham to learn by heart.

“And so Adam and Eve had two sons,” said Laptev. “Very good. But what were they called? Try to remember them!”

Lida, still with the same severe face, gazed dumbly at the table. She moved her lips, but without speaking; and the elder girl, Sasha, looked into her face, frowning.

“You know it very well, only you mustn’t be nervous,” said Laptev. “Come, what were Adam’s sons called?”

“Abel and Canel,” Lida whispered.

“Cain and Abel,” Laptev corrected her.

A big tear rolled down Lida’s cheek and dropped on the book. Sasha looked down and turned red, and she, too, was on the point of tears. Laptev felt a lump in his throat, and was so sorry for them he could not speak. He got up from the table and lighted a cigarette. At that moment Kotchevoy came down the stairs with a paper in his hand. The little girls stood up, and without looking at him, made curtsies.

“For God’s sake, Kostya, give them their lessons,” said Laptev, turning to him. “I’m afraid I shall cry, too, and I have to go to the warehouse before dinner.”

“All right.”

Alexey Fyodorovitch went away. Kostya, with a very serious face, sat down to the table and drew the Scripture history towards him.

“Well,” he said; “where have you got to?”

“She knows about the Flood,” said Sasha.

“The Flood? All right. Let’s peg in at the Flood. Fire away about the Flood.” Kostya skimmed through a brief description of the Flood in the book, and said: “I must remark that there really never was a flood such as is described here. And there was no such person as Noah. Some thousands of years before the birth of Christ, there was an extraordinary inundation of the earth, and that’s not only mentioned in the Jewish Bible, but in the books of other ancient peoples: the Greeks, the Chaldeans, the Hindus. But whatever the inundation may have been, it couldn’t have covered the whole earth. It may have flooded the plains, but the mountains must have remained. You can read this book, of course, but don’t put too much faith in it.”

Tears trickled down Lida’s face again. She turned away and suddenly burst into such loud sobs, that Kostya started and jumped up from his seat in great confusion.

“I want to go home,” she said, “to papa and to nurse.”

Sasha cried too. Kostya went upstairs to his own room, and spoke on the telephone to Yulia Sergeyevna.

“My dear soul,” he said, “the little girls are crying again; there’s no doing anything with them.”

Yulia Sergeyevna ran across from the big house in her indoor dress, with only a knitted shawl over her shoulders, and chilled through by the frost, began comforting the children.

“Do believe me, do believe me,” she said in an imploring voice, hugging first one and then the other. “Your papa’s coming today; he has sent a telegram. You’re grieving for mother, and I grieve too. My heart’s torn, but what can we do? We must bow to God’s will!”

When they left off crying, she wrapped them up and took them out for a drive. They stopped near the Iverskoy chapel, put up candles at the shrine, and, kneeling down, prayed. On the way back they went in Filippov’s, and had cakes sprinkled with poppy-seeds.

The Laptevs had dinner between two and three. Pyotr handed the dishes. This Pyotr waited on the family, and by day ran to the post, to the warehouse, to the law courts for Kostya; he spent his evenings making cigarettes, ran to open the door at night, and before five o’clock in the morning was up lighting the stoves, and no one knew where he slept. He was very fond of opening seltzer water bottles and did it easily, without a bang and without spilling a drop.

“With God’s blessing,” said Kostya, drinking off a glass of vodka before the soup.

At first Yulia Sergeyevna did not like Kostya; his bass voice, his phrases such as “Landed him one on the beak,” “filth,” “produce the samovar,” etc., his habit of clinking glasses and making sentimental speeches, seemed to her trivial. But as she got to know him better, she began to feel very much at home with him. He was open with her; he liked talking to her in a low voice in the evening, and even gave her novels of his own composition to read, though these had been kept a secret even from such friends as Laptev and Yartsev. She read these novels and praised them, so that she might not disappoint him, and he was delighted because he hoped sooner or later to become a distinguished author.

In his novels he described nothing but country-house life, though he had only seen the country on rare occasions when visiting friends at a summer villa, and had only been in a real country-house once in his life, when he had been to Volokolamsk on law business. He avoided any love interest as though he were ashamed of it; he put in frequent descriptions of nature, and in them was fond of using such expressions as, “the capricious lines of the mountains, the miraculous forms of the clouds, the

harmony of mysterious rhythms.…” His novels had never been published, and this he attributed to the censorship.

He liked the duties of a lawyer, but yet he considered that his most important pursuit was not the law but these novels. He believed that he had a subtle, aesthetic temperament, and he always had leanings towards art. He neither sang nor played on any musical instrument, and was absolutely without an ear for music, but he attended all the symphony and philharmonic concerts, got up concerts for charitable objects, and made the acquaintance of singers.…

They used to talk at dinner.

“It’s a strange thing,” said Laptev, “my Fyodor took my breath away again! He said we must find out the date of the centenary of our firm, so as to try and get raised to noble rank; and he said it quite seriously. What can be the matter with him? I confess I begin to feel worried about him.”

They talked of Fyodor, and of its being the fashion nowadays to adopt some pose or other. Fyodor, for instance, tried to appear like a plain merchant, though he had ceased to be one; and when the teacher came from the school, of which old Laptev was the patron, to ask Fyodor for his salary, the latter changed his voice and deportment, and behaved with the teacher as though he were someone in authority.

There was nothing to be done; after dinner they went into the study. They talked about the decadents, about *The Maid of Orleans*, and Kostya delivered a regular monologue; he fancied that he was very successful in imitating Ermolova. Then they sat down and played whist. The little girls had not gone back to the lodge but were sitting together in one armchair, with pale and mournful faces, and were listening to every noise in the street, wondering whether it was their father coming. In the evening when it was dark and the candles were lighted, they felt deeply dejected. The talk over the whist, the footsteps of Pyotr, the crackling in the fireplace, jarred on their nerves, and they did not like to look at the fire. In the evenings they did not want to cry, but they felt strange, and there was a load on their hearts. They could not understand how people could talk and laugh when their mother was dead.

“What did you see through the field-glasses today?” Yulia Sergeyevna asked Kostya.

“Nothing today, but yesterday I saw the old Frenchman having his bath.”

At seven o’clock Yulia and Kostya went to the Little Theatre. Laptev was left with the little girls.

“It’s time your father was here,” he said, looking at his watch. “The train must be late.”

The children sat in their armchair dumb and huddling together like animals when they are cold, while he walked about the room looking impatiently at his watch. It was quiet in the house. But just before nine o’clock someone rang at the bell. Pyotr went to open the door.

Hearing a familiar voice, the children shrieked, burst into sobs, and ran into the hall. Panaurov was wearing a sumptuous coat of antelope skin, and his head and moustaches were white with hoar frost. “In a minute, in a minute,” he muttered, while Sasha and Lida, sobbing and laughing, kissed his cold hands, his hat, his antelope coat. With the languor of a handsome man spoilt by too much love, he fondled the children without haste, then went into the study and said, rubbing his hands:

“I’ve not come to stay long, my friends. I’m going to Petersburg tomorrow. They’ve promised to transfer me to another town.”

He was staying at the Dresden Hotel.

X

A friend who was often at the Laptevs' was Ivan Gavrilitch Yartsev. He was a strong, healthy man with black hair and a clever, pleasant face. He was considered to be handsome, but of late he had begun to grow stout, and that rather spoilt his face and figure; another thing that spoilt him was that he wore his hair cut so close that the skin showed through.

At the University his tall figure and physical strength had won him the nickname of "the pounder" among the students. He had taken his degree with the Laptev brothers in the faculty of philology—then he went in for science and now had the degree of magister in chemistry. But he had never given a lecture or even been a demonstrator. He taught physics and natural history in the modern school, and in two girls' high schools. He was enthusiastic over his pupils, especially the girls, and used to maintain that a remarkable generation was growing up. At home he spent his time studying sociology and Russian history, as well as chemistry, and he sometimes published brief notes in the newspapers and magazines, signing them "Y." When he talked of some botanical or zoological subject, he spoke like an historian; when he was discussing some historical question, he approached it as a man of science.

Kish, nicknamed "the eternal student," was also like one of the family at the Laptevs'. He had been for three years studying medicine. Then he took up mathematics, and spent two years over each year's course. His father, a provincial druggist, used to send him forty roubles a month, to which his mother, without his father's knowledge, added another ten. And this sum was not only sufficient for his board and lodging, but even for such luxuries as an overcoat lined with Polish beaver, gloves, scent, and photographs (he often had photographs taken of himself and used to distribute them among his friends). He was neat and demure, slightly bald, with golden side-whiskers, and he had the air of a man nearly always ready to oblige. He was always busy looking after other people's affairs. At one time he would be rushing about with a subscription list; at another time he would be freezing in the early morning at a ticket office to buy tickets for ladies of his acquaintance, or at somebody's request would be ordering a wreath or a bouquet. People simply said of him:

“Kish will go, Kish will do it, Kish will buy it.” He was usually unsuccessful in carrying out his commissions. Reproaches were showered upon him, people frequently forgot to pay him for the things he bought, but he simply sighed in hard cases and never protested. He was never particularly delighted nor disappointed; his stories were always long and boring; and his jokes invariably provoked laughter just because they were not funny. Thus, one day, for instance, intending to make a joke, he said to Pyotr: “Pyotr, you’re not a sturgeon;” and this aroused a general laugh, and he, too, laughed for a long time, much pleased at having made such a successful jest. Whenever one of the professors was buried, he walked in front with the mutes.

Yartsev and Kish usually came in the evening to tea. If the Laptevs were not going to the theatre or a concert, the evening tea lingered on till supper. One evening in February the following conversation took place:

“A work of art is only significant and valuable when there are some serious social problems contained in its central idea,” said Kostya, looking wrathfully at Yartsev. “If there is in the work a protest against serfdom, or the author takes up arms against the vulgarity of aristocratic society, the work is significant and valuable. The novels that are taken up with ‘Ach!’ and ‘Och!’ and ‘she loved him, while he ceased to love her,’ I tell you, are worthless, and damn them all, I say!”

“I agree with you, Konstantin Ivanovitch,” said Yulia Sergeyevna. “One describes a love scene; another, a betrayal; and the third, meeting again after separation. Are there no other subjects? Why, there are many people sick, unhappy, harassed by poverty, to whom reading all that must be distasteful.”

It was disagreeable to Laptev to hear his wife, not yet twenty-two, speaking so seriously and coldly about love. He understood why this was so.

“If poetry does not solve questions that seem so important,” said Yartsev, “you should turn to works on technical subjects, criminal law, or finance, read scientific pamphlets. What need is there to discuss in *Romeo and Juliet*, liberty of speech, or the disinfecting of prisons, instead of love, when you can find all that in special articles and textbooks?”

“That’s pushing it to the extreme,” Kostya interrupted. “We are not talking of giants like Shakespeare or Goethe; we are talking of the hundreds of talented mediocre writers, who would be infinitely more valuable if they would let love alone, and would employ themselves in spreading knowledge and humane ideas among the masses.”

Kish, lisping and speaking a little through his nose, began telling the story of a novel he had lately been reading. He spoke circumstantially and without haste. Three minutes passed, then five, then ten, and no one could make out what he was talking about, and his face grew more and more indifferent, and his eyes more and more blank.

"Kish, do be quick over it," Yulia Sergeyevna could not resist saying; "it's really agonizing!"

"Shut up, Kish!" Kostya shouted to him.

They all laughed, and Kish with them.

Fyodor came in. Flushing red in patches, he greeted them all in a nervous flurry, and led his brother away into the study. Of late he had taken to avoiding the company of more than one person at once.

"Let the young people laugh, while we speak from the heart in here," he said, settling himself in a deep armchair at a distance from the lamp. "It's a long time, my dear brother, since we've seen each other. How long is it since you were at the warehouse? I think it must be a week."

"Yes, there's nothing for me to do there. And I must confess that the old man wearies me."

"Of course, they could get on at the warehouse without you and me, but one must have some occupation. 'In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread,' as it is written. God loves work."

Pyotr brought in a glass of tea on a tray. Fyodor drank it without sugar, and asked for more. He drank a great deal of tea, and could get through as many as ten glasses in the evening.

"I tell you what, brother," he said, getting up and going to his brother. "Laying aside philosophic subtleties, you must get elected on to the town council, and little by little we will get you on to the local Board, and then to be an alderman. And as time goes on—you are a clever man and well-educated—you will be noticed in Petersburg and asked to go there—active men on the provincial assemblies and town councils are all the fashion there now—and before you are fifty you'll be a privy councillor, and have a ribbon across your shoulders."

Laptev made no answer; he knew that all this—being a privy councillor and having a ribbon over his shoulder—was what Fyodor desired for himself, and he did not know what to say.

The brothers sat still and said nothing. Fyodor opened his watch and for a long, long time gazed into it with strained attention, as though he wanted to detect the motion of the hand, and the expression of his face struck Laptev as strange.

They were summoned to supper. Laptev went into the dining room, while Fyodor remained in the study. The argument was over and Yartsev was speaking in the tones of a professor giving a lecture:

"Owing to differences of climate, of energy, of tastes, of age, equality among men is physically impossible. But civilised man can make this inequality innocuous, as he has already done with bogs and bears. A learned man succeeded in making a cat, a mouse, a falcon, a sparrow, all eat out of one plate; and education, one must hope, will do the same thing with men. Life continually progresses, civilisation makes enormous advances before our eyes, and obviously a time will come when we shall think, for instance, the present condition of the factory population as absurd as we now do the state of serfdom, in which girls were exchanged for dogs."

"That won't be for a long while, a very long while," said Kostya, with a laugh, "not till Rothschild thinks his cellars full of gold absurd, and till then the workers may bend their backs and die of hunger. No; that's not it. We mustn't wait for it; we must struggle for it. Do you suppose because the cat eats out of the same saucer as the mouse—do you suppose that she is influenced by a sense of conscious intelligence? Not a bit of it! She's made to do it by force."

"Fyodor and I are rich; our father's a capitalist, a millionaire. You will have to struggle with us," said Laptev, rubbing his forehead with his hand. "Struggle with me is an idea I cannot grasp. I am rich, but what has money given me so far? What has this power given me? In what way am I happier than you? My childhood was slavery, and money did not save me from the birch. When Nina was ill and died, my money did not help her. If people don't care for me, I can't make them like me if I spend a hundred million."

"But you can do a great deal of good," said Kish.

"Good, indeed! You spoke to me yesterday of a mathematical man who is looking for a job. Believe me, I can do as little for him as you can. I can give money, but that's not what he wants—I asked a well-known musician to help a poor violinist, and this is what he answered: 'You apply to me just because you are not a musician yourself.' In the same way I say to you that you apply for help to me so confidently because you've never been in the position of a rich man."

"Why you bring in the comparison with a well-known musician I don't understand!" said Yulia Sergeyevna, and she flushed crimson. "What has the well-known musician to do with it!"

Her face was quivering with hatred, and she dropped her eyes to conceal the feeling. And not only her husband, but all the men sitting at the table, knew what the look in her face meant.

"What has the well-known musician got to do with it?" she said slowly. "Why, nothing's easier than helping someone poor."

Silence followed. Pyotr handed the woodcock, but they all refused it, and ate nothing but salad. Laptev did not remember what he had said, but it was clear to him that it was not his words that were hateful, but the fact of his meddling in the conversation at all.

After supper he went into his study; intently, with a beating heart, expecting further humiliation, he listened to what was going on in the hall. An argument had sprung up there again. Then Yartsev sat down to the piano and played a sentimental song. He was a man of varied accomplishments; he could play and sing, and even perform conjuring tricks.

"You may please yourselves, my friends, but I'm not going to stay at home," said Yulia. "We must go somewhere."

They decided to drive out of town, and sent Kish to the merchant's club to order a three-horse sledge. They did not ask Laptev to go with them because he did not usually join these expeditions, and because his brother was sitting with him; but he took it to mean that his society bored them, and that he was not wanted in their lighthearted youthful company. And his vexation, his bitter feeling, was so intense that he almost shed tears. He was positively glad that he was treated so ungraciously, that he was scorned, that he was a stupid, dull husband, a moneybag; and it seemed to him, that he would have been even more glad if his wife were to deceive him that night with his best friend, and were afterwards to acknowledge it, looking at him with hatred.… He was jealous on her account of their student friends, of actors, of singers, of Yartsev, even of casual acquaintances; and now he had a passionate longing for her really to be unfaithful to him. He longed to find her in another man's arms, and to be rid of this nightmare forever. Fyodor was drinking tea, gulping it noisily. But he, too, got up to go.

"Our old father must have got cataract," he said, as he put on his fur coat. "His sight has become very poor."

Laptev put on his coat, too, and went out. After seeing his brother part of the way home, he took a sledge and drove to Yar's.

"And this is family happiness!" he said, jeering at himself. "This is love!"

His teeth were chattering, and he did not know if it were jealousy or something else. He walked about near the tables; listened to a comic singer in the hall. He had not a single phrase ready if he should meet his own party; and he felt sure beforehand that if he met his wife, he would only smile pitifully and not cleverly, and that everyone would understand what feeling had induced him to come here. He was bewildered by the electric light, the loud music, the smell of powder, and the fact that the ladies he met looked at him. He stood at the doors trying to see and to hear what was going on in the private rooms, and it seemed to him that he was somehow playing a mean, contemptible part on a level with the comic singers and those ladies. Then he went to Strelna, but he found none of his circle there, either; and only when on the way home he was again driving up to Yar's, a three-horse sledge noisily overtook him. The driver was drunk and shouting, and he could hear Yartsev laughing: "Ha, ha, ha!"

Laptev returned home between three and four. Yulia Sergeyevna was in bed. Noticing that she was not asleep, he went up to her and said sharply:

"I understand your repulsion, your hatred, but you might spare me before other people; you might conceal your feelings."

She got up and sat on the bed with her legs dangling. Her eyes looked big and black in the lamplight.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

He could not utter a single word from excitement and the trembling of his whole body; he stood facing her and was dumb. She trembled, too, and sat with the air of a criminal waiting for explanations.

"How I suffer!" he said at last, and he clutched his head. "I'm in hell, and I'm out of my mind."

"And do you suppose it's easy for me?" she asked, with a quiver in her voice. "God alone knows what I go through."

"You've been my wife for six months, but you haven't a spark of love for me in your heart. There's no hope, not one ray of light! Why did you marry me?" Laptev went on with despair. "Why? What demon thrust you into my arms? What did you hope for? What did you want?"

She looked at him with terror, as though she were afraid he would kill her.

"Did I attract you? Did you like me?" he went on, gasping for breath. "No. Then what? What? Tell me what?" he cried. "Oh, the cursed money! The cursed money!"

“I swear to God, no!” she cried, and she crossed herself. She seemed to shrink under the insult, and for the first time he heard her crying. “I swear to God, no!” she repeated. “I didn’t think about your money; I didn’t want it. I simply thought I should do wrong if I refused you. I was afraid of spoiling your life and mine. And now I am suffering for my mistake. I’m suffering unbearably!”

She sobbed bitterly, and he saw that she was hurt; and not knowing what to say, dropped down on the carpet before her.

“That’s enough; that’s enough,” he muttered. “I insulted you because I love you madly.” He suddenly kissed her foot and passionately hugged it. “If only a spark of love,” he muttered. “Come, lie to me; tell me a lie! Don’t say it’s a mistake! …”

But she went on crying, and he felt that she was only enduring his caresses as an inevitable consequence of her mistake. And the foot he had kissed she drew under her like a bird. He felt sorry for her.

She got into bed and covered her head over; he undressed and got into bed, too. In the morning they both felt confused and did not know what to talk about, and he even fancied she walked unsteadily on the foot he had kissed.

Before dinner Panaurov came to say goodbye. Yulia had an irresistible desire to go to her own home; it would be nice, she thought, to go away and have a rest from married life, from the embarrassment and the continual consciousness that she had done wrong. It was decided at dinner that she should set off with Panaurov, and stay with her father for two or three weeks until she was tired of it.

XI

She travelled with Panaurov in a reserved compartment; he had on his head an astrachan cap of peculiar shape.

"Yes, Petersburg did not satisfy me," he said, drawling, with a sigh. "They promise much, but nothing definite. Yes, my dear girl. I have been a Justice of the Peace, a member of the local Board, chairman of the Board of Magistrates, and finally councillor of the provincial administration. I think I have served my country and have earned the right to receive attention; but—would you believe it?—I can never succeed in wringing from the authorities a post in another town.…"

Panaurov closed his eyes and shook his head.

"They don't recognise me," he went on, as though dropping asleep. "Of course I'm not an administrator of genius, but, on the other hand, I'm a decent, honest man, and nowadays even that's something rare. I regret to say I have not been always quite straightforward with women, but in my relations with the Russian government I've always been a gentleman. But enough of that," he said, opening his eyes; "let us talk of you. What put it into your head to visit your papa so suddenly?"

"Well.… I had a little misunderstanding with my husband," said Yulia, looking at his cap.

"Yes. What a queer fellow he is! All the Laptevs are queer. Your husband's all right—he's nothing out of the way, but his brother Fyodor is a perfect fool."

Panaurov sighed and asked seriously:

"And have you a lover yet?"

Yulia looked at him in amazement and laughed.

"Goodness knows what you're talking about."

It was past ten o'clock when they got out at a big station and had supper. When the train went on again Panaurov took off his greatcoat and his cap, and sat down beside Yulia.

"You are very charming, I must tell you," he began. "Excuse me for the eating-house comparison, but you remind me of fresh salted cucumber; it still smells of the hotbed, so to speak, and yet has a smack of the salt and a scent of fennel about it. As time goes on you will make a

magnificent woman, a wonderful, exquisite woman. If this trip of ours had happened five years ago," he sighed, "I should have felt it my duty to join the ranks of your adorers, but now, alas, I'm a veteran on the retired list."

He smiled mournfully, but at the same time graciously, and put his arm round her waist.

"You must be mad!" she said; she flushed crimson and was so frightened that her hands and feet turned cold.

"Leave off, Grigory Nikolaevitch!"

"What are you afraid of, dear?" he asked softly. "What is there dreadful about it? It's simply that you're not used to it."

If a woman protested he always interpreted it as a sign that he had made an impression on her and attracted her. Holding Yulia round the waist, he kissed her firmly on the cheek, then on the lips, in the full conviction that he was giving her intense gratification. Yulia recovered from her alarm and confusion, and began laughing. He kissed her once more and said, as he put on his ridiculous cap:

"That is all that the old veteran can give you. A Turkish Pasha, a kindhearted old fellow, was presented by someone—or inherited, I fancy it was—a whole harem. When his beautiful young wives drew up in a row before him, he walked round them, kissed each one of them, and said: 'That is all that I am equal to giving you.' And that's just what I say, too."

All this struck her as stupid and extraordinary, and amused her. She felt mischievous. Standing up on the seat and humming, she got a box of sweets from the shelf, and throwing him a piece of chocolate, shouted:

"Catch!"

He caught it. With a loud laugh she threw him another sweet, then a third, and he kept catching them and putting them into his mouth, looking at her with imploring eyes; and it seemed to her that in his face, his features, his expression, there was a great deal that was feminine and childlike. And when, out of breath, she sat down on the seat and looked at him, laughing, he tapped her cheek with two fingers, and said as though he were vexed:

"Naughty girl!"

"Take it," she said, giving him the box. "I don't care for sweet things."

He ate up the sweets—every one of them, and locked the empty box in his trunk; he liked boxes with pictures on them.

"That's mischief enough, though," he said. "It's time for the veteran to go bye-bye."

He took out of his holdall a Bokhara dressing-gown and a pillow, lay down, and covered himself with the dressing-gown.

“Good night, darling!” he said softly, and sighed as though his whole body ached.

And soon a snore was heard. Without the slightest feeling of constraint, she, too, lay down and went to sleep.

When next morning she drove through her native town from the station homewards, the streets seemed to her empty and deserted. The snow looked grey, and the houses small, as though someone had squashed them. She was met by a funeral procession: the dead body was carried in an open coffin with banners.

“Meeting a funeral, they say, is lucky,” she thought.

There were white bills pasted in the windows of the house where Nina Fyodorovna used to live.

With a sinking at her heart she drove into her own courtyard and rang at the door. It was opened by a servant she did not know—a plump, sleepy-looking girl wearing a warm wadded jacket. As she went upstairs Yulia remembered how Laptev had declared his love there, but now the staircase was unscrubbed, covered with footmarks. Upstairs in the cold passage patients were waiting in their outdoor coats. And for some reason her heart beat violently, and she was so excited she could scarcely walk.

The doctor, who had grown even stouter, was sitting with a brick-red face and dishevelled hair, drinking tea. Seeing his daughter, he was greatly delighted, and even lacrymose. She thought that she was the only joy in this old man’s life, and much moved, she embraced him warmly, and told him she would stay a long time—till Easter. After taking off her things in her own room, she went back to the dining room to have tea with him. He was pacing up and down with his hands in his pockets, humming, “Ru-ru-ru”; this meant that he was dissatisfied with something.

“You have a gay time of it in Moscow,” he said. “I am very glad for your sake.… I’m an old man and I need nothing. I shall soon give up the ghost and set you all free. And the wonder is that my hide is so tough, that I’m alive still! It’s amazing!”

He said that he was a tough old ass that everyone rode on. They had thrust on him the care of Nina Fyodorovna, the worry of her children, and of her burial; and that coxcomb Panaurov would not trouble himself about it, and had even borrowed a hundred roubles from him and had never paid it back.

“Take me to Moscow and put me in a madhouse,” said the doctor. “I’m mad; I’m a simple child, as I still put faith in truth and justice.”

Then he found fault with her husband for his shortsightedness in not buying houses that were being sold so cheaply. And now it seemed to Yulia that she was not the one joy in this old man’s life. While he was seeing his patients, and afterwards going his rounds, she walked through all the rooms, not knowing what to do or what to think about. She had already grown strange to her own town and her own home. She felt no inclination to go into the streets or see her friends; and at the thought of her old friends and her life as a girl, she felt no sadness nor regret for the past.

In the evening she dressed a little more smartly and went to the evening service. But there were only poor people in the church, and her splendid fur coat and hat made no impression. And it seemed to her that there was some change in the church as well as in herself. In old days she had loved it when they read the prayers for the day at evening service, and the choir sang anthems such as “I will open my lips.” She liked moving slowly in the crowd to the priest who stood in the middle of the church, and then to feel the holy oil on her forehead; now she only waited for the service to be over. And now, going out of the church, she was only afraid that beggars would ask for alms; it was such a bore to have to stop and feel for her pockets; besides, she had no coppers in her pocket now—nothing but roubles.

She went to bed early, and was a long time in going to sleep. She kept dreaming of portraits of some sort, and of the funeral procession she had met that morning. The open coffin with the dead body was carried into the yard, and brought to a standstill at the door; then the coffin was swung backwards and forwards on a sheet, and dashed violently against the door. Yulia woke and jumped up in alarm. There really was a bang at the door, and the wire of the bell rustled against the wall, though no ring was to be heard.

The doctor coughed. Then she heard the servant go downstairs, and then come back.

“Madam!” she said, and knocked at the door. “Madam!”

“What is it?” said Yulia.

“A telegram for you!”

Yulia went out to her with a candle. Behind the servant stood the doctor, in his nightclothes and greatcoat, and he, too, had a candle in his hand. “Our bell is broken,” he said, yawning sleepily. “It ought to have been mended long ago.”

Yulia broke open the telegram and read:

“WE DRINK TO YOUR HEALTH.
“—YARTSEV, KOTCHEVOY.”

“Ah, what idiots!” she said, and burst out laughing; and her heart felt light and gay.

Going back into her room, she quietly washed and dressed, then she spent a long time in packing her things, until it was daylight, and at midday she set off for Moscow.

XII

In Holy Week the Laptevs went to an exhibition of pictures in the school of painting. The whole family went together in the Moscow fashion, the little girls, the governess, Kostya, and all.

Laptev knew the names of all the well-known painters, and never missed an exhibition. He used sometimes to paint little landscape paintings when he was in the country in the summer, and he fancied he had a good deal of taste, and that if he had studied he might have made a good painter. When he was abroad he sometimes used to go to curio shops, examining the antiques with the air of a connoisseur and giving his opinion on them. When he bought any article he gave just what the shopkeeper liked to ask for it and his purchase remained afterwards in a box in the coach-house till it disappeared altogether. Or going into a print shop, he would slowly and attentively examine the engravings and the bronzes, making various remarks on them, and would buy a common frame or a box of wretched prints. At home he had pictures always of large dimensions but of inferior quality; the best among them were badly hung. It had happened to him more than once to pay large sums for things which had afterwards turned out to be forgeries of the grossest kind. And it was remarkable that, though as a rule timid in the affairs of life, he was exceedingly bold and self-confident at a picture exhibition. Why?

Yulia Sergeyevna looked at the pictures as her husband did, through her open fist or an opera-glass, and was surprised that the people in the pictures were like live people, and the trees like real trees. But she did not understand art, and it seemed to her that many pictures in the exhibition were alike, and she imagined that the whole object in painting was that the figures and objects should stand out as though they were real, when you looked at the picture through your open fist.

“That forest is Shiskin’s,” her husband explained to her. “He always paints the same thing.… But notice snow’s never such a lilac colour as that.… And that boy’s left arm is shorter than his right.”

When they were all tired and Laptev had gone to look for Kostya, that they might go home, Yulia stopped indifferently before a small

landscape. In the foreground was a stream, over it a little wooden bridge; on the further side a path that disappeared in the dark grass; a field on the right; a copse; near it a camp fire—no doubt of watchers by night; and in the distance there was a glow of the evening sunset.

Yulia imagined walking herself along the little bridge, and then along the little path further and further, while all round was stillness, the drowsy landrails calling and the fire flickering in the distance. And for some reason she suddenly began to feel that she had seen those very clouds that stretched across the red part of the sky, and that copse, and that field before, many times before. She felt lonely, and longed to walk on and on along the path; and there, in the glow of sunset was the calm reflection of something unearthly, eternal.

“How finely that’s painted!” she said, surprised that the picture had suddenly become intelligible to her.

“Look, Alyosha! Do you see how peaceful it is?”

She began trying to explain why she liked the landscape so much, but neither Kostya nor her husband understood her. She kept looking at the picture with a mournful smile, and the fact that the others saw nothing special in it troubled her. Then she began walking through the rooms and looking at the pictures again. She tried to understand them and no longer thought that a great many of them were alike. When, on returning home, for the first time she looked attentively at the big picture that hung over the piano in the drawing room, she felt a dislike for it, and said:

“What an idea to have pictures like that!”

And after that the gilt cornices, the Venetian looking-glasses with flowers on them, the pictures of the same sort as the one that hung over the piano, and also her husband’s and Kostya’s reflections upon art, aroused in her a feeling of dreariness and vexation, even of hatred.

Life went on its ordinary course from day to day with no promise of anything special. The theatrical season was over, the warm days had come. There was a long spell of glorious weather. One morning the Laptevs attended the district court to hear Kostya, who had been appointed by the court to defend someone. They were late in starting, and reached the court after the examination of the witnesses had begun. A soldier in the reserve was accused of theft and housebreaking. There were a great number of witnesses, washerwomen; they all testified that the accused was often in the house of their employer—a woman who kept a laundry. At the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross he came late in the evening and began asking for money; he wanted a pick-me-up, as he had been drinking, but no one gave him anything. Then he went away,

but an hour afterwards he came back, and brought with him some beer and a soft gingerbread cake for the little girl. They drank and sang songs almost till daybreak, and when in the morning they looked about, the lock of the door leading up into the attic was broken, and of the linen three men's shirts, a petticoat, and two sheets were missing. Kostya asked each witness sarcastically whether she had not drunk the beer the accused had brought. Evidently he was insinuating that the washerwomen had stolen the linen themselves. He delivered his speech without the slightest nervousness, looking angrily at the jury.

He explained what robbery with housebreaking meant, and the difference between that and simple theft. He spoke very circumstantially and convincingly, displaying an unusual talent for speaking at length and in a serious tone about what had been know to everyone long before. And it was difficult to make out exactly what he was aiming at. From his long speech the foreman of the jury could only have deduced "that it was housebreaking but not robbery, as the washerwomen had sold the linen for drink themselves; or, if there had been robbery, there had not been housebreaking." But obviously, he said just what was wanted, as his speech moved the jury and the audience, and was very much liked. When they gave a verdict of acquittal, Yulia nodded to Kostya, and afterwards pressed his hand warmly.

In May the Laptevs moved to a country villa at Sokolniki. By that time Yulia was expecting a baby.

XIII

More than a year had passed. Yulia and Yartsev were lying on the grass at Sokolniki not far from the embankment of the Yaroslav railway; a little distance away Kotchevoy was lying with hands under his head, looking at the sky. All three had been for a walk, and were waiting for the six o'clock train to pass to go home to tea.

"Mothers see something extraordinary in their children, that is ordained by nature," said Yulia. "A mother will stand for hours together by the baby's cot looking at its little ears and eyes and nose, and fascinated by them. If anyone else kisses her baby the poor thing imagines that it gives him immense pleasure. And a mother talks of nothing but her baby. I know that weakness in mothers, and I keep watch over myself, but my Olga really is exceptional. How she looks at me when I'm nursing her! How she laughs! She's only eight months old, but, upon my word, I've never seen such intelligent eyes in a child of three."

"Tell me, by the way," asked Yartsev: "which do you love most—your husband or your baby?"

Yulia shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know," she said. "I never was so very fond of my husband, and Olga is in reality my first love. You know that I did not marry Alexey for love. In old days I was foolish and miserable, and thought that I had ruined my life and his, and now I see that love is not necessary—that it is all nonsense."

"But if it is not love, what feeling is it that binds you to your husband? Why do you go on living with him?"

"I don't know.… I suppose it must be habit. I respect him, I miss him when he's away for long, but that's—not love. He is a clever, honest man, and that's enough to make me happy. He is very kind and good-hearted.…"

"Alyosha's intelligent, Alyosha's good," said Kostya, raising his head lazily; "but, my dear girl, to find out that he is intelligent, good, and interesting, you have to eat a hundredweight of salt with him.… And what's the use of his goodness and intelligence? He can fork out money as much as you want, but when character is needed to resist insolence or

aggressiveness, he is fainthearted and overcome with nervousness. People like your amiable Alyosha are splendid people, but they are no use at all for fighting. In fact, they are no use for anything."

At last the train came in sight. Coils of perfectly pink smoke from the funnels floated over the copse, and two windows in the last compartment flashed so brilliantly in the sun, that it hurt their eyes to look at it.

"Teatime!" said Yulia Sergeyevna, getting up.

She had grown somewhat stouter of late, and her movements were already a little matronly, a little indolent.

"It's bad to be without love though," said Yartsev, walking behind her. "We talk and read of nothing else but love, but we do very little loving ourselves, and that's really bad."

"All that's nonsense, Ivan Gavrilitch," said Yulia. "That's not what gives happiness."

They had tea in the little garden, where mignonette, stocks, and tobacco plants were in flower, and spikes of early gladiolus were just opening. Yartsev and Kotchevoy could see from Yulia's face that she was passing through a happy period of inward peace and serenity, that she wanted nothing but what she had, and they, too, had a feeling of peace and comfort in their hearts. Whatever was said sounded apt and clever; the pines were lovely—the fragrance of them was exquisite as it had never been before; and the cream was very nice; and Sasha was a good, intelligent child.

After tea Yartsev sang songs, accompanying himself on the piano, while Yulia and Kotchevoy sat listening in silence, though Yulia got up from time to time, and went softly indoors, to take a look at the baby and at Lida, who had been in bed for the last two days feverish and eating nothing.

"My friend, my tender friend," sang Yartsev. "No, my friends, I'll be hanged if I understand why you are all so against love!" he said, flinging back his head. "If I weren't busy for fifteen hours of the twenty-four, I should certainly fall in love."

Supper was served on the verandah; it was warm and still, but Yulia wrapped herself in a shawl and complained of the damp. When it got dark, she seemed not quite herself; she kept shivering and begging her visitors to stay a little longer. She regaled them with wine, and after supper ordered brandy to keep them from going. She didn't want to be left alone with the children and the servants.

"We summer visitors are getting up a performance for the children," she said. "We have got everything—a stage and actors; we are only at a

loss for a play. Two dozen plays of different sorts have been sent us, but there isn't one that is suitable. Now, you are fond of the theatre, and are so good at history," she said, addressing Yartsev. "Write an historical play for us."

"Well, I might."

The men drank up all the brandy, and prepared to go.

It was past ten, and for summer-villa people that was late.

"How dark it is! One can't see a bit," said Yulia, as she went with them to the gate. "I don't know how you'll find your way. But, isn't it cold?"

She wrapped herself up more closely and walked back to the porch.

"I suppose my Alexey's playing cards somewhere," she called to them. "Good night!"

After the lighted rooms nothing could be seen. Yartsev and Kostya groped their way like blind men to the railway embankment and crossed it.

"One can't see a thing," said Kostya in his bass voice, standing still and gazing at the sky. "And the stars, the stars, they are like new threepenny-bits. Gavrilitch!"

"Ah?" Yartsev responded somewhere in the darkness.

"I say, one can't see a thing. Where are you?"

Yartsev went up to him whistling, and took his arm.

"Hi, there, you summer visitors!" Kostya shouted at the top of his voice. "We've caught a socialist."

When he was exhilarated he was always very rowdy, shouting, wrangling with policemen and cabdrivers, singing, and laughing violently.

"Nature be damned," he shouted.

"Come, come," said Yartsev, trying to pacify him. "You mustn't. Please don't."

Soon the friends grew accustomed to the darkness, and were able to distinguish the outlines of the tall pines and telegraph posts. From time to time the sound of whistles reached them from the station and the telegraph wires hummed plaintively. From the copse itself there came no sound, and there was a feeling of pride, strength, and mystery in its silence, and on the right it seemed that the tops of the pines were almost touching the sky. The friends found their path and walked along it. There it was quite dark, and it was only from the long strip of sky dotted with stars, and from the firmly trodden earth under their feet, that they could tell they were walking along a path. They walked along side by side in

silence, and it seemed to both of them that people were coming to meet them. Their tipsy exhilaration passed off. The fancy came into Yartsev's mind that perhaps that copse was haunted by the spirits of the Muscovite Tsars, boyars, and patriarchs, and he was on the point of telling Kostya about it, but he checked himself.

When they reached the town gate there was a faint light of dawn in the sky. Still in silence, Yartsev and Kotchevoy walked along the wooden pavement, by the cheap summer cottages, eating-houses, timber-stacks. Under the arch of interlacing branches, the damp air was fragrant of lime trees, and then a broad, long street opened before them, and on it not a soul, not a light.… When they reached the Red Pond, it was daylight.

"Moscow—it's a town that will have to suffer a great deal more," said Yartsev, looking at the Alexyevsky Monastery.

"What put that into your head?"

"I don't know. I love Moscow."

Both Yartsev and Kostya had been born in Moscow, and adored the town, and felt for some reason antagonistic to every other town. Both were convinced that Moscow was a remarkable town, and Russia a remarkable country. In the Crimea, in the Caucasus, and abroad, they felt dull, uncomfortable, and ill at ease, and they thought their grey Moscow weather very pleasant and healthy. And when the rain lashed at the windowpanes and it got dark early, and when the walls of the churches and houses looked a drab, dismal colour, days when one doesn't know what to put on when one is going out—such days excited them agreeably.

At last near the station they took a cab.

"It really would be nice to write an historical play," said Yartsev, "but not about the Lyapunovs or the Godunovs, but of the times of Yaroslav or of Monomach.… I hate all historical plays except the monologue of Pimen. When you have to do with some historical authority or even read a textbook of Russian history, you feel that everyone in Russia is exceptionally talented, gifted, and interesting; but when I see an historical play at the theatre, Russian life begins to seem stupid, morbid, and not original."

Near Dmitrovka the friends separated, and Yartsev went on to his lodging in Nikitsky Street. He sat half dozing, swaying from side to side, and pondering on the play. He suddenly imagined a terrible din, a clanging noise, and shouts in some unknown language, that might have been Kalmuck, and a village wrapped in flames, and forests near covered with hoarfrost and soft pink in the glow of the fire, visible for miles

around, and so clearly that every little fir tree could be distinguished, and savage men darting about the village on horseback and on foot, and as red as the glow in the sky.

"The Polovtsy," thought Yartsev.

One of them, a terrible old man with a bloodstained face all scorched from the fire, binds to his saddle a young girl with a white Russian face, and the girl looks sorrowful, understanding. Yartsev flung back his head and woke up.

"My friend, my tender friend…" he hummed.

As he paid the cabman and went up his stairs, he could not shake off his dreaminess; he saw the flames catching the village, and the forest beginning to crackle and smoke. A huge, wild bear frantic with terror rushed through the village.… And the girl tied to the saddle was still looking.

When at last he went into his room it was broad daylight. Two candles were burning by some open music on the piano. On the sofa lay Polina Razsudin wearing a black dress and a sash, with a newspaper in her hand, fast asleep. She must have been playing late, waiting for Yartsev to come home, and, tired of waiting, fell asleep.

"Hullo, she's worn out," he thought.

Carefully taking the newspaper out of her hands, he covered her with a rug. He put out the candles and went into his bedroom. As he got into bed, he still thought of his historical play, and the tune of "My friend, my tender friend" was still ringing in his head.…

Two days later Laptev looked in upon him for a moment to tell him that Lida was ill with diphtheria, and that Yulia Sergeyevna and her baby had caught it from her, and five days later came the news that Lida and Yulia were recovering, but the baby was dead, and that the Laptevs had left their villa at Sokolniki and had hastened back to Moscow.

XIV

It had become distasteful to Laptev to be long at home. His wife was constantly away in the lodge declaring that she had to look after the little girls, but he knew that she did not go to the lodge to give them lessons but to cry in Kostya's room. The ninth day came, then the twentieth, and then the fortieth, and still he had to go to the cemetery to listen to the requiem, and then to wear himself out for a whole day and night thinking of nothing but that unhappy baby, and trying to comfort his wife with all sorts of commonplace expressions. He went rarely to the warehouse now, and spent most of his time in charitable work, seizing upon every pretext requiring his attention, and he was glad when he had for some trivial reason to be out for the whole day. He had been intending of late to go abroad, to study night-refuges, and that idea attracted him now.

It was an autumn day. Yulia had just gone to the lodge to cry, while Laptev lay on a sofa in the study thinking where he could go. Just at that moment Pyotr announced Polina Razsudin. Laptev was delighted; he leapt up and went to meet the unexpected visitor, who had been his closest friend, though he had almost begun to forget her. She had not changed in the least since that evening when he had seen her for the last time, and was just the same as ever.

"Polina," he said, holding out both hands to her. "What ages! If you only knew how glad I am to see you! Do come in!"

Polina greeted him, jerked him by the hand, and without taking off her coat and hat, went into the study and sat down.

"I've come to you for one minute," she said. "I haven't time to talk of any nonsense. Sit down and listen. Whether you are glad to see me or not is absolutely nothing to me, for I don't care a straw for the gracious attentions of you lords of creation. I've only come to you because I've been to five other places already today, and everywhere I was met with a refusal, and it's a matter that can't be put off. Listen," she went on, looking into his face. "Five students of my acquaintance, stupid, unintelligent people, but certainly poor, have neglected to pay their fees, and are being excluded from the university. Your wealth makes it your duty to go straight to the university and pay for them."

“With pleasure, Polina.”

“Here are their names,” she said, giving him a list. “Go this minute; you’ll have plenty of time to enjoy your domestic happiness afterwards.”

At that moment a rustle was heard through the door that led into the drawing room; probably the dog was scratching itself. Polina turned crimson and jumped up.

“Your Dulcinea’s eavesdropping,” she said. “That’s horrid!”

Laptev was offended at this insult to Yulia.

“She’s not here; she’s in the lodge,” he said. “And don’t speak of her like that. Our child is dead, and she is in great distress.”

“You can console her,” Polina scoffed, sitting down again; “she’ll have another dozen. You don’t need much sense to bring children into the world.”

Laptev remembered that he had heard this, or something very like it, many times in old days, and it brought back a whiff of the romance of the past, of solitary freedom, of his bachelor life, when he was young and thought he could do anything he chose, when he had neither love for his wife nor memory of his baby.

“Let us go together,” he said, stretching.

When they reached the university Polina waited at the gate, while Laptev went into the office; he came back soon afterwards and handed Polina five receipts.

“Where are you going now?” he asked.

“To Yartsev’s.”

“I’ll come with you.”

“But you’ll prevent him from writing.”

“No, I assure you I won’t,” he said, and looked at her imploringly.

She had on a black hat trimmed with crape, as though she were in mourning, and a short, shabby coat, the pockets of which stuck out. Her nose looked longer than it used to be, and her face looked bloodless in spite of the cold. Laptev liked walking with her, doing what she told him, and listening to her grumbling. He walked along thinking about her, what inward strength there must be in this woman, since, though she was so ugly, so angular, so restless, though she did not know how to dress, and always had untidy hair, and was always somehow out of harmony, she was yet so fascinating.

They went into Yartsev’s flat by the back way through the kitchen, where they were met by the cook, a clean little old woman with grey curls; she was overcome with embarrassment, and with a honeyed smile which made her little face look like a pie, said:

“Please walk in.”

Yartsev was not at home. Polina sat down to the piano, and beginning upon a tedious, difficult exercise, told Laptev not to hinder her. And without distracting her attention by conversation, he sat on one side and began turning over the pages of a *The Messenger of Europe*. After practising for two hours—it was the task she set herself every day—she ate something in the kitchen and went out to her lessons. Laptev read the continuation of a story, then sat for a long time without reading and without being bored, glad to think that he was too late for dinner at home.

“Ha, ha, ha!” came Yartsev’s laugh, and he walked in with ruddy cheeks, looking strong and healthy, wearing a new coat with bright buttons. “Ha, ha, ha!”

The friends dined together. Then Laptev lay on the sofa while Yartsev sat near and lighted a cigar. It got dark.

“I must be getting old,” said Laptev. “Ever since my sister Nina died, I’ve taken to constantly thinking of death.”

They began talking of death, of the immortality of the soul, of how nice it would be to rise again and fly off somewhere to Mars, to be always idle and happy, and, above all, to think in a new special way, not as on earth.

“One doesn’t want to die,” said Yartsev softly. “No sort of philosophy can reconcile me to death, and I look on it simply as annihilation. One wants to live.”

“You love life, Gavrilitch?”

“Yes, I love it.”

“Do you know, I can never understand myself about that. I’m always in a gloomy mood or else indifferent. I’m timid, without self-confidence; I have a cowardly conscience; I never can adapt myself to life, or become its master. Some people talk nonsense or cheat, and even so enjoy life, while I consciously do good, and feel nothing but uneasiness or complete indifference. I explain all that, Gavrilitch, by my being a slave, the grandson of a serf. Before we plebeians fight our way into the true path, many of our sort will perish on the way.”

“That’s all quite right, my dear fellow,” said Yartsev, and he sighed. “That only proves once again how rich and varied Russian life is. Ah, how rich it is! Do you know, I feel more convinced every day that we are on the eve of the greatest triumph, and I should like to live to take part in it. Whether you like to believe it or not, to my thinking a remarkable

generation is growing up. It gives me great enjoyment to teach the children, especially the girls. They are wonderful children!”

Yartsev went to the piano and struck a chord.

“I’m a chemist, I think in chemical terms, and I shall die a chemist,” he went on. “But I am greedy, and I am afraid of dying unsatisfied; and chemistry is not enough for me, and I seize upon Russian history, history of art, the science of teaching music.… Your wife asked me in the summer to write an historical play, and now I’m longing to write and write. I feel as though I could sit for three days and three nights without moving, writing all the time. I am worn out with ideas—my brain’s crowded with them, and I feel as though there were a pulse throbbing in my head. I don’t in the least want to become anything special, to create something great. I simply want to live, to dream, to hope, to be in the midst of everything.… Life is short, my dear fellow, and one must make the most of everything.”

After this friendly talk, which was not over till midnight, Laptev took to coming to see Yartsev almost every day. He felt drawn to him. As a rule he came towards evening, lay down on the sofa, and waited patiently for Yartsev to come in, without feeling in the least bored. When Yartsev came back from his work, he had dinner, and sat down to work; but Laptev would ask him a question, a conversation would spring up, and there was no more thought of work and at midnight the friends parted very well pleased with one another.

But this did not last long. Arriving one day at Yartsev’s, Laptev found no one there but Polina, who was sitting at the piano practising her exercises. She looked at him with a cold, almost hostile expression, and asked without shaking hands:

“Tell me, please: how much longer is this going on?”

“This? What?” asked Laptev, not understanding.

“You come here every day and hinder Yartsev from working. Yartsev is not a tradesman; he is a scientific man, and every moment of his life is precious. You ought to understand and to have some little delicacy!”

“If you think that I hinder him,” said Laptev, mildly, disconcerted, “I will give up my visits.”

“Quite right, too. You had better go, or he may be home in a minute and find you here.”

The tone in which this was said, and the indifference in Polina’s eyes, completely disconcerted him. She had absolutely no sort of feeling for him now, except the desire that he should go as soon as possible—and what a contrast it was to her old love for him! He went out without

shaking hands with her, and he fancied she would call out to him, bring him back, but he heard the scales again, and as he slowly went down the stairs he realised that he had become a stranger to her now.

Three days later Yartsev came to spend the evening with him.

"I have news," he said, laughing. "Polina Nikolaevna has moved into my rooms altogether." He was a little confused, and went on in a low voice: "Well, we are not in love with each other, of course, but I suppose that… that doesn't matter. I am glad I can give her a refuge and peace and quiet, and make it possible for her not to work if she's ill. She fancies that her coming to live with me will make things more orderly, and that under her influence I shall become a great scientist. That's what she fancies. And let her fancy it. In the South they have a saying: 'Fancy makes the fool a rich man.' Ha, ha, ha!"

Laptev said nothing. Yartsev walked up and down the study, looking at the pictures he had seen so many times before, and said with a sigh:

"Yes, my dear fellow, I am three years older than you are, and it's too late for me to think of real love, and in reality a woman like Polina Nikolaevna is a godsend to me, and, of course, I shall get on capitally with her till we're both old people; but, goodness knows why, one still regrets something, one still longs for something, and I still feel as though I am lying in the Vale of Daghestan and dreaming of a ball. In short, man's never satisfied with what he has."

He went into the drawing room and began singing as though nothing had happened, and Laptev sat in his study with his eyes shut, and tried to understand why Polina had gone to live with Yartsev. And then he felt sad that there were no lasting, permanent attachments. And he felt vexed that Polina Nikolaevna had gone to live with Yartsev, and vexed with himself that his feeling for his wife was not what it had been.

XV

Laptev sat reading and swaying to and fro in a rocking-chair; Yulia was in the study, and she, too, was reading. It seemed there was nothing to talk about; they had both been silent all day. From time to time he looked at her from over his book and thought: “Whether one marries from passionate love, or without love at all, doesn’t it come to the same thing?” And the time when he used to be jealous, troubled, distressed, seemed to him far away. He had succeeded in going abroad, and now he was resting after the journey and looking forward to another visit in the spring to England, which he had very much liked.

And Yulia Sergeyevna had grown used to her sorrow, and had left off going to the lodge to cry. That winter she had given up driving out shopping, had given up the theatres and concerts, and had stayed at home. She never cared for big rooms, and always sat in her husband’s study or in her own room, where she had shrines of icons that had come to her on her marriage, and where there hung on the wall the landscape that had pleased her so much at the exhibition. She spent hardly any money on herself, and was almost as frugal now as she had been in her father’s house.

The winter passed cheerlessly. Card-playing was the rule everywhere in Moscow, and if any other recreation was attempted, such as singing, reading, drawing, the result was even more tedious. And since there were few talented people in Moscow, and the same singers and reciters performed at every entertainment, even the enjoyment of art gradually palled and became for many people a tiresome and monotonous social duty.

Moreover, the Laptevs never had a day without something vexatious happening. Old Laptev’s eyesight was failing; he no longer went to the warehouse, and the oculist told them that he would soon be blind. Fyodor had for some reason given up going to the warehouse and spent his time sitting at home writing something. Panaurov had got a post in another town, and had been promoted an actual civil councillor, and was now staying at the Dresden. He came to the Laptevs’ almost every day to ask for money. Kish had finished his studies at last, and while waiting for

Laptev to find him a job, used to spend whole days at a time with them, telling them long, tedious stories. All this was irritating and exhausting, and made daily life unpleasant.

Pyotr came into the study, and announced an unknown lady. On the card he brought in was the name “Josephina Iosefovna Milan.”

Yulia Sergeyevna got up languidly and went out limping slightly, as her foot had gone to sleep. In the doorway appeared a pale, thin lady with dark eyebrows, dressed altogether in black. She clasped her hands on her bosom and said supplicatingly:

“M. Laptev, save my children!”

The jingle of her bracelets sounded familiar to him, and he knew the face with patches of powder on it; he recognised her as the lady with whom he had once so inappropriately dined before his marriage. It was Panaurov’s second wife.

“Save my children,” she repeated, and her face suddenly quivered and looked old and pitiful. “You alone can save us, and I have spent my last penny coming to Moscow to see you! My children are starving!”

She made a motion as though she were going to fall on her knees. Laptev was alarmed, and clutched her by the arm.

“Sit down, sit down…” he muttered, making her sit down. “I beg you to be seated.”

“We have no money to buy bread,” she said. “Grigory Nikolaevitch is going away to a new post, but he will not take the children and me with him, and the money which you so generously send us he spends only on himself. What are we to do? What? My poor, unhappy children!”

“Calm yourself, I beg. I will give orders that that money shall be made payable to you.”

She began sobbing, and then grew calmer, and he noticed that the tears had made little pathways through the powder on her cheeks, and that she was growing a moustache.

“You are infinitely generous, M. Laptev. But be our guardian angel, our good fairy, persuade Grigory Nikolaevitch not to abandon me, but to take me with him. You know I love him—I love him insanely; he’s the comfort of my life.”

Laptev gave her a hundred roubles, and promised to talk to Panaurov, and saw her out to the hall in trepidation the whole time, for fear she should break into sobs or fall on her knees.

After her, Kish made his appearance. Then Kostya came in with his photographic apparatus. Of late he had been attracted by photography and took photographs of everyone in the house several times a day. This

new pursuit caused him many disappointments, and he had actually grown thinner.

Before evening tea Fyodor arrived. Sitting in a corner in the study, he opened a book and stared for a long time at a page, obviously not reading. Then he spent a long time drinking tea; his face turned red. In his presence Laptev felt a load on his heart; even his silence was irksome to him.

“Russia may be congratulated on the appearance of a new author,” said Fyodor. “Joking apart, though, brother, I have turned out a little article—the firstfruits of my pen, so to say—and I’ve brought it to show you. Read it, dear boy, and tell me your opinion—but sincerely.”

He took a manuscript out of his pocket and gave it to his brother. The article was called “The Russian Soul”; it was written tediously, in the colourless style in which people with no talent, but full of secret vanity, usually write. The leading idea of it was that the intellectual man has the right to disbelieve in the supernatural, but it is his duty to conceal his lack of faith, that he may not be a stumbling-block and shake the faith of others. Without faith there is no idealism, and idealism is destined to save Europe and guide humanity into the true path.

“But you don’t say what Europe has to be saved from,” said Laptev.

“That’s intelligible of itself.”

“Nothing is intelligible,” said Laptev, and he walked about the room in agitation. “It’s not intelligible to me why you wrote it. But that’s your business.”

“I want to publish it in pamphlet form.”

“That’s your affair.”

They were silent for a minute. Fyodor sighed and said:

“It’s an immense regret to me, dear brother, that we think differently. Oh, Alyosha, Alyosha, my darling brother! You and I are true Russians, true believers, men of broad nature; all of these German and Jewish crochets are not for us. You and I are not wretched upstarts, you know, but representatives of a distinguished merchant family.”

“What do you mean by a distinguished family?” said Laptev, restraining his irritation. “A distinguished family! The landowners beat our grandfather and every low little government clerk punched him in the face. Our grandfather thrashed our father, and our father thrashed us. What has your distinguished family done for us? What sort of nerves, what sort of blood, have we inherited? For nearly three years you’ve been arguing like an ignorant deacon, and talking all sorts of nonsense, and now you’ve written—this slavish drivel here! While I, while I! Look

at me.… No elasticity, no boldness, no strength of will; I tremble over every step I take as though I should be flogged for it. I am timid before nonentities, idiots, brutes, who are immeasurably my inferiors mentally and morally; I am afraid of porters, doorkeepers, policemen, gendarmes. I am afraid of everyone, because I was born of a mother who was terrified, and because from a child I was beaten and frightened!… You and I will do well to have no children. Oh, God, grant that this distinguished merchant family may die with us!”

Yulia Sergeyevna came into the study and sat down at the table.

“Are you arguing about something here?” she asked. “Am I interrupting?”

“No, little sister,” answered Fyodor. “Our discussion was of principles. Here, you are abusing the family,” he added, turning to his brother. “That family has created a business worth a million, though. That stands for something, anyway!”

“A great distinction—a business worth a million! A man with no particular brains, without abilities, by chance becomes a trader, and then when he has grown rich he goes on trading from day to day, with no sort of system, with no aim, without having any particular greed for money. He trades mechanically, and money comes to him of itself, without his going to meet it. He sits all his life at his work, likes it only because he can domineer over his clerks and get the better of his customers. He’s a churchwarden because he can domineer over the choristers and keep them under his thumb; he’s the patron of a school because he likes to feel the teacher is his subordinate and enjoys lording it over him. The merchant does not love trading, he loves dominating, and your warehouse is not so much a commercial establishment as a torture chamber! And for a business like yours, you want clerks who have been deprived of individual character and personal life—and you make them such by forcing them in childhood to lick the dust for a crust of bread, and you’ve trained them from childhood to believe that you are their benefactors. No fear of your taking a university man into your warehouse!”

“University men are not suitable for our business.”

“That’s not true,” cried Laptev. “It’s a lie!”

“Excuse me, it seems to me you spit into the well from which you drink yourself,” said Fyodor, and he got up. “Our business is hateful to you, yet you make use of the income from it.”

“Aha! We’ve spoken our minds,” said Laptev, and he laughed, looking angrily at his brother. “Yes, if I didn’t belong to your distinguished

family—if I had an ounce of will and courage, I should long ago have flung away that income, and have gone to work for my living. But in your warehouse you've destroyed all character in me from a child! I'm your product."

Fyodor looked at the clock and began hurriedly saying goodbye. He kissed Yulia's hand and went out, but instead of going into the hall, walked into the drawing room, then into the bedroom.

"I've forgotten how the rooms go," he said in extreme confusion. "It's a strange house. Isn't it a strange house!"

He seemed utterly overcome as he put on his coat, and there was a look of pain on his face. Laptev felt no more anger; he was frightened, and at the same time felt sorry for Fyodor, and the warm, true love for his brother, which seemed to have died down in his heart during those three years, awoke, and he felt an intense desire to express that love.

"Come to dinner with us tomorrow, Fyodor," he said, and stroked him on the shoulder. "Will you come?"

"Yes, yes; but give me some water."

Laptev ran himself to the dining room to take the first thing he could get from the sideboard. This was a tall beer-jug. He poured water into it and brought it to his brother. Fyodor began drinking, but bit a piece out of the jug; they heard a crunch, and then sobs. The water ran over his fur coat and his jacket, and Laptev, who had never seen men cry, stood in confusion and dismay, not knowing what to do. He looked on helplessly while Yulia and the servant took off Fyodor's coat and helped him back again into the room, and went with him, feeling guilty.

Yulia made Fyodor lie down on the sofa and knelt beside him.

"It's nothing," she said, trying to comfort him. "It's your nerves.…"

"I'm so miserable, my dear!" he said. "I am so unhappy, unhappy… but all the time I've been hiding it, I've been hiding it!"

He put his arm round her neck and whispered in her ear:

"Every night I see my sister Nina. She comes and sits in the chair near my bed.…"

When, an hour later, he put on his fur coat in the hall, he was smiling again and ashamed to face the servant. Laptev went with him to Pyatnitsky Street.

"Come and have dinner with us tomorrow," he said on the way, holding him by the arm, "and at Easter we'll go abroad together. You absolutely must have a change, or you'll be getting quite morbid."

When he got home Laptev found his wife in a state of great nervous agitation. The scene with Fyodor had upset her, and she could not

recover her composure. She wasn’t crying but kept tossing on the bed, clutching with cold fingers at the quilt, at the pillows, at her husband’s hands. Her eyes looked big and frightened.

“Don’t go away from me, don’t go away,” she said to her husband. “Tell me, Alyosha, why have I left off saying my prayers? What has become of my faith? Oh, why did you talk of religion before me? You’ve shaken my faith, you and your friends. I never pray now.”

He put compresses on her forehead, chafed her hands, gave her tea to drink, while she huddled up to him in terror.…

Towards morning she was worn out and fell asleep, while Laptev sat beside her and held her hand. So that he could get no sleep. The whole day afterwards he felt shattered and dull, and wandered listlessly about the rooms without a thought in his head.

XVI

The doctor said that Fyodor's mind was affected. Laptev did not know what to do in his father's house, while the dark warehouse in which neither his father nor Fyodor ever appeared now seemed to him like a sepulchre. When his wife told him that he absolutely must go every day to the warehouse and also to his father's, he either said nothing, or began talking irritably of his childhood, saying that it was beyond his power to forgive his father for his past, that the warehouse and the house in Pyatnitsky Street were hateful to him, and so on.

One Sunday morning Yulia went herself to Pyatnitsky Street. She found old Fyodor Stepanovitch in the same big drawing room in which the service had been held on her first arrival. Wearing slippers, and without a cravat, he was sitting motionless in his armchair, blinking with his sightless eyes.

"It's I—your daughter-in-law," she said, going up to him. "I've come to see how you are."

He began breathing heavily with excitement.

Touched by his affliction and his loneliness, she kissed his hand; and he passed his hand over her face and head, and having satisfied himself that it was she, made the sign of the cross over her.

"Thank you, thank you," he said. "You know I've lost my eyes and can see nothing.… I can dimly see the window and the fire, but people and things I cannot see at all. Yes, I'm going blind, and Fyodor has fallen ill, and without the master's eye things are in a bad way now. If there is any irregularity there's no one to look into it; and folks soon get spoiled. And why is it Fyodor has fallen ill? Did he catch cold? Here I have never ailed in my life and never taken medicine. I never saw anything of doctors."

And, as he always did, the old man began boasting. Meanwhile the servants hurriedly laid the table and brought in lunch and bottles of wine.

Ten bottles were put on the table; one of them was in the shape of the Eiffel Tower. There was a whole dish of hot pies smelling of jam, rice, and fish.

"I beg my dear guest to have lunch," said the old man.

She took him by the arm, led him to the table, and poured him out a glass of vodka.

"I will come to you again tomorrow," she said, "and I'll bring your grandchildren, Sasha and Lida. They will be sorry for you, and fondle you."

"There's no need. Don't bring them. They are illegitimate."

"Why are they illegitimate? Why, their father and mother were married."

"Without my permission. I do not bless them, and I don't want to know them. Let them be."

"You speak strangely, Fyodor Stepanovitch," said Yulia, with a sigh.

"It is written in the Gospel: children must fear and honour their parents."

"Nothing of the sort. The Gospel tells us that we must forgive even our enemies."

"One can't forgive in our business. If you were to forgive everyone, you would come to ruin in three years."

"But to forgive, to say a kind, friendly word to anyone, even a sinner, is something far above business, far above wealth."

Yulia longed to soften the old man, to awaken a feeling of compassion in him, to move him to repentance; but he only listened condescendingly to all she said, as a grown-up person listens to a child.

"Fyodor Stepanovitch," said Yulia resolutely, "you are an old man, and God soon will call you to Himself. He won't ask you how you managed your business, and whether you were successful in it, but whether you were gracious to people; or whether you were harsh to those who were weaker than you, such as your servants, your clerks."

"I was always the benefactor of those that served me; they ought to remember me in their prayers forever," said the old man, with conviction, but touched by Yulia's tone of sincerity, and anxious to give her pleasure, he said: "Very well; bring my grandchildren tomorrow. I will tell them to buy me some little presents for them."

The old man was slovenly in his dress, and there was cigar ash on his breast and on his knees; apparently no one cleaned his boots, or brushed his clothes. The rice in the pies was half cooked, the tablecloth smelt of soap, the servants tramped noisily about the room. And the old man and the whole house had a neglected look, and Yulia, who felt this, was ashamed of herself and of her husband.

"I will be sure to come and see you tomorrow," she said.

She walked through the rooms, and gave orders for the old man's bedroom to be set to rights, and the lamp to be lighted under the icons in it. Fyodor, sitting in his own room, was looking at an open book without reading it. Yulia talked to him and told the servants to tidy his room, too; then she went downstairs to the clerks. In the middle of the room where the clerks used to dine, there was an unpainted wooden post to support the ceiling and to prevent its coming down. The ceilings in the basement were low, the walls covered with cheap paper, and there was a smell of charcoal fumes and cooking. As it was a holiday, all the clerks were at home, sitting on their bedsteads waiting for dinner. When Yulia went in they jumped up, and answered her questions timidly, looking up at her from under their brows like convicts.

"Good heavens! What a horrid room you have!" she said, throwing up her hands. "Aren't you crowded here?"

"Crowded, but not aggrieved," said Makeitchev. "We are greatly indebted to you, and will offer up our prayers for you to our Heavenly Father."

"The congruity of life with the conceit of the personality," said Potchatkin.

And noticing that Yulia did not understand Potchatkin, Makeitchev hastened to explain:

"We are humble people and must live according to our position."

She inspected the boys' quarters, and then the kitchen, made acquaintance with the housekeeper, and was thoroughly dissatisfied.

When she got home she said to her husband:

"We ought to move into your father's house and settle there for good as soon as possible. And you will go every day to the warehouse."

Then they both sat side by side in the study without speaking. His heart was heavy, and he did not want to move into Pyatnitsky Street or to go into the warehouse; but he guessed what his wife was thinking, and could not oppose her. He stroked her cheek and said:

"I feel as though our life is already over, and that a grey half-life is beginning for us. When I knew that my brother Fyodor was hopelessly ill, I shed tears; we spent our childhood and youth together, when I loved him with my whole soul. And now this catastrophe has come, and it seems, too, as though, losing him, I am finally cut away from my past. And when you said just now that we must move into the house in Pyatnitsky Street, to that prison, it began to seem to me that there was no future for me either."

He got up and walked to the window.

“However that may be, one has to give up all thoughts of happiness,” he said, looking out into the street. “There is none. I never have had any, and I suppose it doesn’t exist at all. I was happy once in my life, though, when I sat at night under your parasol. Do you remember how you left your parasol at Nina’s?” he asked, turning to his wife. “I was in love with you then, and I remember I spent all night sitting under your parasol, and was perfectly blissful.”

Near the bookcase in the study stood a mahogany chest with bronze fittings where Laptev kept various useless things, including the parasol. He took it out and handed it to his wife.

“Here it is.”

Yulia looked for a minute at the parasol, recognised it, and smiled mournfully.

“I remember,” she said. “When you proposed to me you held it in your hand.” And seeing that he was preparing to go out, she said: “Please come back early if you can. I am dull without you.”

And then she went into her own room, and gazed for a long time at the parasol.

XVII

In spite of the complexity of the business and the immense turnover, there were no bookkeepers in the warehouse, and it was impossible to make anything out of the books kept by the cashier in the office. Every day the warehouse was visited by agents, German and English, with whom the clerks talked politics and religion. A man of noble birth, ruined by drink, an ailing, pitiable creature, used to come to translate the foreign correspondence in the office; the clerks used to call him a midge, and put salt in his tea. And altogether the whole concern struck Laptev as a very queer business.

He went to the warehouse every day and tried to establish a new order of things; he forbade them to thrash the boys and to jeer at the buyers, and was violently angry when the clerks gleefully despatched to the provinces worthless shop-soiled goods as though they were new and fashionable. Now he was the chief person in the warehouse, but still, as before, he did not know how large his fortune was, whether his business was doing well, how much the senior clerks were paid, and so on. Potchatkin and Makeitchev looked upon him as young and inexperienced, concealed a great deal from him, and whispered mysteriously every evening with his blind old father.

It somehow happened at the beginning of June that Laptev went into the Bubnovsky restaurant with Potchatkin to talk business with him over lunch. Potchatkin had been with the Laptevs a long while, and had entered their service at eight years old. He seemed to belong to them—they trusted him fully; and when on leaving the warehouse he gathered up all the takings from the till and thrust them into his pocket, it never aroused the slightest suspicion. He was the head man in the business and in the house, and also in the church, where he performed the duties of churchwarden in place of his old master. He was nicknamed “Malyuta Skuratov” on account of his cruel treatment of the boys and clerks under him.

When they went into the restaurant he nodded to a waiter and said:

“Bring us, my lad, half a bodkin and twenty-four unsavouries.”

After a brief pause the waiter brought on a tray half a bottle of vodka and some plates of various kinds of savouries.

"Look here, my good fellow," said Potchatkin. "Give us a plateful of the source of all slander and evil-speaking, with mashed potatoes."

The waiter did not understand; he was puzzled, and would have said something, but Potchatkin looked at him sternly and said:

"Except."

The waiter thought intently, then went to consult with his colleagues, and in the end guessing what was meant, brought a plateful of tongue. When they had drunk a couple of glasses and had had lunch, Laptev asked:

"Tell me, Ivan Vassilitch, is it true that our business has been dropping off for the last year?"

"Not a bit of it."

"Tell me frankly and honestly what income we have been making and are making, and what our profits are. We can't go on in the dark. We had a balancing of the accounts at the warehouse lately, but, excuse me, I don't believe in it; you think fit to conceal something from me and only tell the truth to my father. You have been used to being diplomatic from your childhood, and now you can't get on without it. And what's the use of it? So I beg you to be open. What is our position?"

"It all depends upon the fluctuation of credit," Potchatkin answered after a moment's pause.

"What do you understand by the fluctuation of credit?"

Potchatkin began explaining, but Laptev could make nothing of it, and sent for Makeitchev. The latter promptly made his appearance, had some lunch after saying grace, and in his sedate, mellow baritone began saying first of all that the clerks were in duty bound to pray night and day for their benefactors.

"By all means, only allow me not to consider myself your benefactor," said Laptev.

"Every man ought to remember what he is, and to be conscious of his station. By the grace of God you are a father and benefactor to us, and we are your slaves."

"I am sick of all that!" said Laptev, getting angry. "Please be a benefactor to me now. Please explain the position of our business. Give up looking upon me as a boy, or tomorrow I shall close the business. My father is blind, my brother is in the asylum, my nieces are only children. I hate the business; I should be glad to go away, but there's no one to take my place, as you know. For goodness' sake, drop your diplomacy!"

They went to the warehouse to go into the accounts; then they went on with them at home in the evening, the old father himself assisting. Initiating his son into his commercial secrets, the old man spoke as though he were engaged, not in trade, but in sorcery. It appeared that the profits of the business were increasing approximately ten percent per annum, and that the Laptevs' fortune, reckoning only money and paper securities, amounted to six million roubles.

When at one o'clock at night, after balancing the accounts, Laptev went out into the open air, he was still under the spell of those figures. It was a still, sultry, moonlight night. The white walls of the houses beyond the river, the heavy barred gates, the stillness and the black shadows, combined to give the impression of a fortress, and nothing was wanting to complete the picture but a sentinel with a gun. Laptev went into the garden and sat down on a seat near the fence, which divided them from the neighbour's yard, where there was a garden, too. The bird-cherry was in bloom. Laptev remembered that the tree had been just as gnarled and just as big when he was a child, and had not changed at all since then. Every corner of the garden and of the yard recalled the faraway past. And in his childhood, too, just as now, the whole yard bathed in moonlight could be seen through the sparse trees, the shadows had been mysterious and forbidding, a black dog had lain in the middle of the yard, and the clerks' windows had stood wide open. And all these were cheerless memories.

The other side of the fence, in the neighbour's yard, there was a sound of light steps.

"My sweet, my precious…" said a man's voice so near the fence that Laptev could hear the man's breathing.

Now they were kissing. Laptev was convinced that the millions and the business which was so distasteful to him were ruining his life, and would make him a complete slave. He imagined how, little by little, he would grow accustomed to his position; would, little by little, enter into the part of the head of a great firm; would begin to grow dull and old, die in the end, as the average man usually does die, in a decrepit, soured old age, making everyone about him miserable and depressed. But what hindered him from giving up those millions and that business, and leaving that yard and garden which had been hateful to him from his childhood?

The whispering and kisses the other side of the fence disturbed him. He moved into the middle of the yard, and, unbuttoning his shirt over his chest, looked at the moon, and it seemed to him that he would order the

gate to be unlocked, and would go out and never come back again. His heart ached sweetly with the foretaste of freedom; he laughed joyously, and pictured how exquisite, poetical, and even holy, life might be.…

But he still stood and did not go away, and kept asking himself: “What keeps me here?” And he felt angry with himself and with the black dog, which still lay stretched on the stone yard, instead of running off to the open country, to the woods, where it would have been free and happy. It was clear that that dog and he were prevented from leaving the yard by the same thing; the habit of bondage, of servitude.…

At midday next morning he went to see his wife, and that he might not be dull, asked Yartsev to go with him. Yulia Sergeyevna was staying in a summer villa at Butovo, and he had not been to see her for five days. When they reached the station the friends got into a carriage, and all the way there Yartsev was singing and in raptures over the exquisite weather. The villa was in a great park not far from the station. At the beginning of an avenue, about twenty paces from the gates, Yulia Sergeyevna was sitting under a broad, spreading poplar, waiting for her guests. She had on a light, elegant dress of a pale cream colour trimmed with lace, and in her hand she had the old familiar parasol. Yartsev greeted her and went on to the villa from which came the sound of Sasha’s and Lida’s voices, while Laptev sat down beside her to talk of business matters.

“Why is it you haven’t been for so long?” she said, keeping his hand in hers. “I have been sitting here for days watching for you to come. I miss you so when you are away!”

She stood up and passed her hand over his hair, and scanned his face, his shoulders, his hat, with interest.

“You know I love you,” she said, and flushed crimson. “You are precious to me. Here you’ve come. I see you, and I’m so happy I can’t tell you. Well, let us talk. Tell me something.”

She had told him she loved him, and he could only feel as though he had been married to her for ten years, and that he was hungry for his lunch. She had put her arm round his neck, tickling his cheek with the silk of her dress; he cautiously removed her hand, stood up, and without uttering a single word, walked to the villa. The little girls ran to meet him.

“How they have grown!” he thought. “And what changes in these three years.… But one may have to live another thirteen years, another thirty years.… What is there in store for us in the future? If we live, we shall see.”

He embraced Sasha and Lida, who hung upon his neck, and said:

“Grandpapa sends his love.… Uncle Fyodor is dying. Uncle Kostya has sent a letter from America and sends you his love in it. He’s bored at the exhibition and will soon be back. And Uncle Alyosha is hungry.”

Then he sat on the verandah and saw his wife walking slowly along the avenue towards the house. She was deep in thought; there was a mournful, charming expression in her face, and her eyes were bright with tears. She was not now the slender, fragile, pale-faced girl she used to be; she was a mature, beautiful, vigorous woman. And Laptev saw the enthusiasm with which Yartsev looked at her when he met her, and the way her new, lovely expression was reflected in his face, which looked mournful and ecstatic too. One would have thought that he was seeing her for the first time in his life. And while they were at lunch on the verandah, Yartsev smiled with a sort of joyous shyness, and kept gazing at Yulia and at her beautiful neck. Laptev could not help watching them while he thought that he had perhaps another thirteen, another thirty years of life before him.… And what would he have to live through in that time? What is in store for us in the future?

And he thought:

“Let us live, and we shall see.”

An Artist's Story

I

It was six or seven years ago when I was living in one of the districts of the province of T——, on the estate of a young landowner called Byelokurov, who used to get up very early, wear a peasant tunic, drink beer in the evenings, and continually complain to me that he never met with sympathy from anyone. He lived in the lodge in the garden, and I in the old seigniorial house, in a big room with columns, where there was no furniture except a wide sofa on which I used to sleep, and a table on which I used to lay out patience. There was always, even in still weather, a droning noise in the old Amos stoves, and in thunderstorms the whole house shook and seemed to be cracking into pieces; and it was rather terrifying, especially at night, when all the ten big windows were suddenly lit up by lightning.

Condemned by destiny to perpetual idleness, I did absolutely nothing. For hours together I gazed out of window at the sky, at the birds, at the avenue, read everything that was brought me by post, slept. Sometimes I went out of the house and wandered about till late in the evening.

One day as I was returning home, I accidentally strayed into a place I did not know. The sun was already sinking, and the shades of evening lay across the flowering rye. Two rows of old, closely planted, very tall fir trees stood like two dense walls forming a picturesque, gloomy avenue. I easily climbed over the fence and walked along the avenue, slipping over the fir-needles which lay two inches deep on the ground. It was still and dark, and only here and there on the high treetops the vivid golden light quivered and made rainbows in the spiders' webs. There was a strong, almost stifling smell of resin. Then I turned into a long avenue of limes. Here, too, all was desolation and age; last year's leaves rusted mournfully under my feet and in the twilight shadows lurked

between the trees. From the old orchard on the right came the faint, reluctant note of the golden oriole, who must have been old too. But at last the limes ended. I walked by an old white house of two storeys with a terrace, and there suddenly opened before me a view of a courtyard, a large pond with a bathing-house, a group of green willows, and a village on the further bank, with a high, narrow belfry on which there glittered a cross reflecting the setting sun.

For a moment it breathed upon me the fascination of something near and very familiar, as though I had seen that landscape at some time in my childhood.

At the white stone gates which led from the yard to the fields, old-fashioned solid gates with lions on them, were standing two girls. One of them, the elder, a slim, pale, very handsome girl with a perfect haystack of chestnut hair and a little obstinate mouth, had a severe expression and scarcely took notice of me, while the other, who was still very young, not more than seventeen or eighteen, and was also slim and pale, with a large mouth and large eyes, looked at me with astonishment as I passed by, said something in English, and was overcome with embarrassment. And it seemed to me that these two charming faces, too, had long been familiar to me. And I returned home feeling as though I had had a delightful dream.

One morning soon afterwards, as Byelokurov and I were walking near the house, a carriage drove unexpectedly into the yard, rustling over the grass, and in it was sitting one of those girls. It was the elder one. She had come to ask for subscriptions for some villagers whose cottages had been burnt down. Speaking with great earnestness and precision, and not looking at us, she told us how many houses in the village of Siyanovo had been burnt, how many men, women, and children were left homeless, and what steps were proposed, to begin with, by the Relief Committee, of which she was now a member. After handing us the subscription list for our signatures, she put it away and immediately began to take leave of us.

“You have quite forgotten us, Pyotr Petrovitch,” she said to Byelokurov as she shook hands with him. “Do come, and if Monsieur N—— (she mentioned my name) cares to make the acquaintance of admirers of his work, and will come and see us, mother and I will be delighted.”

I bowed.

When she had gone Pyotr Petrovitch began to tell me about her. The girl was, he said, of good family, and her name was Lidia Voltchaninov,

and the estate on which she lived with her mother and sister, like the village on the other side of the pond, was called Shelkovka. Her father had once held an important position in Moscow, and had died with the rank of privy councillor. Although they had ample means, the Voltchaninovs lived on their estate summer and winter without going away. Lidia was a teacher in the Zemstvo school in her own village, and received a salary of twenty-five roubles a month. She spent nothing on herself but her salary, and was proud of earning her own living.

"An interesting family," said Byelokurov. "Let us go over one day. They will be delighted to see you."

One afternoon on a holiday we thought of the Voltchaninovs, and went to Shelkovka to see them. They—the mother and two daughters—were at home. The mother, Ekaterina Pavlovna, who at one time had been handsome, but now, asthmatic, depressed, vague, and over-feeble for her years, tried to entertain me with conversation about painting. Having heard from her daughter that I might come to Shelkovka, she had hurriedly recalled two or three of my landscapes which she had seen in exhibitions in Moscow, and now asked what I meant to express by them. Lidia, or as they called her Lida, talked more to Byelokurov than to me. Earnest and unsmiling, she asked him why he was not on the Zemstvo, and why he had not attended any of its meetings.

"It's not right, Pyotr Petrovitch," she said reproachfully. "It's not right. It's too bad."

"That's true, Lida—that's true," the mother assented. "It isn't right."

"Our whole district is in the hands of Balagin," Lida went on, addressing me. "He is the chairman of the Zemstvo Board, and he has distributed all the posts in the district among his nephews and sons-in-law; and he does as he likes. He ought to be opposed. The young men ought to make a strong party, but you see what the young men among us are like. It's a shame, Pyotr Petrovitch!"

The younger sister, Genya, was silent while they were talking of the Zemstvo. She took no part in serious conversation. She was not looked upon as quite grown up by her family, and, like a child, was always called by the nickname of "Misuce," because that was what she had called her English governess when she was a child. She was all the time looking at me with curiosity, and when I glanced at the photographs in the album, she explained to me: "That's uncle… that's godfather," moving her finger across the photograph. As she did so she touched me with her shoulder like a child, and I had a close view of her delicate,

undeveloped chest, her slender shoulders, her plait, and her thin little body tightly drawn in by her sash.

We played croquet and lawn tennis, we walked about the garden, drank tea, and then sat a long time over supper. After the huge empty room with columns, I felt, as it were, at home in this small snug house where there were no oleographs on the walls and where the servants were spoken to with civility. And everything seemed to me young and pure, thanks to the presence of Lida and Misuce, and there was an atmosphere of refinement over everything. At supper Lida talked to Byelokurov again of the Zemstvo, of Balagin, and of school libraries. She was an energetic, genuine girl, with convictions, and it was interesting to listen to her, though she talked a great deal and in a loud voice—perhaps because she was accustomed to talking at school. On the other hand, Pyotr Petrovitch, who had retained from his student days the habit of turning every conversation into an argument, was tedious, flat, long-winded, and unmistakably anxious to appear clever and advanced. Gesticulating, he upset a sauceboat with his sleeve, making a huge pool on the tablecloth, but no one except me appeared to notice it.

It was dark and still as we went home.

“Good breeding is shown, not by not upsetting the sauce, but by not noticing it when somebody else does,” said Byelokurov, with a sigh. “Yes, a splendid, intellectual family! I’ve dropped out of all decent society; it’s dreadful how I’ve dropped out of it! It’s all through work, work, work!”

He talked of how hard one had to work if one wanted to be a model farmer. And I thought what a heavy, sluggish fellow he was! Whenever he talked of anything serious he articulated “Er-er” with intense effort, and worked just as he talked—slowly, always late and behindhand. I had little faith in his business capacity if only from the fact that when I gave him letters to post he carried them about in his pocket for weeks together.

“The hardest thing of all,” he muttered as he walked beside me—“the hardest thing of all is that, work as one may, one meets with no sympathy from anyone. No sympathy!”

II

I took to going to see the Voltchaninovs. As a rule I sat on the lower step of the terrace; I was fretted by dissatisfaction with myself; I was sorry at the thought of my life passing so rapidly and uninterestingly, and felt as though I would like to tear out of my breast the heart which had grown so heavy. And meanwhile I heard talk on the terrace, the rustling of dresses, the pages of a book being turned. I soon grew accustomed to the idea that during the day Lida received patients, gave out books, and often went into the village with a parasol and no hat, and in the evening talked aloud of the Zemstvo and schools. This slim, handsome, invariably austere girl, with her small well-cut mouth, always said dryly when the conversation turned on serious subjects:

"That's of no interest to you."

She did not like me. She disliked me because I was a landscape painter and did not in my pictures portray the privations of the peasants, and that, as she fancied, I was indifferent to what she put such faith in. I remember when I was travelling on the banks of Lake Baikal, I met a Buriat girl on horseback, wearing a shirt and trousers of blue Chinese canvas; I asked her if she would sell me her pipe. While we talked she looked contemptuously at my European face and hat, and in a moment she was bored with talking to me; she shouted to her horse and galloped on. And in just the same way Lida despised me as an alien. She never outwardly expressed her dislike for me, but I felt it, and sitting on the lower step of the terrace, I felt irritated, and said that doctoring peasants when one was not a doctor was deceiving them, and that it was easy to be benevolent when one had six thousand acres.

Meanwhile her sister Misuce had no cares, and spent her life in complete idleness just as I did. When she got up in the morning she immediately took up a book and sat down to read on the terrace in a deep armchair, with her feet hardly touching the ground, or hid herself with her book in the lime avenue, or walked out into the fields. She spent the whole day reading, poring greedily over her book, and only from the tired, dazed look in her eyes and the extreme paleness of her face one could divine how this continual reading exhausted her brain. When I

arrived she would flush a little, leave her book, and looking into my face with her big eyes, would tell me eagerly of anything that had happened—for instance, that the chimney had been on fire in the servants' hall, or that one of the men had caught a huge fish in the pond. On ordinary days she usually went about in a light blouse and a dark blue skirt. We went for walks together, picked cherries for making jam, went out in the boat. When she jumped up to reach a cherry or sculled in the boat, her thin, weak arms showed through her transparent sleeves. Or I painted a sketch, and she stood beside me watching rapturously.

One Sunday at the end of July I came to the Voltchaninovs about nine o'clock in the morning. I walked about the park, keeping a good distance from the house, looking for white mushrooms, of which there was a great number that summer, and noting their position so as to come and pick them afterwards with Genya. There was a warm breeze. I saw Genya and her mother both in light holiday dresses coming home from church, Genya holding her hat in the wind. Afterwards I heard them having tea on the terrace.

For a careless person like me, trying to find justification for my perpetual idleness, these holiday mornings in our country-houses in the summer have always had a particular charm. When the green garden, still wet with dew, is all sparkling in the sun and looks radiant with happiness, when there is a scent of mignonette and oleander near the house, when the young people have just come back from church and are having breakfast in the garden, all so charmingly dressed and gay, and one knows that all these healthy, well-fed, handsome people are going to do nothing the whole long day, one wishes that all life were like that. Now, too, I had the same thought, and walked about the garden prepared to walk about like that, aimless and unoccupied, the whole day, the whole summer.

Genya came out with a basket; she had a look in her face as though she knew she would find me in the garden, or had a presentiment of it. We gathered mushrooms and talked, and when she asked a question she walked a little ahead so as to see my face.

"A miracle happened in the village yesterday," she said. "The lame woman Pelagea has been ill the whole year. No doctors or medicines did her any good; but yesterday an old woman came and whispered something over her, and her illness passed away."

"That's nothing much," I said. "You mustn't look for miracles only among sick people and old women. Isn't health a miracle? And life itself? Whatever is beyond understanding is a miracle."

“And aren’t you afraid of what is beyond understanding?”

“No. Phenomena I don’t understand I face boldly, and am not overwhelmed by them. I am above them. Man ought to recognise himself as superior to lions, tigers, stars, superior to everything in nature, even what seems miraculous and is beyond his understanding, or else he is not a man, but a mouse afraid of everything.”

Genya believed that as an artist I knew a very great deal, and could guess correctly what I did not know. She longed for me to initiate her into the domain of the Eternal and the Beautiful—into that higher world in which, as she imagined, I was quite at home. And she talked to me of God, of the eternal life, of the miraculous. And I, who could never admit that my self and my imagination would be lost forever after death, answered: “Yes, men are immortal”; “Yes, there is eternal life in store for us.” And she listened, believed, and did not ask for proofs.

As we were going home she stopped suddenly and said:

“Our Lida is a remarkable person—isn’t she? I love her very dearly, and would be ready to give my life for her any minute. But tell me”—Genya touched my sleeve with her finger—“tell me, why do you always argue with her? Why are you irritated?”

“Because she is wrong.”

Genya shook her head and tears came into her eyes.

“How incomprehensible that is!” she said. At that minute Lida had just returned from somewhere, and standing with a whip in her hand, a slim, beautiful figure in the sunlight, at the steps, she was giving some orders to one of the men. Talking loudly, she hurriedly received two or three sick villagers; then with a busy and anxious face she walked about the rooms, opening one cupboard after another, and went upstairs. It was a long time before they could find her and call her to dinner, and she came in when we had finished our soup. All these tiny details I remember with tenderness, and that whole day I remember vividly, though nothing special happened. After dinner Genya lay in a long armchair reading, while I sat upon the bottom step of the terrace. We were silent. The whole sky was overcast with clouds, and it began to spot with fine rain. It was hot; the wind had dropped, and it seemed as though the day would never end. Ekaterina Pavlovna came out on the terrace, looking drowsy and carrying a fan.

“Oh, mother,” said Genya, kissing her hand, “it’s not good for you to sleep in the day.”

They adored each other. When one went into the garden, the other would stand on the terrace, and, looking towards the trees, call “Aa—oo,

Genya!” or “Mother, where are you?” They always said their prayers together, and had the same faith; and they understood each other perfectly even when they did not speak. And their attitude to people was the same. Ekaterina Pavlovna, too, grew quickly used to me and fond of me, and when I did not come for two or three days, sent to ask if I were well. She, too, gazed at my sketches with enthusiasm, and with the same openness and readiness to chatter as Misuce, she told me what had happened, and confided to me her domestic secrets.

She had a perfect reverence for her elder daughter. Lida did not care for endearments, she talked only of serious matters; she lived her life apart, and to her mother and sister was as sacred and enigmatic a person as the admiral, always sitting in his cabin, is to the sailors.

“Our Lida is a remarkable person,” the mother would often say. “Isn’t she?”

Now, too, while it was drizzling with rain, we talked of Lida.

“She is a remarkable girl,” said her mother, and added in an undertone, like a conspirator, looking about her timidly: “You wouldn’t easily find another like her; only, do you know, I am beginning to be a little uneasy. The school, the dispensary, books—all that’s very good, but why go to extremes? She is three-and-twenty, you know; it’s time for her to think seriously of herself. With her books and her dispensary she will find life has slipped by without having noticed it.… She must be married.”

Genya, pale from reading, with her hair disarranged, raised her head and said as it were to herself, looking at her mother:

“Mother, everything is in God’s hands.”

And again she buried herself in her book.

Byelokurov came in his tunic and embroidered shirt. We played croquet and tennis, then when it got dark, sat a long time over supper and talked again about schools, and about Balagin, who had the whole district under his thumb. As I went away from the Voltchaninovs that evening, I carried away the impression of a long, long idle day, with a melancholy consciousness that everything ends in this world, however long it may be.

Genya saw us out to the gate, and perhaps because she had been with me all day, from morning till night, I felt dull without her, and that all that charming family were near and dear to me, and for the first time that summer I had a yearning to paint.

“Tell me, why do you lead such a dreary, colourless life?” I asked Byelokurov as I went home. “My life is dreary, difficult, and monotonous because I am an artist, a strange person. From my earliest

days I've been wrung by envy, self-dissatisfaction, distrust in my work. I'm always poor, I'm a wanderer, but you—you're a healthy, normal man, a landowner, and a gentleman. Why do you live in such an uninteresting way? Why do you get so little out of life? Why haven't you, for instance, fallen in love with Lida or Genya?"

"You forget that I love another woman," answered Byelokurov.

He was referring to Liubov Ivanovna, the lady who shared the lodge with him. Every day I saw this lady, very plump, rotund, and dignified, not unlike a fat goose, walking about the garden, in the Russian national dress and beads, always carrying a parasol; and the servant was continually calling her in to dinner or to tea. Three years before she had taken one of the lodges for a summer holiday, and had settled down at Byelokurov's apparently forever. She was ten years older than he was, and kept a sharp hand over him, so much so that he had to ask her permission when he went out of the house. She often sobbed in a deep masculine note, and then I used to send word to her that if she did not leave off, I should give up my rooms there; and she left off.

When we got home Byelokurov sat down on the sofa and frowned thoughtfully, and I began walking up and down the room, conscious of a soft emotion as though I were in love. I wanted to talk about the Voltchaninovs.

"Lida could only fall in love with a member of the Zemstvo, as devoted to schools and hospitals as she is," I said. "Oh, for the sake of a girl like that one might not only go into the Zemstvo, but even wear out iron shoes, like the girl in the fairy tale. And Misuce? What a sweet creature she is, that Misuce!"

Byelokurov, drawling out "Er—er," began a long-winded disquisition on the malady of the age—pessimism. He talked confidently, in a tone that suggested that I was opposing him. Hundreds of miles of desolate, monotonous, burnt-up steppe cannot induce such deep depression as one man when he sits and talks, and one does not know when he will go.

"It's not a question of pessimism or optimism," I said irritably; "its simply that ninety-nine people out of a hundred have no sense."

Byelokurov took this as aimed at himself, was offended, and went away.

III

“The prince is staying at Malozyomovo, and he asks to be remembered to you,” said Lida to her mother. She had just come in, and was taking off her gloves. “He gave me a great deal of interesting news.… He promised to raise the question of a medical relief centre at Malozyomovo again at the provincial assembly, but he says there is very little hope of it.” And turning to me, she said: “Excuse me, I always forget that this cannot be interesting to you.”

I felt irritated.

“Why not interesting to me?” I said, shrugging my shoulders. “You do not care to know my opinion, but I assure you the question has great interest for me.”

“Yes?”

“Yes. In my opinion a medical relief centre at Malozyomovo is quite unnecessary.”

My irritation infected her; she looked at me, screwing up her eyes, and asked:

“What is necessary? Landscapes?”

“Landscapes are not, either. Nothing is.”

She finished taking off her gloves, and opened the newspaper, which had just been brought from the post. A minute later she said quietly, evidently restraining herself:

“Last week Anna died in childbirth, and if there had been a medical relief centre near, she would have lived. And I think even landscape-painters ought to have some opinions on the subject.”

“I have a very definite opinion on that subject, I assure you,” I answered; and she screened herself with the newspaper, as though unwilling to listen to me. “To my mind, all these schools, dispensaries, libraries, medical relief centres, under present conditions, only serve to aggravate the bondage of the people. The peasants are fettered by a great chain, and you do not break the chain, but only add fresh links to it—that’s my view of it.”

She raised her eyes to me and smiled ironically, and I went on trying to formulate my leading idea.

“What matters is not that Anna died in childbirth, but that all these Annas, Mavras, Pelageas, toil from early morning till dark, fall ill from working beyond their strength, all their lives tremble for their sick and hungry children, all their lives are being doctored, and in dread of death and disease, fade and grow old early, and die in filth and stench. Their children begin the same story over again as soon as they grow up, and so it goes on for hundreds of years and milliards of men live worse than beasts—in continual terror, for a mere crust of bread. The whole horror of their position lies in their never having time to think of their souls, of their image and semblance. Cold, hunger, animal terror, a burden of toil, like avalanches of snow, block for them every way to spiritual activity—that is, to what distinguishes man from the brutes and what is the only thing which makes life worth living. You go to their help with hospitals and schools, but you don’t free them from their fetters by that; on the contrary, you bind them in closer bonds, as, by introducing new prejudices, you increase the number of their wants, to say nothing of the fact that they’ve got to pay the Zemstvo for drugs and books, and so toil harder than ever.”

“I am not going to argue with you,” said Lida, putting down the paper. “I’ve heard all that before. I will only say one thing: one cannot sit with one’s hands in one’s lap. It’s true that we are not saving humanity, and perhaps we make a great many mistakes; but we do what we can, and we are right. The highest and holiest task for a civilised being is to serve his neighbours, and we try to serve them as best we can. You don’t like it, but one can’t please everyone.”

“That’s true, Lida,” said her mother—“that’s true.”

In Lida’s presence she was always a little timid, and looked at her nervously as she talked, afraid of saying something superfluous or inopportune. And she never contradicted her, but always assented: “That’s true, Lida—that’s true.”

“Teaching the peasants to read and write, books of wretched precepts and rhymes, and medical relief centres, cannot diminish either ignorance or the death-rate, just as the light from your windows cannot light up this huge garden,” said I. “You give nothing. By meddling in these people’s lives you only create new wants in them, and new demands on their labour.”

“Ach! Good heavens! But one must do something!” said Lida with vexation, and from her tone one could see that she thought my arguments worthless and despised them.

“The people must be freed from hard physical labour,” said I. “We must lighten their yoke, let them have time to breathe, that they may not spend all their lives at the stove, at the washtub, and in the fields, but may also have time to think of their souls, of God—may have time to develop their spiritual capacities. The highest vocation of man is spiritual activity—the perpetual search for truth and the meaning of life. Make coarse animal labour unnecessary for them, let them feel themselves free, and then you will see what a mockery these dispensaries and books are. Once a man recognises his true vocation, he can only be satisfied by religion, science, and art, and not by these trifles.”

“Free them from labour?” laughed Lida. “But is that possible?”

“Yes. Take upon yourself a share of their labour. If all of us, townspeople and country people, all without exception, would agree to divide between us the labour which mankind spends on the satisfaction of their physical needs, each of us would perhaps need to work only for two or three hours a day. Imagine that we all, rich and poor, work only for three hours a day, and the rest of our time is free. Imagine further that in order to depend even less upon our bodies and to labour less, we invent machines to replace our work, we try to cut down our needs to the minimum. We would harden ourselves and our children that they should not be afraid of hunger and cold, and that we shouldn’t be continually trembling for their health like Anna, Mavra, and Pelagea. Imagine that we don’t doctor ourselves, don’t keep dispensaries, tobacco factories, distilleries—what a lot of free time would be left us after all! All of us together would devote our leisure to science and art. Just as the peasants sometimes work, the whole community together mending the roads, so all of us, as a community, would search for truth and the meaning of life, and I am convinced that the truth would be discovered very quickly; man would escape from this continual, agonising, oppressive dread of death, and even from death itself.”

“You contradict yourself, though,” said Lida. “You talk about science, and are yourself opposed to elementary education.”

“Elementary education when a man has nothing to read but the signs on public houses and sometimes books which he cannot understand—such education has existed among us since the times of Rurik; Gogol’s Petrushka has been reading for ever so long, yet as the village was in the days of Rurik so it has remained. What is needed is not elementary education, but freedom for a wide development of spiritual capacities. What are wanted are not schools, but universities.”

“You are opposed to medicine, too.”

“Yes. It would be necessary only for the study of diseases as natural phenomena, and not for the cure of them. If one must cure, it should not be diseases, but the causes of them. Remove the principal cause—physical labour, and then there will be no disease. I don’t believe in a science that cures disease,” I went on excitedly. “When science and art are real, they aim not at temporary private ends, but at eternal and universal—they seek for truth and the meaning of life, they seek for God, for the soul, and when they are tied down to the needs and evils of the day, to dispensaries and libraries, they only complicate and hamper life. We have plenty of doctors, chemists, lawyers, plenty of people can read and write, but we are quite without biologists, mathematicians, philosophers, poets. The whole of our intelligence, the whole of our spiritual energy, is spent on satisfying temporary, passing needs. Scientific men, writers, artists, are hard at work; thanks to them, the conveniences of life are multiplied from day to day. Our physical demands increase, yet truth is still a long way off, and man still remains the most rapacious and dirty animal; everything is tending to the degeneration of the majority of mankind, and the loss forever of all fitness for life. In such conditions an artist’s work has no meaning, and the more talented he is, the stranger and the more unintelligible is his position, as when one looks into it, it is evident that he is working for the amusement of a rapacious and unclean animal, and is supporting the existing order. And I don’t care to work and I won’t work.… Nothing is any use; let the earth sink to perdition!”

“Misuce, go out of the room!” said Lida to her sister, apparently thinking my words pernicious to the young girl.

Genya looked mournfully at her mother and sister, and went out of the room.

“These are the charming things people say when they want to justify their indifference,” said Lida. “It is easier to disapprove of schools and hospitals, than to teach or heal.”

“That’s true, Lida—that’s true,” the mother assented.

“You threaten to give up working,” said Lida. “You evidently set a high value on your work. Let us give up arguing; we shall never agree, since I put the most imperfect dispensary or library of which you have just spoken so contemptuously on a higher level than any landscape.” And turning at once to her mother, she began speaking in quite a different tone: “The prince is very much changed, and much thinner than when he was with us last. He is being sent to Vichy.”

She told her mother about the prince in order to avoid talking to me. Her face glowed, and to hide her feeling she bent low over the table as though she were shortsighted, and made a show of reading the newspaper. My presence was disagreeable to her. I said goodbye and went home.

IV

It was quite still out of doors; the village on the further side of the pond was already asleep; there was not a light to be seen, and only the stars were faintly reflected in the pond. At the gate with the lions on it Genya was standing motionless, waiting to escort me.

“Everyone is asleep in the village,” I said to her, trying to make out her face in the darkness, and I saw her mournful dark eyes fixed upon me. “The publican and the horse-stealers are asleep, while we, well-bred people, argue and irritate each other.”

It was a melancholy August night—melancholy because there was already a feeling of autumn; the moon was rising behind a purple cloud, and it shed a faint light upon the road and on the dark fields of winter corn by the sides. From time to time a star fell. Genya walked beside me along the road, and tried not to look at the sky, that she might not see the falling stars, which for some reason frightened her.

“I believe you are right,” she said, shivering with the damp night air. “If people, all together, could devote themselves to spiritual ends, they would soon know everything.”

“Of course. We are higher beings, and if we were really to recognise the whole force of human genius and lived only for higher ends, we should in the end become like gods. But that will never be—mankind will degenerate till no traces of genius remain.”

When the gates were out of sight, Genya stopped and shook hands with me.

“Good night,” she said, shivering; she had nothing but her blouse over her shoulders and was shrinking with cold. “Come tomorrow.”

I felt wretched at the thought of being left alone, irritated and dissatisfied with myself and other people; and I, too, tried not to look at the falling stars. “Stay another minute,” I said to her, “I entreat you.”

I loved Genya. I must have loved her because she met me when I came and saw me off when I went away; because she looked at me tenderly and enthusiastically. How touchingly beautiful were her pale face, slender neck, slender arms, her weakness, her idleness, her reading. And intelligence? I suspected in her intelligence above the average. I was

fascinated by the breadth of her views, perhaps because they were different from those of the stern, handsome Lida, who disliked me. Genya liked me, because I was an artist. I had conquered her heart by my talent, and had a passionate desire to paint for her sake alone; and I dreamed of her as of my little queen who with me would possess those trees, those fields, the mists, the dawn, the exquisite and beautiful scenery in the midst of which I had felt myself hopelessly solitary and useless.

"Stay another minute," I begged her. "I beseech you."

I took off my overcoat and put it over her chilly shoulders; afraid of looking ugly and absurd in a man's overcoat, she laughed, threw it off, and at that instant I put my arms round her and covered her face, shoulders, and hands with kisses.

"Till tomorrow," she whispered, and softly, as though afraid of breaking upon the silence of the night, she embraced me. "We have no secrets from one another. I must tell my mother and my sister at once.… It's so dreadful! Mother is all right; mother likes you—but Lida!"

She ran to the gates.

"Goodbye!" she called.

And then for two minutes I heard her running. I did not want to go home, and I had nothing to go for. I stood still for a little time hesitating, and made my way slowly back, to look once more at the house in which she lived, the sweet, simple old house, which seemed to be watching me from the windows of its upper storey, and understanding all about it. I walked by the terrace, sat on the seat by the tennis ground, in the dark under the old elm tree, and looked from there at the house. In the windows of the top storey where Misuce slept there appeared a bright light, which changed to a soft green—they had covered the lamp with the shade. Shadows began to move.… I was full of tenderness, peace, and satisfaction with myself—satisfaction at having been able to be carried away by my feelings and having fallen in love, and at the same time I felt uncomfortable at the thought that only a few steps away from me, in one of the rooms of that house there was Lida, who disliked and perhaps hated me. I went on sitting there wondering whether Genya would come out; I listened and fancied I heard voices talking upstairs.

About an hour passed. The green light went out, and the shadows were no longer visible. The moon was standing high above the house, and lighting up the sleeping garden and the paths; the dahlias and the roses in front of the house could be seen distinctly, and looked all the same

colour. It began to grow very cold. I went out of the garden, picked up my coat on the road, and slowly sauntered home.

When next day after dinner I went to the Voltchaninovs, the glass door into the garden was wide open. I sat down on the terrace, expecting Genya every minute, to appear from behind the flowerbeds on the lawn, or from one of the avenues, or that I should hear her voice from the house. Then I walked into the drawing room, the dining room. There was not a soul to be seen. From the dining room I walked along the long corridor to the hall and back. In this corridor there were several doors, and through one of them I heard the voice of Lida:

"'God… sent… a crow,'" she said in a loud, emphatic voice, probably dictating—"'God sent a crow a piece of cheese.… A crow… a piece of cheese.'… Who's there?" she called suddenly, hearing my steps.

"It's I."

"Ah! Excuse me, I cannot come out to you this minute; I'm giving Dasha her lesson."

"Is Ekaterina Pavlovna in the garden?"

"No, she went away with my sister this morning to our aunt in the province of Penza. And in the winter they will probably go abroad," she added after a pause. "'God sent… the crow… a piece… of cheese.'… Have you written it?"

I went into the hall, and stared vacantly at the pond and the village, and the sound reached me of "A piece of cheese.… God sent the crow a piece of cheese."

And I went back by the way I had come here for the first time—first from the yard into the garden past the house, then into the avenue of lime trees.… At this point I was overtaken by a small boy who gave me a note:

"I told my sister everything and she insists on my parting from you," I read. "I could not wound her by disobeying. God will give you happiness. Forgive me. If only you knew how bitterly my mother and I are crying!"

Then there was the dark fir avenue, the broken-down fence.… On the field where then the rye was in flower and the corncrakes were calling, now there were cows and hobbled horses. On the slope there were bright green patches of winter corn. A sober workaday feeling came over me and I felt ashamed of all I had said at the Voltchaninovs', and felt bored with life as I had been before. When I got home, I packed and set off that evening for Petersburg.

I never saw the Voltchaninovs again. Not long ago, on my way to the Crimea, I met Byelokurov in the train. As before, he was wearing a jerkin and an embroidered shirt, and when I asked how he was, he replied that, God be praised, he was well. We began talking. He had sold his old estate and bought another smaller one, in the name of Liubov Ivanovna. He could tell me little about the Voltchaninovs. Lida, he said, was still living in Shelkovka and teaching in the school; she had by degrees succeeded in gathering round her a circle of people sympathetic to her who made a strong party, and at the last election had turned out Balagin, who had till then had the whole district under his thumb. About Genya he only told me that she did not live at home, and that he did not know where she was.

I am beginning to forget the old house, and only sometimes when I am painting or reading I suddenly, apropos of nothing, remember the green light in the window, the sound of my footsteps as I walked home through the fields in the night, with my heart full of love, rubbing my hands in the cold. And still more rarely, at moments when I am sad and depressed by loneliness, I have dim memories, and little by little I begin to feel that she is thinking of me, too—that she is waiting for me, and that we shall meet.…

Misuce, where are you?

My Life

The Story of a Provincial

I

The Superintendent said to me: “I only keep you out of regard for your worthy father; but for that you would have been sent flying long ago.” I replied to him: “You flatter me too much, your Excellency, in assuming that I am capable of flying.” And then I heard him say: “Take that gentleman away; he gets upon my nerves.”

Two days later I was dismissed. And in this way I have, during the years I have been regarded as grown up, lost nine situations, to the great mortification of my father, the architect of our town. I have served in various departments, but all these nine jobs have been as alike as one drop of water is to another: I had to sit, write, listen to rude or stupid observations, and go on doing so till I was dismissed.

When I came in to my father he was sitting buried in a low armchair with his eyes closed. His dry, emaciated face, with a shade of dark blue where it was shaved (he looked like an old Catholic organist), expressed meekness and resignation. Without responding to my greeting or opening his eyes, he said:

“If my dear wife and your mother were living, your life would have been a source of continual distress to her. I see the Divine Providence in her premature death. I beg you, unhappy boy,” he continued, opening his eyes, “tell me: what am I to do with you?”

In the past when I was younger my friends and relations had known what to do with me: some of them used to advise me to volunteer for the army, others to get a job in a pharmacy, and others in the telegraph department; now that I am over twenty-five, that grey hairs are beginning to show on my temples, and that I have been already in the army, and in a pharmacy, and in the telegraph department, it would seem that all earthly possibilities have been exhausted, and people have given up advising me, and merely sigh or shake their heads.

“What do you think about yourself?” my father went on. “By the time they are your age, young men have a secure social position, while look at you: you are a proletarian, a beggar, a burden on your father!”

And as usual he proceeded to declare that the young people of today were on the road to perdition through infidelity, materialism, and self-conceit, and that amateur theatricals ought to be prohibited, because they seduced young people from religion and their duties.

“Tomorrow we shall go together, and you shall apologize to the superintendent, and promise him to work conscientiously,” he said in conclusion. “You ought not to remain one single day with no regular position in society.”

“I beg you to listen to me,” I said sullenly, expecting nothing good from this conversation. “What you call a position in society is the privilege of capital and education. Those who have neither wealth nor education earn their daily bread by manual labour, and I see no grounds for my being an exception.”

“When you begin talking about manual labour it is always stupid and vulgar!” said my father with irritation. “Understand, you dense fellow—understand, you addlepate, that besides coarse physical strength you have the divine spirit, a spark of the holy fire, which distinguishes you in the most striking way from the ass or the reptile, and brings you nearer to the Deity! This fire is the fruit of the efforts of the best of mankind during thousands of years. Your great-grandfather Poloznev, the general, fought at Borodino; your grandfather was a poet, an orator, and a Marshal of Nobility; your uncle is a schoolmaster; and lastly, I, your father, am an architect! All the Poloznevs have guarded the sacred fire for you to put it out!”

“One must be just,” I said. “Millions of people put up with manual labour.”

“And let them put up with it! They don’t know how to do anything else! Anybody, even the most abject fool or criminal, is capable of manual labour; such labour is the distinguishing mark of the slave and the barbarian, while the holy fire is vouchsafed only to a few!”

To continue this conversation was unprofitable. My father worshipped himself, and nothing was convincing to him but what he said himself. Besides, I knew perfectly well that the disdain with which he talked of physical toil was founded not so much on reverence for the sacred fire as on a secret dread that I should become a workman, and should set the whole town talking about me; what was worse, all my contemporaries had long ago taken their degrees and were getting on well, and the son of

the manager of the State Bank was already a collegiate assessor, while I, his only son, was nothing! To continue the conversation was unprofitable and unpleasant, but I still sat on and feebly retorted, hoping that I might at last be understood. The whole question, of course, was clear and simple, and only concerned with the means of my earning my living; but the simplicity of it was not seen, and I was talked to in mawkishly rounded phrases of Borodino, of the sacred fire, of my uncle a forgotten poet, who had once written poor and artificial verses; I was rudely called an addlepate and a dense fellow. And how I longed to be understood! In spite of everything, I loved my father and my sister and it had been my habit from childhood to consult them—a habit so deeply rooted that I doubt whether I could ever have got rid of it; whether I were in the right or the wrong, I was in constant dread of wounding them, constantly afraid that my father's thin neck would turn crimson and that he would have a stroke.

"To sit in a stuffy room," I began, "to copy, to compete with a typewriter, is shameful and humiliating for a man of my age. What can the sacred fire have to do with it?"

"It's intellectual work, anyway," said my father. "But that's enough; let us cut short this conversation, and in any case I warn you: if you don't go back to your work again, but follow your contemptible propensities, then my daughter and I will banish you from our hearts. I shall strike you out of my will, I swear by the living God!"

With perfect sincerity to prove the purity of the motives by which I wanted to be guided in all my doings, I said:

"The question of inheritance does not seem very important to me. I shall renounce it all beforehand."

For some reason or other, quite to my surprise, these words were deeply resented by my father. He turned crimson.

"Don't dare to talk to me like that, stupid!" he shouted in a thin, shrill voice. "Wastrel!" and with a rapid, skilful, and habitual movement he slapped me twice in the face. "You are forgetting yourself."

When my father beat me as a child I had to stand up straight, with my hands held stiffly to my trouser seams, and look him straight in the face. And now when he hit me I was utterly overwhelmed, and, as though I were still a child, drew myself up and tried to look him in the face. My father was old and very thin but his delicate muscles must have been as strong as leather, for his blows hurt a good deal.

I staggered back into the passage, and there he snatched up his umbrella, and with it hit me several times on the head and shoulders; at

that moment my sister opened the drawing room door to find out what the noise was, but at once turned away with a look of horror and pity without uttering a word in my defence.

My determination not to return to the government office, but to begin a new life of toil, was not to be shaken. All that was left for me to do was to fix upon the special employment, and there was no particular difficulty about that, as it seemed to me that I was very strong and fitted for the very heaviest labour. I was faced with a monotonous life of toil in the midst of hunger, coarseness, and stench, continually preoccupied with earning my daily bread. And—who knows?—as I returned from my work along Great Dvoryansky Street, I might very likely envy Dolzhikov the engineer, who lived by intellectual work, but, at the moment, thinking over all my future hardships made me lighthearted. At times I had dreamed of spiritual activity, imagining myself a teacher, a doctor, or a writer, but these dreams remained dreams. The taste for intellectual pleasures—for the theatre, for instance, and for reading—was a passion with me, but whether I had any ability for intellectual work I don't know. At school I had had an unconquerable aversion for Greek, so that I was only in the fourth class when they had to take me from school. For a long while I had coaches preparing me for the fifth class. Then I served in various government offices, spending the greater part of the day in complete idleness, and I was told that was intellectual work. My activity in the scholastic and official sphere had required neither mental application nor talent, nor special qualifications, nor creative impulse; it was mechanical. Such intellectual work I put on a lower level than physical toil; I despise it, and I don't think that for one moment it could serve as a justification for an idle, careless life, as it is indeed nothing but a sham, one of the forms of that same idleness. Real intellectual work I have in all probability never known.

Evening came on. We lived in Great Dvoryansky Street; it was the principal street in the town, and in the absence of decent public gardens our *beau monde* used to use it as a promenade in the evenings. This charming street did to some extent take the place of a public garden, as on each side of it there was a row of poplars which smelt sweet, particularly after rain, and acacias, tall bushes of lilac, wild-cherries and apple trees hung over the fences and palings. The May twilight, the tender young greenery with its shifting shades, the scent of the lilac, the buzzing of the insects, the stillness, the warmth—how fresh and marvellous it all is, though spring is repeated every year! I stood at the garden gate and watched the passersby. With most of them I had grown

up and at one time played pranks; now they might have been disconcerted by my being near them, for I was poorly and unfashionably dressed, and they used to say of my very narrow trousers and huge, clumsy boots that they were like sticks of macaroni stuck in boats. Besides, I had a bad reputation in the town because I had no decent social position, and used often to play billiards in cheap taverns, and also, perhaps, because I had on two occasions been hauled up before an officer of the police, though I had done nothing whatever to account for this.

In the big house opposite someone was playing the piano at Dolzhikov's. It was beginning to get dark, and stars were twinkling in the sky. Here my father, in an old top-hat with wide upturned brim, walked slowly by with my sister on his arm, bowing in response to greetings.

"Look up," he said to my sister, pointing to the sky with the same umbrella with which he had beaten me that afternoon. "Look up at the sky! Even the tiniest stars are all worlds! How insignificant is man in comparison with the universe!"

And he said this in a tone that suggested that it was particularly agreeable and flattering to him that he was so insignificant. How absolutely devoid of talent and imagination he was! Sad to say, he was the only architect in the town, and in the fifteen to twenty years that I could remember not one single decent house had been built in it. When anyone asked him to plan a house, he usually drew first the reception hall and drawing room: just as in old days the boarding-school misses always started from the stove when they danced, so his artistic ideas could only begin and develop from the hall and drawing room. To them he tacked on a dining room, a nursery, a study, linking the rooms together with doors, and so they all inevitably turned into passages, and every one of them had two or even three unnecessary doors. His imagination must have been lacking in clearness, extremely muddled, curtailed. As though feeling that something was lacking, he invariably had recourse to all sorts of outbuildings, planting one beside another; and I can see now the narrow entries, the poky little passages, the crooked staircases leading to half-landings where one could not stand upright, and where, instead of a floor, there were three huge steps like the shelves of a bathhouse; and the kitchen was invariably in the basement with a brick floor and vaulted ceilings. The front of the house had a harsh, stubborn expression; the lines of it were stiff and timid; the roof was low-pitched and, as it were, squashed down; and the fat, well-fed-looking chimneys were invariably crowned by wire caps with squeaking black cowls. And for some reason

all these houses, built by my father exactly like one another, vaguely reminded me of his top-hat and the back of his head, stiff and stubborn-looking. In the course of years they have grown used in the town to the poverty of my father's imagination. It has taken root and become our local style.

This same style my father had brought into my sister's life also, beginning with christening her Kleopatra (just as he had named me Misail). When she was a little girl he scared her by references to the stars, to the sages of ancient times, to our ancestors, and discoursed at length on the nature of life and duty; and now, when she was twenty-six, he kept up the same habits, allowing her to walk arm in arm with no one but himself, and imagining for some reason that sooner or later a suitable young man would be sure to appear, and to desire to enter into matrimony with her from respect for his personal qualities. She adored my father, feared him, and believed in his exceptional intelligence.

It was quite dark, and gradually the street grew empty. The music had ceased in the house opposite; the gate was thrown wide open, and a team with three horses trotted frolicking along our street with a soft tinkle of little bells. That was the engineer going for a drive with his daughter. It was bedtime.

I had my own room in the house, but I lived in a shed in the yard, under the same roof as a brick barn which had been built some time or other, probably to keep harness in; great hooks were driven into the wall. Now it was not wanted, and for the last thirty years my father had stowed away in it his newspapers, which for some reason he had bound in half-yearly volumes and allowed nobody to touch. Living here, I was less liable to be seen by my father and his visitors, and I fancied that if I did not live in a real room, and did not go into the house every day to dinner, my father's words that I was a burden upon him did not sound so offensive.

My sister was waiting for me. Unseen by my father, she had brought me some supper: not a very large slice of cold veal and a piece of bread. In our house such sayings as: "A penny saved is a penny gained," and "Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves," and so on, were frequently repeated, and my sister, weighed down by these vulgar maxims, did her utmost to cut down the expenses, and so we fared badly. Putting the plate on the table, she sat down on my bed and began to cry.

"Misail," she said, "what a way to treat us!"

She did not cover her face; her tears dropped on her bosom and hands, and there was a look of distress on her face. She fell back on the pillow, and abandoned herself to her tears, sobbing and quivering all over.

“You have left the service again…” she articulated. “Oh, how awful it is!”

“But do understand, sister, do understand.…” I said, and I was overcome with despair because she was crying.

As ill-luck would have it, the kerosene in my little lamp was exhausted; it began to smoke, and was on the point of going out, and the old hooks on the walls looked down sullenly, and their shadows flickered.

“Have mercy on us,” said my sister, sitting up. “Father is in terrible distress and I am ill; I shall go out of my mind. What will become of you?” she said, sobbing and stretching out her arms to me. “I beg you, I implore you, for our dear mother’s sake, I beg you to go back to the office!”

“I can’t, Kleopatra!” I said, feeling that a little more and I should give way. “I cannot!”

“Why not?” my sister went on. “Why not? Well, if you can’t get on with the Head, look out for another post. Why shouldn’t you get a situation on the railway, for instance? I have just been talking to Anyuta Blagovo; she declares they would take you on the railway-line, and even promised to try and get a post for you. For God’s sake, Misail, think a little! Think a little, I implore you.”

We talked a little longer and I gave way. I said that the thought of a job on the railway that was being constructed had never occurred to me, and that if she liked I was ready to try it.

She smiled joyfully through her tears and squeezed my hand, and then went on crying because she could not stop, while I went to the kitchen for some kerosene.

II

Among the devoted supporters of amateur theatricals, concerts and *tableaux vivants* for charitable objects the Azhogins, who lived in their own house in Great Dvoryansky Street, took a foremost place; they always provided the room, and took upon themselves all the troublesome arrangements and the expenses. They were a family of wealthy landowners who had an estate of some nine thousand acres in the district and a capital house, but they did not care for the country, and lived winter and summer alike in the town. The family consisted of the mother, a tall, spare, refined lady, with short hair, a short jacket, and a flat-looking skirt in the English fashion, and three daughters who, when they were spoken of, were called not by their names but simply: the eldest, the middle, and the youngest. They all had ugly sharp chins, and were shortsighted and round-shouldered. They were dressed like their mother, they lisped disagreeably, and yet, in spite of that, infallibly took part in every performance and were continually doing something with a charitable object—acting, reciting, singing. They were very serious and never smiled, and even in a musical comedy they played without the faintest trace of gaiety, with a businesslike air, as though they were engaged in bookkeeping.

I loved our theatricals, especially the numerous, noisy, and rather incoherent rehearsals, after which they always gave a supper. In the choice of the plays and the distribution of the parts I had no hand at all. The post assigned to me lay behind the scenes. I painted the scenes, copied out the parts, prompted, made up the actors' faces; and I was entrusted, too, with various stage effects such as thunder, the singing of nightingales, and so on. Since I had no proper social position and no decent clothes, at the rehearsals I held aloof from the rest in the shadows of the wings and maintained a shy silence.

I painted the scenes at the Azhogins' either in the barn or in the yard. I was assisted by Andrey Ivanov, a house painter, or, as he called himself, a contractor for all kinds of house decorations, a tall, very thin, pale man of fifty, with a hollow chest, with sunken temples, with blue rings round his eyes, rather terrible to look at in fact. He was afflicted with some

internal malady, and every autumn and spring people said that he wouldn't recover, but after being laid up for a while he would get up and say afterwards with surprise: "I have escaped dying again."

In the town he was called "Radish," and they declared that this was his real name. He was as fond of the theatre as I was, and as soon as rumours reached him that a performance was being got up he threw aside all his work and went to the Azhogins' to paint scenes.

The day after my talk with my sister, I was working at the Azhogins' from morning till night. The rehearsal was fixed for seven o'clock in the evening, and an hour before it began all the amateurs were gathered together in the hall, and the eldest, the middle, and the youngest Azhogins were pacing about the stage, reading from manuscript books. Radish, in a long rusty-red overcoat and a scarf muffled round his neck, already stood leaning with his head against the wall, gazing with a devout expression at the stage. Madame Azhogin went up first to one and then to another guest, saying something agreeable to each. She had a way of gazing into one's face, and speaking softly as though telling a secret.

"It must be difficult to paint scenery," she said softly, coming up to me. "I was just talking to Madame Mufke about superstitions when I saw you come in. My goodness, my whole life I have been waging war against superstitions! To convince the servants what nonsense all their terrors are, I always light three candles, and begin all my important undertakings on the thirteenth of the month."

Dolzhikov's daughter came in, a plump, fair beauty, dressed, as people said, in everything from Paris. She did not act, but a chair was set for her on the stage at the rehearsals, and the performances never began till she had appeared in the front row, dazzling and astounding everyone with her fine clothes. As a product of the capital she was allowed to make remarks during the rehearsals; and she did so with a sweet indulgent smile, and one could see that she looked upon our performance as a childish amusement. It was said she had studied singing at the Petersburg Conservatoire, and even sang for a whole winter in a private opera. I thought her very charming, and I usually watched her through the rehearsals and performances without taking my eyes off her.

I had just picked up the manuscript book to begin prompting when my sister suddenly made her appearance. Without taking off her cloak or hat, she came up to me and said:

"Come along, I beg you."

I went with her. Anyuta Blagovo, also in her hat and wearing a dark veil, was standing behind the scenes at the door. She was the daughter of the Assistant President of the Court, who had held that office in our town almost ever since the establishment of the circuit court. Since she was tall and had a good figure, her assistance was considered indispensable for *tableaux vivants*, and when she represented a fairy or something like Glory her face burned with shame; but she took no part in dramatic performances, and came to the rehearsals only for a moment on some special errand, and did not go into the hall. Now, too, it was evident that she had only looked in for a minute.

"My father was speaking about you," she said drily, blushing and not looking at me. "Dolzhikov has promised you a post on the railway-line. Apply to him tomorrow; he will be at home."

I bowed and thanked her for the trouble she had taken.

"And you can give up this," she said, indicating the exercise book.

My sister and she went up to Madame Azhogin and for two minutes they were whispering with her looking towards me; they were consulting about something.

"Yes, indeed," said Madame Azhogin, softly coming up to me and looking intently into my face. "Yes, indeed, if this distracts you from serious pursuits"—she took the manuscript book from my hands—"you can hand it over to someone else; don't distress yourself, my friend, go home, and good luck to you."

I said goodbye to her, and went away overcome with confusion. As I went down the stairs I saw my sister and Anyuta Blagovo going away; they were hastening along, talking eagerly about something, probably about my going into the railway service. My sister had never been at a rehearsal before, and now she was most likely conscience-stricken, and afraid her father might find out that, without his permission, she had been to the Azhogins'!

I went to Dolzhikov's next day between twelve and one. The footman conducted me into a very beautiful room, which was the engineer's drawing room, and, at the same time, his working study. Everything here was soft and elegant, and, for a man so unaccustomed to luxury as I was, it seemed strange. There were costly rugs, huge armchairs, bronzes, pictures, gold and plush frames; among the photographs scattered about the walls there were very beautiful women, clever, lovely faces, easy attitudes; from the drawing room there was a door leading straight into the garden on to a verandah: one could see lilac trees; one could see a table laid for lunch, a number of bottles, a bouquet of roses; there was a

fragrance of spring and expensive cigars, a fragrance of happiness—and everything seemed as though it would say: “Here is a man who has lived and laboured, and has attained at last the happiness possible on earth.” The engineer’s daughter was sitting at the writing-table, reading a newspaper.

“You have come to see my father?” she asked. “He is having a shower bath; he will be here directly. Please sit down and wait.”

I sat down.

“I believe you live opposite?” she questioned me, after a brief silence.

“Yes.”

“I am so bored that I watch you every day out of the window; you must excuse me,” she went on, looking at the newspaper, “and I often see your sister; she always has such a look of kindness and concentration.”

Dolzhikov came in. He was rubbing his neck with a towel.

“Papa, Monsieur Poloznev,” said his daughter.

“Yes, yes, Blagovo was telling me,” he turned briskly to me without giving me his hand. “But listen, what can I give you? What sort of posts have I got? You are a queer set of people!” he went on aloud in a tone as though he were giving me a lecture. “A score of you keep coming to me every day; you imagine I am the head of a department! I am constructing a railway-line, my friends; I have employment for heavy labour: I need mechanics, smiths, navvies, carpenters, well-sinkers, and none of you can do anything but sit and write! You are all clerks.”

And he seemed to me to have the same air of happiness as his rugs and easy chairs. He was stout and healthy, ruddy-cheeked and broad-chested, in a print cotton shirt and full trousers like a toy china sledge-driver. He had a curly, round beard—and not a single grey hair—a hooked nose, and clear, dark, guileless eyes.

“What can you do?” he went on. “There is nothing you can do! I am an engineer. I am a man of an assured position, but before they gave me a railway-line I was for years in harness; I have been a practical mechanic. For two years I worked in Belgium as an oiler. You can judge for yourself, my dear fellow, what kind of work can I offer you?”

“Of course that is so…” I muttered in extreme confusion, unable to face his clear, guileless eyes.

“Can you work the telegraph, anyway?” he asked, after a moment’s thought.

“Yes, I have been a telegraph clerk.”

“Hm! Well, we will see then. Meanwhile, go to Dubetchnya. I have got a fellow there, but he is a wretched creature.”

“And what will my duties consist of?” I asked.

“We shall see. Go there; meanwhile I will make arrangements. Only please don’t get drunk, and don’t worry me with requests of any sort, or I shall send you packing.”

He turned away from me without even a nod.

I bowed to him and his daughter who was reading a newspaper, and went away. My heart felt so heavy, that when my sister began asking me how the engineer had received me, I could not utter a single word.

I got up early in the morning, at sunrise, to go to Dubetchnya. There was not a soul in our Great Dvoryansky Street; everyone was asleep, and my footsteps rang out with a solitary, hollow sound. The poplars, covered with dew, filled the air with soft fragrance. I was sad, and did not want to go away from the town. I was fond of my native town. It seemed to be so beautiful and so snug! I loved the fresh greenery, the still, sunny morning, the chiming of our bells; but the people with whom I lived in this town were boring, alien to me, sometimes even repulsive. I did not like them nor understand them.

I did not understand what these sixty-five thousand people lived for and by. I knew that Kimry lived by boots, that Tula made samovars and guns, that Odessa was a seaport, but what our town was, and what it did, I did not know. Great Dvoryansky Street and the two other smartest streets lived on the interest of capital, or on salaries received by officials from the public treasury; but what the other eight streets, which ran parallel for over two miles and vanished beyond the hills, lived upon, was always an insoluble riddle to me. And the way those people lived one is ashamed to describe! No garden, no theatre, no decent band; the public library and the club library were only visited by Jewish youths, so that the magazines and new books lay for months uncut; rich and well-educated people slept in close, stuffy bedrooms, on wooden bedsteads infested with bugs; their children were kept in revoltingly dirty rooms called nurseries, and the servants, even the old and respected ones, slept on the floor in the kitchen, covered with rags. On ordinary days the houses smelt of beetroot soup, and on fast days of sturgeon cooked in sunflower oil. The food was not good, and the drinking water was unwholesome. In the town council, at the governor’s, at the head priest’s, on all sides in private houses, people had been saying for years and years that our town had not a good and cheap water-supply, and that it was necessary to obtain a loan of two hundred thousand from the Treasury

for laying on water; very rich people, of whom three dozen could have been counted up in our town, and who at times lost whole estates at cards, drank the polluted water, too, and talked all their lives with great excitement of a loan for the water-supply—and I did not understand that; it seemed to me it would have been simpler to take the two hundred thousand out of their own pockets and lay it out on that object.

I did not know one honest man in the town. My father took bribes, and imagined that they were given him out of respect for his moral qualities; at the high school, in order to be moved up rapidly from class to class, the boys went to board with their teachers, who charged them exorbitant sums; the wife of the military commander took bribes from the recruits when they were called up before the board and even deigned to accept refreshments from them, and on one occasion could not get up from her knees in church because she was drunk; the doctors took bribes, too, when the recruits came up for examination, and the town doctor and the veterinary surgeon levied a regular tax on the butchers' shops and the restaurants; at the district school they did a trade in certificates, qualifying for partial exemption from military service; the higher clergy took bribes from the humbler priests and from the church elders; at the Municipal, the Artisans', and all the other Boards every petitioner was pursued by a shout: "Don't forget your thanks!" and the petitioner would turn back to give sixpence or a shilling. And those who did not take bribes, such as the higher officials of the Department of Justice, were haughty, offered two fingers instead of shaking hands, were distinguished by the frigidity and narrowness of their judgments, spent a great deal of time over cards, drank to excess, married heiresses, and undoubtedly had a pernicious corrupting influence on those around them. It was only the girls who had still the fresh fragrance of moral purity; most of them had higher impulses, pure and honest hearts; but they had no understanding of life, and believed that bribes were given out of respect for moral qualities, and after they were married grew old quickly, let themselves go completely, and sank hopelessly in the mire of vulgar, petty bourgeois existence.

III

A railway-line was being constructed in our neighbourhood. On the eve of feast days the streets were thronged with ragged fellows whom the townspeople called “navvies,” and of whom they were afraid. And more than once I had seen one of these tatterdemalions with a bloodstained countenance being led to the police station, while a samovar or some linen, wet from the wash, was carried behind by way of material evidence. The navvies usually congregated about the taverns and the marketplace; they drank, ate, and used bad language, and pursued with shrill whistles every woman of light behaviour who passed by. To entertain this hungry rabble our shopkeepers made cats and dogs drunk with vodka, or tied an old kerosene can to a dog’s tail; a hue and cry was raised, and the dog dashed along the street, jingling the can, squealing with terror; it fancied some monster was close upon its heels; it would run far out of the town into the open country and there sink exhausted. There were in the town several dogs who went about trembling with their tails between their legs; and people said this diversion had been too much for them, and had driven them mad.

A station was being built four miles from the town. It was said that the engineers asked for a bribe of fifty thousand roubles for bringing the line right up to the town, but the town council would only consent to give forty thousand; they could not come to an agreement over the difference, and now the townspeople regretted it, as they had to make a road to the station and that, it was reckoned, would cost more. The sleepers and rails had been laid throughout the whole length of the line, and trains ran up and down it, bringing building materials and labourers, and further progress was only delayed on account of the bridges which Dolzhikov was building, and some of the stations were not yet finished.

Dubetchnya, as our first station was called, was a little under twelve miles from the town. I walked. The cornfields, bathed in the morning sunshine, were bright green. It was a flat, cheerful country, and in the distance there were the distinct outlines of the station, of ancient barrows, and faraway homesteads.… How nice it was out there in the open! And how I longed to be filled with the sense of freedom, if only

for that one morning, that I might not think of what was being done in the town, not think of my needs, not feel hungry! Nothing has so marred my existence as an acute feeling of hunger, which made images of buckwheat porridge, rissoles, and baked fish mingle strangely with my best thoughts. Here I was standing alone in the open country, gazing upward at a lark which hovered in the air at the same spot, trilling as though in hysterics, and meanwhile I was thinking: “How nice it would be to eat a piece of bread and butter!”

Or I would sit down by the roadside to rest, and shut my eyes to listen to the delicious sounds of May, and what haunted me was the smell of hot potatoes. Though I was tall and strongly built, I had as a rule little to eat, and so the predominant sensation throughout the day was hunger, and perhaps that was why I knew so well how it is that such multitudes of people toil merely for their daily bread, and can talk of nothing but things to eat.

At Dubetchnya they were plastering the inside of the station, and building a wooden upper storey to the pumping shed. It was hot; there was a smell of lime, and the workmen sauntered listlessly between the heaps of shavings and mortar rubble. The pointsman lay asleep near his sentry box, and the sun was blazing full on his face. There was not a single tree. The telegraph wire hummed faintly and hawks were perching on it here and there. I, wandering, too, among the heaps of rubbish, and not knowing what to do, recalled how the engineer, in answer to my question what my duties would consist in, had said: “We shall see when you are there”; but what could one see in that wilderness?

The plasterers spoke of the foreman, and of a certain Fyodor Vasilyev. I did not understand, and gradually I was overcome by depression—the physical depression in which one is conscious of one’s arms and legs and huge body, and does not know what to do with them or where to put them.

After I had been walking about for at least a couple of hours, I noticed that there were telegraph poles running off to the right from the station, and that they ended a mile or a mile and a half away at a white stone wall. The workmen told me the office was there, and at last I reflected that that was where I ought to go.

It was a very old manor house, deserted long ago. The wall round it, of porous white stone, was mouldering and had fallen away in places, and the lodge, the blank wall of which looked out on the open country, had a rusty roof with patches of tinplate gleaming here and there on it. Within the gates could be seen a spacious courtyard overgrown with rough

weeds, and an old manor house with sunblinds on the windows, and a high roof red with rust. Two lodges, exactly alike, stood one on each side of the house to right and to left: one had its windows nailed up with boards; near the other, of which the windows were open, there was washing on the line, and there were calves moving about. The last of the telegraph poles stood in the courtyard, and the wire from it ran to the window of the lodge, of which the blank wall looked out into the open country. The door stood open; I went in. By the telegraph apparatus a gentleman with a curly dark head, wearing a reefer coat made of sailcloth, was sitting at a table; he glanced at me morosely from under his brows, but immediately smiled and said:

"Hullo, Better-than-nothing!"

It was Ivan Tcheprakov, an old schoolfellow of mine, who had been expelled from the second class for smoking. We used at one time, during autumn, to catch goldfinches, finches, and linnets together, and to sell them in the market early in the morning, while our parents were still in their beds. We watched for flocks of migrating starlings and shot at them with small shot, then we picked up those that were wounded, and some of them died in our hands in terrible agonies (I remember to this day how they moaned in the cage at night); those that recovered we sold, and swore with the utmost effrontery that they were all cocks. On one occasion at the market I had only one starling left, which I had offered to purchasers in vain, till at last I sold it for a farthing. "Anyway, it's better than nothing," I said to comfort myself, as I put the farthing in my pocket, and from that day the street urchins and the schoolboys called after me: "Better-than-nothing"; and to this day the street boys and the shopkeepers mock at me with the nickname, though no one remembers how it arose.

Tcheprakov was not of robust constitution: he was narrow-chested, round-shouldered, and long-legged. He wore a silk cord for a tie, had no trace of a waistcoat, and his boots were worse than mine, with the heels trodden down on one side. He stared, hardly even blinking, with a strained expression, as though he were just going to catch something, and he was always in a fuss.

"You wait a minute," he would say fussily. "You listen.… Whatever was I talking about?"

We got into conversation. I learned that the estate on which I now was had until recently been the property of the Tcheprakovs, and had only the autumn before passed into the possession of Dolzhikov, who considered it more profitable to put his money into land than to keep it in notes, and

had already bought up three good-sized mortgaged estates in our neighbourhood. At the sale Tcheprakov's mother had reserved for herself the right to live for the next two years in one of the lodges at the side, and had obtained a post for her son in the office.

"I should think he could buy!" Tcheprakov said of the engineer. "See what he fleeces out of the contractors alone! He fleeces everyone!"

Then he took me to dinner, deciding fussily that I should live with him in the lodge, and have my meals from his mother.

"She is a bit stingy," he said, "but she won't charge you much."

It was very cramped in the little rooms in which his mother lived; they were all, even the passage and the entry, piled up with furniture which had been brought from the big house after the sale; and the furniture was all old-fashioned mahogany. Madame Tcheprakov, a very stout middle-aged lady with slanting Chinese eyes, was sitting in a big armchair by the window, knitting a stocking. She received me ceremoniously.

"This is Poloznev, mamma," Tcheprakov introduced me. "He is going to serve here."

"Are you a nobleman?" she asked in a strange, disagreeable voice: it seemed to me to sound as though fat were bubbling in her throat.

"Yes," I answered.

"Sit down."

The dinner was a poor one. Nothing was served but pies filled with bitter curd, and milk soup. Elena Nikiforovna, who presided, kept blinking in a queer way, first with one eye and then with the other. She talked, she ate, but yet there was something deathly about her whole figure, and one almost fancied the faint smell of a corpse. There was only a glimmer of life in her, a glimmer of consciousness that she had been a lady who had once had her own serfs, that she was the widow of a general whom the servants had to address as "your Excellency"; and when these feeble relics of life flickered up in her for an instant she would say to her son:

"Jean, you are not holding your knife properly!"

Or she would say to me, drawing a deep breath, with the mincing air of a hostess trying to entertain a visitor:

"You know we have sold our estate. Of course, it is a pity, we are used to the place, but Dolzhikov has promised to make Jean stationmaster of Dubetchnya, so we shall not have to go away; we shall live here at the station, and that is just the same as being on our own property! The engineer is so nice! Don't you think he is very handsome?"

Until recently the Tcheprakovs had lived in a wealthy style, but since the death of the general everything had been changed. Elena Nikiforovna had taken to quarrelling with the neighbours, to going to law, and to not paying her bailiffs or her labourers; she was in constant terror of being robbed, and in some ten years Dubetchnya had become unrecognizable.

Behind the great house was an old garden which had already run wild, and was overgrown with rough weeds and bushes. I walked up and down the verandah, which was still solid and beautiful; through the glass doors one could see a room with parquetted floor, probably the drawing room; an old-fashioned piano and pictures in deep mahogany frames—there was nothing else. In the old flowerbeds all that remained were peonies and poppies, which lifted their white and bright red heads above the grass. Young maples and elms, already nibbled by the cows, grew beside the paths, drawn up and hindering each other's growth. The garden was thickly overgrown and seemed impassable, but this was only near the house where there stood poplars, fir trees, and old limetrees, all of the same age, relics of the former avenues. Further on, beyond them the garden had been cleared for the sake of hay, and here it was not moist and stuffy, and there were no spiders' webs in one's mouth and eyes. A light breeze was blowing. The further one went the more open it was, and here in the open space were cherries, plums, and spreading apple trees, disfigured by props and by canker; and pear trees so tall that one could not believe they were pear trees. This part of the garden was let to some shopkeepers of the town, and it was protected from thieves and starlings by a feebleminded peasant who lived in a shanty in it.

The garden, growing more and more open, till it became definitely a meadow, sloped down to the river, which was overgrown with green weeds and osiers. Near the milldam was the millpond, deep and full of fish; a little mill with a thatched roof was working away with a wrathful sound, and frogs croaked furiously. Circles passed from time to time over the smooth, mirror-like water, and the water-lilies trembled, stirred by the lively fish. On the further side of the river was the little village Dubetchnya. The still, blue millpond was alluring with its promise of coolness and peace. And now all this—the millpond and the mill and the snug-looking banks—belonged to the engineer!

And so my new work began. I received and forwarded telegrams, wrote various reports, and made fair copies of the notes of requirements, the complaints, and the reports sent to the office by the illiterate foremen and workmen. But for the greater part of the day I did nothing but walk about the room waiting for telegrams, or made a boy sit in the lodge

while I went for a walk in the garden, until the boy ran to tell me that there was a tapping at the operating machine. I had dinner at Madame Tcheprakov's. Meat we had very rarely: our dishes were all made of milk, and Wednesdays and Fridays were fast days, and on those days we had pink plates which were called Lenten plates. Madame Tcheprakov was continually blinking—it was her invariable habit, and I always felt ill at ease in her presence.

As there was not enough work in the lodge for one, Tcheprakov did nothing, but simply dozed, or went with his gun to shoot ducks on the millpond. In the evenings he drank too much in the village or the station, and before going to bed stared in the looking-glass and said: "Hullo, Ivan Tcheprakov."

When he was drunk he was very pale, and kept rubbing his hands and laughing with a sound like a neigh: "hee-hee-hee!" By way of bravado he used to strip and run about the country naked. He used to eat flies and say they were rather sour.

IV

One day, after dinner, he ran breathless into the lodge and said: “Go along, your sister has come.”

I went out, and there I found a hired brake from the town standing before the entrance of the great house. My sister had come in it with Anyuta Blagovo and a gentleman in a military tunic. Going up closer I recognized the latter: it was the brother of Anyuta Blagovo, the army doctor.

“We have come to you for a picnic,” he said; “is that all right?”

My sister and Anyuta wanted to ask how I was getting on here, but both were silent, and simply gazed at me. I was silent too. They saw that I did not like the place, and tears came into my sister’s eyes, while Anyuta Blagovo turned crimson.

We went into the garden. The doctor walked ahead of us all and said enthusiastically:

“What air! Holy Mother, what air!”

In appearance he was still a student. And he walked and talked like a student, and the expression of his grey eyes was as keen, honest, and frank as a nice student’s. Beside his tall and handsome sister he looked frail and thin; and his beard was thin too, and his voice, too, was a thin but rather agreeable tenor. He was serving in a regiment somewhere, and had come home to his people for a holiday, and said he was going in the autumn to Petersburg for his examination as a doctor of medicine. He was already a family man, with a wife and three children, he had married very young, in his second year at the University, and now people in the town said he was unhappy in his family life and was not living with his wife.

“What time is it?” my sister asked uneasily. “We must get back in good time. Papa let me come to see my brother on condition I was back at six.”

“Oh, bother your papa!” sighed the doctor.

I set the samovar. We put down a carpet before the verandah of the great house and had our tea there, and the doctor knelt down, drank out of his saucer, and declared that he now knew what bliss was. Then

Tcheprakov came with the key and opened the glass door, and we all went into the house. There it was half dark and mysterious, and smelt of mushrooms, and our footsteps had a hollow sound as though there were cellars under the floor. The doctor stopped and touched the keys of the piano, and it responded faintly with a husky, quivering, but melodious chord; he tried his voice and sang a song, frowning and tapping impatiently with his foot when some note was mute. My sister did not talk about going home, but walked about the rooms and kept saying:

"How happy I am! How happy I am!"

There was a note of astonishment in her voice, as though it seemed to her incredible that she, too, could feel lighthearted. It was the first time in my life I had seen her so happy. She actually looked prettier. In profile she did not look nice; her nose and mouth seemed to stick out and had an expression as though she were pouting, but she had beautiful dark eyes, a pale, very delicate complexion, and a touching expression of goodness and melancholy, and when she talked she seemed charming and even beautiful. We both, she and I, took after our mother, were broad shouldered, strongly built, and capable of endurance, but her pallor was a sign of ill-health; she often had a cough, and I sometimes caught in her face that look one sees in people who are seriously ill, but for some reason conceal the fact. There was something naive and childish in her gaiety now, as though the joy that had been suppressed and smothered in our childhood by harsh education had now suddenly awakened in her soul and found a free outlet.

But when evening came on and the horses were brought round, my sister sank into silence and looked thin and shrunken, and she got into the brake as though she were going to the scaffold.

When they had all gone, and the sound had died away… I remembered that Anyuta Blagovo had not said a word to me all day.

"She is a wonderful girl!" I thought. "Wonderful girl!"

St. Peter's fast came, and we had nothing but Lenten dishes every day. I was weighed down by physical depression due to idleness and my unsettled position, and dissatisfied with myself. Listless and hungry, I lounged about the garden and only waited for a suitable mood to go away.

Towards evening one day, when Radish was sitting in the lodge, Dolzhikov, very sunburnt and grey with dust, walked in unexpectedly. He had been spending three days on his land, and had come now to Dubetchnya by the steamer, and walked to us from the station. While waiting for the carriage, which was to come for him from the town, he

walked round the grounds with his bailiff, giving orders in a loud voice, then sat for a whole hour in our lodge, writing letters. While he was there telegrams came for him, and he himself tapped off the answers. We three stood in silence at attention.

"What a muddle!" he said, glancing contemptuously at a record book. "In a fortnight I am transferring the office to the station, and I don't know what I am to do with you, my friends."

"I do my best, your honour," said Tcheprakov.

"To be sure, I see how you do your best. The only thing you can do is to take your salary," the engineer went on, looking at me; "you keep relying on patronage to *faire le carrière* as quickly and as easily as possible. Well, I don't care for patronage. No one took any trouble on my behalf. Before they gave me a railway contract I went about as a mechanic and worked in Belgium as an oiler. And you, Panteley, what are you doing here?" he asked, turning to Radish. "Drinking with them?"

He, for some reason, always called humble people Panteley, and such as me and Tcheprakov he despised, and called them drunkards, beasts, and rabble to their faces. Altogether he was cruel to humble subordinates, and used to fine them and turn them off coldly without explanations.

At last the horses came for him. As he said goodbye he promised to turn us all off in a fortnight; he called his bailiff a blockhead; and then, lolling at ease in his carriage, drove back to the town.

"Andrey Ivanitch," I said to Radish, "take me on as a workman."

"Oh, all right!"

And we set off together in the direction of the town. When the station and the big house with its buildings were left behind I asked: "Andrey Ivanitch, why did you come to Dubetchnya this evening?"

"In the first place my fellows are working on the line, and in the second place I came to pay the general's lady my interest. Last year I borrowed fifty roubles from her, and I pay her now a rouble a month interest."

The painter stopped and took me by the button.

"Misail Alexeyitch, our angel," he went on. "The way I look at it is that if any man, gentle or simple, takes even the smallest interest, he is doing evil. There cannot be truth and justice in such a man."

Radish, lean, pale, dreadful-looking, shut his eyes, shook his head, and, in the tone of a philosopher, pronounced:

"Lice consume the grass, rust consumes the iron, and lying the soul. Lord, have mercy upon us sinners."

V

Radish was not practical, and was not at all good at forming an estimate; he took more work than he could get through, and when calculating he was agitated, lost his head, and so was almost always out of pocket over his jobs. He undertook painting, glazing, paperhanging, and even tiling roofs, and I can remember his running about for three days to find tilers for the sake of a paltry job. He was a first-rate workman; he sometimes earned as much as ten roubles a day; and if it had not been for the desire at all costs to be a master, and to be called a contractor, he would probably have had plenty of money.

He was paid by the job, but he paid me and the other workmen by the day, from one and twopence to two shillings a day. When it was fine and dry we did all kinds of outside work, chiefly painting roofs. When I was new to the work it made my feet burn as though I were walking on hot bricks, and when I put on felt boots they were hotter than ever. But this was only at first; later on I got used to it, and everything went swimmingly. I was living now among people to whom labour was obligatory, inevitable, and who worked like carthorses, often with no idea of the moral significance of labour, and, indeed, never using the word “labour” in conversation at all. Beside them I, too, felt like a carthorse, growing more and more imbued with the feeling of the obligatory and inevitable character of what I was doing, and this made my life easier, setting me free from all doubt and uncertainty.

At first everything interested me, everything was new, as though I had been born again. I could sleep on the ground and go about barefoot, and that was extremely pleasant; I could stand in a crowd of the common people and be no constraint to anyone, and when a cab horse fell down in the street I ran to help it up without being afraid of soiling my clothes. And the best of it all was, I was living on my own account and no burden to anyone!

Painting roofs, especially with our own oil and colours, was regarded as a particularly profitable job, and so this rough, dull work was not disdained, even by such good workmen as Radish. In short breeches, and wasted, purple-looking legs, he used to go about the roofs, looking like a

stork, and I used to hear him, as he plied his brush, breathing heavily and saying: “Woe, woe to us sinners!”

He walked about the roofs as freely as though he were upon the ground. In spite of his being ill and pale as a corpse, his agility was extraordinary: he used to paint the domes and cupolas of the churches without scaffolding, like a young man, with only the help of a ladder and a rope, and it was rather horrible when standing on a height far from the earth; he would draw himself up erect, and for some unknown reason pronounce:

“Lice consume grass, rust consumes iron, and lying the soul!”

Or, thinking about something, would answer his thoughts aloud:

“Anything may happen! Anything may happen!”

When I went home from my work, all the people who were sitting on benches by the gates, all the shopmen and boys and their employers, made sneering and spiteful remarks after me, and this upset me at first and seemed to be simply monstrous.

“Better-than-nothing!” I heard on all sides. “House painter! Yellow ochre!”

And none behaved so ungraciously to me as those who had only lately been humble people themselves, and had earned their bread by hard manual labour. In the streets full of shops I was once passing an ironmonger’s when water was thrown over me as though by accident, and on one occasion someone darted out with a stick at me, while a fishmonger, a grey-headed old man, barred my way and said, looking at me angrily:

“I am not sorry for you, you fool! It’s your father I am sorry for.”

And my acquaintances were for some reason overcome with embarrassment when they met me. Some of them looked upon me as a queer fish and a comic fool; others were sorry for me; others did not know what attitude to take up to me, and it was difficult to make them out. One day I met Anyuta Blagovo in a side street near Great Dvoryansky Street. I was going to work, and was carrying two long brushes and a pail of paint. Recognizing me Anyuta flushed crimson.

“Please do not bow to me in the street,” she said nervously, harshly, and in a shaking voice, without offering me her hand, and tears suddenly gleamed in her eyes. “If to your mind all this is necessary, so be it… so be it, but I beg you not to meet me!”

I no longer lived in Great Dvoryansky Street, but in the suburb with my old nurse Karpovna, a good-natured but gloomy old woman, who always foreboded some harm, was afraid of all dreams, and even in the

bees and wasps that flew into her room saw omens of evil, and the fact that I had become a workman, to her thinking, boded nothing good.

"Your life is ruined," she would say, mournfully shaking her head, "ruined."

Her adopted son Prokofy, a huge, uncouth, redheaded fellow of thirty, with bristling moustaches, a butcher by trade, lived in the little house with her. When he met me in the passage he would make way for me in respectful silence, and if he was drunk he would salute me with all five fingers at once. He used to have supper in the evening, and through the partition wall of boards I could hear him clear his throat and sigh as he drank off glass after glass.

"Mamma," he would call in an undertone.

"Well," Karpovna, who was passionately devoted to her adopted son, would respond: "What is it, sonny?"

"I can show you a testimony of my affection, mamma. All this earthly life I will cherish you in your declining years in this vale of tears, and when you die I will bury you at my expense; I have said it, and you can believe it."

I got up every morning before sunrise, and went to bed early. We house painters ate a great deal and slept soundly; the only thing amiss was that my heart used to beat violently at night. I did not quarrel with my mates. Violent abuse, desperate oaths, and wishes such as, "Blast your eyes," or "Cholera take you," never ceased all day, but, nevertheless, we lived on very friendly terms. The other fellows suspected me of being some sort of religious sectary, and made good-natured jokes at my expense, saying that even my own father had disowned me, and thereupon would add that they rarely went into the temple of God themselves, and that many of them had not been to confession for ten years. They justified this laxity on their part by saying that a painter among men was like a jackdaw among birds.

The men had a good opinion of me, and treated me with respect; it was evident that my not drinking, not smoking, but leading a quiet, steady life pleased them very much. It was only an unpleasant shock to them that I took no hand in stealing oil and did not go with them to ask for tips from people on whose property we were working. Stealing oil and paints from those who employed them was a house painter's custom, and was not regarded as theft, and it was remarkable that even so upright a man as Radish would always carry away a little white lead and oil as he went home from work. And even the most respectable old fellows, who owned the houses in which they lived in the suburb, were not

ashamed to ask for a tip, and it made me feel vexed and ashamed to see the men go in a body to congratulate some nonentity on the commencement or the completion of the job, and thank him with degrading servility when they had received a few coppers.

With people on whose work they were engaged they behaved like wily courtiers, and almost every day I was reminded of Shakespeare's Polonius.

"I fancy it is going to rain," the man whose house was being painted would say, looking at the sky.

"It is, there is not a doubt it is," the painters would agree.

"I don't think it is a rain-cloud, though. Perhaps it won't rain after all."

"No, it won't, your honour! I am sure it won't."

But their attitude to their patrons behind their backs was usually one of irony, and when they saw, for instance, a gentleman sitting in the verandah reading a newspaper, they would observe:

"He reads the paper, but I daresay he has nothing to eat."

I never went home to see my own people. When I came back from work I often found waiting for me little notes, brief and anxious, in which my sister wrote to me about my father; that he had been particularly preoccupied at dinner and had eaten nothing, or that he had been giddy and staggering, or that he had locked himself in his room and had not come out for a long time. Such items of news troubled me; I could not sleep, and at times even walked up and down Great Dvoryansky Street at night by our house, looking in at the dark windows and trying to guess whether everything was well at home. On Sundays my sister came to see me, but came in secret, as though it were not to see me but our nurse. And if she came in to see me she was very pale, with tear-stained eyes, and she began crying at once.

"Our father will never live through this," she would say. "If anything should happen to him—God grant it may not—your conscience will torment you all your life. It's awful, Misail; for our mother's sake I beseech you: reform your ways."

"My darling sister," I would say, "how can I reform my ways if I am convinced that I am acting in accordance with my conscience? Do understand!"

"I know you are acting on your conscience, but perhaps it could be done differently, somehow, so as not to wound anybody."

"Ah, holy Saints!" the old woman sighed through the door. "Your life is ruined! There will be trouble, my dears, there will be trouble!"

VI

One Sunday Dr. Blagovo turned up unexpectedly. He was wearing a military tunic over a silk shirt and high boots of patent leather.

"I have come to see you," he began, shaking my hand heartily like a student. "I am hearing about you every day, and I have been meaning to come and have a heart-to-heart talk, as they say. The boredom in the town is awful, there is not a living soul, no one to say a word to. It's hot, Holy Mother," he went on, taking off his tunic and sitting in his silk shirt. "My dear fellow, let me talk to you."

I was dull myself, and had for a long time been craving for the society of someone not a house painter. I was genuinely glad to see him.

"I'll begin by saying," he said, sitting down on my bed, "that I sympathize with you from the bottom of my heart, and deeply respect the life you are leading. They don't understand you here in the town, and, indeed, there is no one to understand, seeing that, as you know, they are all, with very few exceptions, regular Gogolesque pig faces here. But I saw what you were at once that time at the picnic. You are a noble soul, an honest, high-minded man! I respect you, and feel it a great honour to shake hands with you!" he went on enthusiastically. "To have made such a complete and violent change of life as you have done, you must have passed through a complicated spiritual crisis, and to continue this manner of life now, and to keep up to the high standard of your convictions continually, must be a strain on your mind and heart from day to day. Now to begin our talk, tell me, don't you consider that if you had spent your strength of will, this strained activity, all these powers on something else, for instance, on gradually becoming a great scientist, or artist, your life would have been broader and deeper and would have been more productive?"

We talked, and when we got upon manual labour I expressed this idea: that what is wanted is that the strong should not enslave the weak, that the minority should not be a parasite on the majority, nor a vampire forever sucking its vital sap; that is, all, without exception, strong and weak, rich and poor, should take part equally in the struggle for existence, each one on his own account, and that there was no better

means for equalizing things in that way than manual labour, in the form of universal service, compulsory for all.

"Then do you think everyone without exception ought to engage in manual labour?" asked the doctor.

"Yes."

"And don't you think that if everyone, including the best men, the thinkers and great scientists, taking part in the struggle for existence, each on his own account, are going to waste their time breaking stones and painting roofs, may not that threaten a grave danger to progress?"

"Where is the danger?" I asked. "Why, progress is in deeds of love, in fulfilling the moral law; if you don't enslave anyone, if you don't oppress anyone, what further progress do you want?"

"But, excuse me," Blagovo suddenly fired up, rising to his feet. "But, excuse me! If a snail in its shell busies itself over perfecting its own personality and muddles about with the moral law, do you call that progress?"

"Why muddles?" I said, offended. "If you don't force your neighbour to feed and clothe you, to transport you from place to place and defend you from your enemies, surely in the midst of a life entirely resting on slavery, that is progress, isn't it? To my mind it is the most important progress, and perhaps the only one possible and necessary for man."

"The limits of universal world progress are in infinity, and to talk of some 'possible' progress limited by our needs and temporary theories is, excuse my saying so, positively strange."

"If the limits of progress are in infinity as you say, it follows that its aims are not definite," I said. "To live without knowing definitely what you are living for!"

"So be it! But that 'not knowing' is not so dull as your 'knowing.' I am going up a ladder which is called progress, civilization, culture; I go on and up without knowing definitely where I am going, but really it is worth living for the sake of that delightful ladder; while you know what you are living for, you live for the sake of some people's not enslaving others, that the artist and the man who rubs his paints may dine equally well. But you know that's the petty, bourgeois, kitchen, grey side of life, and surely it is revolting to live for that alone? If some insects do enslave others, bother them, let them devour each other! We need not think about them. You know they will die and decay just the same, however zealously you rescue them from slavery. We must think of that great millennium which awaits humanity in the remote future."

Blagovo argued warmly with me, but at the same time one could see he was troubled by some irrelevant idea.

"I suppose your sister is not coming?" he said, looking at his watch. "She was at our house yesterday, and said she would be seeing you today. You keep saying slavery, slavery…" he went on. "But you know that is a special question, and all such questions are solved by humanity gradually."

We began talking of doing things gradually. I said that "the question of doing good or evil everyone settles for himself, without waiting till humanity settles it by the way of gradual development. Moreover, this gradual process has more than one aspect. Side by side with the gradual development of human ideas the gradual growth of ideas of another order is observed. Serfdom is no more, but the capitalist system is growing. And in the very heyday of emancipating ideas, just as in the days of Baty, the majority feeds, clothes, and defends the minority while remaining hungry, inadequately clad, and defenceless. Such an order of things can be made to fit in finely with any tendencies and currents of thought you like, because the art of enslaving is also gradually being cultivated. We no longer flog our servants in the stable, but we give to slavery refined forms, at least, we succeed in finding a justification for it in each particular case. Ideas are ideas with us, but if now, at the end of the nineteenth century, it were possible to lay the burden of the most unpleasant of our physiological functions upon the working class, we should certainly do so, and afterwards, of course, justify ourselves by saying that if the best people, the thinkers and great scientists, were to waste their precious time on these functions, progress might be menaced with great danger."

But at this point my sister arrived. Seeing the doctor she was fluttered and troubled, and began saying immediately that it was time for her to go home to her father.

"Kleopatra Alexyevna," said Blagovo earnestly, pressing both hands to his heart, "what will happen to your father if you spend half an hour or so with your brother and me?"

He was frank, and knew how to communicate his liveliness to others. After a moment's thought, my sister laughed, and all at once became suddenly gay as she had been at the picnic. We went out into the country, and lying in the grass went on with our talk, and looked towards the town where all the windows facing west were like glittering gold because the sun was setting.

After that, whenever my sister was coming to see me Blagovo turned up too, and they always greeted each other as though their meeting in my room was accidental. My sister listened while the doctor and I argued, and at such times her expression was joyfully enthusiastic, full of tenderness and curiosity, and it seemed to me that a new world she had never dreamed of before, and which she was now striving to fathom, was gradually opening before her eyes. When the doctor was not there she was quiet and sad, and now if she sometimes shed tears as she sat on my bed it was for reasons of which she did not speak.

In August Radish ordered us to be ready to go to the railway-line. Two days before we were "banished" from the town my father came to see me. He sat down and in a leisurely way, without looking at me, wiped his red face, then took out of his pocket our town *Messenger*, and deliberately, with emphasis on each word, read out the news that the son of the branch manager of the State Bank, a young man of my age, had been appointed head of a Department in the Exchequer.

"And now look at you," he said, folding up the newspaper, "a beggar, in rags, good for nothing! Even working-class people and peasants obtain education in order to become men, while you, a Poloznev, with ancestors of rank and distinction, aspire to the gutter! But I have not come here to talk to you; I have washed my hands of you—" he added in a stifled voice, getting up. "I have come to find out where your sister is, you worthless fellow. She left home after dinner, and here it is nearly eight and she is not back. She has taken to going out frequently without telling me; she is less dutiful—and I see in it your evil and degrading influence. Where is she?"

In his hand he had the umbrella I knew so well, and I was already flustered and drew myself up like a schoolboy, expecting my father to begin hitting me with it, but he noticed my glance at the umbrella and most likely that restrained him.

"Live as you please!" he said. "I shall not give you my blessing!"

"Holy Saints!" my nurse muttered behind the door. "You poor, unlucky child! Ah, my heart bodes ill!"

I worked on the railway-line. It rained without stopping all August; it was damp and cold; they had not carried the corn in the fields, and on big farms where the wheat had been cut by machines it lay not in sheaves but in heaps, and I remember how those luckless heaps of wheat turned blacker every day and the grain was sprouting in them. It was hard to work; the pouring rain spoiled everything we managed to do. We were not allowed to live or to sleep in the railway buildings, and we took

refuge in the damp and filthy mud huts in which the navvies had lived during the summer, and I could not sleep at night for the cold and the woodlice crawling on my face and hands. And when we worked near the bridges the navvies used to come in the evenings in a gang, simply in order to beat the painters—it was a form of sport to them. They used to beat us, to steal our brushes. And to annoy us and rouse us to fight they used to spoil our work; they would, for instance, smear over the signal boxes with green paint. To complete our troubles, Radish took to paying us very irregularly. All the painting work on the line was given out to a contractor; he gave it out to another; and this subcontractor gave it to Radish after subtracting twenty percent for himself. The job was not a profitable one in itself, and the rain made it worse; time was wasted; we could not work while Radish was obliged to pay the fellows by the day. The hungry painters almost came to beating him, called him a cheat, a bloodsucker, a Judas, while he, poor fellow, sighed, lifted up his hand to Heaven in despair, and was continually going to Madame Tcheprakov for money.

VII

Autumn came on, rainy, dark, and muddy. The season of unemployment set in, and I used to sit at home out of work for three days at a stretch, or did various little jobs, not in the painting line. For instance, I wheeled earth, earning about fourpence a day by it. Dr. Blagovo had gone away to Petersburg. My sister had given up coming to see me. Radish was laid up at home ill, expecting death from day to day.

And my mood was autumnal too. Perhaps because, having become a workman, I saw our town life only from the seamy side, it was my lot almost every day to make discoveries which reduced me almost to despair. Those of my fellow-citizens, about whom I had no opinion before, or who had externally appeared perfectly decent, turned out now to be base, cruel people, capable of any dirty action. We common people were deceived, cheated, and kept waiting for hours together in the cold entry or the kitchen; we were insulted and treated with the utmost rudeness. In the autumn I papered the reading room and two other rooms at the club; I was paid a penny three-farthings the piece, but had to sign a receipt at the rate of twopence halfpenny, and when I refused to do so, a gentleman of benevolent appearance in gold-rimmed spectacles, who must have been one of the club committee, said to me:

“If you say much more, you blackguard, I’ll pound your face into a jelly!”

And when the flunkey whispered to him what I was, the son of Poloznev the architect, he became embarrassed, turned crimson, but immediately recovered himself and said: “Devil take him.”

In the shops they palmed off on us workmen putrid meat, musty flour, and tea that had been used and dried again; the police hustled us in church, the assistants and nurses in the hospital plundered us, and if we were too poor to give them a bribe they revenged themselves by bringing us food in dirty vessels. In the post-office the pettiest official considered he had a right to treat us like animals, and to shout with coarse insolence: “You wait!” “Where are you shoving to?” Even the house-dogs were unfriendly to us, and fell upon us with peculiar viciousness. But the thing that struck me most of all in my new position was the complete lack of

justice, what is defined by the peasants in the words: “They have forgotten God.” Rarely did a day pass without swindling. We were swindled by the merchants who sold us oil, by the contractors and the workmen and the people who employed us. I need not say that there could never be a question of our rights, and we always had to ask for the money we earned as though it were a charity, and to stand waiting for it at the back door, cap in hand.

I was papering a room at the club next to the reading room; in the evening, when I was just getting ready to go, the daughter of Dolzhikov, the engineer, walked into the room with a bundle of books under her arm.

I bowed to her.

“Oh, how do you do!” she said, recognizing me at once, and holding out her hand. “I’m very glad to see you.”

She smiled and looked with curiosity and wonder at my smock, my pail of paste, the paper stretched on the floor; I was embarrassed, and she, too, felt awkward.

“You must excuse my looking at you like this,” she said. “I have been told so much about you. Especially by Dr. Blagovo; he is simply in love with you. And I have made the acquaintance of your sister too; a sweet, dear girl, but I can never persuade her that there is nothing awful about your adopting the simple life. On the contrary, you have become the most interesting man in the town.”

She looked again at the pail of paste and the wallpaper, and went on:

“I asked Dr. Blagovo to make me better acquainted with you, but apparently he forgot, or had not time. Anyway, we are acquainted all the same, and if you would come and see me quite simply I should be extremely indebted to you. I so long to have a talk. I am a simple person,” she added, holding out her hand to me, “and I hope that you will feel no constraint with me. My father is not here, he is in Petersburg.”

She went off into the reading room, rustling her skirts, while I went home, and for a long time could not get to sleep.

That cheerless autumn some kind soul, evidently wishing to alleviate my existence, sent me from time to time tea and lemons, or biscuits, or roast game. Karpovna told me that they were always brought by a soldier, and from whom they came she did not know; and the soldier used to enquire whether I was well, and whether I dined every day, and whether I had warm clothing. When the frosts began I was presented in the same way in my absence with a soft knitted scarf brought by the soldier. There was a faint elusive smell of scent about it, and I guessed

who my good fairy was. The scarf smelt of lilies-of-the-valley, the favourite scent of Anyuta Blagovo.

Towards winter there was more work and it was more cheerful. Radish recovered, and we worked together in the cemetery church, where we were putting the groundwork on the icon-stand before gilding. It was a clean, quiet job, and, as our fellows used to say, profitable. One could get through a lot of work in a day, and the time passed quickly, imperceptibly. There was no swearing, no laughter, no loud talk. The place itself compelled one to quietness and decent behaviour, and disposed one to quiet, serious thoughts. Absorbed in our work we stood or sat motionless like statues; there was a deathly silence in keeping with the cemetery, so that if a tool fell, or a flame spluttered in the lamp, the noise of such sounds rang out abrupt and resonant, and made us look round. After a long silence we would hear a buzzing like the swarming of bees: it was the requiem of a baby being chanted slowly in subdued voices in the porch; or an artist, painting a dove with stars round it on a cupola would begin softly whistling, and recollecting himself with a start would at once relapse into silence; or Radish, answering his thoughts, would say with a sigh: “Anything is possible! Anything is possible!” or a slow disconsolate bell would begin ringing over our heads, and the painters would observe that it must be for the funeral of some wealthy person.…

My days I spent in this stillness in the twilight of the church, and in the long evenings I played billiards or went to the theatre in the gallery wearing the new trousers I had bought out of my own earnings. Concerts and performances had already begun at the Azhogins’; Radish used to paint the scenes alone now. He used to tell me the plot of the plays and describe the *tableaux vivants* which he witnessed. I listened to him with envy. I felt greatly drawn to the rehearsals, but I could not bring myself to go to the Azhogins’.

A week before Christmas Dr. Blagovo arrived. And again we argued and played billiards in the evenings. When he played he used to take off his coat and unbutton his shirt over his chest, and for some reason tried altogether to assume the air of a desperate rake. He did not drink much, but made a great uproar about it, and had a special faculty for getting through twenty roubles in an evening at such a poor cheap tavern as the Volga.

My sister began coming to see me again; they both expressed surprise every time on seeing each other, but from her joyful, guilty face it was

evident that these meetings were not accidental. One evening, when we were playing billiards, the doctor said to me:

"I say, why don't you go and see Miss Dolzhikov? You don't know Mariya Viktorovna; she is a clever creature, a charmer, a simple, good-natured soul."

I described how her father had received me in the spring.

"Nonsense!" laughed the doctor, "the engineer's one thing and she's another. Really, my dear fellow, you mustn't be nasty to her; go and see her sometimes. For instance, let's go and see her tomorrow evening. What do you say?"

He persuaded me. The next evening I put on my new serge trousers, and in some agitation I set off to Miss Dolzhikov's. The footman did not seem so haughty and terrible, nor the furniture so gorgeous, as on that morning when I had come to ask a favour. Mariya Viktorovna was expecting me, and she received me like an old acquaintance, shaking hands with me in a friendly way. She was wearing a grey cloth dress with full sleeves, and had her hair done in the style which we used to call "dogs' ears," when it came into fashion in the town a year before. The hair was combed down over the ears, and this made Mariya Viktorovna's face look broader, and she seemed to me this time very much like her father, whose face was broad and red, with something in its expression like a sledge-driver. She was handsome and elegant, but not youthful looking; she looked thirty, though in reality she was not more than twenty-five.

"Dear Doctor, how grateful I am to you," she said, making me sit down. "If it hadn't been for him you wouldn't have come to see me. I am bored to death! My father has gone away and left me alone, and I don't know what to do with myself in this town."

Then she began asking me where I was working now, how much I earned, where I lived.

"Do you spend on yourself nothing but what you earn?" she asked.

"No."

"Happy man!" she sighed. "All the evil in life, it seems to me, comes from idleness, boredom, and spiritual emptiness, and all this is inevitable when one is accustomed to living at other people's expense. Don't think I am showing off, I tell you truthfully: it is not interesting or pleasant to be rich. 'Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness' is said, because there is not and cannot be a mammon that's righteous."

She looked round at the furniture with a grave, cold expression, as though she wanted to count it over, and went on:

“Comfort and luxury have a magical power; little by little they draw into their clutches even strong-willed people. At one time father and I lived simply, not in a rich style, but now you see how! It is something monstrous,” she said, shrugging her shoulders; “we spend up to twenty thousand a year! In the provinces!”

“One comes to look at comfort and luxury as the invariable privilege of capital and education,” I said, “and it seems to me that the comforts of life may be combined with any sort of labour, even the hardest and dirtiest. Your father is rich, and yet he says himself that it has been his lot to be a mechanic and an oiler.”

She smiled and shook her head doubtfully: “My father sometimes eats bread dipped in kvass,” she said. “It’s a fancy, a whim!”

At that moment there was a ring and she got up.

“The rich and well-educated ought to work like everyone else,” she said, “and if there is comfort it ought to be equal for all. There ought not to be any privileges. But that’s enough philosophizing. Tell me something amusing. Tell me about the painters. What are they like? Funny?”

The doctor came in; I began telling them about the painters, but, being unaccustomed to talking, I was constrained, and described them like an ethnologist, gravely and tediously. The doctor, too, told us some anecdotes of working men: he staggered about, shed tears, dropped on his knees, and, even, mimicking a drunkard, lay on the floor; it was as good as a play, and Mariya Viktorovna laughed till she cried as she looked at him. Then he played on the piano and sang in his thin, pleasant tenor, while Mariya Viktorovna stood by and picked out what he was to sing, and corrected him when he made a mistake.

“I’ve heard that you sing, too?” I enquired.

“Sing, too!” cried the doctor in horror. “She sings exquisitely, a perfect artist, and you talk of her ‘singing too’! What an idea!”

“I did study in earnest at one time,” she said, answering my question, “but now I have given it up.”

Sitting on a low stool she told us of her life in Petersburg, and mimicked some celebrated singers, imitating their voice and manner of singing. She made a sketch of the doctor in her album, then of me; she did not draw well, but both the portraits were like us. She laughed, and was full of mischief and charming grimaces, and this suited her better than talking about the mammon of unrighteousness, and it seemed to me that she had been talking just before about wealth and luxury, not in earnest, but in imitation of someone. She was a superb comic actress. I

mentally compared her with our young ladies, and even the handsome, dignified Anyuta Blagovo could not stand comparison with her; the difference was immense, like the difference between a beautiful, cultivated rose and a wild briar.

We had supper together, the three of us. The doctor and Mariya Viktorovna drank red wine, champagne, and coffee with brandy in it; they clinked glasses and drank to friendship, to enlightenment, to progress, to liberty, and they did not get drunk but only flushed, and were continually, for no reason, laughing till they cried. So as not to be tiresome I drank claret too.

"Talented, richly endowed natures," said Miss Dolzhikov, "know how to live, and go their own way; mediocre people, like myself for instance, know nothing and can do nothing of themselves; there is nothing left for them but to discern some deep social movement, and to float where they are carried by it."

"How can one discern what doesn't exist?" asked the doctor.

"We think so because we don't see it."

"Is that so? The social movements are the invention of the new literature. There are none among us."

An argument began.

"There are no deep social movements among us and never have been," the doctor declared loudly. "There is no end to what the new literature has invented! It has invented intellectual workers in the country, and you may search through all our villages and find at the most some lout in a reefer jacket or a black frock-coat who will make four mistakes in spelling a word of three letters. Cultured life has not yet begun among us. There's the same savagery, the same uniform boorishness, the same triviality, as five hundred years ago. Movements, currents there have been, but it has all been petty, paltry, bent upon vulgar and mercenary interests—and one cannot see anything important in them. If you think you have discerned a deep social movement, and in following it you devote yourself to tasks in the modern taste, such as the emancipation of insects from slavery or abstinence from beef rissoles, I congratulate you, Madam. We must study, and study, and study and we must wait a bit with our deep social movements; we are not mature enough for them yet; and to tell the truth, we don't know anything about them."

"You don't know anything about them, but I do," said Mariya Viktorovna. "Goodness, how tiresome you are today!"

"Our duty is to study and to study, to try to accumulate as much knowledge as possible, for genuine social movements arise where there

is knowledge; and the happiness of mankind in the future lies only in knowledge. I drink to science!”

“There is no doubt about one thing: one must organize one’s life somehow differently,” said Mariya Viktorovna, after a moment’s silence and thought. “Life, such as it has been hitherto, is not worth having. Don’t let us talk about it.”

As we came away from her the cathedral clock struck two.

“Did you like her?” asked the doctor; “she’s nice, isn’t she?”

On Christmas day we dined with Mariya Viktorovna, and all through the holidays we went to see her almost every day. There was never anyone there but ourselves, and she was right when she said that she had no friends in the town but the doctor and me. We spent our time for the most part in conversation; sometimes the doctor brought some book or magazine and read aloud to us. In reality he was the first well-educated man I had met in my life: I cannot judge whether he knew a great deal, but he always displayed his knowledge as though he wanted other people to share it. When he talked about anything relating to medicine he was not like any one of the doctors in our town, but made a fresh, peculiar impression upon me, and I fancied that if he liked he might have become a real man of science. And he was perhaps the only person who had a real influence upon me at that time. Seeing him, and reading the books he gave me, I began little by little to feel a thirst for the knowledge which would have given significance to my cheerless labour. It seemed strange to me, for instance, that I had not known till then that the whole world was made up of sixty elements, I had not known what oil was, what paints were, and that I could have got on without knowing these things. My acquaintance with the doctor elevated me morally too. I was continually arguing with him and, though I usually remained of my own opinion, yet, thanks to him, I began to perceive that everything was not clear to me, and I began trying to work out as far as I could definite convictions in myself, that the dictates of conscience might be definite, and that there might be nothing vague in my mind. Yet, though he was the most cultivated and best man in the town, he was nevertheless far from perfection. In his manners, in his habit of turning every conversation into an argument, in his pleasant tenor, even in his friendliness, there was something coarse, like a divinity student, and when he took off his coat and sat in his silk shirt, or flung a tip to a waiter in the restaurant, I always fancied that culture might be all very well, but the Tatar was fermenting in him still.

At Epiphany he went back to Petersburg. He went off in the morning, and after dinner my sister came in. Without taking off her fur coat and her cap she sat down in silence, very pale, and kept her eyes fixed on the same spot. She was chilled by the frost and one could see that she was upset by it.

"You must have caught cold," I said.

Her eyes filled with tears; she got up and went out to Karpovna without saying a word to me, as though I had hurt her feelings. And a little later I heard her saying, in a tone of bitter reproach:

"Nurse, what have I been living for till now? What? Tell me, haven't I wasted my youth? All the best years of my life to know nothing but keeping accounts, pouring out tea, counting the halfpence, entertaining visitors, and thinking there was nothing better in the world! Nurse, do understand, I have the cravings of a human being, and I want to live, and they have turned me into something like a housekeeper. It's horrible, horrible!"

She flung her keys towards the door, and they fell with a jingle into my room. They were the keys of the sideboard, of the kitchen cupboard, of the cellar, and of the tea-caddy, the keys which my mother used to carry.

"Oh, merciful heavens!" cried the old woman in horror. "Holy Saints above!"

Before going home my sister came into my room to pick up the keys, and said:

"You must forgive me. Something queer has happened to me lately."

VIII

On returning home late one evening from Mariya Viktorovna's I found waiting in my room a young police inspector in a new uniform; he was sitting at my table, looking through my books.

"At last," he said, getting up and stretching himself. "This is the third time I have been to you. The Governor commands you to present yourself before him at nine o'clock in the morning. Without fail."

He took from me a signed statement that I would act upon his Excellency's command, and went away. This late visit of the police inspector and unexpected invitation to the Governor's had an overwhelmingly oppressive effect upon me. From my earliest childhood I have felt terror-stricken in the presence of gendarmes, policemen, and law court officials, and now I was tormented by uneasiness, as though I were really guilty in some way. And I could not get to sleep. My nurse and Prokofy were also upset and could not sleep. My nurse had earache too; she moaned, and several times began crying with pain. Hearing that I was awake, Prokofy came into my room with a lamp and sat down at the table.

"You ought to have a drink of pepper cordial," he said, after a moment's thought. "If one does have a drink in this vale of tears it does no harm. And if Mamma were to pour a little pepper cordial in her ear it would do her a lot of good."

Between two and three he was going to the slaughterhouse for the meat. I knew I should not sleep till morning now, and to get through the time till nine o'clock I went with him. We walked with a lantern, while his boy Nikolka, aged thirteen, with blue patches on his cheeks from frostbites, a regular young brigand to judge by his expression, drove after us in the sledge, urging on the horse in a husky voice.

"I suppose they will punish you at the Governor's," Prokofy said to me on the way. "There are rules of the trade for governors, and rules for the higher clergy, and rules for the officers, and rules for the doctors, and every class has its rules. But you haven't kept to your rules, and you can't be allowed."

The slaughterhouse was behind the cemetery, and till then I had only seen it in the distance. It consisted of three gloomy barns, surrounded by a grey fence, and when the wind blew from that quarter on hot days in summer, it brought a stifling stench from them. Now going into the yard in the dark I did not see the barns; I kept coming across horses and sledges, some empty, some loaded up with meat. Men were walking about with lanterns, swearing in a disgusting way. Prokofy and Nikolka swore just as revoltingly, and the air was in a continual uproar with swearing, coughing, and the neighing of horses.

There was a smell of dead bodies and of dung. It was thawing, the snow was changing into mud; and in the darkness it seemed to me that I was walking through pools of blood.

Having piled up the sledges full of meat we set off to the butcher's shop in the market. It began to get light. Cooks with baskets and elderly ladies in mantles came along one after another, Prokofy, with a chopper in his hand, in a white apron spattered with blood, swore fearful oaths, crossed himself at the church, shouted aloud for the whole market to hear, that he was giving away the meat at cost price and even at a loss to himself. He gave short weight and short change, the cooks saw that, but, deafened by his shouts, did not protest, and only called him a hangman. Brandishing and bringing down his terrible chopper he threw himself into picturesque attitudes, and each time uttered the sound "*geck*" with a ferocious expression, and I was afraid he really would chop off somebody's head or hand.

I spent all the morning in the butcher's shop, and when at last I went to the Governor's, my overcoat smelt of meat and blood. My state of mind was as though I were being sent spear in hand to meet a bear. I remember the tall staircase with a striped carpet on it, and the young official, with shiny buttons, who mutely motioned me to the door with both hands, and ran to announce me. I went into a hall luxuriously but frigidly and tastelessly furnished, and the high, narrow mirrors in the spaces between the walls, and the bright yellow window curtains, struck the eye particularly unpleasantly. One could see that the governors were changed, but the furniture remained the same. Again the young official motioned me with both hands to the door, and I went up to a big green table at which a military general, with the Order of Vladimir on his breast, was standing.

"Mr. Poloznev, I have asked you to come," he began, holding a letter in his hand, and opening his mouth like a round "o," "I have asked you to come here to inform you of this. Your highly respected father has

appealed by letter and by word of mouth to the Marshal of the Nobility begging him to summon you, and to lay before you the inconsistency of your behaviour with the rank of the nobility to which you have the honour to belong. His Excellency Alexandr Pavlovitch, justly supposing that your conduct might serve as a bad example, and considering that mere persuasion on his part would not be sufficient, but that official intervention in earnest was essential, presents me here in this letter with his views in regard to you, which I share."

He said this, quietly, respectfully, standing erect, as though I were his superior officer and looking at me with no trace of severity. His face looked worn and wizened, and was all wrinkles; there were bags under his eyes; his hair was dyed; and it was impossible to tell from his appearance how old he was—forty or sixty.

"I trust," he went on, "that you appreciate the delicacy of our honoured Alexandr Pavlovitch, who has addressed himself to me not officially, but privately. I, too, have asked you to come here unofficially, and I am speaking to you, not as a Governor, but from a sincere regard for your father. And so I beg you either to alter your line of conduct and return to duties in keeping with your rank, or to avoid setting a bad example, remove to another district where you are not known, and where you can follow any occupation you please. In the other case, I shall be forced to take extreme measures."

He stood for half a minute in silence, looking at me with his mouth open.

"Are you a vegetarian?" he asked.

"No, your Excellency, I eat meat."

He sat down and drew some papers towards him. I bowed and went out.

It was not worth while now to go to work before dinner. I went home to sleep, but could not sleep from an unpleasant, sickly feeling, induced by the slaughter house and my conversation with the Governor, and when the evening came I went, gloomy and out of sorts, to Mariya Viktorovna. I told her how I had been at the Governor's, while she stared at me in perplexity as though she did not believe it, then suddenly began laughing gaily, loudly, irrepressibly, as only good-natured laughter-loving people can.

"If only one could tell that in Petersburg!" she brought out, almost falling over with laughter, and propping herself against the table. "If one could tell that in Petersburg!"

IX

Now we used to see each other often, sometimes twice a day. She used to come to the cemetery almost every day after dinner, and read the epitaphs on the crosses and tombstones while she waited for me. Sometimes she would come into the church, and, standing by me, would look on while I worked. The stillness, the naive work of the painters and gilders, Radish's sage reflections, and the fact that I did not differ externally from the other workmen, and worked just as they did in my waistcoat with no socks on, and that I was addressed familiarly by them—all this was new to her and touched her. One day a workman, who was painting a dove on the ceiling, called out to me in her presence:

"Misail, hand me up the white paint."

I took him the white paint, and afterwards, when I let myself down by the frail scaffolding, she looked at me, touched to tears and smiling.

"What a dear you are!" she said.

I remembered from my childhood how a green parrot, belonging to one of the rich men of the town, had escaped from its cage, and how for quite a month afterwards the beautiful bird had haunted the town, flying from garden to garden, homeless and solitary. Mariya Viktorovna reminded me of that bird.

"There is positively nowhere for me to go now but the cemetery," she said to me with a laugh. "The town has become disgustingly dull. At the Azhogins' they are still reciting, singing, lisping. I have grown to detest them of late; your sister is an unsociable creature; Mademoiselle Blagovo hates me for some reason. I don't care for the theatre. Tell me where am I to go?"

When I went to see her I smelt of paint and turpentine, and my hands were stained—and she liked that; she wanted me to come to her in my ordinary working clothes; but in her drawing room those clothes made me feel awkward. I felt embarrassed, as though I were in uniform, so I always put on my new serge trousers when I went to her. And she did not like that.

"You must own you are not quite at home in your new character," she said to me one day. "Your workman's dress does not feel natural to you;

you are awkward in it. Tell me, isn't that because you haven't a firm conviction, and are not satisfied? The very kind of work you have chosen—your painting—surely it does not satisfy you, does it?" she asked, laughing. "I know paint makes things look nicer and last longer, but those things belong to rich people who live in towns, and after all they are luxuries. Besides, you have often said yourself that everybody ought to get his bread by the work of his own hands, yet you get money and not bread. Why shouldn't you keep to the literal sense of your words? You ought to be getting bread, that is, you ought to be ploughing, sowing, reaping, threshing, or doing something which has a direct connection with agriculture, for instance, looking after cows, digging, building huts of logs.…"

She opened a pretty cupboard that stood near her writing-table, and said:

"I am saying all this to you because I want to let you into my secret. *Voilà!* This is my agricultural library. Here I have fields, kitchen garden and orchard, and cattleyard and beehives. I read them greedily, and have already learnt all the theory to the tiniest detail. My dream, my darling wish, is to go to our Dubetchnya as soon as March is here. It's marvellous there, exquisite, isn't it? The first year I shall have a look round and get into things, and the year after I shall begin to work properly myself, putting my back into it as they say. My father has promised to give me Dubetchnya and I shall do exactly what I like with it."

Flushed, excited to tears, and laughing, she dreamed aloud how she would live at Dubetchnya, and what an interesting life it would be! I envied her. March was near, the days were growing longer and longer, and on bright sunny days water dripped from the roofs at midday, and there was a fragrance of spring; I, too, longed for the country.

And when she said that she should move to Dubetchnya, I realized vividly that I should remain in the town alone, and I felt that I envied her with her cupboard of books and her agriculture. I knew nothing of work on the land, and did not like it, and I should have liked to have told her that work on the land was slavish toil, but I remembered that something similar had been said more than once by my father, and I held my tongue.

Lent began. Viktor Ivanitch, whose existence I had begun to forget, arrived from Petersburg. He arrived unexpectedly, without even a telegram to say he was coming. When I went in, as usual in the evening, he was walking about the drawing room, telling some story with his face

freshly washed and shaven, looking ten years younger: his daughter was kneeling on the floor, taking out of his trunks boxes, bottles, and books, and handing them to Pavel the footman. I involuntarily drew back a step when I saw the engineer, but he held out both hands to me and said, smiling, showing his strong white teeth that looked like a sledge-driver's:

"Here he is, here he is! Very glad to see you, Mr. House-painter! Masha has told me all about it; she has been singing your praises. I quite understand and approve," he went on, taking my arm. "To be a good workman is ever so much more honest and more sensible than wasting government paper and wearing a cockade on your head. I myself worked in Belgium with these very hands and then spent two years as a mechanic.…"

He was wearing a short reefer jacket and indoor slippers; he walked like a man with the gout, rolling slightly from side to side and rubbing his hands. Humming something he softly purred and hugged himself with satisfaction at being at home again at last, and able to have his beloved shower bath.

"There is no disputing," he said to me at supper, "there is no disputing; you are all nice and charming people, but for some reason, as soon as you take to manual labour, or go in for saving the peasants, in the long run it all comes to no more than being a dissenter. Aren't you a dissenter? Here you don't take vodka. What's the meaning of that if it is not being a dissenter?"

To satisfy him I drank some vodka and I drank some wine, too. We tasted the cheese, the sausage, the pâtés, the pickles, and the savouries of all sorts that the engineer had brought with him, and the wine that had come in his absence from abroad. The wine was first-rate. For some reason the engineer got wine and cigars from abroad without paying duty; the caviar and the dried sturgeon someone sent him for nothing; he did not pay rent for his flat as the owner of the house provided the kerosene for the line; and altogether he and his daughter produced on me the impression that all the best in the world was at their service, and provided for them for nothing.

I went on going to see them, but not with the same eagerness. The engineer made me feel constrained, and in his presence I did not feel free. I could not face his clear, guileless eyes, his reflections wearied and sickened me; I was sickened, too, by the memory that so lately I had been in the employment of this red-faced, well-fed man, and that he had been brutally rude to me. It is true that he put his arm round my waist,

slapped me on the shoulder in a friendly way, approved my manner of life, but I felt that, as before, he despised my insignificance, and only put up with me to please his daughter, and I couldn't now laugh and talk as I liked, and I behaved unsociably and kept expecting that in another minute he would address me as Panteley as he did his footman Pavel. How my pride as a provincial and a working man was revolted. I, a proletarian, a house painter, went every day to rich people who were alien to me, and whom the whole town regarded as though they were foreigners, and every day I drank costly wines with them and ate unusual dainties—my conscience refused to be reconciled to it! On my way to the house I sullenly avoided meeting people, and looked at them from under my brows as though I really were a dissenter, and when I was going home from the engineer's I was ashamed of my well-fed condition.

Above all I was afraid of being carried away. Whether I was walking along the street, or working, or talking to the other fellows, I was all the time thinking of one thing only, of going in the evening to see Mariya Viktorovna and was picturing her voice, her laugh, her movements. When I was getting ready to go to her I always spent a long time before my nurse's warped looking-glass, as I fastened my tie; my serge trousers were detestable in my eyes, and I suffered torments, and at the same time despised myself for being so trivial. When she called to me out of the other room that she was not dressed and asked me to wait, I listened to her dressing; it agitated me, I felt as though the ground were giving way under my feet. And when I saw a woman's figure in the street, even at a distance, I invariably compared it. It seemed to me that all our girls and women were vulgar, that they were absurdly dressed, and did not know how to hold themselves; and these comparisons aroused a feeling of pride in me: Mariya Viktorovna was the best of them all! And I dreamed of her and myself at night.

One evening at supper with the engineer we ate a whole lobster. As I was going home afterwards I remembered that the engineer twice called me "My dear fellow" at supper, and I reflected that they treated me very kindly in that house, as they might an unfortunate big dog who had been kicked out by its owners, that they were amusing themselves with me, and that when they were tired of me they would turn me out like a dog. I felt ashamed and wounded, wounded to the point of tears as though I had been insulted, and looking up at the sky I took a vow to put an end to all this.

The next day I did not go to the Dolzhikov's. Late in the evening, when it was quite dark and raining, I walked along Great Dvoryansky Street, looking up at the windows. Everyone was asleep at the Azhogins', and the only light was in one of the furthest windows. It was Madame Azhogin in her own room, sewing by the light of three candles, imagining that she was combating superstition. Our house was in darkness, but at the Dolzhikovs', on the contrary, the windows were lighted up, but one could distinguish nothing through the flowers and the curtains. I kept walking up and down the street; the cold March rain drenched me through. I heard my father come home from the club; he stood knocking at the gate. A minute later a light appeared at the window, and I saw my sister, who was hastening down with a lamp, while with the other hand she was twisting her thick hair together as she went. Then my father walked about the drawing room, talking and rubbing his hands, while my sister sat in a low chair, thinking and not listening to what he said.

But then they went away; the light went out.… I glanced round at the engineer's, and there, too, all was darkness now. In the dark and the rain I felt hopelessly alone, abandoned to the whims of destiny; I felt that all my doings, my desires, and everything I had thought and said till then were trivial in comparison with my loneliness, in comparison with my present suffering, and the suffering that lay before me in the future. Alas, the thoughts and doings of living creatures are not nearly so significant as their sufferings! And without clearly realizing what I was doing, I pulled at the bell of the Dolzhikovs' gate, broke it, and ran along the street like some naughty boy, with a feeling of terror in my heart, expecting every moment that they would come out and recognize me. When I stopped at the end of the street to take breath I could hear nothing but the sound of the rain, and somewhere in the distance a watchman striking on a sheet of iron.

For a whole week I did not go to the Dolzhikovs'. My serge trousers were sold. There was nothing doing in the painting trade. I knew the pangs of hunger again, and earned from twopence to fourpence a day, where I could, by heavy and unpleasant work. Struggling up to my knees in the cold mud, straining my chest, I tried to stifle my memories, and, as it were, to punish myself for the cheeses and preserves with which I had been regaled at the engineer's. But all the same, as soon as I lay in bed, wet and hungry, my sinful imagination immediately began to paint exquisite, seductive pictures, and with amazement I acknowledged to myself that I was in love, passionately in love, and I fell into a sound,

heavy sleep, feeling that hard labour only made my body stronger and younger.

One evening snow began falling most inappropriately, and the wind blew from the north as though winter had come back again. When I returned from work that evening I found Mariya Viktorovna in my room. She was sitting in her fur coat, and had both hands in her muff.

“Why don’t you come to see me?” she asked, raising her clear, clever eyes, and I was utterly confused with delight and stood stiffly upright before her, as I used to stand facing my father when he was going to beat me; she looked into my face and I could see from her eyes that she understood why I was confused.

“Why don’t you come to see me?” she repeated. “If you don’t want to come, you see, I have come to you.”

She got up and came close to me.

“Don’t desert me,” she said, and her eyes filled with tears. “I am alone, utterly alone.”

She began crying; and, hiding her face in her muff, articulated:

“Alone! My life is hard, very hard, and in all the world I have no one but you. Don’t desert me!”

Looking for a handkerchief to wipe her tears she smiled; we were silent for some time, then I put my arms round her and kissed her, scratching my cheek till it bled with her hatpin as I did it.

And we began talking to each other as though we had been on the closest terms for ages and ages.

X

Two days later she sent me to Dubetchnya and I was unutterably delighted to go. As I walked towards the station and afterwards, as I was sitting in the train, I kept laughing from no apparent cause, and people looked at me as though I were drunk. Snow was falling, and there were still frosts in the mornings, but the roads were already dark-coloured and rooks hovered over them, cawing.

At first I had intended to fit up an abode for us two, Masha and me, in the lodge at the side opposite Madame Tcheprakov's lodge, but it appeared that the doves and the ducks had been living there for a long time, and it was impossible to clean it without destroying a great number of nests. There was nothing for it but to live in the comfortless rooms of the big house with the sunblinds. The peasants called the house the palace; there were more than twenty rooms in it, and the only furniture was a piano and a child's armchair lying in the attic. And if Masha had brought all her furniture from the town we should even then have been unable to get rid of the impression of immense emptiness and cold. I picked out three small rooms with windows looking into the garden, and worked from early morning till night, setting them to rights, putting in new panes, papering the walls, filling up the holes and chinks in the floors. It was easy, pleasant work. I was continually running to the river to see whether the ice were not going; I kept fancying that starlings were flying. And at night, thinking of Masha, I listened with an unutterably sweet feeling, with clutching delight to the noise of the rats and the wind droning and knocking above the ceiling. It seemed as though some old house spirit were coughing in the attic.

The snow was deep; a great deal had fallen even at the end of March, but it melted quickly, as though by magic, and the spring floods passed in a tumultuous rush, so that by the beginning of April the starlings were already noisy, and yellow butterflies were flying in the garden. It was exquisite weather. Every day, towards evening, I used to walk to the town to meet Masha, and what a delight it was to walk with bare feet along the gradually drying, still soft road. Halfway I used to sit down and look towards the town, not venturing to go near it. The sight of it

troubled me. I kept wondering how the people I knew would behave to me when they heard of my love. What would my father say? What troubled me particularly was the thought that my life was more complicated, and that I had completely lost all power to set it right, and that, like a balloon, it was bearing me away, God knows whither. I no longer considered the problem how to earn my daily bread, how to live, but thought about—I really don't know what.

Masha used to come in a carriage; I used to get in with her, and we drove to Dubetchnya, feeling lighthearted and free. Or, after waiting till the sun had set, I would go back dissatisfied and dreary, wondering why Masha had not come; at the gate or in the garden I would be met by a sweet, unexpected apparition—it was she! It would turn out that she had come by rail, and had walked from the station. What a festival it was! In a simple woollen dress with a kerchief on her head, with a modest sunshade, but laced in, slender, in expensive foreign boots—it was a talented actress playing the part of a little workgirl. We looked round our domain and decided which should be her room, and which mine, where we would have our avenue, our kitchen garden, our beehives.

We already had hens, ducks, and geese, which we loved because they were ours. We had, all ready for sowing, oats, clover, timothy grass, buckwheat, and vegetable seeds, and we always looked at all these stores and discussed at length the crop we might get; and everything Masha said to me seemed extraordinarily clever, and fine. This was the happiest time of my life.

Soon after St. Thomas's week we were married at our parish church in the village of Kurilovka, two miles from Dubetchnya. Masha wanted everything to be done quietly; at her wish our "best men" were peasant lads, the sacristan sang alone, and we came back from the church in a small, jolting chaise which she drove herself. Our only guest from the town was my sister Kleopatra, to whom Masha sent a note three days before the wedding. My sister came in a white dress and wore gloves. During the wedding she cried quietly from joy and tenderness. Her expression was motherly and infinitely kind. She was intoxicated with our happiness, and smiled as though she were absorbing a sweet delirium, and looking at her during our wedding, I realized that for her there was nothing in the world higher than love, earthly love, and that she was dreaming of it secretly, timidly, but continually and passionately. She embraced and kissed Masha, and, not knowing how to express her rapture, said to her of me: "He is good! He is very good!"

Before she went away she changed into her ordinary dress, and drew me into the garden to talk to me alone.

"Father is very much hurt," she said, "that you have written nothing to him. You ought to have asked for his blessing. But in reality he is very much pleased. He says that this marriage will raise you in the eyes of all society, and that under the influence of Mariya Viktorovna you will begin to take a more serious view of life. We talk of nothing but you in the evenings now, and yesterday he actually used the expression: 'Our Misail.' That pleased me. It seems as though he had some plan in his mind, and I fancy he wants to set you an example of magnanimity and be the first to speak of reconciliation. It is very possible he may come here to see you in a day or two."

She hurriedly made the sign of the cross over me several times and said:

"Well, God be with you. Be happy. Anyuta Blagovo is a very clever girl; she says about your marriage that God is sending you a fresh ordeal. To be sure—married life does not bring only joy but suffering too. That's bound to be so."

Masha and I walked a couple of miles to see her on her way; we walked back slowly and in silence, as though we were resting. Masha held my hand, my heart felt light, and I had no inclination to talk about love; we had become closer and more akin now that we were married, and we felt that nothing now could separate us.

"Your sister is a nice creature," said Masha, "but it seems as though she had been tormented for years. Your father must be a terrible man."

I began telling her how my sister and I had been brought up, and what a senseless torture our childhood had really been. When she heard how my father had so lately beaten me, she shuddered and drew closer to me.

"Don't tell me any more," she said. "It's horrible!"

Now she never left me. We lived together in the three rooms in the big house, and in the evenings we bolted the door which led to the empty part of the house, as though someone were living there whom we did not know, and were afraid of. I got up early, at dawn, and immediately set to work of some sort. I mended the carts, made paths in the garden, dug the flower beds, painted the roof of the house. When the time came to sow the oats I tried to plough the ground over again, to harrow and to sow, and I did it all conscientiously, keeping up with our labourer; I was worn out, the rain and the cold wind made my face and feet burn for hours afterwards. I dreamed of ploughed land at night. But field labour did not attract me. I did not understand farming, and I did not care for it; it was

perhaps because my forefathers had not been tillers of the soil, and the very blood that flowed in my veins was purely of the city. I loved nature tenderly; I loved the fields and meadows and kitchen gardens, but the peasant who turned up the soil with his plough and urged on his pitiful horse, wet and tattered, with his craning neck, was to me the expression of coarse, savage, ugly force, and every time I looked at his uncouth movements I involuntarily began thinking of the legendary life of the remote past, before men knew the use of fire. The fierce bull that ran with the peasants' herd, and the horses, when they dashed about the village, stamping their hoofs, moved me to fear, and everything rather big, strong, and angry, whether it was the ram with its horns, the gander, or the yard-dog, seemed to me the expression of the same coarse, savage force. This mood was particularly strong in me in bad weather, when heavy clouds were hanging over the black ploughed land. Above all, when I was ploughing or sowing, and two or three people stood looking how I was doing it, I had not the feeling that this work was inevitable and obligatory, and it seemed to me that I was amusing myself. I preferred doing something in the yard, and there was nothing I liked so much as painting the roof.

I used to walk through the garden and the meadow to our mill. It was let to a peasant of Kurilovka called Stepan, a handsome, dark fellow with a thick black beard, who looked very strong. He did not like the miller's work, and looked upon it as dreary and unprofitable, and only lived at the mill in order not to live at home. He was a leather-worker, and was always surrounded by a pleasant smell of tar and leather. He was not fond of talking, he was listless and sluggish, and was always sitting in the doorway or on the river bank, humming "oo-loo-loo." His wife and mother-in-law, both white-faced, languid, and meek, used sometimes to come from Kurilovka to see him; they made low bows to him and addressed him formally, "Stepan Petrovitch," while he went on sitting on the river bank, softly humming "oo-loo-loo," without responding by word or movement to their bows. One hour and then a second would pass in silence. His mother-in-law and wife, after whispering together, would get up and gaze at him for some time, expecting him to look round; then they would make a low bow, and in sugary, chanting voices, say:

"Goodbye, Stepan Petrovitch!"

And they would go away. After that Stepan, picking up the parcel they had left, containing cracknels or a shirt, would heave a sigh and say, winking in their direction:

“The female sex!”

The mill with two sets of millstones worked day and night. I used to help Stepan; I liked the work, and when he went off I was glad to stay and take his place.

XI

After bright warm weather came a spell of wet; all May it rained and was cold. The sound of the millwheels and of the rain disposed one to indolence and slumber. The floor trembled, there was a smell of flour, and that, too, induced drowsiness. My wife in a short fur-lined jacket, and in men's high golosh boots, would make her appearance twice a day, and she always said the same thing:

"And this is called summer! Worse than it was in October!"

We used to have tea and make the porridge together, or we would sit for hours at a stretch without speaking, waiting for the rain to stop. Once, when Stepan had gone off to the fair, Masha stayed all night at the mill. When we got up we could not tell what time it was, as the rain-clouds covered the whole sky; but sleepy cocks were crowing at Dubetchnya, and landrails were calling in the meadows; it was still very, very early.… My wife and I went down to the millpond and drew out the net which Stepan had thrown in over night in our presence. A big pike was struggling in it, and a crayfish was twisting about, clawing upwards with its pincers.

"Let them go," said Masha. "Let them be happy too."

Because we got up so early and afterwards did nothing, that day seemed very long, the longest day in my life. Towards evening Stepan came back and I went home.

"Your father came today," said Masha.

"Where is he?" I asked.

"He has gone away. I would not see him."

Seeing that I remained standing and silent, that I was sorry for my father, she said:

"One must be consistent. I would not see him, and sent word to him not to trouble to come and see us again."

A minute later I was out at the gate and walking to the town to explain things to my father. It was muddy, slippery, cold. For the first time since my marriage I felt suddenly sad, and in my brain exhausted by that long, grey day, there was stirring the thought that perhaps I was not living as I ought. I was worn out; little by little I was overcome by despondency

and indolence, I did not want to move or think, and after going on a little I gave it up with a wave of my hand and turned back.

The engineer in a leather overcoat with a hood was standing in the middle of the yard.

“Where’s the furniture? There used to be lovely furniture in the Empire style: there used to be pictures, there used to be vases, while now you could play ball in it! I bought the place with the furniture. The devil take her!”

Moisey, a thin pockmarked fellow of twenty-five, with insolent little eyes, who was in the service of the general’s widow, stood near him crumpling up his cap in his hands; one of his cheeks was bigger than the other, as though he had lain too long on it.

“Your honour was graciously pleased to buy the place without the furniture,” he brought out irresolutely; “I remember.”

“Hold your tongue!” shouted the engineer; he turned crimson and shook with anger… and the echo in the garden loudly repeated his shout.

XII

When I was doing anything in the garden or the yard, Moisey would stand beside me, and folding his arms behind his back he would stand lazily and impudently staring at me with his little eyes. And this irritated me to such a degree that I threw up my work and went away.

From Stepan we heard that Moisey was Madame Tcheprakov's lover. I noticed that when people came to her to borrow money they addressed themselves first to Moisey, and once I saw a peasant, black from head to foot—he must have been a coal heaver—bow down at Moisey's feet. Sometimes, after a little whispering, he gave out money himself, without consulting his mistress, from which I concluded that he did a little business on his own account.

He used to shoot in our garden under our windows, carried off victuals from our cellar, borrowed our horses without asking permission, and we were indignant and began to feel as though Dubetchnya were not ours, and Masha would say, turning pale:

"Can we really have to go on living with these reptiles another eighteen months?"

Madame Tcheprakov's son, Ivan, was serving as a guard on our railway-line. He had grown much thinner and feebler during the winter, so that a single glass was enough to make him drunk, and he shivered out of the sunshine. He wore the guard's uniform with aversion and was ashamed of it, but considered his post a good one, as he could steal the candles and sell them. My new position excited in him a mixed feeling of wonder, envy, and a vague hope that something of the same sort might happen to him. He used to watch Masha with ecstatic eyes, ask me what I had for dinner now, and his lean and ugly face wore a sad and sweetish expression, and he moved his fingers as though he were feeling my happiness with them.

"Listen, Better-than-nothing," he said fussily, relighting his cigarette at every instant; there was always a litter where he stood, for he wasted dozens of matches, lighting one cigarette. "Listen, my life now is the nastiest possible. The worst of it is any subaltern can shout: 'Hi, there, guard!' I have overheard all sorts of things in the train, my boy, and do

you know, I have learned that life's a beastly thing! My mother has been the ruin of me! A doctor in the train told me that if parents are immoral, their children are drunkards or criminals. Think of that!"

Once he came into the yard, staggering; his eyes gazed about blankly, his breathing was laboured; he laughed and cried and babbled as though in a high fever, and the only words I could catch in his muddled talk were, "My mother! Where's my mother?" which he uttered with a wail like a child who has lost his mother in a crowd. I led him into our garden and laid him down under a tree, and Masha and I took turns to sit by him all that day and all night. He was very sick, and Masha looked with aversion at his pale, wet face, and said:

"Is it possible these reptiles will go on living another year and a half in our yard? It's awful! it's awful!"

And how many mortifications the peasants caused us! How many bitter disappointments in those early days in the spring months, when we so longed to be happy. My wife built a school. I drew a plan of a school for sixty boys, and the Zemstvo Board approved of it, but advised us to build the school at Kurilovka the big village which was only two miles from us. Moreover, the school at Kurilovka in which children—from four villages, our Dubetchnya being one of the number—were taught, was old and too small, and the floor was scarcely safe to walk upon. At the end of March at Masha's wish, she was appointed guardian of the Kurilovka school, and at the beginning of April we three times summoned the village assembly, and tried to persuade the peasants that their school was old and overcrowded, and that it was essential to build a new one. A member of the Zemstvo Board and the Inspector of Peasant Schools came, and they, too, tried to persuade them. After each meeting the peasants surrounded us, begging for a bucket of vodka; we were hot in the crowd; we were soon exhausted, and returned home dissatisfied and a little ill at ease. In the end the peasants set apart a plot of ground for the school, and were obliged to bring all the building material from the town with their own horses. And the very first Sunday after the spring corn was sown carts set off from Kurilovka and Dubetchnya to fetch bricks for the foundations. They set off as soon as it was light, and came back late in the evening; the peasants were drunk, and said they were worn out.

As ill-luck would have it, the rain and the cold persisted all through May. The road was in an awful state: it was deep in mud. The carts usually drove into our yard when they came back from the town—and what a horrible ordeal it was. A potbellied horse would appear at the

gate, setting its front legs wide apart; it would stumble forward before coming into the yard; a beam, nine yards long, wet and slimy-looking, crept in on a wagon. Beside it, muffled up against the rain, strode a peasant with the skirts of his coat tucked up in his belt, not looking where he was going, but stepping through the puddles. Another cart would appear with boards, then a third with a beam, a fourth… and the space before our house was gradually crowded up with horses, beams, and planks. Men and women, with their heads muffled and their skirts tucked up, would stare angrily at our windows, make an uproar, and clamour for the mistress to come out to them; coarse oaths were audible. Meanwhile Moisey stood at one side, and we fancied he was enjoying our discomfiture.

"We are not going to cart any more," the peasants would shout. "We are worn out! Let her go and get the stuff herself."

Masha, pale and flustered, expecting every minute that they would break into the house, would send them out a half-pail of vodka; after that the noise would subside and the long beams, one after another, would crawl slowly out of the yard.

When I was setting off to see the building my wife was worried and said:

"The peasants are spiteful; I only hope they won't do you a mischief. Wait a minute, I'll come with you."

We drove to Kurilovka together, and there the carpenters asked us for a drink. The framework of the house was ready. It was time to lay the foundation, but the masons had not come; this caused delay, and the carpenters complained. And when at last the masons did come, it appeared that there was no sand; it had been somehow overlooked that it would be needed. Taking advantage of our helpless position, the peasants demanded thirty kopecks for each cartload, though the distance from the building to the river where they got the sand was less than a quarter of a mile, and more than five hundred cartloads were found to be necessary. There was no end to the misunderstandings, swearing, and importunity; my wife was indignant, and the foreman of the masons, Tit Petrov, an old man of seventy, took her by the arm, and said:

"You look here! You look here! You only bring me the sand; I set ten men on at once, and in two days it will be done! You look here!"

But they brought the sand and two days passed, and four, and a week, and instead of the promised foundations there was still a yawning hole.

"It's enough to drive one out of one's senses," said my wife, in distress. "What people! What people!"

In the midst of these disorderly doings the engineer arrived; he brought with him parcels of wine and savouries, and after a prolonged meal lay down for a nap in the verandah and snored so loudly that the labourers shook their heads and said: “Well!”

Masha was not pleased at his coming, she did not trust him, though at the same time she asked his advice. When, after sleeping too long after dinner, he got up in a bad humour and said unpleasant things about our management of the place, or expressed regret that he had bought Dubetchnya, which had already been a loss to him, poor Masha’s face wore an expression of misery. She would complain to him, and he would yawn and say that the peasants ought to be flogged.

He called our marriage and our life a farce, and said it was a caprice, a whim.

“She has done something of the sort before,” he said about Masha. “She once fancied herself a great opera singer and left me; I was looking for her for two months, and, my dear soul, I spent a thousand roubles on telegrams alone.”

He no longer called me a dissenter or Mr. Painter, and did not as in the past express approval of my living like a workman, but said:

“You are a strange person! You are not a normal person! I won’t venture to prophesy, but you will come to a bad end!”

And Masha slept badly at night, and was always sitting at our bedroom window thinking. There was no laughter at supper now, no charming grimaces. I was wretched, and when it rained, every drop that fell seemed to pierce my heart, like small shot, and I felt ready to fall on my knees before Masha and apologize for the weather. When the peasants made a noise in the yard I felt guilty also. For hours at a time I sat still in one place, thinking of nothing but what a splendid person Masha was, what a wonderful person. I loved her passionately, and I was fascinated by everything she did, everything she said. She had a bent for quiet, studious pursuits; she was fond of reading for hours together, of studying. Although her knowledge of farming was only from books she surprised us all by what she knew; and every piece of advice she gave was of value; not one was ever thrown away; and, with all that, what nobility, what taste, what graciousness, that graciousness which is only found in well-educated people.

To this woman, with her sound, practical intelligence, the disorderly surroundings with petty cares and sordid anxieties in which we were living now were an agony: I saw that and could not sleep at night; my

brain worked feverishly and I had a lump in my throat. I rushed about not knowing what to do.

I galloped to the town and brought Masha books, newspapers, sweets, flowers; with Stepan I caught fish, wading for hours up to my neck in the cold water in the rain to catch eelpout to vary our fare; I demeaned myself to beg the peasants not to make a noise; I plied them with vodka, bought them off, made all sorts of promises. And how many other foolish things I did!

At last the rain ceased, the earth dried. One would get up at four o'clock in the morning; one would go out into the garden—where there was dew sparkling on the flowers, the twitter of birds, the hum of insects, not one cloud in the sky; and the garden, the meadows, and the river were so lovely, yet there were memories of the peasants, of their carts, of the engineer. Masha and I drove out together in the racing droshky to the fields to look at the oats. She used to drive, I sat behind; her shoulders were raised and the wind played with her hair.

"Keep to the right!" she shouted to those she met.

"You are like a sledge-driver," I said to her one day.

"Maybe! Why, my grandfather, the engineer's father, was a sledge-driver. Didn't you know that?" she asked, turning to me, and at once she mimicked the way sledge-drivers shout and sing.

"And thank God for that," I thought as I listened to her. "Thank God."

And again memories of the peasants, of the carts, of the engineer.…

XIII

Dr. Blagovo arrived on his bicycle. My sister began coming often. Again there were conversations about manual labour, about progress, about a mysterious millennium awaiting mankind in the remote future. The doctor did not like our farmwork, because it interfered with arguments, and said that ploughing, reaping, grazing calves were unworthy of a free man, and all these coarse forms of the struggle for existence men would in time relegate to animals and machines, while they would devote themselves exclusively to scientific investigation. My sister kept begging them to let her go home earlier, and if she stayed on till late in the evening, or spent the night with us, there would be no end to the agitation.

"Good Heavens, what a baby you are still!" said Masha reproachfully. "It is positively absurd."

"Yes, it is absurd," my sister agreed, "I know it's absurd; but what is to be done if I haven't the strength to get over it? I keep feeling as though I were doing wrong."

At haymaking I ached all over from the unaccustomed labour; in the evening, sitting on the verandah and talking with the others, I suddenly dropped asleep, and they laughed aloud at me. They waked me up and made me sit down to supper; I was overpowered with drowsiness and I saw the lights, the faces, and the plates as it were in a dream, heard the voices, but did not understand them. And getting up early in the morning, I took up the scythe at once, or went to the building and worked hard all day.

When I remained at home on holidays I noticed that my sister and Masha were concealing something from me, and even seemed to be avoiding me. My wife was tender to me as before, but she had thoughts of her own apart, which she did not share with me. There was no doubt that her exasperation with the peasants was growing, the life was becoming more and more distasteful to her, and yet she did not complain to me. She talked to the doctor now more readily than she did to me, and I did not understand why it was so.

It was the custom in our province at haymaking and harvest time for the labourers to come to the manor house in the evening and be regaled with vodka; even young girls drank a glass. We did not keep up this practice; the mowers and the peasant women stood about in our yard till late in the evening expecting vodka, and then departed abusing us. And all the time Masha frowned grimly and said nothing, or murmured to the doctor with exasperation: “Savages! Petchenyegs!”

In the country newcomers are met ungraciously, almost with hostility, as they are at school. And we were received in this way. At first we were looked upon as stupid, silly people, who had bought an estate simply because we did not know what to do with our money. We were laughed at. The peasants grazed their cattle in our wood and even in our garden; they drove away our cows and horses to the village, and then demanded money for the damage done by them. They came in whole companies into our yard, and loudly clamoured that at the mowing we had cut some piece of land that did not belong to us; and as we did not yet know the boundaries of our estate very accurately, we took their word for it and paid damages. Afterwards it turned out that there had been no mistake at the mowing. They barked the lime trees in our wood. One of the Dubetchnya peasants, a regular shark, who did a trade in vodka without a licence, bribed our labourers, and in collaboration with them cheated us in a most treacherous way. They took the new wheels off our carts and replaced them with old ones, stole our ploughing harness and actually sold them to us, and so on. But what was most mortifying of all was what happened at the building; the peasant women stole by night boards, bricks, tiles, pieces of iron. The village elder with witnesses made a search in their huts; the village meeting fined them two roubles each, and afterwards this money was spent on drink by the whole commune.

When Masha heard about this, she would say to the doctor or my sister indignantly:

“What beasts! It’s awful! awful!”

And I heard her more than once express regret that she had ever taken it into her head to build the school.

“You must understand,” the doctor tried to persuade her, “that if you build this school and do good in general, it’s not for the sake of the peasants, but in the name of culture, in the name of the future; and the worse the peasants are the more reason for building the school. Understand that!”

But there was a lack of conviction in his voice, and it seemed to me that both he and Masha hated the peasants.

Masha often went to the mill, taking my sister with her, and they both said, laughing, that they went to have a look at Stepan, he was so handsome. Stepan, it appeared, was torpid and taciturn only with men; in feminine society his manners were free and easy, and he talked incessantly. One day, going down to the river to bathe, I accidentally overheard a conversation. Masha and Kleopatra, both in white dresses, were sitting on the bank in the spreading shade of a willow, and Stepan was standing by them with his hands behind his back, and was saying:

"Are peasants men? They are not men, but, asking your pardon, wild beasts, impostors. What life has a peasant? Nothing but eating and drinking; all he cares for is victuals to be cheaper and swilling liquor at the tavern like a fool; and there's no conversation, no manners, no formality, nothing but ignorance! He lives in filth, his wife lives in filth, and his children live in filth. What he stands up in, he lies down to sleep in; he picks the potatoes out of the soup with his fingers; he drinks kvass with a cockroach in it, and doesn't bother to blow it away!"

"It's their poverty, of course," my sister put in.

"Poverty? There is want to be sure, there's different sorts of want, Madam. If a man is in prison, or let us say blind or crippled, that really is trouble I wouldn't wish anyone, but if a man's free and has all his senses, if he has his eyes and his hands and his strength and God, what more does he want? It's cockering themselves, and it's ignorance, Madam, it's not poverty. If you, let us suppose, good gentlefolk, by your education, wish out of kindness to help him he will drink away your money in his low way; or, what's worse, he will open a drinkshop, and with your money start robbing the people. You say poverty, but does the rich peasant live better? He, too, asking your pardon, lives like a swine: coarse, loud-mouthed, cudgel-headed, broader than he is long, fat, red-faced mug, I'd like to swing my fist and send him flying, the scoundrel. There's Larion, another rich one at Dubetchnya, and I bet he strips the bark off your trees as much as any poor one; and he is a foul-mouthed fellow; his children are the same, and when he has had a drop too much he'll topple with his nose in a puddle and sleep there. They are all a worthless lot, Madam. If you live in a village with them it is like hell. It has stuck in my teeth, that village has, and thank the Lord, the King of Heaven, I've plenty to eat and clothes to wear, I served out my time in the dragoons, I was village elder for three years, and now I am a free Cossack, I live where I like. I don't want to live in the village, and no one has the right to force me. They say—my wife. They say you are

bound to live in your cottage with your wife. But why so? I am not her hired man."

"Tell me, Stepan, did you marry for love?" asked Masha.

"Love among us in the village!" answered Stepan, and he gave a laugh. "Properly speaking, Madam, if you care to know, this is my second marriage. I am not a Kurilovka man, I am from Zalegoshtcho, but afterwards I was taken into Kurilovka when I married. You see my father did not want to divide the land among us. There were five of us brothers. I took my leave and went to another village to live with my wife's family, but my first wife died when she was young."

"What did she die of?"

"Of foolishness. She used to cry and cry and cry for no reason, and so she pined away. She was always drinking some sort of herbs to make her better looking, and I suppose she damaged her inside. And my second wife is a Kurilovka woman too, there is nothing in her. She's a village woman, a peasant woman, and nothing more. I was taken in when they plighted me to her. I thought she was young and fair-skinned, and that they lived in a clean way. Her mother was just like a Flagellant and she drank coffee, and the chief thing, to be sure, they were clean in their ways. So I married her, and next day we sat down to dinner; I bade my mother-in-law give me a spoon, and she gives me a spoon, and I see her wipe it out with her finger. So much for you, thought I; nice sort of cleanliness yours is. I lived a year with them and then I went away. I might have married a girl from the town," he went on after a pause. "They say a wife is a helpmate to her husband. What do I want with a helpmate? I help myself; I'd rather she talked to me, and not clack, clack, clack, but circumstantially, feelingly. What is life without good conversation?"

Stepan suddenly paused, and at once there was the sound of his dreary, monotonous "oo-loo-loo-loo." This meant that he had seen me.

Masha used often to go to the mill, and evidently found pleasure in her conversations with Stepan. Stepan abused the peasants with such sincerity and conviction, and she was attracted to him. Every time she came back from the mill the feebleminded peasant, who looked after the garden, shouted at her:

"Wench Palashka! Hulla, wench Palashka!" and he would bark like a dog: "Ga! Ga!"

And she would stop and look at him attentively, as though in that idiot's barking she found an answer to her thoughts, and probably he attracted her in the same way as Stepan's abuse. At home some piece of

news would await her, such, for instance, as that the geese from the village had ruined our cabbage in the garden, or that Larion had stolen the reins; and shrugging her shoulders, she would say with a laugh:

"What do you expect of these people?"

She was indignant, and there was rancour in her heart, and meanwhile I was growing used to the peasants, and I felt more and more drawn to them. For the most part they were nervous, irritable, downtrodden people; they were people whose imagination had been stifled, ignorant, with a poor, dingy outlook on life, whose thoughts were ever the same—of the grey earth, of grey days, of black bread, people who cheated, but like birds hiding nothing but their head behind the tree—people who could not count. They would not come to mow for us for twenty roubles, but they came for half a pail of vodka, though for twenty roubles they could have bought four pails. There really was filth and drunkenness and foolishness and deceit, but with all that one yet felt that the life of the peasants rested on a firm, sound foundation. However uncouth a wild animal the peasant following the plough seemed, and however he might stupefy himself with vodka, still, looking at him more closely, one felt that there was in him what was needed, something very important, which was lacking in Masha and in the doctor, for instance, and that was that he believed the chief thing on earth was truth and justice, and that his salvation, and that of the whole people, was only to be found in truth and justice, and so more than anything in the world he loved just dealing. I told my wife she saw the spots on the glass, but not the glass itself; she said nothing in reply, or hummed like Stepan "oo-loo-loo-loo." When this good-hearted and clever woman turned pale with indignation, and with a quiver in her voice spoke to the doctor of the drunkenness and dishonesty, it perplexed me, and I was struck by the shortness of her memory. How could she forget that her father the engineer drank too, and drank heavily, and that the money with which Dubetchnya had been bought had been acquired by a whole series of shameless, impudent dishonesties? How could she forget it?

XIV

My sister, too, was leading a life of her own which she carefully hid from me. She was often whispering with Masha. When I went up to her she seemed to shrink into herself, and there was a guilty, imploring look in her eyes; evidently there was something going on in her heart of which she was afraid or ashamed. So as to avoid meeting me in the garden, or being left alone with me, she always kept close to Masha, and I rarely had an opportunity of talking to her except at dinner.

One evening I was walking quietly through the garden on my way back from the building. It was beginning to get dark. Without noticing me, or hearing my step, my sister was walking near a spreading old apple tree, absolutely noiselessly as though she were a phantom. She was dressed in black, and was walking rapidly backwards and forwards on the same track, looking at the ground. An apple fell from the tree; she started at the sound, stood still and pressed her hands to her temples. At that moment I went up to her.

In a rush of tender affection which suddenly flooded my heart, with tears in my eyes, suddenly remembering my mother and our childhood, I put my arm round her shoulders and kissed her.

"What is the matter?" I asked her. "You are unhappy; I have seen it for a long time. Tell me what's wrong?"

"I am frightened," she said, trembling.

"What is it?" I insisted. "For God's sake, be open!"

"I will, I will be open; I will tell you the whole truth. To hide it from you is so hard, so agonizing. Misail, I love…" she went on in a whisper, "I love him… I love him.… I am happy, but why am I so frightened?"

There was the sound of footsteps; between the trees appeared Dr. Blagovo in his silk shirt with his high top boots. Evidently they had arranged to meet near the apple tree. Seeing him, she rushed impulsively towards him with a cry of pain as though he were being taken from her.

"Vladimir! Vladimir!"

She clung to him and looked greedily into his face, and only then I noticed how pale and thin she had become of late. It was particularly noticeable from her lace collar which I had known for so long, and which

now hung more loosely than ever before about her thin, long neck. The doctor was disconcerted, but at once recovered himself, and, stroking her hair, said:

“There, there.… Why so nervous? You see, I’m here.”

We were silent, looking with embarrassment at each other, then we walked on, the three of us together, and I heard the doctor say to me:

“Civilized life has not yet begun among us. Old men console themselves by making out that if there is nothing now, there was something in the forties or the sixties; that’s the old: you and I are young; our brains have not yet been touched by *marasmus senilis*; we cannot comfort ourselves with such illusions. The beginning of Russia was in 862, but the beginning of civilized Russia has not come yet.”

But I did not grasp the meaning of these reflections. It was somehow strange, I could not believe it, that my sister was in love, that she was walking and holding the arm of a stranger and looking tenderly at him. My sister, this nervous, frightened, crushed, fettered creature, loved a man who was married and had children! I felt sorry for something, but what exactly I don’t know; the presence of the doctor was for some reason distasteful to me now, and I could not imagine what would come of this love of theirs.

XV

Masha and I drove to Kurilovka to the dedication of the school.

"Autumn, autumn, autumn,…" said Masha softly, looking away. "Summer is over. There are no birds and nothing is green but the willows."

Yes, summer was over. There were fine, warm days, but it was fresh in the morning, and the shepherds went out in their sheepskins already; and in our garden the dew did not dry off the asters all day long. There were plaintive sounds all the time, and one could not make out whether they came from the shutters creaking on their rusty hinges, or from the flying cranes—and one's heart felt light, and one was eager for life.

"The summer is over," said Masha. "Now you and I can balance our accounts. We have done a lot of work, a lot of thinking; we are the better for it—all honour and glory to us—we have succeeded in self-improvement; but have our successes had any perceptible influence on the life around us, have they brought any benefit to anyone whatever? No. Ignorance, physical uncleanliness, drunkenness, an appallingly high infant mortality, everything remains as it was, and no one is the better for your having ploughed and sown, and my having wasted money and read books. Obviously we have been working only for ourselves and have had advanced ideas only for ourselves." Such reasonings perplexed me, and I did not know what to think.

"We have been sincere from beginning to end," said I, "and if anyone is sincere he is right."

"Who disputes it? We were right, but we haven't succeeded in properly accomplishing what we were right in. To begin with, our external methods themselves—aren't they mistaken? You want to be of use to men, but by the very fact of your buying an estate, from the very start you cut yourself off from any possibility of doing anything useful for them. Then if you work, dress, eat like a peasant you sanctify, as it were, by your authority, their heavy, clumsy dress, their horrible huts, their stupid beards.… On the other hand, if we suppose that you work for long, long years, your whole life, that in the end some practical results are obtained, yet what are they, your results, what can they do against

such elemental forces as wholesale ignorance, hunger, cold, degeneration? A drop in the ocean! Other methods of struggle are needed, strong, bold, rapid! If one really wants to be of use one must get out of the narrow circle of ordinary social work, and try to act direct upon the mass! What is wanted, first of all, is a loud, energetic propaganda. Why is it that art—music, for instance—is so living, so popular, and in reality so powerful? Because the musician or the singer affects thousands at once. Precious, precious art!" she went on, looking dreamily at the sky. "Art gives us wings and carries us far, far away! Anyone who is sick of filth, of petty, mercenary interests, anyone who is revolted, wounded, and indignant, can find peace and satisfaction only in the beautiful."

When we drove into Kurilovka the weather was bright and joyous. Somewhere they were threshing; there was a smell of rye straw. A mountain ash was bright red behind the hurdle fences, and all the trees wherever one looked were ruddy or golden. They were ringing the bells, they were carrying the icons to the school, and we could hear them sing: "Holy Mother, our Defender," and how limpid the air was, and how high the doves were flying.

The service was being held in the classroom. Then the peasants of Kurilovka brought Masha the icon, and the peasants of Dubetchnya offered her a big loaf and a gilt salt cellar. And Masha broke into sobs.

"If anything has been said that shouldn't have been or anything done not to your liking, forgive us," said an old man, and he bowed down to her and to me.

As we drove home Masha kept looking round at the school; the green roof, which I had painted, and which was glistening in the sun, remained in sight for a long while. And I felt that the look Masha turned upon it now was one of farewell.

XVI

In the evening she got ready to go to the town. Of late she had taken to going often to the town and staying the night there. In her absence I could not work, my hands felt weak and limp; our huge courtyard seemed a dreary, repulsive, empty hole. The garden was full of angry noises, and without her the house, the trees, the horses were no longer "ours."

I did not go out of the house, but went on sitting at her table beside her bookshelf with the books on land work, those old favourites no longer wanted and looking at me now so shamefacedly. For whole hours together, while it struck seven, eight, nine, while the autumn night, black as soot, came on outside, I kept examining her old glove, or the pen with which she always wrote, or her little scissors. I did nothing, and realized clearly that all I had done before, ploughing, mowing, chopping, had only been because she wished it. And if she had sent me to clean a deep well, where I had to stand up to my waist in deep water, I should have crawled into the well without considering whether it was necessary or not. And now when she was not near, Dubetchnya, with its ruins, its untidiness, its banging shutters, with its thieves by day and by night, seemed to me a chaos in which any work would be useless. Besides, what had I to work for here, why anxiety and thought about the future, if I felt that the earth was giving way under my feet, that I had played my part in Dubetchnya, and that the fate of the books on farming was awaiting me too? Oh, what misery it was at night, in hours of solitude, when I was listening every minute in alarm, as though I were expecting someone to shout that it was time for me to go away! I did not grieve for Dubetchnya. I grieved for my love which, too, was threatened with its autumn. What an immense happiness it is to love and be loved, and how awful to feel that one is slipping down from that high pinnacle!

Masha returned from the town towards the evening of the next day. She was displeased with something, but she concealed it, and only said, why was it all the window frames had been put in for the winter it was enough to suffocate one. I took out two frames. We were not hungry, but we sat down to supper.

“Go and wash your hands,” said my wife; “you smell of putty.”

She had brought some new illustrated papers from the town, and we looked at them together after supper. There were supplements with fashion plates and patterns. Masha looked through them casually, and was putting them aside to examine them properly later on; but one dress, with a flat skirt as full as a bell and large sleeves, interested her, and she looked at it for a minute gravely and attentively.

“That’s not bad,” she said.

“Yes, that dress would suit you beautifully,” I said, “beautifully.”

And looking with emotion at the dress, admiring that patch of grey simply because she liked it, I went on tenderly:

“A charming, exquisite dress! Splendid, glorious, Masha! My precious Masha!”

And tears dropped on the fashion plate.

“Splendid Masha…” I muttered; “sweet, precious Masha.…”

She went to bed, while I sat another hour looking at the illustrations.

“It’s a pity you took out the window frames,” she said from the bedroom, “I am afraid it may be cold. Oh, dear, what a draught there is!”

I read something out of the column of odds and ends, a receipt for making cheap ink, and an account of the biggest diamond in the world. I came again upon the fashion plate of the dress she liked, and I imagined her at a ball, with a fan, bare shoulders, brilliant, splendid, with a full understanding of painting, music, literature, and how small and how brief my part seemed!

Our meeting, our marriage, had been only one of the episodes of which there would be many more in the life of this vital, richly gifted woman. All the best in the world, as I have said already, was at her service, and she received it absolutely for nothing, and even ideas and the intellectual movement in vogue served simply for her recreation, giving variety to her life, and I was only the sledge-driver who drove her from one entertainment to another. Now she did not need me. She would take flight, and I should be alone.

And as though in response to my thought, there came a despairing scream from the garden.

“He-e-elp!”

It was a shrill, womanish voice, and as though to mimic it the wind whistled in the chimney on the same shrill note. Half a minute passed, and again through the noise of the wind, but coming, it seemed, from the other end of the yard:

“He-e-elp!”

“Misail, do you hear?” my wife asked me softly. “Do you hear?”

She came out from the bedroom in her nightgown, with her hair down, and listened, looking at the dark window.

“Someone is being murdered,” she said. “That is the last straw.”

I took my gun and went out. It was very dark outside, the wind was high, and it was difficult to stand. I went to the gate and listened, the trees roared, the wind whistled and, probably at the feebleminded peasant’s, a dog howled lazily. Outside the gates the darkness was absolute, not a light on the railway-line. And near the lodge, which a year before had been the office, suddenly sounded a smothered scream:

“He-e-elp!”

“Who’s there?” I called.

There were two people struggling. One was thrusting the other out, while the other was resisting, and both were breathing heavily.

“Leave go,” said one, and I recognized Ivan Tcheprakov; it was he who was shrieking in a shrill, womanish voice: “Let go, you damned brute, or I’ll bite your hand off.”

The other I recognized as Moisey. I separated them, and as I did so I could not resist hitting Moisey two blows in the face. He fell down, then got up again, and I hit him once more.

“He tried to kill me,” he muttered. “He was trying to get at his mamma’s chest.… I want to lock him up in the lodge for security.”

Tcheprakov was drunk and did not recognize me; he kept drawing deep breaths, as though he were just going to shout “help” again.

I left them and went back to the house; my wife was lying on her bed; she had dressed. I told her what had happened in the yard, and did not conceal the fact that I had hit Moisey.

“It’s terrible to live in the country,” she said.

“And what a long night it is. Oh dear, if only it were over!”

“He-e-elp!” we heard again, a little later.

“I’ll go and stop them,” I said.

“No, let them bite each other’s throats,” she said with an expression of disgust.

She was looking up at the ceiling, listening, while I sat beside her, not daring to speak to her, feeling as though I were to blame for their shouting “help” in the yard and for the night’s seeming so long.

We were silent, and I waited impatiently for a gleam of light at the window, and Masha looked all the time as though she had awakened from a trance and now was marvelling how she, so clever, and well-educated, so elegant, had come into this pitiful, provincial, empty hole

among a crew of petty, insignificant people, and how she could have so far forgotten herself as ever to be attracted by one of these people, and for more than six months to have been his wife. It seemed to me that at that moment it did not matter to her whether it was I, or Moisey, or Tcheprakov; everything for her was merged in that savage drunken "help"—I and our marriage, and our work together, and the mud and slush of autumn, and when she sighed or moved into a more comfortable position I read in her face: "Oh, that morning would come quickly!"

In the morning she went away. I spent another three days at Dubetchnya expecting her, then I packed all our things in one room, locked it, and walked to the town. It was already evening when I rang at the engineer's, and the street lamps were burning in Great Dvoryansky Street. Pavel told me there was no one at home; Viktor Ivanitch had gone to Petersburg, and Mariya Viktorovna was probably at the rehearsal at the Azhogins'. I remember with what emotion I went on to the Azhogins', how my heart throbbed and fluttered as I mounted the stairs, and stood waiting a long while on the landing at the top, not daring to enter that temple of the muses! In the big room there were lighted candles everywhere, on a little table, on the piano, and on the stage, everywhere in threes; and the first performance was fixed for the thirteenth, and now the first rehearsal was on a Monday, an unlucky day. All part of the war against superstition! All the devotees of the scenic art were gathered together; the eldest, the middle, and the youngest sisters were walking about the stage, reading their parts in exercise books. Apart from all the rest stood Radish, motionless, with the side of his head pressed to the wall as he gazed with adoration at the stage, waiting for the rehearsal to begin. Everything as it used to be.

I was making my way to my hostess; I had to pay my respects to her, but suddenly everyone said "Hush!" and waved me to step quietly. There was a silence. The lid of the piano was raised; a lady sat down at it screwing up her shortsighted eyes at the music, and my Masha walked up to the piano, in a low-necked dress, looking beautiful, but with a special, new sort of beauty not in the least like the Masha who used to come and meet me in the spring at the mill. She sang: "Why do I love the radiant night?"

It was the first time during our whole acquaintance that I had heard her sing. She had a fine, mellow, powerful voice, and while she sang I felt as though I were eating a ripe, sweet, fragrant melon. She ended, the audience applauded, and she smiled, very much pleased, making play with her eyes, turning over the music, smoothing her skirts, like a bird

that has at last broken out of its cage and preens its wings in freedom. Her hair was arranged over her ears, and she had an unpleasant, defiant expression in her face, as though she wanted to throw down a challenge to us all, or to shout to us as she did to her horses: “Hey, there, my beauties!”

And she must at that moment have been very much like her grandfather the sledge-driver.

“You here too?” she said, giving me her hand. “Did you hear me sing? Well, what did you think of it?” and without waiting for my answer she went on: “It’s a very good thing you are here. I am going tonight to Petersburg for a short time. You’ll let me go, won’t you?”

At midnight I went with her to the station. She embraced me affectionately, probably feeling grateful to me for not asking unnecessary questions, and she promised to write to me, and I held her hands a long time, and kissed them, hardly able to restrain my tears and not uttering a word.

And when she had gone I stood watching the retreating lights, caressing her in imagination and softly murmuring:

“My darling Masha, glorious Masha.…”

I spent the night at Karpovna’s, and next morning I was at work with Radish, recovering the furniture of a rich merchant who was marrying his daughter to a doctor.

XVII

My sister came after dinner on Sunday and had tea with me.

“I read a great deal now,” she said, showing me the books which she had fetched from the public library on her way to me. “Thanks to your wife and to Vladimir, they have awakened me to self-realization. They have been my salvation; they have made me feel myself a human being. In old days I used to lie awake at night with worries of all sorts, thinking what a lot of sugar we had used in the week, or hoping the cucumbers would not be too salt. And now, too, I lie awake at night, but I have different thoughts. I am distressed that half my life has been passed in such a foolish, cowardly way. I despise my past; I am ashamed of it. And I look upon our father now as my enemy. Oh, how grateful I am to your wife! And Vladimir! He is such a wonderful person! They have opened my eyes!”

“That’s bad that you don’t sleep at night,” I said.

“Do you think I am ill? Not at all. Vladimir sounded me, and said I was perfectly well. But health is not what matters, it is not so important. Tell me: am I right?”

She needed moral support, that was obvious. Masha had gone away. Dr. Blagovo was in Petersburg, and there was no one left in the town but me, to tell her she was right. She looked intently into my face, trying to read my secret thoughts, and if I were absorbed or silent in her presence she thought this was on her account, and was grieved. I always had to be on my guard, and when she asked me whether she was right I hastened to assure her that she was right, and that I had a deep respect for her.

“Do you know they have given me a part at the Azhogins’?” she went on. “I want to act on the stage, I want to live—in fact, I mean to drain the full cup. I have no talent, none, and the part is only ten lines, but still this is immeasurably finer and loftier than pouring out tea five times a day, and looking to see if the cook has eaten too much. Above all, let my father see I am capable of protest.”

After tea she lay down on my bed, and lay for a little while with her eyes closed, looking very pale.

“What weakness,” she said, getting up. “Vladimir says all city-bred women and girls are anæmic from doing nothing. What a clever man Vladimir is! He is right, absolutely right. We must work!”

Two days later she came to the Azhogins’ with her manuscript for the rehearsal. She was wearing a black dress with a string of coral round her neck, and a brooch that in the distance was like a pastry puff, and in her ears earrings sparkling with brilliants. When I looked at her I felt uncomfortable. I was struck by her lack of taste. That she had very inappropriately put on earrings and brilliants, and that she was strangely dressed, was remarked by other people too; I saw smiles on people’s faces, and heard someone say with a laugh: “Kleopatra of Egypt.”

She was trying to assume society manners, to be unconstrained and at her ease, and so seemed artificial and strange. She had lost simplicity and sweetness.

“I told father just now that I was going to the rehearsal,” she began, coming up to me, “and he shouted that he would not give me his blessing, and actually almost struck me. Only fancy, I don’t know my part,” she said, looking at her manuscript. “I am sure to make a mess of it. So be it, the die is cast,” she went on in intense excitement. “The die is cast.…”

It seemed to her that everyone was looking at her, and that all were amazed at the momentous step she had taken, that everyone was expecting something special of her, and it would have been impossible to convince her that no one was paying attention to people so petty and insignificant as she and I were.

She had nothing to do till the third act, and her part, that of a visitor, a provincial crony, consisted only in standing at the door as though listening, and then delivering a brief monologue. In the interval before her appearance, an hour and a half at least, while they were moving about on the stage reading their parts, drinking tea and arguing, she did not leave my side, and was all the time muttering her part and nervously crumpling up the manuscript. And imagining that everyone was looking at her and waiting for her appearance, with a trembling hand she smoothed back her hair and said to me:

“I shall certainly make a mess of it.… What a load on my heart, if only you knew! I feel frightened, as though I were just going to be led to execution.”

At last her turn came.

“Kleopatra Alexyevna, it’s your cue!” said the stage manager.

She came forward into the middle of the stage with an expression of horror on her face, looking ugly and angular, and for half a minute stood as though in a trance, perfectly motionless, and only her big earrings shook in her ears.

“The first time you can read it,” said someone.

It was clear to me that she was trembling, and trembling so much that she could not speak, and could not unfold her manuscript, and that she was incapable of acting her part; and I was already on the point of going to her and saying something, when she suddenly dropped on her knees in the middle of the stage and broke into loud sobs.

All was commotion and hubbub. I alone stood still, leaning against the side scene, overwhelmed by what had happened, not understanding and not knowing what to do. I saw them lift her up and lead her away. I saw Anyuta Blagovo come up to me; I had not seen her in the room before, and she seemed to have sprung out of the earth. She was wearing her hat and veil, and, as always, had an air of having come only for a moment.

“I told her not to take a part,” she said angrily, jerking out each word abruptly and turning crimson. “It’s insanity! You ought to have prevented her!”

Madame Azhogin, in a short jacket with short sleeves, with cigarette ash on her breast, looking thin and flat, came rapidly towards me.

“My dear, this is terrible,” she brought out, wringing her hands, and, as her habit was, looking intently into my face. “This is terrible! Your sister is in a condition.… She is with child. Take her away, I implore you.…”

She was breathless with agitation, while on one side stood her three daughters, exactly like her, thin and flat, huddling together in a scared way. They were alarmed, overwhelmed, as though a convict had been caught in their house. What a disgrace, how dreadful! And yet this estimable family had spent its life waging war on superstition; evidently they imagined that all the superstition and error of humanity was limited to the three candles, the thirteenth of the month, and to the unluckiness of Monday!

“I beg you… I beg,” repeated Madame Azhogin, pursing up her lips in the shape of a heart on the syllable “you.” “I beg you to take her home.”

XVIII

A little later my sister and I were walking along the street. I covered her with the skirts of my coat; we hastened, choosing back streets where there were no street lamps, avoiding passersby; it was as though we were running away. She was no longer crying, but looked at me with dry eyes. To Karpovna's, where I took her, it was only twenty minutes' walk, and, strange to say, in that short time we succeeded in thinking of our whole life; we talked over everything, considered our position, reflected.…

We decided we could not go on living in this town, and that when I had earned a little money we would move to some other place. In some houses everyone was asleep, in others they were playing cards; we hated these houses; we were afraid of them. We talked of the fanaticism, the coarseness of feeling, the insignificance of these respectable families, these amateurs of dramatic art whom we had so alarmed, and I kept asking in what way these stupid, cruel, lazy, and dishonest people were superior to the drunken and superstitious peasants of Kurilovka, or in what way they were better than animals, who in the same way are thrown into a panic when some incident disturbs the monotony of their life limited by their instincts. What would have happened to my sister now if she had been left to live at home?

What moral agonies would she have experienced, talking with my father, meeting every day with acquaintances? I imagined this to myself, and at once there came into my mind people, all people I knew, who had been slowly done to death by their nearest relations. I remembered the tortured dogs, driven mad, the live sparrows plucked naked by boys and flung into the water, and a long, long series of obscure lingering miseries which I had looked on continually from early childhood in that town; and I could not understand what these sixty thousand people lived for, what they read the gospel for, why they prayed, why they read books and magazines. What good had they gained from all that had been said and written hitherto if they were still possessed by the same spiritual darkness and hatred of liberty, as they were a hundred and three hundred years ago? A master carpenter spends his whole life building houses in the town, and always, to the day of his death, calls a "gallery" a

“galdery.” So these sixty thousand people have been reading and hearing of truth, of justice, of mercy, of freedom for generations, and yet from morning till night, till the day of their death, they are lying, and tormenting each other, and they fear liberty and hate it as a deadly foe.

“And so my fate is decided,” said my sister, as we arrived home. “After what has happened I cannot go back *there*. Heavens, how good that is! My heart feels lighter.”

She went to bed at once. Tears were glittering on her eyelashes, but her expression was happy; she fell into a sound sweet sleep, and one could see that her heart was lighter and that she was resting. It was a long, long time since she had slept like that.

And so we began our life together. She was always singing and saying that her life was very happy, and the books I brought her from the public library I took back unread, as now she could not read; she wanted to do nothing but dream and talk of the future, mending my linen, or helping Karpovna near the stove; she was always singing, or talking of her Vladimir, of his cleverness, of his charming manners, of his kindness, of his extraordinary learning, and I assented to all she said, though by now I disliked her doctor. She wanted to work, to lead an independent life on her own account, and she used to say that she would become a schoolteacher or a doctor’s assistant as soon as her health would permit her, and would herself do the scrubbing and the washing. Already she was passionately devoted to her child; he was not yet born, but she knew already the colour of his eyes, what his hands would be like, and how he would laugh. She was fond of talking about education, and as her Vladimir was the best man in the world, all her discussion of education could be summed up in the question how to make the boy as fascinating as his father. There was no end to her talk, and everything she said made her intensely joyful. Sometimes I was delighted, too, though I could not have said why.

I suppose her dreaminess infected me. I, too, gave up reading, and did nothing but dream. In the evenings, in spite of my fatigue, I walked up and down the room, with my hands in my pockets, talking of Masha.

“What do you think?” I would ask of my sister. “When will she come back? I think she’ll come back at Christmas, not later; what has she to do there?”

“As she doesn’t write to you, it’s evident she will come back very soon.”

“That’s true,” I assented, though I knew perfectly well that Masha would not return to our town.

I missed her fearfully, and could no longer deceive myself, and tried to get other people to deceive me. My sister was expecting her doctor, and I—Masha; and both of us talked incessantly, laughed, and did not notice that we were preventing Karpovna from sleeping. She lay on the stove and kept muttering:

"The samovar hummed this morning, it did hum! Oh, it bodes no good, my dears, it bodes no good!"

No one ever came to see us but the postman, who brought my sister letters from the doctor, and Prokofy, who sometimes came in to see us in the evening, and after looking at my sister without speaking went away, and when he was in the kitchen said:

"Every class ought to remember its rules, and anyone, who is so proud that he won't understand that, will find it a vale of tears."

He was very fond of the phrase "a vale of tears." One day—it was in Christmas week, when I was walking by the bazaar—he called me into the butcher's shop, and not shaking hands with me, announced that he had to speak to me about something very important. His face was red from the frost and vodka; near him, behind the counter, stood Nikolka, with the expression of a brigand, holding a bloodstained knife in his hand.

"I desire to express my word to you," Prokofy began. "This incident cannot continue, because, as you understand yourself that for such a vale, people will say nothing good of you or of us. Mamma, through pity, cannot say something unpleasant to you, that your sister should move into another lodging on account of her condition, but I won't have it any more, because I can't approve of her behaviour."

I understood him, and I went out of the shop. The same day my sister and I moved to Radish's. We had no money for a cab, and we walked on foot; I carried a parcel of our belongings on my back; my sister had nothing in her hands, but she gasped for breath and coughed, and kept asking whether we should get there soon.

XIX

At last a letter came from Masha.

> “Dear, good M. A.” (she wrote), “our kind, gentle ‘angel’ as the old painter calls you, farewell; I am going with my father to America for the exhibition. In a few days I shall see the ocean—so far from Dubetchnya, it’s dreadful to think! It’s far and unfathomable as the sky, and I long to be there in freedom. I am triumphant, I am mad, and you see how incoherent my letter is. Dear, good one, give me my freedom, make haste to break the thread, which still holds, binding you and me together. My meeting and knowing you was a ray from heaven that lighted up my existence; but my becoming your wife was a mistake, you understand that, and I am oppressed now by the consciousness of the mistake, and I beseech you, on my knees, my generous friend, quickly, quickly, before I start for the ocean, telegraph that you consent to correct our common mistake, to remove the solitary stone from my wings, and my father, who will undertake all the arrangements, promised me not to burden you too much with formalities. And so I am free to fly whither I will? Yes?
>
> “Be happy, and God bless you; forgive me, a sinner.
>
> “I am well, I am wasting money, doing all sorts of silly things, and I thank God every minute that such a bad woman as I has no children. I sing and have success, but it’s not an infatuation; no, it’s my haven, my cell to which I go for peace. King David had a ring with an inscription on it: ‘All things pass.’ When one is sad those words make one cheerful, and when one is cheerful it makes one sad. I have got myself a ring like that with Hebrew letters on it, and this talisman keeps me from infatuations. All things pass, life will pass, one wants nothing. Or at least one wants nothing but the sense of freedom, for when anyone is free, he wants nothing, nothing,

nothing. Break the thread. A warm hug to you and your sister. Forgive and forget your M.”

My sister used to lie down in one room, and Radish, who had been ill again and was now better, in another. Just at the moment when I received this letter my sister went softly into the painter’s room, sat down beside him and began reading aloud. She read to him every day, Ostrovsky or Gogol, and he listened, staring at one point, not laughing, but shaking his head and muttering to himself from time to time:

“Anything may happen! Anything may happen!”

If anything ugly or unseemly were depicted in the play he would say as though vindictively, thrusting his finger into the book:

“There it is, lying! That’s what it does, lying does.”

The plays fascinated him, both from their subjects and their moral, and from their skilful, complex construction, and he marvelled at “him,” never calling the author by his name. How neatly *he* has put it all together.

This time my sister read softly only one page, and could read no more: her voice would not last out. Radish took her hand and, moving his parched lips, said, hardly audibly, in a husky voice:

“The soul of a righteous man is white and smooth as chalk, but the soul of a sinful man is like pumice stone. The soul of a righteous man is like clear oil, but the soul of a sinful man is gas tar. We must labour, we must sorrow, we must suffer sickness,” he went on, “and he who does not labour and sorrow will not gain the Kingdom of Heaven. Woe, woe to them that are well fed, woe to the mighty, woe to the rich, woe to the moneylenders! Not for them is the Kingdom of Heaven. Lice eat grass, rust eats iron…”

“And lying the soul,” my sister added laughing. I read the letter through once more. At that moment there walked into the kitchen a soldier who had been bringing us twice a week parcels of tea, French bread and game, which smelt of scent, from some unknown giver. I had no work. I had had to sit at home idle for whole days together, and probably whoever sent us the French bread knew that we were in want.

I heard my sister talking to the soldier and laughing gaily. Then, lying down, she ate some French bread and said to me:

“When you wouldn’t go into the service, but became a house painter, Anyuta Blagovo and I knew from the beginning that you were right, but we were frightened to say so aloud. Tell me what force is it that hinders us from saying what one thinks? Take Anyuta Blagovo now, for instance.

She loves you, she adores you, she knows you are right, she loves me too, like a sister, and knows that I am right, and I daresay in her soul envies me, but some force prevents her from coming to see us, she shuns us, she is afraid."

My sister crossed her arms over her breast, and said passionately:

"How she loves you, if only you knew! She has confessed her love to no one but me, and then very secretly in the dark. She led me into a dark avenue in the garden, and began whispering how precious you were to her. You will see, she'll never marry, because she loves you. Are you sorry for her?"

"Yes."

"It's she who has sent the bread. She is absurd really, what is the use of being so secret? I used to be absurd and foolish, but now I have got away from that and am afraid of nobody. I think and say aloud what I like, and am happy. When I lived at home I hadn't a conception of happiness, and now I wouldn't change with a queen."

Dr. Blagovo arrived. He had taken his doctor's degree, and was now staying in our town with his father; he was taking a rest, and said that he would soon go back to Petersburg again. He wanted to study antitoxins against typhus, and, I believe, cholera; he wanted to go abroad to perfect his training, and then to be appointed a professor. He had already left the army service, and wore a roomy serge reefer jacket, very full trousers, and magnificent neckties. My sister was in ecstasies over his scarfpin, his studs, and the red silk handkerchief which he wore, I suppose from foppishness, sticking out of the breast pocket of his jacket. One day, having nothing to do, she and I counted up all the suits we remembered him wearing, and came to the conclusion that he had at least ten. It was clear that he still loved my sister as before, but he never once even in jest spoke of taking her with him to Petersburg or abroad, and I could not picture to myself clearly what would become of her if she remained alive and what would become of her child. She did nothing but dream endlessly, and never thought seriously of the future; she said he might go where he liked, and might abandon her even, so long as he was happy himself; that what had been was enough for her.

As a rule he used to sound her very carefully on his arrival, and used to insist on her taking milk and drops in his presence. It was the same on this occasion. He sounded her and made her drink a glass of milk, and there was a smell of creosote in our room afterwards.

"That's a good girl," he said, taking the glass from her. "You mustn't talk too much now; you've taken to chattering like a magpie of late.

Please hold your tongue.”

She laughed. Then he came into Radish’s room where I was sitting and affectionately slapped me on the shoulder.

“Well, how goes it, old man?” he said, bending down to the invalid.

“Your honour,” said Radish, moving his lips slowly, “your honour, I venture to submit.… We all walk in the fear of God, we all have to die.… Permit me to tell you the truth.… Your honour, the Kingdom of Heaven will not be for you!”

“There’s no help for it,” the doctor said jestingly; “there must be somebody in hell, you know.”

And all at once something happened with my consciousness; as though I were in a dream, as though I were standing on a winter night in the slaughterhouse yard, and Prokofy beside me, smelling of pepper cordial; I made an effort to control myself, and rubbed my eyes, and at once it seemed to me that I was going along the road to the interview with the Governor. Nothing of the sort had happened to me before, or has happened to me since, and these strange memories that were like dreams, I ascribed to overexhaustion of my nerves. I lived through the scene at the slaughterhouse, and the interview with the Governor, and at the same time was dimly aware that it was not real.

When I came to myself I saw that I was no longer in the house, but in the street, and was standing with the doctor near a lamppost.

“It’s sad, it’s sad,” he was saying, and tears were trickling down his cheeks. “She is in good spirits, she’s always laughing and hopeful, but her position’s hopeless, dear boy. Your Radish hates me, and is always trying to make me feel that I have treated her badly. He is right from his standpoint, but I have my point of view too; and I shall never regret all that has happened. One must love; we ought all to love—oughtn’t we? There would be no life without love; anyone who fears and avoids love is not free.”

Little by little he passed to other subjects, began talking of science, of his dissertation which had been liked in Petersburg. He was carried away by his subject, and no longer thought of my sister, nor of his grief, nor of me. Life was of absorbing interest to him. She has America and her ring with the inscription on it, I thought, while this fellow has his doctor’s degree and a professor’s chair to look forward to, and only my sister and I are left with the old things.

When I said goodbye to him, I went up to the lamppost and read the letter once more. And I remembered, I remembered vividly how that spring morning she had come to me at the mill, lain down and covered

herself with her jacket—she wanted to be like a simple peasant woman. And how, another time—it was in the morning also—we drew the net out of the water, and heavy drops of rain fell upon us from the riverside willows, and we laughed.

It was dark in our house in Great Dvoryansky Street. I got over the fence and, as I used to do in the old days, went by the back way to the kitchen to borrow a lantern. There was no one in the kitchen. The samovar hissed near the stove, waiting for my father. “Who pours out my father’s tea now?” I thought. Taking the lantern I went out to the shed, built myself up a bed of old newspapers and lay down. The hooks on the walls looked forbidding, as they used to of old, and their shadows flickered. It was cold. I felt that my sister would come in in a minute, and bring me supper, but at once I remembered that she was ill and was lying at Radish’s, and it seemed to me strange that I should have climbed over the fence and be lying here in this unheated shed. My mind was in a maze, and I saw all sorts of absurd things.

There was a ring. A ring familiar from childhood: first the wire rustled against the wall, then a short plaintive ring in the kitchen. It was my father come back from the club. I got up and went into the kitchen. Axinya the cook clasped her hands on seeing me, and for some reason burst into tears.

“My own!” she said softly. “My precious! O Lord!”

And she began crumpling up her apron in her agitation. In the window there were standing jars of berries in vodka. I poured myself out a teacupful and greedily drank it off, for I was intensely thirsty. Axinya had quite recently scrubbed the table and benches, and there was that smell in the kitchen which is found in bright, snug kitchens kept by tidy cooks. And that smell and the chirp of the cricket used to lure us as children into the kitchen, and put us in the mood for hearing fairy tales and playing at “Kings”…

“Where’s Kleopatra?” Axinya asked softly, in a fluster, holding her breath; “and where is your cap, my dear? Your wife, you say, has gone to Petersburg?”

She had been our servant in our mother’s time, and used once to give Kleopatra and me our baths, and to her we were still children who had to be talked to for their good. For a quarter of an hour or so she laid before me all the reflections which she had with the sagacity of an old servant been accumulating in the stillness of that kitchen, all the time since we had seen each other. She said that the doctor could be forced to marry Kleopatra; he only needed to be thoroughly frightened; and that if an

appeal were promptly written the bishop would annul the first marriage; that it would be a good thing for me to sell Dubetchnya without my wife's knowledge, and put the money in the bank in my own name; that if my sister and I were to bow down at my father's feet and ask him properly, he might perhaps forgive us; that we ought to have a service sung to the Queen of Heaven.…

"Come, go along, my dear, and speak to him," she said, when she heard my father's cough. "Go along, speak to him; bow down, your head won't drop off."

I went in. My father was sitting at the table sketching a plan of a summer villa, with Gothic windows, and with a fat turret like a fireman's watch tower—something peculiarly stiff and tasteless. Going into the study I stood still where I could see this drawing. I did not know why I had gone in to my father, but I remember that when I saw his lean face, his red neck, and his shadow on the wall, I wanted to throw myself on his neck, and as Axinya had told me, bow down at his feet; but the sight of the summer villa with the Gothic windows, and the fat turret, restrained me.

"Good evening," I said.

He glanced at me, and at once dropped his eyes on his drawing.

"What do you want?" he asked, after waiting a little.

"I have come to tell you my sister's very ill. She can't live very long," I added in a hollow voice.

"Well," sighed my father, taking off his spectacles, and laying them on the table. "What thou sowest that shalt thou reap. What thou sowest," he repeated, getting up from the table, "that shalt thou reap. I ask you to remember how you came to me two years ago, and on this very spot I begged you, I besought you to give up your errors; I reminded you of your duty, of your honour, of what you owed to your forefathers whose traditions we ought to preserve as sacred. Did you obey me? You scorned my counsels, and obstinately persisted in clinging to your false ideals; worse still you drew your sister into the path of error with you, and led her to lose her moral principles and sense of shame. Now you are both in a bad way. Well, as thou sowest, so shalt thou reap!"

As he said this he walked up and down the room. He probably imagined that I had come to him to confess my wrong doings, and he probably expected that I should begin begging him to forgive my sister and me. I was cold, I was shivering as though I were in a fever, and spoke with difficulty in a husky voice.

“And I beg you, too, to remember,” I said, “on this very spot I besought you to understand me, to reflect, to decide with me how and for what we should live, and in answer you began talking about our forefathers, about my grandfather who wrote poems. One tells you now that your only daughter is hopelessly ill, and you go on again about your forefathers, your traditions.… And such frivolity in your old age, when death is close at hand, and you haven’t more than five or ten years left!”

“What have you come here for?” my father asked sternly, evidently offended at my reproaching him for his frivolity.

“I don’t know. I love you, I am unutterably sorry that we are so far apart—so you see I have come. I love you still, but my sister has broken with you completely. She does not forgive you, and will never forgive you now. Your very name arouses her aversion for the past, for life.”

“And who is to blame for it?” cried my father. “It’s your fault, you scoundrel!”

“Well, suppose it is my fault?” I said. “I admit I have been to blame in many things, but why is it that this life of yours, which you think binding upon us, too—why is it so dreary, so barren? How is it that in not one of these houses you have been building for the last thirty years has there been anyone from whom I might have learnt how to live, so as not to be to blame? There is not one honest man in the whole town! These houses of yours are nests of damnation, where mothers and daughters are made away with, where children are tortured.… My poor mother!” I went on in despair. “My poor sister! One has to stupefy oneself with vodka, with cards, with scandal; one must become a scoundrel, a hypocrite, or go on drawing plans for years and years, so as not to notice all the horrors that lie hidden in these houses. Our town has existed for hundreds of years, and all that time it has not produced one man of service to our country—not one. You have stifled in the germ everything in the least living and bright. It’s a town of shopkeepers, publicans, countinghouse clerks, canting hypocrites; it’s a useless, unnecessary town, which not one soul would regret if it suddenly sank through the earth.”

“I don’t want to listen to you, you scoundrel!” said my father, and he took up his ruler from the table. “You are drunk. Don’t dare come and see your father in such a state! I tell you for the last time, and you can repeat it to your depraved sister, that you’ll get nothing from me, either of you. I have torn my disobedient children out of my heart, and if they suffer for their disobedience and obstinacy I do not pity them. You can go whence you came. It has pleased God to chastise me with you, but I will bear the trial with resignation, and, like Job, I will find consolation

in my sufferings and in unremitting labour. You must not cross my threshold till you have mended your ways. I am a just man, all I tell you is for your benefit, and if you desire your own good you ought to remember all your life what I say and have said to you.…”

I waved my hand in despair and went away. I don’t remember what happened afterwards, that night and next day.

I am told that I walked about the streets bareheaded, staggering, and singing aloud, while a crowd of boys ran after me, shouting:

“Better-than-nothing!”

XX

If I wanted to order a ring for myself, the inscription I should choose would be: “Nothing passes away.” I believe that nothing passes away without leaving a trace, and that every step we take, however small, has significance for our present and our future existence.

What I have been through has not been for nothing. My great troubles, my patience, have touched people’s hearts, and now they don’t call me “Better-than-nothing,” they don’t laugh at me, and when I walk by the shops they don’t throw water over me. They have grown used to my being a workman, and see nothing strange in my carrying a pail of paint and putting in windows, though I am of noble rank; on the contrary, people are glad to give me orders, and I am now considered a first-rate workman, and the best foreman after Radish, who, though he has regained his health, and though, as before, he paints the cupola on the belfry without scaffolding, has no longer the force to control the workmen; instead of him I now run about the town looking for work, I engage the workmen and pay them, borrow money at a high rate of interest, and now that I myself am a contractor, I understand how it is that one may have to waste three days racing about the town in search of tilers on account of some twopenny-halfpenny job. People are civil to me, they address me politely, and in the houses where I work, they offer me tea, and send to enquire whether I wouldn’t like dinner. Children and young girls often come and look at me with curiosity and compassion.

One day I was working in the Governor’s garden, painting an arbour there to look like marble. The Governor, walking in the garden, came up to the arbour and, having nothing to do, entered into conversation with me, and I reminded him how he had once summoned me to an interview with him. He looked into my face intently for a minute, then made his mouth like a round “O,” flung up his hands, and said: “I don’t remember!”

I have grown older, have become silent, stern, and austere, I rarely laugh, and I am told that I have grown like Radish, and that like him I bore the workmen by my useless exhortations.

Mariya Viktorovna, my former wife, is living now abroad, while her father is constructing a railway somewhere in the eastern provinces, and is buying estates there. Dr. Blagovo is also abroad. Dubetchnya has passed again into the possession of Madame Tcheprakov, who has bought it after forcing the engineer to knock the price down twenty percent. Moisey goes about now in a bowler hat; he often drives into the town in a racing droshky on business of some sort, and stops near the bank. They say he has already bought up a mortgaged estate, and is constantly making enquiries at the bank about Dubetchnya, which he means to buy too. Poor Ivan Tcheprakov was for a long while out of work, staggering about the town and drinking. I tried to get him into our work, and for a time he painted roofs and put in windowpanes in our company, and even got to like it, and stole oil, asked for tips, and drank like a regular painter. But he soon got sick of the work, and went back to Dubetchnya, and afterwards the workmen confessed to me that he had tried to persuade them to join him one night and murder Moisey and rob Madame Tcheprakov.

My father has greatly aged; he is very bent, and in the evenings walks up and down near his house. I never go to see him.

During an epidemic of cholera Prokofy doctored some of the shopkeepers with pepper cordial and pitch, and took money for doing so, and, as I learned from the newspapers, was flogged for abusing the doctors as he sat in his shop. His shop boy Nikolka died of cholera. Karpovna is still alive and, as always, she loves and fears her Prokofy. When she sees me, she always shakes her head mournfully, and says with a sigh: “Your life is ruined.”

On working days I am busy from morning till night. On holidays, in fine weather, I take my tiny niece (my sister reckoned on a boy, but the child is a girl) and walk in a leisurely way to the cemetery. There I stand or sit down, and stay a long time gazing at the grave that is so dear to me, and tell the child that her mother lies here.

Sometimes, by the graveside, I find Anyuta Blagovo. We greet each other and stand in silence, or talk of Kleopatra, of her child, of how sad life is in this world; then, going out of the cemetery we walk along in silence and she slackens her pace on purpose to walk beside me a little longer. The little girl, joyous and happy, pulls at her hand, laughing and screwing up her eyes in the bright sunlight, and we stand still and join in caressing the dear child.

When we reach the town Anyuta Blagovo, agitated and flushing crimson, says goodbye to me and walks on alone, austere and

respectable.… And no one who met her could, looking at her, imagine that she had just been walking beside me and even caressing the child.

PEASANTS

I

Nikolay Tchikildyeev, a waiter in the Moscow hotel, Slavyansky Bazaar, was taken ill. His legs went numb and his gait was affected, so that on one occasion, as he was going along the corridor, he tumbled and fell down with a tray full of ham and peas. He had to leave his job. All his own savings and his wife's were spent on doctors and medicines; they had nothing left to live upon. He felt dull with no work to do, and he made up his mind he must go home to the village. It is better to be ill at home, and living there is cheaper; and it is a true saying that the walls of home are a help.

He reached Zhukovo towards evening. In his memories of childhood he had pictured his home as bright, snug, comfortable. Now, going into the hut, he was positively frightened; it was so dark, so crowded, so unclean. His wife Olga and his daughter Sasha, who had come with him, kept looking in bewilderment at the big untidy stove, which filled up almost half the hut and was black with soot and flies. What lots of flies! The stove was on one side, the beams lay slanting on the walls, and it looked as though the hut were just going to fall to pieces. In the corner, facing the door, under the holy images, bottle labels and newspaper cuttings were stuck on the walls instead of pictures. The poverty, the poverty! Of the grown-up people there were none at home; all were at work at the harvest. On the stove was sitting a white-headed girl of eight, unwashed and apathetic; she did not even glance at them as they came in. On the floor a white cat was rubbing itself against the oven fork.

"Puss, puss!" Sasha called to her. "Puss!"

"She can't hear," said the little girl; "she has gone deaf."

"How is that?"

"Oh, she was beaten."

Nikolay and Olga realized from the first glance what life was like here, but said nothing to one another; in silence they put down their bundles, and went out into the village street. Their hut was the third from the end, and seemed the very poorest and oldest-looking; the second was not much better; but the last one had an iron roof, and curtains in the windows. That hut stood apart, not enclosed; it was a tavern. The huts were in a single row, and the whole of the little village—quiet and dreamy, with willows, elders, and mountain-ash trees peeping out from the yards—had an attractive look.

Beyond the peasants homesteads there was a slope down to the river, so steep and precipitous that huge stones jutted out bare here and there through the clay. Down the slope, among the stones and holes dug by the potters, ran winding paths; bits of broken pottery, some brown, some red, lay piled up in heaps, and below there stretched a broad, level, bright green meadow, from which the hay had been already carried, and in which the peasants' cattle were wandering. The river, three-quarters of a mile from the village, ran twisting and turning, with beautiful leafy banks; beyond it was again a broad meadow, a herd of cattle, long strings of white geese; then, just as on the near side, a steep ascent uphill, and on the top of the hill a hamlet, and a church with five domes, and at a little distance the manor-house.

"It's lovely here in your parts!" said Olga, crossing herself at the sight of the church. "What space, oh Lord!"

Just at that moment the bell began ringing for service (it was Saturday evening). Two little girls, down below, who were dragging up a pail of water, looked round at the church to listen to the bell.

"At this time they are serving the dinners at the Slavyansky Bazaar," said Nikolay dreamily.

Sitting on the edge of the slope, Nikolay and Olga watched the sun setting, watched the gold and crimson sky reflected in the river, in the church windows, and in the whole air—which was soft and still and unutterably pure as it never was in Moscow. And when the sun had set the flocks and herds passed, bleating and lowing; geese flew across from the further side of the river, and all sank into silence; the soft light died away in the air, and the dusk of evening began quickly moving down upon them.

Meanwhile Nikolay's father and mother, two gaunt, bent, toothless old people, just of the same height, came back. The women—the sisters-in-law Marya and Fyokla—who had been working on the landowner's estate beyond the river, arrived home, too. Marya, the wife of Nikolay's

brother Kiryak, had six children, and Fyokla, the wife of Nikolay's brother Denis—who had gone for a soldier—had two; and when Nikolay, going into the hut, saw all the family, all those bodies big and little moving about on the lockers, in the hanging cradles and in all the corners, and when he saw the greed with which the old father and the women ate the black bread, dipping it in water, he realized he had made a mistake in coming here, sick, penniless, and with a family, too—a great mistake!

"And where is Kiryak?" he asked after they had exchanged greetings.

"He is in service at the merchant's," answered his father; "a keeper in the woods. He is not a bad peasant, but too fond of his glass."

"He is no great help!" said the old woman tearfully. "Our men are a grievous lot; they bring nothing into the house, but take plenty out. Kiryak drinks, and so does the old man; it is no use hiding a sin; he knows his way to the tavern. The Heavenly Mother is wroth."

In honour of the visitors they brought out the samovar. The tea smelt of fish; the sugar was grey and looked as though it had been nibbled; cockroaches ran to and fro over the bread and among the crockery. It was disgusting to drink, and the conversation was disgusting, too—about nothing but poverty and illnesses. But before they had time to empty their first cups there came a loud, prolonged, drunken shout from the yard:

"Ma-arya!"

"It looks as though Kiryak were coming," said the old man. "Speak of the devil."

All were hushed. And again, soon afterwards, the same shout, coarse and drawn-out as though it came out of the earth:

"Ma-arya!"

Marya, the elder sister-in-law, turned pale and huddled against the stove, and it was strange to see the look of terror on the face of the strong, broad-shouldered, ugly woman. Her daughter, the child who had been sitting on the stove and looked so apathetic, suddenly broke into loud weeping.

"What are you howling for, you plague?" Fyokla, a handsome woman, also strong and broad-shouldered, shouted to her. "He won't kill you, no fear!"

From his old father Nikolay learned that Marya was afraid to live in the forest with Kiryak, and that when he was drunk he always came for her, made a row, and beat her mercilessly.

"Ma-arya!" the shout sounded close to the door.

“Protect me, for Christ’s sake, good people!” faltered Marya, breathing as though she had been plunged into very cold water. “Protect me, kind people.…”

All the children in the hut began crying, and looking at them, Sasha, too, began to cry. They heard a drunken cough, and a tall, black-bearded peasant wearing a winter cap came into the hut, and was the more terrible because his face could not be seen in the dim light of the little lamp. It was Kiryak. Going up to his wife, he swung his arm and punched her in the face with his fist. Stunned by the blow, she did not utter a sound, but sat down, and her nose instantly began bleeding.

“What a disgrace! What a disgrace!” muttered the old man, clambering up on to the stove. “Before visitors, too! It’s a sin!”

The old mother sat silent, bowed, lost in thought; Fyokla rocked the cradle.

Evidently conscious of inspiring fear, and pleased at doing so, Kiryak seized Marya by the arm, dragged her towards the door, and bellowed like an animal in order to seem still more terrible; but at that moment he suddenly caught sight of the visitors and stopped.

“Oh, they have come,…” he said, letting his wife go; “my own brother and his family.…”

Staggering and opening wide his red, drunken eyes, he said his prayer before the image and went on:

“My brother and his family have come to the parental home… from Moscow, I suppose. The great capital Moscow, to be sure, the mother of cities.… Excuse me.”

He sank down on the bench near the samovar and began drinking tea, sipping it loudly from the saucer in the midst of general silence.… He drank off a dozen cups, then reclined on the bench and began snoring.

They began going to bed. Nikolay, as an invalid, was put on the stove with his old father; Sasha lay down on the floor, while Olga went with the other women into the barn.

“Aye, aye, dearie,” she said, lying down on the hay beside Marya; “you won’t mend your trouble with tears. Bear it in patience, that is all. It is written in the Scriptures: ‘If anyone smite thee on the right cheek, offer him the left one also.’… Aye, aye, dearie.”

Then in a low singsong murmur she told them about Moscow, about her own life, how she had been a servant in furnished lodgings.

“And in Moscow the houses are big, built of brick,” she said; “and there are ever so many churches, forty times forty, dearie; and they are all gentry in the houses, so handsome and so proper!”

Marya told her that she had not only never been in Moscow, but had not even been in their own district town; she could not read or write, and knew no prayers, not even “Our Father.” Both she and Fyokla, the other sister-in-law, who was sitting a little way off listening, were extremely ignorant and could understand nothing. They both disliked their husbands; Marya was afraid of Kiryak, and whenever he stayed with her she was shaking with fear, and always got a headache from the fumes of vodka and tobacco with which he reeked. And in answer to the question whether she did not miss her husband, Fyokla answered with vexation:

“Miss him!”

They talked a little and sank into silence.

It was cool, and a cock crowed at the top of his voice near the barn, preventing them from sleeping. When the bluish morning light was already peeping through all the crevices, Fyokla got up stealthily and went out, and then they heard the sound of her bare feet running off somewhere.

II

Olga went to church, and took Marya with her. As they went down the path towards the meadow both were in good spirits. Olga liked the wide view, and Marya felt that in her sister-in-law she had someone near and akin to her. The sun was rising. Low down over the meadow floated a drowsy hawk. The river looked gloomy; there was a haze hovering over it here and there, but on the further bank a streak of light already stretched across the hill. The church was gleaming, and in the manor garden the rooks were cawing furiously.

"The old man is all right," Marya told her, "but Granny is strict; she is continually nagging. Our own grain lasted till Carnival. We buy flour now at the tavern. She is angry about it; she says we eat too much."

"Aye, aye, dearie! Bear it in patience, that is all. It is written: 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.'"

Olga spoke sedately, rhythmically, and she walked like a pilgrim woman, with a rapid, anxious step. Every day she read the gospel, read it aloud like a deacon; a great deal of it she did not understand, but the words of the gospel moved her to tears, and words like "forasmuch as" and "verily" she pronounced with a sweet flutter at her heart. She believed in God, in the Holy Mother, in the Saints; she believed one must not offend anyone in the world—not simple folks, nor Germans, nor gypsies, nor Jews—and woe even to those who have no compassion on the beasts. She believed this was written in the Holy Scriptures; and so, when she pronounced phrases from Holy Writ, even though she did not understand them, her face grew softened, compassionate, and radiant.

"What part do you come from?" Marya asked her.

"I am from Vladimir. Only I was taken to Moscow long ago, when I was eight years old."

They reached the river. On the further side a woman was standing at the water's edge, undressing.

"It's our Fyokla," said Marya, recognizing her. "She has been over the river to the manor yard. To the stewards. She is a shameless hussy and foul-mouthed—fearfully!"

Fyokla, young and vigorous as a girl, with her black eyebrows and her loose hair, jumped off the bank and began splashing the water with her feet, and waves ran in all directions from her.

“Shameless—dreadfully!” repeated Marya.

The river was crossed by a rickety little bridge of logs, and exactly below it in the clear, limpid water was a shoal of broad-headed mullets. The dew was glistening on the green bushes that looked into the water. There was a feeling of warmth; it was comforting! What a lovely morning! And how lovely life would have been in this world, in all likelihood, if it were not for poverty, horrible, hopeless poverty, from which one can find no refuge! One had only to look round at the village to remember vividly all that had happened the day before, and the illusion of happiness which seemed to surround them vanished instantly.

They reached the church. Marya stood at the entrance, and did not dare to go farther. She did not dare to sit down either. Though they only began ringing for mass between eight and nine, she remained standing the whole time.

While the gospel was being read the crowd suddenly parted to make way for the family from the great house. Two young girls in white frocks and wide-brimmed hats walked in; with them a chubby, rosy boy in a sailor suit. Their appearance touched Olga; she made up her mind from the first glance that they were refined, well-educated, handsome people. Marya looked at them from under her brows, sullenly, dejectedly, as though they were not human beings coming in, but monsters who might crush her if she did not make way for them.

And every time the deacon boomed out something in his bass voice she fancied she heard “Ma-arya!” and she shuddered.

III

The arrival of the visitors was already known in the village, and directly after mass a number of people gathered together in the hut. The Leonytchevs and Matvyeitchevs and the Ilyitchovs came to inquire about their relations who were in service in Moscow. All the lads of Zhukovo who could read and write were packed off to Moscow and hired out as butlers or waiters (while from the village on the other side of the river the boys all became bakers), and that had been the custom from the days of serfdom long ago when a certain Luka Ivanitch, a peasant from Zhukovo, now a legendary figure, who had been a waiter in one of the Moscow clubs, would take none but his fellow-villagers into his service, and found jobs for them in taverns and restaurants; and from that time the village of Zhukovo was always called among the inhabitants of the surrounding districts Slaveytown. Nikolay had been taken to Moscow when he was eleven, and Ivan Makaritch, one of the Matvyeitchevs, at that time a headwaiter in the Hermitage garden, had put him into a situation. And now, addressing the Matvyeitchevs, Nikolay said emphatically:

"Ivan Makaritch was my benefactor, and I am bound to pray for him day and night, as it is owing to him I have become a good man."

"My good soul!" a tall old woman, the sister of Ivan Makaritch, said tearfully, "and not a word have we heard about him, poor dear."

"In the winter he was in service at Omon's, and this season there was a rumour he was somewhere out of town, in gardens.… He has aged! In old days he would bring home as much as ten roubles a day in the summertime, but now things are very quiet everywhere. The old man frets."

The women looked at Nikolay's feet, shod in felt boots, and at his pale face, and said mournfully:

"You are not one to get on, Nikolay Osipitch; you are not one to get on! No, indeed!"

And they all made much of Sasha. She was ten years old, but she was little and very thin, and might have been taken for no more than seven. Among the other little girls, with their sunburnt faces and roughly

cropped hair, dressed in long faded smocks, she with her white little face, with her big dark eyes, with a red ribbon in her hair, looked funny, as though she were some little wild creature that had been caught and brought into the hut.

"She can read, too," Olga said in her praise, looking tenderly at her daughter. "Read a little, child!" she said, taking the gospel from the corner. "You read, and the good Christian people will listen."

The testament was an old and heavy one in leather binding, with dog's-eared edges, and it exhaled a smell as though monks had come into the hut. Sasha raised her eyebrows and began in a loud rhythmic chant:

"'And the angel of the Lord… appeared unto Joseph, saying unto him: Rise up, and take the Babe and His mother.'"

"The Babe and His mother," Olga repeated, and flushed all over with emotion.

"'And flee into Egypt,… and tarry there until such time as…'"

At the word "tarry" Olga could not refrain from tears. Looking at her, Marya began to whimper, and after her Ivan Makaritch's sister. The old father cleared his throat, and bustled about to find something to give his granddaughter, but, finding nothing, gave it up with a wave of his hand. And when the reading was over the neighbours dispersed to their homes, feeling touched and very much pleased with Olga and Sasha.

As it was a holiday, the family spent the whole day at home. The old woman, whom her husband, her daughters-in-law, her grandchildren all alike called Granny, tried to do everything herself; she heated the stove and set the samovar with her own hands, even waited at the midday meal, and then complained that she was worn out with work. And all the time she was uneasy for fear someone should eat a piece too much, or that her husband and daughters-in-law would sit idle. At one time she would hear the tavern-keeper's geese going at the back of the huts to her kitchen-garden, and she would run out of the hut with a long stick and spend half an hour screaming shrilly by her cabbages, which were as gaunt and scraggy as herself; at another time she fancied that a crow had designs on her chickens, and she rushed to attack it with loud words of abuse. She was cross and grumbling from morning till night. And often she raised such an outcry that passersby stopped in the street.

She was not affectionate towards the old man, reviling him as a lazybones and a plague. He was not a responsible, reliable peasant, and perhaps if she had not been continually nagging at him he would not have worked at all, but would have simply sat on the stove and talked. He talked to his son at great length about certain enemies of his,

complained of the insults he said he had to put up with every day from the neighbours, and it was tedious to listen to him.

"Yes," he would say, standing with his arms akimbo, "yes.… A week after the Exaltation of the Cross I sold my hay willingly at thirty kopecks a pood.… Well and good.… So you see I was taking the hay in the morning with a good will; I was interfering with no one. In an unlucky hour I see the village elder, Antip Syedelnikov, coming out of the tavern. 'Where are you taking it, you ruffian?' says he, and takes me by the ear."

Kiryak had a fearful headache after his drinking bout, and was ashamed to face his brother.

"What vodka does! Ah, my God!" he muttered, shaking his aching head. "For Christ's sake, forgive me, brother and sister; I'm not happy myself."

As it was a holiday, they bought a herring at the tavern and made a soup of the herring's head. At midday they all sat down to drink tea, and went on drinking it for a long time, till they were all perspiring; they looked positively swollen from the tea-drinking, and after it began sipping the broth from the herring's head, all helping themselves out of one bowl. But the herring itself Granny had hidden.

In the evening a potter began firing pots on the ravine. In the meadow below the girls got up a choral dance and sang songs. They played the concertina. And on the other side of the river a kiln for baking pots was lighted, too, and the girls sang songs, and in the distance the singing sounded soft and musical. The peasants were noisy in and about the tavern. They were singing with drunken voices, each on his own account, and swearing at one another, so that Olga could only shudder and say:

"Oh, holy Saints!"

She was amazed that the abuse was incessant, and those who were loudest and most persistent in this foul language were the old men who were so near their end. And the girls and children heard the swearing, and were not in the least disturbed by it, and it was evident that they were used to it from their cradles.

It was past midnight, the kilns on both sides of the river were put out, but in the meadow below and in the tavern the merrymaking still went on. The old father and Kiryak, both drunk, walking arm-in-arm and jostling against each other's shoulders, went to the barn where Olga and Marya were lying.

"Let her alone," the old man persuaded him; "let her alone.… She is a harmless woman.… It's a sin.…"

"Ma-arya!" shouted Kiryak.

“Let her be.… It’s a sin.… She is not a bad woman.”

Both stopped by the barn and went on.

“I lo-ove the flowers of the fi-ield,” the old man began singing suddenly in a high, piercing tenor. “I lo-ove to gather them in the meadows!”

Then he spat, and with a filthy oath went into the hut.

IV

Granny put Sasha by her kitchen-garden and told her to keep watch that the geese did not go in. It was a hot August day. The tavern-keeper's geese could make their way into the kitchen-garden by the backs of the huts, but now they were busily engaged picking up oats by the tavern, peacefully conversing together, and only the gander craned his head high as though trying to see whether the old woman were coming with her stick. The other geese might come up from below, but they were now grazing far away the other side of the river, stretched out in a long white garland about the meadow. Sasha stood about a little, grew weary, and, seeing that the geese were not coming, went away to the ravine.

There she saw Marya's eldest daughter Motka, who was standing motionless on a big stone, staring at the church. Marya had given birth to thirteen children, but she only had six living, all girls, not one boy, and the eldest was eight. Motka in a long smock was standing barefooted in the full sunshine; the sun was blazing down right on her head, but she did not notice that, and seemed as though turned to stone. Sasha stood beside her and said, looking at the church:

"God lives in the church. Men have lamps and candles, but God has little green and red and blue lamps like little eyes. At night God walks about the church, and with Him the Holy Mother of God and Saint Nikolay, thud, thud, thud!… And the watchman is terrified, terrified! Aye, aye, dearie," she added, imitating her mother. "And when the end of the world comes all the churches will be carried up to heaven."

"With the-ir be-ells?" Motka asked in her deep voice, drawling every syllable.

"With their bells. And when the end of the world comes the good will go to Paradise, but the angry will burn in fire eternal and unquenchable, dearie. To my mother as well as to Marya God will say: 'You never offended anyone, and for that go to the right to Paradise'; but to Kiryak and Granny He will say: 'You go to the left into the fire.' And anyone who has eaten meat in Lent will go into the fire, too."

She looked upwards at the sky, opening wide her eyes, and said:

"Look at the sky without winking, you will see angels."

Motka began looking at the sky, too, and a minute passed in silence.

“Do you see them?” asked Sasha.

“I don’t,” said Motka in her deep voice.

“But I do. Little angels are flying about the sky and flap, flap with their little wings as though they were gnats.”

Motka thought for a little, with her eyes on the ground, and asked:

“Will Granny burn?”

“She will, dearie.”

From the stone an even gentle slope ran down to the bottom, covered with soft green grass, which one longed to lie down on or to touch with one’s hands… Sasha lay down and rolled to the bottom. Motka with a grave, severe face, taking a deep breath, lay down, too, and rolled to the bottom, and in doing so tore her smock from the hem to the shoulder.

“What fun it is!” said Sasha, delighted.

They walked up to the top to roll down again, but at that moment they heard a shrill, familiar voice. Oh, how awful it was! Granny, a toothless, bony, hunchbacked figure, with short grey hair which was fluttering in the wind, was driving the geese out of the kitchen-garden with a long stick, shouting.

“They have trampled all the cabbages, the damned brutes! I’d cut your throats, thrice accursed plagues! Bad luck to you!”

She saw the little girls, flung down the stick and picked up a switch, and, seizing Sasha by the neck with her fingers, thin and hard as the gnarled branches of a tree, began whipping her. Sasha cried with pain and terror, while the gander, waddling and stretching his neck, went up to the old woman and hissed at her, and when he went back to his flock all the geese greeted him approvingly with “Ga-ga-ga!” Then Granny proceeded to whip Motka, and in this Motka’s smock was torn again. Feeling in despair, and crying loudly, Sasha went to the hut to complain. Motka followed her; she, too, was crying on a deeper note, without wiping her tears, and her face was as wet as though it had been dipped in water.

“Holy Saints!” cried Olga, aghast, as the two came into the hut. “Queen of Heaven!”

Sasha began telling her story, while at the same time Granny walked in with a storm of shrill cries and abuse; then Fyokla flew into a rage, and there was an uproar in the hut.

“Never mind, never mind!” Olga, pale and upset, tried to comfort them, stroking Sasha’s head. “She is your grandmother; it’s a sin to be angry with her. Never mind, my child.”

Nikolay, who was worn out already by the everlasting hubbub, hunger, stifling fumes, filth, who hated and despised the poverty, who was ashamed for his wife and daughter to see his father and mother, swung his legs off the stove and said in an irritable, tearful voice, addressing his mother:

"You must not beat her! You have no right to beat her!"

"You lie rotting on the stove, you wretched creature!" Fyokla shouted at him spitefully. "The devil brought you all on us, eating us out of house and home."

Sasha and Motka and all the little girls in the hut huddled on the stove in the corner behind Nikolay's back, and from that refuge listened in silent terror, and the beating of their little hearts could be distinctly heard. Whenever there is someone in a family who has long been ill, and hopelessly ill, there come painful moments when all timidly, secretly, at the bottom of their hearts long for his death; and only the children fear the death of someone near them, and always feel horrified at the thought of it. And now the children, with bated breath, with a mournful look on their faces, gazed at Nikolay and thought that he was soon to die; and they wanted to cry and to say something friendly and compassionate to him.

He pressed close to Olga, as though seeking protection, and said to her softly in a quavering voice:

"Olya darling, I can't stay here longer. It's more than I can bear. For God's sake, for Christ's sake, write to your sister Klavdia Abramovna. Let her sell and pawn everything she has; let her send us the money. We will go away from here. Oh, Lord," he went on miserably, "to have one peep at Moscow! If I could see it in my dreams, the dear place!"

And when the evening came on, and it was dark in the hut, it was so dismal that it was hard to utter a word. Granny, very ill-tempered, soaked some crusts of rye bread in a cup, and was a long time, a whole hour, sucking at them. Marya, after milking the cow, brought in a pail of milk and set it on a bench; then Granny poured it from the pail into a jug just as slowly and deliberately, evidently pleased that it was now the Fast of the Assumption, so that no one would drink milk and it would be left untouched. And she only poured out a very little in a saucer for Fyokla's baby. When Marya and she carried the jug down to the cellar Motka suddenly stirred, clambered down from the stove, and going to the bench where stood the wooden cup full of crusts, sprinkled into it some milk from the saucer.

Granny, coming back into the hut, sat down to her soaked crusts again, while Sasha and Motka, sitting on the stove, gazed at her, and they were glad that she had broken her fast and now would go to hell. They were comforted and lay down to sleep, and Sasha as she dozed off to sleep imagined the Day of Judgment: a huge fire was burning, somewhat like a potter's kiln, and the Evil One, with horns like a cow's, and black all over, was driving Granny into the fire with a long stick, just as Granny herself had been driving the geese.

V

On the day of the Feast of the Assumption, between ten and eleven in the evening, the girls and lads who were merrymaking in the meadow suddenly raised a clamour and outcry, and ran in the direction of the village; and those who were above on the edge of the ravine could not for the first moment make out what was the matter.

“Fire! Fire!” they heard desperate shouts from below. “The village is on fire!”

Those who were sitting above looked round, and a terrible and extraordinary spectacle met their eyes. On the thatched roof of one of the end cottages stood a column of flame, seven feet high, which curled round and scattered sparks in all directions as though it were a fountain. And all at once the whole roof burst into bright flame, and the crackling of the fire was audible.

The light of the moon was dimmed, and the whole village was by now bathed in a red quivering glow: black shadows moved over the ground, there was a smell of burning, and those who ran up from below were all gasping and could not speak for trembling; they jostled against each other, fell down, and they could hardly see in the unaccustomed light, and did not recognize each other. It was terrible. What seemed particularly dreadful was that doves were flying over the fire in the smoke; and in the tavern, where they did not yet know of the fire, they were still singing and playing the concertina as though there were nothing the matter.

“Uncle Semyon’s on fire,” shouted a loud, coarse voice.

Marya was fussing about round her hut, weeping and wringing her hands, while her teeth chattered, though the fire was a long way off at the other end of the village. Nikolay came out in high felt boots, the children ran out in their little smocks. Near the village constable’s hut an iron sheet was struck. Boom, boom, boom!… floated through the air, and this repeated, persistent sound sent a pang to the heart and turned one cold. The old women stood with the holy icons. Sheep, calves, cows were driven out of the backyards into the street; boxes, sheepskins, tubs were carried out. A black stallion, who was kept apart from the drove of

horses because he kicked and injured them, on being set free ran once or twice up and down the village, neighing and pawing the ground; then suddenly stopped short near a cart and began kicking it with his hind-legs.

They began ringing the bells in the church on the other side of the river.

Near the burning hut it was hot and so light that one could distinctly see every blade of grass. Semyon, a red-haired peasant with a long nose, wearing a reefer-jacket and a cap pulled down right over his ears, sat on one of the boxes which they had succeeded in bringing out: his wife was lying on her face, moaning and unconscious. A little old man of eighty, with a big beard, who looked like a gnome—not one of the villagers, though obviously connected in some way with the fire—walked about bareheaded, with a white bundle in his arms. The glare was reflected on his bald head. The village elder, Antip Syedelnikov, as swarthy and black-haired as a gypsy, went up to the hut with an axe, and hacked out the windows one after another—no one knew why—then began chopping up the roof.

"Women, water!" he shouted. "Bring the engine! Look sharp!"

The peasants, who had been drinking in the tavern just before, dragged the engine up. They were all drunk; they kept stumbling and falling down, and all had a helpless expression and tears in their eyes.

"Wenches, water!" shouted the elder, who was drunk, too. "Look sharp, wenches!"

The women and the girls ran downhill to where there was a spring, and kept hauling pails and buckets of water up the hill, and, pouring it into the engine, ran down again. Olga and Marya and Sasha and Motka all brought water. The women and the boys pumped the water; the pipe hissed, and the elder, directing it now at the door, now at the windows, held back the stream with his finger, which made it hiss more sharply still.

"Bravo, Antip!" voices shouted approvingly. "Do your best."

Antip went inside the hut into the fire and shouted from within.

"Pump! Bestir yourselves, good Christian folk, in such a terrible mischance!"

The peasants stood round in a crowd, doing nothing but staring at the fire. No one knew what to do, no one had the sense to do anything, though there were stacks of wheat, hay, barns, and piles of faggots standing all round. Kiryak and old Osip, his father, both tipsy, were

standing there, too. And as though to justify his doing nothing, old Osip said, addressing the woman who lay on the ground:

"What is there to trouble about, old girl! The hut is insured—why are you taking on?"

Semyon, addressing himself first to one person and then to another, kept describing how the fire had started.

"That old man, the one with the bundle, a house-serf of General Zhukov's.… He was cook at our general's, God rest his soul! He came over this evening: 'Let me stay the night,' says he.… Well, we had a glass, to be sure.… The wife got the samovar—she was going to give the old fellow a cup of tea, and in an unlucky hour she set the samovar in the entrance. The sparks from the chimney must have blown straight up to the thatch; that's how it was. We were almost burnt ourselves. And the old fellow's cap has been burnt; what a shame!"

And the sheet of iron was struck indefatigably, and the bells kept ringing in the church the other side of the river. In the glow of the fire Olga, breathless, looking with horror at the red sheep and the pink doves flying in the smoke, kept running down the hill and up again. It seemed to her that the ringing went to her heart with a sharp stab, that the fire would never be over, that Sasha was lost.… And when the ceiling of the hut fell in with a crash, the thought that now the whole village would be burnt made her weak and faint, and she could not go on fetching water, but sat down on the ravine, setting the pail down near her; beside her and below her, the peasant women sat wailing as though at a funeral.

Then the stewards and watchmen from the estate the other side of the river arrived in two carts, bringing with them a fire-engine. A very young student in an unbuttoned white tunic rode up on horseback. There was the thud of axes. They put a ladder to the burning framework of the house, and five men ran up it at once. Foremost of them all was the student, who was red in the face and shouting in a harsh hoarse voice, and in a tone as though putting out fires was a thing he was used to. They pulled the house to pieces, a beam at a time; they dragged away the corn, the hurdles, and the stacks that were near.

"Don't let them break it up!" cried stern voices in the crowd. "Don't let them."

Kiryak made his way up to the hut with a resolute air, as though he meant to prevent the newcomers from breaking up the hut, but one of the workmen turned him back with a blow in his neck. There was the sound of laughter, the workman dealt him another blow, Kiryak fell down, and crawled back into the crowd on his hands and knees.

Two handsome girls in hats, probably the student's sisters, came from the other side of the river. They stood a little way off, looking at the fire. The beams that had been dragged apart were no longer burning, but were smoking vigorously; the student, who was working the hose, turned the water, first on the beams, then on the peasants, then on the women who were bringing the water.

"George!" the girls called to him reproachfully in anxiety, "George!"

The fire was over. And only when they began to disperse they noticed that the day was breaking, that everyone was pale and rather dark in the face, as it always seems in the early morning when the last stars are going out. As they separated, the peasants laughed and made jokes about General Zhukov's cook and his cap which had been burnt; they already wanted to turn the fire into a joke, and even seemed sorry that it had so soon been put out.

"How well you extinguished the fire, sir!" said Olga to the student. "You ought to come to us in Moscow: there we have a fire every day."

"Why, do you come from Moscow?" asked one of the young ladies.

"Yes, miss. My husband was a waiter at the Slavyansky Bazaar. And this is my daughter," she said, indicating Sasha, who was cold and huddling up to her. "She is a Moscow girl, too."

The two young ladies said something in French to the student, and he gave Sasha a twenty-kopeck piece.

Old Father Osip saw this, and there was a gleam of hope in his face.

"We must thank God, your honour, there was no wind," he said, addressing the student, "or else we should have been all burnt up together. Your honour, kind gentlefolks," he added in embarrassment in a lower tone, "the morning's chilly… something to warm one… half a bottle to your honour's health."

Nothing was given him, and clearing his throat he slouched home. Olga stood afterwards at the end of the street and watched the two carts crossing the river by the ford and the gentlefolks walking across the meadow; a carriage was waiting for them the other side of the river. Going into the hut, she described to her husband with enthusiasm:

"Such good people! And so beautiful! The young ladies were like cherubim."

"Plague take them!" Fyokla, sleepy, said spitefully.

VI

Marya thought herself unhappy, and said that she would be very glad to die; Fyokla, on the other hand, found all this life to her taste: the poverty, the uncleanliness, and the incessant quarrelling. She ate what was given her without discrimination; slept anywhere, on whatever came to hand. She would empty the slops just at the porch, would splash them out from the doorway, and then walk barefoot through the puddle. And from the very first day she took a dislike to Olga and Nikolay just because they did not like this life.

"We shall see what you'll find to eat here, you Moscow gentry!" she said malignantly. "We shall see!"

One morning, it was at the beginning of September, Fyokla, vigorous, good-looking, and rosy from the cold, brought up two pails of water; Marya and Olga were sitting meanwhile at the table drinking tea.

"Tea and sugar," said Fyokla sarcastically. "The fine ladies!" she added, setting down the pails. "You have taken to the fashion of tea every day. You better look out that you don't burst with your tea-drinking," she went on, looking with hatred at Olga. "That's how you have come by your fat mug, having a good time in Moscow, you lump of flesh!" She swung the yoke and hit Olga such a blow on the shoulder that the two sisters-in-law could only clasp their hands and say:

"Oh, holy Saints!"

Then Fyokla went down to the river to wash the clothes, swearing all the time so loudly that she could be heard in the hut.

The day passed and was followed by the long autumn evening. They wound silk in the hut; everyone did it except Fyokla; she had gone over the river. They got the silk from a factory close by, and the whole family working together earned next to nothing, twenty kopecks a week.

"Things were better in the old days under the gentry," said the old father as he wound silk. "You worked and ate and slept, everything in its turn. At dinner you had cabbage-soup and boiled grain, and at supper the same again. Cucumbers and cabbage in plenty: you could eat to your heart's content, as much as you wanted. And there was more strictness. Everyone minded what he was about."

The hut was lighted by a single little lamp, which burned dimly and smoked. When someone screened the lamp and a big shadow fell across the window, the bright moonlight could be seen. Old Osip, speaking slowly, told them how they used to live before the emancipation; how in those very parts, where life was now so poor and so dreary, they used to hunt with harriers, greyhounds, retrievers, and when they went out as beaters the peasants were given vodka; how whole wagonloads of game used to be sent to Moscow for the young masters; how the bad were beaten with rods or sent away to the Tver estate, while the good were rewarded. And Granny told them something, too. She remembered everything, positively everything. She described her mistress, a kind, God-fearing woman, whose husband was a profligate and a rake, and all of whose daughters made unlucky marriages: one married a drunkard, another married a workman, the other eloped secretly (Granny herself, at that time a young girl, helped in the elopement), and they had all three as well as their mother died early from grief. And remembering all this, Granny positively began to shed tears.

All at once someone knocked at the door, and they all started.

“Uncle Osip, give me a night’s lodging.”

The little bald old man, General Zhukov’s cook, the one whose cap had been burnt, walked in. He sat down and listened, then he, too, began telling stories of all sorts. Nikolay, sitting on the stove with his legs hanging down, listened and asked questions about the dishes that were prepared in the old days for the gentry. They talked of rissoles, cutlets, various soups and sauces, and the cook, who remembered everything very well, mentioned dishes that are no longer served. There was one, for instance—a dish made of bulls’ eyes, which was called “waking up in the morning.”

“And used you to do cutlets à la marechal?” asked Nikolay.

“No.”

Nikolay shook his head reproachfully and said:

“Tut, tut! You were not much of a cook!”

The little girls sitting and lying on the stove stared down without blinking; it seemed as though there were a great many of them, like cherubim in the clouds. They liked the stories: they were breathless; they shuddered and turned pale with alternate rapture and terror, and they listened breathlessly, afraid to stir, to Granny, whose stories were the most interesting of all.

They lay down to sleep in silence; and the old people, troubled and excited by their reminiscences, thought how precious was youth, of

which, whatever it might have been like, nothing was left in the memory but what was living, joyful, touching, and how terribly cold was death, which was not far off, better not think of it! The lamp died down. And the dusk, and the two little windows sharply defined by the moonlight, and the stillness and the creak of the cradle, reminded them for some reason that life was over, that nothing one could do would bring it back.… You doze off, you forget yourself, and suddenly someone touches your shoulder or breathes on your cheek—and sleep is gone; your body feels cramped, and thoughts of death keep creeping into your mind. You turn on the other side: death is forgotten, but old dreary, sickening thoughts of poverty, of food, of how dear flour is getting, stray through the mind, and a little later again you remember that life is over and you cannot bring it back.…

"Oh, Lord!" sighed the cook.

Someone gave a soft, soft tap at the window. It must be Fyokla come back. Olga got up, and yawning and whispering a prayer, opened the door, then drew the bolt in the outer room, but no one came in; only from the street came a cold draught and a sudden brightness from the moonlight. The street, still and deserted, and the moon itself floating across the sky, could be seen at the open door.

"Who is there?" called Olga.

"I," she heard the answer—"it is I."

Near the door, crouching against the wall, stood Fyokla, absolutely naked. She was shivering with cold, her teeth were chattering, and in the bright moonlight she looked very pale, strange, and beautiful. The shadows on her, and the bright moonlight on her skin, stood out vividly, and her dark eyebrows and firm, youthful bosom were defined with peculiar distinctness.

"The ruffians over there undressed me and turned me out like this," she said. "I've come home without my clothes… naked as my mother bore me. Bring me something to put on."

"But go inside!" Olga said softly, beginning to shiver, too.

"I don't want the old folks to see." Granny was, in fact, already stirring and muttering, and the old father asked: "Who is there?" Olga brought her own smock and skirt, dressed Fyokla, and then both went softly into the inner room, trying not to make a noise with the door.

"Is that you, you sleek one?" Granny grumbled angrily, guessing who it was. "Fie upon you, nightwalker!… Bad luck to you!"

"It's all right, it's all right," whispered Olga, wrapping Fyokla up; "it's all right, dearie."

All was stillness again. They always slept badly; everyone was kept awake by something worrying and persistent: the old man by the pain in his back, Granny by anxiety and anger, Marya by terror, the children by itch and hunger. Now, too, their sleep was troubled; they kept turning over from one side to the other, talking in their sleep, getting up for a drink.

Fyokla suddenly broke into a loud, coarse howl, but immediately checked herself, and only uttered sobs from time to time, growing softer and on a lower note, until she relapsed into silence. From time to time from the other side of the river there floated the sound of the beating of the hours; but the time seemed somehow strange—five was struck and then three.

"Oh Lord!" sighed the cook.

Looking at the windows, it was difficult to tell whether it was still moonlight or whether the dawn had begun. Marya got up and went out, and she could be heard milking the cows and saying, "Stea-dy!" Granny went out, too. It was still dark in the hut, but all the objects in it could be discerned.

Nikolay, who had not slept all night, got down from the stove. He took his dress-coat out of a green box, put it on, and going to the window, stroked the sleeves and took hold of the coattails—and smiled. Then he carefully took off the coat, put it away in his box, and lay down again.

Marya came in again and began lighting the stove. She was evidently hardly awake, and seemed dropping asleep as she walked. Probably she had had some dream, or the stories of the night before came into her mind as, stretching luxuriously before the stove, she said:

"No, freedom is better."

VII

The master arrived—that was what they called the police inspector. When he would come and what he was coming for had been known for the last week. There were only forty households in Zhukovo, but more than two thousand roubles of arrears of rates and taxes had accumulated.

The police inspector stopped at the tavern. He drank there two glasses of tea, and then went on foot to the village elder's hut, near which a crowd of those who were in debt stood waiting. The elder, Antip Syedelnikov, was, in spite of his youth—he was only a little over thirty—strict and always on the side of the authorities, though he himself was poor and did not pay his taxes regularly. Evidently he enjoyed being elder, and liked the sense of authority, which he could only display by strictness. In the village council the peasants were afraid of him and obeyed him. It would sometimes happen that he would pounce on a drunken man in the street or near the tavern, tie his hands behind him, and put him in the lockup. On one occasion he even put Granny in the lockup because she went to the village council instead of Osip, and began swearing, and he kept her there for a whole day and night. He had never lived in a town or read a book, but somewhere or other had picked up various learned expressions, and loved to make use of them in conversation, and he was respected for this though he was not always understood.

When Osip came into the village elder's hut with his tax book, the police inspector, a lean old man with a long grey beard, in a grey tunic, was sitting at a table in the passage, writing something. It was clean in the hut; all the walls were dotted with pictures cut out of the illustrated papers, and in the most conspicuous place near the icon there was a portrait of the Battenburg who was the Prince of Bulgaria. By the table stood Antip Syedelnikov with his arms folded.

"There is one hundred and nineteen roubles standing against him," he said when it came to Osip's turn. "Before Easter he paid a rouble, and he has not paid a kopeck since."

The police inspector raised his eyes to Osip and asked:

"Why is this, brother?"

“Show Divine Mercy, your honour,” Osip began, growing agitated. “Allow me to say last year the gentleman at Lutorydsky said to me, ‘Osip,’ he said, ‘sell your hay… you sell it,’ he said. Well, I had a hundred poods for sale; the women mowed it on the water-meadow. Well, we struck a bargain all right, willingly.…”

He complained of the elder, and kept turning round to the peasants as though inviting them to bear witness; his face flushed red and perspired, and his eyes grew sharp and angry.

“I don’t know why you are saying all this,” said the police inspector. “I am asking you… I am asking you why you don’t pay your arrears. You don’t pay, any of you, and am I to be responsible for you?”

“I can’t do it.”

“His words have no sequel, your honour,” said the elder. “The Tchikildyeevs certainly are of a defective class, but if you will just ask the others, the root of it all is vodka, and they are a very bad lot. With no sort of understanding.”

The police inspector wrote something down, and said to Osip quietly, in an even tone, as though he were asking him for water:

“Be off.”

Soon he went away; and when he got into his cheap chaise and cleared his throat, it could be seen from the very expression of his long thin back that he was no longer thinking of Osip or of the village elder, nor of the Zhukovo arrears, but was thinking of his own affairs. Before he had gone three-quarters of a mile Antip was already carrying off the samovar from the Tchikildyeevs’ cottage, followed by Granny, screaming shrilly and straining her throat:

“I won’t let you have it, I won’t let you have it, damn you!”

He walked rapidly with long steps, and she pursued him panting, almost falling over, a bent, ferocious figure; her kerchief slipped on to her shoulders, her grey hair with greenish lights on it was blown about in the wind. She suddenly stopped short, and like a genuine rebel, fell to beating her breast with her fists and shouting louder than ever in a singsong voice, as though she were sobbing:

“Good Christians and believers in God! Neighbours, they have ill-treated me! Kind friends, they have oppressed me! Oh, oh! dear people, take my part.”

“Granny, Granny!” said the village elder sternly, “have some sense in your head!”

It was hopelessly dreary in the Tchikildyeevs’ hut without the samovar; there was something humiliating in this loss, insulting, as

though the honour of the hut had been outraged. Better if the elder had carried off the table, all the benches, all the pots—it would not have seemed so empty. Granny screamed, Marya cried, and the little girls, looking at her, cried, too. The old father, feeling guilty, sat in the corner with bowed head and said nothing. And Nikolay, too, was silent. Granny loved him and was sorry for him, but now, forgetting her pity, she fell upon him with abuse, with reproaches, shaking her fist right in his face. She shouted that it was all his fault; why had he sent them so little when he boasted in his letters that he was getting fifty roubles a month at the Slavyansky Bazaar? Why had he come, and with his family, too? If he died, where was the money to come from for his funeral…? And it was pitiful to look at Nikolay, Olga, and Sasha.

The old father cleared his throat, took his cap, and went off to the village elder. Antip was soldering something by the stove, puffing out his cheeks; there was a smell of burning. His children, emaciated and unwashed, no better than the Tchikildyeevs, were scrambling about the floor; his wife, an ugly, freckled woman with a prominent stomach, was winding silk. They were a poor, unlucky family, and Antip was the only one who looked vigorous and handsome. On a bench there were five samovars standing in a row. The old man said his prayer to Battenburg and said:

"Antip, show the Divine Mercy. Give me back the samovar, for Christ's sake!"

"Bring three roubles, then you shall have it."

"I can't do it!"

Antip puffed out his cheeks, the fire roared and hissed, and the glow was reflected in the samovar. The old man crumpled up his cap and said after a moment's thought:

"You give it me back."

The swarthy elder looked quite black, and was like a magician; he turned round to Osip and said sternly and rapidly:

"It all depends on the rural captain. On the twenty-sixth instant you can state the grounds for your dissatisfaction before the administrative session, verbally or in writing."

Osip did not understand a word, but he was satisfied with that and went home.

Ten days later the police inspector came again, stayed an hour and went away. During those days the weather had changed to cold and windy; the river had been frozen for some time past, but still there was no snow, and people found it difficult to get about. On the eve of a

holiday some of the neighbours came in to Osip's to sit and have a talk. They did not light the lamp, as it would have been a sin to work, but talked in the darkness. There were some items of news, all rather unpleasant. In two or three households hens had been taken for the arrears, and had been sent to the district police station, and there they had died because no one had fed them; they had taken sheep, and while they were being driven away tied to one another, shifted into another cart at each village, one of them had died. And now they were discussing the question, who was to blame?

"The Zemstvo," said Osip. "Who else?"

"Of course it is the Zemstvo."

The Zemstvo was blamed for everything—for the arrears, and for the oppressions, and for the failure of the crops, though no one of them knew what was meant by the Zemstvo. And this dated from the time when well-to-do peasants who had factories, shops, and inns of their own were members of the Zemstvos, were dissatisfied with them, and took to swearing at the Zemstvos in their factories and inns.

They talked of God's not sending the snow; they had to bring in wood for fuel, and there was no driving nor walking in the frozen ruts. In old days fifteen to twenty years ago conversation was much more interesting in Zhukovo. In those days every old man looked as though he were treasuring some secret; as though he knew something and was expecting something. They used to talk about an edict in golden letters, about the division of lands, about new land, about treasures; they hinted at something. Now the people of Zhukovo had no mystery at all; their whole life was bare and open in the sight of all, and they could talk of nothing but poverty, food, there being no snow yet.…

There was a pause. Then they thought again of the hens, of the sheep, and began discussing whose fault it was.

"The Zemstvo," said Osip wearily. "Who else?"

VIII

The parish church was nearly five miles away at Kosogorovo, and the peasants only attended it when they had to do so for baptisms, weddings, or funerals; they went to the services at the church across the river. On holidays in fine weather the girls dressed up in their best and went in a crowd together to church, and it was a cheering sight to see them in their red, yellow, and green dresses cross the meadow; in bad weather they all stayed at home. They went for the sacrament to the parish church. From each of those who did not manage in Lent to go to confession in readiness for the sacrament the parish priest, going the round of the huts with the cross at Easter, took fifteen kopecks.

The old father did not believe in God, for he hardly ever thought about Him; he recognized the supernatural, but considered it was entirely the women's concern, and when religion or miracles were discussed before him, or a question were put to him, he would say reluctantly, scratching himself:

"Who can tell!"

Granny believed, but her faith was somewhat hazy; everything was mixed up in her memory, and she could scarcely begin to think of sins, of death, of the salvation of the soul, before poverty and her daily cares took possession of her mind, and she instantly forgot what she was thinking about. She did not remember the prayers, and usually in the evenings, before lying down to sleep, she would stand before the icons and whisper:

"Holy Mother of Kazan, Holy Mother of Smolensk, Holy Mother of Troerutchitsy…"

Marya and Fyokla crossed themselves, fasted, and took the sacrament every year, but understood nothing. The children were not taught their prayers, nothing was told them about God, and no moral principles were instilled into them; they were only forbidden to eat meat or milk in Lent. In the other families it was much the same: there were few who believed, few who understood. At the same time everyone loved the Holy Scripture, loved it with a tender, reverent love; but they had no Bible, there was no one to read it and explain it, and because Olga sometimes

read them the gospel, they respected her, and they all addressed her and Sasha as though they were superior to themselves.

For church holidays and services Olga often went to neighbouring villages, and to the district town, in which there were two monasteries and twenty-seven churches. She was dreamy, and when she was on these pilgrimages she quite forgot her family, and only when she got home again suddenly made the joyful discovery that she had a husband and daughter, and then would say, smiling and radiant:

"God has sent me blessings!"

What went on in the village worried her and seemed to her revolting. On Elijah's Day they drank, at the Assumption they drank, at the Ascension they drank. The Feast of the Intercession was the parish holiday for Zhukovo, and the peasants used to drink then for three days; they squandered on drink fifty roubles of money belonging to the Mir, and then collected more for vodka from all the households. On the first day of the feast the Tchikildyeevs killed a sheep and ate of it in the morning, at dinnertime, and in the evening; they ate it ravenously, and the children got up at night to eat more. Kiryak was fearfully drunk for three whole days; he drank up everything, even his boots and cap, and beat Marya so terribly that they had to pour water over her. And then they were all ashamed and sick.

However, even in Zhukovo, in this "Slaveytown," there was once an outburst of genuine religious enthusiasm. It was in August, when throughout the district they carried from village to village the Holy Mother, the giver of life. It was still and overcast on the day when they expected *Her* at Zhukovo. The girls set off in the morning to meet the icon, in their bright holiday dresses, and brought Her towards the evening, in procession with the cross and with singing, while the bells pealed in the church across the river. An immense crowd of villagers and strangers flooded the street; there was noise, dust, a great crush.… And the old father and Granny and Kiryak—all stretched out their hands to the icon, looked eagerly at it and said, weeping:

"Defender! Mother! Defender!"

All seemed suddenly to realize that there was not an empty void between earth and heaven, that the rich and the powerful had not taken possession of everything, that there was still a refuge from injury, from slavish bondage, from crushing, unendurable poverty, from the terrible vodka.

"Defender! Mother!" sobbed Marya. "Mother!"

But the thanksgiving service ended and the icon was carried away, and everything went on as before; and again there was a sound of coarse drunken oaths from the tavern.

Only the well-to-do peasants were afraid of death; the richer they were the less they believed in God, and in the salvation of souls, and only through fear of the end of the world put up candles and had services said for them, to be on the safe side. The peasants who were rather poorer were not afraid of death. The old father and Granny were told to their faces that they had lived too long, that it was time they were dead, and they did not mind. They did not hinder Fyokla from saying in Nikolay's presence that when Nikolay died her husband Denis would get exemption—to return home from the army. And Marya, far from fearing death, regretted that it was so slow in coming, and was glad when her children died.

Death they did not fear, but of every disease they had an exaggerated terror. The merest trifle was enough—a stomach upset, a slight chill, and Granny would be wrapped up on the stove, and would begin moaning loudly and incessantly:

"I am dy-ing!"

The old father hurried off for the priest, and Granny received the sacrament and extreme unction. They often talked of colds, of worms, of tumours which move in the stomach and coil round to the heart. Above all, they were afraid of catching cold, and so put on thick clothes even in the summer and warmed themselves at the stove. Granny was fond of being doctored, and often went to the hospital, where she used to say she was not seventy, but fifty-eight; she supposed that if the doctor knew her real age he would not treat her, but would say it was time she died instead of taking medicine. She usually went to the hospital early in the morning, taking with her two or three of the little girls, and came back in the evening, hungry and ill-tempered—with drops for herself and ointments for the little girls. Once she took Nikolay, who swallowed drops for a fortnight afterwards, and said he felt better.

Granny knew all the doctors and their assistants and the wise men for twenty miles round, and not one of them she liked. At the Intercession, when the priest made the round of the huts with the cross, the deacon told her that in the town near the prison lived an old man who had been a medical orderly in the army, and who made wonderful cures, and advised her to try him. Granny took his advice. When the first snow fell she drove to the town and fetched an old man with a big beard, a converted Jew, in a long gown, whose face was covered with blue veins. There

were outsiders at work in the hut at the time: an old tailor, in terrible spectacles, was cutting a waistcoat out of some rags, and two young men were making felt boots out of wool; Kiryak, who had been dismissed from his place for drunkenness, and now lived at home, was sitting beside the tailor mending a bridle. And it was crowded, stifling, and noisome in the hut. The converted Jew examined Nikolay and said that it was necessary to try cupping.

He put on the cups, and the old tailor, Kiryak, and the little girls stood round and looked on, and it seemed to them that they saw the disease being drawn out of Nikolay; and Nikolay, too, watched how the cups suckling at his breast gradually filled with dark blood, and felt as though there really were something coming out of him, and smiled with pleasure.

"It's a good thing," said the tailor. "Please God, it will do you good."

The Jew put on twelve cups and then another twelve, drank some tea, and went away. Nikolay began shivering; his face looked drawn, and, as the women expressed it, shrank up like a fist; his fingers turned blue. He wrapped himself up in a quilt and in a sheepskin, but got colder and colder. Towards the evening he began to be in great distress; asked to be laid on the ground, asked the tailor not to smoke; then he subsided under the sheepskin and towards morning he died.

IX

Oh, what a grim, what a long winter!

Their own grain did not last beyond Christmas, and they had to buy flour. Kiryak, who lived at home now, was noisy in the evenings, inspiring terror in everyone, and in the mornings he suffered from headache and was ashamed; and he was a pitiful sight. In the stall the starved cows bellowed day and night—a heartrending sound to Granny and Marya. And as ill-luck would have it, there was a sharp frost all the winter, the snow drifted in high heaps, and the winter dragged on. At Annunciation there was a regular blizzard, and there was a fall of snow at Easter.

But in spite of it all the winter did end. At the beginning of April there came warm days and frosty nights. Winter would not give way, but one warm day overpowered it at last, and the streams began to flow and the birds began to sing. The whole meadow and the bushes near the river were drowned in the spring floods, and all the space between Zhukovo and the further side was filled up with a vast sheet of water, from which wild ducks rose up in flocks here and there. The spring sunset, flaming among gorgeous clouds, gave every evening something new, extraordinary, incredible—just what one does not believe in afterwards, when one sees those very colours and those very clouds in a picture.

The cranes flew swiftly, swiftly, with mournful cries, as though they were calling themselves. Standing on the edge of the ravine, Olga looked a long time at the flooded meadow, at the sunshine, at the bright church, that looked as though it had grown younger; and her tears flowed and her breath came in gasps from her passionate longing to go away, to go far away to the end of the world. It was already settled that she should go back to Moscow to be a servant, and that Kiryak should set off with her to get a job as a porter or something. Oh, to get away quickly!

As soon as it dried up and grew warm they got ready to set off. Olga and Sasha, with wallets on their backs and shoes of plaited bark on their feet, came out before daybreak: Marya came out, too, to see them on their way. Kiryak was not well, and was kept at home for another week. For the last time Olga prayed at the church and thought of her husband,

and though she did not shed tears, her face puckered up and looked ugly like an old woman's. During the winter she had grown thinner and plainer, and her hair had gone a little grey, and instead of the old look of sweetness and the pleasant smile on her face, she had the resigned, mournful expression left by the sorrows she had been through, and there was something blank and irresponsive in her eyes, as though she did not hear what was said. She was sorry to part from the village and the peasants. She remembered how they had carried out Nikolay, and how a requiem had been ordered for him at almost every hut, and all had shed tears in sympathy with her grief. In the course of the summer and the winter there had been hours and days when it seemed as though these people lived worse than the beasts, and to live with them was terrible; they were coarse, dishonest, filthy, and drunken; they did not live in harmony, but quarrelled continually, because they distrusted and feared and did not respect one another. Who keeps the tavern and makes the people drunken? A peasant. Who wastes and spends on drink the funds of the commune, of the schools, of the church? A peasant. Who stole from his neighbours, set fire to their property, gave false witness at the court for a bottle of vodka? At the meetings of the Zemstvo and other local bodies, who was the first to fall foul of the peasants? A peasant. Yes, to live with them was terrible; but yet, they were human beings, they suffered and wept like human beings, and there was nothing in their lives for which one could not find excuse. Hard labour that made the whole body ache at night, the cruel winters, the scanty harvests, the overcrowding; and they had no help and none to whom they could look for help. Those of them who were a little stronger and better off could be no help, as they were themselves coarse, dishonest, drunken, and abused one another just as revoltingly; the paltriest little clerk or official treated the peasants as though they were tramps, and addressed even the village elders and church wardens as inferiors, and considered they had a right to do so. And, indeed, can any sort of help or good example be given by mercenary, greedy, depraved, and idle persons who only visit the village in order to insult, to despoil, and to terrorize? Olga remembered the pitiful, humiliated look of the old people when in the winter Kiryak had been taken to be flogged.… And now she felt sorry for all these people, painfully so, and as she walked on she kept looking back at the huts.

After walking two miles with them Marya said goodbye, then kneeling, and falling forward with her face on the earth, she began wailing:

"Again I am left alone. Alas, for poor me! poor, unhappy!…"

And she wailed like this for a long time, and for a long way Olga and Sasha could still see her on her knees, bowing down to someone at the side and clutching her head in her hands, while the rooks flew over her head.

The sun rose high; it began to get hot. Zhukovo was left far behind. Walking was pleasant. Olga and Sasha soon forgot both the village and Marya; they were gay and everything entertained them. Now they came upon an ancient barrow, now upon a row of telegraph posts running one after another into the distance and disappearing into the horizon, and the wires hummed mysteriously. Then they saw a homestead, all wreathed in green foliage; there came a scent from it of dampness, of hemp, and it seemed for some reason that happy people lived there. Then they came upon a horse's skeleton whitening in solitude in the open fields. And the larks trilled unceasingly, the corncrakes called to one another, and the landrail cried as though someone were really scraping at an old iron rail.

At midday Olga and Sasha reached a big village. There in the broad street they met the little old man who was General Zhukov's cook. He was hot, and his red, perspiring bald head shone in the sunshine. Olga and he did not recognize each other, then looked round at the same moment, recognized each other, and went their separate ways without saying a word. Stopping near the hut which looked newest and most prosperous, Olga bowed down before the open windows, and said in a loud, thin, chanting voice:

"Good Christian folk, give alms, for Christ's sake, that God's blessing may be upon you, and that your parents may be in the Kingdom of Heaven in peace eternal."

"Good Christian folk," Sasha began chanting, "give, for Christ's sake, that God's blessing, the Heavenly Kingdom…"

THE PETCHENYEG

Ivan Abramitch Zhmuhin, a retired Cossack officer, who had once served in the Caucasus, but now lived on his own farm, and who had once been young, strong, and vigorous, but now was old, dried up, and bent, with shaggy eyebrows and a greenish-grey moustache, was returning from the town to his farm one hot summer's day. In the town he had confessed and received absolution, and had made his will at the notary's (a fortnight before he had had a slight stroke), and now all the while he was in the railway carriage he was haunted by melancholy, serious thoughts of approaching death, of the vanity of vanities, of the transitoriness of all things earthly. At the station of Provalye—there is such a one on the Donetz line—a fair-haired, plump, middle-aged gentleman with a shabby portfolio stepped into the carriage and sat down opposite. They got into conversation.

"Yes," said Ivan Abramitch, looking pensively out of window, "it is never too late to marry. I myself married when I was forty-eight; I was told it was late, but it has turned out that it was not late or early, but simply that it would have been better not to marry at all. Everyone is soon tired of his wife, but not everyone tells the truth, because, you know, people are ashamed of an unhappy home life and conceal it. It's 'Manya this' and 'Manya that' with many a man by his wife's side, but if he had his way he'd put that Manya in a sack and drop her in the water. It's dull with one's wife, it's mere foolishness. And it's no better with one's children, I make bold to assure you. I have two of them, the rascals. There's nowhere for them to be taught out here in the steppe; I haven't the money to send them to school in Novo Tcherkask, and they live here like young wolves. Next thing they will be murdering someone on the high road."

The fair-haired gentleman listened attentively, answered questions briefly in a low voice, and was apparently a gentleman of gentle and modest disposition. He mentioned that he was a lawyer, and that he was going to the village Dyuevka on business.

“Why, merciful heavens, that is six miles from me!” said Zhmuhin in a tone of voice as though someone were disputing with him. “But excuse me, you won’t find horses at the station now. To my mind, the very best thing you can do, you know, is to come straight to me, stay the night, you know, and in the morning drive over with my horses.”

The lawyer thought a moment and accepted the invitation.

When they reached the station the sun was already low over the steppe. They said nothing all the way from the station to the farm: the jolting prevented conversation. The trap bounded up and down, squeaked, and seemed to be sobbing, and the lawyer, who was sitting very uncomfortably, stared before him, miserably hoping to see the farm. After they had driven five or six miles there came into view in the distance a low-pitched house and a yard enclosed by a fence made of dark, flat stones standing on end; the roof was green, the stucco was peeling off, and the windows were little narrow slits like screwed-up eyes. The farm stood in the full sunshine, and there was no sign either of water or trees anywhere round. Among the neighbouring landowners and the peasants it was known as the Petchenyegs’ farm. Many years before, a land surveyor, who was passing through the neighbourhood and put up at the farm, spent the whole night talking to Ivan Abramitch, was not favourably impressed, and as he was driving away in the morning said to him grimly:

“You are a Petchenyeg,[5] my good sir!”

From this came the nickname, the Petchenyegs’ farm, which stuck to the place even more when Zhmuhin’s boys grew up and began to make raids on the orchards and kitchen-gardens. Ivan Abramitch was called “You Know,” as he usually talked a very great deal and frequently made use of that expression.

In the yard near a barn Zhmuhin’s sons were standing, one a young man of nineteen, the other a younger lad, both barefoot and bareheaded. Just at the moment when the trap drove into the yard the younger one flung high up a hen which, cackling, described an arc in the air; the elder shot at it with a gun and the hen fell dead on the earth.

“Those are my boys learning to shoot birds flying,” said Zhmuhin.

In the entry the travellers were met by a little thin woman with a pale face, still young and beautiful; from her dress she might have been taken for a servant.

“And this, allow me to introduce her,” said Zhmuhin, “is the mother of my young cubs. Come, Lyubov Osipovna,” he said, addressing her, “you

must be spry, mother, and get something for our guest. Let us have supper. Look sharp!”

The house consisted of two parts: in one was the parlour and beside it old Zhmuhin’s bedroom, both stuffy rooms with low ceilings and multitudes of flies and wasps, and in the other was the kitchen in which the cooking and washing was done and the labourers had their meals; here geese and turkey-hens were sitting on their eggs under the benches, and here were the beds of Lyubov Osipovna and her two sons. The furniture in the parlour was unpainted and evidently roughly made by a carpenter; guns, game-bags, and whips were hanging on the walls, and all this old rubbish was covered with the rust of years and looked grey with dust. There was not one picture; in the corner was a dingy board which had at one time been an icon.

A young Little Russian woman laid the table and handed ham, then beetroot soup. The visitor refused vodka and ate only bread and cucumbers.

“How about ham?” asked Zhmuhin.

“Thank you, I don’t eat it,” answered the visitor, “I don’t eat meat at all.”

“Why is that?”

“I am a vegetarian. Killing animals is against my principles.”

Zhmuhin thought a minute and then said slowly with a sigh:

“Yes… to be sure.… I saw a man who did not eat meat in town, too. It’s a new religion they’ve got now. Well, it’s good. We can’t go on always shooting and slaughtering, you know; we must give it up some day and leave even the beasts in peace. It’s a sin to kill, it’s a sin, there is no denying it. Sometimes one kills a hare and wounds him in the leg, and he cries like a child.… So it must hurt him!”

“Of course it hurts him; animals suffer just like human beings.”

“That’s true,” Zhmuhin assented. “I understand that very well,” he went on, musing, “only there is this one thing I don’t understand: suppose, you know, everyone gave up eating meat, what would become of the domestic animals—fowls and geese, for instance?”

“Fowls and geese would live in freedom like wild birds.”

“Now I understand. To be sure, crows and jackdaws get on all right without us. Yes.… Fowls and geese and hares and sheep, all will live in freedom, rejoicing, you know, and praising God; and they will not fear us, peace and concord will come. Only there is one thing, you know, I can’t understand,” Zhmuhin went on, glancing at the ham. “How will it be with the pigs? What is to be done with them?”

“They will be like all the rest—that is, they will live in freedom.”

“Ah! Yes. But allow me to say, if they were not slaughtered they would multiply, you know, and then goodbye to the kitchen-gardens and the meadows. Why, a pig, if you let it free and don’t look after it, will ruin everything in a day. A pig is a pig, and it is not for nothing it is called a pig.…”

They finished supper. Zhmuhin got up from the table and for a long while walked up and down the room, talking and talking.… He was fond of talking of something important or serious and was fond of meditating, and in his old age he had a longing to reach some haven, to be reassured, that he might not be so frightened of dying. He had a longing for meekness, spiritual calm, and confidence in himself, such as this guest of theirs had, who had satisfied his hunger on cucumbers and bread, and believed that doing so made him more perfect; he was sitting on a chest, plump and healthy, keeping silent and patiently enduring his boredom, and in the dusk when one glanced at him from the entry he looked like a big round stone which one could not move from its place. If a man has something to lay hold of in life he is all right.

Zhmuhin went through the entry to the porch, and then he could be heard sighing and saying reflectively to himself: “Yes.… To be sure.… By now it was dark, and here and there stars could be seen in the sky. They had not yet lighted up indoors. Someone came into the parlour as noiselessly as a shadow and stood still near the door. It was Lyubov Osipovna, Zhmuhin’s wife.”

“Are you from the town?” she asked timidly, not looking at her visitor.

“Yes, I live in the town.”

“Perhaps you are something in the learned way, sir; be so kind as to advise us. We ought to send in a petition.”

“To whom?” asked the visitor.

“We have two sons, kind gentleman, and they ought to have been sent to school long ago, but we never see anyone and have no one to advise us. And I know nothing. For if they are not taught they will have to serve in the army as common Cossacks. It’s not right, sir! They can’t read and write, they are worse than peasants, and Ivan Abramitch himself can’t stand them and won’t let them indoors. But they are not to blame. The younger one, at any rate, ought to be sent to school, it is such a pity!” she said slowly, and there was a quiver in her voice; and it seemed incredible that a woman so small and so youthful could have grown-up children. “Oh, it’s such a pity!”

“You don’t know anything about it, mother, and it is not your affair,” said Zhmuhin, appearing in the doorway. “Don’t pester our guest with your wild talk. Go away, mother!”

Lyubov Osipovna went out, and in the entry repeated once more in a thin little voice: “Oh, it’s such a pity!”

A bed was made up for the visitor on the sofa in the parlour, and that it might not be dark for him they lighted the lamp before the icon. Zhmuhin went to bed in his own room. And as he lay there he thought of his soul, of his age, of his recent stroke which had so frightened him and made him think of death. He was fond of philosophizing when he was in quietness by himself, and then he fancied that he was a very earnest, deep thinker, and that nothing in this world interested him but serious questions. And now he kept thinking and he longed to pitch upon someone significant thought unlike others, which would be a guide to him in life, and he wanted to think out principles of some sort for himself so as to make his life as deep and earnest as he imagined that he felt himself to be. It would be a good thing for an old man like him to abstain altogether from meat, from superfluities of all sorts. The time when men give up killing each other and animals would come sooner or later, it could not but be so, and he imagined that time to himself and clearly pictured himself living in peace with all the animals, and suddenly he thought again of the pigs, and everything was in a tangle in his brain.

“It’s a queer business, Lord have mercy upon us,” he muttered, sighing heavily. “Are you asleep?” he asked.

“No.”

Zhmuhin got out of bed and stopped in the doorway with nothing but his shirt on, displaying to his guest his sinewy legs, that looked as dry as sticks.

“Nowadays, you know,” he began, “all sorts of telegraphs, telephones, and marvels of all kinds, in fact, have come in, but people are no better than they were. They say that in our day, thirty or forty years ago, men were coarse and cruel; but isn’t it just the same now? We certainly did not stand on ceremony in our day. I remember in the Caucasus when we were stationed by a little river with nothing to do for four whole months—I was an under-officer at that time—something queer happened, quite in the style of a novel. Just on the banks of that river, you know, where our division was encamped, a wretched prince whom we had killed not long before was buried. And at night, you know, the princess used to come to his grave and weep. She would wail and wail, and moan and moan, and make us so depressed we couldn’t sleep, and

that’s the fact. We couldn’t sleep one night, we couldn’t sleep a second; well, we got sick of it. And from a commonsense point of view you really can’t go without your sleep for the devil knows what (excuse the expression). We took that princess and gave her a good thrashing, and she gave up coming. There’s an instance for you. Nowadays, of course, there is not the same class of people, and they are not given to thrashing and they live in cleaner style, and there is more learning, but, you know, the soul is just the same: there is no change. Now, look here, there’s a landowner living here among us; he has mines, you know; all sorts of tramps without passports who don’t know where to go work for him. On Saturdays he has to settle up with the workmen, but he doesn’t care to pay them, you know, he grudges the money. So he’s got hold of a foreman who is a tramp too, though he does wear a hat. ‘Don’t you pay them anything,’ he says, ‘not a kopeck; they’ll beat you, and let them beat you,’ says he, ‘but you put up with it, and I’ll pay you ten roubles every Saturday for it.’ So on the Saturday evening the workmen come to settle up in the usual way; the foreman says to them: ‘Nothing!’ Well, word for word, as the master said, they begin swearing and using their fists.… They beat him and they kick him… you know, they are a set of men brutalized by hunger—they beat him till he is senseless, and then they go each on his way. The master gives orders for cold water to be poured on the foreman, then flings ten roubles in his face. And he takes it and is pleased too, for indeed he’d be ready to be hanged for three roubles, let alone ten. Yes… and on Monday a new gang of workmen arrive; they work, for they have nowhere to go.… On Saturday it is the same story over again.”

The visitor turned over on the other side with his face to the back of the sofa and muttered something.

“And here’s another instance,” Zhmuhin went on. “We had the Siberian plague here, you know—the cattle die off like flies, I can tell you—and the veterinary surgeons came here, and strict orders were given that the dead cattle were to be buried at a distance deep in the earth, that lime was to be thrown over them, and so on, you know, on scientific principles. My horse died too. I buried it with every precaution, and threw over three hundredweight of lime over it. And what do you think? My fine fellows—my precious sons, I mean—dug it up, skinned it, and sold the hide for three roubles; there’s an instance for you. So people have grown no better, and however you feed a wolf he will always look towards the forest; there it is. It gives one something to think about, eh? How do you look at it?”

On one side a flash of lightning gleamed through a chink in the window-blinds. There was the stifling feeling of a storm coming, the gnats were biting, and Zhmuhin, as he lay in his bedroom meditating, sighed and groaned and said to himself: “Yes, to be sure—” and there was no possibility of getting to sleep. Somewhere far, far away there was a growl of thunder.

“Are you asleep?”

“No,” answered the visitor.

Zhmuhin got up, and thudding with his heels walked through the parlour and the entry to the kitchen to get a drink of water.

“The worst thing in the world, you know, is stupidity,” he said a little later, coming back with a dipper. “My Lyubov Osipovna is on her knees saying her prayers. She prays every night, you know, and bows down to the ground, first that her children may be sent to school; she is afraid her boys will go into the army as simple Cossacks, and that they will be whacked across their backs with sabres. But for teaching one must have money, and where is one to get it? You may break the floor beating your head against it, but if you haven’t got it you haven’t. And the other reason she prays is because, you know, every woman imagines there is no one in the world as unhappy as she is. I am a plainspoken man, and I don’t want to conceal anything from you. She comes of a poor family, a village priest’s daughter. I married her when she was seventeen, and they accepted my offer chiefly because they hadn’t enough to eat; it was nothing but poverty and misery, while I have anyway land, you see—a farm—and after all I am an officer; it was a step up for her to marry me, you know. On the very first day when she was married she cried, and she has been crying ever since, all these twenty years; she has got a watery eye. And she’s always sitting and thinking, and what do you suppose she is thinking about? What can a woman think about? Why, nothing. I must own I don’t consider a woman a human being.”

The visitor got up abruptly and sat on the bed.

“Excuse me, I feel stifled,” he said; “I will go outside.”

Zhmuhin, still talking about women, drew the bolt in the entry and they both went out. A full moon was floating in the sky just over the yard, and in the moonlight the house and barn looked whiter than by day; and on the grass brilliant streaks of moonlight, white too, stretched between the black shadows. Far away on the right could be seen the steppe, above it the stars were softly glowing—and it was all mysterious, infinitely far away, as though one were gazing into a deep abyss; while on the left heavy storm-clouds, black as soot, were piling up one upon

another above the steppe; their edges were lighted up by the moon, and it looked as though there were mountains there with white snow on their peaks, dark forests, the sea. There was a flash of lightning, a faint rumble of thunder, and it seemed as though a battle were being fought in the mountains.

Quite close to the house a little night-owl screeched monotonously:

"Asleep! asleep!"

"What time is it now?" asked the visitor.

"Just after one."

"How long it is still to dawn!"

They went back to the house and lay down again. It was time to sleep, and one can usually sleep so splendidly before rain; but the old man had a hankering after serious, weighty thoughts; he wanted not simply to think but to meditate, and he meditated how good it would be, as death was near at hand, for the sake of his soul to give up the idleness which so imperceptibly swallowed up day after day, year after year, leaving no trace; to think out for himself some great exploit—for instance, to walk on foot far, far away, or to give up meat like this young man. And again he pictured to himself the time when animals would not be killed, pictured it clearly and distinctly as though he were living through that time himself; but suddenly it was all in a tangle again in his head and all was muddled.

The thunderstorm had passed over, but from the edges of the storm-clouds came rain softly pattering on the roof. Zhmuhin got up, stretching and groaning with old age, and looked into the parlour. Noticing that his visitor was not asleep, he said:

"When we were in the Caucasus, you know, there was a colonel there who was a vegetarian, too; he didn't eat meat, never went shooting, and would not let his servants catch fish. Of course, I understand that every animal ought to live in freedom and enjoy its life; only I don't understand how a pig can go about where it likes without being looked after.…"

The visitor got up and sat down. His pale, haggard face expressed weariness and vexation; it was evident that he was exhausted, and only his gentleness and the delicacy of his soul prevented him from expressing his vexation in words.

"It's getting light," he said mildly. "Please have the horse brought round for me."

"Why so? Wait a little and the rain will be over."

“No, I entreat you,” said the visitor in horror, with a supplicating voice; “it is essential for me to go at once.”

And he began hurriedly dressing.

By the time the horse was harnessed the sun was rising. It had just left off raining, the clouds were racing swiftly by, and the patches of blue were growing bigger and bigger in the sky. The first rays of the sun were timidly reflected below in the big puddles. The visitor walked through the entry with his portfolio to get into the trap, and at that moment Zhmuhin’s wife, pale, and it seemed paler than the day before, with tear-stained eyes, looked at him intently without blinking, with the naive expression of a little girl, and it was evident from her dejected face that she was envying him his freedom—oh, with what joy she would have gone away from there!—and she wanted to say something to him, most likely to ask advice about her children. And what a pitiable figure she was! This was not a wife, not the head of a house, not even a servant, but more like a dependent, a poor relation not wanted by anyone, a nonentity.… Her husband, fussing about, talking unceasingly, was seeing his visitor off, continually running in front of him, while she huddled up to the wall with a timid, guilty air, waiting for a convenient minute to speak.

“Please come again another time,” the old man kept repeating incessantly; “what we have we are glad to offer, you know.”

The visitor hurriedly got into the trap, evidently with relief, as though he were afraid every minute that they would detain him. The trap lurched about as it had the day before, squeaked, and furiously rattled the pail that was tied on at the back. He glanced round at Zhmuhin with a peculiar expression; it looked as though he wanted to call him a Petchenyeg, as the surveyor had once done, or some such name, but his gentleness got the upper hand. He controlled himself and said nothing. But in the gateway he suddenly could not restrain himself; he got up and shouted loudly and angrily:

“You have bored me to death.”

And he disappeared through the gate.

Near the barn Zhmuhin’s sons were standing; the elder held a gun, while the younger had in his hands a grey cockerel with a bright red comb. The younger flung up the cockerel with all his might; the bird flew upwards higher than the house and turned over in the air like a pigeon. The elder boy fired and the cockerel fell like a stone.

The old man, overcome with confusion, not knowing how to explain the visitor’s strange, unexpected shout, went slowly back into the house.

And sitting down at the table he spent a long while meditating on the intellectual tendencies of the day, on the universal immorality, on the telegraph, on the telephone, on velocipedes, on how unnecessary it all was; little by little he regained his composure, then slowly had a meal, drank five glasses of tea, and lay down for a nap.

At Home

I

The Don railway. A quiet, cheerless station, white and solitary in the steppe, with its walls baking in the sun, without a speck of shade, and, it seems, without a human being. The train goes on after leaving one here; the sound of it is scarcely audible and dies away at last. Outside the station it is a desert, and there are no horses but one's own. One gets into the carriage—which is so pleasant after the train—and is borne along the road through the steppe, and by degrees there are unfolded before one views such as one does not see near Moscow—immense, endless, fascinating in their monotony. The steppe, the steppe, and nothing more; in the distance an ancient barrow or a windmill; ox-wagons laden with coal trail by.… Solitary birds fly low over the plain, and a drowsy feeling comes with the monotonous beat of their wings. It is hot. Another hour or so passes, and still the steppe, the steppe, and still in the distance the barrow. The driver tells you something, some long unnecessary tale, pointing into the distance with his whip. And tranquillity takes possession of the soul; one is loth to think of the past.…

A carriage with three horses had been sent to fetch Vera Ivanovna Kardin. The driver put in her luggage and set the harness to rights.

"Everything just as it always has been," said Vera, looking about her. "I was a little girl when I was here last, ten years ago. I remember old Boris came to fetch me then. Is he still living, I wonder?"

The driver made no reply, but, like a Little Russian, looked at her angrily and clambered on to the box.

It was a twenty-mile drive from the station, and Vera, too, abandoned herself to the charm of the steppe, forgot the past, and thought only of the wide expanse, of the freedom. Healthy, clever, beautiful, and

young—she was only three-and-twenty—she had hitherto lacked nothing in her life but just this space and freedom.

The steppe, the steppe.… The horses trotted, the sun rose higher and higher; and it seemed to Vera that never in her childhood had the steppe been so rich, so luxuriant in June; the wild flowers were green, yellow, lilac, white, and a fragrance rose from them and from the warmed earth; and there were strange blue birds along the roadside.… Vera had long got out of the habit of praying, but now, struggling with drowsiness, she murmured:

"Lord, grant that I may be happy here."

And there was peace and sweetness in her soul, and she felt as though she would have been glad to drive like that all her life, looking at the steppe.

Suddenly there was a deep ravine overgrown with oak saplings and alder trees; there was a moist feeling in the air—there must have been a spring at the bottom. On the near side, on the very edge of the ravine, a covey of partridges rose noisily. Vera remembered that in old days they used to go for evening walks to this ravine; so it must be near home! And now she could actually see the poplars, the barn, black smoke rising on one side—they were burning old straw. And there was Auntie Dasha coming to meet her and waving her handkerchief; grandfather was on the terrace. Oh dear, how happy she was!

"My darling, my darling!" cried her aunt, shrieking as though she were in hysterics. "Our real mistress has come! You must understand you are our mistress, you are our queen! Here everything is yours! My darling, my beauty, I am not your aunt, but your willing slave!"

Vera had no relations but her aunt and her grandfather; her mother had long been dead; her father, an engineer, had died three months before at Kazan, on his way from Siberia. Her grandfather had a big grey beard. He was stout, red-faced, and asthmatic, and walked leaning on a cane and sticking his stomach out. Her aunt, a lady of forty-two, drawn in tightly at the waist and fashionably dressed with sleeves high on the shoulder, evidently tried to look young and was still anxious to be charming; she walked with tiny steps with a wriggle of her spine.

"Will you love us?" she said, embracing Vera, "You are not proud?"

At her grandfather's wish there was a thanksgiving service, then they spent a long while over dinner—and Vera's new life began. She was given the best room. All the rugs in the house had been put in it, and a great many flowers; and when at night she lay down in her snug, wide, very soft bed and covered herself with a silk quilt that smelt of old

clothes long stored away, she laughed with pleasure. Auntie Dasha came in for a minute to wish her good night.

"Here you are home again, thank God," she said, sitting down on the bed. "As you see, we get along very well and have everything we want. There's only one thing: your grandfather is in a poor way! A terribly poor way! He is short of breath and he has begun to lose his memory. And you remember how strong, how vigorous, he used to be! There was no doing anything with him.… In old days, if the servants didn't please him or anything else went wrong, he would jump up at once and shout: 'Twenty-five strokes! The birch!' But now he has grown milder and you never hear him. And besides, times are changed, my precious; one mayn't beat them nowadays. Of course, they oughtn't to be beaten, but they need looking after."

"And are they beaten now, auntie?" asked Vera.

"The steward beats them sometimes, but I never do, bless their hearts! And your grandfather sometimes lifts his stick from old habit, but he never beats them."

Auntie Dasha yawned and crossed herself over her mouth and her right ear.

"It's not dull here?" Vera inquired.

"What shall I say? There are no landowners living here now, but there have been works built near, darling, and there are lots of engineers, doctors, and mine managers. Of course, we have theatricals and concerts, but we play cards more than anything. They come to us, too.
Dr. Neshtchapov from the works comes to see us—such a handsome, interesting man! He fell in love with your photograph. I made up my mind: he is Verotchka's destiny, I thought. He's young, handsome, he has means—a good match, in fact. And of course you're a match for anyone. You're of good family. The place is mortgaged, it's true, but it's in good order and not neglected; there is my share in it, but it will all come to you; I am your willing slave. And my brother, your father, left you fifteen thousand roubles.… But I see you can't keep your eyes open. Sleep, my child."

Next day Vera spent a long time walking round the house. The garden, which was old and unattractive, lying inconveniently upon the slope, had no paths, and was utterly neglected; probably the care of it was regarded as an unnecessary item in the management. There were numbers of grass-snakes. Hoopoes flew about under the trees calling "Oo-too-toot!" as though they were trying to remind her of something. At the bottom of the hill there was a river overgrown with tall reeds, and half a mile

beyond the river was the village. From the garden Vera went out into the fields; looking into the distance, thinking of her new life in her own home, she kept trying to grasp what was in store for her. The space, the lovely peace of the steppe, told her that happiness was near at hand, and perhaps was here already; thousands of people, in fact, would have said: “What happiness to be young, healthy, well-educated, to be living on one’s own estate!” And at the same time the endless plain, all alike, without one living soul, frightened her, and at moments it was clear to her that its peaceful green vastness would swallow up her life and reduce it to nothingness. She was very young, elegant, fond of life; she had finished her studies at an aristocratic boarding-school, had learnt three languages, had read a great deal, had travelled with her father—and could all this have been meant to lead to nothing but settling down in a remote country-house in the steppe, and wandering day after day from the garden into the fields and from the fields into the garden to while away the time, and then sitting at home listening to her grandfather’s breathing? But what could she do? Where could she go? She could find no answer, and as she was returning home she doubted whether she would be happy here, and thought that driving from the station was far more interesting than living here.

Dr. Neshtchapov drove over from the works. He was a doctor, but three years previously he had taken a share in the works, and had become one of the partners; and now he no longer looked upon medicine as his chief vocation, though he still practised. In appearance he was a pale, dark man in a white waistcoat, with a good figure; but to guess what there was in his heart and his brain was difficult. He kissed Auntie Dasha’s hand on greeting her, and was continually leaping up to set a chair or give his seat to someone. He was very silent and grave all the while, and, when he did speak, it was for some reason impossible to hear and understand his first sentence, though he spoke correctly and not in a low voice.

“You play the piano?” he asked Vera, and immediately leapt up, as she had dropped her handkerchief.

He stayed from midday to midnight without speaking, and Vera found him very unattractive. She thought that a white waistcoat in the country was bad form, and his elaborate politeness, his manners, and his pale, serious face with dark eyebrows, were mawkish; and it seemed to her that he was perpetually silent, probably because he was stupid. When he had gone her aunt said enthusiastically:

“Well? Isn’t he charming?”

II

Auntie Dasha looked after the estate. Tightly laced, with jingling bracelets on her wrists, she went into the kitchen, the granary, the cattleyard, tripping along with tiny steps, wriggling her spine; and whenever she talked to the steward or to the peasants, she used, for some reason, to put on a pince-nez. Vera's grandfather always sat in the same place, playing patience or dozing. He ate a very great deal at dinner and supper; they gave him the dinner cooked today and what was left from yesterday, and cold pie left from Sunday, and salt meat from the servants' dinner, and he ate it all greedily. And every dinner left on Vera such an impression, that when she saw afterwards a flock of sheep driven by, or flour being brought from the mill, she thought, "Grandfather will eat that." For the most part he was silent, absorbed in eating or in patience; but it sometimes happened at dinner that at the sight of Vera he would be touched and say tenderly:

"My only grandchild! Verotchka!"

And tears would glisten in his eyes. Or his face would turn suddenly crimson, his neck would swell, he would look with fury at the servants, and ask, tapping with his stick:

"Why haven't you brought the horseradish?"

In winter he led a perfectly inactive existence; in summer he sometimes drove out into the fields to look at the oats and the hay; and when he came back he would flourish his stick and declare that everything was neglected now that he was not there to look after it.

"Your grandfather is out of humour," Auntie Dasha would whisper. "But it's nothing now to what it used to be in the old days: 'Twenty-five strokes! The birch!'"

Her aunt complained that everyone had grown lazy, that no one did anything, and that the estate yielded no profit. Indeed, there was no systematic farming; they ploughed and sowed a little simply from habit, and in reality did nothing and lived in idleness. Meanwhile there was a running to and fro, reckoning and worrying all day long; the bustle in the house began at five o'clock in the morning; there were continual sounds of "Bring it," "Fetch it," "Make haste," and by the evening the servants

were utterly exhausted. Auntie Dasha changed her cooks and her housemaids every week; sometimes she discharged them for immorality; sometimes they went of their own accord, complaining that they were worked to death. None of the village people would come to the house as servants; Auntie Dasha had to hire them from a distance. There was only one girl from the village living in the house, Alyona, and she stayed because her whole family—old people and children—were living upon her wages. This Alyona, a pale, rather stupid little thing, spent the whole day turning out the rooms, waiting at table, heating the stoves, sewing, washing; but it always seemed as though she were only pottering about, treading heavily with her boots, and were nothing but a hindrance in the house. In her terror that she might be dismissed and sent home, she often dropped and broke the crockery, and they stopped the value of it out of her wages, and then her mother and grandmother would come and bow down at Auntie Dasha's feet.

Once a week or sometimes oftener visitors would arrive. Her aunt would come to Vera and say:

"You should sit a little with the visitors, or else they'll think that you are stuck up."

Vera would go in to the visitors and play Vint with them for hours together, or play the piano for the visitors to dance; her aunt, in high spirits and breathless from dancing, would come up and whisper to her:

"Be nice to Marya Nikiforovna."

On the sixth of December, St. Nikolay's Day, a large party of about thirty arrived all at once; they played Vint until late at night, and many of them stayed the night. In the morning they sat down to cards again, then they had dinner, and when Vera went to her room after dinner to rest from conversation and tobacco smoke, there were visitors there too, and she almost wept in despair. And when they began to get ready to go in the evening, she was so pleased they were going at last, that she said:

"Do stay a little longer."

She felt exhausted by the visitors and constrained by their presence; yet every day, as soon as it began to grow dark, something drew her out of the house, and she went out to pay visits either at the works or at some neighbours', and then there were cards, dancing, forfeits, suppers.… The young people in the works or in the mines sometimes sang Little Russian songs, and sang them very well. It made one sad to hear them sing. Or they all gathered together in one room and talked in the dusk of the mines, of the treasures that had once been buried in the steppes, of Saur's Grave.… Later on, as they talked, a shout of "Help!" sometimes reached

them. It was a drunken man going home, or someone was being robbed by the pit near by. Or the wind howled in the chimneys, the shutters banged; then, soon afterwards, they would hear the uneasy church bell, as the snowstorm began.

At all the evening parties, picnics, and dinners, Auntie Dasha was invariably the most interesting woman and the doctor the most interesting man. There was very little reading either at the works or at the country-houses; they played only marches and polkas; and the young people always argued hotly about things they did not understand, and the effect was crude. The discussions were loud and heated, but, strange to say, Vera had nowhere else met people so indifferent and careless as these. They seemed to have no fatherland, no religion, no public interests. When they talked of literature or debated some abstract question, it could be seen from Dr. Neshtchapov's face that the question had no interest for him whatever, and that for long, long years he had read nothing and cared to read nothing. Serious and expressionless, like a badly painted portrait, forever in his white waistcoat, he was silent and incomprehensible as before; but the ladies, young and old, thought him interesting and were enthusiastic over his manners. They envied Vera, who appeared to attract him very much. And Vera always came away from the visits with a feeling of vexation, vowing inwardly to remain at home; but the day passed, the evening came, and she hurried off to the works again, and it was like that almost all the winter.

She ordered books and magazines, and used to read them in her room. And she read at night, lying in bed. When the clock in the corridor struck two or three, and her temples were beginning to ache from reading, she sat up in bed and thought, "What am I to do? Where am I to go?" Accursed, importunate question, to which there were a number of ready-made answers, and in reality no answer at all.

Oh, how noble, how holy, how picturesque it must be to serve the people, to alleviate their sufferings, to enlighten them! But she, Vera, did not know the people. And how could she go to them? They were strange and uninteresting to her; she could not endure the stuffy smell of the huts, the pothouse oaths, the unwashed children, the women's talk of illnesses. To walk over the snowdrifts, to feel cold, then to sit in a stifling hut, to teach children she disliked—no, she would rather die! And to teach the peasants' children while Auntie Dasha made money out of the pothouses and fined the peasants—it was too great a farce! What a lot of talk there was of schools, of village libraries, of universal education; but if all these engineers, these mine-owners and ladies of her acquaintance,

had not been hypocrites, and really had believed that enlightenment was necessary, they would not have paid the schoolmasters fifteen roubles a month as they did now, and would not have let them go hungry. And the schools and the talk about ignorance—it was all only to stifle the voice of conscience because they were ashamed to own fifteen or thirty thousand acres and to be indifferent to the peasants' lot. Here the ladies said about Dr. Neshtchapov that he was a kind man and had built a school at the works. Yes, he had built a school out of the old bricks at the works for some eight hundred roubles, and they sang the prayer for "long life" to him when the building was opened, but there was no chance of his giving up his shares, and it certainly never entered his head that the peasants were human beings like himself, and that they, too, needed university teaching, and not merely lessons in these wretched schools.

And Vera felt full of anger against herself and everyone else. She took up a book again and tried to read it, but soon afterwards sat down and thought again. To become a doctor? But to do that one must pass an examination in Latin; besides, she had an invincible repugnance to corpses and disease. It would be nice to become a mechanic, a judge, a commander of a steamer, a scientist; to do something into which she could put all her powers, physical and spiritual, and to be tired out and sleep soundly at night; to give up her life to something that would make her an interesting person, able to attract interesting people, to love, to have a real family of her own.… But what was she to do? How was she to begin?

One Sunday in Lent her aunt came into her room early in the morning to fetch her umbrella. Vera was sitting up in bed clasping her head in her hands, thinking.

"You ought to go to church, darling," said her aunt, "or people will think you are not a believer."

Vera made no answer.

"I see you are dull, poor child," said Auntie Dasha, sinking on her knees by the bedside; she adored Vera. "Tell me the truth, are you bored?"

"Dreadfully."

"My beauty, my queen, I am your willing slave, I wish you nothing but good and happiness.… Tell me, why don't you want to marry Nestchapov? What more do you want, my child? You must forgive me, darling; you can't pick and choose like this, we are not princes.… Time is passing, you are not seventeen.… And I don't understand it! He loves you, idolises you!"

“Oh, mercy!” said Vera with vexation. “How can I tell? He sits dumb and never says a word.”

“He’s shy, darling.… He’s afraid you’ll refuse him!”

And when her aunt had gone away, Vera remained standing in the middle of her room uncertain whether to dress or to go back to bed. The bed was hateful; if one looked out of the window there were the bare trees, the grey snow, the hateful jackdaws, the pigs that her grandfather would eat.…

“Yes, after all, perhaps I’d better get married!” she thought.

III

For two days Auntie Dasha went about with a tear-stained and heavily powdered face, and at dinner she kept sighing and looking towards the icon. And it was impossible to make out what was the matter with her. But at last she made up her mind, went in to Vera, and said in a casual way:

"The fact is, child, we have to pay interest on the bank loan, and the tenant hasn't paid his rent. Will you let me pay it out of the fifteen thousand your papa left you?"

All day afterwards Auntie Dasha spent in making cherry jam in the garden. Alyona, with her cheeks flushed with the heat, ran to and from the garden to the house and back again to the cellar.

When Auntie Dasha was making jam with a very serious face as though she were performing a religious rite, and her short sleeves displayed her strong, little, despotic hands and arms, and when the servants ran about incessantly, bustling about the jam which they would never taste, there was always a feeling of martyrdom in the air.…

The garden smelt of hot cherries. The sun had set, the charcoal stove had been carried away, but the pleasant, sweetish smell still lingered in the air. Vera sat on a bench in the garden and watched a new labourer, a young soldier, not of the neighbourhood, who was, by her express orders, making new paths. He was cutting the turf with a spade and heaping it up on a barrow.

"Where were you serving?" Vera asked him.

"At Berdyansk."

"And where are you going now? Home?"

"No," answered the labourer. "I have no home."

"But where were you born and brought up?"

"In the province of Oryol. Till I went into the army I lived with my mother, in my stepfather's house; my mother was the head of the house, and people looked up to her, and while she lived I was cared for. But while I was in the army I got a letter telling me my mother was dead.… And now I don't seem to care to go home. It's not my own father, so it's not like my own home."

“Then your father is dead?”

“I don’t know. I am illegitimate.”

At that moment Auntie Dasha appeared at the window and said:

“*Il ne faut pas parler aux gens.*… Go into the kitchen, my good man. You can tell your story there,” she said to the soldier.

And then came as yesterday and every day supper, reading, a sleepless night, and endless thinking about the same thing. At three o’clock the sun rose; Alyona was already busy in the corridor, and Vera was not asleep yet and was trying to read. She heard the creak of the barrow: it was the new labourer at work in the garden.… Vera sat at the open window with a book, dozed, and watched the soldier making the paths for her, and that interested her. The paths were as even and level as a leather strap, and it was pleasant to imagine what they would be like when they were strewn with yellow sand.

She could see her aunt come out of the house soon after five o’clock, in a pink wrapper and curl-papers. She stood on the steps for three minutes without speaking, and then said to the soldier:

“Take your passport and go in peace. I can’t have anyone illegitimate in my house.”

An oppressive, angry feeling sank like a stone on Vera’s heart. She was indignant with her aunt, she hated her; she was so sick of her aunt that her heart was full of misery and loathing. But what was she to do? To stop her mouth? To be rude to her? But what would be the use? Suppose she struggled with her, got rid of her, made her harmless, prevented her grandfather from flourishing his stick—what would be the use of it? It would be like killing one mouse or one snake in the boundless steppe. The vast expanse, the long winters, the monotony and dreariness of life, instil a sense of helplessness; the position seems hopeless, and one wants to do nothing—everything is useless.

Alyona came in, and bowing low to Vera, began carrying out the armchairs to beat the dust out of them.

“You have chosen a time to clean up,” said Vera with annoyance. “Go away.”

Alyona was overwhelmed, and in her terror could not understand what was wanted of her. She began hurriedly tidying up the dressing-table.

“Go out of the room, I tell you,” Vera shouted, turning cold; she had never had such an oppressive feeling before. “Go away!”

Alyona uttered a sort of moan, like a bird, and dropped Vera’s gold watch on the carpet.

“Go away!” Vera shrieked in a voice not her own, leaping up and trembling all over. “Send her away; she worries me to death!” she went on, walking rapidly after Alyona down the passage, stamping her feet. “Go away! Birch her! Beat her!” Then suddenly she came to herself, and just as she was, unwashed, uncombed, in her dressing-gown and slippers, she rushed out of the house. She ran to the familiar ravine and hid herself there among the sloe trees, so that she might see no one and be seen by no one. Lying there motionless on the grass, she did not weep, she was not horror-stricken, but gazing at the sky open-eyed, she reflected coldly and clearly that something had happened which she could never forget and for which she could never forgive herself all her life.

“No, I can’t go on like this,” she thought. “It’s time to take myself in hand, or there’ll be no end to it.… I can’t go on like this.…”

At midday Dr. Neshtchapov drove by the ravine on his way to the house. She saw him and made up her mind that she would begin a new life, and that she would make herself begin it, and this decision calmed her. And following with her eyes the doctor’s well-built figure, she said, as though trying to soften the crudity of her decision:

“He’s a nice man.… We shall get through life somehow.”

She returned home. While she was dressing, Auntie Dasha came into the room, and said:

“Alyona upset you, darling; I’ve sent her home to the village. Her mother’s given her a good beating and has come here, crying.”

“Auntie,” said Vera quickly, “I’m going to marry Dr. Neshtchapov. Only talk to him yourself… I can’t.”

And again she went out into the fields. And wandering aimlessly about, she made up her mind that when she was married she would look after the house, doctor the peasants, teach in the school, that she would do all the things that other women of her circle did. And this perpetual dissatisfaction with herself and everyone else, this series of crude mistakes which stand up like a mountain before one whenever one looks back upon one’s past, she would accept as her real life to which she was fated, and she would expect nothing better.… Of course there was nothing better! Beautiful nature, dreams, music, told one story, but reality another. Evidently truth and happiness existed somewhere outside real life.… One must give up one’s own life and merge oneself into this luxuriant steppe, boundless and indifferent as eternity, with its flowers, its ancient barrows, and its distant horizon, and then it would be well with one.…

A month later Vera was living at the works.

THE SCHOOLMISTRESS

At half-past eight they drove out of the town.

The high road was dry, a lovely April sun was shining warmly, but the snow was still lying in the ditches and in the woods. Winter, dark, long, and spiteful, was hardly over; spring had come all of a sudden. But neither the warmth nor the languid transparent woods, warmed by the breath of spring, nor the black flocks of birds flying over the huge puddles that were like lakes, nor the marvelous fathomless sky, into which it seemed one would have gone away so joyfully, presented anything new or interesting to Marya Vassilyevna who was sitting in the cart. For thirteen years she had been schoolmistress, and there was no reckoning how many times during all those years she had been to the town for her salary; and whether it were spring as now, or a rainy autumn evening, or winter, it was all the same to her, and she always—invariably—longed for one thing only, to get to the end of her journey as quickly as could be.

She felt as though she had been living in that part of the country for ages and ages, for a hundred years, and it seemed to her that she knew every stone, every tree on the road from the town to her school. Her past was here, her present was here, and she could imagine no other future than the school, the road to the town and back again, and again the school and again the road.…

She had got out of the habit of thinking of her past before she became a schoolmistress, and had almost forgotten it. She had once had a father and mother; they had lived in Moscow in a big flat near the Red Gate, but of all that life there was left in her memory only something vague and fluid like a dream. Her father had died when she was ten years old, and her mother had died soon after.… She had a brother, an officer; at first they used to write to each other, then her brother had given up answering her letters, he had got out of the way of writing. Of her old belongings, all that was left was a photograph of her mother, but it had

grown dim from the dampness of the school, and now nothing could be seen but the hair and the eyebrows.

When they had driven a couple of miles, old Semyon, who was driving, turned round and said:

"They have caught a government clerk in the town. They have taken him away. The story is that with some Germans he killed Alexeyev, the Mayor, in Moscow."

"Who told you that?"

"They were reading it in the paper, in Ivan Ionov's tavern."

And again they were silent for a long time. Marya Vassilyevna thought of her school, of the examination that was coming soon, and of the girl and four boys she was sending up for it. And just as she was thinking about the examination, she was overtaken by a neighboring landowner called Hanov in a carriage with four horses, the very man who had been examiner in her school the year before. When he came up to her he recognized her and bowed.

"Good morning," he said to her. "You are driving home, I suppose."

This Hanov, a man of forty with a listless expression and a face that showed signs of wear, was beginning to look old, but was still handsome and admired by women. He lived in his big homestead alone, and was not in the service; and people used to say of him that he did nothing at home but walk up and down the room whistling, or play chess with his old footman. People said, too, that he drank heavily. And indeed at the examination the year before the very papers he brought with him smelt of wine and scent. He had been dressed all in new clothes on that occasion, and Marya Vassilyevna thought him very attractive, and all the while she sat beside him she had felt embarrassed. She was accustomed to see frigid and sensible examiners at the school, while this one did not remember a single prayer, or know what to ask questions about, and was exceedingly courteous and delicate, giving nothing but the highest marks.

"I am going to visit Bakvist," he went on, addressing Marya Vassilyevna, "but I am told he is not at home."

They turned off the high road into a byroad to the village, Hanov leading the way and Semyon following. The four horses moved at a walking pace, with effort dragging the heavy carriage through the mud. Semyon tacked from side to side, keeping to the edge of the road, at one time through a snowdrift, at another through a pool, often jumping out of the cart and helping the horse. Marya Vassilyevna was still thinking about the school, wondering whether the arithmetic questions at the

examination would be difficult or easy. And she felt annoyed with the Zemstvo board at which she had found no one the day before. How unbusiness-like! Here she had been asking them for the last two years to dismiss the watchman, who did nothing, was rude to her, and hit the schoolboys; but no one paid any attention. It was hard to find the president at the office, and when one did find him he would say with tears in his eyes that he hadn't a moment to spare; the inspector visited the school at most once in three years, and knew nothing whatever about his work, as he had been in the Excise Duties Department, and had received the post of school inspector through influence. The School Council met very rarely, and there was no knowing where it met; the school guardian was an almost illiterate peasant, the head of a tanning business, unintelligent, rude, and a great friend of the watchman's—and goodness knows to whom she could appeal with complaints or inquiries.…

"He really is handsome," she thought, glancing at Hanov.

The road grew worse and worse.… They drove into the wood. Here there was no room to turn round, the wheels sank deeply in, water splashed and gurgled through them, and sharp twigs struck them in the face.

"What a road!" said Hanov, and he laughed.

The schoolmistress looked at him and could not understand why this queer man lived here. What could his money, his interesting appearance, his refined bearing do for him here, in this mud, in this Godforsaken, dreary place? He got no special advantages out of life, and here, like Semyon, was driving at a jog-trot on an appalling road and enduring the same discomforts. Why live here if one could live in Petersburg or abroad? And one would have thought it would be nothing for a rich man like him to make a good road instead of this bad one, to avoid enduring this misery and seeing the despair on the faces of his coachman and Semyon; but he only laughed, and apparently did not mind, and wanted no better life. He was kind, soft, naive, and he did not understand this coarse life, just as at the examination he did not know the prayers. He subscribed nothing to the schools but globes, and genuinely regarded himself as a useful person and a prominent worker in the cause of popular education. And what use were his globes here?

"Hold on, Vassilyevna!" said Semyon.

The cart lurched violently and was on the point of upsetting; something heavy rolled on to Marya Vassilyevna's feet—it was her parcel of purchases. There was a steep ascent uphill through the clay;

here in the winding ditches rivulets were gurgling. The water seemed to have gnawed away the road; and how could one get along here! The horses breathed hard. Hanov got out of his carriage and walked at the side of the road in his long overcoat. He was hot.

"What a road!" he said, and laughed again. "It would soon smash up one's carriage."

"Nobody obliges you to drive about in such weather," said Semyon surlily. "You should stay at home."

"I am dull at home, grandfather. I don't like staying at home."

Beside old Semyon he looked graceful and vigorous, but yet in his walk there was something just perceptible which betrayed in him a being already touched by decay, weak, and on the road to ruin. And all at once there was a whiff of spirits in the wood. Marya Vassilyevna was filled with dread and pity for this man going to his ruin for no visible cause or reason, and it came into her mind that if she had been his wife or sister she would have devoted her whole life to saving him from ruin. His wife! Life was so ordered that here he was living in his great house alone, and she was living in a Godforsaken village alone, and yet for some reason the mere thought that he and she might be close to one another and equals seemed impossible and absurd. In reality, life was arranged and human relations were complicated so utterly beyond all understanding that when one thought about it one felt uncanny and one's heart sank.

"And it is beyond all understanding," she thought, "why God gives beauty, this graciousness, and sad, sweet eyes to weak, unlucky, useless people—why they are so charming."

"Here we must turn off to the right," said Hanov, getting into his carriage. "Goodbye! I wish you all things good!"

And again she thought of her pupils, of the examination, of the watchman, of the School Council; and when the wind brought the sound of the retreating carriage these thoughts were mingled with others. She longed to think of beautiful eyes, of love, of the happiness which would never be.…

His wife? It was cold in the morning, there was no one to heat the stove, the watchman disappeared; the children came in as soon as it was light, bringing in snow and mud and making a noise: it was all so inconvenient, so comfortless. Her abode consisted of one little room and the kitchen close by. Her head ached every day after her work, and after dinner she had heartburn. She had to collect money from the schoolchildren for wood and for the watchman, and to give it to the

school guardian, and then to entreat him—that overfed, insolent peasant—for God's sake to send her wood. And at night she dreamed of examinations, peasants, snowdrifts. And this life was making her grow old and coarse, making her ugly, angular, and awkward, as though she were made of lead. She was always afraid, and she would get up from her seat and not venture to sit down in the presence of a member of the Zemstvo or the school guardian. And she used formal, deferential expressions when she spoke of any one of them. And no one thought her attractive, and life was passing drearily, without affection, without friendly sympathy, without interesting acquaintances. How awful it would have been in her position if she had fallen in love!

"Hold on, Vassilyevna!"

Again a sharp ascent uphill.…

She had become a schoolmistress from necessity, without feeling any vocation for it; and she had never thought of a vocation, of serving the cause of enlightenment; and it always seemed to her that what was most important in her work was not the children, nor enlightenment, but the examinations. And what time had she for thinking of vocation, of serving the cause of enlightenment? Teachers, badly paid doctors, and their assistants, with their terribly hard work, have not even the comfort of thinking that they are serving an idea or the people, as their heads are always stuffed with thoughts of their daily bread, of wood for the fire, of bad roads, of illnesses. It is a hardworking, an uninteresting life, and only silent, patient carthorses like Mary Vassilyevna could put up with it for long; the lively, nervous, impressionable people who talked about vocation and serving the idea were soon weary of it and gave up the work.

Semyon kept picking out the driest and shortest way, first by a meadow, then by the backs of the village huts; but in one place the peasants would not let them pass, in another it was the priest's land and they could not cross it, in another Ivan Ionov had bought a plot from the landowner and had dug a ditch round it. They kept having to turn back.

They reached Nizhneye Gorodistche. Near the tavern on the dung-strewn earth, where the snow was still lying, there stood wagons that had brought great bottles of crude sulphuric acid. There were a great many people in the tavern, all drivers, and there was a smell of vodka, tobacco, and sheepskins. There was a loud noise of conversation and the banging of the swing-door. Through the wall, without ceasing for a moment, came the sound of a concertina being played in the shop. Marya Vassilyevna sat down and drank some tea, while at the next table

peasants were drinking vodka and beer, perspiring from the tea they had just swallowed and the stifling fumes of the tavern.

"I say, Kuzma!" voices kept shouting in confusion. "What there!" "The Lord bless us!" "Ivan Dementyitch, I can tell you that!" "Look out, old man!"

A little pockmarked man with a black beard, who was quite drunk, was suddenly surprised by something and began using bad language.

"What are you swearing at, you there?" Semyon, who was sitting some way off, responded angrily. "Don't you see the young lady?"

"The young lady!" someone mimicked in another corner.

"Swinish crow!"

"We meant nothing…" said the little man in confusion. "I beg your pardon. We pay with our money and the young lady with hers. Good morning!"

"Good morning," answered the schoolmistress.

"And we thank you most feelingly."

Marya Vassilyevna drank her tea with satisfaction, and she, too, began turning red like the peasants, and fell to thinking again about firewood, about the watchman.…

"Stay, old man," she heard from the next table, "it's the schoolmistress from Vyazovye.… We know her; she's a good young lady."

"She's all right!"

The swing-door was continually banging, some coming in, others going out. Marya Vassilyevna sat on, thinking all the time of the same things, while the concertina went on playing and playing. The patches of sunshine had been on the floor, then they passed to the counter, to the wall, and disappeared altogether; so by the sun it was past midday. The peasants at the next table were getting ready to go. The little man, somewhat unsteadily, went up to Marya Vassilyevna and held out his hand to her; following his example, the others shook hands, too, at parting, and went out one after another, and the swing-door squeaked and slammed nine times.

"Vassilyevna, get ready," Semyon called to her.

They set off. And again they went at a walking pace.

"A little while back they were building a school here in their Nizhneye Gorodistche," said Semyon, turning round. "It was a wicked thing that was done!"

"Why, what?"

"They say the president put a thousand in his pocket, and the school guardian another thousand in his, and the teacher five hundred."

“The whole school only cost a thousand. It’s wrong to slander people, grandfather. That’s all nonsense.”

“I don’t know,… I only tell you what folks say.”

But it was clear that Semyon did not believe the schoolmistress. The peasants did not believe her. They always thought she received too large a salary, twenty-one roubles a month (five would have been enough), and that of the money that she collected from the children for the firewood and the watchman the greater part she kept for herself. The guardian thought the same as the peasants, and he himself made a profit off the firewood and received payments from the peasants for being a guardian—without the knowledge of the authorities.

The forest, thank God! was behind them, and now it would be flat, open ground all the way to Vyazovye, and there was not far to go now. They had to cross the river and then the railway line, and then Vyazovye was in sight.

“Where are you driving?” Marya Vassilyevna asked Semyon. “Take the road to the right to the bridge.”

“Why, we can go this way as well. It’s not deep enough to matter.”

“Mind you don’t drown the horse.”

“What?”

“Look, Hanov is driving to the bridge,” said Marya Vassilyevna, seeing the four horses far away to the right. “It is he, I think.”

“It is. So he didn’t find Bakvist at home. What a pigheaded fellow he is. Lord have mercy upon us! He’s driven over there, and what for? It’s fully two miles nearer this way.”

They reached the river. In the summer it was a little stream easily crossed by wading. It usually dried up in August, but now, after the spring floods, it was a river forty feet in breadth, rapid, muddy, and cold; on the bank and right up to the water there were fresh tracks of wheels, so it had been crossed here.

“Go on!” shouted Semyon angrily and anxiously, tugging violently at the reins and jerking his elbows as a bird does its wings. “Go on!”

The horse went on into the water up to his belly and stopped, but at once went on again with an effort, and Marya Vassilyevna was aware of a keen chilliness in her feet.

“Go on!” she, too, shouted, getting up. “Go on!”

They got out on the bank.

“Nice mess it is, Lord have mercy upon us!” muttered Semyon, setting straight the harness. “It’s a perfect plague with this Zemstvo.…”

Her shoes and goloshes were full of water, the lower part of her dress and of her coat and one sleeve were wet and dripping: the sugar and flour had got wet, and that was worst of all, and Marya Vassilyevna could only clasp her hands in despair and say:

"Oh, Semyon, Semyon! How tiresome you are really!…"

The barrier was down at the railway crossing. A train was coming out of the station. Marya Vassilyevna stood at the crossing waiting till it should pass, and shivering all over with cold. Vyazovye was in sight now, and the school with the green roof, and the church with its crosses flashing in the evening sun: and the station windows flashed too, and a pink smoke rose from the engine… and it seemed to her that everything was trembling with cold.

Here was the train; the windows reflected the gleaming light like the crosses on the church: it made her eyes ache to look at them. On the little platform between two first-class carriages a lady was standing, and Marya Vassilyevna glanced at her as she passed. Her mother! What a resemblance! Her mother had had just such luxuriant hair, just such a brow and bend of the head. And with amazing distinctness, for the first time in those thirteen years, there rose before her mind a vivid picture of her mother, her father, her brother, their flat in Moscow, the aquarium with little fish, everything to the tiniest detail; she heard the sound of the piano, her father's voice; she felt as she had been then, young, good-looking, well-dressed, in a bright warm room among her own people. A feeling of joy and happiness suddenly came over her, she pressed her hands to her temples in an ecstasy, and called softly, beseechingly:

"Mother!"

And she began crying, she did not know why. Just at that instant Hanov drove up with his team of four horses, and seeing him she imagined happiness such as she had never had, and smiled and nodded to him as an equal and a friend, and it seemed to her that her happiness, her triumph, was glowing in the sky and on all sides, in the windows and on the trees. Her father and mother had never died, she had never been a schoolmistress, it was a long, tedious, strange dream, and now she had awakened.…

"Vassilyevna, get in!"

And at once it all vanished. The barrier was slowly raised. Marya Vassilyevna, shivering and numb with cold, got into the cart. The carriage with the four horses crossed the railway line; Semyon followed it. The signalman took off his cap.

"And here is Vyazovye. Here we are."

The Man in a Case

At the furthest end of the village of Mironositskoe some belated sportsmen lodged for the night in the elder Prokofy's barn. There were two of them, the veterinary surgeon Ivan Ivanovitch and the schoolmaster Burkin. Ivan Ivanovitch had a rather strange double-barrelled surname—Tchimsha-Himalaisky—which did not suit him at all, and he was called simply Ivan Ivanovitch all over the province. He lived at a stud-farm near the town, and had come out shooting now to get a breath of fresh air. Burkin, the high school teacher, stayed every summer at Count P——'s, and had been thoroughly at home in this district for years.

They did not sleep. Ivan Ivanovitch, a tall, lean old fellow with long moustaches, was sitting outside the door, smoking a pipe in the moonlight. Burkin was lying within on the hay, and could not be seen in the darkness.

They were telling each other all sorts of stories. Among other things, they spoke of the fact that the elder's wife, Mavra, a healthy and by no means stupid woman, had never been beyond her native village, had never seen a town nor a railway in her life, and had spent the last ten years sitting behind the stove, and only at night going out into the street.

"What is there wonderful in that!" said Burkin. "There are plenty of people in the world, solitary by temperament, who try to retreat into their shell like a hermit crab or a snail. Perhaps it is an instance of atavism, a return to the period when the ancestor of man was not yet a social animal and lived alone in his den, or perhaps it is only one of the diversities of human character—who knows? I am not a natural science man, and it is not my business to settle such questions; I only mean to say that people like Mavra are not uncommon. There is no need to look far; two months ago a man called Byelikov, a colleague of mine, the Greek master, died in our town. You have heard of him, no doubt. He was remarkable for always wearing goloshes and a warm wadded coat, and carrying an umbrella even in the very finest weather. And his umbrella was in a case,

and his watch was in a case made of grey chamois leather, and when he took out his penknife to sharpen his pencil, his penknife, too, was in a little case; and his face seemed to be in a case too, because he always hid it in his turned-up collar. He wore dark spectacles and flannel vests, stuffed up his ears with cotton-wool, and when he got into a cab always told the driver to put up the hood. In short, the man displayed a constant and insurmountable impulse to wrap himself in a covering, to make himself, so to speak, a case which would isolate him and protect him from external influences. Reality irritated him, frightened him, kept him in continual agitation, and, perhaps to justify his timidity, his aversion for the actual, he always praised the past and what had never existed; and even the classical languages which he taught were in reality for him goloshes and umbrellas in which he sheltered himself from real life.

"'Oh, how sonorous, how beautiful is the Greek language!' he would say, with a sugary expression; and as though to prove his words he would screw up his eyes and, raising his finger, would pronounce *'Anthropos!'*

"And Byelikov tried to hide his thoughts also in a case. The only things that were clear to his mind were government circulars and newspaper articles in which something was forbidden. When some proclamation prohibited the boys from going out in the streets after nine o'clock in the evening, or some article declared carnal love unlawful, it was to his mind clear and definite; it was forbidden, and that was enough. For him there was always a doubtful element, something vague and not fully expressed, in any sanction or permission. When a dramatic club or a reading room or a teashop was licensed in the town, he would shake his head and say softly:

"It is all right, of course; it is all very nice, but I hope it won't lead to anything!"

"Every sort of breach of order, deviation or departure from rule, depressed him, though one would have thought it was no business of his. If one of his colleagues was late for church or if rumours reached him of some prank of the high school boys, or one of the mistresses was seen late in the evening in the company of an officer, he was much disturbed, and said he hoped that nothing would come of it. At the teachers' meetings he simply oppressed us with his caution, his circumspection, and his characteristic reflection on the ill-behaviour of the young people in both male and female high schools, the uproar in the classes.

"Oh, he hoped it would not reach the ears of the authorities; oh, he hoped nothing would come of it; and he thought it would be a very good thing if Petrov were expelled from the second class and Yegorov from

the fourth. And, do you know, by his sighs, his despondency, his black spectacles on his pale little face, a little face like a polecat's, you know, he crushed us all, and we gave way, reduced Petrov's and Yegorov's marks for conduct, kept them in, and in the end expelled them both. He had a strange habit of visiting our lodgings. He would come to a teacher's, would sit down, and remain silent, as though he were carefully inspecting something. He would sit like this in silence for an hour or two and then go away. This he called 'maintaining good relations with his colleagues'; and it was obvious that coming to see us and sitting there was tiresome to him, and that he came to see us simply because he considered it his duty as our colleague. We teachers were afraid of him. And even the headmaster was afraid of him. Would you believe it, our teachers were all intellectual, right-minded people, brought up on Turgenev and Shtchedrin, yet this little chap, who always went about with goloshes and an umbrella, had the whole high school under his thumb for fifteen long years! High school, indeed—he had the whole town under his thumb! Our ladies did not get up private theatricals on Saturdays for fear he should hear of it, and the clergy dared not eat meat or play cards in his presence. Under the influence of people like Byelikov we have got into the way of being afraid of everything in our town for the last ten or fifteen years. They are afraid to speak aloud, afraid to send letters, afraid to make acquaintances, afraid to read books, afraid to help the poor, to teach people to read and write.…"

Ivan Ivanovitch cleared his throat, meaning to say something, but first lighted his pipe, gazed at the moon, and then said, with pauses:

"Yes, intellectual, right minded people read Shtchedrin and Turgenev, Buckle, and all the rest of them, yet they knocked under and put up with it… that's just how it is."

"Byelikov lived in the same house as I did," Burkin went on, "on the same storey, his door facing mine; we often saw each other, and I knew how he lived when he was at home. And at home it was the same story: dressing-gown, nightcap, blinds, bolts, a perfect succession of prohibitions and restrictions of all sorts, and—'Oh, I hope nothing will come of it!' Lenten fare was bad for him, yet he could not eat meat, as people might perhaps say Byelikov did not keep the fasts, and he ate freshwater fish with butter—not a Lenten dish, yet one could not say that it was meat. He did not keep a female servant for fear people might think evil of him, but had as cook an old man of sixty, called Afanasy, half-witted and given to tippling, who had once been an officer's servant and could cook after a fashion. This Afanasy was usually standing at the door

with his arms folded; with a deep sigh, he would mutter always the same thing:

"'There are plenty of *them* about nowadays!'

"Byelikov had a little bedroom like a box; his bed had curtains. When he went to bed he covered his head over; it was hot and stuffy; the wind battered on the closed doors; there was a droning noise in the stove and a sound of sighs from the kitchen—ominous sighs.… And he felt frightened under the bedclothes. He was afraid that something might happen, that Afanasy might murder him, that thieves might break in, and so he had troubled dreams all night, and in the morning, when we went together to the high school, he was depressed and pale, and it was evident that the high school full of people excited dread and aversion in his whole being, and that to walk beside me was irksome to a man of his solitary temperament.

"'They make a great noise in our classes,' he used to say, as though trying to find an explanation for his depression. 'It's beyond anything.'

"And the Greek master, this man in a case—would you believe it?—almost got married."

Ivan Ivanovitch glanced quickly into the barn, and said:

"You are joking!"

"Yes, strange as it seems, he almost got married. A new teacher of history and geography, Milhail Savvitch Kovalenko, a Little Russian, was appointed. He came, not alone, but with his sister Varinka. He was a tall, dark young man with huge hands, and one could see from his face that he had a bass voice, and, in fact, he had a voice that seemed to come out of a barrel—'boom, boom, boom!' And she was not so young, about thirty, but she, too, was tall, well-made, with black eyebrows and red cheeks—in fact, she was a regular sugarplum, and so sprightly, so noisy; she was always singing Little Russian songs and laughing. For the least thing she would go off into a ringing laugh—'Ha-ha-ha!' We made our first thorough acquaintance with the Kovalenkos at the headmaster's name-day party. Among the glum and intensely bored teachers who came even to the name-day party as a duty we suddenly saw a new Aphrodite risen from the waves; she walked with her arms akimbo, laughed, sang, danced.… She sang with feeling 'The Winds do Blow,' then another song, and another, and she fascinated us all—all, even Byelikov. He sat down by her and said with a honeyed smile:

"'The Little Russian reminds one of the ancient Greek in its softness and agreeable resonance.'

“That flattered her, and she began telling him with feeling and earnestness that they had a farm in the Gadyatchsky district, and that her mamma lived at the farm, and that they had such pears, such melons, such *kabaks*! The Little Russians call pumpkins *kabaks* (i.e., pothouses), while their pothouses they call *shinki*, and they make a beetroot soup with tomatoes and aubergines in it, ‘which was so nice—awfully nice!’

“We listened and listened, and suddenly the same idea dawned upon us all:

“‘It would be a good thing to make a match of it,’ the headmaster’s wife said to me softly.

“We all for some reason recalled the fact that our friend Byelikov was not married, and it now seemed to us strange that we had hitherto failed to observe, and had in fact completely lost sight of, a detail so important in his life. What was his attitude to woman? How had he settled this vital question for himself? This had not interested us in the least till then; perhaps we had not even admitted the idea that a man who went out in all weathers in goloshes and slept under curtains could be in love.

“‘He is a good deal over forty and she is thirty,’ the headmaster’s wife went on, developing her idea. ‘I believe she would marry him.’

“All sorts of things are done in the provinces through boredom, all sorts of unnecessary and nonsensical things! And that is because what is necessary is not done at all. What need was there for instance, for us to make a match for this Byelikov, whom one could not even imagine married? The headmaster’s wife, the inspector’s wife, and all our high school ladies, grew livelier and even better-looking, as though they had suddenly found a new object in life. The headmaster’s wife would take a box at the theatre, and we beheld sitting in her box Varinka, with such a fan, beaming and happy, and beside her Byelikov, a little bent figure, looking as though he had been extracted from his house by pincers. I would give an evening party, and the ladies would insist on my inviting Byelikov and Varinka. In short, the machine was set in motion. It appeared that Varinka was not averse to matrimony. She had not a very cheerful life with her brother; they could do nothing but quarrel and scold one another from morning till night. Here is a scene, for instance. Kovalenko would be coming along the street, a tall, sturdy young ruffian, in an embroidered shirt, his love-locks falling on his forehead under his cap, in one hand a bundle of books, in the other a thick knotted stick, followed by his sister, also with books in her hand.

“‘But you haven’t read it, Mihalik!’ she would be arguing loudly. ‘I tell you, I swear you have not read it at all!’

“‘And I tell you I have read it,’ cries Kovalenko, thumping his stick on the pavement.

“‘Oh, my goodness, Mihalik! why are you so cross? We are arguing about principles.’

“‘I tell you that I have read it!’ Kovalenko would shout, more loudly than ever.

“And at home, if there was an outsider present, there was sure to be a skirmish. Such a life must have been wearisome, and of course she must have longed for a home of her own. Besides, there was her age to be considered; there was no time left to pick and choose; it was a case of marrying anybody, even a Greek master. And, indeed, most of our young ladies don’t mind whom they marry so long as they do get married. However that may be, Varinka began to show an unmistakable partiality for Byelikov.

“And Byelikov? He used to visit Kovalenko just as he did us. He would arrive, sit down, and remain silent. He would sit quiet, and Varinka would sing to him ‘The Winds do Blow,’ or would look pensively at him with her dark eyes, or would suddenly go off into a peal—‘Ha-ha-ha!’

“Suggestion plays a great part in love affairs, and still more in getting married. Everybody—both his colleagues and the ladies—began assuring Byelikov that he ought to get married, that there was nothing left for him in life but to get married; we all congratulated him, with solemn countenances delivered ourselves of various platitudes, such as ‘Marriage is a serious step.’ Besides, Varinka was good-looking and interesting; she was the daughter of a civil councillor, and had a farm; and what was more, she was the first woman who had been warm and friendly in her manner to him. His head was turned, and he decided that he really ought to get married.”

“Well, at that point you ought to have taken away his goloshes and umbrella,” said Ivan Ivanovitch.

“Only fancy! that turned out to be impossible. He put Varinka’s portrait on his table, kept coming to see me and talking about Varinka, and home life, saying marriage was a serious step. He was frequently at Kovalenko’s, but he did not alter his manner of life in the least; on the contrary, indeed, his determination to get married seemed to have a depressing effect on him. He grew thinner and paler, and seemed to retreat further and further into his case.

“‘I like Varvara Savvishna,’ he used to say to me, with a faint and wry smile, ‘and I know that everyone ought to get married, but… you know

all this has happened so suddenly.… One must think a little.’

“‘What is there to think over?’ I used to say to him. ‘Get married—that is all.’

“‘No; marriage is a serious step. One must first weigh the duties before one, the responsibilities… that nothing may go wrong afterwards. It worries me so much that I don’t sleep at night. And I must confess I am afraid: her brother and she have a strange way of thinking; they look at things strangely, you know, and her disposition is very impetuous. One may get married, and then, there is no knowing, one may find oneself in an unpleasant position.’

“And he did not make an offer; he kept putting it off, to the great vexation of the headmaster’s wife and all our ladies; he went on weighing his future duties and responsibilities, and meanwhile he went for a walk with Varinka almost every day—possibly he thought that this was necessary in his position—and came to see me to talk about family life. And in all probability in the end he would have proposed to her, and would have made one of those unnecessary, stupid marriages such as are made by thousands among us from being bored and having nothing to do, if it had not been for a *kolossalische scandal*. I must mention that Varinka’s brother, Kovalenko, detested Byelikov from the first day of their acquaintance, and could not endure him.

“‘I don’t understand,’ he used to say to us, shrugging his shoulders—‘I don’t understand how you can put up with that sneak, that nasty phiz. Ugh! how can you live here! The atmosphere is stifling and unclean! Do you call yourselves schoolmasters, teachers? You are paltry government clerks. You keep, not a temple of science, but a department for red tape and loyal behaviour, and it smells as sour as a police-station. No, my friends; I will stay with you for a while, and then I will go to my farm and there catch crabs and teach the Little Russians. I shall go, and you can stay here with your Judas—damn his soul!’

“Or he would laugh till he cried, first in a loud bass, then in a shrill, thin laugh, and ask me, waving his hands:

“‘What does he sit here for? What does he want? He sits and stares.’

“He even gave Byelikov a nickname, ‘The Spider.’ And it will readily be understood that we avoided talking to him of his sister’s being about to marry ‘The Spider.’

“And on one occasion, when the headmaster’s wife hinted to him what a good thing it would be to secure his sister’s future with such a reliable, universally respected man as Byelikov, he frowned and muttered:

“‘It’s not my business; let her marry a reptile if she likes. I don’t like meddling in other people’s affairs.’

“Now hear what happened next. Some mischievous person drew a caricature of Byelikov walking along in his goloshes with his trousers tucked up, under his umbrella, with Varinka on his arm; below, the inscription ‘Anthropos in love.’ The expression was caught to a marvel, you know. The artist must have worked for more than one night, for the teachers of both the boys’ and girls’ high schools, the teachers of the seminary, the government officials, all received a copy. Byelikov received one, too. The caricature made a very painful impression on him.

“We went out together; it was the first of May, a Sunday, and all of us, the boys and the teachers, had agreed to meet at the high school and then to go for a walk together to a wood beyond the town. We set off, and he was green in the face and gloomier than a storm-cloud.

“‘What wicked, ill-natured people there are!’ he said, and his lips quivered.

“I felt really sorry for him. We were walking along, and all of a sudden—would you believe it?—Kovalenko came bowling along on a bicycle, and after him, also on a bicycle, Varinka, flushed and exhausted, but good-humoured and gay.

“‘We are going on ahead,’ she called. ‘What lovely weather! Awfully lovely!’

“And they both disappeared from our sight. Byelikov turned white instead of green, and seemed petrified. He stopped short and stared at me.…

“‘What is the meaning of it? Tell me, please!’ he asked. ‘Can my eyes have deceived me? Is it the proper thing for high school masters and ladies to ride bicycles?’

“‘What is there improper about it?’ I said. ‘Let them ride and enjoy themselves.’

“‘But how can that be?’ he cried, amazed at my calm. ‘What are you saying?’

“And he was so shocked that he was unwilling to go on, and returned home.

“Next day he was continually twitching and nervously rubbing his hands, and it was evident from his face that he was unwell. And he left before his work was over, for the first time in his life. And he ate no dinner. Towards evening he wrapped himself up warmly, though it was quite warm weather, and sallied out to the Kovalenkos’. Varinka was out; he found her brother, however.

“‘Pray sit down,’ Kovalenko said coldly, with a frown. His face looked sleepy; he had just had a nap after dinner, and was in a very bad humour.

“Byelikov sat in silence for ten minutes, and then began:

“‘I have come to see you to relieve my mind. I am very, very much troubled. Some scurrilous fellow has drawn an absurd caricature of me and another person, in whom we are both deeply interested. I regard it as a duty to assure you that I have had no hand in it.… I have given no sort of ground for such ridicule—on the contrary, I have always behaved in every way like a gentleman.’

“Kovalenko sat sulky and silent. Byelikov waited a little, and went on slowly in a mournful voice:

“‘And I have something else to say to you. I have been in the service for years, while you have only lately entered it, and I consider it my duty as an older colleague to give you a warning. You ride on a bicycle, and that pastime is utterly unsuitable for an educator of youth.’

“‘Why so?’ asked Kovalenko in his bass.

“‘Surely that needs no explanation, Mihail Savvitch—surely you can understand that? If the teacher rides a bicycle, what can you expect the pupils to do? You will have them walking on their heads next! And so long as there is no formal permission to do so, it is out of the question. I was horrified yesterday! When I saw your sister everything seemed dancing before my eyes. A lady or a young girl on a bicycle—it’s awful!’

“‘What is it you want exactly?’

“‘All I want is to warn you, Mihail Savvitch. You are a young man, you have a future before you, you must be very, very careful in your behaviour, and you are so careless—oh, so careless! You go about in an embroidered shirt, are constantly seen in the street carrying books, and now the bicycle, too. The headmaster will learn that you and your sister ride the bicycle, and then it will reach the higher authorities.… Will that be a good thing?’

“‘It’s no business of anybody else if my sister and I do bicycle!’ said Kovalenko, and he turned crimson. ‘And damnation take anyone who meddles in my private affairs!’

“Byelikov turned pale and got up.

“‘If you speak to me in that tone I cannot continue,’ he said. ‘And I beg you never to express yourself like that about our superiors in my presence; you ought to be respectful to the authorities.’

“‘Why, have I said any harm of the authorities?’ asked Kovalenko, looking at him wrathfully. ‘Please leave me alone. I am an honest man,

and do not care to talk to a gentleman like you. I don't like sneaks!'

"Byelikov flew into a nervous flutter, and began hurriedly putting on his coat, with an expression of horror on his face. It was the first time in his life he had been spoken to so rudely.

"'You can say what you please,' he said, as he went out from the entry to the landing on the staircase. 'I ought only to warn you: possibly some one may have overheard us, and that our conversation may not be misunderstood and harm come of it, I shall be compelled to inform our headmaster of our conversation… in its main features. I am bound to do so.'

"'Inform him? You can go and make your report!'

"Kovalenko seized him from behind by the collar and gave him a push, and Byelikov rolled downstairs, thudding with his goloshes. The staircase was high and steep, but he rolled to the bottom unhurt, got up, and touched his nose to see whether his spectacles were all right. But just as he was falling down the stairs Varinka came in, and with her two ladies; they stood below staring, and to Byelikov this was more terrible than anything. I believe he would rather have broken his neck or both legs than have been an object of ridicule. 'Why, now the whole town would hear of it; it would come to the headmaster's ears, would reach the higher authorities—oh, it might lead to something! There would be another caricature, and it would all end in his being asked to resign his post.…

"When he got up, Varinka recognized him, and, looking at his ridiculous face, his crumpled overcoat, and his goloshes, not understanding what had happened and supposing that he had slipped down by accident, could not restrain herself, and laughed loud enough to be heard by all the flats:

"'Ha-ha-ha!'

"And this pealing, ringing 'Ha-ha-ha!' was the last straw that put an end to everything: to the proposed match and to Byelikov's earthly existence. He did not hear what Varinka said to him; he saw nothing. On reaching home, the first thing he did was to remove her portrait from the table; then he went to bed, and he never got up again.

"Three days later Afanasy came to me and asked whether we should not send for the doctor, as there was something wrong with his master. I went in to Byelikov. He lay silent behind the curtain, covered with a quilt; if one asked him a question, he said 'Yes' or 'No' and not another sound. He lay there while Afanasy, gloomy and scowling, hovered about him, sighing heavily, and smelling like a pothouse.

“A month later Byelikov died. We all went to his funeral—that is, both the high schools and the seminary. Now when he was lying in his coffin his expression was mild, agreeable, even cheerful, as though he were glad that he had at last been put into a case which he would never leave again. Yes, he had attained his ideal! And, as though in his honour, it was dull, rainy weather on the day of his funeral, and we all wore goloshes and took our umbrellas. Varinka, too, was at the funeral, and when the coffin was lowered into the grave she burst into tears. I have noticed that Little Russian women are always laughing or crying—no intermediate mood.

“One must confess that to bury people like Byelikov is a great pleasure. As we were returning from the cemetery we wore discreet Lenten faces; no one wanted to display this feeling of pleasure—a feeling like that we had experienced long, long ago as children when our elders had gone out and we ran about the garden for an hour or two, enjoying complete freedom. Ah, freedom, freedom! The merest hint, the faintest hope of its possibility gives wings to the soul, does it not?

“We returned from the cemetery in a good humour. But not more than a week had passed before life went on as in the past, as gloomy, oppressive, and senseless—a life not forbidden by government prohibition, but not fully permitted, either: it was no better. And, indeed, though we had buried Byelikov, how many such men in cases were left, how many more of them there will be!”

“That’s just how it is,” said Ivan Ivanovitch and he lighted his pipe.

“How many more of them there will be!” repeated Burkin.

The schoolmaster came out of the barn. He was a short, stout man, completely bald, with a black beard down to his waist. The two dogs came out with him.

“What a moon!” he said, looking upwards.

It was midnight. On the right could be seen the whole village, a long street stretching far away for four miles. All was buried in deep silent slumber; not a movement, not a sound; one could hardly believe that nature could be so still. When on a moonlight night you see a broad village street, with its cottages, haystacks, and slumbering willows, a feeling of calm comes over the soul; in this peace, wrapped away from care, toil, and sorrow in the darkness of night, it is mild, melancholy, beautiful, and it seems as though the stars look down upon it kindly and with tenderness, and as though there were no evil on earth and all were well. On the left the open country began from the end of the village; it

could be seen stretching far away to the horizon, and there was no movement, no sound in that whole expanse bathed in moonlight.

"Yes, that is just how it is," repeated Ivan Ivanovitch; "and isn't our living in town, airless and crowded, our writing useless papers, our playing Vint—isn't that all a sort of case for us? And our spending our whole lives among trivial, fussy men and silly, idle women, our talking and our listening to all sorts of nonsense—isn't that a case for us, too? If you like, I will tell you a very edifying story."

"No; it's time we were asleep," said Burkin. "Tell it tomorrow."

They went into the barn and lay down on the hay. And they were both covered up and beginning to doze when they suddenly heard light footsteps—patter, patter.… Someone was walking not far from the barn, walking a little and stopping, and a minute later, patter, patter again.… The dogs began growling.

"That's Mavra," said Burkin.

The footsteps died away.

"You see and hear that they lie," said Ivan Ivanovitch, turning over on the other side, "and they call you a fool for putting up with their lying. You endure insult and humiliation, and dare not openly say that you are on the side of the honest and the free, and you lie and smile yourself; and all that for the sake of a crust of bread, for the sake of a warm corner, for the sake of a wretched little worthless rank in the service. No, one can't go on living like this."

"Well, you are off on another tack now, Ivan Ivanovitch," said the schoolmaster. "Let us go to sleep!"

And ten minutes later Burkin was asleep. But Ivan Ivanovitch kept sighing and turning over from side to side; then he got up, went outside again, and, sitting in the doorway, lighted his pipe.

GOOSEBERRIES

The whole sky had been overcast with rain-clouds from early morning; it was a still day, not hot, but heavy, as it is in grey dull weather when the clouds have been hanging over the country for a long while, when one expects rain and it does not come. Ivan Ivanovitch, the veterinary surgeon, and Burkin, the high school teacher, were already tired from walking, and the fields seemed to them endless. Far ahead of them they could just see the windmills of the village of Mironositskoe; on the right stretched a row of hillocks which disappeared in the distance behind the village, and they both knew that this was the bank of the river, that there were meadows, green willows, homesteads there, and that if one stood on one of the hillocks one could see from it the same vast plain, telegraph-wires, and a train which in the distance looked like a crawling caterpillar, and that in clear weather one could even see the town. Now, in still weather, when all nature seemed mild and dreamy, Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin were filled with love of that countryside, and both thought how great, how beautiful a land it was.

"Last time we were in Prokofy's barn," said Burkin, "you were about to tell me a story."

"Yes; I meant to tell you about my brother."

Ivan Ivanovitch heaved a deep sigh and lighted a pipe to begin to tell his story, but just at that moment the rain began. And five minutes later heavy rain came down, covering the sky, and it was hard to tell when it would be over. Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin stopped in hesitation; the dogs, already drenched, stood with their tails between their legs gazing at them feelingly.

"We must take shelter somewhere," said Burkin. "Let us go to Alehin's; it's close by."

"Come along."

They turned aside and walked through mown fields, sometimes going straight forward, sometimes turning to the right, till they came out on the road. Soon they saw poplars, a garden, then the red roofs of barns; there

was a gleam of the river, and the view opened on to a broad expanse of water with a windmill and a white bathhouse: this was Sofino, where Alehin lived.

The watermill was at work, drowning the sound of the rain; the dam was shaking. Here wet horses with drooping heads were standing near their carts, and men were walking about covered with sacks. It was damp, muddy, and desolate; the water looked cold and malignant. Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin were already conscious of a feeling of wetness, messiness, and discomfort all over; their feet were heavy with mud, and when, crossing the dam, they went up to the barns, they were silent, as though they were angry with one another.

In one of the barns there was the sound of a winnowing machine, the door was open, and clouds of dust were coming from it. In the doorway was standing Alehin himself, a man of forty, tall and stout, with long hair, more like a professor or an artist than a landowner. He had on a white shirt that badly needed washing, a rope for a belt, drawers instead of trousers, and his boots, too, were plastered up with mud and straw. His eyes and nose were black with dust. He recognized Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin, and was apparently much delighted to see them.

“Go into the house, gentlemen,” he said, smiling; “I’ll come directly, this minute.”

It was a big two-storeyed house. Alehin lived in the lower storey, with arched ceilings and little windows, where the bailiffs had once lived; here everything was plain, and there was a smell of rye bread, cheap vodka, and harness. He went upstairs into the best rooms only on rare occasions, when visitors came. Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin were met in the house by a maidservant, a young woman so beautiful that they both stood still and looked at one another.

“You can’t imagine how delighted I am to see you, my friends,” said Alehin, going into the hall with them. “It is a surprise! Pelagea,” he said, addressing the girl, “give our visitors something to change into. And, by the way, I will change too. Only I must first go and wash, for I almost think I have not washed since spring. Wouldn’t you like to come into the bathhouse? and meanwhile they will get things ready here.”

Beautiful Pelagea, looking so refined and soft, brought them towels and soap, and Alehin went to the bathhouse with his guests.

“It’s a long time since I had a wash,” he said, undressing. “I have got a nice bathhouse, as you see—my father built it—but I somehow never have time to wash.”

He sat down on the steps and soaped his long hair and his neck, and the water round him turned brown.

"Yes, I must say," said Ivan Ivanovitch meaningly, looking at his head.

"It's a long time since I washed…" said Alehin with embarrassment, giving himself a second soaping, and the water near him turned dark blue, like ink.

Ivan Ivanovitch went outside, plunged into the water with a loud splash, and swam in the rain, flinging his arms out wide. He stirred the water into waves which set the white lilies bobbing up and down; he swam to the very middle of the millpond and dived, and came up a minute later in another place, and swam on, and kept on diving, trying to touch the bottom.

"Oh, my goodness!" he repeated continually, enjoying himself thoroughly. "Oh, my goodness!" He swam to the mill, talked to the peasants there, then returned and lay on his back in the middle of the pond, turning his face to the rain. Burkin and Alehin were dressed and ready to go, but he still went on swimming and diving. "Oh, my goodness!…" he said. "Oh, Lord, have mercy on me!…"

"That's enough!" Burkin shouted to him.

They went back to the house. And only when the lamp was lighted in the big drawing room upstairs, and Burkin and Ivan Ivanovitch, attired in silk dressing-gowns and warm slippers, were sitting in armchairs; and Alehin, washed and combed, in a new coat, was walking about the drawing room, evidently enjoying the feeling of warmth, cleanliness, dry clothes, and light shoes; and when lovely Pelagea, stepping noiselessly on the carpet and smiling softly, handed tea and jam on a tray—only then Ivan Ivanovitch began on his story, and it seemed as though not only Burkin and Alehin were listening, but also the ladies, young and old, and the officers who looked down upon them sternly and calmly from their gold frames.

"There are two of us brothers," he began—"I, Ivan Ivanovitch, and my brother, Nikolay Ivanovitch, two years younger. I went in for a learned profession and became a veterinary surgeon, while Nikolay sat in a government office from the time he was nineteen. Our father, Tchimsha-Himalaisky, was a cantonist, but he rose to be an officer and left us a little estate and the rank of nobility. After his death the little estate went in debts and legal expenses; but, anyway, we had spent our childhood running wild in the country. Like peasant children, we passed our days and nights in the fields and the woods, looked after horses, stripped the bark off the trees, fished, and so on.… And, you know, whoever has

once in his life caught perch or has seen the migrating of the thrushes in autumn, watched how they float in flocks over the village on bright, cool days, he will never be a real townsman, and will have a yearning for freedom to the day of his death. My brother was miserable in the government office. Years passed by, and he went on sitting in the same place, went on writing the same papers and thinking of one and the same thing—how to get into the country. And this yearning by degrees passed into a definite desire, into a dream of buying himself a little farm somewhere on the banks of a river or a lake.

"He was a gentle, good-natured fellow, and I was fond of him, but I never sympathized with this desire to shut himself up for the rest of his life in a little farm of his own. It's the correct thing to say that a man needs no more than six feet of earth. But six feet is what a corpse needs, not a man. And they say, too, now, that if our intellectual classes are attracted to the land and yearn for a farm, it's a good thing. But these farms are just the same as six feet of earth. To retreat from town, from the struggle, from the bustle of life, to retreat and bury oneself in one's farm—it's not life, it's egoism, laziness, it's monasticism of a sort, but monasticism without good works. A man does not need six feet of earth or a farm, but the whole globe, all nature, where he can have room to display all the qualities and peculiarities of his free spirit.

"My brother Nikolay, sitting in his government office, dreamed of how he would eat his own cabbages, which would fill the whole yard with such a savoury smell, take his meals on the green grass, sleep in the sun, sit for whole hours on the seat by the gate gazing at the fields and the forest. Gardening books and the agricultural hints in calendars were his delight, his favourite spiritual sustenance; he enjoyed reading newspapers, too, but the only things he read in them were the advertisements of so many acres of arable land and a grass meadow with farmhouses and buildings, a river, a garden, a mill and millponds, for sale. And his imagination pictured the garden-paths, flowers and fruit, starling cotes, the carp in the pond, and all that sort of thing, you know. These imaginary pictures were of different kinds according to the advertisements which he came across, but for some reason in every one of them he had always to have gooseberries. He could not imagine a homestead, he could not picture an idyllic nook, without gooseberries.

"'Country life has its conveniences,' he would sometimes say. 'You sit on the verandah and you drink tea, while your ducks swim on the pond, there is a delicious smell everywhere, and… and the gooseberries are growing.'

“He used to draw a map of his property, and in every map there were the same things—(a) house for the family, (b) servants’ quarters, (c) kitchen-garden, (d) gooseberry-bushes. He lived parsimoniously, was frugal in food and drink, his clothes were beyond description; he looked like a beggar, but kept on saving and putting money in the bank. He grew fearfully avaricious. I did not like to look at him, and I used to give him something and send him presents for Christmas and Easter, but he used to save that too. Once a man is absorbed by an idea there is no doing anything with him.

“Years passed: he was transferred to another province. He was over forty, and he was still reading the advertisements in the papers and saving up. Then I heard he was married. Still with the same object of buying a farm and having gooseberries, he married an elderly and ugly widow without a trace of feeling for her, simply because she had filthy lucre. He went on living frugally after marrying her, and kept her short of food, while he put her money in the bank in his name.

“Her first husband had been a postmaster, and with him she was accustomed to pies and homemade wines, while with her second husband she did not get enough black bread; she began to pine away with this sort of life, and three years later she gave up her soul to God. And I need hardly say that my brother never for one moment imagined that he was responsible for her death. Money, like vodka, makes a man queer. In our town there was a merchant who, before he died, ordered a plateful of honey and ate up all his money and lottery tickets with the honey, so that no one might get the benefit of it. While I was inspecting cattle at a railway-station, a cattle-dealer fell under an engine and had his leg cut off. We carried him into the waiting room, the blood was flowing—it was a horrible thing—and he kept asking them to look for his leg and was very much worried about it; there were twenty roubles in the boot on the leg that had been cut off, and he was afraid they would be lost.”

“That’s a story from a different opera,” said Burkin.

“After his wife’s death,” Ivan Ivanovitch went on, after thinking for half a minute, “my brother began looking out for an estate for himself. Of course, you may look about for five years and yet end by making a mistake, and buying something quite different from what you have dreamed of. My brother Nikolay bought through an agent a mortgaged estate of three hundred and thirty acres, with a house for the family, with servants’ quarters, with a park, but with no orchard, no gooseberry-bushes, and no duck-pond; there was a river, but the water in it was the

colour of coffee, because on one side of the estate there was a brickyard and on the other a factory for burning bones. But Nikolay Ivanovitch did not grieve much; he ordered twenty gooseberry-bushes, planted them, and began living as a country gentleman.

"Last year I went to pay him a visit. I thought I would go and see what it was like. In his letters my brother called his estate 'Tchumbaroklov Waste, alias Himalaiskoe.' I reached 'alias Himalaiskoe' in the afternoon. It was hot. Everywhere there were ditches, fences, hedges, fir trees planted in rows, and there was no knowing how to get to the yard, where to put one's horse. I went up to the house, and was met by a fat red dog that looked like a pig. It wanted to bark, but it was too lazy. The cook, a fat, barefooted woman, came out of the kitchen, and she, too, looked like a pig, and said that her master was resting after dinner. I went in to see my brother. He was sitting up in bed with a quilt over his legs; he had grown older, fatter, wrinkled; his cheeks, his nose, and his mouth all stuck out—he looked as though he might begin grunting into the quilt at any moment.

"We embraced each other, and shed tears of joy and of sadness at the thought that we had once been young and now were both grey-headed and near the grave. He dressed, and led me out to show me the estate.

"'Well, how are you getting on here?' I asked.

"'Oh, all right, thank God; I am getting on very well.'

"He was no more a poor timid clerk, but a real landowner, a gentleman. He was already accustomed to it, had grown used to it, and liked it. He ate a great deal, went to the bathhouse, was growing stout, was already at law with the village commune and both factories, and was very much offended when the peasants did not call him 'Your Honour.' And he concerned himself with the salvation of his soul in a substantial, gentlemanly manner, and performed deeds of charity, not simply, but with an air of consequence. And what deeds of charity! He treated the peasants for every sort of disease with soda and castor oil, and on his name-day had a thanksgiving service in the middle of the village, and then treated the peasants to a gallon of vodka—he thought that was the thing to do. Oh, those horrible gallons of vodka! One day the fat landowner hauls the peasants up before the district captain for trespass, and next day, in honour of a holiday, treats them to a gallon of vodka, and they drink and shout 'Hurrah!' and when they are drunk bow down to his feet. A change of life for the better, and being well-fed and idle develop in a Russian the most insolent self-conceit. Nikolay Ivanovitch, who at one time in the government office was afraid to have any views

of his own, now could say nothing that was not gospel truth, and uttered such truths in the tone of a prime minister. ‘Education is essential, but for the peasants it is premature.’ ‘Corporal punishment is harmful as a rule, but in some cases it is necessary and there is nothing to take its place.’

“‘I know the peasants and understand how to treat them,’ he would say. ‘The peasants like me. I need only to hold up my little finger and the peasants will do anything I like.’

“And all this, observe, was uttered with a wise, benevolent smile. He repeated twenty times over ‘We noblemen,’ ‘I as a noble’; obviously he did not remember that our grandfather was a peasant, and our father a soldier. Even our surname Tchimsha-Himalaisky, in reality so incongruous, seemed to him now melodious, distinguished, and very agreeable.

“But the point just now is not he, but myself. I want to tell you about the change that took place in me during the brief hours I spent at his country place. In the evening, when we were drinking tea, the cook put on the table a plateful of gooseberries. They were not bought, but his own gooseberries, gathered for the first time since the bushes were planted. Nikolay Ivanovitch laughed and looked for a minute in silence at the gooseberries, with tears in his eyes; he could not speak for excitement. Then he put one gooseberry in his mouth, looked at me with the triumph of a child who has at last received his favourite toy, and said:

“‘How delicious!’

“And he ate them greedily, continually repeating, ‘Ah, how delicious! Do taste them!’

“They were sour and unripe, but, as Pushkin says:

> “‘Dearer to us the falsehood that exalts
> Than hosts of baser truths.’

“I saw a happy man whose cherished dream was so obviously fulfilled, who had attained his object in life, who had gained what he wanted, who was satisfied with his fate and himself. There is always, for some reason, an element of sadness mingled with my thoughts of human happiness, and, on this occasion, at the sight of a happy man I was overcome by an oppressive feeling that was close upon despair. It was particularly oppressive at night. A bed was made up for me in the room next to my brother’s bedroom, and I could hear that he was awake, and that he kept getting up and going to the plate of gooseberries and taking one. I reflected how many satisfied, happy people there really are! ‘What

a suffocating force it is! You look at life: the insolence and idleness of the strong, the ignorance and brutishness of the weak, incredible poverty all about us, overcrowding, degeneration, drunkenness, hypocrisy, lying.… Yet all is calm and stillness in the houses and in the streets; of the fifty thousand living in a town, there is not one who would cry out, who would give vent to his indignation aloud. We see the people going to market for provisions, eating by day, sleeping by night, talking their silly nonsense, getting married, growing old, serenely escorting their dead to the cemetery; but we do not see and we do not hear those who suffer, and what is terrible in life goes on somewhere behind the scenes.… Everything is quiet and peaceful, and nothing protests but mute statistics: so many people gone out of their minds, so many gallons of vodka drunk, so many children dead from malnutrition.… And this order of things is evidently necessary; evidently the happy man only feels at ease because the unhappy bear their burdens in silence, and without that silence happiness would be impossible. It's a case of general hypnotism. There ought to be behind the door of every happy, contented man someone standing with a hammer continually reminding him with a tap that there are unhappy people; that however happy he may be, life will show him her laws sooner or later, trouble will come for him—disease, poverty, losses, and no one will see or hear, just as now he neither sees nor hears others. But there is no man with a hammer; the happy man lives at his ease, and trivial daily cares faintly agitate him like the wind in the aspen tree—and all goes well.

"That night I realized that I, too, was happy and contented," Ivan Ivanovitch went on, getting up. "I, too, at dinner and at the hunt liked to lay down the law on life and religion, and the way to manage the peasantry. I, too, used to say that science was light, that culture was essential, but for the simple people reading and writing was enough for the time. Freedom is a blessing, I used to say; we can no more do without it than without air, but we must wait a little. Yes, I used to talk like that, and now I ask, 'For what reason are we to wait?'" asked Ivan Ivanovitch, looking angrily at Burkin. "Why wait, I ask you? What grounds have we for waiting? I shall be told, it can't be done all at once; every idea takes shape in life gradually, in its due time. But who is it says that? Where is the proof that it's right? You will fall back upon the natural order of things, the uniformity of phenomena; but is there order and uniformity in the fact that I, a living, thinking man, stand over a chasm and wait for it to close of itself, or to fill up with mud at the very time when perhaps I might leap over it or build a bridge across it? And

again, wait for the sake of what? Wait till there's no strength to live? And meanwhile one must live, and one wants to live!

"I went away from my brother's early in the morning, and ever since then it has been unbearable for me to be in town. I am oppressed by its peace and quiet; I am afraid to look at the windows, for there is no spectacle more painful to me now than the sight of a happy family sitting round the table drinking tea. I am old and am not fit for the struggle; I am not even capable of hatred; I can only grieve inwardly, feel irritated and vexed; but at night my head is hot from the rush of ideas, and I cannot sleep.… Ah, if I were young!"

Ivan Ivanovitch walked backwards and forwards in excitement, and repeated: "If I were young!"

He suddenly went up to Alehin and began pressing first one of his hands and then the other.

"Pavel Konstantinovitch," he said in an imploring voice, "don't be calm and contented, don't let yourself be put to sleep! While you are young, strong, confident, be not weary in well-doing! There is no happiness, and there ought not to be; but if there is a meaning and an object in life, that meaning and object is not our happiness, but something greater and more rational. Do good!"

And all this Ivan Ivanovitch said with a pitiful, imploring smile, as though he were asking him a personal favour.

Then all three sat in armchairs at different ends of the drawing room and were silent. Ivan Ivanovitch's story had not satisfied either Burkin or Alehin. When the generals and ladies gazed down from their gilt frames, looking in the dusk as though they were alive, it was dreary to listen to the story of the poor clerk who ate gooseberries. They felt inclined, for some reason, to talk about elegant people, about women. And their sitting in the drawing room where everything—the chandeliers in their covers, the armchairs, and the carpet under their feet—reminded them that those very people who were now looking down from their frames had once moved about, sat, drunk tea in this room, and the fact that lovely Pelagea was moving noiselessly about was better than any story.

Alehin was fearfully sleepy; he had got up early, before three o'clock in the morning, to look after his work, and now his eyes were closing; but he was afraid his visitors might tell some interesting story after he had gone, and he lingered on. He did not go into the question whether what Ivan Ivanovitch had just said was right and true. His visitors did not talk of groats, nor of hay, nor of tar, but of something that had no direct bearing on his life, and he was glad and wanted them to go on.

“It’s bedtime, though,” said Burkin, getting up. “Allow me to wish you good night.”

Alehin said good night and went downstairs to his own domain, while the visitors remained upstairs. They were both taken for the night to a big room where there stood two old wooden beds decorated with carvings, and in the corner was an ivory crucifix. The big cool beds, which had been made by the lovely Pelagea, smelt agreeably of clean linen.

Ivan Ivanovitch undressed in silence and got into bed.

“Lord forgive us sinners!” he said, and put his head under the quilt.

His pipe lying on the table smelt strongly of stale tobacco, and Burkin could not sleep for a long while, and kept wondering where the oppressive smell came from.

The rain was pattering on the windowpanes all night.

About Love

At lunch next day there were very nice pies, crayfish, and mutton cutlets; and while we were eating, Nikanor, the cook, came up to ask what the visitors would like for dinner. He was a man of medium height, with a puffy face and little eyes; he was close-shaven, and it looked as though his moustaches had not been shaved, but had been pulled out by the roots. Alehin told us that the beautiful Pelagea was in love with this cook. As he drank and was of a violent character, she did not want to marry him, but was willing to live with him without. He was very devout, and his religious convictions would not allow him to "live in sin"; he insisted on her marrying him, and would consent to nothing else, and when he was drunk he used to abuse her and even beat her. Whenever he got drunk she used to hide upstairs and sob, and on such occasions Alehin and the servants stayed in the house to be ready to defend her in case of necessity.

We began talking about love.

"How love is born," said Alehin, "why Pelagea does not love somebody more like herself in her spiritual and external qualities, and why she fell in love with Nikanor, that ugly snout—we all call him 'The Snout'—how far questions of personal happiness are of consequence in love—all that is known; one can take what view one likes of it. So far only one incontestable truth has been uttered about love: 'This is a great mystery.' Everything else that has been written or said about love is not a conclusion, but only a statement of questions which have remained unanswered. The explanation which would seem to fit one case does not apply in a dozen others, and the very best thing, to my mind, would be to explain every case individually without attempting to generalize. We ought, as the doctors say, to individualize each case."

"Perfectly true," Burkin assented.

"We Russians of the educated class have a partiality for these questions that remain unanswered. Love is usually poeticized, decorated with roses, nightingales; we Russians decorate our loves with these

momentous questions, and select the most uninteresting of them, too. In Moscow, when I was a student, I had a friend who shared my life, a charming lady, and every time I took her in my arms she was thinking what I would allow her a month for housekeeping and what was the price of beef a pound. In the same way, when we are in love we are never tired of asking ourselves questions: whether it is honourable or dishonourable, sensible or stupid, what this love is leading up to, and so on. Whether it is a good thing or not I don't know, but that it is in the way, unsatisfactory, and irritating, I do know."

It looked as though he wanted to tell some story. People who lead a solitary existence always have something in their hearts which they are eager to talk about. In town bachelors visit the baths and the restaurants on purpose to talk, and sometimes tell the most interesting things to bath attendants and waiters; in the country, as a rule, they unbosom themselves to their guests. Now from the window we could see a grey sky, trees drenched in the rain; in such weather we could go nowhere, and there was nothing for us to do but to tell stories and to listen.

"I have lived at Sofino and been farming for a long time," Alehin began, "ever since I left the University. I am an idle gentleman by education, a studious person by disposition; but there was a big debt owing on the estate when I came here, and as my father was in debt partly because he had spent so much on my education, I resolved not to go away, but to work till I paid off the debt. I made up my mind to this and set to work, not, I must confess, without some repugnance. The land here does not yield much, and if one is not to farm at a loss one must employ serf labour or hired labourers, which is almost the same thing, or put it on a peasant footing—that is, work the fields oneself and with one's family. There is no middle path. But in those days I did not go into such subtleties. I did not leave a clod of earth unturned; I gathered together all the peasants, men and women, from the neighbouring villages; the work went on at a tremendous pace. I myself ploughed and sowed and reaped, and was bored doing it, and frowned with disgust, like a village cat driven by hunger to eat cucumbers in the kitchen-garden. My body ached, and I slept as I walked. At first it seemed to me that I could easily reconcile this life of toil with my cultured habits; to do so, I thought, all that is necessary is to maintain a certain external order in life. I established myself upstairs here in the best rooms, and ordered them to bring me there coffee and liquor after lunch and dinner, and when I went to bed I read every night the *Yyesnik Evropi*. But one day our priest, Father Ivan, came and drank up all my liquor at one sitting;

and the *Yyesnik Evropi* went to the priest's daughters; as in the summer, especially at the haymaking, I did not succeed in getting to my bed at all, and slept in the sledge in the barn, or somewhere in the forester's lodge, what chance was there of reading? Little by little I moved downstairs, began dining in the servants' kitchen, and of my former luxury nothing is left but the servants who were in my father's service, and whom it would be painful to turn away.

"In the first years I was elected here an honourary justice of the peace. I used to have to go to the town and take part in the sessions of the congress and of the circuit court, and this was a pleasant change for me. When you live here for two or three months without a break, especially in the winter, you begin at last to pine for a black coat. And in the circuit court there were frock-coats, and uniforms, and dress-coats, too, all lawyers, men who have received a general education; I had someone to talk to. After sleeping in the sledge and dining in the kitchen, to sit in an armchair in clean linen, in thin boots, with a chain on one's waistcoat, is such luxury!

"I received a warm welcome in the town. I made friends eagerly. And of all my acquaintanceships the most intimate and, to tell the truth, the most agreeable to me was my acquaintance with Luganovitch, the vice-president of the circuit court. You both know him: a most charming personality. It all happened just after a celebrated case of incendiarism; the preliminary investigation lasted two days; we were exhausted. Luganovitch looked at me and said:

"'Look here, come round to dinner with me.'

"This was unexpected, as I knew Luganovitch very little, only officially, and I had never been to his house. I only just went to my hotel room to change and went off to dinner. And here it was my lot to meet Anna Alexyevna, Luganovitch's wife. At that time she was still very young, not more than twenty-two, and her first baby had been born just six months before. It is all a thing of the past; and now I should find it difficult to define what there was so exceptional in her, what it was in her attracted me so much; at the time, at dinner, it was all perfectly clear to me. I saw a lovely young, good, intelligent, fascinating woman, such as I had never met before; and I felt her at once someone close and already familiar, as though that face, those cordial, intelligent eyes, I had seen somewhere in my childhood, in the album which lay on my mother's chest of drawers.

"Four Jews were charged with being incendiaries, were regarded as a gang of robbers, and, to my mind, quite groundlessly. At dinner I was

very much excited, I was uncomfortable, and I don’t know what I said, but Anna Alexyevna kept shaking her head and saying to her husband:

“‘Dmitry, how is this?’

“Luganovitch is a good-natured man, one of those simple-hearted people who firmly maintain the opinion that once a man is charged before a court he is guilty, and to express doubt of the correctness of a sentence cannot be done except in legal form on paper, and not at dinner and in private conversation.

“‘You and I did not set fire to the place,’ he said softly, ‘and you see we are not condemned, and not in prison.’

“And both husband and wife tried to make me eat and drink as much as possible. From some trifling details, from the way they made the coffee together, for instance, and from the way they understood each other at half a word, I could gather that they lived in harmony and comfort, and that they were glad of a visitor. After dinner they played a duet on the piano; then it got dark, and I went home. That was at the beginning of spring.

“After that I spent the whole summer at Sofino without a break, and I had no time to think of the town, either, but the memory of the graceful fair-haired woman remained in my mind all those days; I did not think of her, but it was as though her light shadow were lying on my heart.

“In the late autumn there was a theatrical performance for some charitable object in the town. I went into the governor’s box (I was invited to go there in the interval); I looked, and there was Anna Alexyevna sitting beside the governor’s wife; and again the same irresistible, thrilling impression of beauty and sweet, caressing eyes, and again the same feeling of nearness. We sat side by side, then went to the foyer.

“‘You’ve grown thinner,’ she said; ‘have you been ill?’

“‘Yes, I’ve had rheumatism in my shoulder, and in rainy weather I can’t sleep.’

“‘You look dispirited. In the spring, when you came to dinner, you were younger, more confident. You were full of eagerness, and talked a great deal then; you were very interesting, and I really must confess I was a little carried away by you. For some reason you often came back to my memory during the summer, and when I was getting ready for the theatre today I thought I should see you.’

“And she laughed.

“‘But you look dispirited today,’ she repeated; ‘it makes you seem older.’

“The next day I lunched at the Luganovitchs’. After lunch they drove out to their summer villa, in order to make arrangements there for the winter, and I went with them. I returned with them to the town, and at midnight drank tea with them in quiet domestic surroundings, while the fire glowed, and the young mother kept going to see if her baby girl was asleep. And after that, every time I went to town I never failed to visit the Luganovitchs. They grew used to me, and I grew used to them. As a rule I went in unannounced, as though I were one of the family.

“‘Who is there?’ I would hear from a faraway room, in the drawling voice that seemed to me so lovely.

“‘It is Pavel Konstantinovitch,’ answered the maid or the nurse.

“Anna Alexyevna would come out to me with an anxious face, and would ask every time:

“‘Why is it so long since you have been? Has anything happened?’

“Her eyes, the elegant refined hand she gave me, her indoor dress, the way she did her hair, her voice, her step, always produced the same impression on me of something new and extraordinary in my life, and very important. We talked together for hours, were silent, thinking each our own thoughts, or she played for hours to me on the piano. If there were no one at home I stayed and waited, talked to the nurse, played with the child, or lay on the sofa in the study and read; and when Anna Alexyevna came back I met her in the hall, took all her parcels from her, and for some reason I carried those parcels every time with as much love, with as much solemnity, as a boy.

“There is a proverb that if a peasant woman has no troubles she will buy a pig. The Luganovitchs had no troubles, so they made friends with me. If I did not come to the town I must be ill or something must have happened to me, and both of them were extremely anxious. They were worried that I, an educated man with a knowledge of languages, should, instead of devoting myself to science or literary work, live in the country, rush round like a squirrel in a rage, work hard with never a penny to show for it. They fancied that I was unhappy, and that I only talked, laughed, and ate to conceal my sufferings, and even at cheerful moments when I felt happy I was aware of their searching eyes fixed upon me. They were particularly touching when I really was depressed, when I was being worried by some creditor or had not money enough to pay interest on the proper day. The two of them, husband and wife, would whisper together at the window; then he would come to me and say with a grave face:

“‘If you really are in need of money at the moment, Pavel Konstantinovitch, my wife and I beg you not to hesitate to borrow from us.’

“And he would blush to his ears with emotion. And it would happen that, after whispering in the same way at the window, he would come up to me, with red ears, and say:

“‘My wife and I earnestly beg you to accept this present.’

“And he would give me studs, a cigar-case, or a lamp, and I would send them game, butter, and flowers from the country. They both, by the way, had considerable means of their own. In early days I often borrowed money, and was not very particular about it—borrowed wherever I could—but nothing in the world would have induced me to borrow from the Luganovitchs. But why talk of it?

“I was unhappy. At home, in the fields, in the barn, I thought of her; I tried to understand the mystery of a beautiful, intelligent young woman’s marrying someone so uninteresting, almost an old man (her husband was over forty), and having children by him; to understand the mystery of this uninteresting, good, simple-hearted man, who argued with such wearisome good sense, at balls and evening parties kept near the more solid people, looking listless and superfluous, with a submissive, uninterested expression, as though he had been brought there for sale, who yet believed in his right to be happy, to have children by her; and I kept trying to understand why she had met him first and not me, and why such a terrible mistake in our lives need have happened.

“And when I went to the town I saw every time from her eyes that she was expecting me, and she would confess to me herself that she had had a peculiar feeling all that day and had guessed that I should come. We talked a long time, and were silent, yet we did not confess our love to each other, but timidly and jealously concealed it. We were afraid of everything that might reveal our secret to ourselves. I loved her tenderly, deeply, but I reflected and kept asking myself what our love could lead to if we had not the strength to fight against it. It seemed to be incredible that my gentle, sad love could all at once coarsely break up the even tenor of the life of her husband, her children, and all the household in which I was so loved and trusted. Would it be honourable? She would go away with me, but where? Where could I take her? It would have been a different matter if I had had a beautiful, interesting life—if, for instance, I had been struggling for the emancipation of my country, or had been a celebrated man of science, an artist or a painter; but as it was it would mean taking her from one everyday humdrum life to another as

humdrum or perhaps more so. And how long would our happiness last? What would happen to her in case I was ill, in case I died, or if we simply grew cold to one another?

"And she apparently reasoned in the same way. She thought of her husband, her children, and of her mother, who loved the husband like a son. If she abandoned herself to her feelings she would have to lie, or else to tell the truth, and in her position either would have been equally terrible and inconvenient. And she was tormented by the question whether her love would bring me happiness—would she not complicate my life, which, as it was, was hard enough and full of all sorts of trouble? She fancied she was not young enough for me, that she was not industrious nor energetic enough to begin a new life, and she often talked to her husband of the importance of my marrying a girl of intelligence and merit who would be a capable housewife and a help to me—and she would immediately add that it would be difficult to find such a girl in the whole town.

"Meanwhile the years were passing. Anna Alexyevna already had two children. When I arrived at the Luganovitchs' the servants smiled cordially, the children shouted that Uncle Pavel Konstantinovitch had come, and hung on my neck; everyone was overjoyed. They did not understand what was passing in my soul, and thought that I, too, was happy. Everyone looked on me as a noble being. And grownups and children alike felt that a noble being was walking about their rooms, and that gave a peculiar charm to their manner towards me, as though in my presence their life, too, was purer and more beautiful. Anna Alexyevna and I used to go to the theatre together, always walking there; we used to sit side by side in the stalls, our shoulders touching. I would take the opera-glass from her hands without a word, and feel at that minute that she was near me, that she was mine, that we could not live without each other; but by some strange misunderstanding, when we came out of the theatre we always said goodbye and parted as though we were strangers. Goodness knows what people were saying about us in the town already, but there was not a word of truth in it all!

"In the latter years Anna Alexyevna took to going away for frequent visits to her mother or to her sister; she began to suffer from low spirits, she began to recognize that her life was spoilt and unsatisfied, and at times she did not care to see her husband nor her children. She was already being treated for neurasthenia.

"We were silent and still silent, and in the presence of outsiders she displayed a strange irritation in regard to me; whatever I talked about,

she disagreed with me, and if I had an argument she sided with my opponent. If I dropped anything, she would say coldly:

“‘I congratulate you.’

“If I forgot to take the opera-glass when we were going to the theatre, she would say afterwards:

“‘I knew you would forget it.’

“Luckily or unluckily, there is nothing in our lives that does not end sooner or later. The time of parting came, as Luganovitch was appointed president in one of the western provinces. They had to sell their furniture, their horses, their summer villa. When they drove out to the villa, and afterwards looked back as they were going away, to look for the last time at the garden, at the green roof, everyone was sad, and I realized that I had to say goodbye not only to the villa. It was arranged that at the end of August we should see Anna Alexyevna off to the Crimea, where the doctors were sending her, and that a little later Luganovitch and the children would set off for the western province.

“We were a great crowd to see Anna Alexyevna off. When she had said goodbye to her husband and her children and there was only a minute left before the third bell, I ran into her compartment to put a basket, which she had almost forgotten, on the rack, and I had to say goodbye. When our eyes met in the compartment our spiritual fortitude deserted us both; I took her in my arms, she pressed her face to my breast, and tears flowed from her eyes. Kissing her face, her shoulders, her hands wet with tears—oh, how unhappy we were!—I confessed my love for her, and with a burning pain in my heart I realized how unnecessary, how petty, and how deceptive all that had hindered us from loving was. I understood that when you love you must either, in your reasonings about that love, start from what is highest, from what is more important than happiness or unhappiness, sin or virtue in their accepted meaning, or you must not reason at all.

“I kissed her for the last time, pressed her hand, and parted forever. The train had already started. I went into the next compartment—it was empty—and until I reached the next station I sat there crying. Then I walked home to Sofino.…”

While Alehin was telling his story, the rain left off and the sun came out. Burkin and Ivan Ivanovitch went out on the balcony, from which there was a beautiful view over the garden and the millpond, which was shining now in the sunshine like a mirror. They admired it, and at the same time they were sorry that this man with the kind, clever eyes, who had told them this story with such genuine feeling, should be rushing

round and round this huge estate like a squirrel on a wheel instead of devoting himself to science or something else which would have made his life more pleasant; and they thought what a sorrowful face Anna Alexyevna must have had when he said goodbye to her in the railway-carriage and kissed her face and shoulders. Both of them had met her in the town, and Burkin knew her and thought her beautiful.

THE DARLING

Olenka, the daughter of the retired collegiate assessor, Plemyanniakov, was sitting in her back porch, lost in thought. It was hot, the flies were persistent and teasing, and it was pleasant to reflect that it would soon be evening. Dark rain-clouds were gathering from the east, and bringing from time to time a breath of moisture in the air.

Kukin, who was the manager of an open-air theatre called the Tivoli, and who lived in the lodge, was standing in the middle of the garden looking at the sky.

"Again!" he observed despairingly. "It's going to rain again! Rain every day, as though to spite me. I might as well hang myself! It's ruin! Fearful losses every day."

He flung up his hands, and went on, addressing Olenka:

"There! that's the life we lead, Olga Semyonovna. It's enough to make one cry. One works and does one's utmost, one wears oneself out, getting no sleep at night, and racks one's brain what to do for the best. And then what happens? To begin with, one's public is ignorant, boorish. I give them the very best operetta, a dainty masque, first rate music-hall artists. But do you suppose that's what they want! They don't understand anything of that sort. They want a clown; what they ask for is vulgarity. And then look at the weather! Almost every evening it rains. It started on the tenth of May, and it's kept it up all May and June. It's simply awful! The public doesn't come, but I've to pay the rent just the same, and pay the artists."

The next evening the clouds would gather again, and Kukin would say with an hysterical laugh:

"Well, rain away, then! Flood the garden, drown me! Damn my luck in this world and the next! Let the artists have me up! Send me to prison!—to Siberia!—the scaffold! Ha, ha, ha!"

And next day the same thing.

Olenka listened to Kukin with silent gravity, and sometimes tears came into her eyes. In the end his misfortunes touched her; she grew to

love him. He was a small thin man, with a yellow face, and curls combed forward on his forehead. He spoke in a thin tenor; as he talked his mouth worked on one side, and there was always an expression of despair on his face; yet he aroused a deep and genuine affection in her. She was always fond of someone, and could not exist without loving. In earlier days she had loved her papa, who now sat in a darkened room, breathing with difficulty; she had loved her aunt who used to come every other year from Bryansk; and before that, when she was at school, she had loved her French master. She was a gentle, softhearted, compassionate girl, with mild, tender eyes and very good health. At the sight of her full rosy cheeks, her soft white neck with a little dark mole on it, and the kind, naive smile, which came into her face when she listened to anything pleasant, men thought, “Yes, not half bad,” and smiled too, while lady visitors could not refrain from seizing her hand in the middle of a conversation, exclaiming in a gush of delight, “You darling!”

The house in which she had lived from her birth upwards, and which was left her in her father’s will, was at the extreme end of the town, not far from the Tivoli. In the evenings and at night she could head the band playing, and the crackling and banging of fireworks, and it seemed to her that it was Kukin struggling with his destiny, storming the entrenchments of his chief foe, the indifferent public; there was a sweet thrill at her heart, she had no desire to sleep, and when he returned home at daybreak, she tapped softly at her bedroom window, and showing him only her face and one shoulder through the curtain, she gave him a friendly smile.…

He proposed to her, and they were married. And when he had a closer view of her neck and her plump, fine shoulders, he threw up his hands, and said:

“You darling!”

He was happy, but as it rained on the day and night of his wedding, his face still retained an expression of despair.

They got on very well together. She used to sit in his office, to look after things in the Tivoli, to put down the accounts and pay the wages. And her rosy cheeks, her sweet, naive, radiant smile, were to be seen now at the office window, now in the refreshment bar or behind the scenes of the theatre. And already she used to say to her acquaintances that the theatre was the chief and most important thing in life and that it was only through the drama that one could derive true enjoyment and become cultivated and humane.

“But do you suppose the public understands that?” she used to say. “What they want is a clown. Yesterday we gave *Faust Inside Out*, and almost all the boxes were empty; but if Vanitchka and I had been producing some vulgar thing, I assure you the theatre would have been packed. Tomorrow Vanitchka and I are doing *Orpheus in Hell*. Do come.”

And what Kukin said about the theatre and the actors she repeated. Like him she despised the public for their ignorance and their indifference to art; she took part in the rehearsals, she corrected the actors, she kept an eye on the behaviour of the musicians, and when there was an unfavourable notice in the local paper, she shed tears, and then went to the editor’s office to set things right.

The actors were fond of her and used to call her “Vanitchka and I,” and “the darling”; she was sorry for them and used to lend them small sums of money, and if they deceived her, she used to shed a few tears in private, but did not complain to her husband.

They got on well in the winter too. They took the theatre in the town for the whole winter, and let it for short terms to a Little Russian company, or to a conjurer, or to a local dramatic society. Olenka grew stouter, and was always beaming with satisfaction, while Kukin grew thinner and yellower, and continually complained of their terrible losses, although he had not done badly all the winter. He used to cough at night, and she used to give him hot raspberry tea or lime-flower water, to rub him with eau de cologne and to wrap him in her warm shawls.

“You’re such a sweet pet!” she used to say with perfect sincerity, stroking his hair. “You’re such a pretty dear!”

Towards Lent he went to Moscow to collect a new troupe, and without him she could not sleep, but sat all night at her window, looking at the stars, and she compared herself with the hens, who are awake all night and uneasy when the cock is not in the henhouse. Kukin was detained in Moscow, and wrote that he would be back at Easter, adding some instructions about the Tivoli. But on the Sunday before Easter, late in the evening, came a sudden ominous knock at the gate; someone was hammering on the gate as though on a barrel—boom, boom, boom! The drowsy cook went flopping with her bare feet through the puddles, as she ran to open the gate.

“Please open,” said someone outside in a thick bass. “There is a telegram for you.”

Olenka had received telegrams from her husband before, but this time for some reason she felt numb with terror. With shaking hands she

opened the telegram and read as follows:

> “IVAN PETROVITCH DIED SUDDENLY TODAY. AWAITING IMMATE INSTRUCTIONS FUFUNERAL TUESDAY.”

That was how it was written in the telegram—“fufuneral,” and the utterly incomprehensible word “immate.” It was signed by the stage manager of the operatic company.

“My darling!” sobbed Olenka. “Vanka, my precious, my darling! Why did I ever meet you! Why did I know you and love you! Your poor heartbroken Olenka is alone without you!”

Kukin’s funeral took place on Tuesday in Moscow, Olenka returned home on Wednesday, and as soon as she got indoors, she threw herself on her bed and sobbed so loudly that it could be heard next door, and in the street.

“Poor darling!” the neighbours said, as they crossed themselves. “Olga Semyonovna, poor darling! How she does take on!”

Three months later Olenka was coming home from mass, melancholy and in deep mourning. It happened that one of her neighbours, Vassily Andreitch Pustovalov, returning home from church, walked back beside her. He was the manager at Babakayev’s, the timber merchant’s. He wore a straw hat, a white waistcoat, and a gold watch-chain, and looked more a country gentleman than a man in trade.

“Everything happens as it is ordained, Olga Semyonovna,” he said gravely, with a sympathetic note in his voice; “and if any of our dear ones die, it must be because it is the will of God, so we ought have fortitude and bear it submissively.”

After seeing Olenka to her gate, he said goodbye and went on. All day afterwards she heard his sedately dignified voice, and whenever she shut her eyes she saw his dark beard. She liked him very much. And apparently she had made an impression on him too, for not long afterwards an elderly lady, with whom she was only slightly acquainted, came to drink coffee with her, and as soon as she was seated at table began to talk about Pustovalov, saying that he was an excellent man whom one could thoroughly depend upon, and that any girl would be glad to marry him. Three days later Pustovalov came himself. He did not stay long, only about ten minutes, and he did not say much, but when he left, Olenka loved him—loved him so much that she lay awake all night in a perfect fever, and in the morning she sent for the elderly lady. The match was quickly arranged, and then came the wedding.

Pustovalov and Olenka got on very well together when they were married.

Usually he sat in the office till dinnertime, then he went out on business, while Olenka took his place, and sat in the office till evening, making up accounts and booking orders.

“Timber gets dearer every year; the price rises twenty percent,” she would say to her customers and friends. “Only fancy we used to sell local timber, and now Vassitchka always has to go for wood to the Mogilev district. And the freight!” she would add, covering her cheeks with her hands in horror. “The freight!”

It seemed to her that she had been in the timber trade for ages and ages, and that the most important and necessary thing in life was timber; and there was something intimate and touching to her in the very sound of words such as “baulk,” “post,” “beam,” “pole,” “scantling,” “batten,” “lath,” “plank,” etc.

At night when she was asleep she dreamed of perfect mountains of planks and boards, and long strings of wagons, carting timber somewhere far away. She dreamed that a whole regiment of six-inch beams forty feet high, standing on end, was marching upon the timber-yard; that logs, beams, and boards knocked together with the resounding crash of dry wood, kept falling and getting up again, piling themselves on each other. Olenka cried out in her sleep, and Pustovalov said to her tenderly: “Olenka, what’s the matter, darling? Cross yourself!”

Her husband’s ideas were hers. If he thought the room was too hot, or that business was slack, she thought the same. Her husband did not care for entertainments, and on holidays he stayed at home. She did likewise.

“You are always at home or in the office,” her friends said to her. “You should go to the theatre, darling, or to the circus.”

“Vassitchka and I have no time to go to theatres,” she would answer sedately. “We have no time for nonsense. What’s the use of these theatres?”

On Saturdays Pustovalov and she used to go to the evening service; on holidays to early mass, and they walked side by side with softened faces as they came home from church. There was a pleasant fragrance about them both, and her silk dress rustled agreeably. At home they drank tea, with fancy bread and jams of various kinds, and afterwards they ate pie. Every day at twelve o’clock there was a savoury smell of beetroot soup and of mutton or duck in their yard, and on fast-days of fish, and no one could pass the gate without feeling hungry. In the office the samovar was always boiling, and customers were regaled with tea and cracknels. Once

a week the couple went to the baths and returned side by side, both red in the face.

"Yes, we have nothing to complain of, thank God," Olenka used to say to her acquaintances. "I wish everyone were as well off as Vassitchka and I."

When Pustovalov went away to buy wood in the Mogilev district, she missed him dreadfully, lay awake and cried. A young veterinary surgeon in the army, called Smirnin, to whom they had let their lodge, used sometimes to come in in the evening. He used to talk to her and play cards with her, and this entertained her in her husband's absence. She was particularly interested in what he told her of his home life. He was married and had a little boy, but was separated from his wife because she had been unfaithful to him, and now he hated her and used to send her forty roubles a month for the maintenance of their son. And hearing of all this, Olenka sighed and shook her head. She was sorry for him.

"Well, God keep you," she used to say to him at parting, as she lighted him down the stairs with a candle. "Thank you for coming to cheer me up, and may the Mother of God give you health."

And she always expressed herself with the same sedateness and dignity, the same reasonableness, in imitation of her husband. As the veterinary surgeon was disappearing behind the door below, she would say:

"You know, Vladimir Platonitch, you'd better make it up with your wife. You should forgive her for the sake of your son. You may be sure the little fellow understands."

And when Pustovalov came back, she told him in a low voice about the veterinary surgeon and his unhappy home life, and both sighed and shook their heads and talked about the boy, who, no doubt, missed his father, and by some strange connection of ideas, they went up to the holy icons, bowed to the ground before them and prayed that God would give them children.

And so the Pustovalovs lived for six years quietly and peaceably in love and complete harmony.

But behold! one winter day after drinking hot tea in the office, Vassily Andreitch went out into the yard without his cap on to see about sending off some timber, caught cold and was taken ill. He had the best doctors, but he grew worse and died after four months' illness. And Olenka was a widow once more.

"I've nobody, now you've left me, my darling," she sobbed, after her husband's funeral. "How can I live without you, in wretchedness and

misery! Pity me, good people, all alone in the world!”

She went about dressed in black with long “weepers,” and gave up wearing hat and gloves for good. She hardly ever went out, except to church, or to her husband’s grave, and led the life of a nun. It was not till six months later that she took off the weepers and opened the shutters of the windows. She was sometimes seen in the mornings, going with her cook to market for provisions, but what went on in her house and how she lived now could only be surmised. People guessed, from seeing her drinking tea in her garden with the veterinary surgeon, who read the newspaper aloud to her, and from the fact that, meeting a lady she knew at the post-office, she said to her:

“There is no proper veterinary inspection in our town, and that’s the cause of all sorts of epidemics. One is always hearing of people’s getting infection from the milk supply, or catching diseases from horses and cows. The health of domestic animals ought to be as well cared for as the health of human beings.”

She repeated the veterinary surgeon’s words, and was of the same opinion as he about everything. It was evident that she could not live a year without some attachment, and had found new happiness in the lodge. In anyone else this would have been censured, but no one could think ill of Olenka; everything she did was so natural. Neither she nor the veterinary surgeon said anything to other people of the change in their relations, and tried, indeed, to conceal it, but without success, for Olenka could not keep a secret. When he had visitors, men serving in his regiment, and she poured out tea or served the supper, she would begin talking of the cattle plague, of the foot and mouth disease, and of the municipal slaughterhouses. He was dreadfully embarrassed, and when the guests had gone, he would seize her by the hand and hiss angrily:

“I’ve asked you before not to talk about what you don’t understand. When we veterinary surgeons are talking among ourselves, please don’t put your word in. It’s really annoying.”

And she would look at him with astonishment and dismay, and ask him in alarm: “But, Voloditchka, what *am* I to talk about?”

And with tears in her eyes she would embrace him, begging him not to be angry, and they were both happy.

But this happiness did not last long. The veterinary surgeon departed, departed forever with his regiment, when it was transferred to a distant place—to Siberia, it may be. And Olenka was left alone.

Now she was absolutely alone. Her father had long been dead, and his armchair lay in the attic, covered with dust and lame of one leg. She got

thinner and plainer, and when people met her in the street they did not look at her as they used to, and did not smile to her; evidently her best years were over and left behind, and now a new sort of life had begun for her, which did not bear thinking about. In the evening Olenka sat in the porch, and heard the band playing and the fireworks popping in the Tivoli, but now the sound stirred no response. She looked into her yard without interest, thought of nothing, wished for nothing, and afterwards, when night came on she went to bed and dreamed of her empty yard. She ate and drank as it were unwillingly.

And what was worst of all, she had no opinions of any sort. She saw the objects about her and understood what she saw, but could not form any opinion about them, and did not know what to talk about. And how awful it is not to have any opinions! One sees a bottle, for instance, or the rain, or a peasant driving in his cart, but what the bottle is for, or the rain, or the peasant, and what is the meaning of it, one can't say, and could not even for a thousand roubles. When she had Kukin, or Pustovalov, or the veterinary surgeon, Olenka could explain everything, and give her opinion about anything you like, but now there was the same emptiness in her brain and in her heart as there was in her yard outside. And it was as harsh and as bitter as wormwood in the mouth.

Little by little the town grew in all directions. The road became a street, and where the Tivoli and the timber-yard had been, there were new turnings and houses. How rapidly time passes! Olenka's house grew dingy, the roof got rusty, the shed sank on one side, and the whole yard was overgrown with docks and stinging-nettles. Olenka herself had grown plain and elderly; in summer she sat in the porch, and her soul, as before, was empty and dreary and full of bitterness. In winter she sat at her window and looked at the snow. When she caught the scent of spring, or heard the chime of the church bells, a sudden rush of memories from the past came over her, there was a tender ache in her heart, and her eyes brimmed over with tears; but this was only for a minute, and then came emptiness again and the sense of the futility of life. The black kitten, Briska, rubbed against her and purred softly, but Olenka was not touched by these feline caresses. That was not what she needed. She wanted a love that would absorb her whole being, her whole soul and reason—that would give her ideas and an object in life, and would warm her old blood. And she would shake the kitten off her skirt and say with vexation:

"Get along; I don't want you!"

And so it was, day after day and year after year, and no joy, and no opinions. Whatever Mavra, the cook, said she accepted.

One hot July day, towards evening, just as the cattle were being driven away, and the whole yard was full of dust, someone suddenly knocked at the gate. Olenka went to open it herself and was dumbfounded when she looked out: she saw Smirnin, the veterinary surgeon, grey-headed, and dressed as a civilian. She suddenly remembered everything. She could not help crying and letting her head fall on his breast without uttering a word, and in the violence of her feeling she did not notice how they both walked into the house and sat down to tea.

"My dear Vladimir Platonitch! What fate has brought you?" she muttered, trembling with joy.

"I want to settle here for good, Olga Semyonovna," he told her. "I have resigned my post, and have come to settle down and try my luck on my own account. Besides, it's time for my boy to go to school. He's a big boy. I am reconciled with my wife, you know."

"Where is she?" asked Olenka.

"She's at the hotel with the boy, and I'm looking for lodgings."

"Good gracious, my dear soul! Lodgings? Why not have my house? Why shouldn't that suit you? Why, my goodness, I wouldn't take any rent!" cried Olenka in a flutter, beginning to cry again. "You live here, and the lodge will do nicely for me. Oh dear! how glad I am!"

Next day the roof was painted and the walls were whitewashed, and Olenka, with her arms akimbo walked about the yard giving directions. Her face was beaming with her old smile, and she was brisk and alert as though she had waked from a long sleep. The veterinary's wife arrived—a thin, plain lady, with short hair and a peevish expression. With her was her little Sasha, a boy of ten, small for his age, blue-eyed, chubby, with dimples in his cheeks. And scarcely had the boy walked into the yard when he ran after the cat, and at once there was the sound of his gay, joyous laugh.

"Is that your puss, auntie?" he asked Olenka. "When she has little ones, do give us a kitten. Mamma is awfully afraid of mice."

Olenka talked to him, and gave him tea. Her heart warmed and there was a sweet ache in her bosom, as though the boy had been her own child. And when he sat at the table in the evening, going over his lessons, she looked at him with deep tenderness and pity as she murmured to herself:

"You pretty pet!… my precious!… Such a fair little thing, and so clever."

“‘An island is a piece of land which is entirely surrounded by water,’” he read aloud.

“An island is a piece of land,” she repeated, and this was the first opinion to which she gave utterance with positive conviction after so many years of silence and dearth of ideas.

Now she had opinions of her own, and at supper she talked to Sasha’s parents, saying how difficult the lessons were at the high schools, but that yet the high school was better than a commercial one, since with a high school education all careers were open to one, such as being a doctor or an engineer.

Sasha began going to the high school. His mother departed to Harkov to her sister’s and did not return; his father used to go off every day to inspect cattle, and would often be away from home for three days together, and it seemed to Olenka as though Sasha was entirely abandoned, that he was not wanted at home, that he was being starved, and she carried him off to her lodge and gave him a little room there.

And for six months Sasha had lived in the lodge with her. Every morning Olenka came into his bedroom and found him fast asleep, sleeping noiselessly with his hand under his cheek. She was sorry to wake him.

“Sashenka,” she would say mournfully, “get up, darling. It’s time for school.”

He would get up, dress and say his prayers, and then sit down to breakfast, drink three glasses of tea, and eat two large cracknels and a half a buttered roll. All this time he was hardly awake and a little ill-humoured in consequence.

“You don’t quite know your fable, Sashenka,” Olenka would say, looking at him as though he were about to set off on a long journey. “What a lot of trouble I have with you! You must work and do your best, darling, and obey your teachers.”

“Oh, do leave me alone!” Sasha would say.

Then he would go down the street to school, a little figure, wearing a big cap and carrying a satchel on his shoulder. Olenka would follow him noiselessly.

“Sashenka!” she would call after him, and she would pop into his hand a date or a caramel. When he reached the street where the school was, he would feel ashamed of being followed by a tall, stout woman, he would turn round and say:

“You’d better go home, auntie. I can go the rest of the way alone.”

She would stand still and look after him fixedly till he had disappeared at the school-gate.

Ah, how she loved him! Of her former attachments not one had been so deep; never had her soul surrendered to any feeling so spontaneously, so disinterestedly, and so joyously as now that her maternal instincts were aroused. For this little boy with the dimple in his cheek and the big school cap, she would have given her whole life, she would have given it with joy and tears of tenderness. Why? Who can tell why?

When she had seen the last of Sasha, she returned home, contented and serene, brimming over with love; her face, which had grown younger during the last six months, smiled and beamed; people meeting her looked at her with pleasure.

"Good morning, Olga Semyonovna, darling. How are you, darling?"

"The lessons at the high school are very difficult now," she would relate at the market. "It's too much; in the first class yesterday they gave him a fable to learn by heart, and a Latin translation and a problem. You know it's too much for a little chap."

And she would begin talking about the teachers, the lessons, and the school books, saying just what Sasha said.

At three o'clock they had dinner together: in the evening they learned their lessons together and cried. When she put him to bed, she would stay a long time making the Cross over him and murmuring a prayer; then she would go to bed and dream of that faraway misty future when Sasha would finish his studies and become a doctor or an engineer, would have a big house of his own with horses and a carriage, would get married and have children.… She would fall asleep still thinking of the same thing, and tears would run down her cheeks from her closed eyes, while the black cat lay purring beside her: "*Mrr, mrr, mrr.*"

Suddenly there would come a loud knock at the gate.

Olenka would wake up breathless with alarm, her heart throbbing. Half a minute later would come another knock.

"It must be a telegram from Harkov," she would think, beginning to tremble from head to foot. "Sasha's mother is sending for him from Harkov.… Oh, mercy on us!"

She was in despair. Her head, her hands, and her feet would turn chill, and she would feel that she was the most unhappy woman in the world. But another minute would pass, voices would be heard: it would turn out to be the veterinary surgeon coming home from the club.

"Well, thank God!" she would think.

And gradually the load in her heart would pass off, and she would feel at ease. She would go back to bed thinking of Sasha, who lay sound asleep in the next room, sometimes crying out in his sleep:

“I’ll give it you! Get away! Shut up!”

THE NEW VILLA

I

Two miles from the village of Obrutchanovo a huge bridge was being built. From the village, which stood up high on the steep riverbank, its trellis-like skeleton could be seen, and in foggy weather and on still winter days, when its delicate iron girders and all the scaffolding around was covered with hoar frost, it presented a picturesque and even fantastic spectacle. Kutcherov, the engineer who was building the bridge, a stout, broad-shouldered, bearded man in a soft crumpled cap drove through the village in his racing droshky or his open carriage. Now and then on holidays navvies working on the bridge would come to the village; they begged for alms, laughed at the women, and sometimes carried off something. But that was rare; as a rule the days passed quietly and peacefully as though no bridge-building were going on, and only in the evening, when camp fires gleamed near the bridge, the wind faintly wafted the songs of the navvies. And by day there was sometimes the mournful clang of metal, *don-don-don*.

It happened that the engineer's wife came to see him. She was pleased with the riverbanks and the gorgeous view over the green valley with trees, churches, flocks, and she began begging her husband to buy a small piece of ground and to build them a cottage on it. Her husband agreed. They bought sixty acres of land, and on the high bank in a field, where in earlier days the cows of Obrutchanovo used to wander, they built a pretty house of two storeys with a terrace and a verandah, with a tower and a flagstaff on which a flag fluttered on Sundays—they built it in about three months, and then all the winter they were planting big trees, and when spring came and everything began to be green there were already avenues to the new house, a gardener and two labourers in white aprons were digging near it, there was a little fountain, and a globe of

looking-glass flashed so brilliantly that it was painful to look at. The house had already been named the New Villa.

On a bright, warm morning at the end of May two horses were brought to Obrutchanovo to the village blacksmith, Rodion Petrov. They came from the New Villa. The horses were sleek, graceful beasts, as white as snow, and strikingly alike.

“Perfect swans!” said Rodion, gazing at them with reverent admiration.

His wife Stepanida, his children and grandchildren came out into the street to look at them. By degrees a crowd collected. The Lytchkovs, father and son, both men with swollen faces and entirely beardless, came up bareheaded. Kozov, a tall, thin old man with a long, narrow beard, came up leaning on a stick with a crook handle: he kept winking with his crafty eyes and smiling ironically as though he knew something.

“It’s only that they are white; what is there in them?” he said. “Put mine on oats, and they will be just as sleek. They ought to be in a plough and with a whip, too.…”

The coachman simply looked at him with disdain, but did not utter a word. And afterwards, while they were blowing up the fire at the forge, the coachman talked while he smoked cigarettes. The peasants learned from him various details: his employers were wealthy people; his mistress, Elena Ivanovna, had till her marriage lived in Moscow in a poor way as a governess; she was kindhearted, compassionate, and fond of helping the poor. On the new estate, he told them, they were not going to plough or to sow, but simply to live for their pleasure, live only to breathe the fresh air. When he had finished and led the horses back a crowd of boys followed him, the dogs barked, and Kozov, looking after him, winked sarcastically.

“Landowners, too-oo!” he said. “They have built a house and set up horses, but I bet they are nobodies—landowners, too-oo.”

Kozov for some reason took a dislike from the first to the new house, to the white horses, and to the handsome, well-fed coachman. Kozov was a solitary man, a widower; he had a dreary life (he was prevented from working by a disease which he sometimes called a rupture and sometimes worms) he was maintained by his son, who worked at a confectioner’s in Harkov and sent him money; and from early morning till evening he sauntered at leisure about the river or about the village; if he saw, for instance, a peasant carting a log, or fishing, he would say: “That log’s dry wood—it is rotten,” or, “They won’t bite in weather like this.” In times of drought he would declare that there would not be a

drop of rain till the frost came; and when the rains came he would say that everything would rot in the fields, that everything was ruined. And as he said these things he would wink as though he knew something.

At the New Villa they burned Bengal lights and sent up fireworks in the evenings, and a sailing-boat with red lanterns floated by Obrutchanovo. One morning the engineer's wife, Elena Ivanovna, and her little daughter drove to the village in a carriage with yellow wheels and a pair of dark bay ponies; both mother and daughter were wearing broad-brimmed straw hats, bent down over their ears.

This was exactly at the time when they were carting manure, and the blacksmith Rodion, a tall, gaunt old man, bareheaded and barefooted, was standing near his dirty and repulsive-looking cart and, flustered, looked at the ponies, and it was evident by his face that he had never seen such little horses before.

"The Kutcherov lady has come!" was whispered around. "Look, the Kutcherov lady has come!"

Elena Ivanovna looked at the huts as though she were selecting one, and then stopped at the very poorest, at the windows of which there were so many children's heads—flaxen, red, and dark. Stepanida, Rodion's wife, a stout woman, came running out of the hut; her kerchief slipped off her grey head; she looked at the carriage facing the sun, and her face smiled and wrinkled up as though she were blind.

"This is for your children," said Elena Ivanovna, and she gave her three roubles.

Stepanida suddenly burst into tears and bowed down to the ground. Rodion, too, flopped to the ground, displaying his brownish bald head, and as he did so he almost caught his wife in the ribs with the fork. Elena Ivanovna was overcome with confusion and drove back.

II

The Lytchkovs, father and son, caught in their meadows two carthorses, a pony, and a broad-faced Aalhaus bull-calf, and with the help of redheaded Volodka, son of the blacksmith Rodion, drove them to the village. They called the village elder, collected witnesses, and went to look at the damage.

"All right, let 'em!" said Kozov, winking, "le-et em! Let them get out of it if they can, the engineers! Do you think there is no such thing as law? All right! Send for the police inspector, draw up a statement!…"

"Draw up a statement," repeated Volodka.

"I don't want to let this pass!" shouted the younger Lytchkov. He shouted louder and louder, and his beardless face seemed to be more and more swollen. "They've set up a nice fashion! Leave them free, and they will ruin all the meadows! You've no sort of right to ill-treat people! We are not serfs now!"

"We are not serfs now!" repeated Volodka.

"We got on all right without a bridge," said the elder Lytchkov gloomily; "we did not ask for it. What do we want a bridge for? We don't want it!"

"Brothers, good Christians, we cannot leave it like this!"

"All right, let 'em!" said Kozov, winking. "Let them get out of it if they can! Landowners, indeed!"

They went back to the village, and as they walked the younger Lytchkov beat himself on the breast with his fist and shouted all the way, and Volodka shouted, too, repeating his words. And meanwhile quite a crowd had gathered in the village round the thoroughbred bull-calf and the horses. The bull-calf was embarrassed and looked up from under his brows, but suddenly lowered his muzzle to the ground and took to his heels, kicking up his hind legs; Kozov was frightened and waved his stick at him, and they all burst out laughing. Then they locked up the beasts and waited.

In the evening the engineer sent five roubles for the damage, and the two horses, the pony and the bull-calf, without being fed or given water,

returned home, their heads hanging with a guilty air as though they were convicted criminals.

On getting the five roubles the Lytchkovs, father and son, the village elder and Volodka, punted over the river in a boat and went to a hamlet on the other side where there was a tavern, and there had a long carousal. Their singing and the shouting of the younger Lytchkov could be heard from the village. Their women were uneasy and did not sleep all night. Rodion did not sleep either.

"It's a bad business," he said, sighing and turning from side to side. "The gentleman will be angry, and then there will be trouble.… They have insulted the gentleman.… Oh, they've insulted him. It's a bad business…"

It happened that the peasants, Rodion amongst them, went into their forest to divide the clearings for mowing, and as they were returning home they were met by the engineer. He was wearing a red cotton shirt and high boots; a setter dog with its long tongue hanging out, followed behind him.

"Good day, brothers," he said.

The peasants stopped and took off their hats.

"I have long wanted to have a talk with you, friends," he went on. "This is what it is. Ever since the early spring your cattle have been in my copse and garden every day. Everything is trampled down; the pigs have rooted up the meadow, are ruining everything in the kitchen garden, and all the undergrowth in the copse is destroyed. There is no getting on with your herdsmen; one asks them civilly, and they are rude. Damage is done on my estate every day and I do nothing—I don't fine you or make a complaint; meanwhile you impounded my horses and my bull-calf and exacted five roubles. Was that right? Is that neighbourly?" he went on, and his face was so soft and persuasive, and his expression was not forbidding. "Is that the way decent people behave? A week ago one of your people cut down two oak saplings in my copse. You have dug up the road to Eresnevo, and now I have to go two miles round. Why do you injure me at every step? What harm have I done you? For God's sake, tell me! My wife and I do our utmost to live with you in peace and harmony; we help the peasants as we can. My wife is a kind, warmhearted woman; she never refuses you help. That is her dream—to be of use to you and your children. You reward us with evil for our good. You are unjust, my friends. Think of that. I ask you earnestly to think it over. We treat you humanely; repay us in the same coin."

He turned and went away. The peasants stood a little longer, put on their caps and walked away. Rodion, who always understood everything that was said to him in some peculiar way of his own, heaved a sigh and said:

"We must pay. 'Repay in coin, my friends' … he said."

They walked to the village in silence. On reaching home Rodion said his prayer, took off his boots, and sat down on the bench beside his wife. Stepanida and he always sat side by side when they were at home, and always walked side by side in the street; they ate and they drank and they slept always together, and the older they grew the more they loved one another. It was hot and crowded in their hut, and there were children everywhere—on the floors, in the windows, on the stove.… In spite of her advanced years Stepanida was still bearing children, and now, looking at the crowd of children, it was hard to distinguish which were Rodion's and which were Volodka's. Volodka's wife, Lukerya, a plain young woman with prominent eyes and a nose like the beak of a bird, was kneading dough in a tub; Volodka was sitting on the stove with his legs hanging.

"On the road near Nikita's buckwheat… the engineer with his dog…" Rodion began, after a rest, scratching his ribs and his elbow. "'You must pay,' says he… 'coin,' says he.… Coin or no coin, we shall have to collect ten kopecks from every hut. We've offended the gentleman very much. I am sorry for him.…"

"We've lived without a bridge," said Volodka, not looking at anyone, "and we don't want one."

"What next; the bridge is a government business."

"We don't want it."

"Your opinion is not asked. What is it to you?"

"'Your opinion is not asked,'" Volodka mimicked him. "We don't want to drive anywhere; what do we want with a bridge? If we have to, we can cross by the boat."

Someone from the yard outside knocked at the window so violently that it seemed to shake the whole hut.

"Is Volodka at home?" he heard the voice of the younger Lytchkov. "Volodka, come out, come along."

Volodka jumped down off the stove and began looking for his cap.

"Don't go, Volodka," said Rodion diffidently. "Don't go with them, son. You are foolish, like a little child; they will teach you no good; don't go!"

“Don’t go, son,” said Stepanida, and she blinked as though about to shed tears. “I bet they are calling you to the tavern.”

“‘To the tavern,’” Volodka mimicked.

“You’ll come back drunk again, you currish Herod,” said Lukerya, looking at him angrily. “Go along, go along, and may you burn up with vodka, you tailless Satan!”

“You hold your tongue,” shouted Volodka.

“They’ve married me to a fool, they’ve ruined me, a luckless orphan, you redheaded drunkard…” wailed Lukerya, wiping her face with a hand covered with dough. “I wish I had never set eyes on you.”

Volodka gave her a blow on the ear and went off.

III

Elena Ivanovna and her little daughter visited the village on foot. They were out for a walk. It was a Sunday, and the peasant women and girls were walking up and down the street in their brightly-coloured dresses. Rodion and Stepanida, sitting side by side at their door, bowed and smiled to Elena Ivanovna and her little daughter as to acquaintances. From the windows more than a dozen children stared at them; their faces expressed amazement and curiosity, and they could be heard whispering:

"The Kutcherov lady has come! The Kutcherov lady!"

"Good morning," said Elena Ivanovna, and she stopped; she paused, and then asked: "Well, how are you getting on?"

"We get along all right, thank God," answered Rodion, speaking rapidly. "To be sure we get along."

"The life we lead!" smiled Stepanida. "You can see our poverty yourself, dear lady! The family is fourteen souls in all, and only two breadwinners. We are supposed to be blacksmiths, but when they bring us a horse to shoe we have no coal, nothing to buy it with. We are worried to death, lady," she went on, and laughed. "Oh, oh, we are worried to death."

Elena Ivanovna sat down at the entrance and, putting her arm round her little girl, pondered something, and judging from the little girl's expression, melancholy thoughts were straying through her mind, too; as she brooded she played with the sumptuous lace on the parasol she had taken out of her mother's hands.

"Poverty," said Rodion, "a great deal of anxiety—you see no end to it. Here, God sends no rain… our life is not easy, there is no denying it."

"You have a hard time in this life," said Elena Ivanovna, "but in the other world you will be happy."

Rodion did not understand her, and simply coughed into his clenched hand by way of reply. Stepanida said:

"Dear lady, the rich men will be all right in the next world, too. The rich put up candles, pay for services; the rich give to beggars, but what can the poor man do? He has no time to make the sign of the cross. He is the beggar of beggars himself; how can he think of his soul? And many

sins come from poverty; from trouble we snarl at one another like dogs, we haven't a good word to say to one another, and all sorts of things happen, dear lady—God forbid! It seems we have no luck in this world nor the next. All the luck has fallen to the rich."

She spoke gaily; she was evidently used to talking of her hard life. And Rodion smiled, too; he was pleased that his old woman was so clever, so ready of speech.

"It is only on the surface that the rich seem to be happy," said Elena Ivanovna. "Every man has his sorrow. Here my husband and I do not live poorly, we have means, but are we happy? I am young, but I have had four children; my children are always being ill. I am ill, too, and constantly being doctored."

"And what is your illness?" asked Rodion.

"A woman's complaint. I get no sleep; a continual headache gives me no peace. Here I am sitting and talking, but my head is bad, I am weak all over, and I should prefer the hardest labour to such a condition. My soul, too, is troubled; I am in continual fear for my children, my husband. Every family has its own trouble of some sort; we have ours. I am not of noble birth. My grandfather was a simple peasant, my father was a tradesman in Moscow; he was a plain, uneducated man, too, while my husband's parents were wealthy and distinguished. They did not want him to marry me, but he disobeyed them, quarrelled with them, and they have not forgiven us to this day. That worries my husband; it troubles him and keeps him in constant agitation; he loves his mother, loves her dearly. So I am uneasy, too, my soul is in pain."

Peasants, men and women, were by now standing round Rodion's hut and listening. Kozov came up, too, and stood twitching his long, narrow beard. The Lytchkovs, father and son, drew near.

"And say what you like, one cannot be happy and satisfied if one does not feel in one's proper place." Elena Ivanovna went on. "Each of you has his strip of land, each of you works and knows what he is working for; my husband builds bridges—in short, everyone has his place, while I, I simply walk about. I have not my bit to work. I don't work, and feel as though I were an outsider. I am saying all this that you may not judge from outward appearances; if a man is expensively dressed and has means it does not prove that he is satisfied with his life."

She got up to go away and took her daughter by the hand.

"I like your place here very much," she said, and smiled, and from that faint, diffident smile one could tell how unwell she really was, how young and how pretty; she had a pale, thinnish face with dark eyebrows

and fair hair. And the little girl was just such another as her mother: thin, fair, and slender. There was a fragrance of scent about them.

"I like the river and the forest and the village," Elena Ivanovna went on; "I could live here all my life, and I feel as though here I should get strong and find my place. I want to help you—I want to dreadfully—to be of use, to be a real friend to you. I know your need, and what I don't know I feel, my heart guesses. I am sick, feeble, and for me perhaps it is not possible to change my life as I would. But I have children. I will try to bring them up that they may be of use to you, may love you. I shall impress upon them continually that their life does not belong to them, but to you. Only I beg you earnestly, I beseech you, trust us, live in friendship with us. My husband is a kind, good man. Don't worry him, don't irritate him. He is sensitive to every trifle, and yesterday, for instance, your cattle were in our vegetable garden, and one of your people broke down the fence to the beehives, and such an attitude to us drives my husband to despair. I beg you," she went on in an imploring voice, and she clasped her hands on her bosom—"I beg you to treat us as good neighbours; let us live in peace! There is a saying, you know, that even a bad peace is better than a good quarrel, and, 'Don't buy property, but buy neighbours.' I repeat my husband is a kind man and good; if all goes well we promise to do everything in our power for you; we will mend the roads, we will build a school for your children. I promise you."

"Of course we thank you humbly, lady," said Lytchkov the father, looking at the ground; "you are educated people; it is for you to know best. Only, you see, Voronov, a rich peasant at Eresnevo, promised to build a school; he, too, said, 'I will do this for you,' 'I will do that for you,' and he only put up the framework and refused to go on. And then they made the peasants put the roof on and finish it; it cost them a thousand roubles. Voronov did not care; he only stroked his beard, but the peasants felt it a bit hard."

"That was a crow, but now there's a rook, too," said Kozov, and he winked.

There was the sound of laughter.

"We don't want a school," said Volodka sullenly. "Our children go to Petrovskoe, and they can go on going there; we don't want it."

Elena Ivanovna seemed suddenly intimidated; her face looked paler and thinner, she shrank into herself as though she had been touched with something coarse, and walked away without uttering another word. And she walked more and more quickly, without looking round.

“Lady,” said Rodion, walking after her, “lady, wait a bit; hear what I would say to you.”

He followed her without his cap, and spoke softly as though begging.

“Lady, wait and hear what I will say to you.”

They had walked out of the village, and Elena Ivanovna stopped beside a cart in the shade of an old mountain ash.

“Don’t be offended, lady,” said Rodion. “What does it mean? Have patience. Have patience for a couple of years. You will live here, you will have patience, and it will all come round. Our folks are good and peaceable; there’s no harm in them; it’s God’s truth I’m telling you. Don’t mind Kozov and the Lytchkovs, and don’t mind Volodka. He’s a fool; he listens to the first that speaks. The others are quiet folks; they are silent. Some would be glad, you know, to say a word from the heart and to stand up for themselves, but cannot. They have a heart and a conscience, but no tongue. Don’t be offended… have patience.… What does it matter?”

Elena Ivanovna looked at the broad, tranquil river, pondering, and tears flowed down her cheeks. And Rodion was troubled by those tears; he almost cried himself.

“Never mind…” he muttered. “Have patience for a couple of years. You can have the school, you can have the roads, only not all at once. If you went, let us say, to sow corn on that mound you would first have to weed it out, to pick out all the stones, and then to plough, and work and work… and with the people, you see, it is the same… you must work and work until you overcome them.”

The crowd had moved away from Rodion’s hut, and was coming along the street towards the mountain ash. They began singing songs and playing the concertina, and they kept coming closer and closer.…

“Mamma, let us go away from here,” said the little girl, huddling up to her mother, pale and shaking all over; “let us go away, mamma!”

“Where?”

“To Moscow.… Let us go, mamma.”

The child began crying.

Rodion was utterly overcome; his face broke into profuse perspiration; he took out of his pocket a little crooked cucumber, like a half-moon, covered with crumbs of rye bread, and began thrusting it into the little girl’s hands.

“Come, come,” he muttered, scowling severely; “take the little cucumber, eat it up.… You mustn’t cry. Mamma will whip you.… She’ll tell your father of you when you get home. Come, come.…”

They walked on, and he still followed behind them, wanting to say something friendly and persuasive to them. And seeing that they were both absorbed in their own thoughts and their own griefs, and not noticing him, he stopped and, shading his eyes from the sun, looked after them for a long time till they disappeared into their copse.

IV

The engineer seemed to grow irritable and petty, and in every trivial incident saw an act of robbery or outrage. His gate was kept bolted even by day, and at night two watchmen walked up and down the garden beating a board; and they gave up employing anyone from Obrutchanovo as a labourer. As ill-luck would have it someone (either a peasant or one of the workmen) took the new wheels off the cart and replaced them by old ones, then soon afterwards two bridles and a pair of pincers were carried off, and murmurs arose even in the village. People began to say that a search should be made at the Lytchkovs' and at Volodka's, and then the bridles and the pincers were found under the hedge in the engineer's garden; someone had thrown them down there.

It happened that the peasants were coming in a crowd out of the forest, and again they met the engineer on the road. He stopped, and without wishing them good day he began, looking angrily first at one, then at another:

"I have begged you not to gather mushrooms in the park and near the yard, but to leave them for my wife and children, but your girls come before daybreak and there is not a mushroom left.… Whether one asks you or not it makes no difference. Entreaties, and friendliness, and persuasion I see are all useless."

He fixed his indignant eyes on Rodion and went on:

"My wife and I behaved to you as human beings, as to our equals, and you? But what's the use of talking! It will end by our looking down upon you. There is nothing left!"

And making an effort to restrain his anger, not to say too much, he turned and went on.

On getting home Rodion said his prayer, took off his boots, and sat down beside his wife.

"Yes…" he began with a sigh. "We were walking along just now, and Mr. Kutcherov met us.… Yes.… He saw the girls at daybreak… 'Why don't they bring mushrooms,'… he said 'to my wife and children?' he said.… And then he looked at me and he said: 'I and my wife will look

after you,’ he said. I wanted to fall down at his feet, but I hadn’t the courage.… God give him health… God bless him!…”

Stephania crossed herself and sighed.

“They are kind, simple-hearted people,” Rodion went on. “‘We shall look after you.’… He promised me that before everyone. In our old age… it wouldn’t be a bad thing.… I should always pray for them.… Holy Mother, bless them.…”

The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, the fourteenth of September, was the festival of the village church. The Lytchkovs, father and son, went across the river early in the morning and returned to dinner drunk; they spent a long time going about the village, alternately singing and swearing; then they had a fight and went to the New Villa to complain. First Lytchkov the father went into the yard with a long ashen stick in his hands. He stopped irresolutely and took off his hat. Just at that moment the engineer and his family were sitting on the verandah, drinking tea.

“What do you want?” shouted the engineer.

“Your honour…” Lytchkov began, and burst into tears. “Show the Divine Mercy, protect me… my son makes my life a misery… your honour…”

Lytchkov the son walked up, too; he, too, was bareheaded and had a stick in his hand; he stopped and fixed his drunken senseless eyes on the verandah.

“It is not my business to settle your affairs,” said the engineer. “Go to the rural captain or the police officer.”

“I have been everywhere.… I have lodged a petition…” said Lytchkov the father, and he sobbed. “Where can I go now? He can kill me now, it seems. He can do anything. Is that the way to treat a father? A father?”

He raised his stick and hit his son on the head; the son raised his stick and struck his father just on his bald patch such a blow that the stick bounced back. The father did not even flinch, but hit his son again and again on the head. And so they stood and kept hitting one another on the head, and it looked not so much like a fight as some sort of a game. And peasants, men and women, stood in a crowd at the gate and looked into the garden, and the faces of all were grave. They were the peasants who had come to greet them for the holiday, but seeing the Lytchkovs, they were ashamed and did not go in.

The next morning Elena Ivanovna went with the children to Moscow. And there was a rumour that the engineer was selling his house.…

V

The peasants had long ago grown used to the sight of the bridge, and it was difficult to imagine the river at that place without a bridge. The heap of rubble left from the building of it had long been overgrown with grass, the navvies were forgotten, and instead of the strains of the "Dubinushka" that they used to sing, the peasants heard almost every hour the sounds of a passing train.

The New Villa has long ago been sold; now it belongs to a government clerk who comes here from the town for the holidays with his family, drinks tea on the terrace, and then goes back to the town again. He wears a cockade on his cap; he talks and clears his throat as though he were a very important official, though he is only of the rank of a collegiate secretary, and when the peasants bow he makes no response.

In Obrutchanovo everyone has grown older; Kozov is dead. In Rodion's hut there are even more children. Volodka has grown a long red beard. They are still as poor as ever.

In the early spring the Obrutchanovo peasants were sawing wood near the station. And after work they were going home; they walked without haste one after the other. Broad saws curved over their shoulders; the sun was reflected in them. The nightingales were singing in the bushes on the bank, larks were trilling in the heavens. It was quiet at the New Villa; there was not a soul there, and only golden pigeons—golden because the sunlight was streaming upon them—were flying over the house. All of them—Rodion, the two Lytchkovs, and Volodka—thought of the white horses, the little ponies, the fireworks, the boat with the lanterns; they remembered how the engineer's wife, so beautiful and so grandly dressed, had come into the village and talked to them in such a friendly way. And it seemed as though all that had never been; it was like a dream or a fairytale.

They trudged along, tired out, and mused as they went.… In their village, they mused, the people were good, quiet, sensible, fearing God, and Elena Ivanovna, too, was quiet, kind, and gentle; it made one sad to look at her, but why had they not got on together? Why had they parted like enemies? How was it that some mist had shrouded from their eyes

what mattered most, and had let them see nothing but damage done by cattle, bridles, pincers, and all those trivial things which now, as they remembered them, seemed so nonsensical? How was it that with the new owner they lived in peace, and yet had been on bad terms with the engineer?

And not knowing what answer to make to these questions they were all silent except Volodka, who muttered something.

“What is it?” Rodion asked.

“We lived without a bridge…” said Volodka gloomily. “We lived without a bridge, and did not ask for one… and we don’t want it.…”

No one answered him and they walked on in silence with drooping heads.

On Official Duty

The deputy examining magistrate and the district doctor were going to an inquest in the village of Syrnya. On the road they were overtaken by a snowstorm; they spent a long time going round and round, and arrived, not at midday, as they had intended, but in the evening when it was dark. They put up for the night at the Zemstvo hut. It so happened that it was in this hut that the dead body was lying—the corpse of the Zemstvo insurance agent, Lesnitsky, who had arrived in Syrnya three days before and, ordering the samovar in the hut, had shot himself, to the great surprise of everyone; and the fact that he had ended his life so strangely, after unpacking his eatables and laying them out on the table, and with the samovar before him, led many people to suspect that it was a case of murder; an inquest was necessary.

In the outer room the doctor and the examining magistrate shook the snow off themselves and knocked it off their boots. And meanwhile the old village constable, Ilya Loshadin, stood by, holding a little tin lamp. There was a strong smell of paraffin.

"Who are you?" asked the doctor.

"Conshtable,…" answered the constable.

He used to spell it "conshtable" when he signed the receipts at the post office.

"And where are the witnesses?"

"They must have gone to tea, your honor."

On the right was the parlor, the travelers' or gentry's room; on the left the kitchen, with a big stove and sleeping shelves under the rafters. The doctor and the examining magistrate, followed by the constable, holding the lamp high above his head, went into the parlor. Here a still, long body covered with white linen was lying on the floor close to the table-legs. In the dim light of the lamp they could clearly see, besides the white covering, new rubber goloshes, and everything about it was uncanny and sinister: the dark walls, and the silence, and the goloshes,

and the stillness of the dead body. On the table stood a samovar, cold long ago; and round it parcels, probably the eatables.

“To shoot oneself in the Zemstvo hut, how tactless!” said the doctor. “If one does want to put a bullet through one’s brains, one ought to do it at home in some outhouse.”

He sank on to a bench, just as he was, in his cap, his fur coat, and his felt overboots; his fellow-traveler, the examining magistrate, sat down opposite.

“These hysterical, neurasthenic people are great egoists,” the doctor went on hotly. “If a neurasthenic sleeps in the same room with you, he rustles his newspaper; when he dines with you, he gets up a scene with his wife without troubling about your presence; and when he feels inclined to shoot himself, he shoots himself in a village in a Zemstvo hut, so as to give the maximum of trouble to everybody. These gentlemen in every circumstance of life think of no one but themselves! That’s why the elderly so dislike our ‘nervous age.’”

“The elderly dislike so many things,” said the examining magistrate, yawning. “You should point out to the elder generation what the difference is between the suicides of the past and the suicides of today. In the old days the so-called gentleman shot himself because he had made away with government money, but nowadays it is because he is sick of life, depressed.… Which is better?”

“Sick of life, depressed; but you must admit that he might have shot himself somewhere else.”

“Such trouble!” said the constable, “such trouble! It’s a real affliction. The people are very much upset, your honor; they haven’t slept these three nights. The children are crying. The cows ought to be milked, but the women won’t go to the stall—they are afraid… for fear the gentleman should appear to them in the darkness. Of course they are silly women, but some of the men are frightened too. As soon as it is dark they won’t go by the hut one by one, but only in a flock together. And the witnesses too.…”

Dr. Startchenko, a middle-aged man in spectacles with a dark beard, and the examining magistrate Lyzhin, a fair man, still young, who had only taken his degree two years before and looked more like a student than an official, sat in silence, musing. They were vexed that they were late. Now they had to wait till morning, and to stay here for the night, though it was not yet six o’clock; and they had before them a long evening, a dark night, boredom, uncomfortable beds, beetles, and cold in the morning; and listening to the blizzard that howled in the chimney and

in the loft, they both thought how unlike all this was the life which they would have chosen for themselves and of which they had once dreamed, and how far away they both were from their contemporaries, who were at that moment walking about the lighted streets in town without noticing the weather, or were getting ready for the theatre, or sitting in their studies over a book. Oh, how much they would have given now only to stroll along the Nevsky Prospect, or along Petrovka in Moscow, to listen to decent singing, to sit for an hour or so in a restaurant!

"Oo-oo-oo-oo!" sang the storm in the loft, and something outside slammed viciously, probably the signboard on the hut. "Oo-oo-oo-oo!"

"You can do as you please, but I have no desire to stay here," said Startchenko, getting up. "It's not six yet, it's too early to go to bed; I am off. Von Taunitz lives not far from here, only a couple of miles from Syrnya. I shall go to see him and spend the evening there. Constable, run and tell my coachman not to take the horses out. And what are you going to do?" he asked Lyzhin.

"I don't know; I expect I shall go to sleep."

The doctor wrapped himself in his fur coat and went out. Lyzhin could hear him talking to the coachman and the bells beginning to quiver on the frozen horses. He drove off.

"It is not nice for you, sir, to spend the night in here," said the constable; "come into the other room. It's dirty, but for one night it won't matter. I'll get a samovar from a peasant and heat it directly. I'll heap up some hay for you, and then you go to sleep, and God bless you, your honor."

A little later the examining magistrate was sitting in the kitchen drinking tea, while Loshadin, the constable, was standing at the door talking. He was an old man about sixty, short and very thin, bent and white, with a naive smile on his face and watery eyes, and he kept smacking with his lips as though he were sucking a sweetmeat. He was wearing a short sheepskin coat and high felt boots, and held his stick in his hands all the time. The youth of the examining magistrate aroused his compassion, and that was probably why he addressed him familiarly.

"The elder gave orders that he was to be informed when the police superintendent or the examining magistrate came," he said, "so I suppose I must go now.… It's nearly three miles to the *volost*, and the storm, the snowdrifts, are something terrible—maybe one won't get there before midnight. Ough! how the wind roars!"

"I don't need the elder," said Lyzhin. "There is nothing for him to do here."

He looked at the old man with curiosity, and asked:

"Tell me, grandfather, how many years have you been constable?"

"How many? Why, thirty years. Five years after the Freedom I began going as constable, that's how I reckon it. And from that time I have been going every day since. Other people have holidays, but I am always going. When it's Easter and the church bells are ringing and Christ has risen, I still go about with my bag—to the treasury, to the post, to the police superintendent's lodgings, to the rural captain, to the tax inspector, to the municipal office, to the gentry, to the peasants, to all orthodox Christians. I carry parcels, notices, tax papers, letters, forms of different sorts, circulars, and to be sure, kind gentleman, there are all sorts of forms nowadays, so as to note down the numbers—yellow, white, and red—and every gentleman or priest or well-to-do peasant must write down a dozen times in the year how much he has sown and harvested, how many quarters or poods he has of rye, how many of oats, how many of hay, and what the weather's like, you know, and insects, too, of all sorts. To be sure you can write what you like, it's only a regulation, but one must go and give out the notices and then go again and collect them. Here, for instance, there's no need to cut open the gentleman; you know yourself it's a silly thing, it's only dirtying your hands, and here you have been put to trouble, your honor; you have come because it's the regulation; you can't help it. For thirty years I have been going round according to regulation. In the summer it is all right, it is warm and dry; but in winter and autumn it's uncomfortable. At times I have been almost drowned and almost frozen; all sorts of things have happened—wicked people set on me in the forest and took away my bag; I have been beaten, and I have been before a court of law."

"What were you accused of?"

"Of fraud."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, you see, Hrisanf Grigoryev, the clerk, sold the contractor some boards belonging to someone else—cheated him, in fact. I was mixed up in it. They sent me to the tavern for vodka; well, the clerk did not share with me—did not even offer me a glass; but as through my poverty I was—in appearance, I mean—not a man to be relied upon, not a man of any worth, we were both brought to trial; he was sent to prison, but, praise God! I was acquitted on all points. They read a notice, you know, in the court. And they were all in uniforms—in the court, I mean. I can tell you, your honor, my duties for anyone not used to them are terrible, absolutely killing; but to me it is nothing. In fact, my feet ache when I

am not walking. And at home it is worse for me. At home one has to heat the stove for the clerk in the *volost* office, to fetch water for him, to clean his boots."

"And what wages do you get?" Lyzhin asked.

"Eighty-four roubles a year."

"I'll bet you get other little sums coming in. You do, don't you?"

"Other little sums? No, indeed! Gentlemen nowadays don't often give tips. Gentlemen nowadays are strict, they take offense at anything. If you bring them a notice they are offended, if you take off your cap before them they are offended. 'You have come to the wrong entrance,' they say. 'You are a drunkard,' they say. 'You smell of onion; you are a blockhead; you are the son of a bitch.' There are kindhearted ones, of course; but what does one get from them? They only laugh and call one all sorts of names. Mr. Altuhin, for instance, he is a good-natured gentleman; and if you look at him he seems sober and in his right mind, but so soon as he sees me he shouts and does not know what he means himself. He gave me such a name 'You,' said he,…" The constable uttered some word, but in such a low voice that it was impossible to make out what he said.

"What?" Lyzhin asked. "Say it again."

"'Administration,'" the constable repeated aloud. "He has been calling me that for a long while, for the last six years. 'Hullo, Administration!' But I don't mind; let him, God bless him! Sometimes a lady will send one a glass of vodka and a bit of pie and one drinks to her health. But peasants give more; peasants are more kindhearted, they have the fear of God in their hearts: one will give a bit of bread, another a drop of cabbage soup, another will stand one a glass. The village elders treat one to tea in the tavern. Here the witnesses have gone to their tea. 'Loshadin,' they said, 'you stay here and keep watch for us,' and they gave me a kopeck each. You see, they are frightened, not being used to it, and yesterday they gave me fifteen kopecks and offered me a glass."

"And you, aren't you frightened?"

"I am, sir; but of course it is my duty, there is no getting away from it. In the summer I was taking a convict to the town, and he set upon me and gave me such a drubbing! And all around were fields, forest—how could I get away from him? It's just the same here. I remember the gentleman, Mr. Lesnitsky, when he was so high, and I knew his father and mother. I am from the village of Nedoshtchotova, and they, the Lesnitsky family, were not more than three-quarters of a mile from us and less than that, their ground next to ours, and Mr. Lesnitsky had a

sister, a God-fearing and tenderhearted lady. Lord keep the soul of Thy servant Yulya, eternal memory to her! She was never married, and when she was dying she divided all her property; she left three hundred acres to the monastery, and six hundred to the commune of peasants of Nedoshtchotova to commemorate her soul; but her brother hid the will, they do say burnt it in the stove, and took all this land for himself. He thought, to be sure, it was for his benefit; but—nay, wait a bit, you won't get on in the world through injustice, brother. The gentleman did not go to confession for twenty years after. He kept away from the church, to be sure, and died impenitent. He burst. He was a very fat man, so he burst lengthways. Then everything was taken from the young master, from Seryozha, to pay the debts—everything there was. Well, he had not gone very far in his studies, he couldn't do anything, and the president of the Rural Board, his uncle—'I'll take him'—Seryozha, I mean—thinks he, 'for an agent; let him collect the insurance, that's not a difficult job,' and the gentleman was young and proud, he wanted to be living on a bigger scale and in better style and with more freedom. To be sure it was a comedown for him to be jolting about the district in a wretched cart and talking to the peasants; he would walk and keep looking on the ground, looking on the ground and saying nothing; if you called his name right in his ear, 'Sergey Sergeyitch!' he would look round like this, 'Eh?' and look down on the ground again, and now you see he has laid hands on himself. There's no sense in it, your honor, it's not right, and there's no making out what's the meaning of it, merciful Lord! Say your father was rich and you are poor; it is mortifying, there's no doubt about it, but there, you must make up your mind to it. I used to live in good style, too; I had two horses, your honor, three cows, I used to keep twenty head of sheep; but the time has come, and I am left with nothing but a wretched bag, and even that is not mine but government property. And now in our Nedoshtchotova, if the truth is to be told, my house is the worst of the lot. Makey had four footmen, and now Makey is a footman himself. Petrak had four laborers, and now Petrak is a laborer himself."

"How was it you became poor?" asked the examining magistrate.

"My sons drink terribly. I could not tell you how they drink, you wouldn't believe it."

Lyzhin listened and thought how he, Lyzhin, would go back sooner or later to Moscow, while this old man would stay here forever, and would always be walking and walking. And how many times in his life he would come across such battered, unkempt old men, not "men of any worth," in whose souls fifteen kopecks, glasses of vodka, and a profound

belief that you can't get on in this life by dishonesty, were equally firmly rooted.

Then he grew tired of listening, and told the old man to bring him some hay for his bed. There was an iron bedstead with a pillow and a quilt in the traveler's room, and it could be fetched in; but the dead man had been lying by it for nearly three days (and perhaps sitting on it just before his death), and it would be disagreeable to sleep upon it now.…

"It's only half-past seven," thought Lyzhin, glancing at his watch. "How awful it is!"

He was not sleepy, but having nothing to do to pass away the time, he lay down and covered himself with a rug. Loshadin went in and out several times, clearing away the tea-things; smacking his lips and sighing, he kept tramping round the table; at last he took his little lamp and went out, and, looking at his long, gray-headed, bent figure from behind, Lyzhin thought:

"Just like a magician in an opera."

It was dark. The moon must have been behind the clouds, as the windows and the snow on the window-frames could be seen distinctly.

"Oo-oo-oo!" sang the storm, "Oo-oo-oo-oo!"

"Ho-ho-ly sa-aints!" wailed a woman in the loft, or it sounded like it. "Ho-ho-ly sa-aints!"

"B-booh!" something outside banged against the wall. "Trah!"

The examining magistrate listened: there was no woman up there, it was the wind howling. It was rather cold, and he put his fur coat over his rug. As he got warm he thought how remote all this—the storm, and the hut, and the old man, and the dead body lying in the next room—how remote it all was from the life he desired for himself, and how alien it all was to him, how petty, how uninteresting. If this man had killed himself in Moscow or somewhere in the neighborhood, and he had had to hold an inquest on him there, it would have been interesting, important, and perhaps he might even have been afraid to sleep in the next room to the corpse. Here, nearly a thousand miles from Moscow, all this was seen somehow in a different light; it was not life, they were not human beings, but something only existing "according to the regulation," as Loshadin said; it would leave not the faintest trace in the memory, and would be forgotten as soon as he, Lyzhin, drove away from Syrnya. The fatherland, the real Russia, was Moscow, Petersburg; but here he was in the provinces, the colonies. When one dreamed of playing a leading part, of becoming a popular figure, of being, for instance, examining magistrate in particularly important cases or prosecutor in a circuit court,

of being a society lion, one always thought of Moscow. To live, one must be in Moscow; here one cared for nothing, one grew easily resigned to one's insignificant position, and only expected one thing of life—to get away quickly, quickly. And Lyzhin mentally moved about the Moscow streets, went into the familiar houses, met his kindred, his comrades, and there was a sweet pang at his heart at the thought that he was only twenty-six, and that if in five or ten years he could break away from here and get to Moscow, even then it would not be too late and he would still have a whole life before him. And as he sank into unconsciousness, as his thoughts began to be confused, he imagined the long corridor of the court at Moscow, himself delivering a speech, his sisters, the orchestra which for some reason kept droning: "Oo-oo-oo-oo! Oo-oooo-oo!"

"Booh! Trah!" sounded again. "Booh!"

And he suddenly recalled how one day, when he was talking to the bookkeeper in the little office of the Rural Board, a thin, pale gentleman with black hair and dark eyes walked in; he had a disagreeable look in his eyes such as one sees in people who have slept too long after dinner, and it spoilt his delicate, intelligent profile; and the high boots he was wearing did not suit him, but looked clumsy. The bookkeeper had introduced him: "This is our insurance agent."

"So that was Lesnitsky,… this same man," Lyzhin reflected now.

He recalled Lesnitsky's soft voice, imagined his gait, and it seemed to him that someone was walking beside him now with a step like Lesnitsky's.

All at once he felt frightened, his head turned cold.

"Who's there?" he asked in alarm.

"The conshtable!"

"What do you want here?"

"I have come to ask, your honor—you said this evening that you did not want the elder, but I am afraid he may be angry. He told me to go to him. Shouldn't I go?"

"That's enough, you bother me," said Lyzhin with vexation, and he covered himself up again.

"He may be angry.… I'll go, your honor. I hope you will be comfortable," and Loshadin went out.

In the passage there was coughing and subdued voices. The witnesses must have returned.

"We'll let those poor beggars get away early tomorrow,…" thought the examining magistrate; "we'll begin the inquest as soon as it is daylight."

He began sinking into forgetfulness when suddenly there were steps again, not timid this time but rapid and noisy. There was the slam of a door, voices, the scratching of a match.…

"Are you asleep? Are you asleep?" Dr. Startchenko was asking him hurriedly and angrily as he struck one match after another; he was covered with snow, and brought a chill air in with him. "Are you asleep? Get up! Let us go to Von Taunitz's. He has sent his own horses for you. Come along. There, at any rate, you will have supper, and sleep like a human being. You see I have come for you myself. The horses are splendid, we shall get there in twenty minutes."

"And what time is it now?"

"A quarter past ten."

Lyzhin, sleepy and discontented, put on his felt overboots, his fur-lined coat, his cap and hood, and went out with the doctor. There was not a very sharp frost, but a violent and piercing wind was blowing and driving along the street the clouds of snow which seemed to be racing away in terror: high drifts were heaped up already under the fences and at the doorways. The doctor and the examining magistrate got into the sledge, and the white coachman bent over them to button up the cover. They were both hot.

"Ready!"

They drove through the village. "Cutting a feathery furrow," thought the examining magistrate, listlessly watching the action of the trace horse's legs. There were lights in all the huts, as though it were the eve of a great holiday: the peasants had not gone to bed because they were afraid of the dead body. The coachman preserved a sullen silence, probably he had felt dreary while he was waiting by the Zemstvo hut, and now he, too, was thinking of the dead man.

"At the Von Taunitz's," said Startchenko, "they all set upon me when they heard that you were left to spend the night in the hut, and asked me why I did not bring you with me."

As they drove out of the village, at the turning the coachman suddenly shouted at the top of his voice: "Out of the way!"

They caught a glimpse of a man: he was standing up to his knees in the snow, moving off the road and staring at the horses. The examining magistrate saw a stick with a crook, and a beard and a bag, and he fancied that it was Loshadin, and even fancied that he was smiling. He flashed by and disappeared.

The road ran at first along the edge of the forest, then along a broad forest clearing; they caught glimpses of old pines and a young birch

copse, and tall, gnarled young oak trees standing singly in the clearings where the wood had lately been cut; but soon it was all merged in the clouds of snow. The coachman said he could see the forest; the examining magistrate could see nothing but the trace horse. The wind blew on their backs.

All at once the horses stopped.

"Well, what is it now?" asked Startchenko crossly.

The coachman got down from the box without a word and began running round the sledge, treading on his heels; he made larger and larger circles, getting further and further away from the sledge, and it looked as though he were dancing; at last he came back and began to turn off to the right.

"You've got off the road, eh?" asked Startchenko.

"It's all ri-ight.…"

Then there was a little village and not a single light in it. Again the forest and the fields. Again they lost the road, and again the coachman got down from the box and danced round the sledge. The sledge flew along a dark avenue, flew swiftly on. And the heated trace horse's hoofs knocked against the sledge. Here there was a fearful roaring sound from the trees, and nothing could be seen, as though they were flying on into space; and all at once the glaring light at the entrance and the windows flashed upon their eyes, and they heard the good-natured, drawn-out barking of dogs. They had arrived.

While they were taking off their fur coats and their felt boots below, "Un Petit Verre de Clicquot" was being played upon the piano overhead, and they could hear the children beating time with their feet. Immediately on going in they were aware of the snug warmth and special smell of the old apartments of a mansion where, whatever the weather outside, life is so warm and clean and comfortable.

"That's capital!" said Von Taunitz, a fat man with an incredibly thick neck and with whiskers, as he shook the examining magistrate's hand. "That's capital! You are very welcome, delighted to make your acquaintance. We are colleagues to some extent, you know. At one time I was deputy prosecutor; but not for long, only two years. I came here to look after the estate, and here I have grown old—an old fogey, in fact. You are very welcome," he went on, evidently restraining his voice so as not to speak too loud; he was going upstairs with his guests. "I have no wife, she's dead. But here, I will introduce my daughters," and turning round, he shouted down the stairs in a voice of thunder: "Tell Ignat to have the sledge ready at eight o'clock tomorrow morning."

His four daughters, young and pretty girls, all wearing gray dresses and with their hair done up in the same style, and their cousin, also young and attractive, with her children, were in the drawingroom. Startchenko, who knew them already, began at once begging them to sing something, and two of the young ladies spent a long time declaring they could not sing and that they had no music; then the cousin sat down to the piano, and with trembling voices, they sang a duet from *The Queen of Spades*. Again “Un Petit Verre de Clicquot” was played, and the children skipped about, beating time with their feet. And Startchenko pranced about too. Everybody laughed.

Then the children said goodnight and went off to bed. The examining magistrate laughed, danced a quadrille, flirted, and kept wondering whether it was not all a dream? The kitchen of the Zemstvo hut, the heap of hay in the corner, the rustle of the beetles, the revolting poverty-stricken surroundings, the voices of the witnesses, the wind, the snow storm, the danger of being lost; and then all at once this splendid, brightly lighted room, the sounds of the piano, the lovely girls, the curly-headed children, the gay, happy laughter—such a transformation seemed to him like a fairy tale, and it seemed incredible that such transitions were possible at the distance of some two miles in the course of one hour. And dreary thoughts prevented him from enjoying himself, and he kept thinking this was not life here, but bits of life fragments, that everything here was accidental, that one could draw no conclusions from it; and he even felt sorry for these girls, who were living and would end their lives in the wilds, in a province far away from the center of culture, where nothing is accidental, but everything is in accordance with reason and law, and where, for instance, every suicide is intelligible, so that one can explain why it has happened and what is its significance in the general scheme of things. He imagined that if the life surrounding him here in the wilds were not intelligible to him, and if he did not see it, it meant that it did not exist at all.

At supper the conversation turned on Lesnitsky.

“He left a wife and child,” said Startchenko. “I would forbid neurasthenics and all people whose nervous system is out of order to marry, I would deprive them of the right and possibility of multiplying their kind. To bring into the world nervous, invalid children is a crime.”

“He was an unfortunate young man,” said Von Taunitz, sighing gently and shaking his head. “What a lot one must suffer and think about before one brings oneself to take one’s own life,… a young life! Such a

misfortune may happen in any family, and that is awful. It is hard to bear such a thing, insufferable.…”

And all the girls listened in silence with grave faces, looking at their father. Lyzhin felt that he, too, must say something, but he couldn’t think of anything, and merely said:

“Yes, suicide is an undesirable phenomenon.”

He slept in a warm room, in a soft bed covered with a quilt under which there were fine clean sheets, but for some reason did not feel comfortable: perhaps because the doctor and Von Taunitz were, for a long time, talking in the adjoining room, and overhead he heard, through the ceiling and in the stove, the wind roaring just as in the Zemstvo hut, and as plaintively howling: “Oo-oo-oo-oo!”

Von Taunitz’s wife had died two years before, and he was still unable to resign himself to his loss and, whatever he was talking about, always mentioned his wife; and there was no trace of a prosecutor left about him now.

“Is it possible that I may some day come to such a condition?” thought Lyzhin, as he fell asleep, still hearing through the wall his host’s subdued, as it were bereaved, voice.

The examining magistrate did not sleep soundly. He felt hot and uncomfortable, and it seemed to him in his sleep that he was not at Von Taunitz’s, and not in a soft clean bed, but still in the hay at the Zemstvo hut, hearing the subdued voices of the witnesses; he fancied that Lesnitsky was close by, not fifteen paces away. In his dreams he remembered how the insurance agent, black-haired and pale, wearing dusty high boots, had come into the bookkeeper’s office. “This is our insurance agent.…”

Then he dreamed that Lesnitsky and Loshadin the constable were walking through the open country in the snow, side by side, supporting each other; the snow was whirling about their heads, the wind was blowing on their backs, but they walked on, singing: “We go on, and on, and on.…”

The old man was like a magician in an opera, and both of them were singing as though they were on the stage:

“We go on, and on, and on!… You are in the warmth, in the light and snugness, but we are walking in the frost and the storm, through the deep snow.… We know nothing of ease, we know nothing of joy.… We bear all the burden of this life, yours and ours.… Oo-oo-oo! We go on, and on, and on.…”

Lyzhin woke and sat up in bed. What a confused, bad dream! And why did he dream of the constable and the agent together? What nonsense! And now while Lyzhin's heart was throbbing violently and he was sitting on his bed, holding his head in his hands, it seemed to him that there really was something in common between the lives of the insurance agent and the constable. Don't they really go side by side holding each other up? Some tie unseen, but significant and essential, existed between them, and even between them and Von Taunitz and between all men—all men; in this life, even in the remotest desert, nothing is accidental, everything is full of one common idea, everything has one soul, one aim, and to understand it it is not enough to think, it is not enough to reason, one must have also, it seems, the gift of insight into life, a gift which is evidently not bestowed on all. And the unhappy man who had broken down, who had killed himself—the "neurasthenic," as the doctor called him—and the old peasant who spent every day of his life going from one man to another, were only accidental, were only fragments of life for one who thought of his own life as accidental, but were parts of one organism—marvelous and rational—for one who thought of his own life as part of that universal whole and understood it. So thought Lyzhin, and it was a thought that had long lain hidden in his soul, and only now it was unfolded broadly and clearly to his consciousness.

He lay down and began to drop asleep; and again they were going along together, singing: "We go on, and on, and on.… We take from life what is hardest and bitterest in it, and we leave you what is easy and joyful; and sitting at supper, you can coldly and sensibly discuss why we suffer and perish, and why we are not as sound and as satisfied as you."

What they were singing had occurred to his mind before, but the thought was somewhere in the background behind his other thoughts, and flickered timidly like a faraway light in foggy weather. And he felt that this suicide and the peasant's sufferings lay upon his conscience, too; to resign himself to the fact that these people, submissive to their fate, should take up the burden of what was hardest and gloomiest in life—how awful it was! To accept this, and to desire for himself a life full of light and movement among happy and contented people, and to be continually dreaming of such, means dreaming of fresh suicides of men crushed by toil and anxiety, or of men weak and outcast whom people only talk of sometimes at supper with annoyance or mockery, without going to their help.… And again:

“We go on, and on, and on…” as though someone were beating with a hammer on his temples.

He woke early in the morning with a headache, roused by a noise; in the next room Von Taunitz was saying loudly to the doctor:

“It’s impossible for you to go now. Look what’s going on outside. Don’t argue, you had better ask the coachman; he won’t take you in such weather for a million.”

“But it’s only two miles,” said the doctor in an imploring voice.

“Well, if it were only half a mile. If you can’t, then you can’t. Directly you drive out of the gates it is perfect hell, you would be off the road in a minute. Nothing will induce me to let you go, you can say what you like.”

“It’s bound to be quieter towards evening,” said the peasant who was heating the stove.

And in the next room the doctor began talking of the rigorous climate and its influence on the character of the Russian, of the long winters which, by preventing movement from place to place, hinder the intellectual development of the people; and Lyzhin listened with vexation to these observations and looked out of window at the snow drifts which were piled on the fence. He gazed at the white dust which covered the whole visible expanse, at the trees which bowed their heads despairingly to right and then to left, listened to the howling and the banging, and thought gloomily:

“Well, what moral can be drawn from it? It’s a blizzard and that is all about it.…”

At midday they had lunch, then wandered aimlessly about the house; they went to the windows.

“And Lesnitsky is lying there,” thought Lyzhin, watching the whirling snow, which raced furiously round and round upon the drifts. “Lesnitsky is lying there, the witnesses are waiting.…”

They talked of the weather, saying that the snowstorm usually lasted two days and nights, rarely longer. At six o’clock they had dinner, then they played cards, sang, danced; at last they had supper. The day was over, they went to bed.

In the night, towards morning, it all subsided. When they got up and looked out of window, the bare willows with their weakly drooping branches were standing perfectly motionless; it was dull and still, as though nature now were ashamed of its orgy, of its mad nights, and the license it had given to its passions. The horses, harnessed tandem, had been waiting at the front door since five o’clock in the morning. When it

was fully daylight the doctor and the examining magistrate put on their fur coats and felt boots, and, saying goodbye to their host, went out.

At the steps beside the coachman stood the familiar figure of the constable, Ilya Loshadin, with an old leather bag across his shoulder and no cap on his head, covered with snow all over, and his face was red and wet with perspiration. The footman who had come out to help the gentlemen and cover their legs looked at him sternly and said:

“What are you standing here for, you old devil? Get away!”

“Your honor, the people are anxious,” said Loshadin, smiling naively all over his face, and evidently pleased at seeing at last the people he had waited for so long. “The people are very uneasy, the children are crying.… They thought, your honor, that you had gone back to the town again. Show us the heavenly mercy, our benefactors!…”

The doctor and the examining magistrate said nothing, got into the sledge, and drove to Syrnya.

The Lady with the Dog

I

It was said that a new person had appeared on the seafront: a lady with a little dog. Dmitri Dmitritch Gurov, who had by then been a fortnight at Yalta, and so was fairly at home there, had begun to take an interest in new arrivals. Sitting in Verney's pavilion, he saw, walking on the seafront, a fair-haired young lady of medium height, wearing a beret; a white Pomeranian dog was running behind her.

And afterwards he met her in the public gardens and in the square several times a day. She was walking alone, always wearing the same beret, and always with the same white dog; no one knew who she was, and everyone called her simply "the lady with the dog."

"If she is here alone without a husband or friends, it wouldn't be amiss to make her acquaintance," Gurov reflected.

He was under forty, but he had a daughter already twelve years old, and two sons at school. He had been married young, when he was a student in his second year, and by now his wife seemed half as old again as he. She was a tall, erect woman with dark eyebrows, staid and dignified, and, as she said of herself, intellectual. She read a great deal, used phonetic spelling, called her husband, not Dmitri, but Dimitri, and he secretly considered her unintelligent, narrow, inelegant, was afraid of her, and did not like to be at home. He had begun being unfaithful to her long ago—had been unfaithful to her often, and, probably on that account, almost always spoke ill of women, and when they were talked about in his presence, used to call them "the lower race."

It seemed to him that he had been so schooled by bitter experience that he might call them what he liked, and yet he could not get on for two days together without "the lower race." In the society of men he was bored and not himself, with them he was cold and uncommunicative; but

when he was in the company of women he felt free, and knew what to say to them and how to behave; and he was at ease with them even when he was silent. In his appearance, in his character, in his whole nature, there was something attractive and elusive which allured women and disposed them in his favour; he knew that, and some force seemed to draw him, too, to them.

Experience often repeated, truly bitter experience, had taught him long ago that with decent people, especially Moscow people—always slow to move and irresolute—every intimacy, which at first so agreeably diversifies life and appears a light and charming adventure, inevitably grows into a regular problem of extreme intricacy, and in the long run the situation becomes unbearable. But at every fresh meeting with an interesting woman this experience seemed to slip out of his memory, and he was eager for life, and everything seemed simple and amusing.

One evening he was dining in the gardens, and the lady in the beret came up slowly to take the next table. Her expression, her gait, her dress, and the way she did her hair told him that she was a lady, that she was married, that she was in Yalta for the first time and alone, and that she was dull there…. The stories told of the immorality in such places as Yalta are to a great extent untrue; he despised them, and knew that such stories were for the most part made up by persons who would themselves have been glad to sin if they had been able; but when the lady sat down at the next table three paces from him, he remembered these tales of easy conquests, of trips to the mountains, and the tempting thought of a swift, fleeting love affair, a romance with an unknown woman, whose name he did not know, suddenly took possession of him.

He beckoned coaxingly to the Pomeranian, and when the dog came up to him he shook his finger at it. The Pomeranian growled: Gurov shook his finger at it again.

The lady looked at him and at once dropped her eyes.

“He doesn’t bite,” she said, and blushed.

“May I give him a bone?” he asked; and when she nodded he asked courteously, “Have you been long in Yalta?”

“Five days.”

“And I have already dragged out a fortnight here.”

There was a brief silence.

“Time goes fast, and yet it is so dull here!” she said, not looking at him.

“That’s only the fashion to say it is dull here. A provincial will live in Belyov or Zhidra and not be dull, and when he comes here it’s ‘Oh, the

dullness! Oh, the dust!’ One would think he came from Grenada.”

She laughed. Then both continued eating in silence, like strangers, but after dinner they walked side by side; and there sprang up between them the light jesting conversation of people who are free and satisfied, to whom it does not matter where they go or what they talk about. They walked and talked of the strange light on the sea: the water was of a soft warm lilac hue, and there was a golden streak from the moon upon it. They talked of how sultry it was after a hot day. Gurov told her that he came from Moscow, that he had taken his degree in Arts, but had a post in a bank; that he had trained as an opera-singer, but had given it up, that he owned two houses in Moscow.… And from her he learnt that she had grown up in Petersburg, but had lived in S—— since her marriage two years before, that she was staying another month in Yalta, and that her husband, who needed a holiday too, might perhaps come and fetch her. She was not sure whether her husband had a post in a Crown Department or under the Provincial Council—and was amused by her own ignorance. And Gurov learnt, too, that she was called Anna Sergeyevna.

Afterwards he thought about her in his room at the hotel—thought she would certainly meet him next day; it would be sure to happen. As he got into bed he thought how lately she had been a girl at school, doing lessons like his own daughter; he recalled the diffidence, the angularity, that was still manifest in her laugh and her manner of talking with a stranger. This must have been the first time in her life she had been alone in surroundings in which she was followed, looked at, and spoken to merely from a secret motive which she could hardly fail to guess. He recalled her slender, delicate neck, her lovely grey eyes.

“There’s something pathetic about her, anyway,” he thought, and fell asleep.

II

A week had passed since they had made acquaintance. It was a holiday. It was sultry indoors, while in the street the wind whirled the dust round and round, and blew people's hats off. It was a thirsty day, and Gurov often went into the pavilion, and pressed Anna Sergeyevna to have syrup and water or an ice. One did not know what to do with oneself.

In the evening when the wind had dropped a little, they went out on the *groyne* to see the steamer come in. There were a great many people walking about the harbour; they had gathered to welcome someone, bringing bouquets. And two peculiarities of a well-dressed Yalta crowd were very conspicuous: the elderly ladies were dressed like young ones, and there were great numbers of generals.

Owing to the roughness of the sea, the steamer arrived late, after the sun had set, and it was a long time turning about before it reached the *groyne*. Anna Sergeyevna looked through her lorgnette at the steamer and the passengers as though looking for acquaintances, and when she turned to Gurov her eyes were shining. She talked a great deal and asked disconnected questions, forgetting next moment what she had asked; then she dropped her lorgnette in the crush.

The festive crowd began to disperse; it was too dark to see people's faces. The wind had completely dropped, but Gurov and Anna Sergeyevna still stood as though waiting to see someone else come from the steamer. Anna Sergeyevna was silent now, and sniffed the flowers without looking at Gurov.

"The weather is better this evening," he said. "Where shall we go now? Shall we drive somewhere?"

She made no answer.

Then he looked at her intently, and all at once put his arm round her and kissed her on the lips, and breathed in the moisture and the fragrance of the flowers; and he immediately looked round him, anxiously wondering whether anyone had seen them.

"Let us go to your hotel," he said softly. And both walked quickly.

The room was close and smelt of the scent she had bought at the Japanese shop. Gurov looked at her and thought: "What different people

one meets in the world!” From the past he preserved memories of careless, good-natured women, who loved cheerfully and were grateful to him for the happiness he gave them, however brief it might be; and of women like his wife who loved without any genuine feeling, with superfluous phrases, affectedly, hysterically, with an expression that suggested that it was not love nor passion, but something more significant; and of two or three others, very beautiful, cold women, on whose faces he had caught a glimpse of a rapacious expression—an obstinate desire to snatch from life more than it could give, and these were capricious, unreflecting, domineering, unintelligent women not in their first youth, and when Gurov grew cold to them their beauty excited his hatred, and the lace on their linen seemed to him like scales.

But in this case there was still the diffidence, the angularity of inexperienced youth, an awkward feeling; and there was a sense of consternation as though someone had suddenly knocked at the door. The attitude of Anna Sergeyevna—“the lady with the dog”—to what had happened was somehow peculiar, very grave, as though it were her fall—so it seemed, and it was strange and inappropriate. Her face dropped and faded, and on both sides of it her long hair hung down mournfully; she mused in a dejected attitude like “the woman who was a sinner” in an old-fashioned picture.

“It’s wrong,” she said. “You will be the first to despise me now.”

There was a watermelon on the table. Gurov cut himself a slice and began eating it without haste. There followed at least half an hour of silence.

Anna Sergeyevna was touching; there was about her the purity of a good, simple woman who had seen little of life. The solitary candle burning on the table threw a faint light on her face, yet it was clear that she was very unhappy.

“How could I despise you?” asked Gurov. “You don’t know what you are saying.”

“God forgive me,” she said, and her eyes filled with tears. “It’s awful.”

“You seem to feel you need to be forgiven.”

“Forgiven? No. I am a bad, low woman; I despise myself and don’t attempt to justify myself. It’s not my husband but myself I have deceived. And not only just now; I have been deceiving myself for a long time. My husband may be a good, honest man, but he is a flunkey! I don’t know what he does there, what his work is, but I know he is a flunkey! I was twenty when I was married to him. I have been tormented by curiosity; I wanted something better. ‘There must be a different sort

of life,' I said to myself. I wanted to live! To live, to live! … I was fired by curiosity … you don't understand it, but, I swear to God, I could not control myself; something happened to me: I could not be restrained. I told my husband I was ill, and came here. … And here I have been walking about as though I were dazed, like a mad creature; … and now I have become a vulgar, contemptible woman whom anyone may despise."

Gurov felt bored already, listening to her. He was irritated by the naive tone, by this remorse, so unexpected and inopportune; but for the tears in her eyes, he might have thought she was jesting or playing a part.

"I don't understand," he said softly. "What is it you want?"

She hid her face on his breast and pressed close to him.

"Believe me, believe me, I beseech you …" she said. "I love a pure, honest life, and sin is loathsome to me. I don't know what I am doing. Simple people say: 'The Evil One has beguiled me.' And I may say of myself now that the Evil One has beguiled me."

"Hush, hush! …" he muttered.

He looked at her fixed, scared eyes, kissed her, talked softly and affectionately, and by degrees she was comforted, and her gaiety returned; they both began laughing.

Afterwards when they went out there was not a soul on the seafront. The town with its cypresses had quite a deathlike air, but the sea still broke noisily on the shore; a single barge was rocking on the waves, and a lantern was blinking sleepily on it.

They found a cab and drove to Oreanda.

"I found out your surname in the hall just now: it was written on the board—Von Diderits," said Gurov. "Is your husband a German?"

"No; I believe his grandfather was a German, but he is an Orthodox Russian himself."

At Oreanda they sat on a seat not far from the church, looked down at the sea, and were silent. Yalta was hardly visible through the morning mist; white clouds stood motionless on the mountaintops. The leaves did not stir on the trees, grasshoppers chirruped, and the monotonous hollow sound of the sea rising up from below, spoke of the peace, of the eternal sleep awaiting us. So it must have sounded when there was no Yalta, no Oreanda here; so it sounds now, and it will sound as indifferently and monotonously when we are all no more. And in this constancy, in this complete indifference to the life and death of each of us, there lies hid, perhaps, a pledge of our eternal salvation, of the unceasing movement of life upon earth, of unceasing progress towards perfection. Sitting beside a young woman who in the dawn seemed so lovely, soothed and

spellbound in these magical surroundings—the sea, mountains, clouds, the open sky—Gurov thought how in reality everything is beautiful in this world when one reflects: everything except what we think or do ourselves when we forget our human dignity and the higher aims of our existence.

A man walked up to them—probably a keeper—looked at them and walked away. And this detail seemed mysterious and beautiful, too. They saw a steamer come from Theodosia, with its lights out in the glow of dawn.

"There is dew on the grass," said Anna Sergeyevna, after a silence.

"Yes. It's time to go home."

They went back to the town.

Then they met every day at twelve o'clock on the seafront, lunched and dined together, went for walks, admired the sea. She complained that she slept badly, that her heart throbbed violently; asked the same questions, troubled now by jealousy and now by the fear that he did not respect her sufficiently. And often in the square or gardens, when there was no one near them, he suddenly drew her to him and kissed her passionately. Complete idleness, these kisses in broad daylight while he looked round in dread of someone's seeing them, the heat, the smell of the sea, and the continual passing to and fro before him of idle, well-dressed, well-fed people, made a new man of him; he told Anna Sergeyevna how beautiful she was, how fascinating. He was impatiently passionate, he would not move a step away from her, while she was often pensive and continually urged him to confess that he did not respect her, did not love her in the least, and thought of her as nothing but a common woman. Rather late almost every evening they drove somewhere out of town, to Oreanda or to the waterfall; and the expedition was always a success, the scenery invariably impressed them as grand and beautiful.

They were expecting her husband to come, but a letter came from him, saying that there was something wrong with his eyes, and he entreated his wife to come home as quickly as possible. Anna Sergeyevna made haste to go.

"It's a good thing I am going away," she said to Gurov. "It's the finger of destiny!"

She went by coach and he went with her. They were driving the whole day. When she had got into a compartment of the express, and when the second bell had rung, she said:

"Let me look at you once more… look at you once again. That's right."

She did not shed tears, but was so sad that she seemed ill, and her face was quivering.

"I shall remember you… think of you," she said. "God be with you; be happy. Don't remember evil against me. We are parting forever—it must be so, for we ought never to have met. Well, God be with you."

The train moved off rapidly, its lights soon vanished from sight, and a minute later there was no sound of it, as though everything had conspired together to end as quickly as possible that sweet delirium, that madness. Left alone on the platform, and gazing into the dark distance, Gurov listened to the chirrup of the grasshoppers and the hum of the telegraph wires, feeling as though he had only just waked up. And he thought, musing, that there had been another episode or adventure in his life, and it, too, was at an end, and nothing was left of it but a memory.… He was moved, sad, and conscious of a slight remorse. This young woman whom he would never meet again had not been happy with him; he was genuinely warm and affectionate with her, but yet in his manner, his tone, and his caresses there had been a shade of light irony, the coarse condescension of a happy man who was, besides, almost twice her age. All the time she had called him kind, exceptional, lofty; obviously he had seemed to her different from what he really was, so he had unintentionally deceived her.…

Here at the station was already a scent of autumn; it was a cold evening.

"It's time for me to go north," thought Gurov as he left the platform. "High time!"

III

At home in Moscow everything was in its winter routine; the stoves were heated, and in the morning it was still dark when the children were having breakfast and getting ready for school, and the nurse would light the lamp for a short time. The frosts had begun already. When the first snow has fallen, on the first day of sledge-driving it is pleasant to see the white earth, the white roofs, to draw soft, delicious breath, and the season brings back the days of one's youth. The old limes and birches, white with hoarfrost, have a good-natured expression; they are nearer to one's heart than cypresses and palms, and near them one doesn't want to be thinking of the sea and the mountains.

Gurov was Moscow born; he arrived in Moscow on a fine frosty day, and when he put on his fur coat and warm gloves, and walked along Petrovka, and when on Saturday evening he heard the ringing of the bells, his recent trip and the places he had seen lost all charm for him. Little by little he became absorbed in Moscow life, greedily read three newspapers a day, and declared he did not read the Moscow papers on principle! He already felt a longing to go to restaurants, clubs, dinner-parties, anniversary celebrations, and he felt flattered at entertaining distinguished lawyers and artists, and at playing cards with a professor at the doctors' club. He could already eat a whole plateful of salt fish and cabbage.

In another month, he fancied, the image of Anna Sergeyevna would be shrouded in a mist in his memory, and only from time to time would visit him in his dreams with a touching smile as others did. But more than a month passed, real winter had come, and everything was still clear in his memory as though he had parted with Anna Sergeyevna only the day before. And his memories glowed more and more vividly. When in the evening stillness he heard from his study the voices of his children, preparing their lessons, or when he listened to a song or the organ at the restaurant, or the storm howled in the chimney, suddenly everything would rise up in his memory: what had happened on the *groyne*, and the early morning with the mist on the mountains, and the steamer coming from Theodosia, and the kisses. He would pace a long time about his

room, remembering it all and smiling; then his memories passed into dreams, and in his fancy the past was mingled with what was to come. Anna Sergeyevna did not visit him in dreams, but followed him about everywhere like a shadow and haunted him. When he shut his eyes he saw her as though she were living before him, and she seemed to him lovelier, younger, tenderer than she was; and he imagined himself finer than he had been in Yalta. In the evenings she peeped out at him from the bookcase, from the fireplace, from the corner—he heard her breathing, the caressing rustle of her dress. In the street he watched the women, looking for someone like her.

He was tormented by an intense desire to confide his memories to someone. But in his home it was impossible to talk of his love, and he had no one outside; he could not talk to his tenants nor to anyone at the bank. And what had he to talk of? Had he been in love, then? Had there been anything beautiful, poetical, or edifying or simply interesting in his relations with Anna Sergeyevna? And there was nothing for him but to talk vaguely of love, of woman, and no one guessed what it meant; only his wife twitched her black eyebrows, and said:

"The part of a lady-killer does not suit you at all, Dimitri."

One evening, coming out of the doctors' club with an official with whom he had been playing cards, he could not resist saying:

"If only you knew what a fascinating woman I made the acquaintance of in Yalta!"

The official got into his sledge and was driving away, but turned suddenly and shouted:

"Dmitri Dmitritch!"

"What?"

"You were right this evening: the sturgeon was a bit too strong!"

These words, so ordinary, for some reason moved Gurov to indignation, and struck him as degrading and unclean. What savage manners, what people! What senseless nights, what uninteresting, uneventful days! The rage for card-playing, the gluttony, the drunkenness, the continual talk always about the same thing. Useless pursuits and conversations always about the same things absorb the better part of one's time, the better part of one's strength, and in the end there is left a life grovelling and curtailed, worthless and trivial, and there is no escaping or getting away from it—just as though one were in a madhouse or a prison.

Gurov did not sleep all night, and was filled with indignation. And he had a headache all next day. And the next night he slept badly; he sat up

in bed, thinking, or paced up and down his room. He was sick of his children, sick of the bank; he had no desire to go anywhere or to talk of anything.

In the holidays in December he prepared for a journey, and told his wife he was going to Petersburg to do something in the interests of a young friend—and he set off for S——. What for? He did not very well know himself. He wanted to see Anna Sergeyevna and to talk with her—to arrange a meeting, if possible.

He reached S—— in the morning, and took the best room at the hotel, in which the floor was covered with grey army cloth, and on the table was an inkstand, grey with dust and adorned with a figure on horseback, with its hat in its hand and its head broken off. The hotel porter gave him the necessary information; Von Diderits lived in a house of his own in Old Gontcharny Street—it was not far from the hotel: he was rich and lived in good style, and had his own horses; everyone in the town knew him. The porter pronounced the name “Dridirits.”

Gurov went without haste to Old Gontcharny Street and found the house. Just opposite the house stretched a long grey fence adorned with nails.

“One would run away from a fence like that,” thought Gurov, looking from the fence to the windows of the house and back again.

He considered: today was a holiday, and the husband would probably be at home. And in any case it would be tactless to go into the house and upset her. If he were to send her a note it might fall into her husband’s hands, and then it might ruin everything. The best thing was to trust to chance. And he kept walking up and down the street by the fence, waiting for the chance. He saw a beggar go in at the gate and dogs fly at him; then an hour later he heard a piano, and the sounds were faint and indistinct. Probably it was Anna Sergeyevna playing. The front door suddenly opened, and an old woman came out, followed by the familiar white Pomeranian. Gurov was on the point of calling to the dog, but his heart began beating violently, and in his excitement he could not remember the dog’s name.

He walked up and down, and loathed the grey fence more and more, and by now he thought irritably that Anna Sergeyevna had forgotten him, and was perhaps already amusing herself with someone else, and that that was very natural in a young woman who had nothing to look at from morning till night but that confounded fence. He went back to his hotel room and sat for a long while on the sofa, not knowing what to do, then he had dinner and a long nap.

“How stupid and worrying it is!” he thought when he woke and looked at the dark windows: it was already evening. “Here I’ve had a good sleep for some reason. What shall I do in the night?”

He sat on the bed, which was covered by a cheap grey blanket, such as one sees in hospitals, and he taunted himself in his vexation:

“So much for the lady with the dog… so much for the adventure.… You’re in a nice fix.…”

That morning at the station a poster in large letters had caught his eye. *The Geisha* was to be performed for the first time. He thought of this and went to the theatre.

“It’s quite possible she may go to the first performance,” he thought.

The theatre was full. As in all provincial theatres, there was a fog above the chandelier, the gallery was noisy and restless; in the front row the local dandies were standing up before the beginning of the performance, with their hands behind them; in the Governor’s box the Governor’s daughter, wearing a boa, was sitting in the front seat, while the Governor himself lurked modestly behind the curtain with only his hands visible; the orchestra was a long time tuning up; the stage curtain swayed. All the time the audience were coming in and taking their seats Gurov looked at them eagerly.

Anna Sergeyevna, too, came in. She sat down in the third row, and when Gurov looked at her his heart contracted, and he understood clearly that for him there was in the whole world no creature so near, so precious, and so important to him; she, this little woman, in no way remarkable, lost in a provincial crowd, with a vulgar lorgnette in her hand, filled his whole life now, was his sorrow and his joy, the one happiness that he now desired for himself, and to the sounds of the inferior orchestra, of the wretched provincial violins, he thought how lovely she was. He thought and dreamed.

A young man with small side-whiskers, tall and stooping, came in with Anna Sergeyevna and sat down beside her; he bent his head at every step and seemed to be continually bowing. Most likely this was the husband whom at Yalta, in a rush of bitter feeling, she had called a flunkey. And there really was in his long figure, his side-whiskers, and the small bald patch on his head, something of the flunkey’s obsequiousness; his smile was sugary, and in his buttonhole there was some badge of distinction like the number on a waiter.

During the first interval the husband went away to smoke; she remained alone in her stall. Gurov, who was sitting in the stalls, too, went up to her and said in a trembling voice, with a forced smile:

“Good evening.”

She glanced at him and turned pale, then glanced again with horror, unable to believe her eyes, and tightly gripped the fan and the lorgnette in her hands, evidently struggling with herself not to faint. Both were silent. She was sitting, he was standing, frightened by her confusion and not venturing to sit down beside her. The violins and the flute began tuning up. He felt suddenly frightened; it seemed as though all the people in the boxes were looking at them. She got up and went quickly to the door; he followed her, and both walked senselessly along passages, and up and down stairs, and figures in legal, scholastic, and civil service uniforms, all wearing badges, flitted before their eyes. They caught glimpses of ladies, of fur coats hanging on pegs; the draughts blew on them, bringing a smell of stale tobacco. And Gurov, whose heart was beating violently, thought:

“Oh, heavens! Why are these people here and this orchestra!…”

And at that instant he recalled how when he had seen Anna Sergeyevna off at the station he had thought that everything was over and they would never meet again. But how far they were still from the end!

On the narrow, gloomy staircase over which was written “To the Amphitheatre,” she stopped.

“How you have frightened me!” she said, breathing hard, still pale and overwhelmed. “Oh, how you have frightened me! I am half dead. Why have you come? Why?”

“But do understand, Anna, do understand…” he said hastily in a low voice. “I entreat you to understand.…”

She looked at him with dread, with entreaty, with love; she looked at him intently, to keep his features more distinctly in her memory.

“I am so unhappy,” she went on, not heeding him. “I have thought of nothing but you all the time; I live only in the thought of you. And I wanted to forget, to forget you; but why, oh, why, have you come?”

On the landing above them two schoolboys were smoking and looking down, but that was nothing to Gurov; he drew Anna Sergeyevna to him, and began kissing her face, her cheeks, and her hands.

“What are you doing, what are you doing!” she cried in horror, pushing him away. “We are mad. Go away today; go away at once.… I beseech you by all that is sacred, I implore you.… There are people coming this way!”

Someone was coming up the stairs.

“You must go away,” Anna Sergeyevna went on in a whisper. “Do you hear, Dmitri Dmitritch? I will come and see you in Moscow. I have never been happy; I am miserable now, and I never, never shall be happy, never! Don’t make me suffer still more! I swear I’ll come to Moscow. But now let us part. My precious, good, dear one, we must part!”

She pressed his hand and began rapidly going downstairs, looking round at him, and from her eyes he could see that she really was unhappy. Gurov stood for a little while, listened, then, when all sound had died away, he found his coat and left the theatre.

IV

And Anna Sergeyevna began coming to see him in Moscow. Once in two or three months she left S——, telling her husband that she was going to consult a doctor about an internal complaint—and her husband believed her, and did not believe her. In Moscow she stayed at the Slaviansky Bazaar hotel, and at once sent a man in a red cap to Gurov. Gurov went to see her, and no one in Moscow knew of it.

Once he was going to see her in this way on a winter morning (the messenger had come the evening before when he was out). With him walked his daughter, whom he wanted to take to school: it was on the way. Snow was falling in big wet flakes.

"It's three degrees above freezing-point, and yet it is snowing," said Gurov to his daughter. "The thaw is only on the surface of the earth; there is quite a different temperature at a greater height in the atmosphere."

"And why are there no thunderstorms in the winter, father?"

He explained that, too. He talked, thinking all the while that he was going to see her, and no living soul knew of it, and probably never would know. He had two lives: one, open, seen and known by all who cared to know, full of relative truth and of relative falsehood, exactly like the lives of his friends and acquaintances; and another life running its course in secret. And through some strange, perhaps accidental, conjunction of circumstances, everything that was essential, of interest and of value to him, everything in which he was sincere and did not deceive himself, everything that made the kernel of his life, was hidden from other people; and all that was false in him, the sheath in which he hid himself to conceal the truth—such, for instance, as his work in the bank, his discussions at the club, his "lower race," his presence with his wife at anniversary festivities—all that was open. And he judged of others by himself, not believing in what he saw, and always believing that every man had his real, most interesting life under the cover of secrecy and under the cover of night. All personal life rested on secrecy, and possibly it was partly on that account that civilised man was so nervously anxious that personal privacy should be respected.

After leaving his daughter at school, Gurov went on to the Slaviansky Bazaar. He took off his fur coat below, went upstairs, and softly knocked at the door. Anna Sergeyevna, wearing his favourite grey dress, exhausted by the journey and the suspense, had been expecting him since the evening before. She was pale; she looked at him, and did not smile, and he had hardly come in when she fell on his breast. Their kiss was slow and prolonged, as though they had not met for two years.

"Well, how are you getting on there?" he asked. "What news?"

"Wait; I'll tell you directly.… I can't talk."

She could not speak; she was crying. She turned away from him, and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Let her have her cry out. I'll sit down and wait," he thought, and he sat down in an armchair.

Then he rang and asked for tea to be brought him, and while he drank his tea she remained standing at the window with her back to him. She was crying from emotion, from the miserable consciousness that their life was so hard for them; they could only meet in secret, hiding themselves from people, like thieves! Was not their life shattered?

"Come, do stop!" he said.

It was evident to him that this love of theirs would not soon be over, that he could not see the end of it. Anna Sergeyevna grew more and more attached to him. She adored him, and it was unthinkable to say to her that it was bound to have an end some day; besides, she would not have believed it!

He went up to her and took her by the shoulders to say something affectionate and cheering, and at that moment he saw himself in the looking-glass.

His hair was already beginning to turn grey. And it seemed strange to him that he had grown so much older, so much plainer during the last few years. The shoulders on which his hands rested were warm and quivering. He felt compassion for this life, still so warm and lovely, but probably already not far from beginning to fade and wither like his own. Why did she love him so much? He always seemed to women different from what he was, and they loved in him not himself, but the man created by their imagination, whom they had been eagerly seeking all their lives; and afterwards, when they noticed their mistake, they loved him all the same. And not one of them had been happy with him. Time passed, he had made their acquaintance, got on with them, parted, but he had never once loved; it was anything you like, but not love.

And only now when his head was grey he had fallen properly, really in love—for the first time in his life.

Anna Sergeyevna and he loved each other like people very close and akin, like husband and wife, like tender friends; it seemed to them that fate itself had meant them for one another, and they could not understand why he had a wife and she a husband; and it was as though they were a pair of birds of passage, caught and forced to live in different cages. They forgave each other for what they were ashamed of in their past, they forgave everything in the present, and felt that this love of theirs had changed them both.

In moments of depression in the past he had comforted himself with any arguments that came into his mind, but now he no longer cared for arguments; he felt profound compassion, he wanted to be sincere and tender.…

"Don't cry, my darling," he said. "You've had your cry; that's enough.… Let us talk now, let us think of some plan."

Then they spent a long while taking counsel together, talked of how to avoid the necessity for secrecy, for deception, for living in different towns and not seeing each other for long at a time. How could they be free from this intolerable bondage?

"How? How?" he asked, clutching his head. "How?"

And it seemed as though in a little while the solution would be found, and then a new and splendid life would begin; and it was clear to both of them that they had still a long, long road before them, and that the most complicated and difficult part of it was only just beginning.

At Christmas Time

I

"What shall I write?" said Yegor, and he dipped his pen in the ink.

Vasilisa had not seen her daughter for four years. Her daughter Yefimya had gone after her wedding to Petersburg, had sent them two letters, and since then seemed to vanish out of their lives; there had been no sight nor sound of her. And whether the old woman were milking her cow at dawn, or heating her stove, or dozing at night, she was always thinking of one and the same thing—what was happening to Yefimya, whether she were alive out yonder. She ought to have sent a letter, but the old father could not write, and there was no one to write.

But now Christmas had come, and Vasilisa could not bear it any longer, and went to the tavern to Yegor, the brother of the innkeeper's wife, who had sat in the tavern doing nothing ever since he came back from the army; people said that he could write letters very well if he were properly paid. Vasilisa talked to the cook at the tavern, then to the mistress of the house, then to Yegor himself. They agreed upon fifteen kopecks.

And now—it happened on the second day of the holidays, in the tavern kitchen—Yegor was sitting at the table, holding the pen in his hand. Vasilisa was standing before him, pondering with an expression of anxiety and woe on her face. Pyotr, her husband, a very thin old man with a brownish bald patch, had come with her; he stood looking straight before him like a blind man. On the stove a piece of pork was being braised in a saucepan; it was spurting and hissing, and seemed to be actually saying: "*Flu-flu-flu.*" It was stifling.

"What am I to write?" Yegor asked again.

"What?" asked Vasilisa, looking at him angrily and suspiciously. "Don't worry me! You are not writing for nothing; no fear, you'll be paid

for it. Come, write: ‘To our dear son-in-law, Andrey Hrisanfitch, and to our only beloved daughter, Yefimya Petrovna, with our love we send a low bow and our parental blessing abiding forever.’”

“Written; fire away.”

“‘And we wish them a happy Christmas; we are alive and well, and I wish you the same, please the Lord… the Heavenly King.’”

Vasilisa pondered and exchanged glances with the old man.

“‘And I wish you the same, please the Lord the Heavenly King,’” she repeated, beginning to cry.

She could say nothing more. And yet before, when she lay awake thinking at night, it had seemed to her that she could not get all she had to say into a dozen letters. Since the time when her daughter had gone away with her husband much water had flowed into the sea, the old people had lived feeling bereaved, and sighed heavily at night as though they had buried their daughter. And how many events had occurred in the village since then, how many marriages and deaths! How long the winters had been! How long the nights!

“It’s hot,” said Yegor, unbuttoning his waistcoat. “It must be seventy degrees. What more?” he asked.

The old people were silent.

“What does your son-in-law do in Petersburg?” asked Yegor.

“He was a soldier, my good friend,” the old man answered in a weak voice. “He left the service at the same time as you did. He was a soldier, and now, to be sure, he is at Petersburg at a hydropathic establishment. The doctor treats the sick with water. So he, to be sure, is house-porter at the doctor’s.”

“Here it is written down,” said the old woman, taking a letter out of her pocket. “We got it from Yefimya, goodness knows when. Maybe they are no longer in this world.”

Yegor thought a little and began writing rapidly:

“At the present time”—he wrote—“since your destiny through your own doing allotted you to the Military Career, we counsel you to look into the Code of Disciplinary Offences and Fundamental Laws of the War Office, and you will see in that law the Civilization of the Officials of the War Office.”

He wrote and kept reading aloud what was written, while Vasilisa considered what she ought to write: how great had been their want the year before, how their corn had not lasted even till Christmas, how they had to sell their cow. She ought to ask for money, ought to write that the old father was often ailing and would soon no doubt give up his soul to

God… but how to express this in words? What must be said first and what afterwards?

"Take note," Yegor went on writing, "in volume five of the Army Regulations soldier is a common noun and a proper one, a soldier of the first rank is called a general, and of the last a private.…"

The old man stirred his lips and said softly:

"It would be all right to have a look at the grandchildren."

"What grandchildren?" asked the old woman, and she looked angrily at him; "perhaps there are none."

"Well, but perhaps there are. Who knows?"

"And thereby you can judge," Yegor hurried on, "what is the enemy without and what is the enemy within. The foremost of our enemies within is Bacchus." The pen squeaked, executing upon the paper flourishes like fishhooks. Yegor hastened and read over every line several times. He sat on a stool sprawling his broad feet under the table, well-fed, bursting with health, with a coarse animal face and a red bull neck. He was vulgarity itself: coarse, conceited, invincible, proud of having been born and bred in a pothouse; and Vasilisa quite understood the vulgarity, but could not express it in words, and could only look angrily and suspiciously at Yegor. Her head was beginning to ache, and her thoughts were in confusion from the sound of his voice and his unintelligible words, from the heat and the stuffiness, and she said nothing and thought nothing, but simply waited for him to finish scribbling. But the old man looked with full confidence. He believed in his old woman who had brought him there, and in Yegor; and when he had mentioned the hydropathic establishment it could be seen that he believed in the establishment and the healing efficacy of water.

Having finished the letter, Yegor got up and read the whole of it through from the beginning. The old man did not understand, but he nodded his head trustfully.

"That's all right; it is smooth…" he said. "God give you health. That's all right.…"

They laid on the table three five-kopeck pieces and went out of the tavern; the old man looked immovably straight before him as though he were blind, and perfect trustfulness was written on his face; but as Vasilisa came out of the tavern she waved angrily at the dog, and said angrily:

"Ugh, the plague."

The old woman did not sleep all night; she was disturbed by thoughts, and at daybreak she got up, said her prayers, and went to the station to

send off the letter.

It was between eight and nine miles to the station.

II

Dr. B. O. Mozelweiser's hydropathic establishment worked on New Year's Day exactly as on ordinary days; the only difference was that the porter, Andrey Hrisanfitch, had on a uniform with new braiding, his boots had an extra polish, and he greeted every visitor with "A Happy New Year to you!"

It was the morning; Andrey Hrisanfitch was standing at the door, reading the newspaper. Just at ten o'clock there arrived a general, one of the habitual visitors, and directly after him the postman; Andrey Hrisanfitch helped the general off with his greatcoat, and said:

"A Happy New Year to your Excellency!"

"Thank you, my good fellow; the same to you."

And at the top of the stairs the general asked, nodding towards the door (he asked the same question every day and always forgot the answer):

"And what is there in that room?"

"The massage room, your Excellency."

When the general's steps had died away Andrey Hrisanfitch looked at the post that had come, and found one addressed to himself. He tore it open, read several lines, then, looking at the newspaper, he walked without haste to his own room, which was downstairs close by at the end of the passage. His wife Yefimya was sitting on the bed, feeding her baby; another child, the eldest, was standing by, laying its curly head on her knee; a third was asleep on the bed.

Going into the room, Andrey gave his wife the letter and said:

"From the country, I suppose."

Then he walked out again without taking his eyes from the paper. He could hear Yefimya with a shaking voice reading the first lines. She read them and could read no more; these lines were enough for her. She burst into tears, and hugging her eldest child, kissing him, she began saying—and it was hard to say whether she were laughing or crying:

"It's from granny, from grandfather," she said. "From the country.… The Heavenly Mother, Saints and Martyrs! The snow lies heaped up under the roofs now… the trees are as white as white. The boys slide on

little sledges… and dear old bald grandfather is on the stove… and there is a little yellow dog.… My own darlings!”

Andrey Hrisanfitch, hearing this, recalled that his wife had on three or four occasions given him letters and asked him to send them to the country, but some important business had always prevented him; he had not sent them, and the letters somehow got lost.

“And little hares run about in the fields,” Yefimya went on chanting, kissing her boy and shedding tears. “Grandfather is kind and gentle; granny is good, too—kindhearted. They are warmhearted in the country, they are God-fearing… and there is a little church in the village; the peasants sing in the choir. Queen of Heaven, Holy Mother and Defender, take us away from here!”

Andrey Hrisanfitch returned to his room to smoke a little till there was another ring at the door, and Yefimya ceased speaking, subsided, and wiped her eyes, though her lips were still quivering. She was very much frightened of him—oh, how frightened of him! She trembled and was reduced to terror by the sound of his steps, by the look in his eyes, and dared not utter a word in his presence.

Andrey Hrisanfitch lighted a cigarette, but at that very moment there was a ring from upstairs. He put out his cigarette, and, assuming a very grave face, hastened to his front door.

The general was coming downstairs, fresh and rosy from his bath.

“And what is there in that room?” he asked, pointing to a door.

Andrey Hrisanfitch put his hands down swiftly to the seams of his trousers, and pronounced loudly:

“*Charcot douche*, your Excellency!”

In the Ravine

I

The village of Ukleevo lay in a ravine so that only the belfry and the chimneys of the printed cottons factories could be seen from the high road and the railway-station. When visitors asked what village this was, they were told:

"That's the village where the deacon ate all the caviar at the funeral."

It had happened at the dinner at the funeral of Kostukov that the old deacon saw among the savouries some large-grained caviar and began eating it greedily; people nudged him, tugged at his arm, but he seemed petrified with enjoyment: felt nothing, and only went on eating. He ate up all the caviar, and there were four pounds in the jar. And years had passed since then, the deacon had long been dead, but the caviar was still remembered. Whether life was so poor here or people had not been clever enough to notice anything but that unimportant incident that had occurred ten years before, anyway the people had nothing else to tell about the village Ukleevo.

The village was never free from fever, and there was boggy mud there even in the summer, especially under the fences over which hung old willow trees that gave deep shade. Here there was always a smell from the factory refuse and the acetic acid which was used in the finishing of the cotton print.

The three cotton factories and the tanyard were not in the village itself, but a little way off. They were small factories, and not more than four hundred workmen were employed in all of them. The tanyard often made the water in the little river stink; the refuse contaminated the meadows, the peasants' cattle suffered from Siberian plague, and orders were given that the factory should be closed. It was considered to be closed, but went on working in secret with the connivance of the local police officer

and the district doctor, who was paid ten roubles a month by the owner. In the whole village there were only two decent houses built of brick with iron roofs; one of them was the local court, in the other, a two-storied house just opposite the church, there lived a shopkeeper from Epifan called Grigory Petrovitch Tsybukin.

Grigory kept a grocer's shop, but that was only for appearance' sake: in reality he sold vodka, cattle, hides, grain, and pigs; he traded in anything that came to hand, and when, for instance, magpies were wanted abroad for ladies' hats, he made some thirty kopecks on every pair of birds; he bought timber for felling, lent money at interest, and altogether was a sharp old man, full of resources.

He had two sons. The elder, Anisim, was in the police in the detective department and was rarely at home. The younger, Stepan, had gone in for trade and helped his father: but no great help was expected from him as he was weak in health and deaf; his wife Aksinya, a handsome woman with a good figure, who wore a hat and carried a parasol on holidays, got up early and went to bed late, and ran about all day long, picking up her skirts and jingling her keys, going from the granary to the cellar and from there to the shop, and old Tsybukin looked at her good-humouredly while his eyes glowed, and at such moments he regretted she had not been married to his elder son instead of to the younger one, who was deaf, and who evidently knew very little about female beauty.

The old man had always an inclination for family life, and he loved his family more than anything on earth, especially his elder son, the detective, and his daughter-in-law. Aksinya had no sooner married the deaf son than she began to display an extraordinary gift for business, and knew who could be allowed to run up a bill and who could not: she kept the keys and would not trust them even to her husband; she kept the accounts by means of the reckoning beads, looked at the horses' teeth like a peasant, and was always laughing or shouting; and whatever she did or said the old man was simply delighted and muttered:

"Well done, daughter-in-law! You are a smart wench!"

He was a widower, but a year after his son's marriage he could not resist getting married himself. A girl was found for him, living twenty miles from Ukleevo, called Varvara Nikolaevna, no longer quite young, but good-looking, comely, and belonging to a decent family. As soon as she was installed into the upper-storey room everything in the house seemed to brighten up as though new glass had been put into all the windows. The lamps gleamed before the icons, the tables were covered with snow-white cloths, flowers with red buds made their appearance in

the windows and in the front garden, and at dinner, instead of eating from a single bowl, each person had a separate plate set for him. Varvara Nikolaevna had a pleasant, friendly smile, and it seemed as though the whole house were smiling, too. Beggars and pilgrims, male and female, began to come into the yard, a thing which had never happened in the past; the plaintive singsong voices of the Ukleevo peasant women and the apologetic coughs of weak, seedy-looking men, who had been dismissed from the factory for drunkenness were heard under the windows. Varvara helped them with money, with bread, with old clothes, and afterwards, when she felt more at home, began taking things out of the shop. One day the deaf man saw her take four ounces of tea and that disturbed him.

"Here, mother's taken four ounces of tea," he informed his father afterwards; "where is that to be entered?"

The old man made no reply but stood still and thought a moment, moving his eyebrows, and then went upstairs to his wife.

"Varvarushka, if you want anything out of the shop," he said affectionately, "take it, my dear. Take it and welcome; don't hesitate."

And the next day the deaf man, running across the yard, called to her:

"If there is anything you want, mother, take it."

There was something new, something gay and lighthearted in her giving of alms, just as there was in the lamps before the icons and in the red flowers. When at Carnival or at the church festival, which lasted for three days, they sold the peasants tainted salt meat, smelling so strong it was hard to stand near the tub of it, and took scythes, caps, and their wives' kerchiefs in pledge from the drunken men; when the factory hands stupefied with bad vodka lay rolling in the mud, and sin seemed to hover thick like a fog in the air, then it was a relief to think that up there in the house there was a gentle, neatly dressed woman who had nothing to do with salt meat or vodka; her charity had in those burdensome, murky days the effect of a safety valve in a machine.

The days in Tsybukin's house were spent in business cares. Before the sun had risen in the morning Aksinya was panting and puffing as she washed in the outer room, and the samovar was boiling in the kitchen with a hum that boded no good. Old Grigory Petrovitch, dressed in a long black coat, cotton breeches and shiny top boots, looking a dapper little figure, walked about the rooms, tapping with his little heels like the father-in-law in a well-known song. The shop was opened. When it was daylight a racing droshky was brought up to the front door and the old man got jauntily on to it, pulling his big cap down to his ears; and,

looking at him, no one would have said he was fifty-six. His wife and daughter-in-law saw him off, and at such times when he had on a good, clean coat, and had in the droshky a huge black horse that had cost three hundred roubles, the old man did not like the peasants to come up to him with their complaints and petitions; he hated the peasants and disdained them, and if he saw some peasants waiting at the gate, he would shout angrily:

"Why are you standing there? Go further off."

Or if it were a beggar, he would say:

"God will provide!"

He used to drive off on business; his wife, in a dark dress and a black apron, tidied the rooms or helped in the kitchen. Aksinya attended to the shop, and from the yard could be heard the clink of bottles and of money, her laughter and loud talk, and the anger of customers whom she had offended; and at the same time it could be seen that the secret sale of vodka was already going on in the shop. The deaf man sat in the shop, too, or walked about the street bareheaded, with his hands in his pockets looking absentmindedly now at the huts, now at the sky overhead. Six times a day they had tea; four times a day they sat down to meals; and in the evening they counted over their takings, put them down, went to bed, and slept soundly.

All the three cotton factories in Ukleevo and the houses of the factory owners—Hrymin Seniors, Hrymin Juniors, and Kostukov—were on a telephone. The telephone was laid on in the local court, too, but it soon ceased to work as bugs and beetles bred there. The elder of the rural district had had little education and wrote every word in the official documents in capitals. But when the telephone was spoiled he said:

"Yes, now we shall be badly off without a telephone."

The Hrymin Seniors were continually at law with the Juniors, and sometimes the Juniors quarrelled among themselves and began going to law, and their factory did not work for a month or two till they were reconciled again, and this was an entertainment for the people of Ukleevo, as there was a great deal of talk and gossip on the occasion of each quarrel. On holidays Kostukov and the Juniors used to get up races, used to dash about Ukleevo and run over calves. Aksinya, rustling her starched petticoats, used to promenade in a low-necked dress up and down the street near her shop; the Juniors used to snatch her up and carry her off as though by force. Then old Tsybukin would drive out to show his new horse and take Varvara with him.

In the evening, after the races, when people were going to bed, an expensive concertina was played in the Juniors' yard and, if it were a moonlight night, those sounds sent a thrill of delight to the heart, and Ukleevo no longer seemed a wretched hole.

II

The elder son Anisim came home very rarely, only on great holidays, but he often sent by a returning villager presents and letters written in very good writing by some other hand, always on a sheet of foolscap in the form of a petition. The letters were full of expressions that Anisim never made use of in conversation: “Dear papa and mamma, I send you a pound of flower tea for the satisfaction of your physical needs.”

At the bottom of every letter was scratched, as though with a broken pen: “Anisim Tsybukin,” and again in the same excellent hand: “Agent.”

The letters were read aloud several times, and the old father, touched, red with emotion, would say:

“Here he did not care to stay at home, he has gone in for an intellectual line. Well, let him! Every man to his own job!”

It happened just before Carnival there was a heavy storm of rain mixed with hail; the old man and Varvara went to the window to look at it, and lo and behold! Anisim drove up in a sledge from the station. He was quite unexpected. He came indoors, looking anxious and troubled about something, and he remained the same all the time; there was something free and easy in his manner. He was in no haste to go away, it seemed, as though he had been dismissed from the service. Varvara was pleased at his arrival; she looked at him with a sly expression, sighed, and shook her head.

“How is this, my friends?” she said. “Tut, tut, the lad’s in his twenty-eighth year, and he is still leading a gay bachelor life; tut, tut, tut.…”

From the other room her soft, even speech sounded like tut, tut, tut. She began whispering with her husband and Aksinya, and their faces wore the same sly and mysterious expression as though they were conspirators.

It was decided to marry Anisim.

“Oh, tut, tut… the younger brother has been married long ago,” said Varvara, “and you are still without a helpmate like a cock at a fair. What is the meaning of it? Tut, tut, you will be married, please God, then as you choose—you will go into the service and your wife will remain here at home to help us. There is no order in your life, young man, and I see

you have forgotten how to live properly. Tut, tut, it’s the same trouble with all you townspeople.”

When the Tsybukins married, the most handsome girls were chosen as brides for them as rich men. For Anisim, too, they found a handsome one. He was himself of an uninteresting and inconspicuous appearance; of a feeble, sickly build and short stature; he had full, puffy cheeks which looked as though he were blowing them out; his eyes looked with a keen, unblinking stare; his beard was red and scanty, and when he was thinking he always put it into his mouth and bit it; moreover he often drank too much, and that was noticeable from his face and his walk. But when he was informed that they had found a very beautiful bride for him, he said:

“Oh well, I am not a fright myself. All of us Tsybukins are handsome, I may say.”

The village of Torguevo was near the town. Half of it had lately been incorporated into the town, the other half remained a village. In the first—the town half—there was a widow living in her own little house; she had a sister living with her who was quite poor and went out to work by the day, and this sister had a daughter called Lipa, a girl who went out to work, too. People in Torguevo were already talking about Lipa’s good looks, but her terrible poverty put everyone off; people opined that some widower or elderly man would marry her regardless of her poverty, or would perhaps take her to himself without marriage, and that her mother would get enough to eat living with her. Varvara heard about Lipa from the matchmakers, and she drove over to Torguevo.

Then a visit of inspection was arranged at the aunt’s, with lunch and wine all in due order, and Lipa wore a new pink dress made on purpose for this occasion, and a crimson ribbon like a flame gleamed in her hair. She was pale-faced, thin, and frail, with soft, delicate features sunburnt from working in the open air; a shy, mournful smile always hovered about her face, and there was a childlike look in her eyes, trustful and curious.

She was young, quite a little girl, her bosom still scarcely perceptible, but she could be married because she had reached the legal age. She really was beautiful, and the only thing that might be thought unattractive was her big masculine hands which hung idle now like two big claws.

“There is no dowry—and we don’t think much of that,” said Tsybukin to the aunt. “We took a wife from a poor family for our son Stepan, too,

and now we can't say too much for her. In house and in business alike she has hands of gold."

Lipa stood in the doorway and looked as though she would say: "Do with me as you will, I trust you," while her mother Praskovya the workwoman hid herself in the kitchen numb with shyness. At one time in her youth a merchant whose floors she was scrubbing stamped at her in a rage; she went chill with terror and there always was a feeling of fear at the bottom of her heart. When she was frightened her arms and legs trembled and her cheeks twitched. Sitting in the kitchen she tried to hear what the visitors were saying, and she kept crossing herself, pressing her fingers to her forehead, and gazing at the icons. Anisim, slightly drunk, opened the door into the kitchen and said in a free-and-easy way:

"Why are you sitting in here, precious mamma? We are dull without you."

And Praskovya, overcome with timidity, pressing her hands to her lean, wasted bosom, said:

"Oh, not at all.… It's very kind of you."

After the visit of inspection the wedding day was fixed. Then Anisim walked about the rooms at home whistling, or suddenly thinking of something, would fall to brooding and would look at the floor fixedly, silently, as though he would probe to the depths of the earth. He expressed neither pleasure that he was to be married, married so soon, on Low Sunday, nor a desire to see his bride, but simply went on whistling. And it was evident he was only getting married because his father and stepmother wished him to, and because it was the custom in the village to marry the son in order to have a woman to help in the house. When he went away he seemed in no haste, and behaved altogether not as he had done on previous visits—was particularly free and easy, and talked inappropriately.

III

In the village of Shikalovo lived two dressmakers, sisters, belonging to the Flagellant sect. The new clothes for the wedding were ordered from them, and they often came to try them on, and stayed a long while drinking tea. They were making Varvara a brown dress with black lace and bugles on it, and Aksinya a light green dress with a yellow front, with a train. When the dressmakers had finished their work Tsybukin paid them not in money but in goods from the shop, and they went away depressed, carrying parcels of tallow candles and tins of sardines which they did not in the least need, and when they got out of the village into the open country they sat down on a hillock and cried.

Anisim arrived three days before the wedding, rigged out in new clothes from top to toe. He had dazzling india-rubber goloshes, and instead of a cravat wore a red cord with little balls on it, and over his shoulder he had hung an overcoat, also new, without putting his arms into the sleeves.

After crossing himself sedately before the icon, he greeted his father and gave him ten silver roubles and ten half-roubles; to Varvara he gave as much, and to Aksinya twenty quarter-roubles. The chief charm of the present lay in the fact that all the coins, as though carefully matched, were new and glittered in the sun. Trying to seem grave and sedate he pursed up his face and puffed out his cheeks, and he smelt of spirits. Probably he had visited the refreshment bar at every station. And again there was a free-and-easiness about the man—something superfluous and out of place. Then Anisim had lunch and drank tea with the old man, and Varvara turned the new coins over in her hand and inquired about villagers who had gone to live in the town.

“They are all right, thank God, they get on quite well,” said Anisim. “Only something has happened to Ivan Yegorov: his old wife Sofya Nikiforovna is dead. From consumption. They ordered the memorial dinner for the peace of her soul at the confectioner’s at two and a half roubles a head. And there was real wine. Those who were peasants from our village—they paid two and a half roubles for them, too. They ate nothing, as though a peasant would understand sauce!”

“Two and a half,” said his father, shaking his head.

“Well, it’s not like the country there, you go into a restaurant to have a snack of something, you ask for one thing and another, others join till there is a party of us, one has a drink—and before you know where you are it is daylight and you’ve three or four roubles each to pay. And when one is with Samorodov he likes to have coffee with brandy in it after everything, and brandy is sixty kopecks for a little glass.”

“And he is making it all up,” said the old man enthusiastically; “he is making it all up, lying!”

“I am always with Samorodov now. It is Samorodov who writes my letters to you. He writes splendidly. And if I were to tell you, mamma,” Anisim went on gaily, addressing Varvara, “the sort of fellow that Samorodov is, you would not believe me. We call him Muhtar, because he is black like an Armenian. I can see through him, I know all his affairs like the five fingers of my hand, and he feels that, and he always follows me about, we are regular inseparables. He seems not to like it in a way, but he can’t get on without me. Where I go he goes. I have a correct, trustworthy eye, mamma. One sees a peasant selling a shirt in the market place. ‘Stay, that shirt’s stolen.’ And really it turns out it is so: the shirt was a stolen one.”

“What do you tell from?” asked Varvara.

“Not from anything, I have just an eye for it. I know nothing about the shirt, only for some reason I seem drawn to it: it’s stolen, and that’s all I can say. Among us detectives it’s come to their saying, ‘Oh, Anisim has gone to shoot snipe!’ That means looking for stolen goods. Yes.… Anybody can steal, but it is another thing to keep! The earth is wide, but there is nowhere to hide stolen goods.”

“In our village a ram and two ewes were carried off last week,” said Varvara, and she heaved a sigh, “and there is no one to try and find them.… Oh, tut, tut.…”

“Well, I might have a try. I don’t mind.”

The day of the wedding arrived. It was a cool but bright, cheerful April day. People were driving about Ukleevo from early morning with pairs or teams of three horses decked with many-coloured ribbons on their yokes and manes, with a jingle of bells. The rooks, disturbed by this activity, were cawing noisily in the willows, and the starlings sang their loudest unceasingly as though rejoicing that there was a wedding at the Tsybukins’.

Indoors the tables were already covered with long fish, smoked hams, stuffed fowls, boxes of sprats, pickled savouries of various sorts, and a

number of bottles of vodka and wine; there was a smell of smoked sausage and of sour tinned lobster. Old Tsybukin walked about near the tables, tapping with his heels and sharpening the knives against each other. They kept calling Varvara and asking for things, and she was constantly with a distracted face running breathlessly into the kitchen, where the man cook from Kostukov's and the woman cook from Hrymin Juniors' had been at work since early morning. Aksinya, with her hair curled, in her stays without her dress on, in new creaky boots, flew about the yard like a whirlwind showing glimpses of her bare knees and bosom.

It was noisy, there was a sound of scolding and oaths; passersby stopped at the wide-open gates, and in everything there was a feeling that something extraordinary was happening.

"They have gone for the bride!"

The bells began jingling and died away far beyond the village.… Between two and three o'clock people ran up: again there was a jingling of bells: they were bringing the bride! The church was full, the candelabra were lighted, the choir were singing from music books as old Tsybukin had wished it. The glare of the lights and the bright coloured dresses dazzled Lipa; she felt as though the singers with their loud voices were hitting her on the head with a hammer. Her boots and the stays, which she had put on for the first time in her life, pinched her, and her face looked as though she had only just come to herself after fainting; she gazed about without understanding. Anisim, in his black coat with a red cord instead of a tie, stared at the same spot lost in thought, and when the singers shouted loudly he hurriedly crossed himself. He felt touched and disposed to weep. This church was familiar to him from earliest childhood; at one time his dead mother used to bring him here to take the sacrament; at one time he used to sing in the choir; every icon he remembered so well, every corner. Here he was being married, he had to take a wife for the sake of doing the proper thing, but he was not thinking of that now, he had forgotten his wedding completely. Tears dimmed his eyes so that he could not see the icons, he felt heavy at heart; he prayed and besought God that the misfortunes that threatened him, that were ready to burst upon him tomorrow, if not today, might somehow pass him by as storm-clouds in time of drought pass over the village without yielding one drop of rain. And so many sins were heaped up in the past, so many sins, all getting away from them or setting them right was so beyond hope that it seemed incongruous even to ask forgiveness. But he did ask forgiveness, and even gave a loud sob, but no

one took any notice of that, since they all supposed he had had a drop too much.

There was a sound of a fretful childish wail:

“Take me away, mamma darling!”

“Quiet there!” cried the priest.

When they returned from the church people ran after them; there were crowds, too, round the shop, round the gates, and in the yard under the windows. The peasant women came in to sing songs of congratulation to them. The young couple had scarcely crossed the threshold when the singers, who were already standing in the outer room with their music books, broke into a loud chant at the top of their voices; a band ordered expressly from the town began playing. Foaming Don wine was brought in tall wineglasses, and Elizarov, a carpenter who did jobs by contract, a tall, gaunt old man with eyebrows so bushy that his eyes could scarcely be seen, said, addressing the happy pair:

“Anisim and you, my child, love one another, live in God’s way, little children, and the Heavenly Mother will not abandon you.”

He leaned his face on the old father’s shoulder and gave a sob.

“Grigory Petrovitch, let us weep, let us weep with joy!” he said in a thin voice, and then at once burst out laughing in a loud bass guffaw. “Ho-ho-ho! This is a fine daughter-in-law for you too! Everything is in its place in her; all runs smoothly, no creaking, the mechanism works well, lots of screws in it.”

He was a native of the Yegoryevsky district, but had worked in the factories in Ukleevo and the neighborhood from his youth up, and had made it his home. He had been a familiar figure for years as old and gaunt and lanky as now, and for years he had been nicknamed “Crutch.” Perhaps because he had been for forty years occupied in repairing the factory machinery he judged everybody and everything by its soundness or its need of repair. And before sitting down to the table he tried several chairs to see whether they were solid, and he touched the smoked fish also.

After the Don wine, they all sat down to the table. The visitors talked, moving their chairs. The singers were singing in the outer room. The band was playing, and at the same time the peasant women in the yard were singing their songs all in chorus—and there was an awful, wild medley of sounds which made one giddy.

Crutch turned round in his chair and prodded his neighbours with his elbows, prevented people from talking, and laughed and cried alternately.

“Little children, little children, little children,” he muttered rapidly. “Aksinya my dear, Varvara darling, we will live all in peace and harmony, my dear little axes.…”

He drank little and was now only drunk from one glass of English bitters. The revolting bitters, made from nobody knows what, intoxicated everyone who drank it as though it had stunned them. Their tongues began to falter.

The local clergy, the clerks from the factories with their wives, the tradesmen and tavern-keepers from the other villages were present. The clerk and the elder of the rural district who had served together for fourteen years, and who had during all that time never signed a single document for anybody nor let a single person out of the local court without deceiving or insulting him, were sitting now side by side, both fat and well-fed, and it seemed as though they were so saturated in injustice and falsehood that even the skin of their faces was somehow peculiar, fraudulent. The clerk’s wife, a thin woman with a squint, had brought all her children with her, and like a bird of prey looked aslant at the plates and snatched anything she could get hold of to put in her own or her children’s pockets.

Lipa sat as though turned to stone, still with the same expression as in church. Anisim had not said a single word to her since he had made her acquaintance, so that he did not yet know the sound of her voice; and now, sitting beside her, he remained mute and went on drinking bitters, and when he got drunk he began talking to the aunt who was sitting opposite:

“I have a friend called Samorodov. A peculiar man. He is by rank an honorary citizen, and he can talk. But I know him through and through, auntie, and he feels it. Pray join me in drinking to the health of Samorodov, auntie!”

Varvara, worn out and distracted, walked round the table pressing the guests to eat, and was evidently pleased that there were so many dishes and that everything was so lavish—no one could disparage them now. The sun set, but the dinner went on: the guests were beyond knowing what they were eating or drinking, it was impossible to distinguish what was said, and only from time to time when the band subsided some peasant woman could be heard shouting:

“They have sucked the blood out of us, the Herods; a pest on them!”

In the evening they danced to the band. The Hrymin Juniors came, bringing their wine, and one of them, when dancing a quadrille, held a bottle in each hand and a wineglass in his mouth, and that made

everyone laugh. In the middle of the quadrille they suddenly crooked their knees and danced in a squatting position; Aksinya in green flew by like a flash, stirring up a wind with her train. Someone trod on her flounce and Crutch shouted:

"Aie, they have torn off the panel! Children!"

Aksinya had naive grey eyes which rarely blinked, and a naive smile played continually on her face. And in those unblinking eyes, and in that little head on the long neck, and in her slenderness there was something snakelike; all in green but for the yellow on her bosom, she looked with a smile on her face as a viper looks out of the young rye in the spring at the passersby, stretching itself and lifting its head. The Hrymins were free in their behaviour to her, and it was very noticeable that she was on intimate terms with the elder of them. But her deaf husband saw nothing, he did not look at her; he sat with his legs crossed and ate nuts, cracking them so loudly that it sounded like pistol shots.

But, behold, old Tsybukin himself walked into the middle of the room and waved his handkerchief as a sign that he, too, wanted to dance the Russian dance, and all over the house and from the crowd in the yard rose a roar of approbation:

"*He's* going to dance! *He* himself!"

Varvara danced, but the old man only waved his handkerchief and kicked up his heels, but the people in the yard, propped against one another, peeping in at the windows, were in raptures, and for the moment forgave him everything—his wealth and the wrongs he had done them.

"Well done, Grigory Petrovitch!" was heard in the crowd. "That's right, do your best! You can still play your part! Ha-ha!"

It was kept up till late, till two o'clock in the morning. Anisim, staggering, went to take leave of the singers and bandsmen, and gave each of them a new half-rouble. His father, who was not staggering but still seemed to be standing on one leg, saw his guests off, and said to each of them:

"The wedding has cost two thousand."

As the party was breaking up, someone took the Shikalovo innkeeper's good coat instead of his own old one, and Anisim suddenly flew into a rage and began shouting:

"Stop, I'll find it at once; I know who stole it, stop."

He ran out into the street and pursued someone. He was caught, brought back home and shoved, drunken, red with anger, and wet, into the room where the aunt was undressing Lipa, and was locked in.

IV

Five days had passed. Anisim, who was preparing to go, went upstairs to say goodbye to Varvara. All the lamps were burning before the icons, there was a smell of incense, while she sat at the window knitting a stocking of red wool.

"You have not stayed with us long," she said. "You've been dull, I dare say. Oh, tut, tut. We live comfortably; we have plenty of everything. We celebrated your wedding properly, in good style; your father says it came to two thousand. In fact we live like merchants, only it's dreary. We treat the people very badly. My heart aches, my dear; how we treat them, my goodness! Whether we exchange a horse or buy something or hire a labourer—it's cheating in everything. Cheating and cheating. The Lenten oil in the shop is bitter, rancid, the people have pitch that is better. But surely, tell me pray, couldn't we sell good oil?"

"Every man to his job, mamma."

"But you know we all have to die? Oy, oy, really you ought to talk to your father…!"

"Why, you should talk to him yourself."

"Well, well, I did put in my word, but he said just what you do: 'Every man to his own job.' Do you suppose in the next world they'll consider what job you have been put to? God's judgment is just."

"Of course no one will consider," said Anisim, and he heaved a sigh. "There is no God, anyway, you know, mamma, so what considering can there be?"

Varvara looked at him with surprise, burst out laughing, and clasped her hands. Perhaps because she was so genuinely surprised at his words and looked at him as though he were a queer person, he was confused.

"Perhaps there is a God, only there is no faith. When I was being married I was not myself. Just as you may take an egg from under a hen and there is a chicken chirping in it, so my conscience was beginning to chirp in me, and while I was being married I thought all the time there was a God! But when I left the church it was nothing. And indeed, how can I tell whether there is a God or not? We are not taught right from childhood, and while the babe is still at his mother's breast he is only

taught ‘every man to his own job.’ Father does not believe in God, either. You were saying that Guntorev had some sheep stolen.… I have found them; it was a peasant at Shikalovo stole them; he stole them, but father’s got the fleeces… so that’s all his faith amounts to.”

Anisim winked and wagged his head.

“The elder does not believe in God, either,” he went on. “And the clerk and the deacon, too. And as for their going to church and keeping the fasts, that is simply to prevent people talking ill of them, and in case it really may be true that there will be a Day of Judgment. Nowadays people say that the end of the world has come because people have grown weaker, do not honour their parents, and so on. All that is nonsense. My idea, mamma, is that all our trouble is because there is so little conscience in people. I see through things, mamma, and I understand. If a man has a stolen shirt I see it. A man sits in a tavern and you fancy he is drinking tea and no more, but to me the tea is neither here nor there; I see further, he has no conscience. You can go about the whole day and not meet one man with a conscience. And the whole reason is that they don’t know whether there is a God or not.… Well, goodbye, mamma, keep alive and well, don’t remember evil against me.”

Anisim bowed down at Varvara’s feet.

“I thank you for everything, mamma,” he said. “You are a great gain to our family. You are a very ladylike woman, and I am very pleased with you.”

Much moved, Anisim went out, but returned again and said:

“Samorodov has got me mixed up in something: I shall either make my fortune or come to grief. If anything happens, then you must comfort my father, mamma.”

“Oh, nonsense, don’t you worry, tut, tut, tut… God is merciful. And, Anisim, you should be affectionate to your wife, instead of giving each other sulky looks as you do; you might smile at least.”

“Yes, she is rather a queer one,” said Anisim, and he gave a sigh. “She does not understand anything, she never speaks. She is very young, let her grow up.”

A tall, sleek white stallion was already standing at the front door, harnessed to the chaise.

Old Tsybukin jumped in jauntily with a run and took the reins. Anisim kissed Varvara, Aksinya, and his brother. On the steps Lipa, too, was standing; she was standing motionless, looking away, and it seemed as though she had not come to see him off but just by chance for some

unknown reason. Anisim went up to her and just touched her cheek with his lips.

“Goodbye,” he said.

And without looking at him she gave a strange smile; her face began to quiver, and everyone for some reason felt sorry for her. Anisim, too, leaped into the chaise with a bound and put his arms jauntily akimbo, for he considered himself a good-looking fellow.

When they drove up out of the ravine Anisim kept looking back towards the village. It was a warm, bright day. The cattle were being driven out for the first time, and the peasant girls and women were walking by the herd in their holiday dresses. The dun-coloured bull bellowed, glad to be free, and pawed the ground with his forefeet. On all sides, above and below, the larks were singing. Anisim looked round at the elegant white church—it had only lately been whitewashed—and he thought how he had been praying in it five days before; he looked round at the school with its green roof, at the little river in which he used once to bathe and catch fish, and there was a stir of joy in his heart, and he wished that walls might rise up from the ground and prevent him from going further, and that he might be left with nothing but the past.

At the station they went to the refreshment room and drank a glass of sherry each. His father felt in his pocket for his purse to pay.

“I will stand treat,” said Anisim. The old man, touched and delighted, slapped him on the shoulder, and winked to the waiter as much as to say, “See what a fine son I have got.”

“You ought to stay at home in the business, Anisim,” he said; “you would be worth any price to me! I would shower gold on you from head to foot, my son.”

“It can’t be done, papa.”

The sherry was sour and smelt of sealing-wax, but they had another glass.

When old Tsybukin returned home from the station, for the first moment he did not recognize his younger daughter-in-law. As soon as her husband had driven out of the yard, Lipa was transformed and suddenly brightened up. Wearing a threadbare old petticoat, with her feet bare and her sleeves tucked up to the shoulders, she was scrubbing the stairs in the entry and singing in a silvery little voice, and when she brought out a big tub of dirty water and looked up at the sun with her childlike smile it seemed as though she, too, were a lark.

An old labourer who was passing by the door shook his head and cleared his throat.

“Yes, indeed, your daughters-in-law, Grigory Petrovitch, are a blessing from God,” he said. “Not women, but treasures!”

V

On Friday the 8th of July, Elizarov, nicknamed Crutch, and Lipa were returning from the village of Kazanskoe, where they had been to a service on the occasion of a church holiday in the honour of the Holy Mother of Kazan. A good distance after them walked Lipa's mother Praskovya, who always fell behind, as she was ill and short of breath. It was drawing towards evening.

"A-a-a…" said Crutch, wondering as he listened to Lipa. "A-a!… We-ell!"

"I am very fond of jam, Ilya Makaritch," said Lipa. "I sit down in my little corner and drink tea and eat jam. Or I drink it with Varvara Nikolaevna, and she tells some story full of feeling. We have a lot of jam—four jars. 'Have some, Lipa; eat as much as you like.'"

"A-a-a, four jars!"

"They live very well. We have white bread with our tea; and meat, too, as much as one wants. They live very well, only I am frightened with them, Ilya Makaritch. Oh, oh, how frightened I am!"

"Why are you frightened, child?" asked Crutch, and he looked back to see how far Praskovya was behind.

"To begin with, when the wedding had been celebrated I was afraid of Anisim Grigoritch. Anisim Grigoritch did nothing, he didn't ill-treat me, only when he comes near me a cold shiver runs all over me, through all my bones. And I did not sleep one night, I trembled all over and kept praying to God. And now I am afraid of Aksinya, Ilya Makaritch. It's not that she does anything, she is always laughing, but sometimes she glances at the window, and her eyes are so fierce and there is a gleam of green in them—like the eyes of the sheep in the shed. The Hrymin Juniors are leading her astray: 'Your old man,' they tell her, 'has a bit of land at Butyokino, a hundred and twenty acres,' they say, 'and there is sand and water there, so you, Aksinya,' they say, 'build a brickyard there and we will go shares in it.' Bricks now are twenty roubles the thousand, it's a profitable business. Yesterday at dinner Aksinya said to my father-in-law: 'I want to build a brickyard at Butyokino; I'm going into business on my own account.' She laughed as she said it. And Grigory

Petrovitch's face darkened, one could see he did not like it. 'As long as I live,' he said, 'the family must not break up, we must go on altogether.' She gave a look and gritted her teeth.… Fritters were served, she would not eat them."

"A-a-a!…" Crutch was surprised.

"And tell me, if you please, when does she sleep?" said Lipa. "She sleeps for half an hour, then jumps up and keeps walking and walking about to see whether the peasants have not set fire to something, have not stolen something.… I am frightened with her, Ilya Makaritch. And the Hrymin Juniors did not go to bed after the wedding, but drove to the town to go to law with each other; and folks do say it is all on account of Aksinya. Two of the brothers have promised to build her a brickyard, but the third is offended, and the factory has been at a standstill for a month, and my uncle Prohor is without work and goes about from house to house getting crusts. 'Hadn't you better go working on the land or sawing up wood, meanwhile, uncle?' I tell him; 'why disgrace yourself?' 'I've got out of the way of it,' he says; 'I don't know how to do any sort of peasant's work now, Lipinka.'…"

They stopped to rest and wait for Praskovya near a copse of young aspen trees. Elizarov had long been a contractor in a small way, but he kept no horses, going on foot all over the district with nothing but a little bag in which there was bread and onions, and stalking along with big strides, swinging his arms. And it was difficult to walk with him.

At the entrance to the copse stood a milestone. Elizarov touched it; read it. Praskovya reached them out of breath. Her wrinkled and always scared-looking face was beaming with happiness; she had been at church today like anyone else, then she had been to the fair and there had drunk pear cider. For her this was unusual, and it even seemed to her now that she had lived for her own pleasure that day for the first time in her life. After resting they all three walked on side by side. The sun had already set, and its beams filtered through the copse, casting a light on the trunks of the trees. There was a faint sound of voices ahead. The Ukleevo girls had long before pushed on ahead but had lingered in the copse, probably gathering mushrooms.

"Hey, wenches!" cried Elizarov. "Hey, my beauties!"

There was a sound of laughter in response.

"Crutch is coming! Crutch! The old horseradish."

And the echo laughed, too. And then the copse was left behind. The tops of the factory chimneys came into view. The cross on the belfry glittered: this was the village: "the one at which the deacon ate all the

caviar at the funeral.” Now they were almost home; they only had to go down into the big ravine. Lipa and Praskovya, who had been walking barefooted, sat down on the grass to put on their boots; Elizar sat down with them. If they looked down from above Ukleevo looked beautiful and peaceful with its willow trees, its white church, and its little river, and the only blot on the picture was the roof of the factories, painted for the sake of cheapness a gloomy ashen grey. On the slope on the further side they could see the rye—some in stacks and sheaves here and there as though strewn about by the storm, and some freshly cut lying in swathes; the oats, too, were ripe and glistened now in the sun like mother-of-pearl. It was harvest-time. Today was a holiday, tomorrow they would harvest the rye and carry the hay, and then Sunday a holiday again; every day there were mutterings of distant thunder. It was misty and looked like rain, and, gazing now at the fields, everyone thought, God grant we get the harvest in in time; and everyone felt gay and joyful and anxious at heart.

“Mowers ask a high price nowadays,” said Praskovya. “One rouble and forty kopecks a day.”

People kept coming and coming from the fair at Kazanskoe: peasant women, factory workers in new caps, beggars, children.… Here a cart would drive by stirring up the dust and behind it would run an unsold horse, and it seemed glad it had not been sold; then a cow was led along by the horns, resisting stubbornly; then a cart again, and in it drunken peasants swinging their legs. An old woman led a little boy in a big cap and big boots; the boy was tired out with the heat and the heavy boots which prevented his bending his legs at the knees, but yet blew unceasingly with all his might at a tin trumpet. They had gone down the slope and turned into the street, but the trumpet could still be heard.

“Our factory owners don’t seem quite themselves…” said Elizarov. “There’s trouble. Kostukov is angry with me. ‘Too many boards have gone on the cornices.’ ‘Too many? As many have gone on it as were needed, Vassily Danilitch; I don’t eat them with my porridge.’ ‘How can you speak to me like that?’ said he, ‘you good-for-nothing blockhead! Don’t forget yourself! It was I made you a contractor.’ ‘That’s nothing so wonderful,’ said I. ‘Even before I was a contractor I used to have tea every day.’ ‘You are a rascal…’ he said. I said nothing. ‘We are rascals in this world,’ thought I, ‘and you will be rascals in the next.…’ Ha-ha-ha! The next day he was softer. ‘Don’t you bear malice against me for my words, Makaritch,’ he said. ‘If I said too much,’ says he, ‘what of it? I am a merchant of the first guild, your superior—you ought to hold your

tongue.’ ‘You,’ said I, ‘are a merchant of the first guild and I am a carpenter, that’s correct. And Saint Joseph was a carpenter, too. Ours is a righteous calling and pleasing to God, and if you are pleased to be my superior you are very welcome to it, Vassily Danilitch.’ And later on, after that conversation I mean, I thought: ‘Which was the superior? A merchant of the first guild or a carpenter?’ The carpenter must be, my child!”

Crutch thought a minute and added:

“Yes, that’s how it is, child. He who works, he who is patient is the superior.”

By now the sun had set and a thick mist as white as milk was rising over the river, in the church enclosure, and in the open spaces round the factories. Now when the darkness was coming on rapidly, when lights were twinkling below, and when it seemed as though the mists were hiding a fathomless abyss, Lipa and her mother who were born in poverty and prepared to live so till the end, giving up to others everything except their frightened, gentle souls, may have fancied for a minute perhaps that in the vast, mysterious world, among the endless series of lives, they, too, counted for something, and they, too, were superior to someone; they liked sitting here at the top, they smiled happily and forgot that they must go down below again all the same.

At last they went home again. The mowers were sitting on the ground at the gates near the shop. As a rule the Ukleevo peasants did not go to Tsybukin’s to work, and they had to hire strangers, and now in the darkness it seemed as though there were men sitting there with long black beards. The shop was open, and through the doorway they could see the deaf man playing draughts with a boy. The mowers were singing softly, scarcely audibly, or loudly demanding their wages for the previous day, but they were not paid for fear they should go away before tomorrow. Old Tsybukin, with his coat off, was sitting in his waistcoat with Aksinya under the birch tree, drinking tea; a lamp was burning on the table.

“I say, grandfather,” a mower called from outside the gates, as though taunting him, “pay us half anyway! Hey, grandfather.”

And at once there was the sound of laughter, and then again they sang hardly audibly.… Crutch, too, sat down to have some tea.

“We have been at the fair, you know,” he began telling them. “We have had a walk, a very nice walk, my children, praise the Lord. But an unfortunate thing happened: Sashka the blacksmith bought some tobacco and gave the shopman half a rouble to be sure. And the half rouble was a

false one”—Crutch went on, and he meant to speak in a whisper, but he spoke in a smothered husky voice which was audible to everyone. “The half-rouble turned out to be a bad one. He was asked where he got it. ‘Anisim Tsybukin gave it me,’ he said. ‘When I went to his wedding,’ he said. They called the police inspector, took the man away.… Look out, Grigory Petrovitch, that nothing comes of it, no talk.…”

“Gra-ndfather!” the same voice called tauntingly outside the gates. “Gra-andfather!”

A silence followed.

“Ah, little children, little children, little children…” Crutch muttered rapidly, and he got up. He was overcome with drowsiness. “Well, thank you for the tea, for the sugar, little children. It is time to sleep. I am like a bit of rotten timber nowadays, my beams are crumbling under me. Ho-ho-ho! I suppose it’s time I was dead.”

And he gave a gulp. Old Tsybukin did not finish his tea but sat on a little, pondering; and his face looked as though he were listening to the footsteps of Crutch, who was far away down the street.

“Sashka the blacksmith told a lie, I expect,” said Aksinya, guessing his thoughts.

He went into the house and came back a little later with a parcel; he opened it, and there was the gleam of roubles—perfectly new coins. He took one, tried it with his teeth, flung it on the tray; then flung down another.

“The roubles really are false…” he said, looking at Aksinya and seeming perplexed. “These are those Anisim brought, his present. Take them, daughter,” he whispered, and thrust the parcel into her hands. “Take them and throw them into the well… confound them! And mind there is no talk about it. Harm might come of it.… Take away the samovar, put out the light.”

Lipa and her mother sitting in the barn saw the lights go out one after the other; only overhead in Varvara’s room there were blue and red lamps gleaming, and a feeling of peace, content, and happy ignorance seemed to float down from there. Praskovya could never get used to her daughter’s being married to a rich man, and when she came she huddled timidly in the outer room with a deprecating smile on her face, and tea and sugar were sent out to her. And Lipa, too, could not get used to it either, and after her husband had gone away she did not sleep in her bed, but lay down anywhere to sleep, in the kitchen or the barn, and every day she scrubbed the floor or washed the clothes, and felt as though she were hired by the day. And now, on coming back from the service, they drank

tea in the kitchen with the cook, then they went into the barn and lay down on the ground between the sledge and the wall. It was dark here and smelt of harness. The lights went out about the house, then they could hear the deaf man shutting up the shop, the mowers settling themselves about the yard to sleep. In the distance at the Hrymin Juniors' they were playing on the expensive concertina.… Praskovya and Lipa began to go to sleep.

And when they were awakened by somebody's steps it was bright moonlight; at the entrance of the barn stood Aksinya with her bedding in her arms.

"Maybe it's a bit cooler here," she said; then she came in and lay down almost in the doorway so that the moonlight fell full upon her.

She did not sleep, but breathed heavily, tossing from side to side with the heat, throwing off almost all the bedclothes. And in the magic moonlight what a beautiful, what a proud animal she was! A little time passed, and then steps were heard again: the old father, white all over, appeared in the doorway.

"Aksinya," he called, "are you here?"

"Well?" she responded angrily.

"I told you just now to throw the money into the well, have you done so?"

"What next, throwing property into the water! I gave them to the mowers.…"

"Oh my God!" cried the old man, dumbfounded and alarmed. "Oh my God! you wicked woman.…"

He flung up his hands and went out, and he kept saying something as he went away. And a little later Aksinya sat up and sighed heavily with annoyance, then got up and, gathering up her bedclothes in her arms, went out.

"Why did you marry me into this family, mother?" said Lipa.

"One has to be married, daughter. It was not us who ordained it."

And a feeling of inconsolable woe was ready to take possession of them. But it seemed to them that someone was looking down from the height of the heavens, out of the blue from where the stars were seeing everything that was going on in Ukleevo, watching over them. And however great was wickedness, still the night was calm and beautiful, and still in God's world there is and will be truth and justice as calm and beautiful, and everything on earth is only waiting to be made one with truth and justice, even as the moonlight is blended with the night.

And both, huddling close to one another, fell asleep comforted.

VI

News had come long before that Anisim had been put in prison for coining and passing bad money. Months passed, more than half a year passed, the long winter was over, spring had begun, and everyone in the house and the village had grown used to the fact that Anisim was in prison. And when anyone passed by the house or the shop at night he would remember that Anisim was in prison; and when they rang at the churchyard for some reason, that, too, reminded them that he was in prison awaiting trial.

It seemed as though a shadow had fallen upon the house. The house looked darker, the roof was rustier, the heavy, iron-bound door into the shop, which was painted green, was covered with cracks, or, as the deaf man expressed it, “blisters”; and old Tsybukin seemed to have grown dingy, too. He had given up cutting his hair and beard, and looked shaggy. He no longer sprang jauntily into his chaise, nor shouted to beggars: “God will provide!” His strength was on the wane, and that was evident in everything. People were less afraid of him now, and the police officer drew up a formal charge against him in the shop though he received his regular bribe as before; and three times the old man was called up to the town to be tried for illicit dealing in spirits, and the case was continually adjourned owing to the nonappearance of witnesses, and old Tsybukin was worn out with worry.

He often went to see his son, hired somebody, handed in a petition to somebody else, presented a holy banner to some church. He presented the governor of the prison in which Anisim was confined with a silver glass stand with a long spoon and the inscription: “The soul knows its right measure.”

“There is no one to look after things for us,” said Varvara. “Tut, tut.… You ought to ask someone of the gentlefolks, they would write to the head officials.… At least they might let him out on bail! Why wear the poor fellow out?”

She, too, was grieved, but had grown stouter and whiter; she lighted the lamps before the icons as before, and saw that everything in the house was clean, and regaled the guests with jam and apple cheese. The

deaf man and Aksinya looked after the shop. A new project was in progress—a brickyard in Butyokino—and Aksinya went there almost every day in the chaise. She drove herself, and when she met acquaintances she stretched out her neck like a snake out of the young rye, and smiled naively and enigmatically. Lipa spent her time playing with the baby which had been born to her before Lent. It was a tiny, thin, pitiful little baby, and it was strange that it should cry and gaze about and be considered a human being, and even be called Nikifor. He lay in his swinging cradle, and Lipa would walk away towards the door and say, bowing to him:

"Good day, Nikifor Anisimitch!"

And she would rush at him and kiss him. Then she would walk away to the door, bow again, and say:

"Good day, Nikifor Anisimitch!"

And he kicked up his little red legs, and his crying was mixed with laughter like the carpenter Elizarov's.

At last the day of the trial was fixed. Tsybukin went away five days before. Then they heard that the peasants called as witnesses had been fetched; their old workman who had received a notice to appear went too.

The trial was on a Thursday. But Sunday had passed, and Tsybukin was still not back, and there was no news. Towards the evening on Tuesday Varvara was sitting at the open window, listening for her husband to come. In the next room Lipa was playing with her baby. She was tossing him up in her arms and saying enthusiastically:

"You will grow up ever so big, ever so big. You will be a peasant, we shall go out to work together! We shall go out to work together!"

"Come, come," said Varvara, offended. "Go out to work, what an idea, you silly girl! He will be a merchant…!"

Lipa sang softly, but a minute later she forgot and again:

"You will grow ever so big, ever so big. You will be a peasant, we'll go out to work together."

"There she is at it again!"

Lipa, with Nikifor in her arms, stood still in the doorway and asked:

"Why do I love him so much, mamma? Why do I feel so sorry for him?" she went on in a quivering voice, and her eyes glistened with tears. "Who is he? What is he like? As light as a little feather, as a little crumb, but I love him; I love him like a real person. Here he can do nothing, he can't talk, and yet I know what he wants with his little eyes."

Varvara was listening; the sound of the evening train coming in to the station reached her. Had her husband come? She did not hear and she did not heed what Lipa was saying, she had no idea how the time passed, but only trembled all over—not from dread, but intense curiosity. She saw a cart full of peasants roll quickly by with a rattle. It was the witnesses coming back from the station. When the cart passed the shop the old workman jumped out and walked into the yard. She could hear him being greeted in the yard and being asked some questions.…

"Deprivation of rights and all his property," he said loudly, "and six years' penal servitude in Siberia."

She could see Aksinya come out of the shop by the back way; she had just been selling kerosene, and in one hand held a bottle and in the other a can, and in her mouth she had some silver coins.

"Where is father?" she asked, lisping.

"At the station," answered the labourer. "'When it gets a little darker,' he said, 'then I shall come.'"

And when it became known all through the household that Anisim was sentenced to penal servitude, the cook in the kitchen suddenly broke into a wail as though at a funeral, imagining that this was demanded by the proprieties:

"There is no one to care for us now you have gone, Anisim Grigoritch, our bright falcon.…"

The dogs began barking in alarm. Varvara ran to the window, and rushing about in distress, shouted to the cook with all her might, straining her voice:

"Sto-op, Stepanida, sto-op! Don't harrow us, for Christ's sake!"

They forgot to set the samovar, they could think of nothing. Only Lipa could not make out what it was all about and went on playing with her baby.

When the old father arrived from the station they asked him no questions. He greeted them and walked through all the rooms in silence; he had no supper.

"There was no one to see about things…" Varvara began when they were alone. "I said you should have asked some of the gentry, you would not heed me at the time.… A petition would…"

"I saw to things," said her husband with a wave of his hand. "When Anisim was condemned I went to the gentleman who was defending him. 'It's no use now,' he said, 'it's too late'; and Anisim said the same; it's too late. But all the same as I came out of the court I made an agreement

with a lawyer, I paid him something in advance. I'll wait a week and then I will go again. It is as God wills."

Again the old man walked through all the rooms, and when he went back to Varvara he said:

"I must be ill. My head's in a sort of… fog. My thoughts are in a maze."

He closed the door that Lipa might not hear, and went on softly:

"I am unhappy about my money. Do you remember on Low Sunday before his wedding Anisim's bringing me some new roubles and half-roubles? One parcel I put away at the time, but the others I mixed with my own money. When my uncle Dmitri Filatitch—the kingdom of heaven be his—was alive, he used constantly to go journeys to Moscow and to the Crimea to buy goods. He had a wife, and this same wife, when he was away buying goods, used to take up with other men. She had half a dozen children. And when uncle was in his cups he would laugh and say: 'I never can make out,' he used to say, 'which are my children and which are other people's.' An easygoing disposition, to be sure; and so I now can't distinguish which are genuine roubles and which are false ones. And it seems to me that they are all false."

"Nonsense, God bless you."

"I take a ticket at the station, I give the man three roubles, and I keep fancying they are false. And I am frightened. I must be ill."

"There's no denying it, we are all in God's hands.… Oh dear, dear…" said Varvara, and she shook her head. "You ought to think about this, Grigory Petrovitch: you never know, anything may happen, you are not a young man. See they don't wrong your grandchild when you are dead and gone. Oy, I am afraid they will be unfair to Nikifor! He has as good as no father, his mother's young and foolish… you ought to secure something for him, poor little boy, at least the land, Butyokino, Grigory Petrovitch, really! Think it over!" Varvara went on persuading him. "The pretty boy, one is sorry for him! You go tomorrow and make out a deed; why put it off?"

"I'd forgotten about my grandson," said Tsybukin. "I must go and have a look at him. So you say the boy is all right? Well, let him grow up, please God."

He opened the door and, crooking his finger, beckoned to Lipa. She went up to him with the baby in her arms.

"If there is anything you want, Lipinka, you ask for it," he said. "And eat anything you like, we don't grudge it, so long as it does you

good.…” He made the sign of the cross over the baby. “And take care of my grandchild. My son is gone, but my grandson is left.”

Tears rolled down his cheeks; he gave a sob and went away. Soon afterwards he went to bed and slept soundly after seven sleepless nights.

VII

Old Tsybukin went to the town for a short time. Someone told Aksinya that he had gone to the notary to make his will and that he was leaving Butyokino, the very place where she had set up a brickyard, to Nikifor, his grandson. She was informed of this in the morning when old Tsybukin and Varvara were sitting near the steps under the birch tree, drinking their tea. She closed the shop in the front and at the back, gathered together all the keys she had, and flung them at her father-in-law's feet.

"I am not going on working for you," she began in a loud voice, and suddenly broke into sobs. "It seems I am not your daughter-in-law, but a servant! Everybody's jeering and saying, 'See what a servant the Tsybukins have got hold of!' I did not come to you for wages! I am not a beggar, I am not a slave, I have a father and mother."

She did not wipe away her tears, she fixed upon her father-in-law eyes full of tears, vindictive, squinting with wrath; her face and neck were red and tense, and she was shouting at the top of her voice.

"I don't mean to go on being a slave!" she went on. "I am worn out. When it is work, when it is sitting in the shop day in and day out, scurrying out at night for vodka—then it is my share, but when it is giving away the land then it is for that convict's wife and her imp. She is mistress here, and I am her servant. Give her everything, the convict's wife, and may it choke her! I am going home! Find yourselves some other fool, you damned Herods!"

Tsybukin had never in his life scolded or punished his children, and had never dreamed that one of his family could speak to him rudely or behave disrespectfully; and now he was very much frightened; he ran into the house and there hid behind the cupboard. And Varvara was so much flustered that she could not get up from her seat, and only waved her hands before her as though she were warding off a bee.

"Oh, Holy Saints! what's the meaning of it?" she muttered in horror. "What is she shouting? Oh, dear, dear!… People will hear! Hush. Oh, hush!"

“He has given Butyokino to the convict’s wife,” Aksinya went on bawling. “Give her everything now, I don’t want anything from you! Let me alone! You are all a gang of thieves here! I have seen my fill of it, I have had enough! You have robbed folks coming in and going out; you have robbed old and young alike, you brigands! And who has been selling vodka without a licence? And false money? You’ve filled boxes full of false coins, and now I am no more use!”

A crowd had by now collected at the open gate and was staring into the yard.

“Let the people look,” bawled Aksinya. “I will shame you all! You shall burn with shame! You shall grovel at my feet. Hey! Stepan,” she called to the deaf man, “let us go home this minute! Let us go to my father and mother; I don’t want to live with convicts. Get ready!”

Clothes were hanging on lines stretched across the yard; she snatched off her petticoats and blouses still wet and flung them into the deaf man’s arms. Then in her fury she dashed about the yard by the linen, tore down all of it, and what was not hers she threw on the ground and trampled upon.

“Holy Saints, take her away,” moaned Varvara. “What a woman! Give her Butyokino! Give it her, for the Lord’s sake!”

“Well! Wha-at a woman!” people were saying at the gate. “She’s a wo-oman! She’s going it—something like!”

Aksinya ran into the kitchen where washing was going on. Lipa was washing alone, the cook had gone to the river to rinse the clothes. Steam was rising from the trough and from the cauldron on the side of the stove, and the kitchen was thick and stifling from the steam. On the floor was a heap of unwashed clothes, and Nikifor, kicking up his little red legs, had been put down on a bench near them, so that if he fell he should not hurt himself. Just as Aksinya went in Lipa took the former’s chemise out of the heap and put it in the trough, and was just stretching out her hand to a big ladle of boiling water which was standing on the table.

“Give it here,” said Aksinya, looking at her with hatred, and snatching the chemise out of the trough; “it is not your business to touch my linen! You are a convict’s wife, and ought to know your place and who you are.”

Lipa gazed at her, taken aback, and did not understand, but suddenly she caught the look Aksinya turned upon the child, and at once she understood and went numb all over.

“You’ve taken my land, so here you are!” Saying this Aksinya snatched up the ladle with the boiling water and flung it over Nikifor.

After this there was heard a scream such as had never been heard before in Ukleevo, and no one would have believed that a little weak creature like Lipa could scream like that. And it was suddenly silent in the yard.

Aksinya walked into the house with her old naive smile.… The deaf man kept moving about the yard with his arms full of linen, then he began hanging it up again, in silence, without haste. And until the cook came back from the river no one ventured to go into the kitchen and see what was there.

VIII

Nikifor was taken to the district hospital, and towards evening he died there. Lipa did not wait for them to come for her, but wrapped the dead baby in its little quilt and carried it home.

The hospital, a new one recently built, with big windows, stood high up on a hill; it was glittering from the setting sun and looked as though it were on fire from inside. There was a little village below. Lipa went down along the road, and before reaching the village sat down by a pond. A woman brought a horse down to drink and the horse did not drink.

“What more do you want?” said the woman to it softly. “What do you want?”

A boy in a red shirt, sitting at the water’s edge, was washing his father’s boots. And not another soul was in sight either in the village or on the hill.

“It’s not drinking,” said Lipa, looking at the horse.

Then the woman with the horse and the boy with the boots walked away, and there was no one left at all. The sun went to bed wrapped in cloth of gold and purple, and long clouds, red and lilac, stretched across the sky, guarded its slumbers. Somewhere far away a bittern cried, a hollow, melancholy sound like a cow shut up in a barn. The cry of that mysterious bird was heard every spring, but no one knew what it was like or where it lived. At the top of the hill by the hospital, in the bushes close to the pond, and in the fields the nightingales were trilling. The cuckoo kept reckoning someone’s years and losing count and beginning again. In the pond the frogs called angrily to one another, straining themselves to bursting, and one could even make out the words: “That’s what you are! That’s what you are!” What a noise there was! It seemed as though all these creatures were singing and shouting so that no one might sleep on that spring night, so that all, even the angry frogs, might appreciate and enjoy every minute: life is given only once.

A silver half-moon was shining in the sky; there were many stars. Lipa had no idea how long she sat by the pond, but when she got up and walked on everybody was asleep in the little village, and there was not a single light. It was probably about nine miles’ walk home, but she had

not the strength, she had not the power to think how to go: the moon gleamed now in front, now on the right, and the same cuckoo kept calling in a voice grown husky, with a chuckle as though gibing at her: “Oy, look out, you’ll lose your way!” Lipa walked rapidly; she lost the kerchief from her head… she looked at the sky and wondered where her baby’s soul was now: was it following her, or floating aloft yonder among the stars and thinking nothing now of his mother? Oh, how lonely it was in the open country at night, in the midst of that singing when one cannot sing oneself; in the midst of the incessant cries of joy when one cannot oneself be joyful, when the moon, which cares not whether it is spring or winter, whether men are alive or dead, looks down as lonely, too.… When there is grief in the heart it is hard to be without people. If only her mother, Praskovya, had been with her, or Crutch, or the cook, or some peasant!

“*Boo-oo!*” cried the bittern. “*Boo-oo!*”

And suddenly she heard clearly the sound of human speech: “Put the horses in, Vavila!”

By the wayside a camp fire was burning ahead of her: the flames had died down, there were only red embers. She could hear the horses munching. In the darkness she could see the outlines of two carts, one with a barrel, the other, a lower one with sacks in it, and the figures of two men; one was leading a horse to put it into the shafts, the other was standing motionless by the fire with his hands behind his back. A dog growled by the carts. The one who was leading the horse stopped and said:

“It seems as though someone were coming along the road.”

“Sharik, be quiet!” the other called to the dog.

And from the voice one could tell that the second was an old man. Lipa stopped and said:

“God help you.”

The old man went up to her and answered not immediately:

“Good evening!”

“Your dog does not bite, grandfather?”

“No, come along, he won’t touch you.”

“I have been at the hospital,” said Lipa after a pause. “My little son died there. Here I am carrying him home.”

It must have been unpleasant for the old man to hear this, for he moved away and said hurriedly:

“Never mind, my dear. It’s God’s will. You are very slow, lad,” he added, addressing his companion; “look alive!”

“Your yoke’s nowhere,” said the young man; “it is not to be seen.”

“You are a regular Vavila.”

The old man picked up an ember, blew on it—only his eyes and nose were lighted up—then, when they had found the yoke, he went with the light to Lipa and looked at her, and his look expressed compassion and tenderness.

“You are a mother,” he said; “every mother grieves for her child.”

And he sighed and shook his head as he said it. Vavila threw something on the fire, stamped on it—and at once it was very dark; the vision vanished, and as before there were only the fields, the sky with the stars, and the noise of the birds hindering each other from sleep. And the landrail called, it seemed, in the very place where the fire had been.

But a minute passed, and again she could see the two carts and the old man and lanky Vavila. The carts creaked as they went out on the road.

“Are you holy men?” Lipa asked the old man.

“No. We are from Firsanovo.”

“You looked at me just now and my heart was softened. And the young man is so gentle. I thought you must be holy men.”

“Are you going far?”

“To Ukleevo.”

“Get in, we will give you a lift as far as Kuzmenki, then you go straight on and we turn off to the left.”

Vavila got into the cart with the barrel and the old man and Lipa got into the other. They moved at a walking pace, Vavila in front.

“My baby was in torment all day,” said Lipa. “He looked at me with his little eyes and said nothing; he wanted to speak and could not. Holy Father, Queen of Heaven! In my grief I kept falling down on the floor. I stood up and fell down by the bedside. And tell me, grandfather, why a little thing should be tormented before his death? When a grown-up person, a man or woman, are in torment their sins are forgiven, but why a little thing, when he has no sins? Why?”

“Who can tell?” answered the old man.

They drove on for half an hour in silence.

“We can’t know everything, how and wherefore,” said the old man. “It is ordained for the bird to have not four wings but two because it is able to fly with two; and so it is ordained for man not to know everything but only a half or a quarter. As much as he needs to know so as to live, so much he knows.”

“It is better for me to go on foot, grandfather. Now my heart is all of a tremble.”

“Never mind, sit still.”

The old man yawned and made the sign of the cross over his mouth.

“Never mind,” he repeated. “Yours is not the worst of sorrows. Life is long, there will be good and bad to come, there will be everything. Great is mother Russia,” he said, and looked round on each side of him. “I have been all over Russia, and I have seen everything in her, and you may believe my words, my dear. There will be good and there will be bad. I went as a delegate from my village to Siberia, and I have been to the Amur River and the Altai Mountains and I settled in Siberia; I worked the land there, then I was homesick for mother Russia and I came back to my native village. We came back to Russia on foot; and I remember we went on a steamer, and I was thin as thin, all in rags, barefoot, freezing with cold, and gnawing a crust, and a gentleman who was on the steamer—the kingdom of heaven be his if he is dead—looked at me pitifully, and the tears came into his eyes. ‘Ah,’ he said, ‘your bread is black, your days are black.…’ And when I got home, as the saying is, there was neither stick nor stall; I had a wife, but I left her behind in Siberia, she was buried there. So I am living as a day labourer. And yet I tell you: since then I have had good as well as bad. Here I do not want to die, my dear, I would be glad to live another twenty years; so there has been more of the good. And great is our mother Russia!” and again he gazed to each side and looked round.

“Grandfather,” Lipa asked, “when anyone dies, how many days does his soul walk the earth?”

“Who can tell! Ask Vavila here, he has been to school. Now they teach them everything. Vavila!” the old man called to him.

“Yes!”

“Vavila, when anyone dies how long does his soul walk the earth?”

Vavila stopped the horse and only then answered:

“Nine days. My uncle Kirilla died and his soul lived in our hut thirteen days after.”

“How do you know?”

“For thirteen days there was a knocking in the stove.”

“Well, that’s all right. Go on,” said the old man, and it could be seen that he did not believe a word of all that.

Near Kuzmenki the cart turned into the high road while Lipa went straight on. It was by now getting light. As she went down into the ravine the Ukleevo huts and the church were hidden in fog. It was cold, and it seemed to her that the same cuckoo was calling still.

When Lipa reached home the cattle had not yet been driven out; everyone was asleep. She sat down on the steps and waited. The old man was the first to come out; he understood all that had happened from the first glance at her, and for a long time he could not articulate a word, but only moved his lips without a sound.

"Ech, Lipa," he said, "you did not take care of my grandchild.…"

Varvara was awakened. She clasped her hands and broke into sobs, and immediately began laying out the baby.

"And he was a pretty child…" she said. "Oh, dear, dear.… You only had the one child, and you did not take care enough of him, you silly girl.…"

There was a requiem service in the morning and the evening. The funeral took place the next day, and after it the guests and the priests ate a great deal, and with such greed that one might have thought that they had not tasted food for a long time. Lipa waited at table, and the priest, lifting his fork on which there was a salted mushroom, said to her:

"Don't grieve for the babe. For of such is the kingdom of heaven."

And only when they had all separated Lipa realized fully that there was no Nikifor and never would be, she realized it and broke into sobs. And she did not know what room to go into to sob, for she felt that now that her child was dead there was no place for her in the house, that she had no reason to be here, that she was in the way; and the others felt it, too.

"Now what are you bellowing for?" Aksinya shouted, suddenly appearing in the doorway; in honour of the funeral she was dressed all in new clothes and had powdered her face. "Shut up!"

Lipa tried to stop but could not, and sobbed louder than ever.

"Do you hear?" shouted Aksinya, and she stamped her foot in violent anger. "Who is it I am speaking to? Go out of the yard and don't set foot here again, you convict's wife. Get away."

"There, there, there," the old man put in fussily. "Aksinya, don't make such an outcry, my girl.… She is crying, it is only natural… her child is dead.…"

"'It's only natural,'" Aksinya mimicked him. "Let her stay the night here, and don't let me see a trace of her here tomorrow! 'It's only natural!'…" she mimicked him again, and, laughing, she went into the shop.

Early the next morning Lipa went off to her mother at Torguevo.

IX

At the present time the steps and the front door of the shop have been repainted and are as bright as though they were new, there are gay geraniums in the windows as of old, and what happened in Tsybukin's house and yard three years ago is almost forgotten.

Grigory Petrovitch is looked upon as the master as he was in old days, but in reality everything has passed into Aksinya's hands; she buys and sells, and nothing can be done without her consent. The brickyard is working well; and as bricks are wanted for the railway the price has gone up to twenty-four roubles a thousand; peasant women and girls cart the bricks to the station and load them up in the trucks and earn a quarter-rouble a day for the work.

Aksinya has gone into partnership with the Hrymin Juniors, and their factory is now called Hrymin Juniors and Co. They have opened a tavern near the station, and now the expensive concertina is played not at the factory but at the tavern, and the head of the post office often goes there, and he, too, is engaged in some sort of traffic, and the stationmaster, too. Hrymin Juniors have presented the deaf man Stepan with a gold watch, and he is constantly taking it out of his pocket and putting it to his ear.

People say of Aksinya that she has become a person of power; and it is true that when she drives in the morning to her brickyard, handsome and happy, with the naive smile on her face, and afterwards when she is giving orders there, one is aware of great power in her. Everyone is afraid of her in the house and in the village and in the brickyard. When she goes to the post the head of the postal department jumps up and says to her:

"I humbly beg you to be seated, Aksinya Abramovna!"

A certain landowner, middle-aged but foppish, in a tunic of fine cloth and patent leather high boots, sold her a horse, and was so carried away by talking to her that he knocked down the price to meet her wishes. He held her hand a long time and, looking into her merry, sly, naive eyes, said:

"For a woman like you, Aksinya Abramovna, I should be ready to do anything you please. Only say when we can meet where no one will

interfere with us?”

“Why, when you please.”

And since then the elderly fop drives up to the shop almost every day to drink beer. And the beer is horrid, bitter as wormwood. The landowner shakes his head, but he drinks it.

Old Tsybukin does not have anything to do with the business now at all. He does not keep any money because he cannot distinguish between the good and the false, but he is silent, he says nothing of this weakness. He has become forgetful, and if they don’t give him food he does not ask for it. They have grown used to having dinner without him, and Varvara often says:

“He went to bed again yesterday without any supper.”

And she says it unconcernedly because she is used to it. For some reason, summer and winter alike, he wears a fur coat, and only in very hot weather he does not go out but sits at home. As a rule putting on his fur coat, wrapping it round him and turning up his collar, he walks about the village, along the road to the station, or sits from morning till night on the seat near the church gates. He sits there without stirring. Passersby bow to him, but he does not respond, for as of old he dislikes the peasants. If he is asked a question he answers quite rationally and politely, but briefly.

There is a rumour going about in the village that his daughter-in-law turns him out of the house and gives him nothing to eat, and that he is fed by charity; some are glad, others are sorry for him.

Varvara has grown even fatter and whiter, and as before she is active in good works, and Aksinya does not interfere with her.

There is so much jam now that they have not time to eat it before the fresh fruit comes in; it goes sugary, and Varvara almost sheds tears, not knowing what to do with it.

They have begun to forget about Anisim. A letter has come from him written in verse on a big sheet of paper as though it were a petition, all in the same splendid handwriting. Evidently his friend Samorodov was sharing his punishment. Under the verses in an ugly, scarcely legible handwriting there was a single line: “I am ill here all the time; I am wretched, for Christ’s sake help me!”

Towards evening—it was a fine autumn day—old Tsybukin was sitting near the church gates, with the collar of his fur coat turned up and nothing of him could be seen but his nose and the peak of his cap. At the other end of the long seat was sitting Elizarov the contractor, and beside

him Yakov the school watchman, a toothless old man of seventy. Crutch and the watchman were talking.

“Children ought to give food and drink to the old.… Honour thy father and mother…” Yakov was saying with irritation, “while she, this daughter-in-law, has turned her father-in-law out of his own house; the old man has neither food nor drink, where is he to go? He has not had a morsel for these three days.”

“Three days!” said Crutch, amazed.

“Here he sits and does not say a word. He has grown feeble. And why be silent? He ought to prosecute her, they wouldn’t flatter her in the police court.”

“Wouldn’t flatter whom?” asked Crutch, not hearing.

“What?”

“The woman’s all right, she does her best. In their line of business they can’t get on without that… without sin, I mean.…”

“From his own house,” Yakov went on with irritation. “Save up and buy your own house, then turn people out of it! She is a nice one, to be sure! A pla-ague!”

Tsybukin listened and did not stir.

“Whether it is your own house or others’ it makes no difference so long as it is warm and the women don’t scold…” said Crutch, and he laughed. “When I was young I was very fond of my Nastasya. She was a quiet woman. And she used to be always at it: ‘Buy a house, Makaritch! Buy a house, Makaritch! Buy a house, Makaritch!’ She was dying and yet she kept on saying, ‘Buy yourself a racing droshky, Makaritch, that you may not have to walk.’ And I bought her nothing but gingerbread.”

“Her husband’s deaf and stupid,” Yakov went on, not hearing Crutch; “a regular fool, just like a goose. He can’t understand anything. Hit a goose on the head with a stick and even then it does not understand.”

Crutch got up to go home to the factory. Yakov also got up, and both of them went off together, still talking. When they had gone fifty paces old Tsybukin got up, too, and walked after them, stepping uncertainly as though on slippery ice.

The village was already plunged in the dusk of evening and the sun only gleamed on the upper part of the road which ran wriggling like a snake up the slope. Old women were coming back from the woods and children with them; they were bringing baskets of mushrooms. Peasant women and girls came in a crowd from the station where they had been loading the trucks with bricks, and their noses and their cheeks under their eyes were covered with red brick-dust. They were singing. Ahead

of them all was Lipa singing in a high voice, with her eyes turned upwards to the sky, breaking into trills as though triumphant and ecstatic that at last the day was over and she could rest. In the crowd was her mother Praskovya, who was walking with a bundle in her arms and breathless as usual.

“Good evening, Makaritch!” cried Lipa, seeing Crutch. “Good evening, darling!”

“Good evening, Lipinka,” cried Crutch delighted. “Dear girls and women, love the rich carpenter! Ho-ho! My little children, my little children. (Crutch gave a gulp.) My dear little axes!”

Crutch and Yakov went on further and could still be heard talking. Then after them the crowd was met by old Tsybukin and there was a sudden hush. Lipa and Praskovya had dropped a little behind, and when the old man was on a level with them Lipa bowed down low and said:

“Good evening, Grigory Petrovitch.”

Her mother, too, bowed down. The old man stopped and, saying nothing, looked at the two in silence; his lips were quivering and his eyes full of tears. Lipa took out of her mother’s bundle a piece of savoury turnover and gave it him. He took it and began eating.

The sun had by now set: its glow died away on the road above. It grew dark and cool. Lipa and Praskovya walked on and for some time they kept crossing themselves.

THE BISHOP

I

The evening service was being celebrated on the eve of Palm Sunday in the Old Petrovsky Convent. When they began distributing the palm it was close upon ten o'clock, the candles were burning dimly, the wicks wanted snuffing; it was all in a sort of mist. In the twilight of the church the crowd seemed heaving like the sea, and to Bishop Pyotr, who had been unwell for the last three days, it seemed that all the faces—old and young, men's and women's—were alike, that everyone who came up for the palm had the same expression in his eyes. In the mist he could not see the doors; the crowd kept moving and looked as though there were no end to it. The female choir was singing, a nun was reading the prayers for the day.

How stifling, how hot it was! How long the service went on! Bishop Pyotr was tired. His breathing was laboured and rapid, his throat was parched, his shoulders ached with weariness, his legs were trembling. And it disturbed him unpleasantly when a religious maniac uttered occasional shrieks in the gallery. And then all of a sudden, as though in a dream or delirium, it seemed to the bishop as though his own mother Marya Timofyevna, whom he had not seen for nine years, or some old woman just like his mother, came up to him out of the crowd, and, after taking a palm branch from him, walked away looking at him all the while good-humouredly with a kind, joyful smile until she was lost in the crowd. And for some reason tears flowed down his face. There was peace in his heart, everything was well, yet he kept gazing fixedly towards the left choir, where the prayers were being read, where in the dusk of evening you could not recognize anyone, and—wept. Tears glistened on his face and on his beard. Here someone close at hand was weeping, then someone else farther away, then others and still others,

and little by little the church was filled with soft weeping. And a little later, within five minutes, the nuns' choir was singing; no one was weeping and everything was as before.

Soon the service was over. When the bishop got into his carriage to drive home, the gay, melodious chime of the heavy, costly bells was filling the whole garden in the moonlight. The white walls, the white crosses on the tombs, the white birch trees and black shadows, and the faraway moon in the sky exactly over the convent, seemed now living their own life, apart and incomprehensible, yet very near to man. It was the beginning of April, and after the warm spring day it turned cool; there was a faint touch of frost, and the breath of spring could be felt in the soft, chilly air. The road from the convent to the town was sandy, the horses had to go at a walking pace, and on both sides of the carriage in the brilliant, peaceful moonlight there were people trudging along home from church through the sand. And all was silent, sunk in thought; everything around seemed kindly, youthful, akin, everything—trees and sky and even the moon, and one longed to think that so it would be always.

At last the carriage drove into the town and rumbled along the principal street. The shops were already shut, but at Erakin's, the millionaire shopkeeper's, they were trying the new electric lights, which flickered brightly, and a crowd of people were gathered round. Then came wide, dark, deserted streets, one after another; then the high road, the open country, the fragrance of pines. And suddenly there rose up before the bishop's eyes a white turreted wall, and behind it a tall belfry in the full moonlight, and beside it five shining, golden cupolas: this was the Pankratievsky Monastery, in which Bishop Pyotr lived. And here, too, high above the monastery, was the silent, dreamy moon. The carriage drove in at the gate, crunching over the sand; here and there in the moonlight there were glimpses of dark monastic figures, and there was the sound of footsteps on the flagstones.…

"You know, your holiness, your mamma arrived while you were away," the lay brother informed the bishop as he went into his cell.

"My mother? When did she come?"

"Before the evening service. She asked first where you were and then she went to the convent."

"Then it was her I saw in the church, just now! Oh, Lord!"

And the bishop laughed with joy.

"She bade me tell your holiness," the lay brother went on, "that she would come tomorrow. She had a little girl with her—her grandchild, I

suppose. They are staying at Ovsyannikov's inn."

"What time is it now?"

"A little after eleven."

"Oh, how vexing!"

The bishop sat for a little while in the parlour, hesitating, and as it were refusing to believe it was so late. His arms and legs were stiff, his head ached. He was hot and uncomfortable. After resting a little he went into his bedroom, and there, too, he sat a little, still thinking of his mother; he could hear the lay brother going away, and Father Sisoy coughing the other side of the wall. The monastery clock struck a quarter.

The bishop changed his clothes and began reading the prayers before sleep. He read attentively those old, long familiar prayers, and at the same time thought about his mother. She had nine children and about forty grandchildren. At one time, she had lived with her husband, the deacon, in a poor village; she had lived there a very long time from the age of seventeen to sixty. The bishop remembered her from early childhood, almost from the age of three, and—how he had loved her! Sweet, precious childhood, always fondly remembered! Why did it, that long-past time that could never return, why did it seem brighter, fuller, and more festive than it had really been? When in his childhood or youth he had been ill, how tender and sympathetic his mother had been! And now his prayers mingled with the memories, which gleamed more and more brightly like a flame, and the prayers did not hinder his thinking of his mother.

When he had finished his prayers he undressed and lay down, and at once, as soon as it was dark, there rose before his mind his dead father, his mother, his native village Lesopolye… the creak of wheels, the bleat of sheep, the church bells on bright summer mornings, the gypsies under the window—oh, how sweet to think of it! He remembered the priest of Lesopolye, Father Simeon—mild, gentle, kindly; he was a lean little man, while his son, a divinity student, was a huge fellow and talked in a roaring bass voice. The priest's son had flown into a rage with the cook and abused her: "Ah, you Jehud's ass!" and Father Simeon overhearing it, said not a word, and was only ashamed because he could not remember where such an ass was mentioned in the Bible. After him the priest at Lesopolye had been Father Demyan, who used to drink heavily, and at times drank till he saw green snakes, and was even nicknamed "Demyan Snakeseer." The schoolmaster at Lesopolye was Matvey Nikolaitch, who had been a divinity student, a kind and intelligent man,

but he, too, was a drunkard; he never beat the schoolchildren, but for some reason he always had hanging on his wall a bunch of birch-twigs, and below it an utterly meaningless inscription in Latin: "*Betula kinderbalsamica secuta.*" He had a shaggy black dog whom he called Syntax.

And his holiness laughed. Six miles from Lesopolye was the village Obnino with a wonder-working icon. In the summer they used to carry the icon in procession about the neighbouring villages and ring the bells the whole day long; first in one village and then in another, and it used to seem to the bishop then that joy was quivering in the air, and he (in those days his name was Pavlusha) used to follow the icon, bareheaded and barefoot, with naive faith, with a naive smile, infinitely happy. In Obnino, he remembered now, there were always a lot of people, and the priest there, Father Alexey, to save time during mass, used to make his deaf nephew Ilarion read the names of those for whose health or whose souls' peace prayers were asked. Ilarion used to read them, now and then getting a five or ten kopeck piece for the service, and only when he was grey and bald, when life was nearly over, he suddenly saw written on one of the pieces of paper: "What a fool you are, Ilarion." Up to fifteen at least Pavlusha was undeveloped and idle at his lessons, so much so that they thought of taking him away from the clerical school and putting him into a shop; one day, going to the post at Obnino for letters, he had stared a long time at the post-office clerks and asked: "Allow me to ask, how do you get your salary, every month or every day?"

His holiness crossed himself and turned over on the other side, trying to stop thinking and go to sleep.

"My mother has come," he remembered and laughed.

The moon peeped in at the window, the floor was lighted up, and there were shadows on it. A cricket was chirping. Through the wall Father Sisoy was snoring in the next room, and his aged snore had a sound that suggested loneliness, forlornness, even vagrancy. Sisoy had once been housekeeper to the bishop of the diocese, and was called now "the former Father Housekeeper"; he was seventy years old, he lived in a monastery twelve miles from the town and stayed sometimes in the town, too. He had come to the Pankratievsky Monastery three days before, and the bishop had kept him that he might talk to him at his leisure about matters of business, about the arrangements here.…

At half-past one they began ringing for matins. Father Sisoy could be heard coughing, muttering something in a discontented voice, then he got up and walked barefoot about the rooms.

“Father Sisoy,” the bishop called.

Sisoy went back to his room and a little later made his appearance in his boots, with a candle; he had on his cassock over his underclothes and on his head was an old faded skullcap.

“I can’t sleep,” said the bishop, sitting up. “I must be unwell. And what it is I don’t know. Fever!”

“You must have caught cold, your holiness. You must be rubbed with tallow.” Sisoy stood a little and yawned. “O Lord, forgive me, a sinner.”

“They had the electric lights on at Erakin’s today,” he said; “I don’t like it!”

Father Sisoy was old, lean, bent, always dissatisfied with something, and his eyes were angry-looking and prominent as a crab’s.

“I don’t like it,” he said, going away. “I don’t like it. Bother it!”

II

Next day, Palm Sunday, the bishop took the service in the cathedral in the town, then he visited the bishop of the diocese, then visited a very sick old lady, the widow of a general, and at last drove home. Between one and two o'clock he had welcome visitors dining with him—his mother and his niece Katya, a child of eight years old. All dinnertime the spring sunshine was streaming in at the windows, throwing bright light on the white tablecloth and on Katya's red hair. Through the double windows they could hear the noise of the rooks and the notes of the starlings in the garden.

"It is nine years since we have met," said the old lady. "And when I looked at you in the monastery yesterday, good Lord! you've not changed a bit, except maybe you are thinner and your beard is a little longer. Holy Mother, Queen of Heaven! Yesterday at the evening service no one could help crying. I, too, as I looked at you, suddenly began crying, though I couldn't say why. His Holy Will!"

And in spite of the affectionate tone in which she said this, he could see she was constrained as though she were uncertain whether to address him formally or familiarly, to laugh or not, and that she felt herself more a deacon's widow than his mother. And Katya gazed without blinking at her uncle, his holiness, as though trying to discover what sort of a person he was. Her hair sprang up from under the comb and the velvet ribbon and stood out like a halo; she had a turned-up nose and sly eyes. The child had broken a glass before sitting down to dinner, and now her grandmother, as she talked, moved away from Katya first a wineglass and then a tumbler. The bishop listened to his mother and remembered how many, many years ago she used to take him and his brothers and sisters to relations whom she considered rich; in those days she was taken up with the care of her children, now with her grandchildren, and she had brought Katya.…

"Your sister, Varenka, has four children," she told him; "Katya, here, is the eldest. And your brother-in-law Father Ivan fell sick, God knows of what, and died three days before the Assumption; and my poor Varenka is left a beggar."

“And how is Nikanor getting on?” the bishop asked about his eldest brother.

“He is all right, thank God. Though he has nothing much, yet he can live. Only there is one thing: his son, my grandson Nikolasha, did not want to go into the Church; he has gone to the university to be a doctor. He thinks it is better; but who knows! His Holy Will!”

“Nikolasha cuts up dead people,” said Katya, spilling water over her knees.

“Sit still, child,” her grandmother observed calmly, and took the glass out of her hand. “Say a prayer, and go on eating.”

“How long it is since we have seen each other!” said the bishop, and he tenderly stroked his mother’s hand and shoulder; “and I missed you abroad, mother, I missed you dreadfully.”

“Thank you.”

“I used to sit in the evenings at the open window, lonely and alone; often there was music playing, and all at once I used to be overcome with homesickness and felt as though I would give everything only to be at home and see you.”

His mother smiled, beamed, but at once she made a grave face and said:

“Thank you.”

His mood suddenly changed. He looked at his mother and could not understand how she had come by that respectfulness, that timid expression of face: what was it for? And he did not recognize her. He felt sad and vexed. And then his head ached just as it had the day before; his legs felt fearfully tired, and the fish seemed to him stale and tasteless; he felt thirsty all the time.…

After dinner two rich ladies, landowners, arrived and sat for an hour and a half in silence with rigid countenances; the archimandrite, a silent, rather deaf man, came to see him about business. Then they began ringing for vespers; the sun was setting behind the wood and the day was over. When he returned from church, he hurriedly said his prayers, got into bed, and wrapped himself up as warm as possible.

It was disagreeable to remember the fish he had eaten at dinner. The moonlight worried him, and then he heard talking. In an adjoining room, probably in the parlour, Father Sisoy was talking politics:

“There’s war among the Japanese now. They are fighting. The Japanese, my good soul, are the same as the Montenegrins; they are the same race. They were under the Turkish yoke together.”

And then he heard the voice of Marya Timofyevna:

“So, having said our prayers and drunk tea, we went, you know, to Father Yegor at Novokatnoye, so…”

And she kept on saying, “having had tea” or “having drunk tea,” and it seemed as though the only thing she had done in her life was to drink tea.

The bishop slowly, languidly, recalled the seminary, the academy. For three years he had been Greek teacher in the seminary: by that time he could not read without spectacles. Then he had become a monk; he had been made a school inspector. Then he had defended his thesis for his degree. When he was thirty-two he had been made rector of the seminary, and consecrated archimandrite: and then his life had been so easy, so pleasant; it seemed so long, so long, no end was in sight. Then he had begun to be ill, had grown very thin and almost blind, and by the advice of the doctors had to give up everything and go abroad.

“And what then?” asked Sisoy in the next room.

“Then we drank tea…” answered Marya Timofyevna.

“Good gracious, you’ve got a green beard,” said Katya suddenly in surprise, and she laughed.

The bishop remembered that the grey-headed Father Sisoy’s beard really had a shade of green in it, and he laughed.

“God have mercy upon us, what we have to put up with with this girl!” said Sisoy, aloud, getting angry. “Spoilt child! Sit quiet!”

The bishop remembered the perfectly new white church in which he had conducted the services while living abroad, he remembered the sound of the warm sea. In his flat he had five lofty light rooms; in his study he had a new writing-table, lots of books. He had read a great deal and often written. And he remembered how he had pined for his native land, how a blind beggar woman had played the guitar under his window every day and sung of love, and how, as he listened, he had always for some reason thought of the past. But eight years had passed and he had been called back to Russia, and now he was a suffragan bishop, and all the past had retreated far away into the mist as though it were a dream.…

Father Sisoy came into the bedroom with a candle.

“I say!” he said, wondering, “are you asleep already, your holiness?”

“What is it?”

“Why, it’s still early, ten o’clock or less. I bought a candle today; I wanted to rub you with tallow.”

“I am in a fever…” said the bishop, and he sat up. “I really ought to have something. My head is bad.…”

Sisoy took off the bishop’s shirt and began rubbing his chest and back with tallow.

“That’s the way… that’s the way…” he said. “Lord Jesus Christ… that’s the way. I walked to the town today; I was at what’s-his-name’s—the chief priest Sidonsky’s.… I had tea with him. I don’t like him. Lord Jesus Christ.… That’s the way. I don’t like him.”

III

The bishop of the diocese, a very fat old man, was ill with rheumatism or gout, and had been in bed for over a month. Bishop Pyotr went to see him almost every day, and saw all who came to ask his help. And now that he was unwell he was struck by the emptiness, the triviality of everything which they asked and for which they wept; he was vexed at their ignorance, their timidity; and all this useless, petty business oppressed him by the mass of it, and it seemed to him that now he understood the diocesan bishop, who had once in his young days written on “The Doctrines of the Freedom of the Will,” and now seemed to be all lost in trivialities, to have forgotten everything, and to have no thoughts of religion. The bishop must have lost touch with Russian life while he was abroad; he did not find it easy; the peasants seemed to him coarse, the women who sought his help dull and stupid, the seminarists and their teachers uncultivated and at times savage. And the documents coming in and going out were reckoned by tens of thousands; and what documents they were! The higher clergy in the whole diocese gave the priests, young and old, and even their wives and children, marks for their behaviour—a five, a four, and sometimes even a three; and about this he had to talk and to read and write serious reports. And there was positively not one minute to spare; his soul was troubled all day long, and the bishop was only at peace when he was in church.

He could not get used, either, to the awe which, through no wish of his own, he inspired in people in spite of his quiet, modest disposition. All the people in the province seemed to him little, scared, and guilty when he looked at them. Everyone was timid in his presence, even the old chief priests; everyone “flopped” at his feet, and not long previously an old lady, a village priest’s wife who had come to consult him, was so overcome by awe that she could not utter a single word, and went empty away. And he, who could never in his sermons bring himself to speak ill of people, never reproached anyone because he was so sorry for them, was moved to fury with the people who came to consult him, lost his temper and flung their petitions on the floor. The whole time he had been here, not one person had spoken to him genuinely, simply, as to a human

being; even his old mother seemed now not the same! And why, he wondered, did she chatter away to Sisoy and laugh so much; while with him, her son, she was grave and usually silent and constrained, which did not suit her at all. The only person who behaved freely with him and said what he meant was old Sisoy, who had spent his whole life in the presence of bishops and had outlived eleven of them. And so the bishop was at ease with him, although, of course, he was a tedious and nonsensical man.

After the service on Tuesday, his holiness Pyotr was in the diocesan bishop's house receiving petitions there; he got excited and angry, and then drove home. He was as unwell as before; he longed to be in bed, but he had hardly reached home when he was informed that a young merchant called Erakin, who subscribed liberally to charities, had come to see him about a very important matter. The bishop had to see him. Erakin stayed about an hour, talked very loud, almost shouted, and it was difficult to understand what he said.

"God grant it may," he said as he went away. "Most essential! According to circumstances, your holiness! I trust it may!"

After him came the Mother Superior from a distant convent. And when she had gone they began ringing for vespers. He had to go to church.

In the evening the monks sang harmoniously, with inspiration. A young priest with a black beard conducted the service; and the bishop, hearing of the Bridegroom who comes at midnight and of the Heavenly Mansion adorned for the festival, felt no repentance for his sins, no tribulation, but peace at heart and tranquillity. And he was carried back in thought to the distant past, to his childhood and youth, when, too, they used to sing of the Bridegroom and of the Heavenly Mansion; and now that past rose up before him—living, fair, and joyful as in all likelihood it never had been. And perhaps in the other world, in the life to come, we shall think of the distant past, of our life here, with the same feeling. Who knows? The bishop was sitting near the altar. It was dark; tears flowed down his face. He thought that here he had attained everything a man in his position could attain; he had faith and yet everything was not clear, something was lacking still. He did not want to die; and he still felt that he had missed what was most important, something of which he had dimly dreamed in the past; and he was troubled by the same hopes for the future as he had felt in childhood, at the academy and abroad.

"How well they sing today!" he thought, listening to the singing. "How nice it is!"

IV

On Thursday he celebrated mass in the cathedral; it was the Washing of Feet. When the service was over and the people were going home, it was sunny, warm; the water gurgled in the gutters, and the unceasing trilling of the larks, tender, telling of peace, rose from the fields outside the town. The trees were already awakening and smiling a welcome, while above them the infinite, fathomless blue sky stretched into the distance, God knows whither.

On reaching home his holiness drank some tea, then changed his clothes, lay down on his bed, and told the lay brother to close the shutters on the windows. The bedroom was darkened. But what weariness, what pain in his legs and his back, a chill heavy pain, what a noise in his ears! He had not slept for a long time—for a very long time, as it seemed to him now, and some trifling detail which haunted his brain as soon as his eyes were closed prevented him from sleeping. As on the day before, sounds reached him from the adjoining rooms through the walls, voices, the jingle of glasses and teaspoons.… Marya Timofyevna was gaily telling Father Sisoy some story with quaint turns of speech, while the latter answered in a grumpy, ill-humoured voice: “Bother them! Not likely! What next!” And the bishop again felt vexed and then hurt that with other people his old mother behaved in a simple, ordinary way, while with him, her son, she was shy, spoke little, and did not say what she meant, and even, as he fancied, had during all those three days kept trying in his presence to find an excuse for standing up, because she was embarrassed at sitting before him. And his father? He, too, probably, if he had been living, would not have been able to utter a word in the bishop’s presence.…

Something fell down on the floor in the adjoining room and was broken; Katya must have dropped a cup or a saucer, for Father Sisoy suddenly spat and said angrily:

“What a regular nuisance the child is! Lord forgive my transgressions! One can’t provide enough for her.”

Then all was quiet, the only sounds came from outside. And when the bishop opened his eyes he saw Katya in his room, standing motionless,

staring at him. Her red hair, as usual, stood up from under the comb like a halo.

"Is that you, Katya?" he asked. "Who is it downstairs who keeps opening and shutting a door?"

"I don't hear it," answered Katya; and she listened.

"There, someone has just passed by."

"But that was a noise in your stomach, uncle."

He laughed and stroked her on the head.

"So you say Cousin Nikolasha cuts up dead people?" he asked after a pause.

"Yes, he is studying."

"And is he kind?"

"Oh, yes, he's kind. But he drinks vodka awfully."

"And what was it your father died of?"

"Papa was weak and very, very thin, and all at once his throat was bad. I was ill then, too, and brother Fedya; we all had bad throats. Papa died, uncle, and we got well."

Her chin began quivering, and tears gleamed in her eyes and trickled down her cheeks.

"Your holiness," she said in a shrill voice, by now weeping bitterly, "uncle, mother and all of us are left very wretched.… Give us a little money… do be kind… uncle darling.…"

He, too, was moved to tears, and for a long time was too much touched to speak. Then he stroked her on the head, patted her on the shoulder and said:

"Very good, very good, my child. When the holy Easter comes, we will talk it over.… I will help you.… I will help you.…"

His mother came in quietly, timidly, and prayed before the icon. Noticing that he was not sleeping, she said:

"Won't you have a drop of soup?"

"No, thank you," he answered, "I am not hungry."

"You seem to be unwell, now I look at you. I should think so; you may well be ill! The whole day on your legs, the whole day.… And, my goodness, it makes one's heart ache even to look at you! Well, Easter is not far off; you will rest then, please God. Then we will have a talk, too, but now I'm not going to disturb you with my chatter. Come along, Katya; let his holiness sleep a little."

And he remembered how once very long ago, when he was a boy, she had spoken exactly like that, in the same jestingly respectful tone, with a Church dignitary.… Only from her extraordinarily kind eyes and the

timid, anxious glance she stole at him as she went out of the room could one have guessed that this was his mother. He shut his eyes and seemed to sleep, but twice heard the clock strike and Father Sisoy coughing the other side of the wall. And once more his mother came in and looked timidly at him for a minute. Someone drove up to the steps, as he could hear, in a coach or in a chaise. Suddenly a knock, the door slammed, the lay brother came into the bedroom.

"Your holiness," he called.

"Well?"

"The horses are here; it's time for the evening service."

"What o'clock is it?"

"A quarter past seven."

He dressed and drove to the cathedral. During all the "Twelve Gospels" he had to stand in the middle of the church without moving, and the first gospel, the longest and the most beautiful, he read himself. A mood of confidence and courage came over him. That first gospel, "Now is the Son of Man glorified," he knew by heart; and as he read he raised his eyes from time to time, and saw on both sides a perfect sea of lights and heard the splutter of candles, but, as in past years, he could not see the people, and it seemed as though these were all the same people as had been round him in those days, in his childhood and his youth; that they would always be the same every year and till such time as God only knew.

His father had been a deacon, his grandfather a priest, his great-grandfather a deacon, and his whole family, perhaps from the days when Christianity had been accepted in Russia, had belonged to the priesthood; and his love for the Church services, for the priesthood, for the peal of the bells, was deep in him, ineradicable, innate. In church, particularly when he took part in the service, he felt vigorous, of good cheer, happy. So it was now. Only when the eighth gospel had been read, he felt that his voice had grown weak, even his cough was inaudible. His head had begun to ache intensely, and he was troubled by a fear that he might fall down. And his legs were indeed quite numb, so that by degrees he ceased to feel them and could not understand how or on what he was standing, and why he did not fall.…

It was a quarter to twelve when the service was over. When he reached home, the bishop undressed and went to bed at once without even saying his prayers. He could not speak and felt that he could not have stood up. When he had covered his head with the quilt he felt a sudden longing to be abroad, an insufferable longing! He felt that he would give his life not

to see those pitiful cheap shutters, those low ceilings, not to smell that heavy monastery smell. If only there were one person to whom he could have talked, have opened his heart!

For a long while he heard footsteps in the next room and could not tell whose they were. At last the door opened, and Sisoy came in with a candle and a teacup in his hand.

"You are in bed already, your holiness?" he asked. "Here I have come to rub you with spirit and vinegar. A thorough rubbing does a great deal of good. Lord Jesus Christ!… That's the way… that's the way.… I've just been in our monastery.… I don't like it. I'm going away from here tomorrow, your holiness; I don't want to stay longer. Lord Jesus Christ.… That's the way.…"

Sisoy could never stay long in the same place, and he felt as though he had been a whole year in the Pankratievsky Monastery. Above all, listening to him it was difficult to understand where his home was, whether he cared for anyone or anything, whether he believed in God.… He did not know himself why he was a monk, and, indeed, he did not think about it, and the time when he had become a monk had long passed out of his memory; it seemed as though he had been born a monk.

"I'm going away tomorrow; God be with them all."

"I should like to talk to you.… I can't find the time," said the bishop softly with an effort. "I don't know anything or anybody here.…"

"I'll stay till Sunday if you like; so be it, but I don't want to stay longer. I am sick of them!"

"I ought not to be a bishop," said the bishop softly. "I ought to have been a village priest, a deacon… or simply a monk.… All this oppresses me… oppresses me."

"What? Lord Jesus Christ.… That's the way. Come, sleep well, your holiness!… What's the good of talking? It's no use. Good night!"

The bishop did not sleep all night. And at eight o'clock in the morning he began to have hemorrhage from the bowels. The lay brother was alarmed, and ran first to the archimandrite, then for the monastery doctor, Ivan Andreyitch, who lived in the town. The doctor, a stout old man with a long grey beard, made a prolonged examination of the bishop, and kept shaking his head and frowning, then said:

"Do you know, your holiness, you have got typhoid?"

After an hour or so of hemorrhage the bishop looked much thinner, paler, and wasted; his face looked wrinkled, his eyes looked bigger, and he seemed older, shorter, and it seemed to him that he was thinner,

weaker, more insignificant than anyone, that everything that had been had retreated far, far away and would never go on again or be repeated.

"How good," he thought, "how good!"

His old mother came. Seeing his wrinkled face and his big eyes, she was frightened, she fell on her knees by the bed and began kissing his face, his shoulders, his hands. And to her, too, it seemed that he was thinner, weaker, and more insignificant than anyone, and now she forgot that he was a bishop, and kissed him as though he were a child very near and very dear to her.

"Pavlusha, darling," she said; "my own, my darling son! … Why are you like this? Pavlusha, answer me!"

Katya, pale and severe, stood beside her, unable to understand what was the matter with her uncle, why there was such a look of suffering on her grandmother's face, why she was saying such sad and touching things. By now he could not utter a word, he could understand nothing, and he imagined he was a simple ordinary man, that he was walking quickly, cheerfully through the fields, tapping with his stick, while above him was the open sky bathed in sunshine, and that he was free now as a bird and could go where he liked!

"Pavlusha, my darling son, answer me," the old woman was saying. "What is it? My own!"

"Don't disturb his holiness," Sisoy said angrily, walking about the room. "Let him sleep… what's the use… it's no good.…"

Three doctors arrived, consulted together, and went away again. The day was long, incredibly long, then the night came on and passed slowly, slowly, and towards morning on Saturday the lay brother went in to the old mother who was lying on the sofa in the parlour, and asked her to go into the bedroom: the bishop had just breathed his last.

Next day was Easter Sunday. There were forty-two churches and six monasteries in the town; the sonorous, joyful clang of the bells hung over the town from morning till night unceasingly, setting the spring air aquiver; the birds were singing, the sun was shining brightly. The big market square was noisy, swings were going, barrel organs were playing, accordions were squeaking, drunken voices were shouting. After midday people began driving up and down the principal street.

In short, all was merriment, everything was satisfactory, just as it had been the year before, and as it will be in all likelihood next year.

A month later a new suffragan bishop was appointed, and no one thought anything more of Bishop Pyotr, and afterwards he was completely forgotten. And only the dead man's old mother, who is living

today with her son-in-law the deacon in a remote little district town, when she goes out at night to bring her cow in and meets other women at the pasture, begins talking of her children and her grandchildren, and says that she had a son a bishop, and this she says timidly, afraid that she may not be believed.…

And, indeed, there are some who do not believe her.

BETROTHED

I

It was ten o’clock in the evening and the full moon was shining over the garden. In the Shumins’ house an evening service celebrated at the request of the grandmother, Marfa Mihalovna, was just over, and now Nadya—she had gone into the garden for a minute—could see the table being laid for supper in the dining room, and her grandmother bustling about in her gorgeous silk dress; Father Andrey, a chief priest of the cathedral, was talking to Nadya’s mother, Nina Ivanovna, and now in the evening light through the window her mother for some reason looked very young; Andrey Andreitch, Father Andrey’s son, was standing by listening attentively.

It was still and cool in the garden, and dark peaceful shadows lay on the ground. There was a sound of frogs croaking, far, far away beyond the town. There was a feeling of May, sweet May! One drew deep breaths and longed to fancy that not here but far away under the sky, above the trees, far away in the open country, in the fields and the woods, the life of spring was unfolding now, mysterious, lovely, rich and holy beyond the understanding of weak, sinful man. And for some reason one wanted to cry.

She, Nadya, was already twenty-three. Ever since she was sixteen she had been passionately dreaming of marriage and at last she was engaged to Andrey Andreitch, the young man who was standing on the other side of the window; she liked him, the wedding was already fixed for July 7, and yet there was no joy in her heart, she was sleeping badly, her spirits drooped.… She could hear from the open windows of the basement where the kitchen was the hurrying servants, the clatter of knives, the banging of the swing door; there was a smell of roast turkey and pickled

cherries, and for some reason it seemed to her that it would be like that all her life, with no change, no end to it.

Someone came out of the house and stood on the steps; it was Alexandr Timofeitch, or, as he was always called, Sasha, who had come from Moscow ten days before and was staying with them. Years ago a distant relation of the grandmother, a gentleman's widow called Marya Petrovna, a thin, sickly little woman who had sunk into poverty, used to come to the house to ask for assistance. She had a son Sasha. It used for some reason to be said that he had talent as an artist, and when his mother died Nadya's grandmother had, for the salvation of her soul, sent him to the Komissarovsky school in Moscow; two years later he went into the school of painting, spent nearly fifteen years there, and only just managed to scrape through the leaving examination in the section of architecture. He did not set up as an architect, however, but took a job at a lithographer's. He used to come almost every year, usually very ill, to stay with Nadya's grandmother to rest and recover.

He was wearing now a frock-coat buttoned up, and shabby canvas trousers, crumpled into creases at the bottom. And his shirt had not been ironed and he had somehow all over a look of not being fresh. He was very thin, with big eyes, long thin fingers and a swarthy bearded face, and all the same he was handsome. With the Shumins he was like one of the family, and in their house felt he was at home. And the room in which he lived when he was there had for years been called Sasha's room. Standing on the steps he saw Nadya, and went up to her.

"It's nice here," he said.

"Of course it's nice, you ought to stay here till the autumn."

"Yes, I expect it will come to that. I dare say I shall stay with you till September."

He laughed for no reason, and sat down beside her.

"I'm sitting gazing at mother," said Nadya. "She looks so young from here! My mother has her weaknesses, of course," she added, after a pause, "but still she is an exceptional woman."

"Yes, she is very nice…" Sasha agreed. "Your mother, in her own way of course, is a very good and sweet woman, but… how shall I say? I went early this morning into your kitchen and there I found four servants sleeping on the floor, no bedsteads, and rags for bedding, stench, bugs, beetles… it is just as it was twenty years ago, no change at all. Well, Granny, God bless her, what else can you expect of Granny? But your mother speaks French, you know, and acts in private theatricals. One would think she might understand."

As Sasha talked, he used to stretch out two long wasted fingers before the listener's face.

"It all seems somehow strange to me here, now I am out of the habit of it," he went on. "There is no making it out. Nobody ever does anything. Your mother spends the whole day walking about like a duchess, Granny does nothing either, nor you either. And your Andrey Andreitch never does anything either."

Nadya had heard this the year before and, she fancied, the year before that too, and she knew that Sasha could not make any other criticism, and in old days this had amused her, but now for some reason she felt annoyed.

"That's all stale, and I have been sick of it for ages," she said and got up. "You should think of something a little newer."

He laughed and got up too, and they went together toward the house. She, tall, handsome, and well-made, beside him looked very healthy and smartly dressed; she was conscious of this and felt sorry for him and for some reason awkward.

"And you say a great deal you should not," she said. "You've just been talking about my Andrey, but you see you don't know him."

"My Andrey.… Bother him, your Andrey. I am sorry for your youth."

They were already sitting down to supper as the young people went into the dining room. The grandmother, or Granny as she was called in the household, a very stout, plain old lady with bushy eyebrows and a little moustache, was talking loudly, and from her voice and manner of speaking it could be seen that she was the person of most importance in the house. She owned rows of shops in the market, and the old-fashioned house with columns and the garden, yet she prayed every morning that God might save her from ruin and shed tears as she did so. Her daughter-in-law, Nadya's mother, Nina Ivanovna, a fair-haired woman tightly laced in, with a pince-nez, and diamonds on every finger, Father Andrey, a lean, toothless old man whose face always looked as though he were just going to say something amusing, and his son, Andrey Andreitch, a stout and handsome young man with curly hair looking like an artist or an actor, were all talking of hypnotism.

"You will get well in a week here," said Granny, addressing Sasha. "Only you must eat more. What do you look like!" she sighed. "You are really dreadful! You are a regular prodigal son, that is what you are."

"After wasting his father's substance in riotous living," said Father Andrey slowly, with laughing eyes. "He fed with senseless beasts."

“I like my dad,” said Andrey Andreitch, touching his father on the shoulder. “He is a splendid old fellow, a dear old fellow.”

Everyone was silent for a space. Sasha suddenly burst out laughing and put his dinner napkin to his mouth.

“So you believe in hypnotism?” said Father Andrey to Nina Ivanovna.

“I cannot, of course, assert that I believe,” answered Nina Ivanovna, assuming a very serious, even severe, expression; “but I must own that there is much that is mysterious and incomprehensible in nature.”

“I quite agree with you, though I must add that religion distinctly curtails for us the domain of the mysterious.”

A big and very fat turkey was served. Father Andrey and Nina Ivanovna went on with their conversation. Nina Ivanovna’s diamonds glittered on her fingers, then tears began to glitter in her eyes, she grew excited.

“Though I cannot venture to argue with you,” she said, “you must admit there are so many insoluble riddles in life!”

“Not one, I assure you.”

After supper Andrey Andreitch played the fiddle and Nina Ivanovna accompanied him on the piano. Ten years before he had taken his degree at the university in the Faculty of Arts, but had never held any post, had no definite work, and only from time to time took part in concerts for charitable objects; and in the town he was regarded as a musician.

Andrey Andreitch played; they all listened in silence. The samovar was boiling quietly on the table and no one but Sasha was drinking tea. Then when it struck twelve a violin string suddenly broke; everyone laughed, bustled about, and began saying goodbye.

After seeing her fiancé out, Nadya went upstairs where she and her mother had their rooms (the lower storey was occupied by the grandmother). They began putting the lights out below in the dining room, while Sasha still sat on drinking tea. He always spent a long time over tea in the Moscow style, drinking as much as seven glasses at a time. For a long time after Nadya had undressed and gone to bed she could hear the servants clearing away downstairs and Granny talking angrily. At last everything was hushed, and nothing could be heard but Sasha from time to time coughing on a bass note in his room below.

II

When Nadya woke up it must have been two o'clock, it was beginning to get light. A watchman was tapping somewhere far away. She was not sleepy, and her bed felt very soft and uncomfortable. Nadya sat up in her bed and fell to thinking as she had done every night in May. Her thoughts were the same as they had been the night before, useless, persistent thoughts, always alike, of how Andrey Andreitch had begun courting her and had made her an offer, how she had accepted him and then little by little had come to appreciate the kindly, intelligent man. But for some reason now when there was hardly a month left before the wedding, she began to feel dread and uneasiness as though something vague and oppressive were before her.

"Tick-tock, tick-tock…" the watchman tapped lazily. "… Tick-tock."

Through the big old-fashioned window she could see the garden and at a little distance bushes of lilac in full flower, drowsy and lifeless from the cold; and the thick white mist was floating softly up to the lilac, trying to cover it. Drowsy rooks were cawing in the faraway trees.

"My God, why is my heart so heavy?"

Perhaps every girl felt the same before her wedding. There was no knowing! Or was it Sasha's influence? But for several years past Sasha had been repeating the same thing, like a copybook, and when he talked he seemed naive and queer. But why was it she could not get Sasha out of her head? Why was it?

The watchman left off tapping for a long while. The birds were twittering under the windows and the mist had disappeared from the garden. Everything was lighted up by the spring sunshine as by a smile. Soon the whole garden, warm and caressed by the sun, returned to life, and dewdrops like diamonds glittered on the leaves and the old neglected garden on that morning looked young and gaily decked.

Granny was already awake. Sasha's husky cough began. Nadya could hear them below, setting the samovar and moving the chairs. The hours passed slowly, Nadya had been up and walking about the garden for a long while and still the morning dragged on.

At last Nina Ivanovna appeared with a tear-stained face, carrying a glass of mineral water. She was interested in spiritualism and homeopathy, read a great deal, was fond of talking of the doubts to which she was subject, and to Nadya it seemed as though there were a deep mysterious significance in all that.

Now Nadya kissed her mother and walked beside her.

"What have you been crying about, mother?" she asked.

"Last night I was reading a story in which there is an old man and his daughter. The old man is in some office and his chief falls in love with his daughter. I have not finished it, but there was a passage which made it hard to keep from tears," said Nina Ivanovna and she sipped at her glass. "I thought of it this morning and shed tears again."

"I have been so depressed all these days," said Nadya after a pause. "Why is it I don't sleep at night!"

"I don't know, dear. When I can't sleep I shut my eyes very tightly, like this, and picture to myself Anna Karenin moving about and talking, or something historical from the ancient world.…"

Nadya felt that her mother did not understand her and was incapable of understanding. She felt this for the first time in her life, and it positively frightened her and made her want to hide herself; and she went away to her own room.

At two o'clock they sat down to dinner. It was Wednesday, a fast day, and so vegetable soup and bream with boiled grain were set before Granny.

To tease Granny Sasha ate his meat soup as well as the vegetable soup. He was making jokes all through dinnertime, but his jests were laboured and invariably with a moral bearing, and the effect was not at all amusing when before making some witty remark he raised his very long, thin, deathly-looking fingers; and when one remembered that he was very ill and would probably not be much longer in this world, one felt sorry for him and ready to weep.

After dinner Granny went off to her own room to lie down. Nina Ivanovna played on the piano for a little, and then she too went away.

"Oh, dear Nadya!" Sasha began his usual afternoon conversation, "if only you would listen to me! If only you would!"

She was sitting far back in an old-fashioned armchair, with her eyes shut, while he paced slowly about the room from corner to corner.

"If only you would go to the university," he said. "Only enlightened and holy people are interesting, it's only they who are wanted. The more of such people there are, the sooner the Kingdom of God will come on

earth. Of your town then not one stone will be left, everything will he blown up from the foundations, everything will be changed as though by magic. And then there will be immense, magnificent houses here, wonderful gardens, marvellous fountains, remarkable people.… But that's not what matters most. What matters most is that the crowd, in our sense of the word, in the sense in which it exists now—that evil will not exist then, because every man will believe and every man will know what he is living for and no one will seek moral support in the crowd. Dear Nadya, darling girl, go away! Show them all that you are sick of this stagnant, grey, sinful life. Prove it to yourself at least!"

"I can't, Sasha, I'm going to be married."

"Oh nonsense! What's it for!"

They went out into the garden and walked up and down a little.

"And however that may be, my dear girl, you must think, you must realize how unclean, how immoral this idle life of yours is," Sasha went on. "Do understand that if, for instance, you and your mother and your grandmother do nothing, it means that someone else is working for you, you are eating up someone else's life, and is that clean, isn't it filthy?"

Nadya wanted to say "Yes, that is true"; she wanted to say that she understood, but tears came into her eyes, her spirits drooped, and shrinking into herself she went off to her room.

Towards evening Andrey Andreitch arrived and as usual played the fiddle for a long time. He was not given to much talk as a rule, and was fond of the fiddle, perhaps because one could be silent while playing. At eleven o'clock when he was about to go home and had put on his greatcoat, he embraced Nadya and began greedily kissing her face, her shoulders, and her hands.

"My dear, my sweet, my charmer," he muttered. "Oh how happy I am! I am beside myself with rapture!"

And it seemed to her as though she had heard that long, long ago, or had read it somewhere… in some old tattered novel thrown away long ago. In the dining room Sasha was sitting at the table drinking tea with the saucer poised on his five long fingers; Granny was laying out patience; Nina Ivanovna was reading. The flame crackled in the icon lamp and everything, it seemed, was quiet and going well. Nadya said good night, went upstairs to her room, got into bed and fell asleep at once. But just as on the night before, almost before it was light, she woke up. She was not sleepy, there was an uneasy, oppressive feeling in her heart. She sat up with her head on her knees and thought of her fiancé and her marriage.… She for some reason remembered that her mother

had not loved her father and now had nothing and lived in complete dependence on her mother-in-law, Granny. And however much Nadya pondered she could not imagine why she had hitherto seen in her mother something special and exceptional, how it was she had not noticed that she was a simple, ordinary, unhappy woman.

And Sasha downstairs was not asleep, she could hear him coughing. He is a queer, naive man, thought Nadya, and in all his dreams, in all those marvellous gardens and wonderful fountains one felt there was something absurd. But for some reason in his naivete, in this very absurdity there was something so beautiful that as soon as she thought of the possibility of going to the university, it sent a cold thrill through her heart and her bosom and flooded them with joy and rapture.

"But better not think, better not think…" she whispered. "I must not think of it."

"Tick-tock," tapped the watchman somewhere far away. "Tick-tock… tick-tock.…"

III

In the middle of June Sasha suddenly felt bored and made up his mind to return to Moscow.

“I can’t exist in this town,” he said gloomily. “No water supply, no drains! It disgusts me to eat at dinner; the filth in the kitchen is incredible.…”

“Wait a little, prodigal son!” Granny tried to persuade him, speaking for some reason in a whisper, “the wedding is to be on the seventh.”

“I don’t want to.”

“You meant to stay with us until September!”

“But now, you see, I don’t want to. I must get to work.”

The summer was grey and cold, the trees were wet, everything in the garden looked dejected and uninviting, it certainly did make one long to get to work. The sound of unfamiliar women’s voices was heard downstairs and upstairs, there was the rattle of a sewing machine in Granny’s room, they were working hard at the trousseau. Of fur coats alone, six were provided for Nadya, and the cheapest of them, in Granny’s words, had cost three hundred roubles! The fuss irritated Sasha; he stayed in his own room and was cross, but everyone persuaded him to remain, and he promised not to go before the first of July.

Time passed quickly. On St. Peter’s day Andrey Andreitch went with Nadya after dinner to Moscow Street to look once more at the house which had been taken and made ready for the young couple some time before. It was a house of two storeys, but so far only the upper floor had been furnished. There was in the hall a shining floor painted and parqueted, there were Viennese chairs, a piano, a violin stand; there was a smell of paint. On the wall hung a big oil painting in a gold frame—a naked lady and beside her a purple vase with a broken handle.

“An exquisite picture,” said Andrey Andreitch, and he gave a respectful sigh. “It’s the work of the artist Shismatchevsky.”

Then there was the drawing room with the round table, and a sofa and easy chairs upholstered in bright blue. Above the sofa was a big photograph of Father Andrey wearing a priest’s velvet cap and decorations. Then they went into the dining room in which there was a

sideboard; then into the bedroom; here in the half dusk stood two bedsteads side by side, and it looked as though the bedroom had been decorated with the idea that it would always be very agreeable there and could not possibly be anything else. Andrey Andreitch led Nadya about the rooms, all the while keeping his arm round her waist; and she felt weak and conscience-stricken. She hated all the rooms, the beds, the easy chairs; she was nauseated by the naked lady. It was clear to her now that she had ceased to love Andrey Andreitch or perhaps had never loved him at all; but how to say this and to whom to say it and with what object she did not understand, and could not understand, though she was thinking about it all day and all night.… He held her round the waist, talked so affectionately, so modestly, was so happy, walking about this house of his; while she saw nothing in it all but vulgarity, stupid, naive, unbearable vulgarity, and his arm round her waist felt as hard and cold as an iron hoop. And every minute she was on the point of running away, bursting into sobs, throwing herself out of a window. Andrey Andreitch led her into the bathroom and here he touched a tap fixed in the wall and at once water flowed.

"What do you say to that?" he said, and laughed. "I had a tank holding two hundred gallons put in the loft, and so now we shall have water."

They walked across the yard and went out into the street and took a cab. Thick clouds of dust were blowing, and it seemed as though it were just going to rain.

"You are not cold?" said Andrey Andreitch, screwing up his eyes at the dust.

She did not answer.

"Yesterday, you remember, Sasha blamed me for doing nothing," he said, after a brief silence. "Well, he is right, absolutely right! I do nothing and can do nothing. My precious, why is it? Why is it that the very thought that I may some day fix a cockade on my cap and go into the government service is so hateful to me? Why do I feel so uncomfortable when I see a lawyer or a Latin master or a member of the Zemstvo? O Mother Russia! O Mother Russia! What a burden of idle and useless people you still carry! How many like me are upon you, long-suffering Mother!"

And from the fact that he did nothing he drew generalizations, seeing in it a sign of the times.

"When we are married let us go together into the country, my precious; there we will work! We will buy ourselves a little piece of land

with a garden and a river, we will labour and watch life. Oh, how splendid that will be!”

He took off his hat, and his hair floated in the wind, while she listened to him and thought: “Good God, I wish I were home!”

When they were quite near the house they overtook Father Andrey.

“Ah, here’s father coming,” cried Andrey Andreitch, delighted, and he waved his hat. “I love my dad really,” he said as he paid the cabman. “He’s a splendid old fellow, a dear old fellow.”

Nadya went into the house, feeling cross and unwell, thinking that there would be visitors all the evening, that she would have to entertain them, to smile, to listen to the fiddle, to listen to all sorts of nonsense, and to talk of nothing but the wedding.

Granny, dignified, gorgeous in her silk dress, and haughty as she always seemed before visitors, was sitting before the samovar. Father Andrey came in with his sly smile.

“I have the pleasure and blessed consolation of seeing you in health,” he said to Granny, and it was hard to tell whether he was joking or speaking seriously.

IV

The wind was beating on the window and on the roof; there was a whistling sound, and in the stove the house spirit was plaintively and sullenly droning his song. It was past midnight; everyone in the house had gone to bed, but no one was asleep, and it seemed all the while to Nadya as though they were playing the fiddle below. There was a sharp bang; a shutter must have been torn off. A minute later Nina Ivanovna came in in her nightgown, with a candle.

"What was the bang, Nadya?" she asked.

Her mother, with her hair in a single plait and a timid smile on her face, looked older, plainer, smaller on that stormy night. Nadya remembered that quite a little time ago she had thought her mother an exceptional woman and had listened with pride to the things she said; and now she could not remember those things, everything that came into her mind was so feeble and useless.

In the stove was the sound of several bass voices in chorus, and she even heard "O-o-o my G-o-od!" Nadya sat on her bed, and suddenly she clutched at her hair and burst into sobs.

"Mother, mother, my own," she said. "If only you knew what is happening to me! I beg you, I beseech you, let me go away! I beseech you!"

"Where?" asked Nina Ivanovna, not understanding, and she sat down on the bedstead. "Go where?"

For a long while Nadya cried and could not utter a word.

"Let me go away from the town," she said at last. "There must not and will not be a wedding, understand that! I don't love that man… I can't even speak about him."

"No, my own, no!" Nina Ivanovna said quickly, terribly alarmed. "Calm yourself—it's just because you are in low spirits. It will pass, it often happens. Most likely you have had a tiff with Andrey; but lovers' quarrels always end in kisses!"

"Oh, go away, mother, oh, go away," sobbed Nadya.

"Yes," said Nina Ivanovna after a pause, "it's not long since you were a baby, a little girl, and now you are engaged to be married. In nature

there is a continual transmutation of substances. Before you know where you are you will be a mother yourself and an old woman, and will have as rebellious a daughter as I have."

"My darling, my sweet, you are clever you know, you are unhappy," said Nadya. "You are very unhappy; why do you say such very dull, commonplace things? For God's sake, why?"

Nina Ivanovna tried to say something, but could not utter a word; she gave a sob and went away to her own room. The bass voices began droning in the stove again, and Nadya felt suddenly frightened. She jumped out of bed and went quickly to her mother. Nina Ivanovna, with tear-stained face, was lying in bed wrapped in a pale blue quilt and holding a book in her hands.

"Mother, listen to me!" said Nadya. "I implore you, do understand! If you would only understand how petty and degrading our life is. My eyes have been opened, and I see it all now. And what is your Andrey Andreitch? Why, he is not intelligent, mother! Merciful heavens, do understand, mother, he is stupid!"

Nina Ivanovna abruptly sat up.

"You and your grandmother torment me," she said with a sob. "I want to live! to live," she repeated, and twice she beat her little fist upon her bosom. "Let me be free! I am still young, I want to live, and you have made me an old woman between you!"

She broke into bitter tears, lay down and curled up under the quilt, and looked so small, so pitiful, so foolish. Nadya went to her room, dressed, and sitting at the window fell to waiting for the morning. She sat all night thinking, while someone seemed to be tapping on the shutters and whistling in the yard.

In the morning Granny complained that the wind had blown down all the apples in the garden, and broken down an old plum tree. It was grey, murky, cheerless, dark enough for candles; everyone complained of the cold, and the rain lashed on the windows. After tea Nadya went into Sasha's room and without saying a word knelt down before an armchair in the corner and hid her face in her hands.

"What is it?" asked Sasha.

"I can't…" she said. "How I could go on living here before, I can't understand, I can't conceive! I despise the man I am engaged to, I despise myself, I despise all this idle, senseless existence."

"Well, well," said Sasha, not yet grasping what was meant. "That's all right… that's good."

“I am sick of this life,” Nadya went on. “I can’t endure another day here. Tomorrow I am going away. Take me with you for God’s sake!”

For a minute Sasha looked at her in astonishment; at last he understood and was delighted as a child. He waved his arms and began pattering with his slippers as though he were dancing with delight.

“Splendid,” he said, rubbing his hands. “My goodness, how fine that is!”

And she stared at him without blinking, with adoring eyes, as though spellbound, expecting every minute that he would say something important, something infinitely significant; he had told her nothing yet, but already it seemed to her that something new and great was opening before her which she had not known till then, and already she gazed at him full of expectation, ready to face anything, even death.

“I am going tomorrow,” he said after a moment’s thought. “You come to the station to see me off.… I’ll take your things in my portmanteau, and I’ll get your ticket, and when the third bell rings you get into the carriage, and we’ll go off. You’ll see me as far as Moscow and then go on to Petersburg alone. Have you a passport?”

“Yes.”

“I can promise you, you won’t regret it,” said Sasha, with conviction. “You will go, you will study, and then go where fate takes you. When you turn your life upside down everything will be changed. The great thing is to turn your life upside down, and all the rest is unimportant. And so we will set off tomorrow?”

“Oh yes, for God’s sake!”

It seemed to Nadya that she was very much excited, that her heart was heavier than ever before, that she would spend all the time till she went away in misery and agonizing thought; but she had hardly gone upstairs and lain down on her bed when she fell asleep at once, with traces of tears and a smile on her face, and slept soundly till evening.

V

A cab had been sent for. Nadya in her hat and overcoat went upstairs to take one more look at her mother, at all her belongings. She stood in her own room beside her still warm bed, looked about her, then went slowly in to her mother. Nina Ivanovna was asleep; it was quite still in her room. Nadya kissed her mother, smoothed her hair, stood still for a couple of minutes… then walked slowly downstairs.

It was raining heavily. The cabman with the hood pulled down was standing at the entrance, drenched with rain.

"There is not room for you, Nadya," said Granny, as the servants began putting in the luggage. "What an idea to see him off in such weather! You had better stop at home. Goodness, how it rains!"

Nadya tried to say something, but could not. Then Sasha helped Nadya in and covered her feet with a rug. Then he sat down beside her.

"Good luck to you! God bless you!" Granny cried from the steps. "Mind you write to us from Moscow, Sasha!"

"Right. Goodbye, Granny."

"The Queen of Heaven keep you!"

"Oh, what weather!" said Sasha.

It was only now that Nadya began to cry. Now it was clear to her that she certainly was going, which she had not really believed when she was saying goodbye to Granny, and when she was looking at her mother. Goodbye, town! And she suddenly thought of it all: Andrey, and his father and the new house and the naked lady with the vase; and it all no longer frightened her, nor weighed upon her, but was naive and trivial and continually retreated further away. And when they got into the railway carriage and the train began to move, all that past which had been so big and serious shrank up into something tiny, and a vast wide future which till then had scarcely been noticed began unfolding before her. The rain pattered on the carriage windows, nothing could be seen but the green fields, telegraph posts with birds sitting on the wires flitted by, and joy made her hold her breath; she thought that she was going to freedom, going to study, and this was just like what used, ages ago, to be called going off to be a free Cossack.

She laughed and cried and prayed all at once.
“It’s a-all right,” said Sasha, smiling. “It’s a-all right.”

VI

Autumn had passed and winter, too, had gone. Nadya had begun to be very homesick and thought every day of her mother and her grandmother; she thought of Sasha too. The letters that came from home were kind and gentle, and it seemed as though everything by now were forgiven and forgotten. In May after the examinations she set off for home in good health and high spirits, and stopped on the way at Moscow to see Sasha. He was just the same as the year before, with the same beard and unkempt hair, with the same large beautiful eyes, and he still wore the same coat and canvas trousers; but he looked unwell and worried, he seemed both older and thinner, and kept coughing, and for some reason he struck Nadya as grey and provincial.

"My God, Nadya has come!" he said, and laughed gaily. "My darling girl!"

They sat in the printing room, which was full of tobacco smoke, and smelt strongly, stiflingly of Indian ink and paint; then they went to his room, which also smelt of tobacco and was full of the traces of spitting; near a cold samovar stood a broken plate with dark paper on it, and there were masses of dead flies on the table and on the floor. And everything showed that Sasha ordered his personal life in a slovenly way and lived anyhow, with utter contempt for comfort, and if anyone began talking to him of his personal happiness, of his personal life, of affection for him, he would not have understood and would have only laughed.

"It is all right, everything has gone well," said Nadya hurriedly. "Mother came to see me in Petersburg in the autumn; she said that Granny is not angry, and only keeps going into my room and making the sign of the cross over the walls."

Sasha looked cheerful, but he kept coughing, and talked in a cracked voice, and Nadya kept looking at him, unable to decide whether he really were seriously ill or whether it were only her fancy.

"Dear Sasha," she said, "you are ill."

"No, it's nothing, I am ill, but not very…"

"Oh, dear!" cried Nadya, in agitation. "Why don't you go to a doctor? Why don't you take care of your health? My dear, darling Sasha," she

said, and tears gushed from her eyes and for some reason there rose before her imagination Andrey Andreitch and the naked lady with the vase, and all her past which seemed now as far away as her childhood; and she began crying because Sasha no longer seemed to her so novel, so cultured, and so interesting as the year before. “Dear Sasha, you are very, very ill… I would do anything to make you not so pale and thin. I am so indebted to you! You can’t imagine how much you have done for me, my good Sasha! In reality you are now the person nearest and dearest to me.”

They sat on and talked, and now, after Nadya had spent a winter in Petersburg, Sasha, his works, his smile, his whole figure had for her a suggestion of something out of date, old-fashioned, done with long ago and perhaps already dead and buried.

“I am going down the Volga the day after tomorrow,” said Sasha, “and then to drink koumiss. I mean to drink koumiss. A friend and his wife are going with me. His wife is a wonderful woman; I am always at her, trying to persuade her to go to the university. I want her to turn her life upside down.”

After having talked they drove to the station. Sasha got her tea and apples; and when the train began moving and he waved his handkerchief at her, smiling, it could be seen even from his legs that he was very ill and would not live long.

Nadya reached her native town at midday. As she drove home from the station the streets struck her as very wide and the houses very small and squat; there were no people about, she met no one but the German piano-tuner in a rusty greatcoat. And all the houses looked as though they were covered with dust. Granny, who seemed to have grown quite old, but was as fat and plain as ever, flung her arms round Nadya and cried for a long time with her face on Nadya’s shoulder, unable to tear herself away. Nina Ivanovna looked much older and plainer and seemed shrivelled up, but was still tightly laced, and still had diamonds flashing on her fingers.

“My darling,” she said, trembling all over, “my darling!”

Then they sat down and cried without speaking. It was evident that both mother and grandmother realized that the past was lost and gone, never to return; they had now no position in society, no prestige as before, no right to invite visitors; so it is when in the midst of an easy careless life the police suddenly burst in at night and made a search, and it turns out that the head of the family has embezzled money or committed forgery—and goodbye then to the easy careless life forever!

Nadya went upstairs and saw the same bed, the same windows with naive white curtains, and outside the windows the same garden, gay and noisy, bathed in sunshine. She touched the table, sat down and sank into thought. And she had a good dinner and drank tea with delicious rich cream; but something was missing, there was a sense of emptiness in the rooms and the ceilings were so low. In the evening she went to bed, covered herself up and for some reason it seemed to her to be funny lying in this snug, very soft bed.

Nina Ivanovna came in for a minute; she sat down as people who feel guilty sit down, timidly, and looking about her.

"Well, tell me, Nadya," she enquired after a brief pause, "are you contented? Quite contented?"

"Yes, mother."

Nina Ivanovna got up, made the sign of the cross over Nadya and the windows.

"I have become religious, as you see," she said. "You know I am studying philosophy now, and I am always thinking and thinking.… And many things have become as clear as daylight to me. It seems to me that what is above all necessary is that life should pass as it were through a prism."

"Tell me, mother, how is Granny in health?"

"She seems all right. When you went away that time with Sasha and the telegram came from you, Granny fell on the floor as she read it; for three days she lay without moving. After that she was always praying and crying. But now she is all right again."

She got up and walked about the room.

"Tick-tock," tapped the watchman. "Tick-tock, tick-tock.…"

"What is above all necessary is that life should pass as it were through a prism," she said; "in other words, that life in consciousness should be analyzed into its simplest elements as into the seven primary colours, and each element must be studied separately."

What Nina Ivanovna said further and when she went away, Nadya did not hear, as she quickly fell asleep.

May passed; June came. Nadya had grown used to being at home. Granny busied herself about the samovar, heaving deep sighs. Nina Ivanovna talked in the evenings about her philosophy; she still lived in the house like a poor relation, and had to go to Granny for every farthing. There were lots of flies in the house, and the ceilings seemed to become lower and lower. Granny and Nina Ivanovna did not go out in the streets for fear of meeting Father Andrey and Andrey Andreitch. Nadya walked

about the garden and the streets, looked at the grey fences, and it seemed to her that everything in the town had grown old, was out of date and was only waiting either for the end, or for the beginning of something young and fresh. Oh, if only that new, bright life would come more quickly—that life in which one will be able to face one's fate boldly and directly, to know that one is right, to be lighthearted and free! And sooner or later such a life will come. The time will come when of Granny's house, where things are so arranged that the four servants can only live in one room in filth in the basement—the time will come when of that house not a trace will remain, and it will be forgotten, no one will remember it. And Nadya's only entertainment was from the boys next door; when she walked about the garden they knocked on the fence and shouted in mockery: "Betrothed! Betrothed!"

A letter from Sasha arrived from Saratov. In his gay dancing handwriting he told them that his journey on the Volga had been a complete success, but that he had been taken rather ill in Saratov, had lost his voice, and had been for the last fortnight in the hospital. She knew what that meant, and she was overwhelmed with a foreboding that was like a conviction. And it vexed her that this foreboding and the thought of Sasha did not distress her so much as before. She had a passionate desire for life, longed to be in Petersburg, and her friendship with Sasha seemed now sweet but something far, far away! She did not sleep all night, and in the morning sat at the window, listening. And she did in fact hear voices below; Granny, greatly agitated, was asking questions rapidly. Then someone began crying.… When Nadya went downstairs Granny was standing in the corner, praying before the icon and her face was tearful. A telegram lay on the table.

For some time Nadya walked up and down the room, listening to Granny's weeping; then she picked up the telegram and read it.

It announced that the previous morning Alexandr Timofeitch, or more simply, Sasha, had died at Saratov of consumption.

Granny and Nina Ivanovna went to the church to order a memorial service, while Nadya went on walking about the rooms and thinking. She recognized clearly that her life had been turned upside down as Sasha wished; that here she was, alien, isolated, useless and that everything here was useless to her; that all the past had been torn away from her and vanished as though it had been burnt up and the ashes scattered to the winds. She went into Sasha's room and stood there for a while.

"Goodbye, dear Sasha," she thought, and before her mind rose the vista of a new, wide, spacious life, and that life, still obscure and full of

mysteries, beckoned her and attracted her.

She went upstairs to her own room to pack, and next morning said goodbye to her family, and full of life and high spirits left the town—as she supposed forever.

ENDNOTES

1. On many railway lines, in order to avoid accidents, it is against the regulations to carry hay on the trains, and so live stock are without fodder on the journey. ↩

2. The train destined especially for the transport of troops is called the troop train; when they are no troops it takes goods, and goes more rapidly than ordinary goods train. ↩

3. A character in Gogol's *Dead Souls*.

—Translator

↩

4. *Sobol* in Russian means "sable-marten."

—Translator

↩

5. The Petchenyegs were a tribe of wild Mongolian nomads who made frequent inroads upon the Russians in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

—Translator

↩



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