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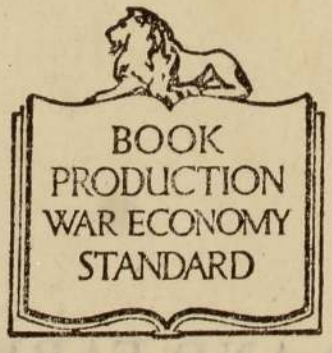

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A. PUSHKIN

The Queen of Spades

When bleak was the weather,
The friends came together
To play.
The stakes, they were doubled,
The sly ones, untroubled,
Were gay.
They all had their innings,
And chalked up their winnings,
And so
They kept busy together
Throughout the bleak weather,
Oho!

There was a card party at the rooms of Narumov of the Horse Guards. The long winter night passed away imperceptibly, and it was five o'clock in the morning before the company sat down to supper. Those who had won, ate with a good appetite; the others sat staring absently at their empty plates. When the champagne appeared, however, the conversation became more animated, and all took a part in it.

"And how did you fare, Surin?" asked the host.

"Oh, I lost, as usual. I must confess that I am unlucky: I never raise the original stakes, I always keep cool, I never allow anything to put me out, and yet I always lose!"

"And you have never been tempted? You have never staked on several cards in succession? . . . Your firmness astonishes me."

"But what do you think of Hermann?" said one of the guests, pointing to a young engineer: "he has never had a card in his

hand in his life, he has never in his life doubled the stake, and yet he sits here till five o'clock in the morning watching our play."

"Play interests me very much," said Hermann: "but I am not in the position to sacrifice the necessary in the hope of winning the superfluous."

"Hermann is a German: he is prudent—that is all!" observed Tomsky. "But if there is one person that I cannot understand, it is my grandmother, the Countess Anna Fedotovna."

"How? What?" cried the guests.

"I cannot understand," continued Tomsky, "how it is that my grandmother does not punt."

"What is there remarkable about an old lady of eighty not gambling?" said Narumov.

"Then you know nothing about her?"

"No, really; haven't the faintest idea."

"Oh! then listen. You must know that, about sixty years ago, my grandmother went to Paris, where she created quite a sensation. People used to run after her to catch a glimpse of '*la Vénus moscovite*'. Richelieu courted her, and my grandmother maintains that he almost blew out his brains in consequence of her cruelty. At that time ladies used to play faro. On one occasion at the Court she lost a very considerable sum to the Duke of Orleans. On returning home, my grandmother removed the patches from her face, took off her hoops, informed my grandfather of her loss at the gaming-table, and ordered him to pay the money. My deceased grandfather, as far as I remember, was a sort of butler to my grandmother. He dreaded her like fire; but, on hearing of such a heavy loss, he almost went out of his mind; he calculated the various sums she had lost, and pointed out to her that in six months she had spent half a million, that neither their Moscow nor Saratov estates were near Paris, and finally refused point blank to pay the debt. My grandmother slapped his face and slept by herself as a sign of her displeasure. The next day she sent for her husband, hoping that this domestic punishment had produced an effect upon him, but she found him inflexible. For the first time in her life, she condescended to offer reasons and explanations. She thought she could convince him by pointing out to him that there are debts and debts, and that there is a great difference between a Prince

and a coachmaker. But it was all in vain, grandfather was in revolt. He said 'no,' and that was all. My grandmother did not know what to do. She was on friendly terms with a very remarkable man. You have heard of Count St. Germain, about whom so many marvellous stories are told. You know that he represented himself as the Wandering Jew, as the discoverer of the elixir of life, of the philosopher's stone, and so forth. Some laughed at him as a charlatan; but Casanova, in his memoirs, says that he was a spy. But be that as it may, St. Germain, in spite of the mystery surrounding him, was a man of decent appearance and had an amiable manner in company. Even to this day my grandmother is in love with him, and becomes quite angry if anyone speaks disrespectfully of him. My grandmother knew that St. Germain had large sums of money at his disposal. She resolved to have recourse to him, and she wrote a letter to him asking him to come to her without delay. The queer old man immediately waited upon her and found her overwhelmed with grief. She described to him in the blackest colours the barbarity of her husband, and ended by declaring that she placed all her hopes in his friendship and graciousness.

"St. Germain reflected.

"'I could advance you the sum you want,' said he; 'but I know that you would not rest easy until you had paid me back, and I should not like to bring fresh troubles upon you. But there is another way of getting out of your difficulty: you can win back your money.'

"'But, my dear Count,' replied my grandmother, 'I tell you that we haven't any money left.'

"'Money is not necessary,' replied St. Germain: 'be pleased to listen to me.'

"Then he revealed to her a secret, for which each of us would give a good deal . . ."

The young gamblers listened with increased attention. Tomsky lit his pipe, pulled at it, and continued:

"That same evening my grandmother went to Versailles *au jeu de la Reine*. The Duke of Orleans kept the bank; my grandmother excused herself in an off-handed manner for not having yet paid her debt, by inventing some little story, and then began to play against him. She chose three cards and played them one

after the other: all three won at the start and my grandmother recovered all that she had lost."

"Mere chance!" said one of the guests.

"A fairy tale!" observed Hermann.

"Perhaps they were marked cards!" said a third.

"I do not think so," replied Tomsky gravely.

"What!" said Narumov, "you have a grandmother who knows how to hit upon three lucky cards in succession, and you have never yet succeeded in getting the secret of it out of her?"

"That's the deuce of it!" replied Tomsky: "she had four sons, one of whom was my father; all four are desperate gamblers, and yet not to one of them did she ever reveal her secret, although it would not have been a bad thing either for them or for me. But this is what I heard from my uncle, Count Ivan Ilych, and he assured me, on his honour, that it was true. The late Chaplitzky—the same who died in poverty after having squandered millions—once lost, in his youth, about three hundred thousand roubles—to Zorich, if I remember rightly. He was in despair. My grandmother, who was always very hard on extravagant young men, took pity, however, upon Chaplitzky. She mentioned to him three cards, telling him to play them one after the other, at the same time exacting from him a solemn promise that he would never play cards again as long as he lived. Chaplitzky then went to his victorious opponent, and they began a fresh game. On the first card he staked fifty thousand roubles and won at once; he doubled the stake and won again, doubled it again, and won, not only all he had lost, but something over and above that . . .

"But it is time to go to bed: it is a quarter to six already."

And indeed it was already beginning to dawn: the young men emptied their glasses and then took leave of one another.

II

—Il paraît que monsieur est
décidément pour les suivantes.
—Que voulez-vous, madame? Elles
sont plus fraîches.

SOCIETY TALK

The Old Countess X. was seated in her dressing-room in front of her looking-glass. Three maids stood around her. One held a small pot of rouge, another a box of hair-pins, and the third a tall cap with bright red ribbons. The Countess had no longer the slightest pretensions to beauty—hers had faded long ago—but she still preserved all the habits of her youth, dressed in strict accordance with the fashion of the 'seventies, and made as long and as careful a toilette as she would have done sixty years previously. Near the window, at an embroidery frame, sat a young lady, her ward.

"Good morning, *grand'maman*," said a young officer, entering the room. "*Bonjour, Mademoiselle Lise. Grand'maman*, I have a favour to ask of you."

"What is it, Paul?"

"I want you to let me introduce one of my friends to you, and to allow me to bring him to the ball on Friday."

"Bring him direct to the ball and introduce him to me there. Were you at N.'s yesterday?"

"Yes; everything went off very pleasantly, and dancing kept up until five o'clock. How beautiful Mme. Yeletzkaya was!"

"But, my dear, what is there beautiful about her? You should have seen her grandmother, Princess Darya Petrovna! By the way, she must have aged very much, Princess Darya Petrovna."

"How do you mean, aged?" cried Tomsky thoughtlessly; "she died seven years ago."

The young lady raised her head and made a sign to the young man. He then remembered that the old Countess was never to be informed of the death of any of her contemporaries, and he bit his lip. But the Countess heard the news with the greatest indifference.

"Died!" said she; "and I did not know it. We were appointed maids of honour at the same time, and when we were being presented, the Empress . . ."

And the Countess for the hundredth time related the anecdote to her grandson.

"Come, Paul," said she, when she had finished her story, "help me to get up. Lizanka, where is my snuff-box?"

And the Countess with her three maids went behind a screen to finish her toilette. Tomsky was left alone with the young lady.

"Who is the gentleman you wish to introduce to the Countess?" asked Lizaveta Ivanovna in a whisper.

"Narumov. Do you know him?"

"No. Is he in the army or is he a civilian?"

"In the army."

"Is he in the Engineers?"

"No, in the Cavalry. What made you think that he was in the Engineers?"

The young lady smiled, but made no reply.

"Paul," cried the Countess from behind the screen, "send me some new novel, only pray not the kind they write nowadays."

"What do you mean, *grand'maman*?"

"That is, a novel, in which the hero strangles neither his father nor his mother, and in which there are no drowned bodies. I have a great horror of them."

"There are no such novels nowadays. Would you like a Russian one?"

"Are there any Russian novels? Send me one, my dear, please send me one!"

"Good-bye, *grand'maman*, I am in a hurry. . . . Good-bye, Lizaveta Ivanovna. What, then, made you think that Narumov was in the Engineers?"

And Tomsky withdrew from the dressing-room.

Lizaveta Ivanovna was left alone: she laid aside her work and began to look out of the window. A few moments afterwards, from behind a corner house on the other side of the street, a young officer appeared. A deep blush covered her cheeks; she took up her work again and bent her head over the frame. At the same moment the Countess returned completely dressed.

"Order the carriage, Lizaveta," said she; "we will go out for a drive."

Lizaveta arose from the frame and began to put away her work.

"What is the matter with you, my dear, are you deaf?" cried the Countess. "Order the carriage to be got ready at once."

"I will do so this moment," replied the young lady, and ran into the ante-room.

A servant entered and gave the Countess some books from Prince Pavel Alexandrovich.

"Tell him that I am much obliged to him," said the Countess. "Lizaveta! Lizaveta! where are you running to?"

"I am going to dress."

"There is plenty of time, my dear. Sit down here. Open the first volume and read aloud to me."

Her companion took the book and read a few lines.

"Louder," said the Countess. "What is the matter with you, my dear? Have you lost your voice? Wait—give me that foot-stool—a little nearer—that will do!"

Lizaveta read two more pages. The Countess yawned.

"Put the book down," said she: "what a lot of nonsense! Send it back to Prince Pavel with my thanks. . . . But where is the carriage?"

"The carriage is ready," said Lizaveta, looking out into the street.

"How is it that you are not dressed?" said the Countess: "I must always wait for you. It is intolerable, my dear!"

Liza hastened to her room. She had not been there two minutes, before the Countess began to ring with all her might. The three maids came running in at one door and the valet at another.

"How is it that you don't come when I ring for you?" said the Countess. "Tell Lizaveta Ivanovna that I am waiting for her."

Lizaveta returned with her hat and cloak on.

"At last you are here!" said the Countess. "But why such an elaborate toilette? Whom do you intend to captivate? What sort of weather is it? It seems rather windy."

"No, Your Ladyship, it is very calm," replied the valet.

"You always speak thoughtlessly. Open the window. So it is: windy and bitterly cold. Unharness the horses. Lizaveta, we won't go out—there was no need for you to deck yourself out like that."

"And that's my life!" thought Lizaveta Ivanovna.

And, in truth, Lizaveta Ivanovna was a very unfortunate creature. "It is bitter to eat the bread of another," says Dante, "and hard to climb his stair." But who can know what the bitterness of dependence is so well as the poor companion of an old lady of quality? The Countess X. had by no means a bad heart, but she was capricious, like a woman who had been spoilt by the world, as well as avaricious and sunk in cold egoism, like

all old people who are no longer capable of affection, and whose thoughts are with the past and not the present. She participated in all the vanities of the great world, went to balls, where she sat in a corner, painted and dressed in old-fashioned style, like an ugly but indispensable ornament of the ballroom; the guests on entering approached her and bowed profoundly, as if in accordance with a set ceremony, but after that nobody took any further notice of her. She received the whole town at her house, and observed the strictest etiquette, although she could no longer recognise people. Her numerous domestics, growing fat and old in her ante-chamber and servants' hall, did just as they liked, and vied with each other in robbing the moribund old woman. Lizaveta Ivanovna was the martyr of the household. She poured tea, and was reprimanded for using too much sugar; she read novels aloud to the Countess, and the faults of the author were visited upon her head; she accompanied the Countess in her walks, and was held answerable for the weather or the state of the pavement. A salary was attached to the post, but she very rarely received it, although she was expected to dress like everybody else, that is to say, like very few indeed. In society she played the most pitiable role. Everybody knew her, and nobody paid her any attention. At balls she danced only when a partner was wanted, and ladies would only take hold of her arm when it was necessary to lead her out of the room to attend to their dresses. She had a great deal of *amour propre*, and felt her position keenly, and she looked about her with impatience for a deliverer to come to her rescue; but the young men calculating in their giddiness, did not condescend to pay her any attention, although Lizaveta Ivanovna was a hundred times prettier than the bare-faced and cold-hearted marriageable girls around whom they hovered. Many a time did she quietly slink away from the dull and elegant drawing-room, to go and cry in her own poor little room, in which stood a screen, a chest of drawers, a looking-glass and a painted bedstead, and where a tallow candle burnt feebly in a copper candlestick.

One morning—this was about two days after the card party described at the beginning of this story, and a week previous to the scene at which we have just assisted—Lizaveta Ivanovna

was seated near the window at her embroidery frame, when, happening to look out into the street, she caught sight of a young officer of the Engineers, standing motionless with his eyes fixed upon her window. She lowered her head and went on again with her work. About five minutes afterward she looked out again—the young officer was still standing in the same place. Not being in the habit of coquetting with passing officers, she did not continue to gaze out into the street, but went on sewing for a couple of hours, without raising her head. Dinner was announced. She rose up and began to put her embroidery away, but glancing casually out of the window, she perceived the officer again. This seemed to her very strange. After dinner she went to the window with a certain feeling of uneasiness, but the officer was no longer there—and she thought no more about him.

A couple of days afterwards, just as she was stepping into the carriage with the Countess, she saw him again. He was standing close to the entrance, with his face half-concealed by his beaver collar, his black eyes flashing beneath his hat. Lizaveta felt alarmed, though she knew not why, and she trembled as she seated herself in the carriage.

On returning home, she hastened to the window—the officer was standing in his accustomed place, with his eyes fixed upon her. She drew back, a prey to curiosity and agitated by a feeling which was quite new to her.

From that time on not a day passed without the young officer making his appearance under the window at the customary hour. A spontaneous relationship was established between them. Sitting in her place at work, she would feel his approach; and raising her head, she would look at him longer and longer each day. The young man seemed to be very grateful to her for it: she saw with the sharp eye of youth, how a sudden flush covered his pale cheeks each time that their glances met. By the end of the week she smiled at him. . . .

When Tomsky asked permission of his grandmother the Countess to present one of his friends to her, the young girl's heart beat violently. But hearing that Narumov was not an engineer, but in the Horse Guards, she regretted that by her indiscreet question she had betrayed her secret to the volatile Tomsky.

Hermann was the son of a Russified German, from whom he had inherited a small fortune. Being firmly convinced of the necessity of ensuring his independence, Hermann did not touch even the interest on his capital, but lived on his pay, without allowing himself the slightest luxury. Moreover, he was reserved and ambitious, and his companions rarely had an opportunity of making merry at the expense of his excessive parsimony. He had strong passions and an ardent imagination, but his firmness of disposition preserved him from the ordinary errors of youth. Thus, though a gambler at heart, he never touched a card, for he considered his position did not allow him—as he said—"to risk the necessary in the hope of winning the superfluous," yet he would sit for nights together at the card table and follow with feverish excitement the various turns of the game.

The story of the three cards had produced a powerful impression upon his imagination, and all night long he could think of nothing else. "If only," he thought to himself the following evening, as he wandered through St. Petersburg, "if only the old Countess would reveal her secret to me! if she would only tell me the names of the three winning cards! Why should I not try my fortune? I must get introduced to her and win her favour—perhaps become her lover. . . . But all that will take time, and she is eighty-seven years old: she might be dead in a week, in a couple of days even! . . . And the story itself: is it credible? . . . No! Prudence, moderation and work: those are my three winning cards; that is what will increase my capital threefold, sevenfold, and procure for me ease and independence."

Musing in this manner, he walked on until he found himself in one of the principal streets of St. Petersburg, in front of a house of old-fashioned architecture. The street was blocked with carriages; one after the other they rolled up in front of the illuminated entrance. Every minute there emerged from the coaches the shapely foot of a young beauty, a spurred boot, a striped stocking above a diplomatic shoe. Fur coats and cloaks whisked past the majestic porter.

Hermann stopped. "Whose house is this?" he asked the watchman at the corner.

"The Countess X.'s," replied the watchman.

Hermann trembled. The strange story of the three cards again presented itself to his imagination. He began walking up and down before the house, thinking of its owner and her marvellous gift. Returning late to his modest lodging, he could not go to sleep for a long time, and when at last he did doze off, he could dream of nothing but cards, green tables, piles of bank-notes and heaps of gold coins. He played card after card, firmly turning down the corners, and won uninterruptedly, raking in the gold and filling his pockets with the notes. Waking up late the next morning, he sighed over the loss of his imaginary wealth, then went out again to wander about the streets, and found himself once more in front of the Countess's house. Some unknown power seemed to draw him thither. He stopped and began to stare at the windows. In one of these he saw the head of a black-haired woman, which was bent probably over some book or handwork. The head was raised. Hermann saw a fresh-cheeked face and a pair of black eyes. That moment decided his fate.

III

Vous m'écrivez, mon ange, des lettres de
quatre pages plus vite que je ne puis les lire.

A CORRESPONDENCE

Lizaveta Ivanovna had scarcely taken off her hat and cloak, when the Countess sent for her and again ordered the carriage. The vehicle drew up before the door, and they prepared to take their seats. Just at the moment when two footmen were assisting the old lady into the carriage, Lizaveta saw her engineer close beside the wheel; he grasped her hand; alarm caused her to lose her presence of mind, and the young man disappeared—but not before leaving a letter in her hand. She concealed it in her glove, and during the whole of the drive she neither saw nor heard anything. It was the custom of the Countess, when out for an airing in her carriage, to be constantly asking such questions as: "Who was that person that met us just now? What is the name of this bridge? What is written on that sign-board?" On this occasion, however, Lizaveta returned such vague and absurd answers, that the Countess became angry with her.

"What is the matter with you, my dear?" she exclaimed. "Have you taken leave of your senses, or what is it? Do you not hear me or understand what I say? . . . Heaven be thanked, I am still in my right mind and speak plainly enough!"

Lizaveta Ivanovna did not hear her. On returning home she ran to her room, and drew the letter out of her glove: it was not sealed. Lizaveta read it. The letter contained a declaration of love; it was tender, respectful, and copied word for word from a German novel. But Lizaveta did not know anything of the German language, and she was quite delighted with the letter.

For all that, it troubled her exceedingly. For the first time in her life she was entering into secret and intimate relations with a young man. His boldness horrified her. She reproached herself for her imprudent behaviour, and knew not what to do. Should she cease to sit at the window and, by assuming an appearance of indifference toward him, put a check upon the young officer's desire to pursue her further? Should she send his letter back to him, or should she answer him in a cold and resolute manner? There was nobody to whom she could turn in her perplexity, for she had neither female friend nor adviser. . . . At length she resolved to reply to him.

She sat down at her little writing-table, took pen and paper, and began to think. Several times she began her letter, and then tore it up: the way she had expressed herself seemed to her either too indulgent or too severe. At last she succeeded in writing a few lines with which she felt satisfied.

"I am convinced," she wrote, "that your intentions are honourable, and that you do not wish to offend me by any imprudent action, but our acquaintance should not have begun in such a manner. I return you your letter, and I hope that I shall never have any cause to complain of undeserved disrespect."

The next day, as soon as Hermann made his appearance, Lizaveta rose from her embroidery, went into the drawing-room, opened the wicket and threw the letter into the street, trusting to the young officer's alertness.

Hermann hastened forward, picked it up and then repaired to a confectioner's shop. Breaking the seal of the envelope, he found inside it his own letter and Lizaveta's reply. He had expected this, and he returned home, very much taken up with his intrigue.

Three days afterward, a bright-eyed young girl from a milliner's establishment brought Lizaveta a letter. Lizaveta opened it with great uneasiness, fearing that it was a demand for money, when suddenly she recognised Hermann's hand-writing.

"You have made a mistake, my dear," said she: "this letter is not for me."

"Oh, yes, it is for you," replied the pert girl, without concealing a sly smile. "Have the goodness to read it."

Lizaveta glanced at the letter. Hermann requested an interview.

"It cannot be," said Lizaveta Ivanovna, alarmed both at the haste with which he had made his request, and the manner in which it had been transmitted. "This letter is certainly not for me."

And she tore it into fragments.

"If the letter was not for you, why have you torn it up?" said the girl. "I should have given it back to the person who sent it."

"Be good enough, my dear," said Lizaveta, disconcerted by this remark, "not to bring me any more letters in future, and tell the person who sent you that he ought to be ashamed. . . ."

But Hermann was not the man to be thus put off. Every day Lizaveta received from him a letter, sent now in this way, now in that. They were no longer translated from the German. Hermann wrote them under the inspiration of passion, and spoke in his own language, and they bore full testimony to the inflexibility of his desire and the disordered condition of his uncontrollable imagination. Lizaveta no longer thought of sending them back to him: she became intoxicated with them and began to reply to them, and little by little her answers became longer and more affectionate. At last she threw out of the window to him the following letter:

"This evening there is going to be a ball at the X. Embassy. The Countess will be there. We shall remain until two o'clock. This is your opportunity of seeing me alone. As soon as the Countess is gone, the servants will very probably go out, and there will be nobody left but the porter, but he, too, usually retires to his lodge. Come at half-past eleven. Walk straight upstairs. If you meet anybody in the ante-room, ask if the Countess is at home. If you are told she is not, there will be

nothing left for you to do but to go away and return another time. But it is most probable that you will meet nobody. The maidservants all sit together in one room. On leaving the ante-room, turn to the left, and walk straight on until you reach the Countess's bedroom. In the bedroom, behind a screen, you will find two small doors; the one on the right leads to a study, which the Countess never enters; the one on the left leads to a corridor, at the end of which is a narrow winding staircase; this leads to my room."

Hermann quivered like a tiger, as he waited for the appointed time. At ten o'clock in the evening he was already in front of the Countess's house. The weather was terrible; the wind was howling; the sleety snow fell in large flakes; the lamps emitted a feeble light, the streets were deserted; from time to time a sledge, drawn by a sorry-looking hack, passed by, the driver on the look-out for a belated fare. Hermann stood there wearing nothing but his jacket, yet he felt neither the wind nor the snow.

At last the Countess's carriage drew up. Hermann saw two footmen carry out in their arms the bent form of the old lady, wrapped in sables, and immediately behind her, clad in a light mantle, and with a wreath of fresh flowers on her head, followed Lizaveta. The door was closed. The carriage rolled away heavily through the yielding snow. The porter shut the street-door; the windows became dark.

Hermann began walking up and down near the deserted house; at length he stopped under a lamp, and glanced at his watch: it was twenty minutes past eleven. He remained standing under the lamp, his eyes fixed upon the watch, impatiently waiting for the remaining minutes to pass. At half-past eleven precisely, Hermann ascended the steps of the house, and made his way into the brightly-illuminated vestibule. The porter was not there. Hermann ran up the stairs, opened the door of the ante-room and saw a footman sitting asleep in an antique soiled armchair, under a lamp. With a light firm step Hermann walked past him. The reception-room and the drawing-room were in semi-darkness. They were lit feebly by a lamp in the ante-room.

Hermann entered the bedroom. Before an ikon-case, filled with ancient ikons, a golden sanctuary-lamp was burning. Armchairs

upholstered in faded brocade, and sofas, the gilding of which was worn off and which were piled with down cushions stood in melancholy symmetry around the room, the walls of which were hung with China silk. On the wall hung two portraits painted in Paris by Madame Lebrun. One of them represented a plump, pink-cheeked man of about forty in a light-green uniform and with a star on his breast; the other—a beautiful young woman, with an aquiline nose, curls at her temples, and a rose in her powdered hair. In all the corners stood porcelain shepherds and shepherdesses, clocks from the workshop of the celebrated Leroy, boxes, roulettes, fans and the various gewgaws for ladies that were invented at the end of the last century, together with Montgolfier's balloon and Mesmer's magnetism. Hermann stepped behind the screen. Behind it stood a little iron bed; on the right was the door which led to the study; on the left—the other which led to the corridor. He opened the latter, and saw the little winding staircase which led to the room of the poor ward. . . . But he retraced his steps and entered the dark study.

The time passed slowly. All was still. The clock in the drawing-room struck twelve; in all the rooms, one clock after another marked the hour, and everything was quiet again. Hermann stood leaning against the cold stove. He was calm; his heart beat regularly, like that of a man resolved upon a dangerous but inevitable undertaking. The clock struck one, then two; and he heard the distant rumbling of carriage-wheels. In spite of himself, excitement seized him. The carriage drew near and stopped. He heard the sound of the carriage-step being let down. All was bustle within the house. The servants were running hither and thither, voices were heard, and the house was lit up. Three antiquated chamber-maids entered the bedroom, and they were shortly afterwards followed by the Countess who, more dead than alive, sank into an armchair. Hermann peeped through a chink. Lizaveta Ivanovna passed close by him, and he heard her hurried steps as she hastened up her staircase. For a moment his heart was assailed by something like remorse, but the emotion was only transitory. He stood petrified.

The Countess began to undress before her looking-glass. Her cap, decorated with roses, was unpinned, and then her powdered

wig was removed from off her white and closely-cropped head. Hairpins fell in showers around her. Her yellow satin dress, embroidered with silver, fell down at her swollen feet.

Hermann witnessed the repulsive mysteries of her toilette; at last the Countess was in her night-cap and night-gown, and in this costume, more suitable to her age, she appeared less hideous and terrifying.

Like all old people in general, the Countess suffered from sleeplessness. Having undressed, she seated herself at the window in an armchair and dismissed her maids. The candles were taken away, and once more the room was lit only by the sanctuary-lamp. The Countess sat there looking quite yellow, moving her flaccid lips and swaying from side to side. Her dull eyes expressed complete vacancy of mind, and, looking at her, one would have thought that the rocking of her body was not voluntary, but was produced by the action of some concealed galvanic mechanism.

Suddenly the death-like face changed incredibly. The lips ceased to move, the eyes became animated: before the Countess stood a stranger.

"Do not be alarmed, for Heaven's sake, do not be alarmed!" said he in a low but distinct voice. "I have no intention of doing you any harm, I have only come to ask a favour of you."

The old woman looked at him in silence, as if she had not heard what he had said. Hermann thought that she was deaf, and, bending down toward her ear, he repeated what he had said. The old woman remained silent as before.

"You can insure the happiness of my life," continued Hermann, "and it will cost you nothing. I know that you can name three cards in succession——"

Hermann stopped. The Countess appeared now to understand what was asked of her; she seemed to be seeking words with which to reply.

"It was a joke," she replied at last: "I swear it was only a joke."

"This is no joking matter," replied Hermann angrily. "Remember Chaplitzky, whom you helped to win back what he had lost."

The Countess became visibly uneasy. Her features expressed strong emotion, but she soon lapsed into her former insensibility.

"Can you not name me these three winning cards?" continued Hermann.

The Countess remained silent; Hermann continued:

"For whom are you preserving your secret? For your grandsons? They are rich enough without it; they do not know the worth of money. Your cards would be of no use to a spendthrift. He who cannot preserve his paternal inheritance, will die in want, even though he had a demon at his service. I am not a man of that sort; I know the value of money. Your three cards will not be wasted on me. Come!"

He paused and tremblingly awaited her reply. The Countess remained silent; Hermann fell upon his knees.

"If your heart has ever known the feeling of love," said he, "if you remember its rapture, if you have ever smiled at the cry of your new-born child, if your breast has ever throbbed with any human feeling, I entreat you by the feelings of a wife, a lover, a mother, by all that is most sacred in life, not to reject my plea. Reveal to me your secret. Of what use is it to you? . . . Maybe it is connected with some terrible sin, the loss of eternal bliss, some bargain with the devil. . . . Consider—you are old; you have not long to live—I am ready to take your sins upon my soul. Only reveal to me your secret. Remember that the happiness of a man is in your hands, that not only I, but my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, will bless your memory and reverence it as something sacred. . . ."

The old woman answered not a word.

Hermann rose to his feet.

"You old witch!" he exclaimed, clenching his teeth, "then I will make you answer!"

With these words he drew a pistol from his pocket.

At the sight of the pistol, the Countess for the second time exhibited strong emotion. She shook her head and raised her hands as if to protect herself from the shot . . . then she fell backward and remained motionless.

"Come, an end to this childish nonsense!" said Hermann, taking hold of her hand. "I ask you for the last time: will you tell me the names of your three cards, or will you not?"

The Countess made no reply. Hermann perceived that she was dead!

IV

7 mai, 18——

Homme sans moeurs et sans religion !

A CORRESPONDENCE

Lizaveta Ivanovna was sitting in her room, still in her ball dress, lost in deep thought. On returning home, she had hastily dismissed the sleepy maid who reluctantly came forward to assist her, saying that she would undress herself, and with a trembling heart had gone up to her own room, hoping to find Hermann there, but yet desiring not to find him. At the first glance she convinced herself that he was not there, and she thanked her fate for the obstacle which had prevented their meeting. She sat down without undressing, and began to recall to mind all the circumstances which in so short a time had carried her so far. It was not three weeks since the time when she had first seen the young man from the window—and she already was in correspondence with him, and he had succeeded in inducing her to grant him a nocturnal tryst! She knew his name only through his having written it at the bottom of some of his letters; she had never spoken to him, had never heard his voice, and had never heard anything of him until that evening. But, strange to say, that very evening at the ball, Tomsky, being piqued with the young Princess Pauline N., who, contrary to her usual custom, did not flirt with him, wished to revenge himself by assuming an air of indifference: he therefore engaged Lizaveta Ivanovna and danced an endless mazurka with her. All the time he kept teasing her about her partiality for officers in the Engineers; he assured her that he knew far more than she could have supposed, and some of his jests were so happily aimed that Lizaveta thought several times that her secret was known to him.

"From whom have you learnt all this?" she asked, smiling.

"From a friend of a person very well known to you," replied Tomsky, "from a very remarkable man."

"And who is this remarkable man?"

"His name is Hermann."

Lizaveta made no reply; but her hands and feet turned to ice.

"This Hermann," continued Tomsky, "is a truly romantic character. He has the profile of a Napoleon, and the soul of a Mephistopheles. I believe that he has at least three crimes upon his conscience. . . . How pale you are!"

"I have a headache. . . . But what did this Hermann—or whatever his name is—tell you?"

"Hermann is very much dissatisfied with his friend: he says that in his place he would act very differently. . . . I even think that Hermann himself has designs upon you; at least, he listens not indifferently to his friend's enamoured exclamations."

"But where has he seen me?"

"In church, perhaps; or promenading—God alone knows where. It may have been in your room, while you were asleep, for he is capable of it."

Three ladies approaching him with the question: "*oubli ou regret?*" interrupted the conversation, which had become so tantalizingly interesting to Lizaveta.

The lady chosen by Tomsky was the Princess Pauline herself. She succeeded in effecting a reconciliation with him by making an extra turn in the dance and managing to delay resuming her seat. On returning to his place, Tomsky thought no more either of Hermann or Lizaveta. She longed to renew the interrupted conversation, but the mazurka came to an end, and shortly afterward the old Countess took her departure.

Tomsky's words were nothing more than the small talk of the mazurka, but they sank deep into the soul of the young dreamer. The portrait, sketched by Tomsky, agreed with the picture she had formed in her own mind, and that image, rendered commonplace by current novels, terrified and fascinated her imagination. She was now sitting with her bare arms crossed and her head, still adorned with flowers, was bowed over her half-uncovered breast. Suddenly the door opened and Hermann entered. She shuddered.

"Where have you been?" she asked in a frightened whisper.

"In the old Countess's bedroom," replied Hermann: "I have just left her. The Countess is dead."

"My God! What are you saying?"

"And I am afraid," added Hermann, "that I am the cause of her death."

Lizaveta looked at him, and Tomsky's words found an echo in her soul: "This man has at least three crimes upon his conscience!" Hermann sat down by the window near her, and related all that had happened.

Lizaveta listened to him in terror. So all those passionate letters, those ardent demands, this bold obstinate pursuit—all this was not love! Money—that was what his soul yearned for! She could not satisfy his desire and make him happy! The poor girl had been nothing but the blind accomplice of a robber, of the murderer of her aged benefactress! . . . She wept bitter tears of belated, agonised repentance. Hermann gazed at her in silence: his heart, too, was tormented, but neither the tears of the poor girl, nor the wonderful charm of her beauty, enhanced by her grief, could produce any impression upon his hardened soul. He felt no pricking of conscience at the thought of the dead old woman. One thing only horrified him: the irreparable loss of the secret which he had expected would bring him wealth.

"You are a monster!" said Lizaveta at last.

"I did not wish her death," replied Hermann: "my pistol is not loaded."

Both grew silent.

The day began to dawn. Lizaveta extinguished her candle: a pale light illumined her room. She wiped her tear-stained eyes and raised them toward Hermann: he was sitting on the window-sill, with his arms folded and frowning fiercely. In this attitude he bore a striking resemblance to the portrait of Napoleon. This resemblance struck even Lizaveta Ivanovna.

"How shall I get you out of the house?" said she at last. "I thought of conducting you down the secret staircase, but in that case it would be necessary to go through the Countess's bedroom, and I am afraid."

"Tell me how to find this secret staircase—I will go alone."

Lizaveta arose, took from her drawer a key, handed it to Hermann and gave him the necessary instructions. Hermann pressed her cold, unresponsive hand, kissed her bowed head, and left the room.

He descended the winding staircase, and once more entered the Countess's bedroom. The dead old woman sat as if petrified;

her face expressed profound tranquillity. Hermann stopped before her, and gazed long and earnestly at her, as if he wished to convince himself of the terrible reality; at last he entered the study, felt behind the tapestry for the door, and then began to descend the dark staircase, agitated by strange emotions. "At this very hour," thought he, "some sixty years ago, a young gallant who has long been mouldering in his grave, may have stolen down this very staircase, perhaps coming from the very same bedroom, wearing an embroidered caftan, with his hair dressed *à l'oiseau royal* and pressing to his heart his three-cornered hat, and the heart of his aged mistress has only to-day ceased to beat. . . ."

At the bottom of the staircase Hermann found a door, which he opened with the same key, and found himself in a corridor which led him into the street.

V

That night the deceased Baroness von W. appeared to me. She was clad all in white and said to me: "How are you, Mr. Councillor?"

SWEDENBORG

Three days after the fatal night, at nine o'clock in the morning Hermann repaired to the Convent of ——, where the burial-service for the deceased Countess was to be held. Although feeling no remorse, he could not altogether stifle the voice of conscience, which kept repeating to him: "You are the murderer of the old woman!" While he had little true faith, he was very superstitious; and believing that the dead Countess might exercise an evil influence on his life, he resolved to be present at her funeral in order to ask her pardon.

The church was full. It was with difficulty that Hermann made his way through the crowd. The coffin stood on a sumptuous catafalque under a velvet baldachin. The deceased lay within it, her hands crossed upon her breast, and wearing a lace cap and a white satin gown. Around the catafalque stood the members of her household: the servants in black caftans, with armorial ribbons upon their shoulders, and candles in their

hands; the relatives—children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—in deep mourning.

Nobody wept; tears would have been *une affectation*. The Countess was so old that her death could have surprised nobody, and her relatives had long looked upon her as not among the living. A famous preacher delivered the funeral oration. In simple and touching words he described the peaceful passing away of the saintly woman whose long life had been a serene, moving preparation for a Christian end. "The angel of death found her," said the preacher, "engaged in pious meditation and waiting for the midnight bridegroom."

The service concluded in an atmosphere of melancholy decorum. The relatives went forward first to bid farewell to the deceased. Then followed the numerous acquaintances, who had come to render the last homage to her who for so many years had participated in their frivolous amusements. After these followed the members of the Countess's household. The last of these was the old housekeeper who was of the same age as the deceased. Two young women led her forward, supporting her by the arms. She had not strength enough to bow down to the ground—she was the only one to shed a few tears and kiss the cold hand of her mistress.

Hermann now resolved to approach the coffin. He bowed down to the ground and for several minutes lay on the cold floor, which was strewn with fir boughs; at last he arose, as pale as the deceased Countess herself, ascended the steps of the catafalque and bent over the corpse. . . . At that moment it seemed to him that the dead woman darted a mocking look at him and winked with one eye. Hermann started back, took a false step and fell to the ground. He was lifted up. At the same moment Lizaveta Ivanovna was carried into the vestibule of the church in a faint. This episode disturbed for some minutes the solemnity of the gloomy ceremony. Among the congregation arose a muffled murmur, and the lean chamberlain, a near relative of the deceased, whispered in the ear of an Englishman who was standing near him, that the young officer was a natural son of the Countess, to which the Englishman coldly replied: "Oh!"

During the whole of that day, Hermann was exceedingly

perturbed. Dining in an out-of-the-way restaurant, he drank a great deal of wine, contrary to his usual custom, in the hope of allaying his inward agitation. But the wine only served to excite his imagination still more. On returning home, he threw himself upon his bed without undressing, and fell into a deep sleep.

When he woke up it was already night, and the moon was shining into the room. He looked at his watch: it was a quarter to three. Sleep had left him; he sat down upon his bed and thought of the funeral of the old Countess.

At that moment somebody in the street looked in at his window, and immediately passed on again. Hermann paid no attention to this incident. A few moments afterward he heard the door of the ante-room open. Hermann thought that it was his orderly, drunk as usual, returning from some nocturnal expedition, but presently he heard footsteps that were unknown to him: somebody was shuffling softly across the floor in slippers. The door opened, and a woman dressed in white, entered the room. Hermann mistook her for his old nurse, and wondered what could bring her there at that hour of the night. But the white woman glided rapidly across the room and stood before him—and Hermann recognised the Countess!

"I have come to you against my will," she said in a firm voice: "but I have been ordered to grant your request. Three, seven, ace, will win for you if played in succession, but only on these conditions: that you do not play more than one card in twenty-four hours, and that you never play again during the rest of your life. I forgive you my death, on condition that you marry my ward, Lizaveta Ivanovna."

With these words she turned round very quietly, walked with a shuffling gait toward the door and disappeared. Hermann heard the street-door bang, and he saw someone look in at him through the window again.

For a long time Hermann could not recover himself. Then he went into the next room. His orderly was asleep upon the floor, and he had much difficulty in waking him. The orderly was drunk as usual, and nothing could be got out of him. The street-door was locked. Hermann returned to his room, lit his candle, and set down an account of his vision.

VI

"Attendez!"
"*How dare you say* attendez *to me?*"
"*Your Excellency, I said:* 'Attendez, *sir.*' "

Two fixed ideas can no more exist together in the moral world than two bodies can occupy one and the same place in the physical world. "Three, seven, ace" soon drove out of Hermann's mind the thought of the dead Countess. "Three, seven, ace" were perpetually running through his head and continually on his lips. If he saw a young girl, he would say: "How slender she is! quite like the three of hearts." If anybody asked: "What is the time?" he would reply: "Five minutes to seven." Every stout man that he saw reminded him of the ace. "Three, seven, ace" haunted him in his sleep, and assumed all possible shapes. The three bloomed before him in the form of a magnificent flower, the seven was represented by a Gothic portal, and the ace became transformed into a gigantic spider. One thought alone occupied his whole mind—to make use of the secret which he had purchased so dearly. He thought of applying for a furlough so as to travel abroad. He wanted to go to Paris and force fortune to yield a treasure to him in the public gambling houses there. Chance spared him all this trouble.

There was in Moscow a society of wealthy gamblers, presided over by the celebrated Chekalinsky, who had passed all his life at the card-table and had amassed millions, accepting bills of exchange for his winnings and paying his losses in ready money. His long experience secured for him the confidence of his companions, and his open house, his famous cook, and his agreeable and cheerful manner gained for him the respect of the public. He came to St. Petersburg. The young men of the capital flocked to his rooms, forgetting balls for cards, and preferring the temptations of faro to the seductions of flirting. Narumov conducted Hermann to Chekalinsky's residence.

They passed through a suite of magnificent rooms, filled with courteous attendants. Several generals and privy counsellors were playing whist; young men were lolling carelessly upon the velvet-covered sofas, eating ices and smoking pipes. In the

drawing-room, at the head of a long table, around which crowded about a score of players, sat the master of the house keeping the bank. He was a man of about sixty years of age, of a very dignified appearance; his head was covered with silvery-white hair; his full, florid countenance expressed good-nature, and his eyes twinkled with a perpetual smile. Narumov introduced Hermann to him. Chekalinsky shook him by the hand in a friendly manner, requested him not to stand on ceremony, and then went on dealing.

The game lasted a long time. On the table lay more than thirty cards. Chekalinsky paused after each throw, in order to give the players time to arrange their cards and note down their losses, listened politely to their requests, and more politely still, straightened out the corners of cards that some absent-minded player's hand had turned down. At last the game was finished. Chekalinsky shuffled the cards and prepared to deal again.

"Allow me to play a card," said Hermann stretching out his hand from behind a stout gentleman who was punting.

Chekalinsky smiled and bowed silently, as a sign of acquiescence. Narumov laughingly congratulated Hermann on ending his long abstention from cards, and wished him a lucky beginning.

"Here goes!" said Hermann, writing the figure with chalk on the back of his card.

"How much, sir?" asked the banker, screwing up his eyes; "excuse me, I cannot see quite clearly."

"Forty-seven thousand," replied Hermann.

At these words every head in the room turned suddenly round, and all eyes were fixed upon Hermann.

"He has taken leave of his senses!" thought Narumov.

"Allow me to observe," said Chekalinsky, with his eternal smile, "that that is a very high stake; nobody here has ever staked more than two hundred and seventy-five roubles at a time."

"Well," retorted Hermann; "do you accept my card or not?"

Chekalinsky bowed with the same look of humble acquiescence.

"I only wish to inform you," said he, "that enjoying the full confidence of my partners, I can only play for ready money. For my own part, I am, of course, quite convinced that your word is sufficient, but for the sake of order, and because of the accounts, I must ask you to put the money on your card."

Hermann drew from his pocket a bank-note and handed it to Chekalinsky, who, after examining it in a cursory manner, placed it on Hermann's card.

He began to deal. On the right a nine turned up, and on the left a three.

"I win!" said Hermann, showing his card.

A murmur of astonishment arose among the players. Chekalinsky frowned, but the smile quickly returned to his face.

"Do you wish me to settle with you?" he said to Hermann.

"If you please," replied the latter.

Chekalinsky drew from his pocket a number of bank-notes and paid up at once. Hermann took his money and left the table. Narumov could not recover from the astonishment. Hermann drank a glass of lemonade and went home.

The next evening he again appeared at Chekalinsky's. The host was dealing. Hermann walked up to the table; the punters immediately made room for him. Chekalinsky greeted him with a gracious bow.

Hermann waited for the next game, took a card and placed upon it his forty-seven thousand roubles, together with his winnings of the previous evening.

Chekalinsky began to deal. A knave turned up on the right, a seven on the left.

Hermann showed his seven.

There was a general exclamation. Chekalinsky was obviously disturbed, but he counted out the ninety-four thousand roubles and handed them over to Hermann, who pocketed them in the coolest manner possible and immediately left the house.

The next evening Hermann appeared again at the table. Everyone was expecting him. The generals and privy counsellors left their whist in order to watch such extraordinary play. The young officers jumped up from their sofas, and even the servants crowded into the room. All pressed round Hermann. The other players left off punting, impatient to see how it

would end. Hermann stood at the table and prepared to play alone against the pale, but still smiling Chekalinsky. Each opened a new pack of cards. Chekalinsky shuffled. Hermann took a card and covered it with a pile of bank-notes. It was like a duel. Deep silence reigned.

Chekalinsky began to deal; his hands trembled. On the right a queen turned up, and on the left an ace.

"Ace wins!" cried Hermann, showing his card.

"Your queen has lost," said Chekalinsky, sweetly.

Hermann started; instead of an ace, there lay before him the queen of spades! He could not believe his eyes, nor could he understand how he had made such a mistake.

At that moment it seemed to him that the queen of spades screwed up her eyes and sneered. He was struck by the remarkable resemblance. . . .

"The old woman!" he exclaimed, in terror.

Chekalinsky gathered up his winnings. For some time Hermann remained perfectly motionless. When at last he left the table, the room buzzed with loud talk.

"Splendidly punted!" said the players. Chekalinsky shuffled the cards afresh, and the game went on as usual.

CONCLUSION

Hermann went out of his mind. He is now confined in room Number 17 of the Obukhov Hospital. He never answers any questions, but he constantly mutters with unusual rapidity: "Three, seven, ace! Three, seven, queen!"

Lizaveta Ivanovna has married a very amiable young man, a son of the former steward of the old Countess. He is a civil servant, and has a considerable fortune. Lizaveta is bringing up a poor relative.

Tomsky has been promoted to the rank of captain, and is marrying Princess Pauline.

N. GOGOL

The Overcoat

In the department of . . . but I had better not mention in what department. There is nothing in the world more readily moved to wrath than a department, a regiment, a government office, and in fact any sort of official body. Nowadays every private individual considers all society insulted in his person. I have been told that very lately a petition was handed in from a police-captain of what town I don't recollect, and that in this petition he set forth clearly that the institutions of the State were in danger and that its sacred name was being taken in vain; and, in proof thereof, he appended to his petition an enormously long volume of some work of romance in which a police-captain appeared on every tenth page, occasionally, indeed, in an intoxicated condition. And so, to avoid any unpleasantness, we had better call the department of which we are speaking a certain department.

And so in a certain department there was a government clerk; a clerk of whom it cannot be said that he was very remarkable; he was short, somewhat pock-marked, with rather reddish hair and rather dim, bleary eyes, with a small bald patch on the top of his head, with wrinkles on both sides of his cheeks and the sort of complexion which is usually associated with haemorrhoids . . . no help for that, it is the Petersburg climate. As for his grade in the service (for among us the grade is what must be put first), he was what is called a perpetual titular councillor, a class at which, as we all know, various writers who indulge in the praiseworthy habit of attacking those who cannot defend themselves jeer and jibe to their hearts' content. This clerk's surname was Bashmatchkin. From the very name it is clear that it must have been derived from a

shoe (bashmak); but when and under what circumstances it was derived from a shoe, it is impossible to say. Both his father and his grandfather and even his brother-in-law, and all the Bashmatchkins without exception wore boots, which they simply re-soled two or three times a year. His name was Akaky Akakyevitch. Perhaps it may strike the reader as a rather strange and far-fetched name, but I can assure him that it was not far-fetched at all, that the circumstances were such that it was quite out of the question to give him any other name. Akaky Akakyevitch was born towards nightfall, if my memory does not deceive me, on the twenty-third of March. His mother, the wife of a government clerk, a very good woman, made arrangements in due course to christen the child. She was still lying in bed, facing the door, while on her right hand stood the godfather, an excellent man called Ivan Ivanovitch Yeroshkin, one of the head clerks in the senate, and the godmother, the wife of a police official, and a woman of rare qualities. Arina Semyonovna Byelobryushkov. Three names were offered to the happy mother for selection—Moky, Sossy, or the name of the martyr Hozdazat. "No," thought the poor lady, "they are all such names!" To satisfy her, they opened the calendar at another place, and the names which turned up were: Trifily, Dula, Varahasy. "What an infliction!" said the mother. "What names they all are! I really never heard such names. Varadat or Varuh would be bad enough, but Trifily and Varahasy!" They turned over another page and the names were: Pavsikahy and Vahtisy. "Well, I see," said the mother, "it is clear that it is his fate. Since that is how it is, he had better be called after his father, his father is Akaky, let the son be Akaky, too." This was how he came to be Akaky Akakyevitch. The baby was christened and cried and made wry faces during the ceremony, as though he foresaw that he would be a titular councillor. So that was how it all came to pass. We have recalled it here so that the reader may see for himself that it happened quite inevitably and that to give him any other name was out of the question. No-one has been able to remember when and how long ago he entered the department, nor who gave him the job. However many directors and higher officials of all sorts came and went, he was always seen in the same place, in the same position, at the very same duty,

precisely the same copying clerk, so that they used to declare that he must have been born a copying clerk in uniform all complete and with a bald patch on his head. No respect at all was shown him in the department. The porters, far from getting up from their seats when he came in, took no more notice of him than if a simple fly had flown across the vestibule. His superiors treated him with a sort of domineering chilliness. The head clerk's assistant used to throw papers under his nose without even saying: "Copy this" or "Here is an interesting, nice little case" or some agreeable remark of the sort, as is usually done in well-behaved offices. And he would take it, gazing only at the paper without looking to see who had put it there and whether he had the right to do so; he would take it and at once set to work to copy it. The young clerks jeered and made jokes at him to the best of their clerkly wit, and told before his face all sorts of stories of their own invention about him; they would say of his landlady, an old woman of seventy, that she beat him, would enquire when the wedding was to take place, and would scatter bits of paper on his head, calling them snow. Akaky Akakyevitch never answered a word, however, but behaved as though there were no-one here. It had no influence on his work even; in the midst of all this teasing, he never made a single mistake in his copying. Only when the jokes were too unbearable, when they jolted his arm and prevented him from going on with his work, he would bring out: "Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?" and there was something strange in the words and in the voice in which they were uttered. There was a note in it of something that aroused compassion, so that one young man, new to the office, who, following the example of the rest, had allowed himself to mock at him, suddenly stopped as though cut to the heart, and from that time forth, everything was, as it were, changed and appeared in a different light to him. Some unnatural force seemed to thrust him away from the companions with whom he had become acquainted, accepting them as well-bred, polished people. And long afterwards, at moments of the greatest gaiety, the figure of the humble little clerk with a bald patch on his head rose before him with his heart-rending words: "Leave me alone! Why do you insult me?" and in those heart-rending words he heard others: "I am your brother." And the

poor young man hid his face in his hands, and many times afterwards in his life he shuddered, seeing how much inhumanity there is in man, how much savage brutality lies hidden under refined, cultured politeness, and, my God! even in a man whom the world accepts as a gentleman and a man of honour. . . .

It would be hard to find a man who lived in his work as did Akaky Akakyevitch. To say that he was zealous in his work is not enough; no, he loved his work. In it, in that copying, he found a varied and agreeable world of his own. There was a look of enjoyment on his face; certain letters were favourites with him, and when he came to them he was delighted; he chuckled to himself and winked and moved his lips, so that it seemed as though every letter his pen was forming could be read in his face. If rewards had been given according to the measure of zeal in the service, he might to his amazement have even found himself a civil councillor; but all he gained in the service, as the wits, his fellow-clerks expressed it, was a buckle in his button-hole and a pain in his back. It cannot be said, however, that no notice had ever been taken of him. One director, being a good-natured man and anxious to reward him for his long service, sent him something a little more important than his ordinary copying; he was instructed from a finished document to make some sort of report for another office; the work consisted only of altering the headings and places changing the first person into the third. This cost him such an effort that it threw him into a regular perspiration: he mopped his brow and said at last, "No, better let me copy something."

From that time forth they left him to go on copying for ever. It seemed as though nothing in the world existed for him outside his copying. He gave no thought at all to his clothes; his uniform was—well, not green but some sort of rusty, muddy colour. His collar was very short and narrow, so that, although his neck was not particularly long, yet, standing out of the collar, it looked as immensely long as those of the plaster kittens that wag their heads and are carried about on trays on the heads of dozens of foreigners living in Russia. And there were always things sticking to his uniform, either bits of hay or threads; moreover, he had a special art of passing under a window at the very moment when various rubbish was being flung out

into the street, and so was continually carrying off bits of melon rind and similar litter in his hat. He had never once in his life noticed what was being done and going on in the streets, all those things at which, as we all know, his colleagues, the young clerks, always stare, carrying their sharp sight so far even as to notice anyone on the other side of the pavement with a trouser strap hanging loose—a detail which always calls forth a sly grin. Whatever Akaky Akakyevitch looked at, he saw nothing anywhere but his clear, evenly written lines, and only perhaps when a horse's head suddenly appeared from nowhere just on his shoulder, and its nostrils blew a perfect gale upon his cheek, did he notice that he was not in the middle of his writing, but rather in the middle of the street.

On reaching home, he would sit down at once to the table, hurriedly sup his soup and eat a piece of beef with an onion; he did not notice the taste at all, but ate it all up together with the flies and anything else that Providence chanced to send him. When he felt that his stomach was beginning to be full, he would rise up from the table, get out a bottle of ink and set to copying the papers he had brought home with him. When he had none to do, he would make a copy expressly for his own pleasure, particularly if the document were remarkable not for the beauty of its style but for the fact of its being addressed to some new or important personage.

Even at those hours when the grey Petersburg sky is completely overcast and the whole population of clerks have dined and eaten their fill, each as best he can, according to the salary he receives and his personal tastes, when they are all resting after the scratching of pens and bustle of the office, their own necessary work and other people's, and all the tasks that an over-zealous man voluntarily sets himself even beyond what is necessary, when the clerks are hastening to devote what is left of their time to pleasure; some more enterprising are flying to the theatre, others to the street to spend their leisure, staring at women's hats, some to spend the evening paying compliments to some attractive girl, the star of a little official circle, while some—and this is the most frequent of all—go simply to a fellow-clerk's flat on the third or fourth storey, two little

rooms with an entry or a kitchen, with some pretensions to style, with a lamp or some such article that has cost many sacrifices of dinners and excursions—at the time when all the clerks are scattered about the little flats of their friends, playing a tempestuous game of whist, sipping tea out of glasses to the accompaniment of farthing rusks, sucking in smoke from long pipes, telling, as the cards are dealt, some scandal that has floated down from higher circles, a pleasure which the Russian can never by any possibility deny himself, or, when there is nothing better to talk about, repeating the everlasting anecdote of the commanding officer who was told that the tail had been cut off the horse on the Falconet monument—in short, even when everyone was eagerly seeking entertainment, Akaky Akakyevitch did not give himself up to any amusement. No-one could say that they had ever seen him at an evening party. After working to his heart's content, he would go to bed, smiling at the thought of the next day and wondering what God would send him to copy. So flowed on the peaceful life of a man who knew how to be content with his fate on a salary of four hundred roubles, and so perhaps it would have flowed on to extreme old age, had it not been for the various calamities that bestrew the path through life, not only of titular, but even of privy, actual court and all other councillors, even those who neither give counsel to others nor accept it themselves.

There is in Petersburg a mighty foe of all who receive a salary of four hundred roubles or about that sum. That foe is none other than our northern frost, although it is said to be very good for the health. Between eight and nine in the morning, precisely at the hour when the streets are full of clerks going to their departments, the frost begins giving such sharp and stinging flips at all their noses indiscriminately that the poor fellows don't know what to do with them. At that time, when even those in the higher grade have a pain in their brows and tears in their eyes from the frost, the poor titular councillors are sometimes almost defenceless. Their only protection lies in running as fast as they can through five or six streets in a wretched, thin little overcoat and then warming their feet thoroughly in the porter's room, till all their faculties and qualifications for their various duties thaw again after being

frozen on the way. Akaky Akakyevitch had for some time been feeling that his back and shoulders were particularly nipped by the cold, although he did try to run the regular distance as fast as he could. He wondered at last whether there were any defects in his overcoat. After examining it thoroughly in the privacy of his home, he discovered that in two or three places, to wit on the back and the shoulders, it had become a regular sieve; the cloth was so worn that you could see through it and the lining was coming out. I must observe that Akaky Akakyevitch's overcoat had also served as a butt for the jibes of the clerks. It had even been deprived of the honourable name of overcoat and had been referred to as the "dressing jacket." It was indeed of rather a strange make. Its collar had been growing smaller year by year as it served to patch the other parts. The patches were not good specimens of the tailor's art, and they certainly looked clumsy and ugly. On seeing what was wrong, Akaky Akakyevitch decided that he would have to take the overcoat to Petrovitch, a tailor who lived on a fourth storey up a back staircase, and, in spite of having only one eye and being pock-marked all over his face, was rather successful in repairing the trousers and coats of clerks and others—that is, when he was sober, be it understood, and had no other enterprise in his mind. Of this tailor I ought not, of course, to say much, but since it is now the rule that the character of every person in a novel must be completely drawn, well, there is no help for it, here is Petrovitch too. At first he was called simply Grigory, and was a serf belonging to some gentleman or other. He began to be called Petrovitch from the time that he got his freedom and began to drink rather heavily on every holiday, at first only on the chief holidays, but afterwards on all church holidays indiscriminately, wherever there is a cross in the calendar. On that side he was true to the customs of his forefathers, and when he quarrelled with his wife used to call her "a worldly woman and a German." Since we have now mentioned the wife, it will be necessary to say a few words about her too, but unfortunately not much is known about her, except indeed that Petrovitch had a wife and that she wore a cap and not a kerchief, but apparently she could not boast of beauty; anyway, none but soldiers of the Guards peeped under her

cap when they met her, and they twitched their moustaches and gave vent to a rather peculiar sound.

As he climbed the stairs leading to Petrovitch's—which, to do them justice, were all soaked with water and slops and saturated through and through with that smell of spirits which makes the eyes smart, and is, as we all know, inseparable from the back-stairs of Petersburg houses—Akaky Akakyevitch was already wondering how much Petrovitch would ask for the job, and inwardly resolving not to give more than two roubles. The door was open, for Petrovitch's wife was frying some fish and had so filled the kitchen with smoke that you could not even see the black-beetles. Akaky Akakyevitch crossed the kitchen unnoticed by the good woman, and walked at last into a room where he saw Petrovitch sitting on a big, wooden, unpainted table with his legs tucked under him like a Turkish Pasha. The feet, as is usual with tailors when they sit at work, were bare; and the first object that caught Akaky Akakyevitch's eye was the big toe, with which he was already familiar, with a misshapen nail as thick and strong as the shell of a tortoise. Round Petrovitch's neck hung a skein of silk and another of thread and on his knees was a rag of some sort. He had for the last three minutes been trying to thread his needle, but could not get the thread into the eye and so was very angry with the darkness and indeed with the thread itself, muttering in an undertone: "It won't go in, the savage! You wear me out, you rascal." Akaky Akakyevitch was vexed that he had come just at the minute when Petrovitch was in a bad humour; he liked to give him an order when he was a little "elevated", or, as his wife expressed it, "had fortified himself with fiz, the one-eyed devil." In such circumstances Petrovitch was as a rule very ready to give way and agree, and invariably bowed and thanked him, indeed. Afterwards, it is true, his wife would come wailing that her husband had been drunk and so had asked too little, but adding a single ten-kopeck piece would settle that. But on this occasion Petrovitch was apparently sober and consequently curt, unwilling to bargain, and the devil knows what price he would be ready to lay on. Akaky Akakyevitch perceived this and was, as the saying is, beating a retreat, but things had gone too far,

for Petrovitch was screwing up his solitary eye very attentively at him and Akaky Akakyevitch involuntarily brought out: "Good day, Petrovitch!" "I wish you a good day, sir," said Petrovitch, and squinted at Akaky Akakyevitch's hands, trying to discover what sort of goods he had brought.

"Here I have come to you, Petrovitch, do you see . . .!"

It must be noticed that Akaky Akakyevitch for the most part explained himself by apologies, vague phrases, and particles which have absolutely no significance whatever. If the subject were a very difficult one, it was his habit indeed to leave his sentences quite unfinished, so that very often after a sentence had begun with the words "It really is, don't you know . . ." nothing at all would follow and he himself would be quite oblivious, supposing he had said all that was necessary.

"What is it?" said Petrovitch, and at the same time with his solitary eye he scrutinized his whole uniform from the collar to the sleeves, the back, the skirts, the button-holes—with all of which he was very familiar, they were all his own work. Such scrutiny is habitual with tailors, it is the first thing they do on meeting one.

"It's like this, Petrovitch . . . the overcoat, the cloth . . . you see everywhere else it is quite strong; it's a little dusty and looks as though it were old, but it is new and it is only in one place just a little . . . on the back, and just a little worn on one shoulder and on this shoulder, too, a little . . . do you see? that's all, and it's not much work. . . ."

Petrovitch took the "dressing jacket," first spread it out over the table, examined it for a long time, shook his head and put his hand out to the window for a round snuff-box with a portrait on the lid of some general—which precisely I can't say, for a finger had been thrust through the spot where a face should have been, and the hole had been pasted up with a square bit of paper. After taking a pinch of snuff, Petrovitch held the "dressing jacket" up in his hands and looked at it against the light, and again he shook his head; then he turned it with the lining upwards and once more shook his head; again he took off the lid with the general pasted up with paper and stuffed a pinch into his nose, shut the box, put it away and at last said:

"No, it can't be repaired; a wretched garment!" Akaky Akakyevitch's heart sank at those words.

"Why can't it, Petrovitch?" he said, almost in the imploring voice of a child. "Why, the only thing is it is a bit worn on the shoulders; why, you have got some little pieces . . ."

"Yes, the pieces will be found all right," said Petrovitch, "but it can't be patched, the stuff is quite rotten; if you put a needle in it, it would give way."

"Let it give way, but you just put a patch on it."

"There is nothing to put a patch on. There is nothing for it to hold on to; there is a great strain on it, it is not worth calling cloth, it would fly away at a breath of wind."

"Well, then, strengthen it with something—upon my word, really, this is . . .!"

"No," said Petrovitch resolutely, "there is nothing to be done, the thing is no good at all. You had far better, when the cold winter weather comes, make yourself leg wrappings out of it, for there is no warmth in stockings, the Germans invented them just to make money." (Petrovitch was fond of a dig at the Germans occasionally.) "And as for the overcoat, it is clear that you will have to have a new one."

At the word "new" there was a mist before Akaky Akakyevitch's eyes, and everything in the room seemed blurred. He could see nothing clearly but the general with the piece of paper over his face on the lid of Petrovitch's snuff-box.

"A new one?" he said, still feeling as though he were in a dream; "why, I haven't the money for it."

"Yes, a new one," Petrovitch repeated with barbarous composure.

"Well, and if I did have a new one, how much would it . . .?"

"You mean what will it cost?"

"Yes."

"Well, three fifty-rouble notes or more," said Petrovitch, and he compressed his lips significantly. He was very fond of making an effect, he was fond of suddenly disconcerting a man completely and then squinting sideways to see what sort of a face he made.

"A hundred and fifty roubles for an overcoat," screamed poor Akaky Akakyevitch—it was perhaps the first time he had

screamed in his life, for he was always distinguished by the softness of his voice.

"Yes," said Petrovitch, "and even then it's according to the coat. If I were to put marten on the collar, and add a hood with silk linings, it would come to two hundred."

"Petrovitch, please," said Akaky Akakyevitch in an imploring voice, not hearing and not trying to hear what Petrovitch said, and missing all his effects, "do repair it somehow, so that it will serve a little longer."

"No, that would be wasting work and spending money for nothing," said Petrovitch, and after that Akaky Akakyevitch went away completely crushed, and when he had gone Petrovitch remained standing for a long time with his lips pursed up significantly before he took up his work again, feeling pleased that he had not demeaned himself nor lowered the dignity of the tailor's art.

When he got into the street, Akaky Akakyevitch was as though in a dream. "So that is how it is," he said to himself. "I really did not think it would be so . . ." and then after a pause he added, "So there it is! so that's how it is at last! and I really could never have supposed it would have been so. And there . . ." There followed another long silence, after which he brought out: "So there it is! well, it really is so utterly unexpected . . . who would have thought . . . what a circumstance. . ." Saying this, instead of going home he walked off in quite the opposite direction without suspecting what he was doing. On the way a clumsy sweep brushed the whole of his sooty side against him and blackened all his shoulder; a regular hatful of plaster scattered upon him from the top of a house that was being built. He noticed nothing of this, and only after he had jostled against a sentry who had set his halberd down beside him and was shaking some snuff out of his horn into his rough fist, he came to himself a little and then only because the sentry said: "Why are you poking yourself right in one's face, haven't you the pavement to yourself?" This made him look round and turn homeward; only there he began to collect his thoughts, to see his position in a clear and true light and began talking to himself no longer incoherently but reasonably and openly as with a sensible friend with whom one can discuss the most

intimate and vital matters. "No, indeed," said Akaky Akakyevitch, "it is no use talking to Petrovitch now; just now he really is . . . his wife must have been giving it to him. I had better go to him on Sunday morning; after the Saturday evening he will be squinting and sleepy, so he'll want a little drink to carry it off and his wife won't give him a penny. I'll slip ten kopecks into his hand and then he will be more accommodating and maybe take the overcoat. . . ."

So reasoning with himself, Akaky Akakyevitch cheered up and waited until the next Sunday; then, seeing from a distance Petrovitch's wife leaving the house, he went straight in. Petrovitch certainly was very tipsy after the Saturday. He could hardly hold his head up and was very drowsy: but, for all that, as soon as he heard what he was speaking about, it seemed as though the devil had nudged him. "I can't," he said, "you must kindly order a new one." Akaky Akakyevitch at once slipped a ten-kopeck piece into his hand. "I thank you, sir, I will have just a drop to your health, but don't trouble yourself about the overcoat; it is not a bit of good for anything. I'll make you a fine new coat, you can trust me for that."

Akaky Akakyevitch would have said more about repairs, but Petrovitch, without listening, said: "A new one now I'll make you without fail; you can rely upon that, I'll do my best. It could even be like the fashion that has come in with the collar to button with silver claws under appliqué"

Then Akaky Akakyevitch saw that there was no escape from a new overcoat and he was utterly depressed. How indeed, for what, with what money could he get it? Of course he could to some extent rely on the bonus for the coming holiday, but that money had long ago been appropriated and its use determined beforehand. It was needed for new trousers and to pay the cobbler an old debt for putting some new tops to some old bootlegs, and he had to order three shirts from a seamstress as well as two specimens of an undergarment which it is improper to mention in print; in short, all that money absolutely must be spent, and even if the director were to be so gracious as to assign him a gratuity of forty-five or even fifty, instead of forty roubles, there would still be left a mere trifle, which would be

but as a drop in tne ocean beside the fortune needed for an overcoat. Though, of course, he knew that Petrovitch had a strange craze for suddenly putting on the devil knows what enormous price, so that at times his own wife could not help crying out: "Why, you are out of your wits, you idiot! Another time he'll undertake a job for nothing, and here the devil has bewitched him to ask more than he is worth himself." Though, of course, he knew that Petrovitch would undertake to make it for eighty roubles, still where would he get those eighty roubles? He might manage half of that sum; half of it could be found, perhaps even a little more; but where could he get the other half? . . . But, first of all, the reader ought to know where that first half was to be found. Akaky Akakyevitch had the habit every time he spent a rouble of putting aside two kopecks in a little locked-up box with a slit in the lid for slipping the money in. At the end of every half-year he would inspect the pile of coppers there and change them for small silver. He had done this for a long time, and in the course of many years the sum had mounted up to forty roubles and so he had half the money in his hands, but where was he to get the other half, where was he to get another forty roubles? Akaky Akakyevitch pondered and pondered and decided at last that he would have to diminish his ordinary expenses, at least for a year; give up burning candles in the evening, and if he had to do anything he must go into the landlady's room and work by her candle; that as he walked along the streets he must walk as lightly and carefully as possible, almost on tiptoe, on the cobbles and flagstones, so that his soles might last a little longer than usual, that he must send his linen to the wash less frequently, and that, to preserve it from being worn, he must take it off every day when he came home and sit in a thin cotton-shoddy dressing-gown, a very ancient garment which Time itself had spared. To tell the truth, he found it at first rather hard to get used to these privations, but after a while it became a habit and went smoothly enough—he even became quite accustomed to being hungry in the evening; on the other hand, he had spiritual nourishment, for he carried ever in his thoughts the idea of his future overcoat. His whole existence had in a sense become fuller, as though he had married, as though some other person were present with him, as though

he were no longer alone, but an agreeable companion had consented to walk the path of life hand in hand with him, and that companion was no other than the new overcoat with its thick wadding and its strong durable lining. He became, as it were, more alive, even more strong-willed, like a man who has set before himself a definite aim. Uncertainty, indecision, in fact all the hesitating and vague characteristics vanished from his face and his manners. At times there was a gleam in his eyes, indeed, the most bold and audacious ideas flashed through his mind. Why not really have marten on the collar? Meditation on the subject always made him absent-minded. On one occasion when he was copying a document, he very nearly made a mistake, so that he almost cried out "ough" aloud and crossed himself. At least once every month he went to Petrovitch to talk about the overcoat, where it would be best to buy the cloth, and what colour it should be, and what price, and, though he returned home a little anxious, he was always pleased at the thought that at last the time was at hand when everything would be bought and the overcoat would be made. Things moved even faster than he had anticipated. Contrary to all expectations, the director bestowed on Akaky Akakyevitch a gratuity of no less than sixty roubles. Whether it was that he had an inkling that Akaky Akakyevitch needed a greatcoat, or whether it happened so by chance, owing to this he found he had twenty roubles extra. This circumstance hastened the course of affairs. Another two or three months of partial fasting and Akaky Akakyevitch had actually saved up nearly eighty roubles. His heart, as a rule very tranquil, began to throb. The very first day he set off in company with Petrovitch to the shops. They bought some very good cloth, and no wonder, since they had been thinking of it for more than six months before, and scarcely a month had passed without their going to the shop to compare prices; now Petrovitch himself declared that there was no better cloth to be had. For the lining they chose calico, but of a stout quality, which in Petrovitch's words was even better than silk, and actually as strong and handsome to look at. Marten they did not buy, because it certainly was dear, but instead they chose cat fur, the best to be found in the shop—cat which in the distance might almost be taken for marten.

Petrovitch was busy over the coat for a whole fortnight, because there were a great many button-holes, otherwise it would have been ready sooner. Petrovitch asked twelve roubles for the work; less than that it hardly could have been, everything was sewn with silk, with fine double seams, and Petrovitch went over every seam afterwards with his own teeth imprinting various figures with them. It was . . . it is hard to say precisely on what day, but probably on the most triumphant day of the life of Akaky Akakyevitch that Petrovitch at last brought the overcoat. He brought it in the morning, just before it was time to set off for the department. The overcoat could not have arrived more in the nick of time, for rather sharp frosts were just beginning and seemed threatening to be even more severe. Petrovitch brought the greatcoat himself as a good tailor should. There was an expression of importance on his face, such as Akaky Akakyevitch had never seen there before. He seemed fully conscious of having completed a work of no little moment and of having shown in his own person the gulf that separates tailors who only put in linings and do repairs from those who make up new materials. He took the greatcoat out of the pocket-handkerchief in which he had brought it (the pocket-handkerchief had just come home from the wash), he then folded it up and put it in his pocket for future use. After taking out the overcoat, he looked at it with much pride and, holding it in both hands, threw it very deftly over Akaky Akakyevitch's shoulders, then pulled it down and smoothed it out behind with his hands; then draped it about Akaky Akakyevitch with somewhat jaunty carelessness. The latter, as a man advanced in years, wished to try it with his arms in the sleeves. Petrovitch helped him to put it on, and it appeared that it looked splendid too with his arms in his sleeves. In fact it turned out that the overcoat was completely and entirely successful. Petrovitch did not let slip the occasion for observing that it was only because he lived in a small street and had no signboard, and because he had known Akaky Akakyevitch so long, that he had done it so cheaply, but on the Nevsky Prospect they would have asked him seventy-five roubles for the work alone. Akaky Akakyevitch had no inclination to discuss this with Petrovitch, besides he was frightened of the big sums that

Petrovitch was fond of flinging airily about in conversation. He paid him, thanked him, and went off on the spot, with his new overcoat on, to the department. Petrovitch followed him out and stopped in the street, staring for a good time at the coat from a distance and then purposely turned off and, taking a short cut by a side street, came back into the street and got another view of the coat from the other side, that is, from the front.

Meanwhile Akaky Akakyevitch walked along with every emotion in its most holiday mood. He felt every second that he had a new overcoat on his shoulders, and several times he actually laughed from inward satisfaction. Indeed, it had two advantages, one that it was warm and the other that it was good. He did not notice the way at all and found himself all at once at the department; in the porter's room he took off the overcoat, looked it over and put it in the porter's special care. I cannot tell how it happened, but all at once everyone in the department learned that Akaky Akakyevitch had a new overcoat and that the "dressing jacket" no longer existed. They all ran out at once into the porter's room to look at Akaky Akakyevitch's new overcoat; they began welcoming him and congratulating him so that at first he could do nothing but smile and afterwards felt positively abashed. When, coming up to him, they all began saying that he must "sprinkle" the new overcoat and that he ought at least to stand them all a supper, Akaky Akakyevitch lost his head completely and did not know what to do, how to get out of it, nor what to answer. A few minutes later, flushing crimson, he even began assuring them with great simplicity that it was not a new overcoat at all, that it was just nothing, that it was an old overcoat. At last one of the clerks, indeed the assistant of the head clerk of the room, probably in order to show that he was not proud and was able to get on with those beneath him, said: "So be it, I'll give a party instead of Akaky Akakyevitch and invite you all to tea with me this evening; as luck would have it, it is my name-day." The clerks naturally congratulated the assistant head clerk and eagerly accepted the invitation. Akaky Akakyevitch was beginning to make excuses, but they all declared that it was uncivil of him, that it was simply a shame and a disgrace and that he could not possibly refuse. However, he felt pleased

about it afterwards when he remembered that through this he would have the opportunity of going out in the evening, too, in his new overcoat. The whole day was for Akaky Akakyevitch the most triumphant and festive day in his life. He returned home in the happiest frame of mind, took off the overcoat and hung it carefully on the wall, admiring the cloth and lining once more, and then pulled out his old "dressing jacket," now completely coming to pieces, on purpose to compare them. He glanced at it and positively laughed, the difference was so immense! And long afterwards he went on laughing at dinner, as the position in which the "dressing jacket" was placed recurred to his mind. He dined in excellent spirits and after dinner wrote nothing, no papers at all, but just took his ease for a little while on his bed, till it got dark, then, without putting things off, he dressed, put on his overcoat, and went out into the street. Where precisely the clerk who had invited him lived we regret to say that we cannot tell; our memory is beginning to fail sadly, and everything there is in Petersburg, all the streets and houses, are so blurred and muddled in our head that it is a very difficult business to put anything in orderly fashion. However that may have been, there is no doubt that the clerk lived in the better part of the town and consequently a very long distance from Akaky Akakyevitch. At first the latter had to walk through deserted streets, scantily lighted, but as he approached his destination the streets became more lively, more full of people, and more brightly lighted; passers-by began to be more frequent, ladies began to appear, here and there, beautifully dressed, beaver collars were to be seen on the men. Cabmen with wooden trellis-work sledges, studded with gilt nails, were less frequently to be met; on the other hand, jaunty drivers in raspberry coloured velvet caps with varnished sledges and bearskin rugs appeared, and carriages with decorated boxes dashed along the streets, their wheels crunching through the snow.

Akaky Akakyevitch looked at all this as a novelty; for several years he had not gone out into the streets in the evening. He stopped with curiosity before a lighted shop-window to look at a picture in which a beautiful woman was represented in the act of taking off her shoe and displaying as she did so the whole

of a very shapely leg, while behind her back a gentleman with whiskers and a handsome imperial on his chin was putting his head in at the door. Akaky Akakyevitch shook his head and smiled and then went on his way. Why did he smile? Was it because he had come across something quite unfamiliar to him, though every man retains some instinctive feeling on the subject, or was it that he reflected, like many other clerks, as follows: "Well, upon my soul, those Frenchmen! it's beyond anything! if they try on anything of the sort, it really is . . .!" Though possibly he did not even think that there is no creeping into a man's soul and finding out all that he thinks. At last he reached the house in which the assistant head clerk lived in fine style; there was a lamp burning on the stairs, and the flat was on the second floor. As he went into the entry Akaky Akakyevitch saw whole rows of goloshes. Amongst them in the middle of the room stood a samovar hissing and letting off clouds of steam. On the walls hung coats and cloaks, among which some actually had beaver collars or velvet revers. The other side of the wall there was noise and talk, which suddenly became clear and loud when the door opened and the footman came out with a tray full of empty glasses, a jug of cream, and a basket of biscuits. It was evident that the clerks had arrived long before and had already drunk their first glass of tea. Akaky Akakyevitch, after hanging up his coat with his own hands, went into the room, and at the same moment there flashed before his eyes a vision of candles, clerks, pipes, and card tables, together with the confused sounds of conversation rising up on all sides and the noise of moving chairs. He stopped very awkwardly in the middle of the room, looking about and trying to think what to do, but he was observed and received with a shout and they all went at once into the entry and again took a look at his overcoat. Though Akaky Akakyevitch was something embarrassed, yet, being a simple-hearted man, he could not help being pleased at seeing how they all admired his coat. Then of course they all abandoned him and his coat, and turned their attention as usual to the tables set for whist. All this—the noise, the talk, and the crowd of people—was strange and wonderful to Akaky Akakyevitch. He simply did not know how to behave, what to do with his arms and legs and his whole figure; at last

he sat down beside the players, looked at the cards, stared first at one and then at another of the faces, and in a little while began to yawn and felt that he was bored—especially as it was long past the time at which he usually went to bed. He tried to take leave of his hosts, but they would not let him go, saying that he absolutely must have a glass of champagne in honour of the new coat. An hour later supper was served, consisting of salad, cold veal, a pasty, pies, and tarts from the confectioner's, and champagne. They made Akaky Akakyevitch drink two glasses, after which he felt that things were much more cheerful, though he could not forget that it was twelve o'clock and that he ought to have been home long ago. That his host might not take it into his head to detain him, he slipped out of the room, hunted in the entry for his greatcoat, which he found, not without regret, lying on the floor, shook it, removed some fluff from it, put it on, and went down the stairs into the street. It was still light in the streets. Some little general shops, those perpetual clubs for house-serfs and all sorts of people, were open; others which were closed showed, however, a long streak of light at every crack of the door, proving that they were not yet deserted, and probably maids and men-servants were still finishing their conversation and discussion, driving their masters to utter perplexity as to their whereabouts. Akaky Akakyevitch walked along in a cheerful state of mind; he was even on the point of running, goodness knows why, after a lady of some sort who passed by like lightning with every part of her frame in violent motion. He checked himself at once, however, and again walked along very gently, feeling positively surprised himself at the inexplicable impulse that had seized him. Soon the deserted streets, which are not particularly cheerful by day and even less so in the evening, stretched before him. Now they were still more dead and deserted; the light of street lamps was scantier, the oil was evidently running low; then came wooden houses and fences; not a soul anywhere; only the snow gleamed on the streets and the low-pitched slumbering hovels looked black and gloomy with their closed shutters. He approached the spot where the street was intersected by an endless square, which looked like a fearful desert with its houses scarcely visible on the further side.

In the distance, goodness knows where, there was a gleam of light from some sentry-box which seemed to be standing at the end of the world. Akaky Akakyevitch's light-heartedness grew somehow sensibly less at this place. He stepped into the square, not without an involuntary uneasiness, as though his heart had a foreboding of evil. He looked behind him and to both sides—it was as though the sea were all round him. "No, better not look," he thought, and walked on, shutting his eyes, and when he opened them to see whether the end of the square were near, he suddenly saw standing before him, almost under his very nose, some men with moustaches; just what they were like he could not even distinguish. There was a mist before his eyes and a throbbing in his chest. "I say the overcoat is mine!" said one of them in a voice like a clap of thunder, seizing him by the collar. Akaky Akakyevitch was on the point of shouting "Help" when another put a fist the size of a clerk's head against his very lips, saying: "You just shout now." Akaky Akakyevitch felt only that they took the overcoat off, and gave him a kick with their knees, and he fell on his face in the snow and was conscious of nothing more. A few minutes later he came to himself and got on to his feet, but there was no-one there. He felt that it was cold on the ground and that he had no overcoat, and began screaming, but it seemed as though his voice could not carry to the end of the square. Overwhelmed with despair and continuing to scream, he ran across the square straight to the sentry-box, beside which stood a sentry leaning on his halberd and, so it seemed, looking with curiosity to see who the devil the man was who was screaming and running towards him from the distance. As Akaky Akakyevitch reached him, he began breathlessly shouting that he was asleep and not looking after his duty not to see that a man was being robbed. The sentry answered that he had seen nothing, that he had only seen him stopped in the middle of the square by two men, and supposed that they were his friends, and that, instead of abusing him for nothing, he had better go the next day to the superintendent and that he would find out who had taken the overcoat. Akaky Akakyevitch ran home in a terrible state: his hair, which was still comparatively abundant on his temples and the back of his head, was completely dishevelled; his side

and chest and his trousers were all covered with snow. When his old landlady heard a fearful knock at the door she jumped hurriedly out of bed and, with only one slipper on, ran to open it, modestly holding her shift across her bosom; but when she opened it she stepped back, seeing what a state Akaky Akakyevitch was in. When he told her what had happened, she clasped her hands in horror and said that he must go straight to the superintendent, that the police constable of the quarter would deceive him, make promises and lead him a dance; that it would be best of all to go to the superintendent, and that she knew him indeed, because Anna the Finnish girl who was once her cook was now in service as a nurse at the superintendent's; and that she often saw him himself when he passed by their house, and that he used to be every Sunday at church too, saying his prayers and at the same time looking good-humouredly at everyone, and that therefore by every token he must be a kind-hearted man. After listening to this advice, Akaky Akakyevitch made his way very gloomily to his room, and how he spent that night I leave to the imagination of those who are in the least able to picture the position of others. Early in the morning he set off to the police superintendent's, but was told that he was asleep. He came at ten o'clock, he was told again that he was asleep; he came at eleven and was told that the superintendent was not at home; he came at dinner-time, but the clerks in the ante-room would not let him in, and insisted on knowing what was the matter and what business had brought him and exactly what had happened; so that at last Akaky Akakyevitch for the first time in his life tried to show the strength of his character and said curtly that he must see the superintendent himself, that they dare not refuse to admit him, that he had come from the department on government business, and that if he made complaint of them they would see. The clerks dared say nothing to this, and one of them went to summon the superintendent. The latter received his story of being robbed of his overcoat in an extremely strange way. Instead of attending to the main point, he began asking Akaky Akakyevitch questions, why had he been coming home so late? wasn't he going, or hadn't he been, to some house of ill-fame? so that Akaky Akakyevitch was overwhelmed with confusion,

and went away without knowing whether or not the proper measures would be taken in regard to his overcoat. He was absent from the office all that day (the only time that it had happened in his life). Next day he appeared with a pale face, wearing his old "dressing jacket" which had become a still more pitiful sight. The tidings of the theft of the overcoat—though there were clerks who did not let even this chance slip of jeering at Akaky Akakyevitch—touched many of them. They decided on the spot to get up a subscription for him, but collected only a very trifling sum, because the clerks had already spent a good deal on subscribing to the director's portrait and on the purchase of a book, at the suggestion of the head of their department, who was a friend of the author, and so the total realized was very insignificant. One of the clerks, moved by compassion, ventured at any rate to assist Akaky Akakyevitch with good advice, telling him not to go to the district police inspector, because, though it might happen that the latter might be sufficiently zealous of gaining the approval of his superiors to succeed in finding the overcoat, it would remain in the possession of the police unless he presented legal proofs that it belonged to him; he urged that far the best thing would be to appeal to a Person of Consequence; that the Person of Consequence, by writing and getting into communication with the proper authorities, could push the matter through more successfully. There was nothing else for it. Akaky Akakyevitch made up his mind to go to the Person of Consequence. What precisely was the nature of the functions of the Person of Consequence has remained a matter of uncertainty. It must be noted that this Person of Consequence had only lately become a person of consequence, and until recently had been a person of no consequence. Though, indeed, his position even now was not reckoned of consequence in comparison with others of still greater consequence. But there is always to be found a circle of persons to whom a person of little consequence in the eyes of others is a person of consequence. It is true that he did his utmost to increase the consequence of his position in various ways, for instance of insisting that his subordinates should come out on to the stairs to meet him when he arrived at his office; that no-one should venture to approach him directly,

but all proceedings should be by the strictest order of precedence; that a collegiate registration clerk should report the matter to the provincial secretary, and the provincial secretary to the titular councillor or whomsoever it might be, and that business should only reach him by this channel. Everyone in Holy Russia has a craze for imitation, everyone apes and mimics his superiors. I have actually been told that a titular councillor who was put in charge of a small separate office, immediately partitioned off a special room for himself, calling it the head office, and set special porters at the door with red collars and gold lace, who took hold of the handle of the door and opened it for everyone who went in, though the "head office" was so tiny that it was with difficulty that an ordinary writing table could be put into it. The manners and habits of the Person of Consequence were dignified and majestic, but not complex. The chief foundation of his system was strictness, "strictness, strictness, and—strictness!" he used to say, and at the last word he would look very significantly at the person he was addressing, though, indeed, he had no reason to do so, for the dozen clerks who made up the whole administrative mechanism of his office stood in befitting awe of him; any clerk who saw him in the distance would leave his work and remain standing at attention till his superior had left the room. His conversation with his subordinates was usually marked by severity and also confined to three phrases: "How dare you?" "Do you know to whom you are speaking?" "Do you understand who I am?" He was, however, at heart a good-natured man, pleasant and obliging with his colleagues; but the grade of general had completely turned his head. When he received it, he was perplexed, thrown off his balance, and quite at a loss how to behave. If he chanced to be with his equals, he was still quite a decent man, a very gentlemanly man, in fact, and in many ways even an intelligent man, but as soon as he was in company with men who were even one grade below him, there was simply no doing anything with him: he sat silent and his position excited compassion, the more so as he himself felt that he might have been spending his time to incomparably more advantage. At times there could be seen in his eyes an intense desire to join in some interesting conversation, but

he was restrained by the doubt whether it would not be too much on his part, whether it would not be too great a familiarity and lowering of his dignity, and in consequence of these reflections he remained everlastingly in the same mute condition, only uttering from time to time monosyllabic sounds, and in this way he gained the reputation of being a very tiresome man.

So this was the Person of Consequence to whom our friend Akaky Akakyevitch appealed, and he appealed to him at a most unpropitious moment, very unfortunate for himself, though fortunate, indeed, for the Person of Consequence. The latter happened to be in his study, talking in the very best of spirits with an old friend of his childhood who had only just arrived and whom he had not seen for several years. It was at this moment that he was informed that a man called Bashmatchkin was asking to see him. He asked abruptly, "What sort of man is he?" and received the answer, "A government clerk." "Ah! he can wait, I haven't time now," said the Person of Consequence. Here I must observe that this was a complete lie on the part of the Person of Consequence; he had time; his friend and he had long ago said all they had to say to each other and their conversation had begun to be broken by very long pauses during which they merely slapped each other on the knee, saying, "So that's how things are, Ivan Abramovitch!" "There it is, Stepan Varlamovitch!" but, for all that, he told the clerk to wait in order to show his friend, who had left the service years before and was living at home in the country how long clerks had to wait in his ante-room. At last after they had talked, or rather been silent to their hearts' content and had smoked a cigar in very comfortable arm-chairs with sloping backs, he seemed suddenly to recollect, and said to the secretary who was standing at the door with papers for his signature: "Oh, by the way, there is a clerk waiting, isn't there? Tell him he can come in." When he saw Akaky Akakyevitch's meek appearance and old uniform, he turned to him at once and said: "What do you want?" in a firm and abrupt voice, which he had purposely practised in his own room in solitude before the looking-glass for a week before receiving his present post and the grade of a general. Akaky Akakyevitch, who was overwhelmed with befitting awe beforehand, was somewhat

confused and, as far as his tongue would allow him, explained to the best of his powers, with even more frequent "ers" than usual, that he had had a perfectly new overcoat and now he had been robbed of it in the most inhuman way, and that now he had come to beg him by his intervention either to correspond with his honour the head policemaster or anybody else, and find the overcoat. This mode of proceeding struck the general for some reason as taking a great liberty. "What next, sir," he went on as abruptly, "don't you know the way to proceed? To whom are you addressing yourself? Don't you know how things are done? You ought first to have handed in a petition to the office; it would have gone to the head clerk of the room, and to the head clerk of the section, then it would have been handed to the secretary and the secretary would have brought it to me . . ."

"But, your Excellency," said Akaky Akakyevitch, trying to collect all the small allowance of presence of mind he possessed and feeling at the same time that he was getting into a terrible perspiration, "I ventured, your Excellency, to trouble you because secretaries . . . er . . . are people you can't depend on. . . ."

"What? what? what?" said the Person of Consequence. "Where did you get hold of that spirit? Where did you pick up such ideas? What insubordination is spreading among young men against their superiors and betters." The Person of Consequence did not apparently observe that Akaky Akakyevitch was well over fifty, and therefore if he could have been called a young man it would only have been in comparison with a man of seventy. "Do you know to whom you are speaking? Do you understand who I am? Do you understand that, I ask you?" At this point he stamped and raised his voice to such a powerful note that Akaky Akakyevitch was not the only one to be terrified. Akaky Akakyevitch was positively petrified; he staggered, trembling all over, and could not stand; if the porters had not run up to support him, he would have flopped upon the floor; he was led out almost unconscious. The Person of Consequence, pleased that the effect had surpassed his expectations and enchanted at the idea that his words could even deprive a man of consciousness, stole a sideway glance at his friend to

see how he was taking it, and perceived not without satisfaction that his friend was feeling very uncertain and even beginning to be a little terrified himself.

How he got downstairs, how he went out into the street—of all that Akaky Akakyevitch remembered nothing, he had no feeling in his arms or his legs. In all his life he had never been so severely reprimanded by a general, and this was by one of another department, too. He went out into the snowstorm, that was whistling through the streets, with his mouth open, and as he went he stumbled off the pavement; the wind, as its way is in Petersburg, blew upon him from all the points of the compass and from every side street. In an instant it had blown a quinsy into his throat, and when he got home he was not able to utter a word; with a swollen face and throat he went to bed. So violent is sometimes the effect of a suitable reprimand!

Next day he was in a high fever. Thanks to the gracious assistance of the Petersburg climate, the disease made more rapid progress than could have been expected, and when the doctor came, after feeling his pulse he could find nothing to do but prescribe a fomentation, and that simply that the patient might not be left without the benefit of medical assistance; however, two days later he informed him that his end was at hand, after which he turned to his landlady and said: "And you had better lose no time, my good woman, but order him now a deal coffin, for an oak one will be too dear for him." Whether Akaky Akakyevitch heard these fateful words or not, whether they produced a shattering effect upon him, and whether he regretted his pitiful life, no-one can tell, for he was all the time in delirium and fever. Apparitions, each stranger than the one before, were continually haunting him: first, he saw Petrovitch and was ordering him to make a greatcoat trimmed with some sort of traps for robbers, who were, he fancied, continually under the bed, and he was calling his landlady every minute to pull out a thief who had even got under the quilt; then he kept asking why his old "dressing jacket" was hanging before him when he had a new overcoat, then he fancied he was standing before the general listening to the appropriate reprimand and saying: "I am sorry, your Excellency," then finally he became abusive, uttering the most awful language, so that his

old landlady positively crossed herself, having never heard anything of the kind from him before, and the more horrified because these dreadful words followed immediately upon the phrase "your Excellency." Later on, his talk was a mere medley of nonsense, so that it was quite unintelligible; all that could be seen was that his incoherent words and thoughts were concerned with nothing but the overcoat. At last poor Akaky Akakyevitch gave up the ghost. No seal was put upon his room nor upon his things, because, in the first place, he had no heirs, and in the second, the property left was very small, to wit, a bundle of goose-feathers, a quire of white government paper, three pairs of socks, two or three buttons that had come off his trousers, and the "dressing jacket" with which the reader is already familiar. Who came into all this wealth God only knows, even I who tell the tale must own that I have not troubled to enquire. And Petersburg remained without Akaky Akakyevitch, as though, indeed, he had never been in the city. A creature had vanished and departed whose cause no-one had championed, who was dear to no-one, of interest to no-one, who never even attracted the attention of the student of natural history, though the latter does not disdain to fix a common fly upon a pin and look at him under the microscope—a creature who bore patiently the jeers of the office and for no particular reason went to his grave, though even he at the very end of his life was visited by a gleam of brightness in the form of an overcoat that for one instant brought colour into his poor life—a creature on whom calamity broke as insufferably as it breaks upon the heads of the mighty ones of this world . . .!

Several days after his death the porter from the department was sent to his lodgings with instructions that he should go at once to the office, for his chief was asking for him; but the porter was obliged to return without him, explaining that he could not come, and to the enquiry "Why?" he added: "Well, you see: the fact is he is dead, he was buried three days ago." This was how they learned at the office of the death of Akaky Akakyevitch, and the next day there was sitting in his seat a new clerk who was very much taller and who wrote not in the same upright hand but made his letters more slanting and crooked.

But who could have imagined that this was not all there was to tell about Akaky Akakyevitch, that he was destined for a few days to make a noise in the world after his death, as though to make up for his life having being unnoticed by any one? But so it happened, and our poor story unexpectedly finishes with a fantastic ending. Rumours were suddenly floating about Petersburg that in the neighbourhood of the Kalinkin Bridge and for a little distance beyond, a corpse had taken to appearing at night in the form of a clerk looking for a stolen overcoat, and stripping from the shoulders of all passers-by, regardless of grade and calling, overcoats of all descriptions—trimmed with cat fur, or beaver or wadded, lined with racoon, fox and bear—made, in fact, of all sorts of skin which men have adapted for the covering of their own. One of the clerks of the department saw the corpse with his own eyes and at once recognised it as Akaky Akakyevitch; but it excited in him such terror, however, that he ran away as fast as his legs could carry him and so could not get a very clear view of him, and only saw him hold up his finger threateningly in the distance.

From all sides complaints were continually coming that backs and shoulders, not of mere titular councillors, but even of upper court councillors, had been exposed to taking chills, owing to being stripped of their greatcoats. Orders were given to the police to catch the corpse regardless of trouble or expense, alive or dead, and to punish him in the cruellest way, as an example to others, and, indeed, they very nearly succeeded in doing so. The sentry of one district police station in Kiryushkin Place snatched a corpse by the collar on the spot of the crime in the very act of attempting to snatch a frieze overcoat from a retired musician, who used in his day to play the flute. Having caught him by the collar, he shouted until he had brought two other comrades, whom he charged to hold him while he felt just for a minute in his boot to get out a snuff-box in order to revive his nose which had six times in his life been frost-bitten, but the snuff was probably so strong that not even a dead man could stand it. The sentry had hardly had time to put his finger over his right nostril and draw up some snuff in the left when the corpse sneezed violently right into the eyes of all three. While they were putting their fists up to wipe them, the corpse

completely vanished, so that they were not even sure whether he had actually been in their hands. From that time forward, the sentries conceived such a horror of the dead that they were even afraid to seize the living and confined themselves to shouting from the distance: "Hi, you there, be off!" and the dead clerk began to appear even on the other side of the Kalinkin Bridge, rousing no little terror in all timid people.

We have, however, quite deserted the Person of Consequence, who may in reality almost be said to be the cause of the fantastic ending of this perfectly true story. To begin with, my duty requires me to do justice to the Person of Consequence by recording that soon after poor Akaky Akakyevitch had gone away crushed to powder, he felt something not unlike regret. Sympathy was a feeling not unknown to him; his heart was open to many kindly impulses, although his exalted grade very often prevented them from being shown. As soon as his friend had gone out of his study, he even began brooding over poor Akaky Akakyevitch, and from that time forward, he was almost every day haunted by the image of the poor clerk who had succumbed so completely to the befitting reprimand. The thought of the man so worried him that a week later he actually decided to send a clerk to find out how he was and whether he really could help him in any way. And when they brought him word that Akaky Akakyevitch had died suddenly in delirium and fever, it made a great impression on him, his conscience reproached him and he was depressed all day. Anxious to distract his mind and to forget the unpleasant impression, he went to spend the evening with one of his friends, where he found a genteel company and, what was best of all, almost everyone was of the same grade so that he was able to be quite free from restraint. This had a wonderful effect on his spirits, he expanded, became affable and genial—in short, spent a very agreeable evening. At supper he drank a couple of glasses of champagne—a proceeding which we all know has a happy effect in inducing good-humour. The champagne made him inclined to do something unusual, and he decided not to go home yet but to visit a lady of his acquaintance, one Karolina Ivanovna—a lady apparently of German extraction, for whom he entertained extremely friendly feelings. It must be noted that the Person of Conse-

quence was a man no longer young, an excellent husband, and the respectable father of a family. He had two sons, one already serving in his office, and a nice-looking daughter of sixteen with a rather turned-up pretty little nose, who used to come every morning to kiss his hand saying: "Bon jour, Papa." His wife, who was still blooming and decidedly good-looking, indeed, used first to give him her hand to kiss and then would kiss his hand, turning it the other side upwards. But though the Person of Consequence was perfectly satisfied with the kind amenities of his domestic life, he thought it proper to have a lady friend in another quarter of the town. This lady friend was not a bit better-looking nor younger than his wife, but these mysterious facts exist in the world and it is not our business to criticise them. And so the Person of Consequence went downstairs, got into his sledge, and said to his coachman, "To Karolina Ivanova," while luxuriously wrapped in his warm fur coat he remained in that agreeable frame of mind sweeter to a Russian than anything that could be invented, that is, when one thinks of nothing while thoughts come into the mind of themselves, one pleasanter than the other, without the labour of following them or looking for them. Full of satisfaction, he recalled all the amusing moments of the evening he had spent, all the phrases that had set the little circle laughing; many of them he repeated in an undertone and found them as amusing as before, and so, very naturally, laughed very heartily at them again. From time to time, however, he was disturbed by a gust of wind which, blowing suddenly, God knows whence and wherefore, cut him in the face, pelting him with flakes of snow, puffing out his coat-collar like a sack, or suddenly flinging it with unnatural force over his head and giving him endless trouble to extricate himself from it. All at once, the Person of Consequence felt that someone had clutched him very tightly by the collar. Turning round he saw a short man in a shabby old uniform, and not without horror recognised him as Akaky Akakyevitch. The clerk's face was white as snow and looked like that of a corpse, but the horror of the Person of Consequence was beyond all bounds when he saw the mouth of the corpse distorted into speech and, breathing upon him the chill of the grave, it uttered the following words: "Ah, so here you

are at last! At last I've . . . er . . . caught you by the collar. It's your overcoat I want, you refused to help me and abused me into the bargain! So now give me yours!" The poor Person of Consequence very nearly died. Resolute and determined as he was in his office and before subordinates in general, and though anyone looking at his manly air and figure would have said: "Oh, what a man of character!" yet in this plight he felt, like very many persons of athletic appearance, such terror that not without reason he began to be afraid he would have some sort of fit. He actually flung his overcoat off his shoulders as fast as he could and shouted to his coachman in a voice unlike his own: "Drive home and make haste!" The coachman, hearing the tone which he had only heard in critical moments and then accompanied by something even more rousing, hunched his shoulders up to his ears in case of worse following, swung his whip and flew on like an arrow. In a little over six minutes the Person of Consequence was at the entrance of his own house. Pale, panic-stricken, and without his overcoat, he arrived home instead of at Karolina Ivanovna's, dragged himself to his own room and spent the night in great perturbation, so that next morning his daughter said to him at breakfast: "You look quite pale to-day, Papa": but her papa remained mute and said not a word to anyone of what had happened to him, where he had been, and where he had been going. The incident made a great impression upon him. Indeed, it happened far more rarely that he said to his subordinates: "How dare you? Do you understand who I am?" and he never uttered those words at all until he had first heard all the rights of the case.

What was even more remarkable is that from that time the apparition of the dead clerk ceased entirely: apparently the general's overcoat had fitted him perfectly, anyway nothing more was heard of overcoats being snatched from anyone. Many restless and anxious people refused, however, to be pacified, and still maintained that in remote parts of the town the ghost of the dead clerk went on appearing. One sentry in Kolomna, for instance, saw with his own eyes a ghost appear from behind a house; but, being by natural constitution somewhat feeble—so much so that on one occasion an ordinary, well-grown pig, making a sudden dash out of some building,

knocked him off his feet to the vast entertainment of the cabmen standing round, from whom he exacted two kopecks each for snuff for such rudeness—he did not dare to stop it, and so followed it in the dark until the ghost suddenly looked round and, stopping, asked him: "What do you want?" displaying a fist such as you never see among the living. The sentry said: "Nothing," and turned back on the spot. This ghost, however, was considerably taller and adorned with immense moustaches, and, directing its steps apparently towards Obuhov Bridge, vanished into the darkness of the night.

M. LERMONTOV

Taman[1]

Taman is one of the most unpleasant little sea-coast towns in the whole of Russia. I once nearly died of hunger there, and an attempt was made to drown me.

I arrived by the mail-coach late one night. The coachman drew up his tired horses at the gates of the only stone house on the outskirts of the town. The sentry, a Black Sea Cossack, heard the bells and fiercely shouted his "Who goes there?" A sergeant and a corporal came out and I explained to them that I was an officer travelling on public business on my way to join a unit on active service, and that quarters must be found for me. The corporal conducted us through the town. Every hut we came to was occupied. It was cold, I had not slept for three nights and I began to feel bored and angry. I shouted at the corporal, "Take me somewhere, idiot! I don't care if it's hell, if I can get some sleep there!"

"There is one more hut I know of," he said, scratching his head. "Only you won't like it there, sir; it's a bad place."

I did not understand what he meant by these last words and told him to lead the way. After wandering a long time through dirty lanes, at the side of which I saw nothing but broken-down fencing, we came to a small hut overlooking the sea.

A full moon shone on the rush roof and white walls of my new habitation; on one side of the yard, which was surrounded by a wall of cobblestones, there was another hut, smaller and more broken-down than the first. The cliff descended very sharply to the sea, almost from the walls of the hut, and down below I could hear the never-ceasing murmur of the waves. The moon

[1] Taman is on the eastern shore of the Straits of Kertch, which unite the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. It faces Kertch and the Crimea across the Straits.—Tr.

looked gently upon the unquiet element which pays obeisance to her, and by her light I could distinguish, far out at sea, two ships, whose black rigging, like a spider's web, was silhouetted motionless against the pale line of the horizon. "There are ships in the harbour," I thought to myself; "to-morrow I shall be able to go to Gelenjik."

A Cossack of the line was acting as my orderly and I told him to take out my bag and dismiss the coachman. I started knocking up the owner of the hut. No reply. I knocked again. Still no reply. What was the matter? At last a boy of about fourteen crept out of a shed.

"Where is your master?"

"Haven't got one."

"What, no master at all?"

"No, none."

"Well, where is your mistress?"

"Gone to the village."

"Who is going to open the door for me?" I asked, kicking it.

The door opened under my foot and a damp smell came from the hut. I lit a match and lifted it to the boy's nose. I saw two white eyes. He was blind, totally blind from birth. He stood before me without moving and I looked at his features.

I confess that I have a strong prejudice against all people who are blind, crooked, deaf, dumb, legless, armless or hunch-backed. I have noticed that there is apt to be a connection between a man's outward appearance and his character; it is as though, in losing a limb, he loses also some moral quality.

And so I looked at the blind boy's face. But how can one read a face that has no eyes? . . . I gazed at him for some time with involuntary pity, when suddenly a barely perceptible smile flickered across his thin lips, and—I don't know why—this produced on me a most sinister impression. There was born in my mind a suspicion that this blind boy was not so blind as he appeared. I tried in vain to reassure myself by saying that those white eyes could not be counterfeited—and besides, what would be the point of it? Also, as I have said, I know I have this prejudice against physical infirmities.

"Are you the son of the owner of the house?" I said at last.

"No."

"Who are you then?"

"A poor orphan."

"Has the mistress got any children?"

"No. She had a daughter, but the daughter went off to sea with a Tartar."

"What Tartar?"

"Don't know—a Crimean Tartar, a boatman from Kertch."

I went into the hut. Its furniture consisted of two benches, a table and a great chest near the stove. There was not a single sacred image on the walls—a bad sign. A sea wind blew in through a broken window. I took a candle-end from my bag, lit it and began to lay out my things. I put my sword and gun in a corner, my pistols on the table and my cloak on a bench, while the Cossack spread his cloak on the other bench. Within ten minutes he was snoring, but I could not get to sleep—I kept on seeing in the darkness the blind boy's white eyes.

About an hour passed. The moon was shining in at the window and the rays lit up the earthen floor of the hut. Suddenly a shadow passed across the bright patch on the floor. I stood up and looked out of the window. Somebody went by it again and passed out of my sight. It was not likely that he could have run down the precipitous cliff, but I was unable to see any other way by which he could have gone. I got up, threw on a shirt, buckled on my knife and went out of the hut as quietly as I could. There in front of me was the blind boy. I kept close under the wall and he went by me, stepping firmly but carefully. He carried a bundle under his arm and went down a narrow precipitous path that led towards the harbour. "'On that day the dumb shall speak and the blind shall see'," I thought to myself as I followed him at a distance which allowed me to keep him in sight.

During this time the moon had gone behind the clouds and mist was rising off the sea so thick that the stern-light of a ship near in to shore was barely visible through it. I could see the glistening foam of the waves which threatened every moment to engulf her.

I made my way down the break-neck path with difficulty and suddenly saw the boy stop and then turn down to the right. He

went so near the water's edge that it looked as though the waves must catch him and drag him out to sea. But evidently this was not his first walk here, judging by the sureness with which he stepped from stone to stone and avoided the holes. Finally he stopped, as if listening to something, and sat down on the ground with the bundle near him. I watched his movements, hidden behind a projecting rock. In a few minutes a white figure appeared from the other direction. It went up to the boy and sat down near him. Now and then snatches of their conversation reached me down wind.

"Well, blind boy," a woman's voice said, "the storm is heavy—Yanko won't come."

"Yanko's not afraid of storms," he replied.

"The mist is getting thicker," the voice said, with an inflection of sadness.

"All the easier for him to slip past the guard-ships."

"But supposing he is drowned?"

"Well, what of it? You'd go to church next Sunday without your new ribbon!"

There followed a silence. I had been struck during this conversation by the fact that though to me the boy talked with a Little Russian accent, he now talked perfect Russian.

"You see, I *was* right," said the boy, suddenly striking the palm of his hand with his fist. "Yanko fears neither sea nor mist nor guard-ships. Listen now. That noise isn't the sea—that's his long oars."

The woman looked uneasily into the distance. "You are talking nonsense, blind boy," she said. "I see nothing."

I tried hard to distinguish the outlines of a boat in the distance, but without success.

Ten minutes went by, and then among the mountainous waves I made out a black dot, which became now bigger, now smaller. The boat rose slowly on the crests and sank quickly to the troughs as it approached ever nearer to the shore. He must be a brave man to risk the fifteen miles of the straits on such a night, and urgent must be the reason for his voyage!

With these thoughts I looked at the wretched little boat, my heart beating violently. But she dived like a duck and emerged

from the abyss with a great sweep of the oars amid sheets of spray. Now, I thought, she will surely be swept violently ashore and be dashed to pieces. But she cleverly turned on her side and was washed unhurt up a little creek.

From her emerged a man of middle height in a Tartar sheepskin cap. He waved his hand and all three started dragging something out of the boat. She was so heavy-laden that I have never to this day understood how she kept afloat. They each took a load on their shoulders and went off along the shore, where I soon lost sight of them. I had to go back to the hut, but so perturbed did I feel by the strange happenings of the night that I awaited the morning with impatience.

My Cossack was very much surprised when he woke up to see me fully dressed, but I did not tell him the reason for it. I stood at the window for some time admiring the blue sky with watery shreds of cloud and the lilac strip which marked the distant shore of the Crimea, ending in a rock with a lighthouse on it. Then I went to the fort of Fanagroya to find out from the Commandant what time I should be leaving for Gelenjik.

But alas! the Commandant could tell me nothing definite. The ships lying in the harbour were all either guard-ships or merchant-ships that had not yet started to load. Possibly within three or four days the post-ship would arrive, and then we should see. I went back to the hut bored and angry, and was met by my Cossack with a frightened face.

"Things are bad, sir," he said to me.

"Yes, my friend. Goodness alone knows when I shall get away from this place."

This upset him more than ever, and he said in a whisper: "There is something wrong about the place. To-day I met a Black Sea sergeant who is a friend of mine and was in the same detachment last year. When I told him where we were staying he said, 'It is a bad place and the people aren't right!' Yes, and I should like to know who that blind boy is. He goes everywhere by himself—to the bazaar for bread and for water. Anyone can see he is used to do all."

"Well, now," I said. "Has the woman of the house appeared yet?"

"Yes, while you were away to-day an old woman came with her daughter."

"Daughter? But she hasn't got a daughter."

"Then I don't know who she is if she isn't a daughter. The old woman is sitting now in her hut over there."

I went over. There was a big fire in the oven, in which she was cooking what seemed to me rather a grand supper for such poor people. To all my questions the old woman replied that she was deaf and could not hear what I said. I could do nothing with her. I turned to the blind boy, who was sitting in front of the oven feeding the fire with wood.

"Now then, you little blind devil," I said, taking him by the ear, "tell me where you took that load last night."

Suddenly he began to cry and howl and wail. "Where did I go? I did not go anywhere. And I hadn't any load."

The old woman heard this time and muttered, "What's that you are making up about him—the poor blind boy? What's he done to you?"

This annoyed me and I went out of the hut, determined to find the key to the mystery.

I wrapped myself in my cloak and sat on a stone near the enclosure, looking into the distance. Before me was the sea, lashed to fury by the night storm; its monotonous noise was like the murmur that rises from a sleeping town. It brought back long-past years and turned my thoughts to the north, to our frozen capital. Deep in memories I lost count of time. . . . And so passed perhaps an hour or more. . . . Suddenly my ear caught a sound that resembled a song. Yes, it was a song, sung in a woman's fresh voice. But where was it coming from? I listened. The singing was tuneful, now drawn out and sad, now brisk and happy. I looked all round—there was nobody there. I listened again—the sound seemed to drop from the skies. I raised my eyes and there, on the roof of my hut, stood a girl in a striped dress, with her hair hanging over her shoulders, a true water-nymph. Protecting her eyes from the sun's rays with her hand she looked steadily into the distance. Sometimes she would laugh and talk to herself, and then start singing anew.

I remember this song of hers word for word. It ran as follows:

"*Ships, white-sailed ships, sail over the green sea, glorying in their freedom.*
"*Among these ships is my little boat, unrigged, with two oars.*
"*Comes a storm, and the ships will unfold their wings and be dispersed over the waters.*
"*Then will I make low obeisance to the sea and say, 'Harm not my little boat, thou angry sea,*
"'*For my little boat carries a precious cargo, and a bold hand guides her through the dark night.*' "

It suddenly occurred to me that I had heard the same voice in the night. I thought for a minute, and when I looked at the roof the girl had vanished. Suddenly she ran past me, singing another song. She went up to the old woman, snapping her fingers, and the two began to quarrel. The old woman became angry, and I heard her loud, cackling laugh. Then I saw my Undine skipping along towards me. When she got up to me she stopped and looked me steadily in the eyes, as though she was surprised to see me there. Then she turned away casually, and quietly went off in the direction of the harbour. But that was not all, for the whole day long she kept passing my hut, never for a moment ceasing to sing and skip.

She was a strange person. Her face bore no marks of weakness of mind; on the contrary, her eyes rested on me with penetrating shrewdness. Those eyes seemed to have some sort of magnetic power and to be perpetually waiting for a question. But no sooner did I begin to talk than she ran away, with a slight smile.

Certainly I have never seen a woman like her. She was decidedly not beautiful, though it is true that I have my prejudices where beauty is concerned. But there was breeding in her, and breeding in women is a very important thing, as it is in horses.

My songstress did not look more than eighteen years old. The unusual suppleness of her figure, an odd way she had of putting her head on one side, her long brown hair, a glowing tinge on the sunburnt skin of her neck and shoulders and, above all, her

straight nose, which, in Russia, is a very rare thing—all these I found delightful.

Though I could read something wild and also suspicious in her side-glances and though there was something mysterious in her smile, yet so strong is my prejudice in favour of straight noses that I pretended to myself that I had found Goethe's Mignon, that marvellous creature of German imagination. There were many resemblances between them—the same swift changè from extreme restlessness to perfect immobility, the same enigmatic remarks, the same repeatings of strange songs.

Towards evening I stopped her at the door, and the following conversation took place between us:

"Tell me, my pretty one, what you were doing to-day on the roof."

"I was looking whence the wind was blowing."

"What had that to do with you?"

"Whence the wind, thence comes also happiness."

"But were you attracting happiness by your singing?"

"Where singing is, there is also happiness."

"But what if by singing you bring down grief on yourself?"

"Where the better is not, there the worse will be; and, again, little separates bad from good."

"Who taught you that song?"

"No-one taught me. If the mood takes me, I sing. He who may listen will hear; but he who may not listen will not understand."

"And what is your name, my songstress?"

"He knows who christened me."

"And who christened you?"

"How should I know?"

"How mysterious you are! But still I have found out a little about you."

Her expression as I said this did not change, nor was there a quiver on her lips. I might have been speaking of someone else.

I went on: "I have discovered that you went down to the shore last night." And then, in a very serious voice, I described to her everything that I had seen, thinking to confuse her. But far from being confused she burst into roars of laughter.

"Much you have seen," she said, "but little you know. And that which you know, reveal not."

"But supposing I decide to report it to the commandant?" I said in my most serious official manner. Suddenly she leapt into the air, broke into song and hid herself, like a bird frightened out of a bush.

These last words of mine were very foolish. I did not at the time suspect their importance, but afterwards I had occasion to repent them.

It had just got dark. I told the Cossack to boil the kettle as he would on active service, and sat at the table smoking my travelling pipe. I was just finishing my second cup of tea when suddenly the door creaked and I heard behind me the rustle of a dress and the sound of footsteps. I started and turned round. It was she, my Undine. She sat opposite me and gazed at me in perfect silence. I don't know how it was, but that gaze seemed to me strangely tender, and it reminded me of those glances which had played so masterful a part in my early life. It was as though she was awaiting a question; but I kept silence, in strange embarrassment. On her face was a pallor that betrayed her emotion. Her hand wandered aimlessly over the table, and I noticed that it trembled slightly. She held her breath.

This comedy was beginning to bore me and I had decided to break the silence prosaically by offering her a cup of tea, when suddenly she jumped up, threw her arms round my neck and a burning kiss fell on my lips. There was a darkness in my eyes and my head swam. I tried to hold her in a passionate embrace but, like a snake, she slipped from between my arms and whispered in my ear, "To-night, when everybody is asleep, come down to the shore." And she was out of the room like an arrow. In the passage she knocked over the kettle and the candle, which were on the floor.

"She is a demon, that girl," cried the Cossack, who was lying on some straw and had hoped to get some warmth into himself by drinking the remains of the tea. That brought me back to my senses.

In two hours' time, when all was silent in the harbour, I woke up my Cossack and said to him, "If I fire my pistol, run

to the harbour as hard as you can." He protruded his eyes and said mechanically, "Very good, sir." I stuck a pistol in my belt and went out. She was waiting for me at the top of the descent, clad only in a thin dress.

"Follow me," she said, taking my hand, and we started the descent. I don't know how I did not break my neck; but we got down and turned to the right along the path on which I had followed the blind boy the previous night. The moon had not yet risen, and only two stars, like two beacons, shone in the dark-blue vault of heaven. A slow swell, peaceful and even, was rolling up, barely moving the solitary boat which was moored to the shore.

"We will get into this boat," my companion said. I shivered, for I am no lover of sentimental sea trips. But it was not the time to withdraw. She jumped into the boat, I after her, and I had not yet recovered myself when I realised that we were afloat.

"What does this mean?" I asked angrily. "It means," she replied, sitting me on a bench and putting her arms round my waist, "that I love you." She put her cheek against mine and I felt her hot breath on my face. Suddenly something dropped into the water with a splash. I felt in my belt—my pistol had gone. A dreadful suspicion stole over me and the blood rushed to my head. I looked round—we were now about a hundred yards from shore and I could not swim! I tried to push her away but she clung to my clothing like a cat, and a sudden violent shove very nearly upset me into the sea. The boat began to rock, but I righted her, and a desperate struggle began. My fury gave me strength, but I soon realised that my antagonist was my superior so far as skill was concerned.

"What is it you want?" I panted, crushing her small hands in mine. Her fingers cracked, but she did not scream.

"You saw," she replied; "you will report us." And by a superhuman effort she threw me to the side of the boat and we both hung over the side so that her hair touched the water. It was a critical moment. I braced my knee against the boat's bottom, clutched her hair with one hand, her throat with the other—she let go of my clothing and I pushed her over into the sea.

It was already dark; twice I saw her head appear—and that was all. On the bottom of the boat I found a broken oar, and with this, after great difficulty, I managed to get her to shore and tied her up to the jetty.

I made my way back to the hut along the track, keeping an unconscious look-out in the direction of the place where the blind boy had waited for the sailor the night before. The moon had now risen, and I thought I could see something white on the shore. My curiosity made me steal nearer, and I crawled through the grass at the top of the cliff. By putting out my head a little I was able to see down below. I was not surprised, and was even a little glad, to see my water nymph. She was wringing the sea-water out of her long hair. Soon a boat appeared in the distance and rapidly approached the shore. A man got out of it, as on the previous occasion, in a Tartar cap, but with his hair cut in Cossack fashion. A large knife flashed in his leather belt.

"Yanko," she said, "we are lost!" Then there was a long conversation between them but in so low a voice that I could distinguish nothing of it. Finally I heard Yanko say in a slightly louder voice, "But where is the blind boy?" "I sent him on an errand," was the reply. And in a few minutes the boy appeared, carrying across his shoulder a sack, which he put into the boat.

"Listen, blind boy," said Yanko. "Watch that place . . . you know . . . where the cargo is. And tell . . ." (I could not catch the name) "that I am his servant no longer. Things have gone badly, and he won't see me any more. There is danger here, and I am going to look for work somewhere else. But he will never find such a clever fellow as me. Yes, and you can tell him that if he had paid me better for my trouble I would never have left him. My way now lies anywhere wind blows or sea roars."

After a silence Yanko went on: "She goes with me—she cannot stay here. And tell the old woman that her time has come to die—she has lived her life. One must be moderate. She won't see us again."

"But what about me?" said the blind boy querulously.

"What has that to do with me?" was the reply.

Meanwhile Undine had jumped into the boat and was beckoning to her comrade. Yanko put something into the boy's hand

and said to him, "Here's something to buy gingerbread with." "Is that all?" said the boy. "Well, here's some more," and I heard the coin ring as it fell and struck a stone. The boy did not pick it up. Yanko got into the boat. The wind was off the shore, and they hoisted a small sail and quickly got under way. For a long time the white sail glimmered in the moonlight against the dark waves. The boy sat on the shore and I heard a sound like a sob. Yes, he was crying bitterly.

I felt depressed. Why had fate thrown me among this peaceful band of honest smugglers? As a stone disturbs the surface of a well, so had I disturbed their peace. And, like a stone, I had almost gone to the bottom.

I went back to my hut. In the passage an expiring candle was sputtering in a wooden dish, and my Cossack, in spite of my order, was sound asleep, holding his gun in both hands. I left him to sleep on, took the candle and went inside. Alas! my box, my sword with its silver chasing, the Daghestan dagger that had been given to me by a friend—everything had vanished. So it was easy to guess what it was that that cursed blind boy had been carrying down to the boat. I woke up the Cossack with a hearty push and scolded him angrily. But it did no good. And how ludicrous to complain to the authorities that a blind boy had stolen my things and that an eighteen-year-old girl had very nearly drowned me! Next morning, thank God, I was able to travel, and I left Taman.

I never heard what happened to the old woman and to the poor blind boy.

But I should like to know how I got mixed up with these people's joys and sorrows—I, an officer travelling in the course of my profession!

IVAN TURGENEV

A Quiet Backwater

CHAPTER I

In a rather large, recently whitewashed room in the manor lodge of the village of Sasovo in the district of X., in the province of T., a young man in an overcoat was sitting on a narrow wooden chair at a little old warped table, looking through his accounts. Two candles in silver travelling candlesticks were burning before him; on a bench in one corner stood an open provision basket, in another a servant was putting up an iron bedstead. A samovar was grumbling and hissing behind the partition wall; a dog was turning round and round on some hay that had just been brought in. A peasant with a big beard and an intelligent face, in a new full coat tied round the waist with a red scarf, apparently the village elder, was standing in the doorway, intently watching the young man at the table. A very old, diminutive piano stood against one wall beside a chest of drawers as ancient, with holes instead of locks; a dark looking-glass was visible between the windows; on the partition wall hung an old portrait with the paint peeling off the canvas, representing a lady in a farthingale, with powdered hair and a black ribbon round her slender neck. To judge from the perceptible crookedness of the ceiling and the slope of the floor which was full of crevices, the little lodge to which we have introduced the reader had existed for long ages; no-one was permanently living in it; it served for the landowner on his visits. The young man sitting at the table was the owner of the village of Sasovo. He had arrived only the evening before from a larger estate about eighty miles away and was intending to go away the next day, after inspecting the establishment,

hearing requests from the peasants and verifying all the business records.

"That's enough," he said, raising his head, "I am tired. You can go now," he added, addressing the village elder. "Come early to-morrow, and tell the peasants in the morning to come here in a body; do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

"And tell the rural clerk to bring me his report for the last month. You did well to whitewash the walls, though," the gentleman added, looking round. "It makes it look cleaner, anyway."

The village elder, too, looked round the walls without speaking.

"Well, now go."

The village elder bowed and went out.

The gentleman stretched.

"Hey!" he cried, "bring in tea—it's bedtime!"

The servant went into the other room and soon returned with a glass of tea, a string of shop-made bread rings and a little jug of cream on a tray. The young man began upon his tea but had not sipped his glass twice when there was the sound of visitors coming into the adjoining room and a squeaky voice asked:

"Is Vladimir Sergeitch Astahov at home? Can we see him?"

Vladimir Sergeitch (this was the name of the young man in the overcoat) looked at his servant in perplexity and said in a hurried whisper: "Go and find out who it is."

The servant went out, carefully closing behind him the door which did not shut properly.

"Tell Vladimir Sergeitch," the same squeaky voice went on, "that his neighbour, Ivatov, wants to see him, if it is not disturbing him; and that another neighbour, Ivan Ilyitch Bodryakov, has come with me; he too wishes to pay his respects."

Vladimir Sergeitch made an involuntary gesture of annoyance. When the servant came into the room, however, he said to him:

"Ask them in."

And he stood up in expectation of his visitors.

The door opened and the visitors came in. One of them, a thick-set, grey-headed old gentleman with a little round head

and light-coloured eyes led the way; the other, a tall, lean man of thirty-five with a long swarthy face and hair in disorder, followed, swaying from one foot to the other. The old gentleman was wearing a neat grey frock-coat with big pearl buttons; a pink cravat, half hidden by the turned-down collar of his white shirt, was loosely swathed round his neck; his legs were adorned with gaiters, his plaid trousers were of an agreeable check and altogether he made an agreeable impression. His companion, on the other hand, produced a less favourable effect on the spectator; he wore an old black swallowtail coat closely buttoned up; the colour of his thick winter trousers was in keeping with his coat; there was no sign of linen at his neck or his wrists. The old man first went up to Vladimir Sergeitch and, bowing politely, said in the same high voice:

"I have the honour to introduce myself: your nearest neighbour and your kinsman, indeed, Mihail Nikolaitch Ipatov. I have long desired the pleasure of your acquaintance. I hope I am not disturbing you."

Vladimir Sergeitch answered that he was delighted and that he, too, desired . . . and that their visit was not disturbing him in the least . . . and would they not sit down and have tea?

"And this gentleman," continued the old man, listening with a cordial smile to Vladimir Sergeitch's unfinished sentences and indicating the gentleman in the swallowtail, "is also a neighbour of yours and a good friend of mine, Ivan Ilyitch. He is extremely desirous to make your acquaintance."

The gentleman in the swallowtail—from whose countenance no-one would have supposed that he was capable of being extremely desirous of anything—so absent-minded and at the same time drowsy was its expression—the gentleman in the swallowtail bowed listlessly and awkwardly. Vladimir Sergeitch bowed in response to him and again begged his visitors to sit down.

They did so.

"I am delighted," the old man began with an agreeable flourish of his hands while his companion fell to gazing at the ceiling with his mouth a little open, "delighted to have the honour at last of seeing you in person. Although you reside permanently in a district somewhat remote from these parts—

yet we reckon you so to say as properly belonging to our neighbourhood."

"That's very flattering to me," replied Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Whether flattering or not, it's the truth. You must excuse me, Vladimir Sergeitch, we are straightforward people here in the X. district, plain in our ways; we say what we think without beating about the bush. Even on name-days we don't put on dress-coats to visit each other. Really! That is the established custom with us. In the neighbouring districts they call us 'the frock-coats' on account of that and reproach us with it as lack of breeding, but we don't pay any attention to that! Upon my word, to live in the country and stand on ceremony like that!"

"To be sure, what can be better—in the country—than simplicity of manners?" observed Vladimir Sergeitch.

"And yet," the old gentleman continued, "in our district, too, there are most intellectual people, people of European education though they don't wear dress-coats. For instance, there is our historian, Stefan Stepanitch Yevsyukov: he is studying Russian history from the most ancient times and his name is known in Petersburg, a very learned man. In our town there is an ancient Swedish cannon-ball, you know . . . it has been put up there in the middle of the square . . . it was he discovered it, you know. Yes, indeed! Anton Karlitch Zenteler, now . . . he has studied natural history; though indeed they say all Germans succeed in that subject. When an escaped hyena was killed here ten years ago, it was Anton Karlitch who discovered that it really was a hyena owing to the peculiar construction of its tail. Then there's Kaburdin, too, one of our landowners; he mostly writes light articles; he has a very lively pen; his articles come out in the *Galatea*. Bodryakov . . . not Ivan Ilyitch, no, Ivan Ilyitch does not care for that sort of thing, but the other Bodryakov, Sergey . . . what is his father's name, Ivan Ilyitch, what is it?"

"Sergeitch," Ivan Ilyitch prompted him.

"Yes, Sergey Sergeitch—his hobby is poetry. Well, of course he is not a Pushkin, but sometimes he is as smart as any Petersburg fellow. Do you know his epigram on Agey Fomitch?"

"What Agey Fomitch?"

"Ah, I beg your pardon; I am always forgetting that you are not a resident here, after all. He is our Chief of Police. A very funny epigram it was. Ivan Ilyitch, you remember it, don't you?"

"Agey Fomitch," Bodryakov began indifferently:

"He's honoured in our Nobles' Hall
Not without reason—for, in brief,"

"I must tell you," Ipatov interposed, "that he was elected almost unanimously, for he is a most worthy man."

"He's honoured in our Nobles' Hall
Not without reason—for, in brief,
He eats and drinks to beat us all!
So surely he's a first-rate Chief!"

Bodryakov repeated.

The old gentleman laughed.

"He-he-he! That's not bad, is it? Ever since—would you believe it—all of us when we say, for instance, good-day to Agey Fomitch, are sure to add, 'Surely he's a first-rate Chief!' And do you imagine that Agey Fomitch is vexed at it? Not a bit. No—that is not the way with us. Ask Ivan Ilyitch here."

Ivan Ilyitch merely looked away.

"Be vexed over a joke, how could one! Take Ivan Ilyitch, for instance: his nickname among us is the Adjustable Soul because he very readily agrees to anything. Well, do you suppose Ivan Ilyitch resents it? Not he!"

Ivan Ilyitch looked, slowly blinking, first at the old gentleman and then at Vladimir Sergeitch.

The nickname of the Adjustable Soul certainly suited Ivan Ilyitch. There was not a trace in him of what is called will or character. Anyone could take him wherever he chose; one had only to say to him, "Ivan Ilyitch, come along," and he would take his hat and come; but if someone else turned up and said, "Ivan Ilyitch, don't go," he would put down his hat and stay. He was of a quiet and peace-loving disposition, he had been a

bachelor all his life, he did not play cards but liked sitting by the players and gazing into their faces. He could not get on without company and detested solitude; he sank into depression when alone; however, that happened to him very rarely. He had another peculiarity: getting up early in the morning, he used to sing in a subdued voice an old ballad:

> "*Once upon a time a baron*
> *Lived a simple country life . . .*"

Thanks to this peculiarity, he was also nicknamed the hawfinch; it is well known that a caged hawfinch sings only once in the day, in the early morning. Such was Ivan Ilyitch Bodryakov.

The conversation between Vladimir Sergeitch and Ipatov lasted a good time but did not again take such an intellectual turn. The old man questioned Vladimir Sergeitch about his estate, about his forest lands and other holdings, about the improvements he had made or was intending to make in the management of his land; he communicated some of his own observations; he advised him, among other things, as a means of getting rid of tussocks in his meadows, to scatter oats round them, which would induce the pigs to dig them up with their snouts and so on. At last, however, observing that Vladimir Sergeitch's eyes were almost closing and that even his speech betrayed a certain languor and incoherence, the old gentleman got up and, bowing affably, announced that he did not intend to intrude upon him any longer but that he hoped to have the pleasure of welcoming him to dinner no later than the following day.

"And to my village," he added, "I won't say any child but I make bold to say any hen or any peasant woman you come across would show you the way; you have only to ask for Ipatovka. The horses will get there of themselves."

Vladimir Sergeitch replied with some slight hesitation, which was characteristic of him, however, that he would try to come . . . that if nothing prevented him. . . .

"Oh, no, we shall expect you for certain," the old gentleman interrupted him genially and he pressed his hand warmly

and rapidly went out of the room, half turning in the doorway to exclaim, "without ceremony!"

The Adjustable Soul, Bodryakov, bowed mutely and vanished after his companion, stumbling over the threshold.

After seeing his unexpected visitors out, Vladimir Sergeitch immediately undressed, went to bed and fell asleep.

Vladimir Sergeitch Astahov belonged to that class of people who after cautiously testing their powers in two or three different careers say of themselves that they have made up their minds to look at life from a practical point of view and devote their leisure to increasing their income. He was by no means stupid, somewhat stingy and very reasonable, was fond of reading, of society, of music, but all in moderation . . . and he behaved with the utmost propriety. He was only twenty-seven. Young men like him have become numerous of late. He was of medium height, with a good figure, his features were pleasing but small; their expression scarcely ever changed, there was always the same cool, clear look in his eyes—only occasionally softened by a slight shade of melancholy or boredom; a polite smile always hovered about his lips. He had splendid hair, fair, silky, long and curly. Vladimir Sergeitch was reckoned to have about six hundred serfs on good land, and he had thoughts of marrying, marrying by inclination but at the same time to advantage. He particularly wanted to find a wife with good connections. He considered that he needed wider connections. In fact, he deserved the title of a "gentleman"—a word which has lately come into fashion.

Getting up next morning as usual very early, our gentleman set to work and did his business rather well, which is more than one can say of all practical young men among us in Russia. He listened patiently to the confused complaints and requests of the peasants, satisfied them as far as he could, went into the quarrels and disputes between relations, talked some people round, reproved others, checked the rural clerk's report, exposed two or three pieces of sharp practice on the part of the village elder—in fact, he settled things so that he felt satisfied with himself, and the peasants as they went home spoke well of him. In spite of what he had said to Ipatov the night before, Vladimir Sergeitch made up his mind to dine and had

even ordered his travelling giblet and rice soup; but all at once, in consequence, perhaps, of the satisfaction which he had been feeling since the morning, he stood still in the middle of the room, slapped himself on the forehead and with a certain recklessness exclaimed, "Suppose I do go to that lively old gossip!" No sooner said than done; half an hour later he was sitting in his new chaise drawn by four good peasant horses, driving to Ipatovka, which was reckoned a distance of eight miles by an excellent road.

CHAPTER II

Mihail Nikolaitch Ipatov had two houses facing each other on opposite sides of a huge pond. A long dam planted with silver poplars bordered this pond; almost on a level with the dam could be seen the red roof of a water-mill. Built exactly alike, painted the same lilac colour, the little houses looked as though they were glancing at one another with the shining panes of their clean little windows across the broad expanse of water. There was a round verandah in the front of each house and a pointed portico rose above it supported by four closely set white columns. There was an old park all round the pond: lime-trees formed avenues across it and stood in close groups about it; ancient pines with pale-yellow trunks, dark oaks, splendid ash-trees lifted their solitary high crests here and there; the dense foliage of overgrown lilacs and acacias reached the very walls, covering all but the front of each house, from which winding brick paths ran down the slope. Bright coloured ducks and white and grey geese were swimming in separate flocks over the shining water of the pond; it was never covered with duckweed, thanks to the numerous springs which rose at the bottom of a steep, rocky ravine at its "head." The position of the houses was fine; inviting, secluded and beautiful.

In one of the little houses lived Mihail Nikolaitch himself; in the other lived his mother, a decrepit old lady of seventy. When he drove on to the dam Vladimir Sergeitch did not know to which house to go. He looked round—a serf boy was

standing, barefoot, on a half-rotten log, angling. Vladimir Sergeitch called to him.

"Whom do you want, the old mistress or the young master?" asked the boy, without taking his eyes off the float.

"What mistress?" answered Vladimir Sergeitch. "I want Mihail Nikolaitch."

"Ah, the young master! Then go to the right." And the boy pulled up his line and drew out of the motionless water a small, silvery carp. Vladimir Sergeitch went to the right.

Mihail Nikolaitch was playing draughts with the Adjustable Soul when Vladimir Sergeitch's arrival was announced. He was extremely delighted, jumped up from his easy-chair, ran into the hall and in the hall kissed him three times.

"You find me with my invariable companion, Vladimir Sergeitch," said the talkative old gentleman, "with Ivan Ilyitch, who, by the way, is absolutely enchanted by your affability (Ivan Ilyitch looked into the corner and said nothing). He has been kind enough to stay and play draughts with me while all my young people have gone into the park; but I will send for them at once."

"But why trouble them . . ." Vladimir Sergeitch was beginning.

"Oh, dear, it is no trouble whatever! Hey, Vanka, make haste and run after the young ladies . . . tell them a visitor has come. And how do you like the place; it is not bad, is it? Kaburdin wrote a poem about it. 'Ipatovka, lovely haven' is how it begins—the rest is very nice, too, only I don't remember it. The park is too large, that is the only pity: beyond my means. And these two houses, so alike, as perhaps you have noticed, were built by two brothers, my father Nikolay and my Uncle Sergey; they laid out the park, too; they were paragons of friendship . . . Damon and . . . there, I have forgotten the name of the other."

"Pythion," observed Ivan Ilyitch.

"Come, is that it? Well, it does not matter. (At home the old gentleman talked in a much more free and easy manner.) As you are, I daresay, aware, Vladimir Sergeitch, I am a widower; I have lost my wife; my elder children are at boarding-school; I have only the two younger ones with me and my sister-in-

law, my wife's sister; you will see her immediately. But why am I offering you nothing? Ivan Ilyitch, go and see about refreshments, my dear fellow. . . . What sort of vodka do you prefer, may I ask?"

"I never drink anything before dinner."

"Upon my word, is it possible. However, as you please. A guest must be honoured and must not be crossed. We are plain people, you know. We live here, I make bold to say, not in barbarous rusticity, but in peace and quiet, a solitary nook—that's what it is! But why don't you sit down?"

Vladimir Sergeitch sat down, still holding his hat.

"Allow me to relieve you," said Ipatov, and with punctilious courtesy taking his hat away from him, he put it in the corner, then came back, looked into his guest's face with a cordial smile, and, not knowing what agreeable speech to make to him, asked him in the most genial way whether he liked draughts.

"I play all games very badly," answered Vladimir Sergeitch.

"And that is quite right on your part," answered Ipatov, "but draughts is hardly a game, but rather an amusement, a pastime, isn't it, Ivan Ilyitch?"

Ivan Ilyitch looked at Ipatov with an apathetic expression which seemed to say, "The devil knows which it is—a game or an amusement," but after a brief pause he brought out:

"Yes, draughts is all right."

"Chess, now, they say, is a different matter," Ipatov went on—"they say it is a very difficult game. But to my mind . . . ah, but here are my young people," he interrupted himself, looking through the half-open glass door that led into the park.

Vladimir Sergeitch got up, turned round and saw first two little girls about ten years old in pink cotton dresses and big hats—running nimbly up the verandah steps; not far behind them appeared a tall, plump, graceful girl of twenty, wearing a dark dress. They all came into the room; the little girls made formal curtseys to the visitor.

"Let me introduce my little daughters," said the old gentleman. "This is Katya and this is Nastya, and this is my sister-in-law, Marya Pavlovna, whom I have had the pleasure of mentioning to you already. I hope you will be good friends."

Vladimir Sergeitch bowed to Marya Pavlovna; she responded with a hardly perceptible inclination of her head.

Marya Pavlovna had a large, open knife in her hand; her thick brown hair was a little untidy, a small green leaf had caught in it, a tress had come loose from the comb; there was a flush on her dark skin, her red lips were parted; her dress looked crumpled. She was out of breath, her eyes were shining; evidently she had been working in the garden. She went out of the room at once and the little girls ran after her.

"To smarten themselves up a little," observed the old gentleman, addressing Vladimir Sergeitch, "they must think of that, of course."

Vladimir Sergeitch smirked in response and grew a little thoughtful. Marya Pavlovna had made an impression upon him. It was many years since he had seen such a typical beauty of the Russian steppes. She soon came back, seated herself on the sofa and sat without moving. She had done her hair, but she had not changed her dress and had not even put on cuffs. There was an expression on her face not so much of pride as of severity—almost of roughness; her brow was broad and low, her nose was short and straight; from time to time her lips curved in a slow, languid smile; there was a scornful frown on her straight brows. Nearly all the time she kept her big dark eyes cast down. "I know," her ungracious young face seemed to be saying, "I know that you are all looking at me; well, look, you weary me." When she did raise her eyes, there was something wild, beautiful and unseeing in them that recalled the eyes of a doe. She was beautifully proportioned. A classical poet would have compared her to Ceres or Juno.

"What were you doing in the garden?" Ipatov asked, trying to draw her into the conversation.

"I was cutting off the dead branches and digging the flower-beds," she said in a rather low, agreeable and resonant voice.

"Well, and are you tired?"

"The children are tired; I am not."

"I know," said the old man with a smile, "you are a regular Bobelina! And have you been in to Grandmamma?"

"Yes; she is asleep. "

"Are you fond of flowers?" Vladimir Sergeitch asked her.

"Yes."

"Why don't you put your hat on when you go out?" Ipatov observed to her; "see how red and sunburnt you are."

She passed her hand over her face and said nothing. Her hands were not large but rather broad and red. She did not wear gloves.

"And are you fond of gardening?" Vladimir Sergeitch asked again.

"Yes."

Vladimir Sergeitch began to describe a beautiful garden belonging to a wealthy landowner in his neighbourhood. "The German head gardener alone receives a salary of two thousand silver roubles," he observed among other things.

"And what is the name of the gardener?" Ivan Ilyitch asked suddenly.

"I don't remember; Meyer or Miller, I believe. Why do you ask?"

"Oh," said Ivan Ilyitch, "simply to know his surname."

Vladimir Sergeitch went on with his description. The little girls, Mihail Nikolaitch's daughters, came in, quietly sat down and began quietly listening.

A servant appeared in the doorway and announced that Yegor Kapitonitch had arrived.

"Ah! Ask him in, ask him in!" cried Ipatov.

A short, stout old gentleman came in, one of those people who are described as "stubby" or "stumpy," with a puffy and at the same time wrinkled face that recalled a baked apple. He had on a grey Hungarian jacket with black frogs and a stand-up collar; his full coffee-coloured plush breeches ended far above his ankles.

"How are you, honoured Yegor Kapitonitch!" exclaimed Ipatov, going to meet him. "It is a long time since we have seen you."

"But Mihail Nikolaitch," began Yegor Kapitonitch in a lisping and plaintive voice, first bowing to all present, "you know I am not a free man, am I?"

"In what way are you not a free man, Yegor Kapitonitch?"

"Why, Mihail Nikolaitch, my family, things to see to. . . . And then there is Matryona Markovna."

And he made a gesture of despair.

"What about Matryona Markovna?" And Ipatov winked to Vladimir Sergeitch as though wishing to secure his attention.

"Why, to be sure," said Yegor Kapitonitch, sitting down, "she is dissatisfied with me, as though you didn't know. Whatever I say it is always wrong, unrefined, improper. And why it is improper, God only knows. And the young ladies—that is, my daughters—do the same, following their mother's example. I am not saying anything against her, of course; Matryona Markovna is an excellent woman but very strict about manners."

"But upon my word, Yegor Kapitonitch, what is there wrong with your manners?"

"That's just what I think myself, but it seems she is hard to please. Yesterday, for instance, I said at table, 'Matryona Markovna' (and Yegor Kapitonitch put a most ingratiating intonation into his voice), 'Matryona Markovna,' I said, 'how careless Alyoshka is with the horses! He does not know how to drive; he has quite knocked up the black stallion!' And dear me, how Matryona Markovna did flare up and began crying shame on me! 'You don't know how to express yourself decently in ladies' society,' she said; the young ladies jumped up and left the table at once, and next day the Biryulovsky young ladies, my wife's nieces, knew all about it. And what improper expression did I use? Judge for yourself! And whatever I say—I may speak a little incautiously sometimes; everyone does, especially at home—the Biryulovsky young ladies know all about it next day. I simply don't know what to do. Sometimes I am sitting like this thinking, as my way is—as perhaps you are aware I breathe rather heavily, and Matryona Markovna scolds me again—'Don't snuffle,' she says, 'nobody snuffles nowadays!' 'Why are you scolding, Matryona Markovna?' I say, 'you ought to be sorry for me, and you are scolding.' Well, I have had to give up thinking at home. I sit and simply look at the floor like this, yes, indeed. And the other day we were going to bed. 'Matryona Markovna,' I said, 'it's dreadful how you spoil your page, my dear; he is such a little pig,' said I, 'he might wash his face on Sunday, anyway.' Well, I hinted it delicately enough, I should have thought, but I did not please her this time, either; Matryona Markovna began putting me to

shame again. 'You do not know how to behave in the company of a lady,' said she, and next day the Biryulovsky young ladies knew all about it. So how can I have the heart to go out paying visits, Mihail Nikolaitch?"

"I am astonished at what you tell me," replied Ipatov; "I should never have expected this of Matryona Markovna; I should have thought she was . . ."

"The best of women," Yegor Kapitonitch caught him up, "an exemplary wife and mother, one may say, but strict on the point of manners. She says that in everything, what is needed is ensemble and that I have not got that. I don't speak French, as you know, I only understand it. But what is this ensemble which I am lacking in?"

Ipatov, who was not very great at French himself, merely shrugged his shoulders.

"And how are your children, your sons, that is?" he asked Yegor Kapitonitch after a brief pause.

Yegor Kapitonitch looked at him sideways.

"My sons? They are all right. I am pleased with them. The young ladies have got out of hand, but I am satisfied with my sons. Alyoshka is doing well in the service, his superiors praise him; my Alyoshka is a shrewd lad. Mihets is different; he has turned out a sort of a philanthropist."

"Why a philanthropist?"

"Goodness knows; never speaks to anyone, fights shy of us all. Matryona Markovna only makes him worse. 'Why do you follow your father's example?' she says. 'You should respect him, but you should imitate your mother's manner.' When he is grown up, he will get on too."

Vladimir Sergeitch asked Ipatov to introduce him to Yegor Kapitonitch. A conversation followed. Marya Pavlovna took no part in it; Ivan Ilyitch sat down beside her, but he only said two words to her; the little girls went up to him and began telling him something in a whisper. . . . The housekeeper, a thin old woman with a dark kerchief on her head, came in and announced that dinner was ready. They all went into the dining-room.

Dinner lasted rather a long time. Ipatov kept a good cook and had good wine, though it did not come from Moscow but

from the town of the province. Ipatov lived in comfort; he had no more than three hundred serfs but he was in debt to no-one and his estate was in good order. The master of the house himself did most of the talking at dinner. Yegor Kapitonitch seconded him but did not forget to look after himself: he ate and drank in fine style. Marya Pavlovna was silent, only answering with a half smile the hurried sayings of the two little girls sitting one on each side of her; they seemed to be very fond of her. Vladimir Sergeitch attempted several times to talk to her but with no great success. The Adjustable Soul, Bodryakov, was slothful and apathetic, even in his eating.

After dinner they all went on to the verandah to drink coffee. The weather was lovely; the sweet fragrance of lime-trees in full flower was wafted from the park; the summer air, slightly freshened by the thick shade of the trees and the dampness of the pond close by, was full of caressing warmth.

All at once from beyond the poplars of the dam came the sound of scurrying horses' hoofs and a moment later a lady wearing a long riding habit and a round grey hat came into sight mounted on a bay horse; she was riding at a gallop; a page rode behind on a small white cob.

"Ah!" cried Ipatov, "here is Nadyezhda Alexyevna—what a pleasant surprise!"

"Alone?" asked Marya Pavlovna, who had till that moment stood motionless by the door.

"Yes, alone . . . I suppose something has detained Pyotr Alexeitch."

Marya Pavlovna looked up from under her brows; her face was suffused with colour, and she turned away.

Meanwhile the lady on horseback rode through the little gate into the garden, galloped up to the terrace and leapt lightly to the ground without waiting for her page or Ipatov, who was coming to meet her. Dexterously picking up the hem of her long skirt, she ran up the steps and, as she landed on the verandah, she called gaily.

"Here I am!"

"You are very welcome!" said Ipatov. "How unexpected! How delightful! Allow me to kiss your hand."

"Certainly," replied the visitor, "only pull off my glove

yourself; I can't do it." And stretching out her hand to him, she nodded to Marya Pavlovna. "Masha, only fancy, my brother won't be here to-day," she said with a faint sigh.

"I see that he is not here," Marya Pavlovna answered in an undertone.

"He told me to tell you that he is busy. Don't be angry. Good afternoon, Yegor Kapitonitch, good afternoon, Ivan Ilyitch, good afternoon, children . . . Vassya," said the visitor, addressing her page, "tell them to walk Beauty up and down a little; do you hear? Masha, give me a pin, please, to fasten up my train . . . Mihail Nikolaitch, come here."

Ipatov went nearer to her.

"Who is that new person?" she asked, in a fairly loud voice.

"A neighbour, Vladimir Sergeitch Astahov, you know, the owner of Sasovo. Shall I introduce him?"

"Very well . . . presently. Oh, what lovely weather," she went on. "Yegor Kapitonitch, tell me, does Matryona Markovna scold even in weather like this?"

"Matryona Markovna does not scold in any weather, Madam; she is only strict about manners."

"And what are the Biryulovsky young ladies doing? They know everything next day, don't they?"

And she broke into a ringing, silvery laugh.

"You are always pleased to laugh," said Yegor Kapitonitch. "But when should one laugh if not at your age?"

"Yegor Kapitonitch, don't be angry, there's a dear! Oh, I am tired, let me sit down."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna sank into a low chair and roguishly pulled her hat right down to her eyes.

Ipatov brought Vladimir Sergeitch up to her.

"Allow me, Nadyezhda Alexyevna, to present to you our neighbour, Monsieur Astahov, of whom you have probably heard a great deal."

Vladimir Sergeitch bowed and Nadyezhda Alexyevna looked up at him from under the brim of her round hat.

"Nadyezhda Alexyevna Veretyev is our neighbour," Ipatov went on, addressing Vladimir Sergeitch. "She lives here with her brother, Pyotr Alexeitch, formerly a lieutenant in the

Guards. She is a great friend of my sister-in-law and is agreeably disposed to us all."

"A full and complete description," said Nadyezhda Alexyevna with a mocking smile, looking at Vladimir Sergeitch from under her hat again.

And Vladimir Sergeitch was thinking meanwhile, "She is very pretty, too." And certainly Nadyezhda Alexyevna was a very charming girl—slim and graceful, she looked much younger than she was. She was twenty-seven. She had a round face and a little head, fluffy, fair hair, a sharp, almost saucily turned-up nose, and gay, rather sly eyes. Her eyes fairly gleamed and flashed with mockery. Her extremely lively and mobile features wore at times an amusing expression; they seemed to be alive with humour. From time to time, as a rule quite suddenly, a shade of pensiveness would pass over her face, and then it became gentle and good-natured; but she could not be thoughtful for long. She readily detected the comic side of people and drew rather good caricatures. From her birth upwards she had been spoiled by everyone and that could be seen from the first moment; people who have been spoiled in their childhood retain a certain stamp all their lives. Her brother was fond of her, though he did declare that she stung not like a bee but like a wasp, since the bee dies when it stings, while stinging means nothing to the wasp. This comparison vexed her.

"Are you staying here long?" she asked Vladimir Sergeitch, dropping her eyes and twisting her riding whip in hard hands.

"No, I propose going away to-morrow."

"Where are you going?"

"Home."

"Home? Why, may I venture to ask?"

"Why? I have business at home that admits of no delay."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna looked at him.

"Are you such a . . . business-like person?"

"I try to be business-like," replied Vladimir Sergeitch. "In our practical age every decent person *ought* to be practical and business-like."

"That is perfectly true," observed Ipatov. "Isn't it, Ivan Ilyitch?"

Ivan Ilyitch simply glanced at Ipatov, while Yegor Kapitonitch commented:

"Yes, that is so."

"It is a pity," said Nadyezhda Alexyevna, "a jeune premier is just what we are short of. You can act comedy, can't you?"

"I have never tried my powers in that line."

"I am sure you would act well. You have such a . . . dignified deportment; that's essential for a jeune premier of to-day. My brother and I are thinking of setting up a dramatic society here. But we shall not confine ourselves to comedies; we shall act everything—dramas, ballets and even tragedies. Wouldn't Masha make a fine Cleopatra or Phaedra? Look at her."

Vladimir Sergeitch turned round. . . . Leaning with her head against the door, Marya Pavlovna was standing with her arms folded, gazing dreamily into the distance. . . . Certainly at that moment her harmonious features were suggestive of antique sculpture. She had not heard Nadyezhda Alexyevna's last words but, noticing that all eyes were suddenly turned upon her, she immediately guessed what was being said, flushed crimson and was on the point of retreating into the drawing-room. . . . Nadyezhda Alexyevna quickly seized her by the hand and with the coquettish tenderness of a kitten drew the almost masculine-looking hand to her and kissed it. Marya Pavlovna flushed a deeper colour.

"You are always full of mischief, Nadya," she said.

"Didn t I tell the truth about you? I appeal to you all. . . . Well, there, there, I'll stop. But I tell you again," Nadyezhda Alexyevna went on, addressing Vladimir Sergeitch, "it is a pity you are going away. It is true we have got a jeune premier; he forces himself upon us, indeed, but he is a very poor one."

"Who is that, may I ask?"

"Bodryakov, the poet. How can a poet be a jeune premier! In the first place he dresses horribly; in the second, though he writes epigrams, in the presence of any woman, even of me, imagine, he is overcome with shyness. He lisps, always holds one arm above his head and I don't know what he doesn't do. Tell me, please, Monsieur Astahov, are all poets like that?"

Vladimir Sergeitch drew himself up a little.

"I have never known one personally and I must confess I have never sought their acquaintance."

"Yes, of course, you are a practical man. We shall have to take Bodryakov; there is no help for it. The other jeunes premiers are even worse. He would learn his part, anyway. In addition to the tragic parts Masha will be our prima-donna . . . Have you heard her sing, Monsieur Astahov?"

"No," replied Vladimir Sergeitch with a smirk, "I didn't know. . . ."

"What is the matter with you to-day, Nadya?" asked Marya Pavlovna with an air of vexation.

Nadyezhda Alexyevna jumped up.

"Do sing us something, Masha, please do! I'll give you no peace till you do, Masha darling. I'd sing myself to entertain your visitor, but you know what a horrid voice I have. But see how nicely I'll accompany you."

Marya Pavlovna did not speak for a minute.

"There's no putting you off," she said at last. "You are used to having your own way in everything, like a spoiled child. Very well, I will sing."

"Bravo, bravo!" cried Nadyezhda Alexyevna, and she clapped her hands. "Gentlemen, let us go into the drawing-room. As for having my own way, I'll score that against you," she added, laughing. "How can you expose my weaknesses before strangers? Yegor Kapitonitch, is that how Matryona Markovna puts you to shame before strangers?"

"Matryona Markovna," muttered Yegor Kapitonitch, "is a very estimable lady; only on the point of manners . . ."

"Well, come along, come along," Nadyezhda Alexyevna interrupted him, and she went into the drawing-room.

Everyone followed her. She flung down her hat and sat down at the piano. Marya Pavlovna stood by the wall, at some distance from Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"Masha," she said after a moment's thought, "sing us 'The Peasant Lad the Wheat is Sowing'."

Marya Pavlovna began singing. Her voice was pure and strong and she sang well—simply and naturally. Everyone listened to her with great attention and Vladimir Sergeitch could not conceal his astonishment. When Marya Pavlovna

had finished he went up to her and began declaring that he had had no idea . . .

"Wait a bit," Nadyezhda Alexyevna interrupted him, "there's better to come! Masha, I will comfort your little Russian heart: sing us now 'Merry Uproar in the Oakwood'."

"Are you a Little Russian?" Vladimir Sergeitch asked her.

"I was born in Little Russia," she answered, and she began singing the "Merry Uproar".

At first she articulated the words indifferently, but the mournful, passionate tune of her native land by degrees roused her, her cheeks flushed, her eyes shone, there was a warm ring in her voice. She finished.

"Good heavens, how well you sang that!" Nadyezhda Alexyevna commented, bending over the keys. "What a pity my brother is not here!"

Marya Pavlovna dropped her eyes at once and her characteristic bitter smile came on to her lips.

"And now we must have something more," observed Ipatov.

"Yes, if you would be so good," added Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Excuse me, I won't sing any more to-night," said Marya Pavlovna, and she walked away from the piano.

Nadyezhda Alexyevna looked after her, seemed thoughtful for a minute, then smiled, began playing with one finger "The Peasant Lad the Wheat is Sowing," then suddenly broke into a brilliant polka and without finishing it, struck a loud chord, shut the piano and got up.

"It is a pity there's no-one to dance with," she exclaimed. "That would have been just the thing."

Vladimir Sergeitch went up to her.

"What a wonderful voice Marya Pavlovna has," he said, "and with what feeling she sings!"

"Are you fond of music?"

"Yes . . . very."

"Such a learned person and fond of music!"

"Why do you suppose that I am learned?"

"Oh, yes, I beg your pardon; I was forgetting—you are a practical man. Where is Masha gone? Wait, I'll go and fetch her."

And Nadyezhda Alexyevna fluttered out of the room.

"Giddy head, as you see," said Ipatov, going up to Vladimir Sergeitch, "but a very good heart. And what an education she has had, you cannot fancy; she can speak in every language. Of course they are people of property, so no wonder."

"Yes," Vladimir Sergeitch acquiesced absent-mindedly, "very charming young lady. But tell me, was your wife also from Little Russia?"

"Yes. My wife was a Little Russian like her sister Marya Pavlovna. To tell the truth, my wife's accent was not perfect; though she knew the Russian language perfectly, she did not pronounce it correctly; her vowel sounds were not quite pure; Marya Pavlovna, now, left her own country when she was little. Yet one can see the Little Russian blood, can't one?"

"Marya Pavlovna sings wonderfully," observed Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Yes, she does sing well. But why is it they don't bring in the tea? And what has become of the young ladies? It is tea-time."

The young ladies did not return for some time. Meanwhile the samovar was brought in and the table was set for tea—Ipatov sent for them. They came back together. Marya Pavlovna sat down at the table to pour out tea, while Nadyezhda Alexyevna went to the door of the verandah and looked out into the garden. The bright summer day was followed by a soft, clear evening; there was the glow of sunset; the broad pond, half flooded with its crimson light, stood a motionless mirror, with stately serenity reflecting in the silvery darkness of its deep bosom all the fathomless ethereal sky and the black shapes of the trees upside down and the house. Everything had sunk into silence; there was not a sound anywhere.

"Look how beautiful," said Nadyezhda Alexyevna to Vladimir Sergeitch as he came up to her. "Out there in the pond a star has just come out, beside the lights of the house; they are red but it is golden. Here is Grandmamma coming," she added.

A bath-chair came into view from behind the lilac bushes. Two men were drawing it. The bent figure of an old lady with her head bowed on her breast was sitting muffled up in it. The fringe of her white cap almost completely covered her withered and shrunken face. The bath-chair stopped before the verandah.

Ipatov went out of the drawing-room; his little daughters ran out after him. They had been scurrying from room to room like mice all the evening.

"I wish you good-evening, Mother," said Ipatov, going up to the old lady and raising his voice. "How do you feel?"

"I have come to have a look at you," the old lady enunciated with an effort, in a toneless voice. "What a lovely evening! I have been asleep all day and now my legs are aching. Ah, my legs! They are no use and they ache."

"Allow me to present to you, Mother, our neighbour, Vladimir Sergeitch Astahov."

"Delighted," said the old lady, turning upon him her big, black, lustreless eyes. "I hope you will be friends with my son. He is a good man; I gave him all the education I could; of course I am only a woman. He is a bit weak yet, but with time he will grow steadier—it's high time he did; it's time for me to hand things over to him. Is that you, Nadya?" she added, looking at Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"Yes, Grandmamma."

"And is Masha pouring out tea?"

"Yes, Grandmamma."

"And who else is there?"

"Ivan Ilyitch and Yegor Kapitonitch."

"Matryona Markovna's husband?"

"Yes, Grandmamma."

The old lady chewed her lips.

"Well . . . Misha, I can't get at the village elder; tell him to come to me early to-morrow—I have a great deal of business to do with him. Everything goes wrong without me, I see. Well, that's enough, I am tired, take me home. . . . Good-bye, sir, I can't remember your name," she added, addressing Vladimir Sergeitch; "you must forgive an old woman. And don't come with me, grandchildren, there's no need. All you think of is to be running about. Sit still, sit still and learn your lessons; do you hear? Masha spoils you. Come, set off."

The old lady's head, raised with difficulty, sank back upon her breast.

The bath-chair started and moved slowly away.

"How old is your mother?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"She is only seventy-two but she lost the use of her legs twenty-six years ago; it happened to her soon after my father's death. But she was a beauty."

Everyone was silent.

All at once Nadyezhda Alexyevna started.

"What's that? I believe it was a bat! Oh, how horrid!" And she went hurriedly back into the drawing-room.

"It is time for me to go home. Mihail Nikolaitch, tell them to saddle my horse."

"It's time for me to go, too," said Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Why should you go?" said Ipatov. "Stay the night here. Nadyezhda Alexyevna has only a mile and a half to go but you have nine. And why are you in a hurry, Nadyezhda Alexyevna? Wait for the moon; it will soon be up. It will be lighter riding then."

"Perhaps," replied Nadyezhda Alexyevna; "it is a long time since I have been for a ride by moonlight."

"And will you stay the night?" said Ipatov, addressing himself to Vladimir Sergeitch.

"I really don't know. . . . But if I am not in the way . . ."

"Not in the least, I assure you; I will bid them prepare a room for you at once."

"It is nice riding by moonlight," began Nadyezhda Alexyevna, as soon as they had brought the candles and handed the tea and Ipatov and Yegor Kapitonitch had sat down to a game of two-handed preference and the Adjustable Soul had installed himself beside them without uttering a word, "especially through woods, between the nut bushes. It's uncanny and delightful and there is a strange play of light and shadow—one feels as though someone were lurking behind or in front . . ."

Vladimir Sergeitch gave a condescending smile.

"And has it happened to you," she went on, "to sit on a warm, dark, still night near a wood? It always seems to me then as though two voices were arguing hotly in a faint whisper behind me close to my ear."

"That's the throbbing of the blood," observed Ipatov.

"Your description is very poetical," observed Vladimir Sergeitch.

Nadyezhda Alexyevna looked at him.

"You think so? . . . In that case, my descriptions would not please Masha."

"Why so? Doesn't Marya Pavlovna like poetry?"

"No; she thinks it is all made up, all false; that is just what she doesn't like."

"What a strange fault to find!" exclaimed Vladimir Sergeitch. "Made up! What else could it be? That's just what creative artists are for!"

"Well, there it is; but you oughtn't to like poetry, either."

"On the contrary, I am very fond of good poetry, when it is really good and musical and—what shall I say?—when it presents ideas, thoughts . . ."

Marya Pavlovna got up.

Nadyezhda Alexyevna turned quickly to her.

"Where are you going, Masha?"

"To put the children to bed. It is nearly nine o'clock."

"But can't they go to bed without you?"

But Marya Pavlovna took the children by their hands and went out with them.

"She is in a bad mood to-day," observed Nadyezhda Alexyevna, "and I know why," she added in an undertone, "but it will pass."

"Allow me to ask you," began Vladimir Sergeitch, "where do you intend to spend the winter?"

"Possibly here, possibly in Petersburg. I feel as though I should be bored in Petersburg."

"Bored in Petersburg? You surprise me! How is that possible?"

And Vladimir Sergeitch fell to describing all the conveniences, charms and advantages of life in the capital. Nadyezhda Alexyevna listened attentively without taking her eyes off him. She seemed to be studying his features and from time to time smiled to herself.

"I see you are very eloquent," she said at last; "I shall have to spend the winter in Petersburg."

"You will not regret it," declared Vladimir Sergeitch.

"I never regret anything; it is not worth the trouble. If you do anything silly, try and forget it as soon as possible, that's all."

"Allow me to ask," Vladimir Sergeitch asked in French after a brief silence, "have you known Marya Pavlovna long?"

"Allow me to ask," Nadyezhda Alexyevna retorted with swift mockery, "why did you ask just that question in French?"

"Oh . . . for no particular reason."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna smiled again.

"No, I have not known her very long. She is a remarkable girl, isn't she?"

"She is very original," Vladimir Sergeitch assented through his teeth.

"Well, from you, from a practical person, is that praise? I don't think so—perhaps I strike you as original, too? But the moon must have risen," she added, getting up from her seat and glancing at the open window, "that's moonlight on the tops of the poplars. It's time to go . . . I'll go and tell them to saddle Beauty."

"He is saddled," said her page, stepping out of the shade of the park into the streak of light that fell on the verandah.

"Oh, that's right! Masha, where are you? Come and say good-bye."

Marya Pavlovna came in from the adjoining room. The men got up from the card-table.

"Are you going already?" asked Ipatov.

"Yes, it's time."

She went towards the verandah door.

"What a night!" she exclaimed. "Come nearer, put your face out; do you feel it? It seems to be breathing. And what a scent! All the flowers are awake now. They wake up while we are thinking of going to sleep. And by the way, Masha," she added, "I have been telling Vladimir Sergeitch that you don't like poetry. And now good-bye. . . . Here they are bringing my horse."

And she ran rapidly down the verandah steps, leapt lightly into the saddle, said, "Good-bye till to-morrow," and switching the horse on the neck, galloped to the dam . . . the page trotted behind her.

Everyone looked after her.

"Till to-morrow," they heard her voice beyond the poplars. The thud of hoofs was audible for a long time in the stillness

of the summer night. At last Ipatov suggested they should go back into the house.

"It certainly is nice in the open air," he said, "but we must finish our game."

All the company returned to the house. Vladimir Sergeitch began asking Marya Pavlovna why she did not like poetry.

"I don't care for it," she answered with seeming reluctance.

"But perhaps you have not read much poetry?"

"I have not read it myself but it has been read to me."

"And wasn't there a single poem you liked?"

"No, not one."

"Even Pushkin?"

"Even Pushkin."

"Why?"

Marya Pavlovna made no answer and Ipatov, turning round, said over the back of his chair, with a good-natured laugh, that she did not only dislike poetry but even sugar, and in fact could not bear sweet things at all.

"But there are poems that are not sweet," Vladimir Sergeitch retorted.

"For instance?" asked Marya Pavlovna.

Vladimir Sergeitch scratched his head. . . . He knew very little poetry by heart himself, particularly of the kind that was not sweet.

"Well," he cried at last, "do you know Pushkin's 'The Upas Tree'? No? That poem cannot possibly be called sweet."

"Repeat it," Marya Pavlovna asked him, and she dropped her eyes.

Vladimir Sergeitch looked at the ceiling, frowned, muttered to himself and at last repeated "The Upas Tree".

After the first four verses, Marya Pavlovna slowly raised her eyes, and when Vladimir Sergeitch finished, she said as slowly:

"Please repeat it over again."

"You like the poem, then?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Repeat it again."

Vladimir Sergeitch recited "The Upas Tree" again. Marya Pavlovna got up, went into another room and came back with a sheet of paper, an inkstand and a pen.

"Please write it out for me," she asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Certainly, with pleasure," he answered, beginning to write. "But I confess I wonder why you like this poem so much. I repeated it just to show you that not all poetry is sweet."

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed Ipatov; "what do you think of those verses, Ivan Ilyitch?"

Ivan Ilyitch, as usual, simply glanced at Ipatov, but did not utter a word.

"Here, it is finished," said Vladimir Sergeitch, putting a note of exclamation at the end of the last line.

Marya Pavlovna thanked him and carried off the copy of the poem to her own room.

Half an hour later supper was served, and within an hour all the guests separated to their rooms. Vladimir Sergeitch more than once addressed Marya Pavlovna, but it was difficult to keep up a conversation with her, and the things he said did not seem to interest her much. He would probably have gone off to sleep at once on getting into bed if he had not been kept awake by his neighbour, Yegor Kapitonitch. The husband of Matryona Markovna, after undressing and getting into bed, carried on a long conversation with his servant—whom he kept admonishing. Every word he uttered reached Vladimir Sergeitch distinctly; the rooms were only divided by a thin partition wall.

"Hold the candle straight in front of you," said Yegor Kapitonitch in a complaining voice, "hold it so that I can see your face. You have turned my hair grey, you unprincipled fellow, you've turned my hair grey."

"But how have I turned your hair grey, Yegor Kapitonitch?" the indistinct and sleepy voice of the servant was heard.

"How? I'll tell you how. How many times have I said to you, 'Mitka,' I have said to you, 'whenever you go away with me anywhere on a visit, always pack two changes of clothes, particularly' . . . hold the candle straight in front of you . . . 'particularly of underclothes?' And what have you done to me to-day?"

"Why, what, sir?"

"You ask what? What am I to put on to-morrow morning?"

"Why, the same as you had on to-day."

"You've turned my hair grey, you ruffian. I did not know what to do with myself, I was so hot to-day. Hold the candle

straight in front of you, I tell you, and don't go to sleep when your master is talking to you."

"And Matryona Markovna told me it was enough. 'Why always take such a lot of things with you?' she said. 'They only get worn out for nothing.'"

"Matryona Markovna. . . . As though it were a woman's business to go into that! You've turned my hair grey, you have!"

"And Yahim said so, too."

"What did you say?"

"I say, Yahim said so, too."

"Yahim! Yahim!" Yegor Kapitonitch repeated reproachfully. "You'll be the death of me, you heathens. They can't speak Russian properly. Yahim! What does Yahim mean? Yefim—well, at a pinch one can say that—for the real Greek name is Yevfimy, do you understand me? . . . Hold the candle straight before you. . . . But for shortness one may say Yefim, but certainly not Yahim. Yahim!" repeated Yegor Kapitonitch with an emphasis on the *ya*. "You've turned my hair grey, you villains. Hold the candle straight before you!"

And Yegor Kapitonitch went on for a long time lecturing his servant, in spite of Vladimir Sergeitch's sighs, coughs and other signs of impatience.

At last he dismissed his Mitka and went to sleep, but this did not improve matters for Vladimir Sergeitch: Yegor Kapitonitch had such a deep and powerful snore, with such playful transitions from the highest treble to the deepest bass, with such whistling and even clicking sounds, that the very partition wall seemed to be quivering in response to it. Poor Vladimir Sergeitch felt ready to cry. It was very stuffy in his room and the feather-bed on which he lay seemed to wrap his whole person in a sort of creeping heat.

In despair Vladimir Sergeitch got up at last, opened his window and greedily drank in the fragrant freshness of the night. The window looked into the park; the sky was light; the round face of the full moon was at one moment reflected clearly in the pond, at the next was drawn out into a long golden sheaf of slowly shifting sparkles. In one of the garden paths Vladimir Sergeitch saw a figure dressed like a woman: it was

Marya Pavlovna; in the moonlight her face looked pale. She stood motionless and suddenly began speaking. . . . Vladimir Sergeitch cautiously put out his head.

> "*Yet thither with imperious glance*
> *A man his fellow-man has sent*"

reached his hearing.

"Imagine that!" he thought; "so the verses have had an effect on her. . . ."

And he listened with redoubled attention. But Marya Pavlovna soon ceased speaking and turned more directly facing him: he could distinguish her large dark eyes, her severe brow and lips.

Suddenly she started, turned round, passed into the shadow cast by a dense wall of tall acacias and disappeared. Vladimir Sergeitch remained standing a considerable time at the window, then at last he got into bed but did not soon fall asleep.

"A strange creature" he thought as he turned from side to side—"and they say there is nothing special to be found in the country. . . . Yes, indeed! A strange creature! I'll ask her to-morrow what she was doing in the garden."

Yegor Kapitonitch was still snoring as before.

CHAPTER III

Next morning Vladimir Sergeitch woke rather late and immediately after breakfast in the dining-room went home to make final arrangements on his estate, in spite of old Ipatov's efforts to keep him. Marya Pavlovna was present at breakfast; Vladimir Sergeitch did not think it necessary, however, to question her about her walk in the garden in the night: he belonged to that class of people to whom it is difficult to give themselves up for two days together to unaccustomed thoughts and conjectures. He would have had to talk about the poem and the "poetical" mood as it is called soon wearied him. He spent the whole day in the fields till dinner, for which he had a keen appetite, had a nap, and on waking up was

about to look through the rural clerk's account, but before he had finished the first page ordered his carriage and set off to Ipatovka. Evidently even practical people have not hearts of stone and are no fonder of being dull than ordinary mortals.

As he drove on to the dam he heard voices and the sound of music. At Ipatov's house they were singing Russian songs in chorus. He found on the verandah the whole company he had left in the morning; they all, among them Nadyezhda Alexyevna, were sitting in a semi-circle round a man of about thirty-two, with a dark complexion, black hair and black eyes, wearing a short velvet coat and a red cravat tied loosely round his neck and holding a guitar in his hands. This was Pyotr Alexeitch Veretyev, the brother of Nadyezhda Alexyevna. On seeing Vladimir Sergeitch old Ipatov went to meet him with an exclamation of delight, led him up to Veretyev and introduced them. After exchanging the usual greetings with his new acquaintance, Astahov bowed respectfully to the latter's sister.

"We are singing songs in the village style," began Ipatov, and, indicating Veretyev, he added, "Pyotr Alexeitch is our conductor—and such a conductor! you will hear."

"It is very delightful," answered Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Won't you join the chorus?" asked Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"I should be delighted but I have no voice."

"That does not matter! Look, Yegor Kapitonitch is singing and I am singing. You need only join in. Sit down; begin, brother."

"What song shall we sing now?" said Veretyev, strumming on the guitar and, stopping suddenly, he looked at Marya Pavlovna, who was sitting beside him.

"I think it is your turn now," he said to her.

"No, you sing," answered Marya Pavlovna.

"There is a song 'Down Mother Volga'," Vladimir Sergeitch observed with dignity.

"No, we are saving that for the end," answered Veretyev, and, striking the strings, he began singing, dwelling on each note "The Sun Is Setting."

He sang capitally, with spirit and gaiety. His manly face, which was expressive at all times, became even livelier when he was singing; now and then he shrugged his shoulders, suddenly

pressed with the palm of his hand on the strings, raised his hand, shook his curls and looked round him with a keen, proud air. In Moscow he had more than once seen the famous gipsy Ilya and was imitating him. The chorus seconded him vigorously. Marya Pavlovna's mellow voice stood out above all the others; it seemed to lead the others; but she would not sing alone and Veretyev remained the conductor to the end.

They sang many other songs.

Meanwhile a storm was coming on with the approach of evening. It had been stiflingly hot since midday and there had been rumblings in the distance; but now a broad storm-cloud, which had long lain like a leaden shroud on the very rim of the horizon, began to grow and appear above the tree-tops; the sultry air began quivering more perceptibly, more and more violently troubled by the approaching storm; a wind sprang up, rustled abruptly among the leaves, sank into silence, again set up a prolonged rustling and howled among the trees; a gloomy darkness moved rapidly over the land, driving before it the last glow of sunset; dense clouds, as though suddenly released, floated upwards and flew across the sky; there came a spatter of rain, a red flash of lightning and a heavy, angry roll of thunder.

"Let us go in," said old Ipatov, "or we may get wet."

Everyone got up.

"In a minute," cried Veretyev. "Let us have the last song. Listen:

"'*Oh, my porch, oh, my new porch*'."

He sang in a loud voice, rapidly striking the chords with the whole of his hand. "My porch of maple." The chorus took it up as though carried away by the tune. Almost at the same instant the rain came lashing down in streams; but Veretyev sang "My Porch" to the end. Drowned from time to time by peals of thunder, the gay reckless song sounded even gayer and more reckless to the accompaniment of the noisy patter and gurgling of the rain. Finally the last outburst of the chorus rang out and the whole company ran, laughing, into the drawing-room. The little girls, Ipatov's daughters, laughed more loudly than anyone as they shook the raindrops off their dresses. Ipatov,

however, by way of precaution, closed the window and the door, and Yegor Kapitonitch commended his prudence, observing that Matryona Markovna too insisted on all windows and doors being shut during a storm, since electricity acts more freely in an empty space. Bodryakov looked into his face, moved away and upset a chair. Such little mishaps were very frequent with him.

The storm was very quickly over. The doors and windows were opened again and the rooms were filled with moist fragrance. Tea was brought in. After tea the old gentlemen sat down to cards again—Ivan Ilyitch, as usual, seated himself beside them. Vladimir Sergeitch went up to Marya Pavlovna, who was sitting in the window with Veretyev; but Nadyezhda Alexyevna summoned him and immediately entered into a lively conversation with him about Petersburg and Petersburg life. She attacked it; Vladimir Sergeitch began defending it. Nadyezhda Alexyevna seemed anxious to keep him at her side.

"What are you arguing about?" said Veretyev, getting up and coming towards them.

He walked with a lazy swing; in all his movements there was something between nonchalance and indolence.

"About Petersburg," answered Nadyezhda Alexyevna. "Vladimir Sergeitch cannot say enough in its praise."

"It's a nice town," observed Veretyev—"but I think it's nice everywhere. Yes, really. Where there are two or three women and, excuse my frankness, wine, man really has nothing left to desire."

"That surprises me," answered Vladimir Sergeitch; "can you really be of the opinion that for an educated man there exists nothing? . . ."

"Perhaps . . . just so . . . I agree with you," interrupted Veretyev, who with all his politeness had the habit of not letting other people finish their sentences. "But that's not in my line; I am not a philosopher."

"I am not a philosopher either," said Vladimir Sergeitch, "and have no desire to be one, but we are talking of something quite different."

Veretyev looked at his sister with a nonchalant air, and with faint smile she bent down to him and half-whispered:

"Petrusha, darling, act Yegor Kapitonitch for us, do!" Veretyev's face instantly changed and God knows by what miracle in a flash became extraordinarily like that of Yegor Kapitonitch, though there was nothing in common in the features of the one and the other, and all that Veretyev did was to wrinkle up his nose and drop the corners of his mouth.

"Of course," he began, whispering in a voice exactly like Yegor Kapitonitch's—"Matryona Markovna is a lady very strict on the point of manners, but she is an exemplary wife. It is true that whatever I say . . ."

"The Biryulovsky young ladies know all about it," Nadyezhda Alexyevna put in, hardly able to restrain her laughter.

"They know all about it next day," answered Veretyev with such a killing grimace, such an embarrassed side glance that even Vladimir Sergeitch laughed.

"You have a great talent for mimicry, I see," he observed.

Veretyev passed his hand over his face; his features resumed their ordinary expression, and Nadyezhda Alexyevna cried:

"Oh, yes, he can mimic anyone he likes. . . . He has a genius for it."

"And could you mimic me?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"To be sure he can!" said Nadyezhda Alexyevna. "I should think so!"

"Oh, please do mimic me," said Astahov, addressing Veretyev—"I beg you not to stand on ceremony."

"Did you really believe her?" answered Veretyev, slightly screwing up one eye and giving his voice Astahov's intonation but so slightly and discreetly that only Nadyezhda Alexyevna noticed it and bit her lip. "You mustn't believe her, please; she may tell you all sorts of stories about me."

"And if only you knew what an actor he is!" Nadyezhda Alexyevna went on—"he can act any character. It's so wonderful. He is our stage manager and prompter and everything. It is a pity you are going away so soon."

"Sister, your partiality blinds you," Veretyev observed in a dignified voice but still with the same intonation. "What will Mr. Astahov think of you? He will think you are a provincial young lady."

"Oh, I assure you . . ." Vladimir Sergeitch was beginning.

"Petrusha, I tell you what," put in Nadyezhda Alexyevna—"you show us how a drunken man cannot get a handkerchief out of his pocket or better act a boy trying to catch a fly on the window while it buzzes under his fingers."

"You are a regular child," answered Veretyev. He got up, however, and going to the window by which Marya Pavlovna was sitting, began passing his hand over the pane and acting a boy catching a fly. The accuracy with which he imitated the pitiful buzz of the insect was really amazing. It seemed as though a real fly were under his fingers. Nadyezhda Alexyevna laughed and gradually everyone in the room began laughing. Marya Pavlovna's face did not change, however; there was not even a quiver on her lips. She sat with downcast eyes; at last she raised them and looking with a grave face at Veretyev she brought out through her teeth:

"It's a strange taste to want to make a fool of yourself."

Veretyev turned away from the window at once and after standing for a while in the middle of the room went out on to the verandah and from it into the park which was by now wrapped in darkness.

"He is an amusing fellow, that Pyotr Alexeitch!" observed Yegor Kapitonitch, flinging down a seven of trumps on his opponent's ace. "He really is an amusing fellow!"

Nadyezhda Alexyevna got up and, going hurriedly to Marya Pavlovna, asked her in an undertone:

"What did you say to my brother?"

"Nothing," she answered.

"What do you mean by 'nothing'? It can't have been nothing."

And after a brief pause Nadyezhda Alexyevna brought out "come along," took Marya Pavlovna by the hand, made her get up and go with her into the garden.

Vladimir Sergeitch looked after the two young ladies with some surprise. But their absence did not last long; they came back within a quarter of an hour and Pyotr Alexeitch came in with them.

"Such a lovely night!" cried Nadyezhda Alexyevna as she walked in. "How nice it is in the garden!"

"Oh, yes, by the way," said Vladimir Sergeitch—"was it you I saw in the garden last night, Marya Pavlovna?"

Marya Pavlovna glanced rapidly into his eyes.

"You were reciting Pushkin's 'Upas Tree,' if I am not mistaken."

Veretyev gave a slight frown and also began looking at Astahov.

"Yes, it was me," said Marya Pavlovna, "but I was not reciting anything; I never recite."

"Perhaps it was my fancy," began Vladimir Sergeitch, "though . . ."

"It was your fancy," Marya Pavlovna added coldly.

"What is this 'Upas Tree'?" asked Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"Don't you know?" answered Astahov. "Pushkin's poem 'on poor and meagre soil'; don't you remember it?"

"I don't seem to . . . it's about a poisonous tree, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Like the datura. . . . Do you remember, Masha, how beautiful the datura plants were on our balcony in the moonlight with their long white flowers? Do you remember the sweet, insidious, treacherous scent they had?"

"Treacherous scent!" cried Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Yes, treacherous. Why does that surprise you? They say it is dangerous, but yet it attracts one. How is it evil things can attract one? What is evil ought not to be lovely."

"Oho! What profound reflections!" observed Pyotr Alexeitch. "We have got a long way from the poem!"

"I repeated that poem to Marya Pavlovna yesterday," said Vladimir Sergeitch, "and she liked it extremely."

"Oh, do repeat it, please," said Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"Certainly."

And Astahov repeated "The Upas Tree".

"Too stilted," Veretyev brought out as it were reluctantly as soon as Vladimir Sergeitch had finished.

"The poem is too stilted?"

"No, not the poem . . . I beg your pardon, it seemed to me that you did not repeat it simply enough. The thing speaks for itself; however, I may be mistaken."

"No, you are not mistaken," said Nadyezhda Alexyevna emphatically.

"Oh, no, we all know that! In your eyes I am a genius, a

gifted person, who knows everything and can do everything, only unluckily he is too lazy—that's it, isn't it?"

Nadyezhda Alexyevna merely nodded her head.

"I don't dispute it; you ought to know better than I," observed Vladimir Sergeitch, and became a little sulky. "It is not in my line."

Meanwhile the game of cards was over.

"Oh, by the way, Vladimir Sergeitch," said Ipatov, getting up—"a gentleman of our neighbourhood, a most excellent and worthy man, Gavril Stepanitch Akilin, asks you to do him the honour to come to his ball. That is, I call it a ball to give it a fine name, but it is simply a little evening party, a dance without ceremony. He would have certainly called upon you himself but he was afraid of disturbing you."

"I am very grateful to the gentleman," said Vladimir Sergeitch, "but I absolutely must go home."

"But when do you suppose the ball is? It's to-morrow. It is Gavril Stepanitch's name-day to-morrow. One day will make no difference, and you will give him so much pleasure! And it is only seven miles from here. If you will allow us, we'll drive you there."

"I really don't know," began Vladimir Sergeitch. "Are you going?"

"Yes, the whole family. Nadyezhda Alexyevna and Pyotr Alexeitch, we are all going!"

"You can ask me for the fifth quadrille now, if you like," observed Nadyezhda Alexyevna—"the first four are engaged already."

"You are very kind; and are you engaged for the mazurka?"

"I? Let me think. . . . No, I believe I am not."

"In that case, if you would be so kind I should like to have the honour . . ."

"You are going then? That's capital. Certainly."

"Bravo!" cried Ipatov. "Well, Vladimir Sergeitch, that is nice of you. Gavril Stepanitch will be simply delighted, won't he, Ivan Ilyitch?"

Ivan Ilyitch would have liked to remain silent as usual, but thought it better to emit a sound of approval.

. . . . .

"What possessed you," Pyotr Alexeitch asked his sister an hour later as he sat beside her in a light chaise which he drove himself—"what possessed you to force yourself on that muff for the mazurka?"

"I have my own reasons," answered Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"What are they, may I ask?"

"That's my secret."

"Oho!"

And he gave a light switch to the horse which had begun to twitch its ears, snort and shy. It was frightened by the shadow of a big bush of willow that lay across the road in the dim moonlight.

"And will you dance it with Masha?" Nadyezhda Alexyevna questioned her brother in her turn.

"Yes," he answered indifferently.

"Yes! Yes!" Nadyezhda Alexyevna repeated reproachfully. "You men", she added after a pause, "certainly do not deserve to be loved by decent women."

"Don't you think so? And that Petersburg muff, does he deserve to be?"

"Better than you do."

"Oh indeed!"

And Pyotr Alexeitch declaimed with a sigh:

"*What a task it is, O Lord,*
To be . . . the brother of a grown-up sister."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna laughed.

"I give you a lot of trouble, indeed! It's I who have a task with you."

"Really? I did not suspect it."

"I am not talking about Masha."

"What about then?"

Nadyezhda Alexyevna's face looked a little troubled.

"You know very well," she said softly.

"Oh, I understand! There's no help for it, Nadyezhda Alexyevna, I am fond of a glass of wine in good company, sinful man that I am!"

"Hush, brother, please don't talk like that . . . It's *not* a joking matter."

"Tram-tram-tam-poom," Pyotr Alexeitch muttered between his teeth.

"It will be your ruin, and you make a joke of it."

"'The Peasant Lad the Wheat is Sowing'" Pyotr Alexeitch sang aloud, switched the horse with the reins and it broke into a rapid trot.

CHAPTER IV

When he got home Veretyev did not undress, and two hours later, when the dawn was just beginning to glow in the sky, he was out of the house.

Halfway between his estate and Ipatov's, on the precipitous edge of a broad ravine, there was a small bird copse. The young trees were growing very close together; no axe had yet touched their slender stems; a patch of light but almost unbroken shadow was thrown by their fine leaves on the soft, delicate grass, all spangled with the golden heads of hen-dazzle, the white specks of wood harebells and the crimson crosses of the wild pinks. The newly risen sun flooded the whole copse with vivid but not glaring light; dewdrops were glittering on all sides; here and there a big drop would suddenly grow crimson. Everything was breathing with freshness, with life and that innocent solemnity of the first moments of morning when everything is already so bright and yet still so silent. There was no sound but the trilling notes of larks over the distant fields and in the copse itself two or three birds were without haste trying their brief bars and as it were listening to the effect. From the wet earth rose a strong, fresh fragrance; the pure light air was stirred by cool breezes. There was a feeling of morning, of a glorious summer morning about everything: everything had the look and smile of morning like the rosy, freshly washed little face of a child just awake.

Not far from the ravine in the middle of a glade Veretyev was sitting on a cloak spread on the ground. Marya Pavlovna was standing by him, leaning against a birch-tree, with her hands behind her. They were both silent. Marya Pavlovna was looking fixedly into the distance; her white scarf had slipped off her head on to her shoulders, the breeze stirred and lifted the ends

of her hastily coiled hair. Veretyev sat bending down, striking the ground with a twig.

"Well," he began at last, "are you angry with me?"

Marya Pavlovna did not answer.

Veretyev glanced at her.

"Masha, are you angry?" he repeated.

Marya Pavlovna took a rapid glance at him, turned slightly away and said:

"Yes."

"What for?" asked Veretyev, and he threw away the twig.

Again Marya Pavlovna did not answer.

"You have a right to be angry with me though," Veretyev went on after a brief silence. "You must look upon me not merely as frivolous but even . . ."

"You don't understand me," Marya Pavlovna interrupted. "I am not angry with you on my own account at all."

"On whose, then?"

"On your own."

Veretyev raised his head and gave a short laugh.

"Ah, I understand!" he began. "Again! You are beginning to be worried again at the thought of my not doing anything with myself. You know, Masha, you are a wonderful creature, you really are. You think so much about other people and so little about yourself. You have no egoism at all, really—there is not another girl like you in the world. But the trouble is that I don't deserve your affection; I tell you that in earnest."

"So much the worse for you. You feel and you do nothing."

Veretyev gave a short laugh again.

"Masha, pull your hand from behind your back and give it to me," he said with an insinuating caress in his voice.

Marya Pavlovna merely shrugged her shoulders.

"Give me your beautiful, honest hand; I want to implant a tender and respectful kiss upon it, as the frivolous pupil kisses the hand of his indulgent preceptor."

And Veretyev stretched forward towards Marya Pavlovna.

"Oh, don't!" she said; "you are always laughing and joking and will joke away all your life."

"H'm! Joke away my life! A new expression! I suppose,

Marya Pavlovna, you used the verb 'joke away' in a transitive sense?"

Marya Pavlovna frowned.

"Don't, Veretyev," she repeated.

"Joke away my life," repeated Veretyev, and he got up—"but you will make a worse business of it than I shall; you will waste your life in taking things seriously. Do you know, Masha, you remind me of a scene in Pushkin's 'Don Juan.' You have not read Pushkin's 'Don Juan?'"

"No."

"Oh, no, I forgot, you don't read poetry. A lady called Laura has visitors come to see her; she drives them all away and is left alone with a man called Carlos. They go out together on the balcony; it is a glorious night. Laura admires it and Carlos suddenly begins to point out to her that she will grow old some day. 'What of it?' Laura answers—at this moment perhaps it is cold and raining in Paris; out here 'the night is fragrant of lemons and laurels.' What's the use of looking into the future? Look about you, Masha, is it not lovely here? Look how everything is rejoicing in life, how youthful it all is. And aren't we young ourselves?"

Veretyev went closer to Marya Pavlovna; she did not draw back but she did not turn her head towards him.

"Smile, Masha," he went on, "only your kind, good smile and not your usual mocking one. I love your good, kind smile—raise your proud, stern eyes. Well? You turn away. Hold out your hand to me, anyway."

"Ah, Veretyev," Masha began, "you know I can't talk. You tell me about that Laura. But she was a woman. It's pardonable for a woman not to think of the future."

"When you speak, Masha," replied Veretyev, "you continually blush from pride and shyness; the blood comes rushing to your cheeks in a flood of colour; I like that awfully in you."

Marya Pavlovna looked straight into Veretyev's eyes.

"Good-bye," she said, and she pulled her scarf on to her head. Veretyev held her back.

"There, there," he cried, "wait a little! What is it you want? Give me my orders. Would you like me to go into the service, to become a farmer? Would you like me to publish songs with

accompaniments on the guitar, to publish a collection of poems, of drawings, to take up painting, sculpture, rope-dancing? I'll do anything, anything you tell me, if only you will be pleased with me. I will really, Masha, believe me."

Marya Pavlovna glanced at him again.

"All that is only words, not deeds. You assure me you obey me . . ."

"Of course, I do obey."

"You obey me but how many times have I asked you . . ."

"What?"

Marya Pavlovna hesitated.

"Not to drink," she said at last.

"Ech, Masha, Masha! So you are at that too! My sister distresses herself about that. But in the first place I am not a drunkard; and in the second, do you know why I drink? Look at that swallow there. . . . See how boldly it disposes of its little body; it flings it wherever it likes! See, it has darted upwards and how it has dropped down; it actually squealed with joy; do you hear? So that's why I drink, Masha—to experience the same sensations as that swallow . . . to fling oneself where one will, to fly where the fancy takes one . . ."

"But what is it all for?" Masha interrupted.

"How can you ask that? What else is there to live for?"

"And can't it be done without drinking?"

"No, it can't; we are all blighted and degenerate. Passion, now . . . that produces the same effect. That is why I love you."

"As you do wine . . . much obliged."

"No, Masha; I love you not as I do wine. Wait a little, I will prove it to you some day when we are married and go abroad. Do you know I am dreaming already how I shall lead you before the Venus of Milo. It will be just the moment to repeat:

'If with grave eyes she stood before
The Queen of Love from Melos famed,
Of the two goddesses, I trow,
The marble beauty would be shamed.'

Why is it I keep talking in verse to-day? It must be the influence of the morning. What air! It's like wine."

"Wine again," observed Marya Pavlovna.

"What of it? Such a morning and you with me—what could be more intoxicating? 'With her grave eyes.' Yes," Veretyev went on, looking intently at Marya Pavlovna, "that is so. . . . But yet I remember that I have seen—not often it is true, but I have seen—those splendid dark eyes look tender. And how lovely they are then! Come, don't turn away, Masha, laugh, anyway. . . . Show me your eyes merry, at least, if they won't grant me a tender look."

"Leave off, Veretyev," said Marya Pavlovna; "let me go; it is time I was at home."

"I'll make you laugh, though," Veretyev interposed, "upon my word I will. Oh, look, there runs a hare!"

"Where?" asked Marya Pavlovna.

"Over there, beyond the ravine, through the field of oats—someone must have frightened it; they don't run in the morning. Would you like me to stop it?"

And Veretyev gave a loud whistle. The hare at once squatted, moved its ears, tucked in its forepaws, drew itself up, munched, sniffed and munched again! Veretyev nimbly squatted on his heels like the hare and began moving his nose, sniffing and munching like the hare. The hare passed its paws once or twice over its face, shook itself—its paws must have been wet with the dew—pricked up its ears and bounded off. Veretyev rubbed his cheeks with his hands and shook himself too. . . . Marya Pavlovna could not refrain from laughing.

"Bravo!" cried Veretyev, and he jumped up, "Bravo! You certainly are not a coquette. Do you know that if any society lady had teeth like yours she would be forever laughing! But that is what I love you for, Masha, that you are not a society lady, you don't laugh without occasion, you don't wear gloves, and it is so nice to kiss your hands because they are sunburnt and one feels how strong they are. . . . I love you because you don't go in for being clever, because you are proud and silent, don't read books, don't like poetry . . ."

"Would you like me to repeat some poetry to you?" Marya Pavlovna interrupted him with a peculiar expression in her face.

"Poetry?" said Veretyev in surprise.

"Yes, some poetry which that Petersburg gentleman recited to us last night."

"The 'Upas Tree' again? So you really were repeating it at night in the garden? The poem suits you. . . . But do you really like it so much?"

"Yes, I like it."

"Repeat it."

Marya Pavlovna was a little abashed.

"Repeat it, repeat it," Veretyev insisted.

Marya Pavlovna began repeating it. Veretyev stood facing her, folded his arms and listened. At the first line Marya Pavlovna lifted her eyes towards the sky: she did not want to meet Veretyev's eyes. She repeated the verses in her mellow even voice which recalled the notes of a violoncello; but when she reached the lines:

"*And at his mighty sovereign's feet*
Fell the poor slave, and died,"

her voice quivered, her haughty, immobile eyebrows were raised naively like a child's, and her eyes rested on Veretyev with involuntary devotion.

He suddenly flung himself at her feet and embraced her knees.

"I am your slave," he cried, "I am at your feet, you are my sovereign, my goddess, my ox-eyed Hera, my Meda . . ."

Marya Pavlovna was going to push him away; but her hands lay motionless on his curly hair and with a smile of confusion she bowed her head.

CHAPTER V

Gavril Stepanitch Akilin, who was giving the ball, belonged to that class of country gentleman who arouse the wonder of their neighbours by their faculty of living well and keeping open house on insufficient means. Though he had no more than four hundred serfs he entertained the whole province in a huge stone mansion erected by himself, with columns, with a tower, and a flagstaff upon it. His estate had come to him from his father and had never been noted for its good condition; Gavril Stepanitch was for many years absent

from it, serving in Petersburg; at last, fifteen years previously, he had returned to his native place with the grade of collegiate assessor, with a wife and three daughters. He began simultaneously building and introducing improvements, immediately set up an orchestra and gave dinner parties. At first everyone prophesied that he would inevitably be ruined before long; more than once there were rumours that Gavril Stepanitch's estate was to be sold by auction; but the years passed, dinner parties, balls, fêtes, concerts followed one another as before, new buildings rose like mushrooms from the ground, and Gavril Stepanitch's estate was still not put up to auction and he went on living as before and had even grown stout of late. Then the neighbours' gossip took another turn; they began hinting at some considerable sums which had, they said, been kept secret, there was talk of buried treasure. . . . "If he had been a good manager," the gentlemen of the neighbourhood argued, "one could understand it, but he is not, not at all! That's what is so surprising and unaccountable." However that might be, everyone was very ready to visit Gavril Stepanitch; he was hospitable and would play cards for any stake. He was a little man with grey hair and a conical-shaped head, a yellow face and yellow eyes, always carefully shaved and scented with eau-de-cologne. He wore on ordinary days as well as on holidays a loose blue swallowtail, buttoned up to the neck, a big cravat into which he had the habit of sticking his chin, and he prided himself on his linen; he screwed up his eyes and thrust out his lips when he took snuff and spoke very softly and affably. Gavril Stepanitch was not distinguished by his liveliness and in fact was not prepossessing in appearance and did not look particularly intelligent, though there was sometimes a gleam of cunning in his eye. He had made good matches for his two elder daughters, the youngest was still at home, unmarried. Gavril Stepanitch had also a wife, an insignificant creature who had not a word to say for herself.

At seven o'clock in the evening Vladimir Sergeitch arrived at Ipatov's wearing a dress-coat and white gloves. He found them all dressed ready to set off; the little girls were sitting stiffly, afraid of crumpling their starched white frocks. Old Ipatov genially reproached Vladimir Sergeitch when he saw

that the young man was wearing a dress-coat, and pointed to his own frock-coat. Marya Pavlovna wore a deep pink muslin dress which suited her admirably. Vladimir Sergeitch paid her a few compliments—Marya Pavlovna's beauty attracted him though she was evidently shy of him; he liked Nadyezhda Alexyevna, too, but the freedom of her manners rather embarrassed him. Moreover, in her words, in her looks and smiles there was often a shade of mockery, and that troubled his well-bred Petersburg soul. He would have had no objection to joining her in mocking other people, but it was disagreeable that she might perhaps be capable of laughing at him.

The ball had already begun; a good many guests had assembled and the home-trained orchestra was blaring, droning and squeaking in the gallery when the Ipatov family with Vladimir Sergeitch entered the ballroom. Their host met them at the door, thanked Vladimir Sergeitch for the feeling way in which he had so agreeably surprised them—as he expressed himself—and, taking Ipatov by the arm, he led him off to the drawing-room, to the card-tables.

Gavril Stepanitch had had an inferior education, and everything in his house—the music, the furniture, the food, the wines—could not even be called second rate. On the other hand there was plenty of everything, and he was not stuck up and did not give himself airs. . . . The gentlemen of the neighbourhood asked nothing more of him and were perfectly satisfied with the entertainment he gave them. At supper, for instance, they handed caviare cut into hard blocks and over-salted, but no-one prevented one from taking it with one's fingers, and there was plenty to wash it down with; cheap wine, it is true, but real wine made from grapes, not any other beverage. The springs in the furniture were so stiff and unyielding as to be rather uncomfortable, but to say nothing of there being many arm-chairs and sofas that had no springs at all, anyone could get hold of a wool-embroidered cushion to put on his seat, for such cushions embroidered by Madame Akilin's own hands lay about in great profusion everywhere—and then there was nothing left to be desired.

In short, Gavril Stepanitch's house was perfectly in keeping with the social and unceremonious manners of the X. district,

and it was simply due to Gavril Stepanitch's own modesty that the marshal of the nobility elected was not he, but a retired major called Podpekin, a very respectable and worthy man though he combed his hair from his left ear over his right temple, dyed his moustache a purplish tint and, suffering from asthma, sank into depression after dinner.

And so the ball had already begun. A quadrille of ten couples was being danced. The gentlemen were officers of a regiment stationed in the neighbourhood, young or youngish landowners, and two or three officials from the town. Everything was as it should be, everything was going well. The marshal of the nobility was playing cards with a retired actual civil councillor and a rich gentleman, the owner of three thousand serfs. The actual civil councillor wore on his first finger a diamond ring, spoke very slowly and always kept his heels together and his feet turned out in the position affected by old-fashioned dancers; he never turned his head, which was half concealed by a magnificent velvet collar. The wealthy gentleman, on the other hand, was continually laughing, raising his eyebrows and flashing the whites of his eyes.

The poet Bodryakov, a man of clumsy and wild appearance, was talking in a corner with the learned historian Yevsyukov; they were holding each other by their buttons. Near them one gentleman with an extraordinarily long waist was expounding some bold opinions to another gentleman who gazed timidly at the top of his head. Mammas in various coloured caps were sitting in a row along the walls; at the doors there were groups of gentlemen of a humbler sort, young men looking embarrassed, older men looking unassuming; but there is no describing it all. All was as it should be, I repeat.

Nadyezhda Alexyevna had arrived before the Ipatovs. Vladimir Sergeitch saw her dancing with a handsome young man with expressive eyes, with a thin black moustache and shining teeth, wearing a smart dress-coat and a gold chain hanging in a semi-circle on his waistcoat. Nadyezhda Alexyevna was dressed in blue with white flowers; a small wreath of the same flowers was twisted round her curly hair. She smiled, flirted her fan and looked gaily about her; she felt herself the queen of the ball. Vladimir Sergeitch went up to her, bowed

and, looking at her affably, asked her whether she remembered her promise of yesterday.

"What promise?"

"You are dancing the mazurka with me, aren't you?"

"Yes, of course."

The young man who was standing near Nadyezhda Alexyevna suddenly turned crimson.

"I think you have forgotten, Mademoiselle," he began, "that you had promised the mazurka to me."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna was confused.

"Oh, dear, what am I to do?" she said: "please forgive me, Monsieur Steltchinsky, I am so careless; I am really so ashamed."

Monsieur Steltchinsky said nothing and dropped his eyes; Vladimir Sergeitch drew himself up slightly.

"Be so kind, Monsieur Steltchinsky," Nadyezhda Alexyevna went on; "we are old friends while Monsieur Astahov is a stranger; do not put me in a difficult position; allow me to dance with him."

"As you please," said the young man. "It's for you to begin, though."

"Thank you," Nadyezhda Alexyevna pronounced and fluttered off to meet her vis-à-vis.

Steltchinsky glanced after her, then looked at Vladimir Sergeitch. Vladimir Sergeitch in his turn looked at him and walked away.

The quadrille was soon over. Vladimir Sergeitch walked up and down the ballroom a little, then went into the drawing-room and stopped beside one of the card-tables. All at once he felt someone behind him touch his arm; he turned round—Steltchinsky stood before him.

"I want a couple of words with you in the next room with your kind permission," he pronounced in French, with great politeness and not with a Russian accent.

Vladimir Sergeitch followed him.

Steltchinsky stopped at the window.

"In the presence of a lady," he said in the same language, "I could not say anything but what I did; but you do not, I hope, imagine that I really intend to surrender to you my right to dance the mazurka with Mdlle Veretieff."

Vladimir Sergeitch was surprised.

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"What I mean," Steltchinsky answered calmly, his nostrils dilating as he thrust his hand into his waistcoat, "is that I don't intend to, that's all."

Vladimir Sergeitch thrust his hand into his waistcoat, too, but his nostrils did not dilate.

"Allow me to observe, my dear sir," he began, "you may put Mdlle Veretieff in an unpleasant position by your action, and I imagine . . ."

"That would be most painful to me, but no-one hinders you from withdrawing, declaring yourself unwell or going away . . ."

"I am not going to do that. What do you take me for?"

"In that case I shall be forced to ask you to give me satisfaction."

"Satisfaction . . . in what sense?"

"In the obvious sense."

"You are challenging me to a duel?"

"Certainly, if you do not give up the mazurka." Steltchinsky tried to utter these words in the most unconcerned manner possible. Vladimir Sergeitch's heart gave a jump. He looked into the face of his unexpected assailant. "Good Lord," he thought, "what idiocy!"

"You are not joking?" he said aloud.

"It is not my habit to joke," Steltchinsky replied with dignity, "and especially with persons with whom I am not acquainted. You will not give up the mazurka?" he added after a brief pause.

"I will not give it up," answered Vladimir Sergeitch, as though reflecting.

"Very good! We will fight to-morrow."

"To-morrow morning my second will call on you." And with a polite bow Steltchinsky retired, evidently very well pleased with himself.

Vladimir Sergeitch remained a few moments longer at the window.

"Here's a nice business," he thought. "That's what comes of making new acquaintances! I was an ass to come! Very nice! Charming!"

He pulled himself together at last, however, and went into the ballroom.

There they were already dancing the polka. Marya Pavlovna flitted by him dancing with Pyotr Alexeitch, whom he had not noticed till then; she looked pale and even melancholy; then Nadyezhda Alexyevna whirled by him, all brightness and delight, with a little bandy-legged but ardent artillery officer; at the next round she was dancing with Steltchinsky, who as he danced kept tossing his hair back.

"Why, my good sir," Vladimir Sergeitch heard the voice of Ipatov behind him, "why are you looking on and not dancing? Confess now, though we do live, so to say, in a quiet backwater, it is not bad here, is it?"

"Nice sort of backwater, damn it!" thought Vladimir Sergeitch, and muttering some sort of answer to Ipatov he went to the other end of the ballroom.

"I shall have to find a second," he thought, continuing his reflections, "and where the devil am I to find him? Veretyev is out of the question; I don't know any of the others; who the devil would have thought of such an absurd business?"

Vladimir Sergeitch was fond of mentioning the devil when he was vexed.

At that moment Vladimir Sergeitch's eyes fell on the Adjustable Soul, Ivan Ilyitch, who was standing doing nothing by the window.

"Wouldn't he do?" he thought, and, shrugging his shoulders, he added almost aloud, "I shall have to ask him."

Vladimir Sergeitch went up to him.

"I have just had a very queer adventure," our hero began with a forced smile—"only imagine, a young man, a complete stranger, has just challenged me to a duel; it is utterly impossible to refuse it; I must have a second; *may* I ask you?"

Although Ivan Ilyitch was distinguished, as the reader is aware, by imperturbable indifference, even he was struck by so unusual a suggestion. He stared at Vladimir Sergeitch in perplexity.

"Yes," said Vladimir Sergeitch, "I should be very much indebted to you; I know no-one here. You are the only one who . . ."

"I cannot," Ivan Ilyitch brought out as though waking up from sleep—"it is utterly impossible."

"Why? You are afraid of unpleasantness; but I hope it will all be kept secret."

As he said this, Vladimir Sergeitch felt that he flushed and was confused.

"How stupid! How awfully stupid it all is!" he was saying inwardly.

"Excuse me, I can't possibly," repeated Ivan Ilyitch, shaking his head and drawing back, upsetting a chair again as he did so.

It was the first time in his life that he had to refuse a request; but it was such a request!

"Anyway," said Vladimir Sergeitch in an agitated voice, catching hold of his arm, "you will do me the favour not to speak to anyone of what I have told you, I beg you most earnestly."

"That I can do, that I can do," Ivan Ilyitch replied hurriedly, "but the other thing I can't, say what you like, I am not equal to it."

"Very well, very well," said Vladimir Sergeitch, "but don't forget that I count upon your discretion. . . . I shall inform that gentleman to-morrow," he muttered to himself with vexation, "that I could not find a second; he can arrange himself as he likes best; I am a stranger here. What the devil possessed me to apply to this fellow! But what could I do?"

Vladimir Sergeitch felt very, very much put out.

Meanwhile the ball went on. He felt very much inclined to go away at once, but till the mazurka was over going away was not to be thought of. How could he let his opponent triumph? Unluckily for Vladimir Sergeitch, the master of the ceremonies was a free-and-easy young man with long black hair and a hollow chest, over which a black satin cravat, with a huge gold pin in it, flowed like a small waterfall. This young man had the reputation all over the province of being completely versed in all the customs and traditions of the highest society, though he had only spent six months in Petersburg and had not succeeded in penetrating into anything higher than the houses of the collegiate councillor Sandaraki and his son-in-law, the civil councillor, Kostandaraki: he led the dances at every ball,

signalled to the musicians by clapping his hands; in the midst of the blare of the trumpets and the scraping of the fiddles shouted, "En avant deux!" or "Grande chaine" or "A vous, mademoiselle," and pale and perspiring, kept flying about, gliding and scraping on the floor. He never began the mazurka before midnight. "And that's something to be thankful for," he would say; "in Petersburg I should have kept you waiting for it till two o'clock."

The ball seemed long to Vladimir Sergeitch. He wandered like a shadow from the ballroom to the drawing-room, from time to time exchanging frigid glances with his rival, who did not miss a single dance, asked Marya Pavlovna for a quadrille, but she was engaged—and once or twice said a few words to his solicitous host who seemed troubled by the look of boredom on the face of his new acquaintance. At last the strains of the longed-for mazurka were heard. Vladimir Sergeitch sought out his partner, brought two chairs and sat with her among the last couples, almost facing Steltchinsky.

As was to be expected, the young leader of the dances was the first to begin. His countenance as he began the mazurka, the way he drew his partner after him, while he struck the floor with his foot and tossed his head—to describe all this is almost beyond the pen of man.

"I think you are bored, Monsieur Astahov," Nadyezhda Alexyevna began, addressing Vladimir Sergeitch.

"I? Not in the least. What makes you think so?"

"Why, from your expression. . . . You have not smiled once since you came in. I did not expect that of you. It doesn't suit you practical gentlemen, to scowl and be unsociable à la Byron—leave that to the poets."

"I notice, Nadyezhda Alexyevna, that you frequently call me a practical person by way of mocking at me. I suppose you look upon me as a cold and very sensible being, not capable of anything. But do you know what I can tell you: a practical person may often feel anything but light-hearted, though he does not think it necessary to display to others what is passing within him; he prefers to be silent!"

"What do you mean by that?" asked Nadyezhda Alexyevna with a glance at him.

"Nothing," said Vladimir Sergeitch, with affected indifference, and he assumed a mysterious air.

"But still?"

"Nothing, really. . . . One day you will know, later."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna would have pursued her questions but at that instant a young lady, the daughter of the host, led up to her Steltchinsky and another gentleman in blue spectacles.

"Life or death?" she asked in French.

"Life," cried Nadyezhda Alexyevna, "I don't want death yet."

Steltchinsky bowed and led her off.

The gentleman in blue spectacles referred to as death led off the daughter of the house. Both names had been suggested by Steltchinsky.

"Tell me, please, who is this Mr. Steltchinsky?" Vladimir Sergeitch asked Nadyezhda Alexyevna as soon as the latter came back to her seat.

"He is in the Governor's service, a very agreeable young man. He does not belong here. He is rather a coxcomb but that's in their blood. I hope you have not had any difficulties with him about the mazurka?"

"Not the slightest," Vladimir Sergeitch replied with some hesitation.

"I am so forgetful! You can't imagine."

"I ought to rejoice in your forgetfulness. It has given me the pleasure of dancing with you this evening."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna looked at him, slightly screwing up her eyes:

"Really? You are glad to dance with me?"

Vladimir Sergeitch responded with a compliment. Little by little he began talking freely. Nadyezhda Alexyevna was always very charming, and was especially so that evening; Vladimir Sergeitch thought her delightful. The thought of the duel next day, working upon his nerves, gave brilliance and liveliness to his talk; under the influence of it he allowed himself some exaggeration in the expression of his feelings. . . . "Well, come what may!" In all his words, in his stifled sighs, in the sudden gloom that from time to time clouded his face, there was something of mystery, of involuntary sadness and

picturesque despair. He unbent at last, so far as to be talking of love, of women, of his future, of his conception of happiness and of what he asked of fate. . . . He expressed himself indirectly, in hints. On the eve of possible death Vladimir Sergeitch flirted with Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

She listened to him attentively, laughed, shook her head, sometimes disputed with him, sometimes pretended to be incredulous. . . . The conversation, frequently interrupted by the other dances, took at last a rather strange turn . . . Vladimir Sergeitch began questioning Nadyezhda Alexyevna about herself, about her character, about her tastes. . . . At first she turned off his questions with a jest, then suddenly to his surprise asked him when he was going away.

"Where?" he asked, wondering.

"Home."

"To Sasovo?"

"No, home, to your estate, seventy miles away?"

Vladimir Sergeitch dropped his eyes.

"I should like it to be as soon as possible," he brought out with a troubled face. "I expect, to-morrow . . . if I am still living. I have business, you know. But what makes you ask me about it?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Nadyezhda Alexyevna.

"What was the reason, though?"

"Nothing," she repeated. "I am surprised at the curiosity of a man who is going away to-morrow, and to-day cares to find out what I am like."

"But really . . ." Vladimir Sergeitch was beginning.

"Oh, this is appropriate . . . read this," Nadyezhda Alexyevna interrupted him with a laugh, handing him the paper from a sweet she had just picked up from a little table, and she got up to meet Marya Pavlovna, who had come up to her with another lady.

Marya Pavlovna was dancing with Pyotr Alexeitch. Her face was flushed and heated but did not look any happier.

Vladimir Sergeitch looked at the paper—on it was printed in inferior French type: Qui me néglige me perd.

He looked up and caught Steltchinsky's eyes fixed upon him. Vladimir Sergeitch gave a forced smile, leaned his elbow on

the back of a chair and crossed his legs, as though to say, "So much for you!"

The ardent artillery officer whirled Nadyezhda Alexyevna back to her seat, slowly rotated with her in front of it, made a bow, clanked his spurs and departed. She sat down.

"Allow me to ask," Vladimir Sergeitch began deliberately, "how am I to take that motto?"

"What was it?" said Nadyezhda Alexyevna. "Oh, yes! Qui me néglige me perd. Why! It is an excellent practical rule which may apply at every turn. To succeed in any pursuit one must neglect nothing. . . . . One must try for all and perhaps one will get something. But it's funny: here am I, I . . . giving good advice to a practical person like you."

Nadyezhda Alexyevna laughed and for the rest of the mazurka Vladimir Sergeitch tried in vain to go back to the previous conversation. Nadyezhda Alexyevna turned it off with the wilfulness of a capricious child. Vladimir Sergeitch talked to her of her feelings and she either refrained from answering him altogether or drew his attention to the dresses of the ladies, to the absurd faces of some of the men, to the perfection of her brother's dancing, to the beauty of Marya Pavlovna; she talked about music, of what they had done the day before, of Yegor Kapitonitch and his wife Matryona Markovna . . . and only at the very end of the mazurka when Vladimir Sergeitch was beginning to make his last bows, she said with an ironical smile on her lips and in her eyes:

"And so you really are going away to-morrow?"

"Yes; and perhaps for a long journey," Vladimir Sergeitch said significantly.

"I wish you bon voyage." And Nadyezhda Alexyevna went quickly to her brother, whispered something gaily in his ear, then asked aloud:

"Are you grateful to me? Yes? Aren't you? But for me he would have asked *her* for the mazurka."

He shrugged his shoulders and said:

"It will lead to nothing, anyway."

She led him into the drawing-room.

"The flirt!" thought Vladimir Sergeitch, and, picking up his hat, he slipped unnoticed out of the ballroom, found his groom

whom he had told to be in readiness and was putting on his overcoat when, to his extreme astonishment, his groom told him that they could not go, that the coachman had somehow succeeded in getting drunk and that there was no possibility of wakening him. Swearing very briefly but very expressively at the absent coachman (there were other people in the hall), and telling the groom that if the coachman were not in a fit state by the early morning no-one in the world could imagine what the consequences would be, Vladimir Sergeitch went back to the ballroom and asked the butler to give him a bedroom without waiting for the supper which was being laid in the drawing-room. The master of the house seemed suddenly to spring out of the floor just at Vladimir Sergeitch's elbow (Gavril Stepanitch wore boots without heels and so moved about noiselessly) and began persuading him to remain, telling him that at supper there would be some first-rate caviare; but Vladimir Sergeitch refused, saying he had a headache. Half an hour later he was lying on a small bed under a short quilt, trying to go to sleep.

But he could not sleep—though he tossed from side to side, though he tried to think of something else, the figure of Steltchinsky persisted in haunting him. . . . Now he was aiming. . . . Now he was firing. . . . "Astahov is killed," someone was saying. Vladimir Sergeitch could not be called valiant though he was not a coward, either; but the idea of fighting a duel with anyone had never entered his head. . . . The notion of fighting—with his good sense, peaceable disposition, regard for propriety, dreams of future prosperity and making a good marriage! If he had not been the person concerned, he would have burst out laughing, the whole business struck him as so ludicrous and absurd. To fight! And with whom and for what?

"Damn it all! What nonsense!" he unconsciously exclaimed aloud. "Well, and if he really does kill me," he continued his meditations. "I must take measures anyway and make arrangements. . . . Will anyone regret me?"

And with vexation he closed his wide-open eyes, drew the quilt up to his neck . . . but still could not sleep.

There was a faint flush of dawn in the sky and, worn out with feverish sleeplessness, Vladimir Sergeitch began dropping

into a doze when he was suddenly conscious of a weight on his feet. He opened his eyes . . . Veretyev was sitting on his bed.

Vladimir Sergeitch was extremely surprised, especially when he noticed that Veretyev had no coat on, that his shirt was unbuttoned and his bare chest was visible, that his hair was falling over his forehead and that his face, too, looked changed, and Vladimir Sergeitch sat up in bed.

"May I ask . . ." he began with a gesture of surprise.

"I have come to see you," Veretyev began in a hoarse voice, "in this condition, excuse me. . . . We had a little drink . . . I wanted to reassure you. I said to myself; there's a gentleman in bed up there who probably can't sleep—let us come to his aid! Take note: you are not going to fight to-morrow and you can sleep. . . ."

Vladimir Sergeitch was more surprised than ever.

"What did you say?" he muttered.

"Yes, it is all settled," Veretyev went on, "that gentleman from the shores of the Vistula . . . Steltchinsky . . . apologises to you . . . you will get a letter from him to-morrow . . . I tell you again, it's all over. . . . You can snore!"

And saying this, Veretyev got up and made unsteadily for the door.

"But excuse me, excuse me," Vladimir Sergeitch began, "how did you find out, and how can I believe . . ."

"Ah! You think that I am . . . h'm! (and he gave a slight lurch forward). I tell you . . . he will send you a letter to-morrow. . . . You don't attract me particularly but generosity is my weak point. And what's the good of talking? . . . It's all such nonsense. . . . But confess," he added with a wink, "you were a little scared, weren't you?"

Vladimir Sergeitch was angry.

"Excuse me, sir," he said.

"Oh, all right, all right," Veretyev interrupted with a good-natured smile. "Don't get excited. You don't know that we never have a ball without an incident of this sort. . . . It's the regular thing. It never leads to anything. As though anyone wants to make a target of himself! But why not show off a bit—to a newcomer, for instance? In vino veritas. Though neither you nor I know Latin. But I see from your appearance that you

are sleepy. I wish you a good-night, you practical person and well-intentioned mortal. Accept that wish from another mortal who is not worth a half-penny. Addio, mio caro!"

And Veretyev went away.

"What on earth is the meaning of it?" exclaimed Vladimir Sergeitch a little later, and he brought his fist down on the pillow. "It's beyond everything! . . . It must be explained! I won't put up with it!"

For all that, five minutes later he was in a quiet, sound sleep. His heart was lighter. . . . A danger passed softens and fills with sweetness the heart of man.

This is what had happened before Veretyev's sudden interview with Vladimir Sergeitch in the night.

Gavril Stepanitch had a second cousin, a bachelor, living in his house. When there were balls young men would run down to his room on the ground floor to smoke in the intervals between the dances, and after supper they assembled there for a friendly drink. On that night a good many guests had gathered together in his room. Steltchinsky and Veretyev were among them; Ivan Ilyitch, the Adjustable Soul, had strolled down there also. They mixed punch. Though Ivan Ilyitch had promised Astahov to say nothing about the approaching duel, yet when Veretyev casually asked him what he had been talking about to that muff (Veretyev always spoke of Astahov in this way), the Adjustable Soul could not refrain from repeating his conversation with Vladimir Sergeitch word for word.

Veretyev laughed, then grew thoughtful.

"But whom is he fighting with?" he asked.

"Well, that I can't tell you," answered Ivan Ilyitch.

"Whom was he talking to, anyway?"

"With different people . . . Yegor Kapitonitch—surely he is not fighting with him?"

Veretyev walked away from Ivan Ilyitch.

And so the punch was made and they began drinking it. Veretyev was sitting in the most conspicuous place; gay and reckless, he took the lead in all young men's parties. He flung off his coat and cravat. He was asked to sing; he took the guitar and sang several songs. The wine began to go to their heads; the young men began drinking toasts. Steltchinsky, with a

flushed face, suddenly leaped onto the table and, holding his glass high above his head, cried aloud:

"To the health of—I know whom," he added hurriedly; he drank off the wine, dashed the glass to the floor and went on: "May my enemy be smashed to fragments like this to-morrow!"

Veretyev, who had been watching him for some time, raised his head quickly.

"Steltchinsky," he said, "to begin with, get off that table—it's unseemly; besides, your boots are nothing to boast of. And then come here; I have something to say to you."

He drew him aside.

"Listen, my boy," he said. "I know you are going to fight to-morrow with that Petersburg gentleman."

Steltchinsky started.

"How . . . who told you?"

"I tell you. And I know whom you are fighting about, too."

"Who is it? It would be interesting to know that."

"Oh, what a Talleyrand! Why, about my sister, of course. Come, come, don't pretend to be surprised. It makes you look like a goose. I can't imagine how it came about, but I know it is so. Come, my boy," Veretyev went on, "what's the use of pretending? I know you've been paying her attention for a long time."

"But that proves nothing."

"Leave off, please. But listen to what I am going to say to you. I won't allow this duel on any account. Do you understand that? All this folly will recoil on my sister. Excuse me, but as long as I am alive . . . I will not allow it. If you and I go to ruin, that's what we deserve, but she ought to have a long life and a happy one. Yes, I swear," he added with sudden heat, "I would betray everyone else, even those who are ready to sacrifice everything for me, but I won't let anyone touch her."

Steltchinsky gave a forced laugh.

"You are drunk, my dear fellow, and raving . . . that's all".

"And aren't you? But whether I am drunk or not does not matter. I am talking sense. You will not fight with that gentleman, that I can guarantee. What possessed you to pick a quarrel with him? Were you jealous, or what? How true it is

that people are fools when they are in love! Why, she only danced with him to prevent him from asking. . . . But that's not the point. The duel will not come off."

"H'm! I should like to know how you are going to prevent me?"

"Why, like this—if you won't promise this minute to give up this duel, I will fight you myself."

"Indeed?"

"My dear fellow, don't doubt it. I will insult you in the most original way imaginable before everyone this minute and then we will fight across a handkerchief if you like. But I imagine this would not be to your liking for several reasons, would it?"

Steltchinsky fired up, began to say that this was intimidation, that he would allow no-one to interfere in his private affairs, that he should consider nothing . . . and ended by giving way and renouncing all attempts on the life of Vladimir Sergeitch. Veretyev embraced him and in less than half an hour they were for the tenth time drinking Bruderschaft; that is, drinking with arms interlocked . . . The young leader of the dance drank Bruderschaft with them, too, and at first kept pace with them but at last fell asleep in the most innocent way and lay for a long time on his back in a condition of complete unconsciousness. The expression of his little pale face was both pathetic and amusing. . . . Good heavens, what would the society ladies of his acquaintance have said, if they had seen him in such a sorry plight! But fortunately he did not know any society ladies.

Ivan Ilyitch, too, distinguished himself that night. To begin with, he astonished the assembled gentlemen by suddenly striking up:

"*Once upon a time a baron . . .*"

"The hawfinch! The hawfinch is singing!" they all shouted. "The hawfinch never sings at night!"

"As though I only knew one song!" retorted Ivan Ilyitch, excited by the wine. "I know others, too."

"All right, show us your talents!"

Ivan Ilyitch was silent for a space and then began in a bass voice—"Krambambuli, the home of my fathers," but so

queerly and out of tune that a general shout of laughter drowned his voice and he subsided.

When the party broke up, Veretyev went to see Vladimir Sergeitch and the brief conversation we have described already took place between them.

Very early the next day Vladimir Sergeitch set off for Sasovo. He spent the whole morning in agitation, almost mistook a merchant who called on him for a second, and heaved a sigh of relief when the footman brought him a letter from Steltchinsky. Vladimir Sergeitch read the letter through several times—it was very cleverly written. Steltchinsky began with the words *la nuit porte conseil*, Monsieur—and did not apologise, since in his opinion he had not insulted his opponent in any way; at the same time he acknowledged that he had been too hasty the evening before and concluded by saying that he was completely at the service de M. Astakov, but for himself no longer desired satisfaction. After writing and dispatching a reply filled with a courtesy that almost approached mockery and a feeling of dignity which did not, however, show a trace of boastfulness, Vladimir Sergeitch sat down at his dinner rubbing his hands, ate it with great relish, and immediately after it set off to his own home, without having even sent a change of horses in advance. The road by which he drove lay within three miles of Ipatov's house. . . . Vladimir Sergeitch gazed at it.

"Farewell, quiet backwater!" he muttered ironically. The figures of Nadyezhda Alexyevna and Marya Pavlovna flitted for a moment before his imagination; he waved them off, turned away and fell into a doze.

CHAPTER VI

Over three months passed. The autumn was far advanced; the yellow woods were losing their last leaves, the blue-tits had arrived and, sure sign of the approach of winter, the wind was beginning to groan and howl. But there had not yet been much rain, and the mud on the roads was not yet very sloppy. Vladimir Sergeitch took advantage of these circumstances to visit the chief town of the province in order to

conclude some business transactions. He spent the morning driving from one place to another, and in the evening went to the club. He met several acquaintances in the big, gloomy clubroom, among them an old retired cavalry officer, Flitch, whom everyone knew as a capable business man, a wit, a card-player and a gossip. Vladimir Sergeitch got into conversation with him.

"Oh, by the way," Flitch exclaimed suddenly, "a lady you know was passing through the town the other day and she sent you her greetings."

"What lady?"

"Madame Steltchinsky."

"I don't know any Madame Steltchinsky."

"You knew her before she was married. . . . Her maiden name was Veretyev . . . Nadyezhda Alexyevna. Her husband was in our Governor's service. You must have seen him, too. . . . A lively fellow, with a little moustache. He has hooked an attractive little party, and with money, too."

"You don't say so!" said Vladimir Sergeitch. "So she has married him. . . . H'm! And where was she going?"

"To Petersburg. She told me to remind you about some motto. . . . What was it, if I may be so inquisitive?"

And the old gossip's sharp nose looked alert with expectation.

"I don't remember, really, some joke," replied Vladimir Sergeitch. "And where is her brother, may I ask?"

"Pyotr? Oh, he is in a bad way."

Mr. Flitch turned up his fox-like little eyes and heaved a sigh.

"How so?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"He's gone to the dogs! He is on the road to ruin."

"Where is he now, then?"

"Nobody knows. He is gone off after some gipsy girls, that's the most likely story. He is not in the province, that I can answer for."

"And old Ipatov, is he still living there?"

"Mihail Nikolaitch? The queer little chap, you mean? He is still there."

"And is everyone in his house . . . as before?"

"Yes, to be sure. How would it be for you to marry his

sister-in-law? She is a regular piece of antique sculpture, isn't she? He-he! People did say, you know . . ."

"Really," said Vladimir Sergeitch, screwing up his eyelids.

At that moment Flitch was invited to a game of cards and the conversation dropped.

Vladimir Sergeitch had intended to return home quickly but a messenger arrived from the village elder at Sasovo telling him that six peasant homesteads had been burnt to the ground, and he decided to go down himself. It was reckoned about forty miles from the town to Sasovo. Vladimir Sergeitch reached that evening the little lodge with which the reader is already familiar, at once summoned the village elder and the rural clerk, duly upbraided them, went in the morning to inspect the scene of the fire, directed that various steps should be taken, and when he had dined, decided, after a brief hesitation, to pay a call on Ipatov. Vladimir Sergeitch would have stayed at home if he had not heard from Flitch that Nadyezhda Alexyevna had left the neighbourhood. He did not want to meet her again; but he felt no disinclination to have another look at Marya Pavlovna.

As on his first visit, Vladimir Sergeitch found Ipatov playing draughts with the Adjustable Soul. The old man was delighted to see him; Vladimir Sergeitch fancied, however, that his face was careworn, and his words did not flow with the same readiness as of old.

Vladimir Sergeitch exchanged silent glances with Ivan Ilyitch. They both felt a twinge of discomfort; but they soon got over it.

"Are all your household well?" inquired Vladimir Sergeitch as he sat down.

"They are all quite well, thank you," answered Ipatov. "Only Marya Pavlovna is not quite the thing . . . she keeps to her room for the most part now."

"Is she ill?"

"No . . . not exactly. She will come in to tea."

"And Yegor Kapitonitch? How is he getting on?"

"Ah, it is all over with Yegor Kapitonitch. His wife is dead."

"Impossible!"

"She died after twenty-four hours' illness of cholera. You wouldn't know him now, he is not like himself. 'Without

Matryona Markovna life is a burden to me. I shall die,' he says, 'and thank God; I don't care to live,' he says. Yes, the poor fellow is quite lost."

"Oh, dear, how unfortunate!" cried Vladimir Sergeitch. "Poor Yegor Kapitonitch!"

Everyone was silent for a space.

"I hear your neighbour is married," said Vladimir Sergeitch, flushing slightly.

"Nadyezhda Alexyevna? Yes, she is married." Ipatov stole a sidelong glance at Vladimir Sergeitch. "Yes . . . yes, she is married and gone away."

"To Petersburg?"

"To Petersburg."

"I expect Marya Pavlovna misses her? I think they were great friends."

"Of course she misses her. That can't be helped. Though as for her friendship, I can assure you young ladies' friendship is worse than men's. It's all right while they are together, but out of sight is out of mind."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, indeed. Take Nadyezhda Alexyevna, for instance. We have not had one letter from her since she went away, and the promises she made, the vows! No doubt she has other things to think of now."

"Has she been gone long?"

"It must be six weeks. She galloped off the day after the wedding, in foreign style."

"They say her brother is not here, either?" said Vladimir Sergeitch a little later.

"Yes, he is gone, too. You see, they are city people; they are not likely to stay long in the country!"

"And don't you know where he has gone?"

"No."

"He is here to-day and gone to-morrow," observed Ivan Ilyitch.

"He is here to-day and gone to-morrow," repeated Ipatov. "And you, Vladimir Sergeitch, what good news is there of you?" he added, turning round in his chair.

Vladimir Sergeitch began telling about himself. Ipatov listened—listened and exclaimed at last:

"But why doesn't Masha come? Ivan Ilyitch, you might go and fetch her."

Ivan Ilyitch went out of the room and returning, announced that Marya Pavlovna was just coming.

"Has she a headache?" Ipatov asked in a low voice.

"Yes," answered Ivan Ilyitch.

The door opened and Marya Pavlovna came in. Vladimir Sergeitch got up, bowed and was so amazed that he could not utter a word; so changed was Marya Pavlovna since he had seen her last! All the colour had gone from her wan cheeks; there were wide, dark rings round her eyes; there was a look of grief about her tightly set lips; her whole face, dark and immovable, seemed turned to stone.

She lifted her eyes and there was no light in them.

"How do you feel?" Ipatov asked her.

"I am quite well," she answered, and sat down to the table on which a samovar was already boiling.

Vladimir Sergeitch was pretty thoroughly bored that evening; and indeed everyone was depressed. The conversation was continually taking a melancholy turn.

"Hark, what a tune it's playing!" Ipatov said, among other things, listening to the howling of the wind. "Summer has long passed; the autumn is passing, too, and winter is upon us. The snowdrifts will lie about us again. If only the snow would come soon! As it is, it makes one depressed to go into the garden. . . . It's a perfect ruin. The branches creak and rattle. . . . Yes, the fine days are over!"

"They are over," repeated Ivan Ilyitch.

Marya Pavlovna looked out of the window in silence.

"Please God, they will come back," observed Ipatov.

No-one answered him.

"Do you remember the delightful singing we had here?" said Vladimir Sergeitch.

"Yes, those were pleasant times!"

"But you might sing," said Vladimir Sergeitch, turning to Marya Pavlovna; "you have such a splendid voice."

She did not answer.

"And how is your mother?" said Vladimir Sergeitch to Ipatov, not knowing how to keep up the conversation.

"Thank God, she keeps pretty middling in spite of her infirmities. To-day she went out in her chair and I tell you she is like an old broken tree—it creaks and creaks; and yet some strong young sapling will fall, and it will go on standing. Ech, ech!"

Marya Pavlovna dropped her hands on her knees and bowed her head.

"And yet she has a bad time of it," Ipatov said again, "it's a true saying that old age is no happiness."

"Youth isn't happiness, either," said Marya Pavlovna as though to herself.

Vladimir Sergeitch wanted to go home that evening but it was such a dark night that he did not venture to go. He was given the same upstairs room in which three months before he had spent a troubled night—owing to Yegor Kapitonitch.

"I wonder whether he still snores?" thought Vladimir Sergeitch and remembered his admonitions to his servant; he recalled Marya Pavlovna's sudden appearance in the garden. . . .

Vladimir Sergeitch went to the window and put his head against the cold pane. His own face looked in at him dimly from without; his eyes seemed up against a curtain of darkness and only after a little time could he distinguish against the starless sky the branches of trees twisting convulsively in the dark night. They were being lashed by the relentless wind.

All at once it seemed to Vladimir Sergeitch as though he caught a glimpse of something white on the ground. . . . He looked, smiled, shrugged his shoulders and, exclaiming half aloud, "The tricks imagination will play one!" got into bed.

He fell asleep very quickly but he was not fated to spend a peaceful night on this occasion either. He was roused by a hurrying to and fro in the house. He lifted up his head from the pillow. . . . He heard agitated voices, exclamations, scurrying footsteps, the banging of doors; then there was a sound of women's weeping, shouts were heard in the garden, other shouts answered them in the distance. . . . The agitation in the house increased, and grew noisier every moment. . . . "There must be a fire!" flashed through Vladimir Sergeitch's mind. In alarm he jumped out of bed and ran to the window, but there was no glow of fire; only red points of light were moving

rapidly along the garden paths between the trees—men were running with lanterns. Vladimir Sergeitch went quickly to the door, opened it and ran straight into Ivan Ilyitch. Pale, dishevelled and half-dressed, the latter was rushing along without knowing where he was going.

"What is it? What has happened?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch in excitement, clutching vigorously at his arm.

"She is lost, she is drowned, she has thrown herself into the water," Ivan Ilyitch responded in a breathless voice.

"Who is in the water, who is lost?"

"Marya Pavlovna! Who else could it be? He has been the death of her, poor darling! Help! Run, good people, make haste! Make haste, lads!"

And Ivan Ilyitch dashed down the stairs.

Vladimir Sergeitch got into his boots, flung his greatcoat over his shoulders and ran after him.

He found no-one in the house, they had all rushed into the garden; only the little girls, Ipatov's daughters, met him in the passage close to the front door; half dead with fright they were standing in their white petticoats with clasped hands and bare feet, near a night-light on the ground. Vladimir Sergeitch ran through the drawing-room, passing an overturned table, on to the verandah. Through the shrubbery, in the direction of the dam, lights were gleaming and shadows were fleeting. . . .

"The hooks! Run for the hooks!" he heard the voice of Ipatov.

"The net, the net! The boat!" cried other voices.

Vladimir Sergeitch ran towards the shouts. He found Ipatov on the bank of the pond; a lantern hung on a branch threw a vivid light on the old man's grey head. He was wringing his hands and staggering as though he were drunk; on the grass near him a woman was writhing and sobbing; people were running to and fro. Ivan Ilyitch was already up to his knees in the water and feeling the depth with a pole; the coachman was undressing, shivering all over; two men were dragging a boat along the bank; the rapid thud of horses' hoofs could be heard along the village street. . . . The wind blew, shrieking, as though doing its utmost to put out the lanterns. The waters of the black and menacing pond splashed noisily on the bank.

"What do I hear?" cried Vladimir Sergeitch, running up to Ipatov. "Is it possible?"

"The hooks! Quick, the hooks!" moaned the old man in reply.

"But perhaps you are mistaken, Mihail Nikolaitch!"

"No, how can it be a mistake!" the woman lying on the grass—Marya Pavlovna's maid—said in a tearful voice, "wretch that I am, I heard her myself jump into the water, cry out, 'Save me,' and then once more, 'Save me'!"

"How was it you did not prevent her?"

"How could I prevent her, sir? Why, by the time I missed her she was gone, but I must have had a foreboding in my heart; the last few days she has been in such grief and did not say a word; but I knew and I ran straight into the garden, as though someone had told me. All at once I heard something go plop into the water: 'Save me,' I heard her cry . . . 'save me!' . . . Oh, dear, kind people!"

"But perhaps it was your fancy?"

"My fancy, indeed! And where is she, then? What has become of her?"

"So that was the white thing I thought I saw in the darkness," thought Vladimir Sergeitch.

Meanwhile men had run up with hooks, brought a net and begun laying it out on the grass, numbers of people came up, there was a great running to and fro . . . the coachman snatched up a hook, the village elder another; they both jumped into the boat, pushed off and began dragging the water with the hooks; they were lighted from the bank. Their movements and their shadows seemed strange and terrible in the darkness, on the troubled water in the dim and uncertain light of the lantern.

"It's caught," the coachman cried suddenly.

Everyone stood faint with expectation.

"A stump," said the coachman, and pulled out the hook.

"Come back, come back," they shouted from the bank, "you will do nothing with the hooks, you want the net."

"Yes, yes, the net," others chimed in.

"Stay," cried the village elder, "my hook has caught too. . . . I think it's something soft," he added a little later.

A patch of white came into sight near the boat.

"The young lady!" cried the village elder—"It's she!" He was right . . . the hook had caught Marya Pavlovna by the sleeve of her dress. The coachman got hold of her at once, they drew her out of the water . . . with two strong strokes the boat was brought to the bank. . . . Ipatov, Ivan Ilyitch, Vladimir Sergeitch all rushed to Marya Pavlovna, lifted her up and carried her home in their arms. They undressed her, warmed her and tried to restore respiration. . . . But all their efforts were in vain. Marya Pavlovna did not come to herself. . . . Life had fled.

Next morning early Vladimir Sergeitch left Ipatovka; before he set off he went to take the last farewell of the dead girl. She was lying on the table in the drawing-room in a white dress. Her thick hair was hardly dry, there was a look of sorrowful bewilderment on her pale face which was still unchanged; her parted lips seemed striving to speak and ask some question . . . her crossed arms seemed pressing on her bosom as though in anguish. . . . But with whatever bitter thoughts the poor girl had perished, death had laid upon her its imprint of eternal silence and resignation. . . . And who can say what the dead face expresses in those few moments when for the last time it meets the eyes of the living before vanishing forever and perishing in the grave?

Vladimir Sergeitch stood in decorous melancholy before the body of Marya Pavlovna, crossed himself three times and went out without noticing Ivan Ilyitch, who was quietly weeping in the corner. . . . And he was not the only one who wept that day, all the servants in the house wept bitterly; nothing but good was remembered of Marya Pavlovna.

A week later old Ipatov wrote as follows in reply to a letter that had come at last from Nadyezhda Alexyevna:

"A week ago, dear Madam Nadyezhda Alexyevna, my sister-in-law, your friend Marya Pavlovna, made an end of her life by throwing herself at night into the pond and we have already consigned her body to the earth. She took this grievous and terrible step without saying good-bye to me, without leaving a letter or the smallest note to convey her last wishes. . . . But you know better than anyone, Nadyezhda Alexyevna, on whose soul this great and mortal sin should fall! May the Lord be

your brother's judge, but my sister-in-law could neither forget him nor survive the separation."

By the time Nadyezhda Alexyevna received this letter she was in Italy, where she had gone with her husband, Count de Steltchinsky, as he was styled in all the hotels. It was not only the hotels he visited, however: he was frequently seen in gambling saloons, in the Kursaals in watering-places. . . . At first he lost a great deal of money, then left off losing, and his face assumed the peculiar expression, half suspicious, half impudent, which is seen in a man liable to being suddenly involved in some unpleasant affray. . . . He rarely saw his wife. Nadyezhda Alexyevna was not dull in his absence, however. She developed a taste for the arts. Her acquaintances chiefly consisted of artists and she liked discussing the beautiful with young men. Ipatov's letter grieved her extremely but did not prevent her from going the same day to the "Cave of Dogs" to watch unfortunate animals gasp for breath as they were plunged into sulphurous fumes.

She did not go alone. She was accompanied by several admirers. Among them the most amiable was considered to be Mr. Popelin, an unsuccessful French painter with a beard and a check jacket. He sang the newest songs in a thin tenor, made jokes in a very free-and-easy style and ate a very great deal though he was very lean.

CHAPTER VII

It was a sunny, frosty day in January; numbers of people were walking along the Nevsky. The clock on the tower of the Town Hall struck three. Our old acquaintance, Vladimir Sergeitch Astahov, was walking among others on the broad flags sprinkled with yellow sand. He had grown much more manly-looking since we parted from him; he had grown whiskers and was stouter all over but did not look older. He followed the crowd without haste, from time to time looking about him: he was expecting his wife; she had meant to drive up in their carriage with her mother. It was about five years since Vladimir Sergeitch had married, exactly as he wished; his wife was

wealthy and with the best connections. Affably lifting his superbly brushed hat as he met his numerous acquaintances, Vladimir Sergeitch moved forward with the free step of a man satisfied with his lot. All at once, close to the Arcade, he was almost run into by a man in a Spanish cloak and a jockey cap; his face was rather the worse for wear, his moustache was dyed and his big eyes looked out from swollen and puffy eyelids. Vladimir Sergeitch moved aside with dignity, but the gentleman in the cap stared at him and suddenly exclaimed:

"Ah! Mr. Astahov, how are you?"

Vladimir Sergeitch made no reply and stood still in amazement. He could not imagine how a gentleman who had the temerity to appear on the Nevsky in a jockey cap knew his surname.

"You don't recognise me," the gentleman in the cap went on; "I saw you eight years ago in the country, in T. province, at the Ipatovs. My name is Veretyev."

"Oh dear! I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Vladimir Sergeitch, "but how you have changed."

"Yes, I am older," answered Pyotr Alexeitch, and he passed over his face a hand without a glove, "but you, now, have not changed."

Veretyev did not so much look older as fallen off and deteriorated. Tiny, delicate wrinkles covered his whole face and when he talked his lips and cheeks twitched slightly. Everything about him indicated that he had been living hard.

"Where have you been lost all this time that one has seen nothing of you?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch.

"I have been wandering about. And have you been in Petersburg all the time?"

"For the most part in Petersburg."

"Are you married?"

"Yes."

And Vladimir Sergeitch assumed a rather severe air as though to say to Veretyev, "Don't venture to ask me, my good fellow, to introduce you to my wife."

Veretyev seemed to understand him. A careless smile faintly stirred his lips.

"And how is your sister?" asked Vladimir Sergeitch. "Where is she?"

"I can't tell you for certain. I expect she is in Moscow. I have not had a letter from her for a long time."

"And is her husband living?"

"Yes."

"And Mr. Ipatov himself?"

"I don't know; I expect he is alive too; but he may be dead."

"And that other gentleman—what was his name?—Bodryakov, wasn't it?"

"The one you asked to be your second, do you remember, when you were in such a funk? The devil only knows."

Vladimir Sergeitch, with a dignified face, remained silent.

"I always recall with pleasure those evenings," he continued, "when I had the opportunity (he had almost said 'honour') of making the acquaintance of your sister and yourself. She is a very charming person. Do you still sing as agreeably?"

"No, I've lost my voice. . . . Yes, that was a nice time."

"I visited Ipatovka once since," Vladimir Sergeitch went on, raising his eyebrows mournfully; "I think that was what they called the village—on the very day of a terrible event. . . ."

"Yes, yes, that was horrible, horrible." Veretyev hurriedly interrupted him. "Yes, yes—and do you remember how you almost fought a duel with my present brother-in-law?"

"H'm! Yes, I remember," Vladimir Sergeitch replied deliberately. "However, I must confess, it is so long ago that it all seems to me rather like a dream now."

"Like a dream," Veretyev repeated, and his pale cheeks flushed—"like a dream . . . no, it was not a dream, not for me, anyway. It was the time of youth, of gaiety, of happiness, the time of boundless hopes and unconquerable strength, and if it was a dream, it was a lovely dream. But that we have grown old and stupid, and dye our moustache, and lounge about the Nevsky and are good for nothing like broken-down hacks, that we have lost our savour, have worn threadbare, whether we are stuck up and dignified or whether we are simply loafers, and, very likely, drown our sorrow in wine—that is more like a dream, and a most hideous dream. Our life has been lived and lived in vain, absurdly, vulgarly—that's what is bitter!

If only one could shake that off like a dream, if only one could wake up from that. . . . And then everywhere, always one awful memory, one phantom. . . . But good-bye."

Veretyev moved rapidly away, but on reaching the doors of one of the principal cafés of the Nevsky Prospect, stopped, went in and tossing off at the bar a glass of orange bitters, he crossed the billiard-room, dark and foggy with tobacco fumes, and went into a back room. There he found some friends, old comrades: Petya Lasurin, Kostya Kovrovsky, Prince Serdyukov and two gentlemen who were addressed simply as Vasyuk and Filat. They were all men no longer young, though unmarried; some were a little bald, others were turning grey, they had wrinkled faces and double chins; in short, these gentlemen had all, as they say, begun going to seed. They all, however, still looked upon Veretyev as an exceptional man, destined to astonish the world, and he was more intelligent only in that he was very well aware of his complete and essential uselessness. And even outside his own circle there were people who thought of him that if he had not ruined himself, something very remarkable might have come of him. . . . These people were mistaken: nothing ever does come of the Veretyevs.

Pyotr Alexeitch's friends met him with their usual greetings. He puzzled them at first by his gloomy expression and bitter remarks, but he soon recovered, grew merry and things went as usual.

As soon as Veretyev left him, Vladimir Sergeitch frowned and drew himself up. Pyotr Alexeitch's sudden outburst had greatly perplexed and even offended him.

"Grown stupid, drink, dye our moustache . . . parlez pour vous, mon cher," he said at last almost aloud and snorting once or twice with involuntary indignation, was about to continue his walk.

"Who was that talking to you?" he heard a loud and self-confident voice behind him.

Vladimir Sergeitch turned round and saw one of his intimate friends, a certain Mr. Pomponsky. This Mr. Pomponsky, a tall and stout gentleman, held a rather important post and had never once, even in his early youth, had the slightest doubt of his own efficiency.

"Oh, a queer fellow," said Vladimir Sergeitch, taking Pomponsky's arm.

"Upon my soul, Vladimir Sergeitch, is it possible for a gentleman to be seen talking in the street to an individual in a jockey cap? It's unseemly! I am amazed! Where could you have made the acquaintance of such a person?"

"In the country."

"In the country? . . . Country neighbours are not recognised in town . . . ce n'est pas comme il faut. A gentleman must always behave like a gentleman if he wants . . ."

"Here is my wife," Vladimir Sergeitch made haste to interrupt him. "Let us go to her."

And the two gentlemen made their way to a smart, low carriage, from the window of which the pale, fatigued and irritably haughty face of a woman still young, but already a little faded, was looking out.

Another lady who also seemed cross, her mother, could be seen behind her. Vladimir Sergeitch opened the carriage door and gave his wife his arm. Pomponsky approached the mother-in-law and both couples walked along the Nevsky, accompanied by a short, black-haired footman in greenish gaiters with a big cockade on his hat.

F. M. DOSTOEVSKY

Bobók[1]

Semion Ardalionovitch happened to say to me the other day: "Ivan Ivanovitch, are you ever going to be sober, tell me, pray?"

A strange request. I'm not offended. I'm a timid man, and yet they have turned me into a lunatic. An artist painted my portrait. Quite casually. "After all," he said, "you are an author." I yielded—and then he exhibits it! I read: "Go and see that morbid face on the verge of madness."

Let that be as it may. Still, to put it so bluntly in print! The press should tell of noble matters, ideals, and yet. . . .

It might at least have been expressed with more subtlety. Style exists for that purpose. But no, they no longer want to put things subtly. Humour and fine style are disappearing, and abuse is regarded as wit. I am not offended. I am not the sort of great writer that goes mad. I wrote a novel—it was not published. I wrote an essay—it was rejected. I took many essays to various editors—they rejected them everywhere, saying: "You lack salt."

"What salt do you need?" I would ask derisively. "Attic salt?"

But they do not understand me.

I'm mostly doing translations from the French for booksellers. I also write advertisements for shopkeepers, such as this: "Rare! Reddish Tea from our own Plantations!" . . . A big purse was the reward for an encomium I composed on His Excellency the late Piotr Matveyevitch. At the order of a bookseller I wrote *The Art of Pleasing the Ladies*. Altogether, I have

[1]Published in the daily *Grazhdanin*, No. 6, 1873 (at the time when Dostoevsky edited that paper) and republished in "The Journal of an Author."

written six books like that in my life. I would like to collect Voltaire's *bons-mots*, but I am afraid they would seem too watery to our public. Voltaire, indeed! They want cudgels, not Voltaires! They have knocked out the last teeth from each other's mouths. . . . Well, that's my whole literary activity, if I leave out letters I send gratis to editors under my full name. I keep giving them exhortation and advice, criticising and pointing the way. To one editor I sent last week my fortieth letter in two years. I've spent eight shillings in stamps alone. . . . My temper must be bad, that's it.

I think the artist painted me not because I am a literary man, but for the sake of the two symmetrical warts on my forehead, as if to say: "There's a phenomenon." Lacking ideas, to-day they hunt for phenomena. Still, how splendidly he did my warts! They are alive. This they call realism.

Then, as regards madness—well, last year they declared me to be mad. And in what a style! "With this original talent of his . . . this is what it comes to . . . but we ought to have foreseen that long ago." This is rather cunning: from the viewpoint of real art it can even be taken as praise. For the mad may come back wiser than before. Well, there it is; we can drive people mad all right, but we haven't yet made a single one more sensible.

The most sensible man, to my mind, is he who would call himself a fool, if only once a month—a thing unheard of nowadays. Time was when a fool knew, at any rate once a year, that he was a fool, but to-day—not a sign of it! They have messed things up to such an extent that one can't distinguish between a fool and a sensible man. They did that on purpose.

There comes to my mind a Spanish witticism from the days when the French, two and a half centuries ago, founded the first lunatic asylum. "They have locked all their fools in a special building to make sure they themselves are sane." That's the point. Locking a man in a lunatic asylum doesn't prove your own sanity. "K. has gone mad, therefore we are sane." No, it does not follow.

But the deuce! . . . why am I making a fuss about my sanity—grumbling, grumbling away? Even my charwoman is sick of it Yesterday a friend called on me. "Your style," he said, "is

changing, it is becoming choppy. You chop, chop away. An interpolated sentence here, another interpolated sentence there, then in parentheses another sentence. And again you start chop, chopping."

My friend is right. There's something queer happening to me. My character, too, is changing, and my head aches. I begin to see and hear queer things. Not exactly voices, but "Bobók, bobók, bobók," as though from someone standing close.

What? What's bobók? . . . I must divert myself. . . .

* * * * *

I went out to divert myself, and happened on a funeral. A remote relation of mine—A Collegiate Councillor. He left a widow and five unmarried daughters. Counting only boots, they would cost a deal! The Councillor managed to make a living, and now there's a little pension left. They will have to keep their tails tight. They had never received me very cordially and I would not have gone to them now, but for the special occasion. I joined the other followers to the cemetery. They carried themselves proudly and avoided me. Yes, my overcoat really is shabby. I think I cannot have been to a cemetery for the last twenty-five years. Pity! for it's a cosy little place.

First I noticed the odour. About fifteen corpses arrived. There were palls of various prices; even two catafalques: in one was a General and in the other a lady. Many sorrowful faces, much feigned sorrow, and also a great deal of frank merriment. The clergy should not grumble: look at the revenue. . . . But the odour, the odour! I should not like to be one of the cemetery clergy.

Into the faces of the dead I peeped warily, for I feared my impressibility. Gentle expressions and also unpleasant ones. Generally, the smiles are bad, some very bad. . . . I don't like it. I see them in my dreams.

During the liturgy I walked out of the Church into the air. It was a greyish day, but dry. And it was cold; but, of course, it was October. I wandered about for a while among the tombs. There are different categories. The third class costs thirty roubles—genteel and inexpensive. The first and second classes are in the Church or under the porch—too expensive. Six people

were buried to-day in the third class, among them the General and the lady.

I glanced into the graves. Horrible! Water—and what water! Quite green, and . . . well, that'll do! Every now and then the gravedigger pumps out the water into a trough. The service was still on, so I went out of the gate for a stroll. A workhouse is close by, and not far away a restaurant. Quite a middling sort of little restaurant: you can have a bite there and so forth. A number of people entered, among them many of those who had followed the dead. I noticed a great deal of jollity and genuine animation. I took a snack and a drop. Afterwards with my own hands I helped to carry the coffin out of the Church to the grave. Why do dead people become so heavy in their coffins? Owing to inertia, they say, the body ceases to right itself . . . or some such tosh. It contradicts mechanics and common sense. It annoys me when people with but a general education begin to poke their noses into the solution of matters of special knowledge. With us, however, it is universal. Civilians love to talk of military matters, even of the business of a Field-Marshal, and people with an education in engineering to discuss philosophy and political economy.

I did not go to the funeral dinner. I am proud, and if people receive me only on special occasions why should I drag myself to their dinners—even mourning dinners? Still, I cannot make out why I remained in the cemetery. I sat down on a tomb and fell into a suitable reverie.

I started with the Moscow Exhibition and ended on "Surprise"—I mean, in a general way, as a theme. About "Surprise" I came to this conclusion:

To be surprised at everything is, of course, silly; not to be surprised at anything is considered much finer, and, for some reason, good form. But it is hardly so; indeed, in my opinion, not to be surprised at anything is much sillier than to be surprised. Besides, not to be surprised at anything is almost the same as not to respect anything. Nor can a fool respect.

"Above all, I long to respect. I *crave* to respect," an acquaintance of mine said to me the other day.

He craves to respect! And, my goodness, I thought, what would befall you if you dared publish such a thing nowadays?

At this point I fell into a trance. I don't like reading inscriptions on graves; they are ever the same thing. On the memorial stone near me lay a half-eaten sandwich. Stupid and out of place. I threw it on the earth, for it was not bread, you see, but a sandwich. Though, I believe, it is not wrong to crumble bread on the earth, it is a sin to do so on the floor. I must have a look in *Souvorin's Encyclopaedia.*

It must have happened that I sat there for a long while, too long, I should say. I stretched myself on a long stone shaped like a marble coffin. How was it that suddenly I began to hear voices? At first I paid no attention, regarding it with contempt. Yet a conversation undoubtedly was going on. I heard dull mutterings as from mouths covered with cushions, yet distinct and very close. I woke from the reverie, sat up, and began to listen attentively. . . .

"Your Excellency, it is simply impossible. You declared hearts. You have seven diamonds. You ought to have called diamonds."

"Well, then, do you want me to play by rule? Where's the attraction then?"

"But, Your Excellency, it's quite impossible to play without rules. It is necessary to play with a dummy, so there must be a dark deal."

"Well, you can't get a dummy here, can you?"

Biting words! Queer, and unexpected. One a weighty and serious voice, and the other as if it were softly sugared. I would not have believed it had I not heard it myself. Surely, I did not go to that dinner! And yet what does that card game mean, and who is the General? The sounds came from under the graves; there could be no doubt of that. I bent down and read the inscription on the tomb:

"Here rests the body of Major-General Pervoyedov. . . . Knight of such and such orders." H'm. "Passed away in August . . . aged fifty-seven. . . . Rest, dear ashes, until the joyful dawn!"

H'm, the deuce, it's certainly a General! On the other tomb, from which had come the tones of an ingratiating voice, there was no memorial yet, only a slab. It must be one of the freshers. By the voice it should be an Aulic Councillor.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" This was a new voice, from a fresh little grave thirty to thirty-five feet from the General's tomb. An uncultured voice, the voice of a man of the shopkeeping class, but modulated to accents both reverential and affected.

"Ho! Ho! Ho!"

"Ah, he's hiccuping again!" came the squeamish and haughty voice of an irritated society lady. "It's torture to be so near to that shopkeeper!"

"I didn't hiccup at all; nor have I had any food. It is only my nature. And why can't your ladyship drop your caprices here and be quiet!"

"How is it you are come so close, then?"

"They put me here, my wife and my dear children put me here; I didn't put myself here. The mystery of death! Nor would I lie near you for anything, not for any gold. I lie here because of the price. This we can always manage—to pay for a third-class grave."

"But you piled up money—cheating!"

"Well, I did not cheat you. Since January you haven't paid a single bill. There's an account for you now in the shop."

"How stupid! Trying to settle a bill here! It's silly. You go up. Ask my niece, my heir."

"Can't. This isn't the time to ask for money. Besides one can't go nowhere. We have both crossed the boundary, and before the Divine Judgement are equal in our trespasses."

"Trespasses!" The lady mimicked him contemptuously. "You ought not to dare speak to me at all!"

"Ho! Ho! Ho!"

"See, the shopkeeper does respect the lady, Your Excellency."

"Why shouldn't he respect her?"

"Why, because you see, Your Excellency, it's a new order here."

"What do you mean, a new order?"

"Well, one might point out we are dead, Your Excellency."

"Ah, just so! Still, order is order. . . ."

* * * * *

Well, they have put the lid on it. No denying they've settled it! If it had come to such a pass here, what can one expect

from the upper floor? What jokes! . . . However, I continued to listen, but with utter amazement.

* * * * *

"Oh! I *should* like to have a good time! Oh! . . . you see, I *must* have a good time." A new voice, from the space between the General and the irascible lady.

"Do you hear, Your Excellency, that fellow is harping again on that chord. He keeps silent for three days on end, and then suddenly: 'Oh! I *will* have a good time. I *must* have a good time!' And with what relish he says it! He! He!"

"And lightmindedness," the General added.

"He's like that at times, Your Excellency. He's asleep, quite asleep. Been here since April. Then suddenly: "I *will* have a good time."

"Well, it is dull," remarked His Excellency.

"Yes, isn't it dull, Your Excellency? Shall I tease Mme. Avdotya Ignatievna? He! He!"

"Pray don't. I can't stand that spiteful cat."

"And I can't stand either of you," came the retort from the lady. "You are both very dull, and can never talk of higher things. Yes, I'm referring to you, Your Excellency. Don't be so conceited. I know a pretty little story about you: how one morning the butler swept you out with a broom from under a married lady's bed."

"Nasty woman!" the General muttered through his teeth.

"Avdotya Ignatievna, your ladyship," the shopkeeper suddenly wailed out. "My dear lady, do, without remembering evil, tell me if I am now going through the torments, or is this something else? . . ."

"Ah, he's up to his game again. I knew it from the smell coming from him. There's always that smell when he turns about!"

"I am not turning about, my lady. And there's no special smell from me. I am still in my full body—well preserved. It's you, my lady, who's a bit off. The smell from you is simply unbearable, even for this place. It's only my politeness checked me mentioning it before."

"Ah, you wicked slanderer! Makes that terrible smell—and blames it on me!"

"Oh! Oh! Oh! If only the fortieth day would come! I shall hear their tearful voices over me, the wail of my missus and the gentle wailing of my children!" . . .

"He's found something to wail about! Why, they will only gorge themselves and leave him here alone. Ah! I wish someone else would wake up."

"Avdotya Ignatievna," called the toadying civil servant. "Wait a while, the new ones will start talking."

"Are there any young men among them?"

"Yes, there are young men, Avdotya Ignatievna. There are even raw youths."

"Ah, how welcome!"

"Haven't they begun yet?" His Excellency enquired.

"Even those buried the day before yesterday haven't yet recovered, Your Excellency. You are well aware they sometimes keep silent for a week on end. It is lucky a lot of them were brought in together to-day and yesterday and the day before. Why, for nearly seventy feet round us they're all last year's."

"That's interesting news!"

"To-day, Your Excellency, they brought down here Privy Councillor Tarasevitch. I knew that by their voices. I know his nephew: it was he who let down my coffin."

"H'm, where's he?"

"About five paces away from you, Your Excellency; to the left. Very near your heels. . . . You ought to make his acquaintance, Your Excellency."

"H'm, no . . . why should I introduce myself?"

"Oh, he'll start it, Your Excellency. He'll be flattered. You leave it to me, Your Excellency, I'll arrange . . ."

"Ah! Ah! Ah! Where am I?" a young voice, small and frightened, suddenly groaned.

"Here's a fresh one speaking, Your Excellency. A new one, thank God! How very soon! Sometimes it takes them a week."

"Oh, I believe it is a young man," Avdotya Ignatievna screamed out.

"I—er—it was—er—through a complication. And so suddenly!" the youth began again. "Only the day before, Dr.

Schultz said to me, 'You've a complication,' and in the morning I died suddenly. Oh! Oh!"

"Well, there's nothing to be done, young man," the General observed graciously and obviously glad of a newcomer. "You must be comforted. You are welcome in our vale of Jehoshaphat. We are kind people, you'll get to know and appreciate us. Major-General Vasili Vasilievitch Pervoyedov, at your service."

"Oh, no! No, no, I can't, I can't! It's Schultz who treats me. You see, I had a complication. There was something the matter with my chest and I had a cough. Then I caught a cold. Chest trouble and grippe . . . and now, so sudden and unexpected . . . above all so unexpected!"

"You say it started with the chest?" The civil servant crept into the conversation gently, as though wishing to encourage the newcomer.

"Yes, the chest and mucus, and then suddenly no mucus at all, and the chest, and no breathing . . . and you see. . . ."

"Yes, I know. But if you had trouble with your chest, you should have consulted Ek, not Schultz."

"I intended all the while to see Botkin . . . and suddenly. . . ."

"Well, Botkin is too expensive," the General observed.

"Ah, no, he's not at all expensive; I have heard he is very attentive and can tell you everything beforehand."

"His Excellency's remark referred only to the price," the civil servant corrected.

"Ah, you can't mean it. He takes only three roubles, and he examines thoroughly, and gives a prescription. . . . I made up my mind to go to him because I was told. . . . Oh! what am I to do now, gentlemen, shall I go to Ek or Botkin?"

"What? Where?" The General's corpse shook with laughter. The civil servant's falsetto chimed in.

"My dear boy, my lovely, my precious boy! How I love you!" came an ecstatic cry from Avdotya Ignatievna. "Oh, if only they had put him close to me!"

* * * * *

No, this is impossible! This is what the modern dead are like! Still, I must hear more and not draw hurried conclusions.

That snotty newcomer! I remember him in his coffin—his expression of a terrified chick. Disgusting!

* * * * *

Such a hubbub now arose that I could not keep it all in my memory. Many dead awoke at the same moment, among them the State Councillor, who started at once to talk to the General about a project for a new sub-commission in the Ministry of —— Affairs, and of the probable change of the sub-commission's personnel. It amused the General greatly. I must admit that I, too, learnt much, and I was astonished at the strange way one sometimes gathers news of the administration. Then awoke, or half awoke, an engineer, but for a long while he muttered such absolute tosh, that he was left alone till his recovery was complete. At last, signs of sepulchral animation came from the celebrated lady who was buried in the morning. Lebesiatnikov (for that hateful ingratiating Aulic Councillor lying near General Pervoyedov, turned out to be Mr. Lebesiatnikov) was now bustling about and expressed his wonder that so many had awakened so quickly. I confess I too was surprised, though some, it should be remembered, were buried the day before yesterday—for instance, the girl of sixteen, who was giggling . . . a horrible voluptuous giggle.

"Your Excellency, Privy Councillor Tarasevitch is awaking!" Lebesiatnikov hastily announced.

"Eh? What?" came the thick disdainful voice of the Privy Councillor. The tone had in it something both capricious and authoritative. I listened with curiosity, for recently I had heard something about that Tarasevitch, something piquant, though alarming in the highest degree.

"It is only me, Your Excellency, humble me."

"What's your request."

"Only to enquire about Your Excellency's health. It seems a bit crowded here. Perhaps that's because I am not used to it. . . . General Pervoyedov would like the honour of making the acquaintance of Your Excellency, and hopes . . ."

"I've never heard of him."

"Really, Your Excellency! General Vasili Vasilievitch Pervoyedov . . ."

"Are you General Pervoyedov?"

"No, Your Excellency, I am only Aulic Councillor Lebesiatnikov, at your service, but General Pervoyedov . . ."

"Nonsense! I ask you to leave me in peace."

"Leave him alone!" With dignity, General Pervoyedov stopped the indecent haste of his sepulchral client.

"He hasn't yet properly recovered, Your Excellency. Please take that into consideration. It is just lack of habit. When he recovers, he will look at it differently. . . ."

"Leave him alone," the General repeated.

* * * * *

"Vasili Vasilievitch! Eh, you there, Your Excellency!" suddenly came a quite new voice, loud and bold, from close by Avdotya Ignatievna. The voice was that of an aristocrat, commanding, in the fashionable weary utterance and impudent drawl. "I have been watching you all now for two hours. I've been lying here three days. Do you remember me, Vasili Vasilievitch? Klinevitch. We used to meet at the Volokonskies, where they allowed you to come, though I never knew why."

"Why, Count Piotr Petrovitch here! . . . you here! . . . so young! . . . How sorry I am!"

"So am I. Still, I want to get all that's possible out of everything, everywhere. Besides, I'm not a count, but a baron, only a baron. We are scurvy little barons, sprung from lackeys. I don't know how it came about, but I'm sick of it. I am a scoundrel of pseudo-high society, and am considered 'a lovely blackguard.' My father is a little General, and my mother was once received *en haut lieu*. Last year I made a deal with Sifel, the Jew, for fifty thousand roubles, counterfeit notes. Then I informed against him. But the money little Julie Charpentier de Lusignan took away with her to Bordeaux. Imagine! I was engaged—you know, Miss Schevalevsky; she was not then sixteen, still at school, had a dowry of ninety thousand. Avdotya Ignatievna, do you remember fifteen years ago, when I was a page of fourteen, how you seduced me?. . ."

"Ah, it's you, you blackguard. Though thank God even for you. For here it is so . . ."

"You were wrong to suspect your merchant neighbour of a bad smell. . . . I kept mum and laughed. The smell was from me. They buried me in a nailed-up coffin."

"Ah, naughty! Still, I am glad. You wouldn't believe, Klinevitch, how empty of life and wit it is here."

"Oh yes, yes, I know. But I'm going to introduce something original. Your Excellency!—I don't mean you, Pervoyedov—the other Excellency, Tarasevitch, the Privy Councillor! Answer me! I'm Klinevitch—do you remember? Last Lent I took you to Mdlle. Furie. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you, Klinevitch. And very glad too. . . ."

"I don't believe you a bit and the deuce take you. I would kiss you, my old rip, but thank God I can't do it. Do you know, ladies and gentlemen, what this old grandfather did? When he died two or three days ago, there was a deficiency in the accounts of his government department of four hundred thousand roubles. Imagine it! The money was meant for widows and orphans. For some reason, he managed the department alone, and for about eight years it was not inspected. Picture their long faces now, and the way they talk of him! A voluptuous idea, eh? All last year I was wondering how that old spark of seventy, gouty in his legs and arms, preserved such a power of energy for debauchery. And . . . well, now, here's the solution! Widows and orphans! The very idea of them must have set him aglow! . . . I knew all about it for a long time. Mdlle. Charpentier let it out to me. When I learned of it, I set about him, in a friendly way, of course, in Holy Week. 'Let me have twenty-five thousand or there'll be an inspection to-morrow,' I said. Think of it! He could put up only thirteen thousand! It looks as though he died at the right moment. Grand-père, Grand-père, do you hear me?"

"Cher Klinevitch, I perfectly agree with you. But you should not have . . . entered into all these details. In life there's so much suffering, torment, and so little reward. . . . I wished, at last, to be at peace, and, as far as I can, I hope to get all that's possible even out of this. . . ."

"I bet he's already scented out Mdlle. Katiche Berestov!"

"Who? . . . Which Katiche? . . ." The voice of the old man trembled voluptuously.

"Oh! Which Katiche? Here to the left, five paces from me, ten from you. It's the fifth day she's been here, and if you only knew, Grand-père, what a little slut she is. . . . Of a good family too, educated. But a monster, a monster to the last degree! I've never pointed her out to anyone. Only I knew. . . . Katiche! Answer!"

"He! He! He!" came the voice of a maiden. It was shrill and cracked but it had the stab of a needle. "He! He! He!"

"I . . . I've been dreaming a long while," muttered grandfather, in a choked voice, "a dream of a little blonde . . . about fifteen . . . and, in just such a place as this. . . ."

"Ah, you monster!" exclaimed Avdotya Ignatievna.

"Basta!" Klinevitch cut in abruptly, "I see we have splendid stuff here. We'll presently settle down for a great treat. The chief thing is to spend the rest of the time merrily. But what time? Eh, you, clerk, thingummy Lebesiatnikov. That's what they call you, isn't it?"

"Lebesiatnikov, Aulic Councillor, Semyon Evseyeitch, at your service—and very—very—very glad."

"I spit on your gladness. But you seem to know everything here. Tell me, firstly—I've been wondering since yesterday—how it is that we can talk now? Surely we are dead, and yet we talk! We seem to be moving, and yet we cannot be either talking or moving? What trick is it?"

"Baron, if it would please you to know that, here's Platon Nicolayevitch, he can explain it better than I."

"Who's Platon Nicolayevitch? Don't mumble. Let's have it straight out."

"Platon Nicolayevitch is our home-bred local philosopher, naturalist and magister. He's thrown off several philosophical booklets. But it's three months since he fell completely asleep, so it's impossible to shake him any longer. About once a week he mutters a few words, but they're always wide of the mark."

"Oh! Get to the point, to the point!. . ."

"He explains it all most simply. Upstairs, when we were alive, death was considered unmistakenly as death. Here the body comes to life again, as it were; the remains of life concentrate though only in the consciousness. That is—I can't make it quite clear—life seems to continue by inertia. All is

concentrated, in his opinion, somewhere in the consciousness and goes on for another two or three months. . . . Sometimes even for six. . . . Here, for instance, is one fellow who is almost quite decomposed, but once in six weeks he still murmurs one word. No meaning in it, of course; something like bobók: 'Bobók, bobók!' he says. But even in him an imperceptible spark of life still smoulders."

"Nonsense! And how is it, tell me, that I, with no sense of smell, yet know there is a stench?"

"This. . . . He! He! He! . . . Oh! about that our philosopher is in a fog. It was about the sense of smell that he remarked that there was a stench, a moral stench, here. He! He! He! The stench of the soul, as it were. To remind us. So that in these two or three months we come to know ourselves for what we are. The last mercy, you see. . . . But it seems to me, Baron, all this is just mystical frenzy—perfectly excusable, of course, in his position. . . ."

"Enough! And what's to follow, I'm sure, is all rubbish. The chief thing is: two or three months of life. After that—bobók. What I propose is that we all spend these two months as pleasantly as possible—in our own way. See! I propose we don't be ashamed of anything!"

"Ah, let us, let us be ashamed of nothing!" many voices were heard, among them, strangely enough, voices of those who awoke at that moment. Very readily the engineer, now completely aroused, in a deep bass thundered his consent. Little Mdlle. Katiche giggled rapturously.

"Ah, how I long to be ashamed of nothing!" Avdotya Ignatievna exclaimed enthusiastically.

"Look here, if Avdotya Ignatievna is ready to be ashamed of nothing, then. . . ."

"No, no, no, Klinevitch, up above I used to feel ashamed, but here I want awfully, awfully not to be ashamed of anything!"

"I understand, Klinevitch," came the engineer's voice, "that you propose to arrange our present life on new and rational principles."

"Why, I spit on that! Let's wait a while for Kudeyarov; they brought him here yesterday. When he comes to, he will explain it all to you. He's a titanic chap. To-morrow, I believe, they

are bringing another fellow, a naturalist, probably an officer, and, if I am not mistaken, in a couple of days they'll bring a leader writer, and his editor too. Why—the deuce with them all—we'll have a perfect circle of our own, and everything will settle itself. Meanwhile, what I want is that there should be no lying. That's all. But it's the chief thing. To live on earth and not tell lies is impossible, for life and lying are synonymous. But here, for the fun of the thing, let us tell no lies! The Devil take it! After all, the grave does mean something. We shall all tell our stories aloud and without shame. First of all I'll tell about myself. As you know, I love the flesh. Upstairs, of course, all that was tied up with rotten twine. Away with twine! Let us live these two months in shameless truth! Bare ourselves, strip ourselves naked."

"Let us bare ourselves, let's strip ourselves naked," came a chorus of voices.

"I want awfully, awfully, to strip myself naked," screamed Avdotya Ignatievna.

"Ha! Ha! I see it's going to be jolly here. I don't want Dr. Ek!"

"No, I should so like to have a good time. Oh, yes, I *will* have a good time."

"He! He! He!" giggled Katiche.

"Remember, first of all, that nobody can forbid us here; and although I see Pervoyedov is cross, still, his hand can't reach me. Grand-père, do you agree?"

"Perfectly, perfectly. With the greatest pleasure—but on condition that Katiche is the first to begin her bi-o-graphy."

"I protest, I protest with all my power," General Pervoyedov announced firmly.

"Your Excellency!" The scoundrel Lebesiatnikov began lisping persuasively in a lowered voice. "Your Excellency, surely it is more profitable to us, if we agree. You see, there's that girl here. . . . And, finally, all these various little things. . . ."

"Well, we'll say there's the girl, but . . ."

"It is more profitable to us, Your Excellency. I swear it's more profitable! Why, even as a little example, as a little effort. . . ."

"Even in the grave one can't be left in peace."

"First of all, General, you play cards in the grave, and secondly, you can go to the Devil," Klinevitch drawled out.

"Sir, please do not forget yourself."

"What? You can't reach me, and I can rag you from here like Mdlle. Julie's spaniel. Anyway, what's a General here? He was a General above, but he's a civvy here."

"No, I am not a civvy . . . here, too, I am. . . ."

"Here you will rot in your grave, and there'll be nothing left but six brass buttons."

"Bravo, Klinevitch! Ha! Ha! Ha!" voices roared.

"I served my Sovereign. . . . I wear a sword. . . . ."

"Well, you can use your sword to chop mice. Besides, you've never drawn it."

"What does that matter? I was a cog in the machine."

"There are all sorts of cogs."

"Bravo, Klinevitch, bravo! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

"I don't understand what a sword means," said the engineer.

"We shall run away from the Prussians like mice. They'll grind us into powder!" cried out a remote unfamiliar voice.

"A sword, Sir, means honour," the General attempted to shout, but I scarcely heard him. For there arose a long and furious roar, a perfect riot and hubbub, amid which could be distinguished only Avdotya Ignatievna's impatient hysterical screams: "But let's start at once, let's start! When are we going to begin to be ashamed of nothing?"

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Verily, my soul *is* going through the torments," the tradesman's voice began, and . . .

* * * * *

Suddenly I sneezed. It happened unexpectedly, without warning. The effect was astonishing. There was nothing but the silence of the cemetery. Everything had vanished like a dream. A truly sepulchral stillness. I don't think they could have been ashamed of me. Had they not decided to be ashamed of nothing? I waited about five minutes. Not a word, not a sound. It cannot be supposed they were frightened of my reporting them to the police. What can the police do there? Well, I can but conclude that they must have some secret which they hide from all mortals.

"Well," I thought, "I'll pay you another visit, my dears," and with this word I left the cemetery.

* * * * *

No, I can't admit it; no, in truth I can't! Bobók does not annoy me (there's where bobók comes in).

Debauchery in such a place, debauchery of the last hopes, debauchery of flabby and rotting corpses—even in the last moments of consciousness! The moments are given to them, given as a gift, and . . . And the chief thing, even there! . . . No, I can't admit it. . . .

I shall pay a visit to the other classes in the cemetery. I'll listen everywhere. Yes, that's imperative. To learn and know, one must listen everywhere, not in one place only. Perhaps I'll find something comforting yet. And here, surely, I will come again. They have promised to tell their stories and various little anecdotes. Pah! Still, I must come, I'll come without fail. It is a matter of conscience.

I'll take it to the *Grazhdanin*. Yes, they have printed the portrait of a certain editor. Maybe, they'll publish this.

L. TOLSTOY

The Death of Ivan Ilych

I

During an interval in the Melvinski trial in the large building of the Law Courts, the members and public prosecutor met in Ivan Egorovich Shebek's private room, where the conversation turned on the celebrated Krasovski case. Fedor Vasilievich warmly maintained that it was not subject to their jurisdiction, Ivan Egorovich maintained the contrary, while Peter Ivanovich, not having entered into the discussion at the start, took no part in it but looked through the *Gazette* which had just been handed in.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Ivan Ilych has died!"

"You don't say so!"

"Here, read it yourself," replied Peter Ivanovich, handing Fedor Vasilievich the paper still damp from the press. Surrounded by a black border were the words: "Praskovya Fedorovna Golovina, with profound sorrow, informs relatives and friends of the demise of her beloved husband Ivan Ilych Golovin, Member of the Court of Justice which occurred on February the 4th of this year 1882. The funeral will take place on Friday at one o'clock in the afternoon."

Ivan Ilych had been a colleague of the gentlemen present and was liked by them all. He had been ill for some weeks with an illness said to be incurable. His post had been kept open for him, but there had been conjectures that in case of his death Alexeev might receive his appointment, and that either Vinnikov or Shtabel would succeed Alexeev. So on receiving the news of Ivan Ilych's death the first thought of each of the gentlemen in that private room was of the changes and promotions it might occasion among themselves or their acquaintances.

"I shall be sure to get Shtabel's place or Vinnikov's," thought Fedor Vasilievich. "I was promised that long ago, and the promotion means an extra eight hundred roubles a year for me besides the allowance."

"Now I must apply for my brother-in-law's transfer from Kaluga," thought Peter Ivanovich. "My wife will be very glad, and then she won't be able to say that I never do anything for her relations."

"I thought he would never leave his bed again," said Peter Ivanovich aloud. "It's very sad."

"But what really was the matter with him?"

"The doctors couldn't say—at least they could, but each of them said something different. When last I saw him I thought he was getting better."

"And I haven't been to see him since the holidays. I always meant to go."

"Had he any property?"

"I think his wife had a little—but something quite trifling."

"We shall have to go to see her, but they live so terribly far away."

"Far away from you, you mean. Everything's far away from your place."

"You see, he never can forgive my living on the other side of the river," said Peter Ivanovich, smiling at Stebek. Then still talking of the distances between different parts of the city they returned to the Court.

Besides considerations as to the possible transfers and promotions likely to result from Ivan Ilych's death, the mere fact of the death of a near acquaintance aroused, as usual, in all who heard of it the complacent feeling that, "it is he who is dead and not I."

Each one thought or felt, "Well, he's dead but I'm alive!" But the more intimate of Ivan Ilych's acquaintances, his so-called friends, could not help thinking also that they would now have to fulfil the very tiresome demands of propriety by attending the funeral service and paying a visit of condolence to the widow.

Fedor Vasilievich and Peter Ivanovich had been his nearest acquaintances. Peter Ivanovich had studied law with Ivan

Ilych and had considered himself to be under obligations to him.

Having told his wife at dinner-time of Ivan Ilych's death, and of his conjecture that it might be possible to get her brother transferred to their circuit, Peter Ivanovich sacrificed his usual nap, put on his evening clothes, and drove to Ivan Ilych's house.

At the entrance stood a carriage and two cabs. Leaning against the wall in the hall downstairs near the cloak-stand was a coffin-lid covered with cloth of gold, ornamented with gold cord and tassels, that had been polished up with metal powder. Two ladies in black were taking off their fur cloaks. Peter Ivanovich recognised one of them as Ivan Ilych's sister, but the other was a stranger to him. His colleague, Schwartz, was just coming downstairs, but on seeing Peter Ivanovich enter he stopped and winked at him, as if to say: "Ivan Ilych has made a mess of things—not like you and me."

Schwartz's face with his Piccadilly whiskers, and his slim figure in evening dress, had as usual an air of elegant solemnity which contrasted with the playfulness of his character and had a special piquancy here, or so it seemed to Peter Ivanovich.

Peter Ivanovich allowed the ladies to precede him and slowly followed them upstairs. Schwartz did not come down but remained where he was, and Peter Ivanovich understood that he wanted to arrange where they should play bridge that evening. The ladies went upstairs to the widow's room, and Schwartz with seriously compressed lips but a playful look in his eyes, indicated by a twist of his eyebrows the room to the right where the body lay.

Peter Ivanovich, like everyone else on such occasions, entered feeling uncertain what he would have to do. All he knew was that at such times it is always safe to cross oneself. But he was not quite sure whether one should make obeisances while doing so. He therefore adopted a middle course. On entering the room he began crossing himself and made a slight movement resembling a bow. At the same time, as far as the motion of his head and arm allowed, he surveyed the room. Two young men—apparently nephews, one of whom was a high-school pupil—were leaving the room, crossing themselves as they did so. An old woman was standing motionless, and a

lady with strangely arched eyebrows was saying something to her in a whisper. A vigorous, resolute Church Reader, in a frock-coat, was reading something in a loud voice with an expression that precluded any contradiction. The butler's assistant, Gerasim, stepping lightly in front of Peter Ivanovich, was strewing something on the floor. Noticing this, Peter Ivanovich was immediately aware of a faint odour of a decomposing body.

The last time he had called on Ivan Ilych, Peter Ivanovich had seen Gerasim in the study. Ivan Ilych had been particularly fond of him and he was performing the duty of a sick nurse.

Peter Ivanovich continued to make the sign of the cross slightly inclining his head in an intermediate direction between the coffin, the Reader, and the icons on the table in a corner of the room. Afterwards, when it seemed to him that this movement of his arm in crossing himself had gone on too long, he stopped and began to look at the corpse.

The dead man lay, as dead men always lie, in a specially heavy way, his rigid limbs sunk in the soft cushions of the coffin, with the head forever bowed on the pillow. His yellow waxen brow with bald patches over his sunken temples was thrust up in the way peculiar to the dead, the protruding nose seeming to press on the upper lip. He was much changed and had grown even thinner since Peter Ivanovich had last seen him, but, as is always the case with the dead, his face was handsomer and above all more dignified than when he was alive. The expression on the face said that what was necessary had been accomplished, and accomplished rightly. Besides this there was in that expression a reproach and a warning to the living. This warning seemed to Peter Ivanovich out of place, or at least not applicable to him. He felt a certain discomfort and so he hurriedly crossed himself once more and turned and went out of the door—too hurriedly and too regardless of propriety, as he himself was aware.

Schwartz was waiting for him in the adjoining room with legs spread wide apart and both hands toying with his top-hat behind his back. The mere sight of that playful, well-groomed, and elegant figure refreshed Peter Ivanovich. He felt that Schwartz was above all these happenings and would not

surrender to any depressing influences. His very look said that this incident of a church service for Ivan Ilych could not be a sufficient reason for infringing the order of the session—in other words, that it would certainly not prevent his unwrapping a new pack of cards and shuffling them that evening while a footman placed four fresh candles on the table; in fact, that there was no reason for supposing that this incident would hinder their spending the evening agreeably. Indeed he said this in a whisper as Peter Ivanovich passed him, proposing that they should meet for a game at Fedor Vasilievich's. But apparently Peter Ivanovich was not destined to play bridge that evening. Praskovya Fedorovna (a short, fat woman who despite all efforts to the contrary had continued to broaden steadily from her shoulders downwards and who had the same extraordinarily arched eyebrows as the lady who had been standing by the coffin), dressed all in black, her head covered with lace, came out of her own room with some other ladies, conducted them to the room where the dead body lay, and said: "The service will begin immediately. Please go in."

Schwartz, making an indefinite bow, stood still, evidently neither accepting nor declining this invitation. Praskovya Fedorovna recognising Peter Ivanovich, sighed, went close up to him, took his hand, and said: "I know you were a true friend to Ivan Ilych . . ." and looked at him awaiting some suitable response. And Peter Ivanovich knew that, just as it had been the right thing to cross himself in that room, so what he had to do here was to press her hand, sigh, and say, "Believe me. . . ." So he did all this and as he did it felt that the desired result had been achieved: that both he and she were touched.

"Come with me. I want to speak to you before it begins," said the widow. "Give me your arm."

Peter Ivanovich gave her his arm and they went to the inner rooms, passing Schwartz who winked at Peter Ivanovich compassionately.

"That does for our bridge! Don't object if we find another player. Perhaps you can cut in when you do escape," said his playful look.

Peter Ivanovich sighed still more deeply and despondently, and Praskovya Fedorovna pressed his arm gratefully. When

they reached the drawing-room, upholstered in pink cretonne and lighted by a dim lamp, they sat down at the table—she on a sofa and Peter Ivanovich on a low pouf, the springs of which yielded spasmodically under his weight. Praskovya Fedorovna had been on the point of warning him to take another seat, but felt that such a warning was out of keeping with her present condition and so changed her mind. As he sat down on the pouf, Peter Ivanovich recalled how Ivan Ilych had arranged this room and had consulted him regarding this pink cretonne with green leaves. The whole room was full of furniture and knick-knacks, and on her way to the sofa the lace of the widow's black shawl caught on the carved edge of the table. Peter Ivanovich rose to detach it, and the springs of the pouf, relieved of his weight, rose also and gave him a push. The widow began detaching her shawl herself, and Peter Ivanovich again sat down, suppressing the rebellious springs of the pouf under him. But the widow had not quite freed herself and Peter Ivanovich got up again, and again the pouf rebelled and even creaked. When this was all over she took out a clean cambric handkerchief and began to weep. The episode with the shawl and the struggle with the pouf had cooled Peter Ivanovich's emotions and he sat there with a sullen look on his face. This awkward situation was interrupted by Sokolov, Ivan Ilych's butler, who came to report that the plot in the cemetery that Praskovya Fedorovna had chosen would cost two hundred roubles. She stopped weeping and, looking at Peter Ivanovich with the air of a victim, remarked in French that it was very hard for her. Peter Ivanovich made a silent gesture signifying his full conviction that it must indeed be so.

"Please smoke," she said in a magnanimous yet crushed voice, and turned to discuss with Sokolov the price of the plot for the grave.

Peter Ivanovich, while lighting his cigarette, heard her inquiring very circumstantially into the prices of different plots in the cemetery and finally decide which she would take. When that was done she gave instructions about engaging the choir. Sokolov then left the room.

"I look after everything myself," she told Peter Ivanovich, shifting the albums that lay on the table; and noticing that the

table was endangered by his cigarette-ash, she immediately passed him an ash-tray, saying as she did so: "I consider it an affectation to say that my grief prevents my attending to practical affairs. On the contrary, if anything can—I won't say console me, but—distract me, it is seeing to everything concerning him." She again took out her handkerchief as if preparing to cry, but suddenly, as if mastering her feelings, she shook herself and began to speak calmly. "But there is something I want to talk to you about."

Peter Ivanovich bowed, keeping control of the springs of the pouf, which immediately began quivering under him.

"He suffered terribly the last few days."

"Did he?" said Peter Ivanovich.

"Oh, terribly! He screamed unceasingly, not for minutes but for hours. For the last three days he screamed incessantly. It was unendurable. I cannot understand how I bore it; you could hear him three rooms off. Oh, what I have suffered!"

"Is it possible that he was conscious all that time?" asked Peter Ivanovich.

"Yes," she whispered. "To the last moment. He took leave of us a quarter of an hour before he died, and asked us to take Volodya away."

The thought of the sufferings of this man he had known so intimately, first as a merry little boy, then as a school-mate, and later as a grown-up colleague, suddenly struck Peter Ivanovich with horror, despite an unpleasant consciousness of his own and this woman's dissimulation. He again saw that brow, and that nose pressing down on the lip, and felt afraid for himself.

"Three days of frightful suffering and then death! Why, that might suddenly, at any time, happen to me," he thought, and for a moment felt terrified. But—he did not himself know how—the customary reflection at once occurred to him that this had happened to Ivan Ilych and not to him, and that it should not and could not happen to him, and that to think that it could would be yielding to depression which he ought not to do, as Schwartz's expression plainly showed. After which reflection Peter Ivanovich felt reassured, and began to ask with interest about the details of Ivan Ilych's death, as though

death was an accident natural to Ivan Ilych but certainly not to himself.

After many details of the really dreadful physical sufferings Ivan Ilych had endured (which details he learnt only from the effect those sufferings had produced on Praskovya Fedorovna's nerves) the widow apparently found it necessary to get to business.

"Oh, Peter Ivanovich, how hard it is! How terribly, terribly hard!" and she again began to weep.

Peter Ivanovich sighed and waited for her to finish blowing her nose. When she had done so he said, "Believe me . . ." and she again began talking and brought out what was evidently her chief concern with him—namely, to question him as to how she could obtain a grant of money from the government on the occasion of her husband's death. She made it appear that she was asking Peter Ivanovich's advice about her pension, but he soon saw that she already knew about that to the minutest detail, more even than he did himself. She knew how much could be got out of the government in consequence of her husband's death, but wanted to find out whether she could not possibly extract something more. Peter Ivanovich tried to think of some means of doing so, but after reflecting for a while and, out of propriety, condemning the government for its niggardliness, he said he thought that nothing more could be got. Then she sighed and evidently began to devise means of getting rid of her visitor. Noticing this, he put out his cigarette, rose, pressed her hand, and went out into the ante-room.

In the dining-room where the clock stood that Ivan Ilych had liked so much, and had bought at an antique shop, Peter Ivanovich met a priest and a few acquaintances who had come to attend the service, and he recognised Ivan Ilych's daughter, a handsome young woman. She was in black and her slim figure appeared slimmer than ever. She had a gloomy, determined, almost angry expression, and bowed to Peter Ivanovich as though he were in some way to blame. Behind her, with the same offended look, stood a wealthy young man, an examining magistrate, whom Peter Ivanovich also knew and who was her fiancé, as he had heard. He bowed mournfully to them and was about to pass into the death-chamber, when from under the

stairs appeared the figure of Ivan Ilych's schoolboy son, who was extremely like his father. He seemed a little Ivan Ilych, such as Peter Ivanovich remembered when they studied law together. His tear-stained eyes had in them the look that is seen in the eyes of boys of thirteen or fourteen who are not pure-minded. When he saw Peter Ivanovich he scowled morosely and shamefacedly. Peter Ivanovich nodded to him and entered the death-chamber. The service began: candles, groans, incense, tears, and sobs. Peter Ivanovich stood looking gloomily down at his feet. He did not look once at the dead man, did not yield to any depressing influence, and was one of the first to leave the room. There was no-one in the ante-room, but Gerasim darted out of the dead man's room, rummaged with his strong hands among the fur coats to find Peter Ivanovich's and helped him on with it.

"Well, friend Gerasim," said Peter Ivanovich, so as to say something. "It's a sad affair, isn't it?"

"It's God's will. We shall all come to it some day," said Gerasim, displaying his teeth—the even, white teeth of a healthy peasant—and, like a man in the thick of urgent work, he briskly opened the front door, called the coachman, helped Peter Ivanovich into the sledge, and sprang back to the porch as if in readiness for what he had to do next.

Peter Ivanovich found the fresh air particularly pleasant after the smell of incense, the dead body, and carbolic acid.

"Where to, sir?" asked the coachman.

"It's not too late even now. . . . I'll call round on Fedor Vasilievich."

II

Ivan Ilych's life had been most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible.

He had been a member of the Court of Justice, and died at the age of forty-five. His father had been an official who after serving in various ministries and departments in Petersburg, had made the sort of career which brings men to positions from which by reason of their long service they cannot be dismissed, though they are obviously unfit to hold any responsible position, and for whom therefore posts are specially

created, which though fictitious, carry salaries of from six to ten thousand roubles that are not fictitious, and in receipt of which they live on to a great age.

Such was the Privy Councillor and superfluous member of various superfluous institutions, Ilya Epimovich Golovin.

He had three sons, of whom Ivan Ilych was the second. The eldest son was following in his father's footsteps only in another department, and was already approaching that stage in the service at which a similar sinecure would be reached. The third son was a failure. He had ruined his prospects in a number of positions and was now serving in the railway department. His father and brothers, and still more their wives, not merely disliked meeting him, but avoided remembering his existence unless compelled to do so. His sister had married Baron Greff, a Petersburg official of her father's type. Ivan Ilych was *le phénix de la famille* as people said. He was neither as cold and formal as his elder brother nor as wild as the younger, but was a happy mean between them—an intelligent, polished, lively and agreeable man. He had studied with his younger brother at the School of Law, but the latter had failed to complete the course and was expelled when he was in the fifth class. Ivan Ilych finished the course well. Even when he was at the School of Law he was just what he remained for the rest of his life: a capable, cheerful, good-natured, and sociable man, though strict in the fulfilment of what he considered to be his duty: and he considered his duty to be what was so considered by those in authority. Neither as a boy nor as a man was he a toady, but from early youth was by nature attracted to people of high station as a fly is drawn to the light, assimilating their ways and views of life and establishing friendly relations with them. All the enthusiasms of childhood and youth passed without leaving much trace on him; he succumbed to sensuality, to vanity, and latterly among the highest classes to liberalism, but always within limits which his instinct unfailingly indicated to him as correct.

At school he had done things which had formerly seemed to him very horrid and made him feel disgusted with himself when he did them; but when later on he saw that such actions were done by people of good position and that they did not regard

them as wrong, he was able not exactly to regard them as right, but to forget about them entirely or not be at all troubled at remembering them.

Having graduated from the School of Law and qualified for the tenth rank of the civil service, and having received money from his father for his equipment, Ivan Ilych ordered himself clothes at Scharmer's, the fashionable tailor, hung a medallion inscribed *respice finem* on his watch-chain, took leave of his professor and the prince who was patron of the school, had a farewell dinner with his comrades at Donon's first-class restaurant, and with his new and fashionable portmanteau, linen, clothes, shaving and other toilet appliances, and a travelling rug, all purchased at the best shops, he set off for one of the provinces where, through his father's influence, he had been attached to the Governor as an official for special service.

In the province Ivan Ilych soon arranged as easy and agreeable a position for himself as he had had at the School of Law. He performed his official tasks, made his career, and at the same time amused himself pleasantly and decorously. Occasionally he paid official visits to country districts, where he behaved with dignity both to his superiors and inferiors, and performed the duties entrusted to him, which related chiefly to the sectarians, with an exactness and incorruptible honesty of which he could not but feel proud.

In official matters, despite his youth and taste for frivolous gaiety, he was exceedingly reserved, punctilious, and even severe; but in society he was often amusing and witty, and always good-natured, correct in his manner, and *bon enfant*, as the Governor and his wife—with whom he was like one of the family—used to say of him.

In the province he had an affair with a lady who made advances to the elegant young lawyer, and there was also a milliner; and there were carousals with aides-de-camp who visited the district, and after-supper visits to a certain outlying street of doubtful reputation; and there was too some obsequiousness to his chief and even to his chief's wife, but all this was done with such a tone of good breeding that no hard names could be applied to it. It all came under the heading

of the French saying: "*Il faut que jeunesse se passe.*"[1] It was all done with clean hands, in clean linen, with French phrases, and above all among people of the best society and consequently with the approval of people of rank.

So Ivan Ilych served for five years and then came a change in his official life. The new and reformed judicial institutions were introduced, and new men were needed. Ivan Ilych became such a new man. He was offered the post of examining magistrate, and he accepted it though the post was in another province and obliged him to give up the connections he had formed and to make new ones. His friends met to give him a send-off; they had a group-photograph taken and presented him with a silver cigarette-case, and he set off to his new post.

As examining magistrate Ivan Ilych was just as *comme il faut* and decorous a man, inspiring general respect and capable of separating his official duties from his private life, as he had been when acting as an official on special service. His duties now as examining magistrate were far more interesting and attractive than before. In his former position it had been pleasant to wear an undress uniform made by Scharmer, and to pass through the crowd of petitioners and officials who were timorously awaiting an audience with the Governor, and who envied him as with free and easy gait he went straight into his chief's private room to have a cup of tea and a cigarette with him. But not many people had then been directly dependent on him—only police officials and the sectarians when he went on special missions—and he liked to treat them politely, almost as comrades, as if he were letting them feel that he who had the power to crush them was treating them in this simple, friendly way. There were then but few such people. But now, as an examining magistrate, Ivan Ilych felt that everyone without exception, even the most important and self-satisfied, was in his power, and that he need only write a few words on a sheet of paper with a certain heading, and this or that important, self-satisfied person would be brought before him in the role of an accused person or a witness, and if he did not choose to allow him to sit down, would have to stand before him and answer his questions. Ivan Ilych never abused his power; he

[1] Youth must have its fling.

tried on the contrary to soften its expression, but the consciousness of it and of the possibility of softening its effect, supplied the chief interest and attraction of his office. In his work itself, especially in his examinations, he very soon acquired a method of eliminating all considerations irrelevant to the legal aspect of the case, and reducing even the most complicated case to a form in which it would be presented on paper only in its externals, completely excluding his personal opinion of the matter, while above all observing every prescribed formality. The work was new and Ivan Ilych was one of the first men to apply the new Code of 1864.[1]

On taking up the post of examining magistrate in a new town, he made new acquaintances and connections, placed himself on a new footing, and assumed a somewhat different tone. He took up an attitude of rather dignified aloofness towards the provincial authorities, but picked out the best circle of legal gentlemen and wealthy gentry living in the town and assumed a tone of slight dissatisfaction with the government, of moderate liberalism, and of enlightened citizenship. At the same time, without at all altering the elegance of his toilet, he ceased shaving his chin and allowed his beard to grow as it pleased.

Ivan Ilych settled down very pleasantly in this new town. The society there, which inclined towards opposition to the Governor, was friendly, his salary was larger, and he began to play *vint* (a form of bridge), which he found added not a little to the pleasure of life, for he had a capacity for cards, played good-humouredly, and calculated rapidly and astutely, so that he usually won.

After living there for two years he met his future wife, Praskovya Fedorovna Mikhel, who was the most attractive, clever, and brilliant girl of the set in which he moved, and among other amusements and relaxations from his labours as examining magistrate, Ivan Ilych established light and playful relations with her.

While he had been an official on special service he had been accustomed to dance, but now as an examining magistrate it was exceptional for him to do so. If he danced now, he did it

[1] The emancipation of the serfs in 1861 was followed by a thorough all-round reform of judicial proceedings. A.M.

as if to show that though he served under the reformed order of things, and had reached the fifth official rank, yet when it came to dancing he could do it better than most people. So at the end of an evening he sometimes danced with Praskovya Fedorovna, and it was chiefly during these dances that he captivated her. She fell in love with him. Ivan Ilych had at first no definite intention of marrying, but when the girl fell in love with him he said to himself: "Really, why shouldn't I marry?"

Praskovya Fedorovna came of a good family, was not bad-looking, and had some little property. Ivan Ilych might have aspired to a more brilliant match, but even this was good. He had his salary, and she, he hoped, would have an equal income. She was well connected, and was a sweet, pretty, and thoroughly correct young woman. To say that Ivan Ilych married because he fell in love with Praskovya Fedorovna and found that she sympathised with his views of life would be as incorrect as to say that he married because his social circle approved of the match. He was swayed by both these considerations: the marriage gave him personal satisfaction, and at the same time it was considered the right thing by the most highly placed of his associates.

So Ivan Ilych got married.

The preparations for marriage and the beginning of married life, with its conjugal caresses, the new furniture, new crockery, and new linen, were very pleasant until his wife became pregnant—so that Ivan Ilych had begun to think that marriage would not impair the easy, agreeable, gay and always decorous character of his life, approved of by society and regarded by himself as natural, but would even improve it. But from the first months of his wife's pregnancy, something new, unpleasant, depressing, and unseemly, and from which there was no way of escape, unexpectedly showed itself.

His wife, without any reason—*de gaieté de cœur* as Ivan Ilych expressed it to himself—began to disturb the pleasure and propriety of their life. She began to be jealous without any cause, expected him to devote his whole attention to her, found fault with everything, and made coarse and ill-mannered scenes.

At first Ivan Ilych hoped to escape from the unpleasantness of this state of affairs by the same easy and decorous relation

to life that had served him heretofore; he tried it ignore his wife's disagreeable moods, continued to live in his usual easy and pleasant way, invited friends to his house for a game of cards, and also tried going out to his club or spending his evenings with friends. But one day his wife began upbraiding him so vigorously, using such coarse words, and continued to abuse him every time he did not fulfil her demands, so resolutely and with such evident determination not to give way till he submitted—that is, till he stayed at home and was bored just as she was—that he became alarmed. He now realised that matrimony—at any rate with Praskovya Fedorovna—was not always conducive to the pleasures and amenities of life but on the contrary often infringed both comfort and propriety, and that he must therefore entrench himself against such infringement. And Ivan Ilych began to seek for means of doing so. His official duties were the one thing that imposed upon Praskovya Fedorovna, and by means of his official work and the duties attached to it he began struggling with his wife to secure his own independence.

With the birth of their child, the attempts to feed it and the various failures in doing so, and with the real and imaginary illnesses of mother and child, in which Ivan Ilych's sympathy was demanded but about which he understood nothing, the need of securing for himself an existence outside his family life became still more imperative.

As his wife grew more irritable and exacting and Ivan Ilych transferred the centre of gravity of his life more and more to his official work, so did he grow to like his work better and became more ambitious than before.

Very soon, within a year of his wedding, Ivan Ilych had realised that marriage, though it may add some comforts to life, is in fact a very intricate and difficult affair towards which in order to perform one's duty, that is, to lead a decorous life approved of by society, one must adopt a definite attitude just as towards one's official duties.

And Ivan Ilych evolved such an attitude towards married life. He only required of it those conveniences—dinner at home, housewife, and bed—which it could give him, and above all that propriety of external forms required by public opinion. For the

rest he looked for light-hearted pleasure and propriety, and was very thankful when he found them, but if he met with antagonism and querulousness he at once retired into his separate fenced-off world of official duties, where he found satisfaction.

Ivan Ilych was esteemed a good official, and after three years was made Assistant Public Prosecutor. His new duties, their importance, the possibility of indicting and imprisoning anyone he chose, the publicity his speeches received, and the success he had in all these things, made his work still more attractive.

More children came. His wife became more and more querulous and ill-tempered, but the attitude Ivan Ilych had adopted towards his home life rendered him almost impervious to her grumbling.

After seven years' service in that town he was transferred to another province as Public Prosecutor. They moved, but were short of money and his wife did not like the place they moved to. Though the salary was higher the cost of living was greater, besides which two of their children died and family life became still more unpleasant for him.

Praskovya Fedorovna blamed her husband for every inconvenience they encountered in their new home. Most of the conversations between husband and wife, especially as to the children's education, led to topics which recalled former disputes, and those disputes were apt to flare up again at any moment. There remained only those rare periods of amorousness which still came to them at times but did not last long. These were islets at which they anchored for a while and then again set out upon that ocean of veiled hostility which showed itself in their aloofness from one another. This aloofness might have grieved Ivan Ilych had he considered that it ought not to exist, but he now regarded the position as normal, and even made it the goal at which he aimed in family life. His aim was to free himself more and more from those unpleasantnesses and to give them a semblance of harmlessness and propriety. He attained this by spending less and less time with his family, and when obliged to be at home he tried to safeguard his position by the presence of outsiders. The chief thing, however, was that he had his official duties. The whole interest of his life now centred in the official world and that interest absorbed

him. The consciousness of his power, being able to ruin anybody he wished to ruin, the importance, even the external dignity of his entry into court, or meetings with his subordinates, his success with superiors and inferiors, and above all his masterly handling of cases, of which he was conscious—all this gave him pleasure and filled his life, together with chats with his colleagues, dinners, and bridge. So that on the whole Ivan Ilych's life continued to flow as he considered it should do—pleasantly and properly.

So things continued for another seven years. His eldest daughter was already sixteen, another child had died, and only one son was left, a schoolboy and a subject of dissension. Ivan Ilych wanted to put him in the School of Law, but to spite him Praskovya Fedorovna entered him at the High School. The daughter had been educated at home and had turned out well; the boy did not learn badly either.

III

So Ivan Ilych lived for seventeen years after his marriage. He was already a Public Prosecutor of long standing, and had declined several proposed transfers while awaiting a more desirable post, when an unanticipated and unpleasant occurrence quite upset the peaceful course of his life. He was expecting to be offered the post of presiding judge in a University town, but Happe somehow came to the front and obtained the appointment instead. Ivan Ilych became irritable, reproached Happe, and quarrelled both with him and with his immediate superiors—who became colder to him and again passed him over when other appointments were made.

This was in 1880, the hardest year of Ivan Ilych's life. It was then that it became evident on the one hand that his salary was insufficient for them to live on, and on the other that he had been forgotten, and not only this, but that what was for him the greatest and most cruel injustice appeared to others a quite ordinary occurrence. Even his father did not consider it his duty to help him. Ivan Ilych felt himself abandoned by everyone, and that they regarded his position with a salary of 3,500 roubles (about £350) as quite normal and

even fortunate. He alone knew that with the consciousness of the injustices done him, with his wife's incessant nagging, and with the debts he had contracted by living beyond his means, his position was far from normal.

In order to save money that summer he obtained leave of absence and went with his wife to live in the country at her brother's place.

In the country, without his work, he experienced ennui for the first time in his life, and not only ennui but intolerable depression, and he decided that it was impossible to go on living like that, and that it was necessary to take energetic measures.

Having passed a sleepless night pacing up and down the veranda, he decided to go to Petersburg and bestir himself, in order to punish those who had failed to appreciate him and to get transferred to another ministry.

Next day, despite many protests from his wife and her brother, he started for Petersburg with the sole object of obtaining a post with a salary of five thousand roubles a year. He was no longer bent on any particular department, or tendency, or kind of activity. All he now wanted was an appointment to another post with a salary of five thousand roubles, either in the administration, in the banks, with the railways, in one of the Empress Marya's Institutions, or even in the customs—but it had to carry with it a salary of five thousand roubles and be in a ministry other than that in which they had failed to appreciate him.

And this quest of Ivan Ilych's was crowned with remarkable and unexpected success. At Kursk an acquaintance of his, F. I. Ilyin, got into the first-class carriage, sat down beside Ivan Ilych, and told him of a telegram just received by the Governor of Kursk announcing that a change was about to take place in the ministry: Peter Ivanovich was to be superseded by Ivan Semenovich.

The proposed change, apart from its significance for Russia, had a special significance for Ivan Ilych, because by bringing forward a new man, Peter Petrovich, and consequently his friend, Zachar Ivanovich, it was highly favourable for Ivan Ilych, since Zachar Ivanovich was a friend and colleague of his.

In Moscow this news was confirmed, and on reaching Petersburg Ivan Ilych found Zachar Ivanovich and received a definite promise of an appointment in his former department of Justice.

A week later he telegraphed to his wife: "Zachar in Miller's place. I shall receive appointment on presentation of report."

Thanks to this change of personnel, Ivan Ilych had unexpectedly obtained an appointment in his former ministry which placed him two stages above his former colleagues besides giving him five thousand roubles salary and three thousand five hundred roubles for expenses connected with his removal. All his ill humour towards his former enemies and the whole department vanished, and Ivan Ilych was completely happy.

He returned to the country more cheerful and contented than he had been for a long time. Praskovya Fedorovna also cheered up and a truce was arranged between them. Ivan Ilych told of how he had been fêted by everybody in Petersburg, how all those who had been his enemies were put to shame and now fawned on him, how envious they were of his appointment, and how much everybody in Petersburg had liked him.

Praskovya Fedorovna listened to all this and appeared to believe it. She did not contradict anything, but only made plans for their life in the town to which they were going. Ivan Ilych saw with delight that these plans were his plans, that he and his wife agreed, and that, after a stumble, his life was regaining its due and natural character of pleasant lightheartedness and decorum.

Ivan Ilych had come back for a short time only, for he had to take up his new duties on the 10th of September. Moreover, he needed time to settle into the new place, to move all his belongings from the province, and to buy and order many additional things: in a word, to make such arrangements as he had resolved on, which were almost exactly what Praskovya Fedorovna, too, had decided on.

Now that everything had happened so fortunately, and that he and his wife were at one in their aims and, moreover, saw so little of one another, they got on together better than they had done since the first years of marriage. Ivan Ilych had thought of taking his family away with him at once, but the

insistence of his wife's brother and her sister-in-law, who had suddenly become particularly amiable and friendly to him and his family, induced him to depart alone.

So he departed, and the cheerful state of mind induced by his success and by the harmony between his wife and himself, the one intensifying the other, did not leave him. He found a delightful house, just the thing both he and his wife had dreamt of. Spacious, lofty reception-rooms in the old style, a convenient and dignified study, rooms for his wife and daughter, a study for his son—it might have been specially built for them. Ivan Ilych himself superintended the arrangements, chose the wall-papers, supplemented the furniture (preferably with antiques which he considered particularly *comme il faut*), and supervised the upholstering. Everything progressed and progressed and approached the ideal he had set himself; even when things were only half completed they exceeded his expectations. He saw what a refined and elegant character, free from vulgarity, it would all have when it was ready. On falling asleep he pictured to himself how the reception-room would look. Looking at the yet unfinished drawing-room he could see the fireplace, the screen, the what-not, the little chairs dotted here and there, the dishes and plates on the walls, and the bronzes, as they would be when everything was in place. He was pleased by the thought of how his wife and daughter, who shared his taste in this matter, would be impressed by it. They were certainly not expecting as much. He had been particularly successful in finding, and buying cheaply, antiques which gave a particularly aristocratic character to the whole place. But in his letters he intentionally understated everything in order to be able to surprise them. All this so absorbed him that his new duties—though he liked his official work—interested him less than he had expected. Sometimes he even had moments of absent-mindedness during the Court Sessions, and would consider whether he should have straight or curved cornices for his curtains. He was so interested in it all that he often did things himself, rearranging the furniture, or rehanging the curtains. Once when mounting a step-ladder to show the upholsterer, who did not understand, how he wanted the hangings draped, he made a false step and slipped, but being a strong

and agile man he clung on and only knocked his side against the knob of the window frame. The bruised place was painful but the pain soon passed, and he felt particularly bright and well just then. He wrote: "I feel fifteen years younger." He thought he would have everything ready by September, but it dragged on till mid-October. But the result was charming, not only in his eyes, but to everyone who saw it.

In reality it was just what is usually seen in the houses of people of moderate means who want to appear rich, and therefore succeed only in resembling others like themselves; there were damasks, dark wood, plants, rugs, and dull and polished bronzes—all the things people of a certain class have in order to resemble other people of that class. His house was so like the others that it would never have been noticed, but to him it all seemed to be quite exceptional. He was very happy when he met his family at the station and brought them to the newly-furnished house all lit up, where a footman in a white tie opened the door into the hall decorated with plants, and when they went on into the drawing-room and the study uttering exclamations of delight. He conducted them everywhere, drank in their praises eagerly, and beamed with pleasure. At tea that evening, when Praskovya Fedorovna, among other things, asked him about his fall, he laughed, and showed them how he had gone flying and had frightened the upholsterer.

"It's a good thing I'm a bit of an athlete. Another man might have been killed, but I merely knocked myself, just here; it hurts when it's touched, but it's passing off already—it's only a bruise."

So they began living in their new home—in which, as always happens, when they got thoroughly settled in they found they were just one room short—and with the increased income, which as always was just a little (some five hundred roubles) too little, but it was all very nice.

Things went particularly well at first, before everything was finally arranged and while something had still to be done; this thing bought, that thing ordered, another thing moved, and something else adjusted. Though there were some disputes between husband and wife, they were both so well satisfied and had so much to do that it all passed off without any serious

quarrels. When nothing was left to arrange it became rather dull and something seemed to be lacking, but they were then making acquaintances, forming habits, and life was growing fuller.

Ivan Ilych spent his mornings at the law court and came home to dinner, and at first he was generally in a good humour, though he occasionally became irritable just on account of his house. (Every spot on the tablecloth or the upholstery, and every broken window-blind string, irritated him. He had devoted so much trouble to arranging it all that every disturbance of it distressed him.) But on the whole his life ran its course as he believed life should do: easily, pleasantly, and decorously.

He got up at nine, drank his coffee, read the paper, and then put on his undress uniform and went to the law courts. There the harness in which he worked had already been stretched to fit him and he donned it without a hitch: petitioners, inquiries at the chancery, the chancery itself, and the sittings, public and administrative. In all this the thing was to exclude everything fresh and vital, which always disturbs the regular course of official business, and to admit only official relations with people, and then only on official grounds. A man would come, for instance, wanting some information. Ivan Ilych, as one in whose sphere the matter did not lie, would have nothing to do with him; but if the man had some business with him in his official capacity, something that could be expressed on officially stamped paper, he would do everything, positively everything he could within the limits of such relations, and in doing so would maintain the semblance of friendly human relations, that is, would observe the courtesies of life. As soon as the official relations ended, so did everything else. Ivan Ilych possessed this capacity to separate his real life from the official side of affairs and not mix the two, in the highest degree, and by long practice and natural aptitude had brought it to such a pitch that sometimes, in the manner of a virtuoso, he would even allow himself to let the human and official relations mingle. He let himself do this just because he felt that he could at any time he chose resume the strictly official attitude again and drop the human relation. And he did it all easily, pleasantly, correctly, and even artistically. In the intervals between the

sessions he smoked, drank tea, chatted a little about politics, a little about general topics, a little about cards, but most of all about official appointments. Tired, but with the feelings of a virtuoso—one of the first violins who has played his part in an orchestra with precision—he would return home to find that his wife and daughter had been out paying calls, or had a visitor, and that his son had been to school, had done his home-work with his tutor, and was duly learning what is taught at High Schools. Everything was as it should be. After dinner, if they had no visitors, Ivan Ilych sometimes read a book that was being much discussed at the time, and in the evening settled down to work, that is, read official papers, compared the depositions of witnesses, and noted paragraphs of the Code applying to them. This was neither dull nor amusing. It was dull when he might have been playing bridge, but if no bridge was available it was at any rate better than doing nothing or sitting with his wife. Ivan Ilych's chief pleasure was giving little dinners to which he invited men and women of good social position, and just as his drawing-room resembled all other drawing-rooms so did his enjoyable little parties resemble all other such parties.

Once they even gave a dance. Ivan Ilych enjoyed it and everything went off well, except that it led to a violent quarrel with his wife about the cakes and sweets. Praskovya Fedorovna had made her own plans, but Ivan Ilych insisted on getting everything from an expensive confectioner and ordered too many cakes, and the quarrel occurred because some of those cakes were left over and the confectioner's bill came to forty-five roubles. It was a great and disagreeable quarrel. Praskovya Fedorovna called him "a fool and an imbecile," and he clutched at his head and made angry allusions to divorce.

But the dance itself had been enjoyable. The best people were there, and Ivan Ilych had danced with Princess Trufonova, a sister of the distinguished founder of the Society "Bear my Burden."

The pleasures connected with his work were pleasures of ambition; his social pleasures were those of vanity; but Ivan Ilych's greatest pleasure was playing bridge. He acknowledged that whatever disagreeable incident happened in his life, the

pleasure that beamed like a ray of light above everything else was to sit down to bridge with good players, not noisy partners, and of course to four-handed bridge (with five players it was annoying to have to stand out, though one pretended not to mind), to play a clever and serious game (when the cards allowed it) and then to have supper and drink a glass of wine. After a game of bridge, especially if he had won a little (to win a large sum was unpleasant), Ivan Ilych went to bed in specially good humour.

So they lived. They formed a circle of acquaintances among the best people and were visited by people of importance and by young folk. In their views as to their acquaintances, husband, wife and daughter were entirely agreed, and tacitly and unanimously kept at arm's length and shook off the various shabby friends and relations who, with much show of affection, gushed into the drawing-room with its Japanese plates on the walls. Soon these shabby friends ceased to obtrude themselves and only the best people remained in the Golovins' set.

Young men made up to Lisa, and Petrischhev, an examining magistrate and Dmitri Ivanovich Petrischhev's son and sole heir, began to be so attentive to her that Ivan Ilych had already spoken to Praskovya Fedorovna about it, and considered whether they should not arrange a party for them, or get up some private theatricals.

So they lived, and all went well, without change, and life flowed pleasantly.

IV

They were all in good health. It could not be called ill health if Ivan Ilych sometimes said that he had a queer taste in his mouth and felt some discomfort in his left side.

But this discomfort increased and, though not exactly painful, grew into a sense of pressure in his side, accompanied by ill humour. And his irritability became worse and worse and began to mar the agreeable, easy, and correct life that had established itself in the Golovin family. Quarrels between husband and wife became more and more frequent, and soon the ease and amenity disappeared and even the decorum was barely maintained. Scenes again became frequent, and very few of

those islets remained on which husband and wife could meet without an explosion. Praskovya Fedorovna now had good reason to say that her husband's temper was trying. With characteristic exaggeration she said he had always had a dreadful temper, and that it had needed all her good nature to put up with it for twenty years. It was true that now the quarrels were started by him. His bursts of temper always came just before dinner, often just as he began to eat his soup. Sometimes he noticed that a plate or dish was chipped, or the food was not right, or his son put his elbow on the table, or his daughter's hair was not done as he liked it, and for all this he blamed Praskovya Fedorovna. At first she retorted and said disagreeable things to him, but once or twice he fell into such a rage at the beginning of dinner that she realised it was due to some physical derangement brought on by taking food, and so she restrained herself and did not answer, but only hurried to get the dinner over. She regarded this self-restraint as highly praiseworthy. Having come to the conclusion that her husband had a dreadful temper and made her life miserable, she began to feel sorry for herself, and the more she pitied herself the more she hated her husband. She began to wish he would die; yet she did not want him to die because then his salary would cease. And this irritated her against him still more. She considered herself dreadfully unhappy just because not even his death could save her, and though she concealed her exasperation, that hidden exasperation of hers increased his irritation also.

After one scene in which Ivan Ilych had been particularly unfair and after which he had said in explanation that he certainly was irritable but that it was due to his not being well, she said that if he was ill it should be attended to, and insisted on his going to see a celebrated doctor.

He went. Everything took place as he had expected and as it always does. There was the usual waiting and the important air assumed by the doctor, with which he was so familiar (resembling that which he himself assumed in court), and the sounding and listening, and the questions which called for answers that were foregone conclusions and were evidently unnecessary, and the look of importance which implied that: "If only you put yourself in our hands we will arrange every-

thing—we know indubitably how it has to be done, always in the same way for everybody alike." It was all just as it was in the law courts. The doctor put on just the same air towards him as he himself put on towards an accused person.

The doctor said that so-and-so indicated that there was so-and-so inside the patient, but if the investigation of so-and-so did not confirm this, then he must assume that and that. If he assumed that and that, then . . . and so on. To Ivan Ilych only one question was important: was his case serious or not? But the doctor ignored that inappropriate question. From his point of view it was not the one under consideration, the real question was to decide between a floating kidney, chronic catarrh, or appendicitis. It was not a question of Ivan Ilych's life or death, but one between a floating kidney and appendicitis. And that question the doctor solved brilliantly, as it seemed to Ivan Ilych, in favour of the appendix, with the reservation that should an examination of the urine give fresh indications the matter would be reconsidered. All this was just what Ivan Ilych had himself brilliantly accomplished a thousand times in dealing with men on trial. The doctor summed up just as brilliantly, looking over his spectacles triumphantly and even gaily at the accused. From the doctor's summing up Ivan Ilych concluded that things were bad, but that for the doctor, and perhaps for everybody else, it was a matter of indifference, though for him it was bad. And this conclusion struck him painfully, arousing in him a great feeling of pity for himself and of bitterness towards the doctor's indifference to a matter of such importance.

He said nothing of this, but rose, placed the doctor's fee on the table, and remarked with a sigh: "We sick people probably often put inappropriate questions. But tell me, in general, is this complaint dangerous, or not? . . ."

The doctor looked at him sternly over his spectacles with one eye, as if to say: "Prisoner, if you will not keep to the questions put to you, I shall be obliged to have you removed from the court."

"I have already told you what I consider necessary and proper. The analysis may show something more." And the doctor bowed.

Ivan Ilych went out slowly, seated himself disconsolately in his sledge, and drove home. All the way home he was going over what the doctor had said, trying to translate those complicated, obscure, scientific phrases into plain language and find in them an answer to the question: "Is my condition bad? Is it very bad? Or is there as yet nothing much wrong?" And it seemed to him that the meaning of what the doctor had said was that it was very bad. Everything in the streets seemed depressing. The cabmen, the houses, the passers-by, and the shops, were dismal. His ache, this dull gnawing ache that never ceased for a moment, seemed to have acquired a new and more serious significance from the doctor's dubious remarks. Ivan Ilych now watched it with a new and oppressive feeling.

He reached home and began to tell his wife about it. She listened, but in the middle of his account his daughter came in with her hat on, ready to go out with her mother. She sat down reluctantly to listen to this tedious story, but could not stand it long, and her mother, too, did not hear him to the end.

"Well, I am very glad," she said. "Mind now to take your medicine regularly. Give me the prescription and I'll send Gerasim to the chemist's." And she went to get ready to go out.

While she was in the room Ivan Ilych had hardly taken time to breathe, but he sighed deeply when she left it.

"Well," he thought, "perhaps it isn't so bad after all."

He began taking his medicine and following the doctor's directions, which had been altered after the examination of the urine. But then it happened that there was a contradiction between the indications drawn from the examination of the urine and the symptoms that showed themselves. It turned out that what was happening differed from what the doctor had told him, and that he had either forgotten, or blundered, or hidden something from him. He could not, however, be blamed for that, and Ivan Ilych still obeyed his orders implicitly and at first derived some comfort from doing so.

From the time of his visit to the doctor, Ivan Ilych's chief occupation was the exact fulfilment of the doctor's instructions regarding hygiene and the taking of medicine, and the observation of his pain and his excretions. His chief interests

came to be people's ailments and people's health. When sickness, death, or recoveries, were mentioned in his presence, especially when the illness resembled his own, he listened with agitation which he tried to hide, asked questions, and applied what he heard to his own case.

The pain did not grow less, but Ivan Ilych made efforts to force himself to think that he was better. And he could do this so long as nothing agitated him. But as soon as he had any unpleasantness with his wife, any lack of success in his official work, or held bad cards at bridge, he was at once acutely sensible of his disease. He had formerly borne such mischances, hoping soon to adjust what was wrong, to master it and attain success, or make a grand slam. But now every mischance upset him and plunged him into despair. He would say to himself: "There now, just as I was beginning to get better and the medicine had begun to take effect, comes this accursed misfortune, or unpleasantness . . ." And he was furious with the mishap, or with the people who were causing the unpleasantness and killing him, for he felt that this fury was killing him but could not restrain it. One would have thought that it should have been clear to him that this exasperation with circumstances and people aggravated his illness, and that he ought therefore to ignore unpleasant occurrences. But he drew the very opposite conclusion: he said that he needed peace, and he watched for everything that might disturb it and became irritable at the slightest infringement of it. His condition was rendered worse by the fact that he read medical books and consulted doctors. The progress of his disease was so gradual that he could deceive himself when comparing one day with another—the difference was so slight. But when he consulted the doctors it seemed to him that he was getting worse, and even very rapidly. Yet despite this he was continually consulting them.

That month he went to see another celebrity, who told him almost the same as the first had done, but put his questions rather differently, and the interview with this celebrity only increased Ivan Ilych's doubts and fears. A friend of a friend of his, a very good doctor, diagnosed his illness again quite differently from the others, and though he predicted recovery, his questions and suppositions bewildered Ivan Ilych still

more and increased his doubts. A homoeopathist diagnosed the disease in yet another way, and prescribed medicine which Ivan Ilych took secretly for a week. But after a week, not feeling any improvement and having lost confidence both in the former doctor's treatment and in this one's, he became still more despondent. One day a lady acquaintance mentioned a cure effected by a wonder-working icon. Ivan Ilych caught himself listening attentively and beginning to believe that it had occurred. This incident alarmed him. "Has my mind really weakened to such an extent?" he asked himself. "Nonsense! It's all rubbish. I mustn't give way to nervous fears, but having chosen a doctor must keep strictly to his treatment. That is what I will do. Now it's all settled. I won't think about it, but will follow the treatment seriously till summer, and then we shall see!" This was easy to say but impossible to carry out. The pain in his side oppressed him and seemed to grow worse and more incessant, while the taste in his mouth grew stranger and stranger. It seemed to him that his breath had a disgusting smell, and he was conscious of a loss of appetite and strength. There was no deceiving himself: something terrible, new, and more important than anything before in his life, was taking place within him of which he alone was aware. Those about him did not understand or would not understand it, but thought everything in the world was going on as usual. That tormented Ivan Ilych more than anything. He saw that his household, especially his wife and daughter, who were in a perfect whirl of visiting, did not understand anything of it and were annoyed that he was so depressed and so exacting, as if he were to blame for it. Though they tried to disguise it he saw that he was an obstacle in their path, and that his wife had adopted a definite line in regard to his illness and kept to it regardless of anything he said or did. Her attitude was this: "You know," she would say to her friends, "Ivan Ilych can't do as other people do, and keep to the treatment prescribed for him. One day he'll take his drops and keep strictly to his diet and go to bed in good time, but the next day unless I watch him he'll suddenly forget his medicine, eat sturgeon—which is forbidden—and sit up playing cards till one o'clock in the morning."

"Oh, come, when was that?" Ivan Ilych would ask in vexation. "Only once at Peter Ivanovich's."

"And yesterday with Shebek."

"Well, even if I hadn't stayed up, this pain would have kept me awake."

"Be that as it may, you'll never get well like that, but will always make us wretched."

Praskovya Fedorovna's attitude to Ivan Ilych's illness, as she expressed it both to others and to him, was that it was his own fault and was another of the annoyances he caused her. Ivan Ilych felt that this opinion escaped her involuntarily—but that did not make it easier for him.

At the law courts, too, Ivan Ilych noticed, or thought he noticed, a strange attitude towards himself. It sometimes seemed to him that people were watching him inquisitively as a man whose place might soon be vacant. Then again, his friends would suddenly begin to chaff him in a friendly way about his low spirits, as if the awful, horrible, and unheard-of-thing that was going on within him, incessantly gnawing at him and irresistibly drawing him away, was a very agreeable subject for jests. Schwartz in particular irritated him by his jocularity, vivacity, and savoir-faire, which reminded him of what he himself had been ten years ago.

Friends came to make up a set and they sat down to cards. They dealt, bending the new cards to soften them, and he sorted the diamonds in his hand and found he had seven. His partner said, "No trumps," and supported him with two diamonds. What more could be wished for? It ought to be jolly and lively. They would make a grand slam. But suddenly Ivan Ilych was conscious of that gnawing pain, that taste in his mouth, and it seemed ridiculous that in such circumstances he should be pleased to make a grand slam.

He looked at his partner, Mikhail Mikhaylovich, who rapped the table with his strong hand and instead of snatching up the tricks pushed the cards courteously and indulgently towards Ivan Ilych that he might have the pleasure of gathering them up without the trouble of stretching out his hand for them. "Does he think I am too weak to stretch out my arm?" thought Ivan Ilych, and forgetting what he was doing he over-trumped

his partner, missing the grand slam by three tricks. And what was most awful of all was that he saw how upset Mikhail Mikhaylovich was about it but did not himself care. And it was dreadful to realise why he did not care.

They all saw that he was suffering, and said: "We can stop if you are tired. Take a rest." Lie down? No, he was not at all tired, and he finished the rubber. All were gloomy and silent. Ivan Ilych felt that he had diffused this gloom over them and could not dispel it. They had supper and went away, and Ivan Ilych was left alone with the consciousness that his life was poisoned and was poisoning the lives of others, and that this poison did not weaken but penetrated more and more deeply into his whole being.

With this consciousness, and with physical pain besides the terror, he must go to bed, often to lie awake the greater part of the night. Next morning he had to get up again, dress, go to the law courts, speak, and write; or if he did not go out, spend at home those twenty-four hours a day each of which was a torture. And he had to live thus all alone on the brink of an abyss, with no-one who understood or pitied him.

V

So one month passed and then another. Just before the New Year his brother-in-law came to town and stayed at their house. Ivan Ilych was at the law courts and Praskovya Fedorovna had gone shopping. When Ivan Ilych came home and entered his study he found his brother-in-law there—a healthy, florid man—unpacking his portmanteau himself. He raised his head on hearing Ivan Ilych's footsteps and looked up at him for a moment without a word. That stare told Ivan Ilych everything. His brother-in-law opened his mouth to utter an exclamation of surprise but checked himself, and that action confirmed it all.

"I have changed, eh?"

"Yes, there is a change."

And after that, try as he would to get his brother-in-law to return to the subject of his looks, the latter would say nothing about it. Praskovya Fedorovna came home and her brother

went out to her. Ivan Ilych locked the door and began to examine himself in the glass, first full face, then in profile. He took up a portrait of himself taken with his wife, and compared it with what he saw in the glass. The change in him was immense. Then he bared his arms to the elbow, looked at them, drew the sleeves down again, sat down on an ottoman, and grew blacker than night.

"No, no, this won't do!" he said to himself, and jumped up, went to the table, took up some law papers and began to read them, but could not continue. He unlocked the door and went into the reception-room. The door leading to the drawing-room was shut. He approached it on tiptoe and listened.

"No, you are exaggerating!" Praskovya Fedorovna was saying.

"Exaggerating! Don't you see it? Why, he's a dead man! Look at his eyes—there's no light in them. But what is it that is wrong with him?"

"No-one knows. Nikolaevich (that was another doctor) said something, but I don't know what. And Leshchetitsky (this was the celebrated specialist) said quite the contrary . . ."

Ivan Ilych walked away, went to his own room, lay down, and began musing: "The kidney, a floating kidney." He recalled all the doctors had told him of how it detached itself and swayed about. And by an effort of imagination he tried to catch that kidney and arrest it and support it. So little was needed for this, it seemed to him. "No, I'll go to see Peter Ivanovich again." (That was the friend whose friend was a doctor.) He rang, ordered the carriage, and got ready to go.

"Where are you going, Jean?" asked his wife, with a specially sad and exceptionally kind look.

This exceptionally kind look irritated him. He looked morosely at her.

"I must go to see Peter Ivanovich."

He went to see Peter Ivanovich, and together they went to see his friend, the doctor. He was in, and Ivan Ilych had a long talk with him.

Reviewing the anatomical and physiological details of what in the doctor's opinion was going on inside him, he understood it all.

There was something, a small thing, in the vermiform appendix. It might all come right. Only stimulate the energy of one organ and check the activity of another, then absorption would take place and everything would come right. He got home rather late for dinner, ate his dinner, and conversed cheerfully, but could not for a long time bring himself to go back to work in his room. At last, however, he went to his study and did what was necessary, but the consciousness that he had put something aside—an important, intimate matter which he would revert to when his work was done—never left him. When he had finished his work he remembered that this intimate matter was the thought of his vermiform appendix. But he did not give himself up to it, and went to the drawing-room for tea. There were callers there, including the examining magistrate who was a desirable match for his daughter, and they were conversing, playing the piano, and singing. Ivan Ilych, as Praskovya Fedorovna remarked, spent that evening more cheerfully than usual, but he never for a moment forgot that he had postponed the important matter of the appendix. At eleven o'clock he said good-night and went to his bedroom. Since his illness he had slept alone in a small room next to his study. He undressed and took up a novel by Zola, but instead of reading it he fell into thought, and in his imagination that desired improvement in the vermiform appendix occurred. There was the absorption and evacuation and the re-establishment of normal activity. "Yes, that's it!" he said to himself. "One need only assist nature, that's all." He remembered his medicine, rose, took it, and lay down on his back watching for the beneficent action of the medicine and for it to lessen the pain. "I need only take it regularly and avoid all injurious influences. I am already feeling better, much better." He began touching his side: it was not painful to the touch. "There, I really don't feel it. It's much better already." He put out the light and turned on his side. . . . "The appendix is getting better, absorption is occurring." Suddenly he felt the old, familiar, dull, gnawing pain, stubborn and serious. There was the same familiar loathsome taste in his mouth. His heart sank and he felt dazed. "My God! My God!" he muttered. "Again, again! And it will never cease." And suddenly the matter presented itself in a quite different

aspect. "Vermiform appendix! Kidney!" he said to himself. "It's not a question of appendix or kidney, but of life and . . . death. Yes, life was there and now it is going, going and I cannot stop it. Yes. Why deceive myself? Isn't it obvious to everyone but me that I'm dying, and that it's only a question of weeks, days . . . it may happen this moment. There was light and now there is darkness. I was here and now I'm going there! Where?" A chill came over him, his breathing ceased, and he felt only the throbbing of his heart.

"When I am not, what will there be? There will be nothing. Then where shall I be when I am no more? Can this be dying? No, I don't want to!" He jumped up and tried to light the candle, felt for it with trembling hands, dropped candle and candlestick on the floor and fell back on his pillow.

"What's the use? It makes no difference," he said to himself, staring with wide-open eyes into the darkness. "Death. Yes, death. And none of them know or wish to know it, and they have no pity for me. Now they are playing." (He heard through the door the distant sound of a song and its accompaniment.) "It's all the same to them, but they will die too! Fools! I first, and they later, but it will be the same for them. And now they are merry . . . the beasts!"

Anger choked him and he was agonisingly, unbearably miserable. "It is impossible that all men have been doomed to suffer this awful horror!" He raised himself.

"Something must be wrong. I must calm myself—must think it all over from the beginning." And he again began thinking. "Yes, the beginning of my illness: I knocked my side, but I was still quite well that day and the next. It hurt a little, then rather more. I saw the doctors, then followed despondency and anguish, more doctors, and I drew nearer to the abyss. My strength grew less and I kept coming nearer and nearer, and now I have wasted away and there is no light in my eyes. I think of the appendix—but this is death! I think of mending the appendix, and all the while here is death! Can it really be death?" Again terror seized him and he gasped for breath. He leant down and began feeling for the matches, pressing with his elbow on the stand beside the bed. It was in his way and hurt him, he grew furious with it, pressed on it

still harder, and upset it. Breathless and in despair he fell on his back, expecting death to come immediately.

Meanwhile the visitors were leaving. Praskovya Fedorovna was seeing them off. She heard something fall and came in.

"What has happened?"

"Nothing. I knocked it over accidentally."

She went out and returned with a candle. He lay there panting heavily, like a man who has run a thousand yards, and stared upwards at her with a fixed look.

"What is it, Jean?"

"No . . . o . . . thing. I upset it." ("Why speak of it? She won't understand," he thought.)

And in truth she did not understand. She picked up the stand, lit his candle, and hurried away to see another visitor off. When she came back he still lay on his back, looking upwards.

"What is it? Do you feel worse?"

"Yes."

She shook her head and sat down.

"Do you know, Jean, I think we must ask Leshchetitsky to come and see you here."

This meant calling in the famous specialist, regardless of expense. He smiled malignantly and said "No." She remained a little longer and then went up to him and kissed his forehead.

While she was kissing him he hated her from the bottom of his soul and with difficulty refrained from pushing her away.

"Good-night. Please God you'll sleep."

"Yes."

VI

Ivan Ilych saw that he was dying, and he was in continual despair.

In the depth of his heart he knew he was dying, but not only was he not accustomed to the thought, he simply did not and could not grasp it.

The syllogism he had learnt from Kiezewetter's Logic: "Caius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Caius is mortal," had always seemed to him correct as applied to Caius, but certainly not as applied to himself. That Caius—man in the abstract—was mortal, was perfectly correct, but he was not

Caius, not an abstract man, but a creature quite quite separate from all others. He had been little Vanya, with a mamma and a papa, with Mitya and Volodya, with the toys, a coachman and a nurse, afterwards with Katenka and with all the joys, griefs and delights of childhood, boyhood, and youth. What did Caius know of the smell of that striped leather ball Vanya had been so fond of? Had Caius kissed his mother's hand like that, and did the silk of her dress rustle so for Caius? Had he rioted like that at school when the pastry was bad? Had Caius been in love like that? Could Caius preside at a session as he did? "Caius really was mortal, and it was right for him to die; but for me, little Vanya, Ivan Ilych, with all my thoughts and emotions, it's altogether a different matter. It cannot be that I ought to die. That would be too terrible."

Such was his feeling.

"If I had to die like Caius I should have known it was so. An inner voice would have told me so, but there was nothing of the sort in me and I and all my friends felt that our case was quite different from that of Caius. And now here it is!" he said to himself. "It can't be. It's impossible! But here it is. How is this? How is one to understand it?"

He could not understand it, and tried to drive this false, incorrect, morbid thought away and to replace it by other proper and healthy thoughts. But that thought, and not the thought only but the reality itself, seemed to come and confront him.

And to replace that thought he called up a succession of others, hoping to find in them some support. He tried to get back into the former current of thoughts that had once screened the thought of death from him. But strange to say, all that had formerly shut off, hidden, and destroyed, his consciousness of death, no longer had that effect. Ivan Ilych now spent most of his time in attempting to re-establish that old current. He would say to himself: "I will take up my duties again—after all I used to live by them." And banishing all doubts he would go to the law courts, enter into conversation with his colleagues, and sit carelessly as was his wont, scanning the crowd with a thoughtful look and leaning both his emaciated arms on the arms of his oak chair; bending over as usual to a colleague

and drawing his papers nearer he would interchange whispers with him, and then suddenly raising his eyes and sitting erect, would pronounce certain words and open the proceedings. But suddenly in the midst of those proceedings the pain in his side, regardless of the stage the proceedings had reached, would begin its own gnawing work. Ivan Ilych would turn his attention to it and try to drive the thought of it away, but without success. *It* would come and stand before him and look at him, and he would be petrified and the light would die out of his eyes, and he would again begin asking himself whether *It* alone was true. And his colleagues and subordinates would see with surprise and distress that he, the brilliant and subtle judge, was becoming confused and making mistakes. He would shake himself, try to pull himself together, manage somehow to bring the sitting to a close, and return home with the sorrowful consciousness that his judicial labours would not as formerly hide from him what he wanted them to hide, and could not deliver him from *It*. And what was worst of all was that *It* drew his attention to itself not in order to make him take some action but only that he should look at *It*, look it straight in the face: look at it and without doing anything, suffer inexpressibly.

And to save himself from this condition Ivan Ilych looked for consolations—new screens—and new screens were found and for a while seemed to save him, but then they immediately fell to pieces or rather became transparent, as if *It* penetrated them and nothing could veil *It*.

In these latter days he would go into the drawing-room he had arranged—that drawing-room where he had fallen and for the sake of which (how bitterly ridiculous it seemed) he had sacrificed his life—for he knew that his illness originated with that knock. He would enter and see that something had scratched the polished table. He would look for the cause of this and find that it was the bronze ornamentation of an album, that had got bent. He would take up the expensive album which he had lovingly arranged, and feel vexed with his daughter and her friends for their untidiness—for the album was torn here and there and some of the photographs turned upside down. He would put it carefully in order and bend the ornamentation back into position. Then it would occur to him to

place all those things in another corner of the room, near the plants. He would call the footman, but his daughter or wife would come to help him. They would not agree, and his wife would contradict him, and he would dispute and grow angry. But that was all right, for then he did not think about *It*. *It* was invisible.

But then, when he was moving something himself, his wife would say: "Let the servants do it. You will hurt yourself again." And suddenly *It* would flash through the screen and he would see it. It was just a flash, and he hoped it would disappear, but he would involuntarily pay attention to his side. "It sits there as before, gnawing just the same!" And he could no longer forget *It*, but could distinctly see it looking at him from behind the flowers. "What is it all for?"

"It really is so! I lost my life over that curtain as I might have done when storming a fort. Is that possible? How terrible and how stupid. It can't be true! It can't, but it is."

He would go to his study, lie down and again be alone with *It*: face to face with *It*. And nothing could be done with *It* except to look at it and shudder.

VII

How it happened it is impossible to say because it came about step by step, unnoticed, but in the third month of Ivan Ilych's illness, his wife, his daughter, his son, his acquaintances, the doctors, the servants, and above all he himself, were aware that the whole interest he had for other people was whether he would soon vacate his place, and at last release the living from the discomfort caused by his presence and be himself released from his sufferings.

He slept less and less. He was given opium and hypodermic injections of morphine, but this did not relieve him. The dull depression he experienced in a somnolent condition at first gave him a little relief, but only as something new, afterwards it became as distressing as the pain itself or even more so.

Special foods were prepared for him by the doctors' orders, but all those foods became increasingly distasteful and disgusting to him.

For his excretions also special arrangements had to be made, and this was a torment to him every time—a torment from the uncleanliness, the unseemliness, and the smell, and from knowing that another person had to take part in it.

But just through this most unpleasant matter, Ivan Ilych obtained comfort. Gerasim, the butler's young assistant, always came in to carry the things out. Gerasim was a clean, fresh peasant lad, grown stout on town food and always cheerful and bright. At first the sight of him, in his clean Russian peasant costume, engaged on that disgusting task embarrassed Ivan Ilych.

Once when he got up from the commode too weak to draw up his trousers, he dropped into a soft armchair and looked with horror at his bare, enfeebled thighs with the muscles so sharply marked on them.

Gerasim with a firm light tread, his heavy boots emitting a pleasant smell of tar and fresh winter air, came in wearing a clean Hessian apron, the sleeves of his print shirt tucked up over his strong bare young arms; and refraining from looking at his sick master out of consideration for his feelings, and restraining the joy of life that beamed from his face, he went up to the commode.

"Gerasim!" said Ivan Ilych in a weak voice.

Gerasim started, evidently afraid he might have committed some blunder, and with a rapid movement turned his fresh, kind, simple young face which just showed the first downy signs of a beard.

"Yes, sir?"

"That must be very unpleasant for you. You must forgive me. I am helpless."

"Oh, why, sir," and Gerasim's eyes beamed and he showed his glistening white teeth, "what's a little trouble? It's a case of illness with you, sir."

And his deft strong hands did their accustomed task, and he went out of the room stepping lightly. Five minutes later he as lightly returned.

Ivan Ilych was still sitting in the same position in the armchair.

"Gerasim," he said when the latter had replaced the freshly-washed utensil. "Please come here and help me." Gerasim

went up to him. "Lift me up. It is hard for me to get up, and I have sent Dmitri away."

Gerasim went up to him, grasped his master with his strong arms deftly but gently, in the same way that he stepped—lifted him, supported him with one hand, and with the other drew up his trousers and would have set him down again, but Ivan Ilych asked to be led to the sofa. Gerasim, without an effort and without apparent pressure, led him, almost lifting him, to the sofa and placed him on it.

"Thank you. How easily and well you do it all!"

Gerasim smiled again and turned to leave the room. But Ivan Ilych felt his presence such a comfort that he did not want to let him go.

"One thing more, please move up that chair. No, the other one—under my feet. It is easier for me when my feet are raised."

Gerasim brought the chair, set it down gently in place, and raised Ivan Ilych's legs on to it. It seemed to Ivan Ilych that he felt better while Gerasim was holding up his legs.

"It's better when my legs are higher." he said. "Place that cushion under them."

Gerasim did so. He again lifted the legs and placed them, and again Ivan Ilych felt better while Gerasim held his legs. When he set them down Ivan Ilych fancied he felt worse.

"Gerasim," he said. "Are you busy now?"

"Not at all, sir," said Gerasim, who had learnt from the townsfolk how to speak to gentlefolk.

"What have you still to do?"

"What have I to do? I've done everything except chopping the logs for to-morrow."

"Then hold my legs up a bit higher, can you?"

"Of course I can. Why not?" And Gerasim raised his master's legs higher and Ivan Ilych thought that in that position he did not feel any pain at all.

"And how about the logs?"

"Don't trouble about that, sir. There's plenty of time."

Ivan Ilych told Gerasim to sit down and hold his legs, and began to talk to him. And strange to say it seemed to him that he felt better while Gerasim held his legs up.

After that Ivan Ilych would sometimes call Gerasim and get him to hold his legs on his shoulders, and he liked talking to him. Gerasim did it all easily, willingly, simply, and with a good nature that touched Ivan Ilych. Health, strength, and vitality in other people were offensive to him, but Gerasim's strength and vitality did not mortify but soothed him.

What tormented Ivan Ilych most was the deception, the lie, which for some reason they all accepted, that he was not dying but was simply ill, and that he only need keep quiet and undergo a treatment and then something very good would result. He, however, knew that do what they would, nothing would come of it, only still more agonising suffering and death. This deception tortured him—their not wishing to admit what they all knew and what he knew, but wanting to lie to him concerning his terrible condition, and wishing and forcing him to participate in that lie. Those lies—lies enacted over him on the eve of his death and destined to degrade this awful, solemn act to the level of their visitings, their curtains, their sturgeon for dinner—were a terrible agony for Ivan Ilych. And strangely enough, many times when they were going through their antics over him he had been within a hairbreadth of calling out, to them: "Stop lying! You know and I know that I am dying. Then at least stop lying about it!" But he had never had the spirit to do it. The awful, terrible act of his dying was, he could see, reduced by those about him to the level of a casual, unpleasant, and almost indecorous incident (as if someone entered a drawing-room diffusing an unpleasant odour) and this was done by that very decorum which he had served all his life long. He saw that no-one felt for him, because no-one even wished to grasp his position. Only Gerasim recognised it and pitied him. And so Ivan Ilych felt at ease only with him. He felt comforted when Gerasim supported his legs (sometimes all night long) and refused to go to bed, saying: "Don't you worry, Ivan Ilych. I'll get sleep enough later on," or when he suddenly became familiar and exclaimed: "If you weren't sick it would be another matter, but as it is, why should I grudge a little trouble?" Gerasim alone did not lie; everything showed that he alone understood the facts of the case and did not consider it necessary to disguise them, but simply felt sorry for his emaciated

and enfeebled master. Once when Ivan Ilych was sending him away he even said straight out: "We shall all of us die, so why should I grudge a little trouble?"—expressing the fact that he did not think his work burdensome, because he was doing it for a dying man and hoped someone would do the same for him when his time came.

Apart from this lying, or because of it, what most tormented Ivan Ilych was that no-one pitied him as he wished to be pitied. At certain moments after prolonged suffering he wished most of all (though he would have been ashamed to confess it) for someone to pity him as a sick child is pitied. He longed to be petted and comforted. He knew he was an important functionary, that he had a beard turning grey, and that therefore what he longed for was impossible, but still he longed for it. And in Gerasim's attitude towards him there was something akin to what he wished for, and so that attitude comforted him. Ivan Ilych wanted to weep, wanted to be petted and cried over, and then his colleague Shebek would come, and instead of weeping and being petted, Ivan Ilych would assume a serious, severe, and profound air, and by force of habit would express his opinion on a decision of the Court of Cassation and would stubbornly insist on that view. This falsity around him and within him did more than anything else to poison his last days.

VIII

It was morning. He knew it was morning because Gerasim had gone, and Peter the footman had come and put out the candles, drawn back one of the curtains, and begun quietly to tidy up. Whether it was morning or evening, Friday or Sunday, made no difference, it was all just the same; the gnawing, unmitigated, agonising pain, never ceasing for an instant, the consciousness of life inexorably waning but not yet extinguished, the approach of that ever dreaded and hateful Death which was the only reality, and always the same falsity. What were days, weeks, hours, in such a case?

"Will you have some tea, sir?"

"He wants things to be regular, and wishes the gentlefolk to drink tea in the morning," thought Ivan Ilych, and only said "No."

"Wouldn't you like to move on to the sofa, sir?"

"He wants to tidy up the room, and I'm in the way. I am uncleanliness and disorder," he thought, and said only:

"No, leave me alone."

The man went on bustling about. Ivan Ilych stretched out his hand. Peter came up, ready to help.

"What is it, sir?"

"My watch."

Peter took the watch which was close at hand and gave it to his master.

"Half-past eight. Are they up?"

"No sir, except Vladimir Ivanich" (the son) "who has gone to school. Praskovya Fedorovna ordered me to wake her if you asked for her. Shall I do so?"

"No, there's no need to." "Perhaps I'd better have some tea." he thought, and added aloud: "Yes, bring me some tea."

Peter went to the door but Ivan Ilych dreaded being left alone. "How can I keep him here? Oh yes, my medicine." "Peter, give me my medicine." "Why not? Perhaps it may still do me some good." He took a spoonful and swallowed it. "No, it won't help. It's all tomfoolery, all deception." he decided as soon as he became aware of the familiar, sickly, hopeless taste. "No, I can't believe in it any longer. But the pain, why this pain? If it would only cease just for a moment!" And he moaned. Peter turned towards him. "It's all right. Go and fetch me some tea."

Peter went out. Left alone, Ivan Ilych groaned not so much with pain, terrible though that was, as from mental anguish. Always and for ever the same, always these endless days and nights. If only it would come quicker! If only *what* would come quicker? Death, darkness? . . . No, no! Anything rather than death!

When Peter returned with the tea on a tray, Ivan Ilych stared at him for a time in perplexity, not realising who and what he was. Peter was disconcerted by that look and his embarrassment brought Ivan Ilych to himself.

"Oh, tea! All right, put it down. Only help me to wash and put on a clean shirt."

And Ivan Ilych began to wash. With pauses for rest, he

washed his hands and then his face, cleaned his teeth, brushed his hair, and looked in the glass. He was terrified by what he saw, especially by the limp way in which his hair clung to his pallid forehead.

While his shirt was being changed he knew that he would be still more frightened at the sight of his body, so he avoided looking at it. Finally he was ready. He drew on a dressing-gown, wrapped himself in a plaid, and sat down in the armchair to take his tea. For a moment he felt refreshed, but as soon as he began to drink the tea he was again aware of the same taste, and the pain also returned. He finished it with an effort, and then lay down, stretching out his legs, and dismissed Peter.

Always the same. Now a spark of hope flashes up, then a sea of despair rages, and always pain; always pain, always despair, and always the same. When alone he had a dreadful and distressing desire to call someone, but he knew beforehand that with others present it would be still worse. "Another dose of morphine—to lose consciousness. I will tell him, the doctor, that he must think of something else. It's impossible, impossible, to go on like this."

An hour and another pass like that. But now there is a ring at the door bell. Perhaps it's the doctor? It is. He comes in fresh, hearty, plump, and cheerful, with that look on his face that seems to say: "There now, you're in a panic about something, but we'll arrange it all for you directly!" The doctor knows this expression is out of place here, but he has put it on once for all and can't take it off—like a man who has put on a frock-coat in the morning to pay a round of calls.

The doctor rubs his hands vigorously and reassuringly.

"Brr! How cold it is! There's such a sharp frost; just let me warm myself!" he says, as if it were only a matter of waiting till he was warm, and then he would put everything right.

"Well now, how are you?"

Ivan Ilych feels that the doctor would like to say: "Well, how are our affairs?" but that even he feels that this would not do, and says instead: "What sort of a night have you had?"

Ivan Ilych looks at him as much as to say: "Are you really never ashamed of lying?" But the doctor does not wish to understand this question, and Ivan Ilych says: "Just as terrible

as ever. The pain never leaves me and never subsides. If only something . . ."

"Yes, you sick people are always like that. . . . There, now I think I am warm enough. Even Praskovya Fedorovna, who is so particular, could find no fault with my temperature. Well, now I can say good morning," and the doctor presses his patient's hand.

Then, dropping his former playfulness, he begins with a most serious face to examine the patient, feeling his pulse and taking his temperature, and then begins the sounding and auscultation.

Ivan Ilych knows quite well and definitely that all this is nonsense and pure deception, but when the doctor, getting down on his knee, leans over him, putting his ear first higher then lower, and performs various gymnastic movements over him with a significant expression on his face, Ivan Ilych submits to it all as he used to submit to the speeches of the lawyers, though he knew very well that they were all lying and why they were lying.

The doctor, kneeling on the sofa, is still sounding him when Praskovya Fedorovna's silk dress rustles at the door and she is heard scolding Peter for not having let her know of the doctor's arrival.

She comes in, kisses her husband, and at once proceeds to prove that she has been up a long time already, and only owing to a misunderstanding failed to be there when the doctor arrived.

Ivan Ilych looks at her, scans her all over, sets against her the whiteness and plumpness and cleanness of her hands and neck, the gloss of her hair, and the sparkle of her vivacious eyes. He hates her with his whole soul. And the thrill of hatred he feels for her makes him suffer from her touch.

Her attitude towards him and his disease is still the same. Just as the doctor had adopted a certain relation to his patient which he could not abandon, so had she formed one towards him—that he was not doing something he ought to do and was himself to blame, and that she reproached him lovingly for this—and she could not now change that attitude.

"You see he doesn't listen to me and doesn't take his

medicine at the proper time. And above all he lies in a position that is no doubt bad for him—with his legs up."

She described how he made Gerasim hold his legs up.

The doctor smiled with a contemptuous affability that said: "What's to be done? These sick people do have foolish fancies of that kind, but we must forgive them."

When the examination was over the doctor looked at his watch, and then Praskovya Fedorovna announced to Ivan Ilych that it was of course as he pleased, but she had sent to-day for a celebrated specialist who would examine him and have a consultation with Michael Danilovich (their regular doctor).

"Please don't raise any objections. I am doing this for my own sake," she said ironically, letting it be felt that she was doing it all for his sake and only said this to leave him no right to refuse. He remained silent, knitting his brows. He felt that he was so surrounded and involved in a mesh of falsity that it was hard to unravel anything.

Everything she did for him was entirely for her own sake, and she told him she was doing for herself what she actually was doing for herself, as if that was so incredible that he must understand the opposite.

At half-past eleven the celebrated specialist arrived. Again the sounding began and the significant conversations in his presence and in another room, about the kidneys and the appendix, and the questions and answers, with such an air of importance that again, instead of the real question of life and death which now alone confronted him, the question arose of the kidney and appendix which were not behaving as they ought to and would now be attacked by Michael Danilovich and the specialist and forced to amend their ways.

The celebrated specialist regarded him with a serious though not hopeless look, and in reply to the timid question Ivan Ilych, with eyes glistening with fear and hope, put to him as to whether there was a chance of recovery, said that he could not vouch for it but there was a possibility. The look of hope with which Ivan Ilych watched the doctor out was so pathetic that Praskovya Fedorovna, seeing it, even wept as she left the room to hand the doctor his fee.

The gleam of hope kindled by the doctor's encouragement did not last long. The same room, the same pictures, curtains, wall-paper, medicine bottles, were all there, and the same aching, suffering body, and Ivan Ilych began to moan. They gave him a subcutaneous injection and he sank into oblivion.

It was twilight when he came to. They brought him his dinner and he swallowed some beef tea with difficulty, and then everything was the same again and night was coming on.

After dinner, at seven o'clock, Praskovya Fedorovna came into the room in evening dress, her full bosom pushed up by her corset, and with traces of powder on her face. She had reminded him in the morning that they were going to the theatre. Sarah Bernhardt was visiting the town and they had a box, which he had insisted on their taking. Now he had forgotten about it and her toilet offended him, but he concealed his vexation when he remembered that he had himself insisted on their securing a box and going because it would be an instructive and aesthetic pleasure for the children.

Praskovya Fedorovna came in, self-satisfied but yet with a rather guilty air. She sat down and asked how he was but, as he saw, only for the sake of asking and not in order to learn about it, knowing that there was nothing to learn—and then went on to what she really wanted to say; that she would not on any account have gone but that the box had been taken and Helen and their daughter were going, as well as Petrischhev (the examining magistrate, their daughter's fiancé) and that it was out of the question to let them go alone; but that she would have much preferred to sit with him for a while; and he must be sure to follow the doctor's orders while she was away.

"Oh, and Fedor Petrovich" (the fiancé) "would like to come in. May he? And Lisa?"

"All right."

Their daughter came in in full evening dress, her fresh young flesh exposed (making a show of that very flesh which in his own case caused so much suffering), strong, healthy, evidently in love, and impatient with illness, suffering, and death, because they interfered with her happiness.

Fedor Petrovich came in too, in evening dress, his hair curled à la Capoul, a tight stiff collar round his long sinewy

neck, an enormous white shirt-front and narrow black trousers tightly stretched over his strong thighs. He had one white glove tightly drawn on, and was holding his opera hat in his hand.

Following him the schoolboy crept in unnoticed, in a new uniform, poor little fellow, and wearing gloves. Terribly dark shadows showed under his eyes, the meaning of which Ivan Ilych knew well.

His son had always seemed pathetic to him, and now it was dreadful to see the boy's frightened look of pity. It seemed to Ivan Ilych that Vasya was the only one besides Gerasim who understood and pitied him.

They all sat down and again asked how he was. A silence followed. Lisa asked her mother about the opera-glasses, and there was an altercation between mother and daughter as to who had taken them and where they had been put. This occasioned some unpleasantness.

Fedor Petrovich inquired of Ivan Ilych whether he had ever seen Sarah Bernhardt. Ivan Ilych did not at first catch the question, but then replied: "No, have you seen her before?"

"Yes, in Adrienne Lecouvreur."

Praskovya Fedorovna mentioned some roles in which Sarah Bernhardt was particularly good. Her daughter disagreed. Conversation sprang up as to the elegance and realism of her acting—the sort of conversation that is always repeated and is always the same.

In the midst of the conversation Fedor Petrovich glanced at Ivan Ilych and became silent. The others also looked at him and grew silent. Ivan Ilych was staring with glittering eyes straight before him, evidently indignant with them. This had to be rectified, but it was impossible to do so. The silence had to be broken, but for a time no-one dared to break it and they all became afraid that the conventional deception would suddenly become obvious and the truth become plain to all. Lisa was the first to pluck up courage and break that silence, but by trying to hide what everybody was feeling, she betrayed it.

"Well, if we are going it's time to start," she said, looking at her watch, a present from her father, and with a faint and significant smile at Fedor Petrovich relating to something known only to them. She got up with a rustle of her dress.

They all rose, said good night, and went away.

When they had gone it seemed to Ivan Ilych that he felt better; the falsity had gone with them. But the pain remained—that same pain and that same fear that made everything monotonously alike, nothing harder and nothing easier. Everything was worse.

Again minute followed minute and hour followed hour. Everything remained the same and there was no cessation. And the inevitable end of it all became more and more terrible.

"Yes, send Gerasim here," he replied to a question Peter asked.

IX

His wife returned late at night. She came in on tiptoe, but he heard her, opened his eyes, and made haste to close them again. She wished to send Gerasim away and to sit with him herself, but he opened his eyes and said: "No, go away."

"Are you in great pain?"

"Always the same."

"Take some opium."

He agreed and took some. She went away.

Till about three in the morning he was in a state of stupefied misery. It seemed to him that he and his pain were being thrust into a narrow, deep black sack, but though they were pushed further and further in they could not be pushed to the bottom. And this, terrible enough in itself, was accompanied by suffering. He was frightened yet wanted to fall through the sack, he struggled but yet co-operated. And suddenly he broke through, fell, and regained consciousness. Gerasim was sitting at the foot of the bed dozing quietly and patiently, while he himself lay with his emaciated stockinged legs resting on Gerasim's shoulders; the same shaded candle was there and the same unceasing pain.

"Go away, Gerasim," he whispered.

"It's all right, sir. I'll stay a while."

"No. Go away."

He removed his legs from Gerasim's shoulders, turned sideways on to his arm, and felt sorry for himself. He only waited till Gerasim had gone into the next room and then restrained

himself no longer but wept like a child. He wept on account of his helplessness, his terrible loneliness, the cruelty of man, the cruelty of God, and the absence of God.

"Why hast Thou done all this? Why hast Thou brought me here? Why, why dost Thou torment me so terribly?"

He did not expect an answer and yet wept because there was no answer and could be none. The pain again grew more acute, but he did not stir and did not call. He said to himself: "Go on! Strike me! But what is it for? What have I done to Thee? What is it for?"

Then he grew quiet and not only ceased weeping but even held his breath and became all attention. It was as though he were listening not to an audible voice, but to the voice of his soul, to the current of thoughts arising within him.

"What is it you want?" was the first clear conception capable of expression in words, that he heard.

"What do you want? What do you want?" he repeated to himself.

"What do I want? To live and not to suffer," he answered.

And again he listened with such concentrated attention that even his pain did not distract him.

"To live? How?" asked his inner voice.

"Why, to live as I used to—well and pleasantly."

"As you lived before, well and pleasantly?" the voice repeated.

And in imagination he began to recall the best moments of his pleasant life. But strange to say none of those best moments of his pleasant life now seemed at all what they had then seemed—none of them except the first recollections of childhood. There, in childhood, there had been something really pleasant with which it would be possible to live if it could return. But the child who had experienced that happiness existed no longer, it was like a reminiscence of somebody else.

As soon as the period began which had produced the present Ivan Ilych, all that had then seemed joys now melted before his sight and turned into something trivial and often nasty.

And the further he departed from childhood and the nearer he came to the present the more worthless and doubtful were the joys. This began with the School of Law. A little that was

really good was still found there—there was light-heartedness, friendship, and hope. But in the upper classes there had already been fewer of such good moments. Then during the first years of his official career, when he was in the service of the Governor, some pleasant moments again occurred; they were the memories of love for a woman. Then all became confused and there was still less of what was good; later on again there was still less that was good, and the further he went the less there was. His marriage, a mere accident, then the disenchantment that followed it, his wife's bad breath and the sensuality and hypocrisy; then that deadly official life and those preoccupations about money, a year of it, and two, and ten, and twenty, and always the same thing. And the longer it lasted the more deadly it became. "It is as if I had been going downhill while I imagined I was going up. And that is really what it was. I was going up in public opinion, but to the same extent life was ebbing away from me. And now it is all done and there is only death."

"Then what does it mean? Why? It can't be that life is so senseless and horrible. But if it really has been so horrible and senseless, why must I die and die in agony? There is something wrong!"

"Maybe I did not live as I ought to have done," it suddenly occurred to him. "But how could that be, when I did everything properly?" he replied, and immediately dismissed from his mind this, the sole solution of all the riddles of life and death, as something quite impossible.

"Then what do you want now? To live? Live how? Live as you lived in the law courts when the usher proclaimed: "The judge is coming!" "The judge is coming, the judge!" he repeated to himself. "Here he is, the judge. But I am not guilty!" he exclaimed angrily. "What is it for?" And he ceased crying, but turning his face to the wall continued to ponder on the same question: Why, and for what purpose, is there all this horror? But however much he pondered he found no answer. And whenever the thought occurred to him, as it often did, that it all resulted from his not having lived as he ought to have done, he at once recalled the correctness of his whole life and dismissed so strange an idea.

X

Another fortnight passed. Ivan Ilych now no longer left his sofa. He would not lie in bed but lay on the sofa, facing the wall nearly all the time. He suffered ever the same unceasing agonies and in his loneliness pondered always on the same insoluble question: "What is this? Can it be that it is Death?" And the inner voice answered: "Yes, it is Death."

"Why these sufferings?" And the voice answered, "For no reason—they just are so." Beyond and besides this there was nothing.

From the very beginning of his illness, ever since he had first been to see the doctor, Ivan Ilych's life had been divided between two contrary and alternating moods; now it was despair and the expectation of this uncomprehended and terrible death, and now hope and an intently interested observation of the functioning of his organs. Now before his eyes there was only a kidney and an intestine that temporarily evaded its duty, and now only that incomprehensible and dreadful death from which it was impossible to escape.

Those two states of mind had alternated from the very beginning of his illness, but the further it progressed the more doubtful and fantastic became the conception of the kidney, and the more real the sense of impending death.

He had but to call to mind what he had been three months before and what he was now, to call to mind with what regularity he had been going downhill, for every possibility of hope to be shattered.

Latterly during that loneliness in which he found himself as he lay facing the back of the sofa, a loneliness in the midst of a populous town and surrounded by numerous acquaintances and relations but that yet could not have been more complete anywhere—either at the bottom of the sea or under the earth—during that terrible loneliness Ivan Ilych had lived only in memories of the past. Pictures of his past rose before him one after another. They always began with what was nearest in time and then went back to what was most remote—to his childhood—and rested there. If he thought of the stewed prunes

that had been offered him that day, his mind went back to the raw shrivelled French plums of his childhood, their peculiar flavour and the flow of saliva when he sucked their stones, and along with the memory of that taste came a whole series of memories of those days: his nurse, his brother, and their toys. "No, I mustn't think of that. . . . It is too painful," Ivan Ilych said to himself, and brought himself back to the present—to the button on the back of the sofa and the creases in its morocco. "Morocco is expensive, but it does not wear well; there had been a quarrel about it. It was a different kind of quarrel and a different kind of morocco that time when we tore father's portfolio and were punished, and mamma brought us some tarts. . . ." And again his thoughts dwelt on his childhood, and again it was painful and he tried to banish them and fix his mind on something else.

Then again together with that chain of memories another series passed through his mind—of how his illness had progressed and grown worse. There also the further back he looked the more life there had been. There had been more of what was good in life and more of life itself. The two merged together. "Just as the pain went on getting worse and worse so my life grew worse and worse," he thought. "There is one bright spot there at the back, at the beginning of life, and afterwards all becomes blacker and blacker and proceeds more and more rapidly—in inverse ratio to the square of the distance from death," thought Ivan Ilych. And the example of a stone falling downwards with increasing velocity entered his mind. Life, a series of increasing sufferings, flies further and further towards its end—the most terrible suffering. "I am flying. . . ." He shuddered, shifted himself, and tried to resist, but was already aware that resistance was impossible, and again with eyes weary of gazing but unable to cease seeing what was before them, he stared at the back of the sofa and waited—awaiting that dreadful fall and shock and destruction.

"Resistance is impossible!" he said to himself. "If I could only understand what it is all for! But that too is impossible. An explanation would be possible if it could be said that I have not lived as I ought to. But it is impossible to say that," and he remembered all the legality, correctitude, and propriety of

his life. "That at any rate can certainly not be admitted," he thought, and his lips smiled ironically as if someone could see that smile and be taken in by it. "There is no explanation! Agony, death. . . . What for?"

XI

Another two weeks went by in this way and during that fortnight an event occurred that Ivan Ilych and his wife had desired. Petrischhev formally proposed. It happened in the evening. The next day Praskovya Fedorovna came into her husband's room considering how best to inform him of it, but that very night there had been a fresh change for the worse in his condition. She found him still lying on the sofa but in a different position. He lay on his back, groaning and staring fixedly straight in front of him.

She began to remind him of his medicines, but he turned his eyes towards her with such a look that she did not finish what she was saying; so great an animosity, to her in particular, did that look express.

"For Christ's sake let me die in peace!" he said.

She would have gone away, but just then their daughter came in and went up to say good morning. He looked at her as he had done at his wife, and in reply to her inquiry about his health said dryly that he would soon free them all of himself. They were both silent and after sitting with him for a while went away.

"Is it our fault?" Lisa said to her mother. "It's as if we were to blame! I am sorry for papa, but why should we be tortured?"

The doctor came at his usual time. Ivan Ilych answered "Yes" and "No", never taking his angry eyes from him, and at last said: "You know you can do nothing for me, so leave me alone."

"We can ease your sufferings."

"You can't even do that. Let me be."

The doctor went into the drawing-room and told Praskovya Fedorovna that the case was very serious and that the only resource left was opium to allay her husband's sufferings, which must be terrible.

It was true, as the doctor said, that Ivan Ilych's physical sufferings were terrible, but worse than the physical sufferings were his mental sufferings which were his chief torture.

His mental sufferings were due to the fact that that night, as he looked at Gerasim's sleepy, good-natured face with its prominent cheek-bones, the question suddenly occurred to him: "What if my whole life has really been wrong?"

It occurred to him that what had appeared perfectly impossible before, namely that he had not spent his life as he should have done, might after all be true. It occurred to him that his scarcely perceptible attempts to struggle against what was considered good by the most highly placed people, those scarcely noticeable impulses which he had immediately suppressed, might have been the real thing, and all the rest false. And his professional duties and the whole arrangement of his life and of his family, and all his social and official interests, might all have been false. He tried to defend all those things to himself and suddenly felt the weakness of what he was defending. There was nothing to defend.

"But if that is so," he said to himself, "and I am leaving this life with the consciousness that I have lost all that was given me and it is impossible to rectify it—what then?"

He lay on his back and began to pass his life in review in quite a new way. In the morning when he saw first his footman, then his wife, then his daughter, and then the doctor, their every word and movement confirmed to him the awful truth that had been revealed to him during the night. In them he saw himself—all that for which he had lived—and saw clearly that it was not real at all, but a terrible and huge deception which had hidden both life and death. This consciousness intensified his physical suffering tenfold. He groaned and tossed about, and pulled at his clothing which choked and stifled him. And he hated them on that account.

He was given a large dose of opium and became unconscious, but at noon his sufferings began again. He drove everybody away and tossed from side to side.

His wife came to him and said:

"Jean, my dear, do this for me. It can't do any harm and often helps. Healthy people often do it."

He opened his eyes wide.

"What? Take communion? Why? It's unnecessary! However. . . ."

She began to cry.

"Yes do, my dear. I'll send for our priest. He is such a nice man."

"All right. Very well," he muttered.

When the priest came and heard his confession, Ivan Ilych was softened and seemed to feel a relief from his doubts and consequently from his sufferings, and for a moment there came a ray of hope. He again began to think of the vermiform appendix and the possibility of correcting it. He received the sacrament with tears in his eyes.

When they laid him down again afterwards he felt a moment's ease, and the hope that he might live awoke in him again. He began to think of the operation that had been suggested to him. "To live! I want to live!" he said to himself.

His wife came in to congratulate him after his communion, and when uttering the usual conventional words she added:

"You feel better, don't you?"

Without looking at her he said: "Yes."

Her dress, her figure, the expression of her face, the tone of her voice, all revealed the same thing. "This is wrong, it is not as it should be. All you have lived for and still live for is falsehood and deception, hiding life and death from you." And as soon as he admitted that thought, his hatred and his agonising physical suffering again sprang up, and with that suffering a consciousness of the unavoidable, approaching end. And to this was added a new sensation of grinding shooting pain and a feeling of suffocation.

The expression of his face when he uttered that "yes" was dreadful. Having uttered it, he looked her straight in the eyes, turned on his face with a rapidity extraordinary in his weak state and shouted:

"Go away! Go away and leave me alone!"

XII

From that moment the screaming began that continued for three days, and was so terrible that one could not hear it

through two closed doors without horror. At the moment he answered his wife he realised that he was lost, that there was no return, that the end had come, the very end, and his doubts were still unsolved and remained doubts.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" he cried in various intonations. He had begun by screaming: "I won't!" and continued screaming on the letter "o."

For three whole days, during which time did not exist for him, he struggled in that black sack into which he was being thrust by an invisible, resistless force. He struggled as a man condemned to death struggles in the hands of the executioner, knowing that he cannot save himself. And every moment he felt that despite all his efforts he was drawing nearer and nearer to what terrified him. He felt that his agony was due to his being thrust into that black hole and still more to his not being able to get right into it. He was hindered from getting into it by his conviction that his life had been a good one. That very justification of his life held him fast and prevented his moving forward, and it caused him most torment of all.

Suddenly some force struck him in the chest and side, making it still harder to breathe, and he fell through the hole and there at the bottom was a light. What had happened to him was like the sensation one sometimes experiences in a railway carriage when one thinks one is going backwards while one is really going forwards and suddenly becomes aware of the real direction.

"Yes, it was all not the right thing," he said to himself, "but that's no matter. It can be done. But what *is* the right thing?" he asked himself, and suddenly grew quiet.

This occurred at the end of the third day, two hours before his death. Just then his schoolboy son had crept softly in and gone up to the bedside. The dying man was still screaming desperately and waving his arms. His hand fell on the boy's head, and the boy caught it, pressed it to his lips, and began to cry.

At that very moment Ivan Ilych fell through and caught sight of the light, and it was revealed to him that though his life had not been what it should have been, this could still be rectified. He asked himself "What *is* the right thing?" and grew still, listening. Then he felt that someone was kissing his hand. He opened his eyes, looked at his son, and felt sorry for

him. His wife came up to him and he glanced at her. She was gazing at him open-mouthed, with undried tears on her nose and cheek and a despairing look on her face. He felt sorry for her too.

"Yes, I am making them wretched," he thought. "They are sorry, but it will be better for them when I die." He wished to say this but had not the strength to utter it. "Besides, why speak? I must act," he thought. With a look at his wife he indicated his son and said: "Take him away . . . sorry for him . . . sorry for you too. . . ." He tried to add, "forgive me", but said "forego" and waved his hand, knowing that He whose understanding mattered would understand.

And suddenly it grew clear to him that what had been oppressing him and would not leave him was all dropping away at once from two sides, from ten sides, and from all sides. He was sorry for them, he must act so as not to hurt them: release them and free himself from these sufferings. "How good and how simple!" he thought. "And the pain?" he asked himself. "What has become of it? Where are you, pain?"

He turned his attention to it.

"Yes, here it is. Well, what of it? Let the pain be."

"And death . . . where is it?"

He sought his former accustomed fear of death and did not find it. "Where is it? What death?" There was no fear because there was no death.

In place of death there was light.

"So that's what it is!" he suddenly exclaimed aloud. "What joy!"

To him all this happened in a single instant, and the meaning of that instant did not change. For those present his agony continued for another two hours. Something rattled in his throat, his emaciated body twitched, then the gasping and rattle became less and less frequent.

"It is finished!" said someone near him.

He heard these words and repeated them in his soul.

"Death is finished," he said to himself. "It is no more!"

He drew in a breath, stopped in the midst of a sigh, stretched out, and died.

25*th March*, 1886.

NICOLAI LYESKOV

The Sentry

The events of the story which is now presented to the reader are so touching and terrible in their importance for the chief and heroic actor who took part in them, and the issue of the affair was so unique, that anything similar could scarcely have occurred in another country than Russia.

It forms in part a court anecdote, in part a historic event that characterises fairly well the manners and the very strange tendencies of the uneventful period comprised in the third decade of this nineteenth century.

There is no invention in the following story.

During the winter of 1839, just before the Festival of Epiphany, there was a great thaw in Petersburg. The weather was so warm, that it was almost like spring; the snow melted during the day, water dripped from the roofs, the ice on the rivers became blue, and just in front of the Winter Palace there was a large open space. A warm but very high wind blew from the west, the water was driven in from the gulf, and the signal guns were fired.

The guard at the Palace at that time was a company of the Ismailovsky regiment, commanded by a very brilliant well-educated officer named Nicolai Ivanovich Miller, a young man of the very best society (who subsequently rose to the rank of general and became the director of the Lycium). He was a man of the so-called "humane tendencies," which had long since been noticed in him, and somewhat impaired his chances in the service, in the eyes of his superiors.

Miller was really an exact and trustworthy officer; the duty of the guard at the Palace was without any danger; the time was most uneventful and tranquil; the Palace sentries were

only required to stand accurately at their posts. Nevertheless, just when Captain Miller was in command, a most extraordinary and very alarming event took place, which is probably scarcely remembered even by the few of his contemporaries who are now ending their days upon earth.

At first everything went well with the guard. The sentries were placed, the men were all at their posts and all was in the most perfect order. The Emperor Nikolai Pavlovich was well, he had been for a drive in the evening, returned home, and had gone to bed. The Palace slept, too. The night was most quiet. There was tranquillity in the guard-room. Captain Miller had pinned his white pocket handkerchief to the back of the officer's chair, with its traditionally greasy morocco high back and had settled down to while away the time by reading.

Captain Miller had always been a passionate reader, and therefore was never dull; he read and did not notice how the night passed away. When suddenly at about three o'clock he was alarmed by a terrible anxiety. The sergeant on duty, pale and trembling with fear, stood before him, and stammered hurriedly:

"A calamity, your honour, a calamity!"

"What has happened?"

"A terrible misfortune has occurred."

Captain Miller jumped up in indescribable agitation and with difficulty was able to ascertain what really was the nature of the "calamity" and the "terrible misfortune".

The case was as follows: The sentry, a private of the Ismailovsky regiment named Postnikov, who was standing on guard at the outer door of the Palace, now called the "Jordan" entrance, heard that a man was drowning in the open spaces which had appeared in the ice just opposite the Palace, and was calling for help in his despair.

Private Postnikov, a domestic serf of some great family, was a very nervous and sensitive man. For a long time he listened to the distant cries and groans of the drowning man, and they seemed to benumb him with horror. He looked on all sides, but on the whole visible expanse of the quays and the Neva, as if on purpose, not a living soul could he see.

There was nobody who could give help to the drowning man, and he was sure to sink . . .

All this time the man struggled long and terribly.

It seemed as if there was but one thing left for him—to sink to the bottom without further struggle, but no! His cries of exhaustion were now broken and ceased, then were heard again, always nearer and nearer to the Palace quay. It was evident that the man had not lost his direction, but was making straight for the lights of the street lamps, but doubtless he would perish because just in his path, he would fall into the "Jordan" (a hole made in the ice of the river for the consecration of the water on the 6th of January). There he would be drawn under the ice and it would be the end. Again he was quiet, but a minute later he began to splash through the water, and moan: "Save me, save me!" He was now so near that the splashing of the water could actually be heard as he waded along.

Private Postnikov began to realise that it would be quite easy to save this man. It was only necessary to run on to the ice, as the drowning man was sure to be there, throw him a rope, or stretch a pole or a gun towards him, and he could be saved. He was so near that he could take hold of it with his hand and save himself. But Postnikov remembered his service and his oath; he knew he was the sentry, and that the sentry dare not leave his sentry-box on any pretext or for any reason whatever.

On the other hand, Postnikov's heart was not at all submissive; it gnawed, it throbbed, it sank. He would have been glad to tear it out and throw it at his feet—he had become so uneasy at the sound of these groans and sobs. It was terrible to hear another man perishing and not to stretch out a hand to save him, when really it was quite possible to do so, because the sentry-box would not run away, and no other harm could happen. "Shall I run down? Will anybody see it? Oh, Lord, if it could only end! He's groaning again!"

For a whole half hour, while this was going on, Private Postnikov's heart tormented him so much that he began to feel doubts of his own reason. He was a clever and conscientious soldier with a clear judgment, and he knew perfectly well that for a sentry to leave his post was a crime that would have to be tried by court-martial, and he would afterwards have to run the gauntlet between two lines of cat-o'-nine-tails and then have penal servitude, or perhaps even be shot—but from the

direction of the swollen river again there rose, always nearer and nearer, groans, mumblings and desperate struggles.

"I am drowning! Save me, I am drowning!"

Soon he would come to the Jordan cutting and then—the end.

Postnikov looked round once or twice on all sides. Not a soul was to be seen, only the lamps rattled, shook and flickered in the wind, and on the wind were borne broken cries, perhaps the last cries. . . .

There was another splash, a single sob and a gurgling in the water.

The sentry could bear it no longer, and left his post.

Postnikov rushed to the steps, with his heart beating violently, ran on to the ice, then into the water that had risen above it. He soon saw where the drowning man was struggling for life and held out the stock of his gun to him. The drowning man caught hold of the butt-end and Postnikov holding on to the bayonet, drew him to the bank.

Both the man who had been saved, and his rescuer were completely wet; the man who had been saved was in a state of great exhaustion, shivered and fell; his rescuer, Private Postnikov, could not make up his mind to abandon him on the ice, but led him to the quay, and began looking about for somebody to whom he could confide him. While all this was happening, a sledge in which an officer was sitting had appeared on the quay. He was an officer of the Palace Invalid Corps, a company which existed then, but has since been abolished.

This gentleman who arrived at such an inopportune moment for Postnikov, was evidently a man of a very heedless character, and besides a very muddle-headed and impudent person. He jumped out of his sledge and inquired:

"What man is this? Who are these people?"

"He was nearly drowned—he was sinking," began Postnikov.

"How was he drowning? Who was drowning? Was it you? Why is he here?"

But he only spluttered and panted, and Postnikov was no longer there; he had shouldered his gun and had gone back to his sentry-box.

Possibly the officer understood what had happened, for he made no further inquiries, but at once took the man who had

been rescued into his sledge and drove with him to the Admiralty Police Station in the Morskaia Street.

Here the officer made a statement to the inspector, that the dripping man he had brought had nearly been drowned in one of the holes in the ice in front of the Palace, and that he, the officer, had saved him at the risk of his own life.

The man who had been saved was still quite wet, shivering and exhausted. From fright and owing to his terrific efforts he fell into a sort of unconsciousness, and it was quite indifferent to him who had saved him.

The sleepy police orderly bustled around him, while in the office a statement was drawn up from the officer's verbal deposition and, with the suspicion natural to members of the police, they were perplexed to understand how he had managed to come out of the water quite dry. The officer who was anxious to receive the life saving medal, tried to explain this happy concurrence of circumstances, but his explanation was incoherent and improbable. They went to wake the police inspector, and sent to make inquiries.

Meantime in the Palace this occurrence was the cause of another rapid series of events.

In the Palace guard-room all that had occurred since the officer took the half-drowned man into his sledge was unknown. There the Ismailovsky officer and the soldiers only knew that Postnikov, a private of their regiment, had left his sentry-box, and had hurried to save a man and, this being a great breach of military duty, Private Postnikov would certainly be tried by court-martial and have to undergo a thrashing, and all his superior officers, beginning from the commander of the company, would have to face terrible unpleasantness, to avert which they would have nothing to say, nor would they be able to defend themselves.

The wet and shivering soldier, Postnikov, was of course at once relieved from his post, and when he was brought to the guard-room frankly related to Captain Miller all that we already know, with all details to the moment when the officer of the Invalid Corps put the half-drowned man into his sledge, and ordered the coachman to drive to the Admiralty Police Station.

The danger grew greater and more unavoidable. It was

certain the officer of the Invalid Corps would relate everything to the police inspector and the inspector would at once state all the facts to the chief of police, Kokoshkin, who in the morning would make his report to the Emperor, and then the trouble would begin.

There was no time for reflection; the advice of the superior officer must be obtained.

Nicolai Ivanovich Miller forthwith sent an alarming note to his immediate superior, the commander of his battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Svinin, in which he begged him to come to the guard-room as soon as he could to take every possible measure to help him out of the terrible misfortune that had occurred.

It was already about three o'clock, and Kokoshkin had to present his report to the Emperor fairly early in the morning, so that but little time remained for reflection and action.

Lieutenant-Colonel Svinin did not possess that compassion and tenderness of heart for which Nicolai Ivanovich Miller had always been distinguished. Svinin was not a heartless man, but first and foremost a martinet (a type that is now remembered with regret). Svinin was known for his severity and he even liked to boast of his exacting discipline. He had no taste for evil, and never tried to cause anybody useless suffering, but when a man had violated any of the duties of the service, Svinin was inexorable. In the present case he considered it out of place to enter into the consideration of the causes that had guided the actions of the culprit, and held to the rule that every deviation from discipline was guilt. Therefore, in the company on guard, all knew that Private Postnikov would have to suffer what he deserved, for having left his post, and that Svinin would remain absolutely indifferent.

Such was the character by which the staff officer was known to his superiors, and also to his comrades, amongst whom there were men who did not sympathise with Svinin, because at that time "humaneness", and other similar delusions, had not entirely died out. Svinin was indifferent to whether he would be blamed or praised by the "humanitarians". To beg or entreat Svinin, or even to try to move him to pity was quite useless. To all this he was hardened with the well-tempered

armour of the people of those times, who wanted to make their way in the world, but even he, like Achilles, had a weak spot.

Svinin's career in the service had commenced well, and he of course greatly valued it and was very careful that on it, as on a full dress uniform, not a grain of dust should settle, and now this unfortunate action of one of the men of the battalion entrusted to him would certainly throw a shadow on the discipline of the whole company. Those on whom Svinin's well-started and carefully maintained military career depended, would not stop to inquire if the commander of the battalion was guilty or not guilty of what one of his men had done, while moved by the most honourable feelings of sympathy, and many would gladly have put a spoke in the wheel, so as to make way for their relations or to push forward some fine young fellow with high patronage. If the Emperor, who would certainly be angry, said to the commander of the regiment that he had feeble officers, that their men were undisciplined; who was the cause of it? Svinin. So it would be repeated that Svinin was feeble, and the reproach of feebleness would remain a stain on his reputation that could not be washed out. Then he would never be in any way remarkable among his contemporaries, and he would not leave his portrait in the gallery of historical personages of the Russian Empire.

Although at that time but few cultivated the study of history, nevertheless they believed in it, and aspired, with special pleasure, to take part in its making.

At about three o'clock in the morning, as soon as Svinin received Captain Miller's disquieting letter, he at once jumped out of bed, put on his uniform and, swayed by fear and anger, arrived at the guard-room of the Winter Palace. Here he forthwith examined Private Postnikov, and assured himself that the extraordinary event had really taken place. Private Postnikov again frankly confirmed to the commander of his battalion all that had occurred while he was on guard duty, and what he (Postnikov) had already related to the commander of his company, Captain Miller. The soldier said that he was guilty before God and the Emperor, and could not expect mercy; that he, standing on guard, hearing the groans of a man who was drowning in the open places of the ice, had suffered long,

had struggled long between his sense of military duty and his feelings of compassion and at last he had yielded to temptation and not being able to stand the struggle, had left his sentry-box, jumped on the ice and had drawn the drowning man to the bank, and there to his misfortune, he had met an officer of the Palace Invalid Corps.

Lieutenant-Colonel Svinin was in despair; he gave himself the only possible satisfaction by wreaking his anger on Postnikov, whom he at once sent under arrest to the regimental prison, and then said some biting words to Miller, reproaching him with "humanitarianism", which was of no use at all in military service; but all this was of no avail, nor would it improve the matter. It was impossible to find any excuse, still less justification, for a sentry who had left his post, and there remained only one way of getting out of the difficulty—to conceal the whole affair from the Emperor. . . .

But was it possible to conceal such an occurrence?

It was evident that this appeared to be impossible, as the rescue of the drowning man was known, not only to the whole of the guard, but also to that hateful officer of the Invalid Corps, who by now had certainly had time to report the whole matter to General Kokoshkin.

Which way was he to turn? To whom could he address himself? From whom could he obtain help and protection?

Svinin wanted to gallop off to the Grand Duke Michael Pavlovich and relate to him, quite frankly, all that had happened. Manœuvres of this nature were then customary. The Grand Duke, who had a hot temper, would be angry and storm, but his humour and habits were such, that the greater the harshness he showed at first, even when he grievously insulted the offender, the sooner he would forgive him and himself take up his defence. Similar cases were not infrequent and they were even sometimes sought after. Words do not hurt; and Svinin was very anxious to bring the matter to a favourable conclusion; but was it possible at night to obtain entrance to the palace and disturb the Grand Duke? To wait for morning and appear before Michael Pavlovich, after Kokoshkin had made his report to the Emperor, would be too late.

While Svinin was agitated by these difficulties he became

more subtle, and his mind began to see another issue, which till then had been hidden as in a mist.

Among other well-known military tactics there is the following: at the moment when the greatest danger is threatened from the walls of a beleaguered fortress, not to retire, but to advance straight under its walls. Svinin decided not to do any of the things that had at first occurred to him, but to go straight to Kokoshkin.

Many terrible things were related at that time in Petersburg about the chief of police Kokoshkin, and many absurd things too, but among others it was affirmed that he possessed such wonderful resource and tact, that with the assistance of this tact he was not only able to make a mountain out of a molehill, but that he was able as easily to make a molehill out of a mountain.

Kokoshkin was really very stern and very terrible, and inspired great fear in all who came in contact with him, but he sometimes showed mercy to the gay young scamps among the officers and such young scamps were not few in those days, and they had often found in him a merciful and zealous protector. In a word, he was able to do much and knew how to do it, if he only chose. Both Svinin and Captain Miller knew this side of his character. Miller therefore encouraged his superior officer to risk going to Kokoshkin and trust to the General's magnanimity and resource and tact, which would probably suggest to him the means of getting out of this unpleasant situation without incurring the anger of the Emperor, which Kokoshkin, to his honour be it said, always made great efforts to avoid.

Svinin put on his overcoat, looked up to heaven, murmured several times, "Good Lord! Good Lord!" and drove off to Kokoshkin.

It was already past four o'clock in the morning.

The chief of police, Kokoshkin, was aroused and the arrival of Svinin, who had come on important business, that could not be postponed, was reported to him.

The general got up at once and with an overcoat wrapped round him, wiping his forehead, yawning and stretching himself, came out to receive Svinin. Kokoshkin listened with great

attention, but quite calmly, to all Svinin had to relate. During all these explanations and requests for indulgence he only said:

"The soldier left his sentry-box and saved a man?"

"Yes, sir," answered Svinin.

"And the sentry-box?"

"Remained empty during that time."

"Hm! I knew that it remained empty. I'm very pleased that nobody stole it."

Hearing this, Svinin felt certain that the General knew all about the case, and that he had already decided in what manner he would place the facts before the Emperor in his morning's report, and also that he would not alter this decision. Otherwise such an event as a soldier of the Palace Guard having left his post would, without doubt, have caused greater alarm to the energetic chief of police.

But Kokoshkin did not know anything about it. The police inspector to whom the officer of the Invalid Corps had conveyed the man saved from drowning, did not consider it a matter of great importance. In his sight it was not at all a subject that required him to awaken the weary chief of police in the middle of the night, and besides the whole event appeared to the inspector somewhat suspicious, because the officer of the Invalids was quite dry, which certainly could not have been the case if he had saved a man from drowning at the risk of his own life. The inspector looked upon the officer as an ambitious liar, who wanted to obtain another medal for his breast, and therefore detained him while the clerk on duty was taking down his statement, and tried to arrive at the truth by asking about all sorts of minute details.

It was disagreeable for the inspector that such an event should have occurred in his district, and that the man had been saved, not by a policeman but by an officer of the Palace Guard.

Kokoshkin's calmness could be explained very simply: first, by his terrible fatigue, after a day of anxiety and hard work, and by his having assisted in the night at the extinguishing of two fires, and secondly because the act of the sentry, Postnikov, did not concern him, as Chief of Police, at all.

Nevertheless, Kokoshkin at once gave the necessary instructions.

He sent to the Inspector of the Admiralty Quarter and ordered him to come at once and bring the officer of the Invalid Corps and the man who had been saved with him, and asked Svinin to remain in the small waiting-room adjoining his office. Then Kokoshkin went into his study, without closing the door, sat down at the table, and began to sign various papers, but he soon rested his head on his hand and fell asleep in his arm-chair at the table.

In those days there were neither municipal telegraphs nor telephones, and in order to transmit the commands of the chiefs the "forty thousand couriers," of whom Gogol has left a last memory in his comedy, had to ride post haste in all directions.

This, of course, was not so quickly done as by telegraph or telephone, but lent considerable animation to the town and proved that the authorities were indefatigably vigilant.

Before the breathless inspector, the life-saving officer, and the man rescued from drowning had time to come from the Admiralty police station, the nervous and energetic General Kokoshkin had had time to have a snooze and refresh himself. This was seen in the expression of his face and by the revival of his mental faculties.

Kokoshkin ordered all who had arrived to come to his study and with them Svinin, too.

"The official report?" the General demanded of the inspector.

The latter silently handed a folded paper to the General and then whispered in a low voice:

"I must beg permission to communicate a few words to your Excellency in private."

"Very well."

Kokoshkin went towards the bay-window, followed by the inspector.

"What is it?"

The inspector's indistinct whispers could be heard and the General's loud interjections.

"H'm, yes! Well, what then? . . . It is possible. . . . They take care to come out dry. . . . Anything more?"

"Nothing, sir."

The General came out of the bay-window, sat down at his desk, and began to read. He read the report in silence without showing any signs of uneasiness or suspicion, and then turning to the man who had been saved, asked in a loud voice:

"How comes it, my friend, that you got into the open places before the Palace?"

"Forgive me!"

"So! You were drunk?"

"Excuse me, I was not drunk, only tipsy."

"Why did you get into the water?"

"I wanted to cut across the ice, lost my way, and got into the water."

"That means it was dark before your eyes."

"It was dark; it was dark all round, your Excellency."

"And you were not able to notice who pulled you out?"

"Pardon me, I could not notice anything. I think it was he"—he pointed to the officer and added: "I could not distinguish anything. I was so scared."

"That's what it comes to. You were loafing about when you ought to have been asleep. Now look at him well and remember who was your benefactor. An honourable man risked his life to save you."

"I shall never forget it."

"Your name, sir?"

The officer mentioned his name.

"Do you hear?"

"I hear, your Excellency."

"You are Orthodox?"

"I am Orthodox, your Excellency."

"In your prayers for health, remember this man's name."

"I will write it down, your Excellency."

"Pray to God for him, and go away. You are no longer wanted."

He bowed to the ground and cleared off, immeasurably pleased that he was released.

Svinin stood there and could not understand how, by God's grace, things were taking such a turn.

Kokoshkin turned to the officer of the Invalid Corps.

"You saved this man, at the risk of your own life?"

"Yes, your Excellency."

"There were no witnesses to this occurrence, and owing to the late hour there could not have been any?"

"Yes, your Excellency, it was dark and on the quay there was nobody, except the sentry."

"There is no need to mention the sentry; the sentry has to stand at his post and has no right to occupy himself with anything else. I believe what is written in this report. Was it not taken down from your words?"

These words Kokoshkin pronounced with special emphasis, as if he were threatening or shouting.

The officer did not falter, but with staring eyes and expanded chest, standing at attention, answered:

"From my words and quite correctly, your Excellency."

"Your action deserves a reward."

The officer bowed gracefully.

"There is nothing to thank for," continued Kokoshkin, "I shall report your self-sacrificing act to His Majesty the Emperor and your breast may be decorated with a medal even to-day. Now you may go home, have a warm drink, and don't leave the house, as perhaps you may be wanted."

The officer of the Invalid Corps beamed all over, bowed and retired.

Kokoshkin, looking after him, said:

"It is possible that the Emperor may wish to see him."

"I understand," answered the inspector, with apprehension.

"I do not require you any more."

The inspector left the room, closed the door, and in accordance with his religious habit, crossed himself.

The officer of the Invalids was waiting for the inspector below and they went away together, much better friends than when they had come.

Only Svinin remained in the study of the Chief of Police. Kokoshkin looked at him long and attentively and then asked:

"You have not been to the Grand Duke?"

At that time when the Grand Duke was mentioned everybody knew that it referred to the Grand Duke Michael.

"I came straight to you," answered Svinin.

"Who was the officer on guard?"

"Captain Miller."

Kokoshkin looked again at Svinin and said:

"I think you told me something different before."

Svinin did not understand to what this could refer and remained silent, and Kokoshkin added:

"Well, it's all the same; good night."

The audience was over.

About one o'clock the officer of the Invalids, was really sent for by Kokoshkin, who informed him most amiably the Emperor was very much pleased that among the officers of the Invalids corps of his palace there were to be found such vigilant and self-sacrificing men, and had honoured him with the medal for saving life. Then Kokoshkin decorated the hero with his own hands and the officer went away to swagger about town with the medal on his breast.

This affair could therefore be considered as quite finished, but Lieutenant-Colonel Svinin felt that it was not concluded, and regarded himself as called upon to put the dots on the "i's."

He had been so much alarmed that he was ill for three days, and on the fourth, drove to the Peter House, had a service of thanksgiving said for him before the icon of the Saviour, and returning home, reassured in his soul, sent to ask Captain Miller to come to him.

"Well, thank God, Nicolai Ivanovich," he said to Miller, "the storm that was hanging over us has entirely passed away and our unfortunate affair with the sentry has been quite settled. I think we can now breathe freely. All this we owe without doubt, first to the mercy of God, and secondly to General Kokoshkin. Let people say he is not kind and heartless, but I am full of gratitude for his magnanimity and respect for his resourcefulness and tact. In what a masterly way he took advantage of that vainglorious Invalid swindler who, in truth, for his impudence ought to have received not a medal, but a good thrashing in the stable. There was nothing else for him to do; he had to take advantage of this to save many, and Kokoshkin manœuvred the whole affair so cleverly that nobody had the slightest unpleasantness; on the contrary, all

are very happy and contented. Between ourselves, I can tell you, I have been informed by a reliable person that Kokoshkin is very satisfied with me. He was pleased I had not gone anywhere else, but came straight to him, and that I did not argue with this swindler, who received a medal. In a word, nobody has suffered, and all has been done with so much tact that there can be no fear for the future; but there is one thing wanting on our side. We must follow Kokoshkin's example and finish the affair with tact on our side, so as to guarantee ourselves from any future occurrences. There is still one person whose position is not regulated. I speak of Private Postnikov. He is still lying in prison under arrest, no doubt troubled with thoughts of what will be done to him. We must put an end to his torments."

"Yes, it is time," said Miller, delighted.

"Well, certainly, and you are the best man to do it. Please go at once to the barracks, call your company together, lead Private Postnikov out of prison, and let him be punished with two hundred lashes before the whole company."

Miller was astonished, and made an attempt to persuade Svinin to complete the general happiness by showing mercy to Private Postnikov, and to pardon him as he had already suffered so much while lying in prison waiting his fate, but Svinin only got angry and did not allow Miller to continue.

"No," he broke in, "none of that! I have only just talked to you about tact and you at once are tactless! None of that!"

Svinin changed his tone to a dryer, more official one, and added sternly:

"And as in this affair you too are not quite in the right, but really much to blame because your softness of heart is quite unsuitable for a military man, and this deficiency of your character is reflected in your subordinates, therefore you are to be present personally at the execution of my orders and to see that the flogging is done seriously—as severely as possible. For this purpose have the goodness to give orders that the young soldiers who have just arrived from the army, shall do the whipping, because our old soldiers are all infected with the liberalism of the guards. They won't whip a comrade properly, but would only frighten the fleas away from his back. I

myself will look in to see that they have done the guilty man properly."

To evade in any way instructions given by a superior officer was of course impossible, and kind-hearted Captain Miller was obliged to execute with exactitude the orders received from the commander of his battalion.

The company was drawn up in the courtyard of the Ismailovsky barracks; the rods were fetched in sufficient quantities from the stores, and Private Postnikov was brought out of his prison and "done properly" at the hands of the zealous comrades, who had just arrived from the army. These men, who had not as yet been tainted by the liberalism of the guards, put all the dots on the i's to the full, as ordered by the commander of the battalion. Then Postnikov, having received his punishment, was lifted up on the overcoat on which he had been whipped and carried to the hospital of the regiment.

The commander of the battalion, Svinin, as soon as he heard that the punishment had been inflicted, went at once to visit Postnikov in the hospital in a most fatherly way, and to satisfy himself by a personal examination that his orders had been properly executed. Heartsore and nervous, Postnikov had been "done properly". Svinin was satisfied and ordered that Postnikov should receive, on his behalf, a pound of sugar and a quarter of a pound of tea with which to regale himself while he was recovering. Postnikov, from his bed, heard this order about tea and said:

"I am very contented, your honour. Thank you for your fatherly kindness."

And he really was contented, because while lying three days in prison he had expected something much worse. Two hundred lashes, according to the strict ideas of those days, was of very little consequence in comparison with the punishments that people suffered by order of the military courts; and that is the sort of punishment he would have had awarded him if, by good luck, all the bold and tactful evolutions, which are related above, had not taken place.

But the number of persons who were pleased at the events just described was not limited to these.

The story of the exploit of Private Postnikov was secretly

whispered in various circles of society in the capital, which in those days, when the public Press had no voice, lived in a world of endless gossip. In these verbal transmissions the name of the real hero, Private Postnikov, was lost, but instead of that the episode became embellished and received a very interesting and romantic character.

It was related that an extraordinary swimmer had swum from the side of the Peter and Paul Fortress, and had been fired at and wounded by one of the sentries stationed before the Winter Palace and an officer of the Invalid Guard, who was passing at the time, threw himself into the water and saved him from drowning, for which the one had received the merited reward, and the other the punishment he deserved. These absurd reports even reached the Conventual House, inhabited at that time by His Eminence, a high ecclesiastic, who was cautious but not indifferent to worldly matters, and who was benevolently disposed towards, and a well-wisher of, the pious Moscow family, Svinin.

The story of the shot seemed improbable to the astute ecclesiastic. What nocturnal swimmer could it be? If he was an escaped prisoner, why was the sentry punished, for he had only done his duty in shooting at him, when he saw him swimming across the Neva from the Fortress. If he was not a prisoner, but another mysterious man, who had to be saved from the waves of the Neva, how could the sentry know anything about him? And then again, it could not have happened as it was whispered in frivolous society. In society much is accepted in a light-hearted and frivolous manner, but those who live in monasteries and conventual houses look upon all this much more seriously and are quite conversant with the real things of this world.

Once when Svinin happened to be at His Eminence's to receive his blessing, the distinguished dignitary began: "By the by, about that shot?" Svinin related the whole truth, in which there was nothing whatever "about that shot."

The high ecclesiastic listened to the real story in silence, gently touching his white rosary and never taking his eyes off the narrator. When Svinin had finished, His Eminence quietly murmured in rippling speech:

"From all this one is obliged to conclude that in this matter the statements made were neither wholly nor on every occasion strictly true."

Svinin stammered and then answered with the excuse that it was not he but General Kokoshkin who had made the report.

His Eminence passed his rosary through his waxen fingers in silence, and then murmured:

"One must make a distinction between a lie and what is not wholly true."

Again the rosary, again silence, and at last a soft ripple of speech:

"A half truth is not a lie, but the less said about it the better."

Svinin was encouraged and said:

"That is certainly true. What troubles me most is that I had to inflict a punishment upon the soldier, who, although he had neglected his duty . . ."

The rosary and a soft rippling interruption:

"The duties of service must never be neglected."

"Yes, but it was done by him through magnanimity, through sympathy after such a struggle, and with danger. He understood that in saving the life of another man he was destroying himself. This is a high, holy feeling . . ."

"Holiness is known to God; corporal punishment is not destruction for a common man, nor is it contrary to the customs of the nations, nor to the spirit of the Scriptures. The rod is easier borne by the coarse body than delicate suffering by the soul. In this case your justice has not suffered in the slightest degree."

"But he was deprived of the reward for saving one who was perishing."

"To save those who are perishing is not a merit, but rather a duty. He who could save but did not save is liable to the punishment of the laws; but he who saves does his duty."

A pause, the rosary, and soft rippling speech:

"For a warrior to suffer degradation and wounds for his action is perhaps much more profitable than marks of distinction. But what is most important is to be careful in this case, and never to mention anywhere or on any occasion what anybody said about it."

It was evident His Eminence was also satisfied.

If I had the temerity of the happy chosen of Heaven, who through their great faith are enabled to penetrate into the secrets of the Will of God, then I would perhaps dare to permit myself the supposition that probably God Himself was satisfied with the conduct of Postnikov's humble soul, which He had created. But my faith is small; it does not permit my mind to penetrate so high. I am of the earth, earthy. I think of those mortals who love goodness, simply because it is goodness and do not expect any reward for it, wherever it may be. I think these true and faithful people will also be entirely satisfied with this holy impulse of love, and not less holy endurance of the humble hero of my true and artless story.

V. GARSHIN

Four Days

I remember how we ran through the wood, how the bullets rattled, how the torn branches fell down, how we cut our way through the thick bushes. The firing grew hotter. Through the fringe of the wood there appeared red little flames, flashing here and there. Sidorov, a young little soldier of No. 1 Company ("How did he manage to get into our firing line?" flashed across my mind) suddenly tumbled down on the ground and silently glanced at me with big startled eyes. A stream of blood was trickling from his mouth. Oh, yes, I remember it quite well. I also remember how, almost on the fringe of the wood, among the thick bushes, I caught sight of . . . *him*. He was a huge, fat Turk, but I, although weak and thin, rushed straight at him. There was a bang, something enormous seemed to me to have flown past; my ears tingled. "He has fired at me," flashed across my mind. But he, with a scream of terror, pressed close with his back against a thick hawthorn bush. He could have got round the bush, but in terror he did not know what he was doing and pressed on against the prickly branches. With one blow I knocked his rifle down, and with the second I plunged my bayonet somewhere into him. There was something like a growl, or groan. Then I ran further on. Our men shouted "hurrah!" fired. I remember having fired several times, when I was already out of the wood, in the open. Suddenly the "hurrah" sounded louder, and we all rushed forward. I mean, not we, but our line did, for I remained where I was. That seemed strange. Stranger still was this that everything suddenly vanished; the shouts and firing ceased. I heard nothing, only saw something blue; it must have been the sky. Then it, too, vanished.

. . . . .

I have never had such an experience. I am lying apparently on my stomach and seeing before me only a tiny strip of the ground. A few blades of grass, an ant descending head foremost one of the blades, some scraps of rubbish from last year's grass—that is my whole world. And I am seeing it all with only one eye, for the other eye is pressed by something hard, it must be a branch, on which my head is resting. I feel a terrible discomfort, and I want to move, and can't make out why I am unable. Time is passing. I hear the chirruping of grasshoppers, the humming of a bee. That's all. At last I make an effort, free my right arm from under my body, and resting both hands on the ground, I try to get on my knees.

Something sharp and quick, as lightning, pierces my whole body from the knees up to my chest and head, and I fall down again. Darkness again, again blankness.

I am awake. Why do I see the stars shining so bright in the blue-black Bulgarian sky? Am I not in a tent? Why did I crawl out of it? I make a movement and feel a tormenting pain in my legs.

Yes, I have been wounded in battle. Dangerously, or not? I touch my legs in the spot where it aches. Both the right and left leg are covered with clotted blood. When I touch them with my hands, the pain is worse. A pain like toothache: continuous, excruciating. There is a tingling in my ears and my head feels heavy. I vaguely understand that I have been wounded in both legs. What does it mean then? Why did not they pick me up? Is it possible that the Turks have beaten us? I begin to recollect what has happened to me, at first vaguely, then more clearly, and I have come to the conclusion that we have not been defeated at all. I had fallen (in fact, I don't remember that; but I remember how we all rushed forward, and I could not run, and only something blue remained before my eyes)—I had fallen in the open field on the top of the hill. Our little battalion commander had pointed out that field to us. "Men, we must get there!" he had shouted to us in his ringing voice. And we got there; therefore, we had not been beaten. . . . Why then did not they pick me up? Surely, this field is exposed on every side, everything can be seen. Surely, I am not the only one lying here.

The firing was so continuous. I must turn my head and see. Now I can do it more comfortably, for when I came to myself and I saw the grass and the ant, descending head foremost, I tried to raise myself, and fell down not in my former position, but on to my back. That is why I can see the stars now.

I am trying to raise myself into a sitting position. It is difficult when both legs are shattered. Several times I have given it up in despair; at last, with tears in my eyes from the pain, I manage to sit down.

Above me is a strip of blue-black sky, in which a large star and some small ones are shining; around me is something dark, tall. It must be the bushes. I am among the bushes: they could not find me!

I feel the hair on my head standing on end. Still, how did I manage to get into the bushes, when I was shot in the field? Wounded, as I was, I must have crawled down here, without being conscious of it, owing to the pain. Only it is strange that now I can't move, and yet *then* I was able to drag myself down to these bushes. Or perhaps at that moment I had only one wound, and the second bullet caught me when I got here.

Pale pink spots begin moving around me. The large star grows pale, some small ones disappear. It is the moon rising. How nice it must be now at home! . . .

Strange sounds are reaching me. . . . As though someone were moaning. Yes, it is a moan. Is there lying somewhere near me someone forgotten like myself, with shattered legs or with a bullet in his stomach? No, the moans are so close, and near me, I believe, there is no-one . . . Good God, it is simply myself! Still, plaintive moans; does it, indeed, pain as much as that? It must. Only I can't understand that pain, for my head feels dizzy, leaden. I had better lie down again and sleep, sleep, sleep. . . . But shall I ever awake? It does not matter.

At the moment when I want to lie down, a wide pale gleam of moonlight clearly illumines the spot where I am lying, and I see something dark and big, lying at a distance of about five paces from me. Here and there are visible on it the gleams of the moonlight. It must be buttons or equipment. It is either a dead or a wounded man.

All the same, I'm going to lie down. . . .

No, it cannot be. Our men cannot have left the place. They are here; they dislodged the Turks and remained in this position. Why then do I hear no voices, no crackling of fires? Surely it is because of my weakness that I can't hear anything. They must be here for certain.

"Help! Help!——"

The wild, mad, hoarse cries come tearing from my chest, and there is no answer to them. They sound loud in the night air. All the rest is silence. Only the crickets are chirruping ceaselessly as before. The moon looks at me pityingly with its round face.

If *he* were wounded, he would have been awakened by my cries. It is a corpse. Is it one of our men or a Turk? Oh, good God! As if it matters. . . . And sleep is falling on my fevered eyes.

I am lying with my eyes shut, although I have been a long time awake. I have no desire to open my eyes, for through my closed eyelids I feel the light of the sun: if I were to open my eyes, the light would make them smart. And I had better not move. . . . Yesterday (I think, it was yesterday?) I was wounded; a day and a night have passed, another day and night will pass and I shall be dead. It does not matter. I had better not move. I had better let my body lie still. How nice it would be to stop also the work of the brain; but nothing will stop it. Thoughts, recollections are crowding on one another in my head. Still, it won't last long, there will soon be an end. There will just appear a few lines in the papers to say that our losses are negligible; so many wounded; private Ivanov, a volunteer, killed. No, they won't even give the name; they will simply say: one killed. One private, just like that little dog.

The whole picture flashes up distinctly in my mind. It was a long time ago; yet everything, my whole life, *that* life, which I lived before I lay here with shattered legs, happened so long ago. . . . I was walking along the street, and a group of people barred my way. A crowd had collected and was silently looking at something white, bleeding, plaintively whining. It was a pretty, tiny little dog, which had been run over by a tram. It was dying, as I am now. A house-porter pushed his way through the crowd, seized the dog by the neck and carried it off. The crowd dispersed. . . .

Will some one carry me away? No, I shall lie here and die. And how good life is! . . . On that day (of the accident to the little dog) I was happy. I walked as though I were intoxicated, and I had good reason. Oh, recollection, leave off tormenting me, leave me alone! . . . Happiness in the past, torments now . . . let the torments remain; but let the recollections that cause these involuntary comparisons, cease to torment me. Oh, the anguish! The anguish! How much worse it is than the pain from my wounds. However, it is getting hot. The sun is scorching me. I open my eyes, and see the same bushes, the same sky, only it is daylight. And here is my neighbour. A Turk, a corpse. What a huge man! I recognise him, he is that same fellow. . . .

There before me is the man I killed. Why did I kill him?

He lies here dead, covered with blood. Why did fate drive him here? Who is he? Perhaps he, like myself, has an old mother. She will sit for long evenings at the door of her poor hut and cast her eyes to the far north waiting for her beloved son, her breadwinner and support! . . .

And myself? I too. . . . I should like to change places with him. How happy he must be: he hears nothing, feels no pain from his wounds, no mortal anguish, no thirst. . . . The bayonet went straight through his heart. . . . There is a big black hole in his uniform, there is blood round it. *It is I who did it.*

I did not want to do it. I wished no evil to anyone when I went to the war. Somehow I was always forgetting that I too should have to kill men. I only imagined how I should be exposing *my* chest to the bullets. And I went and exposed it.

And the result? How stupid, how stupid! This unfortunate fellah (he is wearing an Egyptian uniform)—he is still less to blame. Before they were put, like herrings in a barrel, on board a steamer and taken to Constantinople, he had heard nothing of Russia or Bulgaria. He was ordered to go, and he went. Had he refused to go, they would have beaten him with sticks, or perhaps a Pasha would have put a bullet in his head. He marched by a long, laborious route from Stamboul to Ruschuk. We attacked, he defended himself. But, since we, terrible men, not afraid of his patent English Peabody & Martin rifle, kept on advancing, he was seized with terror. When he wanted to get away, a little man, whom he could have killed with one blow

of his black fist, jumped forward and plunged a bayonet into his heart.

How is he to blame then?

And how am I to blame, although I did kill him? How am I to blame? Why does the thirst torment me so much? Thirst! Who knows what the word means? Even then, when we marched across Rumania, covering fifty versts a day in the terrific heat of forty degrees Centigrade, I never experienced what I am experiencing now. Oh, if only someone would come along!

God! In that huge bottle he is sure to have some water! I must crawl up to him. How very painful it will be! Still, I must get at it.

I crawl. I am dragging my legs behind me. My weakened arms can hardly move my motionless body. The corpse is about fifteen feet from me, but to me it is more—worse than leagues. Yet I must crawl. My throat is burning, scorching me like fire. Death without the water would be quicker. . . . After all, perhaps. . . .

And I crawl. My feet are catching in the ground, and each movement causes insufferable pain. I cry, I cry and yell, and still keep on crawling. At last I get to him. There's the bottle . . . there is water in it—and what a lot! More than half full. Oh! I shall have water enough to last me . . . until my very death!

You are saving me, my victim! . . . I begin to unfasten the bottle, leaning on one elbow, when suddenly, losing balance, I fall down face forward on to the chest of my saviour. Already a strong cadaverous smell is coming from him.

I have had a good drink. The water was warm, but not spoiled, and moreover there was a lot of it. I shall live a few more days. I remember it says in "The Physiology of Everyday Life," that a man can live without food for more than a week, provided he has water. Yes, there is also the account there of a suicide who starved himself to death. He lived for a long time, because he drank water.

And well? What if I go on living another five or six days, what will happen then? Our men have gone, the Bulgarians have run away. There is no road near. All the same I have to die. Only instead of agonies lasting three days I shall protract them

for a week. Would it not be better to make an end? There is my neighbour's rifle lying by, an excellent English article. I need only stretch out my hand; then—a flash and the end. There are cartridges there, heaps. He had not time to discharge them all.

Make an end or wait? Wait for what? Deliverance? Death? Wait until the Turks arrive and start flaying the skin off my wounded legs? Better finish the job myself.

No, I must not lose heart; I shall struggle to the end, to the utmost of my strength. Surely, if they find me, I am saved. Perhaps the bones are not affected, and I shall recover. I shall see my country, my mother, Marie. . . .

Lord, grant that they may never learn the whole truth! Let them believe that I was killed outright. What will happen to them, if they learn that I have been in agonies for two, three, four days!

My head is spinning round; the journey to my neighbour has quite exhausted me. And now this awful smell. How black he has become. . . . What will he be like to-morrow, after to-morrow? And I am lying here now merely because I have no strength left to drag myself away. I shall rest a while and crawl back to my old spot; the wind, too, is blowing from that direction and will carry the stench away from me.

I am lying thoroughly exhausted. The sun is scorching my face and hands. I can find no shelter. If only the night would come soon; I think this will be the second night.

My thoughts are becoming confused, and I am losing consciousness.

I slept for a long time, because when I awoke it was already night. Everything as before; my wounds ache, my neighbour is lying there, as huge and motionless as ever.

I keep on thinking of him. Did I really give up everything I loved, that is dear to me, and come here marching a thousand versts, starving, frozen by the cold, tormented by heat; and now am lying here in this agony only in order that this unfortunate man should cease to live? Have I done anything useful in the war except this murder?

Murder, murderer. . . . And who? I!

When I conceived the idea of going to the war, my mother and Marie made no attempt to dissuade me, although they both

cried. Dazzled by the idea, I did not see those tears. I did not understand (now I do realise) what I was doing to my dear ones.

Must I remember? I can't undo what is past.

And what a strange attitude towards my action many of my friends took! "Oh, he's crazy! He does not know himself what he's doing it for!" How could they say it? How could they reconcile such words with *their* notions of heroism, love of country and such like things? Surely in *their* eyes I ought to have represented all these virtues. And yet I am "crazy". . . .

I went to Kishiniov; they loaded me up with a knapsack and the full military equipment. I marched with thousands, of whom only a few, like myself, were going as volunteers. The rest would have stayed at home, had they been allowed to. Yet they marched just like us, the "conscious ones," they covered thousands of versts and fought just like us, or even better. They were doing their duty, notwithstanding the fact that they would immediately have given it up and gone home, had they only been allowed.

A sharp, keen, early morning breeze has arisen. The bushes begin to stir, a half-asleep little bird is fluttering its wings. The stars have faded away. The dark blue sky has grown grey, veiled with soft, feathery clouds; a grey mist is rising from the ground. The third day of my . . . what shall I call it? Life? Agony—has dawned.

The third. . . . How many more will there be? At any rate, not many. I have become very weak and I do not think I shall be able to move away from the corpse. We shall soon be square and shall not be unpleasant to one another.

I must have some water. I shall drink three times a day: in the morning, at midday, and in the evening.

The sun has risen. Its enormous disc, intersected and divided by the dark branches of the bushes, is red like blood. It looks as if it is going to be a hot day. My neighbour—what will you look like? Even now you are terrible.

Yes, he was terrible. His hair has begun to fall out. His skin, naturally dark, has become pale and yellow; his swollen face has stretched the skin so tight that it has burst behind the ear. Worms are moving there. His feet in their boots have swollen

up and large blisters have pushed their way through the openings in the leather. And altogether he is swollen like a mountain. What is the sun going to make of him to-day?

It is unbearable to lie so close to him. I must crawl away, at all costs. But shall I be able to? All I can do now is to raise my arm, to open the bottle and to sip some water; but how to move my own heavy, motionless body? Yet I must move it, be it ever so little, if only half a pace an hour.

I have spent the whole morning in moving. The pain has been awful, but what is that to me now? I no longer remember, I cannot imagine the sensations of a man in good health. I have even got used to the pain. During the morning I crawled away about a dozen feet and found myself in my old place. But I could not enjoy the fresh air for long, only six paces from a rotting corpse. The wind changed and wafted back on me a stench so violent that it made me sick. My empty stomach was contracting painfully and convulsively; all my inside was turning over and over. And the stinking, infected air kept blowing on me.

In despair I burst into tears.

Completely crushed, stupefied, I lay almost unconscious. Suddenly. . . . Isn't it a delusion of my disordered imagination? It seems to me that I hear something . . . but no! Yes, it is a noise of voices. The stamping of horses, the sound of human voices. I nearly cried out aloud, but restrained myself. Suppose they were Turks? To my present torments would be added other, far more terrible ones, the mere reading of which in the newspapers makes one's hair stand on end. They would flay me alive, roast my wounded legs. . . . It would be all right, if they did no more than this, but they are so inventive. . . . Would it be better to end life in their hands than to die here? But, suppose, they are our men? Oh, cursed bushes! Why have you enveloped me with so thick a hedge? I can see nothing through them, only in one spot a little opening, like a window among the branches, gives me a view into the distance, into a hollow. There, I believe, is the little stream, from which we drank before the battle. Yes, there is also a huge block of sand-stone, placed across the stream like a bridge. They are sure to cross by it.

The sounds have ceased. I can't detect the language they speak: my hearing, too, has grown weak. God! Suppose they are our men . . . I will call to them; they should hear me even from there, from the stream. It is better than risking falling into the hands of the Bashibazouks. Why then are they so long in coming? My impatience is so great that I don't even notice the smell of the corpse, although the stench has in no way diminished.

And then suddenly, at the crossing of the stream, Cossacks appear! Blue uniforms, red stripes, lances. There is a half squadron. Ahead of them, on a magnificent horse, rides a black-bearded officer. As soon as they cross the stream he, turning in his saddle with his whole body, gives the order to them:

"Tro-t! March!"

"Stop, stop! Help, help, help!" I cry. But the stamping of the powerful horses, the clanging of the lances, and the lively chatter of the Cossacks is louder than my half-choked cries—and they do not hear me.

Oh, damnation! Exhausted I fall face foremost on the ground and begin to sob. From my overturned bottle the water is trickling out—my life, my salvation, my respite from death. But I notice it only when not more than half a glass of water is left, the rest having gone into the thirsty, dry soil.

How can I recall the torpor which seized me after that terrible moment? I lay motionless, with half-closed eyes. The wind kept on changing, now blowing on me a fresh pure air, now again suffocating me with the stench. My neighbour had that day become still more dreadful, beyond description. Once when I opened my eyes to look at him I was horror stricken. He had no longer a face. It had fallen away from the bones. The terrible, ossified grin, the eternal grin seemed to me more revolting, more horrible than ever I had known it before, although I had more than once held skulls in my hands and handled whole heads. That skeleton in uniform with bright buttons made me shudder. "This is war," I thought, "and this is its image."

The sun is scorching and baking as usual. My hands and face are all burnt. The rest of the water I have already drunk. I was so tormented by thirst that after having made up my mind to take just a sip, I swallowed it all at one gulp. Oh, why did

I not call to the Cossacks when they were so near me? Even had they been Turks, still it would have been better. They would perhaps have tortured me for an hour, two hours, but now I wonder how long I shall have to writhe and suffer here. Mother, my darling mother, you will tear out your grey hair, you will knock your head against the wall, you will curse the day you bore me, you will curse the whole world for inventing war to torment people!

But you and Marie will surely never know of my tortures. Good-bye, mother; good-bye, my sweetheart, my dear love. Oh, how hard, how bitter! Something is gripping at my heart. . . .

Again I see the little dog. The house-porter took no pity on it, but knocked its head against the wall and flung it into a pit, where they throw rubbish and refuse. But it was still alive. And its agony lasted a whole day. Yet I am still more unfortunate, for I have already had three days of torture. To-morrow will be the fourth day, then there will come the fifth, the sixth. . . . Death, where art thou? Come, come! Take me!

But death does not come and does not take me. And I am lying here under this awful sun, with not a drop of water to refresh my burning throat, and near a corpse which is poisoning me. It has become quite decomposed. Thousands of worms are falling off it. What a seething mass! When it has all been eaten up and nothing is left save the bones and uniform, then will come my turn. I, too, shall be like that.

The day passes; the night passes. Everything remains the same. Another morning is arriving. No change. Yet another day passes. . . .

The bushes rustle and murmur as though they whispered: "You'll die, you'll die, you'll die!" And the bushes from the other side respond: "You won't see, you won't see, you won't see."

"You won't see them here!" sounds a loud voice near me.

I shudder and at once come to myself. From out of the bushes the kindly blue eyes of Yakovlev, our corporal, are looking at me.

"Spades here!" he shouts. "There are two more here, one of our men and a Turk."

"No spades, no need to bury me, I'm alive!" I want to cry out, but only a feeble groan comes from my parched lips.

"God! He is alive! It is our Ivanov! Mates! Come along, our *barin* is alive! Call the doctor!"

In a few moments they pour water into my mouth, vodka and something else. Then everything disappears.

The stretcher-bearers carry me with a measured swing. The measured movement lulls me to sleep. I keep on waking and lapsing into forgetfulness. My bandaged wounds do not hurt me; and an inexpressibly comforting sensation suffuses my whole body. . . .

"Halt! Lower it down! Fourth relief, march! Take the stretcher! Come on, lift it up!"

It is Peter Ivanovich, our medical officer, who gives the order. He is a tall, lanky and a very kind fellow. He is so tall that, turning my eyes in his direction, I see all the time his head, face and his sparse long beard and shoulders, although four stalwart men are carrying me shoulder high.

"Peter Ivanovich!" I whisper.

"What's it, old chap?" Peter Ivanovich says bending over me.

"Peter Ivanovich, what did the doctor say to you? Shall I die soon?"

"No, my dear chap, you are not going to die. Your bones are all safe and sound. You are a lucky fellow! Not a bone or an artery touched. But how have you managed to hold out these four days? What had you to eat?"

"Nothing."

"And to drink?"

"I took the Turk's water-bottle. Peter Ivanovich, I can't talk now. Afterwards. . . ."

"All right, old chap. Try to sleep now."

Again sleep, oblivion. . . .

I wake up in the field hospital. Around me stand doctors, nurses, and among them I recognise the familiar face of a well-known Petersburg professor, bending over my legs. His hands are covered with blood. He makes no long job of it, and says to me:

"You are in luck, young man. You will live. We have had to take one leg off; well, that's a mere trifle, isn't it? Can you talk now?"

I am able to talk and I tell them all that I have written here.

ANTON TCHEKHOV

My Life

THE STORY OF A PROVINCIAL

The director said to me: "I only keep you out of respect for your worthy father, or you would have gone long since." I replied: "You flatter me, your Excellency, but I suppose I am in a position to go." And then I heard him saying: "Take the fellow away, he is getting on my nerves."

Two days later I was dismissed. Ever since I had been grown up, to the great sorrow of my father, the municipal architect, I had changed my position nine times, going from one department to another, but all the departments were as like each other as drops of water; I had to sit and write, listen to inane and rude remarks, and just wait until I was dismissed.

When I told my father, he was sitting back in his chair with his eyes shut. His thin, dry face, with a dove-coloured tinge where he shaved (his face was like that of an old Catholic organist), wore an expression of meek submission. Without answering my greeting or opening his eyes, he said:

"If my dear wife, your mother, were alive, your life would be a constant grief to her. I can see the hand of Providence in her untimely death. Tell me, you unhappy boy," he went on, opening his eyes, "what am I to do with you?"

When I was younger my relations and friends knew what to do with me; some advised me to go into the army as a volunteer, others were for pharmacy, others for the telegraph service; but now that I was twenty-four and was going grey at the temples and had already tried the army and pharmacy and the telegraph service, and every possibility seemed to be exhausted, they gave me no more advice, but only sighed and shook their heads.

"What do you think of yourself?" my father went on. "At your age other young men have a good social position, and just look at yourself: a lazy lout, a beggar, living on your father!"

And, as usual, he went on to say that young men were going to the dogs through want of faith, materialism, and conceit, and that amateur theatricals should be prohibited because they seduce young people from religion and their duty.

"To-morrow we will go together, and you shall apologise to the director and promise to do your work conscientiously," he concluded. "You must not be without a position in society for a single day."

"Please listen to me," said I firmly, though I did not anticipate gaining anything by speaking. "What you call a position in society is the privilege of capital and education. But people who are poor and uneducated have to earn their living by hard physical labour, and I see no reason why I should be an exception."

"It is foolish and trivial of you to talk of physical labour," said my father with some irritation. "Do try to understand, you idiot, and get it into your brainless head, that in addition to physical strength you have a divine spirit; a sacred fire, by which you are distinguished from an ass or a reptile and bringing you nigh to God. This sacred fire has been kept alight for thousands of years by the best of mankind. Your great-grandfather, General Polozniev, fought at Borodino; your grandfather was a poet, an orator, and a marshal of the nobility; your uncle was an educationist; and I, your father, am an architect! Have all the Poloznievs kept the sacred fire alight for you to put it out?"

"There must be justice," said I. "Millions of people have to do manual labour."

"Let them. They can do nothing else! Even a fool or a criminal can do manual labour. It is the mark of a slave and a barbarian, whereas the sacred fire is given only to a few!"

It was useless to go on with the conversation. My father worshipped himself and would not be convinced by anything unless he said it himself. Besides, I knew quite well that the annoyance with which he spoke of unskilled labour came not so much from any regard for the sacred fire, as from a secret fear that I should

become a working man and the talk of the town. But the chief thing was that all my school-fellows had long ago gone through the University and were making careers for themselves, and the son of the director of the State Bank was already a collegiate assessor, while I, an only son, was nothing! It was useless and unpleasant to go on with the conversation, but I still sat there and raised objections in the hope of making myself understood. The problem was simple and clear: how was I to earn my living? But he could not see its simplicity and kept on talking with sugary rounded phrases about Borodino and the sacred fire, and my uncle, a forgotten poet who wrote bad, insincere verses, and he called me a brainless fool. But how I longed to be understood! In spite of everything, I loved my father and my sister, and from boyhood I have had a habit of considering them, so strongly rooted that I shall probably never get rid of it; whether I am right or wrong I am always afraid of hurting them, and go in terror lest my father's thin neck should go red with anger and he should have an apoplectic fit.

"It is shameful and degrading for a man of my age to sit in a stuffy room and compete with a typewriting-machine," I said. "What has that to do with the sacred fire?"

"Still, it is intellectual work," said my father. "But that's enough. Let us drop the conversation and I warn you that if you refuse to return to your office, and indulge your contemptible inclinations, then you will lose my love and your sister's. I shall cut you out of my will—that I swear, by God!"

With perfect sincerity, in order to show the purity of my motives, by which I hope to be guided all through my life, I said:

"The matter of inheritance does not strike me as important. I renounce any rights I may have."

For some unexpected reason these words greatly offended my father. He went purple in the face.

"How dare you talk to me like that, you fool!" he cried to me in a thin, shrill voice. "You scoundrel!" And he struck me quickly and dexterously with a familiar movement; once—twice. "You forget yourself!"

When I was a boy and my father struck me, I used to stand bolt upright like a soldier and look him straight in the face; and, exactly as if I were still a boy, I stood erect, and tried to

look into his eyes. My father was old and very thin, but his spare muscles must have been as strong as whip-cord, for he hit very hard.

I returned to the hall, but there he seized his umbrella and struck me several times over the head and shoulders; at that moment my sister opened the drawing-room door to see what the noise was, but immediately drew back with an expression of pity and horror, and said not one word in my defence.

My intention not to return to the office, but to start a new working life, was unshakable. It only remained to choose the kind of work—and there seemed to be no great difficulty about that, because I was strong, patient, and willing. I was prepared to face a monotonous, laborious life, of semi-starvation, filth, and rough surroundings, always overshadowed with the thought of finding a job and a living. And—who knows—returning from work in the Great Gentry Street, I might often envy Dolzhikov, the engineer, who lives by intellectual work, but I was happy in thinking of my coming troubles. I used to dream of intellectual activity, and to imagine myself a teacher, a doctor, a writer, but my dreams remained only dreams. A liking for intellectual pleasures—like the theatre and reading—grew into a passion with me, but I did not know whether I had any capacity for intellectual work. At school I had an unconquerable aversion for the Greek language, so that I had to leave when I was in the fourth class. Teachers were got to coach me up for the fifth class, and then I went into various departments, spending most of my time in perfect idleness, and this, I was told, was intellectual work.

My activity in the education department or in the municipal office required neither mental effort, nor talent, nor personal ability, nor creative spiritual impulse; it was purely mechanical, and such intellectual work seemed to me lower than manual labour. I despise it and I do not think that it for a moment justifies an idle, careless life, because it is nothing but a swindle, and only a kind of idleness. In all probability I have never known real intellectual work.

It was evening. We lived in Great Gentry Street—the chief street in the town—and our rank and fashion walked up and down it in the evenings, as there were no public gardens. The

street was very charming, and was almost as good as a garden, for it had two rows of poplar-trees, which smelt very sweet, especially after rain, and acacias, and tall trees, and apple-trees hung over the fences and hedges. May evenings, the scent of the lilac, the hum of the cockchafers, the warm, still air—how new and extraordinary it all is, though spring comes every year! I stood by the gate and looked at the passers-by. With most of them I had grown up and had played with them, but now my presence might upset them, because I was poorly dressed, in unfashionable clothes, and people made fun of my very narrow trousers and large, clumsy boots, and called them macaroni-on-steamboats. And I had a bad reputation in the town because I had no position and went to play billiards in low cafés, and had once been taken up, for no particular offence, by the political police.

In a large house opposite, Dolzhikov's, the engineer's, some one was playing the piano. It was beginning to get dark and the stars were beginning to shine. And slowly, answering people's salutes, my father passed with my sister on his arm. He was wearing an old top hat with a broad curly brim.

"Look!" he said to my sister, pointing to the sky with the very umbrella with which he had just struck me. "Look at the sky! Even the smallest stars are worlds! How insignificant man is in comparison with the universe."

And he said this in a tone that seemed to convey that he found it extremely flattering and pleasant to be so insignificant. What an untalented man he was! Unfortunately, he was the only architect in the town, and during the last fifteen or twenty years I could not remember one decent house being built. When he had to design a house, as a rule he would draw first the hall and the drawing-room; as in olden days schoolgirls could only begin to dance by the fireplace, so his artistic ideas could only evolve from the hall and drawing-room. To them he would add the dining-room, nursery, study, connecting them with doors, so that in the end they were just so many passages, and each room had two or three doors too many. His houses were obscure, extremely confused, and limited. Every time, as though he felt something was missing, he had recourse to various additions, plastering them one on top of the other, and there would be various lobbies, and passages, and crooked

staircases leading to the entresol, where it was only possible to stand in a stooping position, and where instead of a floor there would be a thin flight of stairs like a Russian bath, and the kitchen would always be under the house with a vaulted ceiling and a brick floor. The front of his houses always had a hard, stubborn expression, with stiff, timid lines, low, squat roofs, and fat, pudding-like chimneys surmounted with black cowls and squeaking weathercocks. And somehow all the houses built by my father were like each other, and vaguely reminded me of his top hat, and the stiff, obstinate back of his head. In the course of time the people of the town grew used to my father's lack of talent, which took root and became our style.

My father introduced the style into my sister's life. To begin with, he gave her the name of Cleopatra (and he called me Misail). When she was a little girl he used to frighten her by telling her about the stars and our ancestors; and explained the nature of life and duty to her at great length; and now when she was twenty-six he went on in the same way, allowing her to take no-one's arm but his own, and somehow imagining that sooner or later an ardent young man would turn up and wish to enter into marriage with her out of admiration for his qualities. And she adored my father, was afraid of him, and believed in his extraordinary intellectual powers.

It got quite dark and the street grew gradually empty. In the house opposite the music stopped. The gate was wide open and out into the street, careering with all its bells jingling, came a troika. It was the engineer and his daughter going for a drive. Time to go to bed!

I had a room in the house, but I lived in the courtyard in a hut, under the same roof as the coach-house, which had been built probably as a harness-room—for there were big nails in the walls—but now it was not used, and my father for thirty years had kept his newspapers there, which for some reason he had bound half-yearly and then allowed no-one to touch. Living there I was less in touch with my father and his guests, and I used to think that if I did not live in a proper room and did not go to the house every day for meals, my father's reproach that I was living on him lost some of its sting.

My sister was waiting for me. She had brought me supper

unknown to my father; a small piece of cold veal and a slice of bread. In the family there were sayings: "Money loves an account," or "A copeck saves a rouble," and so on, and my sister, impressed by such wisdom, did her best to cut down expenses and made us feed rather meagrely. She put the plate on the table, sat on my bed, and began to cry.

"Misail," she said, "what are you doing to us?"

She did not cover her face, her tears ran down her cheeks and hands, and her expression was sorrowful. She fell on the pillow, gave way to her tears, trembling all over and sobbing.

"You have left your work again!" she said. "How awful!"

"Do try to understand, sister!" I said, and because she cried I was filled with despair.

As though it were deliberately arranged, the paraffin in my little lamp ran out, and the lamp smoked and guttered, and the old hooks in the wall looked terrible and their shadows flickered.

"Spare us!" said my sister, rising up. "Father is in an awful state, and I am ill. I shall go mad. What will become of you?" she asked, sobbing and holding out her hands to me. "I ask you, I implore you, in the name of our dear mother, to go back to your work."

"I cannot, Cleopatra," I said, feeling that only a little more would make me give in. "I cannot."

"Why?" insisted my sister, "why? If you have not made it up with your chief, look for another place. For instance, why shouldn't you work on the railway? I have just spoken to Aniuta Blagovo, and she assures me you would be taken on, and she even promised to do what she could for you. For goodness' sake, Misail, think! Think it over, I implore you!"

We talked a little longer and I gave in. I said that the thought of working on the railway had never come into my head, and that I was ready to try.

She smiled happily through her tears and clasped my hand, and still she cried, because she could not stop, and I went into the kitchen for paraffin.

II

Among the supporters of amateur theatricals, charity concerts, and *tableaux vivants* the leaders were the Azhoguins, who

lived in their own house in Great Gentry Street. They used to lend their house and assume the necessary trouble and expense. They were a rich landowning family, and had about three thousand dessiatins, with a magnificent farm in the neighbourhood, but they did not care for village life and lived in the town summer and winter. The family consisted of a mother, a tall, spare, delicate lady, who had short hair, wore a blouse and a plain skirt *à l'anglaise*, and three daughters, who were spoken of, not by their names, but as the eldest, the middle, and the youngest; they all had ugly, sharp chins, and they were short-sighted, high-shouldered, dressed in the same style as their mother, had an unpleasant lisp, and yet they always took part in every play and were always doing something for charity—acting, reciting, singing. They were very serious and never smiled, and even in burlesque operettas they acted without gaiety and with a businesslike air, as though they were engaged in bookkeeping.

I loved our plays, especially the rehearsals, which were frequent, rather absurd, and noisy, and we were always given supper after them. I had no part in the selection of the pieces and the casting of the characters. I had to look after the stage. I used to design the scenery and copy out the parts, and prompt and make up. And I also had to look after the various effects such as thunder, the singing of a nightingale, and so on. Having no social position, I had no decent clothes, and during rehearsals had to hold aloof from the others in the darkened wings and shyly say nothing.

I used to paint the scenery in the Azhoguins' coachhouse or yard. I was assisted by a house-painter, or, as he called himself, a decorating contractor, named Andrey Ivanov, a man of about fifty, tall and very thin and pale, with a narrow chest, hollow temples, and dark rings under his eyes, he was rather awful to look at. He had some kind of wasting disease, and every spring and autumn he was said to be on the point of death, but he would go to bed for a while and then get up and say with surprise: "I'm not dead this time!"

In the town he was called Radish, and people said it was his real name. He loved the theatre as much as I, and no sooner did he hear that a play was in hand than he gave up all his work and went to the Azhoguins' to paint scenery.

The day after my conversation with my sister I worked from morning till night at the Azhoguins'. The rehearsal was fixed for seven o'clock, and an hour before it began all the players were assembled, and the eldest, the middle, and the youngest Miss Azhoguin were reading their parts on the stage. Radish, in a long, brown overcoat with a scarf wound round his neck, was standing, leaning with his head against the wall, looking at the stage with a rapt expression. Mrs. Azhoguin went from guest to guest saying something pleasant to everyone. She had a way of gazing into one's face and speaking in a hushed voice as though she were telling a secret.

"It must be difficult to paint scenery," she said softly, coming up to me. "I was just talking to Mrs. Mufke about prejudice when I saw you come in. Mon Dieu! All my life I have struggled against prejudice. To convince the servants that all their superstitions are nonsense I always light three candles, and I begin all my important business on the thirteenth."

The daughter of Dolzhikov, the engineer, was there, a handsome, plump, fair girl, dressed as people said in our town in Parisian style. She did not act, but at rehearsals a chair was put for her on the stage, and the plays did not begin until she appeared in the front row, to astonish everybody with the brilliance of her clothes. As coming from the metropolis, she was allowed to make remarks during rehearsals, and she did so with an affable, condescending smile, and it was clear that she regarded our plays as a childish amusement. It was said that she had studied singing at the Petersburg conservatoire and had sung for a winter season in opera. I liked her very much, and during rehearsals or the performance, I never took my eyes off her.

I had taken the book and begun to prompt when suddenly my sister appeared. Without taking off her coat and hat she came up to me and said:

"Please come!"

I went. Behind the stage in the doorway stood Aniuta Blagovo, also wearing a hat with a dark veil. She was the daughter of the vice-president of the Court, who had been appointed to our town years ago, almost as soon as the High Court was established. She was tall and had a good figure, and was considered indispensable for the *tableaux vivants*, and when she represented

a fairy or a muse, her face would burn with shame; but she took no part in the plays, and would only look in at rehearsals, on some business, and never enter the hall. And it was evident now that she had only looked in for a moment.

"My father has mentioned you," she said dryly, not looking at me and blushing . . . "Dolzhikov has promised to find you something to do on the railway. If you go to his house to-morrow, he will see you."

I bowed and thanked her for her kindness.

"And you must leave this," she said, pointing to my book.

She and my sister went up to Mrs. Azhoguin and began to whisper, looking at me.

"Indeed," said Mrs. Azhoguin, coming up to me, and gazing into my face. "Indeed, if it takes you from your more serious business"—she took the book out of my hands—"then you must hand it over to some one else. Don't worry, my friend. It will be all right."

I said good-bye and left in some confusion. As I went downstairs I saw my sister and Aniuta Blagovo going away; they were talking animatedly, I suppose about my going on the railway, and they hurried away. My sister had never been to a rehearsal before, and she was probably tortured by her conscience and by her fear of my father finding out that she had been to the Azhoguins' without permission.

The next day I went to see Dolzhikov at one o'clock. The man servant showed me into a charming room, which was the engineer's drawing-room and study. Everything in it was charming and tasteful, and to a man like myself, unused to such things, very strange. Costly carpets, huge chairs, bronzes, pictures in gold and velvet frames; photographs on the walls of beautiful women, clever, handsome faces, and striking attitudes; from the drawing-room a door led straight into the garden, by a veranda, and I saw lilac and a table laid for breakfast, rolls, and a bunch of roses; and there was a smell of spring, and good cigars, and happiness—and everything seemed to say, here lives a man who has worked and won the highest happiness here on earth. At the table the engineer's daughter was sitting reading a newspaper.

"Do you want my father?" she asked. "He is having a shower-bath. He will be down presently. Please take a chair."

I sat down.

"I believe you live opposite?" she asked after a short silence.

"Yes."

"When I have nothing to do I look out of the window. You must excuse me," she added, turning to her newspaper, "and I often see you and your sister. She has such a kind, wistful expression."

Dolzhikov came in. He was wiping his neck with a towel.

"Papa, this is Mr. Polozniev," said his daughter.

"Yes, yes. Blagovo spoke to me." He turned quickly to me, but did not hold out his hand. "But what do you think I can give you? I'm not bursting with situations. You are queer people!" he went on in a loud voice and as though he were scolding me. "I get about twenty people every day, as though I were a Department of State. I run a railway, sir. I employ hard labour; I need mechanics, navvies, joiners, well-sinkers, and you can only sit and write. That's all! You are all clerks!"

And he exhaled the same air of happiness as his carpets and chairs. He was stout, healthy, with red cheeks and a broad chest; he looked clean in his pink shirt and wide trousers, just like a china figure of a post-boy. He had a round, bristling beard—and not a single grey hair—and a nose with a slight bridge, and bright, innocent, dark eyes.

"What can you do?" he went on. "Nothing! I am an engineer and well-to-do, but before I was given this railway I worked very hard for a long time. I was an engine-driver for two years. I worked in Belgium as an ordinary lubricator. Now, my dear man, just think—what work can I offer you?"

"I quite agree," said I, utterly abashed, not daring to meet his bright, innocent eyes.

"Are you any good with the telegraph?" he asked after some thought.

"Yes. I have been in the telegraph service."

"Mm. . . . Well, we'll see. Go to Dubechnia. There's a fellow there already. But he is a scamp."

"And what will my duties be?" I asked.

"We'll see to that later. Go there now. I'll give orders. But

please don't get drunk and don't bother me with petitions or I'll kick you out."

He turned away from me without even a nod. I bowed to him and his daughter, who was reading the newspaper, and went out. I felt so miserable that when my sister asked how the engineer had received me, I could not utter a single word.

To go to Dubechnia I got up early in the morning at sunrise. There was not a soul in the street, the whole town was asleep, and my footsteps rang out with a hollow sound. The dewy poplars filled the air with a soft scent. I was sad and had no desire to leave the town. It seemed so nice and warm! I loved the green trees, the quiet sunny mornings, the ringing of the bells, but the people in the town were alien to me, tiresome and sometimes even loathsome. I neither liked nor understood them.

I did not understand why or for what purpose those thirty-five thousand people lived. I knew that Kimry made a living by manufacturing boots, that Tula made samovars and guns, that Odessa was a port; but I did not know what our town was or what it did. The people in Great Gentry Street and two other clean streets had independent means and salaries paid by the Treasury, but how the people lived in the other eight streets which stretched parallel to each other for three miles and then were lost behind the hill—that was always an insoluble problem to me. And I am ashamed to think of the way they lived. They had neither public gardens, nor a theatre, nor a decent orchestra; the town and club libraries are used only by young Jews, so that books and magazines would lie for months uncut. The rich and the intelligentsia slept in close, stuffy bedrooms, with wooden beds infested with bugs; the children were kept in filthy, dirty rooms called nurseries, and the servants, even when they were old and respectable, slept on the kitchen floor and covered themselves with rags. Except in Lent all the houses smelt of *bortsch*, and during Lent of sturgeon fried in sunflower oil. The food was unsavoury, the water unwholesome. On the town council, at the governor's, at the archbishop's, everywhere there had been talk for years about there being no good, cheap water-supply and of borrowing two hundred thousand roubles from the Treasury. Even the very rich people, of whom there were about thirty in the town, people

who would lose a whole estate at cards, used to drink the bad water and talk passionately about the loan—and I could never understand this, for it seemed to me it would be simpler for them to pay up the two hundred thousand.

I did not know a single honest man in the whole town. My father took bribes, and imagined they were given to him out of respect for his spiritual qualities; the boys at the high school, in order to be promoted, went to lodge with the masters and paid them large sums; the wife of the military commandant took levies from the recruits during the recruiting, and even allowed them to stand her drinks, and once she was so drunk in church that she could not get up from her knees; during the recruiting the doctors also took bribes, and the municipal doctor and the veterinary surgeon levied taxes on the butcher shops and public houses; the district school did a trade in certificates which gave certain privileges in the civil service; the provosts took bribes from the clergy and churchwardens whom they controlled, and on the town council and various committees every one who came before them was pursued with: "One expects thanks!"—and thereby forty copecks had to change hands. And those who did not take bribes, like the High Court officials, were stiff and proud, and shook hands with two fingers, and were distinguished by their indifference and narrow-mindedness. They drank and played cards, married rich women, and always had a bad, insidious influence on those round them. Only the girls had any moral purity; most of them had lofty aspirations and were pure and honest at heart; but they knew nothing of life, and believed that bribes were given to honour spiritual qualities; and when they married, they soon grew old and weak, and were hopelessly lost in the mire of that vulgar, bourgeois existence.

III

A railway was being built in our district. On holidays and thereabouts the town was filled with crowds of ragamuffins called "railies," of whom the people were afraid. I used often to see a miserable wretch with a bloody face, and without a hat, being dragged off by the police, and behind him was the proof of his crime, a samovar or some wet, newly washed linen.

The "railies" used to collect near the public-houses and on the squares; and they drank, ate, and swore terribly, and whistled after the town prostitutes. To amuse these ruffians our shop-keepers used to make the cats and dogs drink vodka, or tie a kerosene-tin to a dog's tail, and whistle to make the dog come tearing along the street with the tin clattering after him, and making him squeal with terror and think he had some frightful monster hard at his heels, so that he would rush out of the town and over the fields until he could run no more. We had several dogs in the town which were left with a permanent shiver and used to crawl about with their tails between their legs, and people said that they could not stand such tricks and had gone mad.

The station was being built five miles from the town. It was said that the engineer had asked for a bribe of fifty thousand roubles to bring the station nearer, but the municipality would only agree to forty; they would not give in to the extra ten thousand, and now the townspeople are sorry because they had to make a road to the station which cost them more. Sleepers and rails were fixed all along the line, and service-trains were running to carry building materials and labourers, and they were only waiting for the bridges upon which Dolzhikov was at work, and here and there the stations were not ready.

Dubechnia—the name of our first station—was seventeen versts from the town. I went on foot. The winter and spring corn was bright green, shining in the morning sun. The road was smooth and bright, and in the distance I could see in outline the station, the hills, and the remote farmhouses. . . . How good it was out in the open! And how I longed to be filled with the sense of freedom, if only for that morning, to stop thinking of what was going on in the town, or of my needs, or even of eating! Nothing has so much prevented my living as the feeling of acute hunger, which make my finest thoughts get mixed up with thoughts of porridge, cutlets, and fried fish. When I stand alone in the fields and look up at the larks hanging marvellously in the air, and bursting with hysterical song, I think: "It would be nice to have some bread and butter." Or when I sit in the road and shut my eyes and listen to the wonderful sounds of a May-day, I remember how good hot potatoes smell. Being big and of a strong constitution I never have quite enough to eat,

and so my chief sensation during the day is hunger, and so I can understand why so many people who are working for a bare living, can talk of nothing but food.

At Dubechnia the station was being plastered inside, and the upper story of the water-tank was being built. It was close and smelt of lime, and the labourers were wandering lazily over piles of chips and rubbish. The signalman was asleep near his box with the sun pouring straight into his face. There was not a single tree. The telegraph wire gave a faint hum, and here and there birds had alighted on it. I wandered over the heaps, not knowing what to do, and remembered how when I asked the engineer what my duties would be, he had replied: "We will see there." But what was there to see in such a wilderness? The plasterers were talking about the foreman and about one Fedot Vassilievich. I could not understand and was filled with embarrassment—physical embarrassment. I felt conscious of my arms and legs, and of the whole of my big body, and did not know what to do with them or where to go.

After walking for at least a couple of hours I noticed that from the station to the right of the line there were telegraph-poles which after about one and a half or two miles ended in a white stone wall. The labourers said it was the office, and I decided at last that I must go there.

It was a very old farmhouse, long unused. The wall of rough, white stone was decayed, and in places had crumbled away, and the roof of the wing, the blind wall of which looked toward the railway, had perished, and was patched here and there with tin. Through the gates there was a large yard, overgrown with tall grass, and beyond that, an old house with Venetian blinds in the windows, and a high roof, brown with rot. On either side of the house, to right and left, were two symmetrical wings; the windows of one were boarded up, while by the other, the windows of which were open, there was a number of calves grazing. The last telegraph-pole stood in the yard, and the wire went from it to the wing with the blind wall. The door was open and I went in. By the table at the telegraph was sitting a man with a dark, curly head in a canvas coat; he glared at me sternly and askance, but he immediately smiled and said:

"How do you do, Little Profit?"

It was Ivan Cheprakov, my school friend, who was expelled, when he was in the second class, for smoking. Once, during the autumn, we were out catching goldfinches, starlings, and hawfinches, to sell them in the market early in the morning when our parents were still asleep.

We beat up flocks of starlings and shot at them with pellets, and then picked up the wounded, and some died in terrible agony—I can still remember how they moaned at night in my cage—and some recovered. And we sold them, and swore black and blue that they were male birds. Once in the market I had only one starling left, which I hawked about and finally sold for a copeck. "A little profit!" I said to console myself, and from that time at school I was always known as "Little Profit", and even now, schoolboys and the townspeople sometimes use the name to tease me, though no-one but myself remembers how it came about.

Cheprakov never was strong. He was narrow-chested, round-shouldered, long-legged. His tie looked like a piece of string, he had no waistcoat, and his boots were worse than mine—with the heels worn down. He blinked with his eyes and had an eager expression as though he were trying to catch something and he was in a constant fidget.

"You wait," he said, bustling about. "Look here! . . . What was I saying just now?"

We began to talk. I discovered that the estate had till recently belonged to the Cheprakovs and only the previous autumn had passed to Dolzhikov, who thought it more profitable to keep his money in land than in shares, and had already bought three big estates in our district with the transfer of all mortgages. When Cheprakov's mother sold, she stipulated for the right to live in one of the wings for another two years and get her son a job in the office.

"Why shouldn't he buy?" said Cheprakov of the engineer. "He gets a lot from the contractors. He bribes them all."

Then he took me to dinner, deciding in his emphatic way that I was to live with him in the wing and board with his mother.

"She is a screw," he said, "but she will not take much from you."

In the small rooms where his mother lived there was a queer

jumble; even the hall and the passage were stacked with furniture, which had been taken from the house after the sale of the estate; and the furniture was old, and of redwood. Mrs. Cheprakov, a very stout elderly lady, with slanting, Chinese eyes, sat by the window, in a big chair, knitting a stocking. She received me ceremoniously.

"It is Polozniev, mother," said Cheprakov, introducing me. "He is going to work here."

"Are you a nobleman?" she asked in a strange, unpleasant voice as though she had boiling fat in her throat.

"Yes," I answered.

"Sit down."

The dinner was bad. It consisted only of a pie with unsweetened curds and some milk soup. Elena Nikifirovna, my hostess, was perpetually winking, first with one eye, then with the other. She talked and ate, but in her whole aspect there was a deathlike quality, and one could almost detect the smell of a corpse. Life hardly stirred in her, yet she had the air of being the lady of the manor, who had once had her serfs, and was the wife of a general, whose servants had to call him "Your Excellency," and when these miserable embers of life flared up in her for a moment, she would say to her son:

"Ivan, that is not the way to hold your knife!"

Or she would say, gasping for breath, with the preciseness of a hostess labouring to entertain her guest:

"We have just sold our estate, you know. It is a pity, of course, we have got so used to being here, but Dolzhikov promised to make Ivan station-master at Dubechnia, so that we shan't have to leave. We shall live here on the station, which is the same as living on the estate. The engineer is such a nice man! Don't you think him very handsome?"

Until recently the Cheprakovs had been very well-to-do, but with the general's death everything changed. Elena Nikifirovna began to quarrel with the neighbours and to go to law, and she did not pay her bailiffs and labourers; she was always afraid of being robbed—and in less than ten years Dubechnia changed completely.

Behind the house there was an old garden run wild, overgrown with tall grass and brushwood. I walked along the

terrace which was still well-kept and beautiful; through the glass door I saw a room with a parquet floor, which must have been the drawing-room. It contained an ancient piano, some engravings in mahogany framed on the walls—and nothing else. There was nothing left of the flower-garden but peonies and poppies, rearing their white and scarlet heads above the ground; on the paths, all huddled together, were young maples and elm-trees, which had been stripped by the cows. The growth was dense and the garden seemed impassable, and only near the house, where there still stood poplars, firs, and some old lime trees, were there traces of the former avenues, and further on the garden was being cleared for a hay-field, and here it was no longer allowed to run wild, and one's mouth and eyes were no longer filled with spiders' webs, and a pleasant air was stirring. The further out one went, the more open it was, and there were cherry-trees, plum-trees, wide-spreading old apple-trees, lichened and held up with props, and the pear-trees were so tall that it was incredible that there could be pears on them. This part of the garden was let to the market-women of our town, and it was guarded from thieves and starlings by a peasant—an idiot who lived in a hut.

The orchard grew thinner and became a mere meadow running down to the river, which was overgrown with reeds and withy-beds. There was a pool by the mill-dam, deep and full of fish, and a little mill with a straw roof ground and roared, and the frogs croaked furiously. On the water, which was as smooth as glass, circles appeared from time to time, and water-lilies trembled on the impact of a darting fish. The village of Dubechnia was on the other side of the river. The calm, azure pool was alluring with its promise of coolness and rest. And now all this, the pool, the mill, the comfortable banks of the river, belonged to the engineer!

And here my new work began. I received and despatched telegrams, I wrote out various accounts and copied orders, claims, and reports, sent in to the office by our illiterate foremen and mechanics. But most of the day I did nothing, walking up and down the room waiting for telegrams, or I would tell the boy to stay in the wing, and go into the garden until the boy came to say the bell was ringing. I had dinner with Mrs.

Cheprakov. Meat was served very rarely; most of the dishes were made of milk, and on Wednesdays and Fridays we had Lenten fare, and the food was served in pink plates, which were called Lenten. Mrs. Cheprakov was always blinking—the habit grew on her, and I felt awkward and embarrassed in her presence.

As there was not enough work for one, Cheprakov did nothing, but slept or went down to the pool with his gun to shoot ducks. In the evenings he got drunk in the village, or at the station, and before going to bed he would look in the glass and say:

"How are you, Ivan Cheprakov?"

When he was drunk, he was very pale and used to rub his hands and laugh, or rather neigh, He-he-he! Out of bravado he would undress himself and run naked through the fields, and he used to eat flies and say they were a bit sour.

IV

Once after dinner he came running into the wing, panting to say:

"Your sister has come to see you."

I went out and saw a fly standing by the steps of the house. My sister had brought Aniuta Blagovo and a military gentleman in a summer uniform. As I approached I recognised the military gentleman as Aniuta's brother, the doctor.

"We've come to take you for a picnic," he said, "if you've no objection."

My sister and Aniuta wanted to ask how I was getting on, but they were both silent and only looked at me. They felt that I didn't like my job, and tears came into my sister's eyes and Aniuta Blagovo blushed. We went into the orchard, the doctor first, and he said ecstatically:

"What air! By Jove, what air!"

He was just a boy to look at. He talked and walked like an undergraduate, and the look in his grey eyes was as lively, simple, and frank as that of a nice boy. Compared with his tall, handsome sister he looked weak and slight, and his little beard was thin and so was his voice—a thin tenor, though quite pleasant. He was away somewhere with his regiment and had

come home on leave, and said that he was going to Petersburg in the autumn to take his M.D. He already had a family—a wife and three children; he had married young, in his second year at the University, and people said he was unhappily married and was not living with his wife.

"What is the time?" My sister was uneasy. "We must go back soon, for my father would only let me be away until six o'clock."

"Oh, your father," sighed the doctor.

I made tea, and we drank it sitting on a carpet in front of the terrace, and the doctor, kneeling, drank from his saucer, and said that he was perfectly happy. Then Cheprakov fetched the key and unlocked the glass door and we all entered the house. It was dark and mysterious and smelled of mushrooms, and our footsteps made a hollow sound as though there were a vault under the floor. The doctor stopped by the piano and touched the keys and it gave out a faint, tremulous, cracked but still melodious sound. He raised his voice and began to sing a romance, frowning and impatiently stamping his foot when he touched a broken key. My sister forgot about going home, but walked agitatedly up and down the room and said:

"I am happy! I am very, very happy!"

There was a note of surprise in her voice as though it seemed impossible to her that she should be happy. It was the first time in my life that I had seen her so gay. She even looked handsome. Her profile was not good, her nose and mouth somehow protruded and made her look as if she was always blowing, but she had beautiful, dark eyes, a pale, very delicate complexion, and a touching expression of kindness and sadness, and when she spoke she seemed very charming and even beautiful. Both she and I took after our mother; we were broad-shouldered, strong, and sturdy, but her paleness was a sign of sickness, she often coughed, and in her eyes I often noticed the expression common to people who are ill, but who for some reason conceal it. In her present cheerfulness there was something childish and naïve, as though all the joy which had been suppressed and dulled during our childhood by a strict upbringing, had suddenly awakened in her soul and rushed out into freedom.

But when evening came and the fly was brought round, my sister became very quiet and subdued, and sat in the fly as though it were a prison-van.

Soon they were all gone. The noise of the fly died away. . . . I remembered that Aniuta Blagovo had said not a single word to me all day.

"A wonderful girl!" I thought. "A wonderful girl."

Lent came and every day we had Lenten dishes. I was greatly depressed by my idleness and the uncertainty of my position, and, slothful, hungry, dissatisfied with myself, I wandered over the estate and only waited for an energetic mood to leave the place.

Once in the afternoon when Radish was sitting in our wing, Dolzhikov entered unexpectedly, very sunburnt, and grey with dust. He had been out on the line for three days and had come to Dubechnia on a locomotive and walked over. While he waited for the carriage which he had ordered to come out to meet him he went over the estate with his bailiff, giving orders in a loud voice, and then for a whole hour he sat in our wing and wrote letters. When telegrams came through for him, he himself tapped out the answers, while we stood there stiff and silent.

"What a mess!" he said, looking angrily through the accounts. "I shall transfer the office to the station in a fortnight and I don't know what I shall do with you then."

"I've done my best, sir," said Cheprakov.

"Quite so. I can see what your best is. You can only draw your wages." The engineer looked at me and went on. "You rely on getting introductions to make a career for yourself with as little trouble as possible. Well, I don't care about introductions. Nobody helped me. Before I had this line, I was an engine-driver. I worked in Belgium as an ordinary lubricator. And what are you doing here, Panteley?" he asked, turning to Radish. "Going out drinking?"

For some reason or other he called all simple people Panteley, while he despised men like Cheprakov and myself, and called us drunkards, beasts, canaille. As a rule he was hard on petty officials, and paid and dismissed them ruthlessly without any explanation.

At last the carriage came for him. When he left he promised to dismiss us all in a fortnight; called the bailiff a fool, stretched himself out comfortably in the carriage, and drove away.

"Andrey Ivanich," I said to Radish, "will you take me on as a labourer?"

"Why! All right!"

We went together toward the town, and when the station and the farm were far behind us, I asked:

"Andrey Ivanich, why did you come to Dubechnia?"

"Firstly because some of my men are working on the line, and secondly to pay interest to Mrs. Cheprakov. I borrowed fifty roubles from her last summer, and now I pay her one rouble a month interest."

The decorator stopped and took hold of my coat.

"Misail Alexeich, my friend," he went on, "I take it that if a common man or a gentleman takes interest, he is a wrong-doer. The truth is not in him."

Radish, looking thin, pale, and rather terrible, shut his eyes, shook his head, and muttered in a philosophic tone:

"The grub eats grass, rust eats iron, lies devour the soul. God save us, miserable sinners!"

V

Radish was unpractical and he was no business man; he undertook more work than he could do, and when it came to payment he always lost his reckoning and so was always out on the wrong side. He was a painter, a glazier, a paper-hanger, and would even take on tiling, and I remember how he used to run about for days looking for tiles to make an insignificant profit. He was an excellent workman and would sometimes earn ten roubles a day, and but for his desire to be a master and to call himself a contractor, he would probably have made quite a lot of money.

He himself was paid by contract and paid me and the others by the day, between seventy-five copecks and a rouble per day. When the weather was hot and dry we did various outside jobs, chiefly painting roofs. Not being used to it, my feet got hot, as though I were walking over a red-hot oven, and when I wore

felt boots my feet swelled. But this was only at the beginning. Later on I got used to it and everything went all right. I lived among the people, to whom work was obligatory and unavoidable, people who worked like dray-horses, and knew nothing of the moral value of labour, and never even used the word "labour" in their talk. Among them I also felt like a dray-horse, more and more imbued with the necessity and inevitability of what I was doing, and this made my life easier, and saved me from doubt.

At first everything amused me, everything was new. It was like being born again. I could sleep on the ground and go barefoot—and found it exceedingly pleasant. I could stand in a crowd of simple folks, without embarrassing them, and when a cab-horse fell down in the street, I used to run and help it up without being afraid of soiling my clothes. But, best of all, I was living independently and was not a burden on anyone.

The painting of roofs, especially when we mixed our own paint, was considered a very profitable business, and therefore, even such good workmen as Radish did not shun this rough and tiresome work. In short trousers, showing his lean, muscular legs, he used to prowl over the roof like a stork, and I used to hear him sigh wearily as he worked his brush:

"Woe, woe to us, miserable sinners!"

He could walk as easily on a roof as on the ground. In spite of his looking so ill and pale and corpse-like, his agility was extraordinary; like any young man he would paint the cupola and the top of the church without scaffolding, using only ladders and a rope, and it was queer and strange when, standing there, far above the ground, he would rise to his full height and cry to the world at large:

"Grubs eat grass, rust eats iron, lies devour the soul!"

Or, thinking of something, he would suddenly answer his own thought:

"Anything may happen! Anything may happen!"

When I went home from work all the people sitting outside their doors, the shop assistants, boys, and their masters, used to shout after me and jeer spitefully, and at first it seemed monstrous and distressed me greatly.

"Little Profit," they used to shout. "House-painter! Yellow ochre!"

And no-one treated me so unmercifully as those who had only just risen above the people and had quite recently had to work for their living. Once in the market-place as I passed the ironmonger's a can of water was spilled over me as if by accident, and once a stick was thrown at me. And once a fishmonger, a grey-haired old man, stood in my way and looked at me morosely and said:

"It isn't you I'm sorry for, you fool, it's your father."

And when my acquaintances met me they got confused. Some regarded me as a queer fish and a fool, and they were sorry for me; others did not know how to treat me and it was difficult to understand them. Once, in the daytime, in one of the streets off Great Gentry Street, I met Aniuta Blagovo. I was on my way to my work and was carrying two long brushes and a pot of paint. When she recognised me, Aniuta blushed.

"Please do not acknowledge me in the street," she said nervously, sternly, in a trembling voice, without offering to shake hands with me, and tears suddenly gleamed in her eyes. "If you must be like this, then, so—so be it, but please avoid me in public!"

I had left Great Gentry Street and was living in a suburb, called Makarikha, with my nurse Karpovna, a good-natured but gloomy old woman who was always looking for evil, and was frightened by her dreams, and saw omens and ill in the bees and wasps which flew into her room. And in her opinion my having become a working man boded no good.

"You are lost!" she said mournfully, shaking her head. "Lost!"

With her in her little house lived her adopted son, Prokofyi, a butcher, a huge, clumsy fellow, of about thirty, with ginger hair and scrubby moustache. When he met me in the hall, he would silently and respectfully make way for me, and when he was drunk he would salute me with his whole hand. In the evenings he used to have supper, and through the wooden partition I could hear him snorting and snuffling as he drank glass after glass.

"Mother," he would say in an undertone.

"Well," Karpovna would reply. She was passionately fond of him. "What is it, my son?"

"I'll do you a favour, mother. I'll feed you in your old age in this vale of tears, and when you die I'll bury you at my own expense. So I say and so I'll do."

I used to get up every day before sunrise and go to bed early. We painters ate heavily and slept soundly, and only during the night would we have any excitement. I never quarrelled with my comrades. All day long there was a ceaseless stream of abuse, cursing and hearty good wishes, as, for instance, that one's eyes should burst, or that one might be carried off by cholera, but, all the same, among ourselves we were very friendly. The men suspected me of being a religious crank and used to laugh at me good-naturedly, saying that even my own father denounced me, and they used to say that they very seldom went to church and that many of them had not been to confession for ten years, and they justified their laxness by saying that a decorator is among men like a jackdaw among birds.

My mates respected me and regarded me with esteem; they evidently liked my not drinking or smoking, and leading a quiet, steady life. They were only rather disagreeably surprised at my not stealing the oil, or going with them to ask our employers for a drink. The stealing of the employers' oil and paint was a custom with house-painters, and was not regarded as theft, and it was remarkable that even so honest a man as Radish would always come away from work with some white lead and oil. And even respectable old men who had their own houses in Makarikha were not ashamed to ask for tips, and when the men, at the beginning or end of a job, made up to some vulgar fool and thanked him humbly for a few pence, I used to feel sick and sorry.

With the customers they behaved like sly courtiers, and almost every day I was reminded of Shakespeare's Polonius.

"There will probably be rain," a customer would say, staring at the sky.

"It is sure to rain," the painters would agree.

"But the clouds aren't rain-clouds. Perhaps it won't rain."

"No, sir. It won't rain. It won't rain, sure."

Behind their backs they generally regarded the customers ironically, and when, for instance, they saw a gentleman sitting on his balcony with a newspaper, they would say:

"He reads newspapers, but he has nothing to eat."

I never visited my people. When I returned from work I often found short, disturbing notes from my sister about my father; how he was very absent-minded at dinner, and then slipped away and locked himself in his study and did not come out for a long time. Such news upset me. I could not sleep, and I would go sometimes at night and walk along Great Gentry Street by our house, and look up at the dark windows, and try to guess if all was well within. On Sundays my sister would come to see me, but by stealth, as though she came not to see me, but our nurse. And if she came into my room she would look pale, with her eyes red, and at once she would begin to weep.

"Father cannot bear it much longer," she would say. "If, as God forbid, something were to happen to him, it would be on your conscience all your life. It is awful, Misail! For mother's sake I implore you to mend your ways."

"My dear sister," I replied. "How can I reform when I am convinced that I am acting according to my conscience? Do try to understand me!"

"I know you are obeying your conscience, but it ought to be possible to do so without hurting anybody."

"Oh, saints above!" the old woman would sigh behind the door. "You are lost. There will be a misfortune, my dear. It is bound to come."

VI

One Sunday, Doctor Blagovo came to see me unexpectedly. He was wearing a white summer uniform over a silk shirt, and high glacé boots.

"I came to see you!" he began, gripping my hand in his hearty, undergraduate fashion. "I hear of you every day and I have long intended to go and see you to have a heart-to-heart, as they say. Things are awfully boring in the town; there is not a living soul worth talking to. How hot it is, by Jove!" he went on, taking off his tunic and standing in his silk shirt. "My dear fellow, let us have a talk."

I was feeling bored and longing for other society than that of the decorators. I was really glad to see him.

"To begin with," he said, sitting on my bed, "I sympathise with you heartily, and I have a profound respect for your present way of living. In the town you are misunderstood and there is nobody to understand you, because, as you know, it is full of Gogolian pig-faces. But I guessed what you were at the picnic. You are a noble soul, an honest, high-minded man! I respect you and think it an honour to shake hands with you. To change your life so abruptly and suddenly as you did, you must have passed through a most trying spiritual process, and to go on with it now, to live scrupulously by your convictions, you must have to toil incessantly both in mind and in heart. Now, please tell me, don't you think that if you spent all this force of will, intensity, and power on something else, like trying to be a great scholar or an artist, that your life would be both wider and deeper, and altogether more productive?"

We talked and when we came to speak of physical labour, I expressed this idea: that it was necessary that the strong should not enslave the weak, and that the minority should not be a parasite on the majority, always sucking up the finest sap, i.e., it was necessary that all without exception—the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor—should share equally in the struggle for existence, every man for himself, and in that respect there was no better means of levelling than physical labour and compulsory service for all.

"You think, then," said the doctor, "that all, without exception, should be employed in physical labour?"

"Yes."

"But don't you think that if everybody, including the best people, thinkers and men of science, were to take part in the struggle for existence, each man for himself, and took to breaking stones and painting roofs, it would be a serious menace to progress?"

"Where is the danger?" I asked. "Progress consists in deeds of love, in the fulfilment of the moral law. If you enslave no-one, and are a burden upon no-one, what further progress do you want?"

"But look here!" said Blagovo, suddenly losing his temper and getting up. "I say! If a snail in its shell is engaged in self-perfection in obedience to the moral law—would you call that progress!"

"But why?" I was nettled. "If you don't make your neighbours feed you, clothe you, carry you, defend you from your enemies, surely, that *is* progress amidst a life resting on slavery. My view is that that is the most real and, perhaps, the only possible, the only progress necessary."

"The limits of universal progress, which is common to all men, are in infinity, and it seems to me strange to talk of a 'possible' progress limited by our needs and temporal conceptions."

"If the limits of progress are in infinity, as you say, then it means that its goal is indefinite," I said. "Think of living without knowing definitely what for!"

"Why not? Your 'not knowing' is not so boring as your 'knowing.' I am walking up a ladder which is called progress, civilisation, culture. I go on and on, not knowing definitely where I am going to, but surely it is worth while living for the sake of the wonderful ladder alone. And you know exactly what you are living for—that some should not enslave others, that the artist and the man who mixes his colours for him should dine equally well. But that is the bourgeois, kitchen side of life, and isn't it disgusting only to live for that? If some insects devour others, devil take them, let them! We need not think of them, they will perish and rot, however you save them from slavery—we must think of that great Millennium which awaits all mankind in the distant future."

Blagovo argued hotly with me, but it was noticeable that he was disturbed by some outside thought.

"Your sister is not coming," he said, consulting his watch. "Yesterday she was at our house and said she was going to see you. You go on talking about slavery, slavery," he went on, "but it is a special question, and all these questions are solved by mankind gradually."

We begin to talk of evolution. I said that every man decides the question of good and evil for himself, and does not wait for mankind to solve the question by virtue of gradual development. Besides, evolution is a stick with two ends. Side by side with the gradual development of humanitarian ideas, there is the gradual growth of ideas of a different kind. Serfdom is past, and capitalism is growing. And with ideas of liberation at their height the majority, just as in the days of Baty, feeds,

clothes, and defends the minority; and is left hungry, naked, and defenceless. The state of things harmonises beautifully with all your tendencies and movements, because the art of enslaving is also being gradually developed. We no longer flog our servants in the stables, but we give slavery more refined forms; at any rate, we are able to justify it in each separate case. Ideas remain ideas with us, but if we could, now, at the end of the nineteenth century, throw upon the working classes all our most unpleasant physiological functions, we should do so, and, of course, we should justify ourselves by saying that if the best people, thinkers and great scholars, had to waste their time on such functions, progress would be in serious jeopardy.

Just then my sister entered. When she saw the doctor, she was flurried and excited, and at once began to say that it was time for her to go home to her father.

"Cleopatra Alexeyevna," said Blagovo earnestly, laying his hands on his heart, "what will happen to your father if you spend half an hour with your brother and me?"

He was a simple kind of man and could communicate his cheerfulness to others. My sister thought for a minute and began to laugh, and suddenly got very happy, suddenly, unexpectedly, just as she did at the picnic. We went out into the fields and lay on the grass, and went on with our conversation and looked at the town, where all the windows facing the west looked golden in the setting sun.

After that Blagovo appeared every time my sister came to see me, and they always greeted each other as though their meeting was unexpected. My sister used to listen while the doctor and I argued, and her face was always joyful and rapturous, admiring and curious, and it seemed to me that a new world was slowly being discovered before her eyes, a world which she had not seen before even in her dreams, which now she was trying to divine; when the doctor was not there she was quiet and sad, and if, as she sat on my bed, she sometimes wept, it was for reasons of which she did not speak.

In August Radish gave us orders to go to the railway. A couple of days before we were "driven" out of town, my father came to see me. He sat down and, without looking at me, slowly wiped his red face, then took out of his pocket our local

paper and read out with deliberate emphasis on each word that a schoolfellow of my own age, the son of the director of the State Bank, had been appointed chief clerk of the Court of the Exchequer.

"And now, look at yourself," he said, folding up the newspaper. "You are a beggar, a vagabond, a scoundrel! Even the working-class people and peasants get education to make themselves decent people, while you, a Polozniev, with famous, noble ancestors, go wallowing in the mire! But I did not come here to talk to you. I have given you up already." He went on in a choking voice, as he stood up: "I came here to find out where your sister is, you scoundrel! She left me after dinner. It is now past seven o'clock and she is not in. She has been going out lately without telling me, and she has been disrespectful—and I see your filthy, abominable influence at work. Where is she?"

He had in his hands the familiar umbrella, and I was already taken aback, and I stood stiff and erect, like a schoolboy, waiting for my father to thrash me, but he saw the glance I cast at the umbrella and this probably checked him.

"Live as you like!" he said. "My blessing is gone from you."

"Good God!" muttered my old nurse behind the door. "You are lost. Oh! my heart feels some misfortune coming. I can feel it."

I went to work on the railway. During the whole of August there was wind and rain. It was damp and cold; the corn had now been gathered in the fields, and on the big farms where the reaping was done with machines, the wheat lay not in sheaves; but in heaps; and I remember how those melancholy heaps grew darker and darker every day, and the grain sprouted. It was hard work; the pouring rain spoiled everything that we succeeded in finishing. We were not allowed either to live or to sleep in the station buildings and had to take shelter in dirty, damp, mud huts where the "railies" had lived during the summer, and at night I could not sleep from the cold and the bugs crawling over my face and hands. And when we were working near the bridges, then the "railies" used to come out in a crowd to fight the painters—which they regarded as sport. They used to thrash us, steal our brushes, and to infuriate us and provoke us to a fight; they used to spoil our work, as when

they smeared the signal-boxes with green paint. To add to all our miseries Radish began to pay us very irregularly. All the painting on the line was given to one contractor, who subcontracted with another, and he again with Radish, stipulating for twenty per cent. commission. The job itself was unprofitable; then came the rains; time was wasted; we did no work and Radish had to pay his men every day. The starving painters nearly came to blows with him, called him a swindler, a blood-sucker, a Judas, and he, poor man, sighed and in despair raised his hands to the heavens and was continually going to Mrs. Cheprakov to borrow money.

VII

Came the rainy, muddy, dark autumn, bringing a slack time, and I used to sit at home three days in the week without work, or did various jobs outside painting; such as digging earth for ballast for twenty copecks a day. Doctor Blagovo had gone to Petersburg. My sister did not come to see me. Radish lay at home ill, expecting to die every day.

And my mood was also autumnal; perhaps because when I became a working man I saw only the seamy side of the life of our town, and every day made fresh discoveries which brought me to despair. My fellow townsmen, both those of whom I had had a low opinion before, and those whom I had thought fairly decent, now seemed to me base, cruel, and up to any dirty trick. We poor people were tricked and cheated in the accounts, kept waiting for hours in cold passages or in the kitchen, and we were insulted and uncivilly treated. In the autumn I had to paper the library and two rooms at the club. I was paid seven copecks a piece, but was told to give a receipt for twelve copecks, and when I refused to do it, a respectable gentleman in gold spectacles, one of the stewards of the club, said to me:

"If you say another word, you scoundrel, I'll knock you down."

And when a servant whispered to him that I was the son of Polozniev, the architect, then he got flustered and blushed, but he recovered himself at once and said:

"Damn him."

In the shops we working men were sold bad meat, musty

flour, and coarse tea. In church we were jostled by the police, and in the hospitals we were mulcted by the assistants and nurses, and if we could not give them bribes through poverty, we were given food in dirty dishes. In the post-office the lowest official considered it his duty to treat us as animals and to shout rudely and insolently: "Wait! Don't you come pushing your way in here!" Even the dogs, even they were hostile to us and hurled themselves at us with a peculiar malignancy. But what struck me most of all in my new position was the entire lack of justice, what the people call "forgetting God." Rarely a day went by without some swindle. The shopkeeper, who sold us oil, the contractor, the workmen, the customers themselves, all cheated. It was an understood thing that our rights were never considered, and we always had to pay for the money we had earned, going with our hats off to the back door.

I was paper-hanging in one of the club-rooms, next the library, when, one evening as I was on the point of leaving, Dolzhikov's daughter came into the room carrying a bundle of books.

I bowed to her.

"Ah! How are you?" she said, recognising me at once and holding out her hand. "I am very glad to see you."

She smiled and looked with a curious puzzled expression at my blouse and the pail of paste and the papers lying on the floor; I was embarrassed and she also felt awkward.

"Excuse my staring at you," she said. "I have heard so much about you. Especially from Doctor Blagovo. He is enthusiastic about you. I have met your sister; she is a dear, sympathetic girl, but I could not make her see that there is nothing awful in your simple life. On the contrary, you are the most interesting man in the town."

Once more she glanced at the pail of paste and the paper and said:

"I asked Doctor Blagovo to bring us together, but he either forgot or had no time. However, we have met now. I should be very pleased if you would call on me. I do so want to have a talk. I am a simple person," she said, holding out her hand, "and I hope you will come and see me without ceremony. My father is away, in Petersburg."

She went into the reading-room, with her dress rustling, and for a long time after I got home I could not sleep.

During that autumn some kind soul, wishing to relieve my existence, sent me from time to time presents of tea and lemons, or biscuits, or roast game. Karpovna said the presents were brought by a soldier, though from whom she did not know; and the soldier used to ask if I was well, if I had dinner every day, and if I had warm clothes. When the frost began the soldier came while I was out and brought a soft knitted scarf, which gave out a soft, hardly perceptible scent, and I guessed who my good fairy had been. For the scarf smelled of lily-of-the-valley, Aniuta Blagovo's favourite scent.

Toward winter there was more work and things became more cheerful. Radish came to life again and we worked together in the cemetery church, where we scraped the holy shrine for gilding. It was a clean, quiet, and, as our mates said, a specially good job. We could do a great deal in one day, and so time passed quickly, imperceptibly. There was no swearing, nor laughing, nor loud altercations. The place compelled quiet and decency, and disposed one for tranquil, serious thoughts. Absorbed in our work, we stood or sat immovably, like statues; there was a dead silence, very proper to a cemetery, so that if a tool fell down, or the oil in the lamp spluttered, the sound would be loud and startling, and we would turn to see what it was. After a long silence one could hear a humming like that of a swarm of bees; in the porch, in an undertone, the funeral service was being read over a dead baby; or a painter painting a moon surrounded with stars on the cupola would begin to whistle quietly, and remembering suddenly that he was in a church, would stop; or Radish would sigh at his own thoughts: "Anything may happen! Anything may happen!" or above our heads there would be the slow, mournful tolling of a bell, and the painters would say it must be a rich man being brought to the church. . . .

The days I spent in the peace of the little church, and during the evenings I played billiards, or went to the gallery of the theatre in the new serge suit I had bought with my own hard-earned money. They were already beginning plays and concerts at the Azhoguins', and Radish did the scenery by himself.

He told me about the plays and *tableaux vivants* at the Azhoguins', and I listened to him enviously. I had a great longing to take part in the rehearsals, but I dared not go to the Azhoguins'.

A week before Christmas Doctor Blagovo arrived, and we resumed our arguments and played billiards in the evenings. When he played billiards he used to take off his coat, and unfasten his shirt at the neck, and generally try to look like a debauchee. He drank a little, but rowdily, and managed to spend in a cheap tavern like the Volga as much as twenty roubles in an evening.

Once more my sister came to see me, and when they met they expressed surprise, but I could see by her happy, guilty face that these meetings were not accidental. One evening when we were playing billiards the doctor said to me:

"I say, why don't you call on Miss Dolzhikov? You don't know Maria Victorovna. She is a clever, charming, simple creature."

I told him how her father, the engineer, had received me in the spring.

"Nonsense!" laughed the doctor. "The engineer is one thing and she is another. Really, my good fellow, you mustn't offend her. Go and see her some time. Let us go to-morrow evening. Will you?"

He persuaded me. Next evening I donned my serge suit and with some perturbation set out to call on Miss Dolzhikov. The footman did not seem to me so haughty and formidable, or the furniture so oppressive, as on the morning when I had come to ask for work. Maria Victorovna was expecting me and greeted me as an old friend and gave my hand a warm, friendly grip. She was wearing a grey dress with wide sleeves, and had her hair done in the style which when it became the fashion a year later in our town, was called "dog's ears." The hair was combed back over the ears, and it made Maria Victorovna's face look broader, and she looked very like her father, whose face was broad and red and rather like a coachman's. She was handsome and elegant, but not young; about thirty to judge by her appearance, though she was not more than twenty-five.

"Dear doctor!" she said, making me sit down. "How grateful I am to him. But for him, you would not have come. I am bored

to death! My father has gone and left me alone, and I do not know what to do with myself."

Then she began to ask where I was working, how much I got, and where I lived.

"Do you spend what you earn on yourself?" she asked.

"Yes."

"You are a happy man." she replied. "All the evil in life, it seems to me, comes from boredom and idleness, and spiritual emptiness, which are inevitable when one lives at other people's expense. Don't think I'm showing off. I mean it sincerely. It is dull and unpleasant to be rich. Win friends by just riches, they say, because as a rule there is and can be no such thing as just riches."

She looked at the furniture with a serious, cold expression, as though she was making an inventory of it, and went on:

"Ease and comfort possess a magic power. Little by little they seduce even strong-willed people. Father and I used to live poorly and simply, and now you see how we live. Isn't it strange?" she said with a shrug. "We spend twenty thousand roubles a year! In the provinces!"

"Ease and comfort must not be regarded as the inevitable privilege of capital and education," I said. "It seems to me possible to unite the comforts of life with work, however hard and dirty it may be. Your father is rich, but, as he says, he used to be a mechanic, and just a lubricator."

She smiled and shook her head doubtfully.

"Papa sometimes eats *tiurya*," she said, "but only out of caprice."

A bell rang and she got up.

"The rich and the educated ought to work like the rest," she went on, "and if there is to be any comfort, it should be accessible to all. There should be no privileges. However, that's enough philosophy. Tell me something cheerful. Tell me about the painters. What are they like? Funny?"

The doctor came. I began to talk about the painters, but, being unused to it, I felt awkward and talked solemnly and ponderously like an ethnographist. The doctor also told a few stories about working people. He rocked to and fro and cried and fell on his knees, and when he was depicting a drunkard,

lay flat on the floor. It was as good as a play, and Maria Victorovna laughed until she cried. Then he played the piano and sang in his high-pitched tenor, and Maria Victorovna stood by him and told him what to sing and corrected him when he made a mistake.

"I hear you sing, too," said I.

"Too?" cried the doctor. "She is a wonderful singer, an artist, and you say—too? Careful, careful!"

"I used to study seriously," she replied, "but I have given it up now."

She sat on a low stool and told us about her life in Petersburg, and imitated famous singers, mimicking their voices and mannerisms; then she sketched the doctor and myself in her album, not very well, but both were good likenesses. She laughed and made jokes and funny faces, and this suited her better than talking about unjust riches, and it seemed to me that what she had said about "riches and comfort" came not from herself, but was just mimicry. She was an admirable comedian. I compared her mentally with the girls of our town, and not even the beautiful, serious Aniuta Blagovo could stand up against her; the difference was as vast as that between a wild and a garden rose.

We stayed to supper. The doctor and Maria Victorovna drank red wine, champagne, and coffee with cognac; they touched glasses and drank to friendship, to wit, to progress, to freedom, and never got drunk, but went rather red and laughed for no reason until they cried. To avoid being out of it I, too, drank red wine.

"People with talent and with gifted natures," said Miss Dolzhikov, "know how to live and go their own way; but ordinary people like myself know nothing and can do nothing by themselves; there is nothing for them but to find some deep social current and let themselves be borne along by it."

"Is it possible to find that which does not exist?" asked the doctor.

"It doesn't exist because we don't see it."

"Is that so? Social currents are the invention of modern literature. They don't exist here."

A discussion began.

"We have no profound social movements; nor have we had them," said the doctor. "Modern literature has invented a lot of things, and modern literature invented intellectual working men in village life, but go through all our villages and you will only find Mr. Cheeky Snout in a jacket or black frock coat, who will make four mistakes in the word 'one.' Civilised life has not begun with us yet. We have the same savagery, the same slavery, the same triviality as we had five hundred years ago. Movements, currents—all that is so wretched and puerile mixed up with such vulgar, catch-penny interests—and one cannot take it seriously. You may think you have discovered a large social movement, and you may follow it and devote your life in the modern fashion to such problems as the liberation of vermin from slavery, or the abolition of meat cutlets—and I congratulate you, madam. But we have to learn, learn, learn, and there will be plenty of time for social movements; we are not up to them yet, and upon my soul, we don't understand anything at all about them."

"You don't understand, but I do," said Maria Victorovna. "Good Heavens! What a bore you are to-night."

"It is our business to learn and learn, to try and accumulate as much knowledge as possible, because serious social movements come where there is knowledge, and the future happiness of mankind lies in science. Here's to science!"

"One thing is certain. Life must somehow be arranged differently," said Maria Victorovna, after some silence and deep thought, "and life as it has been up to now is worthless. Don't let us talk about it."

When we left her the Cathedral clock struck two.

"Did you like her?" asked the doctor. "Isn't she a dear girl?"

We had dinner at Maria Victorovna's on Christmas Day, and then we went to see her every day during the holidays. There was nobody besides ourselves, and she was right when she said she had no friends in the town but the doctor and me. We spent most of the time talking, and sometimes the doctor would bring a book or a magazine and read aloud. After all, he was the first cultivated man I had met. I could not tell if he knew much, but he was always generous with his knowledge because he wished others to know too. When he talked about medicine,

he was not like any of our local doctors, but he made a new and singular impression, and it seemed to me that if he had wished he could have become a genuine scientist. And perhaps he was the only person at that time who had any real influence over me. Meeting him and reading the books he gave me, I began gradually to feel a need for knowledge to inspire the tedium of my work. It seemed strange to me that I had not known before such things as that the whole world consisted of sixty elements. I did not know what oil or paint was, and that I could have got on without knowing these things. My acquaintance with the doctor raised me morally too. I used to argue with him, and though I usually stuck to my opinion, yet, through him, I came gradually to perceive that everything was not clear to me, and I tried to cultivate convictions as definite as possible so that the promptings of my conscience should be precise and have nothing vague about them. Nevertheless, educated and fine as he was, far and away the best man in the town, he was by no means perfect. There was something rather rude and priggish in his ways and in his trick of dragging talk down to discussion, and when he took off his coat and sat in his shirt and gave the footman a tip, it always seemed to me that culture was just a part of him, with the rest untamed Tartar.

After the holidays he left once more for Petersburg. He went in the morning and after dinner my sister came to see me. Without taking off her furs, she sat silent, very pale, staring in front of her. She began to shiver and seemed to be fighting against some illness.

"You must have caught a cold," I said.

Her eyes filled with tears. She rose and went to Karpovna without a word to me, as though I had offended her. And a little later I heard her speaking in a tone of bitter reproach.

"Nurse, what have I been living for, up to now? What for? Tell me; haven't I wasted my youth? During the best years I have had nothing but making up accounts, pouring out tea, counting the copecks, entertaining guests, without a thought that there was anything better in the world! Nurse, try to understand me, I too have human desires and I want to live and they have made a housekeeper of me. It is awful, awful!"

She flung her keys against the door and they fell with a clatter in my room. They were the keys of the sideboard, the larder, the cellar, and the tea-chest—the keys my mother used to carry.

"Oh! Oh! Saints above!" cried my old nurse in terror. "The blessed saints!"

When she left, my sister came into my room for her keys and said:

"Forgive me. Something strange has been going on in me lately."

VIII

One evening when I came home late from Maria Victorovna's I found a young policeman in a new uniform in my room; he was sitting by the table reading.

"At last!" he said, getting up and stretching himself. "This is the third time I have been to see you. The governor has ordered you to go and see him to-morrow at nine o'clock sharp. Don't be late."

He made me give him a written promise to comply with his Excellency's orders and went away. This policeman's visit and the unexpected invitation to see the governor had a most depressing effect on me. From my early childhood I have had a dread of gendarmes, police, legal officials, and I was tormented with anxiety as though I had really committed a crime, and I could not sleep. Nurse and Prokofyi were also upset and could not sleep. And, to make things worse, nurse had an earache, and moaned and more than once screamed out. Hearing that I could not sleep Prokofyi came quietly into my room with a little lamp and sat by the table.

"You should have a drop of pepper-brandy . . ." he said after some thought. "In this vale of tears things go on all right when you take a drop. And if mother had some pepper-brandy poured into her ear she would be much better."

About three he got ready to go to the slaughterhouse to fetch some meat. I knew I should not sleep until morning, and to use up the time until nine, I went with him. We walked with a lantern, and his boy, Nicolka, who was about thirteen, and had blue spots on his face and an expression like a murderer's,

drove behind us in a sledge, urging the horse on with hoarse cries.

"You will probably be punished at the governor's," said Prokofyi as we walked. "There is a governor's rank, and an archimandrite's rank, and an officer's rank, and a doctor's rank, and every profession has its own rank. You don't keep to yours and they won't allow it."

The slaughter-house stood behind the cemetery, and till then I had only seen it at a distance. It consisted of three dark sheds surrounded by a grey fence, from which, when the wind was in that direction in summer, there came an overpowering stench. Now, as I entered the yard, I could not see the sheds in the darkness; I groped through horses and sledges, both empty and laden with meat; and there were men walking about with lanterns and swearing disgustedly. Prokofyi and Nicolka swore as filthily and there was a continuous hum from the swearing and coughing and the neighing of the horses.

The place smelled of corpses and offal, the snow was thawing and already mixed with mud, and in the darkness it seemed to me that I was walking through a pool of blood.

When we had filled the sledge with meat, we went to the butcher's shop in the market-place. Day was beginning to dawn. One after another the cooks came with baskets and old women in mantles. With an axe in his hand, wearing a white, blood-stained apron, Prokofyi swore terrifically and crossed himself, turning toward the church, and shouted so loud that he could be heard all over the market, avowing that he sold his meat at cost price and even at a loss. He cheated in weighing and reckoning, the cooks saw it, but, dazed by his shouting, they did not protest, but only called him a gallows-bird.

Raising and dropping his formidable axe, he assumed picturesque attitudes and constantly uttered the sound "Hak!" with a furious expression, and I was really afraid of his cutting off some one's head or hand.

I stayed in the butcher's shop the whole morning, and when at last I went to the governor's my fur coat smelled of meat and blood. My state of mind would have been appropriate for an encounter with a bear armed with no more than a staff. I remember a long staircase with a striped carpet, and a young

official in a frock coat with shining buttons, who silently indicated the door with both hands and went in to announce me. I entered the hall, where the furniture was most luxurious, but cold and tasteless, forming a most unpleasant impression—the tall, narrow pier-glasses, and the bright, yellow hangings over the windows; one could see that, though governors changed, the furniture remained the same. The young official again pointed with both hands to the door and I went toward a large, green table, by which stood a general with the Order of Vladimir at his neck.

"Mr. Polozniev," he began, holding a letter in his hand and opening his mouth wide so that it made a round O. "I asked you to come to say this to you: 'Your esteemed father has applied verbally and in writing to the provincial marshal of nobility, to have you summoned and made to see the incongruity of your conduct with the title of nobleman which you have the honour to bear. His Excellency Alexander Pavlovich justly thinking that your conduct may be subversive, and finding that persuasion may not be sufficient, without serious intervention on the part of the authorities, has given me his decision as to your case, and I agree with him."

He said this quietly, respectfully, standing erect as if I was his superior, and his expression was not at all severe. He had a flabby, tired face, covered with wrinkles, with pouches under his eyes; his hair was dyed, and it was hard to guess his age from his appearance—fifty or sixty.

"I hope," he went on, "that you will appreciate Alexander Pavlovich's delicacy in applying to me, not officially, but privately. I have invited you unofficially not as a governor, but as a sincere admirer of your father's. And I ask you to change your conduct and to return to the duties proper to your rank, or, to avoid the evil effects of your example, to go to some other place where you are not known and where you may do what you like. Otherwise I shall have to resort to extreme measures."

For half a minute he stood in silence staring at me open-mouthed.

"Are you a vegetarian?" he asked.

"No, your Excellency, I eat meat."

He sat down and took up a document, and I bowed and left.

It was not worth while going to work before dinner. I went home and tried to sleep, but could not because of the unpleasant, sickly feeling from the slaughter-house and my conversation with the governor. And so I dragged through till the evening and then, feeling gloomy and out of sorts, I went to see Maria Victorovna. I told her about my visit to the governor and she looked at me in bewilderment, as if she did not believe me, and suddenly she began to laugh merrily, heartily, stridently as only good-natured, light-hearted people can.

"If I were to tell this in Petersburg!" she cried, nearly dropping with laughter, bending over the table. "If I could tell them in Petersburg!"

IX

Now we saw each other often, sometimes twice a day. Almost every day, after dinner, she drove up to the cemetery and, as she waited for me, read the inscriptions on the crosses and monuments. Sometimes she came into the church and stood by my side and watched me working. The silence, the simple industry of the painters and gilders, Radish's good sense, and the fact that outwardly I was no different from the other artisans and worked as they did, in a waistcoat and old shoes, and that they addressed me familiarly—were new to her, and she was moved by it all. Once in her presence a painter who was working, at a door on the roof, called down to me:

"Misail, fetch me the white lead."

I fetched him the white lead and as I came down the scaffolding she was moved to tears and looked at me and smiled:

"What a dear you are!" she said.

I have always remembered how when I was a child a green parrot got out of its cage in one of the rich people's houses and wandered about the town for a whole month, flying from one garden to another, homeless and lonely. And Maria Victorovna reminded me of the bird.

"Except to the cemetery," she said with a laugh, "I have absolutely nowhere to go. The town bores me to tears. People read, sing, and twitter at the Azhoguins', but I cannot bear

them lately. Your sister is shy, Miss Blagovo for some reason hates me. I don't like the theatre. What can I do with myself?"

When I was at her house I smelled of paint and turpentine, and my hands were stained. She liked that. She wanted me to come to her in my ordinary working-clothes; but I felt awkward in them in her drawing-room, and as if I were in uniform, and so I always wore my new serge suit. She did not like that.

"You must confess," she said once, "that you have not got used to your new rôle. A working-man's suit makes you feel awkward and embarrassed. Tell me, isn't it because you are not sure of yourself and are unsatisfied. Does this work you have chosen, this painting of yours, really satisfy you?" she asked merrily. "I know paint makes things look nicer and wear better, but the things themselves belong to the rich and after all they are a luxury. Besides you have said more than once that everybody should earn his living with his own hands and you earn money, not bread. Why don't you keep to the exact meaning of what you say? You must earn bread, real bread, you must plough, sow, reap, thrash, or do something which has to do directly with agriculture, such as keeping cows, digging, or building houses. . . ."

She opened a handsome bookcase which stood by the writing-table and said:

"I'm telling you all this because I'm going to let you into my secret. Voilà. This is my agricultural library. Here are books on arable land, vegetable-gardens, orchard-keeping, cattle-keeping, bee-keeping: I read them eagerly and have studied the theory of everything thoroughly. It is my dream to go to Dubechnia as soon as March begins. It is wonderful there, amazing; isn't it? The first year I shall only be learning the work and getting used to it, and in the second year I shall begin to work thoroughly, without sparing myself. My father promised to give me Dubechnia as a present, and I am to do anything I like with it."

She blushed and with mingled laughter and tears she dreamed aloud of her life at Dubechnia and how absorbing it would be. And I envied her. March would soon be here. The days were drawing out, and in the bright sunny afternoons the snow

dripped from the roofs, and the smell of spring was in the air. I too longed for the country.

And when she said she was going to live at Dubechnia, I saw at once that I should be left alone in the town, and I felt jealous of the bookcase with her books about farming. I knew and cared nothing about farming and I was on the point of telling her that agriculture was work for slaves, but I recollected that my father had once said something of the sort and I held my peace.

Lent began. The engineer, Victor Ivanich, came home from Petersburg. I had begun to forget his existence. He came unexpectedly, not even sending a telegram. When I went there as usual in the evening, he was walking up and down the drawing-room, after a bath, with his hair cut, looking ten years younger, and talking. His daughter was kneeling by his trunks and taking out boxes, bottles, books, and handing them to Pavel, the footman. When I saw the engineer, I involuntarily stepped back and he held out both his hands and smiled and showed his strong, white, cab-driver's teeth.

"Here he is! Here he is! I'm very pleased to see you, Mr. Housepainter! Maria told me all about you and sang your praises. I quite understand you and heartily approve." He took me by the arm and went on: "It is much cleverer and more honest to be a decent workman than to spoil State paper and to wear a cockade. I myself worked with my hands in Belgium. I was an engine-driver for five years . . ."

He was wearing a short jacket and comfortable slippers, and he shuffled along like a gouty man waving and rubbing his hands; humming and buzzing and shrugging with pleasure at being at home again with his favourite shower-bath.

"There's no denying," he said at supper, "there's no denying that you are kind, sympathetic people, but somehow as soon as you gentlefolk take on manual labour or try to save the peasants, you reduce it all to sectarianism. You are a sectarian. You don't drink vodka. What is that but sectarianism?"

To please him I drank vodka. I drank wine, too. We ate cheese, sausages, pastries, pickles, and all kinds of dainties that the engineer had brought with him, and we sampled wines sent from abroad during his absence. They were excellent. For some reason the engineer had wines and cigars sent from abroad—

duty free; somebody sent him caviare and sturgeon gratis; he did not pay rent for his house because his landlord supplied the railway with kerosene, and generally he and his daughter gave me the impression of having all the best things in the world at their service free of charge.

I went on visiting them, but with less pleasure than before. The engineer oppressed me and I felt cramped in his presence. I could not endure his clear, innocent eyes; his opinions bored me and were offensive to me, and I was distressed by the recollection that I had so recently been subordinate to this ruddy, well-fed man, and that he had been mercilessly rude to me. True he would put his arm round my waist and slap me kindly on the shoulder and approve of my way of living, but I felt that he despised my nullity just as much as before and only suffered me to please his daughter, but I could no longer laugh and talk easily, and I thought myself ill-mannered, and all the time was expecting him to call me Panteley as he did his footman Pavel. How my provincial, working man's pride rode up against him! I, a working man, a painter, going every day to the house of rich strangers, whom the whole town regarded as foreigners, and drinking their expensive wines and outlandish dishes! I could not reconcile this with my conscience. When I went to see them I sternly avoided those whom I met on the way, and looked askance at them like a real sectarian, and when I left the engineer's house I was ashamed of feeling so well-fed.

But chiefly I was afraid of falling in love. Whether walking in the street, or working, or talking to my mates, I thought all the time of going to Maria Victorovna's in the evening, and always had her voice, her laughter, her movements with me. And always as I got ready to go to her, I would stand for a long time in front of the cracked mirror tying my necktie; my serge suit seemed horrible to me, and I suffered, but at the same time, despised myself for feeling so small. When she called to me from another room to say that she was not dressed yet and to ask me to wait a bit, and I could hear her dressing, I was agitated and felt as though the floor was sinking under me. And when I saw a woman in the street, even at a distance, I fell to comparing her figure with hers, and it seemed to me

that all our women and girls were vulgar, absurdly dressed, and without manners; and such comparisons roused in me a feeling of pride; Maria Victorovna was better than all of them. And at night I dreamed of her and myself.

Once at supper the engineer and I ate a whole lobster. When I reached home I remembered that the engineer had twice called me "my dear fellow," and I thought that they treated me, as they might have done a big, unhappy dog, separated from his master, and that they were amusing themselves with me, and that they would order me away like a dog when they were bored with me. I began to feel ashamed and hurt; went to the point of tears, as though I had been insulted, and, raising my eyes to the heavens, I vowed to put an end to it all.

Next day I did not go to the Dolzhikovs'. Late at night, when it was quite dark and pouring with rain, I walked up and down Great Gentry Street, looking at the windows. At the Azhoguins' everybody was asleep and the only light was in one of the top windows; old Mrs. Azhoguin was sitting in her room embroidering by candle-light and imagining herself to be fighting against prejudice. It was dark in our house and opposite, at the Dolzhikovs' the windows were lit up, but it was impossible to see anything through the flowers and curtains. I kept on walking up and down the street; I was soaked through with the cold March rain. I heard my father come home from the club; he knocked at the door; in a minute a light appeared at a window and I saw my sister walking quickly with her lamp and hurriedly arranging her thick hair. Then my father paced up and down the drawing-room, talking and rubbing his hands, and my sister sat still in a corner, lost in thought, not listening to him. . . .

But soon they left the room and the light was put out. . . . I looked at the engineer's house and that too was now dark. In the darkness and the rain I felt desperately lonely. Cast out at the mercy of Fate, and I felt how, compared with my loneliness, and my suffering, actual and to come, all my work and all my desires and all that I had hitherto thought and read, were vain and futile. Alas! The activities and thoughts of human beings are not nearly so important as their sorrows! And not knowing exactly what I was doing I pulled with all

my might at the bell at the Dolzhikovs' gate, broke it, and ran away down the street like a little boy, full of fear, thinking they would rush out at once and recognise me. When I stopped to take breath at the end of the street, I could hear nothing but the falling rain and far away a night-watchman knocking on a sheet of iron.

For a whole week I did not go to the Dolzhikovs'. I sold my serge suit. I had no work and I was once more half-starved, earning ten or twenty copecks a day, when possible, by disagreeable work. Floundering knee-deep in the mire, putting out all my strength, I tried to drown my memories and to punish myself for all the cheeses and preserves to which I had been treated at the engineer's. Still, no sooner did I go to bed, wet and hungry, than my untamed imagination set to work to evolve wonderful, alluring pictures, and to my amazement I confessed that I was in love, passionately in love, and I fell sound asleep feeling that the hard life had only made my body stronger and younger.

One evening it began, most unseasonably, to snow, and the wind blew from the north, exactly as if winter had begun again. When I got home from work I found Maria Victorovna in my room. She was in her furs with her hands in her muff.

"Why don't you come to see me?" she asked, looking at me with her bright sagacious eyes, and I was overcome with joy and stood stiffly in front of her, just as I had done with my father when he was going to thrash me; she looked straight into my face and I could see by her eyes that she understood why I was overcome.

"Why don't you come to see me?" she repeated. "You don't want to come? I had to come to you."

She got up and came close to me.

"Don't leave me," she said, and her eyes filled with tears. "I am lonely, utterly lonely."

She began to cry and said, covering her face with her muff:

"Alone! Life is hard, very hard, and in the whole world I have no-one but you. Don't leave me!"

Looking for her handkerchief to dry her tears, she gave a smile; we were silent for some time, then I embraced and kissed her, and the pin in her hat scratched my face and drew blood.

And we began to talk as though we had been dear to each other for a long, long time.

X

In a couple of days she sent me to Dubechnia and I was beyond words delighted with it. As I walked to the station, and as I sat in the train, I laughed for no reason and people thought me drunk. There were snow and frost in the mornings still, but the roads were getting dark, and there were rooks cawing above them.

At first I thought of arranging the side wing opposite Mrs. Cheprakov's for myself and Maria, but it appeared that doves and pigeons had taken up their abode there and it would be impossible to cleanse it without destroying a great number of nests. We would have to live willy-nilly in the uncomfortable rooms with Venetian blinds in the big house. The peasants called it a palace; there were more than twenty rooms in it, and the only furniture was a piano and a child's chair, lying in the attic, and even if Maria brought all her furniture from town we should not succeed in removing the impression of frigid emptiness and coldness. I chose three small rooms with windows looking on to the garden, and from early morning till late at night I was at work in them, glazing the windows, hanging paper, blocking up the chinks and holes in the floor. It was an easy, pleasant job. Every now and then I would run to the river to see if the ice was breaking and all the while I dreamed of the starlings returning. And at night when I thought of Maria I would be filled with an inexpressibly sweet feeling of an all-embracing joy to listen to the rats and the wind rattling and knocking above the ceiling; it was like an old hobgoblin coughing in the attic.

The snow was deep; there was a heavy fall at the end of March, but it thawed rapidly, as if by magic, and the spring floods rushed down so that by the beginning of April the starlings were already chattering and yellow butterflies fluttered in the garden. The weather was wonderful. Every day toward evening I walked toward the town to meet Masha, and how delightful it was to walk along the soft, drying road with

bare feet! Half-way I would sit down and look at the town, not daring to go nearer. The sight of it upset me, I was always wondering how my acquaintances would behave toward me when they heard of my love. What would my father say? I was particularly worried by the idea that my life was becoming more complicated, and that I had entirely lost control of it, and that she was carrying me off like a balloon. God knows whither. I had already given up thinking how to make a living, and I thought—indeed, I cannot remember what I thought.

Masha used to come in a carriage. I would take a seat beside her and together, happy and free, we used to drive to Dubechnia. Or, having waited till sunset, I would return home, weary and disconsolate, wondering why Masha had not come, and then by the gate or in the garden I would find my darling. She would come by the railway and walk over from the station. What a triumph it was! In her plain, woollen dress, with a simple umbrella, but keeping a trim, fashionable figure and expensive, Parisian boots—she was a gifted actress playing the country girl. We used to go over the house, and plan out the rooms, and the paths, and the vegetable-garden, and the bee-hives. We already had chickens and ducks and geese which we loved because they were ours. We had oats, clover, buck-wheat, and vegetable seeds all ready for sowing, and we used to examine them all and wonder what the crops would be like, and everything Masha said to me seemed extraordinarily clever and fine. This was the happiest time of my life.

Soon after Easter we were married in the parish church in the village of Kurilovka three miles from Dubechnia. Masha wanted everything to be simple; by her wish our bridesmen were peasant boys, only one deacon sang, and we returned from the church in a little, shaky cart which she drove herself. My sister was the only guest from the town. Masha had sent her a note a couple of days before the wedding. My sister wore a white dress and white gloves. . . . During the ceremony she cried softly for joy and emotion, and her face had a maternal expression of infinite goodness. She was intoxicated with our happiness and smiled as though she were breathing a sweet perfume, and when I looked at her I understood that there was nothing in the world higher in her eyes than love, earthly love,

and that she was always dreaming of love, secretly, timidly, yet passionately. She embraced Masha and kissed her, and, not knowing how to express her ecstasy, she said to her of me:

"He is a good man! A very good man."

Before she left us, she put on her ordinary clothes, and took me into the garden to have a quiet talk.

"Father is very hurt that you have not written to him," she said. "You should have asked for his blessing. But, at heart, he is very pleased. He says that this marriage will raise you in the eyes of society, and that under Maria Victorovna's influence you will begin to adopt a more serious attitude toward life. In the evening now we talk about nothing but you; and yesterday he even said, 'our Misail.' I was delighted. He has evidently thought of a plan and I believe he wants to set you an example of magnanimity, and that he will be the first to talk of reconciliation. It is quite possible that one of these days he will come and see you here."

She made the sign of the cross over me and said:

"Well, God bless you. Be happy. Aniuta Blagovo is a very clever girl. She says of your marriage that God has sent you a new ordeal. Well? Married life is not made up only of joy but of suffering as well. It is impossible to avoid it."

Masha and I walked about three miles with her, and then walked home quietly and silently, as though it were a rest for both of us. Masha had her hand on my arm. We were at peace and there was no need to talk of love; after the wedding we grew closer to each other and dearer, and it seemed as though nothing could part us.

"Your sister is a dear, lovable creature," said Masha, "but looks as though she had lived in torture. Your father must be a terrible man."

I began to tell her how my sister and I had been brought up and how absurd and full of torture our childhood had been. When she heard that my father had thrashed me quite recently she shuddered and clung to me:

"Don't tell me any more," she said. "It is too horrible."

And now she did not leave me. We lived in the big house, in three rooms, and in the evenings we bolted the door that led to the empty part of the house, as though some one lived

there whom we did not know and feared. I used to get up early, at dawn, and begin working. I repaired the carts; made paths in the garden, dug the flower beds, painted the roofs. When the time came to sow oats, I tried to plough and harrow, and sow and did it all conscientiously, and did not leave it all to the labourer. I used to get tired, and my face and feet used to burn with the rain and the sharp cold wind. But work in the fields did not attract me. I knew nothing about agriculture and did not like it; perhaps because my ancestors were not tillers of the soil and pure town blood ran in my veins. I loved nature dearly; I loved the fields and the meadows and the garden, but the peasant who turns the earth with his plough, shouting at his miserable horse, ragged and wet, with bowed shoulders, was to me an expression of wild, rude, ugly force, and as I watched his clumsy movements I could not help thinking of the long-passed legendary life, when men did not yet know the use of fire. The fierce bull which led the herd, and the horses that stampeded through the village, filled me with terror, and all the large creatures, strong and hostile, a ram with horns, a gander, or a watch-dog seemed to me to be symbolical of some rough, wild force. These prejudices used to be particularly strong in me in bad weather, when heavy clouds hung over the black plough-lands. But worst of all was that when I was ploughing or sowing, and a few peasants stood and watched how I did it, I no longer felt the inevitability and necessity of the work and it seemed to me that I was trifling my time away.

I used to go through the gardens and the meadow to the mill. It was leased by Stiepan, a Kurilovka peasant; handsome, swarthy, with a black beard—an athletic appearance. He did not care for mill work and thought it tiresome and unprofitable, and he only lived at the mill to escape from home. He was a saddler and always smelled of tan and leather. He did not like talking, was slow and immovable, and used to hum "U-lu-lu-lu," sitting on the bank or in the doorway of the mill. Sometimes his wife and mother-in-law used to come from Kurilovka to see him; they were both fair, languid, soft, and they used to bow to him humbly and call him Stiepan Petrovich. And he would not answer their greeting with a word or a sign, but

would turn where he sat on the bank and hum quietly: "U-lu-lu-lu." There would be a silence for an hour or two. His mother-in-law and his wife would whisper to each other, get up and look expectantly at him for some time, waiting for him to look at them, and then they would bow humbly and say in sweet, soft voices:

"Good-bye, Stiepan Petrovich."

And they would go away. After that, Stiepan would put away the bundle of cracknels or the shirt they had left for him and sigh and give a wink in their direction and say:

"The female sex!"

The mill was worked with both wheels day and night. I used to help Stiepan, I liked it, and when he went away I was glad to take his place.

XI

After a spell of warm bright weather we had a season of bad roads. It rained and was cold all through May. The grinding of the millstones and the drip of the rain induced idleness and sleep. The floor shook, the whole place smelled of flour, and this too made one drowsy. My wife in a short fur coat and high rubber boots used to appear twice a day and she always said the same thing:

"Call this summer! It is worse than October!"

We used to have tea together and cook porridge, or sit together for hours in silence thinking the rain would never stop. Once when Stiepan went away to a fair, Masha stayed the night in the mill. When we got up we could not tell what time it was for the sky was overcast; the sleepy cocks at Dubechnia were crowing, and the corncrakes were trilling in the meadow; it was very, very early . . . My wife and I walked down to the pool and drew up the bow-net that Stiepan had put out in our presence the day before. There was one large perch in it and a crayfish angrily stretched out his claws.

"Let them go," said Masha. "Let them be happy too."

Because we got up very early and had nothing to do, the day seemed very long, the longest in my life. Stiepan returned before dusk and I went back to the farmhouse.

"Your father came here to-day," said Masha.

"Where is he?"

"He has gone. I did not receive him."

Seeing my silence and feeling that I was sorry for my father, she said:

"We must be logical. I did not receive him and sent a message to ask him not to trouble us again and not to come and see us."

In a moment I was outside the gates, striding towards the town to make it up with my father. It was muddy, slippery, cold. For the first time since our marriage I suddenly felt sad, and through my brain, tired with the long day, there flashed the thought that perhaps I was not living as I ought; I got more and more tired and was gradually overcome with weakness, inertia; I had no desire to move or to think, and after walking for some time, I waved my hand and went home.

In the middle of the yard stood the engineer in a leather coat with a hood. He was shouting:

"Where's the furniture? There was some good Empire furniture, pictures, vases. There's nothing left! Damn it, I bought the place with the furniture!"

Near him stood Moissey, Mrs. Cheprakov's bailiff, fumbling with his cap; a lank fellow of about twenty-five, with a spotty face and little, impudent eyes; one side of his face was larger than the other as though he had been lain on.

"Yes, Right Honourable Sir, you bought it without the furniture," he said sheepishly. "I remember that clearly."

"Silence!" shouted the engineer, going red in the face, and beginning to shake, and his shout echoed through the garden.

XII

When I was busy in the garden or the yard, Moissey would stand with his hands behind his back and stare at me impertinently with his little eyes. And this used to irritate me to such an extent that I would put aside my work and go away.

We learned from Stiepan that Moissey had been Mrs. Cheprakov's lover. I noticed that when people went to her for money they used to apply to Moissey first, and once I saw a peasant, a charcoal-burner, black all over, grovel at his feet. Sometimes after a whispered conversation Moissey would hand

over the money himself without saying anything to his mistress, from which I concluded that the transaction was settled on his own account.

He used to shoot in our garden, under our very windows, steal food from our larder, borrow our horses without leave, and we were furious, feeling that Dubechnia was no longer ours, and Masha used to go pale and say:

"Have we to live another year and a half with these creatures?"

Ivan Cheprahov, the son, was a guard on the railway. During the winter he got very thin and weak, so that he got drunk on one glass of vodka, and felt cold out of the sun. He hated wearing his guard's uniform and was ashamed of it, but found his job profitable because he could steal candles and sell them. My new position gave him a mixed feeling of astonishment, envy, and vague hope that something of the sort might happen to him. He used to follow Masha with admiring eyes, and to ask me what I had for dinner nowadays, and his ugly, emaciated face used to wear a sweet, sad expression, and he used to twitch his fingers as though he could feel my happiness with them.

"I say, Little Profit," he would say excitedly, lighting and relighting his cigarette; he always made a mess wherever he stood because he used to waste a whole box of matches on one cigarette. "I say, my life is about as beastly as it could be. Every little squirt of a soldier can shout: 'Here guard! Here!' I have such a lot in the trains and you know, mine's a rotten life! My mother has ruined me! I heard a doctor say in the train, if the parents are loose, their children become drunkards or criminals. That's it."

Once he came staggering into the yard. His eyes wandered aimlessly and he breathed heavily; he laughed and cried, and said something in a kind of frenzy, and through his thickly uttered words I could only hear: "My mother? Where is my mother?" and he wailed like a child crying because it has lost its mother in a crowd. I led him away into the garden and laid him down under a tree, and all that day and through the night Masha and I took it in turns to stay with him. He was sick and Masha looked with disgust at his pale, wet face and said:

"Are we to have these creatures on the place for another year and a half? It is awful! Awful!"

And what a lot of trouble the peasants gave us! How many disappointments we had at the outset, in the spring, when we so longed to be happy! My wife built a school. I designed the school for sixty boys, and the Zemstvo Council approved the design, but recommended our building the school at Kurilovka, the big village, only three miles away; besides the Kurilovka school, where the children of four villages, including that of Dubechnia, were taught, was old and inadequate and the floor was so rotten that the children were afraid to walk on it. At the end of March Masha, by her own desire, was appointed trustee of the Kurilovka school, and at the beginning of April we called three parish meetings and persuaded the peasants that the school was old and inadequate, and that it was necessary to build a new one. A member of the Zemstvo Council and the elementary school inspector came down too and addressed them, After each meeting we were mobbed and asked for a pail of vodka; we felt stifled in the crowd and soon got tired and returned home dissatisfied and rather abashed. At last the peasants allotted a site for the school and undertook to cart the materials from the town. And as soon as the spring corn was sown, on the very first Sunday, carts set out from Kurilovka and Dubechnia to fetch the bricks for the foundations. They went at dawn and returned late in the evening. The peasants were drunk and said they were tired out.

The rain and the cold continued, as though deliberately, all through May. The roads were spoiled and deep in mud. When the carts came from town they usually drove to our horror, into our yard! A horse would appear in the gate, straddling its forelegs, with its big belly heaving; before it came into the yard it would strain and heave and after it would come a ten-yard beam in a four-wheeled wagon, wet and slimy, alongside it, wrapped up to keep the rain out, never looking where he was going and splashing through the puddles, a peasant would walk with the skirt of his coat tucked up in his belt. Another cart would appear with planks; then a third with a beam, then a fourth . . . and the yard in front of the house would gradually be blocked up with horses, beams, planks.

Peasants, men and women with their heads wrapped up and their skirts tucked up, would stare morosely at our windows, kick up a row and insist on the lady of the house coming out to them; and they would curse and swear. And in a corner Moissey would stand, and it seemed to us that he delighted in our discomfiture.

"We won't cart any more!" the peasants shouted. "We are tired to death! Let her go and cart it herself!"

Pale and scared, thinking they would any minute break into the house, Masha would send them money for a pail of vodka; after which the noise would die down and the long beams would go jolting out of the yard.

When I went to look at the building my wife would get agitated and say:

"The peasants are furious. They might do something to you. No. Wait. I'll go with you."

We used to drive over to Kurilovka together and then the carpenters would ask for tips. The framework was ready for the foundations to be laid, but the masons never came and when at last the masons did come it was apparent that there was no sand; somehow it had been forgotten that sand was wanted. Taking advantage of our helplessness, the peasants asked thirty copecks a load, although it was less than a quarter of a mile from the building to the river where the sand was to be fetched, and more than five hundred loads were needed. There were endless misunderstandings, wrangles, and continual begging. My wife was indignant and the building contractor, Petrov, an old man of seventy, took her by the hand and said:

"You look here! Look here! Just get me sand and I'll find ten men and have the work done in two days. Look here!"

Sand was brought, but two, four days, a week passed and still there yawned a ditch where the foundations were to be.

"I shall go mad," cried my wife furiously. "What wretches they are! What wretches!"

During these disturbances Victor Ivanich used to come and see us. He used to bring hampers of wine and dainties, and eat for a long time, and then go to sleep on the terrace and snore so that the labourers shook their heads and said:

"He's all right!"

Masha took no pleasure in his visits. She did not believe in him, and yet she used to ask his advice; when, after a sound sleep after dinner, he got up out of humour, and spoke disparagingly of our domestic arrangements, and said he was sorry he had ever bought Dubechnia which had cost him so much, and poor Masha looked miserably anxious and complained to him, he would yawn and say the peasants ought to be flogged.

He called our marriage and the life we were living a comedy, and used to say it was a caprice, a whimsy.

"She did the same sort of thing once before," he told me. "She fancied herself as an opera singer, and ran away from me. It took me two months to find her, and my dear fellow, I wasted a thousand roubles on telegrams alone."

He had dropped calling me a sectarian or the Housepainter; and no longer approved of my life as a working man, but he used to say:

"You are a queer fish! An abnormality. I don't venture to prophesy, but you will end badly!"

Masha slept poorly at nights and would sit by the window of our bedroom thinking. She no longer laughed and made faces at supper. I suffered, and when it rained, every drop cut into my heart like a bullet, and I could have gone on my knees to Masha and apologised for the weather. When the peasants made a row in the yard, I felt that it was my fault. I would sit for hours in one place, thinking only how splendid and how wonderful Masha was. I loved her passionately, and I was enraptured by everything she did and said. Her taste was for quiet indoor occupation; she loved to read for hours and to study; she who knew about farm-work only from books, surprised us all by her knowledge and the advice she gave was always useful, and when applied was never in vain. And in addition she had the fineness, the taste, and the good sense, the very sound sense which only very well-bred people possess!

To such a woman, with her healthy, orderly mind, the chaotic environment with its petty cares and dirty tittle-tattle, in which we lived, was very painful. I could see that, and I, too, could not sleep at night. My brain whirled and I could hardly choke back my tears. I tossed about, not knowing what to do.

I used to rush to town and bring Masha books, newspapers, sweets, flowers, and I used to go fishing with Stiepan, dragging for hours, neck-deep in cold water, in the rain, to catch an eel by way of varying our fare. I used humbly to ask the peasants not to shout, and I gave them vodka, bribed them, promised them anything they asked. And what a lot of other foolish things I did!

At last the rain stopped. The earth dried up. I used to get up in the morning and go into the garden—dew shining on the flowers, birds and insects shrilling, not a cloud in the sky, and the garden, the meadow, the river were so beautiful, perfect but for the memory of the peasants and the carts and the engineer. Masha and I used to drive out in a car to see how the oats were coming on. She drove and I sat behind; her shoulders were always a little hunched, and the wind would play with her hair.

"Keep to the right!" she shouted to the passers-by.

"You are like a coachman!" I once said to her.

"Perhaps. My grandfather, my father's father, was a coachman. Didn't you know?" she asked, turning round, and immediately she began to mimic the way the coachmen shout and sing.

"Thank God!" I thought, as I listened to her. "Thank God!"

And again I remember the peasants, the carts, the engineer. . . .

XIII

Doctor Blagovo came over on a bicycle. My sister began to come often. Once more we talked of manual labour and progress, and the mysterious Cross awaiting humanity in the remote future. The doctor did not like our life, because it interfered with our discussions and he said it was unworthy of a free man to plough, and reap, and breed cattle, and that in time all such elementary forms of the struggle for existence would be left to animals and machines, while men would devote themselves exclusively to scientific investigation. And my sister always asked me to let her go home earlier, and if she stayed late, or for the night, she was greatly distressed.

"Good gracious, what a baby you are," Masha used to say reproachfully. "It is quite ridiculous."

"Yes, it is absurd," my sister would agree. "I admit it is absurd, but what can I do if I have not the power to control myself. It always seems to me that I am doing wrong."

During the haymaking my body, not being used to it, ached all over; sitting on the terrace in the evening, I would suddenly fall asleep and they would all laugh at me. They would wake me up and made me sit down to supper. I would be overcome with drowsiness and in a stupor saw lights, faces, plates, and heard voices without understanding what they were saying. And I used to get up early in the morning and take my scythe, or go to the school and work there all day.

When I was at home on holidays I noticed that my wife and sister were hiding something from me and even seemed to be avoiding me. My wife was tender with me as always, but she had some new thought of her own which she did not communicate to me. Certainly her exasperation with the peasants had increased and life was growing harder and harder for her, but she no longer complained to me. She talked more readily to the doctor than to me, and I could not understand why.

It was the custom in our province for the labourers to come to the farm in the evenings to be treated to vodka, even the girls having a glass. We did not keep the custom; the haymakers and the women used to come into the yard and stay until late in the evening, waiting for vodka, and then they went away cursing. And then Masha used to frown and relapse into silence or whisper irritably to the doctor:

"Savages! Barbarians!"

Newcomers to the villages were received ungraciously, almost with hostility; like new arrivals at a school. At first we were looked upon as foolish, soft-headed people who had bought the estate because we did not know what to do with our money. We were laughed at. The peasants grazed their cattle in our pasture and even in our garden, drove our cows and horses into the village and then came and asked for compensation. The whole village used to come into our yard and declare loudly that in mowing we had cut the border of common land which did not belong to us; and as we did not know our boundaries exactly we used to take their word for it and pay a fine. But afterward it appeared that we had been in the right. They

used to bark the young lime-trees in our woods. A Dubechnia peasant, a money-lender, who sold vodka without a licence, bribed our labourers to help him cheat us in the most treacherous way; he substituted old wheels for the new on our wagons, stole our ploughing yokes and sold them back to us, and so on. But worst of all was the building at Kurilovka. There the women at night stole planks, bricks, tiles, iron; the bailiff and his assistants made a search; the women were each fined two roubles by the village council, and then the whole lot of them got drunk on the money.

When Masha found out, she would say to the doctor and my sister,

"What beasts! It is horrible! Horrible!"

And more than once I heard her say she was sorry she had decided to build the school.

"You must understand," the doctor tried to point out, "that if you build a school or undertake any good work, it is not for the peasants, but for the sake of culture and the future. The worse the peasants are the more reason there is for building a school. Do you understand!"

There was a lack of confidence in his voice, and it seemed to me that he hated the peasants as much as Masha.

Masha used often to go to the mill with my sister and they would say jokingly that they were going to have a look at Stiepan because he was so handsome. Stiepan it appeared was reserved and silent only with men, and in the company of women was free and talkative. Once when I went down to the river to bathe I involuntarily overheard a conversation. Masha and Cleopatra, both in white, were sitting on the bank under the broad shade of a willow and Stiepan was standing near with his hands behind his back, saying:

"But are peasants human beings? Not they; they are, excuse me, brutes, beasts, and thieves. What does a peasant's life consist of? Eating and drinking, crying for cheaper food, bawling in taverns, without decent conversation, or behaviour or manners. Just an ignorant beast! He lives in filth, his wife and children live in filth; he sleeps in his clothes; takes the potatoes out of the soup with his fingers, drinks down a black beetle with his *kvass*—because he won't trouble to fish it out!"

"It is because of their poverty!" protested my sister.

"What poverty? Of course there is want, but there are different kinds of necessity. If a man is in prison, or is blind, say, or has lost his legs, then he is in a bad way and God help him; but if he is at liberty and in command of his senses, if he has eyes and hands and strength, then, good God, what more does he want? It is lamentable, my lady, ignorance, but not poverty. If you kind people, with your education, out of charity try to help him, then he will spend your money in drink, like the swine he is, or worse still, he will open a tavern and begin to rob the people on the strength of your money. You say—poverty. But does a rich peasant live any better? He lives like a pig, too, excuse me, a clodhopper, a blusterer, a big-bellied blockhead, with a swollen red mug—makes me want to hit him in the eye, the blackguard. Look at Larion of Dubechnia—he is rich, but all the same he barks the trees in your woods just like the poor; and he is a foul-mouthed brute, and his children are foul-mouthed, and when he is drunk he falls flat in the mud and goes to sleep. They are all worthless, my lady. It is just hell to live with them in the village. The village sticks in my gizzard, and I thank God, the King of heaven, that I am well fed and clothed, and that I am a free man; I can live where I like, I don't want to live in the village and nobody can force me to do it. They say: 'You have a wife.' They say: 'You are obliged to live at home with your wife.' Why? I have not sold myself to her."

"Tell me, Stiepan. Did you marry for love?" asked Masha.

"What love is there in a village?" Stiepan answered with a smile. "If you want to know, my lady, it is my second marriage. I do not come from Kurilovka, but from Zalegosch, and I went to Kurilovka when I married. My father did not want to divide the land up between us—there are five of us. So I bowed to it and cut adrift and went to another village to my wife's family. My first wife died when she was young."

"What did she die of?"

"Foolishness. She used to sit and cry. She was always crying for no reason at all and so she wasted away. She used to drink herbs to make herself prettier and it must have ruined her inside. And my second wife at Kurilovka—what about her?

A village woman, a peasant; that's all. When the match was being made I was nicely had; I thought she was young, nice to look at and clean. Her mother was clean enough, drank coffee and, chiefly because they were a clean lot, I got married. Next day we sat down to dinner and I told my mother-in-law to fetch me a spoon. She brought me a spoon and I saw her wipe it with her finger. So that, thought I, is their cleanliness! I lived with them for a year and went away. Perhaps I ought to have married a town girl"—he went on after a silence. "They say a wife is a helpmate to her husband. What do I want with a helpmate. I can look after myself. But you talk to me sensibly and soberly, without giggling all the while. He—he—he! What is life without a good talk?"

Stiepan suddenly stopped and relapsed into his dreary, monotonous "U-lu-lu-lu." That meant that he had noticed me.

Masha used often to visit the mill, she evidently took pleasure in her talks with Stiepan; he abused the peasants so sincerely, and convincingly—and this attracted her to him. When she returned from the mill the idiot who looked after the garden used to shout after her:

"Palashka! Hullo, Palashka!" And he would bark at her like a dog: "Bow-wow!"

And she would stop and stare at him as if she found in the idiot's barking an answer to her thought, and perhaps he attracted her as much as Stiepan's abuse. And at home she would find some unpleasant news awaiting her, as that the village geese had ruined the cabbages in the kitchen-garden, or that Larion had stolen the reins, and she would shrug her shoulders with a smile and say:

"What can you expect of such people?"

She was exasperated and a fury was gathering in her soul, and I, on the other hand, was getting used to the peasants and more and more attracted to them. For the most part, they were nervous, irritable, absurd people; they were people with suppressed imaginations, ignorant, with a bare, dull outlook, always dazed by the same thought of the grey earth, grey days, black bread; they were people driven to cunning, but, like birds, they only hid their heads behind the trees—they could not reason. They did not come to us for the twenty roubles

earned by haymaking, but for the half-pail of vodka, though they could buy four pails of vodka with the twenty roubles. Indeed they were dirty, drunken, and dishonest, but for all that one felt that the peasant life as a whole was sound at the core. However clumsy and brutal the peasant might look as he followed his antiquated plough, and however he might fuddle himself with vodka, still, looking at him more closely, one felt that there was something vital and important in him, something that was lacking in Masha and the doctor, for instance, namely, that he believes that the chief thing on earth is truth, that his and everybody's salvation lies in truth, and therefore above all else on earth he loves justice. I used to say to my wife that she was seeing the stain on the window, but not the glass itself; and she would be silent or, like Stiepan, she would hum, "U-lu-lu-lu. . . ." When she, good, clever actress that she was, went pale with fury and then harangued the doctor in a trembling voice about drunkenness and dishonesty, her blindness confounded and appalled me. How could she forget that her father, the engineer, drank, drank heavily, and that the money with which he bought Dubechnia was acquired by means of a whole series of impudent, dishonest swindles? How could she forget?

XIV

And my sister, too, was living with her own private thoughts which she hid from me. She used often to sit whispering with Masha. When I went up to her, she would shrink away, and her eyes would look guilty and full of entreaty. Evidently there was something going on in her soul of which she was afraid or ashamed. To avoid meeting me in the garden or being left alone with me she clung to Masha and I hardly ever had a chance to talk to her except at dinner.

One evening, on my way home from the school, I came quietly through the garden. It had already begun to grow dark. Without noticing me or hearing footsteps, my sister walked round an old wide-spreading apple-tree, perfectly noiselessly like a ghost. She was in black, and walked very quickly, up and down, up and down, with her eyes on the ground. An apple

fell from the tree, she started at the noise, stopped and pressed her hands to her temples. At that moment I went up to her.

In an impulse of tenderness, which suddenly came rushing to my heart, with tears in my eyes, somehow remembering our mother and our childhood, I took hold of her shoulders and kissed her.

"What is the matter?" I asked. "You are suffering. I have seen it for a long time now. Tell me, what is the matter?"

"I am afraid . . ." she murmured, with a shiver.

"What's the matter with you?" I inquired. "For God's sake, be frank!"

"I will, I will be frank. I will tell you the whole truth. It is so hard, so painful to conceal anything from you! . . . Misail, I am in love." She went on in a whisper. "Love, love. . . . I am happy, but I am afraid."

I heard footsteps and Doctor Blagovo appeared among the trees. He was wearing a silk shirt and high boots. Clearly they had arranged a rendezvous by the apple-tree. When she saw him she flung herself impulsively into his arms with a cry of anguish, as though he was being taken away from her:

"Vladimir! Vladimir!"

She clung to him, and gazed eagerly at him and only then I noticed how thin and pale she had become. It was especially noticeable through her lace collar, which I had known for years, for it now hung loosely about her slim neck. The doctor was taken aback, but controlled himself at once, and said, as he stroked her hair:

"That's enough. Enough! . . . Why are you so nervous? You see, I have come."

We were silent for a time, bashfully glancing at each other. Then we all moved away and I heard the doctor saying to me:

"Civilised life has not yet begun with us. The old console themselves with saying that, if there is nothing now, there was something in the forties and the sixties; that is all right for the old ones, but we are young and our brains are not yet touched with senile decay. We cannot console ourselves with such illusions. The beginning of Russia was in 862, and civilised Russia, as I understand it, has not yet begun."

But I could not bother about what he was saying. It was

very strange, but I could not believe that my sister was in love, that she had just been walking with her hand on the arm of a stranger and gazing at him tenderly. My sister, poor, frightened, timid, downtrodden creature as she was, loved a man who was already married and had children. I was full of pity without knowing why; the doctor's presence was distasteful to me and I could not make out what was to come of such a love.

XV

Masha and I drove over to Kurilovka for the opening of the school.

"Autumn, autumn, autumn . . ." said Masha, looking about her. Summer had passed. There were no birds and only the willows were green.

Yes. Summer had passed. The days were bright and warm, but it was fresh in the mornings; the shepherds went out in their sheepskins, and the dew never dried all day on the asters in the garden. There were continual mournful sounds and it was impossible to tell whether it was a shutter creaking on its rusty hinges or the cranes flying—and one felt so well and so full of the desire for life!

"Summer had passed . . ." said Masha. "Now we can both make up our accounts. We have worked hard and thought a great deal and we are the better for it—all honour and praise to us; we have improved ourselves; but have our successes had any perceptible influence on the life around us, have they been of any use to a single person? No! Ignorance, dirt, drunkenness, a terribly high rate of infant mortality—everything is just as it was, and no-one is any the better for your having ploughed and sown and my having spent money and read books. Evidently we have only worked and broadened our minds for ourselves."

I was abashed by such arguments and did not know what to think.

"From beginning to end we have been sincere," I said, "and if a man is sincere, he is right."

"Who denies that? We have been right but we have been wrong in our way of setting about it. First of all, are not our

very ways of living wrong? You want to be usefuul to people, but by the mere fact of buying an estate you make it impossible to be so: Further, if you work, dress, and eat like a peasant you lend your authority and approval to the clumsy clothes, and their dreadful houses and their dirty beards. . . . On the other hand, suppose you work for a long, long time, all your life, and in the end obtain some practical results—what will your results amount to, what can they do against such elemental forces as wholesale ignorance, hunger, cold, and degeneracy? A drop in the ocean! Other methods of fighting are necessary, strong, bold, quick! If you want to be useful then you must leave the narrow circle of common activity and try to act directly on the masses! First of all, you need vigorous, noisy, propaganda. Why are art and music, for instance, so much alive and so popular and so powerful? Because the musician or the singer influences thousands directly. Art, wonderful art!" She looked wistfully at the sky and went on: "Art gives wings and carries you far, far away. If you are bored with dirt and pettifogging interests, if you are exasperated and outraged and indignant, rest and satisfaction are only to be found in beauty."

As we approached Kurilovka the weather was fine, clear, and joyous. In the yards the peasants were thrashing and there was a smell of corn and straw. Behind the wattled hedges the fruit-trees were reddening and all around the trees were red or golden. In the church-tower the bells were ringing, the children were carrying ikons to the school and singing the Litany of the Virgin. And how clear the air was, and how high the doves soared!

The Te Deum was sung in the schoolroom. Then the Kurilovka peasants presented Masha with an ikon, and the Dubechnia peasants gave her a large cracknel and a gilt salt-cellar. And Masha began to weep.

"And if we have said anything out of the way or have been discontented, please forgive us," said an old peasant, bowing to us both.

As we drove home Masha looked back at the school. The green roof which I had painted glistened in the sun, and we could see it for a long time. And I felt that Masha's glances were glances of farewell.

XVI

In the evening she got ready to go to town.

She had often been to town lately to stay the night. In her absence I could not work, and felt listless and disheartened; our big yard seemed dreary, disgusting, and deserted; there were ominous noises in the garden, and without her the house, the trees, the horses were no longer "ours".

I never went out but sat all the time at her writing-table among her books on farming and agriculture, those deposed favourites, wanted no more, which looked out at me so shamefacedly from the bookcase. For hours together, while it struck seven, eight, nine, and the autumn night crept up as black as soot to the windows, I sat brooding over an old glove of hers, or the pen she always used, and her little scissors. I did nothing and saw clearly that everything I had done before, ploughing, sowing, and felling trees, had only been because she wanted it. And if she told me to clean out a well, when I had to stand waist-deep in water, I would go and do it, without trying to find out whether the well wanted cleaning or not. And now, when she was away, Dubechnia with its squalor, its litter, its slamming shutters, with thieves prowling about it day and night, seemed to me like a chaos in which work was entirely useless. And why should I work, then? Why trouble and worry about the future, when I felt that the ground was slipping away from under me, that my position at Dubechnia was hollow, that, in a word, the same fate awaited me as had befallen the books on agriculture? Oh! what anguish it was at night, in the lonely hours, when I lay listening uneasily, as though I expected some one any minute to call out that it was time for me to go away. I was not sorry to leave Dubechnia, my sorrow was for my love, for which it seemed that autumn had already begun. What a tremendous happiness it is to love and to be loved, and what a horror it is to feel that you are beginning to topple down from that lofty tower!

Masha returned from town toward evening on the following day. She was dissatisfied with something, but concealed it and said only: "Why have the winter windows been put in? It will

be stifling." I opened two of the windows. We did not feel like eating, but we sat down and had supper.

"Go and wash your hands," she said. "You smell of putty."

She had brought some new illustrated magazines from town and we both read them after supper. They had supplements with fashion-plates and patterns. Masha just glanced at them and put them aside to look at them carefully later on; but one dress, with a wide, bell-shaped skirt and big sleeves interested her, and for a moment she looked at it seriously and attentively.

"That's not bad," she said.

"Yes, it would suit you very well," said I. "Very well."

And I admired the dress, only because she liked it, and went on tenderly:

"A wonderful, lovely dress! Lovely, wonderful, Masha. My dear Masha."

And tears began to drop on the fashion-plate.

"Wonderful Masha. . . ." I murmured. "Dear, darling Masha. . . ."

She went and lay down and I sat still for an hour and looked at the illustrations.

"You should not have opened the windows," she called from the bedroom. "I'm afraid it will be cold. Look how the wind is blowing in!"

I read the miscellany, about the preparation of cheap ink, and the size of the largest diamond in the world. Then I chanced on the picture of the dress she had liked and I imagined her at a ball, with a fan, and bare shoulders, a brilliant, dazzling figure, well up in music and painting and literature, and how insignificant and brief my share in her life seemed to be!

Our coming together, our marriage, was only an episode, one of many in the life of this lively, highly gifted creature. All the best things in the world, as I have said, were at her service, and she had them for nothing; even ideas and fashionable intellectual movements served her pleasure, a diversion in her existence, and I was only the coachman who drove her from one infatuation to another. Now I was no longer necessary to her; she would fly away and I should be left alone.

As if in answer to my thoughts a desperate scream suddenly came from the yard:

"Mur-der!"

It was a shrill female voice, and exactly as though it were trying to imitate it, the wind also howled dismally in the chimney. Half a minute passed and again it came through the sound of the wind, but as though from the other end of the yard:

"Mur-der!"

"Misail, did you hear that?" said my wife in a hushed voice. "Did you hear?"

She came out of the bedroom in her nightgown, with her hair down, and stood listening and staring out of the dark window.

"Somebody is being murdered!" she muttered. "It only wanted that!"

I took my gun and went out; it was very dark outside; a violent wind was blowing so that it was hard to stand up. I walked to the gate and listened; the trees were moaning; the wind went whistling through them, and in the garden the idiot's dog was howling. Beyond the gate it was pitch dark; there was not a light on the railway. And just by the wing, where the offices used to be, I suddenly heard a choking cry:

"Mur-der!"

"Who is there?" I called.

Two men were locked in a struggle. One had nearly thrown the other, who was resisting with all his might. And both were breathing heavily.

"Let go!" said one of them and I recognised Ivan Cheprakov. It was he who had cried out in a thin, falsetto voice. "Let go, damn you, or I'll bite your hands!"

The other man I recognised as Moissey. I parted them and could not resist hitting Moissey in the face twice. He fell down, then got up, and I struck him again.

"He tried to kill me," he muttered. "I caught him creeping to his mother's drawer. . . . I tried to shut him up in the wing for safety."

Cheprakov was drunk and did not recognise me. He stood gasping for breath as though trying to get enough wind to shriek again.

I left them and went back to the house. My wife was lying on the bed, fully dressed. I told her what had happened in

the yard and did not keep back the fact that I had struck Moissey.

"Living in the country is horrible," she said. "And what a long night it is!"

"Mur-der!" we heard again, a little later.

"I'll go and part them," I said.

"No. Let them kill each other," she said with an expression of disgust.

She lay staring at the ceiling, listening, and I sat near her, not daring to speak and feeling that it was my fault that screams of "murder" came from the yard and the night was so long.

We were silent and I waited impatiently for the light to peep in at the window. And Masha looked as though she had wakened from a long sleep and was astonished to find herself, so clever, so educated, so refined, cast away in this miserable provincial hole, among a lot of petty, shallow people, and to think that she could have so far forgotten herself as to have been carried away by one of them and to have been his wife for more than half a year. It seemed to me that we were all the same to her—myself, Moissey, Cheprakov; all swept together into the drunken, wild scream of "murder"—myself, our marriage, our work, and the muddy roads of autumn; and when she breathed or stirred to make herself more comfortable I could read in her eyes: "Oh, if the morning would come quicker!"

In the morning she went away.

I stayed at Dubechnia for another three days, waiting for her; then I moved all our things into one room, locked it, and went to town. When I rang the bell at the engineer's, it was evening, and the lamps were alight in Great Gentry Street. Pavel told me that nobody was at home; Victor Ivanich had gone to Petersburg and Maria Victorovna must be at a rehearsal at the Azhoguins'. I remember the excitement with which I went to the Azhoguins', and how my heart thumped and sank within me, as I went upstairs and stood for a long while on the landing, not daring to enter that temple of the Muses! In the hall, on the table, on the piano, on the stage, there were candles burning; all in threes, for the first performance was fixed for the thirteenth, and the dress rehearsal was on Monday—the

unlucky day. A fight against prejudice! All the lovers of dramatic art were assembled; the eldest, the middle, and the youngest Miss Azhoguin were walking about the stage, reading their parts. Radish was standing still in a corner all by himself, with his head against the wall, looking at the stage with adoring eyes, waiting for the beginning of the rehearsal. Everything was just the same!

I went toward my hostess to greet her, when suddenly everybody began to say "Ssh" and to wave their hands to tell me not to make such a noise. There was a silence. The top of the piano was raised, a lady sat down, screwing up her short-sighted eyes at the music, and Masha stood by the piano, dressed up, beautiful, but beautiful in an odd new way, not at all like the Masha who used to come to see me at the mill in the spring. She began to sing:

"*Why do I love thee, straight night?*"

It was the first time since I had known her that I had heard her sing. She had a fine, rich, powerful voice, and to hear her sing was like eating a ripe, sweet-scented melon. She finished the song and was applauded. She smiled and looked pleased, made play with her eyes, stared at the music, plucked at her dress exactly like a bird which has broken out of its cage and preens its wings at liberty. Her hair was combed back over her ears, and she had a sly defiant expression on her face, as though she wished to challenge us all, or to shout at us, as though we were horses: "Gee up, old things!"

And at that moment she must have looked very like her grandfather, the coachman.

"You here, too?" she asked, giving me her hand. "Did you hear me sing? How did you like it?" And, without waiting for me to answer she went on: "You arrived very opportunely. I'm going to Petersburg for a short time to-night. May I?"

At midnight I took her to the station. She embraced me tenderly, probably out of gratitude, because I did not pester her with useless questions, and she promised to write to me, and I held her hands for a long time and kissed them, finding it hard to keep back my tears, and not saying a word.

And when the train moved, I stood looking at the receding lights, kissed her in my imagination and whispered:

"Masha dear, wonderful Masha! . . ."

I spent the night at Makarikha, at Karpovna's, and in the morning I worked with Radish, upholstering the furniture at a rich merchant's, who had married his daughter to a doctor.

XVII

On Sunday afternoon my sister came to see me and had tea with me.

"I read a great deal now," she said, showing me the books she had got out of the town library on her way. "Thanks to your wife and Vladimir. They awakened my self-consciousness. They saved me and have made me feel that I am a human being. I used not to sleep at night for worrying: 'What a lot of sugar has been wasted during the week.' 'The cucumbers must not be oversalted!' I don't sleep now, but I have quite different thoughts. I am tormented with the thought that half my life has passed so foolishly and half-heartedly. I despise my old life. I am ashamed of it. And I regard my father now as an enemy. Oh, how grateful I am to your wife! And Vladimir. He is such a wonderful man! They opened my eyes."

"It is not good that you can't sleep," I said.

"You think I am ill? Not a bit. Vladimir sounded me and says I am perfectly healthy. But health is not the point. That doesn't matter so much. . . . Tell me, am I right?"

She needed moral support. That was obvious. Masha had gone, Doctor Blagovo was in Petersburg, and there was no-one except myself in the town, who could tell her that she was right. She fixed her eyes on me, trying to read my inmost thoughts, and if I were sad in her presence, she always took it upon herself and was depressed. I had to be continually on my guard, and when she asked me if she was right, I hastened to assure her that she was right and that I had a profound respect for her.

"You know, they have given me a part at the Azhoguins'," she went on. "I wanted to act. I want to live. I want to drink deep of life; I have no talent whatever, and my part is only ten lines, but it is immeasurably finer and nobler than pouring out

tea five times a day and watching to see that the cook does not eat the sugar left over. And most of all I want to let father see that I too can protest."

After tea she lay down on my bed and stayed there for some time, with her eyes closed, and her face very pale.

"Just weakness!" she said, as she got up. "Vladimir said all town girls and women are anæmic from lack of work. What a clever man Vladimir is! He is right; wonderfully right! We do need work!"

Two days later she came to rehearsal at the Azhoguins' with her part in her hand. She was in black, with a garnet necklace, and a brooch that looked at a distance like a pasty, and she had enormous earrings, in each of which sparkled a diamond. I felt uneasy when I saw her; I was shocked by her lack of taste. The others noticed too that she was unsuitably dressed and that her earrings and diamonds were out of place. I saw their smiles and heard someone say jokingly:

"Cleopatra of Egypt!"

She was trying to be fashionable, and easy, and assured, and she seemed affected and odd. She lost her simplicity and her charm.

"I just told father that I was going to a rehearsal," she began, coming up to me, "and he shouted that he would take his blessing from me, and he nearly struck me. Fancy," she added, glancing at her part, "I don't know my part. I'm sure to make a mistake. Well, the die is cast," she said excitedly, "the die is cast."

She felt that all the people were looking at her and were all amazed at the important step she had taken and that they were all expecting something remarkable from her, and it was impossible to convince her that nobody took any notice of such small uninteresting persons as she and I.

She had nothing to do until the third act, and her part, a guest, a country gossip, consisted only in standing by the door, as if she were overhearing something, and then speaking a short monologue. For at least an hour and a half before her cue, while the others were walking, reading, having tea, quarrelling, she never left me and kept on mumbling her part, and dropping her written copy, imagining that everybody was

looking at her, and waiting for her to come on, and she patted her hair with a trembling hand and said:

"I'm sure to make a mistake. . . . You don't know how awful I feel! I am as terrified as if I were going to the scaffold."

At last her cue came.

"Cleopatra Alexeyevna—your cue!" said the manager.

She walked on to the middle of the stage with an expression of terror on her face; she looked ugly and stiff, and for half a minute was speechless, perfectly motionless, except for her large earrings which wobbled on either side of her face.

"You can read your part, the first time," said some one.

I could see that she was trembling so that she could neither speak nor open her part, and that she had entirely forgotten the words and I had just made up my mind to go up and say something to her when she suddenly dropped down on her knees in the middle of the stage and sobbed loudly.

There was a general stir and uproar. And I stood quite still by the wings, shocked by what had happened, not understanding at all, not knowing what to do. I saw them lift her up, and lead her away. I saw Aniuta Blagovo come up to me. I had not seen her in the hall before and she seemed to have sprung up from the floor. She was wearing a hat and veil, and as usual looked as if she had only dropped in for a minute.

"I told her not to try to act," she said angrily, biting out each word, with her cheeks blushing. "It is folly! You ought to have stopped her!"

Mrs. Azhoguin came up in a short jacket with short sleeves. She had tobacco ash on her thin, flat bosom.

"My dear, it is too awful!" she said, wringing her hands, and, as usual, staring into my face. "It is too awful! . . . Your sister is in a condition. . . . She is going to have a baby! You must take her away at once. . . ."

In her agitation she breathed heavily. And behind her, stood her three daughters, all thin and flat-chested like herself, and all huddled together in their dismay. They were frightened, overwhelmed just as if a convict had been caught in the house. What a shame! How awful! And this was the family that had been fighting the prejudices and superstitions of mankind all their lives; evidently they thought that all the prejudices

and superstitions of mankind were to be found in burning three candles and in the number thirteen, or the unlucky day—Monday.

"I must request . . . request . . ." Mrs Azhoguin kept on saying, compressing her lips and accentuating the *quest.* "I must request you to take her away."

XVIII

A little later my sister and I were walking along the street. I covered her with the skirt of my overcoat; we hurried along through by-streets, where there were no lamps, avoiding the passers-by, and it was like a flight. She did not weep any more, but stared at me with dry eyes. It was about twenty minutes' walk to Makarikha, whither I was taking her, and in that short time we went over the whole of our lives, and talked over everything, and considered the position and pondered. . . .

We decided that we could not stay in the town, and that when I could get some money, we would go to some other place. In some of the houses the people were asleep already, and in others they were playing cards; we hated those houses, were afraid of them, and we talked of the fanaticism, callousness, and nullity of these respectable families, these lovers of dramatic art whom we had frightened so much, and I wondered how those stupid, cruel, slothful, dishonest people were better than the drunken and superstitious peasants of Kurilovka, or how they were better than animals, which also lose their heads when some accident breaks the monotony of their lives, which are limited by their instincts. What would happen to my sister if she stayed at home? What moral torture would she have to undergo, talking to my father and meeting acquaintances every day? I imagined it all and there came into my memory people I had known who had been gradually dropped by their friends and relations, and I remember the tortured dogs which had gone mad, and sparrows plucked alive and thrown into the water—and a whole long series of dull, protracted sufferings which I had seen going on in the town since my childhood; and I could not conceive what the sixty thousand inhabitants lived for, why they read the Bible, why they

prayed, why they skimmed books and magazines. What good was all that had been written and said, if they were in the same spiritual darkness and had the same hatred of freedom, as if they were living hundreds and hundreds of years ago? The builder spends his time putting up houses all over the town, and yet would go down to his grave saying "galdary" for "gallery". And the sixty thousand inhabitants had read and heard of truth and mercy and freedom for generations, but to the bitter end they would go on lying from morning to night, tormenting one another, fearing and hating freedom as a deadly enemy.

"And so, my fate is decided," said my sister when we reached home. "After what has happened I can never go *there* again. My God, how good it is! I feel at peace."

She lay down at once. Tears shone on her eyelashes, but her expression was happy. She slept soundly and softly, and it was clear that her heart was easy and that she was at rest. For a long, long time she had not slept so well.

So we began to live together. She was always singing and said she felt very well, and I took back the books we had borrowed from the library unread, because she gave up reading; she only wanted to dream and to talk of the future. She would hum as she mended my clothes or helped Karpovna with the cooking, or talk of her Vladimir, of his mind, and his goodness, and his fine manners, and his extraordinary learning. And I agreed with her, though I no longer liked the doctor. She wanted to work, to be independent, and to live by herself, and she said she would become a school-teacher or a nurse as soon as her health allowed, and she would scrub the floors and do her own washing. She loved her unborn baby passionately, and she knew already the colour of his eyes and the shape of his hands and how he laughed. She liked to talk of his upbringing, and since the best man on earth was Vladimir, all her ideas were reduced to making the boy as charming as his father. There was no end to her chatter, and everything she talked about filled her with a lively joy. Sometimes I, too, rejoiced, though I knew not why.

She must have infected me with her dreaminess, for I, too, read nothing and just dreamed. In the evenings, in spite of

being tired, I used to pace up and down the room with my hands in my pockets, talking about Masha.

"When do you think she will return?" I used to ask my sister. "I think she'll be back at Christmas. Not later. What is she doing there?"

"If she doesn't write to you, it means she must be coming soon."

"True," I would agree, though I knew very well that there was nothing to make Masha return to our town.

I missed her very much, but I could not help deceiving myself and wanted others to deceive me. My sister was longing for her doctor, I for Masha, and we both laughed and talked and never saw that we were keeping Karpovna from sleeping. She would lie on the stove and murmur:

"The samovar tinkled this morning. Tink-led! That bodes nobody any good, my merry friends!"

Nobody came to the house except the postman who brought my sister letters from the doctor, and Prokofyi, who used to come in sometimes in the evening and glance secretly at my sister, and then go into the kitchen and say:

"Every class has its ways, and if you're too proud to understand that, the worse for you in this vale of tears."

He loved the expression—vale of tears. And—about Christmas time—when I was going through the market, he called me into his shop, and without giving me his hand, declared that he had some important business to discuss. He was red in the face with the frost and with vodka; near him by the counter stood Nicolka of the murderous face, holding a bloody knife in his hand.

"I want to be blunt with you," began Prokofyi. "This business must not happen because, as you know, people will neither forgive you nor us for such a vale of tears. Mother, of course, is too dutiful to say anything unpleasant to you herself, and tell you that your sister must go somewhere else because of her condition, but I don't want it either, because I do not approve of her behaviour."

I understood and left the shop. That very day my sister and I went to Radish's. We had no money for a cab, so we went on foot; I carried a bundle with all our belongings on my back,

my sister had nothing in her hands, and she was breathless and kept coughing and asking if we would soon be there.

XIX

At last there came a letter from Masha.

"My dear, kind M. A.," she wrote, "my brave, sweet angel, as the old painter calls you, good-bye. I am going to America with my father for the exhibition. In a few days I shall be on the ocean—so far from Dubechnia. It is awful to think of! It is vast and open like the sky and I long for it and freedom. I rejoice and dance about and you see how incoherent my letter is. My dear Misail, give me my freedom. Quick, tear the thread which still holds and binds us. My meeting and knowing you was a ray from heaven, which brightened my existence. But, you know, my becoming your wife was a mistake, and the knowledge of the mistake weighs me down, and I implore you on my knees, my dear, generous friend, quick—quick—before I go over the sea—wire that you will agree to correct our mutual mistake, remove then the only burden on my wings, and my father, who will be responsible for the whole business, has promised me not to overwhelm you with formalities. So, then, I am free of the whole world? Yes?

"Be happy. God bless you. Forgive my wickedness.

"I am alive and well. I am squandering money on all sorts of follies, and every minute I thank God that such a wicked woman as I am has no children. I am singing and I am a success, but it is not a passing whim. No. It is my haven, my convent cell where I go for rest. King David had a ring with an inscription: 'Everything passes.' When one is sad, these words make one cheerful; and when one is cheerful, they make one sad. And I have got a ring with the words written in Hebrew, and this talisman will keep me from losing my heart and head. Or does one need nothing but consciousness of freedom, because, when one is free, one wants nothing, nothing, nothing. Snap the thread then. I embrace you and your sister warmly. Forgive and forget your M."

My sister had one room. Radish, who had been ill and was recovering, was in the other. Just as I received this letter, my

sister went into the painter's room and sat by his side and began to read to him. She read Ostrovsky or Gogol to him every day, and he used to listen, staring straight in front of him, never laughing, shaking his head and every now and then muttering to himself:

"Anything may happen! Anything may happen!"

If there was anything ugly in what she read, he would say vehemently, pointing to the book:

"There it is! Lies! That's what lies do!"

Stories used to attract him by their contents as well as by their moral and their skilfully complicated plot, and he used to marvel at *him*, though he never called *him* by his name.

"How well *he* has managed it."

Now my sister read a page quickly and then stopped, because her breath failed her. Radish held her hand, and moving his dry lips he said in a hoarse, hardly audible voice:

"The soul of the righteous is white and smooth as chalk; and the soul of the sinner is as a pumice-stone. The soul of the righteous is clear oil, and the soul of the sinner is coal-tar. We must work and sorrow and pity," he went on. "And if a man does not work and sorrow he will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Woe, woe to the well fed, woe to the strong, woe to the rich, woe to the usurers! They will not see the kingdom of heaven. Grubs eat grass, rust eats iron . . ."

"And lies devour the soul," said my sister, laughing.

I read the letter once more. At that moment the soldier came into the kitchen who had brought in twice a week, without saying from whom, tea, French bread, and game, all smelling of scent. I had no work and used to sit at home for days together, and probably the person who sent us the bread knew that we were in want.

I heard my sister talking to the soldier and laughing merrily. Then she lay down and ate some bread and said to me:

"When you wanted to get away from the office and become a house-painter, Aniuta Blagovo and I knew from the very beginning that you were right, but we were afraid to say so. Tell me what power is it that keeps us from saying what we feel? There's Aniuta Blagovo. She loves you, adores you, and she knows that you are right. She loves me, too, like a sister,

and she knows that I am right, and in her heart she envies me, but some power prevents her coming to see us. She avoids us. She is afraid."

My sister folded her hands across her bosom and said rapturously:

"If only you knew how she loves you! She confessed it to me and to no-one else, very hesitatingly, in the dark. She used to take me out into the garden, into the dark, and begin to tell me in a whisper how dear you were to her. You will see that she will never marry because she loves you. Are you sorry for her?"

"Yes."

"It was she sent the bread. She is funny. Why should she hide herself? I used to be silly and stupid, but I left all that and I am not afraid of anyone, and I think and say aloud what I like—and I am happy. When I lived at home I had no notion of happiness, and now I would not change places with a queen."

Doctor Blagovo came. He had got his diploma and was now living in the town, at his father's, taking a rest. After which he said he would go back to Petersburg. He wanted to devote himself to vaccination against typhus, and, I believe, cholera; he wanted to go abroad to increase his knowledge and then to become a University professor. He had already left the army and wore serge clothes, with well-cut coats, wide trousers, and expensive ties. My sister was enraptured with his pins and studs and his red-silk handkerchief, which, out of swagger, he wore in his outside breast-pocket. Once, when we had nothing to do, she and I fell to counting up his suits and came to the conclusion that he must have at least ten. It was clear that he still loved my sister, but never once, even in joke, did he talk of her taking her, to Petersburg or abroad with him, and I could not imagine what would happen to her if she lived, or what was to become of her child. But she was happy in her dreams and would not think seriously of the future. She said he could go wherever he liked and even cast her aside, if only he were happy himself, and what had been was enough for her.

Usually when he came to see us he would sound her very carefully, and ask her to drink some milk with some medicine

in it. He did so now. He sounded her and made her drink a glass of milk, and the room began to smell of creosote.

"That's a good girl," he said, taking the glass from her. "You must not talk much, and you have been chattering like a magpie lately. Please, be quiet."

She began to laugh and he came into Radish's room, where I was sitting, and tapped me affectionately on the shoulder.

"Well, old man, how are you?" he asked, bending over the patient.

"Sir," said Radish, only just moving his lips. "Sir, I make so bold . . . We are all in the hands of God, and we must all die . . . Let me tell you the truth, sir . . . You will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

And suddenly I lost consciousness and was caught up into a dream: it was winter, at night, and I was standing in the yard of the slaughter-house with Prokofyi by my side, smelling of pepper-brandy; I pulled myself together and rubbed my eyes and then I seemed to be going to the governor's for an explanation. Nothing of the kind ever happened to me, before or after, and I can only explain these strange dreams like memories, by ascribing them to overstrain of the nerves. I lived again through the scene in the slaughter-house and the conversation with the governor, and at the same time I was conscious of its unreality.

When I came to myself I saw that I was not at home, but standing with the doctor by a lamp in the street.

"It is sad, sad," he was saying with tears running down his cheeks. "She is happy and always laughing and full of hope. But, poor darling, her condition is hopeless. Old Radish hates me and keeps trying to make me understand that I have wronged her. In his way he is right, but I have my point of view, too, and I do not repent of what has happened. It is necessary to love. We must all love. That's true, isn't it? Without love there would be no life, and a man who avoids and fears love is not free."

We gradually passed to other subjects. He began to speak of science and his dissertation which had been very well received in Petersburg. He spoke enthusiastically and thought no more of my sister, or of his grief, or of myself. Life was

carrying him away. She has America and a ring with an inscription, I thought, and he has his medical degree and his scientific career, and my sister and I are left with the past.

When we parted I stood beneath the lamp and read my letter again. And I remembered vividly how she came to me at the mill that spring morning and lay down and covered herself with my fur coat—pretending to be just a peasant woman. And another time—also in the early morning—when we pulled the bow-net out of the water, and the willows on the bank showered great drops of water on us and we laughed. . . .

All was dark in our house in Great Gentry Street. I climbed the fence, and, as I used to do in old days, I went into the kitchen by the back door to get a little lamp. There was nobody in the kitchen. On the stove the samovar was singing merrily, all ready for my father. "Who pours out my father's tea now?" I thought. I took the lamp and went on to the shed and made a bed of old newspapers and lay down. The nails in the wall looked ominous as before and their shadows flickered. It was cold. I thought I saw my sister coming in with my supper, but I remembered at once that she was ill at Radish's, and it seemed strange to me that I should have climbed the fence and be lying in the cold shed. My mind was blurred and filled with fantastic imaginations.

A bell rang; sounds familiar from childhood; first the wire rustled along the wall, and then there was a short, melancholy tinkle in the kitchen. It was my father returning from the club. I got up and went into the kitchen. Aksinya, the cook, clapped her hands when she saw me and began to cry:

"Oh, my dear," she said in a whisper. "Oh, my dear! My God!"

And in her agitation she began to pluck at her apron. On the window-sill were two large bottles of berries soaking in vodka. I poured out a cup and gulped it down, for I was very thirsty. Aksinya had just scrubbed the table and the chairs, and the kitchen had the good smell which kitchens always have when the cook is clean and tidy. This smell and the trilling of the cricket used to entice us into the kitchen when we were children, and there we used to be told fairy-tales, and we played at kings and queens. . . .

"And where is Cleopatra?" asked Aksinya hurriedly, breathlessly. "And where is your hat, sir? And they say your wife has gone to Petersburg."

She had been with us in my mother's time and used to bathe Cleopatra and me in a tub, and we were still children to her, and it was her duty to correct us. In a quarter of an hour or so she laid bare all her thoughts, which she had been storing up in her quiet kitchen all the time I had been away. She said the doctor ought to be made to marry Cleopatra—we would only have to frighten him a bit and make him send in a nicely written application, and then the archbishop would dissolve his first marriage, and it would be a good thing to sell Dubechnia without saying anything to my wife, and to bank the money in my own name; and if my sister and I went on our knees to our father and asked him nicely, then perhaps he would forgive us; and we ought to pray to the Holy Mother to intercede for us. . . .

"Now, sir, go and talk to him," she said, when we heard my father's cough. "Go, speak to him, and beg his pardon. He won't bite your head off."

I went in. My father was sitting at his desk working on the plan of a bungalow with Gothic windows and a stumpy tower like the lookout of a fire-station—an immensely stiff and inartistic design. As I entered the study I stood so that I could not help seeing the plan. I did not know why I had come to my father, but I remember that when I saw his thin face, red neck, and his shadow on the wall, I wanted to throw my arms round him and, as Aksinya had bid me, to beg his pardon humbly; but the sight of the bungalow with the Gothic windows and the stumpy tower stopped me.

"Good evening," I said.

He glanced at me and at once cast his eyes down on his plan.

"What do you want?" he asked after a while.

"I came to tell you that my sister is very ill. She is dying," I said dully.

"Well?" My father sighed, took off his spectacles and laid them on the table. "As you have sown, so you must reap. I want you to remember how you came to me two years ago, and on this very spot I asked you to give up your delusions,

and I reminded you of your honour, your duty, your obligations to your ancestors, whose traditions must be kept sacred. Did you listen to me? You spurned my advice and clung to your wicked opinions; furthermore, you dragged your sister into your abominable delusions and brought about her downfall and her shame. Now you are both suffering for it. As you have sown, so you must reap."

He paced up and down the study as he spoke. Probably he thought that I had come to him to admit that I was wrong, and probably he was waiting for me to ask his help for my sister and myself. I was cold, and I shook as though I were in a fever, and I spoke with difficulty in a hoarse voice.

"And I must ask you to remember," I said, "that on this very spot I implored you to try to understand me, to reflect, and to think what we were living for and to what end, and your answer was to talk about my ancestors and my grandfather who wrote verses. Now you are told that your only daughter is in a hopeless condition and you talk of ancestors and traditions! . . . And you can maintain such frivolity when death is near and you have only five or ten years left to live!"

"Why did you come here?" asked my father sternly, evidently affronted at my reproaching him with frivolity.

"I don't know. I love you. I am more sorry than I can say that we are so far apart. That is why I came. I still love you, but my sister has finally broken with you. She does not forgive you and will never forgive you. Your very name fills her with hatred of her past life."

"And who is to blame?" cried my father. "You, you scoundrel!"

"Yes. Say that I am to blame," I said. "I admit that I am to blame for many things, but why is your life, which you have tried to force on us, so tedious and frigid, and ungracious, why are there no people in any of the houses you have built during the last thirty years from whom I could learn how to live and how to avoid such suffering? These houses of yours are infernal dungeons in which mothers and daughters are persecuted, children are tortured . . . My poor mother! My unhappy sister! One needs to drug oneself with vodka, cards, scandal; cringe, play the hypocrite, and go on year after year

designing rotten houses, not to see the horror that lurks in them. Our town has been in existence for hundreds of years, and during the whole of that time it has not given the country one useful man—not one! You have strangled in embryo everything that was alive and joyous! A town of shopkeepers, publicans, clerks, and hypocrites, an aimless, futile town, and not a soul would be the worse if it were suddenly razed to the ground."

"I don't want to hear you, you scoundrel," said my father, taking a ruler from his desk. "You are drunk! You dare come into your father's presence in such a state! I tell you for the last time, and you can tell this to your strumpet of a sister, that you will get nothing from me. I have torn my disobedient children out of my heart, and if they suffer through their disobedience and obstinacy I have no pity for them. You may go back where you came from! God has been pleased to punish me through you. I will humbly bear my punishment and, like Job, I find consolation in suffering and unceasing toil. You shall not cross my threshold until you have mended your ways. I am a just man, and everything I say is practical good sense, and if you had any regard for yourself, you would remember what I have said, and what I am saying now."

I threw up my hands and went out; I do not remember what happened that night or next day.

They say that I went staggering through the street without a hat, singing aloud, with crowds of little boys shouting after me:

"Little Profit! Little Profit!"

XX

If I wanted to order a ring, I would have it inscribed: "Nothing passes." I believe that nothing passes without leaving some trace, and that every little step has some meaning for the present and the future life.

What I lived through was not in vain. My great misfortunes, my patience, moved the hearts of the people of the town and they no longer call me "Little Profit," they no longer laugh at me and throw water over me as I walk through the market.

They got used to my being a working man and see nothing strange in my carrying paint-pots and glazing windows; on the contrary, they give me orders, and I am considered a good workman and the best contractor, after Radish, who, though he recovered and still paints the cupolas of the church without scaffolding, is not strong enough to manage the men, and I have taken his place and go about the town touting for orders, and take on and sack the men, and borrow money at exorbitant interest. And now that I am a contractor I can understand how it is possible to spend several days hunting through the town for slaters to carry out a trifling order. People are polite to me, and address me respectfully and give me tea in the houses where I work, and send the servant to ask me if I would like dinner. Children and girls often come and watch me with curious, sad eyes.

Once I was working in the governor's garden, painting the summer-house marble. The governor came into the summer-house, and having nothing better to do, began to talk to me, and I reminded him how he had once sent for me to caution me. For a moment he stared at my face, opened his mouth like a round O, waved his hands, and said:

"I don't remember."

I am growing old, taciturn, crotchety, strict; I seldom laugh, and people say I am growing like Radish, and, like him, I bore the men with my aimless moralising.

Maria Victorovna, my late wife, lives abroad, and her father is making a railway somewhere in the Eastern provinces and buying land there. Doctor Blagovo is also abroad. Dubechnia has passed to Mrs. Cheprakov, who bought it from the engineer after haggling him into a twenty-per-cent reduction in the price. Moissey walks about in a bowler hat; he often drives into town in a trap and stops outside the bank. People say he has already bought an estate on a mortgage, and is always inquiring at the bank about Dubechnia, which he also intends to buy. Poor Ivan Cheprakov used to hang about the town, doing nothing and drinking. I tried to give him a job in our business, and for a time he worked with us painting roofs and glazing, and he rather took to it, and, like a regular house-painter, he stole the oil, and asked for tips, and got drunk.

But it soon bored him. He got tired of it and went back to Dubechnia, and some time later I was told by the peasants that he had been inciting them to kill Moissey one night and rob Mrs. Cheprakov.

My father has got very old and bent, and just takes a little walk in the evening near his house.

When we had the cholera, Prokofyi cured the shopkeepers with pepper-brandy and tar and took money for it, and as I read in the newspaper, he was flogged for libelling the doctors as he sat in his shop. His boy Nicolka died of cholera. Karpovna is still alive, and still loves and fears her Prokofyi. Whenever she sees me she sadly shakes her head and says with a sigh:

"Poor thing. You are lost!"

On week-days I am busy from early morning till late at night. And on Sundays and holidays I take my little niece (my sister expected a boy, but a girl was born) and go with her to the cemetery, where I stand or sit and look at the grave of my dear one, and tell the child that her mother is lying there.

Sometimes I find Aniuta Blagovo by the grave. We greet each other and stand silently, or we talk of Cleopatra, and the child, and the sadness of this life. Then we leave the cemetery and walk in silence and she lags behind—on purpose, to avoid staying with me. The little girl, joyful, happy, with her eyes half-closed against the brilliant sunlight, laughs and holds out her little hands to her, and we stop and together we fondle the darling child.

And when we reach the town, Aniuta Blagovo, blushing and agitated, says good-bye, and walks on alone, serious and circumspect. . . . And, to look at her, none of the passers-by could imagine that she had just been walking by my side and even fondling the child.

FEODOR SOLOGUB

The Hoop

I

A woman was taking her morning stroll in a lonely suburban street; a boy of four was with her. She was young and smart and she was smiling brightly; she was casting affectionate glances at her son, whose red cheeks beamed with happiness. The boy was bowling a hoop; a large, new, bright yellow hoop. He ran after his hoop awkwardly, laughed uproariously with joy, thrust forward his plump little legs, bare at the knee, and flourished his stick. He needn't have raised his stick so high above his head—but what of that?

What happiness! He had never had a hoop before; how briskly it made him run!

And nothing of this had existed for him before; everything was new to him—the streets in early morning, the merry sun, and the distant din of the city. Everything was new to the boy—joyous and pure.

II

A shabbily-dressed old man, with coarse hands, stood at the street crossing. He pressed close to the wall to let the woman and the boy pass. The old man looked at the boy with dull eyes and smiled stupidly. Confused, sluggish thoughts struggled within his almost bald head.

"A little gentleman!" said he to himself. "Quite a small fellow. And simply bursting with joy. Just look at him cutting his paces!"

He could not quite understand it. Somehow it seemed strange to him.

Here was a child—a thing to be pulled about by the hair!

Play is mischief. Children, as everyone knows, are mischief-makers.

And there was the mother—she uttered no reproach, she made no fuss, she did not scold. She was smart and bright. It was quite easy to see that they were used to warmth and comfort.

On the other hand, when he, the old man, was a boy he lived a dog's life! There was nothing particularly rosy in his life even now; though, to be sure, he was no longer thrashed and he had plenty to eat. He recalled his younger days—their hunger, their cold, their drubbings. He had never had fun with a hoop, or other playthings of well-to-do folks. Thus passed all his life—in poverty, in care, in misery. And he could recall nothing—not a single joy.

He smiled with his toothless mouth at the boy, and he envied him. He reflected:

"What a silly sport!"

But envy tormented him.

He went to work—to the factory where he had worked from childhood, where he had grown old. And all day he thought of the boy.

It was a fixed, deep-rooted thought. He simply could not get the boy out of his mind. He saw him running, laughing, stamping his feet, bowling the hoop. What plump little legs he had, bared at the knee . . .!

All day long, amid the din of the factory wheels, the boy with the hoop appeared to him. And at night he saw the boy in a dream.

III

Next morning his reveries again pursued the old man.

The machines were clattering, the labour was monotonous, automatic. The hands were busy at their accustomed tasks; the toothless mouth was smiling at a diverting fancy. The air was thick with dust, and under the high ceiling strap after strap, with hissing sound, glided quickly from wheel to wheel, endless in number. The far corners were invisible for the dense escaping vapours. Men emerged here and there like phantoms, and the human voice was not heard for the incessant din of the machines.

The old man's fancy was at work—he had become a little boy for the moment, his mother was a gentlewoman, and he had his hoop and his little stick; he was playing, driving the hoop with the little stick. He wore a white costume, his little legs were plump, bare at the knee. . . .

The days passed; the work went on, the fancy persisted.

IV

The old man was returning from work one evening when he saw the hoop of an old barrel lying in the street. It was a rough, dirty object. The old man trembled with happiness, and tears appeared in his dull eyes. A sudden, almost irresistible desire took possession of him.

He glanced cautiously around him; then he bent down, picked up the hoop with trembling hands, and smiling shamefacedly, carried it home with him.

No-one noticed him, no-one questioned him. Whose concern was it? A ragged old man was carrying an old, battered, useless hoop—who cared?

He carried it stealthily, afraid of ridicule. Why he picked it up and why he carried it, he himself could not tell. Still, it was like the boy's hoop, and this was enough. There was no harm in it lying about.

He could look at it; he could touch it. It would stimulate his reveries; the whistle and turmoil of the factory would grow fainter, the escaping vapours less dense. . . .

For several days the hoop lay under the bed in the old man's poor, cramped quarters. Sometimes he would take it from its place and look at it; the dirty, grey hoop soothed the old man, and the sight of it quickened his persistent thoughts about the happy little boy.

V

It was a clear, warm morning, and the birds were chirping away in the consumptive urban trees somewhat more cheerfully than usual. The old man rose early, took his hoop, and walked a little distance out of town.

He coughed as he made his way among the old trees and the thorny bushes in the woods. The trees, covered with their dry, blackish, bursting bark, seemed to him incomprehensively and sternly silent. The odours were strange, the insects astonishing, the ferns of gigantic growth. There was neither dust nor din here, and the gentle, exquisite morning mist lay behind the trees. The old feet glided over the dry leaves and stumbled across the old gnarled roots.

The old man broke off a dry limb and hung his hoop upon it.

He came upon an opening, full of daylight and of calm. The dewdrops, countless and opalescent, gleamed upon the green blades of newly mown grass.

Suddenly the old man let the hoop slide off the stick. He struck with the stick, and sent the hoop rolling across the green lawn. The old man laughed, brightened at once, and pursued the hoop like that little boy. He kicked up his feet and drove the hoop with his stick, which he flourished high over his head, just as that little boy did.

It seemed to him that he was small, beloved, and happy. It seemed to him that he was being looked after by his mother, who was following close behind and smiling. Like a child on his first outing, he felt refreshed on the bright grass, and on the still mosses.

His goat-like, dust-grey beard, that harmonised with his sallow face, trembled, while his cough mingled with his laughter, and raucous sounds came from his toothless mouth.

VI

And the old man grew to love his morning hour in the woods with the hoop.

He sometimes thought he might be discovered, and ridiculed —and this aroused him to a keen sense of shame. This shame resembled fear; he would grow numb, and his knees would give way under him. He would look round him with fright and timidity.

But no—there was no-one to be seen, or to be heard. . . .

And having diverted himself to his heart's content, he would return to the city, smiling gently and joyously.

VII

No-one had ever found him out. And nothing unusual ever happened. The old man played peacefully for several days, and one very dewy morning he caught cold. He went to bed, and soon died. Dying in the factory hospital, among strangers, indifferent people, he smiled serenely.

His memories soothed him. He, too, had been a child; he, too, had laughed and scampered across the green grass, among the dark trees—his beloved mother had followed him with her eyes.

M. GORKY

Twenty-six Men and a Girl

There were six-and-twenty of us;—six-and-twenty living machines in a damp, underground cellar, where from morning till night we kneaded dough and rolled it into kringels. Opposite the underground window of our cellar was a bricked area, green and mouldy with moisture. The window was protected from outside with a close iron grating, and the light of the sun could not pierce through the window panes, covered as they were with flour dust.

Our employer had bars placed in front of the windows, so that we should not be able to give a bit of his bread to passing beggars, or to any of our fellows who were out of work and hungry. Our employer called us rogues, and gave us half-rotten tripe to eat for our mid-day meal, instead of meat. It was swelteringly close for us cooped up in that stone underground chamber, under the low, heavy, soot-blackened, cob-webby ceiling. Dreary and sickening was our life between its thick, dirty, mouldy walls.

Unrefreshed, and with a feeling of not having had our sleep out, we used to get up at five o'clock in the morning; and before six, we were already seated, worn out and apathetic, at the table, rolling out the dough which our mates had already prepared whilst we slept. The whole day, from ten in the early morning until ten at night, some of us sat round that table, working up in our hands the yielding paste, rolling it to and fro so that it should not get stiff; whilst the others kneaded the swelling mass of dough. And the whole day the simmering water in the kettle, where the kringels were being cooked, sang low and sadly; and the baker's shovel scraped harshly over the oven floor, as he threw the slippery bits of dough out of the kettle on to the heated bricks.

From morning till evening wood was burning in the oven, and the red glow of the fire gleamed and flickered over the walls of the bake-shop, as if silently mocking us. The giant oven was like the misshapen head of a monster in a fairy tale; it thrust itself up out of the floor, opened wide jaws, full of glowing fire, and blew hot breath upon us; it seemed to be ever watching out of its black air-holes our interminable work. Those two deep holes were like eyes—the cold, pitiless eyes of a monster. They watched us always with the same darkened glance, as if they were weary of seeing before them such eternal slaves, from whom they could expect nothing human, and therefore scorned them with the cold scorn of wisdom.

In meal dust, in the mud which we brought in from the yard on our boots, in the hot, sticky atmosphere, day in, day out, we rolled the dough into kringels, which we moistened with our own sweat. And we hated our work with a glowing hatred; we never ate what had passed through our hands, and preferred black bread to kringels. Sitting opposite each other, at a long table—nine facing nine—we moved our hands and fingers mechanically during endlessly long hours, till we were so accustomed to our monotonous work that we ceased to pay any attention to it.

We had all studied each other so constantly, that each of us knew every wrinkle of his mates' faces. It was not long also before we had exhausted almost every topic of conversation; that is why we were most of the time silent, unless we were chaffing each other; but one cannot always find something about which to chaff another man, especially when that man is one's mate. Neither were we much given to finding fault with one another; how, indeed, could one of us poor devils be in a position to find fault with another, when we were all of us half dead and, as it were, turned to stone? For the heavy drudgery seemed to crush all feeling out of us. But silence is only terrible and fearful for those who have said everything and have nothing more to say to each other; for men, on the contrary, who have never begun to communicate with one another, it is easy and simple.

Sometimes, too, we sang; and this is how it happened that we began to sing: one of us would sigh deeply in the midst of

our toil, like an overdriven horse, and then we would begin one of those songs whose gentle swaying melody seems always to ease the burden on the singer's heart.

At first one sang by himself, and we others sat in silence listening to his solitary song, which, under the heavy vaulted roof of the cellar, died gradually away, and became extinguished, like a little fire in the steppes, on a wet autumn night, when the grey heaven hangs like a heavy mass over the earth. Then another would join in with the singer, and now two soft, sad voices would break into song in our narrow, dull hole of a cellar. Suddenly others would join in, and the song would roll forward like a wave, would grow louder and swell upwards, till it would seem as if the damp, foul walls of our stone prison were widening out and opening. Then, all six-and-twenty of us would be singing; our loud, harmonious song would fill the whole cellar, our voices would travel outside and beyond, striking, as it were, against the walls in moaning sobs and sighs, moving our hearts with soft, tantalizing ache, tearing open old wounds, and awakening longings.

The singers would sigh deeply and heavily; suddenly one would become silent and listen to the others singing, then let his voice flow once more in the common tide. Another would exclaim in a stifled voice, "Ah!" and would shut his eyes, whilst the deep, full sound waves would show him, as it were, a road, in front of him—a sunlit, broad road in the distance, which he himself, in thought, wandered along.

But the flame flickers once more in the huge oven, the baker scrapes incessantly with his shovel, the water simmers in the kettle, and the flicker of the fire on the wall dances as before in silent mockery. While in other men's words we sing out our dumb grief, the weary burden of live men robbed of the sunlight, the burden of slaves.

So we lived, we six-and-twenty, in the vault-like cellar of a great stone house, and we suffered, each one of us, as if we had to bear on our shoulders the whole three storeys of that house.

But we had something else good, besides the singing—something we loved, that perhaps took the place of the sunshine.

In the second storey of our house there was established a gold-embroiderer's shop, and there, living amongst the other

embroidery girls, was Tanya, a little maid-servant of sixteen. Every morning there peeped in through the glass door a rosy little face, with merry blue eyes; while a ringing, tender voice called out to us:

"Little prisoners! Have you any kringels, please, for me?"

At that clear sound, we knew so well, we all used to turn round, gazing with simple-hearted joy at the pure girlish face which smiled at us so sweetly. The sight of the small nose pressed against the window-pane, and of the white teeth gleaming between the half-open lips, had become for us a daily pleasure. Tumbling over each other we used to jump up to open the door, and she would step in, bright and cheerful, holding out her apron, with her head thrown on one side, and a smile on her lips. Her thick, long chestnut hair fell over her shoulder and across her breast. But we, ugly, dirty and misshapen as we were, looked up at her—the threshold door was four steps above the floor—looked up at her with heads thrown back, wishing her good morning, and speaking strange unaccustomed words, which we kept for her only. Our voices became softer when we spoke to her, our jests were lighter. For her—everything was different with us. The baker took from his oven a shovel of the best and the brownest kringels, and threw them deftly into Tanya's apron.

"Be off now with you, or the boss will catch you!" we warned her each time. She laughed roguishly, called out cheerfully: "Good-bye, poor prisoners!" and slipped away as quickly as a mouse.

That was all. But long after she had gone we talked about her to one another with pleasure. It was always the same thing as we had said yesterday and the day before, because everything about us, including ourselves and her, remained the same—as yesterday—and as always.

Painful and terrible it is when a man goes on living, while nothing changes around him; and when such an existence does not finally kill his soul, then the monotony becomes with time, even more and more painful. Generally we spoke about women in such a way, that sometimes it was loathsome to us ourselves to hear our rude, shameless talk. The women whom we knew deserved perhaps nothing better. But about Tanya we never let fall an evil word; none of us ever ventured so much as to

lay a hand on her, even too free a jest she never heard from us. Maybe this was so because she never remained for long with us; she flashed on our eyes like a star falling from the sky, and vanished; and maybe because she was little and very beautiful, and everything beautiful calls forth respect, even in coarse people. And besides—though our life of penal labour had made us dull beasts, oxen, we were still men, and, like all men, could not live without worshipping something or other. Better than her we had none, and none but she took any notice of us, living in the cellar—no-one, though there were dozens of people in the house. And then, too—most likely, this was the chief thing—we all regarded her as something of our own, something existing as it were only by virtue of our kringels. We took on ourselves in turns the duty of providing her with hot kringels, and this became for us like a daily sacrifice to our idol, it became almost a sacred rite, and every day it bound us more closely to her. Besides kringels, we gave Tanya a great deal of advice—to wear warmer clothes, not to run upstairs too quickly, not to carry heavy bundles of wood. She listened to all our counsels with a smile, answered them by a laugh, and never took our advice, but we were not offended at that; all we wanted was to show how much care we bestowed upon her.

Often she would apply to us with different requests, she asked us for instance to open the heavy door into the store-cellar, and to chop wood: with delight and a sort of pride, we did this for her and everything else she wanted.

But when one of us asked her to mend his solitary shirt for him, she said, with a laugh of contempt:

"What next! A likely idea!"

We made great fun of the queer fellow who could entertain such an idea, and—never asked her to do anything else. We loved her—all is said in that. Man always wants to lay his love on someone, though sometimes he crushes, sometimes he sullies, with it; he may poison another life because he loves without respecting the beloved. We were bound to love Tanya, for we had no-one else to love.

At times one of us would suddenly begin to reason like this:

"And why do we make so much of the wench? What is there in her? eh? What a to-do we make about her!"

The man who dared to utter such words we promptly and coarsely cut short—we wanted something to love: we had found it and loved it, and what we twenty-six loved must be for each of us unalterable, as a holy thing, and anyone who acted against us in this was our enemy. We loved, maybe, not what was really good, but you see there were twenty-six of us, and so we always wanted to see what was precious to us held sacred by the rest.

Our love is not less burdensome than hate, and maybe that is just why some proud souls maintain that our hate is more flattering than our love. But why do they not run away from us, if it is so?

* * * * *

Besides our department our employer had also a bread-bakery; it was in the same house, separated from our hole only by a wall; but the bakers—there were four of them—held aloof from us, considering their work superior to ours, and therefore themselves better than us; they never used to come into our workroom, and laughed contemptuously at us when they met us in the yard. We, too, did not go to see them; this was forbidden by our employer, from fear that we should steal the fancy bread. We did not like the bakers, because we envied them; their work was lighter than ours, they were paid more, and were better fed; they had a light, spacious workroom, and they were all so clean and healthy—and that made them hateful to us. We all looked grey and yellow; three of us had syphilis, several suffered from skin diseases, one was completely crippled by rheumatism. On holidays and in their leisure time the bakers wore pea-jackets and creaking boots, two of them had accordions, and they all used to go for strolls in the town gardens,—we wore filthy rags and leather clogs or plaited shoes on our feet, the police would not let us into the town gardens—could we possibly like the bakers?

And one day we learned that their chief baker had been drunk, the master had sacked him and had already taken on another, and that this other was a soldier, wore a satin waist-coat and a watch and gold chain. We were inquisitive to get a sight of such a dandy, and in the hope of catching a glimpse of him we kept running one after another out into the yard.

But he came of his own accord into our room. Kicking at the door, he pushed it open, and leaving it ajar, stood in the doorway smiling, and said to us:

"God help the work! Good morning, mates!"

The ice-cold air, which streamed in through the open door, curled in streaks of vapour round his feet. He stood on the threshold, looked us up and down, and under his fair, twisted moustache gleamed big yellow teeth. His waistcoat was really something quite out of the common, blue-flowered, brilliant with shining little buttons of red stones. He also wore a watch chain.

He was a fine fellow, this soldier; tall, healthy, rosy-cheeked, and his big, clear eyes had a friendly, cheerful glance. He wore on his head a white starched cap, and from under his spotlessly clean apron peeped the pointed toes of fashionable, well-blacked boots.

Our baker asked him politely to shut the door. The soldier did so without hurrying himself, and began to question us about the master. We explained to him, all speaking together, that our employer was a thorough-going brute, a rogue, a knave, and a slave-driver; in a word we repeated to him all that can and must be said about an employer, but cannot be repeated here. The soldier listened to us, twisted his moustache, and watched us with a friendly, open-hearted look.

"But haven't you got a lot of girls here?" he asked, suddenly.

Some of us began to laugh deferentially, others put on a meaning expression, and one of us explained to the soldier that there were nine girls here.

"You make the most of them?" asked the soldier, with a wink.

We laughed, but not so loudly, and with some embarrassment. Many of us would have liked to have shown the soldier that we also were tremendous fellows with the girls, but not one of us could do so; and one of our number confessed as much, when he said in a low voice:

"That sort of thing is not in our line."

"Well no, it wouldn't quite do for you," said the soldier with conviction, after having looked us over. "There is something wanting about you all. You don't look the right sort.

You've no sort of appearance; and the women, you see, they like a bold appearance, they will have a well set up body. Everything has to be tip-top for them. That's why they respect strength. They want an arm like that!"

The soldier drew his right hand, with its turned-up shirt sleeve, out of his pocket, and showed us his bare arm. It was white and strong, and covered with shining yellow hairs.

"Leg and chest, all must be strong. And then a man must be dressed in the latest fashion, so as to show off his looks to advantage. Yes, all the women take to me. Whether I call to them, or whether I beckon them, they with one accord, five at a time, throw themselves at my head."

He sat down on a flour sack, and told at length all about the way women loved him, and how bold he was with them. Then he left, and after the door had creaked to behind him, we sat for a long time silent, and thought about him and his talk. Then we all suddenly broke silence together, and it became apparent that we were all equally pleased with him. He was such a nice, open-hearted fellow; he came to see us without any stand-offishness, sat down and chatted. No-one else came to us like that, and no-one else talked to us in that friendly sort of way. And we continued to talk of him and his coming triumph among the embroidery girls, who passed us by with contemptuous sniffs when they saw us in the yard, or who looked straight through us as if we had been air. But we admired them always when we met them outside, or when they walked past our windows; in winter, in fur jackets and toques to match; in summer, in hats trimmed with flowers, and with coloured parasols in their hands. We talked, however, about these girls in a way that would have made them mad with shame and rage, if they could have heard us.

"If only he does not get hold of little Tanya!" said the baker, suddenly, in an anxious tone of voice.

We were silent, for these words troubled us. Tanya had quite gone out of our minds, supplanted, put on one side by the strong, fine figure of the soldier.

Then began a lively discussion; some of us maintained that Tanya would never lower herself so; others thought she would not be able to resist him, and the third group proposed to give

him a thrashing if he should try to annoy Tanya. And, finally, we all decided to watch the soldier and Tanya, and to warn the girl against him. This brought the discussion to an end.

Four weeks had passed by since then; during this time the soldier baked white bread, walked about with the gold-embroidery girls, visited us often, but did not talk any more about his conquests; only twisted his moustache, and licked his lips lasciviously.

Tanya called in as usual every morning for "little kringels," and was as gay and as nice and friendly with us as ever. We certainly tried once or twice to talk to her about the soldier, but she called him a "goggle-eyed calf," and made fun of him all round, and that set our minds at rest. We saw how the gold-embroidery girls carried on with the soldier, and we were proud of our girl; Tanya's behaviour reflected honour on us all; we imitated her, and began in our talks to treat the soldier with small consideration. She became dearer to us, and we greeted her with more friendliness and kindliness every morning.

One day the soldier came to see us, a bit drunk, and sat down and began to laugh. When we asked him what he was laughing about, he explained to us:

"Why, two of them—that Lydka girl and Grushka—have been clawing each other on my account. You should have seen the way they went for each other! Ha! Ha! One got hold of the other one by the hair, threw her down on the floor of the passage, and sat on her! Ha! ha! ha! They scratched and tore each other's faces. It was enough to make one die with laughter! Why is it women can't fight fair? Why do they always scratch one another, eh?"

He sat on the bench, healthy, fresh and jolly; he sat there and went on laughing. We were silent. This time he made an unpleasant impression on us.

"Well, it's a funny thing what luck I have with the women-folk! Eh? I've laughed till I'm ill! One wink, and it's all over with them! It's the d-devil!"

He raised his white hairy hands, and slapped them down on his knees. And his eyes seemed to reflect such frank astonishment, as if he were himself quite surprised at his good luck with

women. His fat red face glistened with delight and self-satisfaction, and he licked his lips more than ever.

Our baker scraped the shovel violently and angrily along the oven floor, and all at once he said sarcastically:

"There's no great strength needed to pull up fir saplings, but try a real pine-tree."

"Why—what do you mean by saying that to me?" asked the soldier.

"Oh, well . . ."

"What is it?"

"Nothing—it slipped out!"

"No, wait a minute! What's the point? What pine-tree?"

Our baker did not answer, working rapidly away with the shovel at the oven; flinging into it the half-cooked kringels, taking out those that were done, and noisily throwing them on the floor to the boys who were stringing them on bast. He seemed to have forgotten the soldier and his conversation with him. But the soldier had all at once dropped into a sort of uneasiness. He got up on to his feet, and went to the oven, at the risk of knocking against the handle of the shovel, which was waving spasmodically in the air.

"No, tell me, do—who is it? You've insulted me. I? There's not one could withstand me, n-no! And you say such insulting things to me?"

He really seemed genuinely hurt. He must have had nothing else to pride himself on except his gift for seducing women; maybe, except for that, there was nothing living in him, and it was only that by which he could feel himself a living man.

There are men to whom the most precious and best thing in their lives appears to be some disease of their soul or body. They spend their whole life in relation to it, and only living by it, suffering from it, they sustain themselves on it, they complain of it to others, and so draw the attention of their fellows to themselves. For that they extract sympathy from people, and apart from it they have nothing at all. Take from them that disease, cure them, and they will be miserable, because they have lost their one resource in life—they are left empty then. Sometimes a man's life is so poor, that he is driven instinctively

to prize his vice and to live by it; one may say for a fact that often men are vicious from boredom.

The soldier was offended, he went up to our baker and roared:

"No, tell me, do—who?"

"Tell you?" the baker turned suddenly to him.

"Well?"

"You know Tanya?"

"Well?"

"Well, there then! Only try."

"I?"

"You!"

"Her? Why, that's nothing to me—pooh!"

"We shall see!"

"You will see! Ha! ha!"

"She'll——"

"Give me a month!"

"What a braggart you are, soldier!"

"A fortnight! I'll prove it! Who is it? Tanya! Pooh!"

"Well, get out. You're in my way!"

"A fortnight—and it's done! Ah, you——"

"Get out, I say!"

Our baker, all at once, flew into a rage and brandished his shovel. The soldier staggered away from him in amazement, looked at us, paused, and softly, malignantly said, "Oh, all right, then!" and went away.

During the dispute we had all sat silent, absorbed in it. But when the soldier had gone, eager, loud talk and noise arose among us.

Some one shouted to the baker: "It's a bad job that you've started, Pavel!"

"Do your work!" answered the baker, savagely.

We felt that the soldier had been deeply aggrieved, and that danger threatened Tanya. We felt this, and at the same time we were all possessed by a burning curiosity, most agreeable to us. What would happen? Would Tanya hold out against the soldier? And almost all cried confidently: "Tanya? She'll hold out! You won't catch her with your bare arms!"

We longed terribly to test the strength of our idol; we forcibly proved to each other that our divinity was a strong

divinity and would come victorious out of this ordeal. We began at last to fancy that we had not worked enough on the soldier, that he would forget the dispute, and that we ought to pique his vanity more keenly. From that day we began to live a different life, a life of nervous tension, such as we had never known before. We spent whole days in arguing together; we all grew, as it were, sharper; and got to talk more and better. It seemed to us that we were playing some sort of game with the devil, and the stake on our side was Tanya. And when we learnt from the bakers that the soldier had begun "running after our Tanya," we felt a sort of delighted terror, and life was so interesting that we did not even notice that our employer had taken advantage of our preoccupation to increase our work by fourteen pounds of dough a day. We seemed, indeed, not even tired by our work. Tanya's name was on our lips all day long. And every day we looked for her with a certain special impatience. Sometimes we pictured to ourselves that she would come to us, and it would not be the same Tanya as of old, but somehow different. We said nothing to her, however, of the dispute regarding her. We asked her no questions, and behaved as well and affectionately to her as ever. But even in this a new element crept in, alien to our old feeling for Tanya—and that new element was keen curiosity, keen and cold as a steel knife.

"Mates! To-day the time's up!" our baker said to us one morning, as he set to work.

We were well aware of it without his reminder; but still we were thrilled.

"Look at her. She'll be here directly," suggested the baker.

One of us cried out in a troubled voice, "Why! as though one could notice anything!"

And again an eager, noisy discussion sprang up among us. To-day we were about to prove how pure and spotless was the vessel into which we had poured all that was best in us. This morning, for the first time, it became clear to us that we really were playing a great game; that we might, indeed, through the exaction of this proof of purity, lose our divinity altogether.

During the whole of the intervening fortnight we had heard that Tanya was persistently followed by the soldier, but not

one of us had thought of asking her how she had behaved towards him. And she came every morning to fetch her kringels, and was the same towards us as ever.

This morning, too, we heard her voice outside: "You poor prisoners! Here I am!"

We opened the door, and when she came in we all remained, contrary to our usual custom, silent. Our eyes fixed on her, we did not know how to speak to her, what to ask her. And there we stood in front of her, a gloomy, silent crowd. She seemed to be surprised at this unusual reception; suddenly we saw her turn white, and become uneasy, then she asked, in a choking voice: "Why are you—like this?"

"And you?" the baker flung at her, grimly, never taking his eyes off her.

"What am I?"

"N—nothing."

"Well, then, give me quickly the little kringels."

Never before had she bidden us hurry.

"There's plenty of time," said the baker, not stirring, and not removing his eyes from her face.

Then, suddenly, she turned round and disappeared through the door.

The baker took his shovel and said, calmly turning away towards the oven:

"Well, that settles it! But a soldier! a common beast like that—a low cur!"

Like a flock of sheep we all pressed round the table, sat down silently, and began listlessly to work. Soon, however, one of us remarked:

"Perhaps, after all——"

"Shut up!" shouted the baker.

We were all convinced that he was a man of judgment, a man who knew more than we did about things. And at the sound of his voice we were convinced of the soldier's victory, and our spirits became sad and downcast.

At twelve o'clock—whilst we were eating our dinners—the soldier came in. He was as clean and as smart as ever, and looked at us—as usual—straight in the eyes. But we were all awkward in looking at him.

"Now then, honoured sirs, would you like me to show you a soldier's quality?" he said, chuckling proudly.

"Go out into the passage, and look through the crack—do you understand?"

We went into the passage, and stood all pushing against one another, squeezed up to the cracks of the wooden partition of the passage that looked into the yard. We had not to wait long. Very soon Tanya, with hurried footsteps and a careworn face, walked across the yard, jumping over the puddles of melting snow and mud: she disappeared into the store cellar. Then whistling, and not hurrying himself, the soldier followed in the same direction. His hands were thrust in his pockets; his moustaches were quivering.

Rain was falling, and we saw how its drops fell into the puddles, and the puddles were wrinkled by them. The day was damp and grey—a very dreary day. Snow still lay on the roofs, but on the ground dark patches of mud had begun to appear. And the snow on the roofs too was covered by a layer of brownish dirt. The rain fell slowly with a depressing sound. It was cold and disagreeable for us waiting.

The first to come out of the store cellar was the soldier; he walked slowly across the yard, his moustaches twitching, his hands in his pockets—the same as always.

Then—Tanya, too, came out. Her eyes—her eyes were radiant with joy and happiness, and her lips—were smiling. And she walked as though in a dream, staggering, with unsteady steps.

We could not bear this quietly. All of us at once rushed to the door, dashed out into the yard and—hissed at her, reviled her viciously, loudly, wildly.

She started at seeing us, and stood as though rooted in the mud under her feet. We formed a ring round her; and malignantly, without restraint, abused her with vile words, said shameful things to her.

We did this not loudly, not hurriedly, seeing that she could not get away, that she was hemmed in by us, and we could deride her to our hearts' content. I don't know why, but we did not beat her. She stood in the midst of us, and turned her head this way and that, as she heard our insults. And we—

more and more violently flung at her the filth and venom of our words.

The colour had left her face. Her blue eyes, so happy a moment before, opened wide, her bosom heaved, and her lips quivered.

We in a ring round her avenged ourselves on her as though she had robbed us. She belonged to us, we had lavished on her our best, and though that best was a beggar's crumb, still we were twenty-six, she was one, and so there was no pain we could give her equal to her guilt! How we insulted her! She was still mute, still gazed at us with wild eyes, and a shiver ran all over her.

We laughed, roared, yelled. Other people ran up from somewhere and joined us. One of us pulled Tanya by the sleeve of her blouse.

Suddenly her eyes flashed; deliberately she raised her hands to her head and straightening her hair she said loudly but calmly, straight in our faces:

"Ah, you miserable prisoners!"

And she walked straight at us, walked as directly as though we had not been before her, as though we were not blocking her way.

And hence it was that no-one did actually prevent her passing.

Walking out of our ring, without turning round, she said loudly and with indescribable contempt:

"Ah, you scum—brutes."

And—was gone.

We were left in the middle of the yard, in the rain, under the grey sky without the sun.

Then we went mutely away to our damp stone cellar. As before—the sun never peeped in at our windows, and Tanya came no more!

ALEXANDER KUPRIN

A Slav Soul

The farther I go back in my memory of the past, and the nearer I get to remembering incidents connected with my childhood, the more confused and doubtful do my recollections become. Much, no doubt, was told me afterwards, in a more conscious stage of my existence, by those who, with loving care, noticed my early doings. Perhaps many of the things that I recall never happened to me; I heard or read them some time or other and their remembrance grew to be part of myself. Who can guarantee which of these recollections are of real facts and which of tales told so long ago that they have all the appearance of truth—who can know where one ends and the other begins?

My imagination recalls with special vividness, the eccentric figure of Yasha and the two companions—I might almost call them friends—who accompanied him along the path of life: Matsko, an old rejected cavalry horse. and the yard-dog, Bouton.

Yasha was distinguished by the deliberate slowness of his speech and actions, and he always had the air of a man whose thoughts were concentrated on himself. He spoke very seldom and considered his speech; he tried to speak good Russian, though at times when he was moved, he would burst out in his native dialect of Little-Russian. Owing to his dress of a dark colour and sober cut, and to the solemn and almost melancholy expression of his shaven face and thin pursed lips, he always gave the impression that he was an old servant of a noble family of the good old times.

Of all the human beings that he knew, Yasha seemed to find my father the only one besides himself, worthy of his veneration. And though to us children, to my mother, and to all our

family and friends, his manner was respectful, it was mingled with a certain pity and slighting condescension. It was always an enigma to me—whence came this immeasurable pride of his. Servants have often a well-known form of insolence; they take upon themselves some of that attractive authority which they have noticed in their masters. But my father, a poor doctor in a little Jewish village, lived so modestly and quietly, that Yasha could never have learnt from him to look down upon his neighbours. And in Yasha himself, there was none of the ordinary insolence of a servant—he had no metropolitan polish and could not overawe people by using foreign words, and he had no overbearing manners towards country chambermaids, no gentle art of tinkling out touching romances on the guitar, an art by which so many inexperienced souls have been ruined. He occupied his leisure hours in lying in sheer idleness full-length on the box in which he kept his belongings. He not only did not read books, but he sincerely despised them. All things written, except in the Bible, were, in his opinion, written not for truth's sake but just to get money, and he therefore preferred to any book, those long rambling thoughts which he turned over in his mind as he lay idly on his bed.

Matsko, the horse, had been rejected from military service on account of many vices, the chief of which was that he was old, far too old. Then his forelegs were crooked, and at the places where they joined the body were adorned with bladder-like growths; he strutted on his hind legs like a cock. He held his head like a camel, and from old military habit, tossed it upward and thrust his long neck forward. This, combined with his enormous size and unusual leanness, and the fact that he had only one eye, gave him a pitiful warlike and serio-comic expression. Such horses are called in the regiments "star-gazers".

Yasha prized Matsko much more than Bouton, who sometimes displayed a frivolity entirely out of keeping with his size. He was one of those shaggy, long-haired dogs who at times remind one of ferrets, but being ten times as large, they sometimes look like poodles; they are by nature the very breed for yard-dogs. At home, Bouton was always overwhelmingly serious and sensible in all his ways, but in the streets his

behaviour was positively disgraceful. If he went out with my father he would never run modestly behind the carriage as a well-behaved dog should do. He would rush to meet all other dogs, jump about them and bark loudly in their very noses, only springing away to one side in affright if one of them with a snort of alarm, bent his head quickly and tried to bite him. He ran into other people's yards and came tearing out again after a second or so, chased by a dozen angry dogs of the place. He wandered about on terms of deepest friendship with dogs of a known bad reputation.

In our districts of Podolia and Volhynia nothing was thought so much of as a person's way of setting out from his house. A squire might long since have mortgaged and re-mortgaged his estate, and be only waiting for the officers of the Crown to take possession of his property, but let him only on a Sunday go out to "Holy Church", it must be in a light tarantass drawn by four or six splendid fiery Polish horses, and driving into the market square of the village he must cry to the coachman—"Lay on with the whip, Joseph", yet I am sure that none of our right neighbours started off in such pomp as Yasha was able to impart to our equipage when my father made up his mind to journey forth. Yasha would put on a shining hat with a shade in front and behind, and a broad yellow belt. Then the carriage would be taken out about a hundred yards from the house—an antique coach of the old Polish days—and Matsko put in. Hardly would my father show himself at the house-door than Yasha would give a magnificent crack with his whip, Matsko would wave his tail some time in hesitation and then start at a sober trot, flinging out and raising his hind legs, and strutting like a cock. Coming level with the house door, Yasha would pretend that only with great difficulty could he restrain the impatient horses, stretching out both his arms and pulling back the reins with all his might. All his attention would seem to be swallowed up by the horses, and whatever might happen elsewhere round about him, Yasha would never turn his head. Probably he did all this to sustain our family honour.

Yasha had an extraordinarily high opinion of my father. It would happen upon occasion that some poor Jew or peasant

would be waiting his turn in the ante-room while my father was occupied with another patient. Yasha would often enter into a conversation with him, with the simple object of increasing my father's popularity as a doctor.

"What do you think?" he would ask, taking up a position of importance on a stool and surveying the patient before him from head to foot. "Perhaps you fancy that coming to my master is like asking medical advice of the clerk at the village police-station. My master not only stands higher than such a one, brother, but higher than the chief of police himself. He knows about everything in the world, my brother. Yes, he does. Now, what's the matter with you?"

"There's something wrong with my inside . . ." the sick person would say, "my chest burns."

"Ah, you see—what causes that? What will cure you? You don't know, and I don't. But my master will only throw a glance at you and he'll tell you at once whether you'll live or die."

Yasha lived very economically, and he spent his money in buying various things which he carefully stored away in his large tin-bound wooden trunk. Nothing gave us children greater pleasure than for Yasha to let us look on while he turned out these things. On the inside of the lid of the trunk were pasted pictures of various kinds. There, side by side with portraits of terrifying green-whiskered generals who had fought for the fatherland, were pictures of martyrs, engravings from the *Neva*[1], studies of women's heads, and fairy-tale pictures of the robber-swallow in an oak, opening wide his right eye to receive the arrow of Ilya-Muromets. Yasha would bring out from the trunk a whole collection of coats, waistcoats, top-coats, fur-caps, cups and saucers, wire boxes ornamented with false pearls and with transfer pictures of flowers, and little circular mirrors. Sometimes, from a side pocket of the trunk, he would bring out an apple or a couple of buns strewn with poppy-seed, which he always found especially appetising.

Yasha was usually very precise and careful. Once he broke a large decanter and my father scolded him for it. The next day

[1] A popular Russian magazine which presents its readers with many supplements.

Yasha appeared with two new decanters. "I daresay I shall break another one," he explained, "and anyhow we can find a use for the two somehow." He kept all the rooms of the house in perfect cleanliness and order. He was very jealous of all his rights and duties, and he was firmly convinced that no-one could clean the floors as well as he. At one time he had a great quarrel with a new housemaid, Yevka, as to which of them could clean out a room better. We were called in as expert judges, and in order to tease Yasha, we gave the palm to Yevka. But children as we were, we didn't know the human soul, and we little suspected what a cruel blow this was to Yasha. He went out of the room without saying a word, and next day everybody in the village knew that Yasha was drunk.

Yasha used to get drunk about two or three times a year, and these were times of great unhappiness for him and for all the family. There was nobody then to chop wood, to feed the horses, to bring in water. For five or six days we lost sight of Yasha and heard nothing of his doings. On the seventh day he came back without hat or coat and in a dreadful condition. A crowd of noisy Jews followed about thirty paces behind him, and ragged urchins called names after him and made faces. They all knew that Yasha was going to hold an auction.

Yasha came into the house, and then in a minute or so ran out again into the street, carrying in his arms almost all the contents of his trunk. The crowd came round him quickly.

"How's that? You won't give me any more vodka, won't you?" he shouted, shaking out trousers and waistcoats and holding them up in his hands. "What, I haven't any more money, eh? How much for this? and this, and this?"

And one after another he flung his garments among the crowd, who snatched at them with tens of rapacious fingers.

"How much'll you give?" Yasha shouted to one of the Jews who had possessed himself of a coat—"how much'll you give, mare's head?"

"We-ll, I'll give you fifty copecks," drawled the Jew, his eyes staring.

"Fifty copecks, fifty?" Yasha seemed to fall into a frenzy of despair. "I don't want fifty copecks. Why not say twenty? Give me gold! What's this? Towels? Give me ten copecks for

the lot, eh? Oh that you had died of fever! Oh that you had died when you were young!"

Our village has its policeman, but his duties consist mainly in standing as godfather to the farmers' children, and on such an occasion as this "the police" took no share in quelling the disorder, but acted the part of a modest and silent looker-on. But my father, seeing the plunder of Yasha's property, could no longer restrain his rage and contempt. "He's got drunk again, the idiot, and now he'll lose all his goods," said he, unselfishly hurling himself into the crowd. In a second the people were gone and he found himself alone with Yasha, holding in his hands some pitiful-looking razor-case or other. Yasha staggered in astonishment, helplessly raising his eyebrows, and then he suddenly fell heavily on his knees.

"Master! My own dear master! See what they've done to me!"

"Go off into the shed," ordered my father angrily, pulling himself away from Yasha, who had seized the tail of his coat and was kissing it. "Go into the shed and sleep off your drunkenness so that to-morrow even the smell of you may be gone!"

Yasha went away humbly into the shed, and then began for him those tormenting hours of getting sober, the deep and oppressive torture of repentance. He lay on his stomach and rested his head on the palms of his hands, staring fixedly at some point in front of him. He knew perfectly well what was taking place in the house. He could picture to himself how we were all begging my father to forgive him, and how my father would impatiently wave his hands and refuse to listen. He knew very well that probably this time my father would be implacable.

Every now and then we children would be impelled by curiosity to go and listen at the door of the shed, and we would hear strange sounds as of bellowing and sobbing.

In such times of affliction and degradation, Bouton counted it his moral duty to be in attendance upon the suffering Yasha. The sagacious creature knew very well that ordinarily when Yasha was sober he would never be allowed to show any sign of familiarity towards him. Whenever he met the stern figure of Yasha in the yard, Bouton would put on an air of gazing attentively into the distance or of being entirely occupied in

snapping at flies. We children used to fondle Bouton and feed him occasionally, we used to pull the burrs out of his shaggy coat while he stood in patient endurance, we even used to kiss him on his cold, wet nose. And I always wondered that Bouton's sympathy and devotion used to be given entirely to Yasha, from whom he seemed to get nothing but kicks. Now, alas! when bitter experience has taught me to look all round and on the under side of things, I begin to suspect that the source of Bouton's devotion was not really enigmatical—it was Yasha who fed Bouton every day, and brought him his dish of scraps after dinner.

In ordinary times, I say, Bouton would never have risked forcing himself upon Yasha's attention. But in these days of repentance he went daringly into the shed and planted himself by the side of Yasha, staring into a corner and breathing deeply and sympathetically. If this seemed to do no good, he would begin to lick his patron's face and hands, timidly at first, but afterwards boldly and more boldly. It would end by Yasha putting his arms round Bouton's neck and sobbing, then Bouton would insinuate himself by degrees under Yasha's body, and the voices of the two would mingle in a strange and touching duet.

Next day Yasha came into the house at early dawn, gloomy and downcast. He cleaned the floor and the furniture and put everything into a state of shining cleanliness ready for the coming of my father, the very thought of whom made Yasha tremble. But my father was not to be appeased. He handed Yasha his wages and his passport and ordered him to leave the place at once. Prayers and oaths of repentance were in vain.

Then Yasha resolved to take extreme measures.

"So it means you're sending me away, sir, does it?"

"Yes, and at once."

"Well then, I won't go. You send me away now, and you'll simply all die off like beetles. I won't go. I'll stay years!"

"I shall send for the policeman to take you off."

"Take me off," said Yasha in amazement. "Well, let him. All the town knows that I've served you faithfully for twenty years, and then I'm sent off by the police. Let them take me. It won't be shame to me but to you, sir!"

And Yasha really stayed on. Threats had no effect upon him. He paid no attention to them, but worked untiringly in an exaggerated way, trying to make up for lost time. That night he didn't go into the kitchen to sleep, but lay down in Matsko's stall, and the horse stood up all night, afraid to move and unable to lie down in his accustomed place. My father was a good-natured and indolent man, who easily submitted himself to surrounding circumstances, and to people and things with which he was familiar. By the evening he had forgiven Yasha.

Yasha was a handsome man, of a fair, Little-Russian, melancholy type. Young men and girls looked admiringly at him, but not one of them, running like a quail across the yard, would have dared to give him a playful punch in the side or even an inviting smile—there was too much haughtiness in him and icy contempt for the fair sex. And the delights of a family hearth seemed to have little attraction for him. "When a woman establishes herself in a cottage," he used to say intolerantly, "the air becomes bad at once." However, he did once make a move in that direction, and then he surprised us more than ever before. We were seated at tea one evening when Yasha came into the dining-room. He was perfectly sober, but his face wore a look of agitation, and pointing mysteriously with his thumb over his shoulder towards the door, he asked in a whisper, "Can I bring them in?"

"Who is it?" asked father. "Let them come in."

All eyes were turned in expectation towards the door, from behind which there crept a strange being. It was a woman of over fifty years of age, ragged, drunken, degraded and foolish-looking.

"Give us your blessing, sir, we're going to be married," said Yasha, dropping on his knees. "Get down on your knees, fool," cried he, addressing the woman and pulling her roughly by the sleeve.

My father with difficulty overcame his astonishment. He talked to Yasha long and earnestly, and told him he must be going out of his mind to think of marrying such a creature. Yasha listened in silence, not getting up from his knees; the silly woman knelt too, all the time.

"So you don't allow us to marry, sir?" asked Yasha at last.

"Not only do I not allow you, but I'm quite sure you won't do such a thing," answered my father.

"That means I won't," said Yasha resolutely. "Get up, you fool," said he, turning to the woman. "You hear what the master says. Go away at once."

And with these words he hauled the unexpected guest away by the collar, and they both went quickly out of the room.

This was the only attempt Yasha made towards the state of matrimony. Each of us explained the affair to ourselves in our own way, but we never understood it fully, for whenever we asked Yasha further about it, he only waved his hands in vexation.

Still more mysterious and unexpected was his death. It happened so suddenly and enigmatically and had apparently so little connection with any previous circumstance in Yasha's life that if I were forced to recount what happened, I feel I couldn't do it at all well. Yet all the same, I am confident that what I say really took place, and that none of the clear impression of it is at all exaggerated.

One day, in the railway station, three versts from the village a certain well-dressed young man, a passenger from one of the trains, hanged himself in a lavatory. Yasha at once asked my father if he might go and see the body.

Four hours later he returned and went straight into the dining-room—we had visitors at the time—and stood by the door. It was only two days after one of his drinking bouts and repentance in the shed, and he was quite sober.

"What is it?" asked my mother.

Yasha suddenly burst into a guffaw. "He-he-he!" said he. "His tongue was all hanging out. . . . The gentleman. . . ."

My father ordered him into the kitchen. Our guests talked a little about Yasha's idiosyncrasies and then soon forgot about the little incident. Next day, about eight o'clock in the evening, Yasha went up to my little sister in the nursery and kissed her.

"Good-bye, missy."

"Good-bye, Yasha," answered the little one, not looking up from her doll.

Half an hour later, Yevka, the housemaid, ran into my father's study, pale and trembling.

"Oh, sir . . . there . . . in the attic . . . he's hanged himself . . . Yasha . . ."

And she fell down in a swoon.

On a nail in the attic hung the lifeless body of Yasha.

When the coroner questioned the cook, she said that Yasha's manner had been very strange on the day of his death.

"He stood before the looking-glass," said she, "and pressed his hands so tightly round his neck that his face went quite red and his tongue stuck out and his eyes bulged. . . . He must have been seeing what he would look like."

The coroner brought in a verdict of "suicide while in a state of unsound mind."

Yasha was buried in a special grave dug for the purpose in the ravine on the other side of the wood. Next day Bouton could not be found anywhere. The faithful dog had run off to the grave and lay there howling, mourning the death of his austere friend. Afterwards he disappeared and we never saw him again.

And now that I myself am nearly what may be called an old man, I go over my varied recollections now and then, and when I come to the thought of Yasha, every time I say to myself: "What a strange soul—faithful, pure, contradictory, absurd—and great. Was it not a truly Slav soul that dwelt in the body of Yasha?"

I. BUNIN

The Gentleman from San Francisco

"Woe to thee, Babylon, that mighty city!"

APOCALYPSE.

The gentleman from San Francisco—nobody either in Capri or Naples ever remembered his name—was setting out with his wife and daughter for the Old World, to spend there two years of pleasure.

He was fully convinced of his right to rest, to enjoy long and comfortable travels, and so forth. Because, in the first place he was rich, and in the second place, notwithstanding his fifty-eight years, he was just starting to live. Up to the present he had not lived, but only existed; quite well, it is true, yet with all his hopes on the future. He had worked incessantly—and the Chinamen whom he employed by the thousand in his factories knew what that meant. Now at last he realised that a great deal had been accomplished, and that he had almost reached the level of those whom he had taken as his ideals, so he made up his mind to pause for a breathing space. Men of his class usually began their enjoyments with a trip to Europe, India, Egypt. He decided to do the same. He wished naturally to reward himself in the first place for all his years of toil, but he was quite glad that his wife and daughter should also share in his pleasures. True, his wife was not distinguished by any marked susceptibilities, but then elderly American women are all passionate travellers. As for his daughter, a girl no longer young and somewhat delicate, travel was really necessary for her: apart from the question of health, do not happy meetings often take place in the course of travel? One may find one's self sitting next to a multi-millionaire at table, or examining frescoes side by side with him.

The itinerary planned by the Gentleman of San Francisco was extensive. In December and January he hoped to enjoy the sun of southern Italy, the monuments of antiquity, the tarantella, the serenades of vagrant minstrels, and, finally, that which men of his age are most susceptible to, the love of quite young Neapolitan girls, even when the love is not altogether disinterestedly given. Carnival he thought of spending in Nice, in Monte Carlo, where at that season gathers the most select society, the precise society on which depend all the blessings of civilisation—the fashion in evening dress, the stability of thrones, the declaration of wars, the prosperity of hotels; where some devote themselves passionately to automobile and boat races, others to roulette, others to what is called flirtation, and others to the shooting of pigeons which beautifully soar from their traps over emerald lawns, against a background of forget-me-not sea, instantly to fall, hitting the ground in little white heaps. The beginning of March he wished to devote to Florence, Passion Week in Rome, to hear the music of the Miserere; his plans also included Venice, Paris, bull-fights in Seville, bathing in the British Isles; then Athens, Constantinople, Egypt, even Japan . . . certainly on his way home. . . . And everything at the outset went splendidly.

It was the end of November. Practically all the way to Gibraltar the voyage passed in icy darkness, varied by storms of wet snow. Yet the ship travelled well, even without much rolling. The passengers on board were many, and all people of some importance. The boat, the famous *Atlantis*, resembled a most expensive European hotel with all modern equipments: a night refreshment bar, Turkish baths, a newspaper printed on board; so that the days aboard the liner passed in the most select manner. The passengers rose early, to the sound of bugles sounding shrilly through the corridors in that grey twilit hour, when day was breaking slowly and sullenly over the grey-green, watery desert, which rolled heavily in the fog. Clad in their flannel pyjamas, the gentlemen took coffee, chocolate, or cocoa, then seated themselves in marble baths, did exercises, thereby whetting their appetite and their sense of well-being, made their toilet for the day, and proceeded to breakfast. Till eleven o'clock they were supposed to stroll cheerfully on deck,

breathing the cold freshness of the ocean; or they played table-tennis or other games, that they might have an appetite for their eleven o'clock refreshment of sandwiches and bouillon; after which they read their newspaper with pleasure, and calmly awaited luncheon—which was a still more varied and nourishing meal than breakfast. The two hours which followed luncheon were devoted to rest. All the decks were crowded with lounge chairs on which lay passengers wrapped in plaids, looking at the mist-heavy sky or the foamy hillocks which flashed behind the bows, and dozing sweetly. Till five o'clock, when, refreshed and lively, they were treated to strong, fragrant tea and sweet cakes. At seven bugle-calls announced a dinner of nine courses. And now the Gentleman from San Francisco, rubbing his hands in a rising flush of vital forces, hastened to his state cabin to dress.

In the evening, the tiers of the *Atlantis* yawned in the darkness as with innumerable fiery eyes, and a multitude of servants in the kitchens, sculleries, wine-cellars, worked with a special frenzy. The ocean heaving beyond was terrible, but no-one thought of it, firmly believing in the captain's power over it. The captain was a ginger-haired man of monstrous size and weight, apparently always torpid, who looked in his uniform with broad gold stripes very like a huge idol, and who rarely emerged from his mysterious chambers to show himself to the passengers. Every minute the siren howled from the bows with hellish moroseness, and screamed with fury, but few diners heard it—it was drowned by the sounds of an excellent string band, exquisitely and untiringly playing in the huge two-tiered hall that was decorated with marble and covered with velvet carpets, flooded with feasts of light from crystal chandeliers, and gilded girandoles, and crowded with ladies in bare shoulders and jewels, with men in dinner-jackets, elegant waiters and respectful *maîtres d'hôtel*, one of whom, he who took the wine orders only, wore a chain round his neck like a lord mayor. Dinner-jacket and perfect linen made the Gentleman from San Francisco look much younger. Dry, of small stature, badly built but strongly made, polished to a glow and in due measure animated, he sat in the golden-pearly radiance of this palace, with a bottle of amber Johannisberg

at his hand, and glasses, large and small, of delicate crystal, and a curly bunch of fresh hyacinths. There was something Mongolian in his yellowish face with its trimmed silvery moustache, large teeth blazing with gold, and strong bald head blazing like old ivory. Richly dressed, but in keeping with her age, sat his wife, a big, broad, quiet woman. Intricately, but lightly and transparently dressed, with an innocent immodesty, sat his daughter, tall, slim, her magnificent hair splendidly done, her breath fragrant with violet cachous, and the tenderest little rosy moles showing near her lip and between her bare, slightly powdered shoulder-blades. The dinner lasted two whole hours, to be followed by dancing in the ball-room, whence the men, including, of course, the Gentleman from San Francisco, proceeded to the bar; there, with their feet cocked up on the tables, they settled the destinies of nations in the course of their political and stock-exchange conversations, smoking meanwhile Havana cigars and drinking liqueurs till they were crimson in the face, waited on all the while by negroes in red jackets with eyes like peeled, hard-boiled eggs.

Outside, the ocean heaved in black mountains; the snow-storm hissed furiously in the clogged cordage; the steamer trembled in every fibre as she surmounted these watery hills and struggled with the storm, ploughing through the moving masses which every now and then reared in front of her, foam-crested. The siren, choked by the fog, groaned in mortal anguish. The watchmen in the look-out towers froze with cold, and went mad with their super-human straining of attention. As the gloomy and sultry depths of the inferno, as the ninth circle, was the submerged womb of the steamer, where gigantic furnaces roared and dully giggled, devouring with their red-hot maws mountains of coal cast hoarsely in by men naked to the waist, bathed in their own corrosive dirty sweat, and lurid with the purple-red reflection of flame. But in the refreshment bar men jauntily put their feet up on the tables, showing their patent-leather pumps, and sipped cognac or other liqueurs, and swam in waves of fragrant smoke as they chatted in well-bred manner. In the dancing hall light and warmth and joy were poured over everything; couples turned in the waltz or writhed in the tango, while the music insistently, shamelessly,

delightfully, with sadness entreated for one, only one thing, one and the same thing all the time. Amongst this resplendent crowd was an ambassador, a little dry modest old man; a great millionaire, clean-shaven, tall, of an indefinite age, looking like a prelate in his old-fashioned dress-coat; also a famous Spanish author, and an international beauty already the least bit faded, of unenviable reputation; finally an exquisite loving couple, whom everybody watched curiously because of their unconcealed happiness: *he* danced only with *her*, and sang, with great skill, only to *her* accompaniment, and everything about them seemed so charming!—and only the captain knew that this couple had been engaged by the steamship company to play at love for a good salary, and that they had been sailing for a long time, now on one liner, now on another.

At Gibraltar the sun gladdened them all: it was like early spring. A new passenger appeared on board, arousing general interest. He was a hereditary prince of a certain Asiatic state, travelling incognito: a small man, as if all made of wood, though his movements were alert; broad-faced, in gold-rimmed glasses, a little unpleasant because of his large black moustache which was sparse and transparent like that of a corpse; but on the whole inoffensive, simple, modest. In the Mediterranean they met once more the breath of winter. Waves, large and florid as the tail of a peacock, waves with snow-white crests heaved under the impulse of the tramontane wind, and came merrily, madly rushing towards the ship, in the bright lustre of a perfectly clear sky. The next day the sky began to pale, the horizon grew dim, land was approaching: Ischia, Capri could be seen through the glasses, then Naples herself, looking like pieces of sugar strewn at the foot of some dove-coloured mass; whilst beyond, vague and deadly white with snow, a range of distant mountains. The decks were crowded. Many ladies and gentlemen were putting on light fur-trimmed coats. Noiseless Chinese servant boys, bandy-legged, with pitch-black plaits hanging down to their heels, and with girlish thick eyebrows, unobtrusively came and went, carrying up the stairways plaids, canes, valises, hand-bags of crocodile leather, and never speaking above a whisper. The daughter of the Gentleman from San Francisco stood side by side with the

prince, who, by a happy circumstance, had been introduced to her the previous evening. She had the air of one looking fixedly into the distance towards something which he was pointing out to her, and which he was explaining hurriedly, in a low voice. Owing to his size he looked amongst the rest like a boy. Altogether he was not handsome, rather queer, with his spectacles, bowler hat, and English coat, and then the hair of his sparse moustache just like horse-hair, and the swarthy, thin skin of his face seeming stretched over his features and slightly varnished. But the girl listened to him, and was so excited that she did not know what he was saying. Her heart beat with incomprehensible rapture because of him, because he was standing next to her and talking to her, to her alone. Everything, everything about him was so unusual—his dry hands, his clean skin under which flowed ancient, royal blood, even his plain, but somehow particularly tidy European dress; everything was invested with an indefinable glamour, with all that was calculated to enthral a young woman. The Gentleman from San Francisco, wearing for his part a silk hat and grey spats over patent-leather shoes, kept eyeing the famous beauty who stood near him, a tall, wonderful figure, blonde, with her eyes painted according to the latest Parisian fashion, holding on a silver chain a tiny, cringing, hairless little dog, to which she was addressing herself all the time. And the daughter, feeling some vague embarrassment, tried not to notice her father.

Like all Americans, he was very liberal with his money when travelling. And like all of them, he believed in the full sincerity and good-will of those who brought his food and drinks, served him from morn till night, anticipated his smallest desire, watched over his cleanliness and rest, carried his things, called the porters, conveyed his trunks to the hotels. So it was everywhere, so it was during the voyage, so it ought to be in Naples. Naples grew and drew nearer. The brass band, shining with the brass of their instruments, had already assembled on deck. Suddenly they deafened everybody with the strains of their triumphant rag-time. The giant captain appeared in full uniform on the bridge, and like a benign pagan idol waved his hands to the passengers in a gesture of welcome. And to the

Gentleman from San Francisco, as well as to every other passenger, it seemed as if for him alone was thundered forth that rag-time march, so greatly beloved by proud America; for him alone the Captain's hand waved, welcoming him on his safe arrival. Then, when at last the *Atlantis* entered port and veered her many-tiered mass against the quay that was crowded with expectant people, when the gangways began their rattling —ah, then what a lot of porters and their assistants in caps with golden galloon, what a lot of all sorts of commissionaires, whistling boys, and sturdy ragamuffins with packs of postcards in their hands rushed to meet the Gentleman from San Francisco with offers of their services! With what amiable contempt he grinned at those ragamuffins as he walked to the automobile of the very same hotel at which the prince would probably put up, and calmly muttered between his teeth, now in English, now in Italian—"Go away! Via!"

Life at Naples started immediately in the set routine. Early in the morning, breakfast in a gloomy dining-room with a draughty damp wind blowing in from the windows that opened on to a little stony garden: a cloudy, unpromising day, and a crowd of guides at the doors of the vestibule. Then the first smiles of a warm, pinky-coloured sun, and from the high, overhanging balcony a view of Vesuvius, bathed to the feet in the radiant vapours of the morning sky, while beyond, over the silvery-pearly ripple of the bay, the subtle outline of Capri upon the horizon! Then nearer, tiny donkeys running in two-wheeled buggies away below on the sticky embankment, and detachments of tiny soldiers marching off with cheerful and defiant music.

After this a walk to the taxi-stand, and a slow drive along crowded, narrow, damp corridors of streets, between high, many-windowed houses. Visits to deadly-clean museums, smoothly and pleasantly lighted, but monotonously, as if from the reflection of snow. Or visits to churches, cold, smelling of wax, and always the same thing: a majestic portal, curtained with a heavy leather curtain: inside, a huge emptiness, silence, lonely little flames of clustered candles ruddying the depths of the interior on some altar decorated with ribbon: a forlorn old woman amid dark benches, slippery gravestones under one's

feet, and somebody's infallibly famous "Descent from the Cross". Luncheon at one o'clock on San Martino, where quite a number of the very selectest people gather about midday, and where once the daughter of the Gentleman from San Francisco almost became ill with joy, fancying she saw the prince sitting in the hall, although she knew from the newspapers that he had gone to Rome for a time. At five o'clock, tea in the hotel, in the smart salon where it was so warm, with the deep carpets and blazing fires. After which the thought of dinner—and again the powerful commanding voice of the gong heard over all the floors, and again strings of bare-shouldered ladies rustling with their silks on the staircases and reflecting themselves in the mirrors, again the wide-flung, hospitable, palatial dining-room, the red jackets of musicians on the platform, the black flock of waiters around the *maître d'hôtel*, who with extraordinary skill was pouring out a thick, roseate soup into soup-plates. The dinners, as usual, were the crowning event of the day. Everyone dressed as if for a wedding, and so abundant were the dishes, the wines, the table-waters, sweetmeats, and fruit, that at about eleven o'clock in the evening the chamber-maids would take to every room rubber hot-water bottles, to warm the stomachs of those who had dined.

None the less, December of that year was not a success for Naples. The porters and secretaries were abashed if spoken to about the weather, only guiltily lifting their shoulders and murmuring that they could not possibly remember such a season; although this was not the first year they had had to make such murmurs, or to hint that "everywhere something terrible is happening." . . . Unprecedented rains and storms on the Riviera, snow in Athens, Etna also piled with snow and glowing red at night; tourists fleeing from the cold of Palermo. . . . The morning sun daily deceived the Neapolitans. The sky invariably grew grey towards midday, and fine rain began to fall, falling thicker and colder. The palms of the hotel approach glistened like wet tin; the city seemed peculiarly dirty and narrow, the museums excessively dull; the cigar-ends of the fat cab-men, whose rubber rain-capes flapped like wings in the wind, seemed insufferably stinking, the energetic cracking of whips over the ears of thin-necked horses sounded altogether

false, and the clack of the shoes of the signorine who cleaned the tram-lines quite horrible, while the women, walking through the mud, with their black heads uncovered in the rain, seemed disgustingly short-legged: not to mention the stench and dampness of foul fish which drifted from the quay where the sea was foaming. The gentleman and lady from San Francisco began to bicker in the mornings; their daughter went about pale and head-achey, and then roused up again, went into raptures over everything, and was lovely, charming. Charming were those tender, complicated feelings which had been aroused in her by the meeting with the plain little man in whose veins ran such special blood. But after all, does it matter *what* awakens a maiden soul—whether it is money, fame, or noble birth? . . . Everybody declared that in Sorrento, or in Capri, it was quite different. There it was warmer, sunnier, the lemon trees were in bloom, the morals were purer, the wine unadulterated. So behold, the family from San Francisco decided to go with all their trunks to Capri, after which they would return and settle down in Sorrento: when they had seen Capri, trodden the stones where stood Tiberius' palaces, visited the famous caves of the Blue Grotto, and listened to the pipers from Abruzzi, who wander about the isle during the month of the Nativity, singing the praises of the Virgin.

On the day of departure—a very memorable day for the family from San Francisco—the sun did not come out even in the morning. A heavy fog hid Vesuvius to the base, and came greying low over the leaden heave of the sea, whose waters were concealed from the eye at a distance of half a mile. Capri was completely invisible, as if it had never existed on earth. The little steamer that was making for the island tossed so violently from side to side that the family from San Francisco lay like stones on the sofas in the miserable saloon of the tiny boat, their feet wrapped in plaids, and their eyes closed. The lady, as she thought, suffered worst of all, and several times was overcome with sickness. It seemed to her that she was dying. But the stewardess who came to and fro with the basin, the stewardess who had been for years, day in, day out, through heat and cold, tossing on those waves, and who was still indefatigable, even kind to everyone—she only smiled. The younger

lady from San Francisco was deathly pale, and held in her teeth a slice of lemon. Now not even the thought of meeting the prince at Sorrento, where he was due to arrive by Christmas, could gladden her. The gentleman lay flat on his back, in a broad overcoat and a flat cap, and did not loosen his jaws throughout the voyage. His face grew dark, his moustache white, his head ached furiously. For the last few days, owing to the bad weather, he had been drinking heavily, and had more than once admired the "tableaux vivants". The rain whipped on the rattling window-panes, under which water dripped on to the sofas, the wind beat the masts with a howl, and at moments, aided by an onrushing wave, laid the little steamer right on its side, whereupon something would roll noisily away below. At the stopping places, Castellamare, Sorrento, things were a little better. But even the ship heaved frightfully, and the coast with all its precipices, gardens, pines, pink and white hotels, and hazy, curly green mountains swooped past the window, up and down, as it were on swings. The boats bumped against the side of the ship, the sailors and passengers shouted lustily, and somewhere a child, as if crushed to death, choked itself with screaming. The damp wind blew through the doors, and outside on the sea, from a reeling boat which showed the flag of the Hotel Royal, a fellow with guttural French exaggeration yelled unceasingly: "Rrroy-al! Hotel Rrroy-al!" intending to lure passengers aboard his craft. Then the Gentleman from San Francisco, feeling as he ought to have felt, quite an old man, thought with anguish and spite of all these "Royals", "Splendids", "Excelsiors", and of these greedy, good-for-nothing, garlic-stinking fellows called Italians. Once, during a halt, on opening his eyes and rising from the sofa he saw under the rocky cliff-curtain of the coast a heap of such miserable stone hovels, all musty and mouldy, stuck on top of one another by the very water, among the boats, and the rags of all sorts, tin cans and brown fishing-nets, and, remembering that this was the very Italy he had come to enjoy, he was seized with despair. . . . At last, in the twilight, the black mass of the island began to loom nearer, looking as if it were bored through at the base with little red lights. The wind grew softer, warmer, more sweet-smelling. Over the

tamed waves, undulating like black oil, there came flowing golden boa-constrictors of light from the lanterns of the harbour. . . . Then suddenly the anchor rumbled and fell with a splash into the water. Furious cries of the boatmen shouting against one another came from all directions. And relief was felt at once. The electric light of the cabin shone brighter, and a desire to eat, drink, smoke, move once more made itself felt. . . . Ten minutes later the family from San Francisco disembarked into a large boat; in a quarter of an hour they had stepped on to the stones of the quay, and were soon seated in the bright little car of the funicular railway. With a buzz they were ascending the slope, past the stakes of the vineyards and wet, sturdy orange trees, here and there protected by straw screens, past the thick glossy foliage and the brilliancy of orange fruits. . . . Sweetly smells the earth in Italy after rain, and each of her islands has its own peculiar aroma.

The island of Capri was damp and dark that evening. For the moment, however, it had revived, and was lighted up here and there as usual at the hour of the steamer's arrival. At the top of the ascent, on the little piazza by the funicular station stood the crowd of those whose duty it was to receive with propriety the luggage of the Gentleman from San Francisco. There were other arrivals too, but none worthy of notice: a few Russians who had settled in Capri, untidy and absent-minded owing to their bookish thoughts, spectacled, bearded, half-buried in the upturned collars of their thick woollen overcoats. Then a group of long-legged, long-lecked, round-headed German youths in Tirolese costumes, with knapsacks over their shoulders, needing no assistance, feeling everywhere at home and always economical in tips. The Gentleman from San Francisco, who kept quietly apart from both groups, was marked out at once. He and his ladies were hastily assisted from the car, men ran in front to show them the way, and they set off on foot, surrounded by urchins and by the sturdy Capri women who carry on their heads the luggage of decent travellers. Across the piazza, that looked like an opera scene in the light of the electric globe that swung aloft in the damp wind, clacked the wooden pattens of the women-porters. The gang of urchins began to whistle to the Gentleman from San Francisco, and to turn somersaults

around him, whilst he, as if on the stage, marched among them towards a mediæval archway and under huddled houses, behind which led a little echoing lane, past tufts of palm-trees showing above the flat roofs to the left, and under the stars in the dark blue sky, upwards towards the shining entrance of the hotel. . . . And again it seemed as if purely in honour of the guests from San Francisco the damp little town on the rocky little island of the Mediterranean had revived from its evening stupor, that their arrival alone had made the hotel proprietor so happy and hearty, and that for them had been waiting the Chinese gong which sent its howlings through all the house the moment they crossed the doorstep.

The sight of the proprietor, a superbly elegant young man with a polite and exquisite bow, startled for a moment the Gentleman from San Francisco. In the first flash, he remembered that amid the chaos of images which had possessed him the previous night in his sleep, he had seen that very man, to a *t* the same man, in the same full-skirted frock-coat and with the same glossy, perfectly smoothed hair. Startled, he hesitated for a second. But long, long ago he had lost the last mustard-seed of any mystical feeling he might ever have had, and his surprise at once faded. He told the curious coincidence of dream and reality jestingly to his wife and daughter, as they passed along the hotel corridor. And only his daughter glanced at him with a little alarm. Her heart suddenly contracted with home-sickness, with such a violent feeling of loneliness in this dark, foreign island, that she nearly wept. As usual, however, she did not mention her feelings to her father.

Reuss XVII, a high personage who had spent three whole weeks on Capri, had just left, and the visitors were installed in the suite of rooms that he had occupied. To them was assigned the most beautiful and expert chamber-maid, a Belgian with a thin, firmly corseted figure, and a starched cap in the shape of a tiny indented crown. The most experienced and distinguished-looking footman was placed at their service, a coal-black, fiery-eyed Sicilian, and also the smartest waiter, the small, stout Luigi, a tremendous buffoon, who had seen a good deal of life. In a minute or two a gentle tap was heard at the door of the Gentleman from San Francisco, and there stood the

maître d'hôtel, a Frenchman, who had come to ask if the guests would take dinner, and to report, in case of answer in the affirmative—of which, however, he had small doubt—that this evening there were Mediterranean lobsters, roast beef, asparagus, pheasants, etc., etc. The floor was still rocking under the feet of the Gentleman from San Francisco, so rolled about had he been on that wretched, grubby Italian steamer. Yet with his own hands, calmly, though clumsily from lack of experience, he closed the window which had banged at the entrance of the *maître d'hôtel*, shutting out the drifting smell of distant kitchens and of wet flowers in the garden. Then he turned and replied with unhurried distinctness, that they would take dinner, that their table must be far from the door, in the very centre of the dining-room, that they would have local wine and champagne, moderately dry and slightly cooled. To all of which the *maître d'hôtel* gave assent in the most varied intonations, which conveyed that there was not and could not be the faintest question of the justness of the desires of the Gentleman from San Francisco, and that everything should be exactly as he wished. At the end he inclined his head and politely enquired:

"Is that all, sir?"

On receiving a lingering "Yes," he added that Carmela and Giuseppe, famous all over Italy and "to all the world of tourists," were going to dance the tarantella that evening in the hall.

"I have seen picture-postcards of her," said the Gentleman from San Francisco, in a voice expressive of nothing. "And is Giuseppe her husband?"

"Her cousin, sir," replied the *maître d'hôtel.*

The Gentleman from San Francisco was silent for a while, thinking of something, but saying nothing; then he dismissed the man with a nod of the head. After which he began to make preparations as if for his wedding. He turned on all the electric lights, and filled the mirrors with brilliance and reflection of furniture and open trunks. He began to shave and wash, ringing the bell every minute, and down the corridor raced and crossed the impatient ringings from the rooms of his wife and daughter. Luigi, with the nimbleness peculiar to certain stout people, making grimaces of horror which brought tears of laughter to the eyes of chambermaids dashing past with

marble-white pails, turned a cart-wheel to a gentleman's door, and tapping with his knuckles, in a voice of sham timidity and respectfulness reduced to idiocy, asked:

"Ha suonato, Signore?"

From behind the door, a slow, grating, offensively polite voice:

"Yes, come in."

What were the feelings, what were the thoughts of the Gentleman from San Francisco on that evening so significant to him? He felt nothing exceptional, since unfortunately everything on this earth is too simple in appearance. Even had he felt something imminent in his soul, all the same he would have reasoned that, whatever it might be, it could not take place immediately. Besides, as with all who have just experienced sea-sickness, he was very hungry, and looked forward with delight to the first spoonful of soup, the first mouthful of wine. So he performed the customary business of dressing in a state of excitement which left no room for reflection.

Having shaved, washed, and dexterously arranged several artificial teeth, standing in front of the mirror, he moistened his silver-mounted brushes and plastered the remains of his thick pearly hair on his swarthy yellow skull. He drew on to his strong old body, with its abdomen protuberant from excessive good living, his cream-coloured silk underwear, put black silk socks and patent-leather slippers on his flat-footed feet. He put sleeve-links in the shining cuffs of his snow-white shirt, and bending forward so that his shirt front bulged out, he arranged his trousers that were pulled up high by his silk braces, and began to torture himself, putting his collar-stud through the stiff collar. The floor was still rocking beneath him, the tips of his fingers hurt, the stud at moments pinched the flabby skin in the recess under his Adam's apple, but he persisted, and at last, with eyes all strained and face dove-blue from the over-tight collar that enclosed his throat, he finished the business and sat down exhausted in front of the pier glass, which reflected the whole of him, and repeated him in all the other mirrors.

"It is awful!" he muttered, dropping his strong, bald head, but without trying to understand or to know what was awful. Then, with habitual careful attention examining his gouty-

jointed short fingers and large, convex, almond-shaped finger-nails, he repeated: "It is awful. . . ."

As if from a pagan temple shrilly resounded the second gong through the hotel. The Gentleman from San Francisco got up hastily, pulled his shirt-collar still tighter with his tie, and his abdomen tighter with his open waistcoat, settled his cuffs and again examined himself in the mirror. . . . "That Carmela, swarthy, with her enticing eyes, looking like a mulatto in her dazzling-coloured dress, chiefly orange, she must be an extra-ordinary dancer——" he was thinking. So, cheerfully leaving his room and walking on the carpet to his wife's room, he called to ask if they were nearly ready.

"In five minutes, Dad," came the gay voice of the girl from behind the door. "I'm arranging my hair."

"Right-o!" said the Gentleman from San Francisco.

Imagining to himself her long hair hanging to the floor, he slowly walked along the corridors and staircases covered with red carpet, downstairs, looking for the reading-room. The servants he encountered on the way pressed close to the wall, and he walked past as if not noticing them. An old lady, late for dinner, already stooping with age, with milk-white hair and yet *décolletée* in her pale grey silk dress, hurried at top speed, funnily, hen-like, and he easily overtook her. By the glass-door of the dining-room wherein the guests had already started the meal, he stopped before a little table heaped with boxes of cigars and cigarettes, and taking a large Manilla. threw three liras on the table. After which he passed along the winter terrace, and glanced through an open window. From the darkness came a waft of soft air, and there loomed the top of an old palm-tree that spreads its boughs over the stars, looking like a giant, bringing down the far-off smooth quivering of the sea. . . . In the reading-room, cosy with the shaded reading-lamps, a grey, untidy German, looking rather like Ibsen in his round silver-rimmed spectacles and with mad astonished eyes, stood rustling the newspapers. After coldly eyeing him, the Gentleman from San Francisco seated himself in a deep leather arm-chair in a corner, by a lamp with a green shade, put on his pince-nez, and, with a stretch of his neck because of the tightness of his shirt-collar, obliterated himself behind a newspaper.

He glanced over the headlines, read a few sentences about the never-ending Balkan war, then with a habitual movement turned over the page of the newspaper—when suddenly the lines blazed up before him in a glassy sheen, his neck swelled, his eyes bulged, and the pince-nez came flying off his nose. . . . He lunged forward, wanted to breathe—and rattled wildly. His lower jaw dropped, and his mouth shone with gold fillings. His head fell swaying on his shoulder, his shirt-front bulged out basket-like, and all his body, writhing, with heels scraping up the carpet, slid down to the floor, struggling desperately with some invisible foe.

If the German had not been in the reading-room, the frightful affair could have been hushed up. Instantly, through obscure passages the Gentleman from San Francisco could have been hurried away to some dark corner, and not a single guest would have discovered what he had been up to. But the German dashed out of the room with a yell, alarming the house and all the diners. Many sprang up from the table, upsetting their chairs, many, pallid, ran towards the reading-room, and in every language it was asked: "What—what's the matter?" None answered intelligibly, nobody understood, for even to-day people are more surprised at death than at anything else, and never want to believe it is true. The proprietor rushed from one guest to another, trying to keep back those who were hastening up, to soothe them with assurances that it was a mere trifle, a fainting-fit that had overcome a certain Gentleman from San Francisco. . . . But no-one heeded him. Many saw how the porters and waiters were tearing off the tie, waistcoat, and crumpled dress-coat from that same gentleman, even, for some reason or other, pulling off his patent evening-shoes from his black-silk, flat-footed feet. And he was still writhing. He continued to struggle with death, by no means wanting to yield to that which had so unexpectedly and rudely overtaken him. He rolled his head, rattled like one throttled, and turned up the whites of his eyes as if he were drunk. When he had been hastily carried into room No. 43, the smallest, wretchedest, dampest, and coldest room at the end of the bottom corridor, his daughter came running with her hair all loose, her dressing-gown flying open, showing her bosom raised by her corsets;

then his wife, large and heavy and completely dressed for dinner, her mouth opened round with terror. But by that time he had already ceased rolling his head.

In a quarter of an hour the hotel settled down somehow or other. But the evening was ruined. The guests, returning to the dining-room, finished their dinner in silence, with a look of injury on their faces, whilst the proprietor went from one to another, shrugging his shoulders in hopeless and natural irritation, feeling himself guilty through no fault of his own, assuring everybody that he perfectly realised "how disagreeable this is," and giving his word that he would take "every possible measure within his power" to remove the trouble. The tarantella had to be cancelled, the superfluous lights were switched off, most of the guests went to the bar, and soon the house became so quiet that the ticking of the clock was heard distinctly in the hall, where the lonely parrot woodenly muttered something as he bustled about in his cage preparatory to going to sleep, and managed to fall asleep at length with his paw absurdly suspended from the little upper perch. . . . The Gentleman from San Francisco lay on a cheap iron bed under coarse blankets on to which fell a dim light from the obscure electric lamp in the ceiling. An ice-bag slid down on his wet cold forehead; his blue, already lifeless face grew gradually cold; the hoarse bubbling which came from his open mouth, where the gleam of gold still showed, grew weak. The Gentleman from San Francisco rattled no longer; he was no more—something else lay in his place. His wife, his daughter, the doctor, and the servants stood and watched him dully. Suddenly that which they feared and expected happened. The rattling ceased. And slowly, slowly under their eyes a pallor spread over the face of the deceased, his features began to grow thinner, more transparent . . . with a beauty which might have suited him long ago. . . .

Entered the proprietor. "Già, è morto!" whispered the doctor to him. The proprietor raised his shoulders, as if it were not his affair. The wife, on whose cheeks tears were slowly trickling, approached and timidly asked that the deceased should be taken to his own room.

"Oh no, madame," hastily replied the proprietor, politely, but coldly and not in English, but in French. He was no longer

interested in the trifling sum the guests from San Francisco would leave at his cash desk. "That is absolutely impossible." Adding by way of explanation, that he valued that suite of rooms highly, and that should he accede to madame's request, the news would be known all over Capri and no-one would take the suite afterwards.

The young lady, who had glanced at him strangely all the time, now sat down in a chair and sobbed, with her handkerchief to her mouth. The elder lady's tears dried at once, her face flared up. Raising her voice and using her own language she began to insist, unable to believe that the respect for them had gone already. The manager cut her short with polite dignity. "If madame does not like the ways of the hotel, he dare not detain her." And he announced decisively that the corpse must be removed at dawn: the police had already been notified, and an official would arrive presently to attend to the necessary formalities. "Is it possible to get a plain coffin?" madame asked. Unfortunately not! Impossible! And there was no time to make one. It would have to be arranged somehow. Yes, the English soda-water came in large strong boxes—if the divisions were removed.

The whole hotel was asleep. The window of No. 43 was open, on to a corner of the garden where, under a high stone wall ridged with broken glass, grew a battered banana tree. The light was turned off, the door locked, the room deserted. The deceased remained in the darkness, blue stars glanced at him from the black sky, a cricket started to chirp with sad carelessness in the wall. . . . Out in the dimly-lit corridor two chambermaids were seated in a window-sill, mending something. Entered Luigi, in slippers, with a heap of clothes in his hand.

"Pronto?" he asked, in a singing whisper, indicating with his eyes the dreadful door at the end of the corridor. Then giving a slight wave thither with his free hand: "Patenza!" he shouted in a whisper, as though sending off a train. The chambermaids, choking with noiseless laughter, dropped their heads on each other's shoulders.

Tip-toeing, Luigi went to the very door, tapped, and cocking his head on one side asked respectfully, in a subdued tone:

"Ha suonato, Signore?"

Then contracting his throat and shoving out his jaw, he answered himself in a grating, drawling, mournful voice, which seemed to come from behind the door:

"*Yes, come in. . . .*"

When the dawn grew white at the window of No. 43, and a damp wind began rustling the tattered fronds of the banana tree; as the blue sky of morning lifted and unfolded over Capri, and Monte Solaro, pure and distinct, grew golden, catching the sun which was rising beyond the far-off blue mountains of Italy; just as the labourers who were mending the paths of the islands for the tourists came out for work, a long box was carried into room No. 43. Soon this box weighed heavily, and it painfully pressed the knees of the porter who was carrying it in a one-horse cab down the winding white high-road, between stone walls and vineyards, down, down the face of Capri to the sea. The driver, a weakly little fellow with reddened eyes, in a little old jacket with sleeves too short and bursting boots, kept flogging his wiry small horse that was decorated in Sicilian fashion, its harness tinkling with busy little bells and fringed with fringes of scarlet wool, the high saddle-peak gleaming with copper and tufted with colour, and a yard-long plume nodding from the pony's cropped head from between the ears. The cabby had spent the whole night playing dice in the inn, and was still under the effects of drink. Silent, he was depressed by his own debauchery and vice: by the fact that he gambled away to the last farthing all those copper coins with which his pockets had yesterday been full, in all four lire, forty centesimi. But the morning was fresh. In such air, with the sea all round, under the morning sky headaches evaporate, and man soon regains his cheerfulness. Moreover, the cabby was cheered by this unexpected fare which he was making out of some Gentleman from San Francisco, who was nodding with his dead head in a box at the back. The little steamer, which lay like a water-beetle on the tender bright blueness which brims the bay of Naples, was already giving the final hoots, and this tooting resounded again cheerily all over the island. Each contour, each ridge, each rock was so clearly visible in every direction, it was as if there were no atmosphere at all. Near the beach the porter in the cab was overtaken by the head porter dashing

down in an automobile with the lady and her daughter, both pale, their eyes swollen with the tears of a sleepless night. . . . . And in ten minutes the little steamer again churned up the water and made her way back to Sorrento, to Castellamare, bearing away from Capri for ever the family from San Francisco. . . . And peace and tranquillity reigned once more on the island.

On that island two thousand years ago lived a man entangled in his own infamous and strange acts, one whose rule for some reason extended over millions of people, and who, having lost his head through the absurdity of such power, committed deeds which have established him for ever in the memory of mankind; mankind which in the mass now rules the world just as hideously and uncomprehendingly as he ruled it then. And men come here from all quarters of the globe to look at the ruins of the stone house where that one man lived, on the brink of one of the steepest cliffs in the island. On this exquisite morning all who had come to Capri for that purpose were still asleep in the hotels, although through the streets already trotted little mouse-coloured donkeys with red saddles, towards the hotel entrances where they would wait patiently until, after a good sleep and a square meal, young and old American men and women, German men and women would emerge and be hoisted up into the saddles, to be followed up the stony paths, yea to the very summit of Monte Tiberio, by old persistent beggar-women of Capri, with sticks in their sinewy hands. Quieted by the fact that the dead old Gentleman from San Francisco, who had intended to be one of the pleasure party but who had only succeeded in frightening the rest with the reminder of death, was now being shipped to Naples, the happy tourists still slept soundly, the island was still quiet, the shops in the little town not yet open. Only fish and greens were being sold in the tiny piazza, only simple folk were present, and amongst them, as usual without occupation, the tall old boatman Lorenzo, thorough debauchee and handsome figure, famous all over Italy, model for many a picture. He had already sold for a trifle two lobsters which he had caught in the night, and which were rustling in the apron of the cook of that very same hotel where the family from San Francisco had spent the

night. And now Lorenzo could stand calmly till evening, with a majestic air showing off his rags and gazing round, holding his clay pipe with its long reed mouth-piece in his hand, and letting his scarlet bonnet slip over one ear. For as a matter of fact he received a salary from the little town, from the commune which found it profitable to pay him to stand about and make a picturesque figure—as everybody knows. . . . Down the precipices of Monte Solaro, down the stony little stairs cut in the rock of the old Phœnician road came two Abruzzi mountaineers, descending from Anacapri. One carried a bagpipe under his leather cloak, a large goat skin with two little pipes; the other had a sort of wooden flute. They descended, and the whole land, joyous, was sunny beneath them. They saw the rocky, heaving shoulder of the island, which lay almost entirely at their feet, swimming in the fairy blueness of the water. Shining morning vapours rose over the sea to the east, under a dazzling sun which already burned hot as it rose higher and higher; and there, far off, the dimly cerulean masses of Italy, of her near and far mountains, still wavered blue as if in the world's morning, in a beauty no words can express. . . . Halfway down the descent the pipers slackened their pace. Above the road, in a grotto of the rocky face of Monte Solaro stood the Mother of God, the sun full upon her, giving her a splendour of snow-white and blue raiment, and royal crown rusty from all weathers. Meek and merciful, she raised her eyes to heaven, to the eternal and blessed mansions of her thrice-holy Son. The pipers bared their heads, put their pipes to their lips: and there streamed forth naïve and meekly joyous praises to the sun, to the morning, to Her, Immaculate, who would intercede for all who suffer in this malicious and lovely world, and to Him, born of Her womb among the caves of Bethlehem, in a lowly shepherd's hut, in the far Judean land. . . .

And the body of the dead old man from San Francisco was returning home, to its grave, to the shore of the New World. Having been subjected to many humiliations, much human neglect, after a week's wandering from one warehouse to another, it was carried at last on to the same renowned vessel which so short a time ago, and with such honour, had borne him living to the Old World. But now he was to be hidden far

from the knowledge of the voyagers. Closed in a tar-coated coffin, he was lowered deep into the vessel's dark hold. And again, again the ship set out on the long voyage. She passed at night near Capri, and to those who were looking out from the island, sad seemed the lights of the ship slowly hiding themselves in the sea's darkness. But there aboard the liner, in the bright halls shining with lights and marble, gay dancing filled the evening, as usual. . . .

The second evening, and the third evening, still they danced, amid a storm that swept over the ocean, booming like a funeral service, rolling up mountains of mourning darkness silvered with foam. Through the snow the numerous fiery eyes of the ship were hardly visible to the Devil who watched from the rocks of Gibraltar, from the stony gateway of two worlds, peering after the vessel as she disappeared into the night and storm. The Devil was huge as a cliff. But huger still was the liner, many storeyed, many funnelled, created by the presumption of the New Man with the old heart. The blizzard smote the rigging and the funnels, and whitened the ship with snow, but she was enduring, firm, majestic—and horrible. On the topmost deck rose lonely amongst the snowy whirlwind the cosy and dim quarters where lay the heavy master of the ship, he who was like a pagan idol, sunk now in a light, uneasy slumber. Through his sleep he heard the sombre howl and furious screechings of the siren, muffled by the blizzard. But again he reassured himself by the nearness of that which stood behind his wall, and was in the last resort incomprehensible to him; by the large, apparently armoured cabin which was now and then filled with a mysterious rumbling, throbbing, and crackling of blue fires that fired up explosive around the pale face of the telegraphist who, with a metal hoop fixed on his head, was eagerly straining to catch the dim voices of vessels which spoke to him from hundreds of miles away. In the depths, in the under-water womb of the *Atlantis*, steel glimmered and steam wheezed, and huge masses of machinery and thousand-ton boilers dripped with water and oil, as the motion of the ship was steadily cooked in this vast kitchen heated by hellish furnaces from beneath. Here bubbled in their awful concentration the powers which were being transmitted to the keel,

down an infinitely long round tunnel lit up and brilliant like a gigantic gun-barrel, along which slowly, with a regularity crushing to the human soul, revolved a gigantic shaft, precisely like a living monster coiling and uncoiling its endless length down the tunnel, sliding on its bed of oil. The middle of the *Atlantis*, the warm, luxurious cabins, dining-rooms, halls, shed light and joy, buzzed with the chatter of an elegant crowd, was fragrant with fresh flowers, and quivered with the sounds of a string orchestra. And again amidst that crowd, amidst the brilliance of lights, silks, diamonds, and bare feminine shoulders, a slim and supple pair of hired lovers painfully writhed and at moments convulsively clashed. A sinfully discreet, pretty girl with lowered lashes and hair innocently dressed, and a tallish young man with black hair looking as if it were glued on, pale with powder, and wearing the most elegant patent-leather shoes and a narrow, long-tailed dress coat, a beau resembling an enormous leech. And no-one knew that this couple had long since grown weary of shamly tormenting themselves with their beatific love-tortures, to the sound of bawdy-sad music; nor did anyone know of that thing which lay deep, deep below at the very bottom of the dark hold, near the gloomy and sultry bowels of the ship that was so gravely overcoming the darkness, the ocean, the blizzard. . . .

LEONID ANDREYEV

On the Day of the Crucifixion

On that terrible day, when the universal injustice was committed and Jesus Christ was crucified in Golgotha among robbers—on that day, from early morning, Ben-Tovit, a tradesman of Jerusalem, suffered from an unendurable toothache. His toothache had commenced on the day before, toward evening; at first his right jaw started to pain him, and one tooth, the right one next the wisdom tooth, seemed to have risen somewhat, and when his tongue touched the tooth, he felt a slightly painful sensation. After supper, however, his toothache had passed, and Ben-Tovit had forgotten all about it—he had made a profitable deal on that day, had bartered an old donkey for a young, strong one, so he was very cheerful and paid no heed to any ominous sign.

And he slept very soundly. But just before daybreak something began to disturb him, as if someone were calling him on a very important matter, and when Ben-Tovit awoke angrily, his teeth were aching, aching openly and maliciously, causing him an acute, drilling pain. And he could no longer understand whether it was only the same tooth that had ached on the previous day, or whether others had joined that tooth; Ben-Tovit's entire mouth and his head were filled with terrible sensations of pain, as though he had been forced to chew thousands of sharp, red-hot nails. He took some water into his mouth from an earthen jug—for a minute the acuteness of the pain subsided, his teeth twitched and swayed like a wave, and this sensation was even pleasant as compared with the other.

Ben-Tovit lay down again, recalled his new donkey, and thought how happy he would have been if not for his toothache, and he wanted to fall asleep. But the water was warm, and five

minutes later his toothache began to rage more severely than ever; Ben-Tovit sat up in his bed and swayed back and forth like a pendulum. His face became wrinkled and seemed to have shrunk, and a drop of cold perspiration was hanging on his nose, which had turned pale from his sufferings. Thus, swaying back and forth and groaning for pain, he met the first rays of the sun, which was destined to see Golgotha and the three crosses, and grow dim from horror and sorrow.

Ben-Tovit was a good and kind man, who hated any injustice, but when his wife awoke he said many unpleasant things to her, opening his mouth with difficulty, and he complained that he was left alone, like a jackal, to groan and writhe for pain. His wife met the undeserved reproaches patiently, for she knew that they came not from an angry heart—and she brought him numerous good remedies: rats' litter to be applied to his cheek, some strong liquid in which a scorpion was preserved, and a real chip of the tablets that Moses had broken. He began to feel a little better from the rats' litter, but not for long, also from the liquid and the stone, but the pain returned each time with renewed intensity.

During the moments of rest, Ben-Tovit consoled himself with the thought of the little donkey, and he dreamed of him, and when he felt worse he moaned, scolded his wife, and threatened to dash his head against a rock if the pain should not subside. He kept pacing back and forth on the flat roof of his house from one corner to the other, feeling ashamed to come close to the side facing the street, for his head was tied around with a kerchief, like that of a woman. Several times children came running to him and told him hastily about Jesus of Nazareth. Ben-Tovit paused, listened to them for a while, his face wrinkled, but then he stamped his foot angrily and chased them away. He was a kind man and he loved children, but now he was angry at them for bothering him with trifles.

It was disagreeable to him that a large crowd had gathered in the street, and on the neighbouring roofs, doing nothing and looking curiously at Ben-Tovit, who had his head tied around with a kerchief like a woman.

"Look, they are leading robbers there. Perhaps that will divert you."

"Let me alone. Don't you see how I am suffering?" Ben-Tovit answered angrily.

But there was a vague promise in his wife's words that there might be a relief for his toothache, so he walked over to the parapet unwillingly. Bending his head on one side, closing one eye, and supporting his cheek with his hand, his face assumed a squeamish, weeping expression, and he looked down to the street.

On the narrow street, going uphill, an enormous crowd was moving forward in disorder, covered with dust and shouting uninterruptedly. In the middle of the crowd walked the criminals, bending down under the weight of their crosses, and over them the scourges of the Roman soldiers were wriggling about like black snakes. One of the men, he of the long light hair, in a torn blood-stained cloak, stumbled over a stone which was thrown under his feet, and he fell. The shouting grew louder, and the crowd, like coloured sea water, closed in about the man on the ground. Ben-Tovit suddenly shuddered for pain; he felt as though someone had pierced a red-hot needle into his tooth and turned it there; he groaned and walked away from the parapet, angry and squeamishly indifferent.

"How they are shouting!" he said enviously, picturing to himself their wide-open mouths with strong, healthy teeth, and how he himself would have shouted if he had been well. This intensified his toothache, and he shook his muffled head frequently, and roared: "Moo-Moo . . ."

"They say that He restored sight to the blind," said his wife, who remained standing at the parapet, and she threw down a little cobblestone near the place where Jesus, lifted by the whips, was moving slowly.

"Of course, of course! He should have cured my toothache," replied Ben-Tovit ironically, and he added bitterly with irritation: "What dust they have kicked up! Like a herd of cattle! They should all be driven away with a stick! Take me down, Sarah!"

The wife proved to be right. The spectacle had diverted Ben-Tovit slightly—perhaps it was the rats' litter that had helped after all—he succeeded in falling asleep. When he awoke,

his toothache had passed almost entirely, and only a little inflammation had formed over his right jaw. His wife told him that it was not noticeable at all, but Ben-Tovit smiled cunningly—he knew how kind-hearted his wife was and how fond she was of telling him pleasant things.

Samuel, the tanner, a neighbour of Ben-Tovit's, came in, and Ben-Tovit led him to see the new little donkey and listened proudly to the warm praises for himself and his animal.

Then, at the request of the curious Sarah, the three went to Golgotha to see the people who had been crucified. On the way Ben-Tovit told Samuel in detail how he had felt a pain in his right jaw the day before, and how he awoke at night with a terrible toothache. To illustrate it he made a martyr's face, closing his eyes, shook his head, and groaned while the grey-bearded Samuel nodded his head compassionately.

"Oh, how painful it must have been!"

Ben-Tovit was pleased with Samuel's attitude, and he repeated the story to him, then went back to the past, when his first tooth was spoiled on the left side. Thus, absorbed in a lively conversation, they reached Golgotha. The sun, which was destined to shine upon the world on that terrible day, had already set beyond the distant hills, and in the west a narrow, purple-red strip was burning, like a stain of blood. The crosses stood out darkly but vaguely against this background, and at the foot of the middle cross white kneeling figures were seen indistinctly.

The crowd had long dispersed; it was growing chilly, and after a glance at the crucified men, Ben-Tovit took Samuel by the arm and carefully turned him in the direction of his house. He felt that he was particularly eloquent just then, and he was eager to finish the story of his toothache. Thus they walked, and Ben-Tovit made a martyr's face, shook his head and groaned skilfully, while Samuel nodded compassionately and uttered exclamations from time to time, and from the deep, narrow defiles, out of the distant, burning plains, rose the black night. It seemed as though it wished to hide from the view of heaven the great crime of the earth.

MIKHAIL PRISHVIN

A Werewolf of the Steppe

Ramazan, the ninth month of the lunar year, was in its last days. On a clear morning the mountains of the steppe showed, like the tall blue tents of giant nomads. The steppe wavered, the road became uneven; the pail of water, tied to the shaft of our waggon, splashed and tinkled.

"This is the backbone of the earth, the land of Arka," said Isaac.

Happy land! Here the mutton is fat and the koumiss intoxicating,—it is the best land in the world for shepherds.

Seven tents at the foot of the mountain, as it were, seven white birds, slept, hiding their heads among their wings. By the well, laid round with stones, a girl is sitting and shearing a sheep.

"Will Janas take us in?" we ask, just as the heathen had asked Abraham in the land of Canaan.

"He'll take you in. . . ."

Here he is, a grey-haired old man, coming out of the tent with two of his sons. The old man puts his hand to his heart.

His hands are healthy. His feet are healthy. His sheep are healthy, their camels, their horses—they are all healthy, just as ours are. Thank God, amen!

His sons are lifting the tent door of felt. The father, bowing, bids us enter; a girl, with tinkling trinkets, is running to the well to shear the sheep.

Inside the shepherds' tent you feel as though you were inside a balloon, and there is even an opening at the top which may be opened or closed.

Above may be seen a circle of blue sky; below on the ground are three black burnt stones and a log—it is the hearth. Behind the hearth, just opposite the entrance, facing the Caaba, there

is a rug spread out for the guest; here also, beside the rug, feather-grass grows. Things are hanging all around.

The host himself gives water to his guest to wash his hands. His sons are holding the towels ready. One of them looks at the guest with sharp insolent eyes; the other is more noticeable for his naked yellow feet which give the impression of goodness and for his dishevelled heap of hair. The Bible comes to mind: Cain was a tiller of the soil, Abel a shepherd.

The sun still shines on the steppe: when the door of felt is lifted and some one enters, one's eyes are blinded, and afterwards for a long time there float before them violet-radiant slopes and fiery horses. One by one the kinsmen of the host enter, and one is like unto the other. One enters and sits down, cross-legged, by the hearth; another enters and sits down; and it seems as if someone were reading from a big ancient book: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob . . .

But looked at more closely, they are not all alike: one, a very robust fellow, has such a small seal-like head; another has small black mouse-like tails hanging from his upper lip; a third has the same kind of tails but, as it were, bitten short, a fourth is smaller in stature than the others, and his face is copper-red.

They all sit in a circle between the bed and the oxen-yoke, and look at the guest in silence.

For a whole month now I have wandered in the steppe on nomadic highways, and with me has wandered my double, the Black Arab. From one end of the land to the other. Long Ear has spread tidings of his presence. He is on his way from Mecca, but whither—no one knows. Now, at last, he has strayed hither.

"Where is the Arab going?"

From all sides the watchful eyes of the steppe are fixed on the stranger. Somewhere, a white sharp tooth glistens from a half open mouth, as if ready to bite into the Arab, to see what he is made of. And here is one sitting ever so close, and looks so intently and so long until, weary, he drops back on to the pillow and snores. Another draws nearer. . . .

Enough of mirages. . . .

"I'm not an Arab!"

"Ee-oh!" exclaimed the robust fellow with the seal-like head.

"Ee-oh! Allah! He's not an Arab!" said the others.

And they all opened their mouths wide.

"Who is he then? What does he want?"

"He does not want anything," explains Isaac. "He's a scholar, he takes nothing from the steppe: neither anything hard nor anything soft, neither anything bitter nor anything salt."

"Ee-oh, Khoodai![1]—Is it not the spirit of our forefathers, *aoorakh*?"

"No. He eats biscuits, drinks tea, asks about the grass, the sheep, the stars, the songs. He hunts, does his own cooking, eats like the Kirghis, with his hands; he does not pray to God. . . ."

"He's a robber!" whispers the thick-set fellow with the mice-tails on his upper lip.

"He's not a robber!" Isaac says reassuringly. "Robbers are wicked people, and this scholar from Petersburg is a good man. . . ."

"Has he a soft finger on his right hand?" asks the other robust fellow with the bitten-off mice-tails on his upper lip.

The allusion is to Khidar, beggar and holy man, whose big finger on his right hand is quite boneless.

They all look at my hand, they touch the big finger: it is quite hard. The guest is not an Arab, nor an aoorakh, nor a robber, nor a holy man.

Isaac expostulates with them—for an hour—for two—the faces redden, the eyes burn, but the riddle of the Black Arab remains unsolved.

They go on chattering.

"Jock! No, it's not clear at all!"

New people, and still more new people, enter the tent, they all take up seats by the hearth, look on, ask questions, and go on chattering.

"Jock! No, it's not clear at all!"

The felt door of the tent is slightly wavering: someone outside is digging a small hole in it, and before long a narrow dark eye is to be seen gleaming through it. If you look there, the eye vanishes; when you stop looking, it reappears. The peeper had peeped his fill, and disappeared; the little hole shone with light,

[1] O Lord.

like a star. Now that eye was surely meeting with other like narrow dark eyes. There all the women have gathered, you can hear them whisper,—and the Arab, like a *werewolf of the steppe*, becomes transformed from the tiniest thing into the head of a pin, from a genie into the terrible albasti.[1] Who knows? It may be, the spell of the Black Arab is working right here, among the bushes, ready to stop the kisses of loving couples; it may be, the childless wife, preparing to spend the night in the holy mountains, has had her chaste thoughts confounded?

But it all ended simply.

Someone asked:

"Has the guest a father?"

All were overjoyed at the simple question and moved nearer.

"Yes, he has a father."

"And a mother?"

"Yes. He has also a mother, and brothers, and sisters, and a grandmother, and a grandfather, just as you have in the steppes and as it is written in the holy books: Abraham begot Isaac, Isaac begot Jacob."

"Are they all living?"

"All are living, and all are living in Petersburg."

"Ee-oh!" rejoices the old man, who resembles Abraham.

"How many houses are there in Petersburg?"

"Thousands!"

"Oh!" broke the happy cry from the open mouths.

"And are there sheep in Petersburg?" asked Abraham.

"There are, but they don't have fat tails like here in the steppe, but so!"

"How so?"

"They haven't fat tails, but tails like goats."

Like a spark, the smile flew from the lips of the interpreter into these open mouths with white sharp teeth. The dusty folds under the broad gowns kindled, and our balloon, as it were, exploded into fragments—such is the laughter of the steppe!

The one who had fallen asleep on the pillow suddenly sprang up. Rubbing his eyes, he asks what has happened.

[1] A yellow-haired sterile woman, the enemy of all women desiring children, and capable of working a spell on them.

They answer him:

"In Petersburg the sheep don't have fat tails, but slender tails like goats."

He falls back on the pillow in convulsions, like one mown down. They all fall backward on their spines, holding their stomachs: all: the thin man with the copper-red face, the big-bellied man with the mice-tails, and the robust man who resembles him, and the man with the seal-like head, and the clever young man with the split beard, and Abraham, and even Isaac. They raise themselves, glance at their guest and again fall back, and shake their gowns with their stomachs. He who can moves nearer and caresses the good-natured man, only a little while before the mysterious, terrible Arab.

And one can hear behind the thin walls, the coins tinkle against the scythes. The loving couples in the bushes are no longer afraid. No longer do thoughts confound the childless wives ready for a journey among the holy mountains. He is not terrible, this Black Arab, and it is as if he had lived here always, thousands and thousands of years.

S. SERGEYEV-TSENSKY

The Man You Couldn't Kill

One man beats another with none too great assurance. He may even entertain a fear that the other, whom he is beating, should suddenly play a trick on him.

He beats his victim with the bigger half of his being, while the smaller observes and weighs the act.

The smaller whispers: "Enough!" The bigger goes on beating. The smaller says unmistakably: "It's folly! Stop it!" The bigger goes on beating, but more weakly, with some restraint. The smaller, at last, commands: "Stop it, I tell you!"—and in an instant takes the place of the bigger. The man who did the beating walks away, outwardly righteous and indignant but is inwardly sometimes even ashamed.

Not so the crowd. Delicate feelings are unknown to it. When a crowd shouts, it does not shout but judges; does not discuss but pronounces; does not beat but punishes, and anyone whom the crowd has beaten knows he will not rise again.

And Feodor—Feodor Titkov, from the Cossacks' village, Ouriupinskaya—knew this. He was of low stature and inconspicuous, but compact of body and with bright red face, still young and slenderish, his small eyes not set into eyes' hollows but resting, as it were, on the immediate surface of his angular cheeks.

But he saw, as did another comrade, Manolati, a Bessarabian gypsy, whose dark face was marked with white scars; and a third, a cobbler from Akhtirka, named Karavanchenko, otherwise comrade Semyon, a lugubrious fellow with caved-in chest, loud voice and eyes which shone.

When they were seized in the village and their arms bound, they were asked curtly:

"Bolsheviks?"

They replied with equal curtness:

"Bolsheviks."

And Manolati, only stretching out his neck, added vehemently:

"Never mind! Just wait and see. We'll be on top yet!"

Then they were led to a well with a very high crane on it, and no-one shouted nor mocked at them; only a thick dust rose from heavy boots, and someone sneezed, or coughed, or spat. Now Cossack women appeared on either side, standing by their homes, and scampering small boys.

Just before he had been caught here at work, Titkov had been eating a herring, and hadn't had time to quench his thirst; then, with his comrades, he was locked for the night in a barn.

The day had been very hot and he craved water. As he approached the well, he felt with his whole compact, swollen body that he was being led precisely where he needed to be led, and his eyes sought the pail.

The pail was large enough to be a tub, and stood, as it happened, with its wet-gleaming chain, on the well shelf and he could not take his eyes from it.

They were near it now: it was full to the brim. Someone had just given his horse a drink and had refilled the pail, but the horse wouldn't drink any more.

Around the well the sand was damp: there was a smell of cattle. A gad-fly settled on Titkov's cheek; he got rid of it by wiping his face against his left shoulder, never once removing his gaze from the pail. When they had come to a halt, he said, without pleading, but simply yet audibly:

"Comrades, let us have a drink!"

To this the Cossack nearest to him, a red-bearded fellow with blue veins on his nose and wet locks showing under his cap, responded no less simply:

"Drink to your content!"—and vigorously struck him across the cheek from which the gad-fly had just been brushed off.

And at the same moment he saw that they had knocked down comrade Semyon, whose feet, in the upset, kicked his own; and it seemed to him that Manolati's dark head flew upward, above the other heads, as if it actually flew; and just

as he observed this something struck him on the back of his head and brought him to his knees, and he murmured distinctly:

"So this is the end of us!"

And he drew in his head into his shoulders, like a turtle, and stretched out his legs. He lay flat upon his face; he felt the wet sand upon his lips, and it smelt strongly of the water of horses.

He tried to work his hands round under him, but they were bound tight and the rope resisted his most desperate efforts.

They kept beating him, except for brief interjections, in silence: and did it in earnest, as if they were killing a pig.

At first Titkov was able to tell where it hurt him most: afterwards, it pained equally, no matter where they struck. He merely gritted his teeth and swallowed spittle.

The shrill outcries of Semyon could no longer be heard. Titkov thought: "They've killed him!" and drew his head in further. But Manolati still managed to make himself heard. Again and again he cried:

"Ours! They'll be on top yet! They will! . . . They will! . . . On top! . . ."

Titkov had time to think about him: "He's a tough one. . . . He'll have to get it a hundred times! . . ."

Then, suddenly, he was hit on his right arm, so hard, the pain went to his head, and was hit again on the head, so he ceased to hear Manolati and everything else.

* * * * *

The cold woke him.

He was wet from head to foot.

He could not at once recall what had happened to him: then remembered the well, and the Cossacks, and how they had beaten him. He thought: "They have thrown me into the well!" But quickly corrected himself: "Why soil the well? It would have to be cleaned out afterwards. . . ."

And, opening the eye which was higher above the ground than the other, he saw the wet tawny point of a boot almost at his very nose, and understood someone's quite good-natured words:

"Eheh! . . . This devil's still alive!"

Then he heard another voice:

"The gypsy, too, is stirring!"

He scarcely had time to think that men had come to their rescue when the boot, with a hard crack, struck him just under his eyes.

Again he lowered his face and drew in his head.

"On top!" came the stertorous sound somewhere near Manolati.

Then they began to hammer with their boots, and someone heavy sprang on his back and jumped up and down.

Titkov tightened his stomach, but the iron-shod heels with their sharp points tore the skin from his arms. . . . At last, the other arm, as yet unhurt, cracked above the wrist under the onslaught.

Titkov was in the act of moistening his lips with his tongue when he ceased to feel.

Once more they poured ice-cold well-water on his body. Again he opened one eye—the other was filled and would not open—and again he saw the huge wet point of the boot.

They turned him over. Someone's beard, as it were a paternal one, bent over him, and he murmured into it:

"A drink! . . ."

Then, simultaneously, a deafening concord of voices:—

"Alive! . . . The devil himself! . . . The gypsy, and the other, have pegged out, but this one's still alive! . . ."

He lay thus for a few moments and saw above him fragments of beards, and red noses, and, as if the men were not at all the ones who had been trying to beat him to death, he again whispered:

"A drink . . . brothers!"

Then, above his eye, a fist flashed out and broke his teeth.

Someone asked, with astonishment and not a little distress:

"Where did he get it all? The strength of an anathema! Whew!"

And no matter how Titkov braced his stomach, he felt the full force of the iron-shod boot.

Five minutes later the three bodies near the well were motionless.

The Cossacks washed, coughed intermittently, and blew their noses, as they did in the morning after sleep; one even wetted his hair and drew a small metal comb through it.

Cossack women with infants in their arms approached to have a look. The sun was inclining toward mid-day when a cart drove up. The three bodies were dumped into it and were borne four versts from the village—towards a ravine.

Two young Cossacks walked beside the cart. Their shouldered rifles gleamed in the sun.

They never left the village without their rifles, even a small matter of four versts. It was a turbulent time—the 'eighteenth year.

And it so happened that when Titkov, lying uppermost of the others, opened his eye, he was blinded instantly by the gleam of the rifles at the backs of the Cossacks walking side by side.

Cossacks and rifles—he remembered them afterward—he had seen them before, but the gleam seemed extraordinary, had something unearthly about it. . . .

And the pain, all at once, went through his whole frame: his throat, and every organ in his body burned unbearably.

He had come to himself just as the horses were approaching the ravine, and once more tried to recover his memory, to find out what was the matter with him, where he was, and why he felt pain everywhere, when he heard one Cossack say to the other:

"Here's a nice slope. . . . They'll fly like jackdaws. . . ."

And the second voice said:

"Here, of course! The very place. . . ."

Titkov could make neither head nor tail of this. And when, all wet, he was being dragged from the cart by four hands, amidst curses, he groaned with his whole broken body, and looked with his single eye, so that the four superstitious hands perceptibly relaxed, and as he struck the earth he groaned even louder.

Then the horses snorted and moved their heads about, and the pair with the rifles sprang back twenty paces. . . .

He listened, and heard one of the Cossacks, after prolonged cursing, add:

"And you, unholy power, when will you give up your accursed breath?"

And when Titkov looked again, he saw how the other snatched his rifle off his back, aimed and fired. . . .

Titkov trembled as he lay. It was as if someone had driven a huge nail into his breast. . . . And here, a jot higher, another nail was driven in: a bullet fired by the second Cossack.

His mouth opened to let the blood out; twice he jerked his head, then grew quiet.

The Cossacks dragged the stiffened body of Semyon, with its broken head, toward the chasm, and, swinging it first by the feet and shoulders, flung it down in silence. The corpse of the gypsy Manolati, with its head to one side, they threw after it, with the remark:

"Well, that's where your 'On top' will be!"

As for Titkov's body, when they had dragged it to the edge of the ravine, they paused:

"Suppose, suddenly, this devil . . ." began one.

"D'you think he's alive?" said the other.

They even pulled up his wet shirt to see where the bullets were. But when they saw the whole body blue with bruises, and that the bullets had pierced the right breast, they merely shook the tufts of hair at the edge of their caps and pushed him down genially and watched the body turning somersaults, now catching vegetation by the feet, now by the head, until, at last, it lay at the bottom of the slope beside the first bodies.

* * * * *

Evening was coming on. The sun was no longer shining in the valley. There were shadows and coolness.

Three women from a neighbouring farm descended into the ravine for wood. At the bottom, and here and there on the slopes, there were bushes hacked down each year, and not the less persistent in growing again. And the women brought with them knives and rope.

When they stumbled on the corpses, they fled in fright. They looked behind and paused. Each pushed the other forward until again they confronted the bodies.

They gazed, shook their heads, and held the ends of their head-kerchiefs against their eyes.

"They must stink by this time?" asked one, doubtfully.

"They look fresh, I think," said the second, feeling her nose.

"A'n yesterday I was rummaging here, my dears—them

wasn't here then!" said the third, clasping her hands. "What kind o' scoundrels did it to them?"

Corpses should lie quiet. It is terrifying when a corpse tries to lift its head. It is enough to frighten anyone.

And when, slightly opening an eye, Titkov's head weakly turned, the women groaned and screamed all together, and the place was full of gleaming white ankles and running feet.

Scarcely a quarter of an hour had passed when, one encouraging the other, the women returned for the third time, and heard the whisper:

"Little women, a drink, please. . . ."

A tiny spring had broken a way through the ravine two hundred paces below. The women knew this, but they had neither jugs nor cups, only knives and rope.

They suddenly noticed a blood-stained cap on the slope. It had fallen off Semyon Karavanchenko when his body had been flung down. They washed it as best they could and brought water to Titkov, and, bending over him, with the cap full of water in their hands, they thirstily watched as he thirstily drank it.

He drank the whole contents of the cap and, breathing with difficulty, glanced from woman to woman.

"My poor man, what kind of villains beat you like this?" one of the women asked; but in a whisper, which came as it were from his vitals, he responded:

"My dears . . . mayn't I have a little more water?"

* * * * *

It had grown dark when the women, at last, lifted him and bore him from the ravine.

Several times they paused wearily, while he again lost consciousness, and they said one to the other, reproachfully:

"What was the good of disturbing the poor soul? . . . Better had he died there, in the night. He'll only suffer now. . . ."

Nevertheless, they dragged him out, unbound his hands, and took him to the hospital in town, some twelve versts away.

And all, during the journey, went on reproaching one another. They said it would have been better if they had let him alone, if they had not brought him water, if they had left him to die back there in the ravine. They said they would never get him

to the hospital alive, and that it was all for nothing. They'd only lose their sleep, and tire out their horse.

If they comforted themselves at all, it was that there were but few moujiks left on the farm, and their households were without any, and they could do as they pleased: it pleased them to be taking this man to the hospital, that was all there was to it . . . they'd take him there. . . . Let him die in the hospital if he must: there was something good in that, he'd at least have a proper burial.

To the questions asked them in the hospital: "Who is he?" and "Who beat him up?" the women answered:

"An' how should we know? . . . We found him like that . . . in the ravine. . . ."

"What's the good of bringing him here?" they said. "It's all the same, he'll die in the end!"

"If he dies, we'll fetch a wreath to put on his grave," said the women. "We've got to hurry home now, and be there by morning. There are cows to feed. . . ."

The women returned home in time, just as the first light showed in the sky. That morning the physicians in the hospital sought and marked off Titkov's broken ribs with the same dispassionateness with which the ribs had been broken in the village, by the well.

II

A month had passed.

It was a holiday—there was little to do.

The three women from the farm journeyed to town, bringing with them a wreath of simple country flowers to put on the grave of the man whose thirst they had quenched and whom they had rescued from the ravine.

Much had happened during the month, and everyone knew all about the corpses and how they came to be in the ravine.

It was a summer day, and the women, having started at luncheon time, thought to return in the evening. They had no business of any kind in town. Their one thought was to pay a visit to the grave, place the wreath there, and return home.

They harnessed a pair of horses, both well-fed beasts.

And while the hoofs and the wheels sounded their measured

pace along the little-frequented road, the women recalled how but a month before they had covered the same ground with the man in their cart.

"Did anyone ever carry in a cart such a cripple?" said the eldest, who was about forty years of age and was called Lukerya and had faded eyes. "That shaking-up was enough to be the end of him!"

"Yes, pulling at the reins, it was all I could do to keep my eyes off him, lying there so pitiful-like . . ." said Aksinya, who was somewhat younger and had dark arched eyebrows.

"An' he lying there with his head on my knees all the time, and me never moving for fear of disturbing him, though my legs did ache . . ." said Likonida, the youngest of all, grief in her grey eyes. "If we just knew his name!"

Thus rode the women with the wreath, and on their sides there stretched first the Cossack fields, then the peasant fields. The boundary of the district lay not far from the farm; they were across the frontier of another province.

Hordes of men had not long since passed over these fields and in places had trod the wheat down. The women observed these traces of indifferently treading feet.

The sun, however, shone friendly, and the earth, like a warm body, exhaled odours comprehensible to the women—was not the earth like a woman's body?

A hawk circled overhead, a mere dot in the blue. A cuckoo sounded its note in the ravine. Flies settled on the horses, who vigorously switched their tails, but could effect nothing and had to depend on the reins to drive the flies off.

There had been a fire on one of the farms. The women knew of this, they had seen the flames a week before; and now, fastening their eyes on the spot where some charred cottages and barns were standing:

"Cattle must have been lost, too!" said Aksinya, holding the reins.

"How long do you think it will keep up?" said Lukerya, arranging the straw under her.

Likonida, who was holding the wreath, tore off a leaf that seemed to her superfluous, held it between her lips; then, throwing it on the road, said sadly:

"Fool-ish, fool-ish women. . . . What's the good of going? Why go?"

But the belfries of the town were already appearing from behind the dark green of the gardens, and the other two said:

"It's all the same now—it won't take long."

As it happened, in approaching the hospital they had to pass the graveyard, which lay to the right of the road. And the women said one to the other:

"If we just knew his name! You get down and ask the watchman. He's obliged to know the names of the dead."

They stopped the horses, but found no-one they could ask

* * * * *

They drove on, and at two o'clock reached the hospital.

They left the horses at the gate after giving them hay. For fear some one passing by would steal the wreath, grey-eyed Likonida took it with her. And thus the trio, carrying it, marched across the hospital courtyard, to ask where they should find the grave of him they had brought a month before, and what his name was.

Simple people remember their illnesses and the illnesses of those near them during holidays—never on work-a-days. And now amid the bustle in the hospital courtyard, with grass between the cobbles, the three women with the wreath wandered, not knowing of whom to ask what they wanted to know.

They ran into a stocky figure in an apron, and asked him, but he only grunted angrily:

"Can't you see? I am the cook."

They met another, this time a bareheaded man, also in an apron, carrying an ill-smelling pail. He listened to them, then said that he hadn't been long here, and went off at a trot.

They turned to a woman, all in white with a red cross, and she answered by asking:

"And what's his name?"

"An' how should we know, my dear?" said the women, in astonishment.

"If you don't know, what's the good of looking?"

And she hurried away from them on her high heels.

Then they stopped an old woman, who chanced to be the matron. She did not know, but conducted them to the assistant-surgeon, a red-moustached, beardless man, in a white smock.

He greatly astonished them.

"You say he died a month ago? . . . It sounds simple, but to say a month ago! It'll take a little searching. You couldn't count them. . . . Do you know what it's like now? Do you know how many people die here? You can't imagine it!"

"But you see, this man of ours—he was killed," they tried to jog his memory. But the assistant-surgeon, staring at them, said:

"Everybody's killed nowadays. . . . There's no such a thing as a live man."

In any case, they'd look up the books.

The women looked to their horses, who were standing where they had left them, munching their hay. They made a complete circuit of the courtyard, glanced into the laundry, into the kitchen, into the cesspool (Likonida holding on to the wreath), and walked into the garden to sit in the cool for a while, until the assistant-surgeon should find in the books what they wanted to know.

The garden was small; it had but two narrow pathways. There were a few patients sitting on forms painted yellow. They were in white—dressed all alike; only their caps were their own. One lay on a folding stretcher and read a newspaper —they looked at him critically—while another sat in a wheel-chair and gazed high at the foliage; his arms were bandaged, and his head was also bound in white. . . . Two patients had relatives sitting with them; near one of them a tiny girl sucked at a sweet in a rose paper.

Timidly, holding to one another, the women went along one of the paths, staring hard with country eyes: such were the patients, such was the three-flounced frock worn by one woman, such were the brown stockings worn by the little girl. . . .

They walked past the man who was reading the newspaper. They studied him attentively, each for herself noting his thin fingers—like straws, they thought—however did he manage

to hold the paper with them!—what keen eyes he had. . . . Then they walked past the one in the chair, and they scrutinized him as well. His eyes were sunken and large, and his arms supported from the neck by a sling . . . and they noticed another thing, that the wheel-chair was in the full sun and they thought it might better have been in the shade. . . . And they went farther.

It was impossible to go very far in this small garden. They had come to the green fence, and so they retraced their steps along the same path, past the little girl with the sweet, past the stretcher, past the wheel-chair.

They pushed back their kerchiefs on their heads to allow coolness to reach them, while Likonida bore the wreath over the crook of her elbow, like a basket. As they approached the wheel-chair, it occurred to her to look at the flowers and say regretfully:

"See, they've withered, dragging 'em about. . . ."

The patient with the white swathe around his head, and his arms bandaged as far as the neck, darted a perturbed look at them suddenly, and said in a low voice:

"My d-dears. . . . Is it you . . .?"

And the women stopped short.

"It's you—yes! my dears! . . ." he repeated with an uncommon joy, all radiant.

"It's our man! . . . Our man! In God's truth, ours! . . ." The women cried it loud enough for everyone in the garden to hear. "Our very own! . . . And we, with a wreath for your grave. . . . Look, it's he! . . . come to life again! . . ."

It was so unlooked-for, so marvellous, so exquisite, it transported their very souls, and unable to do otherwise, they fell each after the other on their knees by the wheel-chair, full of prayer and praise.

ISAAC BABEL

The Letter

Here is a letter home, dictated to me by a youngster in our detachment named Kurdiakova. It does not deserve oblivion. I wrote it down without embellishment, and I present it here word for word, without the least exaggeration.

"My dear mamma, Evdokia Feodorovna.

"In the first lines of this letter I hasten to let you know that, thanks to God, I am alive and well, and I wish I could hear the same from you. I likewise greet you—I humbly bow to you, my white face touching the damp ground. . . ." (Here follows a list of kinsmen, godfathers and godmothers. But we'll let this pass. Let us look to the next paragraph.)

"My dear mamma, Evdokia Feodorovna Kurdiakova. I hasten to write to you that I find myself in the Red Horse Army of comrade Budeny, and here also is to be found your godfather, Nikon Vasilyitch, who at the present time is a Red hero. They took me into the expedition of the Politotdel, where we transport to the positions literature and newspapers—the Moscow *Izvestia* and the Moscow *Pravda* and our own merciless *Red Cavalryman*, which every fighter in the front line likes to read, after which, with heroic spirit, he slashes the filthy Polish gentry, and I am living very handsomely with Nikon Vasilyitch.

"My dear mamma, Evdokia Feodorovna. Send me anything that's in your power to send. I beg you to kill the speckled boar and send the parcel addressed to Vasily Kurdiakov, in the Politotdel of Comrade Budeny. Every night I lie down to rest hungry and without any blankets, so that I am mighty cold. Write me a letter about my Stepka, if he's alive or not, I beg you to let me know all about him—if he still has the hitch,

and also if he still has the scabs on his fore-legs, and if he has been shoed or not? I beg you, my dear mother, Evdokia Feodorovna, wash his fore-legs without fail with soap, which I left behind the images, and if father used up the soap, then please buy some in Krasnodar and may God reward you. I am also able to tell you that the country here is quite poor, the moujiks with their horses hide from our Red eaglēs in the woods, there is little wheat to be seen and it is so small we laugh at it. The owners sow rye, the same with oats. Hops here grow on sticks, it all looks in order; they make illegal spirits with it.

"After this I want to tell you in this letter about father, how he killed my brother Feodor Timofeitch Kurdiakov a year or thereabouts since. Our Red brigade of Comrade Pavlichenko attacked the town Rostov, when there was treachery in our ranks. At that time father was commander of a company in Denikin's army. The people that have seen them, those people said they wore medals on them like during the old regime. And because of that treachery we were all made prisoners and brother Feodor Timofeitch came under father's eyes. And father began to cut Fedya about, saying—you filthy hide, you red dog, you son of a bitch and the like and they cut him about until dusk, until brother Feodor Timofeitch died. I then wrote you a letter, how your Fedya was lying under ground without a cross. But father caught me with that letter and he said: 'You are mother's children, her roots are in you, and she a tart, I bellied your mother and I'll belly her some more, my life's gone as it is, I'll destroy my own for truth and much more the like of it. I suffered from them like the Saviour Jesus Christ.' Only soon I ran away from father and managed to reach my detachment of Comrade Pavlichenko. And our brigade received an order to go to the town of Voronezh to fill its quota there and we filled our quota there, and we also got some horses, kit-bags, revolvers and everything we wanted. About Voronezh, dear mamma, Evdokia Feodorovna, I can tell you that it's a fine little town, bigger than Krasnodar, the people in it are very handsome, the river fit for bathing. They gave us two pounds of bread a day there, half a pound of meat and enough sugar, so that on getting up we drank sweet tea,

we did the same in the evening and forgot what hunger was, as for dinner I went to brother Semyon Timofeitch for pancakes or roast-goose and after that I would lie down to rest. At that time, because of his desperate bravery the whole regiment wanted Semyon Timofeitch for commander and Comrade Budeny sent such an order and he received two horses, excellent clothes, a cart for his equipment all to himself and the order of the Red Standard, and they knew me for his brother. And now if some neighbour tries to bother you any—then Semyon Timofeitch has the right to cut him up. Then we began to go after General Denikin, and we drove him straight into the Black Sea, only we couldn't see father anywhere and Semyon Timofeitch looked for him everywhere in all the lines, because he missed so much his brother Fedya. Only you see, dear mamma, as you know father for his obstinate character, so this is what he did—he brazenly painted his red beard and made it black in the town of Maikop in mufti, so that no-one in town knew that he was a policeman under the old regime. But there's no getting away from truth, your godfather Nikon Vasilyitch saw him by chance in the cottage of an inhabitant and he wrote Semyon Timofeitch a letter. We hopped on our horses and galloped two hundred versts—I, brother Senka and some other lad who wanted to join in the fun.

"And what did we see in the town of Maikop? We saw that the people who lived in the rear had no kind of sympathy for the fighters at the front and everywhere in town we saw nothing but treachery and Jews, just as in the old regime. And Semyon Timofeitch was as large as life there wrangling with the Jews, who would not let father go but put him in gaol under lock and key, saying—an order had come from Comrade Trotsky not to kill the prisoners, we ourselves will judge him, don't growl, he'll get what's coming to him. But Semyon Timofeitch got his way and proved that he was the commander of the regiment and had from Comrade Budenny all the orders of the Red Standard and threatened to do them all in, those who held on to father and refused to give him up and the other lads from our camp were with him in this. But as soon as Semyon Timofeitch got hold of father he began to lay on him with a whip and drew up his men around him like they do on

parade. And then Senka splashed some water on father Timofey Rodionovitch and the water trickled red down his beard. And Senka asked Timofey Rodionovitch:

"'How d'you like it, father, being in my hands?'

"'No,' said father, 'I don't like it.'

"Then Senka asked:

"'And when you cut up Fedya, did he like being in your hands?'

"'No,' said father, 'Fedya didn't like it.'

"Then Senka asked:

"'And did you think then, father, that your turn would come?'

"'No,' said father, 'I didn't think my turn would come.'

"Then Senka turned to the crowd and said:

"'And it's my opinion that if I get into your hands, then no mercy will be shown me. And now, father, we'll put an end to you. . . .'

"And Timofey Rodionovitch began insolently to curse Senka and did not spare mother nor the Virgin and he hit Senka on the jaw and Semyon Timofeitch sent me from the yard, so that I can't, dear mamma Evdokia Feodorovna, describe to you how they finished father, because I was sent away from the yard.

"After that we had our camp moved to the town of Novorossiysk. As for this town I can tell you that on the other side of it there isn't any dry land but only water, the Black Sea, and we stayed there as late as May, when we went to the Polish front and are beating up the Polish gentry in proper fashion. . . .

"I remain your loving son Vasily Timofeitch Kurdiukov. Dear mamma, be sure to look after Stepka and God will reward you. . . ."

This is Kurdiukov's letter, word for word. When I finished writing it for him, he took the covered sheet and hid it in his bosom, next to the skin.

"Kurdiukov," I asked the boy, "was your father a wicked man?"

"My father was a dog," he replied gloomily.

"And is your mother better?"

"I've nothing to complain of there. Here's our family, if you'd like to have a look. . . ."

He handed me a broken photograph. On it was Timofey Kurdiukov, a broad-shouldered police-officer in uniform, with a well-combed beard, motionless, with high cheek-bones, with a gleam in his colourless, insipid eyes. At his side, in a bamboo armchair, was a tiny peasant woman in a loose blouse, with emaciated, bright, timid features. And against the wall, with its pitiful provincial background of flowers and pigeons, two young men were postured—monstrously huge, stupid, broad-shouldered, stare-eyed, moping as if at lessons—the two Kurdiukov brothers, Feodor and Semyon.

VSEVOLOD IVANOV

The Child

I

Mongolia is a wild beast, and a gloomy one! Its stone is a wild beast, and its water is a wild beast; even its ladybird watches for an opportunity to bite.

No-one knows the heart of the Mongolian—he walks about in skins, he looks like a Chinaman and, very remote from the Russians, across the desert of Nor-Koi, he has made his home. And, it is said, that he will go beyond China into India, into the unknown blue lands on the seven shores. . . .

Many Kirghis who had left Irtish during the Russian war and trekked to Mongolia had pitched their tents near the Russians. Their heart is well-known—it can be seen through and through. They wandered here in no undue haste—and they brought their beasts and their children, and even their sick.

The Russians were being driven hither without mercy—but then they were moujiks, and sturdy fellows. On the mountain stones they left their superfluous weakness—here one fellow died, there another was beaten to death. The families and the tools and the domestic beasts had been left to the Whites. The moujiks were malignant like wolves during the spring. They lay in their tents and thought about the steppe, about Irtish. . . .

There were about fifty of them. Sergey Selivanov acted as their head, and the detachment was called: "The partisan detachment of the Red Guard of Comrade Selivanov."

They were bored.

While they were being driven across the mountains, their hearts had been in fear of the black stoniness over which they had to pass. They reached the steppe—and they found it tedious here; because the steppe was like their own Irtish steppe: there

was sand, harsh grass, a hard-forged sky. Everything was alien, not one's own, and the land was unploughed and wild.

And it was hard without women.

At night they sat around and told soldiers' tales about women, and when it became unbearable they saddled their horses and caught Kirghis women in the steppe.

And the Kirghis women submitted to their Russian captors.

It was loathsome to take them, for they were still and never opened their tightly closed eyes. It was as if you had sinned with domestic cattle.

The Kirghis feared the moujiks, and would wander away further into the steppe. When they saw a Russian they threatened him with a rifle or with a sling; they raised whoops, but they did not shoot. Perhaps they couldn't? . . .

II

The paymaster of the detachment, Afanasy Petrovitch, was tearful, like an infant. And his face was like an infant's: it was small, hairless and rosy. But his legs were long and strong, like a camel's.

When he mounted a horse, he was forbidding. His face seemed hidden, and he sat there looking grey, angry and terrifying.

On Trinity day three men were ordered out into the steppe to find good meadows. They were Selivanov himself, paymaster Afanasy Petrovitch, and secretary Drevesinin.

The sand rose in the sun like a cloud of smoke.

From on high the wind blew. While from the earth, toward the tremulous sky, the warmth rose. The bodies of the men and the beasts were hard and heavy, like stones. It was tedious.

And Selivanov hoarsely said:

"What sort of meadows are there out there? . . ."

The others knew: he was speaking of Irtish. But the beardless faces were mute. It was as if the sun had burnt out their hair, as it burns out the grass in the steppe. Their narrow eyes, like wounds from a fish-hook, were inflamed red. It was hot.

Afanasy Petrovitch responded at last in a lamenting voice:

"Surely everything hasn't dried up there too?"

His slender voice was tearful, but there were no tears on his face. Only the horse under him, tired and panting, showed a trickle in its great long eyes.

Thus, one after the other, along paths traced by wild goats, the partisans rode into the steppe. . . .

The sand glowed hot, in endless monotony. A stifling wind blew. The sweat struggled within the body, unable to break through the dry skin. . . .

Towards evening, just as they were issuing out of a valley, Selivanov said, pointing to the west:

"Look! There are riders out there!"

It was true: on the remote horizon rosy clouds of sand could be seen.

"It must be Kirghis."

A dispute arose. Drevesinin said that the Kirghis wandered afar and dared not approach Selivanov's camp. Afanasy Petrovitch said it was certainly Kirghis. It was the sort of thick dust the Kirghis usually raised.

But when they got nearer to the dust, they all decided:

"Strangers . . . unknown folk. . . ."

From the voices of their riders the horses sniffed something strange in the air. They pricked up their ears, and fell to the earth long before the command. They lay there, in the hollows, these grey and yellow horses, still as corpses. They were helpless and laughable, with their legs as thin as poles. Was it from shame, then, they closed their large frightened eyes and breathed panting?

Selivanov and paymaster Afanasy Petrovitch lay beside their horses. The paymaster, his nose sniffing, was crying. To make it easier for him, Selivanov always placed him by his side, and from this childish crying the heavy moujik's heart felt almost cheered and incited to mischief.

The pathway was lost in the dust. The beat of wheels was audible. The long black manes of horses could be seen wavering in the dust.

Selivanov said with assurance:

"Russians. . . . Officers."

Two persons in hats with red bands were sitting in the new plaited waggon. Their faces were invisible through the dust.

It was as if the red bands shimmered in a yellow cloud. The muzzle of a gun could be seen thrust upward each time a hand with a whip was flung out above the dust.

Drevesinin reflected and said:

"Officers . . . on business, of course. An expedition is on foot. . . . That's clear."

He winked an insolent eye, and added:

"We'll prescribe for them, won't we, Selivanchik?"

The waggon with its passengers firmly goes on. They have good horses. Merrily they go on, and behind them, as with a foxen tail, the waggon hides its traces under the falling Mongolian dust.

Afanasy Petrovitch drawled in his lachrymose way:

"It's not necessary, brothers. . . . Better put them in prison. . . . Wait before you must beat them."

"Aren't you sorry for your own head . . . d'you want a beating?"

Selivanov grew angry and snapped at him:

"It is not necessary to cry here, paymaster!"

What, above all, provoked them to anger was that the officers should have ventured to appear alone, without a convoy. It was as if their strength were considered as nothing, as if death were to be meted out to the moujiks as a matter of course. At that moment one officer actually had risen to his height and was looking round the steppe; but it was hard for him to see: there was the dust; there was the evening wind on the red burned grass; there were the two stones by two hollows in the ground resembling corpses of horses. . . . What sort of stones were they? . . . Were these corpses? . . .

The waggon, the wheels, the passengers, their thoughts. . . . They rode on in the red dust.

The men in ambush fired their rifles. . . . They raised a whoop. Then again fired.

At the same moment the two hats, one hitting against the other, fell into the waggon.

The reins had suddenly been dropped. . . .

The horses tore forward . . . fell. There was white froth at their manes. . . . Their muscles trembling, they lowered their heads, and rose to their feet.

Afanasy Petrovitch said:

"They must be dead. . . ."

The moujiks walked up, looked in.

The two passengers with the red bands in their hats were dead. They were sitting shoulder to shoulder, their heads thrown back. One of the dead was a woman. Her hair had fallen apart; her military tunic outlined her high woman's breasts.

"It's odd," said Drevesinin. "She has herself to blame. She had no right to wear that hat. Who wants to kill a woman? . . . Women are necessary to society."

Afanasy Petrovitch spat.

"You're a monster and a boorjooy.[1] . . . There's nothing in your head . . . just trash. . . ."

"Don't go so fast," Selivanov interrupted them. "We're not robbers, we must write it all down—it's all national property now. Give me some paper."

The first thing they saw among other articles of "national property" was a light-eyed, fair-haired infant, lying in a plaited Chinese basket. In his small hand he tightly clutched a corner of the brown blanket. A suckling, he was tiny and he squealed in a slender voice.

With much feeling, Afanasy Petrovitch said:

"So there . . . he's got to have his say . . . and all about it."

They took pity on the woman and did not deprive her of her clothes, but the man they buried naked in the sand.

III

Afanasy Petrovitch journeyed back in the seized waggon, he held the infant in his arms and, rocking him, he sang quietly:

The nightingale bird
Sings its sad song . . .
The canary bird
Too . . . how my heart's wrung. . . .

He remembered the small village Lebiajy—his native home; the droves of cattle; his family; the little children—and he cried in subdued tones.

[1] A bourgeois.

The infant also cried.

The heated sand, dry and friable, also seemed to cry subduedly, as the waggon ran over it. The partisans rode on their low, firm-fleshed Mongolian horses. Their faces were burning and their souls were burning.

Near the pathways stifled by the sun there were stretches of wormwood, resembling sand—very fine and almost invisible to the eye.

And the sand is wormwood, fine and bitter.

Oh, pathways, goat pathways! Oh, sands, bitter sands! Mongolia is a wild beast, and a gloomy one! . . .

* * * * *

They examined the officer's property. There were books, a box containing tobacco, and gleaming steel instruments. One of these was a small four-cornered brass case standing on three long legs and divided into several compartments.

The partisans examined the various objects, felt them with their hands, again and again tried their weight.

The moujiks smelt of sheep's fat—from sheer tedium they ate a great deal, and the fat had gotten on to their clothes. Big-cheek-boned and thin-lipped, they had come from a Cossack village on the Don; with long black hair and dark faces, they had known the lime mines. And they all had bow-legs and guttural steppe voices.

Afanasy Petrovitch lifted the brass-topped tripod and said:

"It's a tiliscope. . . ." And he half closed his eyes. "It's a good tiliscope, must cost more than a million. They've looked at the moon through it, fellows, and they've found gold sand on it. . . . It isn't necessary to wash it. . . . It pours like flour, and all of it the purest gold. All you've got to do is to pour it into a sack. . . ."

One of the others, who had lived in a town, roared with laughter.

"A cock and bull story. . . ."

Afanasy Petrovitch got angry.

"A cock and bull story, is it, you filthy carrion? . . . Just wait. . . ."

"Wait for whom?"

Afanasy Petrovitch seized a revolver.

"Sh-h!" Selivanov quieted them.

They shared the tobacco, and they handed over the instruments to Afanasy Petrovitch—as paymaster he would wait for an opportunity to give it in exchange for something from the Kirghis.

He placed the instruments before the infant.

"Here's something to play with. . . ."

The infant paid no attention to the offering. He was crying. Afanasy Petrovitch tried this and that, even worked himself into a sweat; but the infant, unappeased, went on whimpering.

The cooks brought in dinner. There was a thick odour of butter, of gruel, of cabbage-soup. Huge wooden spoons were drawn from the boot-legs. The grass had been stamped down by the campers. Higher up, on the cliffs, the sentinel shouted:

"Hurry up! . . . I want some grub. . . . Send up a fellow to take my place!"

They had their dinner, then remembered: the infant wanted food. He had not ceased crying.

Afanasy masticated a mouthful of bread. He thrust a bit of the wet bread into the open tiny mouth, to the accompaniment of:

"Pp-i-pi . . . little fellow . . . get it down, young 'un. . . . It's tasty."

But the infant turned away his head and shut his mouth—he simply wouldn't have any of it. He was whimpering through his nose, in low but piercing tones.

The moujiks came up, surrounding them. Heads looked above heads at the infant. All were silent.

It was hot. The cheeks and the lips looked greasy from the mutton they had eaten. The shirts were open. The feet were bare, yellow—like the Mongolian soil.

One of the moujiks proposed:

"Try the cabbage soup on him. . . ."

They cooled the soup. Afanasy Petrovitch dipped a finger into it and stuck it into the infant's mouth. The good fat cabbage-soup ran down from his lips on to his little rose-coloured shirt and baize blanket.

He refused it. He went on whimpering.

"A puppy is more clever—he'll eat off your finger. . . ."

"One's a dog, the other a human being. . . ."

"Thinkin' won't help here! . . ."

There was no cow's milk in the camp. They thought of feeding the infant on mare's milk. That too was impossible. The child might die.

The moujiks scattered among their carts. Disturbed, they talked it over in groups. Afanasy Petrovitch wandered among the carts, a torn under-tunic over his shoulders, his small eyes also looking ragged. His voice was thin, perturbed, like a child's; it was as if the infant himself were running about, complaining.

"What's to come of it? . . . What's the way out, moujiks? . . . There must be a way out, eh? . . . Can't you think up something, you sons of dogs . . ."

They stood about, these broad-shouldered, mighty fellows, and looked helpless.

"It's a woman's business. . . ."

"To be sure. . . ."

"From a woman's hands he would have eaten a whole sheep. . . ."

"That's how it is."

Selivanov collected a crowd and announced:

"It's impossible to let the little Christian fellow die like a beast. Let's say, the father was a boorjoy, but the baby—what about him? He's not to blame."

The moujiks agreed.

"It's nothing to do with the child. He's innocent."

Drevesinin broke into a loud laugh:

"Let the child grow up! He'll grow up with us—and he'll fly up to the moon. . . . To pick up the golden dust. . . ."

The moujiks did not laugh. Afanasy Petrovitch raised a fist and shouted:

"You're an ignorant dog—that's what you are! The only one in camp that makes mock!"

He stamped his feet, waved his arms, then suddenly raised the piercing cry:

"A cow. . . . A cow is what we want for him!"

They responded in one voice:

"Without a cow it means death. . . ."

"We must have a cow. . . ."

"Without a cow he'll die!"

Afanasy Petrovitch said with decision:

"Fellows, I intend going for a cow. . . ."

Drevesinin insolently interrupted him:

"Are you going to Irtish, to the Lebiajy village? . . ."

"It's no good my going to Irtish, unspeakable monster! I'm going to the Kirghis!"

"You'll exchange the tiliscope for a cow, I s'pose! Go, then, benefactor!"

Afanasy Petrovitch turned on him and cried savagely:

"You carrion! D'you want to smell my fist?"

The chairman of the gathering, Selivanov, called for order:

"Enough!"

A vote was taken. It was decided that Drevesinin, Afanasy Petrovitch and three others should mount their horses and go to a Kirghis village, in the steppe, and drive back a cow. With luck, they might bring two or five cows, as the cooks were complaining that their meat supply was becoming exhausted.

They attached rifles to their saddles, and donned caps of fox fur, so as to give the appearance at a distance of being Kirghis.

They wound the blanket around the baby and put it in the shadow under a cart. A young moujik sat at his side, and for his own amusement and the baby's fired intermittently into a bush of wormwood.

IV

Oh, sands,—joyless, Mongolian! Oh, stone—blue, unhappy! The hands here are deep in the soil, evil!

The Russians ride on the sands. It is night.

The sands smell of heat, of wormwood.

The dogs in the acolas [1] bark at the wolf, at the darkness.

The wolves howl in the darkness at hunger, at death.

The Kirghis ran to escape death.

Will the droves of cattle escape death?

* * * * *

[1] Kirghis villages.

The Kirghis village smelt of sour milk. Lean and hungry children sat by bonfires. Near them were several bare-ribbed, sharp-muzzled dogs. The tents looked like hay-ricks. Beyond the tents was a lake and rushes. Suddenly, shots rang out, from the rushes, aimed at the bonfires. There were cries: "O-o-a-at!' . . ."

The Kirghis all at once rushed from their felt huts. They raised cries of fear. They sprang on their horses. The horses were kept bridled day and night. They trampled on their tents. They trampled on the steppe. Wild cries came from the rushes:

"Ai-ai, the Reds—the Whites—Russians—ai-ai . . ."

One grey-bearded fellow fell from his horse, his head landing in the huge boiling kettle, which was upset. Scalded, he whimpered in a thick voice. Its tail between its legs, a hungry, shaggy dog cautiously dipped its muzzle into the hot milk.

The mares neighed shrilly. Frightened, as if they were threatened by wolves, the sheep in the fold were panicky. The cows panted.

The Kirghis women, seeing the Russians, humbly submitted to them.

Drevesinin laughed lewdly:

"We are stallions, then, are we? . . . We shan't always. . . ."

Quickly filling his flat Austrian flask with milk and, cracking his whip, he drove some cows and calves towards a tent. The calves, loosed from their leash, made at once for the cows' udders, and joyously, with their large soft lips, seized the teats.

"They look mighty hungry, I say. . . ."

And Drevesinin fired his revolver at the calves.

Afanasy Petrovitch made a circuit of the village and was about to follow Drevesinin on his horse, when he suddenly remembered:

"Why, we must have a sucking-bottle. The deuce take it, we've almost forgotten it!"

He rushed in and out of the tents in search of a sucking-bottle. The fires in the tents were almost extinguished. Afanasy Petrovitch seized a firebrand and, flourishing it so that the sparks flew, and coughing from the smoke, he searched for a sucking-bottle. In one hand the firebrand crackled, in the other

he held a revolver. He could find no sucking-bottle. The submissive Kirghis women sprawled about on their beds of felt. The children were bawling.

Afanasy Petrovitch grew angry and, in one tent, he shouted at a young Kirghis woman:

"A sucking-bottle, you good-for-nothing, I want a sucking bottle!"

The Kirghis woman wept and began to undo her silk caftan. . . . At her side cried an infant, wrapped in rags.

At that moment Afanasy Petrovitch seized her breast and pressed it. He whistled and cried joyously:

"Woh. . . . A sucking-bottle! Ah, a good one! . . . Don't make that noise! It's a good one!"

And he seized the woman by the hand and dragged her after him.

In the darkness he placed the woman in the saddle, and from time to time he felt her breast until he brought her to Selivanov's camp.

"I've found what I wanted," he said, overjoyed, and there were tears in his eyes. "When I say I'll find a thing, I'll find it if I have to dig in the earth for it."

V

Once in camp, Afanasy Petrovitch discovered that, in the darkness, the Kirghis woman had managed to bring her own child with her.

"Never mind," the moujiks said. "There'll be enough milk for both. "There are cows, and she's a healthy wench."

The Kirghis woman was taciturn and strict, and she fed the infants when no-one was looking on. The two of them lay on the felt bed in the tent—one of them all white, the other a little yellow fellow—and they whimpered in one voice.

In the course of a week, at the common gathering, Afanasy Petrovitch complained:

"Comrades, I don't like this hiding game. The Kirghis woman is cheating us. She's giving all her milk to her own. As for ours, she sometimes lets him have a drop or two. Brothers, I know, for I've peeped. Just have a look for yourselves. . . ."

The moujiks went and looked. The infants were like all infants. One was a little white fellow, the other a yellow, like a ripe melon. But it was clearly to be seen that the Russian was meagre compared to the Kirghis.

Afanasy Petrovitch gesticulated with his hands.

"I've given him a name—Vaska. . . . But when you take a look at him. . . . Cheating, I call it!"

Then spoke Drevesinin, without his usual smile:

"Oh, you Vaska, you look as if you had a foot in the other world. . . ."

They found a stick, and they arranged it on a waggon shaft to make sure that one half did not outweigh the other.

They suspended the infants, one at either end, to see which outweighed the other.

The infants tied in hanging rags whimpered. The faint odour of babies came from them. The Kirghis woman was standing near the waggon and, understanding nothing, was crying.

The moujiks were silently looking on.

"Let it go!" said Selivanov. "We'll see what the scales say!"

Afanasy Petrovitch removed his hands from the stick, and immediately the Russian youngster rose high.

"Oh, you yellow-mouthed wretch!" said Afanasy Petrovitch wrathfully.

He lifted a sheep's skull lying on the ground and placed it on the Russian child's side of the scales. The two infants were then even.

The moujiks raised a din.

"She had overfed her own by a whole sheep's head, eh?"

"No-one's watched her!"

"What a beast! Not to have fed ours!"

"Who's watched her?"

"There're other things to do besides watching her!"

A few of the more sedate moujiks confirmed this view:

"How's one to watch her!"

"Besides—she's the other babe's mother. . . ."

Afanasy Petrovitch stamped his feet, and shouted:

"I s'pose you think a Russian human being must perish for some sort of foreign trash. . . . Is my Vaska to perish then? . . .

They looked at Vaska. He was lying there, looking pale and meagre.

The moujiks felt perturbed.

Said Selivanov to Afanasy Petrovitch:

"Why don't you get rid of him . . . of the other, I mean. God be with him, let him die . . . the little Kirghis fellow. We've beat up a lot of them. And what's one more or less to answer for?"

The moujiks gave a look at Vaska and, without another word, went their ways.

Afanasy Petrovitch took the little Kirghis and put him into a torn sack.

The mother began to weep. Afanasy Petrovitch hit her lightly on her jaw and went to the steppe.

VI

Two days later the moujiks stood on their tiptoes near the tent and, looking over each other's shoulder, peeped inside, where on the felt bed the Kirghis woman was feeding the white child.

The woman had a submissive face with narrow eyes, like seeds of oats; she wore her purple silk caftan and boots of morocco leather.

The infant had his face snuggled against her breast, and he played with his hands on the caftan, while his legs pranced about with ridiculous awkwardness.

The moujiks looked on and laughed uproariously.

And more tender than anyone else was Afanasy Petrovitch. Sniffing, he said in a tearful voice:

"Ain't he a fine youngster!"

Beyond the linen tent there ran, no-one knew whither: dales, cliffs, the steppe, alien Mongolia.

No-one knew whither ran Mongolia—a wild beast, and a gloomy one.

VALENTIN KATAEV

Fellow-Countrymen

"Women love me," said the young handsome soldier with short bristly hair to his ailing comrades.

He stood in the middle of the hut. Besides him, there were three other sick men. They were lying on wide boards, which were covered with dry rotted straw. Two of them were indifferently gazing at the ceiling, while the third lay still in a corner, all wrapped up like a woman in tatters. He was frozen.

It was a northern winter, deep and overcast. There were wooden cottages, and firs which resembled pencils. Above the railway station there were patches of steam from an engine, and slanting clouds of crows. There were goods trucks with red crosses and stacks of spotted birch logs.

The ailing soldiers were weary of tedium and inactivity. Nevertheless, they were not anxious to return to the lines where their battery was entrenched, because it was necessary there to obey the command, to dig trenches, and, besides, there was always the danger from enemy fire. One of the party suffered from rheumatism. Another was having the boils on his legs treated. The one wrapped in rags had only lately contracted typhoid. The soldier with the bristly hair had a vile disease.

"Women love me," he said, slowly. "Do you think I'm lying? By God, it's the truth! Why they love me—the devil alone knows. I understand how to handle women. The main thing is, you shouldn't try to take a woman with insolence. You've got to know how to handle them. That's so. Because not every woman respects insolence. Of course, there are some. I don't say anything against that. It doesn't always work. With a good woman you've got to be honourable. She says yes to you, and you say yes to her. She says no to you, and you say no to her. That should be understood. That's so. I once served

in real service with Captain Viren. He was an independent man, was Captain Viren. There was the wench serving in his house too. She was the house-maid. She was a good, clean wench. Quite a young lady. Her manners were not at all bad. At first I thought I'd win her with insolence. Nothing came of it. Then I took to other ways. When she says yes, I say yes. When she says no, I say no. I go to this and that place with her, I go to theatre with her. I bought her chocolate too. I had my way. She going this way and that way—but it was too late. I went to see her every night. . . . Well, I grew tired of her. That's the truth. Women love me—everyone says so."

The assistant-surgeon came into the room with a thermometer.

"And you, countryman, are you again telling lying yarns about women loving you?" he asked. "Go on lying, go on! It's quite evident how women love you."

And he winked an eye.

"Sure enough, they've rewarded you."

"Ah, these women!" with feigned unconcern said the former orderly. "Be they thrice accursed! it's possible they've ruined my life."

The assistant-surgeon shook the man in the rags by the shoulder.

"Countryman, are you asleep? Wake up, won't you? It's necessary to take the temperature. How you quake! I'm afraid it'll show forty degrees at least."

"I'd like to have a drink . . ." said the ailing man quietly.

"There, stick the thermometer under your arm-pit."

The sick man obediently took the thermometer and grew silent. He felt hot and uncomfortable.

It grew dark in the cottage. The assistant-surgeon went away and returned with a cup and a tiny tin oil-lamp without a chimney. The little lamp emitted a reddish smoky flame. The assistant-surgeon placed it on the oven, and immediately the windows appeared blue and it grew bright in the room, but at the same time it became crowded and dirty.

"Do you feel badly?" asked the assistant-surgeon.

"Yes."

"I must report to the surgeon."

Within half an hour they got used to the red flicker of the little lamp, and it grew tedious again. The soldier who had rheumatism began to scratch. Insects were biting him.

"The devil take them! The cursed things are biting again. I don't like the Minsk province for that, there's no hut without them."

He restlessly rose to his knees, drew from his pocket a small greasy box and, lighting a match, began to draw the flame along the wall.

"Are you burning them again?" asked the soldier with the boils.

"Yes, I'm burning the anathemas. They've made life miserable for me."

"Only see that you don't burn the hut down!"

"Never fear!"

A long silence followed.

"That's all there's to it—the women love me," said the orderly. "Why they love me—it's more than I can say. Not one's been able to stand up against me. By God, it's true. Only last year I was on leave, and I couldn't keep the women off. Soldiers' wives. You wouldn't believe it of them!"

"Yes, that's true as to soldiers' wives," said the man who was burning the insects. "You wouldn't believe it of them! Yet everyone knows it. The husbands aren't at home."

"What have they to be afraid of?" said the man with the boils angrily. "The husband is in the trenches. Far away. It's hard to live without a man! Ekh! Our life is like serving a sentence of hard labour. Only if I ever found out that my little wife was tricking me, I'd kill her. By God, I'd kill her!"

"Good. All the same you wouldn't do it!" said the orderly. "As I was saying, I arrived there during my leave. Everybody taking off their hat to you! Well, I had a jolly good time. I couldn't pass by for the women. Only I don't want such women. What I want is that a woman should be young and spruce-like. And in our village, where I was stopping, the third hut from the end, there was living a woman, a good sort. A soldier's wife. She was called Dasha. That means, Darya. A proper sort of woman. Good. I am for her. There's nothing at first. She holds her own, and won't hear anything. I tried insolence—nothing in that. I tried the honour game—nothing in that either. A hard nut to crack, thought I. And an artillery-

man to boot! I approach her this way and that—she won't give in. I take a stroll with her every blessed day—she won't give in. I say to her: I'll come to you to-night. She sits there all white like that oven there. If she'd only smile—but nothing. I see people laughing at me. But no! Just think of it, she came to me herself, of her own good will. 'I can't,' says she, 'stand it any longer without my husband.' And she breaks out crying because it's two years since she's seen her husband. Of course, I kissed her gently-like, take her hands in mine, and all that. I lived with her during my whole leave as with a wife: I come to see her in the evening, and she takes off my boots for me, and trembles all over. It was wonderful! She followed me wherever I went, like a shadow. Such a quiet one she was. A fine woman. And the main thing, if another young fellow went up to her—she wouldn't have anything to do with him. But against me she wouldn't stand up. Women love me, and it's a fact!"

"And what province do you come from?" asked the soldier with the boils suspiciously.

"The Kherson, the Ananyevsky district. We're not fellow-countrymen by any chance?"

"No. I'm from Tavrichesk."

"Yes. She was a fine woman, was Dasha. In a word, tea with cream. Just to think of her is enough to——"

A sufficiently long silence followed.

"What village do you come from?" suddenly asked the man wrapped in rags, in a weak voice.

They all turned to him. From the dark corner gleamed a single attentive eye.

"I'm from Nikolaevka, the Ananyevsky district. Countryman, by any chance?"

"Yes, we're countrymen," replied the man in rags. "I too am from Nikolaevka."

"Ah!" The orderly grew animated. "That means you know Dasha, the soldier's wife?"

"I know her," uttered the weak voice. "She's my wife. My wife. So we're fellow-countrymen."

It became so quiet that the dim booming of a gun in the lines, eight versts away, was clearly audible. The soldier with the boils coughed.

"If only I could have a drink . . ." said the man wrapped in rags.

He felt frozen again. He was cold and uncomfortable. He wished he might neither see nor hear anything, nor feel the fever that burned at his eyes and temples. It seemed to him there was no war, and no stranger's hut, and no bristly soldier—he was in his fancy in his own hut—and all this appeared to be only a horrible nightmare.

LEONID LEONOV

Ivan's Misadventure

She laughed at his wretched gift and, crumpling it into a ball, flung it on the snow at Ivan's feet. Then, her arms akimbo, she laughed at his love's sorrow, but Ivan did not hear. . . . While still an orphan lad, working on the soil, Ivan had caught a fever and suffered for a long time, until he was urged to visit the mistress of the estate. The proprietress lived alone and gave medical attendance to the peasants from sheer boredom. She gave Ivan quinine, great quantities of it, and said: "You'll be deaf, but you'll be well!" And, to be sure, Ivan was cured of the ague, and in his joy did not notice his sudden deafness. It did not hinder him from bearing his peasant yoke, it saved him from village quarrels, it saved him from the war, and although his deafness stupefied him he got used to it and even grew fond of inviolate silence.

The world became in his eyes soundless and wistful; clouds and birds floated in it, the grass grew in it, and the snow fell. . . . Ivan did not notice human beings in this world, but much dropped to his share from them. Among other things he was regarded as a carpenter, but he lived for the most part half hungry. He did not offend his world, his birds, his grass; but it pleased the priest not to pay him for digging graves, while the lads made diversion for themselves by throwing Ivan's simple tools into the pond. His life abounded in such misadventures. It was precisely with this word that he expressed his guileless astonishment at the order of the world. And though it seemed as if nothing could darken the lowly joy of his existence, his failure to win Lenka Bragina's heart deeply wounded him.

Humbly he picked up the head kerchief crumpled up by Lenka, smoothed it out and put it to his bosom. The village urchins danced in the snow round the simple fellow and taunted

him, but Ivan did not hear them. The sole creature capable of dissipating his confusion before his lot was his aunt; and it was toward her he was now wending his way. His aunt lived in a rich village twenty versts away. She was living out her time as a nurse at the priest's house. She was good, and was called Maria. He often came to her with his griefs, and, after three days as her guest, he would return to his own village more happily reconciled to his fate. The sorrows of the world did not perturb him.

In that same stern year the War had broken out. The world was in agony, and in its convulsions it gnawed the ground poisoned by its own blood. Maddened by the thirst to see their own home and family and to build a new life, the soldiers abandoned the front and became scattered wanderers in the land. In hostile bands they passed by the village, because the village in which Ivan Esakov lived stood on one of the main highways. The road ran on a high embankment and against the blazing evening sunset were to be seen the dragging, drooping figures, dark with anger and weighed down with weapons, which they bore with them for every untoward occasion. These appearances awakened forebodings of misfortune in the hearts of the peasants to whom the soldiers came for bread, but they did not frighten Ivan, locked as in a fastness in his impenetrable silence.

Ivan was oblivious of the things which happened round him. A soft, gentle snow was falling, the road was comfortable, covered as with down; it was pleasant to wander upon it in the obscure darkness toward the remote welcoming flame in his aunt's window and to think about Lenka. Proud and handsome creature that she was, it was not for her to marry a white-browed journeyman, and when Ivan understood this he at once decided to present the head kerchief to Aunt Maria in gratitude for her solicitude, so that she might wear it during holy days and remember the orphan.

It was darkening when, having passed the wood, he began to climb upward toward the village. It stood on the hill, the belfry stuck into the heavens, and under it the evening birds careered. He took the usual path toward the priest's house and knocked. The door was opened to him not by his aunt, but by

the priest's daughter, and all at once Ivan's heart beat violently at the ostensible incongruity. Guiltily smiling and clutching at the hat in his hands, he gazed at the girl, who crossly stamped her foot clad in a felt boot and bade him go.

In answer to her cry, the sleepy priest came out. He was dressed in striped wadded trousers, and he was unkempt and angry.

"The old woman has died," he said, digging his fingers deep into his abundant hair. "She's died and's lying under a stone."

Then Ivan began to bow low and humbly to thank the priest, and he did this for a long time, and when he came to his senses he was sitting on a bench in the porch and before him stood his aunt's meagre suitcase, while his hat lay before the closed door. He put his hat on his thinnish hair, and drew the kerchief from his bosom. He no longer had anyone to whom he might offer it, and, dumbfounded, he gazed at it. The kerchief was a cheap one, with a narrow flowery border, but it was red and pretty, he thought. In the half-darkness it flamed, and it burned Ivan's hands. He quickly thrust it into its former place, in his bosom, and descended the steps. The dim shafts of light from the priest's windows pierced the half darkness, and in these shafts of light he could see the snow falling.

"A misadventure," he said, smiling in a lost way at himself; for there was no place for him in the big village, and the wolves hindered his returning to Lenka. So he decided to look for a night's lodging at the pot-house, which was kept by a widow. The woman made a decoction from apples, and the drink was famed throughout the district. With tucked-up sleeves and buxom bosom and looking very much the Amazon, she took Ivan's money in a business-like way and brought him out a bottle.

"It's turned out thick enough to dilute," said the widow, and pricked up her ears at a whining sound audible in the nocturnal silence. "Again Efim is beating his wife. He loves to do it across the face. Tell me, what passions exist on earth!" Suddenly recognising in her customer a deaf man, she took it into her head to use him for diverting her from her widowed boredom.

Putting her cloudy face close to Ivan's, she slapped him in man-like fashion on his back, and bursting into guffaws, pushed him into the hut. A red jacket she had been sewing

was lying on the table near the lamp, and because of it the vapours rising from the vat in which the spiced drink was cooking appeared red. With his habitual confused smile Ivan went into the hut, and sitting down by the stove, he watched the widow prepare a repast on the table, consisting of soaked apples, nuts and bottle already bought by Ivan. Then, with hands folded across her stomach, she gravely seated herself on a bench, and bade Ivan to make himself at home. Making an effort not to look at the unsightly hole in the widow's strong teeth, a souvenir left by her bullying first husband, Ivan took the glass from the table and for a moment watched his own reflection in the liquid, dark as fate itself, then, with a frown, he drank the contents of the glass at one gulp and stretched his hand out for a second glass, but for some reason hesitated and sat down on the bench.

Sadly, yet with the dignity of assurance, the widow observed his incoherent movements.

"Why do you sit there lamenting-like, and don't liven up a bit?" she asked, gnawing at a tough apple skin. "Why be angry at anybody . . . you look as though you hadn't anything or anybody in life. Every crow crawls into its hole at night, but you are alone, without a nest, an orphan!" With a bitter tear of sympathy the widow was preparing the way for love's solace. "And your eye is uneasy, sickly. . . . How can a man look at a woman with an eye like that? A woman is a hornless beast, a cunning creature . . . a woman wants good cheer. Another one in my place would have shown you the door long ago! Only I'm sorry for you."

Ivan was silent, without ceasing watching the yellow leaf of flame in the lamp, and he was thinking that it was well to have matches against wolves. The widow had already edged her way to his side and was petting him and making love to him, inciting him to passion, but he paid no attention to her contacts. Not being used to drink, he became intoxicated at once, and though he thought of his aunt's suit-case, he had no will to rise. It was then that she extinguished the flame of the lamp. Ivan turned in confusion, but in the widow's place there was darkness, satiated with the same red, odorous vapours. The dead silence rose, rang and darted away, quickly he hit out and

struck something stony, but the red vapours merely laughed, mocking his resistance. . . . He fell asleep only towards dawn and in a dream he saw the quiet road of the wood; the tree branches bepowdered with snow inclined over the road, and all this was enveloped in a confused, restless longing for Lenka.

With the object of avoiding gossip and entertaining no hopes of further amorous actions on the part of Ivan, the widow quickly awakened him and jostled him, unfed, across the yard into the street. On her sated face it was impossible to note any traces of the night just passed, though it left Ivan weary. Tired of her solitude, she had not sated her longing with Ivan, and the respectable moujiks had not yet returned from the war. Burning with shame for this the first misadventure of its kind in his life, Ivan made no effort to remain any longer with the woman.

For a minute, while the bolt made a malignant noise behind the gates, he stood irresolutely; then he trembled and ran away across the chaste snow. His body was in pain, until once more he entered the wood which he had just seen in his dream. Here everything was stilled, the pain as well as the shame, because his own inner silence fell in with the silence of the world. Every step he took here across space was pleasantly familiar. He secretly knew his favourite tree by name, he remembered by face every juniper bush. He had been here hundreds of times, but now he was glad at the dumb solemnity of the morning, in which, as it were, his own underided truth had taken shelter. His breast became filled with cheer and blitheness, while his body became light, and the bearing of it to meet its fate was no onerous task. Suddenly Ivan wanted to shout, and he refrained only because in the distance he espied some sledges in the road.

"Ah, you'd better hurry, lad . . . there, at the Krutilins, someone got away with a horse last night!" shouted an old man quickly from his sledge, but recognising the deaf man he merely waved his hand and smacked his lips to hurry his mare. The perturbation in his words did not touch Ivan, and at the end of his journey his sorrows of yesterday were wholly lifted, he felt only hunger, and when the plain in all its snowy magnificence opened before him, he was again ready for his astounding

misadventures. It was near midday, and Ivan was already coming face to face with unfamiliar persons attired in military tatters.

Ascending a mound which overlooked the village, Ivan sadly paused on its height. Below him, near the storehouses, where, from time immemorial, crowds gathered, there was a huge throng. Angry fists rose above human heads, and many men's feet attired in felt boots were urged across the snow by rage; the dense vapours of breathing floated above the throng. Intermittently, with the moujiks, strange soldiers stamped their feet; there was about a dozen of them, and they joined in discussing the occurrence of the night. Two good-natured bearded moujiks held the blacksmith Zotov under the arms, while the others formed a tight ring to prevent an escape. The blacksmith, who was a notorious horse-thief in the district, smiled sullenly at the stern judges; he hardened himself and he spat; he had apparently reconciled himself to his fate. At the same time a tall lean moujik, Foma Krutilin himself, was holding forth before the villagers . . . not so much before them as before the strange soldiers . . . and not so much before the soldiers as before the dark power of their guns, at which he looked askew with an enraged eye.

"I ask you, fellow moujiks, what does it mean?" asked Foma, turning to the provisional court of justice. "And what's one to do? Bring the horse for the night into one's hut? . . . The authorities have bunked, so it's up to you fellows to take the law into your own hands . . . for if you don't watch out, the thief will take your breeches off and carry away your hut on his shoulders. Look at Zotov now! There isn't any shame in him nor a tear. He's willing enough to talk a heap, but as for repenting he's not thinking of it a bit! Repent, scoundrel, did you get away with my Crow?" shouted Krutilin in a shrill voice, and from rage flung his hat on the ground.

"What if I did!" the blacksmith admitted sulkily, rolling a small cigar in his fingers and spitting out blood from blows he had received.

They were about to execute the sentence pronounced by strangers against the villain when, suddenly, Vasily Bragin stepped into the midst of the throng. He was low of stature,

sharp of tongue, unmerciful of heart. His sickly eyes always emitted tears and he never looked anyone in the face, and for this reason the village valued and feared Vasily Bragin's judgements.

"I am thinking," he began, stroking his bristly grey hair in his habitual manner, "the blacksmith won't think again of fooling with other people's horses. . . ." He had in mind the blows the blacksmith had received in the night. "Only why should one punish Zotov? We might as well shoot our horses with our own hands, and be done with it. We have but one blacksmith, fellow moujiks, for a whole district and a half . . . he shoes our mare, and our colt, and is a regular veterinary so to speak, and he stretches the hoop over the wheel. Zotov is the first nail in our management. It's too early to think of digging Zotov's grave! We're grateful to the soldier boys here . . . how they've devoted themselves to the war and live everywhere in military fashion . . . but now we'll speak straight, the chaps need a bit of work to do. But we're going to stand up for our blacksmith, and we shan't give him up to the soldier boys for amusement!" He paused for a respite and lifted his screwed-up eyes toward the mound from which Ivan was descending to the village; at that moment the speaker's tearful eyes looked dispassionately and sagely. "And to let such a chance pass is not to be thought of . . . to be sure, we ought to make a warning of death to wicked people. Fellow moujiks, we have but one blacksmith, and we have four carpenters. Now it seems to me we can easier spare a carpenter than the blacksmith. . . ."

He jumped down from the log and was immediately lost in the crowd. No-one looked at Vasily Bragin, but everyone thought his thought and was in accord with his decision. At this moment Ivan, propelled by the perilous curiosity of a deaf man, nudged his way through the crowd into the circle. All were silent, and suddenly he observed that they were all looking at him. He was an orphan, he was a carpenter, he was a poor wretch, and there was no-one to weep over him; he was guilty, because his guilt was necessary to the community. He smiled now to one side, now to the other, but the faces in the crowd all assumed the same pattern, cold and forbidding.

"Submit, Ivan, it's all the same to you!" said an old man who stood nearest to him, warning him with a raised finger.

"Have a pity on the community, Vaniusha. You can see for yourself, horse thieves have overcome us . . . and we shan't forget you!"

"We'll bury you like our own son . . . Woh!" came a shout from behind, and the voice conquered by its real despair, but Ivan did not hear.

He was astonished at the hands outstretched towards him from all sides, but the crowd had already moved from the spot and drew him along beyond the village. Fearlessly smiling and making no attempt at justification, because not even in thought had he sinned against the world, he went with the crowd; he only thought that his misadventures had gone rather fast. It even seemed to him that he was deceiving the world with his nameless guilt—and this was the cause of his confused smile. Once outside the village, the crowd moved across the chaste snow of the fields; in the rear the old men briskly limped along, and in front ran the little children to witness Ivan's last misadventure. He was placed near a gully, and two soldiers, whose eyes deeper than those of the others were sunken under their foreheads, loaded their rifles. In the same instant, as during a betrothal, the women raised their voices.

It was a windy place, and in the driven snow were thrust upward the black heads of milfoil. Ivan tore one of them off and, after rubbing it between his fingers in a bewildered way he smelt its aroma, dense and poignant in the frosty air. He was still smiling and, on meeting the glance of the soldiers' screwed-up eyes, comprehended much in his fate and, above all, his bitter nonconformity with the impetuous tempests of the world. Ivan again remembered the forgotten suitcase of his aunt's, his heritage, but this was no time to think about a suitcase.

"Greet Lenka for me!" was all he shouted into the air, where a bird soared, and for the second time in the course of the day his own silence merged with the silence of the world.